Cultures in Dialogue:
Communicating Noongar Culture to non-Aboriginal People in Southwest Australia

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Abstract

Based on fifteen months fieldwork, this thesis is an ethnographic account of cross-cultural engagements between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, focussing on the Perth metropolitan area, Western Australia. I have engaged equally with Aboriginal (mainly Noongar) and non-Aboriginal people and gathered detailed data that allow me to investigate the social processes of cross-cultural interactions. The thesis also presents ethnographic material focussed on contemporary Noongar cultural practices.

The first chapter begins with a brief reflection on the notion of culture, as the use of the term by participants was prevalent throughout my fieldwork. This is followed by an overview of the structure of the thesis. I make the point that interactions between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people are complex and, at first sight, hard to define because they derive from separate influences. I have identified three factors involved in cross-cultural processes: people's actions, social settings and cultural knowledge. This finding is reflected in the three sections of the thesis: people's agency in cross-cultural engagement (Part One), finding a common ground: the intercultural body of knowledge (Part Two) and the constraints imposed by the Australian economy in shaping cross-cultural engagement (Part Three).

The second chapter provides a reflection on my methods and methodology. This also offers me the opportunity to investigate some issues of terminology in regard to the labelling of heterogenous groups of participants, such as Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal, and Black versus White. I end this chapter with reflections on fieldwork. I discuss some of the difficulties I faced in conducting my fieldwork in a section titled: the 'washing machine syndrome', which refers to being tumbled between, within and across cultures.

The finding of Part One is that cross-cultural engagements depend on the way people embrace various opportunities with which they are faced. This feature of cross-cultural interaction prompts me to investigate empirically the relationships between two core anthropological concepts: structure and agency. I have selected twelve participants' narratives, which provide me with a means to discuss how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from different backgrounds and in different periods are choosing to engage with each other. These narrations demonstrate individuals' participation in enhancing cross-cultural communication and illustrate how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants negotiate their cultural identity whilst engaging with each other.

In Part Two, cross-cultural engagements are shown to be not just a matter of learning about, or communicating Noongar culture; they are primarily a matter of finding a common ground of understanding between people of Noongar and non-Aboriginal backgrounds. This is a significant component in understanding cross-cultural engagements. Throughout the three chapters of Part Two, I discuss empirically the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge, something that derives from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. I illustrate this point through discussing Noongar cultural features in terms of six themes: tradition, language, spirituality, the environment, kinship and history. Indeed, each of these themes shows different processes involved in the co-construction of the intercultural body of knowledge.
Part Three examines how cross-cultural engagements are also shaped by various sets of opportunities. I illustrate the strong influence of the Australian economy on the nature of cross-cultural engagements between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people. I investigate three settings and show that a competitive free market economy tends to limit the scope of cross-cultural engagement; on the other hand, the government tends to set up and fund projects that increase Noongar cultural awareness, even though such projects may be not economically viable for commercial enterprises. In the third chapter, I discuss non-monetary consumption. I demonstrate that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal intentions to engage cross-culturally are driven by different motivations and that the economy constrains cultural awareness, as non-Aboriginal people are unlikely to purchase something that deeply challenges their own cultural beliefs.

Beyond the contribution of the ethnographic material, the central argument of the thesis is that there is a need to take into consideration a plurality of factors when seeking to understand the nature of cross-cultural interactions. Solely discussing the co-construction of the intercultural body of knowledge, only showing that economic settings are defining the opportunities to engage, or reducing the processes of engagement to a discussion of structure and agency, would be inadequate in comprehending the complexity of cross-cultural engagements. My thesis seeks to present the intricacy of these multiple factors in producing contemporary relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an Australian city.
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Conventions

Spelling of the term Noongar

There are a number of spellings for the word Noongar, which appear to be used simultaneously:

Nyungar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah

A Noongar Elder spoke to me about the several different spellings of the word Nyungar, Nyoongah, Noongar, Nungar. He noted: ‘The West Australian spelled Nyoongar in a lot of different ways. In 1997 we did research. From that day the West spells it properly’. However, other organizations use a variety of spellings. For example, by Perth Noongar Regional Council; Nyoongar Patrol System Inc.; Nyoongah Community Inc.; Noongar Language and Culture Centre; Noongar Economic Foundation; Noongar Mia Mia. PEEDAC Ltd use Nyungah and PIAF uses Nyoongah on the advice of Yirra Yaakin Aboriginal Corporation.

There is little scholarly guidance on the matter, given the scarcity of anthropological research in Perth over the past two decades. Earlier researchers such as Wilson (1958) used Nunga; more recently Toussaint (1987) and Birdall (1988), for example, used Nyungar. The historian Carter (2006) used Nyungah. However, I prefer to use Noongar as it is probably now the most common spelling in the public sphere, albeit there is a certain flexibility. This is evident in the following quote from the Noongar Language Course booklet (Noongar—our way 1992: xi), which used two different terms in the same paragraph: ‘... Nyungar elders as language models.... A suitable elder is someone who has lived around Noongars’.

Spelling of the term Wadjela

There are also a number of spellings for the word Waldjela, which appear to be used simultaneously:

Wedjela, Wedjella, Wadjala, Wadjela, Wadjella

In this thesis, I have chosen to use Wadjela as it appears to have the widest usage.

Spelling of the term Yamatji

There are also a number of spellings for the word Yamatji, which appear to be used simultaneously:

Yamidji, Yamitji, Yamatji, Yamadjji

In this thesis, I have chosen to use Yamatji as it appears to have the widest usage.

Spelling of the term Koorie
There are two spellings for the word Koorie, which appear to be used equally: -

Koorie, Koori

In this thesis, I have chosen to use Koorie.

**The Use of Pseudonyms**

All participants have been given pseudonyms in order to respect their privacy. Sometimes, the title of their job has been slightly modified if its use would identify them in any way. Similarly, I conceal the true professional function of any government employee who could otherwise be identified by their Department; for example, a politician or the head of a government department. In a comparable way, I mask the identity of some Aboriginal people who are non-Noongar and could have been readily identified from any reference to their origins or local affiliation. In such cases, I used ‘Aboriginal’ rather than the most precise identification that is possible for Aboriginal people; that is, the local grouping. The names of speakers at public events have not been masked; however, if I subsequently talked with them privately they were given a pseudonym.

**Use of ‘South-West’**

I have adopted the convention of a capitalised and hyphenated ‘South-West’ when referring to Noongar cultural extent. As a regional signifier, I use ‘south-west’ or ‘South West’.

**Field Notes**

I have eighteen A4 sized fieldnote books, and each quote of participants is labelled by the volume number and the page number, in the following manner: for example, (15: 3). This was the only means for me to refer subsequently to the original quotation or to assess its context. I have also a number of small fieldnote pads, which are labelled by fieldwork event, such as PRS for those of the Perth Royal Show, while others have only a number from one to nine. I have found having all these notated quotations as the only means of recalling the details of who said what and when.
Abbreviations

AAS: Australian Anthropological Society
ABC: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics
AbStudy: Aboriginal Study Assistance Program
AGWA: Art Gallery of Western Australian
ATSIC: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ALS: Aboriginal Legal Services
AMS: Aboriginal Medical Services
CAEPR: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
CALM: Department Conservation And Land Management
DEG: Department of Environment and Conservation
DIA: Department of Indigenous Affairs
NT: Northern Territory
NSW: New South Wales
AIEO: Aboriginal Islander Education Officer
NAIDOC: National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NTA: Native Title Act 1993
NASAS: Noongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service
PIAF: Perth International Arts Festival
SBS: Special Broadcasting Service
SWALSC: South-West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
UWA: The University of Western Australia
WAAMA: Western Australia Aboriginal Media Association
WA: Western Australia
WAITC: Western Australian Indigenous Tourist Commission
WAITOC: Western Australian Indigenous Tourism Operators Committee
WATC: Western Australian Tourist Commission
WMS: Washing Machine Syndrome
Chapter One — Introduction

Noongar people are the Aboriginal custodians of the southwest corner of the State of Western Australia\(^1\). This thesis presents an analysis of cross-cultural interactions between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people in the city of Perth, Western Australia (Figure 1.1). Through an extensive ethnographic investigation, I examine the means by which non-Indigenous people are learning about local Noongar (and more generally Aboriginal) cultures, and how Noongar people assert, communicate and negotiate cultural values with other Australians. I acknowledge people's agency in social actions and outline the ways in which people aspire to be involved cross-culturally within the constraints of existing cultural and economic structures. I integrate theories from anthropology and economics, as I analyse how cross-cultural engagements occur through complex matrices that are rooted in the two cultural worlds and are highly dependent on economic forces. I discuss thematic meanings that define an 'intercultural' knowledge of engagement and illustrate a range of economic processes that allow these interactions to take place.

The research examines the following interconnected questions: What are people's actual experiences of cross-cultural engagements? How is Noongar culture being communicated? What are the processes involved? What kinds of knowledge are communicated, and why? What are the apparatuses that facilitate cross-cultural communication?

My intention in this thesis is to reflect on cross-cultural communication and its reception; that is, the processes through which non-Aboriginal people are gaining Noongar (or, more generally in some cases, Aboriginal) cultural awareness. Below is the instructive comment of an Aboriginal friend who conducted a cultural awareness program for non-Aboriginal people. She felt concern that her participants may not have understood her message:

\(^1\) There has been Native Title recognition of this regional custodianship since September 2006 following the Single Noongar Native Title Claim, for which Kingsley Palmer was the Principal Anthropologist. For further documentation on the claim, see Jowitt (2007) and oldsite.nttt.gov.au/newsletter/hotspots/1083296716_2796.html (accessed 10.10.2008). However, there was a subsequent overturning of this finding by the Court of Appeal.
It’s like hitting a brick wall. The message does not go through. They cannot really make sense of what we are telling them (18: 21).

In this thesis, I wish to analyse how non-Indigenous people are apprehending Aboriginal cultural values and experiences that are different from their own.

_Cultures in Dialogue_ explores the processes of communication and negotiation between the cultures involved because ‘"[c]ultural" difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than essence’ (Clifford 1988: 14). From my fieldwork, I suggest that asserting Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people is an act of self-empowerment, but dialoguing culture also involves a kind of negotiation between the cultures involved. However, does dialoguing culture with outsiders diminish the notion of inherent cultural strength and power?

Foucault’s (1997: 26) generalized reflection on power is a useful viewpoint, as it raises the issue of the dialectical nature of the assertion of power:

Power, I think, should be analysed as something that circulates, or rather as something that only works as a chain. It is never localised here or there, it is never between the hands of some, it is never appropriate as a wealth or a good. Power functions. Power is to be exerted on a network and, on this network, not only do individuals circulate, but they are always in a position to sustain and also to exert this power.2

Noongar people are communicating their cultural heritage with non-Indigenous Australia and, by doing so, are gaining broader socio-political recognition. Does this involve cultural changes? Many anthropologists, as well as Aboriginal people themselves, are emphasising the dynamics of ‘tradition’ (e.g. Langton 1994: 3-4; Merlan 2006; Tonkinson 1997). Philosopher Jacques Derrida (2001: 15) reflected on the broad notion of heritage and change, and provides an insight on the issue that asserting cultural heritage is also about change:

We must do everything to appropriate a past that we know remains basically not appropriable that is for a philosophical memory, the occurrence of a language, a culture, and the line in general. To reassert, what does it mean? Not only to accept this inheritance, but also to relaunch it differently and to maintain it in life.3

Understanding the dynamics of cultural dialogues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is sometimes a difficult task to pursue, especially when there is a range of long-term misunderstandings and misapprehensions (Dodson 2003: 28; Oxenham et al. 1999; Nakata 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2003). Through my fieldwork, I

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2 My translation as there is no published translation.

3 My translation as there is no published translation.
Major towns in the South-West. Yellow indicates Noongar country, Aboriginal regional groups in blue.

Tindale's naming of South-West Aboriginal local groups (from Berndt 1979: 82) in the Noongar region.
became aware that dialoguing cultures requires careful consideration, partly because ‘[t]he problem with the concept of culture... is that despite its positive intent, it seems to work as an essential tool for making “others”’ (Abu-Lughod 1993: 12).

**Culture, domain and the intercultural: reflections on these notions**

This section focuses on the underlying thrust of my thesis. It reviews the issues associated with defining the concept of culture and, importantly, the derivative problem of conceptualising cross-cultural engagements. I firstly discuss some notions concerning the cultural interface and embed the argument about these issues within some existing ethnographic research on the South-West.

*Earlier views on Noongar culture in the South-West*

Broadly speaking, Rosaldo (1993: 36) noted that the study of cultures is no longer a matter of defining them as ‘unchanging and homogeneous’ because this understanding is ‘irrelevant’, although Sahlins (1999: 411) observed, ‘ethnography has always known that cultures were never as bounded, self-contained and self-sustaining as postmodernism pretends that modernism pretends’. In a comparable vein, Keesing (1990: 46) has commented on the enduring permeability of cultures and discussed some anthropological misapprehension about cultural singularity:

> If radical alterity did not exist, it would be anthropology’s project to invent it. I believe that the radical alterity we have sought has not existed for many millenia. The tribal world in which we have situated that alterity—the world of Lévi-Strauss’s ‘cold societies’—was our anthropological invention.

In the Western world, people have demonstrated long-established interest towards different cultures. Greek and Roman civilisations, which are the cultural cradles of Western societies, have often made artistic and mythological references to ‘otherness’ (Stenou 1998). As early as antiquity, people were already exchanging goods with people of other cultures through commercial routes (Clapier-Vallandon et al. 1991: 543). Later, the trade of spices and silk through Venetian and other European markets only served to confirm this interest in ‘otherness’. The attraction of ‘Oriental splendors’, in regard to palaces, perfumes and spices, was already filling the Western imagination as early as the fourth century (pers. com. Robert Paris, historian-anthropologist, Collège de France, 2000). In European feudal times, the appeal of the Arab world was evident and these
influences can still be witnessed today in European religious architecture, through stained glass (Bourde 1991: 606) for example, as the Crusaders brought souvenirs back from their voyages. Cross-cultural contacts were shaped variously throughout the centuries but, as Trouillot (1991: 23) suggested, 'The Conquest of America stands as Europe’s model for the constitution of the Other' (see also Todorov and Howard 1999: 185 on the notion of ‘otherness’ in the discovery of the Americas).

The appreciation of items from other cultures seems to have always been present in Western history. In the nineteenth century, the Western world developed some further interest in 'exotic' artefacts, often goods deriving from colonial linkages. These were known as the ‘curiosities’, contained in the so-called ‘cabinets of curiosities’, where exoticism was constituted through unusual objects (Findlen 1989; Impey and MacGregor 1985). Today, the interest in other cultures remains, and the commercialisation of goods from overseas allows many people to possess at least something from somewhere else, thus participating in a long history of cross-cultural engagement (see Root 1996 for a broad discussion on this issue).

Despite this long-standing Western tradition of expressing interest in other cultures, there is little detailed information available on the social and cultural life of the Perth region, southwest Australia, from the time of the arrival of the European settlers in 1829. The earliest references on the area are by Moore (1842), Grey (1840), Salvado (1850), Curr (1886) and Bates (1914). However, as Berndt (1979: 81) noted, these early records ‘are not detailed and are anthropologically unsatisfactory’. Nevertheless, they provide the only early documents of any significance and some Noongar people I met during my fieldwork have referred to these early documents when discussing elements of their own history. In regard to cross-cultural interaction between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, these early publications give sparse detail that mostly concern topics such as people explaining about food or informing the explorers about cultural features.

From a reading of old references about Aboriginal Australia (by explorers, missionaries

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4 A large body of literature has investigated the commodification of culture in different regions of the world, and in different contexts. See, for example, Marcus and Myers (1995), Mathews (2000), Ryan and Aicken (2005).

5 During my fieldwork, I noted several times that literature by Daisy Bates (1985) and Hallam and Tilbrook (1990) were in use in cross-cultural contexts, as well as in some people's homes. A participant who showed me some Noongar sites of significance and told me about the life in the old days added, 'You should look at Daisy Bates for your thesis'. On the other hand, a Noongar Elder once told me, 'For Daisy Bates, we were just part of the flora and fauna' as, indeed, Aboriginal people were originally administered as part of the flora and fauna of the state (see Aborigines Protection Act 1886).
and early anthropologists), non-Aboriginal people were convinced that Aboriginal cultures might, or would, disappear. In her concern for recording Noongar culture, Bates (1938) made brief reference to cross-cultural engagements, mostly drawing on her own experience and occasionally those of settlers; however, cross-cultural interactions were not the primary concern of her writing.

There has been a scarcity of anthropological research conducted in the South-West. John Wilson’s (1958) ethnography of Noongar families living at Cooraradale 6 housing settlement provides detailed, and now historical, data on organizations such as the Native Welfare Department, Aborigines Service Council Inc. and the Kurra League. Although unpublished, Wilson’s research remains one of the most valuable ethnographies of the South-West. In two volumes, he details Noongar social practices of the time on topics concerning kinship, age, employment, Christianity, citizenship rights, visiting patterns and social contact with the wider community. Wilson’s research is interesting, but at times puzzling, in the context of my own data collected nearly fifty years later. Reading Wilson’s ethnography, I do not observe major differences in terms of Noongar cultural practices per se; by this, I mean that his data resonate strongly with what people are doing now or what they told me their forebears were doing. However, there is a fundamental difference between his research and mine, although this is not cast in terms of cultural practices. It is the nature of cross-cultural engagement that has changed.

Firstly and predictably, there is a major change of context between the two periods 7. In 1958, Aboriginal people were still regulated under the Western Australian Aborigines Act 1905 and the Native Administration Act 1936 (for details see Commonwealth of Australia 1997: 631-3) and the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities ‘were further accentuated by the special legislation enacted by State or Federal Governments to deal with matters of “native” welfare and their status as Citizens’ (J. Wilson 1958: 6) 8. Bearing in mind the socio-political changes that have occurred in regard to Aboriginal affairs from the late 50s to now, I suggest it is vital to

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6 This is Wilson’s pseudonym for the locality where he conducted his field research.
7 See Chapter Three of this thesis for participants’ comments on socio-political changes.
8 In the following paragraphs, I discuss John Wilson’s thesis. His wife, Katherine, conducted a less detailed ethnography the same year at the same place. I refer to her dissertation later in my thesis.
the issue of cross-cultural interactions to acknowledge that today, participants and scholars assign a different emphasis to the notion of culture, as I now discuss.

Wilson remained, throughout his dissertation, hesitant about recognizing Noongar practices as cultural identifiers of difference from the wider non-Aboriginal society. He wrote:

The ‘whites’ emphasised differences, so too did the part-Aborigines. In many instances these differences were fictional, in the sense that they did not differentiate *nunga* behaviour from ‘white’ behaviour in certain strata of the wider Australian community, even if differences could be noted in comparison with say, ‘upper-middle class’ ‘white’ (J. Wilson 1958: 5).

It is indeed the way Noongar people communicate culture and talk about culture that has changed considerably since Wilson’s ethnography. He did not observe assertions of what the participants in this study regarded as the enduring strength of Noongar culture, although his comments are, at times, ambiguous. He suggested that the people with whom he was working had not maintained much of Noongar culture; nevertheless, he suspected that more was going on beneath the surface, as the following comments show:

It is our contention that *nungas* were acculturated in so far as there was little trace of Aboriginal culture, and that which remained had been so modified that it was usually readily intelligible to ‘Whites’. Socially, however, they were far less assimilated (J. Wilson 1958: 149).

Unfortunately, Wilson did not elaborate on what he meant by this last sentence. Later, in his Conclusion, he noted:

[T]he view that ‘we do things differently from “white” people’, whereas in actual fact the practices of both ‘whites’ and ‘coloureds’ in relation to the ‘things’ referred to were often not divergent (J. Wilson 1958: 6).

Whereas Wilson doubted the ‘success’ of the Assimilation policy (for a contemporary view on this matter, see Rowse 2005a), he is timid about recognizing the continuing strength of Noongar culture for its differentiation from the non-Aboriginal, at that time essentially ‘Anglo’ culture.

These comments do not intend at all any denigration of Wilson’s research. Rather, the fact that he is not putting the focus on ‘Noongar culture’, as people do now, is possibly a result of two factors. Firstly, there have been changes in anthropological approaches to the notion of culture from the time he conducted his research. In the post-colonial area, scholars have challenged some of the previous assumptions about how to understand
'culture', as Ortner broadly documented from a historical perspective (see also Sahlins 1999: 401-2):

The culture concept in anthropology has, like ethnography, come under heavy attack in recent years, partly for assumptions of timelessness, homogeneity, uncontested sharedness, and the like that were historically embedded in it and in anthropological practice more generally (Ortner 1995: 180).

Secondly, I observe that lay people talk extensively about 'culture' in today's society. I discuss these two issues below. Taking them into consideration helps us to understand the very different contemporary setting in which many Noongar people are now proudly asserting their culture.

Tonkinson's Honours thesis (1962) also provides valuable data about Noongar people living at Narrogin (a country town 192 km south-east of Perth). Tonkinson gives information on daily life at the reserve, on employment, on mobility, on expenditure and possessions, Christian missions, football clubs, schools, welfare organizations, and more generally on interactions with the wider community. It is worth emphasising that data collected by Tonkinson resonate not only with my participants' recollection of this period on issues like cross-cultural interactions and life-style, but also with today's Noongar cultural practices (e.g. kinship, spirituality), although his ethnography was conducted forty years earlier. Despite similar cultural beliefs and values, the major difference lies in the acknowledgement (and recognition) of Noongar culture by outsiders. Tonkinson began his dissertation with the sentence, 'The part-Aborigines of the Narrogin area of Western Australia no longer possess any traditional skills of their Aboriginal ancestors' (p. ii). He restated this point throughout the thesis:

Today, after about one hundred years of contact with whites, there are no longer any full-bloods in the Narrogin area, and the part-Aboriginal population is distinguishable from the whites.... more by virtue of its 'visibility' (darker skin, and in many cases, 'aboriginal' features) than by any obvious differences in customs, habits and social organizations (Tonkinson 1962: 8).

In a similar vein to Wilson, Tonkinson's interpretations are ambiguous in discussing Noongar culture:

[T]here are several features which are probably residual, and, though undoubtedly modified, are derived from tribal days (Tonkinson 1962: 11).

Whereas Tonkinson discussed Noongar language, keening (funerary crying) and distinctive beliefs (in spirits), he stated:
Chapter One — Introduction

In the Narrogin situation, however, the minority group has very little, if anything, remaining of its traditional culture after long years of contact and gradual adaptation to a Western European way of life (Tonkinson 1962: 44).

At this period, there was an unstated ambiguity in the recognition of Aboriginal cultural differences and the assimilation of Aboriginal people within the broader Australian society, as McGregor (2005) noted in discussing assimilation policies and cultural change:

The anthropologist A P Elkin was surely Australia’s most longstanding advocate of Aboriginal assimilation (p. 169).... Elkin conceived ‘cultural blending’ as no mere haphazard mixing; rather, he envisaged it as a process of modernisation that would ensure continuity with tradition (p. 172).... [he] grappled with the tension between two divergent principles: on the one hand, a universal human right to ‘progress in civilisation’; on the other, a right of each human group to maintain its cultural particularity (p. 173).

My own fieldwork observations were very different from these earlier field observations of Wilson and Tonkinson⁹. Although many everyday Noongar cultural practices are comparable to those of the wider community, I observed a strong assertion of Noongar culture and an emphasis on cultural differences vis-à-vis non-Aboriginal cultures, a point that this thesis illustrates. This was a resounding theme throughout my field data. The words ‘Noongar culture’ came out regularly in conversations with participants, and even more frequently in cross-cultural settings. While it was predictable that participants would mention the word ‘culture’ in the context of cross-cultural events, as these are focused on the communication of, and learning about culture, the issue goes far beyond this. The notion of ‘culture’ itself was the constant referent to people’s everyday actions, as I discuss in the following section.

Prior to ending this section on early research conducted in the South-West, however, it is worth noting that I share a different perspective to that of Brunton (2007), who discussed the recent legal decision on the Single Noongar Native Title case. Brunton (2007: 9-10) has highlighted the scope of earlier anthropological research in the region and reviewed relevant UWA unpublished theses. On the basis of this he noted that none of the research, including that of Wilson and Tonkinson, identifies a strong and enduring cultural presence in this region:

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⁹ I have chosen to refer to these two ethnographies because they are very detailed and are broadly representative of the viewpoints of other researchers who conducted their fieldwork in the 1950s and 1960s (e.g. K. Wilson 1958; Harison 1960; Makin 1970).
None of the nine UWA researchers whose findings were discussed in my first report presented anything to indicate that traditional laws and customs of the south west Aborigines were still being acknowledged and observed in any meaningful sense (Brunton 2007: 12-13).

In the context of native title, the demonstration of cultural continuity has become a key factor in asserting Aboriginal identity (e.g. Merlan 2006; Ritter 2003; Ritchie 1999). Brunton (2007: 19) remains doubtful of the integrity and continuity of a Noongar culture and challenged the claim. He wrote:

... I find it very hard to understand the logic behind Justice Wilcox’s treatment of this evidence [about continuity from the past], or to identify the principle he used to evaluate consistencies in laws and customs and their continuities with the past.

From my fieldwork, I have little doubt that some Noongar practices and knowledge have been maintained or, at times, re-foregrounded (see Chapter Three) when cultural elements have been pushed to the background in the earlier Assimilation-oriented era. I discuss in Part Two a number of Noongar cultural features, even though earlier policies have aimed to assimilate Noongar people into the broader society by subjugating Noongar culture. This cultural continuity was also observed during preparations in the course of the Single Noongar Native Title Claim:

It was useful to travel with people to their country with some of their family. On these occasions people exchanged stories, talked in language, collected food and bush medicines and really demonstrated their connection to their country. Despite the effects of colonisation and the inability of the Noongar people to access all of their land, their knowledge and devotion have not waned (Jowett10 2007).

However, it is essential to grapple with the fundamental change of context between the period when Wilson and Tonkinson conducted their research and the current context of the native title claim. Indeed, it is the broader and contemporary understanding about the notion of culture that has significantly changed, and this is something that Brunton seems to fail to appreciate.

**Contemporary reflections on the notion of culture**

Scholars have debated the idiosyncrasies of anthropological approaches to defining culture, a signature concept of the discipline. Indeed, the concept carries with it some contentious issues, which remain open to debate. As Barth (2002: 24)11 noted:

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11 See also Fox and King (2002: 1) for similar comment.
Most painful and perplexing are the paradoxes that appear when one tries to make
generalizations or theoretical statements about the ‘nature of culture’.

Speaking in lay terms, ‘culture’, as a statement of difference, has been used to exclude
some, and include others; ‘culture’ was (and is) a means to marginalise the undesirable
‘other’, whilst bounding the community of ‘self’. It was on the basis of cultural
dismissal that Aboriginal people were not allowed to practise and acknowledge their
own cultures, which were commonly labelled by the wider community of the time with
adjectives such as ‘primitive’, and the like12. Culture was a means of creating otherness;
Narayan (1997: 14) encapsulates the notion that cultural otherness is associated with,
and inherent to, colonialism:

The ‘colonial encounter’ resulted in problematic pictures both of ‘Western
culture’ and the ‘indigenous culture’ of particular colonies, pictures that relied on
a sharp sense of contrast between the ‘two cultures’.

More specifically, speaking in regard to the issue of putting the focus on ‘Noongar
culture’ versus the ‘broader Australian culture’, I can only suggest that this may reflect
the change in Noongar and non-Aboriginal approaches to the mater, or perhaps
Tonkinson (1962) and Wilson (1958) were distancing themselves from the colonial
enterprise? It is likely, however, that this contemporary focus on culture results from the
different political and economic context in which we are now. Indeed, acknowledging
Indigenous cultures and demonstrating their continuity has political outcomes in terms
of land rights (Merlan 2006), but also economic ones in terms of Aboriginal art and
tourism (e.g. Hinch and Butler 1996 on tourism and Altman 2003 on art).

To the Federal Court, Noongar claimants have demonstrated a cultural continuity
through traditional practices; broadly speaking, however, Noongar people are
ameliorating their positioning in the wider Australian since the Australian government
has started to acknowledge Aboriginal cultures (see Chapters Three and Eight). This is
something that Merlan (2006: 85) has broadly defined as ‘the liberal multicultural
system’. Beyond such politico-strategic recognition, it is also essential to acknowledge
the contemporary and global focus on the notion of culture. The contemporary ‘culture
focus’ is far from being solely an Australian paradigm.

12 In this period, the driving policy of economic and social assimilation created an environment for such
cultural denial.
Throughout the history of anthropology, scholars have taken different stances in regard to the notion of culture (see Sahlins 1999 and Brumann 1999 for reviews). Since the sixties, the postcolonial and the postmodernist\textsuperscript{13} thrusts for a non-authoritative approach to the definition of culture have encouraged anthropologists to re-debate the relevance of the concept (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Abu-Lughod 1991; Brightman 1995; Brumann 1999; Gilbert 2000; Sahlins 1999; Trouillot 2002). In the new light of redefining culture, Boggs (2004: 189) denounced the notion that culture was a means of classifying people, suggesting that culture is 'merely a categorizing concept'. Abu-Lughod (1991), who actively participated in the anthropological discussion of 'culture', commented on the 'sense of hierarchy' (p. 138) associated with the concept, saying that it 'operates much like its predecessor—race' (p. 143) (see also Brumann 1999: S2, S10 [page numbers] for discussion on the issue). Clifford (1988: 274) opposed the boundedness and homogeneity attached to the 'culture concept', and suggested that it 'has served its time'. His viewpoint resonates with that of Abu-Lughod (1991: 147), who commented, '[p]erhaps anthropologists should consider strategies for writing against culture.' Jackson (1989, quoted in Briggs 1996: 435) asked 'in the title of an essay “Is There a way to Talk about Making Culture without Making Enemies?”'. Indeed, the concept of 'culture' is problematic. Within the Australian context, Merlan (2001: 188) wrote 'Concepts such as culture are potential weapons in political and legal disputes'. In the light of this literature, I therefore pose the question: Is the concept of 'culture' adequate for this type of study?

Throughout my fieldwork, I was constantly reminded (by Noongar and non-Aboriginal people) that I was working on cross-cultural interactions, cross-cultural communication, cultural awareness, and the like. Unlike the earlier research conducted in Perth that discussed 'engagements with the wider community' without mentioning the word 'culture', I was dealing with what participants called 'culture' when they discussed the matter of cross-cultural engagement. During my fieldwork, Noongar people have used extensively the word 'culture' in what was termed 'cultural awareness workshops', in their personal life and at cultural festivals. For example, a booklet designed by the Aboriginal Unit of the W.A. Department of Education (\textit{Our Story}), declares:

\begin{quote}
Purpose of training... assisting non-Aboriginal teachers and other education workers to develop skills which will help them design and deliver services and programs which take account of cultural differences.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13} What Sahlins (1999: 404) labelled the 'afterlogical studies'.
At various ‘cultural awareness workshops’, people were invited to ‘think of situations illustrating cultural differences’. The word ‘culture’ was constantly in the background of social events or in the comments of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants during the course of my fieldwork. This is the reason I use it throughout the thesis. For example, when a non-Indigenous participant spoke to me about her recent connection with Noongar people, she expressed it in terms of ‘culture’, her own and the Noongar one: ‘We don’t have a culture; Aboriginal people do’ (2: 77). Another non-Aboriginal participant, one of many, used the term culture repeatedly:

I worked for Reconciliation. I needed to learn about our own culture, how ‘sorry’ become a scary word, what our culture understands about nationhood.... Our culture is very defensive. We want to fix up the blackfellas without talking about us (15: 136).

On a number of occasions, Noongar people have used the terms ‘Noongar culture’ with pride. Craig, a Noongar man, spoke about the way he felt in talking about his culture with outsiders:

I wouldn’t display my culture if people don’t show interest. It’s a waste of time. The people who are interested, I show my culture to them (4: 3).

Many other Noongar participants expressed their pride in having a Noongar culture with comments such as ‘this is the Noongar way’; or even more directly, ‘I’m proud of being Noongar’, to quote two participants. This echoes Sahlins’s (2000: 507) observation that ‘nowadays all culture is “power”.’ This also resonates with Trigger (1997: 100) who observed, in the context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal engagements in the Gulf country, that ‘culture’ has became a currency for asserting resistance to marginalisation in land, mining and seeking funding for government projects.

In the Assimilation era, conversely, Noongar people were not encouraged to talk about their culture. Gillian discussed with me her childhood and various aspects of her upbringing. Whereas she used twice the word ‘culture’, she said:

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14 This increased usage of the term ‘culture’ goes far beyond the research topic of this thesis. For example, in 2006, I observed in Perth that the fashion shop Esprit displayed the slogan in every one of its shop windows ‘Esprit, the world is our culture’. Body Shop Australia raised people’s awareness on cultural diversity and tolerance with the logo: ‘The universe is made of stories, not atoms... Celebrate Cultural Diversity!’ A Perth shop selling kitchenware is named Kitchen Culture.

15 It is worth noting the comment of Lofgren (1982: 26), who noted in a more global context, ‘we often take too much for granted. Things are seen but not noticed. We simply fail to... realize that much of what we view as normal... are in fact cultural products’. 

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Dad never talked about culture... I'm not really part of the Aboriginal community in Perth. In the Home [Sister Kate's\textsuperscript{16}], they make you think you're like a White person. You're told, like Dad and grandpa were, that we couldn't mix with our culture (5: 1).

These are only a few quotes from amongst many participants who 'talked about culture'. However, I was disconcerted when a non-Aboriginal participant suggested, after I asked her if she could elaborate about some cultural differences following a Noongar Welcome ceremony she organized (see Chapter Four):

There is no difference with Noongar people... no differences at all. We're all the same (12: 52).

And I was even more disconcerted when she said after we met:

I read the book \textit{Almost French}. There are huge cultural differences between France and Australia. When the author arrived at a cocktail party and helped herself before the guest arrived. This is a big cultural difference with here (12: 55).

I could never identify precisely why she was ill at ease with mentioning cultural differences between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, whilst she emphasised the French-Australian ones. Was this an echo of her childhood in the 1950s when the notion of culture was a means of excluding Noongar people? I acknowledge that culture 'can serve to boost fanatic nationalisms and ethnic, religious and racial hate' (Andrade 2002: 253), and perhaps she was concerned to avoid any suggestion of racism or discrimination.

The emphasis on culture is far from being a particularity of Aboriginal issues in a city as Perth, Australia. Fox and King (2002: 2) noted 'in the public sphere, the culture concept has gained broad acceptance'. Grillo (2003: 157) and Hannerz (1993: 95), in a similar vein, observe a strong search for 'culture' outside the realm of anthropology. To quote Grillo:

'[C]ulturespeak' (Hannerz 1999) is everywhere. Marc Augé (1999: 39) remarks that in France 'there has never been more talk of culture: culture as it pertains to the media, young people, immigrants. The intensive use of this word, more or less uncontrolled, is itself a piece of ethnological data.

Working on cross-cultural interactions, I share the point of view of scholars who accept the enduring value of the concept. Barth (2002: 23) suggested a need to 'repair culture as an analytical concept' and entitled a section of his discussion, 'Rethinking Culture'.

\textsuperscript{16} Residential home for Aboriginal children in the context of the Stolen Generation.
A valuable body of literature discussed the 'rethinking' or the 'rewriting' (Watson 1991) of the concept, causing me to ask myself if 'culture' may merely be an anthropological conundrum.\(^\text{17}\)

In her paper that discussed culture in terms of domination and resistance, Ortner (1995: 180) wrote, 'I do not see how we can do without it', whilst referring to Clifford (1988: 10), who also wrote, 'Culture is a deeply compromised idea I cannot yet do without.' As the topic is at the core of anthropological theory, scholars have held such conferences as one that 're-examine[d] the concept and ask[ed] whether we still need it' (Silverman 2002: xv). In the subsequent publication, it appeared that, 'We reach no agreement about the culture concept... but a major agreement about the continuing worth of anthropology.... This surprises us.... It made us feel that anthropology might be ready to get beyond culture worry' (Fox and King 2002: 13). For the anthropologists who remain dubious about the use of the concept, I quote Sahlins (1999: 402): 'So pretty soon everyone will have a culture; only the anthropologists will doubt it.'\(^\text{18}\)

From my fieldwork, I also observed that one paradox of today's society may be that, on the one hand, there is an increase of global connections (with the circulation of people, goods and knowledge) and, on the other, a number of respondents were resentful of this global modernity and were keen to promote events that identify strong regional identities, folk cultures and indigenous cultures (see Appadurai 1996). How do global homogenisation and fragmentation (that is, the recognition of local identities) affect the concept of culture? Reflecting on the literature, and on what participants in this project told me, the concept would seem more prevalent than it was five decades ago. Eriksen (2002: 3) suggests:

Modernity is associated with fragmentation, individuation, Gesellschaft and fast-moving changes.... There is by now massive evidence to the effect that in spite of the ubiquity of modernity, systematic cultural differences continue to exist.

The relationship between the cultural homogenisation of today's world and the notion of culture as singular expressions of diversity is a contemporary concern in anthropology.

\(^{17}\) For discussion of the concept of culture in the social sciences beyond anthropology, see Schneider and Bonjean (1973).

\(^{18}\) Furthermore, 'Ironic it is (once more) that anthropologists have been to so much trouble of late denying the existence of cultural boundaries just when so many peoples are being called upon to mark them. Conscious and conspicuous boundary-making has been increasing around the world in inverse relation to anthropological notions of its significance' (Sahlins 1999: 414).
Geertz (2000: 246), for example, poses the question, ‘What is a culture if it is not a consensus?’ and answers:

There is a paradox...concerning the present state of ... ‘the world scene’: it is growing both more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned, at the same time.

In order to understand the nature of cultural engagement between Noongar people and the wider Australian society (and more generally the world through tourism or art), it is necessary to keep in mind the notion of locality of culture in the context of a broader and more amorphous societal setting (see Friedman 1994 for discussion of the relationship between the global and the local). Sahlin (2000: 512-3) also discussed the notion of the ‘indigenisation of modernity’:

In some measure, global homogeneity and local differentiation have developed together, the latter as a response to the former in the name of native cultural autonomy. I described this new planetary organization as ‘a Culture of cultures’, a world cultural system made up of diverse forms of life. As Ulf Hannerz put it: ‘There is now a world culture, but we had better make sure we understand what this means. It is marked by an organization of diversity rather than a replication of uniformity’ (1990: 237).... Everyone now speaks their ‘culture’, or some near-local equivalent, precisely in the context of national or international threats to its existence.... The project is the indigenisation of modernity.

To summarize, I use the concept of culture in this thesis as a multi-dimensional category, bearing in mind that cultures are open to and influence each other. They are shared markers of identity. It is a category that allows the recognition of differences within the so-called ‘global modernity’ (see also Sullivan 2006). I share Merlan’s (2005: 169) intention to:

[L]ook ... for a formulation of the ‘cultural’ which recognizes difference but does not begin from an overspecified notion of ‘culture’; as well as for a way of writing about relations ‘between’ people that focuses on the processual character of interrelationships.

Having situated my position within the broader understanding of the notion of ‘culture’, how do I locate the study in regard to notions of ‘domain’, the Aboriginal ‘domain’ vis-à-vis the non-Aboriginal one?

**The notion of domain**

Since the fifties, maybe earlier, Aboriginal people were never to be understood apart from the wider surrounding Australian society. The investigation of social engagements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is far from being a new theme of
anthropological research in Australia, and the interconnection between the ‘whitefella’ and ‘blackfella’ businesses has been analysed, often by focusing on Aboriginal responses to the colonial encounter. Across all regions, but particularly in the Desert and North of Australia, there is a very extensive literature that discusses interactions with non-Aboriginal society. This body of literature is extremely valuable, as it provides sources on Aboriginal cultures themselves, gives knowledge about regional perspectives, and discusses thematic investigations (for example media, self-determination, economic sustainability, the fine art world and Aboriginal painters). Within this large body of references, several authors have discussed the notion of domain (e.g. Rowse 1992; Tonkinson 1978; Trigger 1992), which suggests a degree of social compartmentalisation for social actions and for the reproduction of cultural identity. The concept of ‘domain’ is a means of expressing the existence of differences (in social practices and cultural values) between the two communities, but mitigates too much emphasis on the notion of separation (and cultural difference). Trigger (1992), for example, conducted his research at Doomadgee (northwest Queensland) and observed:

... the ‘Blackfella’ and ‘Whitefella’ domains. These were arenas of material, intellectual and social activity which indexed a high degree of social distance between Aborigines and Whites.... The extreme social distance between the two spatial domains is thus illustrated strikingly by the separate areas for Aboriginal and White residence (p. 82).... The White domain was also recognised as containing extensive bodies of knowledge and opinion that were not derived from Aboriginal tradition (p. 90) .... social life within the Aboriginal domain derives in many important ways from Aboriginal tradition... (p. 102).

Rowse (1992) discussed the notion of ‘Aboriginal domain’ in northern and central Australia primarily in regard to issues of governance. He noted, ‘An alternative approach to explaining the persistence of the Aboriginal domain is that it survives partly because of its apparent triviality,’ although there is a contradiction in his writing. He cites Sutton, who denied this marginality (Rowse 1992: 20-1), but fails to develop further this difference in opinion between himself and Sutton. Although Rowse suggested the notion of an ‘Aboriginal enclave... to refer to parts of Australia where non-Aboriginal institutions could still be placed under pressure to adjust to indigenous ways’ (p. 21), he used the term ‘domain’ extensively throughout his book.

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This concept of ‘Aboriginal domain’ has certainly influenced scholars who conducted their research relatively soon after the Whitlam Labor government implemented its policy of self-determination (see Fletcher 1994 for a discussion on self-determination). Hinkson and Smith (2005: 161) referred to domain as ‘[a] key trope in “Australianist” literature dealing with “intercultural” relations’ and noted (p. 162):

While implicitly or explicitly seeking to understand relatedness between Indigenous lifeworlds and non-Indigenous ‘others’, accounts of distinct domains tend to emphasise the cultural distance that Aboriginal people managed to effect from whites and European authority in mission and settlement contexts.

Whereas the notion of cultural specificity within a cross-cultural engagement is a concept that continues to have relevance within the Australian setting, the use of the term domain itself may be fading away. It is noteworthy that Hinkson and Smith (2005: 162) wrote in their editorial comment that ‘Batty sees the notion of distinct domains as deeply problematic’. Batty (2005) investigated ‘intercultural partnerships’ (p. 216) of non-Aboriginal people working within/for Aboriginal organizations; however, he did not once employ the term ‘domain’ in his paper.

Discussing Aboriginal and non-Indigenous engagement in Perth, I prefer to use the term ‘culture’ in my analysis. As I noted earlier, people were talking about ‘cultures’. Only in a single setting, some cross-cultural workshops offered by DWT [pseud.], did the convenor trained in anthropology mention the word ‘domain’, but he suggested only that workshop participants should look at the term as used in the booklet provided to the attendees. Otherwise, none of the people with whom I worked have ever employed the word—it is perhaps not surprising that lay people did not use the term, given its technical specificity within anthropology. Anyway, Noongar people talked of Noongar culture. Non-Aboriginal people also used extensively the term ‘culture’, as indicated, for example, in the following words of a woman with whom I discussed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions:

...two worlds pretty separate. It might be, we don’t know. Our Western culture is in everybody’s face, but Indigenous culture is not in everybody’s face. We don’t know, it’s a lack of knowledge. People would like to gain knowledge, but some people might have hesitation. How to talk about it? How to talk about culture? And there is shyness in both sides, for Indigenous people and for non-Indigenous people. I don’t want to appear over-inquisitive or being non-appropriate. Awkwardness drowns all questions (5: 143).
Moreover, the notion of domain may have more relevance in remote communities\textsuperscript{20} as, in a city such as Perth, the concept of a Noongar domain is both difficult to identify and inaccurate in many settings of cross-cultural communication\textsuperscript{21} (e.g. Noongar ‘cultural’ events display ‘culture’, more than a ‘Noongar domain’).

The blur between the terms and concepts of domain and culture is, I suggest, a result of the approach to the notion of culture at the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. In a general context, Geertz (2000: 248) noted the contemporary assertion of cultural identities in a way that is comparable to what is the notion of domain:

\ldots people themselves make such contrasts and draw such lines: regard themselves, at some times, for some purposes, as French not English, Hindu not Buddhist… Black not White… Whatever we might wish, or regard as enlightenment, the severalty of culture abides and proliferates… in response to, the powerfully connecting forces of modern manufacture, finance, travel, and trade. The more things come together, the more they remain apart….

I also suggest that privileging the notion of culture over that of domain is also recognising the right of Noongar people to exclude and include who belongs to the Noongar community. Within a cross-cultural setting, the notion of an individual’s culture is defined by its difference to the culture of another person. I suggest that the use of the notion of domain implies that the two cultures are located with a constant proximity. In this context, I consider that the words ‘Noongar domain’ promote a sense of distinction from a surrounding world, which is the non-Aboriginal domain. Culture, suggests more clearly that it is something Noongar people had before the colonial experience and have retained to this day. In all cases, asserting a ‘Noongar domain’ or an ‘Aboriginal culture’ is an act of affirming a cultural identity different to that of another group of individuals. This statement is not restricted to Noongar, nor to other indigenous cultures; it concerns the concept of culture itself—at least, within the contemporary setting where, to quote Geertz (2000: 254), ‘They are not separate “cultures,” or “people,” or “ethnic groups,”… they are various modes of involvement in a collective life that take place at different levels…’. I acknowledge that the use of the concept of domain is a valuable tool in analysing cultural occurrences and to distinguish them from what is not in the surrounding world; however, I will re-emphasise my

\textsuperscript{20} The dichotomy urban versus remote is highly contested (Langton 1981; Sansom 1982: 117-8).
\textsuperscript{21} Discussing the coverage of Aboriginal affairs in the media, Hartley and McKee (2000: 73-82) use the term ‘domain’ to indicate different spheres of influences, however.
support for preferring to use the word ‘culture’ rather than ‘domain’ with the following quote by Brumann (1999: S11) in mind:

Whether anthropologists like it or not, it appears that people... want culture, and they often want it in precisely the bounded, reified, essentialized, and timeless fashion that most of us now reject.

My decision is, indeed, strongly influenced by the contemporary context.

**The intercultural**

Beyond culture, a further concept arises: the notion of the ‘intercultural’ occurring within a ‘cross-cultural’ setting. Clifford (1988: 256) has dated the appearance of an ‘intercultural discourse’ from being something that has emerged in the last few decades:

Since 1950 Asians, Africans, Arab orientals, Pacific islanders, and Native Americans have in a variety of ways asserted their independence from Western cultural and political hegemony and established a new multivocal field of intercultural discourse.

In the Australian context, how can we understand the ‘intercultural discourse’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people? Whereas the notion of Aboriginal domain investigates socio-cultural aspects associated with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds, the notion of the ‘intercultural’ domain, discussed by Merlan (1998, 2005), seeks to describe a more fluid cultural exchange, which she (2005: 169) has called ‘a story of engagement’. Merlan conceptualised it as, ‘a way of writing about relations “between” people that focuses on the processual character of interrelationship’ (2005: 169).

Reflecting on her research, Merlan (1998, 2005) analysed the concept of the ‘intercultural’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in the town of Katherine (Northern Territory). She acknowledged that ‘there is no simple “answer”’ (2005: 167) for grasping the processes of these interactions whilst keeping in sight the ‘questions of difference, boundedness and transformation’ (2005: 167). In an attempt to theorize the ‘intercultural’, she suggests four scholars and three theories. Firstly, she calls on Sahlins’s (1976) idea of approaching culture as ‘a system of meaning’, for which: ‘Meaning values exist in relation to each other rather than directly to “the world”’ (Merlan 2005: 173). This approach resonates with my own data, as I understand that the ‘intercultural’ is based on accounts of cultural commonalities, something that I
originally named a 'common ground of understanding'. Secondly, Merlan (2005: 175) used Bourdieus (1977) notions of 'habitus' and 'field', as these notions provide a means to differentiate and to position both social actors and social praxis. Thirdly, Merlan used Voloshinov and Bakhtin's analysis of the notion of dialogue\textsuperscript{22}. To me, Merlan's insights on the 'intercultural' at Katherine were very inspiring. I share her view that intercultural knowledge has to do with the way non-Aboriginal people grapple with Aboriginal cultures and the non-Aboriginal overarching framework to understand them. However, I draw attention to a need to conceptualise further the notion of the 'intercultural' by analysing in more detail how non-Aboriginal people understand Aboriginal cultures—an area dealt with only minimally in Merlan's book (Trigger 2000: 371)—and how the intercultural body of knowledge is defined during cultural interfaces.

Indeed, this has a degree of urgency, as it has fundamental outcomes in a variety of sectors where Australian law, economy or social practices are confronted with their Aboriginal counterparts (e.g. Native Title, mining industry, secondary education). I suggest that, without a clear understanding of the two systems of values and the processes of their interface, cross-cultural communication may fail. In regard to Native Title, Mantziaris and Martin (2000) reflected on cultural differences and identified a zone of engagement that they named the 'space of recognition'. Their analysis results from the conceptualisation of the following cross-cultural context:

That native title is the product of the intersection of traditional law and custom and the Australian legal system.... The 'intersection' to which the court refers may be visualised as the area bounded by the intersection of the two circles in the recognition space diagram (p. 14).... As the recognition space device suggests, native title rights and interests have two sources – the particular indigenous system of traditional law and custom associated with the group claiming native title and the Australian legal system (p. 15).... A clear conceptual distinction between indigenous 'relations' and native title rights and interests in the definition of native title also assists in the analysis of native title extinguishment and compensation (p. 16).

Cross-cultural engagements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds have inspired Mantziaris and Martin (2000), also Jones (2002), to use a two-set Venn diagram. I do the same in this thesis in order to define the intercultural body of

\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, prior to Merlan (2005) publishing her paper, I had referred in my thesis proposal to Bakhtin (1981, 1986) for my investigation of cultural dialogues. This is because it requires taking into account two, or a plurality of, cultural standpoints in order to lead the engagement toward a shared agreement (see Chapters Two and Four of this thesis).
knowledge, which is at the intersection between two sets of experiences, values and beliefs. Indeed, Venn diagrams are a means of showing the relationships between two or a plurality of sets that have some commonalities, albeit being otherwise different. I note that such a diagram visually implies that each culture maintains a zone of specificity and that the 'intercultural' actually results from some overlapping and shared concerns (Figure 1.3). This is far from suggesting that Noongar and non-Aboriginal motivations in defining an intercultural body of knowledge are identical; indeed, they are different. For example, my data show that Noongar participants were pleased to gain a broader socio-politico-cultural recognition by being able to communicate some cultural knowledge to the broader community, whereas non-Aboriginal participants enjoyed learning about Noongar culture (see Chapters Three, Eight and Nine for the empirical data).

However, the Venn diagram is a potent conceptualisation of cross-cultural engagement as it provides a means to graphically illustrate the multiple forces at play in the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge—that is, the inclusion or exclusion of some cultural elements into the intercultural. Jones (2002) also discussed the notion of an intercultural space in Native Title. Influenced by Mantziaris and Martin’s diagram and their notion of a ‘recognition space’, Jones reproduced it for the following situation:

This bi-cultural context can be typified as the space defined by the intersection of Aboriginal laws and customs and the NTA or Australian law (p. 1).... The intersection of the two systems of law and custom can be seen as the ‘recognition space’.... It is in this recognition space that the NTA operates and where native title determination applications are lodged (p. 4).

Native Title claims result from a situation of negotiation, if not dispute at times, as do legal cases in general. With the attempt to conceptualise issues of conflict within Native Title, Jones (2002: 5) incorporated ‘a series of domains’ that ‘represent all the societal elements – social, political and legal – that impact on a particular Aboriginal group.’ He used a three-set Venn diagram to discuss the ‘conflict resolution domain’ which is the intersection between the Aboriginal domain one (set 1), the Aboriginal domain two (set 2) and Native Title domain (set 3). It is worth noting that there may be some divergences in the politico-economic agenda between a State government (and/or other respondent parties) and Aboriginal claimants in a Native Title claim. The background setting is, as Jones (2002: 9) noted:
The problem here is the clash of systems... the result of cultural communication
difficulties between the Aboriginal system and the Australian legal system. In this
sense the mediation path represents a compromise....

In my thesis, I discuss the context of the reception (following its communication) of
Noongar culture, which is also a matter of negotiation, like native title claims are. When
non-Aboriginal people improve their understanding of Noongar culture it may have
some implications in term of the socio-cultural positioning of Noongar people within
the broader society. Indeed, Noongar people may gain a broader recognition because, as
Merlan (2006: 86) observed in relation to the negotiation of Aboriginal land rights:

Systems introduced by the Australian state for the purposes of recognising
Indigenous land rights have required Indigenous people to demonstrate continuity
with traditional forms and practices. Sufficient demonstration of traditionality
triggers recognition and a positive outcome; inadequate demonstration produces
denial of recognition of rights to land.

Holcombe (2005) also discusses the intercultural and the Aboriginal domain. As noted
earlier, the academic focus seems to be now more on the intercultural than on discrete
domains. Holcombe (2005: 222) understands the intercultural as ‘the space for
engagement, and conversely disengagement’ for her investigation of the ‘administrative
apparatus’. Whereas this situation may have been theorised in term of ‘domains’ two
decades ago, Holcombe draws attention to some problems inherent in the concept; as
she noted: ‘The “domains” theory could be perceived as an extension of this earlier
anthropological paradigm’ (2005: 224)—that is, an over-focussing on Aboriginal
responses to non-Aboriginal encounter in terms of a cultural ‘battle’, struggling between
a kind of assimilation versus a cultural opposition. Unlike the intercultural, Holcombe
suggests that ‘domains’ fail to incorporate ‘the changes that have occurred over time in
the creation and evolution of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface’ (p. 224). She
asserts that Aboriginal engagement with the administrative apparatus ‘needs to be
understood as occurring in a hybridised space... [and] It is only within this space that
inter-cultural communication can begin’ (p. 226).

I suggest that the notions of domain and the intercultural are a matter of different focus
in cross-cultural encounters. In contexts where some interactions occur, domain seems\textsuperscript{23} to focus on the cultural backgrounds of each part involved in a kind of binary
opposition, whereas my understanding of the intercultural draws the focus to the jointly

\textsuperscript{23} As Holcombe (2005) also suggested.
constructed interface of engagement: the intercultural results from the engagement between people of different cultures and is a means to communicate different practices, beliefs and values.

Objectives of the thesis and thesis outline

Following this introductory chapter, I deal with my methods and methodology in Chapter Two. I firstly discuss the initial conceptualisation of this research as, at that time, I was strongly inspired by Marcus’s (1995) methodology of conducting multi-sited ethnography. The second section concerns the participants of this research, as their insights are at the core of my analysis. The section ‘The participants’ also provides me with an opportunity to investigate some issues of terminology in regard to the labelling of heterogenous groups of respondents, such as Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal, and Black versus White. After detailing my fieldwork methodology in the section ‘Fieldwork in Practice’, I discuss some of the difficulties I have faced in conducting my fieldwork; I felt that I was being tumbled between and within a variety of cultural standpoints and experiences.

The following seven chapters of my thesis are organised in three parts, each of which analyses a facet of the nature of cross-cultural understandings (Figure 1.2).

Part One illustrates how cross-cultural engagements depend on the way people embrace various opportunities. I have selected the narratives of twelve participants that provide me with a means to discuss the relationships between two core anthropological concepts: structure and agency. In Part Two, I discuss empirically the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge, something that is derived from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. Indeed, the ways non-Aboriginal people conceptualise issues of Noongar tradition, language, spirituality, the environment, kinship and history strongly shape the construction of an intercultural body of knowledge. By this I mean the features of Noongar cultures that are communicated to, and well-received by, non-Aboriginal people. Part Three shows that various economic settings are influencing the nature of cross-cultural engagements and may or may not enhance non-Aboriginal cultural awareness.
Part One — People’s agency in cross-cultural engagement

The first strand of the research investigates people’s agency in interaction—that is, the articulation between structural elements of cross-cultural interactions and actors’ agency. I understand the structural elements as being the cultural influences (Part Two) and the economic forces (Part Three). Part One provides an opportunity to revisit the relationship between structure and agency. This idea originated from the fact that the structural features that facilitate contemporary forms of cross-cultural interactions are relatively recent: first, the development of the niche market of Aboriginal art as a major economic influence and the focus for cross-cultural interactions since the 1970s; second, the emergence of Aboriginal media broadcasting since the early 1980s; third, the introduction of Aboriginal Studies in school curricula since the early 1990s, but with a higher profile since 2003 (according to participants); and fourth, the increased presence of government-sponsored festivals and cross-cultural events.

The extensive stories from Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people provide a means to analyse the relationships between ‘structure and agency’ in relation to cross-cultural engagements and to illustrate how the changing political climate provides some encouragement for these engagements. Whereas Parts Two and Three depict an environment through which people’s agency can be understood, the stories in Part One illustrate the diversity of participants’ experiences in order to reflect on the relationships between structure and agency within the setting of Noongar and non-Aboriginal engagement in Perth.

While Part One comprises a single chapter, I treat it as ‘a part’ rather than just Chapter Three. This was a means to show that each of the three parts are equally influential in producing contemporary relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an Australian city. In Chapter Three I give voice to some of the participants in this research; however, the theoretical background concerns structure, agency and the relationships among these concepts, as I now discuss.

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24 I acknowledge that, in the past (prior to the 1960s), structural features (e.g. through employment and education, see Chapter 9) prompted some cross-cultural interactions; however, at this time Noongar culture was sidelined by the broader Australian society.
**Figure 1.2** Visual representation of the three components of the thesis

**Part One** People’s agency in cross-cultural engagement  
**Part Two** Finding a common ground: the intercultural body of knowledge  
**Part Three** The constraint of the Australian economy in cross-cultural engagement

**Figure 1.3** Conceptualisation of the intercultural

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**Noongar cultural knowledge**  
Noongar cultural elements that are not appreciated as expressions of Noongar culture by non-Aboriginal people

**Intercultural Knowledge**  
Defined by and co-constructed on shared understandings

**Non-Aboriginal preconceptions**  
Knowledge of Noongar culture held by non-Aboriginal people that is not shared by Noongar people

Cross-cultural setting: the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people
Functionalists, structuralists, phenomenologists and, more recently, postmodernists have debated the relationships between social structures and people's actions. Each of them has added new perspectives on the influence of society on people, and *vice versa* (e.g. Giddens 1977, 1982, 1984; Hindess 1996; Layder 1981, for a review on the input of the different approaches). Commenting on the varied schools of thought, Bhaskar (1986: 125) placed in opposition, on the one hand, the 'Weberian and phenomenological traditions', which stresses the 'intentional ... human behaviour' with, on the other hand, the 'Durkheimian and structuralist traditions', where 'social objects are ... external to and coercing the individual.' Such a binary opposition is, and has been, at the core of the debate between structure and agency. For example, Archer (2000: 18) reviewed the schools of thought in term of a strong dichotomy that clearly and explicitly stated the point. She quoted some 'leading postmodernists', noting that the 'postmodernist denies human subjects any form of external mastery over society's development and form, in opposition to the Enlightenment model which gives them complete sway' (p. 24). She set 'Modernity's Man' (p. 86) for whom 'society contributed "nothing" to our making' (p. 253) in opposition to 'Society's Being' (p. 86), for whom 'society contributes "everything" to our making' (p. 253).

Contemporary debates on the relationship between structure and agency tend to emphasise mutual dependence, a point of view that I share. I aim firstly to review the definitions of structure and agency, and then to refer to these relationships mainly through Giddens's theory of structuration, about which Dallmayr (1982: 21) commented, '[t]he chief merit of the 'theory of structuration' lie[s] clearly in the reinterpretation and novel correlation of agency and structure'.

Many scholars have discussed the concept of agency. Giddens (1982: 9), for example, wrote about 'human conduct' or 'human action' as the 'capability of "making a difference"' (p. 212); that is, of 'intervening in the world' and influencing 'events which occur in that world' (p. 212). As I will illustrate through my data, motivations behind human actions are complex. Giddens (1982: 9) argued that people have a sense of 'knowledgeability' about their actions, which he defined as 'all those things which the members of the society know about that society'.

25 Such a conceptualisation may appear too extreme to some scholars, failing to acknowledge the complexity of the relationships.
Bhaskar (1986: 122) provided another key reference in the contemporary understanding of agency. He introduced the notion of 'intentional agency' that results from 'human activity or praxis'. He noted, however, that 'actors' understanding of their social world' may have limitations (p. 126) and, echoing Giddens (1984: 9) on the notion of 'knowledgeability', Bhaskar (1986: 130) added, '[a]ctivity is intentional only so far as it is informed ... by an agent's beliefs' (p.130). This latter point is illustrated in Story Six of Chapter Three.

Archer (2000: 308) also contributes to the definition of agency as 'the powers, which ultimately enable people to reflect upon their social context, and to act reflexively towards it, either individually or collectively'. Archer (2000: 78) referred to the concept of the 'oversocialised "cultural dope"', defined as a person 'who only does things because [s/he is] required to do so by the roles occupied'. This interpretation is echoed by Layder (1981: 69), who commented on assumptions about the lack of initiative in people's decision making, calling them ""cultural morons", "cultural dopes" or cultural "bearers" of structural constraints". Whereas the participants in this research project have their say about their decisions to engage cross-culturally, I also raise the influence of structure in this process, as people's 'actions are explained by opportunities and desires—by what people can do and by what they want to do' (Elster 1989: 14-5).

Indeed, Giddens (1982: 9) defined structure as 'rules and resources instantiated in social systems, but having only a "virtual existence"'. He (1984: 31) observed three key structural elements: those of signification (linked with the institutional mode of discourse), domination (linked with political and economic institutions) and legitimation (linked with legal institutions). Giddens's definition of 'structure' is directly applicable to my research, as I situate Part Two in the mode of discourse and Part Three in the realm of political economy. In Giddens's words (1984: 185), structure is '[u]nderstood as rules and resources, structure is recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems and is wholly fundamental to structuration theory.' In Part One, I raise the notion of social reproduction, which I see as the processes through which cross-cultural interactions will be maintained in the future, indeed perhaps amplified.
The relationship between structure and agency is at the core of the debate. Giddens (1982: 36-7) defined the notion of 'duality of structure' as 'social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices that constitute those systems.' Later, he (1984) elaborated on the 'production and reproduction of social action' (p. 19) by writing that '[s]tructure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling' (p. 25). This is at the center of his structuration theory, which 'is based on the proposition that structure is always both enabling and constraining, in virtue of the inherent relation between structure and agency' (1984: 169); a point of view that is strongly echoed in my data.

Archer (2000: 17) also investigated the relationship between structure and agency, and observed their interdependence. She noted that 'humanity and society have their own sui generis properties and powers, which makes their interplay the central issue of social theory for all time'; she added (2000: 21), 'we must neither under- nor over-privilege human agency in our analytical approach'.

In similar vein, Layder (1981: 4) explained that 'there are no advantages to be gained from treating "social relations" as separable from the rules' as 'interaction takes place within structured contexts'. He developed the notion of 'structural ... constraint' through which he said, 'contextual structures can be roughly classified in terms of whether or not they provide a framework of explicit and/or mandatory constraints which govern interaction occurring within their parameters' (p. 110). I will illustrate this point with Amy’s story (Story Eight, Chapter Three).

Bhaskar (1986) commented on the relationship between structure and agency, also emphasising mutual dependence. He wrote that, 'society is only manifest in (and exists only in virtue of) intentional agency, and intentional agency depends upon (or even just consists in) acting on beliefs' (p.135). This follows earlier comments such as '[i]f society is the condition of our agency, human agency is equally a condition for society, which, in its continuity, it continually reproduces and transforms' (p. 123).
Broadly speaking, unlike earlier writers who have tended to privilege either structure or agency, numerous scholars are now recognising the reciprocal linkages between the two, and such linking is clearly necessary to make sense of my data.

As I investigate in Part Two the co-construction of a ‘inter-cultural’ body of knowledge, I now pose the question: how does the concept of culture (at the core of cross-cultural interactions) fit within these notions of structure? In other words, are the concepts of ‘structure’ and ‘culture’ the same?

The blurred boundary between structure and culture has long been acknowledged. Parsons26 (1961b: 978-9), for example, exemplifies a parallel between culture and society as he wrote, ‘Social systems are dependent on the cultural systems ... a social system can be considered as suspended in a web of cultural definitions.’ Following on the issue of understanding whether culture acts as a structure, Geertz (1993: 37) commented:

[M]an is a composite of “levels,” each superimposed upon those beneath it and underpinning those above it. As one analyzes man, one peels off layer after layer.... Strip off the motley forms of culture and one finds the structural and functional regularities of social organization.

Structure and culture are similar, and Bauman (1973) dedicated a full chapter of his book to ‘culture as structure’. He investigated the inter-relationship between agency and culture/structure, suggesting that the shady zone between culture and social structure dates from the earliest days of anthropology. Bauman (1973: 1-2) noted that the American anthropologists ‘called what they saw (or more exactly, what they imagined they saw), “culture”; whereas ‘their British counterparts... called it “social structure”’.

Culture and structure overlap, and as Archer (2000: 262) noted, ‘[t]he structures into which we are born and the cultures which we inherit mean that we are involuntarily situated beings.’ Previously, Archer (1996) aimed to analyse the relationships between culture and agency and dedicated a full book to the topic. She discussed different schools of thought and observed the same dichotomy that was being discussed for

26 I am quoting Parsons to highlight the enduring overlap between the two terms rather than for the content of his comment; as Ortner (1984: 150) suggested, ‘[e]veryone seems to agree in opposing a Parsonian ... view in which action is seen as sheer en-actment or execution of rules and norms (Bourdieu 1978; Sahlins 1982; Giddens 1979)’.
structure and agency. She noted that, for some scholars, culture governs actors in a way that, 'culture is held to work surreptitiously “behind the back” of every actor... lacking ... of human agency' (p. 72) whilst in other schools of thought, people's agency dominates and 'culture is seen as nothing' (p. 72). She addressed the issue of 'the duality of culture' that strongly echoes the notion of duality of structure, which Archer actually discussed in light of Giddens and Bauman. She did not state that culture and structure are precisely the same, but suggested throughout her book that culture is structured, and discussed culture and agency in as much the same relationships as exist for structure and agency. For example, Archer (1996: 143) noted, 'our prime interest in the Cultural System lies precisely in its two-fold relationship with human agency; that is with its effects upon us... and our effects on it'.

In light of these comments, I treat culture and structure as similar socio-cultural overarching frameworks that are in a relationship with people's agency, as I illustrate in Part One.

**Part Two — Finding a common ground: the intercultural body of knowledge**

Part Two is based on the premise that cross-cultural engagements require at least a partially shared template, a common ground, a basis of commonality. This premise expresses the idea that these engagements are possible, or are enhanced, under particular conditions; that is, the existence of an intercultural ‘zone’ of mutual understanding. As I noted earlier in this chapter, I find a two-set Venn diagram (Figure 1.3) a useful tool to illustrate the forces involved in the processes of defining this intercultural ‘zone’ of mutual understanding, while maintaining cultural differences.

Based on fieldwork data, Part Two aims to define the processes involved in shaping the body of Noongar knowledge that was communicated to (and appreciated by) non-Aboriginal participants. In other words, I illustrate what specific knowledge has been shared with cross-cultural audiences and I show what is ascribed to Noongar knowledge in the intercultural context by essentially focusing on the non-Aboriginal reception of Noongar culture.
Chapter One — Introduction

Through ethnographic data collected at various settings where cross-cultural engagements have occurred (see Part Three for discussion about these settings), I focus on the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge that emerged from the cultural interface between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people. Such a notion resonates with the stance of Bhabha (1988), who challenged the inaccuracy of some absolute binary cultural oppositions and suggested the concept of a ‘third space’ to understand cultural encounters.²⁷

In three chapters, I show empirically a range of processes involved in the co-construction of the intercultural body of knowledge. From my data, I have identified six themes of engagement within which people shared cultural meaning with a recipient of cross-cultural information, in this case the non-Aboriginal listener. Each chapter (Four to Six) discusses two of the following themes: tradition, language, kinship, history, spirituality and the environment. I illustrate how each of the themes is constructed around notions that are culturally meaningful to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Each theme illustrates a range of processes concerning the way non-Aboriginal people grapple with Noongar culture.

I have focused on these six themes in order to facilitate the communication of my data, since they represent various areas of Noongar knowledge that were brought to the interface. These themes have a heuristic purpose of explaining the cultural processes involved in shaping the ‘middle space’ of engagement where cross-cultural understandings emerge. These categories were not, however, as clearly defined in reality. For example, spiritual knowledge is ‘tradition’, as well as being strongly embedded in the notion of environmental appreciation of the land. The contemporary practices of Noongar kinship result from a long history of contact. The use of Noongar words and Aboriginal English also result from an historical context.

Bearing in mind that such a thematic typology has for its main purpose the clarification or facilitation of the analysis, I have also paired the six themes in three chapters. This dyadic grouping intends to illustrate some over-arching processes involved in defining the body of knowledge that is communicated to, and appreciated by, cross-cultural audiences.

²⁷ For a case study relevant to this thesis, see Holcombe (2005), who draws on this source.
This results from a plurality of factors that are more apparent in some themes than others, which explains the reason of the selection and its pairing. I could have linked them differently, as there are some commonalities between the different themes. For example, 'Tradition' and 'Spirituality' both show how non-Aboriginal cultural templates influence the reception of Noongar culture. Moreover, some people (non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal) romanticize and emphasis the lifestyle of hunting and gathering. Such romanticisation of past practices was evident in ideas about the use of the land as well as the use of traditional stone tools. In other words, I could also have paired 'Tradition' with the use of the land (the section on 'Environment').

Nevertheless, for my purpose I have paired 'Language' with 'Tradition', as in both cases some elements of Noongar cultures were more appreciated than others. Albeit not spoken in everyday life, Noongar language was seen by non-Aboriginal audiences as a feature of traditional culture whereas Aboriginal English, largely spoken in contemporary settings, was not seen as such. Similar processes occur in regard to Tradition. As the landscape is an expression of Noongar spirituality, I have paired these two themes together in the following chapter. As shown in Chapter Six, the pairing of themes allows me to acknowledge the existence of contrasts in the communication of cultural values or practices. Indeed, the practices of Noongar kinship (a contemporary 'habitus') were not talked about during my fieldwork, whereas Noongar history has been prominently discussed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

Broadly speaking, the thematic presentation of the intercultural body of knowledge and the processes of dual (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) negotiation around each theme is a heuristic device to describe and explain the knowledge exchange at the interface. The concept of a communication of Noongar culture as a whole is much too broad to be dealt with without sub-categories.

Chapter Four discusses the co-construction of the intercultural by analysing Noongar tradition and language. I demonstrate that the intercultural body of knowledge draws upon both Noongar and non-Aboriginal cultures. I illustrate that some cultural features remain outside the realm of the intercultural body of knowledge, while, at the same time, other elements are being incorporated with enthusiasm. In terms of Noongar tradition, I look at a variety of features that enter the context of intercultural knowledge,
such as the practices of the past or the Noongar Welcome to Country. Non-Aboriginal people are less responsive to traditions involving the notion of secrecy of knowledge. By looking at tradition, I identify a non-Aboriginal fascination with exoticism. This particular theme of Noongar tradition also provides me with an opportunity to discuss the notion of the invention of tradition. I have paired 'language' with 'tradition', as both of these clearly illustrate how non-Aboriginal people are selective in their receptivity of Noongar cultural features. Indeed, while Aboriginal English and standard Australian English are the language of everyday life, non-Aboriginal people seem to be more responsive in their engagement with Noongar language itself, and dismissive about the former.

In Chapter Five, I focus on notions concerning 'the bush' and 'spirituality'. I suggest that non-Aboriginal people listening to accounts of Noongar culture are highly receptive to knowledge concerning the land and its spiritual significance because, for them, these were both important foci in their own culture not so long ago—and even now (Read 2000). This chapter reveals very clearly the need for a common ground for understanding, in order to appreciate any body of knowledge that is communicated cross-culturally. I explain that non-Aboriginal people have articulated an enduring interest in Aboriginal spirituality over more than a century; that they are responsive to elements such as Dreaming stories, the idea of 'totems' and spirits. Simultaneously, I demonstrate the importance of a non-Aboriginal Western background in believing (or disbelieving) ideas about Noongar spirituality. With knowledge concerning the environment, I also show the importance this has for Western cultures, from their prehistoric origins. I end this chapter by illustrating, through a case study, the difficulty of interweaving two cultures—despite the positive intentions of those Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal, people involved in the process.

Chapter Six provides me with an opportunity to illustrate another over-arching process associated with the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge. With the theme of Noongar 'kinship practice', I show that what is being taken for granted, that is, 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977), cannot be packaged readily for the purpose of cross-cultural communication, as there is no existing didactic template that explain the complexity of Noongar kinship practices. Conversely, the theme of 'history' shows a very different process in the way the intercultural body of knowledge is articulated. Indeed, historical
knowledge appears to be increasingly intercultural, as the historical experiences of Noongar and non-Aboriginal people are woven together to create an ‘official’ Australian history of the southwest of the state. The two foci of attention in this chapter contrast starkly, perhaps more so than any topic I treat elsewhere in Part One.

Broadly speaking, cross-cultural engagements tend to occur within what I referred to earlier as a space of overlapping and joint attention, if not interest. The intercultural is, therefore, a kind of ‘third space’ (to use the idiom of Bhabha 1998) that is defined by the cultural interface. It is not only that each of the cultural ‘entities’ need to find some commonality (a common ground) on which to engage; it is also that these cross-cultural engagements (discussed in Part Three) occur when some cultural commonalities have been established—without people necessarily being aware of this process. In more specific words, non-Aboriginal people seem to best understand Noongar culture when the elements of Noongar culture that are being communicated concern features that resonate with non-Aboriginal Australian culture. Similarly, these could also be elements of Noongar cultural knowledge about which non-Aboriginal people already know something (e.g. that Aboriginal kinship systems are complex).

I observed that some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who were involved in cross-cultural engagements tended to explain cultural knowledge by using values that ‘speak’ to the ‘outsiders’ (see Chapter Nine) in order to improve the reception of the message communicated. This requires some degree of familiarity with both cultures. Moreton-Robinson (2003: 127) commented on this feature of Aboriginal people being knowledgeable with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural worlds, something she thought was less common among the non-Aboriginal population:

We [Aboriginal people] have become extremely knowledgeable about white Australia in ways that are unknown to most white ‘settlers’. Our social worlds are imbued with meaning grounded in knowledges of different realities.

Interestingly, two Noongar participants expressed a similar view. However, I emphasise here that understanding the processes at stake in defining the ‘intercultural’ is more than just a matter of knowing both worlds; it requires me to decode and analyse some of the meanings rooted in non-Indigenous cultures, since the way non-Aboriginal people perceive and engage with Noongar culture is based on what makes sense in their own (non-Indigenous) culture.
Reflecting on my data, I find it difficult to suggest that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are consciously aware of this notion of a common ground. The intercultural is a kind of ‘field’ (Bourdieu 1977) where inter-cultural meanings are established within the setting of a cross-cultural engagement. This resonates with Merlan (2005), who noted the value of Bourdieu’s theory to a conceptualisation of the intercultural. The intercultural could be understood as a culture of engagement, which is based on meanings that are located at the intersection of the two cultural worlds and through which people can pursue their aspiration to engage. The notion of shared meaning is fundamental in the construction of the intercultural. Indeed, Geertz (1973: 5) noted the importance of meaning in defining the concept of culture:

The concept of culture I espouse... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.

In cross-cultural communication, meanings play a key role; however, I reiterate that the jointly spun ‘web of significance’ that shapes the cultural dialogue is rooted, not in one culture, but in two cultures, as I exemplify through six themes that concern cultural features that have some significance in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

It is worth noting that Torres Strait Islander scholar Nakata (2007: 9) investigated the cultural interface from a different perspective to mine. He looked, not at the common ground on which cross-cultural engagements occur, but at what he defined as the ‘contested space between the two knowledge systems’ where ‘things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western.’ To conceptualise the cultural interface, he placed a strong emphasis on ‘knowing who you are, knowing where you stand’ (Nakata 2006: 272). Indeed, the notion of cultural standpoint is at the core of his writing (2007a, 2007b; Minniecon, Franks and Heffernan 2007) as a person’s standpoint influences their perspective (something that I illustrate in Part One). As Merlan (2005: 175) suggested with reference to Bourdieu (1977), people are ‘socially situated’.

In Part Two, I am investigating the co-construction of the intercultural body of knowledge rather than the cultural interface, in terms of history and cultural identity, as observed by Nakata (2007). I see his approach as different to mine; it is, however, complementary. This notion of cultural standpoint is fundamental to grasping the nature
of cross-cultural interactions (see Part One); my intention in Part Two is to illustrate empirically some of the processes that shape the body of cultural meanings that is exchanged within the context of engagement. I do not investigate how the politics of the cultural interface influences the positioning of Noongar people within the broader Australian society. I suggest that having a body of cultural knowledge on which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can engage may result in a better recognition of Noongar culture within the broader society (see Chapters Three, Eight and Nine). My focus in Part Two is to understand how the intercultural is constructed; however, I take into consideration the notion of a duality of cultural standpoints.

To conclude, Part Two aims to understand the content of the Noongar knowledge communicated in various cross-cultural settings, despite Hinkson and Smith (2005: 157) noting ‘anthropology’s apparent difficulty in making these “intercultural” circumstances analytically tractable.’ I acknowledge that my findings about the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge were based on data collected at cross-cultural settings (Part Three). Some of these settings (e.g. cultural awareness workshops) aimed at increasing non-Aboriginal awareness of Noongar culture, and the strategic decision of communicating some features of Noongar culture rather than others may be connected to Indigenous politics associated with gaining a broader recognition within Australian society (see Chapter Eight). In Part Two, however, I focus my analysis on the cultural side of the process. I investigate the corpus of knowledge that is communicated in order to understand why the non-Indigenous participants in this research were responsive to some Noongar cultural features, whilst rejecting some others. There is a need to grapple with the way non-Indigenous people apprehend Aboriginal cultures (see also Macdonald 1997: 80-1). Such matters may not be restricted to the Australian setting; in the United States, a lack of awareness of cross-cultural understandings has resulted in the failure of a court action, where legal notions of ‘authenticity’ were contested in an indigenous land rights case:

Anthropologists who testified for the Wampanoag of Mashpee, Massachusetts, failed to convince the court because, as Brightman notes, their representations of culture as referring to ‘a mutable, syncretic, and dispersable field of ideation and practice, lacking any essential core or content and detachable from territory, language and heredity [were] clearly refractory to folk-American notions of genuine Indian culture (1995: 530)” (Lambek and Boddy 1997: 11-12).

I suggest that defining how the ‘intercultural’ is co-constructed could have broad outcomes for some enterprises in the corporate sector, resource development or the
Native Title assessment process. Indeed, accommodating the intercultural body of knowledge to non-Aboriginal expectations ‘... triggers recognition and a positive outcome’, to use Merlan’s (2006: 86) words in relation to tradition and Native Title agreements, whereas ‘inadequate ... [communication] ... produces denial of recognition’, and could enhance, or subdue, further interactions (see Part One). In the light of the empirical data from this study, I am aware that a detailed understanding of the ways in which non-Aboriginal people grapple with the Noongar intercultural body of knowledge shapes the condition by which Noongar culture itself is recognised. As Povinelli (2002: 8) observed in the context of her experience in the Northern Territory:

[A] particular scene would elevate to sociological significance the impossible demand placed on these and other indigenous people: namely, that they desire and identify with their cultural traditions in a way that just so happens, in an uncanny convergence of interests, to fit the national and legal imaginary of multiculturalism.

Through this thesis, I hope to contribute an understanding of the demands that are placed on Noongar (and more broadly, Aboriginal) people to demonstrate their Indigenous status within the contemporary context of recognising the local cultural perspective. I define the intercultural from a non-Aboriginal standpoint (i.e. the reception of Noongar culture by non-Aboriginal people). I encourage further research to investigate the communication and incorporation of non-Aboriginal cultural elements in Noongar culture.

**Part Three — The constraints imposed by the Australian economy in shaping cross-cultural engagement**

The intercultural having been defined, I now focus on the opportunities that allow the ‘intercultural’ to be communicated to the broader Australian society—that is, the settings within which cross-cultural engagements may occur. My data suggest the need to take into consideration the constraints of the Australian economy (see also Altman 2005 for similar comments, though in a different setting), as various economic settings have differential impacts on cross-cultural engagements. Over three chapters, I investigate the cross-cultural implication of three economic contexts. Once again, I find the Venn diagram a useful means to illustrate graphically my analytical understanding of the way the economy influence social practices (Figure 1.4). I discuss a plurality of

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28 For a broader perspective on the politics of culture, see Handler (1988) on Quebec, and Cantwell (1994) on American folklife.
Altman (2007) presented a comparable Venn diagram that showed these three types of economic settings.
cases that represent three features of the Australian economy: the competitive free-market, government intervention\(^\text{29}\) and the issue of non-monetary consumption. I show that opportunities for cross-cultural engagements are highly dependent on these three types of settings, each of which is driven by different economic forces. In other words, the economy (including the political economy) is strongly involved in shaping Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss the free market economy by investigating the highly competitive industries of commercial media and advertising for mass consumption\(^\text{30}\). In a free market setting, corporate enterprises seek to maximise their profits, which occurs when the supply and the demand of goods or services coincide and consequently determine the prices (this is the realm of micro-economy, e.g. the equilibrium of Pareto\(^\text{31}\)). This quest for profit influences cross-cultural communication, as it leads commercial businesses (vendors) to transmit selected aspects of Aboriginal cultures (i.e. what sells well) to non-Indigenous people. From my research, I suggest that the

\(^{29}\) In using this term, I am not referring to the policy developed by former Prime Minister John Howard to intervene in the administration of the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities. Rather, I am referring to the concept from an economic point of view, as I discuss here.

\(^{30}\) I suggest, however, that this type of analysis could be applied to any economic enterprise, including the niche market of Aboriginal art and cultural tourism. I did not include in my thesis the chapter on the niche markets of Aboriginal art and Noongar tourism, given the constraints on thesis length.

\(^{31}\) This fundamental concept in microeconomics was defined by Pareto. The 'equilibrium of Pareto' aims at theorising economic efficiency by focussing on the allocation of resources amongst economic agents. The equilibrium is calculated through mathematical models that aim at improving the economic wealth of at least one agent, without the others agents having any subsequent loss in the process.
advertising industry contributes to a marginalisation of Aboriginal people and cultures from the broader Australian society, as advertising campaigns do not feature Aboriginal Australians in everyday activities.

This chapter analyses the highly competitive market of commercial television, including the advertising industry that funds it. As evidenced in my data, the competitiveness of the commercial media shapes the communication, or non-communication, of Aboriginal cultures to audiences and, therefore, influences non-Aboriginal learning. Commercial television broadcasters seek to appeal to a broad range of consumers (as virtually every household has a television set). This industry operates by competition, aims at producing wealth and is driven by the logic of maximisation of profit, as indeed, profit maximisation is achieved through seeking competitive advantage. Commercial television provides a means of analysing issues surrounding the cross-cultural communication of Aboriginal interests to the broader Australian society, whose members may or may not want to learn about Aboriginal cultures. In free-market settings, private enterprises aim at maximising their profit by attracting consumers. In this chapter, I investigate some mass media, as they provide a potent illustration of the processes imposed by the market economy on the communication of Aboriginal cultures to the broader Australian society.

In Chapter Eight, I observe the contribution of state and federal government agencies to the cross-cultural communication of Noongar culture. I exemplify this by referring to various cases that illustrate some of the politico-economic structures (e.g. the Western Australian Department of Education) through which people find some means to engage with each other (as I discuss in Part One). A 'true' capitalist economy suggests no government intervention. Indeed, in such economic settings, corporate enterprises (the means of production) should be solely regulated by the interplay of the supply and the demand that define the market (Bayes 2004) and subsequently determine the prices of goods-and-services in circulation within a free market. This process was theorised by Adam Smith as the 'invisible hand'. In most capitalist economies (not to say all), however, there is a degree of government intervention. This is often referred to as

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32 This is a fundamental notion in micro-economy suggested by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). It implies a self-regulation of the market economy. For details, see Vaggi and Groenewegen (2003), Crompton (2006: 8), Gregory and Altman (1989).
Keynesianism. These competitive free-market economies that have a degree of government intervention (e.g. trade regulations, social issues) constitute mixed economies and, as Sloman and Norris (2002: 76) noted, 'the real world is one of mixed economies.' This is the case for the Australian economy, albeit major changes have occurred since the oil crisis of 1973 (Quiggin 1996: 9).

In regard to the cross-cultural interface, government intervention is rarely motivated by the maximisation of profit, but by the principle of social intervention (e.g. public sector cultural programs) to promote the principles of multiculturalism (on this latter issue, see Jamrozik, Boland and Urquhart 1995: 99). This brings to cross-cultural communication a different dynamic. In this chapter, I illustrate a variety of case studies that demonstrate the government's intention to increase non-Aboriginal cultural awareness of Noongar people. These comprise cultural awareness workshops, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training, public broadcasters, and a government-funded art exhibition. Indeed, these settings provide other opportunities for Noongar people to share and communicate cultural features with the non-Indigenous community. Unlike the case of commercial television, which is highly constrained by the search for economic viability, the Department of Education can introduce into the school curriculum a component of Aboriginal knowledge—whether non-Indigenous parents want it or not—without fearing that it could lose its 'audiences'—that is, its funding if it was operating in the corporate sector. Indeed, the argument comes from a fundamentally different standpoint, one that is not predicated on the balance sheet but on informing and teaching. This is not, however, to suggest that government cultural programs are fully disengaged from their audiences as, for example, my research findings concerning the content of intercultural knowledge (dependent on both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures) were partly collected at government workshops. The investigation of government intervention is a means of illustrating the communication of Noongar/Aboriginal culture(s) from the standpoint of Noongar and

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33 Keynesian economics is based on the theory of John Maynard Keynes, who propounded a need for state intervention to stimulate economic efficiency. Keynes challenged classical economists such as Adam Smith and Ricardo, who believed in the ability of the market to regulate itself through the equilibrium between supply and demand, and subsequent price adjustment. State intervention occurs through a variety of actions, which range from regulating interest rates, taxation and, more generally, through public programs.

34 For an American perspective on the dichotomy of market economy and state intervention see, for example, Brown (1997).
Aboriginal people themselves, since I focus on government agencies that deal with Indigenous units that are essentially staffed by Aboriginal people.

Chapter Nine concerns the issue of non-monetary consumption. At first glance, non-monetary consumption is not a strong force in capitalist economies, where failings in consumerism and retail trade indicators alert economists. However, Australians commonly exchange birthday, Christmas, and wedding presents, or ‘thank you gifts’ (Carrier 1995; Berking 1999). Non-Indigenous and Aboriginal people engage extensively in non-monetary consumption and, through such consumption, assert, communicate or learn about Noongar (and more generally Aboriginal) culture(s).

Non-monetary consumption concerns goods and services that have been acquired free of charge at the end of the economic chain—that is, without any monetary transactions taking place at that time. In this chapter, I firstly investigate cross-cultural awareness through gifts bearing some sort of Aboriginal iconography. I also discuss an interesting aspect of cross-cultural interaction. Indeed, Noongar people are engaging with free products bearing an Aboriginal design, mainly to assert cultural pride or cultural recognition, whereas non-Aboriginal people engage with expert talks, in order to learn about Aboriginal cultures. These two sections demonstrate that the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal intentions to engage cross-culturally are driven by slightly different motivations. Moreover, neither the free market setting, nor government-funded opportunities have provided possibilities for non-Aboriginal people to participate in the practice of customary exchange that occurs in Aboriginal societies (discussed by Altman 1989; Berndt 1964 and Ackerman 1979, for example). The communication of Noongar culture discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight shows that the content of cultural awareness was, to some extent, socially accepted by the broader society. This section demonstrates further that the economy constrains cultural awareness, as non-Aboriginal people are unlikely to purchase something that deeply challenges their own cultural beliefs.

Whereas I take the three settings discussed in Part Three (free-market economy, government intervention and non-monetary consumption) as a heuristic tool of analysis\(^{35}\), it is vital to understand that the intersection zones (4/5/6/7) of the three

\(^{35}\) See Altman (n.d.), where he uses a similar heuristic device that emphasises comparable interstices.
circles depicted in Figure 1.4 have a particular social reality. For example, in Chapter Nine, I discuss the consumption of goods acquired for free by Noongar people at festivals; however, government departments produced most of these goods, so they properly lie in Section 6 of the Venn diagram. In a comparable manner, I also discuss gifts (Chapter Nine) purchased on the commercial market (that is, Chapter Seven), even though these properly lie in Section 5 of the diagram. Moreover, during my fieldwork, I conducted some participant observation at Noongar tours where the enterprises were acting in the market economy; however, they took their customers to places like Yanchep National Park and Wave Rock, which are staffed by people from the Indigenous Unit of DEC (Department of Environment and Conservation). Such tours are, therefore, in section 4 of the Venn diagram. An awkward example of Section 7 in the diagram concerns an art show. The attendees received a free ticket (non-monetary consumption, as in Chapter Nine) from a commercial gallery (driven by the increasing consumers' demand, as in Chapter Seven); however, two of the speakers who opened the selling exhibition worked for the Western Australian government (that is, Chapter Eight).

Part Three focuses on market forces. Indeed, in the light of my fieldwork, I have endeavoured to identify a link between the sites that I investigated. This is how I realized that the notion of varied economic settings was essential to the analysis of my research. In Part Three, I discuss the ability of governments to set up cultural projects that commercial enterprises would often not be able to consider, as they commonly seek financial viability and the maximization of profit. Whereas Part Three is cast in economic terms, it is essential to bear in mind that the willingness of the government to facilitate Noongar cultural recognition (and communication) is also a result of today's ideology of Reconciliation.

In Chapter Seven, I discuss commercial television. It could be claimed that editorial policies (e.g. educating consumers, appealing to a specific segment of the market) and ideologies could counteract market forces. Whereas this may be true, it appears that commercial television is fundamentally seeking to maximize its income by meeting consumers' (that is viewers') demand. As a result, editorial policies are constrained by market realities. In regard to commercial newscasting, journalists have explained to me

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36 Yanchep National Park is located on the coast approximately 50km north of Perth and Wave Rock approximately 200km south-east of Perth.
how market forces drive the notion of an editorial philosophy. Indeed, the journalistic assumptions about 'what sells' result from strict monitoring of the audience, as I note in Chapter Seven. More broadly speaking, the ideology of communicating Indigeneity (in a free-market setting) is dependent on market forces (e.g. consumers' expectations), and some participants have explicitly voiced that there is no place for ideology if this implies financial failure.

In the case of government-sponsored activities, ideological values find their sustenance because government money is subsidising financial loss. Commercial private businesses tend not to favour the ideological commitment of communicating Noongar culture without profit. This dualist approach to the communication of Noongar culture shows the amplitude and the role of the economy in regard to the interface. Indeed, my position in this thesis is that ideological positioning of engaging cross-culturally is driven by, and dependent on, market forces—rather than being a fully independent factor. I should note, however, that I have not analysed how consumers' expectations and, more generally, non-Aboriginal understandings of Indigeneity influence the market.

In particular contexts the commercialisation of a notion of Aboriginality is prescriptive of consumers' purchasing practices (e.g. the niche market of Aboriginal art or Aboriginal heritage tourism). For such settings, the market forces are dependent on the communication of Noongar (Aboriginal) culture(s), as consumers seek exposure to it. Participants have said that these niche markets target a smaller segment of the population—that is, people who are willing to pay for acquiring Aboriginal products or knowledge. This is different to the case of commercial television, which is dominated by a policy of a mass-consumption. The role of the economy is insidious in regard to cross-cultural awareness. Bluntly speaking, Aboriginal products or knowledge seem to be marketed if they sell, if they generate a market and financial sustainability—otherwise not. Enterprises operating in a free-market setting seek to appeal to consumers and grab notions or products that sell well. Outside the particular niche markets of Aboriginal art and tourism, the communication of Aboriginal knowledge remains marginal.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I draw together the key themes and outcomes of this thesis. The three key elements I focus on—people's aspiration to engage cross-culturally, the
intercultural body of knowledge, and the constraints of the Australian economy—have illustrated the multiple factors involved in the articulation of contemporary relationships between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people in Perth.
Chapter Two — Methods and Methodology

Designing the research

I initially conceptualised this project by drawing on both my personal experiences and on the relevant literature. A number of scholars have reflected on the way the personal influences the shaping of investigation, in specific contexts, where researchers have a prior degree of familiarity with their field site. Narayan (1993: 678), for example, commented on the ‘pre-existing experience’ of the researcher, reframed with ‘analytic categories’. Marcus (1997: 240) also noted that it is ‘a matter of shaping the personal into the objective and shared discourse of scholarly communities’. The interweaving of theoretical discourse with empirical facts is part of a broader discussion in which, for example, Clifford (1988: 32) quoted Evans-Pritchard on The Nuer, “facts can only be selected and arranged in the light of theory”.

In the light of the anthropological literature, I was aware of a plurality of influences in cross-cultural engagements. The art industry tends to promote the interchange of cultural knowledge (Myers 2002: 236; Morphy 1998: 25); news and current affairs programs on television often seek to emphasise social disruption (Mickler 1998; Trigger 1995; Hartley and McKee 2000; Mickler and McHoul 1998); the state and federal governments employ a larger number of Aboriginal people than does the private sector1; and the tourist industry frequently promotes and sells a sense of an ‘exotic otherness’ (Willis 1993; Urry 2002). In parallel with these processes, however, many non-Indigenous Australians rarely, or ever, engage with Aboriginal people. A non-Aboriginal woman who started a relationship with a Noongar man commented:

My friends were pleased and interested to meet him because he was Aboriginal. Someone different. Because people don’t have much contact and they see the romantic side: Yothu Yindi, Ernie Dingo, Cathy Freeman [i.e. referring to publicly well-known individuals] (5: 11).

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1 See Hunter, Kinfu and Taylor (2003: 13-4) who provide economic data on public sector Aboriginal employment versus that of the private sector; Foley (2006) on Aboriginal entrepreneurs; Altman, Biddle and Hunter (2004) on the role of the state and Federal governments in socio-economic change over the last three decades.
Before I started my PhD, I had had a variety of background experiences that helped focus my approach. I had done some volunteer work for a Noongar organization in 1998. I had socialised with very different groups of non-Aboriginal people who have varied awareness about Noongar culture, and I had extensive conversations with Aboriginal friends about their family experiences of interactions (past and present). I also went to a number of Aboriginal art shows, I watched news reports and participated in some Aboriginal heritage tours while I travelled in Australia. From these diverse experiences, I was aware of different settings within which Aboriginal and non-Indigenous engagements occur.

Anthropologists and sociologists are well aware that societies are non-homogeneous in character (e.g. Goffman 1959; Bourdieu 1984), and a number of scholars have reflected on this issue. Brightam (1995: 517), for example, commented on the incoherence and apparent confusion of societies:

The recent message is clearly that the culture construct falsely ascribes coherence to fields of social experience which are incoherent or, at least, less coherent than they have been imagined to be. The claim is not that cultures are internally diverse (versus homogeneous) but they are disordered, contradictory, and sometimes disputed.

For Strathern (1995: 159), Geertz’s approach to culture was even more focussed on its minutiae:

In Clifford Geertz’s (1973: 14) definition, culture is context, the frame within which, as he says, social life can be intelligibly described.

Reflecting on these comments, I asked myself, how could cross-cultural interactions be approached as a manageable entity for enquiry? I conceptualised my research as a diagram that shows a multiplicity of opportunities for interactions (Figure 2.1), as each situation tends to be located within a context that facilitates it, as well as defining its nature.

As shown in the diagram, I investigated five sites (or contexts): the ‘tourist industry’, the ‘art industry’, the ‘media (including advertising industry)’, ‘government departments (such as the Department of Education, ArtsWA, CALM, for example)’ and ‘Indigenous and non-Indigenous interactions in every day social life’. Within each of

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2 I selected five sites, as the constraints of time, budget and manageability did not enable me to investigate the entire range of settings for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous engagements. The legal system (including the criminal court and the Native Title Tribunal, for example), health carers (mainly through
**Figure 2.1** Selected opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction

**Figure 2.2** Proportion of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australian capital cities (data obtained from Census 2006, ABS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistical division</th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Aboriginal population in %</th>
<th>Non-Aboriginal pop. in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>1,105,839</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>1,763,131</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>98.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>3,592,591</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>99.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>4,119,190</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>98.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra</td>
<td>323,056</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darwin</td>
<td>105,991</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>90.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Hobart</td>
<td>200,525</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>1,445,078</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>98.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
these contexts, the communication of Indigenous cultures was partial. Each site represented a different genre of opportunity, within which the corpus of Noongar knowledge was, somehow, located within a sectoral setting. This could be seen as a localised knowledge\(^3\), a located knowledge, or a partial representation of social process. I referred to my sites as thematic contexts for interaction. They were not presented as matters of ‘cultural truth’ in cross-cultural interaction, but more as ‘an opportunity … to investigate an interesting setting’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 36).

The sites for cross-cultural interactions were, in a sense, non-spatial. They could not be defined by a geographically distinct sense of place. I was not going ‘there’ to study ‘that’. I was following a multiplicity of *mise-en-scènes* where interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people occurred. I was inspired by the notion of ‘[dis]continuity in cultural formations—their multiple and heterogeneous sites of production’ (Marcus 1997a: 117). Marcus’s (1995) concept of multi-sited ethnography provided a framework with which to conceptualise and conduct my fieldwork. He was ambiguous in his definition of multi-sited ethnography. On the one hand, he used the term to label a method to investigate multiple geographic locations; on the other, he commented about sites in a non-geographic sense when he reviewed Martin’s (1994) multi-sited ethnography. Her ethnography was located in a single geographic location (in an American city), although it focussed on a plurality of thematic settings (medical practitioners, people of the street, a scientific laboratory, alternative practitioners, and patients). I was inspired by Martin’s research, which gave me confidence to investigate multi-sectoral contexts and a plurality of situations.

My multi-sited ethnography was cast in terms of industries rather than geographic places. I was aiming to grasp the apparent contradictory nature of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions, some of the discordances that define the engagements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Perth today. I was aware that Friedman (1999:

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\(^3\) This is not a matter of ‘emic’ versus ‘etic’ knowledge. Many people involved in the tourism industry in Perth are Noongar, and they themselves put the emphasis of tourist tours on traditional ways of life, such as daily activities of hunting and gathering, which have long disappeared as a mode of subsistence.
13) argued, ‘it is important to take these contradictions into account when trying to understand the trajectory of Indigeneity in today’s world.’ It is worth noting that it would have been bewildering to pursue my goal of grasping the complexity of cross-cultural engagement through a traditional ethnographic approach. I needed to use a methodological framework that would help me to cope with diversity and rupture. This methodology for multi-sited ethnography reassured me that I was not stepping beyond the boundaries of the research question itself; it confirmed me in my role as an ethnographer. It was a way to grasp the influence of ‘things happening elsewhere’ (Marcus 1997a: 118); although, in my research, the notion of ‘elsewhere’ only comprises various opportunities for interactions, as well as an understanding of ‘behind the scenes structure’ (Marcus 1997b) that reveals connections between the different sites involved. I spent an equal amount of time investigating each site, as none of the sites could be presumed to be more significant than another (Marcus 1995). The variety of opportunities occurs simultaneously in Perth, and people navigate among them, as I experienced myself before I started my research. This was confirmed throughout the fieldwork.

While Marcus (1995) provided a valuable methodology for my data collection, I retreated from this methodology in the analysis. My reading of Marcus is that a multi-sited ethnography is more than simply a fieldwork methodology. It requires that the anthropologist identify what I term the common denominator that links all the sites together. The genre of this common denominator (people, metaphor, things) defines one of the ‘modes of construction’ suggested by Marcus⁴. In analysing my data, I found that the operational matrix of cross-cultural interactions lays mainly in economic settings (Part Three) and is influenced by intercultural meanings (Part Two). People’s agency and the structural components of interactions are also significant elements that I investigate in ‘Stories in Black and White’ (Part One). I have chosen not to allocate a chapter to each site, as this was not the best operational matrix by which to grasp the nature of the interactions. For example, in the light of my data, I observed that there are many commonalities among commercial media, art and tourism, whereas these were different sites in the original conceptualisation of the project.

⁴ These modes are: 1) Follow the People; 2) Follow the Thing; 3) Follow the Metaphor; 4) Follow the Plot, Story or Allegory; 5) Follow the Life or Biography; 6) Follow the Conflict (Marcus 1995).
The participants

In a total of 1.4 million people living in Perth, Aboriginal people represent just 1.5%, which means that 98.5% are non-Indigenous (Figure 2.2 compares the ratio with other state capitals). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants who grew up in the Eastern States commented on the clear Noongar presence in Perth. Helena, a Koorie participant, felt that ‘here, in Perth, Noongar people are more obvious than Koorie [people are] in Sydney’ and Fiona, a non-Aboriginal woman working for the art industry, noted:

I come from Melbourne. Koorie culture is involved but there are not many Koorie representatives. Noongar people are more visible (4: 117).

Conversely, though, some non-Aboriginal people I met during my fieldwork had never engaged with Noongars. For example, a woman living in Femantle even recounted, ‘I have never seen a Noongar person.’

Selection criteria

I first briefly comment on general issues about the selection of participants. I recruited most respondents through participant observation, as I explain in the section ‘Fieldwork in practice’. The first principle was to have approximately an even number of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in order to grasp both standpoints in cross-cultural engagements. In achieving this, I kept in mind the need to seek an approximately equal distribution by gender and age\(^5\) in order to avoid any bias. I also aimed to ensure that participants represented, more or less, the socio-economic range of Perth’s population\(^6\), in order to minimise bias in documenting cross-cultural engagements. While I was not attempting to match the profile of participants with statistical accuracy, as the ABS Census 2006 does by occupation, I was able to include people who were employed (including technicians, tradespeople, service workers, managers or government employees), unemployed, and not in the labour force. The socio-economic diversity reflects the kinds of events I was attending: these ranged from private art gallery openings, dominated by the presence of wealthy patrons, to local

\(^5\) In the course of my engagement with participants, the issue of gender was very rarely raised, with the exception of secrecy of knowledge (see the section ‘Tradition’ in Chapter Three); however, I noted that the experiences of interaction changed significantly across different age groups (see Chapter Ten for detail on this latter issue).

\(^6\) My previous training in quantitative data analysis and economics may have influenced me in this.
community events in poorer suburbs and to large-scale public events (e.g. the Perth Royal Show), which attracted a very wide diversity of attendees.

I also sought, in my data collection, to grasp a diversity of experiences in regard to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cross-cultural engagements. As I conducted participant observation at cross-cultural events, I was making contact with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, who themselves were interested in crossing cultures. It was much more difficult to locate potential participants who were not interested or involved in cross-cultural engagements. After four months of fieldwork, I realized that all my respondents had engaged in some forms of cross-cultural contacts or were interested in Aboriginal cultures. I was concerned at biasing the outcome of the research by overestimating the apparent level of interaction. How could I best remedy this?

I sought the advice of a Noongar Elder whom I knew well. He understood my problem, but could not really help me. I was aware that some Aboriginal people seek to minimise their contact with non-Indigenous people\(^7\), largely due to previous negative experiences. I met such respondents—that is, Aboriginal people minimising contact—in the course of participant observation, but I only had superficial engagements with them and was therefore unable to talk with them on a more personal level.

On the other hand, I was aware that some non-Indigenous people never engaged with Aboriginal people (as is evident in my fieldwork)\(^8\). In order to address this potential imbalance, I relied on my existing network of friends and acquaintances. Their first reaction was that they could not contribute to the project because they ‘don’t know anything’, as one person told me. I asked them if they could tell me about their childhood and life experiences. I had very long and reflective discussions, and their answers provided me with some insights about the circumstances that had shaped their lack of contact. By talking to those having no cross-cultural experiences relevant to the research, I was able to locate the patterns of interaction within the wider Australian

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\(^7\) Several Noongar people confirmed this during the course of the research.

\(^8\) In order to achieve the goal of this project, which was to investigate cross-cultural engagements, I needed to talk with people who had some sort of engagement, that is, who actually knew some Aboriginal people and had contact with them. I asked people the question: ‘Do you have any Aboriginal work colleagues, or friends or family members?’ Many said ‘No, actually’.
Chapter Two — Methods and Methodology

community; that is, neither to over- nor to under-estimate the extent of Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interactions.

The non-Aboriginal participants: issues of terminology

The research aims to investigate cross-cultural interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; however, it does not actually refer to two distinctly homogeneous and identifiable cultures\(^9\). My thesis focuses on what I can best describe as conglomerates of cultures (or non-monolithic categories), as the notion of a non-Aboriginal identity is complex and multi-faceted, like that of an Aboriginal identity. Indeed, Beckett (1988: 2) has noted that ‘Aboriginality... is a cultural construction’ but ‘[i]t shares this quality with all other nationalisms, including the Australian...’ In this section, I discuss the terminology I am using to refer to the cultural identity of categories of participants, as this may be contentious. Labelling with a generalized terminology a culturally heterogenous population is problematic and often inaccurate, as it contains unresolved issues associated with describing the people located within these categories.

On the one hand, I worked with people having no Aboriginal ancestry. Trigger and Mulcock (2005: 317) have noted the use of ‘Euro-Australian’ as an appropriate term in their discussion of the spiritual significance of forests; however, I could not use this term because some participants in my study were of Malay, Indonesian, Indian, Turkish, Persian and African backgrounds. During seven decades, ‘Anglo’, ‘Western’ and ‘Euro’ ethnicity dominated non-Aboriginal settlement in Australia. Indeed, the long-term enactment of the \textit{Immigration Restriction Act 1901} resulted in what is known as the White Australia Policy (e.g. Jureidini and Poole 2003: 193-6, 296-7; McMaster 2001: 39). From the mid-1970s, however, the Australian government embraced the ideology of a multicultural society\(^10\), where all migrants could acknowledge their ethnicity and maintain their respective cultures (Jupp 1996, Rowse 2005b). I engaged with people without seeking, nor avoiding, any particular ethnicity. I recruited people at various events (see section Fieldwork in Practice) and encountered the cultural diversity of Australian society. At the time of my fieldwork, ethnic diversity was not itself an issue.

\(^9\) Although no group is, of course, fully homogeneous (see Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 50).

\(^{10}\) See Hage (1998) for debate on the issue.
Being a migrant myself, I took Australian multiculturalism for granted. It is only when I started to write this thesis that I realised I had not foreseen the issue of the terminology to refer to half of the study participants who represent the diversity of a multicultural and cosmopolitan Australian city. How should I refer to them?

Are they ‘Westerners’? No. Christianity underpins religious beliefs in the ‘Western’ world and two Muslim respondents commented on their Islamic religion as being separate to that of Westerners (accordingly to Yasmeen 2005: 165\(^{11}\)). A non-Aboriginal participant, for example, told me after we discussed Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions: ‘My husband is from a Turkish background and because of his upbringing he comes with a different approach of Aboriginality, you might want to talk to him’ (Notepad 3). Secondly, the ‘West’ as a ‘civilisation’ has a long history of symbolic cultural opposition to the ‘East’, from the Middle East through to Asia (Said 1978; Buruma and Margalit 2004; Abu-Lughod 1991: 143-4; Stenou 1998). Indeed, many respondents from non-Western cultural backgrounds have emphasised in various ways their opposition to ‘the West’. For example, an Iranian man commented: ‘I see similarities with the culture of Aboriginal people and my own. We have extended family. We have collectivist cultures, as opposed to the West’s individualism’ (13: 73).

It is also noteworthy that Australia has a history of discrimination against Asians (Tanner 1999; Collins 1988; Hage 1998; Jupp 2002), despite such practices being regarded as unacceptable for more than three decades. A Malay participant said, ‘My boss treated me differently because I wasn’t White, I wasn’t a Westerner.’ The term Westerner, however, is a generalization that does not recognise the diversity of its component cultures (Italian, French, Anglo, Canadian or Australian, for example).

How should I refer to participants whose ancestry does not include Aboriginal forbears? Are they ‘migrants’? It is worth noting that five participants described themselves as being of ‘early settler ancestry’ and distanced themselves from ‘migrants’ who, they felt, had not gained a comparable genealogical depth in their relationship with Australia. For these five participants, migrants are believed to lack an on-going contact and established connections with particular areas of landscape. Participants whose families

\(^{11}\) An extensive literature from the disciplines of history, religious studies, political science, etc. discusses the strong and long-established rupture between Islam and the West/Christianity. Yasmeen (2005: 165) noted: ‘Of all the religions, however, Islam retains the dubious honour of being identified in most of the literature as distinct from the “West”. Such a categorisation seems to imply that those belonging to one community are ipso facto excluded from membership of the other.’
had settled in Australia for many generations commonly see themselves as being from a settler ancestry, whereas respondents who were raised overseas tend to refer to themselves as migrants or by their ethnic origins (e.g. Italian, Singaporean, Jewish); nevertheless people also see themselves as ‘Australian’.

Should I label this heterogenous group with the terminology ‘non-Indigenous people’? The categories ‘non-Indigenous’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’ are defined negatively, in terms of what they are not. These terms carry problematic issues and reflect a long-standing debate on the nature of ‘me’ and ‘you’, ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘self’ and ‘other’ in a manner similar to the words ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’, which are themselves the result of colonial misapprehensions (Dodson 1994: 8). Moreover, two participants were Maori, and therefore, indigenous to New Zealand. Using the terminology ‘non-Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ is, somehow, inaccurate. It presumes a kind of homogeneity among ‘non-Aboriginal’ persons and omits the cultural background of people such as ‘Italian Australians’, ‘Indian Australians’, ‘Indonesian Australians’ or ‘Anglo Australians’. In writing this, I am thinking of some participants who were born in Australia and of some who have migrated later in life, as a child or an adult.

To summarize, none of the terms ‘migrant’, ‘Westerner’, ‘settler’, ‘non-Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ are accurate words to refer generically to all those participants with no Aboriginal ancestry. As I have not found any alternative or adequate solution, I call them ‘non-Indigenous’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’ people.

Being ‘Black’ or ‘White’: the inaccuracy of terminology

Could I term the group of non-Aboriginal participants ‘White people’? No, because the term ‘White’, as well as ‘Black’, has connotations associated with it, as I will now discuss. ‘White’ as a term to refer to non-Aboriginal people is problematic because some participants were ‘Black’ people, but they were from Kenya and India. The terms ‘White’ and ‘Black’ were originally descriptive of skin colour, but this is now not the case, at least in Perth. ‘White’ is definitely not an appropriate term to define non-Aboriginal participants. For those whose skin colour is ‘black’, it is not appropriate for them to be labelled a ‘White person’, as one respondent advised me.
There is a stigma associated with 'Whiteness' (Moreton-Robinson 2004: 75) by members of ethnic groups who have suffered 'White' (or colonial, as it is often equated) domination. Broadly speaking, Tate (2005: 107) noted 'that individuals construct themselves as Black in opposition to whiteness', and Gale (2004: 334) declared that 'Whiteness has been a significant historical maker of national identity in Australia'. This resonates with Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos (2004: 32), who wrote that the social construction of whiteness 'at once position[ed] Indigenous peoples as non-Australian'. Speaking more generally of the Australian society, Hage (1998: 232) observed:

Whiteness operates as a symbolic field of accumulation where many attributes such as looks, accent, 'cosmopolitanism' or 'Christianity' can be accumulated and converted into Whiteness.

Anthropologist Myrna Tonkinson (1994: 162), who is Jamaican, reflected on her own experience at Jigalong Aboriginal community (Western Desert). She wrote about her feeling when the terminology 'White' represented people with no Aboriginal ancestor:

'Jurra! jurra! Walybala nyaangga' (Stop, stop there's a whitefella here). It took me a few seconds to realise that the person being referred to as 'whitefella' was me, a black woman.... As a woman of Afro-Caribbean ancestry, being labelled 'whitefella' was entirely alien to me.

This discomfort at being wrongly labelled 'White' or 'Wadjela' (Noongar word for 'White person') was clearly articulated by some Noongar participants, including a young Noongar child who resented being incorrectly called 'a Wadjela'. Her father told me:

In a lot of cases, I can identify Noongar people, but for my kids many people couldn't. Ninety percent of Noongar, I could pick them out [as being Noongar]. At the park, a little kid denied the Aboriginality of our little kid, 'Hi, little Wadjela', he said. My daughter replied, 'I'm Noongar. I'm not a Wadjela' (5: 57).

The terms 'Wadjela' and 'White person' are often used in everyday conversations; however, their use may be problematic for those unaware of the nuances of meanings associated with them. A participant said:

I say Noongar and Wadjela. I don't use the word White, I never use Black either. I wouldn't use them. Some Indigenous people use Black and White, but for me it's an emphasis on skin colour. I don't see a Black or White person (14: 116-7).

It is common knowledge that a number of Noongar and other Aboriginal people are fair skinned. Pamela (Noongar/Yamatji) recalled about her youth:

In my family there are different skin colours, from fair to darker complexions. When I moved up north, I was exposed to dark-skinned Aboriginal people. I was
scared. I was 19. I had never seen so many dark-skinned Aboriginal people. It was such a huge group (3: 88).

This debate over identification by skin colour is a direct result of 200 years of contact and the mixing of ancestries. Up to the early 1970s many children with mixed ancestry were taken away from their parents (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). The ideology of the time was to remove these children from their Aboriginal cultural influences, in order to incorporate them within the broader Australian society. Children lacking entirely any European ancestry were, in some ways, protected from the effects of these policies, as they were thought to be ‘beyond redemption’ (Neville 1947)12. These practices are not from a distant past. An Aboriginal friend from the Western Desert who was born in the early 1960s reflected on her own childhood: ‘I am a full-blood, so I wasn’t taken away.’ Some parents avoided having their fair skinned children being taken away, and this came at a heavy cost. For example, a Noongar man recalled his childhood:

We lived in the bush, hiding. My mother took us there to be safe, for us not to be taken away to Moore River [Native Settlement]. We lived in the bush for many years. We grew up bush way (NotePad K).

Children were also often hidden when authorities came to the Reserve, as some participants have told me. One of my friends recalled that a fair-skinned Noongar had said to him, ‘When the Welfare came, my mother covered my skin with charcoal, so I looked like a full blood’. Given the impact of past policies, many people may feel concern to exclude fair-skinned Aboriginal people from the category ‘Black’. For example, Lina (Noongar) recalled:

My father is White. My Mum was sent to Moore River. I was in a catch 22. By law I was non-Aboriginal, because Mum was a ‘quadroon’ [one quarter Aboriginal]13. I was one eighth but I was still treated as an Aboriginal. When I was nine, I went to East Perth police station [late 1940s]. I said ‘our name is on the board’. It was the name of all Aboriginal people living in East Perth. They wanted to know where Black people were, where they go.... White people were so different. We couldn’t relate to a lot of things (11:114).

Blackness and Whiteness are not descriptive of skin colour. Someone can be ‘Black’ in the sense of ‘being Aboriginal’ despite having a ‘white’ skin14. Indeed, Noongar people have discussed the issues of skin colour at cultural awareness workshops, and Dallas

12 For a broader consideration of the role of Neville in developing the policy of assimilation see Paisley (2005).
13 J. Wilson (1958: 129,) noted: ‘The quadroon was not under the Act, and legally was treated as “white”.’
Winmar (2000) mentioned it in a theatrical performance (Plate 2.1). At her home, Alice (Noongar) expressed dismay:

My father was White but I was never identified as White. I’m more accepted by Aboriginal people. Some people talk down and patronise you. How are you an Aboriginal, you don’t look like an Aboriginal. What I am suppose to look like? (4: 134).

Two slang words raise this issue of skin colour and Aboriginality, which is indicative of this complexity. The term ‘Wigger’, meaning ‘White Nigger’, defines people who are ‘White on the outside and Black on the inside’—for example, fair skinned Noongars who acknowledge their own culture and act in the ‘Noongar way’, as people put it. Another term, ‘very trendy but not very well known’, according to a Noongar woman (30 years old) is ‘Coolmint’, which means the same thing ‘White on the outside, Black on the inside’. In opposition, the words ‘Coconut’ and ‘Bounty Bar’¹⁵ (although the latter is less commonly used) are derogatory terms that label Noongars who pursue material rewards (thought to be a non-Aboriginal value) with little consideration of Noongar practices¹⁶ (e.g. sharing with family members, see Chapter Nine). A respondent said:

They [a Noongar household] all live together. People come and go in the house. They live more simply. I met all of them with my bikini and sarong. Marc [Noongar] was with his laptop and his fair skin. It was quite a meeting: two to three minutes. I drove away and said to him, ‘you don’t really fit in?’ ‘I’ve been called a coconut before’ he answered. He lived in a Western suburb, in a house by himself. He put himself in a very White setting (5: 14-5).

Indeed, the terms ‘Black’ and ‘White’ remain contentious, so I prefer to use the alternatives, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’.

**Aboriginal participants: further issues of terminology**

Having discussed previously some problems associated with the terminology I could use for non-Aboriginal participants as a group, my second dilemma is: ‘How should I refer to the other half of the respondents in my project—Aboriginal people collectively?’ The vast majority of Aboriginal participants were Noongars; however, some were from other areas of Western Australia, a handful came from the Eastern

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¹⁵ The terms mean ‘Black on the outside, White on the inside’, as a Noongar friend told me in 2000.
¹⁶ In a different setting, see Martin (1995: 7) for a discussion on economic consumption and Aboriginal cultural values.
**Plate 2.1** ‘Everything is either black or white. There are no shades of grey.’

**Scene: Black shoes: White shoes**

*Two spiritual beings on stage, no gender.*

White: It’s funny don’t you think. Everything is either black or white. There are no shades of grey.

Black: Strange don’t you think. Black shoes, white shoes.

W: I was asked a question of what it means to be white.

B: I was asked a question of what it means to be black.

W: For me to understand the concept of whiteness.

B: I first have to understand blackness.

W: If there were only blacks populating the earth, my understanding of whites wouldn’t be fully realised.

B: It may not even exist.

W: We wouldn’t realise we were all white, if there was no black.

B: But we wouldn’t see what it means to be white.

W: I know what it means to be white only when I compare the two.

Courtesy of Dallas Winmar
States, one was a Torres Strait Islander and therefore not Aboriginal but still Indigenous. I would emphasise that there is no issue about the terminology to label a culturally homogenous group of Aboriginal participants, such as Noongar, Bardi or Yamatji people. Problems only emerge when I discuss a collective category that represents itself as a diversity of Aboriginal cultures.

The first issue concerns the understandings of Aboriginal Australia in the eyes of non-Indigenous participants. While some, if not many, were indeed aware of cultural differences in Aboriginal Australia, this was a somewhat abstract concept for many of the non-Aboriginal people with whom I spoke. For many of them, their knowledge of Aboriginal cultures was slight, and they adopted a ready generalisation about 'Aboriginal Australia'. Public functions, which are a means of exposing non-Indigenous people to Aboriginal cultures, sometimes mix performers from different cultures. This may contribute to a blended view of Aboriginal Australia. Seeing Aboriginality in homogeneous terms is widespread and occurs in a number of different settings. Given the homogenisation of Aboriginality, it leads me to sometimes use the generalised term by referring to Aboriginal people rather than Noongar.

It is important to note, though, that the term ‘Aboriginal’ is a category arising from an opposition (Langton 1994: 16); it did not exist before colonisation. In the academic setting, there is also some complexity in defining Aboriginal identity, and the concept has variously been framed in terms of ‘Aboriginality-as-resistance’ (Hollinsworth 1992:151), as ‘shared-blood’ or ‘shar[ing] a common cultural heritage as well as a history of oppression by white society’ (M. Tonkinson 1990), and as distinctive social life (Keen 1988b: 1; see also Sutton 1988b: 265, for an approach on myths and shared events). Beyond the definition of Aboriginal identity is the concept of pan-Aboriginality, which is a contested label (R. Tonkinson 1998: 288-9); whilst

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17 For example, Torres Strait Islander and Noongar performers at a Noongar Cabaret at the Deckchair Theatre, Fremantle, 2004.

18 For example, while I was able to get from the Australian Bureau of Statistics a detailed breakdown of non-Indigenous ethnic origins for people living in Perth, I was advised that no comparable figures were available to profile Aboriginal cultural diversity in the metropolitan area. After talking with several officers of the ABS, including the Indigenous section, they suggested alternative routes to the data, including the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), the State Library, and the UWA. None of these organizations hold detailed information about the ethnic diversity of Aboriginal people. An officer of DIA told me that it would be really useful in both planning and service delivery for them to have access to this kind of information, and that it should be collected in the Australian census. Unfortunately, this level of detail is not yet available from the ABS, in contrast to that which refers to non-Indigenous Australia. Perhaps this is due to differences in scale of population numbers?
Glowczewski (1998: 335) noted the fundamental significance of local identity, and Molnar (1990) stated ‘[a] pan-Aboriginal solution is inappropriate’.

The use of the term Aboriginal is, in many ways, inadequate—and to some—ineffective, because of the inherent cultural differences among Aboriginal groups. Indeed, it is worth commenting on the centrality of local Noongar identity for those Aboriginal people living in Perth. At times there is a sense of suspicion expressed by some members of the Noongar community towards non-Noongar Aboriginal people. For example, one Noongar woman warned me about Wongai [Goldfields-Western Desert] people, ‘Careful with those tribal people, they are featherfoots [punishers]. Don’t let them get any fallen hair off your jumper, they can use it for magic.’

(Notepad HS). Some non-Noongar participants who came to live in the Noongar heartland commented about a feeling of shyness inherent to their ‘other’ Aboriginal ethnicity. A Yamatji man told me that when he is at a meeting at the Noongar organization where he works, ‘I keep quiet. I’m not Noongar. They could tell me to go back to my country. I’m fully aware of it’ (Notepad SI). Emma, a woman working for an Aboriginal government agency said, ‘I wouldn’t dare raise that view here. I’m Yamatji and there’s a lot of Noongar, I am still considered as a visitor’ (8: 120). A Koorie man, John, working for a Noongar government agency in Perth was told by one of his Noongar colleague, ‘You shouldn’t take a Noongar’s job’ (12: 32).

The issue of belonging is rather complex, however. There is not always a sense of exclusion as, at times, this strangely blurs with a sense of inclusion. A prominent Noongar Elder, who is also a friend of my husband, told him, ‘Yamatji are our friends. They’re our old trading partners. They can come down here [to Perth] to visit. But they don’t belong here.’ In my field notebooks, I also have some comments that express unresolved issues about Aboriginality. Indeed, whereas many Aboriginal participants tended to conceptualise themselves at a local level (e.g. Noongar, Yamatji), the issue of identity is rather more complex. Below, Craig voiced how he feels about his own identity expressing a clear sense of ambiguity on the matter:

I’m not Aboriginal, I’m a Noongar. I don’t know about Yamatji and Wongai, I just know about Noongar. We all share the same beginning. I’m a Noongar before


19 In Central Australia, ‘featherfoot men’ or kadaitja carry out expeditions of punishment against others. Their name comes from the feather slippers they wear to conceal the identifiable pattern of their feet, and to dampen any noise of their movement (Elkin 1974: 313).
I'm Aboriginal, we share the same experience of the way Australia treats us. We are not Australian, we are Aboriginal (4: 1).

In relation to Aboriginal participants, it is also important to reaffirm the non-Noongar Aboriginal presence in Perth. While Noongar people are recognized as the ‘traditional owners’ (in terms of the Native Title Act, for example) of the South-West of Western Australia, many Aboriginal people from other areas of the continent are now living in the city on a long-term basis (for a New South Wales perspective, see Macdonald 1997: 69-70). More than any country towns or communities of Western Australia, the city attracts Aboriginal people from other areas for various reasons (e.g. hospitalisation, education, work). The families of some participants raised in Perth, and sometimes even born here, originate in the Kimberley, the Pilbara, the Western Desert and even the Eastern States (e.g. coming from Koorie and Murri group). Indeed, some Noongar participants referred to the shared affiliation their families have with distant places, often through marriage (see also Birdsall 1990).

There are also strong cultural similarities between Noongar and some other Aboriginal cultures and some long-standing relationships between Noongar and non-Noongar that are not simply a result of forced relocations due to past policies. Long-term trading relationships extended out from the Noongar world to embrace the Yamatji of the Murchinson-Gascoyne, as well as those in the Western Desert in the east. For example, Noongar implements and ochres were traded for stone tools and pearl shells (Akerman and Stanton 1993). The contact was not limited to trade. It appears that ceremonial knowledge also circulated among Aboriginal cultures as, for example, a Desert woman visiting Perth quietly pointed out that members of her community held knowledge of Dreaming songs associated with a prominent Perth landmark. She said, ‘Some Noongar people don’t know these songs anymore, because they’ve been taken away [removal of children and policies of assimilation], but we know them.’ (Notepad LS). Processes such as these bring some special cultural ties between Noongar and non-Noongar Aboriginal people in ways that leave out non-Indigenous people.

To summarise the complex issues surrounding Noongar identity versus a more general sense of Aboriginality, I have throughout the thesis endeavoured to use the most precise identifier I can for Aboriginal people; that is, I refer to the local grouping when there is no mixing of cultural identities. Otherwise, I use the term Aboriginal. I also use the
same term to protect the privacy of individuals where they might otherwise be identifiable.

Another dilemma I now address lay in choosing whether to use the term ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal’. Some Indigenous and non-Indigenous people used the word ‘Indigenous’, some may see it as being ‘politically correct’; as an academic told me on one occasion when I used ‘Aboriginal’. Some respondents may simply adopt it as a current trend, and indeed, more than half of the non-Indigenous participants used ‘Indigenous’ rather than ‘Aboriginal’ during my fieldwork. This, however, was heavily reversed in the case of Aboriginal participants. Indeed, during my fieldwork, I encountered many Noongar people and other Aboriginal participants who strongly preferred to refer to themselves as ‘Aboriginal people’ rather than ‘Indigenous people’. Some non-Indigenous people also preferred to use the term ‘Aboriginal’, as a respondent suggested: ‘The term “Aboriginal” is widely known both in Australia and around the world as being clearly identified with Australia’s First Peoples’ (Field Notes LS). Today, there is clearly a degree of flexibility in using ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Indigenous’. This flexibility in terminology is identifiable in the naming of several government agencies, such as Department of Indigenous Affairs, Aboriginal Lands Trust, Aboriginal Legal Services, for example. Some scholars also frequently interpose the two terms, for example Rose (2005: 294-5); others use one or the other. An ATSIC publication, used in cross-cultural workshops to train teachers in the implementation of the Aboriginal curriculum in all Western Australian schools, makes the distinction: ‘Australia has two Indigenous cultures—Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.’ (ATSIC 1999: 4).

In this thesis, I alternatively use both terms ‘non-Aboriginal’ and ‘non-Indigenous’ but I prefer to use ‘Aboriginal’ rather than ‘Indigenous’ in order to follow Noongar preferences on the matter.

20 This is with the exception of my reference to the two participants who were Torres Strait Islanders living in Perth. They are Indigenous Australians. Many participants are using the term ‘non-Indigenous’ and ‘non-Aboriginal’ interchangeably, so I often do the same in this thesis in order to provide a variety of terminology.

21 Overseas readers may not be aware of some identity labelling practices in Perth. Terms such as ‘coloured’ and ‘half-caste’ are still used from time to time in other areas of the state; however, in Perth they are today regarded as highly politically incorrect. In the 1950s and 1960s, people in Perth used the words ‘coloured’, ‘half-caste’ and ‘part-Aboriginal’ (e.g. J. Wilson 1958; Harrison 1960; Tonkinson 1962). Such terms may be used elsewhere in Western Australia. For example, Redmond (2005: 240) defined a key person in his research in the Kimberley as a ‘mixed descent Aboriginal woman’. During my fieldwork, a Western Desert woman said to me describing somebody in her community with mixed ancestry, ‘It was the half-caste girl....’. Such a comment would be deeply offensive to Noongar people, as the archetypal comment illustrates, ‘Which part of me is Aboriginal? My leg, my head, my arm...?’ (Winmar 2000).
Fieldwork in practice

Described as ‘a mix of institutionalised practices of dwelling and travelling’ (Clifford 1997: 198), fieldwork provides a way of gaining knowledge that is distinctive to the discipline of anthropology. Mulcock (2004: xi) noted that, by “‘being there” and... taking part in the interactions at hand, the researcher can come closer to experiencing and understanding the ‘insider’s” point of view.’ From my experience, fieldwork is more than just a matter of ‘being there’. As Wolcott (2005: 58) has commented, ‘the essence of fieldwork is revealed by intent rather than by location.... Fieldwork is characterized by personal involvement to achieve a level of understanding that will be shared with others.’ I often heard fieldwork being described as the rite de passage of the discipline. Scholars who have written on the topic typify it in myriad ways, including as a ‘marker of professionalism’ (Clifford 1997: 193), an ‘initiation rite’ (Jackson 1990: 24), as ‘half-jokingly... a ritual of initiation into a mature professional identity’ (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 16), which seduced Rabinow (1977: 3) who characterize fieldwork as ‘the promise of initiation into the clan secrets’. Wolf (1996: 7) commented on the ‘sink and swim mystique’ of fieldwork, as varied dilemmas and blurred guidance defined it (see also Berik 1996: 58). Kelly (2004: 6) wrote, ‘No amount of anthropological training or theory could have prepared me for the field as life had’—a point of view that I share. I found myself drawing on my past professional and social experiences to conduct the fieldwork. While the way to conduct fieldwork seems to be left largely to the individual researcher (see also Hammersley and Atkinson 1983: 23-4), in my view one guideline is essential in order to conduct good research: engaging with people.

For fifteen months (January 2003 to April 2004), I conducted my fieldwork, working with Noongar people, with other Aboriginal people and with non-Indigenous people, most of them living around the Perth metropolitan area. I spent the month of August 2003 in France, and I used this opportunity to investigate some of the overseas influences on Aboriginal art and tourism. In 2003 I also visited, on two occasions, two

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22 Fox (1991: 94) noted that ‘The Malinowskian text depended on the convention that the anthropologist had “been there”. As a narrative of empathy, it gave a false concreteness to a “there” that was constructed only in the presence of the anthropologist. Such texts in fact acknowledged the anthropologist’s presence only to prove that he or she had made an effective entree.’
good Ngaanyatjarra friends living on the Central Homelands (1500 km to the northeast of Perth). While I did not do fieldwork there, the visit provided me with a glimpse of another Aboriginal culture and helped me to understand more clearly some references made by Noongar people about Western Desert Aboriginal cultures.

Having lived in Perth for four years prior to commencing this PhD research, I could have simply used my pre-existing personal networks as fieldwork contacts; however, I decided not to do so\(^\text{23}\). I started the fieldwork process by conducting participant observation at tourist tours and art performances, since such events were public and I could simply turn up and melt in with the audience (Plates 2.2 and 2.3). In other words, the public nature of my fieldwork allowed me to ‘jump into the field’ and to participate in some events from the very first day (unlike private functions, for which I relied on invitations from participants)\(^\text{24}\). During the first month of fieldwork, I attended the Survival Concert 2003, a full day tourist tour, an Aboriginal play, an Indigenous music showcase, and a public lecture given by Aboriginal writers and organised by UWA Extension.

I relied on e-mail, word of mouth, public posters, mailing lists, friends and participants to gain information on ‘where to go’. On the other hand, the kindness of some Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people who invited me to work-related events, such as cross-cultural awareness workshops, work conferences or meetings, has significantly contributed to the outcomes of the research. Participant observation was a major component of my research methodology. I travelled extensively around the Perth metropolitan area to attend 97 events, through which I came in contact with most of the participants in the project.

Fieldtrip events varied in time from 45 minutes for the shortest one, which was the renaming of a courtyard at UWA with a Noongar name to acknowledge Noongar traditional ownership of the land, to three or four days for the following events: a cross-cultural awareness workshop, a political rally to save a Noongar sacred site, and the

\(^{23}\) My decision was intuitive, but Narayan (1993: 679) has raised some of her concerns on such issues: ‘[T]he process of doing fieldwork involves getting to know a range of people and listening closely to what they say. Even if one should already be acquainted with some of these people before one starts fieldwork, the intense and sustained engagements of fieldwork will inevitably transmute these relationships.’

\(^{24}\) See Hammersley and Atkinson’s (1983), Chapter Three, on issues addressing field access.
Plate 2.2 Snapshots of my fieldwork illustrate the diversity of field settings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image Description</th>
<th>Text Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plate 2.3 Key to field settings Plate 2.2</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transperth Yellow Cat during PIAF, 2004.</td>
<td>Telling culture at Kings Park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngaanyatjarra artefacts presented at a conference for the WA Department of Education.</td>
<td>Noongar dancers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Street audience during NAIDOC Week.</strong></td>
<td>Commercial Aboriginal art gallery opening.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noongar Elder Ken Colbung explaining his culture at a tour on the Swan River organised by the Department of Indigenous Affairs.</td>
<td>Mark Olive, Koorie chef, presenting some of his food at a WAITOC conference, Fremantle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimberley men performing on the Ngurara canvas, PIAF 2004.</td>
<td>Noongar heritage tour at Yallingup, Margaret River.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station owner.</td>
<td>Noongar heritage tour for Noongar children.</td>
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Perth Royal Show. The number of participants ranged from small groups at functions, meetings, and workshops to over five hundred for festivals such as the Survival Concert or Wardarnji Aboriginal Cultural Celebration. I always made sure that I arrived early at events to have time to talk with the people who were present. I obtained general information on what people ‘think’ (see Martin 1994 for similar methodology) and do, by asking questions orientated around the positioning of themselves within the event and the positioning of the event itself within the surrounding society. To engage with people in lay terms, I asked questions along the lines of: ‘How did you hear of [name of the event]?’25, ‘Why did you come to this event?’26, ‘What are you looking for in Aboriginal paintings?’27, ‘Would you mind telling me why you are wearing these clothes?’ These are just some examples (Plate 2.4).

At other times I engaged with people because I heard in the crowd a comment that caught my attention. At the Perth Royal Show, for example, a family stopped at the miamia (Plate 2.5), and the mother said to her children: ‘It’s like that, the kangaroo skins used to be worn as clothes or to sleep in.’ I turned, and the young boy looked at me, adding: ‘When I go to Fitzroy Crossing fishing with Dad, he’ll make his spear to get the fish and I’ll make mine to get the fish. We need a spear to get the fish’ (Notepad PRS). This sparked my engagement with the family, as I never took a passive role in the field (Plate 2.6). I constantly engaged with people attending events. I agree fully with Watson’s comment (1999: 4), ‘we use ourselves and our own personal experience as primary research tools.’28

I encountered most of the 158 participants through the short engagements I had with hundreds of people whom I met (and engaged superficially with) while I was doing participant observation. After exchanging phone numbers or business cards, I visited

25 'Answers varied and included leaflets, community newspapers, radio advertising, mailing lists, free newspapers, a friend or family members.
26 Non-Indigenous people expressed curiosity or an interest in learning about Aboriginal cultures; others were closely linked with Perth Indigenous communities and often go to Indigenous events. Reflecting on a tourist tour, one person commented: ‘it was wonderful, very good. You can hear the love of his culture, the trees. He is very proud of being Aboriginal’.
27 I try to find a meaning’ said someone, ‘I look at the story and the meaning’ said another person, ‘I look at the prices’ answered someone else, ‘I try to guess the symbol, it’s a game’ expressed another woman.
29 The fieldwork was vibrant and all embracing. Events were happening frequently and many people were extremely keen to spend their time contributing to the research. I had planned to continue my fieldwork up to April 2004. I stopped collecting data at that point, hence the apparently arbitrary number of participants and participatory events.
them subsequently in their homes, cafés, or in their workplace. Some people came to the University or my own home. I attended a multiplicity of events and worked with many participants in order to identify atypical occurrences and to avoid inaccurate generalizations. I was aiming to grasp as clearly as possible the difference between one person’s imagination as against social facts. I also privileged engaging with a diversity of people as I intended to identify sub-cultural trends that influence people’s experiences of Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interactions (hippies, environmentalists, Greens, Aboriginal art collectors, spiritual groups of New-Age orientation, just to name a few of the kinds of people who were keen to engage cross-culturally). I always kept in mind that people’s knowledge is often situated in their own sets of experiences, and that ‘All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others’ (Rosaldo 1989: 8). Having engaged with many respondents, my findings are far from being a collage of partial and scattered knowledge. They are an attempt to bring some systematic order to recordings of what people know, understand and experience when people talk of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions. Indeed, I would like to quote a Cree hunter: “I’m not sure I can tell the truth... I can only tell what I know” (quoted in Clifford 1986: 8). Throughout my fieldwork, I learnt that anthropology is about sustaining a dialogue with a diversity of participants as:

Once culture is seen as arising from a dialogical ground, then ethnography itself is revealed as an emergent cultural (or intercultural) phenomenon, produced, reproduced, and revised in dialogues between field-workers and natives (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995: 2).

With the exception of eight participants (both Noongar and non-Indigenous) with whom I worked very closely and continuously throughout my fieldwork, the length of each of my discussions with respondents varied from 45 minutes to 5 hours, with an average of one hour and a half to two hours. I usually talked to participants on a one-to-one basis;

30 What are ‘societal facts’ are not always clearly identifiable, as Barth (2002: 27) commented, ‘The ethnographer is exposed during fieldwork to a “blooming, buzzing confusion” of different events: a near chaos of actions and utterances and constellations of circumstances. No two events will be identical: we are surrounded by variations, and we know it.’

31 Although different to my point of view, I acknowledge the plurality of scholarly voices, as I did with the plurality of participants’ standpoints. Fox (1991: 94) wrote: ‘... some anthropologists hope to revive ethnography with “reflective”, “polyphonic”, or “dialogic” devices. The question is: do they preserve life or only stave off death? The long quotations from informants, the emphasis on the dialogue between an ethnographer and an interlocutor, the Babel of many native voices—these new devices may only further burden an already overstressed text form.’

32 The first six months of fieldwork, I saw people more than once. Later I saw participants only once, as I could not even keep up with the number of people who kindly agreed to share their experiences and
Plate 2.4 Engaging with the audience
Plate 2.5 Noongar mia mia, brush shelter. Replica of former housing.

Partially constructed mia mia, used to teach people (Noongar, non-Aboriginal, school children, tourists, etc.)

Mia mia displayed by the Aboriginal Unit of the former Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) at the Perth Royal Show.
Plate 2.6 Participative observation

Ethnographer being painted at a Noongar cultural awareness workshop at City Farm. Ethnographer painting Noongar children during a NAIDOC Week event.

Plate 2.7 Fieldwork business

Workshop aimed at improving cross-cultural interaction. Business cards were an important means of engagement in the field.
however, on six occasions friends, family members or work colleagues joined the
discussion and participated equally in it. I raised different topics with different
participants.

With Aboriginal and non-Indigenous participants whom I met at public events, I
orientated our dialogue around their personal journey of dealing with their own
Aboriginality or with their personal experiences that had shaped their understanding of
Aboriginal peoples and cultures.

When I met Aboriginal and non-Indigenous participants at workshops or work-related
events, I encouraged them to reflect on their work connections with Indigenous issues,
whether through tourism, art, government departments or the media. These people
included Noongar Elders, politicians, government employees, journalists, producers,
artists, advertising designers, souvenir shops owners, and gallery owners. I shared with
them their enthusiasm, contradictions, quandaries, and experiences of Aboriginal
protocols, professional needs and expressions of Aboriginal cultural meanings. I also
incorporated their personal experiences and viewpoints in these discussions. My
decision was guided by my desire to investigate how working closely with Aboriginal
people and cultures intersected with government policies, economic opportunities and
participants’ personal commitment, for example.

I intentionally refer to the time I spent with participants as being dialogues, discussions
or participative dialogues, rather than interviews, as I never prepared questions before
my discussions. I knew in which context and where I had met each participant, and the
reason why I wanted to talk at greater length with them; this was sufficient to underpin
the conversation. Not having a set of questions was not a matter of carelessness; on the
contrary, it was driven by a strong intention to optimise the breadth of my learning
about Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interactions. Throughout all the dialogues with
participants, I grasped slowly some of the meanings and practices embedded in cross-
cultural processes. I could not have grasped these issues solely through participant
observation, without engaging in dialogues with people. Through these participative

insights. It is hard to pinpoint the reason for the positive response; I suggest that it was because I was
working equally with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people: Aboriginal people were interested in
the non-Indigenous perspectives and experiences and vice versa.
dialogues I was able to access the behind-the-scene (i.e. backstage) dynamics identified by Goffman (1959) in his analysis of social interaction.

Some participants asked me beforehand what issues I would like to discuss; I always replied with something along the lines of ‘your own experiences’. Only two participants asked me prior to our conversation if I had a set of questions. On one of these occasions, in November 2003, I wrote afterwards in my field notebook my response to her question; I also added my own reflections on the issue:

Sophia [pseudonym] asked me if I had a set of questions. I replied no, because I want to grasp different kinds of interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The issues that are relevant to one person may be totally irrelevant to another. I could have drafted a different set of questions for every site, or for Aboriginal people as against non-Aboriginal people, but this would have located people within pre-existing categories and would not have shown the linkages of intercultural relations. Doing this, I would never have grasped how people move from one kind of experience, or one kind of exposure to the next, since it is through this that they gain their knowledge (13: 50-51).

Reflecting on my dialogues with participants, I share the point of view of Mannheim and Tedlock (1995: 13) that ‘a narrative told to an ethnographer is a joint construction of the ethnographer and the storyteller’. I can only conjecture that if I had used pre-existing sets of questions, these may have only confirmed or denied my existing expectations or understandings, and I may have failed to grasp the logic of intercultural interactions as these are understood in the minds of participants. In researching Cultures in Dialogue, I discussed cultural interactions with participants, sometimes asking respondents ‘What do you mean by this?’ or ‘Could you tell me more about that?’ in order to propel the conversation into the research focus. As Bakhtin (1981: 346) noted:

Every discourse presupposes a special conception of the listener, of his apperceptive background and the degree of his responsiveness; it presupposes a specific distance.

I have noticed that in each of my dialogues, the expressions of thoughts, comments or experiences of the participants depended, not only on their position as speaker, but also on my knowledge as listener, as we are both active participants in the dialogue. My fieldwork methodology required that I was familiar with both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous experiences and standpoints, as:

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33 This may be an optimistic expectation knowing that ‘the ability of the fieldworker to inhabit the indigenous mind is always in doubt’ Clifford (1988: 47).
A person’s knowledge is supposed to grow only in small increments, and in any aspect of life, people are deliberately told only a little bit more than the speaker thinks they already know (Clifford 1986: 8).

A number of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous participants occupied prominent status positions in Perth (four politicians, two Chief Executive Officers of large corporations, distinguished members of the community). They were all extremely approachable, and their insights most valuable to the research. I contacted some of these participants with whom I was ‘studying up’ by phone, and others directly at functions. From my fieldwork I knew they were key actors in the Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interface and that it would enhance the research to grasp the perspectives of ‘those who shape attitudes and actually control institutional structures’ (Nader 1974: 284). I would have missed a significant element of the interactions if I had not included a studying-up component, as Wolf (1996: 2) suggested:

The first dimension of power difference cannot be altered if one is studying marginalized or poor peoples. [...] “Studying up”—studying those with more power than the researcher—is perhaps one way to subvert this particular power hierarchy.

A decade ago, scholars who discussed the ethnographic practice of ‘studying up’ noted an enduring lack of recognition (eg Weston 1997: 170); however, more and more anthropologists engage with people ‘up the socio-economic ladder’. When I discussed my fieldwork practice with three fellow postgraduates and an academic staff member, they agreed with each other that ‘people in power are not willing to participate in research’ (to quote one comment from the academic). My own experience is rather different. People were, in fact, very keen to give some of their time to the research. Why was I so lucky? Was it that the research interested them? Or was it simply that, after all, engaging with ‘the powerful’ is not really an issue? I am convinced that ‘studying up’ is not a difficulty, and that such people are quite willing to share their personal experiences. In this context, I always asked for an appointment to discuss a particular point. I never posed a general request along the lines of: ‘I would like to meet with you to discuss the policy of the Department of X on Aboriginal issues?’; as this kind of request is simply too vague and I foresaw an answer along the lines of: ‘Just look at our government department web site’.

34 I acknowledge the use of this term is contentious amongst some anthropologists, as it may not accurately represent the distribution of power in a given situation.
35 At its 2007 conference, the Australian Anthropological Society had a two-day-long panel on the topic.
From my own experience, high-level professionals with little spare time agreed to discuss inquiries that required personalized responses that only they could provide. For example, a parliamentary minister referred in a public speech to (a) his friendship with a famous Aboriginal man, (b) his own community background as being a ‘community that doesn’t see colour in people’, and (c) that his Department was keen to promote its engagement with Aboriginal communities. I wanted to understand how government policy and economic opportunities (structural features) alongside a Minister’s personal commitments (her/his own agency) lead to new directions in their own department. After he left the podium, I asked the Minister: ‘Would it be possible to meet with you to discuss how your personal interactions with Aboriginal people influence the new directions of the Department of X?’ Three weeks later I spent an hour with the Minister and obtained invaluable data on decision-making, government direction and the agency of a particular politician.

Throughout my fieldwork, I gathered a broad range of leaflets, posters, hats, fridge magnets, water flasks and other paraphernalia that were given out for free by Indigenous organizations to children and adults attending, for example the Survival Concert or the NAIDOC opening day. If there were relevant pamphlets with Aboriginal referents displayed on the reception table when I was waiting to meet a participant, I always asked if I could have one. Collecting such items has been a consistent feature of the research (see Chapter Nine). I was aiming to investigate references, symbols, colours, and issues that are associated with Aboriginal cultures in Australia (see, for example, Banks (2001) and Pink (2001) on the incorporation of visual materials).

I also recorded news and television programs, when I could and when they were relevant, and gathered newspaper clippings, with the aim of seeking out material for analysis. In this way I became familiar with what appears in the media. I based my analysis of the media on my discussion with participants (including a number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal journalists) rather than on the clippings and recordings that only helped me to grasp the media context (Chapter Seven).

Communication during fieldwork occurred in a number of different ways. E-mail was an important tool used daily throughout the fieldwork period. I sent some people digital copies of the Information Sheet and Consent Form. Most of the paperwork arranging
my attendance at work-events was done through e-mail. Three Noongar respondents kindly added my e-mail address to their e-mail lists, so I could be forwarded information on Aboriginal events and functions. E-mail list messages are a means of passing on information about Indigenous events to members of Perth’s Indigenous community. These vary from cultural festivals open to the public to specifically Indigenous-oriented events, such as workshops on Aboriginal health issues and Indigenous broadcasting, for example. I participated in all of these types of events. Another tool was the mobile phone, which has been publicly and jokingly described by a Noongar elder as ‘a modern message stick’ (Notepad NT).

On many occasions, while I was doing my fieldwork, I thought that my day-to-day field activities were somewhat similar to those of a self-employed person running their own business (Plate 2.7). Office work was a daily activity. I spent hours on the phone arranging appointments with potential participants. I never anticipated that my fieldwork would require me to spend so much time using e-mail, my mobile phone, and my computer for diverse purposes, such as burning CDs of digital photos for gifts as part of the reciprocal process of fieldwork. Clifford (1997: 187) has noted these methods of engaging with fieldwork:

> These mental images [of a distinct field location] focus and constrain definitions. For example, they make it strange to say that an anthropologist in his or her office talking on the phone is doing fieldwork—even if what is actually happening is the disciplined, interactive collection of ethnographic data.

I conclude from this that I was, indeed, carried along by rather than just carrying out the fieldwork.

The ‘washing machine’ syndrome: being tumbled between, within and across cultures.

In this section, I address some of my feelings, emotions and reflections that emerged during the course of a culturally heteromorphic fieldwork. I was working on cross-cultural interactions and, therefore, focussed on and followed people’s movements.

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36 Some surfers describe the disorienting sensation of being tossed around by a wave as ‘it’s like being tumbled around in a washing machine, you don’t know where you are’, to quote one of my friends.

37 A body of literature deals with the notion of emotion in social theory (see, for example, Shilling 2002 for a historical review). Amongst many topics discussed, Lutz (1988: 8) commented on some cross-cultural issues of emotions; Barbalet (1998: 9) raises the awareness that ‘emotion can be regarded as an outcome or effect of social processes’; whilst Milton (2005: np) noted, ‘Emotions do not depend on social situations; they arise and operate outside these contexts as well.’
between cultures. As a consequence, I experienced from time to time a strange sense of disorientation, a feeling that I named the ‘washing machine syndrome’ (WMS). In discussing the WMS, I hope to convey as clearly as possible the idea that crossing cultures can be emotionally and psychologically disturbing. This is a fact to acknowledge prior to analysing the particular processes that I address in the following chapters. Here, I first revisit the literature concerning anthropologists’ cultural positioning within their fieldwork, their writings about being a cultural ‘insider’ versus ‘outsider’. This vast corpus of data provides a useful source of thoughts about the quandaries of crossing cultures and some of the issues about dealing within a ‘new’ cultural setting. Secondly, I reflect on my fieldwork to explain my WMS as, behind the quixotic wording, lays the realisation that we all carry our own culture, and that in some way we are prisoners of our own culture. This is something I now acknowledge when I engage in cross-cultural interactions maybe because, as Watson (1999: 2) noted about field experience, ‘things are never quite the same again.’

Nearly a century after Malinowski’s extensive period of fieldwork established a new way of practising anthropology, fieldwork in a distant, small and homogeneous community, where people are observed by a culturally removed scholar who has the authority to understand ‘their’ practices, is now highly disputed (Hamilton 2003; Clifford 1997: 210; Gupta & Ferguson 1997; Caputo: 2000), although MacClancy (2002: 1) also noted that anthropology has a long-term practice of engaging with ‘the world, and not just its more wondrous corners.’ Increasingly, many anthropologists have reflected critically on their fieldwork experiences, a concern that Crick (1993: 4) described as ‘a major anthropological growth industry’, whilst Van Maanen (1988: 73) suggested that reflecting on field experiences is something of a ‘confessional tale’. Many anthropologists appreciate this as an invaluable asset to the discipline as, for example, ‘reflexivity has the advantage of calling attention to differences that make a difference.... Reflexivity reminds the reader to view the circumstances of the anthropologist in relation to the circumstances of the people studied’ (Westson 1997: 171-2). The variety in field-locations, from far away to closer-to-home, has led to a plethora of field experiences that raise different issues concerning anthropologists’ cross-cultural experiences. How anthropologists understand the people with whom they work, how they fit within their ‘new’ cultural practices, is illustrated in the vast corpus of literature that discusses the notion of being a cultural ‘insider’ as opposed to an
Chapter Two — Methods and Methodology

'outsider', which is what some of us are at the beginning of our field research. Being an ‘outsider’ is a disconcerting position, something of the ‘confused “non-person” status’ that Clifford (1988: 40) noted in regard to Geertz’s cockfight. The discomfort of being different is not always easy to accept. As Robinson (2004: 162) wrote, ‘I had first to deal with a tendency, common among ethnographers perhaps, to deny the possibility that my otherness, my “whiteness”, was always present as a potentially distancing or inhibiting factor for the people I was working with.’ Acknowledging cultural differences was at the core of my research: it is a tautology to suggest that without cultural differences there can be no cross-cultural engagements.

Even where there are no cultural differences, when anthropologists are familiar with the cultural background of their participants, some problems remain in fitting within the ‘group’. An increasing number of ‘native anthropologists’38 have brought a new eye to the dilemma of crossing culture, in their linkages with participants of their own culture or sub-culture (Narayan 1993; Weston 1997; Berik 1996; Abu-Lughod 1991). Being ‘native’ may offset the sharp dichotomy of familiar cultural ‘insider’ versus culturally clumsy ‘outsider’; nevertheless, Teaiwa (2004: 217) referred to the ‘deeply troubling experience of navigating contexts in which I was neither insider nor outsider’. Kurotani (2004: 204-9), who shared the same ethnicity as the Japanese housewives with whom she was working, reflected on the ‘differences’ between herself and her participants. With more and more anthropologists working at home, the quandary of being alike has occurred in increasingly varied ways. Weston (1997: 162), for example, wrote: ‘[t]he virtual anthropologist is the colleague produced as the Native Ethnographer. Fixed as the one who sets out to study “her own,” she attracts, disturbs, disorders.’ Lal (1996: 190) reflected on her own status of being an Indian feminist anthropologist and on identity issues associated with re-immersion in her own cultural background, ‘what happens when the traditional boundaries between the knower and the known begin to break down, are reversed, or crosscut with mixed and hybrid identities?’ Even though anthropologists are trained to cope with crossing culture, the activity is still problematic.

In cross-cultural engagements there is a degree of selectivity in the knowledge communicated, as I witnessed in the field. Wolf (1996: 15) has raised the point that

38 Clifford (1997: 208) wrote: ‘The oxymoronic term “indigenous anthropologist,” coined at the beginning of the ongoing postcolonial / neocolonial recentering of the discipline, is no longer adequate to characterize a wide range of scholars studying in their home societies.’
participants will tend to share different types of information with native anthropologists and with non-native anthropologists: 'Chicana subjects were much more open about sex ... with the Anglo interviewer ... with the Chicana, they spoke much more freely about discrimination than with the Anglo researcher.' In a similar vein, Hammersley and Atkinson (1983: 110) noted, 'Outsiders and insiders are likely to have immediate access to different sorts of information.'

Through the fieldwork, I became strongly aware that the understanding of a cultural practice depends on people’s cultural standpoint. Anthropologists have long acknowledged that understanding cultural practices requires a degree of both closeness and distance, something that is difficult to achieve while being either a cultural ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’. For example, Aguilar (1981: 24) wrote, ‘Insiders must attain a necessary degree of distance for the sake of objectivity; outsiders must avoid too much distance’. In the field I learnt that approaching culture is a matter of standpoint (see Nakata 2007 for the case of Torres Strait Islanders) as, in a very different context, Clifford (1988: 42) noted in reference to Favret-Saada (1980):

She argues that the event of interlocution always assigns to the ethnographer a specific position in a web of intersubjective relations. There is no neutral standpoint in the power-laden field of discursive positionings, in a shifting matrix of relationships, of I’s and you’s.

People’s cross-cultural interactions may also be influenced by the political context. Abu-Lughod (1993: 40) raised an interesting issue when she wrote that being an insider or an outsider is also a matter of ‘position within a larger political context’, such ‘as a Frenchman in Algeria during the war of independence’. Evan-Pritchard’s brief period of fieldwork for his ethnography The Nuer is another well-known example that illustrates Abu-Lughod’s point about the impact of state politics and world conflict on positioning the anthropologist within the field. We must acknowledge that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interactions are subject, for example, to political agenda, such as Reconciliation.

The literature on fieldwork raises some of the difficulties about grasping the dynamics of a socio-cultural group. Reading anthropologists’ insights enabled me to reflect more clearly on my own experience and on the mechanisms of cross-cultural engagements. I acknowledge that most scholars are by necessity forced to examine some elements of the cultural interface, as no culture is an isolate. I am fully aware that there is often
more than one cultural grouping present in any Aboriginal community. In my research, I focus on these particular moments of cross-cultural engagement. Through my research, I needed to gain a level of familiarity with the multiplicity of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous perspectives, each of which has a long history of misunderstood engagements. On an everyday basis, I switched between the pluralities of participants' experiences, as these were the foci of my research.

The more I explored the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in my fieldwork, the more I became aware of the WMS. This term expresses my disconcerting process of constantly moving among cultural parameters (historical references, cultural patterns, cultural beliefs, and the like) in order to engage successfully with the diversity of all participants (see Smith 1999; Nakata 2007; Said 1978 on the cultural construction of knowledge). It was by reflecting on this WMS process that I realized that I was taking a deeper step in understanding the difficulties associated with the crossing of cultures and how destabilizing this action can sometimes be. A Noongar participant told me that he experiences a similar feeling every time he ‘[is] dealing with Wadjelas’, but labelled his feeling with an even more persuasive wording: ‘It is a schizophrenic kind of thing’ (4: 7). I wish to emphasise here that I am not referring to the kind of superficial interactions that may emerge at a social gathering, such as a dinner party, or even through work interactions. I am referring to a kind of alternate identity that results from moving between cultural systems. This required an ongoing process of cultural adaptation, something different to culture shock, which is a feeling of loss. Many of the Noongars with whom I worked and who have been raised with a duality of cultures (for example, Noongar at home and non-Indigenous elsewhere) are aware of some of the difficulties of engaging with people who have dissimilar cultural codes. When Noongar people find themselves within the wider community, they usually adapt their behaviour to the changed context, whereas non-Aboriginal people are mostly unaware of this cross-cultural practice (see Trigger 1992: 95-8 for a similar comment on the Gulf Country, Queensland). However, non-Aboriginal people who have also experienced the duality of cultures (e.g. migrants) commented similarly on their experience of changing practices. By reflecting in the field on the WMS I grasped first-hand the difficulties inherent in the act of engaging cross-culturally. It is through pondering on these issues that I gained a more acute understanding of the processes of interactions. To quote another anthropologist who
reflected on her fieldwork in Thailand, 'I became, in essence, another subject in my own fieldwork' (Fadzillah 2004: 43).

My notion of the WMS crystallized when I started to refine my understanding of localised knowledge, in order to optimise the nature of my interactions with participants. I sought to maintain credibility with the people with whom I was working, while I was moving between cultural backgrounds. I learnt that crossing cultural boundaries is not about finding a 'cultural truth'; rather, it is a matter of understanding how one's cultural background impacts on the interaction. From my own experience, moving between cultural domains is a disorienting process, since it can generate a sense of disability. In describing this, I can best typify it in the following terms: living in a particular society, an individual develops a personality comprising a variety of features including, for example, a sense of humour, a background of knowledge and a manner of interacting. Julia, a participant, discussed her feelings on the issue:

When we’re with Noongar, we are who we are. We don’t have to feel we’re different. It’s an unspoken understanding, just unspoken stuff, how we communicate, the sense of humour, laughing at the appropriate thing.\(^\text{39}\) (4: 148).

In crossing over to another culture, some features of a personality are not recognised. Some participants found their own sense of humour irrelevant, or even incomprehensible, when the referent on which a joke is based is unknown to the other group or unacceptable. Participants who have extensively crossed cultures realize that some of their codes of behaviour have counted for little or have even been regarded in negative terms. Their knowledge base has, sometimes, become out of place or irrelevant. From my experience I noted that the more I engaged in this process, the more readily I coped with—and even accepted—the sense of loss and disorientation inherent in crossing cultures. In a very different context, Behar (1993: 320) reflected on her own mixed and shifting identity as a Cuban-American anthropologist, writing: 'We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us.'

I believe my experience of the WMS was due to my hectic fieldwork period; however, I also think it was a very important step in the participative process of ethnographic research on cross-cultural experiences. I had to constantly readjust myself within my surroundings and ever changing discrete cultural worlds. I moved, for example, from a

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\(^{39}\) This is actually what Bourdieu (1977) intends to encapsulate by his use of the term 'habitus'.

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non-Aboriginal cultural setting into a Noongar environment, and then again from this environment into that of an overseas visitor, and then discussed interactions with long-established farmers in the South-West, a gold prospector, a mother of Koorie children, a racist ‘Whitefellow’, a Yamatji woman and her self-termed ‘coconut’ cousin, one event following another. Many Noongar participants were aware of undertaking cultural adjustments on a daily basis, as Lindy put it:

In a way, Mum took on certain aspects of being non-Indigenous, how she presents herself and how she speaks. Mum speaks fluently in a non-Indigenous manner when she is in a professional setting, very much so. But she switches codes. When she is around Noongar friends and family, the lingo comes (13: 147).

For me, it was never a case of speaking Noongar or acting as a Noongar; rather I was aiming to get enough credibility to engage with the plurality of participants. It reflected on the content of my dialogues with participants, as:

Unlike monologues, dialogues are characterized by the emergence of forms through negotiation, elaboration, interruption and other forms of exchange (Burns 1995: 77).

Constant field engagements with a variety of people are sometimes confronting and destabilizing. For example, the words ‘boong’ and ‘coon’ are very derogatory and offensive words used by some to refer to Aboriginal people. Many Noongars have found it, during the course of our fieldwork dialogues, very hard simply to mention the words to recall experienced verbal abuse. People referred to this issue quietly by saying ‘calling us names’. The words are now grossly politically incorrect, but unfortunately still commonly used by some non-Indigenous people. A retirement-aged non-Indigenous participant thought it is part of Australian culture:

It’s an Ocker thing. My kids are on the Ocker side. It’s just an Australian thing: boong bashing. Australian boong bashing. I reckon you never go to any Australian gathering that it doesn’t come up. On Sunday, my daughter had some friends over. Real Ocker. They had a little girl around six years old. We were watching the Dockers’ football match. The girl said, “The boong hit the ball”. A coon. A boong. Here and now (3: 120).

When I moved from one setting to the next, I sometimes experienced a strong sense of disorientation. Where was I? I was not an Australian citizen. Did this make me an outsider? I had developed a level of ‘complicity, friendship, respect, coercion... an hermeneutic attention to deep or implicit structures and meanings’ (Clifford 1997: 201) with participants, so was I an insider? I experienced the feelings of being in turn, an insider, an outsider, and a native anthropologist. I experienced all of them, and neither of them, for a long time. I had no fixed positioning within the field. On one occasion,
for example, I was at a Noongar cultural street event held by a city council where Noongar artists danced and told Dreaming stories. The organizer invited me to this event. Before the street show started, I had a ‘yarn’ with two artists and caught up with a good Noongar friend I had not seen for a while. Was I an insider at this moment? The audience was mainly non-Indigenous people passing by. I took, as usual, many photos. I accidentally shoved a big White Australian man and apologised with my French accent. He commented to the person standing close to him, ‘Another bloody tourist taking photos!’ Was I, after all, an outsider? A couple of days later, I spent the morning with a non-Indigenous woman I met at this event and we discussed Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interactions. Was I, that morning, a native anthropologist, working with non-Indigenous people like myself?

Prior to my fieldwork, I was aware that ‘No one can be an insider to all sectors of a community’ (Clifford 1997: 214); however, I was not prepared to face how disorientating it could be to grasp the standpoints of different participant’s communities in order to understand the processes of their interactions. Looking back on my field experiences, I can interpret the WMS as representing a liminal effect (van Gennep 1960). This state of liminality is an ambiguous and indeterminate state, a period of transition, like the time of dawn and dusk. I felt this character of liminality every time I engaged consecutively with very different people who have had very dissimilar experiences, sometimes opposing understandings of cross-cultural interactions. Leaving one setting to join the next and alone in my car, I felt I was located within the ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner 1967: 97), a liminal state where I lacked the status of belonging to any group. My feelings and emotions were triggered by the realisation that these participants were highly influenced by their own sets of values, their cultural standpoints, beliefs and experiences.

My intention to immerse myself within the plurality of cultural environments of each participant made me aware of the difficulty of going beyond what appeared increasingly to be the intercultural zone, the mutually accepted area of cross-cultural interactions (see Part Two). As I noted at the beginning of this section, the WMS is about feelings and emotions. I am not sure I am able to pinpoint these clearly enough to enunciate them. I can only suggest that people who are ready to go through the process of crossing culture could be tumbled between and within different cultural standpoints. To follow
the analogy of dialogue, when two parties disagree it takes a conscious effort and the skills of negotiation to grasp the perspective of the other in order to find a zone of agreement. To the reader, I suggest that this instant of stepping into other people’s standpoints can be disorientating. The daily repetition of this instant induced the WMS.

I now describe briefly a case of my constantly unfolding cross-cultural experience, which illustrates some of the subtlety of cultural awareness, despite the participants sharing the same language, sometimes the same employer, or whatever. One afternoon I crossed cultural boundaries without even leaving the premises of a government building. In this particular instance, I had two successive and lengthy discussions with participants. The first was a Noongar woman, the second a non-Indigenous woman, both working for the same agency. I talked to each of them in the same conference room; nevertheless, I felt from the content of these two engagements that I had metaphorically travelled across two radically different cultural frameworks and sets of experiences. I felt I crossed a virtual cultural border, comparable to Clifford’s (1997: 199) point:

In tracking anthropology’s changing relations with travel, we may find it useful to think of the “field” as a habitus rather than as a place, a cluster of embodied dispositions and practices.

In this instance, I had to know both cultural worlds in order to be able to move from one to the other, if I was to understand how the experience of each participant was being framed. I am talking here about subtle shifts in emphasis; differences in the ways the two participants addressed their understandings of cross-cultural interactions. The Noongar woman focussed her conversation within the contexts of family history, intergenerational knowledge, her experiences of exclusion and the centrality of Noongar culture in her life. She referred to a well-known family feud in the South-West, to Noongar language, advised me to talk to a specific Elder on a particular issue, told me a Dreaming story and made a reference to the continued guidance of spirits. The non-Indigenous woman spoke of her own personal accomplishments, her career paths, her travels as a means for learning about other cultures, her children’s education. She did not comment about the centrality of her own culture in her life; however, she discussed extensively her interest in other cultures:

When I grew up I travelled the world a lot. I’m used to different cultures. I’m more open because of this. People are scared of the unknown. It strikes me that people can be so ignorant, their lack of awareness of Aboriginal affairs. The
media can be so biased; reporters are playing on people’s misfortune. I find it disappointing that people can be so ignorant (3: 51).

Within the context of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions, it appears that non-Indigenous people tend to view the process in terms of learning about Aboriginal cultures and rarely put their own culture into the equation. This contrasts strongly with Noongar people, who centre the interaction on the communication of their own culture. In communicating their culture, many Aboriginal people call on concepts that make sense in terms of non-Indigenous cultures (see Chapter Nine). It is also noteworthy that people who operate on a daily basis within a culturally different environment (e.g. at school, work) are more likely to develop skills to engage cross-culturally; however, this remains a difficult task, as Alex told me in the following quote. He has close family connections with Wongai and Noongar people, but commented on his lack of familiarity with Aboriginal cultures to resolve industrial relations, despite an unusual cultural awareness:

I don’t find it as easy to share with Aboriginal people as with non-Indigenous people. With non-Indigenous, I share experiences. I’m comfortable with assumptions and stereotypes. If someone makes a sexist remark, I try to clarify the belief. I’m working on common ground. I can challenge them without offending people. With Aboriginal people, I feel I’m the one who’s learning and I feel reluctant to make assumptions because I might be presuming things that are not at all correct. I didn’t feel comfortable in my own ability, because of my lack of knowledge (12: 95).

During the course of my fieldwork, I progressively gained a degree of familiarity with aspects of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous perspectives on cross-cultural engagement. Working on the ‘cross-cultural’ matters involved having participants drawn from different cultures, and in this chapter I have discussed some of the issues that emerged from such a context. During the writing phase, I analysed the mechanisms of navigating between these different cultural standpoints, and I became even more conscious of the process and quandaries associated with the act of engaging cross-culturally. Cross-cultural engagements are enhanced by opportunities that allow interactions to take place, as I discuss in Parts One and Three. Nevertheless, this process depends also on the presence of a common ground within which cultural understandings may take place, as I illustrate in Part Two. This was partly inspired by the notion that, in order for a dialogue to emerge, it is essential to understand the contributions of both parties. As Bakhtin (1986: 94-5) has noted:

But from the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions…. As we know, the role of the others for
whom the utterance is constructed is extremely great.... From the very beginning, the speaker expects a response from them, an active understanding. The entire utterance is constructed, as it were, in anticipation of encountering this response.

The congruence of diverse cultural backgrounds defines the intercultural zone, which is germane to cross-cultural dialogue. Understanding this zone of engagement is central to grasping the nature of cross-cultural encounters; this is due to its dialogical nature (Part Two). Prior to this, however, and having discussed my own engagement with cross-cultural fieldwork, I now give voice to participants who tell their 'stories in black and white'.
People’s Agency in Cross-Cultural Engagement

Part One

Chapter Three
Chapter Three — Stories in Black and White

People used to have no interest in Aboriginal issues and people, in the place I was in. But now because of the Bringing them Home report, people got a sense of responsibility, and the New Age gives a sense of spirituality, and they all want it. When the Bringing Them Home document came out, my book club, highly political women, wanted to read it. I felt uncomfortable. I was thinking. What about me? What about my experience? (Laura, non-Indigenous woman, 12: 49)

In this chapter, I aim to analyse what processes are generating cross-cultural interactions: do these emerge from people’s initiatives or solely from the economic and cultural environment that I discuss in Parts Two and Three? If both, what are the relationships between people’s inspiration and the social context? This brings me to the problematic issue of the relationships between structure and agency that I investigate in the light of my empirical data. I intend to determine what causes, and sustains, cross-cultural engagements and how the agency of participants interweaves with societal structures. My intention to analyse ways in which people make the decision to participate at the interface was initially triggered by the fact that the structures that facilitate these interactions are relatively recent. Indeed, political and economic structural circumstances have changed over the last three decades and thus enable different or new forms of agency in cross-cultural engagements between Noongar people and the wider society (e.g. Beckett 1994: 97; Morton 1996 for comments on social change in Aboriginal Australia).

Broadly speaking, the relationships between societal structures and people’s actions have long been a core issue for sociologists and anthropologists. Over a century ago, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber, among other scholars, have discussed different perspectives on this point. In a paper published early last century, Durkheim suggested that deviance in society is the result of social structures (Europe was undergoing major

1 These include: the development of the niche market of Aboriginal art as a major economic influence and a focus for cross-cultural interactions that dates from the 1970s; the emergence of Aboriginal media broadcasting in Perth beginning in the early 1980s; and the introduction of an Aboriginal perspective in education. Aboriginal cultural festivals are also a relatively new feature of cross-cultural engagement. Whereas past politico-economic structures (e.g. mission stations, employment in various industries, educational institutions) have resulted in some cross-cultural interactions, these were not seeking a dialogical cultural interface, as tends to occur today.

2 See, for example, early issues of l’Année Sociologique (a review founded by Emile Durkheim).

3 Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris (1901).
social changes with an increase in crime and suicide at that time). He proposed to transport delinquents to Australia, arguing that under a more entrepreneurial environment they would benefit the society rather than falling into crime. From today's standpoint (both time-wise and geographically), this proposal seems extremely strange; however, it leads me to pose the question: Is it really possible to analyse how people's agency is influenced by, and is influencing, socio-cultural structures?

The contemporary structures that prompt cross-cultural communication (e.g. Reconciliation) were probably influenced by the fact that '[o]ur epoch is apparently distinguished by the lack of a hierarchical concept of culture' (Bauman 1973: 15). I envisage that the recent changes of cultural and economic contexts that prompt interactions might reveal new insights about the engagement of people (their agency) with structure. In suggesting a structural shift, I imply a notion of transformation in the structural apparatus of the Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interface. I am far, however, from saying that societies are static as 'human history is marked by certain “discontinuities”' (Cassel 1993: 284). Indeed, structural changes have constantly occurred in the Western world; for example, after the industrial revolution, 'a novel type of culture' emerged 'based on' notions of 'rationality, social participation, and individualism rather than tradition' (Tucker 1998: 15; see also Layder 1981: 62). Similarly, emphasising the non-static nature of society, Bhaskar (1986: 131) observed that 'social products dependent upon social activity, are liable to social transformation (and not merely reproduction) across time-space, that is, in world history.'

Whereas it is worth emphasising that the new setting for cross-cultural engagement triggered the focus for this chapter, scholars have often brought the notion of social change to their discussion of structure and agency. Giddens (1984: 132) discussed social change and the concept of time; and he endeavoured to analyse 'the contextuality [emphasis in the original] of social life and social institutions'. When Giddens (1982: 9) refers to 'institutions' he 'mean[s] structured social practices that have a broad spatial and temporal extension... and which are followed or acknowledged by the majority of the members of a society.' According to Giddens (1984: 85), the individual is positioned in society through their individual lifecycle, but 'the longue durée of institutions... creates the overall framework of social positioning'. Societies are not bounded in time and, examining Giddens, Tucker (1998: 112) noted that 'people must
continually adjust to new circumstances and cultural change’. It is the changes in the socio-cultural structure of Noongar/non-Aboriginal engagements that has prompted me to discuss structure and agency.

**My methodology for investigating people’s agency**

The agency of participants in cross-cultural interactions is demonstrated in their stories, all of which were initiated by one of the following two questions: ‘Do you remember the first time you met Aboriginal people or heard of Aboriginal cultures?’, addressed to non-Aboriginal participants and, ‘Do you remember the first time you were aware of being Noongar/Aboriginal?’ when the participant was Aboriginal. Participants were insightful, analytical and self-reflective about their own experiences and provided a personal perspective, an individual interpretation, of cross-cultural interactions.

The narrations spread across a wide range of social and cultural settings. I selected many different profiles of participants and my intention was guided by a desire to express the plurality of views as ‘[s]ociety does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which the individual stand.’ (Karl Marx quoted in Bhaskar 1986: 124, fn.28). Giddens (1984: 87) also noted the multiplicity of experiences in society, since questioning ‘What is going on?’ is unlikely to admit of as simple answer because in all social situations there may be many things ‘going on’ simultaneously. More recently, Kvale (1996: 43) reflected:

> In open interviews people tell stories, narratives, about their lives.... with the collective stories contributing to uphold the values of the community.

Among the 158 participants with whom I discussed extensively cross-cultural interactions, 76 shared their personal experiences. The narrations have been shortened, slightly edited to preserve people’s anonymity or to facilitate reading. In this chapter, I have selected twelve of these ‘life-time experiences’, which are stories comparable to those in a number of published books.

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4 Starting the conversation by discussing the distant past, often in early childhood, was an effective way for people to recall their experiences. Participants felt at ease with a question that was not confronting and was linked with childhood; however, people spontaneously and subsequently raised significant and recent experiences of interactions.

5 My dialogues with the other respondents focussed essentially on their work (e.g. media, art, tourism, education) or on a special event (e.g. a festival, a workshop).

6 These include *Black Chicks Talking* (Purcell 2002); *Aboriginal Woman by Degree: Their stories of the journey towards academic achievement* (Bin-Sallik 2000); *Maybe Tomorrow* (Prior 1998); *Indigenous
Each participant’s story captures her or his experiences in the format of a monologue; together, the narrations provide a kind of a virtual dialogue among participants, a dialogue through the ethnographic text. The stories are linked by their focus on cross-cultural interactions between people living in Perth. The concept of dialogue and dialogical anthropology has been widely discussed in the literature since the mid-eighties, with a number of scholars challenging the Western bias in ethnographic knowledge (e.g. Clifford 1988; Tedlock 1995; Abu-Lughod 1993). Anthropological writings no longer seek to assert a voice of scientific authority, and polyphonic (Bakhtin 1981) dialogues have become ‘modes of textual production’ (Clifford 1986: 15). They transmit the ‘interplay of voices, of positioned utterances’ (Clifford 1986: 12). Indeed, as Tyler (1986: 126) wrote, ‘Post-modern ethnography... foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue’.

Participants knew I was investigating cross-cultural interactions and, therefore, our conversation was influenced by the research focus. Abu-Lughod (1993: 15) observed that ‘[a] story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience. Its perspective is partial (in both sense of the word), and its telling is motivated.’ In the field, I encouraged participants to tell their experiences of interactions, in order to grasp how their agency is dependent on, and influenced by, the opportunities that facilitate cross-cultural engagements.

In the following chapters, I analysed the structural process of interaction in the light of what participants told me—that is, through their insights about the media, the bush, the arts, the language. I now focus on how people’s actions can influence these social processes. Cerny (1990: 56) noted that ‘[t]he concept of structure implicitly puts the emphasis of the analysis... on constraints on individual agents’ choices. In contrast, the concept of agency implicitly puts the weight on those very choices. That means that the analytical focus turns to the elements making up the process of choosing’ [the agents].

_Australia: Standing Strong_ (Tweedie 2001) and _Being Whitefella_ (Graham 1994) on the non-Aboriginal perspective.
The twelve stories

In this section, I analyse the stories of seven non-Aboriginal and five Aboriginal people. This biography-based chapter introduces a plurality of issues concerning cross-cultural communication (and learning by non-Aboriginal people) that I address in Parts Two and Three.

**Story One — Harold**

The first story refers to a time when cross-cultural engagements were highly influenced by ethnocentric and negative beliefs about Aboriginal people; however, the narrator’s maternal grandfather acted differently from the broader pattern—that is, outside the framework of the cultural beliefs of his time.

Prior to 1945, many Aboriginal people worked on farms and stations; this changed dramatically in the post-War period. The farming and cattle industries had provided an economic structure for cross-cultural engagements; however, these were not always based on Aboriginal empowerment and respect (Haebich 1988: 14-6; Clark 1992: 119). On this issue, Rose (Noongar participant) recalls:

> My father and brother, they used to work for farmers, clearing the land. They worked very hard. The elder sisters helped to pack the trees cut down, wash their brothers’ clothes, and all ended up with nothing. It's very sad (13: 128).

Many non-Indigenous people limited their engagement with Aboriginal workers and, consequently, gained little knowledge of Aboriginal culture(s) (Haebich 1988).

Harold’s mother’s family had had contact with South-West Noongar culture over many years and his grandfather interacted closely with Noongar people who lived in the area where his farm was located. His grandfather spoke the language and knew some of the Dreaming stories. Harold’s story illustrates that connections have existed since the beginning of the state’s colonisation; long before a wider interest in Noongar knowledge and Aboriginal affairs emerged.

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*This was unusual; however, some people had contact with Aboriginal people, even though the structures of the day did not facilitate cross-cultural engagements. In some cases, non-Indigenous people have embraced a specific Aboriginal culture through their spouse.*
Harold’s family background of engaging with Aboriginal cultures has, however, two sides to it. On the paternal side of his family, one of his ancestors was involved in a massacre of Noongar people in the South-West of Western Australia.

Harold:

I was born in the late 1950s in the Northern Wheatbelt, northeast of Geraldton. My family [on mother’s side] was left wing, from several generations, and very tolerant. We were trained to be generous. It’s been a generational thing with my family, on my mother’s side, they grew up in the Kojonup area. My grandfather could speak Noongar of the Kojonup area. I spent time with him at Kojonup. He told me funny stories, what he did with Aboriginal people, some medicines, what an emu was called in Noongar. Funny stories, massive funerals, how to pay respect. He was born in 1899 to a poor Irish family. He went to the First World War. He had a lot of Aboriginal friends in Wagin and Kojonup. He talked about a big group of people coming for a funeral, how comradeship feels. They called him by a nickname, he would say, “Oh, X, it was a beautiful funeral.” They taught him how to spy on an emu, making a certain noise, and how the emu would circle you. How to approach a snake and a lizard. He said wagin was “emu” in Noongar, and that the name of his farm had a Noongar meaning. He told me all of these things. My grandfather told me about astrology, the Noongar meanings of star patterns as opposed to Western or Greek meanings. I also remember some Dreaming stories about relationships between a snake and a lizard. The lizard used to be poisonous.

In my twenties, I was running my own cattle station. I was a young man employing Aboriginal people, it was to give them an opportunity. Three Aboriginal people were working with me, this was reasonably unusual in the late 70s and 80s. I became a really good friend with one [John]. He was a leader, working for a government department. I learned about the culture. This was very different from my grandfather’s knowledge, which was more limited to where he grew up. My friend John was more from the Goldfields and Esperance, different trees, different animals. Mullewa means “a lot of different underground water”. So I needed extra hands, and he was bringing various friends to help. I learned, for instance, that they preferred to eat bush meat. I learned about food, more about bush food, about fruit, medicinal leaves, herbs. These things came up in conversations. That sparked an interest that continues. John’s stuff was more practical than my grandfather’s.

Continuity of tolerance, understanding and respect that came with five generations. My children want to know. I have encouraged my two kids to do the same thing, to be tolerant, to learn about the countryside. My wife grew up in a country town of the South-West. I couldn’t have married a racist because I wouldn’t have been attracted to such a person. My wife enjoys learning about Aboriginal culture. My great-great-great uncle was speared to death by Aboriginal people near Esperance in 1863. Afterwards there was a massacre of Aborigines led by a member of my family, and Aboriginal people were killed. That was on my father’s side. This was a survival strategy 100 years ago. The farm was there because there was water, there wasn’t a lot of water everywhere. Water was precious, the well is still there. After the massacre, the Aboriginal people left the area because so many died. I had two different backgrounds [tolerance versus antagonism].
This story prompts me to raise two issues regarding the relationships between structure and agency. Whereas contemporary scholars state that structure and agency are in a relationship of interdependence, a point of view that I share, I want to exemplify that, in some instances, people are acting by privileging their agency above social structures. Harold’s story illustrates that people are not ‘cultural dopes’ (to use Archer’s 2000: 78 term). Indeed, Harold’s family engaged with Noongar people whether or not the social structure prompted cross-cultural interactions. This exemplifies the power that agents have in regard to their actions. Harold chose to carry on the family interest in learning from Aboriginal people and to share with his own family the tenets of respect, tolerance and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures; rather than acting under racist precepts, which he could also have done if he had chosen to give preference to the behavioural influence of the paternal side of his family. Agency is observable through what people choose to do (or what not to do). Although it may appear self-evident, it is worth noting that this notion of ‘wanting to be involved’ is the first impetus towards cross-cultural engagement. Scholars have described this in terms of the structure-agency debate. Archer (2000: 199) observed, ‘we can choose... to stand in very different places’. Giddens (1982: 9) also commented on ‘the ability of agents to make “decisions”’, noting that ‘individuals consciously confront a range of potential alternatives of conduct, making some choice among those alternatives’.

**Story Two — Karen**

This story shows that, before the society encourages cross-cultural engagements and Aboriginal recognition, there were interactions prompted by structural features. Karen is a non-Indigenous woman whose association with Noongar people started in her youth, in the early 1960s. She was placed in an orphanage and shared with Noongar people of her generation similar experiences of institutionalisation. Karen married a Noongar man and subsequently gained additional knowledge of day-to-day Noongar practices such as cooking habits, how to hunt kangaroo, sharing community knowledge, and travelling in large groups. Institutionalisation as a State Ward provided Karen with

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8 Past government structures were usually discouraging and coercive: for example, the 1905 Act gave the Government power to seize mixed ancestry children from their parents and institutionalise them (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997: 103).
some opportunities for engagement. Karen recounted her interactions with Noongar teenagers as positive experiences and throughout her adult life she has been part of the Noongar community and committed to it.

Karen:

I was born in the Wheatbelt. I was made a State Ward at 13. My mother was a single parent who worked in a hotel. In the early ‘60s, there were no benefits for single parents, no support. I went to home for kids in limbo, for foster kids. I met a lot of Indigenous kids in foster care, in institutions. Kids were keeping together, neglected or juvenile offence kids. In the early ‘60s, I had contact with Indigenous kids from reserves, strong and close contacts early in my life.

My mother was in a de facto relationship with a taxi driver. My stepfather said not to call them ‘Aboriginal’ people but ‘Noongar’. He was the only taxi driver in town who took Noongar people in his car. My stepfather had been overseas and exposed to other cultures. He had been to Papua New Guinea and had a compassionate attitude. The Reserve was still running, and Aboriginal people lived in town. There were no Noongar kids in the swimming pool, I don’t know why. I used to swim a lot. I was called a ‘boong’ because of my olive skin. I used to swim five or six days a week. That was the only time I realised that there were no Indigenous kids at the pool, when someone pointed it out to me that I shouldn’t be at the pool. They thought I might be Aboriginal.

I had contact while I was in foster care. Indigenous kids were always in and out. We ate at the same table, slept in the dormitory, and we had institutional clothes. I went to a hostel in Perth as a working girl. I was 14. I used to walk to the station every morning. I saw David [now her husband] at the bus stop. That hostel was for Indigenous kids run by the Baptist Church, to give opportunities to people to find employment. I asked a Noongar girl who was the boy at the bus stop. The girl would know who he was [being Noongar herself]. On Friday night, there was the dance at Canterbury Court. This used to be a dance for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, like a disco. The Indigenous kids tend to group together. The Noongar kids were the boys from the hostel. I used to socialise more with Noongar kids. A lot of these Noongar kids had no family [in Perth] to come to look after them. I was in the same position. Noongar people are more accepting of people who are disadvantaged. They are not judgemental. I had a strong personality, I blended with Noongar kids. I was comfortable with myself. I also met a non-Aboriginal girl, she’s still my friend. She married a Noongar man who was in the other hostel.

The first time I met David’s family, I was the only White person in the family. The first trip home, they were living in a tin two-bedroom house, and David had let them know a White girl was coming down, they cleaned up everything. They cooked chips, meat and damper. I was happy.

My husband is a leader of his own people. He is dynamic in his community. When we had kids, at Christmas time an Elder came dressed as Father Christmas with a kangaroo skin on. When I was still a young mother, I lived in the suburbs. This land was allocated for Indigenous houses. People complained before Indigenous people moved in. I was alone. I was lonely. All of David’s family is still in the South-West. I played netball with non-Indigenous, just netball. I was never invited to their houses.

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9 The Wheatbelt is an agricultural region, east of Perth.
Maybe they were not comfortable with a mixed relationship.
Some of my family was horrified that I was married to an Aboriginal man. One member asked if the baby was Black. My auntie thought the relationship would never last, because of the cultural differences. An example of cultural difference is eating kangaroo and emu. When we were younger, we ate much more, not just because we liked the taste, but it fed also a lot of people. We skinned the ‘roo and cooked it in a big pot, cooked a damper, and fed a lot of people. Recently, we went ‘roo shooting around Geraldton way. We don’t kill anything unless we eat it. Cook the ‘roo in slices, with bacon, onion and potato, or mince it. Sharing the food is a big cultural thing. People get smaller portions if there are lots there. My parents are British; they get together and have a big meal. But with Indigenous people, it’s not the same food, it’s a different type, and there’s always enough.

This story shows that some positive interactions took place in the past, although the structure of the time did not encourage cross-cultural engagement. Giddens (1984: 9) elaborated on the notion by suggesting that:

Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place [...] . Agency concerns events of which an individual is the perpetrator, in the sense that the individual could, at any phase in a given sequence of conduct, have acted differently.

Indeed, Karen could have chosen not to engage with Noongar people; however, throughout her adult life, she has been very well embedded within the Noongar community, both in Perth and in a country town of the South-West. She even works for a Noongar organization today.

**Story Three — Sarah**

The third story shows how Sarah (Noongar) responded to the changes in education (structure). As I point out throughout the thesis, the contemporary setting promotes Aboriginal/non-Indigenous engagements, and this is a key feature in understanding contemporary dynamics of interactions.

Sarah’s narration firstly focuses on governmental structures, such as government policies of removal of children, government settlement of Aboriginal people, discrimination and the disempowerment of Aboriginal people. Sarah dates the social changes favouring Aboriginal/non-Indigenous engagements from the 1970s. Her story
refers to a new structural component of Australian society (Aboriginal education) and her personal engagement with it\(^{10}\).

Sarah:

I was born in a station, in a paddock. In the 1940s I was taken away by the police. They sent us to Moore River. That's when I first met White people. The missionaries, some were nice, others were cruel. They were all strange people. I must have blocked out the early past. There was punishment in front of all of us. We were all called up. Sometimes you were like sheep in the back of a truck and White kids used to call us Niggers. You couldn't do anything. They were teaching us to be servants. A lot of bad things happened.

I was reading a file of my uncle. He was shot through the leg by a missionary. Their excuse was that he was aggressive, intimidating and that he had drunk a bottle of beer. He was fifteen years old. That missionary got off with that.

I read my file: ten shillings to the bank, 5/- to the girl. The money was put in a trust but no one had the money. The people in the farm didn't know where the money went. We've gone through a lot of bad times, a lot of discrimination.

I started to realise it wasn't right when I did a bit of study at TAFE in the late 70s. When my kids started to go to school, I did a study on Aboriginal Australia. I came to realise that what White people have been doing was wrong. In the mid-seventies there was the push toward Aboriginal education. May O'Brien was at the beginning of the push of Aboriginal education. I've got a social science degree in education. It makes a big difference to involve us in teaching. To make thing successful they have to have Aboriginal input, otherwise it's a White men's program. White people were so different. We couldn't relate to a lot of things because of what's happened in the past. With Aboriginal cultures, also it's diverse, there is a lot of similarity, not one mum, but aunties, brothers and sisters.

Sarah chose to embrace the structural changes in education and to participate in the assertion and communication of her culture as soon as she had the opportunity to do so\(^{11}\). Her commitment to Noongar culture was facilitated by these changes; however, she embraced them with a degree of agency arising from her own desire to enhance Noongar social positioning. This is unlike the experience of another Noongar participant who strongly criticized the government push toward Reconciliation, which he said ‘means nothing to me’.

Indeed, various social behaviours occur simultaneously. People's choices result from having the opportunity to do one thing rather than another; however, their actions are a consequence of their selection. This presupposes a degree of social awareness, which

\(^{10}\) For a comparable perspective from Brisbane, see Aird (2001: 72).

\(^{11}\) See Chapter Eight for detail on Aboriginal education.
Giddens (1982: 9) referred to as the ‘knowledgeability of social actors’. I emphasise the role of some participants who embraced politico-economic structures to allow their agency to take place, as Sarah did. This strongly resonates with Giddens’s (1982: 36) discussion on the notion of ‘duality of structure’, where he identified the dual nature of structure that both allows and shapes social actions; in his words, the structure is ‘both constraining and enabling’ (Giddens 1984: 25). This point is at the core of his ‘theory of structuration’ (see Giddens 1984: 169). Sarah’s impetus to embrace the surrounding structure, one that promotes Aboriginal involvement in education, also resonates with the analysis of Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 971) who commented on ‘the capacity of actors to make practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action’.

**Story Four — Jo**

In this narration, Jo (non-Aboriginal) recalls that her attraction to Aboriginal cultures was facilitated by governmental structures. Jo is in her late twenties. She has lived in a number of different country towns in the South-West of Western Australia. In her childhood, she had little contact with Aboriginal people. She noted that there were no Aboriginal children in most of the schools she attended. In her teenage years Aboriginal issues were sometimes raised in her family’s conversations, generally around ‘land rights, government grants and general behaviour’, as she explained to me. Jo commented that she ‘feel[s] empathy and could relate to their feeling of having been dispossessed from their land.’ She could understand their ‘feeling of frustration’, a point of view that she shared with some friends but less with her family members as she thought that some of her kin ‘were not willing to understand’ because ‘they have very stereotypical views about Aboriginal people’. When she went to university, Jo took a course on Aboriginal cultures but ‘did not do very well’, as she recalled:

> The non-Indigenous academics involved make it a cold and a hard subject. They were putting their personal point of views, they were disconnected with their emotions and took the spirituality out of it (2: 15).

Jo felt that ‘when Aboriginal culture is in your heart, it is not in your mind.’ In the university course, she read Sally Morgan’s book *My Place* and other Aboriginal writers and recounted, ‘that was the best part of it’. She did the course to gain ‘an insight into Aboriginal culture, but got an academic insight’, as she phrased it.
Since she attended a workshop on cross-cultural awareness organized by Noongar people and the government agency where she works, Jo feels 'more connected'. Why? She explains:

Jo:

At the beginning of the workshop one of the Noongar speakers told me, "You are the wild dolphin spirit". At morning tea, I went to see him and he said, "You’ve seen the eye of the whale, you are the wild dolphin spirit, you are very wise. You need to be there, when there are whales, you should look after them." The Workshop opened a whole world of Indigenous culture and spirituality.

Before the Workshop, I knew the culture was linked to the Dreaming. I learned it at Uni. I knew the concept through a conceptual interpretation. I had an understanding that Dreaming and Country were important. I had an understanding of different tribes, of the importance of songs and ritual, but I couldn’t relate to it. It seemed abstract, not real, like a story, not real for me. Something that could be fascinating, but not necessarily truth behind the story. I didn’t relate to it. It was a lack of understanding. I knew it was important to them, but I couldn’t get the reality behind it. What made it real for me? After the Workshop, I realised how I am linked to the Dreaming. Things started to happen that demonstrated that it was real. It’s based on experience, and is also linked to an understanding. The Workshop revealed my linkage to the Dreaming. I became part of the Dreaming. I was shown how I fit with the Dreaming, the South-West Noongar story. My spirit was of the Whale and Dolphin. That has been revealed, it has been demonstrated through my life.

I relate to Western culture and I can now relate to Aboriginal culture. The bridge was crossed. I was told my Dreaming, spiritual child of Dolphin and Whale, that’s my custodianship. Dreaming is about experience, it’s about who you are and why, it’s part of you. You are responsible for it.

This experience changed my identity. I haven’t spoken with anyone [else], just a little but not in detail with my mother. The Whale and the Dolphin are my totem, I lock after them, I’ve got a role to play. I’ve got a feeling towards Indigenous people, a feeling of being more related to them, and an understanding of what they feel. I’m more connected to some. Other are caught up in drugs and violence, I don’t relate to that, I feel fearful. If people criticise Aboriginal people, now it’s more of a personal attack. I’m feeling some connectedness on my identity. Before, I was standing up for injustice, now it is part of me that is linked in a broader picture.

I always felt a connectedness with the Earth, but I didn’t use to be connected to the Dreaming story. There are a lot of similarities with lots of Indigenous cultures, the United States, here and Africa.... Wisdom, connectedness, totemism, custodianship, responsibility, the Earth is our Mother, wisdom and knowledge. It has become a fad. Everyone wants to be a part of this Dreaming thing. It’s a very New Age concept. It’s become something people want to talk about. The mainstream may be racist, but a lot more people are opening up through it and try to relate to it [the Dreaming]. I don’t know if there is really a White culture, we [non-Aboriginal people] don’t have an over-arching belief system, except if you belong to a religion. I’ve been given a taste of Aboriginal community and the sense of enormity. The culture is still here, and it will come back strong through the Aboriginal people, when the healing will be done. I learn, steady, steady, slowly, slowly, I experience. It’s a slow process. It’s like your brain is overwhelmed with this new understanding.
Since she was a teenager, Jo has felt empathy for Aboriginal people. Like many non-Indigenous participants, she grew up with relatively little direct contact; however, she choose to learn about Noongar/Aboriginal culture(s) as soon as she had some opportunities to do so—firstly through a university course and subsequently through a government cross-cultural workshop. Both occasions resulted from institutional structural features of Australian society. It was during the workshop that she was able to get a degree of proximity with Noongar culture that satisfied her. Jo’s cultural exposure through tertiary education was not for her a fulfilling experience but she responded more positively to direct interactions with Noongar people\textsuperscript{12}. Without the institutional structures that prompt cross-cultural awareness Jo may not have ever had a chance to get ‘some connectedness with [her] identity’, as she said in her story.

The institutional structures have allowed Jo to fulfil her desire of engaging with Aboriginal people. Her actions subsequently impacted on the way she has constructed her identity\textsuperscript{13}. Whereas Jo’s story shows that structure and agency are in a relationship of mutual dependence, I want to contrast her story with Caroline to demonstrate the complexity of this relationship of interdependence. Indeed, I illustrate that non-Aboriginal people’s empathy towards Aboriginal people is expressed differently according to the structural opportunities presented to them.

\textit{Story Five — Caroline}

The following story shows clearly that different structures affect people’s actions, and that ‘[a]ll social interaction is situated [author’s emphasis] interaction – situated in space and time’ (Giddens 1984: 86). Like Jo, Caroline is a non-Indigenous woman who, since her teenage years, has felt a strong empathy for Aboriginal people. Both women, however, put their feelings into practice through very different actions, because the structural opportunities to engage with Aboriginal people have changed dramatically over the years. When Caroline grew up, Aboriginal cultures were seen in non-Indigenous Australia in a negative way. Many Aboriginal children were still being

\textsuperscript{12} Giddens (1984: 64) commented on the context of ‘interaction with other who are physically co-present’ as ‘Goffman has devoted considerable care to analysing this phenomenon’.

\textsuperscript{13} Personal development is becoming a cultural feature (structure) of the Western world (Tucker 1998: 205-6; O’Brien 1998: 23).
removed from their families under government policies. Although the practice of non-Indigenous families adopting Aboriginal children is now condemned\(^{14}\), Caroline sought close proximity to Aboriginal people by adopting an Aboriginal child.

Caroline:

Fifty years ago, Aboriginal people were not allowed in the [Perth] metro area\(^{15}\). There was an Aboriginal guy in City Beach. He made clothes props out of saplings from the bush where they lived. They lived in a humpy. The butcher gave off-cuts, flaps, rolled in a newspaper to the Aboriginal fellow. The butcher wouldn’t have served my meat like that, but it was free, it wasn’t a sale.

My father had racial prejudice. That was the time of the White Australia policy. Aboriginal people were not recognised as people. We were made aware that we were different. A girl down the road married a Coloured, it was thought of as a disgrace.

When I was 17, I met my first full-blood Aboriginal kid. He was from Beagle Bay [Kimberley], living with his White aunt. There was no racism, he was the only one at school. If there were Aboriginal kids, it wasn’t known, it was never mentioned. You didn’t tell anybody that you were Aboriginal. The government policy was to try to breed them out. I had no contact. I admired them from a distance.

The next thought was, one day, when we had everything that we needed, was to take an Aboriginal kid and give him a chance to grow up and have a chance in society. In the 50s and 60s, there were lots of Aboriginal kids in orphanages, some of them were taken away. There was Sister Kate’s. That’s where they all grew up. We had two kids of our own, and we adopted our younger daughter. The decision came from both of us, me and my husband. We didn’t want the approval of others. His mother grew up in the country, and Aboriginal people were badly treated there. In the 20s, a lot of Aboriginal people stole sheep, there was no work. You didn’t mix with them. His parents were White Australians. The reaction when we adopted our young Aboriginal daughter in the late 60s was, “You have no idea of what you are getting yourself into, a whole lot of trouble.” Aboriginals were a no-no. For my mother-in-law, if you were not flesh and blood, it was nothing. My older kids were pre-teen then, they thought it was wonderful. A baby was a baby. There was no problem with them. She’s part of the family.

\(^{14}\) I heard this condemnation expressed a few times during my fieldwork from both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people; this is because more and more people are aware of the long-term and devastating effects of the Stolen Generation. However, there is a number of people who think that, if there are no foster Aboriginal parents available, non-Aboriginal foster carers should be allowed for the benefit of the children. For example, a foster parent told me, ‘White foster parents are not allowed to take Aboriginal children any more.... Half of the problems are because of these bureaucrats. Even if a Noongar mother agrees that her kid goes in a White family, the Department says you can’t. You need the right culture. If I had had to foster an Aboriginal kid, I would have learned. I would have found out about Aboriginal culture, Noongar culture if that was the kid’s tribe.’ (10: 122, 133) This is, however, a contentious debate.

\(^{15}\) See Chapter Five (section ‘History’) for details.
I first heard about Caroline through one of her close friends, who described her as, ‘the mother of an Aboriginal child’, which is a very strong feature of personal identity (and cultural positioning). Jo also feels a close association with Aboriginal Australia and this is reflected in her own sense of self. Both Jo and Caroline have taken advantage of the structures available to them. In the 1960s, one means available to gain close engagement with Aboriginal people was through the adoption of children, whereas in 2003 cross-cultural workshops and Noongar spirituality give people a sense of cultural proximity. Caroline’s agency is now condemned whilst Jo’s is today socially accepted and valued.

The fundamental difference between Jo’s and Caroline’s actions result from the change of social structures, as both of them have sought a close engagement with Aboriginal people. The kind of opportunities for cross-cultural interactions available in a society strongly influences people’s agency. Therefore, the range of opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people to engage can have long-term effects, as is obvious with the consequence of the Stolen Generation that affects many Aboriginal people today (see for example, the Bringing them Home report 1997).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, structure and agency are in a relationship of interdependence. Social structures are produced, and reproduced, by people’s agency. Giddens (1991: 20) reflected on the ways in which institutions maintain themselves and build upon themselves over time, a process that he labelled ‘institutional reflexitivity’. In other words, Layder (1981: 63) observed, ‘social structures are both produced by human agency and are simultaneously the conditions of human agency.’ Jo and Caroline’s stories exemplify how they have contributed to the social reproduction of the structure. For example, the workshop Jo attended would have been cancelled if nobody had enrolled. Individual actions define agency and contribute to the reproduction of social structures, as Giddens (1984: 26) suggested in his ‘structuration theory’.

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16 A non-Aboriginal participant told me that one of her friends adopted an Aboriginal girl in 1956. She explained that adoption was difficult and Child Welfare told her friend that, ‘if they were interested in Aboriginal children, they would get a girl in eleven days’ (2: 136).
**Story Six — Coskun**

I have exemplified that structure and agency rely on each other and that people choose their actions in relation to available social opportunities (structure). Jo and Caroline have adapted to the existing structures to suit their desires and expectations. I now discuss how some participants have interpreted their cultural identities, or their cultural experiences, to suit their desire and expectations. Indeed, some participants have explained opposed types of agency through an identical structural feature: the notion of culture. I present the story of Coskun, a man with a Turkish background, along with a number of reflections from other participants. This section shows that people are not ‘cultural dopes’ and it exemplifies further the complexity of the relationship between structure and agency in regard to the Noongar/non-Aboriginal interface.

Some non-Aboriginal participants with a non-Anglo background raised their own ethnicity as a means of gaining proximity with and, an understanding of, Aboriginal people. As one participant put it:

I come from an ethnic background [Italian]. I experienced racism as a child. White Australian policy is not that old. I’m born here. Italians were not to have very dark skins; if we were too dark our applications were not processed. I’ve seen Aboriginal people going to hotels and not being served. I’m more sensitive because I’ve experienced myself the effects of racism (11: 8-9).

A Kenyan woman similarly referred extensively to her own ethnicity when we discussed Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions. Although she had never engaged with an Aboriginal person and socialised mostly with non-Indigenous Australians, she commented on an emotional link that she felt she shared with Aboriginal people, at the same time distancing herself from some non-Indigenous Australians:

In Kenya most people are Black, there’s no colour issue, but there are tribal issues. People said my tribe is full of thieves. Some tribes are nomadic. Most of the Whites don’t think Black people are as good as they are. It’s a colonial attitude. Colonialism is not something you can explain, it’s like childbirth, you have to share the same experience (10: 14).

I met Coskun through his wife. She suggested, ‘My husband is of Turkish background and, because of his upbringing, he comes with a different approach of Aboriginality. You might want to talk to him’ (Notepad 4).
Coskun:

I was born in Melbourne. My family is from Turkey. I was raised in the Turkish culture. It’s different from growing up in Anglo Australia. I learnt Turkish first. The religion is different [Islam], the way we were brought up is different. I lived in government housing. Everybody was low income. The Turkish kids interacted [with non-Turkish], but not the parents. At home, we were in Turkey, but outside we were Australian. I grew up in two cultures. Turkish culture is very different. For example, we have respect for the elderly. When I was a kid, if elderly people were in a room, you kept quiet. You let them talk first. We never swore in front of our parents, or other adults. In teenage years you do, and there are clashes for a few years. I can talk of these cultural differences a lot.

In Melbourne, I was not aware of this, as Melbourne is very multicultural. But when I moved up to the country when I was 14 years old, there were just four Turkish kids in the school. There were a few Aboriginal kids, and the rest were Anglo-Australian. Maybe some Italians, but they were here for a long time, and they were different from Melbourne Italians, who were more locked into Italian culture. The Italian kids in the country were there for a few generations, and they were more Australian in the things they ate, the way they spoke. In the country they couldn’t speak Italian.

How did I fit? I had a lot of fights with mainstream people. What triggered it was always different things, it could be a soccer ball, but the bottom line is that we were different, and we didn’t understand each other. The way sex was talked about, the way family was spoken about. For example, hearing somebody swearing about their father or their mother. Turkish people don’t do that. Some actions, like throwing food around. In our culture, we don’t throw food around. With my Turkish friends and Aboriginal boys, we could talk about family problems and money problems. All kinds of stuff, the real stuff, things that matter to me. We were not talking about cars and what guys were wearing.

In the country town, one street was all Housing Commission, all the street was Aboriginal apart from maybe two Turkish families. We, the Turkish people, were fruit pickers. It was the fruit-seller town. All the pickers were Turkish people. I get along well with Aboriginal people because they didn’t look at me as just a fruit-picker. Aboriginal people never looked at us as being weird. A lot of them were easy going. We hung out with those kids, they couldn’t look down at us, at anyone. Aboriginal people never looked down at me.

The schoolteachers were good, no negative feelings from the school teachers, but the students were different. I was different to the majority of the school. We were looked at, especially in my first two years. As I grew up, I developed friendships with mainstream Australians, other kids couldn’t adapt. I was invited to parties by Anglo kids. Some Turkish kids wouldn’t do it, some friends didn’t want to mix. It goes both ways. Maybe they had a bad experience. I can get along with all types of persons. I always thank the way I was brought up.

In the country, I learned to be more Australian. For example, football games, the way you drink, going to the pub, the Australian cultural things. Turkish kids go more to nightclubs, not to the pub. My friends want to dress up and smell nice and go to nightclubs. But going to the pub with thongs, the Australian way, I also like it. Aboriginal Australia was not really talked about by the people I grew up with. The main thing we talked about was either staying in Australia, or going back to Turkey.
Coskun chooses to assert his non-Anglo background as a signifier to position himself more closely than mainstream Australians to Aboriginal people. He implies that mainstream Australians are more distant than he is from Aboriginal people on issues relating to family, minority status, and deference to elders.

In similar terms, John, an Indian participant, reflected on his personal involvement with Aboriginal people:

My skin colour gives me confidence when I approach Aboriginal people. “G’day bro, how are you?” People try to identify a link. I welcome this closeness (14: 36).

In contrast with Greenwood (1995: 131 quoted in Archer 2000: 74) who wrote, ‘[b]eing black does not itself fix any form of identity, any more than being a woman or a man does’, it was on the basis of being black that the above participant claimed a special bonding with the Aboriginal people he meets.

These participants claimed proximity with Aboriginal Australians on the basis of their non-Anglo origins. Conversely, other non-Anglo respondents distanced themselves from Aboriginal people in terms of their cultural background. For example, I met a Chinese man who migrated to Perth as an adult fifteen years ago. He thinks that his culture, as well as Western cultures, are ‘much more sophisticated than Aboriginal cultures’, which he believes are ‘primitive’ (Notepad HS). In a similar vein, a man born and raised in India before migrating to Australia as a teenager told me, ‘The Indian middle-class is very upwardly mobile. Education is a primary issue, as well as social advancement. I don’t represent my community at all, they have very negative views on Aboriginal Australia.’ Ethnic background, that is culture (a structure), can become a signifier through which some people assert close linkages with Aboriginal Australia, whereas others do not. It is each person’s choice (their agency) to decide whether or not s/he wishes to refer to their ethnicity as a means of connecting with Aboriginal people. Whereas I have shown that politico-economic structures allow people to exercise their agency, the point I am now discussing is slightly different. Indeed, some participants explained their empathy, or their discrimination, toward Aboriginal people on the basis of socio-cultural structures; their agency appears to initiate their action according to a

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17 Cynthia (Noongar) commented whilst we were discussing appropriate cultural behaviour with older Noongar people: ‘with an older Noongar person, I wouldn’t talk. I’ll listen. I listen to elders since I’m a kid. To non-Aboriginal people, you talk to them. It’s the way it is.’
more Weberian sense of the discussion on structure and agency—that is, privileging their intentional behaviour above institutional structures.

Anglo-Australians cannot claim to be part of an ethnic minority to assert a cultural proximity with, and an understanding of, Aboriginal Australia. However, some Anglo-participants used their long-term family settlement in Australia to differentiate themselves from more recent 'migrants' and to express a connection with Aboriginal people. Other non-Aboriginal participants raised, with a similar sense of agency, their experiences of living overseas as a way of claiming some understanding of discrimination. Karen (whose story is above) commented that her stepfather had 'a compassionate attitude' to Noongar people because he had lived in Papua New Guinea and was ‘exposed to another culture’. Conversely, another participant justified his extremely strong racism toward Aboriginal people in terms of his work in Africa and in the Middle East. He claimed: ‘Western cultures are far more advanced than African, Arabic and Aboriginal cultures’. He also said that ‘I really know this as I have experienced first hand their incompetence’.

In regard to the way non-Aboriginal people are willing, or not, to engage with Noongar people; it is important to understand the strong weight of their agency, but as significant is the way people are interpreting the cultural structures available to attribute meaning to their decisions and actions. Indeed, people’s decisions on their ‘likes’ or ‘dislikes’ about initiating cross-cultural engagements are heavily influenced by the way they ‘choose to engage’ (agency) with their socio-cultural world (structure). Each of the above stories show that there are some relationships of interdependence between ‘structure’ and ‘agency’; however, the experiences of these participants illustrate numerous differences in regard to the nature of this relationship. Whereas Harold’s grandfather and Coskun both act in a Weberian way, where their agency came prior to the structure, they interact with it (the structure) in very different ways. Harold’s grandfather chose to ignore the social separation between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, whereas Coskun, the Chinese and the Kenyan woman re-interpret their cultural experiences and personal backgrounds to suit their agency. I have shown above that, presented with similar circumstances, people make different choices. Individual have different ideas, different agency, and they use their socio-cultural experiences as points
of reference. There are obvious contradictions\textsuperscript{18} in the ways people rely on socio-cultural structure.

In Perth, some people claim proximity with Aboriginal people whilst others prefer to maintain distance; all of this in the name of their engagements (agency) with the notion of culture (structure). I suggest that, at times where societies were demographically more homogenous and governed more strongly by implicit rules\textsuperscript{19}, people may have narrow ranges of models for behaviour. Structure relies on agency, and vice versa, but the complexity of their relationship is partly due to the fact that people adapt structures to suit their desires. The heterogeneity of the Australian population (Aboriginal people, people born in Australia and migrants, all of them of multicultural backgrounds) results in a plethora of socially accepted behaviours.

\textit{Story Seven — Elizabeth}

I now discuss the social reproduction of cross-cultural communication. This is how an individual can now share information about Noongar culture and how the economic setting allows cultural communication, which results in the broader recognition of Noongar culture (see Chapter Eight). Elisabeth (28) is a Noongar woman. She grasped the opportunity to connect with her cultural heritage as soon as she could. She learnt about Noongar culture and Aboriginal issues through tertiary education, and now through the government agency for which she is working. Elizabeth shares Noongar knowledge with non-Indigenous people through presenting cross-cultural workshops for government departments, talking in schools, at art shows and at miscellaneous gatherings of people who are wishing to gain cultural awareness. This recognition of her culture gives pride to Elizabeth and satisfies non-Aboriginal people who are interested in learning about Noongar heritage. From the story below, it is clear that Noongar culture was repressed by past government policy; however, a change of structure brought new opportunities for the affirmation of Noongar culture and, within a very short time, it has demonstrated a strong and observable presence in the South-West.

\textsuperscript{18} Giddens (1984: 310) analysed 'the concept of contradiction... connected to notions of structural properties and structural constraint.'

\textsuperscript{19} See Bourdieu (1977) for discussion on the notion of social rules.
Social structures (e.g. education) are a means of either restraining or encouraging cultural practices (e.g. speaking Noongar) and cross-cultural awareness. Elizabeth demonstrates her agency by engaging fully in the processes of asserting and communicating Noongar culture to Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. As a cultural communicator, Elizabeth contributes to the reproduction of cultural dialogue, which leads to an even broader recognition of Noongar tradition.

Elisabeth:

I was born in Perth. Most of my life was around the Fremantle area. I’m a Noongar, born and bred. My Dad is Aboriginal from back East, my Mum is Noongar. When I was growing up, it was a lot different. I was ashamed of being Aboriginal. I couldn’t hide it, there were a lot of hassles at school. We were not allowed to talk about Aboriginal issues. I knew I was Noongar, but I didn’t understand. When I got to Uni, I learned about Noongar culture. I wanted to find out who I am. For a long time, I didn’t know much about my Dad. In ’94, I did Aboriginal Studies. In that course, some Elders were coming, we had fieldtrips to communities, we learned about government organizations like ATSIC, ALS, AMS. We got a feel for that.

When I was young, I didn’t have it [feeling Aboriginal] in a strong sense like today. For so long, Aboriginal culture has been sitting there, it’s a matter of me knowing who I am. Where I’m coming from. The wider community is now hungry for knowledge. Tourism, schooling. The society is becoming more aware of Indigenous people, respecting the knowledge and the cultures. More Aboriginal people are in the workforce, in school. People realise we have to know who these people are.

As a kid, I wasn’t told about Noongar culture. It wasn’t in your face, as it is now. My Nan and Mum didn’t know anything, with the Stolen Generation. You weren’t allowed to talk of culture. I wasn’t grown up having a strong mind and will. I was ashamed of being Aboriginal, and that was because other people didn’t know about my culture, just the negative part of it, the massacres, and the negative became part of me. We didn’t have much information, and I was told about just the negative side. Now, for example, the massacres are not talked about as if the Aboriginal people were the bad ones. We try to balance it off.

I had no awareness of that as a kid. I was aware of being different, I spoke a bit of language, I had a different way of speaking. Sometimes, the White kids, they would start talking like me!

Even the festivals [Aboriginal cultural festival], they weren’t until the early 1990s. I identified as an Aboriginal, and I’m proud of myself. Back then, we did nothing Aboriginal. We didn’t eat Aboriginal food. We just said, ‘I’m Noongar’. That was all I knew. Now, I learn of what being Noongar is all about, and how different it is from White Australia. I knew about the missions, but Aboriginal culture wasn’t talked about. Growing up was hard. We adapted to the White man’s world, we became one of them. Now, I’m proud, and it gives me a buzz to talk with people. I guess it’s because people want to know. I’ve got heaps of friends from different cultures. They want to know about my culture, I want to know about their culture. Sharing each other’s cultures makes you who you are. I’m so glad at the end of the day that we are different, that we have different ways of living. Now I try to get kangaroo meat for my different cultural friends.

A lot of Noongars don’t share their culture, a lot of our people don’t know who they
are. They do their thing. My Mum is still learning, because she wasn’t taught her culture. I teach her at the end of the day, because I’ve been working in the Aboriginal heritage sector, with the old people. I want to tell it, to share it with everyone, I have that drive. The old people are starting to talk to their own families. A lot were taken away [Stolen Generation], and flogged, and were sent away into a dark room if they talked with each other about their culture. My Nan is still fearful, she feels uneasy to talk about language and culture. But it’s good now, she’s starting to open up. It’s a hard struggle with the old fellows, it’s crucial to take their information because when they pass on, they take the knowledge with them: the stories, the language, and knowledge about certain sites. Most of them have the knowledge. The old people will tell you what to share, I go to see them and ask them, ‘What do you want me to teach?’

By telling people about her culture, Elizabeth contributes to the reproduction of the very structure that enhances cultural communication. For example, hearing her speak, some non-Indigenous participants have commissioned her to participate in further cross-cultural events. In this sense, structure, agency and social reproduction are linked and depend on each other. This feature resonates with contemporary writing on the issue. For example, O’Brien (1998: 12) noted, ‘social structures are... conditions of social action that are reproduced through social action.’ In similar veins, Bhaskar (1986: 131) observed that ‘social activity occurs when agents occupy positions and engage in practices effectively given to them, which they reproduce or transform’.

Berndt (1977: 11) suggested that Aboriginal people who had been prevented from practising their culture might rely on anthropological knowledge from the early period. Giddens (1976: 102) noted that ‘all reproduction is necessarily production’, and Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 983-4) commented that ‘human actors do not merely repeat past routines; they are also the inventors of new possibilities for thought and action’. Elizabeth’s story exemplifies the capacity of human agency to ‘reproduce or transform’ social activity. Elizabeth participates in cross-cultural communication, shares her culture with people in Perth and innovates in setting up new opportunities for learning about Noongar culture (e.g. setting up a ‘women’s business workshops’), all of these being dependent on cultural structures and the agency of individuals.

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20 Children were not allowed to talk ‘in language’ or refer to cultural practices in the schools and on the missions during this period.

21 Emphasis in original.
Chapter Three — Stories in Black and White

Story Eight — Amy

Giddens (1984: 83) asserted, ‘Social systems only exist in and through the continuity of social practices, fading away in time’; however, this story shows that a person can be influenced by a structure that no longer exists. Amy is a Koorie\(^\text{22}\) woman in her mid-twenties who now lives in Perth. In her story, she referred to a number of structural features, such as education, the media, the culture (e.g. the bush), and tourism that have played a part in her journey towards her Aboriginality. Unlike her father, who has difficulty acknowledging his Aboriginality, Amy is proud of her cultural heritage. Unlike Elizabeth, who is in a position to communicate aspects of Noongar heritage (e.g. history, bush knowledge, spirituality, traditional practices) through economic settings that allow this to happen (such as art shows, government workshops, the Department of Education, free talks), Amy has limited knowledge about Koorie culture. She told me about her commitment to Aboriginal people (just as Elizabeth did); however, Amy and Elizabeth act out their cultural dedication very differently. Being Noongar and living in Noongar country, it is relatively easy for Elizabeth to learn about her culture, whereas Amy cannot, since past government policies imposed cultural disjunctions on families such as hers. Amy engages with Aboriginal culture in a broader sense, incorporating elements of it (e.g. going camping, awareness of discrimination) in order to articulate a sense of her own heritage and to assert her Aboriginal identity.

People have different kinds of cultural knowledge and therefore engage with diverse aspects of their culture, as ‘[a]gency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place’ (Giddens 1984: 9). Amy has told me about her frustration of not being able to learn more about her culture, as she has very little knowledge about her own Aboriginal family. Amy is caught in a setting characterized by a particular set of factors, a specific ‘conjuncture’ of a break in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Discussing the notion of ‘habitus’ that is the principle authoring the ‘production of practices’, Bourdieu noted that the structure facilitates practices; however, this occurs within a defined context, that is, within a particular conjuncture ‘which, short of a radical transformation, represents a particular state of structure’ (Bourdieu 1972: 263; 1977: 79).

\(^{22}\) Aboriginal people from the South-East of Australia, especially Victoria and NSW.
Chapter Three — Stories in Black and White

In the historical context of Hawaiian and British interactions, Sahlins (1981: 35) also noted the influence of circumstantial factors and wrote:

Practice, rather, has its own dynamics—a ‘structure of the conjuncture’—which meaningfully defines the persons and the objects that are parties to it.

In the context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interactions, Merlan (2005: 173) also commented on the notion of conjuncture, as she wrote:

The reproduction and transformation of cultural categories occurs when people act, putting their cultural construction into play. This ‘structure of conjuncture’ is an engagement of categories as people act in terms of them.

Amy:

I grew up in a fairly middle class Anglo-Saxon area in Victoria. I didn’t have a lot of contact with Aboriginal people. I didn’t see them. I went to High School. There was one Black person in the whole 2,000 pupils at the school, and she wasn’t even Aboriginal. I came to Perth when I was 24, three years ago. I wanted to come over here to work with Aboriginal people. In Perth, it’s more obvious.

In the curriculum, in Grade Six, there was the classic picture in Sydney, of the Aboriginal people with spears. The teachers said it was all peaceful, but how come everybody had a spear and a gun?

Mum really valued different cultures. She taught us cultures through food. We knew how to use chop-sticks. We didn’t eat kangaroo often, it was a treat. I never asked Mum if she knew Dad was Aboriginal. She knew, it was intuitive. We needed time in nature, and we valued the environment.

My real interest started at 16. I was interested in working in Third World countries. World Vision was on TV. In Year 11, I read an article about Palm Island in Queensland. It was talking about Third World conditions, poverty and violence. That was the realisation, and then I had more and more interest.

At 18, I took a road trip to Darwin. I was driven to see what was going on in Aboriginal communities. I didn’t see anything in Victoria, I wanted to see Aboriginal people, how they lived, what they do, to get a sense of how bad it was for Aboriginal people in Australia. I went through Alice, Darwin, and a few communities. I stayed in a caravan park, there were no tourists, and the group of kids swum in the pool. They just came when no tourists were there. That shocked me. I think, because they were Aboriginal. I had the sense it was a racist thing. The White people’s attitude shocked me. In general conversation, how Aboriginal people were perceived, how they were talked about, the superiority of White people, bluntly racist comments by local people in the pubs and bars. I saw Aboriginal people not being able to go into the Roadhouse. The sign on the wall of the Roadhouse said, ‘It is illegal to supply alcohol to Aboriginal persons.’ That was at the border of South Australia and the Northern Territory.

After Darwin, I spoke with Dad about Aboriginal people I met. I must have been 23 when I found out [that I was Aboriginal]. When I said that I wanted to go to Uni, he said, ‘Do you know your grandfather was Aboriginal?’ That explains it, that’s why I have been so driven. I wanted to connect with Aboriginal people. It makes sense.

23 A non-Indigenous participant from Melbourne also told me that she noted a more obvious Aboriginal presence and had more cross-cultural interactions in Perth than in Melbourne.
that's why I was drawn to them, because of my heritage. I wanted to work with Aboriginal people, to get an Aboriginal perspective, but there was no Aboriginal teaching, no Aboriginal students. I didn't want to be claiming something I didn't know about. I didn't live the experience of Aboriginal people, but because of my Italian background, my family knew about minorities. My family is happy to be Italian, we do salami. They make their wine.

We were driven across the Nullabor. People came to me, and said, “Hi sister.” When I came to WA, people were identifying me as Aboriginal. Then I started thinking, how do I fit, and to what level do I identify? I don’t know where my family comes from. I don’t know. I’m a Koorie because I came from Victoria, and for my grandfather to have married my grandmother, he must have had to leave his people to marry her. He might have been torn between two worlds. My Dad didn’t meet his dad before he was 16. Dad is very secretive. He didn’t know he was Aboriginal before he met his Dad. My grandfather died a year after he met Dad. Dad was a little bit supportive, but he doesn’t know himself. It’s hard to bring the subject up.

In Perth, people recognise me as Aboriginal. It makes me quite proud. I don’t see it but other people can identify it in me, it makes me confident in acknowledging my identity. That’s why I always walked with no shoes, I’m a Gypsy. Mum, she’s the same. She says, ‘No wonder you girls get crazy if I don’t take you camping!’ Since she knows, she says when I’m upset, ‘Get yourself camping!’

Past governmental structures are influencing the agency of Amy (and other Aboriginal families). Cross-cultural communication is still affected by past structures, which were not an incentive to cross-cultural engagements; they left ‘shadows’ on people experiences. The ‘structure of conjuncture’ is not solely dependent on historical events, as Amy’s story illustrates. The various settings for cross-cultural engagement (Part Three) and themes of cultural significances (Part Two) also provide a genre of structure of conjuncture that influences interactions. Indeed, I noted some non-Indigenous people have differing knowledge about Aboriginal cultures (e.g. art, government, media, bush, spirituality) and therefore focus on different aspects of Aboriginal cultures. In the field, I observed that people talk to their peers, friends and family about their cross-cultural experiences and therefore contribute to the reproduction of some features rather than others (structure of conjuncture).

**Story Nine — Jackie and Jane**

Story Nine, told by a mother and her daughter, is about their experiences around the school environment. Jackie is a non-Indigenous woman who gained a degree of proximity with Aboriginal people through fostering children, travelling around Australia, and living in a neighbourhood having a high number of Aboriginal
households. She presents a non-Indigenous perspective on some day-to-day issues relating to parenting and AbStudy. While some of her comments are critical, Jackie is very open to Noongar culture. An example is that as she fosters children, she has gone out of her way to locate a Black Aboriginal doll because she did not want all the dolls to be White. When I was interviewing Jackie, her daughter Jane joined us and brought a student’s perspective to the conversation. Although mother and daughter engage with Noongar people and have some cultural awareness, both Jackie and Jane maintain a degree of compartmentalisation in their understanding of the interface (see Nakata 2007 for a discussion on the issue of cultural standpoints in Torres Strait Education). Their perspectives on cross-cultural engagements are very different to the one of Leila in Story Ten.

Jackie:

I was born and raised in the Perth metropolitan area. I had no contact with Aboriginal people, except for one girl during my childhood. That was until my son Mike had a friend who was part-Aboriginal. He was slightly dark. He came here a few times. He was paid to go to school. It was hard to explain to my son that school should be done for yourself. His friend had free range, he could go where he wanted at any time of the night. Mike couldn’t understand. He was my son, and I thought that this was the best for him.

Both of my kids have issues about how Aboriginal people get money. My daughter is 18. Her friend got bashed by a group of Aboriginal girls. She had no cigarettes, so they stole the mobile phone. There is trouble walking to town, Aboriginals asking for ciggies. I say, ‘Give one when you have one.’ The mentality is that the world owes them. My daughter works, why not them?

There’s a lot in the paper, and a lot of people say it’s not our fault. I agree with them. We must make sure it doesn’t happen again, but we should make it fair for everybody. If my kids didn’t go to school, the Police would be there. I’m guessing, but paying kids to go to school, it’s not giving them the self-esteem they need.

Mike keeps very much to himself. He has a small group of friends and where they go, they don’t have issues. They go to movies, nightclubs. My daughter Jane sometimes says, ‘The boongs were there again.’ A lot of her friends are from the northern suburbs. There are a lot of Aboriginal kids at her school. The girls are far more bitchy than the boys. She wouldn’t walk over and be hassled. My daughter has had more issues than my son now. She wasn’t afraid, and wouldn’t let me go to the school. It was just silly stuff. Aboriginal schoolkids just wanted to run the place. A lot get suspended. Aboriginals call them ‘sluts’. ‘We are babysitters, not mothers’ my teenage daughter said. It’s not just Aboriginal people.

[The daughter came into the room and joined the discussion.]

Jane:

There’re a lot of fights with them. One Aboriginal group was always starting it. My
best friend [Noongar] was always nice. She’s into drugs now. There was an average of one or two Noongar in every class. In Year 8, the naughty ones thought they were better. I nearly had a fight with one Aboriginal girl. She said, ‘I’ll get my sisters, my cousins. Fuck you, White cunt, you White bitch.’ Most of them are half-caste. They get more violent when they drink.

Some groups are just Aboriginal people, and some are with White and Aboriginal. I was in one of those groups. There’s the good and the bad, the good Aboriginal and the bad one. You get really scared, because there are more people. They can bring hundreds of relatives. An Aboriginal girl beating another Aboriginal girl, and two sisters and brothers were fighting. They were all Aboriginal, they were cousins. Non-Aboriginal kids have fewer fights, a lot of talk but nothing really happens. The majority of fights came from Aboriginal people. The ones that always fight, they say, ‘Stop looking at me, or I’ll kill you.’ It’s a power trip. The Whites would be scared, but if you’re racist and White, you’d do it. I don’t know anyone who is racist. A Noongar boy, he was pretty good. He’s a hairdresser. He’s also gay, which is also weird for a 14-year-old Aboriginal boy. We knew he was gay. It never occurred to me that an Aboriginal could be gay. It’s stupid. You’d see Aboriginal couples, but not Aboriginal gay couples. There’s no recognition. When I did Years 11 and 12, all my friends were Aboriginal. We never had fights. They were non-violent. My friend, her Mum was White, her Dad was Aboriginal. Her Dad was in jail, mine wasn’t. She talked with me about it a bit, but not much. She didn’t like to talk about it. A lot of men were on drugs, my friends didn’t like to mention it. When school finished, we went different ways. Drugs separated us. Sonia, she wasn’t Aboriginal, and she sniffed at school. None of my Aboriginal friends sniffed glue.

The nice ones are like normal people. They don’t want to have fights. They do something with their lives. They did their schoolwork, speak to the teacher with respect. There are a lot of traineeships for Aboriginal people. A lot of my friends were doing that.

When I walked with Jody [2-years-old Noongar child] in the pram and my partner, there’s no problem in the street. People don’t look at us. They presume this is my kid and I slept with an Aboriginal guy. There’s not a problem any more, unlike with somebody Mum’s age. A lot of Aboriginal people prefer to date White people, because of the fights. When somebody dies, everybody goes to the funeral. Somebody dies, they make it up, and the fighting stops. It’s just grieving. It’s not an issue now of dating a different race. It’s common, now.

This story is especially poignant when put in contrast with Leila, who brings an Aboriginal perspective on school interactions.

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24 The inter-family dispute is commonly termed a ‘feud’ (see also Toussaint 1987: 89-90; Wilson 1958: 79). Some Nyungar families perpetuate a feud over many generations, the original reason for the hostility sometimes being lost in time. Members of two families in feud have fights together just by being in proximity with each other. This is a cultural Nyungar feature. Toussaint (1987: 139) noted, whilst discussing Aboriginal housing, ‘the necessity to stay away from particular suburbs because Nyungars cannot live within the same geographical locations as families with whom they are feuding.’
Chapter Three — Stories in Black and White

Story Ten — Leila

Leila, who is the same age as Jane, discusses the difficulties she faces blending into her school because of her Aboriginal background. She expressed outbursts of anger because her schoolmates ostracized her. Leila explains how she values the support of the person who is an Aboriginal coordinator, a position funded by the Department of Education.

Leila:

I was born in Kalgoorlie and I lived there for a few years. Dad is Aboriginal, but I don’t know where he’s born. Mum is from up north. I didn’t know I was Aboriginal. Mum told me when I was 10. Dad was Dad. He didn’t tell me anything, that’s why I just know he’s Aboriginal. He wants to be White, he’s not proud of being Aboriginal. It doesn’t bother me. In Kal [Kalgoorlie] there was heaps of Aboriginal children [at school], maybe 200. There’s a lot more there [compared with where she lives now, in the South-West].

When I lived in Kal, I hung out with Aboriginal children. Here, all children are racist. In Kal it’s an Aboriginal area. Everyone knew everyone, where here White kids were racist. I had no friends. The first day, I went to hang around with some girls and one said, ‘We don’t hang around with Boongs and Niggers.’ I had no idea of racism in Kal. When I was in Kal, we were all children. We hardly knew anything. Here, there was a lot of boyfriend business going on. I didn’t want to go to school, because I had no friends. Mum told me, “You’ll find friends soon.” But there were no Aboriginal children in the school. There were, but they were much older. I was the only young one in the school. There were not many Aboriginal kids because it was more of a flash area.

In High School, there’s an Aboriginal teacher, a coordinator. She introduced me to Aboriginal girls. I fitted in with them. I didn’t feel different. We were all Aboriginal. White kids were afraid. The girls didn’t call me names when I was with the Aboriginal kids. No one said anything. I’ve got a lot more friends now. I had friendship with a White kid. Not everybody is racist. A lot of it is when the parents tell them not to be friendly with Aboriginal kids.

I’m doing a Business Certificate, I want to be an Aboriginal youth worker, going through it all, you know, my own feelings, my own problems: having no friends, and Mum and my brother not having much money for clothes and movies. Mum was on a pension. When I was a kid, I was angry with myself. I swore at the teachers. I didn’t know how to control my anger. It’s hard when no one comes to talk to you. I went into drinking and drugs, I didn’t want to live no more.

Now, I’m a secretary for a White organization. They do work for Aboriginal people, so they want to have an Aboriginal secretary. They can show Aboriginal people that they’re doing something. It’s a good thing, because it can show how far Aboriginal people can go. I’m the only Aboriginal staff member. I haven’t worked with Aboriginal people. I’ve been doing the job for eight months now, it’s a government institution. They try to help Aboriginal communities do different stuff, raise money for different things.

Aborigines don’t feel welcome in hospital, people feel scared. They’re not welcome

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25 See Chapter Eight for detail on the issue.
because it’s just White staff. They need Aboriginal staff, nurses. At work, there’re Aboriginal posters around the office. Paintings, bush fires, kangaroos, dot paintings. It’s to make it more welcoming to Aboriginal people. Many elders are scared to come to hospital because [of conditions] when they were younger, but that’s not the case for younger Aboriginal people.

For Aboriginal children, they need to learn more about the culture. I’d love to learn more about the stories. I’m interested in how years ago people used to live and cook. Now, we couldn’t imagine living in the bush. In Kal, there were the featherfoot stories, and that kind of stuff. I’d like to know more. It’s hard to explain. If I’m an Aboriginal youth worker, I can know more about my culture. I can’t see myself behind a desk. I want to tell people that they’re not alone. In High School, there’s the Aboriginal art teacher. You can go to talk with her. I want to be an Aboriginal youth worker. I know what I went through. People say everything’s free, but it’s not like this, with AbStudy, free excursions. They think it’s free, that’s why there’s a lot of racism. In Kal, we learned about NAIDOC week, we did some parades, we were told stories. Here, there’s not much of that around. It was more fun in Kal because I was around Aboriginal people.

Putting into perspective Jane’s and Leila’s stories, it is clear that, although the Department of Education encourages cross-cultural communication, the voice of Leila is an Aboriginal voice, whereas Jane’s is not despite some Noongar cultural awareness.

Like a number of other Aboriginal participants, Leila’s sense of agency focuses on her cultural community, and the Aboriginal Unit of Department of Education helps her to achieve this. Although the Western Australian government today encourages Aboriginal recognition and facilitates cross-cultural engagements, these stories (Nine and Ten) illustrate the weight of people’s cultural background in influencing their agency. In other words, the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people does not seem to eliminate the notion of an Aboriginal domain (e.g. Trigger 1992) or cultural identity (in terms of the notion of culture that I discussed in Chapter One of this thesis); Leila’s story express clearly a sense of Aboriginal cultural identity, whereas Jane shows a non-Aboriginal perspective of the issue.

It is also worth noting that there are also some contradictions in ‘structure’: the political structure of Reconciliation encourages engagement, but the structure of culture (as people’s cultural background) maintains a degree of compartmentalisation, albeit the existence of cross-cultural engagement. There are even more paradoxes in the understanding of culture and agency, as the notion of culture is put to the forefront in today’s society, the latter also encouraging the cultural interface. Leila finds the means
to learn about her culture because of the political context; however, the cultural background of both Leila and Jane remain apparent in their narrative—the Aboriginal voice and the Whitefella voice.

**Story Eleven — Haley**

This story illustrates further the complexity of cross-cultural processes, as people’s agency is also a matter of social positioning. This is influenced by their cultural standpoint and impact on the way they engage with others.

Haley (21) reflects on her non-Indigeneity and her possible Aboriginal ancestry. Whereas her own grandmother denied having any Aboriginal descent, Haley said she would be proud of having an Aboriginal identity. Haley centred the debate about her being, or not being, Aboriginal on knowledge of cooking recipes. When I mentioned Haley’s story at a cross-cultural workshop at which I was invited to speak, Noongar people responded positively to her ‘kangaroo tail’ story and shared their experiences about middle-class relatives who did not want to acknowledge their Noongar kin.

Haley has a strong empathy with Aboriginal Australia but, at the same time, she challenges many of her peers who she thinks have a naive understanding of Aboriginal issues. Haley would have liked to find out whether or not she has an Aboriginal ancestry, as it would allow her to act more freely. Being non-Indigenous, Haley is constrained by the non-Indigenous perspective of engagement and she feels that, if she had an Aboriginal ancestry, she could express her views on Aboriginal affairs with less concern of being politically correct. An Aboriginal identity would anchor her in two cultural communities and position her as a cross-cultural ‘free agent’: free of any constraint of cultural identity. This leads me to mention Tucker (1998: 51) who noted, ‘self-identities are created and sustained in the context of a cultural community which supplies us with ways of feeling, speaking, and understanding.’ Indeed, his

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26 A more and more common response to the political and economic changes that started 40 years ago.
27 In his chapter ‘ideology as a cultural system’, Geertz (1993: 205) noted, ‘the power of ideology to knit a social group or class together.’
28 See also Friedman (1994: 212-6) who discusses ‘individualism’ as one of ‘[t]he parameters of modernity’. Hobsbawm (1983: 291) noted that this is an enduring European cultural practice as, around the turn of the 19th century, ‘the middle classes were par excellence the locus of ... individual self-improvement’.
Chapter Three — Stories in Black and White

observation resonates with Haley, who resents being constrained by her non-Aboriginal background in regard to the way she appreciates cross-cultural engagements—that is, the way she feels, speaks and understand Aboriginal cultures, as she now recalls:

Haley:

I was born in Perth in the mid-80s and I grew up in a middle class inner-city suburb. I can’t remember the first time I heard about Aboriginal culture; it was forever in our house. There were bark paintings. My sister did a project at school about Aboriginal culture, but I don’t remember the first time, it has always been there. My Dad loves Aboriginal art. He goes out all the time, he’s careful what he buys, he doesn’t want people ripping off Aboriginal people, or a fraud. He thinks Aboriginal culture is important, so he would feel terrible if somebody copied it to make money. He goes to reputable places, he wants to know a lot about the artists.

There is a debate in my family. My great-grandmother looked very Aboriginal, but she says she was Spanish. It was funny, my sister asked Grandma about some Spanish dishes, but she just cooked kangaroo tail. We looked into it a bit, but there is no way we could ever find out, no documents. Every track was a dead end. Nothing more I can remember. Grandma strongly assured us that her mum was Spanish. Grandma didn’t want to recognise my great-grandma as Aboriginal. My Mum started making enquiries in the family. My great-grandma lived in country Victoria, but has no relatives over there, and she came to Western Australia when she was 11 or 12. My Grandma was a bit shocked when we raised this, and she said, ‘Oh no, oh no, it couldn’t be.’

For me, it was quite cool, I was quite impressed. I thought it would be something I would quite like. It’s not bad to have a Spanish grandmother, I’m not cultural at all. A lot of Australians have Spanish relatives, but not many have Aboriginal relatives. My family and me and friends, we have always been pro-Reconciliation, and to claim part of that is something special.

Aboriginal people are quite a closed community, and cultural issues and ideas have been carried for so long. It’s a rich culture, and the fact your family has been involved, it’s good to be put into this culture. I don’t have much of a culture, except the global culture, but it’s so generic and devoid of anything significant to the individual. It’s completely different to Indigenous culture, the idea about family. For Christmas, you can argue [about Western cultural values], but it’s nothing significant to me. I’m not religious, there’s nothing.

Because we can never know anything about me being—or not—Aboriginal, I feel like a fraud, a label cast on myself. I’ll never have any of the cultural traditions, and I’d feel that I was grabbing on. And as an Aboriginal I’d feel offended, as there’s more to being identified as Aboriginal than the matter of blood. In the same way, Australian society is no different, because it has different blood. There’s tradition, you need to grow up, it’s not just the blood. It’s not just a key to getting [in] there. Aboriginality is not just blood, it’s how you perceive things.

My family has a lot of contact with Aboriginal people. I never think of how many there are. One friend’s grandmother was part of the Stolen Generation. I think my sister and this friend look similar. My friend never suffered from the effect of being Aboriginal. She said strongly that she is Aboriginal, she always said she is part-Aboriginal. That’s all the issues of the Stolen Generation and people who are robbed of their Aboriginality, people who don’t have their identity because of the Stolen
Generation. My friend has always been part-Aboriginal. She’s got family in Britain. They are recognised as part of the family. She recognises the other culture involved, she always has lived as non-Aboriginal, but being Aboriginal is part of her inheritance, not the way she lives. It’s something in your head.

Aboriginal people sitting in a group in the park, you have to see that, it’s a cultural difference. Some people have a shallow level of observation. They see the difference and don’t acknowledge the difference when there are real differences. How did I get my awareness of acknowledging difference? My school was pro-Aboriginal on issues, it was almost one-sided. Sometimes, Indigenous issues come up with my friends. One friend said a gang of Aboriginal youths had beaten her up. I didn’t say too much, I couldn’t defend Aboriginal people as a whole, because it couldn’t be. Acknowledging difference, I wouldn’t dare speaking about this with most of my friends, because some of my friends are really pro-Indigenous, and they would dig themselves in by a stick, that there’s no difference. By acknowledging difference, I don’t want to be labelled as ‘racist’, and a lot of people have this reaction. And people would point their fingers at me. Having an Aboriginal grandmother would stop people from labelling me [as ‘racist’], because then I could joke and make comments. Some White Australians are uncomfortable about that kind of thing, because they fear they might be seen as racist. They say they’re not racist, and they accept people rather than thinking about Aboriginal issues. They concentrate on accepting rather than seeing the reality.

Reflecting on Haley’s story I observe a need to address some issues associated with cross-cultural communication. In one sense, the intercultural knowledge (Part Two) acts as a kind of shared cultural agreement between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, something that is constructed for the purpose of cross-cultural engagement. As I illustrate in Part Two, some conceptualisation of an intercultural body of knowledge suggests a partitioned but shared social sphere of engagement, while maintaining a notion of distinctiveness between an Aboriginal and a non-Indigenous cultural background (e.g. tradition). Haley would appreciate being able to bend the containment between groups, allowing individuals to move freely without being constrained by being either ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘non-Aboriginal’.

Giddens (1984: xxv) noted that ‘each person is positioned, in a “multiple” way, within social relations conferred by specific social identities; this is the main sphere of application of the concept of social role’. Indeed, Haley’s agency is constrained by her social positioning (being non-Indigenous) as her own sense of cultural belonging limits her agency. Whereas the political structure encourages cross-cultural engagement, Haley is highly conscious of the notion of political correctness that this structure of Reconciliation has imposed on non-Indigenous people. Being of Aboriginal ancestry would allow her to free her agency, as an Aboriginal cultural positioning would prevent
her non-Aboriginal friends from labelling her views as being a ‘politically incorrect’. Specifically, Haley suggested that pro-Aboriginal people are naïve in some ways.

**Story Twelve — Alan**

Alan is a Noongar man who married a non-Indigenous woman forty years ago even though, at the time, most Aboriginal people were excluded from sharing day-to-day social activities with non-Indigenous people. Social changes over the past four decades have allowed Alan to flourish socially and to participate in public and political recognition of Noongar culture. Calling for more intercultural interactions, he said, ‘The White people are becoming disenchanted with the White system, and are looking for anybody to be an example’. This story also highlights that the motivation for cross-cultural engagements may vary according to people’s cultural background.

Alan:

My Noongar awareness came early, 4 or 5 I suppose. My father worked for White people, and was put in jail by White people. We were not allowed on the street in town. We were told to ‘Move on’ by the Police. I’ve been aware of the cultural difference all my life. I was taken away from my Mum and Dad at 9 years of age. Growing up in a Mission, I realised the White people were in charge. When I was 14 or 16, it didn’t change so much. I wasn’t allowed with other workers. Two Aboriginal people, we had to live by ourselves. We were working together [with non-Indigenous people]. We played football together, but did not share the meals. In the Mission it was different, we shared the meals. There was racism where we played football. Things were said. White people were different than Noongar, and their attitude was that Aboriginal had to work for the White people.

It’s changing slowly because of the laws and Human Rights. The changes started in the early ‘60s. My wife is Irish. It wasn’t easy to start with, it was pretty hard when we moved in together. The Church minister refused to marry us. We were surprised. That’s because she was non-Aboriginal. Now there is a relaxed attitude towards it, but there’re pockets of people who are anti. There are a few pockets here. People don’t do things bluntly. They do it in subtle ways, for example, they put pressure on the Government not to allow Aboriginal people to get proper housing, or question Government policy on Aboriginal issues.

My whole attitude relaxes more these days. The fact that I have succeeded to a degree, and I have mastered things, reached the height of White people. White people have been working, protecting their own interests. Being Noongar, I’m very proud of it, because being Noongar gives me a sense of

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In the very different historical context of Hawaiian cross-cultural interactions, Sahlins (1981: 40) commented on the notion of people’s motivation varying according to their cultural standpoints. He wrote, ‘the women gave themselves because they thought there was a god; while the British seamen took them because they had forgotten it.’
being in a particular place. I’m very proud of being a senior Noongar, being Noongar, that’s my homeland. Being Noongar I have peace of mind, and rest in my spirit. I live on my own land, I live on the soil where my people were. That gives me a sense of dignity. My wife has a tremendous sense of peace, she has every confidence in me because I know my boundaries. In a physical sense, Australia is my boundary, Perth is my geographic region. We have had a few clashes regarding White values and Aboriginal values. White values are more active, get up and do it; Aboriginal values are more restful, there needs to be a spiritual involvement. I find White people are motivated by projects, and when its completed they move on to the next, to give them a sense of peace, but we don’t need to do that.

The Western system is controlled by Western rules. The White people are becoming disenchanted with the White system, and are looking for anybody to be an example. It’s time for Aboriginal people to reach the White community, as Aboriginal people are not takers but contributors and givers. Australia needs to respect Noongar culture, to give recognition to traditional owners, and respect the Elders.

The communication of culture needs to be carefully thought through. Giddens commented on the incidence of “unacknowledged conditions” and “unintended consequences” of action’ (in Dallmayr 1982: 20) and raised the notion of un-intentional agency (Giddens 1984: 9). There could be a paradox in cross-cultural communication, as a new ‘intercultural’ zone may result in the fading away over time of clearly distinguishable Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultures. This may be something to pursue; however, it needs to be carefully thought through in order to avoid unintentional consequences in the future. However, I exemplify throughout the thesis that this blending of culture resulting from cross-cultural engagement leads people to bring to the forefront the notion of culture itself. Indeed, Aboriginal identity is stronger since a cross-communicative structure encourages it. As Alan suggested, non-Aboriginal people are looking for something in Aboriginal culture, and this resonates with Part Two where I illustrate that the intercultural body of knowledge is a joint construction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests.

I observed in the field that some non-Indigenous people are not willing to learn, value or recognize the strength of Noongar culture, whereas others are very keen to engage with Noongar and more generally Aboriginal cultures. Some Noongar people, like Elizabeth and Alan, communicate Noongar culture in cross-cultural settings. Some non-Indigenous people now appreciate Noongar culture and wish to be associated with it. The social structures (culture and political economy) discuss in the following chapters shape Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions; however, people agency is strongly influencing these engagements.
The twelve stories of this chapter have illustrated that some cross-cultural engagement can occur without social structures to prompt them. Harold’s grandfather, who engaged closely with local Noongar people, exemplified this. Today, Harold explains his agency by making reference to his mother’s side of the family, rather than his paternal one. This notion of choice in people’s agency was also demonstrated in Sarah’s story, as she chose to participate in social structures that prompt cross-cultural engagement as soon as she had the opportunity to do so. With the stories of Jo and Caroline, I showed that social structures are strongly influencing how people’s agency is put into action, as both are, or have been in their youth, very empathic for Aboriginal people. Their agency was to get close to Aboriginal people; however, they exercised it very differently as Caroline adopted an Aboriginal girl whereas Jo embraced Noongar spirituality. The story of Coskun, put in perspective with other participants, shows that people can use their cultural identity to assert either sympathy or antagonism toward Aboriginal people. People referred to in Coskun’s section have interpreted, or re-interpreted, their cultural background in order to legitimate their agency—interestingly, the cultural background (structure) that they refer to is used to justify an opposing type of agency. The story of Elizabeth (Noongar woman involved in the communication of her heritage) shows that the reproduction of cross-cultural communication is influenced by people’s agency—that is, the individual’s commitment to cultural communication. The experience of Amy (the Koorie woman) shows that a structure which no longer exists can influence people’s agency today. Indeed, because of past policies, her father was ashamed of being Aboriginal and did not communicate to Amy her Koorie heritage. Now, her capacity to exercise her agency has been very much constrained by this lack of knowledge. The stories of Haley, Jane, Leila and Alan also stress issues of cross-cultural communication and their respective agency in this process. They discuss their experiences and provide insights on how they negotiate their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identities with each other whilst engaging cross-culturally.

I now end this chapter by quoting Maurice, a non-Aboriginal participant who summarised in lay terms the issues raised here, while I was having a conversation with him about his cross-cultural involvement and commitment. He voiced his understanding of the relationships between structure and agency: ‘People make things change, but they need the opportunity.’ In the following chapters, I analyse some structures of
engagement by, firstly, investigating the cultural opportunities that allow the interface—that is, how the intercultural body of knowledge is co-constructed. I investigate the need for a common ground of understanding upon discrete cultural features. This precedes the investigation of the various settings within which the cultural interface take place, as discussed Part Three. In other words, Part Two and Three of this thesis address both the opportunities available and the nature of the social actions emerging from my fieldwork period.
Finding a Common Ground: the Intercultural Body of Knowledge

Part Two

Chapters Four, Five, Six
Chapter Four — Tradition and Language

Part Two focuses on the non-Aboriginal reception of Noongar cultures subsequent to its communication; my intention is not to investigate how Noongar people decide to represent themselves—that is, the construction of Aboriginality or the politics of representation. Whereas a vast corpus of my ethnography concerns descriptive features of Noongar culture, my analysis concentrates on how non-Aboriginal people receive it as, to my knowledge of the cultural interface, non-Aboriginal reception is one aspect of the cultural dialogue that required investigation.

This chapter analyses two themes of significance for cross-cultural engagement: Noongar language and tradition. In two sections, each of them dealing with one of these themes, I show how the intercultural is constructed upon both Noongar and non-Aboriginal cultures, leaving some cultural features outside the realm of intercultural knowledge, while people are incorporating others with enthusiasm. The key analytical point of this chapter is conceptualised with a diagram (Figure 4.1), which illustrates my discussion of the failure to attain an intercultural consensus with regard to some cultural elements of both language and tradition. There is selectivity in the content of the intercultural body of knowledge that emerges from cross-cultural encounters as the subjects that enter the intercultural need to be acceptable to both sides (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal). In other words, intercultural knowledge requires a kind of common ground (a shared zone of acceptance) that resonates with both cultures. I focus on the communication of Noongar culture to non-Indigenous people, and I aim to illustrate that the intercultural is not just a matter of the transmission of knowledge by Noongar people, but it is also a co-construction (a joint construction), as it is influenced by the non-Aboriginal reception (e.g. cultural expectations and backgrounds). Both themes of tradition and language exemplify this process and allow me to illustrate methodically how some Noongar cultural features are received cross-culturally.

Here, I bundle tradition and language within the same chapter because the process of selectivity is most apparent within these two themes, by contrast with other themes addressed in the two following chapters.
The Macquarie Dictionary (2004: 1970) defines tradition as ‘a long-established action or pattern of behaviour ... often one that has been handed down from generation to generation’. Similarly, Lévi-Strauss declared that tradition tends to be legitimised by its durability (interview with Lévi-Strauss in Charbonier 1961: 58). On the other hand, many anthropologists, as well as Aboriginal people in the Australian context, are emphasising the dynamics of ‘tradition’ (Langton 1994: 3-4; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Tonkinson 1997). Ritchie (1999: 268), for example, commented, ‘Dynamism is fundamental to Aboriginal traditions’, and Bergmann (2003: 45) has written about the Kimberley region: ‘As with all cultures, our traditions are dynamic and evolve, they are not frozen at any time in history’. Outside the realm of anthropology, scholars have also challenged the static quality of ‘tradition’ (Derrida 2001: 15; Giddens 2003: 40). To quote Giddens (2003: 40):

It is a myth to think of traditions as impervious to change. Traditions evolve over time, but also can be quite suddenly altered or transformed. If I can put it this way, they are invented and reinvented1.

The demonstration of Aboriginal tradition is a core element of the Western Australian Aboriginal Heritage Act. For example, sect. 5(a) (in Ritter 2003: 196) concerns ‘places of importance and significance.... connected with the traditional cultural life of the Aboriginal people, past or present’. The Native Title Act has also brought to the forefront the notion of ‘tradition’ in Aboriginal cultures, as it is a key requirement in demonstrating ownership of the land. For example:

In Australia, laws that give Aboriginal people legal title to their land, and enable them to exercise rights in relation to their cultural heritage, require that aspects of Aboriginal tradition must first be established as matters of fact. (Ritchie 1999: 255).

Povinelli (2002: 3) also observed this focus on tradition, as ‘traditional customs give their native title application its legal efficacy under Australian statutory and common law.’ In this context of Native Title, ‘[a] “traditional” law or custom is one which has been passed from generation to generation ... usually by word of mouth and common practice’ (Wright 2003: 16), but the High Court also recognises elements of adaptation

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1 I discuss the notion of ‘invention of tradition’ later in this chapter.
Figure 4.1 Conceptualisation of the intercultural on the themes of Tradition and Language

- Noongar cultural knowledge
  - Noongar cultural elements that are not appreciated as expressions of Noongar culture by non-Aboriginal people
    - Gender-based knowledge
    - Aboriginal English

- Intercultural Knowledge
  - Defined by and co-constructed on shared understandings
    - Noongar language
    - Past tradition
    - Noongar Welcome to Country

- Non-Aboriginal preconceptions
  - Knowledge of Noongar culture held by non-Aboriginal people that is not shared by Noongar people
    - 'Mysterious' tradition

Cross-cultural setting: the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people
and change (Wright 2003: 15, 18). In the same context of discussing the recognition of both changes to and maintenance of tradition in the Native Title Act, Avery (1993: 125) commented, ‘Traditions... and customs are sourced to and obligatory to the past’, but specified, '[t]he legislation does not limit permissible change in Aboriginal traditions, and it does not establish particular requirements for “authenticity”.' Indeed, under the legal interpretative framework, Aboriginal traditions are far from being seen as static in nature.

Albeit ‘tradition’ suggests a certain continuity of practice, its underlying quality of constancy is now challenged on both a scholarly and legal basis. For many participants, however, tradition often remains something old and enduring, as I now discuss in regard to cross-cultural engagements.

**According importance to past tradition: a common ground for engagement**

Beyond the legal context, where Aboriginal tradition is a means of establishing cultural rights or land and sea ownership, it is worth noting that in the specific context of the cultural interface, Noongar people themselves often talked about Noongar traditions. This provides a way of asserting a cultural identity that is different to that of the broader Australian society (see Trigger 1997 for comparable comments on the Gulf country).

Noongar people who are now over fifty years old grew up in a world in which very few Aboriginal people shared equal opportunities with non-Indigenous Australians (Anderson 2003: 18). During my fieldwork, Noongar participants have often spoken about traditional practices, such as fishing and hunting, which were maintained in the 30s, 40s and 50s (see also Maushart 1993, for comparable data). For example, a Noongar elder felt that fishing and hunting activities did not occur the same way in the living conditions of non-Aboriginal people of that period:

White people were the authority, they dispensed the rations. We were probably in a better position than the Whites. We could get food. In the river were fish, marron, gilgies [fresh water crayfish], turtles in the swamp. We had as much food as we wanted (7: 93).

Changes over the last four decades have brought a different positioning for Noongar people within the broader Australian society; however, in regard to everyday practices,
many younger Noongar participants still contrast the Noongar way to the non-Indigenous way, often by referring to ‘old’ practices—however, re-adapted to contemporary lifestyle. For Sarah, Noongar tradition provides a powerful statement of her identity that she sees as being different to the wider non-Aboriginal society:

We [Noongar people] are different. I bumped into a friend in a pub. She wasn’t Noongar [she was non-Indigenous]. The conversation turned around, “Are you still working here?” “Where do you live?” “I’m getting engaged.” With Aboriginal people it is different. It’s hard to explain. When I have a conversation with Noongar people, with a Noongar girl friend for example, it’s like going to the conversation I had with her years ago. That’s like the old way. Walking the trails, women disappearing to do their business and gathering of family to celebrate the season. It’s quite an amazing similarity with the past.

More broadly speaking, Noongars’ interest in their cultural heritage is prevalent and a number of respondents clearly expressed the centrality of Noongar tradition in their lives. Lisa, for example, commented about this issue:

My husband [Noongar] wants to learn more about Noongar traditions, so he can teach them to his son.

Indeed, Noongar participants have talked about ‘the old way’. A Noongar woman in her twenties put it, ‘the old way reflects us’. Other participants, who themselves or whose parents or grandparents were placed in institutions and who suffered the shame associated at that time with being Noongar, have not passed on many Noongar practices. Cheryl (Noongar) referred to this rupture in the inter-generational transmission of knowledge as ‘the missing link’ and, along with other Noongars, she now participates actively in communicating, within Noongar and non-Indigenous communities, cultural knowledge surrounding the traditional use of plants, artefacts, and food. In the field, I met a number of Noongar people for whom heritage was such an essential part of their own lives that it even drives their professional careers. Dan gave details:

I work for a business which is linked to Noongar culture. I wanted to learn more about Aboriginal culture, I wanted to protect and preserve as much of Aboriginal heritage and culture for the Noongar region as I could. Because of the early contact, there is a loss of heritage places. I worked [in the past] in a job situation where there was no connection with heritage. In some situations, we take the job in order to survive, but I’m glad I’m back in the heritage area.

Despite being a general statement about cultural changes, Jourdan (1996: 37) contributes to an explanation of Sarah’s observation: ‘When it comes to cultural changes, nothing is given or fixed: individuals creatively select and appropriate different discourses and ideologies and map them, very often partially, onto existing practices’.

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I have no hesitation to write that much of my field data illustrate the importance of tradition for Noongar people. At a cultural awareness bush tour, for example, a Noongar convenor explained that he had been taken away from his family at the age of four. He added that, later in life, he 'hit the grog' because of his anger against the 'Wadjela world that hurt him', in reference to the Native Welfare officers who took him away from his parents and placed him in an institution. He now 'want[s] to learn about [his] tradition and to share it' (3: 69). Other Noongar participants grew up with more exposure to 'tradition', but were still very keen to know about Noongar heritage: ‘I didn’t grow up in the bush but I was taken there by my Nan. I wish I could remember more’ (7: 25). For other Noongar people, there was no such discontinuity. These Noongar participants were very proud to be in a position to hand on Noongar culture to the next generation.

According importance to ‘tradition’ is far from being exclusively a Noongar cultural feature. Indeed, a number of non-Aboriginal people with whom I talked were also proud of their own heritage, voicing it with comments such as ‘it’s great to see my neighbour renovating their old Federation house’ (6: 18) or ‘I took my kids to see the museum so I could show them how my grandfather used to live on the farm’ (17: 3). A non-Aboriginal woman who had a child with a Koorie man, but split up with him when the baby was 6 months old (the boy is now a teenager), said that she grasped every opportunity to learn about Aboriginal cultures because she has an interest in her own culture. She explained:

I suppose that when my son has a child of his own he might ask me more about Aboriginal culture. I try to learn as much as I can, for when these questions will come. When I had children I was more interested in my [non-Aboriginal] heritage (2: 67).

It is worth emphasising that non-Indigenous Australians are familiar with learning about their own heritage through artefacts that were once used in the past. Museums and heritage centres (e.g. old settlers’ cottages) commonly display such items. An Australian heritage volunteer at the Lake Herdsman Settlers Cottage told me that visiting school pupils are using artefacts of the 1920s household in order to learn about the non-Indigenous Australian heritage.

There is, however, a degree of irony for the contemporary appreciation of ‘tradition’ in the Western world. Indeed, Giddens (2003: 39) argued that the word ‘tradition’ is
relatively recent, as ‘in medieval times…. There was no call for such a word, precisely because tradition and custom were everywhere. The idea of tradition, then, is itself a creation of modernity.’ In a comparable vein, O’Brien (1998: 15-6) commented on the contemporary preoccupation of tradition as emerging from modernity, noting: ‘If once we lived in a traditional world, today we live in a world of traditions’.

As I discuss throughout Part Two, the intercultural body of knowledge is co-constructed on features that resonate with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. According importance to the notion of tradition is, without a doubt, something that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians share with each other. Noongar concern with heritage and traditional practices echoes non-Indigenous interest in their own tradition, and it is, somehow, predictable that people engage with themes for which they have some joint interests.

I observed that the notion of Noongar tradition provides a potent common ground on which Noongar and non-Aboriginal people engage. Throughout my fieldwork, I attended many cross-cultural events (e.g. workshops, heritage tours, Perth Royal Show) that showed and taught about Noongar traditional artefacts such as message sticks, clapping sticks and tarp [stone] knives, among other items. I observed that the non-Indigenous people present at these events tended to be very interested in learning about Noongar practices of the past. At a few cross-cultural events, the Noongar ranger even involved the audience (non-Indigenous in most cases) in the making of Noongar tarp knives bearing one (Plate 4.1), two or three flakes of quartz and some members of the non-Aboriginal audiences clearly expressed their enthusiasm, ‘It was fantastic’, to quote one woman.

Message sticks, like knifes, are objects utilised in the past, but were often referred to in contexts of cross-cultural communication of Noongar culture. Whereas message sticks were once used to convey specific information, they are now a means of transmitting Noongar cultural knowledge in a more general sense. During my fieldwork, I collected

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3 There are, of course, some Noongar and non-Indigenous people who have no interest in learning about or sharing Noongar heritage. For example, I overheard a Noongar student telling his friend during the renaming of the Guild Courtyard at UWA, ‘This is to keep the wadjela happy’. I acknowledge that this raises the complexity of the politics of intercultural knowledge communication, a politics that I am unable to address fully in this thesis.

4 On all occasions, the handle was made from wood, while the quartz was fixed to the wood with the resin of a balga tree mixed with ashes and kangaroo dung.
Two non-Aboriginal children learning to make a tarp knife at the Perth Royal Show, under the instruction of a Noongar ranger from CALM, now DEC.

The tarp knife used as an example at the Perth Royal Show.
five message sticks (Plate 4.2): three were given to me (one for each attendee) at three
cross-cultural events; one was part of the table decoration at the NAIDOC Ball 2003;
and one I bought at a Noongar tour. In most cases a story accompanied the message
stick. The following was presented with the WAITOC message stick (Plate 4.2, bottom
right) and provides information about past Noongar traditional practices:

Message sticks are used to relay messages to people of other groups.
The patterns do not comprise ‘writing’: without the messenger who carries them
they convey little detailed information. The same stick can be used on various
occasions for quite different messages.
Message sticks extend invitations to initiations, funerals and feasts and issue
challenges to fight. Message sticks can emphasise the purpose of the invitation.
Messengers are usually young men. On arriving a messenger presents the stick to
the recipient and conveys his message.

The message stick is an artefact that appealed to some non-Aboriginal tourists, to
people attending cultural awareness workshops or a conference during which they were
given one, and to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people at the NAIDOC Ball 2003. I
suggest that this is because message sticks communicate a sense of ‘culture’ rather than
being appreciated solely for their aesthetic value. The concept of the message stick, as a
means to store and pass information, seems to resonate with the contemporary
Australian society; as, for example, it has even become an icon through which people
can exchange their information about a cycle trail named the Munda Biddi Trail. As the
web site (www.mundabiddi.org.au.) said:

We will be using the concept of the message stick to pass along your stories from
the trail and to share photos and information about off-road cycle touring,
planning your trips and organising group rides.

The contemporary use of the message stick resonates with the original (and pre-contact)
intent to communicate information. By association, Gell’s (1998) discussion of the
Asmat shield (PNG) is illuminating. He suggested that the shield was intended to
frighten people by its appearance but, put in a cross-cultural setting, it engenders a
comparable type of emotion that goes far beyond inter-tribal warfare. Throughout his
book, Gell suggests a return to the intention and social condition of the object given by
the maker.

Past practices, such as body painting, throwing boomerangs or making fire, are also
often taught in cultural awareness settings and non-Aboriginal listeners seem to respond
positively to it. At a workshop organised at Perth’s City Farm, Cheryl, the convenor,
taught the twelve non-Indigenous participants how to make fire with two sticks (Plate
4.3). Later, she painted the faces of participants. When she decorated the forehead of my husband, Cheryl said she was painting the Wagul. A few people commented that he was lucky (the Wagul is widely known to be a significant Noongar Dreaming being, representing the Rainbow Snake). People were very enthusiastic about the workshop, one participant remarking as she left, ‘My family is coming tonight. I’d like to open the door with the face painting (12: 78)’.

Whereas most non-Aboriginal participants who were keen to engage with Noongar culture have expressed unambiguously their appreciation to learn something about Noongar tradition, the content of the intercultural body of knowledge on this theme requires further investigation. Indeed, Bourdieu (1994: 163) has noted that ‘tradition is silent’ and ‘what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying’ [emphasis in original]. From my fieldwork, I observed that tradition might not always be silent and many people have clearly enunciated features of Noongar tradition, often in opposition to non-Noongar ones; however, what is often a matter of silence are the principles by which certain elements are allowed passage or denied entry to the intercultural body of traditional knowledge.

**The need for a shared understanding**

I now discuss further the important element in the cross-cultural communication of ‘tradition’, that is, the crucial requirement for a common ground. Indeed, some non-Indigenous participants have shown some difficulty accepting a ‘traditional practice’ that was not part of their contemporary moral values. Australian society generally advocates gender equality; to do otherwise may result in accusations of discrimination. In regard to the broader non-Aboriginal Australian society, knowledge about places and religious practices is, as far as I am aware, generally accessible to both males and females. From my personal experience of learning about my own French heritage, I have never encountered a situation where either men or women have had to leave the room in order to respect cultural gendered secrecy. In making these comments, I am thinking of knowledge concerning the usage and significance of artefacts associated with the land, and information about areas of the land itself. In the non-Aboriginal

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5 This is mainly when women are excluded. I acknowledge the contribution of feminism in some victories toward gender equality.
Message stick shown to participants of a Noongar cultural awareness workshop and given afterwards by the convenor to the ethnographer.

On a Noongar heritage tourist tour, message sticks were being sold. All had different stories; this one was called, *kepi kwonal*, water hole, engraved on the message stick. The ranger told me it is the story of a person going from his home to a water hole, then visiting a relative’s house and returning home.

This message stick was part of a table decoration at the NAIDOC BiJl 2003. This one represents a goanna, and the tag reads: ‘*Wanginji Boorna, Message Stick* – used as a passport when Nyungars were traveling between camps and also used as a map so people did not get lost or offend other Nyungars. This is for people to travel between camps to visit relatives for ceremony.’

Message stick given as a momento to participants of a Noongar cultural awareness workshop.

Momento of a WAITOC event presented to all participants.
Plate 4.3 Making fire with two sticks

Noongar child accompanying his relative trying to make fire with sticks after the workshop participants had been experimenting with making fire.
setting, restrictions on knowledge centre on the private and domestic arena, while matters of community knowledge ‘are the business of all’, according to Cowlishaw (1999: 21).

In contrast, the restriction of knowledge according to gender is prevalent in Aboriginal cultures (Keen 1994; Berndt 1970: 40; Bourke 1997: 333; Langton 2000: 16; Rose 1996b: 36-8). Anthropologists and lawyers working for Native Title claimants have widely discussed the issues (Black 2002: 23; McIntyre and Bagshaw 2002: 4; Rose 1996a: 38). In 1999, Rebecca, an Aboriginal friend, described her feelings about men’s business, in saying: ‘It’s like entering by mistake into the men’s toilets.’

However, if ‘the political economies of knowledge...formed by criteria of age, gender and initiation’ (Rose 1996c: 113) are at the core of Aboriginal cultures, this remains a foreign concept to most non-Aboriginal participants who were exposed to it, as ‘the familiar concept “secret/sacred” finds little support in western concepts of either the secret or the sacred’ (Rose 1996c: 117). Cross-cultural communication on this topic is, therefore, difficult as I now detail with reference to two cases documented during my fieldwork.

At the time, Cheryl was setting up a cross-cultural awareness workshop for women to learn about knowledge associated with Aboriginal women’s business. Non-Indigenous respondents were at ease with the idea of a women’s workshop versus a men’s one. It is not, however, part of non-Indigenous cultures to exclude women from gaining knowledge on heritage when they are present at an event. During my fieldwork, I had on two occasions witnessed the negative responses of non-Indigenous women, not to say the anger of some, toward the Noongar expression of men’s business. I cannot provide a male response on this issue, as I never encountered a setting where men had to leave due to women’s business.

On one occasion, a non-Indigenous political activist was complaining to her girl friends. A couple of days earlier, she had been travelling with Noongar and non-Indigenous

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6 The Hindmarsh Island controversy, as it has become known, brought to the forefront the notion of gender-based knowledge and secrecy and generated an extensive anthropological literature (Brunton 1992; Weiner 1995; Fergie 1996; Bourke 1997; Tonkinson 1997; Rose 2000; Ogle 2002).  
men, all concerned with protecting a sacred Noongar hill from mining activity (there was some debate about the spiritual significance of the hill). At a site of cultural significance, the Noongar men asked her to move away because being a woman she could not listen to the knowledge associated with the place. She knew it was ‘traditional’, but felt excluded and offended because ‘women have fought for their own rights’, as she explained to her friends. Six months earlier, I had observed similar reactions from overseas women. For the Australian Studies unit at UWA, the coordinator of the course organized a half-a-day trip to a National Park to learn about Noongar culture. Twenty-five students enrolled, all from overseas (mainly Europe and America) with the exception of one young Australian woman. Half way through the tour, the Noongar ranger asked the women to move twenty metres ahead and to wait for the men, because of men’s business. As the women moved away, many commented: ‘That’s discrimination’; ‘It’s unfair, we paid the same price’ (3: 73). A student asked me, ‘Do women have their own secret life?’, and was very concerned to know if ‘Aboriginal culture is egalitarian with regard to gender?’ Despite being told by the guide that gendered secrecy is a cultural practice, another anthropology student, angry at being excluded from gaining knowledge said, ‘I will ask one of the boys’ and added, ‘I’m sure he will tell me’. During my fieldwork, I also met an Aboriginal man who operated a tourist enterprise in the Kimberley. He mentioned some difficulties he and his people have with some tourists: ‘A lot of tourists ask a lot of questions. They don’t understand a woman can only tell a bit. She can only tell what she knows she can say’ (Notepad TC).

I suggest that those non-Aboriginal people who were excluded from gaining knowledge felt dis-empowered. This may be due to the fact that power is closely linked with, and related to, knowledge; as Foucault (1980: 52) elucidated:

Knowledge and power are integrated with one another.... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power.

I conclude that, for some people with little familiarity with the notion that Aboriginal traditional heritage is gender-based, such ‘discrimination’ may be seen as a perpetuation of the pre-feminist ‘women’s discrimination’—in other words, male hegemonic power.

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8 Unit offered in the discipline of Anthropology and History.
I have illustrated that the traditional practice of gendered discrimination about knowledge remains a problematic issue in cross-cultural interactions. It fails to enter the intercultural body of knowledge, as it does not fit with Australian and, more generally, Western-based ideological discourse of gendered equal opportunity. Cultural practices that are not shared (or appreciated) by the two cultures may remain outside the 'intercultural', whose construction must concur with the two cultures (Figure 4.1).

Broadly speaking, Bakhtin's investigation of dialogical engagement (1981, 1986) has certain relevance in the matter of cross-cultural communication. He wrote (1986: 146), '[a]ctual contextual meaning inheres not in one (single) meaning, but only in two meanings that meet and accompany one another.' In a similar vein, Giddens (1998: 83) noted about this need for a shared meaning, 'People can only act conventionally because of mutual understanding of convention'. More directly related to the issue I discuss, Rummery (1995: 44) observed in the context of Australian Native Title claims, 'Some communication difficulties arise from cultural differences and from a lack of shared understandings.' I suggest that cross-cultural interactions thrive when the knowledge exchanged fits cultural patterns of both the listener and the cultural sharer. Otherwise, as my data show, it may lead to some feelings of cultural resentment on the part of either the listener (as I have discussed) or the presenter (as I further illustrate).

Noongar tradition as opposed to modernity

Some Noongar participants have put the emphasis on contemporary everyday Noongar practices, opposing these latter to the way they interact with non-Indigenous people. The following quote is an extract from a conversation I had with two Noongar women. One said, asserting a distinctive sense of Noongar culture:

We had a meeting today and because we were all Aboriginals when we said “hello” and “goodbye”, we hugged and kissed. But with non-Aboriginal we wouldn’t do that, we wouldn’t hug and kiss in the same way with non-Aboriginal people (17: 69).

Although these two Noongar woman saw this ‘kissing and hugging’ as being different to non-Aboriginal practices of ending a meeting, many non-Aboriginal participants seem to favour Noongar traditional practices that are not in use anymore (e.g. spear fishing and trap fishing) as markers of a distinctive Noongar identity rather than such everyday and mundane practices. Discussing Australian history (Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal), Attwood (1996a: xxvi) noted that ‘the past...is regarded as valuable.’ Indeed, was it only because the past is regarded as valuable or does the communication of culture involve some intercultural dialogue, here favouring the communication of a pre-contact Noongar culture dissociate from current everyday life?

This emphasis on the past can certainly affect the cross-cultural reception of Noongar culture and have some significant outcomes, such as denying modernity, something that Tonkinson (1997: 18) has also observed in regard to the broader Aboriginal Australian context:

A problem for Aboriginal people about ‘tradition’ is the tendency of non-indigenous Australians to limit it to the past and to things ‘cultural’, and to exclude the possibility that its authenticity is retained when it includes components that clearly post-date the European invasion.

From my fieldwork, it was evident that Noongar people were aware that everyday contemporary practices are also part of Noongar culture whereas many non-Indigenous participants tended to think of Noongar culture as being solely articulated around ‘past traditional practices’. A non-Aboriginal participant, who had just started a de facto relationship with a Noongar man, reflected on her preconceptions:

Michael went into the bush in a remote area. He said he went hunting. I asked him “How?”. He replied, “With a Toyota and a gun, what did you expect?” I laughed and realised [that usages had changed] (5: 20).

Many non-Aboriginal participants have emphasised their interest in Noongar, and indeed more broadly Aboriginal, culture in what they perceived to be an essentially unchanging tradition. Cultural features that are emerging from within an enduring tradition were often perceived as icons of culture: in other words, they were seen as signifiers of culture. Below, a non-Indigenous participant dichotomises traditional past heritage from contemporary everyday practices, an understanding that could be offensive to Noongar people as it imposes something of an “‘authentic” knowledge, uncontaminated by modernity’ to use the words of Crosby (1997: 28 quoted in Trigger 1997: 89)—albeit written a very different context (Canada). The participant said to me:

Aboriginal people lived in Western areas. They are poorly educated, they want to be given things all the time, and they blame the White people. I don’t think they live their traditional culture. That finished when they moved to the reserve or to missions (4: 25).

This woman’s view mirrored the comments of a number of non-Aboriginal participants, such as Mark (early 20s), who put it in the following words:
I'd like to learn more about the traditional lifestyle, because it's the culture in its purest form, more than how sociological factors have changed it. I find traditional culture more interesting, because it is more about culture than the effect of social policy (9: 139).

This is a concern and a number of scholars have discussed the issue of change and continuity in Aboriginal Australia. For example, Merlan (1998) questioned the matter, arguing:

A great deal of current public debate in Australia ranges around the concept of “Aboriginal culture.” Will this be seen as static or as dynamic? And if the latter, to what extent? (p.10).... In this compartmentalization, the changing modern is set against the unchanging traditional, the artificial or constructed against the natural or customary... (p.230).

In a comparable vein, Ritchie (1999: 272) wrote about this misapprehension of Aboriginal tradition as something often seen as being fixed:

While we recognise Aboriginal tradition as dynamic, there is a view in Australian popular culture that, to be authentic, Aboriginal tradition must be shown to be ancient and immutable.

Grappling with the principles that define the cultural features entering the intercultural body of knowledge (features communicated by Noongar and appreciated by non Aboriginal people) is a difficult point to convey, especially when concerning notions such as past versus modernity. Whereas the intercultural body of knowledge depends on dialogical engagements between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people (as discussed throughout Part Two), it is particularly problematic in discussing tradition, given the nuances between past and modernity, and between a desire to establish the veracity of a Noongar culture that accords with its cultural reception by non-Aboriginal people.

Recognising this distinction between a pre-contact cultural tradition and current practices, it is also worth bearing in mind that the long-term endurance of Aboriginal cultures is a widely known feature around the world⁹; often labelled as ‘the oldest culture in the world’ by the tourist industry¹⁰. Some non-Aboriginal people living in Perth have similarly remarked on this feature in a number of occasions. At a one-day

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⁹ This was evident in my fieldwork during Noongar cultural events, with my engagements with tourists and by looking at websites, tourist brochures and the like.

¹⁰ Texts in tourist brochures refer to an ‘unforgettable experience’, ‘to catch a glimpse of local culture’, ‘to visit one of nature’s wonders of the world’, promise to ‘leave unforgettable memories’, ‘to experience the oldest culture of the world’. They draw on words such as ‘unique’, ‘wilderness’, ‘remote’, ‘distinctive’, ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’, or use superlatives such as ‘oldest’, ‘longest’, ‘greatest’, ‘most’, ‘finest’, and the like.
cultural awareness workshop, the convenor asked the non-Aboriginal attendees to voice their motivations for coming to the workshop. One of them said: ‘It’s the longest living culture in the world and it’s in our backyard.’ The value of being a long-sustained culture was also highly appreciated by Noongar people, who have often commented at cultural awareness workshops about Aboriginal cultures being ‘the longest enduring culture in the world’. Thus, Noongar people impart pre-contact tradition on many occasions. I have gathered some ethnographic accounts where traditional practices of hunting and gathering were explained to non-Aboriginal people in an ambiguous way that suggested these practices were still being maintained today. Following is an extract of my field notes that I took at a Noongar tour organised by a commercial enterprise. There is clearly some ambiguity in the ranger’s narrative in regard to differentiate past and contemporary Noongar practices:

The boat dropped the tourists (all of whom were non-Aboriginal) at Point Walter where two Noongar guides were waiting for them. Steve, one of the guides, told everybody that ‘we are standing on Noongar Land, at a place where Noongar children learn about their culture’. Steve pointed to the fish in the Swan River and explained that ‘Noongars caught the fish with rock traps. Children also learn spearing, so they are able to catch food in sandy parts of the river’. A few metres along the track, he stopped at a peppermint tree and told us about its medicinal properties. He said, ‘the gum is a powerful antiseptic, used as treatment for food poisoning’. He talked in the present tense throughout. One of the tourists asked if the gum was still in use today. Steve’s answer was vague and ambiguous, ‘Yes, more or less’.... Steve added, ‘I always like to have sugar in my tea’ as he picked a leaf from another nearby tree and squeezed a few transparent drops from it. Everybody tasted the sugary juice (4:49).

The general lack of knowledge about contemporary Noongar culture (and I emphasise this point), combined with the emphasis on ‘past tradition’, contributes to wrongly communicating an idea of timelessness about the Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people. For example, during a Noongar heritage tour, the mobile phone of the guide rang while he was explaining to the tourists (domestic and overseas) about traditional Noongar practices of spearing a fish. A South African visitor expressed surprise that he had a mobile phone, ‘I thought they were just two guys telling their culture. I didn’t think Aboriginal people worked with cell phones.’ According importance to past traditions has relevance for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and, therefore, such traditions enter the intercultural body of knowledge. This emphasis on the past can also have the effect of promoting some romantic ideas about Noongar culture, as being

frozen in a distant past, as many scholars have observed. Nevertheless, I reiterate the need to understand the dialogical process where both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and cultures shape the intercultural body of knowledge. The tourism industry or cultural government-funded projects, for example, require that Noongar culture is being strongly asserted. In a way, this corresponds to the expectation of Noongar people and non-Aboriginal people who are both seeking cultural distinctiveness; and past traditional knowledge becomes emblematic of Noongar culture in cross-cultural settings. If non-Aboriginal people were not interested in learning about pre-contact life, the emphasis may be more on the present day and expressed less in historical terms—this also reflects the expectation of some non-Aboriginal people that there are still Aboriginal hunter-gatherers. One German exchange student who knew about my research commented:

I'd like to go in the bush and to see Aboriginal people. It's always interesting to see people that are happy to make fire with a bit of dry grass and who eat worms. To see peoples who are still living in a way that is for us very uncomfortable. People who live very happily despite they are far away of civilisation. I've been told that people in town are outcast of their tribes because they drink and use drugs (2: 105-6).

This perception that an ‘authentic’ Noongar tradition concerns hunting-gathering activities, is likely to promote the communication of hunting-gathering practices—including the tasting of witchetty grubs imported frozen from an Adelaide farm at a Noongar cultural awareness day.

Removed from cross-cultural contexts, tradition was not opposed to modernity for many Noongar participants; rather, the two were interwoven. When discussing Noongar cultures at some cultural awareness workshops, some convenors have also brought to the forefront this duality of cultural backgrounds, in regard to tradition and modernity. This was something that non-Aboriginal respondent did not always appreciate. At one cross-cultural event, for example, Cheryl taught the non-Indigenous audience how to make damper, and jokingly opposed the modern way of shopping to the old way of gathering food, ‘I bought the chunky stuff [showing a large pack of flour] from the supermarket because I should update the culture!’ One non-Indigenous woman sitting

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12 Langton (2003: 81) wrote: ‘many non-Indigenous Australians continue to hold the trope of a ‘Stone Age’ Aboriginal culture frozen in time.

13 Damper, which shares both European and Aboriginal origins, is nevertheless now an icon of Aboriginal ‘traditional food’ and on many occasions I participated in ‘making damper’ or ‘damper tasting’ at cross-cultural settings.
next to me whispered, 'I did not get it [the joke]' her friend replied 'Me neither'. The rest of the audience did not smile at the joke either.

Such an interweaving of 'past and present', or 'modernity and tradition', was also mentioned in a language course book directed to Noongars (Noongar—our way 1992: viii): 'In this way Noongar tradition continues to the present day... we can have two ways. We can have our Noongar way, and we can have the wadjela way.' Indeed, I suggest that this process should operate in the same way that Scottish tradition is not held in opposition to the modern Scottish lifestyle, for example.

There is, however, a general understanding of Aboriginal cultures that seems to be grounded heavily on the supposition of 'non-modernity', in a similar sense of the dichotomy of some data concerning 'the bush' (see Chapter Five). Discussing land rights and cultural heritage, Ritchie (1999: 275) comparably noted 'a romanticised notion of the value of preserving 40,000-year-old tribal wisdom'. Likewise, in reference to Australian historical narratives, Attwood (1996a: xxv) observed, '[t]he appropriation of Aboriginality is also explicable in another broad context, that of disillusionment with modernity.' The emphasis on 'ancientness' can actually lead to an appreciation of Aboriginal cultures (e.g. in tourism).

Indeed, because of the 'common ground' nature of the concept of tradition, shared amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, it has become a theme for engagement. Non-Aboriginal people seem generally interested about learning Noongar practices, although not always aware that some changes have occurred, nor of the reality of contemporary Noongar life.

The Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal awareness about past tradition makes this category of knowledge readily communicated and well received; since it has relevance for both cultures, albeit the traditional knowledge is different (different tools, different techniques for making utensils). For the non-Aboriginal populace, however, tradition

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14 More precisely, it reads: 'It is important for us to identify and understand our culture.... Many modern Noongar cultural habits are traditional Noongar customs (sometimes updated with wadjala technology) and some modern Noongar cultural habits are traditional wadjala customs (such as football). These together make up the culture of Noongar today.... In this way Noongar tradition continues to the present day... we can have two ways. We can have our Noongar way, and we can have the wadjela way.' (Noongar—our way 1992: viii)

15 I acknowledge that some Aboriginal people may also engage in this romanticism.
often remains something old and enduring—the ‘past’ versus ‘modernity’—although this underlying quality of constancy is now challenged on both a scholarly and legal basis. The complexity of the issue is that, in regards to tradition, Noongar people are speaking about both the present and the past in the same breath. Non-Aboriginal people are more often interested about the past, essentially the pre-contact setting; this, in turn, leads Noongars to emphasis the past. It is a self-perpetuating process, whereby the past is emphasised because people want to hear about it. When I was invited by a Noongar man to speak to members of a Noongar government organization, I mentioned this finding, and illustrated it by referring to the presence of body painting in images on posters, including one from ATSIC that was on the wall, that depicted an Aboriginal child. A number of Noongar people were vitally interested in this point, which resonates with the writing of Aboriginal activist Daryl Pearce (2003: 56):

There are Noongar people who say that they have lost their culture because they assume that ‘culture’ has to be what was there when Europeans arrived. The culture that they are actually living doesn’t seem ‘authentic’ because it doesn’t necessarily involve the sorts of things the non-Aboriginal community associates with Aboriginality.

Tradition constitutes an arena of knowledge that is recognisable as ‘cultural’ by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, despite putting the emphasis on the past and denying the certain aspects of modernity, seeking a timeless culture that set apart from non-Aboriginal influences (see Merlan 2006 for similar comments in other areas of Australia).

It is essential, however, to grapple with the dialogical process occurring between non-Aboriginal people who appreciate learning about Noongar pre-contact culture and Noongar people who are keen to have their culture recognised for personal pride, but also financial or political outcomes. By contrast to anthropologists who have demonstrated an interest in the mixing of cultural traditions (e.g. cargo-cult), with scholars such as Brown (2003: 5) noting, ‘No longer is this mixing of traditions seen as evidence of cultural decline or acculturation’, the populace tend to privilege un-mixed Noongar culture. Thus, communicating cultural elements that are valued by cross-cultural audiences is a means to assert cultural strength to these ‘outsiders’.

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16 For further discussion on the notion of cultural authenticity from the perspective of scholars who have challenged the concept see, for example, Brigg (1996), Clifford (2004) and Jolly (1992).
'Mysterious' tradition

I have shown earlier that some non-Aboriginal respondents do not always understand the cultural practice of segregating gender in order to learn about some specific artefacts, places and issues of spirituality. I now discuss how the interest in Aboriginal cultural practices that some non-Aboriginal people perceived as something somehow 'mysterious' has fascinated some (non-Aboriginal) respondents, while the same interest can be offensive to some Noongar people. The 'mysterious tradition' is a positioning of Aboriginal culture as uniquely exotic, which, unlike modernity, is not endorsed by Noongars.

The point I am making now in terms of the co-construction of the intercultural knowledge is quite subtle. In a previous section, I have shown that objects such as tarp knifes and message sticks exemplify cultural difference, but still enter the intercultural, as there are some commonalities in learning about the use of objects of the past in both cultures. Some Noongar respondents, however, were not keen to be seen as 'oddities', even though many Noongar people were glad to acknowledge different cultural practices to those of the wider society during many cross-cultural engagements. The notion I discuss in this section about the 'mysterious' tradition is something different. It is a fascination for 'strangeness', which may only satisfy the viewpoint of non-Aboriginal people, a kind of binary opposition between 'us' and 'them'. Within the politics of cultural communication in cross-cultural settings (e.g. cultural awareness workshops, Perth Royal Show), a number of Noongar speakers have largely emphasised what appears to be a strong statement of cultural difference, referring to practices that are dissimilar to the cultural traditions of wider community. Communicating such different practices has had the result of asserting a sense of Aboriginality, claiming a cultural background through maintaining a cultural consciousness of difference. This emphasis on 'culture' is, as I suggest in the Introduction, something valued; this was especially the case amongst those participants who were willing to engage cross-culturally.

I noted in the field that some non-Indigenous participants have expressed a strong interest in practices that epitomise the idea of something 'mysterious'. For example, I
had a brief conversation with a woman from Adelaide who was visiting Perth. When I mentioned to her my research, she commented:

My son worked at a Central Desert community as a teacher for six years. When boys turn 14 they become men, they have to be circumcised. My son was invited to watch the ceremony. It was rather painful (4: 19).

She made her comment in the open, with other people listening around us, highlighting the exoticism of the practice. This is very different from my experience with Western Desert women who always refer to male initiation in a very subdued and private manner. Nearly a century earlier, Bates (2004: 36) expressed a similar sense of pride upon having gained people’s trust and being able to witness male initiation17. Four non-Indigenous respondents who had gained access, or knew someone who had been exposed to Aboriginal ceremonial life, considered this experience as a real privilege over other non-Indigenous people who had not gained comparable entry into Aboriginal ceremonial life. One man said to me in a rather pretentious manner at an Aboriginal art gallery opening: ‘I know everything about male initiation, I could teach you about it’ (Notepad 3). Another participant tried to seduce me by referring to his knowledge of the secret male ceremonial life to which he claimed some exposure.

A tourist operator said to me that ‘many overseas visitors are keen to learn about Aboriginal cultures’ (3: 152). Although some people are interested in learning, they are also sometimes culturally disrespectful. In Western Desert cultures, the bullroarer is a very sensitive object, used only by initiated men during some ceremonies. It is a blasphemy for women to see these objects. Although I feel uncomfortable raising such an example, one of my friends was looking for a Christmas present for her mother in France. A tourist shop in Fremantle suggested that she buy a bullroarer, which was a commercial reproduction. Another shop manager, who does not sell such items out of respect, observed to me that backpackers often ask for bullroarers (4: 12), and that if they cannot buy one from his shop then they will go elsewhere, even after he has told them of their cultural sensitivity.

During my fieldwork, I met some non-Indigenous participants who, because of their work or personal opportunities, had recently engaged with Aboriginal people rather more than they had done before. Dan is one of these people. He is an artist in his

17 Bates (2004: 33) wrote: ‘They even allowed me free access to the sacred places and the sacred ceremonies of the initiations of men, which their own women must never see under penalty of death.’
twenties who grew up in a country town that he described as being 'a quite racist environment'. Last year he worked closely with Aboriginal people. Commenting on his recent cultural learning, he explained how privileged he felt to have had the opportunity:

It was an amazing experience to be with these guys [Aboriginal people]. I was around these people for three or four months and I understand for the first time the issues and beauty of the people. It was an experience. We were on the road and I was in the car with Alex [an Aboriginal man]. We were driving and we went through a group of kangaroos. Alex slowed down and said “no good food”. Half an hour later we saw another group. We hit one. Alex made an incision, checking for fat. ‘No good’ he said, we left the kangaroo and went on a bit more. We hit another kangaroo. He said “very good”. We said a sort of grace to the kangaroo. Alex made the fire. We all had a little bit. The meat was almost raw. He prepared it in a certain way. He said that if you don’t prepare it in a certain way, you break the Law. That might mean you are punished or killed. I was fascinated with Alex. I felt privileged. I felt it was a new world I knew nothing about it. I’ve already been with them for three months, but I’ve always seen them in the city where we were performing a play. In the bush, he was transformed. He was alert, listening. I was fascinated with him (10: 108).

A fascination with ‘mysteriousness’ and cultural difference is well embedded in Western cultures (see also Chapter One) and, indeed, today’s interest in message sticks also fits into this long-standing attraction. Historically speaking, a comparable taste for otherness has been expressed through the Western interest in assembling ‘exotic’ items for display in the early ‘cabinets de curiosité’, museums and private collections (Findlen 1989; Impey and MacGregor 1985), for example. As Kenseth (1991: 91) wrote, ‘[t]he exotic or historical piece was a means of access to the invisible, ultimately serving the collector’s quest to gain a complete view of the universe. Humble utilitarian objects of foreign or ancient origin fulfilled this purpose.’ Interestingly, Babadzan (1988: 206 quoted in Friedman 1992: 850) commented about the changed Western values and discussed the contemporary interest in exotic practices, ‘Those who used to mock the backwardness of “savages” in the name of Progress and Civilization are now (verbally) the fiercest defenders of primitivity and archaic values.’

The ‘mysterious’ traditions may remain outside the joint approval of the intercultural. This subtle distinction between what is perceived as ‘offensive’ and what is more of a romantic approach of Noongar culture is a difficult point to convey. Indeed, in the case of past tradition, the intercultural is a knowledge that is controlled by Noongar people, in the sense that people are willing to talk about it with pride, whereas in the matter of the ‘mysterious’, Aboriginal participants were ill-pleased at discussing such practices. I
have another field account that illustrates an occurrence where non-Absoriginal people demonstrate their willingness to act knowingly against Noongar practice. Here is my fieldwork entry:

Bette entered a city didgeridoo shop with a friend in order to buy one as a present for a musician friend. The shop manager invited them to play some of her products. The two girls played the didgeridoo, and while they were doing so, a Noongar couple entered the shop clutching a bundle of didgeridoos. Immediately, the shopkeeper told Bette and her friend, ‘You can’t play this, it’s only for Aboriginal men.’ The woman acted as if she was shocked and surprised that they would have dared to do so, even though it resulted it from her direct invitation. Bette was totally confused (16: 43).

In this story, there could not have been any cultural dialogue as most Noongars are opposed to women playing the didgeridoo. The two sections named the ‘mysterious tradition’ and ‘the need for a shared understanding’ illustrate an aspect of the co-construction of the intercultural—that is, the vital need for a common ground—whereas the section concerning ‘tradition as opposed to modernity’ brings to the forefront the existence of a cultural dialogue.

**The ‘innovative’ tradition**

Having started the section ‘tradition’ by focussing on the ‘past’, I end it by investigating the concept of the ‘invention of tradition’, to use the anthropological terminology. I now discuss the construction of an ‘innovative’ tradition and its relationship to the ‘intercultural’.

An extensive body of anthropological literature deals with the notion of the ‘invention’ of tradition at different times and in various places of the world. Trigger (1997b: 786) even observed, ‘the now commonplace recognition within anthropology that culture and tradition are “constructed”.’ Indeed, in the key reference that investigated the invention of tradition, Hobsbawm (1983a: 1) argued:

‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented.

18 See Hobsbawn (1983a) for Europe, India and Africa; Briggs (1996) for Venezuela; Haley and Wilcoxon (1997) for Chumash people in California and the role of anthropology in the process. Hobsbawm (1983a: 4) observed that the invention of tradition ‘is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past’. He defined them in ‘three overlapping types’ (1983a: 9) that are: firstly, ‘those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or membership of groups, real or artificial communities’; secondly, ‘those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority’; and thirdly, ‘those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behaviour.’
In their paper discussing Quebecois nationalism, Handler and Linnekin (1984: 279-80) commented about the symbolic value of an invented tradition:

‘Tradition is invented because it is necessarily reconstructed in the present.... Tradition is not handed down from the past ... it is symbolically reinvented in an ongoing present.’

I now refer to the Noongar Welcome to Country, which is a practice that is widely considered as a traditional feature despite being, in its contemporary form, a recent practice essentially resulting from cross-cultural engagements. The Noongar Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of some public events. Over approximately the last ten to fifteen years, it has become increasingly common, firstly for cross-cultural events with an Aboriginal focus, and sometimes on non-Indigenous occasions, that a Noongar Elder will welcome the audience to the function with a speech in Noongar.

The Noongar Welcome to Country is a way of acknowledging Noongar ownership of the region, the cultural significance of the land, the enduring quality of Noongar culture, the Noongar ancestors or spiritual world, and sometimes constitutes an occasion to share some personal experiences or to tell a Dreaming story. Noongar Welcomes to Country are always conducted by one or more Noongar Elders, who are defined not by age but by seniority, as expressed through their cultural knowledge and their involvement as active and respected community members. Some Elders wear kangaroo skin cloaks, or *bouka* (Plate 4.4). Others affirm Noongar cultural identity with paraphernalia bearing the colours of the Aboriginal flag (e.g. headbands, scarves, necklaces). There are various formats for a Noongar Welcome to Country: these range from a short speech, accompanied perhaps by a didgeridoo performance, to more elaborate welcomes involving either dance, a smoking ceremony to cleanse the occasion, the ceremonial burning of a *balga* tree (also known as a grass tree), bird calls, the projection of images on a screen (landscape, people, places) or the offering of gifts (e.g. commonly clapping sticks, but also boomerangs or coolamons) (Plate 4.5, at left). Noongar people are often paid a fee to conduct a Welcome to Country and the format of the ceremony varies according to the budget and the intention of the organizers.

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19 Friedman (1994: 139) comments on this issue.
20 For documentation on the varied spelling of Noongar words for the kangaroo skin cloak, see Meagher (1973a: 198).
21 For more detail on issues of spirituality, see Chapter Six.
22 A generic Aboriginal term for a wooden carrying bowl.
Plate 4.4 Noongar officials at Welcomes to Country

Welcome to Country at Fremantle Noongar street performance.

Welcome to Country at Wardanji Cultural Festival, Fremantle.

Welcoming Kimberley dancers to Noongar Country at a PIAF performance.

Welcome to Country at a conference for the WA Department of Education.
Noongar Welcomes to Country contribute to the cross-cultural communication of Noongar identity: they communicate symbolic elements of shared Aboriginal cultures such as the three colours of the Aboriginal flag (when Noongar people wear items bearing its colours), as well as cultural practices (e.g. body painted dancers) and the symbolic importance of the bush in Noongar tradition (e.g. kangaroo skin cloak, burning foliage).

Distinguished members of the non-Indigenous community are often invited to give a speech at a Noongar Welcomes to Country (Plate 4.5). They generally begin it by acknowledging the Noongar elders present at the function and Noongar ownership of the land, then explain why they support Reconciliation, discuss their personal linkages with the Noongar community or their awareness of discrimination, for example. More precisely, they usually start their speech by saying, ‘I acknowledge the Noongar people, the original custodians of the Land’ or ‘First, I want to acknowledge Noongar country, the Noongar Elders that are here today…’.

Noongar Welcomes to Country are contemporary events that are strongly influenced by a practice of the past. Visitors to ceremonial events involving different language groupings of the South-West are known to have customarily welcomed the visiting group through the exchange of weaponry and other items (this tradition was once clearly explained by a Noongar Elder during an Welcome ceremony; see also Berndt 1964: 114 for examples elsewhere in Australia).

Welcomes to Country are increasingly central to cross-cultural communication and show the enduring strength and presence of Noongar culture in the South-West (including the metropolitan area). They are highly visible public events, sometimes attended by several hundred people from a wide variety of backgrounds, frequently comprising almost exclusively non-Indigenous people, apart from the immediate families of the Noongar official party (Plate 4.6). Programs advertising a cultural festival refer to the Noongar Welcome as a traditional feature. For example, the printed invitation for the celebration of NAIDOC 2003 in Fremantle contained the wording, ‘Traditional Noongar Welcome’.
Noongar Welcomes to Country fit Noongar and non-Aboriginal notions of tradition and culture. When performed at a function, many people with whom I engaged during the event saw it as a traditional Noongar protocol, and some Noongar public speakers had clearly communicated this notion to their (mostly non-Aboriginal) audiences. At a cross-cultural workshop organized by the art industry in May 2003, a Noongar guest speaker informed the audience about the protocol of having a Noongar Welcome to country: ‘Protocols are symbols that make our values visible and more significant’ (5: 35).

In some contexts, having a Noongar Welcome to Country is a convenient means for an organization to affirm its awareness of Noongar rights and aspirations. It is a way of expressing publicly the organization’s recognition of the Noongar community. Welcomes to Country may result from policy decisions (e.g. in case some government departments) or a generosity of spirit from some non-Aboriginal organizations. By no means do all organizations have such Welcomes. It is essential to note that such ceremonies were rarely presented at events that had no Indigenous input. For example, the mayor of a city council in the Perth metropolitan wished to avoid a negative response from members of the public if he was to begin an official ceremony with a Noongar Welcome to Country:

I don’t do it at civic events. When I’m opening a civic event, I’m representing the City across all cultures. In schools, for Foundation Day, I don’t do it. People might find it offensive. I don’t do it (11: 8).

Willing to learn more about the intentions driving some non-Aboriginal people to organise a Noongar Welcome to country, I discussed the issue with Archie, a senior [non-Aboriginal] government executive who is often invited to represent the State at Welcomes to Country. He spoke to me about his intention to convey to the wider society an Aboriginal politico-cultural awareness through the ceremony:

That helps non-Indigenous people to understand and think about it. For a split second it makes them [non-Indigenous people] think that Aboriginal people were here first (10: 91).

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23 Noongar Welcomes to Country tend to be performed at events with an Aboriginal component. During my fieldwork, however, I attended some events that were held within Aboriginal organizations for Aboriginal beneficiaries. A Noongar Welcome to Country was sometimes conducted to acknowledge Noongar land; however, it was not always the case. It is noteworthy that the absence of a Noongar Welcome is not necessarily an indication of a lack of cultural awareness or respect to Noongar people and their custodianship of the region.
Plate 4.5 Non-Aboriginal officials speaking at Noongar Welcomes to Country

Mayor of Fremantle receiving a message stick as a gift from a Noongar elder after his speech at the Welcome to Country.

Director of the Fremantle Maritime Museum on the screen as he spoke at the Noongar Welcome to Country.
Plate 4.6 Audiences at Noongar Welcomes to Country

Fremantle Arts Centre
exhibition opening 2004

PIAF 2004
opening ceremony

Welcoming new students,
UWA 2004
In 2003, I went to a conference organised in Perth by a state government department. Although the conference was not focussing on Aboriginal Australia, there was a long Noongar Welcome ceremony. I wanted to investigate the background reason for this. I was told to contact Debbie and we discussed this Noongar Welcome to Country:

I’m aware that it is a protocol for big functions in the metro area. We need a Noongar welcome to country because of Noongar land. We also have a few Aboriginal people who are coming to the conference; it’s doing the right thing’ (12: 54).

Further into our discussion, Debbie remarked:

I saw a Noongar Welcome to Country for the first time five or six years ago: ‘I was at a Rotary conference. It’s one of those things. I saw it, I follow that practice. I thought it was the right thing to do. The first time… I thought it was wonderful (12: 56).

Noongar Welcomes to Country are, as I said earlier, a recent cross-cultural practice. Does it make it less traditional? Reflecting on their data collected in Canada, Handler and Linnekin (1984: 281) challenged the ‘distinction between genuine and spurious traditions’, as ‘to do something because it is traditional is always to reinterpret, and hence to change it’. The authors also discussed Hawaiian identity and ‘cultural revival’ or ‘cultural renaissance’ (p. 282). They noted that it is a ‘false dichotomy’ to understand tradition as ‘naively inherited’ versus ‘consciously shaped’ (p. 285) by noting that ‘The origin of cultural practices is largely irrelevant to the experience of tradition; authenticity is always defined in the present’ and observed that the traditional has ‘an assigned meaning rather than an objective quality’ (p. 286).

In a discussion about the Noongar Welcome to Country with an anthropologist, he commented, ‘This is all new! It’s not traditional.’ I was ill at ease with his view, as I perceived it as being an ethnographic misapprehension, a misuse of ethnographic authority. This was because none of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who saw it, or were doing it, and with whom I spoke, had commented negatively about it. Participants never raised any concern about this practice. In order to respond to this kind of derogatory comment about new cultural tradition, I quote Finney (2001: 184), who perceptively wrote:

Musings about how people invent their cultures may make good sense to theorists but appear insulting to those whose cultures are so labelled.

24 If people had an issue, it appeared to be more about acknowledging Noongar culture (as the participant mentioned about the above civic event).
In a similar vein, Friedman (1994: 136), discussing cultural constructions (e.g. the invention of tradition)\(^{25}\), challenged the role of ethnographic authority in analysing the ‘invention’ of tradition:

This approach may work in periods of hegemony when anthropologists can speak or write the other. But in periods of dissolution of hegemony when the other begins identifying themselves, conflict must arise as to the authority to define, demystify and debunk others’ constructions of themselves.

In a previous paper, Friedman (1992: 846) had noted the ambiguity in unconditionally accepting change whilst people are participating in an ‘invented tradition’:

The ‘invention of tradition’ is a double-edged sword that criticizes the assumptions of cultural continuity while implicitly reprimanding those who would identify with such cultural fantasies today.

In the Western cultural context, however, the invention of tradition is nothing new. It involves many countries and many domains\(^{26}\). Hobsbawm (1983b: 271) argued that Bastille Day (comparable to Australia Day in Australia), which is a widely known icon of the French Republic and its cultural identity, was actually invented in 1880. The revival or re-invention of tradition is also familiar to Australian culture. ANZAC is an ‘invented tradition’ (Thomson 1994: 190), for which Seal (2004: 4) wrote:

Anzac is an invented tradition; a deliberate ideological construct which, in collusion with the digger tradition, operates hegemonically within Australian society.

Invented traditions often answer the desire for a new identity and/or fulfil people’s need to adjust new social contexts (Hobsbawn 1983b; Ranger 1983). The Mabo decision (June 1992) and the political ethos of Reconciliation (1999) have changed the positioning of Noongar society in relation to non-Indigenous Australian communities. The Welcome to Country is a direct response to social changes and a means to state this new political positioning. Such cultural patterns are not unique to Perth, although the Noongar Welcome as such solely occurs in the South-West\(^{27}\). Broadly reflecting about the concept of culture, Sahlins’s (1999) comment reiterates my point:

\(^{25}\) This also raises ‘the question of ownership … a question of who has the right to define another person’s or population’s culture.’ (Friedman 1994: 141) (see also Friedman 1997 for discussion on ‘the making of Chumash tradition’).

\(^{26}\) Hobsbawm (1983b) discussed the ‘mass-generation of traditions’ in nineteenth-century Britain, France, Italy and Germany; Trevor-Roper (1983) the Scottish Highland kilt and the assertion of a Scott national identity; and Morgan (1983) the ‘Welsh Renaissance’ and the rediscovery of druidism. The practice of inventing traditions has also been carried out into other countries with which Europe has politico-colonial interests (see Cohn 1983 for India). Ranger (1983) noted that, in Africa, White settlers ‘drew upon European invented traditions both to define and to justify their roles’ (p. 211) or ‘to exclude Africans [workers] from participation’ (p. 213).

\(^{27}\) See Haggis (2004: 48) for a brief mention of Koori Welcomes to Country.
What is called culture or tradition is strategically adaptable to the pragmatic situation (p. 403).... From what I know about culture, then, traditions are invented in the specific terms of the people who construct them (p. 409).

Noongar Welcomes perform a variety of goals. They establish Noongar territorial ownership in a post-Mabo context; they are a means of asserting the distinctiveness of Noongar cultural knowledge in a post-Assimilation context; they state publicly the contemporary political context of Reconciliation; and, they communicate the enduring strength of Noongar culture. Whereas Noongar Welcomes to Country gave pride to Noongar participants, non-Indigenous respondents tend to see it more as acknowledging Noongar culture, a kind of valued expression of humanism. Indeed, as Tacey (1995: 119) noted in the broader Australian context: ‘The other is politically correct at present’.

It seems that the Noongar Welcome to Country is a Noongar tradition that crosses cultures easily, as it is readily accommodated within non-Indigenous rituals and folk performances of Western cultures. Noongar Welcomes are public representations of Noongar culture and powerful assertions of it. Maybe this is because, to quote Geertz (1993: 12): ‘Culture is public because meaning is.’ At events that prompted the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface, Noongar Welcomes were collectively meaningful to the people who perform them, as well as to many of those who witness them (that is, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal).

A number of respondents were negative toward ‘cultural attractions’ that appeared to them to be constructed for the tourists; however, many non-Indigenous respondents have commented positively on Noongar Welcomes at the ceremonies I attended during my fieldwork. People with whom I talked expressed enjoyment at hearing the sound of didgeridoos, watching the dancing, listening to the story telling and learning more about Noongar culture. Some people working in the art industry, at UWA and for the Department of Education, said that Noongar Welcomes are becoming more and more popular in cross-cultural settings. The ceremony fits within the framework of Western rituals (having a festive activity to initiate them) as well as satisfying a Western image of Aboriginal tradition (e.g. body painting). The new traditional practice of the Noongar Welcome to Country echoes both the Noongar past practice of welcoming other groups.

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28 This is a change from the shame of practising Noongar culture less than half a century ago (see Chapter Three).
29 A Noongar participant told me that didgeridoos were introduced to Perth in the mid 1970s; however, many Noongar people use them for Noongar Welcomes, to start or end a Noongar cultural awareness workshop, and some people have one in their home. Like the Welcome to Country, this tradition of men playing the didgeridoo is now widely accepted.
and the Western (familiar) process of creating tradition to convey a new socio-political context. In this sense, the Noongar Welcome or Welcome to Country enters the domain of the intercultural and becomes a common ground ritual that resonates with both cultures. Noongar Welcomes give Noongar people a sense of pride resulting from the cultural recognition the Welcome provides, whereas non-Indigenous people get a glimpse of Noongar culture. A Noongar Welcome is an effective cross-cultural practice. It fits both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests and idea of tradition and triggers the attention of many non-Indigenous people who attended such ceremonies. Following on the Venn diagram (Figure 4.1) as a means to graphically illustrating the processes at stake in the co-construction of the 'intercultural', the Welcomes to Country ceremonies sits within the area of overlap as the study case illustrates the shared concern or interest—albeit such concerns being of a different nature, as exemplified here.

To conclude on the theme of 'tradition', I observed during my fieldwork that some people were willing to engage cross-culturally. However, cultural communication requires shared zones of acceptance. The concept of 'tradition' provides a strong and recognisable basis for cultural exchange; however, non-Indigenous people seem to respond more favourably to some traditions that connote culture (e.g. tool making, body painting, Noongar Welcome to Country) rather than to the ones that they perceived as attached to, for example, male domination and/or hegemony (e.g. gender-based secrecy). 'Mysterious' traditions similarly attract the resentment of Aboriginal people whereas the emphasis on 'pre-contact' illustrates the occurrence of a dialogue between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people. The content of the intercultural body of knowledge is selective to the orientation of both parties involved in the cultural interface and requires shared, however different, interests (see discussion about Welcomes to Country). Only certain traditions are 'chosen' to 'represent' or 'define' it, whilst other cultural aspects may be ignored or forgotten. In cross-cultural settings, preferring some traditions above others is also a matter of defining 'intercultural tradition', which in all cases results from the cross-cultural dialogue emerging at the interface.
This section conveys further the analysis of the intercultural by investigating the cross-cultural communication and, its reception, of Noongar language and Aboriginal English.

**Background context of Noongar language**

The Noongar language has been recorded by a number of people since the time of early contact: Grey (1840), Salvado (1851), Moore (1884), Bates (1907, 1914), Hassell (1936), Davis (1969), and more recently, Douglas (1976), Green (1979), von Brandenstein (1988) and Bindon & Chadwick (1992). Whereas English is the language spoken in everyday life in the South-West, Noongar language appear to be a vital and symbolic cultural feature, and its significance is recognised by both Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, as I now discuss.

In the literature of Anthropology and Linguistics, as well as in popular culture, language is generally associated with cultural identity and with the expression of cultural belonging:

> We know that language, (even the symbol of one) and identity, are inseparably linked’ *(Noongar—our way* 1992: 21).

During one of my conversations with Alexandra, a non-Aboriginal participant, she strongly felt the importance of people’s vernacular language with respect to cultural belonging:

> Language is the expression of culture. Unlike you recognise a culture and its language you repress it (3: 45).

In the specific context of Native Title claimants demonstrating their cultural linkages with specific territory, Henderson and Nash (2002: v) observed the importance of language to the process:

> Language matters have been increasingly recognised as an important part of native title claims.

It is widely thought that, in regard to Aboriginal Australia\(^{31}\), people who lose their language also in this process lose part of their culture *(e.g. Walsh 2002: 236)*. However,

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30 Note: the translation of Noongar words used in this section comes from the relevant Noongar organizations utilising them or directly from Noongar participants.
Henderson (1994: 6) commented on the difficulty of appreciating the full extent of the relationships between language and culture:

While probably everyone agrees that language and culture are closely linked, the exact relationship between them is also the subject of disagreement.

He suggested that in some cases the teaching of cultural knowledge is not necessarily associated with an increased knowledge of language. Henderson’s comment resonates with one of my data sets, as Elisabeth (Noongar) explained at a cultural awareness workshop:

Everything goes together: art, language, country. I need to get into that too [language]. We need to catch up on language. We know the bush tucker, the [names and use of the] trees, but we don’t know the language (12: 101).

As language is widely recognised as an important feature of cultural identity, a number of government strategies have emerged over the past two decades to promote familiarity with and use of the Noongar language in the South-West region. These include language preservation activities to record the very few remaining fluent speakers and the progressive implementation of language learning among school students by the Indigenous Unit of the Department of Education (Plate 4.7). The ‘Noongar Language and Culture Centre’ is a key body in the revitalisation of Noongar language and culture in Noongar country.

The preservation of Noongar language is a serious concern for some members of the Noongar community, as clearly mentioned in the language course booklet that is dedicated to ‘all those Noongars who have a dream that their language will one day be spoken fully again’ (Noongar—our way 1992: iii). Today’s concern for the revival of the language was also shown in the resentful comment of a Noongar man who mentioned at a meeting:

Our language was put on the backburner for a long time (5: 29).

This was a direct consequence of past policies of domination (e.g. the Assimilation policy) and the imposition of a standardised language and a “national” identity, as

31 And beyond.
32 ‘Over the last 15 to 20 years there has been a resurgence of interest in and commitment to indigenous languages among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in many areas and there has been growing government and public recognition and support for indigenous language activities.’ (McKay 1996: xx).
33 There is no scholarly source concerning this issue; however, I understand that there are no more than a handful of fluent speakers of Noongar.
34 For a broader Aboriginal Australian perspective, see for example Bell (2003: 167) for Murri people; Jolly (1995); Hartman and Henderson (1994: ix); Donaldson (1994) for the western region of New South Wales; Hudson (1994) for the Kimberley region.
Plate 4.7 Department of Education and Noongar Elders developed a resource package for learning Noongar language, examples of three pages.
McKay (1996: 222) put it. On this issue of not being allowed to speak Noongar, one Noongar participant recalled her childhood in the late forties:

We were not allowed to speak the language. It’s really sad but we had to obey the rules (13: 134).

Despite an attempt during the colonial era to suppress the use of Noongar language, there is little doubt today that the language is reappearing\(^{35}\), as a symbolic marker of Noongar culture, as well as its usage. During my fieldwork, I went to a meeting held to discuss the broader implementation of Noongar language, in schools and beyond. Following are some of the comments made by different attendees (6: 79-87), which illustrate varied perspectives on the contemporary status of the language held by some members of the Noongar community:

Noongar language is not recognised as Japanese is.

Versus

Noongar language is recognized. We don’t need to go around to have it recognized.

ATSIC use the word “reinvigorated”. It’s not our word. Noongar language is alive.

And more precisely,

We want the recognition of the diversity of dialects.

There is, sometimes, contention over the use of particular Noongar words. It is not uncommon that Noongar people disagree on the word itself, its pronunciation or its spelling. A Noongar participant informed me that this is because:

There’s no one Noongar language, there are fourteen dialects (6: 81).

On this issue of dialects (see Dench 1994: 173-5; Douglas 1976: 5-6), a Noongar folk singer recounted:

We start with the Noongar Welcome song in language. We use clapping sticks and vocals. This identifies us as being Indigenous. Fred and Em disagreed with the pronunciation of some of the words I used in the song. It must be a matter of dialect (17: 62).

Whereas many Noongar people seemed to be familiar with these issues (e.g. different dialects, contemporary use of language), most non-Indigenous respondents appeared ignorant of such concerns; of course, this excludes those who have regular contacts with Noongars (e.g. family, friends). From my engagements with people during fieldwork, it

\(^{35}\) However, in 1958 J. Wilson (1958: 4-5) noted that Noongar ‘was a criterion of identity’ and ‘was often used as a means of holding conversations incomprehensible to nearby “whites”’.

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seems that most non-Aboriginal people were only becoming aware that Noongar language itself still ‘exists’. I observed in the field that some cultural practices are simply not communicated cross-culturally because they do not concern the interests of non-Aboriginal people. Unsurprisingly, they remain outside the intercultural body of knowledge. In the two following sections, I discuss the emic and etic usage of Noongar words.

The emic usage of Noongar words

In everyday life, Noongar people sprinkle Noongar words in their conversations (see also Toussaint 1987: 94-6). This occurs mainly when they are in the presence of Noongar people only, and many Noongar participants have commented about this practice (see Sutton 1998: 104 for a general perspective). Conversely, most non-Indigenous people appeared to be unaware of this use of Noongar words within the community, which is readily explained. Indeed, many Noongar people tend to use Noongar words while at home, with their friends (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and with other Noongar people. People speak in a different way when engaging with non-Aboriginal ‘outsiders’. For example, Karina talked about her use of the Noongar term *unna*, meaning ‘isn’t it’ or ‘yes’:

You switch codes when you get around friends. The lingo comes. When I’m working at Name Ltd., [pseud.] I was always saying ‘yes, yes’. At home I say ‘unna’. I say that a lot. At work “yea”, at home ‘unna’ (13: 147).

Along similar lines, a Noongar man of the same age group (late twenties) provided me with more details:

We follow Wadjela way, but we still got the knowledge of Noongar way. *Unna* means true [meaning ‘yes’ in Aboriginal English], really true. Nice shirt. *Unna*. Through school we were told off for saying Noongar words. With my family I say a lot of Noongar words. Still maintaining who I am. ‘*Corden*’ means shame, I talk in Wadjela way when I’m with Westerners, the other way when I’m with my family (4: 2).

Whereas there are extremely few fluent speakers of Noongar—and this includes people expressing themselves in making full sentences—there is little doubt that many Noongar people use some words in everyday life whilst speaking English. Among

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36 In Part Three, I discuss the nature of cross-cultural settings.
37 A non-Aboriginal participant, who lived overseas for few years, recalled the use of Aboriginal words whilst speaking English. She said: ‘I met a nice Aboriginal person in London. I was working at Australian House. We used to have barbecues on Friday nights. She called them “corroborees”.’
diverse fieldwork data concerning this issue, I recalled a joke between two work colleagues in an organization where several Noongar people were working together and felt comfortable cracking jokes with cultural and language referents:

- You’ve got your message stick [USB storage device]?
- Yes, I’m a mooditj [great] Noongar! (Notepad HS)

When I did some voluntary work for a Noongar organization, staff members taught me some Noongar words and often a word came up in the conversation such as *khart wara* (meaning mad) when joking or teasing someone.

Jess, a non-Indigenous participant, spoke to me about her Noongar boyfriend and the significance that the language has for him, although it concerns the use of Noongar words within a conversation otherwise in English:

I’m happy to share his culture but I know I’m not Noongar. It’s important I speak Noongar. It’s important to him. What’s that bird name in Noongar. Or, are you *jirrupin* [being happy]? It’s in relation to him and my feelings for him (6: 59).

Before discussing the cross-cultural communication concerning the theme of the language, I wish to detail further its use within the Noongar community. A second aspect of the use of Noongar language that I have noted is the number of (Noongar) government organizations that incorporate Noongar words within their logos, their formal titles, or their newsletters and pamphlets. It provides the organization with a sense of cultural identity and indicates that the focus of their activity is directed towards the needs of Noongar/Aboriginal people. It is important to highlight that most non-Indigenous people were simply unaware of this use of Noongar words, as most of these organizations deal exclusively with Aboriginal clients (e.g. Aboriginal health services directed towards Aboriginal patients). This latter point is partly explained by a staff member of one of those organizations:

I do feel that our [medical] services, if we didn’t have them, a lot of Indigenous people wouldn’t go, because of racism. I can just talk of what I observe (14: 75).... the fact people see black faces, people feel more comfortable (14: 77).

A more efficient way to address the incorporation of Noongar words within government organizations directed towards Noongar/Aboriginal clients, is through observing the use of a variety of publicly circulating items, such as ephemeral publications, brochures, gift bags (see Chapter Nine). These material forms illustrate the significance that Noongar
language\textsuperscript{38} has for Noongar people in everyday contexts, as exemplified by the following list of occurrences (Plate 4.8).

- The Aboriginal Health Worker College in Perth (established to provide training in primary health care for Aboriginal people through Aboriginal management and control of Aboriginal health issues) proclaims its focus with these Noongar words in its title: \textit{Marr Mooditj} (Great Hands), although Noongar words do not appear elsewhere in their Information Booklet.
- A video for children, parents and carers on dietary guidelines for adolescents, was titled \textit{Mooditj Tucker: helping parents, carers and children make healthy choices}.
- The word \textit{mia mia} is widely recognised by Noongar, and some non-Indigenous, people to refer to a house. Noongar Mia Mia Pty Ltd is an Aboriginal Housing Organization, that was established to address the needs of housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the South-West region.
- The \textit{Little Black Book}, produced by the Western Australian Council of Social Service for Aboriginal Youth, provides a list of 28 Noongar words with their translations, often heard in everyday speech. These include the following: \textit{mooditj} (great), \textit{yorga} (woman, girl), \textit{marr} (hand), \textit{monach} (police), \textit{wadjella} (white person), \textit{khart} (head), \textit{koolingah} (children), \textit{koolbardi} (maggpie), \textit{mindjtj} (sick), \textit{nanabah} (baby), \textit{yonga} (kangaroo), \textit{watje} (emu), \textit{yirra} (stand), \textit{yaakin} (tall), \textit{winyan} (poor), \textit{kharna} (shame).
- The Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service (Aboriginal Medical Service) provides health care and family support to Aboriginal people in Perth, its name echoing the Noongar name for the Swan River. When we discussed the use of Noongar words in some pamphlets, as opposed to other such materials distributed to the wider society, Wendy (who worked there) said, pointing at a poster hang on her office’s wall: ‘That’s our own language. Cultural protocol, a bit of language, Aboriginal design and quite easy to read’ (14: 76).
- A poster from Pika Wiya Service (Aboriginal Health Service) was hung on one wall, ‘that’s from South-Australia’ an office worker said, and she showed me another one from Yorgum\textsuperscript{39}, also bearing a couple of Noongar words. ‘That’s in Perth, in Northbridge’, she added.
- At King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women, there is a room for Aboriginal mothers to meet, listen to music or play cards. The room is called the Ngalla Moort Wanganing Mia (translated by the organization as ‘Our Family Talking Place’). During my fieldwork, I saw the advertising poster of a morning tea held in the Ngalla Moort Wanganing Mia. It said: ‘Morning Tea for \textit{Mooditj Yorgas}, which I translate as ‘morning tea for great women’.
- The Noongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service Inc. has for its logo: ‘Wangeniny Ngarlang Kang-ya... [the] words of the Noongar country [for] “Healing our Spirit”’.  

The use of Noongar words in all these organizations aims at assuring clients that they are Aboriginal agencies where staff members are aware of community issues and that many staff members are Aboriginal. It is noteworthy to emphasise that such use of

\textsuperscript{38} Noongar people refer to ‘Noongar language’ when people are generalising about its use. 
\textsuperscript{39} Noongar government organization that supports Aboriginal families against sexual abuse and provides counselling support.
Plate 4.8 Examples of the use of Noongar words by organisations

Video for children, parents and carers on dietary requirements.

Give-away show bag (see Chapter 8).

NASAS logo clearly demonstrates the use of Noongar language.
Noongar language is not directed toward a cross-cultural audience, but to solely assert the Aboriginal focus of the organization toward its Aboriginal ‘clients’. During my fieldwork, most non-Aboriginal people were unaware of this because it does not occur in a cross-cultural setting. In other words, the assertion of Noongar identity through the use Noongar words in Aboriginal welfare organizations is simply foreign to most non-Aboriginal people, like Noongar words being spoken at home. These Noongar practices are not in the domain of the intercultural body of knowledge, as the setting is not cross-cultural.

The etic use of Noongar language

Some cross-cultural events, essentially events organized by the art industry, have also utilized Noongar words, as follows (Plate 4.9).

• The Maamoong Festival 2003, a public arts event, was performed at the Perth Concert Hall and hosted various Aboriginal performers. One of these was a 50-minute performance telling the Noongar Dreaming story of a whale (Maamoong) trapped in the area of York\textsuperscript{40}.
• The Biruk Yeedee Mooditj Dreaming Festival was held for the first time on Australia Day 2007, supplanting the Survival Concert. The title translates as, ‘The summer songs good dreaming Festival’, according to the poster and website.
• The Wardarnji Aboriginal Cultural Celebration is a one-day event held during the Fremantle Festival; Wardarnji means ‘beside the sea’\textsuperscript{41}.
• The Berndt Museum of Anthropology (at the University of Western Australia) held in 2006 an exhibition ‘Koorah Coolingah (Children long ago)’, an exhibition of Noongar children’s art created in the early 1950s.

These were only a few examples of cross-cultural events that have made use of Noongar words. Whereas most non-Indigenous people have no contact with Aboriginal welfare organizations, as they are not entitled to benefit from these services, this is not the case for cultural festivals, which are open to the public and attract non-Indigenous audiences (including overseas visitors). The usage of Noongar words in the ways described above provides a substantive arena for cultural contact with the wider Australian society.

\textsuperscript{40} York is 100 km inland from Perth. Someone commented, ‘How could a whale be at York so far from the sea?’ A Noongar participant has told me that was the Dreaming story at a time when the sea reached further inland.

\textsuperscript{41} See Chapter Nine for more details on this festival.
Cross-cultural workshops (see Chapter Eight) are a further means of communicating relevant features of Noongar (and other Aboriginal) culture(s)\(^42\). In settings aimed at increasing Aboriginal cultural awareness to mainly non-Indigenous audiences, some Noongar convenors sprinkled Noongar words into their discourse periodically. I wish to note that I observed this practice much more frequently at occasions organized by the art industry than I did elsewhere (e.g. in the case of events convened by government departments focussing on environment, land management or employment). This may be due to the fact that the art industry relies on a overt assertion of Aboriginal cultures, as it sustains the consumer’s appreciation of the Aboriginal art\(^43\). This contrasts with a situation of, for example, a workshop aiming to boost cultural awareness in order to increase Aboriginal employment. In such contexts, cultural assertions are not seen to be as necessary, as they do not drive the employment industry.

At a cross-cultural workshop that was intended to promote better understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working within, and for, the art industry, a Noongar speaker said:

We are *koolingah* (children) before becoming Noongar, *koolingah* and then after initiation we become *Noongar*\(^44\) or *Yorga* (women) (9: 54).

Another speaker introduced herself at the same workshop by saying that she was a *yorga*. A third speaker mentioned the significance of the *boodja* (land) in Noongar culture. At another cross-cultural workshop organised by a different art institution, two speakers also used the words *boodja* or *yorga*. Despite using just a smattering of Noongar words, this practice was a means of asserting the presence and vitality of Noongar language and communicating it to non-Indigenous audiences. These latter were, then, more likely to become aware of a strong sense of a Noongar culture. This was, at least, the intention in doing this, and it had this effect on me. Because of the significance that a language has in defining a cultural identity (as mentioned earlier), I

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\(^{42}\) All the non-Indigenous people with whom I talked at a number of cross-cultural workshops volunteered their attendance because they said that they wished to gain a greater understanding or a better appreciation of Aboriginal cultures. A number of these people commented that their upbringing had created barriers and that they hoped that a cross-cultural workshop would contribute to improving their understanding of Aboriginal people and cultures. Very few of these non-Indigenous participants had ever had extensive interactions with Aboriginal people.

\(^{43}\) Another occurrence of the dialogical engagement referred earlier when I discussed un-mixed traditions.

\(^{44}\) The speaker said that *nyungar* means ‘man’ (in the generic sense of humankind) and *yorga* means woman; however, there are a number of Noongar people who do not agree with this translation. More broadly speaking, Noongar is recognized widely as a cultural grouping in the same way that Koorie, Murri and Yamatji are recognized as generic labels for Southeast, Queensland and Murchison-Gascogne Aboriginal groups, respectively.
Plate 4.9 Cross-cultural events with Noongar names

Koorah Coolingah
(Children Long Ago)
Two Exhibitions

Katanning Art Gallery
24 February — 10 March 2006
(Picker Art Gallery, Colgate University)

Western Australian Museum
27 February — 10 March 2006
(Bernard Museum of Anthropology)
suggest that peppering Noongar words has the effect of reaffirming the speakers’ identity, as something that distinguishes them from the standard Australian English speaking audiences.

Some Noongar people, who are committed to communicate Noongar heritage (including the language), are grasping surrounding opportunities to accomplish their goal. For example, a Noongar Elder, in collaboration with the Swan Catchment Council, narrates on a published CD some ‘Noongar creation stories’ that he holds through his family. In one of the stories he used the following Noongar words for some animals. The translation is on the CD wrapper (Swan Catchment Council, with N. Nannup 2006):

- Mamong (Whale), Kieler (Dolphin), Nyingarn (Echidna), Kaarda (Goanna), Ngoorlark (White tailed black cockatoo), Jennaark (Seagull), Minga (Ants).

In the examples I have cited, the audiences were passively exposed to just a few Noongar words. By contrast, at the free public Opening Ceremony of the PIAF Festival 2006, for which the entire event had as its theme ‘The Noongar World’, two Noongar Masters of Ceremony (one male, one female) encouraged an audience of about one thousand (Noongar, other Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people) to repeat loudly four Noongar words that were printed on the program. People responded to the Masters of Ceremony’s encouragement with enthusiasm, and soon a large crowd of smiling Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were shouting these four Noongar words. In 2007, the PIAF opening ceremony also had a Noongar Welcome. On the Festival brochure issued two months earlier, people had been invited to join a choir to sing in Noongar. Eight hundred people, maybe all non-Indigenous, attended the rehearsals and a music sheet (with Noongar words on it), and an accompanying CD was provided to them to practise singing in Noongar (Plate 4.10). On the day of the ceremony, a wide projection screen showed the choir and the Noongar words sung appeared as subtitles.

At a cultural awareness tour that was organised for university students, the Noongar guide set up a little children’s game, commonly played in English language with Australian children. Students repeated after him khart (head), ton-ga (ear), moolya (nose), munga (shoulders), bonnit (knee). Both he and the audience were putting hands on parts of the body related to the word (3: 70). Similarly, in the Trevor Jamieson play Ngapartji Ngapartji performed at PIAF in 2007, the same simple word game was

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45 This reflects the different orthographies utilised in spelling Aboriginal words.
played in Pitjantjatjarra. More and more events like this provide non-Indigenous people with an opportunity to hear, and even learn, some individual words from an Aboriginal language, whether it be Noongar or something else. This had previously remained entirely beyond the reach of people who did not engage with an Aboriginal community. The university students at the cultural awareness tour, and the audience at the play, voiced their strong appreciation either to me or as I overheard. I suggest the reason is that it gave them a privileged insight into an Aboriginal language, a sensation or momentary illustration of the language, hence of the culture. This is something that, unlike many other languages (e.g. Spanish, German, Arabic, Mandarin), they could not access easily through formal language courses. Noongar people appreciated the cross-cultural recognition of Noongar language, as is evident in many Noongar participants’ comments, and many non-Aboriginal participants were keen to learn a few words in Noongar. Whereas, I suggest, Noongar people gain cultural pride in such engagements as the language is now valued rather than being dismissed by colonial policies (e.g. Assimilation), the non-Aboriginal audiences seems to fulfil an interest in learning such words as they were rarely (not to say never) exposed to these words in their everyday life. Although being of a different nature, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people expressed interest in the use of Noongar words.

Whereas my previous field data concern only the use of Noongar words, it is worth noting that today, opportunities for experiencing full narrations also occur. Interestingly, these are mainly in cross-cultural settings, through the Noongar Welcome to Country. This practice is a means both of keeping the language alive and exposing people, Noongars and non-Noongars alike, to its cultural significance. As Elders who conduct the Welcome always translate it (Plate 4.11), this could be a vital tool for language maintenance. Moreover, some Noongar officials who perform Welcomes to Country have mentioned to me that they now seek fluency in Noongar for such occasions, and also want teach the language to their families. Such field data resonates with a point made by Jolly (1995), in reference to Dixon (1989: 32), who wrote:

> It has been pointed out that no matter the degree of language loss or official support for language programs, funding alone will not maintain a language if its speakers are not committed to increasing their own and their children’s use of the language.

This use of Noongar language represents a considerable change over time, as many Noongar participants remembered that, not long ago (less than forty years), they were
The music sheets distributed to the members of the choir contain the words for the Noongar Welcome. The CD was provided to choir members for people to use in practising the piece.
Lower left photo: the choir and the big screen on which the Noongar words are projected for the audience.
Lower right photo: part of the choir group.
Welcome, welcome

A long time ago our people and family lived here on Nyungar land in their bush and bark huts, they were looking a long way, their stomachs were weak from hunger, they were looking for and saying where is the kangaroo, emu, possum, small kangaroo, wallaby, parrots, galahs our family is hungry, where is the water we drink, our family is hungry where is our food. Our dog is sitting here weak and hungry.

Nyungars were looking way out and they said, who is this coming onto our land, look it is shining and glowing, sparkling in the sun, it is the waagal (the Sacred Serpent). Excited, they shout, food is coming, Men, women and children look, the thunder and lightning is following the waagal, water is coming down, food is coming, and the Nyungar river will be full of good water.

Nyungars are looking at the waagal, shining and glowing, sparkling in the sun, our good spirits are looking after us.

Our snake has brought food to our land, water and trees, Nyungars can sleep in their bush and bark homes in our land, and our families are good.

Our children will later grow up to be men and women and they will go forward, looking, listening and talking about our culture.

Kaya, Kaya


Nyungars djinong Waakal, Koo Waakal karkilyung, gnulluk moorditj wirin djinong Nyungar.

Bulup waakal meriny nitja, gnulla Boodja, meriny, kep, boorn, Nyungar ngoondiny mia mia nitja ngulla boodja, ngulluk moort moorditji.

Koolungurras burda burda Maaman and yok, bulup woort koorl burda burda djinang, Ni, wanginy gnulla kulija. (WAITOC 2004)

This Welcome to Country was given by Kylie Farmer and Kathleen Yarran for the Opening Ceremony of PIAF in 2006. It depicts a different style:

From the beginning of time to the end, this is Noongar Country.

We respect the earth our mother, and understand that we belong to her – she does not belong to us. In all her beauty, we find comfort, wellbeing and life that create a home for everyone that has become a keeper of Noongar Country.

Look, listen, understand and embrace all the elements of Noongar Country that is forever our home.

Ngallak nyinniny kooralong koorra ngallak noitj nidja Noongar Boodja.

Ngallak djorrapiny maambart boodja ngallak bala maambart quop ngalla koort djorrapiny nidja ngalla mia mia nyinniny Noongar Boodja.

Djinanginy katjin djorrapiny nidja weern Noongar Boodja ngalla mia mia boorda. (PIAF 2006)
not allowed to speak Noongar (see Nicholls 1994: 214 for similar comments on Walpiri language speakers). A number of Noongar people, including some who were in their twenties, recalled that they were discouraged from using their own language at school. Henderson (1994: 1) elucidated on this issue of political change, as well as in the public's perception:

Governments and the wider community have begun to accept that Aboriginal languages are of value, and there is more general interest in knowing something about them.

The coercive policies of past governments imposed on Noongar people are now widely recognised and even denounced in public speech in cross-cultural settings by Noongar Elders. Alf Taylor, a Noongar poet, spoke about his childhood to an audience of twelve non-Aboriginal people:

They [the Monks at New Norcia] used God as an executor on us Aboriginal kids. They say, 'You shouldn't use your mother tongue. It's the devil's language (1: 45).

From what people had said to me in the field, less than fifteen years ago, non-Indigenous people had fewer opportunities, possibly none, to be exposed to the language. The cross-cultural recognition of Noongar language is steadily more evident. For example, Batchelor Press has recently published eight bilingual children’s books (in both Noongar and English) and two Noongar sound chart posters, which contribute to the intra- and cross-cultural diffusion of Noongar language. Another point of exposure is the renaming of localities with Noongar names, which is becoming more commonplace. This is another influence on expanding language familiarity among Perth's wider population. As some city council employees explained to me, this is a means of acknowledging the importance of Noongar culture in their areas. It often results from the initiative of particular city councils that are intent on, for example, 'raising awareness of Noongar culture' (City of Melville) or dedicated to showing a commitment toward Reconciliation (City of Subiaco). The City of Melville acknowledges Noongar sites of cultural significance and refers to Noongar language; and in Subiaco a wetland originally known as Ju'álbup (its Noongar name) was renamed Dyson Swamp, later as Shenton Park Lake, before being changed back in 1996.

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46 For Koorie renaming of places, see Birch (2003).
47 Some non-Indigenous people now see the use of Noongar place-names as a response to Reconciliation and/or a recent recognition of Aboriginal culture, as some participants have told me. The practice is long standing: for example, the South-West town of Nannup was named on 9th January 1890, meaning “stopping place”. “Nann” — stop; “up” — place; and much more recently, on 31st December 1963, the town of Wakalup was named, meaning 'place of the carpet snake'. (Yarrow and Batchelor 1979: 28)
to Lake Jualbup. A participant involved in the re-naming spoke to me about her collaboration with members of the local Noongar community, because the City of Subiaco recognises that they hold the knowledge, which is also a cross-cultural statement of Noongar presence:

It means water and it rises in that area in spring. The Aboriginal community agreed with this. There was consultation with the Noongar Circle of Elders (17: 95).

There are numerous ways of paying homage, through the use of Noongar language, to the Noongar community within the broader society. In 2003, for example, The University of Western Australia renamed the Guild Village Courtyard Koort Kwoba Dandjoo. A small pamphlet was given to passers-by at the opening ceremony. It wrote that this was:

... the local Indigenous term for peace and harmony.... As one of the main meeting places on campus, the Guild Village Courtyard is the ideal place for the Guild and the University to promote a sense of harmony and friendship amongst students.

A Noongar elder involved in the renaming informed me two weeks before the occasion:

I was looking for a word in Noongar that means ‘harmony’, but it doesn’t exist in Noongar. So I translate it by ‘bringing the hearts together’ (10: 102).

Cross-cultural acknowledgment that is articulated around language sometimes requires a degree of imagination to accommodate a meaning that may not exist in Noongar, but does in English. The words koort kwoba dandjoo are now translated as ‘harmony’, as this relates to an important concept in Western culture that is being used to express Reconciliation with Noongar people48. Such transformations within vernacular languages are not unusual, as a Murri scholar (Bell 2003: 165) observed in discussing ‘traditional singing and dancing’ in south-east Queensland:

The versions that you hear now quite often have been modernised a bit, which always happens with language and song. I’m not one of those people who think that the language we speak today has to be exactly the same as the language that the old people spoke fifty years ago. Obviously whatever form of language we start to generate in this community is a form that has been adapted to modern-day living and modern-day conditions.

During the course of my fieldwork, I found much more opportunities through which the broader Australian society was exposed to Noongar words. In a bicycle-shop, for

48 As I noted in the Introduction, I investigate the intercultural body of knowledge from a non-Aboriginal standpoint. It would be appropriate to study the intercultural from Noongar standpoint—that is, how Noongar culture shapes and influences the content of Western knowledge that enters the intercultural.
example, I collected a free sticker saying, ‘I’d rather be cycling on the Munda Biddi Trail’, directing me to a web site www.mundabiddi.org.au. The website stated, ‘The Munda Biddi (which means path through the forest in the Nyoongar Aboriginal language)....’ And in another section of the website people can read: ‘Message sticks (or “boornoo wangkinya” in the Nyoongar language)....’

On the one hand, Noongar participants are proud of their language, even if it concerns only a few words peppered in the conversation when engaging with other Noongars. On the other, non-Aboriginal participants who had been exposed to Noongar language in cross-cultural settings expressed great pleasure at experiencing this. For example, at one cultural awareness workshop in November 2003, a non-Indigenous woman was so enthusiastic and willing to carry it a step further that she then wanted to learn Noongar49. She asked Elisabeth, the convenor:

Is there any body [organization] teaching language?
Elisabeth replied: Find an elder to learn50, go to the community or go to uni. Curtin [University] is teaching Noongar51 (12: 128).

Earlier in this section, I have indicated that language represents an expression of cultural identity and, therefore, people saw great value in engaging around the theme when ‘dialoguing’ Noongar culture. Additionally, I ponder whether there is a cultural factor that triggers the enthusiasm of non-Aboriginal people for learning a few words in Noongar? I did not investigate this in depth during my fieldwork. Whereas I have the empirical observation gained during participant observation, as well as cursory comments with people, I did not discuss in great detail this issue with non-Aboriginal participants. Looking at the literature, Yallop (1982: 19) noted that Westerners have a certain fascination with Aboriginal languages, a comment with which I concur. Discussing Western museums, Kenseth (1991: 92) pointed to a centuries-long interest in ‘exotic languages’. This is also evident from the early history of recording Noongar cultural material in the South-West (see also Plate 4.12); as early explorers and settlers all noted Noongar word lists (e.g. Moore 1978 [1884], Nind in Green 1979, Lyon in Green 1979, Collie in Green 1979). Noongar language also reached the Australian

49 Henderson (1994: 18) noted, ‘There seems to be a fair amount of interest now in Aboriginal language courses for non-Aboriginal students’.
50 In a similar vein, the Noongar Language Course booklet (Noongar—our way 1992: xii) encouraged ‘Nyungar elders as language models’ and defined ‘A suitable elder is someone who has lived around Noongars while the language was being spoken, and who can speak some basic language, understands the structure of the language, “hears” the language, and knows how to shape her/his mouth.’
51 The Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University offers a three hours per week course as an introduction to Noongar language and culture.
public when, for example, *The Western Mail* published on 29th December 1927 the following story of Jitti-jitti and Wej by Daisy Bates:

In the Nyitting (cold) times of long ago, Jitti-jitti, the Wagtail was a nyungar (man) but Wej, the emu was only a bird. That was Kuraa’-Kuraa’—a long time ago. Jitti-jitti had two waters on his Kalleep (home ground)—Koddalilling and Yoo’jung-up; and Ngow (the mallee hen) and Debburn (the squeaker crow), his two wives, were fat and strong with good meat he brought them and the good water they drank (Bridge 1992: 157).

Being valued by both Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, Noongar language or, at least Noongar words, is an intercultural form of knowledge that is exchanged in cross-cultural settings and which brings a degree of satisfaction to both parties. It is an intercultural knowledge that satisfies the joint interests: Noongar people assert a sense of identity through communicating Noongar words and non-Aboriginal people seem to appreciate learning this. Full narrations in Noongar language occur mainly (if not exclusively) in cross-cultural settings, as non-Aboriginal people recognise language as a vital cultural marker (the dialogical process of the intercultural). Speaking fluently Noongar is seen as a strong indicator of connection with the culture, hence it is not surprising that Noongar Welcomes to Country, which acknowledge Noongar cultural presence in the South-West, bring the language to the forefront.

*Aboriginal English and non-Aboriginal people*

The final issue I deal with in this chapter concerns the nature and use of Aboriginal English, that is, with Australian English, the predominant language spoken by Noongar people. Unlike Noongar language, it triggered a muted response from non-Aboriginal participants, although Aboriginal English and creoles have been scholarly described as an expression of Aboriginal cultural specificity:

> [A]s forms of language which can be and are treated by at least some of their users as distinctively indigenous forms of speech (and even of writing) (McKay 1996: 8).

Aboriginal English is based on the use of Australian English language words articulated differently to those of Standard English, as Malcolm *et al.* (1999a: 11) explained:

> Aboriginal English shares many features with other dialects (varieties) of English, including Standard Australian English, as well as with Indigenous languages and creole languages.
'This was recorded before 1949. It was close to where the Kojonup School is now. Mum used to go and sit close to the camp fire, and record Noongar words phonetically, and what they meant. That was just Mum [a primary school teacher], she was interested in a whole lot of things. It was recorded over quite a long time, over 12 months, when she sat down by the camp fire.'
Chapter Four — Tradition and Language

Around Australia, many Aboriginal people speak Aboriginal English. This is evident in the extensive literature that deals with it\(^{52}\), which raised the important outcomes in student-teacher engagements within secondary/primary education (e.g. Harkins 1994), as well as in the Court system (Eades 1992).

Malcolm et al. (1999b) provide clear examples about the use of Aboriginal English spoken by Noongar people. They show that Aboriginal English spoken in the South-West derived from Noongar words and English words, referring to words that I often heard in the field. For example, Malcolm et al. (1999b: 44) show that words in Aboriginal English can have ‘a Nyungar meaning’ (e.g. *kulunga, yorga*), can have ‘an extra meaning’ (e.g. *monach* originally meaning ‘“black cockatoo”’ in Noongar, but the word is now also used for ‘policeman’) and, thirdly, that Noongar words can have an ‘English morphology’—that is, for example, *yorgas* with a ‘s’ to indicate the plural. They also discuss the ‘English words’ (p. 45-6) in Aboriginal English:

> A large proportion of the vocabulary of Aboriginal English is from English... [but].... Many English words changed their meanings once in Aboriginal English (p. 45).

My fieldwork data illustrate this feature\(^{53}\). For example, the word *grannies* means grandparents and grandchildren (see section kinship of this thesis). In more detail, Malcolm et al. (1999b) provide some useful data about the construction of this language. They wrote:

> Some words reflect the vocabulary of early European settlement, e.g. *porcupine ‘echidna’, bunny ‘rabbit*. Some English words have been extended to become a superordinate or overriding category: e.g. *toyota* to refer to all four wheel-drive vehicles... There are also extensions of meaning which might include closely related semantic concepts, e.g. *cheekin* for *teasing*.... (p. 46).

Aboriginal English is an incontestable feature of Noongar culture (see also Toussaint 1987: 94-6). A non-Aboriginal participant whose work focuses on Noongar language elucidated:

> People think Aboriginal people speak English. They are not aware of Aboriginal English as a dialect in Australia (13: 72).

A number of cultural awareness workshops have explained its importance to the attendees, often by showing part of the education package (e.g. Department of

\(^{52}\) See Foster et al. (2003) for historical data in South-Australia, Eades (1983) for a substantial research in Southeast Queensland, Arthur (1996) for a broad Australian perspective.

\(^{53}\) For Aboriginal words incorporated in ‘Standard English’ see, for example, Dixon et al. (1990).
Education 2002) which re-enacted interactions of people using Aboriginal English and featuring a Noongar actress who gave general information about the language. As evident during the fieldwork, for some Noongar people, more commonly amongst teenagers and young adults than for older persons\textsuperscript{54}, Aboriginal English was a way of asserting Noongar identity. Some younger Aboriginal respondents viewed this as a positive attribute, a way of saying unambiguously, ‘I’m Noongar’. This seems, however, to be an enduring statement of identity as fifty years ago, J. Wilson (1958: 77) commented that the ‘use of the “lingo”... was a means of predicting attitudes to Aboriginality’.\textsuperscript{55}

The two-ways of speaking, Aboriginal English versus standard Australian, was indeed mentioned by a number of Noongar participants. Bridgit, who was in her twenties, observed:

With White people I talk differently. I’ll always be Aboriginal, but I use different words (16: 13).

In a similar vein, Karina talked about her feeling in regard to the contemporary use of Aboriginal English among Aboriginal people:

At work, I present myself in a business mood. If Aboriginal people come, I would switch and use Noongar terminology. Generally to non-Aboriginal family I say, “Hello, how are you?” With Aboriginal family, “How’re you fellow?” I’ve grown up with a non-Aboriginal kid who spoke like that. He wanted to fit in with Noongar kids, but that wasn’t appropriate (13: 148).

I asked Karina to elaborate on her views about non-Indigenous people using ‘Aboriginal English’, and she replied, ‘It’s false speech. It could become patronizing and inappropriate’ (see Bourdieu 1991: 76-82 on the symbolic role of language in defining group/class identity), but did not comment further on her views.

Despite a greater consciousness about the use of Aboriginal English as a marker of Noongar identity among those under thirty, all age groups within the Noongar community use Aboriginal English, sometimes termed ‘the Noongar way’ of speaking. Following, a Noongar participant illustrated this in reference to her grandmother who was in her seventies:

\textsuperscript{54} During my fieldwork, I did not engage enough with children to comment on the use of Aboriginal English amongst them. I suspect many will follow their parents’ practices.

\textsuperscript{55} In 1938, Bates noted the use of the term ‘big mob’ by Noongar people, which is now regarded as an icon of the Noongar way of speaking (and, more broadly, Aboriginal English).
One time, Nanna came to visit me at work and she makes a beeline for this old fellow. All of a sudden she starts talking with him cultural way, blackfella way, and says: ‘Who’s your Mob? Where’re you from?’ It’s just like when you see Wadjelas when they meet each other and they say, ‘Hello, what do you do? [her emphasis] In the Aboriginal community you go up to a person and say ‘Who’s your mob? Where’re you from? (Notepad DEA).

The ‘Noongar way’ is also a matter of pronunciation. A Noongar artist recounted to me with a broad smile the amusing story that shows that the Noongar way of speaking is different to standard Australian. She referred to the PIAF 2004 Opening Ceremony when a choir sang the Noongar Welcome:

Hundreds of people were singing the choir. We wrote the words and the Lady asked for pronunciation. We had to correct them [non-Aboriginal people] for pronunciation. The Wadjelas were singing in a posh way. They were singing like singing hymn. It was an Aboriginal song arranged classical! But at the end it did sound Aboriginal. It didn’t sound like a 16th century classical choir. We sounded more like a corroboree (17: 73).

Aboriginal English or ‘Noongar way’ are features of Noongar culture to which non-Indigenous people tend to be oblivious. Most cultural awareness workshops raised the importance of Aboriginal English, and the non-Indigenous participants with whom I talked during the workshops were interested to learn about it because many of them had no idea even of the term itself. Nevertheless, most of these non-Aboriginal people discussed or commented about Noongar words, whereas they seemed to have perceived Aboriginal English as a kind of slang, rather than a statement about Noongar culture.

Another field example that corroborates these comments refers to a non-Indigenous participant, who was an activist in Aboriginal affairs. She was deeply concerned about the loss of Noongar language:

Most Noongar don’t speak Noongar. People should get their language back (18: 25).

She also spoke to me about the issue of Aboriginal English, which she named ‘Pidgin English’, and felt that it is ‘a disadvantage to achieve economic success’. She never mentioned the cultural and identity issues of Aboriginal English. For her, Noongar language was the only language that should be encouraged within the Noongar community.

It appears from my fieldwork that non-Indigenous people respond much more positively to the use of Noongar words by learning what they regard as a ‘legitimate’ cultural
feature. It could be interesting to investigate further this issue; however, I now can only suggest that Aboriginal English is rather too closely related to Standard Australian English and very much a result of the contact experience. The general public may be unaware that:

There are also different ideas of what it means to 'learn', 'speak' or 'know' a language; these can mean things ranging from being able to understand and speak a language fluently to just knowing some important words. The social significance might be almost the same in one respect; using words that are distinctive to your social group is a powerful way of expressing your membership of the group both with other members of the group and with outsiders (Henderson 1994: 5).

Alternatively, the lack of interest and language recognition that non-Indigenous people expressed toward Aboriginal English may also be due to the fact that Aboriginal English is not associated with notions of territory and cultural ownership in the same way that Noongar language is. Walsh (2002: 234) noted that a 'crucial feature of language ownership concerns the linkage between a language and its territory.'

Noongar language asserts the strength of Noongar culture cross-culturally and presents its validity within Australian Aboriginal cultures. Some non-Indigenous people may see the cultures of remote areas of Australia, such as Central Australia and the Top End of the Northern Territory, as being the locus for highly recognisable Aboriginal societies; this is, in part, because people are known to have kept their languages and are speaking them on a regular basis. The use of Noongar words is, in a comparable way, a means of asserting a sense of cultural identity for Noongar people and contributes to affirming cultural strength cross-culturally. In comparison, the lack of interest from non-Indigenous people toward Aboriginal English demonstrates that cross-cultural communication requires that the person who communicates his/her culture does so in a way that 'makes sense' to the listeners and is valued by them. Unlike Aboriginal English, the use of Noongar words, and more generally Aboriginal languages, appears to be a very effective way for Noongar people to assert their culture.

This section has illustrated that non-Indigenous people accept Noongar words as being a signifier of 'culture', whereas Aboriginal English is only seen as a way of speaking. To follow on the Venn diagram (Figure 4.2) as a means of conceptualising my data, I suggest that Noongar language enters the overlapping component of the 'intercultural';

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56 See Chapter 4 section Kinship for a similar observation on a different theme.
that is, the body of knowledge that is communicated by Noongar whilst engaging with non-Aboriginal respondents. By contrast Aboriginal English remains outside the interest of non-Indigenous participants\textsuperscript{57}. Moreover, the content of the intercultural body of knowledge is also constrained by the interface, as there are settings that are not themselves cross-cultural. An example of this is non-Aboriginal people’s lack of awareness of Noongar words contained in the names of some Aboriginal medical services, whereas the art industry makes constant references to Noongar language terms (e.g. *boodja* meaning ‘the land’).

This chapter has focussed on illustrating that some cultural features fail to enter the intercultural body of knowledge, whereas others do. In both cases of language and tradition, some knowledge is integrated in the intercultural as a result of cross-cultural interactions, whereas other elements remain outside this sphere (Aboriginal English, gender-restricted knowledge). The following chapter investigates other processes involved in the co-construction of emergent intercultural knowledge by investigating the themes of spirituality and the bush, which provide further illustrations of the complexity of conceptualising the intercultural.

\textsuperscript{57} Many people who work with Aboriginal communities only learn Aboriginal English, and not the local Aboriginal language, because this is easier and it is also the \textit{lingua franca}. The point I am discussing here is the reception of Aboriginal English by people who are not anthropologists or community workers, and who may have only a passing interest in Aboriginal culture—in other words, the vast majority of Australians.
Chapter Five — Spirituality and Environment

In this chapter I illustrate that giving importance to the bush and to spiritual manifestations is far from being foreign to the wider Australian society. It is on this basis of a convergence of cultural patterns that the intercultural body of knowledge emerges, although the meanings associated with the natural environment and spirituality are very different between Noongar and non-Aboriginal Australian society. I suggest, however, that there is a degree of cultural comparability. I will first examine the intercultural knowledge of spirituality, and then focus on knowledge concerning the various uses of plants (e.g. healing, food), and the ways native flora and fauna are used to assert a sense of Aboriginality. The theme of spirituality illustrates cogent issues concerning the non-Aboriginal reception of the knowledge that is communicated, whereas the subject of the bush shows that there is, at time, considerable difficulty in interweaving two cultures. As for the previous chapter, I illustrate Noongar cultural communication and its reception through a diagram (Figure 5.1).

Spirituality of the landscape

First of all, I acknowledge that land and spirituality are closely interrelated in Aboriginal cultures (see, for example, Williams 1986; Myers 1986; Morphy 1991; Keen 1994)\(^1\) and this was, indeed, evident throughout my fieldwork. Below, I quote Uncle Lori, a Noongar Elder, who told the attendees of a cultural awareness workshop:

Noongar land is the basis of keeping spiritual life strong (Notepad HS).

This linkage was widely understood by many non-Aboriginal participants. For example, when I discussed with Ken his own experience of interactions between himself and Noongar people, he spoke about the relationships between Aboriginal spirituality and the land:

They [Noongar people] depict the religion and the spirituality in the land. The spirituality is part of the land (5: 118).

Andrew, another non-Aboriginal participant, discussed with me his understanding of Aboriginal spiritual connections to the landscape in relation to his own background:

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\(^1\) For a worldwide perspective upon the sacredness associated with places in the landscape, see Carmichael et al. (1994).
I went to the bush university.... He, the Aboriginal man from the Kimberley said, 'I'm leaving you. I have to pick up my son, to do this White men thing and then go to my Land'.

He was attached to many more things than we [non-Indigenous people] would ever be. There's no separation from his land and his spirit. I grew up in the country and I understand some reminiscences of the land. I express myself in terms of landscape. I see Australia as mine, but this man has a real connection. I could walk in the bush, know a lot of wildflowers, snake-holes, ants, but I had to find my own meaning, it wasn't my culture to have this meaning here (13: 5).

Such field comments resonate with an Australian scholar, Read (2000: 89), who recalled Aboriginal spiritual connections to the landscape:

When telling Ian creation stories the older men would point to distant landforms and see—in some sense literally—the physical landform and creative spirit simultaneously. It was no vision; not 'looked like', not Westerners seeing a hill in the shape of a horse or dingo. The elder saw at once both spirit and landform.

In the field, I was often reminded about the spiritual connection between people and the land because it is so prevalent in Noongar culture. For example, at a Noongar Welcome to Country held for a conference on the theme of environmental sustainability, a Noongar Elder said to the audience, ‘People’s spirit comes from the land.’

The spirituality of landscape is articulated through the many sites of significance and this feature is often communicated cross-culturally. For example, a Noongar Elder explained to a large group of government employees about places in the Fremantle area that were associated with the Dingo Dreaming. Similarly, a broadsheet guide to the Manjaree Track produced by the W.A. Heritage Trails Network notes the spirituality of the Fremantle area:

1. Cantonment Hill was a landmark. It was known as Dwerda Weeardinup (place of the dingo spirit)....
2. The river was known as Derbal Yaragan. It was created by the movements of the Waugal, the powerful, serpent-like dreamtime spirit.

A number of researchers have discussed the notion of spiritual meaning within the Australian landscape (e.g. Trigger and Mulcock 2005b: 310; Tacey 2000: 113-4) but looking at the non-Aboriginal interest in Aboriginal spirituality, Tacey (1995: 14), comparably to Read quoted above, noted that this ‘sacred bond with the land’ is an element absent in non-Aboriginal Australian society. In a subsequent book, Tacey (2000: 93) wrote:
Figure 5.1 Conceptualisation of the intercultural on the themes of Spirituality and the Environment

Cross-cultural setting: the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people
Chapter Five — Spirituality and Environment

We non-Aboriginals are so used to being told...that a land-based spirituality in Australia is off-limits for white people.²

This perception is mirrored in a number of my field notes. For example, a participant spoke to me about the spiritual connection he has with some places in the South-West (Birdsall 1990: 142 for a comparable comment); something that he felt is lacking amongst non-Aboriginal people:

... you learnt as a young boy...stories that you were given, places shown, you had to know how to approach this place... In our Noongar area people hold on their stories because of their spiritual connection, not to themselves but to the land. The stories give a sense of security and a connection to the land... That’s the richness of our culture, how there were always be a connection that Wadjela couldn’t understand why the land is so important. To sit on a rock and to feel the spirit, the sacredness (94: 101).

It is noteworthy, however, to mention that I heard three Aboriginal Elders telling their audiences (at cultural awareness workshops, but also occasionally during a Noongar Welcome to Country) that people who are born in Australia could also claim some spiritual connections with the Australian landscape. To quote Uncle Lori again, he told fifteen non-Aboriginal people at a Noongar cultural awareness workshop:

- Where you’re born is an important place as you’re connected to it. If you are born here, your spirit belong here, no matter your colour and shape.’
- What about migrants? A man asked in the audience.
- After six years⁵ maybe, the spirit will know you and come to you (3: 24).

Whereas Aboriginal spirituality is without doubt grounded in the environment, I separate the two elements to facilitate the analysis of this chapter. This is because I mainly focus on non-Aboriginal recipients of Noongar knowledge and the two themes are separate in the wider Australian society.

There is a certain degree of complexity in defining the intercultural body of knowledge associated with Noongar spirituality. It involves a plurality of factors, some of them contradicting each other. For example, I observed that some non-Aboriginal people

² See also Tacey (2000: 135).
³ I also heard seven years mentioned on a different occasion by another Noongar man.
were very receptive, and interested, in Noongar spirituality, whilst others are disparaging about it. Noongar tours, art shows, cultural awareness workshops, and the like often communicate some elements of Noongar spirituality, while other features have not been mentioned by Noongar people in the variety of cross-cultural events I attended during my fieldwork. This section aims at analysing some of the cultural processes that are involved in the construction of the intercultural spiritual knowledge.

Aboriginal spirituality is expressed through the concept of the Dreaming, a period when the world and everything that populates it was created. The mythic events of this past, associated with the activities of the Dreaming beings themselves, provide a template for present-day behaviour (e.g. Rose 1999: 3; Hiatt 1975: 6; Myers 1986; Berndt 1979: 4; Keen 1990; Sutton 1988: 15). Individual and social groups are associated with particular Dreaming beings through totemic affiliations with, for example, kangaroos, dingos, and so on.

Various research conducted in the South-West makes brief references to Noongar spirituality, as the topic is very much part of everyday Noongar life (Tonkinson 1962: 12-5; Meagher 1973a: 229; Toussaint 1987: 198; J. Wilson 1958; K. Wilson 1958; Harrison 1960; Baines 1987; Birdsall 1990). These earlier data mirror the comments of participants in my research, when people talked about Noongar spirituality in conversations at home, amongst friends or at work. Elements of spiritual knowledge are well embedded in Noongar society and concern all aspects of life. They are an everyday referent that informs people’s lives. Some elements of Aboriginal religious knowledge have been customarily shrouded in secrecy, away from the uninitiated (Berndt 1964) or outsiders. In regard to his research in the South-West, Wilson (1958: 126) noted, ‘It is likely that with longer acquaintance and more intensive contact more elements of Aboriginal beliefs would have come to light.’ This is, however, no longer the case as Noongars are more than willing to talk about elements of Noongar spirituality.

Today, the communication of spiritual beliefs is a significant element of Noongar life that is imparted to non-Aboriginal people, even when these concern practices that were more readily performed in the past. For example, a Noongar man talked to a group of non-Aboriginal people at a presentation on Perth’s water catchment about the issue of
people being custodians of particular places and having special responsibility to them (demonstrating the blurring of past and present discussed in Chapter Four):

They are the master of ceremony for the song, the dance, the art for this special location. For us, Aboriginal people, if no one sings the country, the country gets sick. When I talk about spirituality, I talk about the story, the dance, the art (Notepad WC).

Prior to discussing how Noongar spirituality enters the intercultural, I briefly review some of the long-established non-Aboriginal engagements with Aboriginal spirituality. In doing so, I am guided by a desire to provide a historical background that puts into context the contemporary non-Aboriginal interest in this theme.

**An enduring non-Aboriginal interest in Aboriginal spirituality**

Aboriginal spiritual beliefs have interested Western scholars for more than one hundred years. Pioneer anthropologists such as Spencer and Gillen, as well as Radcliff-Brown have detailed many features of Aboriginal religion, often in great detail. As the topic represents a core element of Aboriginal life, many anthropologists continue to address the issue (e.g. Charlesworth *et al.* 1984, 1990; Sansom 2001). Here, I am commenting about the long-term interest, not to say the fascination for some, in Aboriginal spirituality expressed by non-Aboriginal people. Indeed, some of their interests in Aboriginal religions were aiming to answer some quandaries about their own cultures. This is something Maddock (1991, quoted in Gelder and Jacobs 1998: 43) noted and which led him to label Spencer and Gillen or Durkheim as ‘addicts to the sacred’.

Indeed, from the 19th century, Aboriginal beliefs triggered non-Aboriginal interest. Evolutionist theorists, for example, were aiming to find in indigenous cultures, not just in Australia, an original core of religious knowledge through which they thought they could grasp the progressive development of religion. They thought this would help them to understand better their own Christian monotheism (see Geertz 1985 for more details). A number of early writers adopted this ethnocentric and comparative view of Aboriginal spirituality. Emile Durkheim (1912), for example, sought to find a primal religious system through the study of Aboriginal religions. Durkheim’s discussion of the nature of Aboriginal totemism and other aspects of Aboriginal religion directly
contributed to an early popularity of totemism in the academic literature in the first half of the 20th century.\footnote{Eliade (1973: 198) noted the ‘the rather unfortunate consequences of the vogue of totemism, launched by Durkheim’s \textit{Formes élémentaires}'. Evans-Pritchard (1965: 61) wrote about Durkheim’s understanding of Australian totemism as ‘obscure’ and ‘un-convincing’, despite his now dated and offensive title. Eliade (1973: xiv) also denounced the early misapprehensions about Aboriginal spirituality of evolutionist research or of ‘romantic-decadents’ who were concerned with ‘the Noble savage ideology’ and evolutionist perceptions of Australian religious beliefs: ‘there was also, at least unconsciously, an implicit conviction of the religious, or “scientific”, justification for the white man’s conquest of black fellow’s continent.’ (Eliade 1973: 14)}

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud also investigated Aboriginal religions and, with the publication of \textit{Totem and Taboo} (1919), he aimed to locate ‘the origin of social organization, moral restrictions, and religion in a primordial murder, namely, the first patricide’ (Eliade 1976: 3). Overlapping in his career with Freud, psychoanalyst Jung focussed his work on symbolism, religion and the unconscious. Jung also contributed to tease Western interest toward spirituality, including Aboriginal manifestations, because ‘the unconscious is always religious’ as Eliade (1965: 21) noted in regard to Jung’s research. Today, Jung still influences the way some Australian people approach Aboriginal religion and Gelder and Jacobs (1998: 1) use the word ‘Jungian spiritualism’ in reference to some of today’s Australian engagements of the Aboriginal sacred.

Many publications (and not just in Australia) make reference to Aboriginal spirituality. Some scholars aim at providing an account of the diversity of religious beliefs around the world and discuss the topic (e.g. Eliade 1967, 1973). For other writers, their intention is more obscure, verging on a personal New Age quest which often includes Aboriginal, North American Indian, Asian societies, and others (as, for example, Torrance 1994).

Popular culture has also referred Aboriginal spirituality over the last century. Writers have communicated aspects of it, some even seeking to convey a kind of exotic mysticism (Lawlor 1991; Cameron 1993; Fox \textit{et al.} 1991; Idriess 1963; Cowan 1990; Chatwin 1987; Rothwell 2004). Indeed, reference to Aboriginal spirituality has appeared in a plethora of places over the years, as the topic has long fascinated non-Indigenous people, especially when it concerns practices that are somehow considered ‘mysterious’. A non-Indigenous respondent, Tim, remembered from his childhood in the forties:

\footnote{See Hiatt (1975: 7-8) for a commentary on the writings of Roheim, who followed on from Freud’s work.}
- There were the cards about Aboriginal cultures. You’d get a book from Sanitarian people, to eat as much corn flakes as possible. There were all the mysterious things about Aboriginal cultures. The willie light. How perceptive and psychic Aboriginal people were. They could talk over a long distance. The cards were also about the totems and the dances.
- What is the willie light? I asked.
- Under certain climatic condition a little light floats around the landscape, and it’s meant to be a spirit (13: 25).

I wish to indicate here that it is crucial to bear in mind this long-lasting interest in Aboriginal spirituality, because it gives a historic depth to today’s appreciation of Noongar culture on this theme.

**The non-Aboriginal demand for spirituality**

Despite the apparent secular nature of contemporary Western life, expressions of spirituality are only hidden superficially, although they may no longer occur solely within the main religious institutions such as Christianity. Geertz (2000: 184) wrote about today’s world:

> There are as many varieties of ‘religious experience’, or again, expressions of religious experience, as there ever were. Perhaps more.

Addressing the contemporary mercantilism of spirituality in a broader context, Minois (1998: 11) noted that religion does not bring many people to the church, but that it nevertheless sells well. Australian scholar, David Tacey (2000: 47), discussed the spiritual revival in contemporary Australian society. He noted, ‘the churches do not speak a language that the modern world can understand’; however, he also observed, ‘Spirituality is making a comeback’ (p. 2).

Aboriginal spirituality is often evident in the public domain, and it is commonly recognised through visual art, with the depiction of Dreaming stories and the elaboration of mythic accounts through the documentation that almost invariably

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6 Tacey observed (2000: 215) about the Church iconography that ‘death and sacrifice are morbid’ and ‘do not suit “modern” taste, with its denial of death and its rejection of darkness and suffering’.

7 One of Tacey’s (2000) concerns is to deal with the expression of spirituality and secularity in Australia. The boundary between these two notions seems to blur, as he observed (2000: 5) ‘that it is un-Australian to talk about it’. It is interesting to note that later he wrote, ‘Young Australians today feel increasingly free to announce that they are searching for spirituality.’ (Tacey 2000: 186) Following on the uncertainty about spirituality he later observed ‘I am sometimes told that the tag “Australian spirituality” represents a contradiction in terms, since the word “Australia” signifies everything that is modern and secular.’ (2000: 236, see also 239 for further debate on the issue of where Australians might stand between secularity and religiosity).

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accompanies the works. When I asked a participant who is employed by the Aboriginal art industry if she could elaborate on her experience in the reception of art by the wider community, she replied:

People are fascinated for more reasons than just the aesthetic or fine arts, but also for the spirituality of it. In England, there is also an interest in the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal art. It is the same in the Netherlands.

I'm detecting from people a kind of hunger to know more. People are aware of the spiritual dimensions of the works but don't know what they're about. The interest is multi-faceted, it's an abstraction that fits so well with contemporary art, plus the spiritual dimension of it (Notepad LS).

The Australian interest in Aboriginal spirituality is part of a worldwide discourse. It is illustrated, for example, by the international success of books such as Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Downunder*, which fictionalises the spirituality of Aboriginal people. Morgan's 'spiritual' journey started in Perth and, despite a media controversy surrounding the novel (www.dumbartung.org.au), the book seems to have seduced a number of readers. I discussed the author's biased and offensive representation of Aboriginal people in the book with a friend. She concluded our conversation, saying:

I like the way she talked about Aboriginal people. Their spiritual power. Maybe Morgan said something I wanted to hear.

A number of overseas tourists expressed their interest in having read *Mutant Message Downunder* and admired the spiritual focus Aboriginal people have, often in opposition to the secularity of their own worlds (all were living in 'Western' countries). Many of these people bought the book because they were very keen to learn about 'Aboriginal culture', although their recollection about the novel seems to focus on spiritual powers of this imaginary tribe described by Morgan. A Canadian visitor commented on how she enjoyed reading about Aboriginal spirituality, as she felt the topic has given her some meaningful answers to a modern emptiness. She opined:

The book was an enjoyable read. The spiritual wisdom of this tribe compares to the way we live. We're concerned with material things and superficial things. Their focus is on what is really important... This is a well-documented book (3: 71).

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8 Moberg (2001: 7) noted that 'even secularists who profess they have no religion are actually "worshipping" gods of technology, materialism ("mammon"), sex, or self-adoration, and thus have a religion of their own.'

9 I put it in quotation marks, as Morgan's account is nothing more than a fantasy.
Many people who have mentioned the book emphasised the strong Aboriginal connection to spirituality, and very often associated it with wisdom\textsuperscript{10}; however, Tacey (1995: 132) noted some possible negative outcomes concerning such spiritual consumerism:

If the sacred has become neatly embodied in the indigenous people, then the Western consumerist mentality will want to devour and consume Aboriginality.

More broadly speaking, I noted people’s interest in the spirituality of the ‘other’, for which Aboriginal spiritualities are only one component. For example, the long-lasting popularity of Carlos Castaneda’s books about his ‘spiritual journey’ (as described on the back cover of Castaneda 1968) with a Yaqui Indian shaman is one of many examples that shows the contemporary interest about indigenous spirituality. This goes alongside the multiplicity of New Age (and ‘religious’) web sites, pamphlets, books, magazines and shops that promote spiritual enlightenment and personal well-being through various practices that are grounded in various religions: Aboriginal spiritual healing, the Lakota sweat lodge\textsuperscript{11}, Navaho spiritual wisdom, Tibetan medicine, Aztec divination, Aboriginal New Agers (see Mulcock 2003), Celtic druids, and so on. These are just a few examples from my fieldwork observations. Some scholars have expressed their concerns about New Agers appropriating Aboriginal spiritual elements to fulfil a perceived Western spiritual emptiness (e.g. Tacey 2000: 105, 237-8; Marcus 1997: 30; Lattas 1997: 224); however, Tacey (2000: 249) also observed that non-Indigenous spiritual engagements with Aboriginal spirituality lead to ‘appreciation’ and should not be seen only in terms of ‘appropriation’. From my fieldwork data, I noted that some non-Aboriginal people were very receptive to Noongar spirituality and I suggest that the theme of spirituality provides an opportunity for cross-cultural engagements to take place.

My fieldwork did not focus on New Agers, nor on people who have expressed a strong personal interest in Aboriginal spirituality. In the field, however, I encountered many Noongar and non-Aboriginal people who unambiguously pointed to the importance of Noongar spirituality, and I observed a strong cross-cultural recognition about the theme.

At a cross-cultural training workshop, for example, a Noongar speaker said to the seventeen attendees:

We cannot talk about Aboriginal culture without talking about spirituality (7: 81).

\textsuperscript{10} There is some similarity in this focus on indigenous spirituality and wisdom relating to many other parts of the world, such as North America.

\textsuperscript{11} For general background about this practice, see for example, Bucko (1998).
After the workshop, I had a long conversation with Bob, one of the non-Aboriginal people I met there. From his viewpoint:

Aboriginal spirituality is a message for everyone. It gives some practical direction [about looking after the country] as well as spiritual direction (7: 103).

On another occasion, an overseas exchange student was disappointed that the Noongar ranger did not give detailed information about Noongar spirituality, with the exception of a brief reference to male initiation at the age of 13. He regretted this lack of opportunity to learn more about spiritual beliefs and practices:

I would have like to learn about their spirituality, their connection with God, their means of prayer. I think they are very spiritual people (2: 102).

A number of the pamphlets, brochures and newspaper articles that I collected affirmed the importance of Noongar spirituality. As written on one that was given to me at the Fremantle Town Hall:

Aboriginal people have a deep spiritual and custodial relationship to the land and sea that does not have an equivalent in western culture. It is the source of their life, their spirituality and their culture (City of Fremantle 2000: 39).

During cross-cultural engagements, many Noongar people were keen to refer to, or to explain, elements of Noongar spirituality also because it is something very distinctive of Aboriginality. It is something different to the beliefs of the non-Aboriginal communities. As I mentioned earlier, such cross-cultural settings often assert unambiguously Noongar culture, bringing to the forefront its specific characteristics. Whereas some non-Aboriginal people were very receptive about Aboriginal spirituality, it is noteworthy to mention Alice (Noongar), who was concerned about some consequences concerning non-Aboriginal interest in Noongar spirituality:

Some people idealise it, 'It must be wonderful to be Aboriginal', 'I wish I was Aboriginal.' They think we're spiritual. It's very paternalistic. It's unrealistic. It makes you feel you can't be on equal terms with White people (4: 136).

To conclude my comments on the context of cultural background, I observed that Noongar people frequently imparted some features of Noongar spirituality to non-Aboriginal people, who are largely aware of its importance in Noongar culture. It is because the wider community appreciates the importance of these elements that the message is received as a cultural assertion. In other words, Noongar people are expected to be 'spiritual'. Whereas everyone seems to agree about the significance of the theme, I
now turn to the body of knowledge that is frequently communicated to non-Aboriginal people.

**Sharing Noongar spiritual knowledge with non-Aboriginal people**

This section is based on my field observations concerning my personal engagement with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, as well as data gathered at various cultural awareness workshops, Noongar tours, art gallery openings and miscellaneous observations (e.g. in the workplace), where some elements of Noongar spirituality were discussed openly. Some spiritual knowledge, however, remains private and is more ‘quietly’ shared, as I discuss in the section ‘Keeping knowledge from outsiders’.

**Noongar Dreaming stories**

Some of the activities of Dreaming beings represent a key feature of the knowledge that is given to non-Aboriginal people. For example, Martin (a Noongar elder) narrated an hour-long Dreaming story to a group of people enrolled for a cultural awareness workshop. The story is part of the lengthy account that depicts the creation of Noongar country and is directly associated with the area of Perth. As Dreaming stories provide templates for the present, the actions of the Noongar Dreaming Beings raise the importance of caring for country, which is analogous to today’s ‘ecological awareness’. In this cross-cultural setting, the narrator emphasised that this consciousness requires a shared involvement between various carers and suggested that non-Aboriginal people should be eco-conscious. This is unlike the case of the past when Dreaming stories were solely a template for Noongar people, as it was not a means to engage with non-Aboriginal ‘outsiders’. The story (Figure 5.2) involves the Wagul, which is the Rainbow Snake that now lives in the Swan River. It is a mythological being found widely across Australia, albeit with local variation of emphasis (Maddock 1978; Elkin 1930). Across Australia, the Rainbow Snake has become ‘an icon of Aboriginal “culture”’, as Merlan (2005: 180) observed. Within Perth’s wider population, the Wagul is probably the most well known Noongar Dreaming being.

Other Noongar Dreaming stories were told to non-Aboriginal people during my fieldwork. During a two-day Noongar cultural awareness workshop held at a Yanchep
National Park, where attendees stayed overnight, participants went outside with Peter, one convenor, who invited all of us to look at the cloudless dark evening sky with a very clear Milky Way. Here is my fieldnote entry:

He pointed to a shadow under the Southern Cross and explained to us that this was the Dreaming Emu. The two pointers mark its neck and the body beneath. He told us briefly about the sky and the Emu. He then showed us the Seven Sisters, another Dreaming story. People listened very carefully, but most of them found difficulty in spotting the Seven Sisters in a sky full of stars. Everyone’s eyes seem to be attracted by the Milky Way, and Peter told another Noongar Dreaming story, the Jundalup story. Jundalup was a woman who saved the little children and gathered them in her long hair, which now forms the Milky Way. Peter explained that, when we see a shooting star, we see the children coming back to sit on earth12 (3: 57).

He talked for an hour; nobody was taking notes, and most of the details were soon forgotten. However, the next day people were still expressing their delight about their evening of learning some Noongar Dreaming stories.

There are a few variations of the Jundalup story in the South-West (Figure 5.3):

John, a Noongar ranger, told another version to a group attending a Noongar tour in Perth. He explained that a man lived in a cave in Wave Rock (340km from Perth), but he was blind and could not go hunting, so to feed himself he ate children. Jundalup put the children in her long blond hair and came to Perth, where she lost a lock of hair, and this became the sand spit at Point Walter—fifty metres away from where we were standing at the time. Jundalup continued her journey and arrived at the Pinnacles where she lost some children from her hair. The children were transformed into rocks as, by being metamorphosed, they could not be eaten (1: 32).

Whereas I observed that Noongar people have only told Noongar Dreaming stories, in Perth the cross-cultural communication of these stories is not limited to those of the Noongar world. Aboriginal religion is more commonly identified in terms of ‘Aboriginal spirituality’ rather than ‘Noongar spirituality’, ‘Walbiri spirituality’ or ‘Bardi spirituality’, for example. Non-Aboriginal respondents who mentioned some of their knowledge nearly always referred it as being simply ‘Aboriginal’. This may be partly explained because the local spiritual perspectives of more distant areas of the state are also a means for non-Indigenous people in Perth to gain knowledge of a generalized Aboriginal spirituality. Whereas the knowledge itself is actually very specific to a location and group, most of the non-Indigenous respondents were exposed

12 Green (1984: 21) noted, ‘There were legends which told that certain stars and planets were previously people and, on summer nights when the southern skies were bright and clear, the star lore was passed down the generations to the children.’

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This place in Kings Park is about stories connected to country.

A long time ago everything here was dark and dim. The twigs and branches of the trees tried to become real. The Wagul, the Great Serpent, was the first thing to become real. But the sky was crushing the Wagul. Everything was dim. Some creatures held the sky up until the Wagul could become real, and could cross the land. The Great Serpent on the ground pushed the mountain, the river, and left the features in the land. The spirits came out of the dark, to the light, to care for the land.

Later, the kangaroo, the emu, the echidna and the goanna started talking, “How do we look after everything?”

They gained more and more information after working thorough many details.

She went, collecting the spirit children, thousands and thousands of them. The man was following her.

She put the children into her hair. The little children were sliding down the strands of her hair. She collected more and more little children. Now her hair was almost full of all the little children. She reached a point 200km north-east, but she realised what she did was wrong, because the little children were put there to care for the future generations. The man was eating them.

When the children touched the land they turned into stone. She shook with emotion. She was punished, lifted higher and higher, until she turned into the Milky Way. The little children smiled and danced. She lit the fire, collected the children to warm, them, and sent the children back.

When we see a shooting star, we don’t make a wish: we say, “One of the little children is coming back. When they touch the ground they are adult, but still spirits.”

Two brothers who belong to the Noongar tribe go to look for food. They chase the game. By lunchtime, they have caught a kangaroo, a goanna and two mountain ducks. They cook the food before they go back to the camp. When they were sitting down, one asked if the other wanted to go out further in the brush.

'Why?' The younger asked.

'Because there is more game there.' The older said.

The younger was reluctant. The older bother asked because he thought it was a good idea. The younger brother kept quite. The older bother got upset and hit his brother, who rolled away and hit the fire with his shoulder.

They fought with spears. There were two footsteps on the ground, but there was no noise at all. It was the great Creator Spirit, who said, ‘Why are you hurting one another?’

Wardang, the Crow, was the older brother. Coolbardi, the Magpie, was the younger brother. Even today, the crow and the magpie will never share a carcass. The crow eats first, and then the magpie afterwards.
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to the beliefs of a multiplicity of groups, each with their different religious traditions. Lara, for example, bought a diary for herself, which states the importance of the Dreaming stories from the Western Desert bloc and explained the concept of the *Jukurrpa* (Plate 5.1). Indeed, the Dreaming is a key concept that unites all Aboriginal groups in Australia, as Morphy (1997: 171-2) noted in discussing Chatwin’s book (1987), ‘the Dreaming, [is] a symbol of difference of Aboriginal society’.

The depiction of Dreaming stories provide an important style of publication that enhances cross-cultural awareness; often in the large format ‘coffee table’ book\(^\text{13}\), which result from academic research, community art centres, commercial and public art galleries. These include books such as *Windows on the Dreaming: Aboriginal paintings in the Australian National Gallery* (Caruana 1989), *Songlines and Dreamings: contemporary Australian Aboriginal painting* (Corbally Stourton 1996), *Aboriginal art and spirituality* (Crumlin and Knight 1995) and *Dreamings: the art of Aboriginal Australia* (Sutton 1988).

The notion of the Dreaming is part of the Aboriginal intercultural knowledge and Noongar Dreaming stories are one illustration of this vast body of knowledge that is often communicated widely around Australia. This is evident in commercial art (e.g. Crumlin and Knight 1995), tourism, on national park signs, or more scholarly publications such as Hume (2002). Some Dreaming stories are communicated quite openly to non-Aboriginal people in the private sphere. For example, a Noongar participant that I had just met told me the Dreaming story about the animosity between the Magpie and the Crow (Figure 5.4) and, when I was at another Noongar man’s house, he depicted to his friend a Noongar Dreaming concerning the Magpie after she commented on these birds that were in the garden. Although many non-Indigenous people lack detailed knowledge of the Dreaming beings, a number of Dreaming stories are shared by Noongar and recognised by non-Aboriginal people as a cultural expression. In this sense, Jundalup, the Wagul and other Dreaming narrations are an element of the intercultural body of knowledge. As I argued earlier in this chapter,

\(^{13}\) My use of the term ‘coffee table book’ is not pejorative; rather, it indicates a style of book that I have noted in many commercial bookshops in Perth, commercial art galleries and on the sitting room tables or shelves of participants interested in the arts. Some of these were purchased by people for whom Aboriginal art is a passion. In other cases, these kinds of books have been given as Christmas or birthday presents to participants.
Aboriginal spirituality has triggered non-Aboriginal interest over a long period, and the recounting of Dreaming stories is recognised by non-Aboriginal people as a cultural icon of Aboriginal culture. As I suggested in the Introduction, the kinds of Noongar knowledge that enter the ‘intercultural’ sometimes focus on what non-Aboriginal people already know about Aboriginal cultures. The recounting of these Dreaming stories, indeed, permits this process to occur because ‘ceremonial activity is widely considered to lie at the heart of Aboriginal culture, to define its difference’, as Povinelli (2002: 265) observed in regard to a Northern Territory Native Title claim.

'Totems'

The concept of the ‘totem’ is a link to the environment and the Dreaming. Toussaint (1987: 103) made reference to some totemic affiliations of Noongar people and historian Crawford and Crawford (2003: 21) argued what Noongar totems meant for non-Aboriginal writers:

> At the beginning of the twentieth century, writers used the term “totem” to describe this link between a person and his or her spirit’s Ancestral Being.

Whereas some Noongar people, and probably many of them, do not know their personal totem, it is commonly seen as part of Noongar culture, as I observed in the field. Some people have mentioned their totemic affiliations in private or public contexts, by saying ‘my totem is ....’ and followed on indicating the name of a local animal, such as the echidna, the emu, the whale or the dolphin. On one occasion, a Noongar man mentioned his totem to his non-Aboriginal work colleague. Two non-Aboriginal political activists, who were keen to know the totem of a Noongar person they knew, also mentioned it to me. ‘Having a totem’ was clearly stated by people as a specific cultural element of being Noongar, although one non-Aboriginal woman has been given a totemic affiliation at a cultural awareness workshop (see Chapter Three). Two Noongar participants identified their totem only late in life and one of them spoke about this in cultural awareness workshops.

Some Noongar people have referred to their totemic affiliations at various cultural awareness workshops. Indeed, saying ‘my totem is the echidna’, for example, is becoming a cross-culturally recognized feature of Noongar culture; but it is also a broader assertion of Aboriginal identity. One workshop aimed to improve the cultural
Plate 5.1 An example of communication of Aboriginal spirituality

Jukurrpa is the Warlpiri spelling of the word which means ‘Dreaming’, ‘Story’ or ‘Law’ in some Central Australian languages. All life and the laws by which people live were created in the Jukurrpa by the ancestral beings who made the land and whose essence remains in the land. (Institute of Aboriginal Development 2004: back cover)

Plate 5.2 Burning native vegetation to bring good spirits

Burning of a *balga* tree at the public Opening Ceremony, PIAF 2004.

Bushes for collection at City Beach to ‘smoke’ a Noongar participant’s home in Nedlands, in order to bring good spirits.
knowledge of people working for a government art institution, as they were dealing with Aboriginal art works. Martin, one Noongar speaker, mentioned his totem and explained:

...about spiritual totem.... Some family have spiritual rights. My grandfather’s totem is a frog. If I go to Brisbane and someone has a frog totem too, well, that’s your brother, or your mum, for example (9: 61).

Martin’s totemic affiliation enables him to identify a commonality with Aboriginal people from other areas, and in some ways to differentiate himself from the wider Australian population which has no totems. The notion of people having a totemic affiliation is recognised by both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people as being a key feature of Aboriginal Australian society, very different to that of non-Indigenous societies. Whereas for some people (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) the statement of totemic identity by may be seen as an exaltation toward an ‘exotic identity’—however, never so clearly expressed—I suggest for some others it is, rather, a statement of asserting a local Noongar identity, part of broader Aboriginality but different to that of the mainstream. In terms of the co-construction of the intercultural knowledge, it is essential to bear in mind that, because the notion is known by everyone (Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal), totemic affiliations are a significant aspect of intercultural knowledge about Aboriginal culture in general.

Noongar spirit beings

In various settings (private and public, cross- and inter-cultural) Noongar people have clearly spoken about the spirits of Dreaming beings, as well as the spirits of past ancestors, as they continue to occupy the South-West landscape. They interact from time to time with human beings, by showing their presence through smells, noises and the unusual behaviour of particular bush creatures (birds, kangaroos), or even domestic animals (dogs or cats). This is very much part of Noongar culture.14

Noongar people have unambiguously enunciated that spirits are much more part of their everyday life than is the case for non-Indigenous people. It is not uncommon for Noongar people to comment about non-Aboriginal people as being unaware of the

presence of spirits. At a two-hour tour around the Fremantle area offered by DIA during NAIDOC week, the Noongar Elder stopped at some caves, the entrance of which is now blocked. He explained to the audience:

At the beginning of the colony, settlers heard some voices in these caves but did not know what it was, but Noongar people used to smoke them in order to send away the spirits (6: 105).

Within Noongar culture, human beings and spirits live in proximity with each other. This notion was often communicated at various cultural awareness events, as Noongar people made numerous references to the surrounding spirits. Convenors acknowledged, or invited, the good spirits and distanced less friendly ones by cleansing acts such as the burning of native bushes (Plate 5.2). At a one-day workshop organised for the employees of a government department, one convenor started the day with a didgeridoo performance. He introduced it by saying:

The didgeridoo came into use to Perth about 1970. I play it to bring the good spirits (2: 158).

In Noongar culture, spirits are more than ‘just around’; they communicate cultural knowledge to people. Some Noongars who were taught by spiritual beings have explained their learning-process to non-Aboriginal people. For example, Peter (convenor) made a brief reference at a workshop to the spirit of his grandfather who had passed away, but who still comes to provide his grandchild with some support and knowledge:

My grandfather comes and teaches me something every night (9: 54).

This mirrored the comments of Ralph Taylor (Noongar poet and novelist). At a PIAF event, Ralph discussed his writing and said to the audience of fifteen people:

My ancestors guide my life, they put me here and they guide me (2: 7).

It is a social reality that there has been a gap in the transmission of knowledge due to the Stolen Generation. To fill the gap of knowledge people go to see an Elder, read early records such as the works of Daisy Bates, or are helped by spirits. To achieve the cross-cultural recognition of Noongar culture, it is more effective to tell non-Indigenous people, ‘my grandfather’s spirit is teaching me my culture, because mum was taken away and don’t know’ rather than to say, ‘I read Daisy Bates and early anthropological works’. In other words, the non-Aboriginal listeners tend to see spirit-teaching as being cultural, which is unlike the essays of a pioneer and colonial anthropologist who had been heavily challenged by a number of people (Noongar and non-Aboriginal). Some
Noongar people, however, are relying on both (spirit and early works), but one is kept in the background but not fully hidden. Whereas people have not explicitly spoken about their motivations underlying this (as I did not investigate this), I suggest that this diffuse intergenerational cultural break-up and distance this learning from what could be termed ‘cultural re-vitalisation’ and the like. Indeed, it ‘culturalises’ such learning—that is, this grounds learning in traditional Aboriginal practices. The presence of spirits is an element of Noongar cultures and non-Aboriginal participants acknowledged this as so, which resonates with the dialogical process treated in the previous chapter. However, here I discuss some issues about the reception of the presence of spirits.

Noongar people often refer to spirits, and this occurs in many contexts. Spirits can be custodians of a place and ensure that human beings are behaving in a culturally appropriate manner. If people misbehave, spirits can punish them, even when they are non-Aboriginal people (which illustrates the extend of cross-cultural engagement). For example, a Noongar guide explained to non-Indigenous people at a cultural awareness tour in a national park:

You can touch the artefacts but don’t take any with you. It is dangerous and the spirits can punish you (9: 76).

He did not detail his comments nor did he explain what kind of punishment the spirits may inflict on people. This reminds me of Rita (Noongar), who said to me that once she went to a place of significance and took a stone. She had a very strong headache until she realised the cause of it and took back the stone. Her headache then disappeared.

I have many field notes that illustrate cross-cultural communication of the importance of spirits. Indeed, Noongar people referred to spirits at most cross-cultural events, if not all. For example, at one occasion, a ranger told the non-Indigenous participants:

Aboriginal people do not look into the eyes of people as this could steal their spirit (3: 72).

Giving credence to spirits is an element of the intercultural body of knowledge. Whereas the cross-cultural communication of spirit activity asserts Noongar culture, recipients have shown alternative responses. The theme of spirituality provides me with the opportunity to illustrate, more clearly than any of the other themes, the cultural input of the recipient in the co-construction of intercultural knowledge; each theme addressed in Part Two is showing clearly some specific aspects of the cultural dialogue. Indeed,
the agency of spiritual beings is accepted by non-Aboriginal people as part of Noongar culture and, on this ground, has become part of the ‘intercultural’; however, responses and reactions varied from disbelief to acceptance. A number of non-Aboriginal people had expressed some disapproving views about this, and others were very responsive to it. In other words, some non-Aboriginal people believe in the existence of Noongar spirits whilst others do not.

**Being receptive to Noongar spiritual knowledge**

Unlike the previous chapters, where there was a readily identifiable trend (e.g. Noongar language is appreciated as an expression of culture, whereas Aboriginal English is not), there is a fairly even split between those who are sympathetic and those who are negatively disposed to Noongar spiritual beliefs. In other words, I observed a polarity of beliefs amongst non-Aboriginal people. Some will respect, and even embrace, Aboriginal spiritual beliefs, whereas other non-Aboriginal people will be dismissive about them, sometimes by regarding them as a kind folk tale for children. As in any kind of generalization, however, it difficult to establish a definite binary classification.

At first glance, many participants have shown a superficial receptivity in regard to Aboriginal spirituality. One man, for example, said to me after a cultural awareness workshop:

> Aboriginal way of looking at the land.... This guy telling me the story of the echidna, that’s what attracted me. His enthusiasm. The way it’s my land too and to hear the spiritual story was very nice (5: 118).

I have commented repeatedly that non-Aboriginal people were more receptive to cultural features for which they have a degree of familiarity, an understanding. Throughout Part Two, I suggest that cultural dialogue requires a kind of common ground to facilitate and to create an intercultural body of knowledge. Having discussed earlier in this chapter the long-standing interest of non-Aboriginal people in Aboriginal spirituality, which makes this knowledge readily accepted, I am now posing another question: Are there some cultural explanations that lead some non-Aboriginal Australians to have an interest for Aboriginal spirituality, whilst others reject it? This concern echoes Kolig’s insightful paper (1996) that discussed non-Aboriginal understanding of the notion of Aboriginal sacred sites, by observing a parallel with
ancient Austrian traditions. He also commented that there is ‘a fashionable trend now to re-discover such places of folklore and pre-history’ (Kolig 1996: 357).

Some people with whom I talked, as well as some scholars (e.g. Tacey 2000: 139, 156), have perceived a kind of proximity between Anglo-Celtic and Aboriginal cultures. This is also evident through lay publications that find pathways between Aboriginal spirituality and those of people with Celtic ancestries (e.g. Fox et al. 1991: 10). One participant, for example, noted to me, “I’m Irish; I believe in spirits, like Aboriginal people.” For others, it was more of a general belief in the existence, and presence, of supernatural beings. For example, the following participant commented, ‘My sister believes in Aboriginal spirits, but also in ghosts.’ More broadly, participants who were appreciative of Noongar spirituality tend to accept spirits and ghosts in their own culture. This is something actually present in the wider Australian culture. Indeed, as Gelder and Jacobs (1998: 31) reminded us, ‘Australia has a ghost of its own, of course: the bunyip. There have been a number of stories, usually by non-Aboriginal writers’.

Witchcraft, also referred to as magic, sorcery or wizardry, was practiced in Europe and, surprisingly or not, still is in some Western countries (see Hume 1997 for Australia; Favret-Sadaa 1980 for France; Luhrmann 1989 for England). It is worth noting that Levack (1987: 232) observed that 20th century witchcraft has gained a degree of social appreciation, and witches are no longer ‘named by other people’, unlike their sixteenth and seventeenth century counterparts. The status is now a self-proclaimed one15.

I suggest that there is a convergence of cultural patterns between Noongar spirituality and Western non-Christian traditional beliefs. Indeed, witchcraft has a long-term presence in Western cultures and Ogden (2002, 1999) investigated the practice of magic by ancient Greeks and Romans16. During European middle age, witchcraft remained a form of spirituality. Historians (Ankarloo and Clark 2002; Peters 2002; Kors and Peters 1992; Thomas 1971; Briggs 1996; Davidson 1993; Kies 1986; Zika 1998; Bostridge

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15 Levack (1987: 116-136) gave a profile of early witches, who tended to be unmarried women, mostly over fifty and of lower economic status, whereas now they tend to be ‘well educated, middle-class people who have nice homes and doctorates—people you wouldn’t classify as cultural drop-outs’ (Levack 1987: 233; see also Luhrmann 1989:17).

1997; Gibson 1999; Rowlands 2003; Lea 1957; Monter 1976) and anthropologists (Stewart and Strathern 2004; Baroja 1961) have investigated various occurrences of witchcraft activities in European cultures—although most surviving historical evidence of past witchcraft practices is based on records of trials that actually condemned them, as the church opposed witchcraft activities (Lea 1957: 107-8; Stewart and Strathern 2004: 142). Briggs (1996: 398) noted about the prevalence of witchcraft European history, ‘Witches were people you lived with’, and villagers and small town dwellers ‘almost certainly believed some of their neighbours to be witches’ (Briggs 1996: 400). Eliade (1985: 221) observed their continuing significance in the history of European religious beliefs in various ‘symbioses and religious syncretisms’.

Discussing religious beliefs in the Middle-Age, Barber (2004: 376) pointed to the relationships between human beings and other creatures natural or supernatural. Holmes (1984: 105), investigated witchcraft in England in the 16th and 17th centuries and wrote, ‘Witchcraft ... entails the manipulation of the forces of the animal world’. This spiritual knowledge is rooted in the Western world and as ghost, spirits, and the like, are still mentioned in Australian culture. This provides a pathway for engagement and a common ground on which the co-construction of the intercultural occurs, as I have discussed. This may explain why some participants were very responsive to recognise and even to practise ritual that keep disturbing spirits at a distance. For example, Lisa recently married a Noongar man and wanted to do a smoking ceremony for the baby she was expecting. She added, ‘Mum thinks it’s wonderful.’ Another fieldwork example is the case of a non-Aboriginal theatrical director who told me that, before the opening night of an Aboriginal play:

We smoked the theatre before we did the show. It’s also a sense of invoking the spirit of the place. One of my friends had just died. When we did the smoking, I spoke to his spirit, I called him, and said, ‘Come and see the show’ (5: 116).

17 Witchcraft was used for a variety of purposes including healing, for ‘recovery of stolen goods’ (Thomas 1971: 213), ‘to win at cards... or to escape arrest’ (Thomas 1971: 231), to ‘recover money owed by a kinsman’ (p. 231), in order to make ‘love charms’ (p. 233) and for ‘fortune telling’ (p. 237) See also Briggs (1996: 398).

18 See Levack (1987), who investigated witch-hunts in Europe between 1450 to 1750, and Kieckhefer (1976), who focussed on the period of the 14th and 16th centuries. The practices were associated with devilish intentions, as Notestein (1911: 2) noted: ‘The word was the current English term for one who used spells and charms, who was assisted by evil spirits to accomplish certain ends’.
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Disbelieving the existence of Noongar spirit beings

There is, however, a certain ambiguity in Western ideas about witchcraft and, more generally supernatural activity. For example, Jeanne Favret-Sadaa, who investigated witchcraft practices in contemporary French society, observed, ‘The geographical and cultural “isolation” of the Bocage is partly responsible for the “survival” of these “beliefs” in our time’ (Favret-Sadaa 1980: 3). However, she also acknowledged the ‘public’s immense curiosity, the fascination produced by the very word “witchcraft”, the guaranteed success of anything written about it’ (p. 4).

Witchcraft is not politically, socially and religiously condemned, as it was in medieval Europe, but some people seem to be extremely sceptical about it and see it as something lacking rationality. This tendency is also rooted in Western cultures. Philosophers such as Hobbes and Locke refuted the ability of spirits to be able to engage with the human-world as practitioners of witchcraft said they do (Thomas 1971: 571). Since the Renaissance, Western scientific rationality has put the emphasis on empirical methods, and some thinkers deny supernatural manifestations (Trigg 1998: 73). In contemporary Western cultures, witchcraft activities have, for some people, an undertone of ‘primitivism’, as evident, for example, in the writings of Kieckhefer (1976: 1) who declared, ‘In early European society, as in primitive cultures, one finds a lack of rigidity in the notion of causality’.

In the field, I recorded a number of participants whose comments mirrored this ambiguity that the Western world has with supernatural engagements between the human and animal worlds, or living beings and the dead. Some people disbelieved elements of Noongar spirituality as they could not accept that spirits can appear to human and can guide them, for example. During my fieldwork, I encountered some participants who had negative views about this, and regarded it as something ‘untrue’, ‘superstition’ or even ‘humbug’, to quote a number of sceptics. Others did not always express themselves with words, but pulled a face, rolled their eyes or smiled sarcastically when the topic was mentioned. Noongar people were aware of such disbelief. Peter, for example, added after having mentioned the help of his grandfather’s spirit who comes to teach him:

You can send me to Graylands [Perth’s mental hospital]. But I’m normal, we are spiritual in our culture (9: 104).
Most of the time, people did not really condemn Noongar spirituality. Their perception of it was more ambivalent; in some ways they appreciated that Noongar people believe in the presence of spirits whilst, on the other hand, they disbelieved the scientific rationality of such manifestations and beliefs.

I conducted participant observation at a day-long cultural awareness tour organized by UWA for exchange students at a National Park. In the bus, going back to University, one of the students (Nick) was very surprised that the ranger believed in the power that spirits have on living human beings:

The ranger told us he was not from this area. He’s from Katanning [pseud.]. He doesn’t want to overstep the boundaries and be disrespectful to people from York [pseud.]. He doesn’t want to be here at night because it’s not his land, and he hasn’t got the permission from people from this area. He said that wild things happen at night. If things happen, it will be at night. He doesn’t want the spirits to punish him. He didn’t talk about what kind of punishment. He said that other people had heard spirits at night. That was the most surprising revelation, this comment about not staying at night. He’s a practical person still capable of attending to spiritual things. A lot of people would see this as superstition. I was surprised to hear about it. I was surprised, it is a way of life that doesn’t correspond to my way of life (2: 97).

I met Jeremy a year after Nick. He had recently gained some cultural awareness after working for a few weeks with Noongar people in a Noongar government organization. Some of his colleagues started talking about spirits one afternoon. A couple of days later, Jeremy spoke to me about his thoughts on the conversation, which oscillated between a feeling of dismissal and a certain pride in being trusted by his Noongar colleagues:

My first experience was a profound experience. Noongar people were talking about spiritual things. In other contexts, I would be suspicious but they were sharing these things with me. They were talking of some spiritual experiences, seeing a spirit like you and me. It was remarkable. They were willing to talk and had no fear of being judged. I was feeling I was being trusted by Noongars.

Q: Could you tell me more about it?
I felt a slight difference than being trusted by Wadjelas. It has to do with the power relationship. Because even though I might be associated with the power they still accept me. Maybe it disconnected me with colonial imperialism (15: 53).

Whereas I have illustrated that Noongar Dreaming stories have been commonly shared in cross-cultural settings, and that many respondents saw these stories as icons of Aboriginal cultures, there are also some non-Aboriginal people who regarded them as being directed towards a young audience. As a result of such perceptions among the
wider Australian society, there are many books published that narrate Dreaming stories for a youth market. A participant recalled the children’s books of Dreaming stories that her parents gave her:

‘Why does the Wombat live on the ground?’ The wombat stood so high that it got burned by the sun. There were mega-fauna in Australia, and this was a way of telling me the history of this country. My parents were very conservative, but Dreaming stories were harmless, they weren’t political, they didn’t say anything about the history of Australia. I was allowed access to this [despite her parents’ attitudes], because my parents agreed that they were beautiful’ (13: 101).

Having just illustrated that some non-Aboriginal people I met in the field have shown mixed responses to Noongar spirituality, I now illustrate that some knowledge is omitted from a cross-cultural setting, and is not communicated equally to all. Indeed, Noongar spirituality is often mentioned, not just as a means of asserting a sense of a cultural identity that is different to those of the non-Aboriginal Australians and overseas visitors, but may simply be an expression of everyday culture in the 21st century. However, it is worth noting that some Noongar people have not talked openly about some spiritual features.

**Keeping knowledge**

A corpus of spiritual knowledge remains untold in cross-cultural settings or to ‘outsiders’, i.e. those with whom special bonds of friendship or trust have not been established. This includes some Dreaming stories or references to spirit beings, for example. One day during my fieldwork, I had a conversation with a Noongar Elder who told me a Dreaming story associated with a bushland park in the Perth metropolitan area. The tape recorder was running, and I was also taking notes. Although he was happy for me to record an earlier Dreaming story, he said, before commencing another the story to which I am now referring, ‘Could you stop taking notes and stop the recorder?’ (14: 94).

The idea of having this section is problematic. My intention is to illustrate that knowledge spoken about openly does not necessarily concern all aspects of the culture. I lack data to assert whether there are formal rules of what can be told or not (see Bourdieu 1977 on the notion of rule); however, I observed that some knowledge about spirits helping humans, or of being dangerous to them, is not discussed with ‘outsiders’.
The activities of some spirits remain discussed only in a subdued manner, and it would be considered inappropriate, not to say dangerous, to mention these matters at night or too loudly. Having said this, I feel uncomfortable to write about what was not discussed openly; however, it is important to understand that cultural communication has some implicit practices to determine what can be said, and what cannot be said.

An example is Tonkinson’s (1962) reference to the *marmarie* man. I face a problem in discussing his activities as I never witnessed this spirit being discussed freely. I am aware that a local Noongar artist has painted scenes relating to the *marmarie* man. These artworks have been exhibited for sale in a West Perth art gallery. Details about the *marmarie* man remain private. Indeed, one Noongar elder said to me that some Noongar people might not know the specific activities and intentions associated with this spirit being (Notepad 6). There are problems with what is discussed privately by some, yet publicly by others. When can some things be talked about when I know that other families, or other groups, do not discuss them? Discussing this issue with anthropologist John Stanton, he noted:

> In the Western Desert, people are constantly negotiating what can be talked about to outsiders, and what may not. Some things, like the very secret-sacred, are inviolate. At least at the moment. But other things may, or may not, be included in the public repertoire. And this is discussed, negotiated, often at great length, just what can be talked about, or displayed, publicly, and what may not.

In Noongar country, I am not sure how these issues are being negotiated, but what I am sure about is that a lot of Noongar convenors of cultural awareness workshops are seeking advice from Noongar elders about cultural issues, including what they may or may not be able to talk about publicly. People often say, ‘We’ve got to talk to the Elders about it’. People have consulted Elders, since these are the individuals who are seen by the Noongar community as holders of cultural knowledge, and the people who define the content of knowledge that can be communicated. As soon a Noongar people are in a setting where they feel they should not talk, or that it might be disrespectful to the community, or that they might step beyond what they are allowed to do, reference will be made to the need for an Elder’s guidance, as Elders are the only individuals who have the right to potentially, at least, talk on behalf of a Noongar community (see Trigger 1997 on the issue of elders holding knowledge in the Gulf country). There are no overt rules about defining what is permissible, however. When something has been
discussed a few times publicly, it then becomes a subject of public intercultural knowledge, because people know they can then talk openly about it.

More than finding an answer to pinpoint the reason for the withholding of elements of spiritual knowledge, I can only suggest from my fieldwork that this practice raises one issue—that is, the act of cultural sharing that is not fully transparent. This may be a key mechanism in the preservation of cultural identity and social status within the community. It would be totally unrealistic for anyone to expect that they could learn the totality of a culture; without that there is a zone of exclusive knowledge—here, a sense of limit in cross-cultural engagement. Indeed, many non-Indigenous people hold a partial degree of cultural awareness and, therefore lack of awareness about the importance of spirits in everyday Noongar life. Participants who are engaging cross-culturally have often gained this awareness through everyday mundane activities. For example, Doris recounted to her Noongar and non-Aboriginal friends the appearance of a spirit on the side of a road. The spirit caused the driver to slow down, which was very fortunate as a Police speed trap was in place just 300m later. This is how they avoided being fined for driving over the limit on a country road. The spirits are present in the world of the everyday, and only on-going cross-cultural engagements would reveal this to non-Aboriginal people. From my fieldwork, as well as my own experience, I suggest that it is through the multiplicity of interactions with Noongar (or more generally Aboriginal) people that non-Aboriginal individuals are gaining a refined awareness of the culture(s).

I have illustrated that the intercultural body of knowledge is co-constructed with, and dependent on, non-Aboriginal spiritual beliefs. It is worth re-noting that I focus on the non-Aboriginal underlying cultural principles that influence the reception of Noongar knowledge following the cross-cultural communication of South-West Aboriginal culture; an investigation of how Noongar culture shapes the content of the intercultural in regard to Noongars engagements with non-Aboriginal knowledge would be valuable.
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The environment

The landscape has important meanings in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures, albeit very different ones (Ingold 2005: 166)\(^{19}\). In this section, I show that it provides material for cross-cultural communication, especially because both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have long-attached significance to their surrounding environments. The theme of the environment is the fourth area of engagement that I analyse. It has its own particular cross-cultural dynamics and the bush provides me with an additional opportunity to understand further the notion of intercultural discourse.

Broadly speaking, most (not to say all) Aboriginal people across Australia no longer rely on the environment to sustain everyday activities, but the centrality of the land in Aboriginal cultures remains; this is widely recognized (Tehan 1996: 274; Mardiros 1997: 29-30; Mulcock 2002; Trigger 2006: 25)\(^{20}\). In the past, the land (that is, ‘the bush’) was at the core of Noongar culture: it linked people to places, it was the key to spiritual understanding, it sustained everyday hunting and gathering activities, as well as health practices. Areas of land of the South-West were owned by culturally recognised and defined social groups, such as the Bibbulmun and the Yuat\(^{21}\). Today, the land is still viewed as a central feature of Noongar culture. Regional affiliations with specific ‘countries’\(^{22}\) (Berndt 1964; Tindale 1976: 28; Peterson 1976) are an important value in Noongar culture (Birdsall 1990: 149-50; Keen 2004: 155-6). These specific affiliations are asserted by some Noongar families, who place great value on these earlier connections with land. For others the processes of history and the colonial encounter have muddied such particular backgrounds. The land, however, represents a source of inspiration (see M. Tonkinson 1990: 196 for a broader Australian perspective) and its

\(^{19}\) Whereas Noongar people have not been hunter-gatherers for a long time, it is worth quoting Ingold (2005: 166) who argued that people from hunter-gather societies have a different relationship to the land. Among these differences, he suggested, for example, people ‘do not generally distinguish human from nonhuman components of the environment’. He added, ‘hunter-gatherers do not occupy the land, they \textit{inhabit it}’ (p. 172, emphasis in original).

\(^{20}\) Aboriginal linkages with the land are recognised both under Native Title, and earlier by Western Australia’s \textit{Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972} (see, for example, Aboriginal Land Rights Commission 1974). As Avery (1993: 117) noted, ‘[d]uring the 1960s the preservation of Aboriginal sites entered the progressive agenda…. It is obvious that the value of sites preservation here is conceived in national and historical terms.’ (for more literature on Aboriginal Heritage see, for example Dillon 1990; Mardiros 1997; Moore 1999; Ritchie 1994; Ritter 2003).


\(^{22}\) To use the term in the Aboriginal sense.
significance for Aboriginal people is often communicated to non-Indigenous Australians. For example, a Noongar ranger of a national park informed a group of visitors, ‘If people are removed from the land, they get sick’.

Indeed, Noongar connectedness with the Australian bush is uncontestedly rooted in the South-West, both in bushland and the city—a cultural feature that is widely recognised in the broader community. An example of this is Helen Bell’s book *Idjhil* (1996), written by a non-Indigenous novelist, which is structured around numerous references to the importance of the land and the place of Noongar people within it. It includes comments such as ‘the Land was at one with the people’ (p. 8); ‘... and the Land worked with its people’ (p. 20). Bell’s writing and her understanding of Noongar culture echoes Rose’s (1996b: 7) statement about Aboriginal perceptions of country:

People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country.

A vast number of non-Aboriginal participants were aware of the Aboriginal sense of connection with the landscape, making comments such as, ‘Aboriginal people are in tune with nature’. Other people were more explicit in discussing the topic:

I was interested in Aboriginal culture. It brings a sense of wonder to European society. It explains about the Australian landscape, the birds, the seasons. Growing up in a farm, I had a connection with the land and Aboriginal culture brings a sense of wonder because it explains things. The black cockatoo flying to Perth means rain, a hill represents a pregnant woman. That’s very basic things of Aboriginal culture (15: 112).

Lattas (1992: 52) also raised this issue, observing that ‘[m]any authors emphasise the haunting emptiness of the Australian landscape as a fear which whites must overcome’. Tacey’s (1995: 150) writing communicate this feeling, especially when he opposed Aboriginal meaningful connections to the landscape with Euro-Australian ones that he viewed as:

We feel isolated, lonely, rootless, disconnected. Nature is at best a dead background to our human endeavours, at worst a surreal or nightmare projection from our own heads. This alienation is hardly a recent phenomenon, but is a culmination of a long historical process in Western European cultures.

Unlike the present day situation, it may be useful to note that Green (1984: i) observed that at the time of first settlement, ‘European settlers were at a loss to understand the Aborigines’ affinity with the land’. However, non-Aboriginal people have always acknowledged Aboriginal people’s bush skills. Since the beginning of the colony,
settlers relied on Aboriginal knowledge of, and expertise in regard to, the bush (e.g. reading tracks, locating of waterholes, finding edible food). A number of Aboriginal people worked, as some still do, on stations and farms and, many non-Indigenous people in Australia know of Aboriginal bush skills. A participant whose family operates a pastoral station in the Kimberley confirmed this recognition of Aboriginal empathy with the environment:

People want to know if we still employ Aboriginal stockmen. They like the idea of it. There's a notion that Aboriginal people have an affinity with the countryside, horses, the cattle. It's true, they do amazing things with horses and cattle and they have knowledge of country. They [non-Indigenous people] like to think Aboriginal people have an affinity with the land (12: 110).

Whereas Aboriginal connection with the land is widely acknowledged and cross-culturally appreciated, there is a common discourse amongst some non-Indigenous people and writers who assert that Western cultures have never created a sense of connection with the environment. Before addressing issues of cross-cultural engagement, I review some of the existing meanings about the natural environment in Euro-cultures, as these have strongly influenced Australian values. I suggest that this subsequently shapes the content of the intercultural body of knowledge as this provides a common ground for dialogue.

**The importance accorded to the environment by 'Westerners'**

In order to discuss cross-cultural dialogue around this theme, it is essential to acknowledge the European standpoint on the issue, as it has probably shaped the way the wider Australian society has perceived the landscape over the last two hundred odd years. Indeed, Europeans had already built strong connections with their environments when they colonised Australia and early settlers have brought with them their perspective on the environment (including the naturalisation of foxes and rabbits to replicate English hunting activities).

In the past, and not so distantly, Europeans relied solely on the land for their entire supply of food and medicines (e.g. Opsomer-Halleux 1986; Cambornac 1998 provides

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23 A number of writers refer to the role of Aboriginal people in farming and cattle industries. See, for example, Haebich (1982); Broome (1982:120-42); Shaw (1986) and Berndt (1987).

24 The notion of Terra Nullius is in itself also associated with the environment and people's perceived use of it. Until the recognition of Aboriginal rights of property (following Mabo 1992, NTA 1993, revised 1998), Aboriginal people were not perceived to have property, which justified colonisation of Australia.
brief descriptions on the use of plants during the Middle-Ages), just as Aboriginal people did until relatively recently. Later in this section, I show that Noongar people often talk about bush food and medicines, a corpus of knowledge that non-Aboriginal people enjoy learning about. Indeed, in a very recent past those elements were valued and important to them and have long-been important in the Western world, hence Australian culture.

More relevant in this context are the symbolic meanings and values that Europeans attached to their natural environment, its flora and fauna. Indeed, the attribution of spiritual meaning to the landscape is an enduring cultural feature, as there is evidence of this in ancient Greece, the cradle of Western cultures, which includes Australian culture. Discussing Greek mythology, Baumann (1993: 45) has noted, ‘[t]rees have always been regarded as the first temples of the gods and sacred groves as their first places of worship’. Likewise, in the Celtic pre-Christian tradition, which is not absent from contemporary Australian cultures, ‘Celtic tradition and beliefs are expressed spiritually through the land: the landscape is filled with places where the spirit is present’ (Pennick1996: 13). In ancient Greek orientations, and again in Celtic culture, the landscape was filled with spirits and meanings. I suggest that the shadow of these ancient beliefs provide a cultural pathway that enhances the reception of Noongar culture.

Whereas the Celts valued wildness, Judeo-Christian dogma tamed the wilderness (Brady 1991: 43). Here, human beings are situated under the power of God and above the natural environment that was to be acted upon, but not something to be ignored. The Bible is fundamentally based on this notion of human mastery over nature. As Thomas (1983: 25) noted, ‘Human civilization indeed was virtually synonymous with the conquest of nature.’ The spiritual meaning of the landscape also appeared with the art of the garden and Pizzoni (1997: 13) noted its importance in the three major monotheist religions. The Garden of Eden and the imagery of paradise (present in Judaism, Christianity and Islam) are in themselves strongly grounded on features of the natural

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25 I have no knowledge of how settlers and migrants have re-adapted their vernacular botanical knowledge when they arrived in Australia.
27 'One of Arab culture’s most alluring gifts to European culture was the garden. The very concept is an integral part of both Islamic philosophy and religion. As with the two other monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianity, in the culture of Islam the connection between garden and paradise is very close: the Koran itself defines paradise as a garden.'
environment (Hoyles 1991: 263; Hales 2000: 10-11). Moreover, McLean (1981: 120) noted that St Augustine said, "Paradise... is a place where there are trees growing"; whereas Koolemans Beynen (1990) discussed the symbolism concerning the significant animal presence in the Garden of Eden.

Natural environments are not solely associated with spiritual enlightenment. Their symbolism remains prevalent in a more recent and secular time. For example, Stickells (2004: 2) discussed the idea that gardens and parks were a means of promoting social well-being in England around the turn of the nineteenth century, which is when Anglo settlement began in Australia. Gardens and parks often symbolise social wealth too. In Australia, many mansions and government estates have large gardens, and a number of wealthy properties are facing parks. The prestige attributed to parklands is an enduring feature of the Western world; as Plumptre (2005: 6) noted, the royal gardens of Europe were 'one of the best ways of providing such evidence of both their power and their prestige.'

With this background, it is not surprising that non-Aboriginal settlers and European migrants have carried with them some cultural values attached to natural landscapes, and have paid attention to these (see also Morton and Smith 1999: 168 on the transformation of the landscape). For over 200 years, Australian land has been the source of inspiration for non-Indigenous people. For example, it is commonplace to note that art is an expression of culture. The importance of the Australian landscape is demonstrated through the vast corpus of paintings that depicts it (e.g. John Glover), as 'from the earliest days of European settlement the landscape has dominated Australian painting' (Australian Art Library 1973: 7). This endured over a lengthy period (Bruce 1979: 55). Reading Australian writers (e.g. Jolley, Chatwin, Stow, Winton), I also observed that they have also made numerous references to the bush, its flora and fauna. On a more mundane stance, commercial designs, Australian postage stamps, postcards, home decorations (pottery, woodwork, embroidered items, etc.) have extensively used the iconography of kangaroo, kookaburra, balga tree and others features of the

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29 Today, the Aboriginal art market partly fulfils this interest.
Australian bush, something which appears to have happened since the early days of Euro-settlement (Hooper 1982; Cozzolino and Rutherford 1990).

Non-Aboriginal Australians themselves have created some linkages with the bush. The image of an Australian iconic character ‘intimately connected with the bush’ (Ward 1992:181) was essentially a construction of nineteenth-century city-dwellers (Davison 1992)\(^30\). It has symbolically shaped the expression of Australian identity. Moreover, the legend of Ned Kelly was ‘almost a generation too late for the heyday of bushranging during the 1860s’; however, ‘Ned Kelly was the last rural hero’ (Seal 1980: 16-7), and today this story remains a heroic Australian legend. Glynn (1992: 229-30) questioned why, with one of the world’s highest rates of urbanization, the Australian character is based on the bush; he calls attention to the larrikin as a city-dweller alternative to the stockman or the ‘bush hero’.

That some non-Aboriginal people attached value to the Australian environment was clearly demonstrated throughout my fieldwork. Some non-Aboriginal participants, mainly people from rural areas, felt strong connections with the Australian bush on which they base their sense of identity, although it may be of a different kind to that of Aboriginal people, and less frequently recognised:

> England was my home, that is how I was brought up. When I got there, I realised it wasn’t my culture. I wasn’t European in any way. We were gumnut babies in Albany, we were living close to the bushland, where we spent days. We were connected with the Australian bush, playing with wildflowers, pretending that we were living off the land (13: 100).

Today, most people in Australia live in the cities along the coasts, and some participants have never ‘experienced’ the outback (see King 2005: 355 for similar observations in Victoria) and may not express their identity in connections with Australian bushland. For example, I met a Perth woman who has had to go to remote Australia for work. She had never gone in the bush before because she thought it was ‘just red dust’. She preferred ‘to socialise in trendy cafes’ or ‘to go shopping in Melbourne’; however, she thought that the ‘bush is quite beautiful’.

\(^{30}\) See also Walter (1992: 15).
A number of scholars have investigated the sense of ‘belonging’ within settler societies (Read 2000; Bonyhady & Griffiths 2002; Probyn 2002; Cameron 2003)\textsuperscript{31}; as indeed, Australian nature triggers some interest within non-Indigenous communities. For some scholars, it is the notion of autochthony within settler communities that is at stake. Trigger and Mulcock (2005a: 1301) ‘aim to better understand the connections between nature and culture in a settler-descendant society, focusing on contested views about “indigeneity” and “belonging” ’, whilst Lattas (1992), as well as Morton and Smith (1999), discussed the role of the landscape in nationalist discourse in Australia. Separately, Smith (1999: 3) even posed the question, ‘how and why is that indigenous nature exerts such a huge influence on the settler-Australian imagination?’

For participants from overseas (e.g. people visiting Australian, exchange students, expatriates) the Australian bush could not be a means to answer questions about their own identity and belonging; however, a number of these people have expressed an interest in the Australian bush and commented in a similar vein to Monique, a Swedish visitor: ‘My interest in Australia is that there is a frontier, there are areas in nature that are still untouched, all of those things’. A Dutch man said about the Australian landscape:

> Aboriginal culture belongs to the landscape. In Holland it’s all man-made. There’s not a centimetre of real nature (14: 87).

The symbolism attached to the natural environment by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is an important feature to keep in mind when investigating the intercultural knowledge concerning the native environment. Here, there is a convergence of cultural patterns. Beyond major cultural differences, the land has meaning for both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people; as is, for example, evident in Read (2000: 82) who wrote: ‘I never felt I had a strong sense of belonging until I worked with Aboriginal people’. Such powerful identity statements indicate that some kinds of cross-cultural communication have already been established between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people about the theme of the ‘natural’ environment—in lay terms, ‘the bush’. Rose (2005: 295) noted, ‘The subjectivity of “nature” is a prime

example of an area for constructive dialogue in which Indigenous people and Westerners could engage.'

However, the cross-cultural communication of the environmental theme remains at times contentious. In the specific context of land claims, which is a setting of cross-cultural discussions about the land, Madiros (1997: 34) observed:

Experience has shown, in fact, that problems in translating the indigenous concepts of land tenure occur before the cases even get to court. Lawyers acting for indigenous groups may themselves be ill-equipped to argue the specifics of particular cases because of their own cultural blinders.

There is little doubt that the natural environment has meaning for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but which kind of knowledge is communicated cross-culturally?

**Noongar knowledge of bush products**

Some Noongar people hold a wide range of knowledge associated with the bush, and this is often shared in cross-cultural settings (e.g. cultural awareness workshops, Noongar tours) or on more private occasions. A non-Aboriginal woman who has recently started a relationship with a Noongar man said to me that her friends and family are now gaining a degree of cultural awareness because of her Noongar boyfriend:

> My partner is proud of his culture. He tells people about his culture. My friends find it educational. They have limited contact. My husband showed them bush food. They were really excited. They have spent a lot of time in the bush, but they didn’t know (6: 54).

Knowledge about the bush is detailed amongst some Noongar people, especially those with an interest in Noongar heritage. This is often conveyed through the identification and use of native plants in a multiplicity of ways within cross-cultural settings. One form of knowledge about these plants concerns herbal remedies to cure sickness and ensure good health. From my fieldwork at cross-cultural events, I learnt many things about Noongar botanical knowledge:

- In the old days when someone had a cold, Noongar people burnt a wet branch of a peppermint tree and the sick person inhaled the smoke to heal his/her cold and clear sick people’s chest.
- The red gum is also an antiseptic that was used as a filling for a sore tooth. It was also made into powder mixed with water and swallowed in case of food poisoning. Red gum healed injuries. It was then powdered, put on the wound and bound with eucalyptus leaves and string.
The gum from the marri tree has an antiseptic quality and was used as an alternative treatment for a sore tooth.

Noongar people continued to rely on ‘bush food’ long after their first contact with non-Aboriginal settlers. Knowledge about hunting-gathering bush food is part of Noongar cultural heritage; it may, or may not, still be practised (comparable to aspects of non-Indigenous cultural heritage that are still practised whilst others are not). On this issue a participant said to me, ‘as a man in Noongar way we were given special things to learn.... how to hunt for large game or berries’ (14: 94). This bush knowledge remained very much part of the cultural background of many Noongar people and was often communicated to outsiders:

- The female Zamia (a local cycad palm) tree bears bright red nuts the size of a small apricot. Unprepared, these nuts are extremely poisonous. Noongar people soaked them in a stream of water for several days, leaching out the toxin, after which they become perfectly edible (see also Green 1984: 14). The seeds were then ground into flour.

A large variety of plants and animals were consumed:

- The witchetty grubs, which live in hollow trunks of the Balga tree, were also an important food. Although such grubs are still consumed by Aboriginal people in other areas of Australia, such as the Western Desert, Noongar people have not maintained this practice.
- People also ate a waxy leaved plant that grows in shady areas, now commonly known as ‘bush lettuce’.
- Echidnas, kangaroos, emus, birds, eggs, and fish were hunted. Landscape and seascape were both settings for hunting. Underwater rocks and pools in the Swan River were used to help catch fish.

Detailing hunting practices to a group of fifty non-Aboriginal Perth people, a Noongar Elder explained:

- In the old days, people pushed kangaroos off the escarpment of Kings Park to help the hunters.

The knowledge associated with past hunting and gathering practices in Perth’s metropolitan area remains detailed and precise. It is an important part of Noongar cultural heritage. Bush products were used for all aspects of everyday life:

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33 See Moore 1978: 220 for references on grubs from red gum tree as food.
34 For further detail on Noongar techniques of hunting, see Meagher 1973a: 33-4, 56.
• For example, a Noongar ranger told the non-Indigenous audience that the tiny nut at the tip of the Banksia branch could be chewed for hours to prevent dehydration. The throat was kept moist with saliva, and this helped people when walking for long distances with only a small quantity of water during hunting or gathering activities.
• A completely different use of the Banksia tree was the slow burning of its flower to provide light similar to that of a European candle.
• The bush provided most, not to say all, of what people needed, including glue to make tools. This was made out of a mixture of kangaroo dung and red gum resin.

Bush knowledge concerns a wide range of activities. For example, a Noongar Elder told the audience of a cultural awareness event organized by the Department of Indigenous Affairs: ‘Perth railway station was a swamp where we used to get the ochre from’ (6: 143). Botanical knowledge is very much part of the intercultural discourse. From my fieldwork, I recorded that knowledge about bush food is held commonly much more widely among Noongars than with non-Aboriginal people, hence an assertion of cultural specificity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in 2004, a non-Indigenous woman said to me that she makes jam from quandong fruit (6: 105). Whereas many non-Aboriginal people may not hold knowledge about the consumption of native plants, I saw food-products for sale that include native bush ingredients (i.e. David Jones, Coles, the airport), as I discuss below.

I reiterate that all the ethnographic details I just mentioned were told openly to friends of Noongar people, to me, to outsiders (males, females, school pupils, tourists) as an expression of Noongar culture and gathered at various settings that I mentioned in Part Three.

Non-Aboriginal participants have surely enjoyed learning about the Noongar knowledge of the bush, as many told me. Many respondents at various cultural awareness workshops, walks and other events said that they were extremely pleased not just to learn about bush knowledge, but also to be able to subsequently share some aspects of Noongar culture with their peers and their families. Erin, for example, is a middle-aged woman whose family migrated from England when she was ten years old. She had no contact with Aboriginal people when she grew up, until she met an Aboriginal man through her husband, but ‘we never had any discussion about his culture’, as she told me. She lives in Queensland but went to a Noongar cultural awareness walk in Perth. The guide told the attendees about the use of plants. In the evening Erin shared her
newly acquired knowledge with her husband, ‘I explained the trees, the leaves, the
fishing’. I met her again the next day she commented about the Noongar heritage walk:

They’ve got a very good story to tell. How people were self-sufficient, how they
looked after themselves. As White people we would be lost. We’ve got a different
culture. We look at the bushes and we don’t see anything. I am fascinated by the
way the red gum is used as an antiseptic. And the Banksia chewing-gum to stop
dehydration. And the vine he used for bandage, we’ve got it at home and we dig
them out (4: 27).

The use of bush products (eating and healing, for example) is part of the intercultural
discourse. During my fieldwork, Noongar people who hold the knowledge
communicate it with pride, and non-Aboriginal people were keen to learn about it.

**Noongar identity and the symbolic value of bush products**

Whereas the bush has an undoubtable significance in Noongar culture, it is also widely
known as an icon of Aboriginality (Smith 1999). Many participants of a cultural
awareness tour raised the issue. One told me:

Aboriginal people are more respectful of nature than we are.... because the more
time you spend surrounding with nature, the more time you have to understand it
(2: 87).

Non-Indigenous people associated Aboriginal cultures with bush knowledge and
appeared to be pleased when cross-cultural settings conformed to their cultural
expectations. During my fieldwork, I encountered a number of cross-cultural events in
which bush food was used, by the organizers, as a means to assert the Aboriginal focus
of the gathering. Bush-food was on the menu at various cross-cultural awareness
workshops, conferences with an Aboriginal focus and Aboriginal art gallery openings.
As bush food is considered to be distinctively Aboriginal, people served kangaroo
kebabs, emu meatballs, bush tomato chutney, emu egg mayonnaise, native pepper on
kangaroo meat and witchetty grubs. At an event organised by Noongar people to
enhance Aboriginal awareness of university students, one of the Noongar hosts prepared
the meal of kangaroo tail stew and damper (soda bread cooked in the coals). This was
because both are still staple foods for many Aboriginal people throughout the State.
More importantly, students enjoyed their food-tasting experience, especially because it
was an Aboriginal recipe, as many commented to me. I have many examples of bush
food being offered at cross-cultural events. At one workshop, the small long leaflets of
the Geraldton Wax bush were sprinkled on the top of the meat to add flavour. The non-
Indigenous people attending the workshop responded very favourably, as they liked both the unusual citrus flavour, as well as the notion that it is a Noongar recipe that came from a native bush endemic to Perth.

Nativity in food recipes is a means of asserting an Aboriginal focus and non-Indigenous people respond positively to this cultural exposure. It echoes with their long-established understanding that Aboriginal people know which are the edible bush products and how to process them (the Bush-tucker Man based his ABC television program on this widely known aspect of Aboriginal cultures).

Sometimes, it is the presence of native plants and bushes that, in themselves, are sufficient to assert the Aboriginal focus of a gathering and to communicate this to the audience. During my fieldwork, I recall helping the Noongar coordinator of a cultural awareness workshop decorate a room with branches of native bushes. She commented, as we were spreading the leafy branches around the room, ‘Let’s make it Indigenous’ (Field Notebook TC1). On another occasion, participants at a cross-cultural workshop were each presented at the end of the program with a small gift as a memento of their experience of learning about Noongar culture. Most of them had previously little or very superficial interactions with Aboriginal people. The gift was a defoliated Banksia bud (Plate 5.3) and all the participants took it home with them carefully. At another workshop, participants were given a necklace made of seven nuts from the quandong, jarrah, eucalypt and tuart trees hanging on a piece of string (Plate 5.3). There is no shortage of comparable examples that show that bush-products are a means to state and reinforce the Aboriginality of cross-cultural events.

This practice of using bush products to assert a Noongar focus is, in some way, cross-cultural. Bush-products are icons of Noongar culture and many Noongars have referred to the centrality of the bush in Noongar heritage, in recalling their childhood and family activities. However, I noted during my fieldwork that conveying an Aboriginal focus through bush products was much more common in cross-cultural settings. For example, I observed that many events organized by Noongar organizations for solely Noongar people tended to give preference to sausage sizzles, pies, sandwiches and fruit platters rather than kangaroo stew, damper or bush tomato mini-quiches.
Non-Indigenous and Noongar people responded to, and engaged, differently with ‘traditional’ bush food. Noongar people joke about it much more than non-Aboriginal participants who were more intrigued by their culinary experiences. For example, a few cross-cultural events served witchetty grubs to their participants. A number of non-Indigenous people were fascinated by the grubs, although their responses to them varied from total disgust to photo-shots of each other eating it. Noongar people did not react the same way. At a workshop lunch, a Noongar friend joked to me about some witchetty grubs that came frozen from an Adelaide grub farm. He said, ‘I’m a modern Noongar, I eat meat [as opposed to grubs]’. Bush food helps to define Noongar cultural heritage to outsiders; however, despite being proud of it, Noongar people joke about the difference between the past and the present. A Noongar ranger said to his audience during a cultural tour in a National Park:

The mia mia is an Aboriginal hut made with local ingredients of the bush. We joined grass leaves for the roofing…. We ate kangaroos, snakes, lizards. We used kangaroo skin for clothes and bedding stuff. Kangaroo droppings for fuel…. We used kangaroo sinew for spears…. The bush was our shopping centre! And if a snake come into the mia mia, of course we are going to kill it. And eat it. The food was paid for and home delivery, like you guys! (2: 91).

This is not to say that bush food solely belongs to the past for Noongars. For example, the widespread occurrence of diabetes among Noongar people is a relatively recent phenomenon that is partly due to today over-consumption of processed food. Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service promotes healthy eating in the fight against diabetes and heart disease, with a message referring to bush food:

As us mob hold hands and embrace the land together, we venture along the pathway gathering, healing and cleansing at the water hole, eating healthy bush tucker, healthy western food and walking to improve our health. This way, diabetes and heart disease can be prevented (Flyer).

In this case, bush food is seen as a healthy complement to Western-style eating habits rather than as an exotic feature appealing for its dichotomisation between Aboriginal versus Western non-Indigenous cultures. However, it is a potent way to assert symbolically the Noongar identity of a cross-cultural event.

**Noongar cultural communication and the ‘Aussie way’**

Noongar cultural communication about food is facilitated when the ingredient is adaptable to non-Indigenous cooking practices. I mentioned earlier the Geraldton Wax
Plate 5.3 Bush products and Indigienity

Geraldton wax

Defoliated Banksia bud

Native nut necklace

Koorie chef Mark Olive serving prawns seasoned with bush product dressing

Bush products in food

Room decorated with branches of native trees
used on the barbecued meat to add a ‘Noongar flavour’. Having liked it myself, I used it a few weeks later on my barbeque with non-Indigenous friends, who were similarly impressed. One of them took some home to France, as she was totally seduced by the fact that it was a Noongar condiment readily adaptable to European cuisine. Whereas Aboriginal food is appreciated for its ‘exotic nature’, non-Indigenous people value it, and borrow it, for their Western-style cooking. People find in bush food a different flavour to add to a style of cooking with which they are familiar: emu egg mayonnaise, bush tomato mini quiches (Plate 5.3). This is an important feature of intercultural knowledge: it needs to resonate with something of the cultural background of the receiver.

This is because people can understand, borrow and adapt it easily in their culture. For example, the landscape and everything in it changes according to the season. Noongar seasons differ from Western notions of four seasons in that there are six (Plate 5.4). The notion of seasonal differences (and seasonal activities)\(^35\) makes sense in Western culture, and non-Aboriginal people understand in principle, if not in detail, Noongar seasonal markers; Orilove (2003) argues that naming of seasons is universal across cultures. As a result, people engage with the topic. Noongar people communicate it often and non-Aboriginal people seem to enjoy learning about it. For example, a non-Indigenous landscape designer at a cross-cultural workshop asked the Noongar convenor if someone in Perth is doing ‘Noongar gardens’ by ‘respecting the six Noongar seasons’ (12: 126), as she was keen to adapt this knowledge in her own work. Knowledge of Noongar seasons is often cross-culturally shared because there is a parallel between Noongar and Western notions of seasonality\(^36\). Non-Indigenous people understand its principles, nevertheless it is a clear marker of cultural difference. It is also a way of asserting the continuing strength of Noongar knowledge to the broader society and, therefore, Noongar people are keen to talk about it. The Boola Wongin Nursery at Forrestdale WA is an Aboriginal-run and operated nursery specialising in Western Australian native plants\(^37\). Its brochure emphasises the importance of Noongar seasons for gardening productivity in suburban gardens:

\(^{35}\) For some historical details on the issue see Green (1984: 10) and Crawford and Crawford (2003).\(^{36}\) It is possible that the notion of Noongar seasons has been refashioned to coincide more closely with Western months and seasons. I have no data on this issue, which also concern a point that I do not investigate in this thesis—that is, how Noongar people grapple with Western knowledge.\(^{37}\) The State government funds the nursery. For government funded opportunities that enhance cultural awareness, see Chapter Eight.
According to the Noongar seasonal calendar, we are currently in the Bunuru (pronounced “bu-nu-ru”) or season of fire and Karda (pronounced “kar-da”) which means goanna. This is late summer early autumn season from February to March. Our staff will be delighted to assist you with your choice of water saving native plants best suited to your garden.... You can also discover how many Noongar seasons there are (Flyer).

I have illustrated that the theme of the environment provides a common ground of understanding, and have just shown that some pathways exist for the incorporation of Noongar knowledge into non-Aboriginal everyday life. I now turn to the dilemma of interweaving the two cultures.

**Interweaving two cultures: a real cross-cultural dilemma**

Everyone seems to agree that being respectful of the environment is a significant aspect of Noongar culture. People have voiced it in many ways, for example: ‘Aboriginal people do live in nature, they are more respectful of nature’ (2:37). Broadly speaking there is the popular perception of Aboriginal people having valuable cultural knowledge and wisdom related to ecology and care of the land, and Perth is very much a local manifestation of a global discourse\(^{38}\) (see Knudtson and Suzuki 1992 for an international perspective). This is a widely known aspect of Aboriginal cultures, both nationally and internationally. During my fieldwork, I had many opportunities to observe that people have expressed Noongar environmental wisdom and knowledge in term of a dichotomy with the non-Aboriginal world. Some respondents from both groups have contrasted Noongar ecological awareness with Western material greed and environmental destruction. As one non-Aboriginal respondent voiced it, ‘Aboriginal way of looking at the environment—it’s not in dollar signs’ (5: 123). A Noongar Elder voiced angrily:

> Everything is put on earth for equal opportunities, the creeks, the birds. The Whiteman is too greedy. When the Second World War finished, some soldiers were given land. They cleared the land, cut the trees. The Whiteman is here to make money. He’s not here to look after the culture or to respect the land. It was our country, we looked after it (11: 38).

The principle of Aboriginal connectedness to the land is widely appreciated as being different from non-Indigenous concepts of farming, mining and more generally land-exploitative activities. Whereas some Aboriginal people have embraced farming,\(^{38}\) The ‘environmental wisdom’ as it is sometimes called in the indigenous people’s movement.
Plate 5.4 Noongar seasons (Courtesy of a Noongar workshop convenor)

**KEY TO WHEEL**

1. **KARRAK** - Red-tailed Black Cockatoo
2. **KERL** - Boobook
3. **BUYI** - Tortoise
4. **MAMANG** - Whale
5. **KITI** - Spear
6. **KAADAR** - Rainbow Goanna
7. **BALKA** - Blackboy

**MONTHS**

- **Bunuru**: Hot easterly and northerly winds from February to March
- **Djeran**: Becoming cooler with winds from southwest from April to March
- **Makuru**: Cold and wet with westerly gales from June to July
- **Jilbab**: Becoming warmer from August to September
- **Karnharang**: Sun decreasing from October to November
- **Birak**: Hot and dry with easterly winds during the day and south west sea breezes in the late afternoon from December to January
mining and the like, in this environmental climate of protecting the environment, it is widely recognised that Aboriginal ecological awareness is directly linked to the preservation of the land and the maintenance of native plants, rather than to the large-scale clearing of the land for the introduction of exotic species and farming activities. Ecological lobby groups make frequent references to Aboriginal cultures, particularly when lobbying interests focus on corporate or government plans to reclaim bush land. From my data I recalled that, in order to save the Tuart Forest (near Busselton in the South-West) from mining activities in 2003, as the forestry reserve was threatened by mining, a number of environmentalists gathered alongside some Noongar people bearing the Aboriginal flag.

The relatively recent concern of non-Indigenous people for ecological sustainability has encouraged them to listen to, or even turn to, alternative practices in land management based on Aboriginal knowledge. Locally, the shortage of water in Perth and its possible consequences has raised strong concern across varied segments of the population (i.e. politicians, scientists, public). The long-term unsustainable clearance of land for farming activities has resulted in a potentially dangerous increase in salinity. The issue of water management was addressed at a conference in July 2003. The first speaker was a Noongar elder who emphasised the long-term ecological awareness of Aboriginal people by saying, ‘for thousand of years Aboriginal people have known about the importance of water to life.’ A scientist, then, discussed the water crisis, possible water reforms and the need for a new way of thinking about water. He mentioned that Aboriginal people ‘burnt’ the land ‘in a mosaic’ that ‘was to encourage re-growth’, whereas Europeans ‘talk of burning in terms of property damage’. I took notes of his presentation as it captures a strong sense of polarisation between an Aboriginal environmental care versus a non-Aboriginal environmental destruction. He gave the dramatic figures such as, ‘for 40 000 years, Aboriginal people have lived here but in 100 years we have destroyed’ the South-West, or ‘bush fires have multiplied by seven’ since European occupation. He acknowledged Noongar ecological care; however, his presentation soon became more strongly embedded in an academic discourse with

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39 See Hallam (1975: 14) on Aboriginal use of fire in ‘resource management’. Rose (1996b: 63) referred to the ‘firestick farming’ in Aboriginal land management, as well as Keen (2004: 94-6); Crawford and Crawford (2003: 32) noted, ‘The greatest impact the Aborigines had on the vegetation was through fire, and the landscape first described by Europeans was the product of Aboriginal burning regimes’, but ‘[t]he colonial government passed regulations prohibiting Aboriginal fires, and gaoled Aborigines in Rottnest Island Prison for breaches of these regulations’ (p. 71).
graphs showing evaporation, rainfall, domestic garden use and irrigation. I questioned in my field notebook, ‘Was the Aboriginal reference only aimed at communicating to the audience an urge for a more environmental consciousness? Does he imply that non-Indigenous people need to change their cultural approach to the land? If so, how to put into practice this cross-cultural engagement?’ A few minutes later, he said ‘Could we combine our technology with the philosophy of Aboriginal people?’ He did not explain how to put this into practice. His comment may bring about an ecological awareness, but at the same time it only serves to dichotomise Western science and Aboriginal beliefs.

The third speaker at this meeting was a Noongar man who emphasised the spiritual connection of Aboriginal people to the land and the need ‘to understand that there is another way’. He explained that ‘water is created by the Rainbow Snake and it is for everything to use’. He talked of the spirituality of the Dreaming and invited the audience to ‘believe our culture’. Similar to the non-Indigenous scientist, who dichotomised Aboriginal and Western knowledge and failed to interweave the two cultural perspectives, the Noongar speaker said, ‘I understand it is spirituality. Science has its place, but at the moment it’s left behind Noongar spirituality.’ Both speakers, the Noongar elder and the Western scientist, were willing to engage with each other; however, they enunciated their cultural knowledge in parallel rather than providing some empirical and pragmatic solutions based on a synthesis of cultural viewpoints to address the environmental problem of water shortages in the South-West.

Later, I discussed the conference with a participant who commented on these two perspectives:

I can recognise the scientific facts as more tangible, the Aboriginal narrative was more circular, it was articulated around feelings. My background is in the sciences. For me the language of the scientist was more familiar. But the talks were so stereotypical, not subtle. How are people going to link the two? (6: 149).

This is a major issue of cross-cultural communication. It shows the difficulties of interweaving two different sets of significance, even though both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people alike perceived Aboriginal concern for the land as an essential characteristic of Aboriginal Australia and an orientation with which to engage. In this particular context, the intercultural knowledge concerns the ‘Aboriginal caring for the environment’; however, the cross-cultural practice of interweaving the two cultures
remains problematic to achieve (see Altman and Whitehead 2003 for an economic perspective on the issue).

I encountered a number of initiatives that recognised the Aboriginal connection with the land but perpetuate the notion that the Aboriginal world is alongside, but separate from the everyday world of non-Indigenous people. A suburban walk through Jolimont and Daglish developed by the Subiaco City Council provides a good example:

The Mabel Talbot Reserve in Jolimont lies within a chain of wetlands and lakes extending far into the northern suburbs. They are connected by underground streams that relate back to Nyungah Spiritual Dreaming. The lakes were a source of water and food for the Nyungah Aboriginal people who lived in and around this area moving with the seasonal changes through the Swan River and Swan Coastal Plains. Nyungah people today remain connected to the lakes through their religion and work closely with the City of Subiaco to protect and maintain the wetland system ....

Jolimont’s well-defined residential area, some of its houses dating back to the very early 20th century, was originally separated from Subiaco by the railway...Much of Daglish was built in the 1930s when many of the solid and distinctively styled Workers Homes Board houses were erected (Didactic pamphlet).

While such projects are well intended, and clearly contribute to the assertion of Noongar culture to non-Indigenous people, they also indirectly maintain a sense of separation in everyday life between the two groups. Closely related to my comment, Lattas (1992: 46) observed the contemporary trend amongst public intellectuals to categorize their world in terms of being either ‘primitive’ or ‘civilised’ / ‘modern’. This is another form of dichotomisation involving everyday modernity; however, going back to the Enlightenment and perhaps to the Greek distinguishing themselves from barbaros (Stenou 1998). Following on from this, I noted earlier that there is another bipolarisation between pre-Christian interest in forest and ‘wilderness’ versus the Christian dogma associated with the ‘taming of the environment’.

A large body of bush knowledge is passed on in cross-cultural settings, and I do not know of elements that are withheld from cross-cultural communication. However, communication about the bush raises some issues. I have shown that non-Indigenous people respond positively to this learning but borrow, when there is already a degree of cultural convergence (such as the Noongar seasons and barbecue food). I have also shown that despite both groups having positive intentions to engage cross-culturally, some cultural differences are difficult to bridge and often result in a dichotomy: in
particular, Noongar knowledge versus non-Indigenous knowledge or Aboriginal connection with the environment versus non-Indigenous ones. On balance, however, an intercultural body of knowledge is observable between Noongar and non-Aboriginal within the contexts of spirituality and the environment.
Chapter Six — Kinship and History

Kinship enters the intercultural body of knowledge in some interesting ways: I attended over ten cultural awareness workshops that have imparted kinship organization and, in all of them, Noongar convenors explained Aboriginal kinship systems belonging to other areas. The contemporary usage of Noongar kinship practices seemed to remain absent from the ‘intercultural’1 (Figure 6.1). The second part of the chapter focuses on history and shows a very different process in the way the intercultural body of knowledge is articulated. Indeed, historical knowledge seems to be now more and more ‘intercultural’, as historical experiences of Noongar and non-Aboriginal people are woven together to create the official Australian history of the South-West. The two foci of attention in this chapter contrast starkly, perhaps more so than any other topic I treat in Part One. Indeed, Noongar kinship does not enter the intercultural, whereas history is one of the most productive zones for the emergence of intercultural knowledge (Figure 6.1)2.

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## Kinship

Writing of Australian Aboriginal communities, Merlan (1982: 125) says that kinship ‘link[s] every person in the community or wider sphere of social interaction to every other’. Sutton similarly (1998: 11) notes the centrality of kinship in Aboriginal societies (see also Keen 2004: 174; Scheffler 1978: 1). An extensive literature deals with the complexity of Aboriginal kinship systems around different regions of Australia and focuses on themes such as rules regulating relations among a wide range of relatives, including rules for prescriptive marriage; other works deal with moieties, section and subsection systems (Radcliffe-Brown 1930; Elkin 1938; Meggitt 1962; Scheffler 1978;  

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1 Of course, this is with the exception of persons who have close friendships and family linkages with Noongar people.  
2 It is important to restate that the underlying focus of this chapter is the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people; I do not investigate how Noongar people integrate non-Aboriginal cultural elements.
Whereas early anthropologists have investigated kinship organization in remote areas of Australia, it is not an overstatement to claim that there has been no detailed research on past Noongar kinship organization. In 1931, Lavas collected in Albany some information on Noongar kinship and social organization; however, these materials are today still in a note-format and need to be analyzed (pers. com. John Henderson). Sporadic references to past Noongar kinship organization appear in early recordings (e.g. Bates 1938: 75, 1985: 76-7, 83); however, these materials do not present a detailed, analyzed and clear depiction of Noongar kinship as it was. Berndt (1979: 82-3) provides some further additional information on matrimoieties in the South-West; the book Noongar—our way (1992: 167) and historians Crawford and Crawford (2003: 22) both also make a brief reference to past practice. Keen (2004: 157-60, 187-90) briefly discusses the Wiil and Minong groups of the Albany area (now incorporated within the term Noongar) by referring only to historical sources on local kinship structures. Dench’s (1999: 179) Noongar dictionary is another resource, which mentions some Noongar language kinship terms, such as dhem or dheman (grandmother), kambart (niece), mayar (nephew). However, to my knowledge, these words are no longer in use in Perth. Noongar participants are, instead, using English words, such as Nana, Uncle, Aunty, Brother, Sister, Cousin and the like as both terms of address and terms of reference.

Some researchers have investigated contemporary Aboriginal kinship operating in Australian cities. A common finding is the centrality of kin relationships. Schwab (1988: 78), for example, conducted his research in Adelaide and observed that ‘identity among most Aborigines in Adelaide is fundamentally a matter of kinship’, adding, ‘as it was in the past’ (p. 79). Schwab (1988: 79) also noted that Aboriginal people are aware that the importance accorded to their extended family is significantly different to non-Aboriginal practices (see also Gale and Wundersitz 1982 for Adelaide). Even though Schwab made his comments in regard to a very different locality, his observation resonates with my fieldwork data. Birdsall (1988: 137) observed the distinctiveness of Noongar ‘kinship organization that ha[s] enabled the Noongar people to maintain
Figure 6.1 Conceptualisation of the intercultural on the themes of Kinship and History

Noongar cultural knowledge
- Noongar cultural elements that are not known by non-Aboriginal people
- Contemporary Noongar kinship practices

Intercultural Knowledge
- Western Desert and Pilbara kinship system practices
- More and more Noongar historical experiences

Non-Aboriginal preconceptions
- Knowledge of Noongar culture held by non-Aboriginal people that is not shared by Noongar people

Cross-cultural setting: the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal people
themselves as a distinct socio-cultural group within the wider Australian society.' In her PhD thesis, Birdsall (1990: 151) reiterated the centrality of kinship for Noongar people:

The social identity of Nyungar people is thus well-anchored in the system of kinship.

Toussaint (1987) investigated Noongar government housing facilities around the Perth metropolitan area and provided some information about Noongar kinship. She noted that 'kinship networks have been maintained and reinforced' (p. 84). For example, she stated:

Nyungars turn to relatives for support (p. 127).... [and] will overcrowd [in state housing] rather than not have contact with family members so necessary to their existence (p. 139).

Toussaint (1987: 87-8) also discussed the place of individuals within the broader kin-based network, a feature that K. Wilson (1958: 58) had already noted thirty years earlier and which I also observed during my fieldwork. A Noongar participant felt that the importance of family is significantly more prevalent in Noongar society and she perceived the notion of an extended family in a broad way, as a means to connect all Noongars together:

It's more family with Aboriginal people [than with non-Indigenous people]; if you're not related you're still family [meaning Noongars with unknown family linkages] (17: 69).

Such comment resonates with Nicola, a Noongar teenager, who also felt that her people are, in some way, all related to each other. As she put it, 'Down the track, we're [Noongar people] all connected' (Notepad DEA).

Families, children and grandparents are core elements of Noongar culture today (see also Wilson 1958; Toussaint 1987; Birdsall 1990), and both Noongar and non-Aboriginal participants have brought to the forefront this feature as being different to the broader Australian society. It is noteworthy to clarify this latter point, as I met few migrants who have extensively spoken about their wide kin connections; some of them even felt that their experience was comparable to Aboriginal people and different to the broader Australian society (e.g. Coskun, Chapter Three). However, Lisa is a non-

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3 See also Birdsall (1990: 153) and Crawford and Crawford (2003: 11) for an historical perspective. In an eastern Australia perspective, Calley (1960: 12) wrote: 'Among people of Western European ancestry, kinship is limited. Generally, only close kin are important socially and people are uninterested in tracing kinship beyond first, or at the most, second cousins. Our social relationships with distant kin are less important than our relationships with neighbours, workmates, and so on. Aboriginal kinship is quite different.'
Aboriginal participant with an Anglo background. She is married to a Noongar man and compared her own family experience with her Noongar in-laws:

Family means a different thing for us [non-Aboriginal people]. We have contact with our cousins, but it's not an everyday thing. Our family, we look after ourselves. Your extended family are not people you turn to (6: 57).

From my ethnographic accounts, inter-generational linkages were evident in patterns of attendance at many social and community events, including the large annual Aboriginal festivals (e.g. the Survival Concert), where Aboriginal family groups attending have frequently spanned three generations—quite unlike those of non-Indigenous people, who rarely exceed two generations. By no means do I suggest that non-Aboriginal Australians have no family linkages; however, having a large Noongar family, and being in regular contact with family members, is probably the most commonly recognised Noongar kinship feature, one that has been mentioned by non-Indigenous people. Some of these have spoken with ambivalence about Noongar extended family linkages, and this cultural feature may sometimes become a justification for discrimination:

I have the stereotype view that renting a house to Aboriginal people, even if they are professional, I have the impression that there will be a lot of kids because they have big families, and also by not being materialistic, that not to scratch the floor is not important, but family is important, and that’s good about them (17:109).

The importance of kinship is pervasive throughout the Noongar community and two Noongar participants have detailed to me some of the complexities of its practice. Prior to recounting their comments and addressing some of the difficulties of communicating Noongar kinship, I discuss cross-cultural settings where Noongar convenors have taught Aboriginal kinship practices to non-Aboriginal attendees.

**The cross-cultural communication of kinship practices**

Today, there is a common understanding amongst the wider population that ‘traditional’ Aboriginal societies are articulated around complex systems of kinship, something that is very different from the broader Australian society. Some non-Indigenous participants, referring to their tourist experiences in the Kimberley or the Northern Territory, commented that even though tour guides explained something of the complexity of local kinship rules, they did not really understand how kinship operated. Working in northern New South Wales, Calley (1960: 15) wrote:
I think it is safe to say that practically never did Europeans dealing with Aborigines understand their system of kinship and family organization.

Nearly forty years later, Sutton’s (1998: 11-12) comment confirms the complexity of grappling with Aboriginal kinship organisation:

The subject is inherently difficult, for the simple reason that Aboriginal kinship systems and the social organisational structures and processes built on them are themselves often dauntingly complex.

How, therefore, can Noongar kinship practices be communicated to lay audiences?

At some cultural awareness workshops held in Perth, Noongar convenors have discussed features of Aboriginal kinship by explaining the system of four, six and eight ‘sections’ or ‘skins’ (operating variously in the traditional cultures of the Pilbara, Kimberley and Desert regions) that are linked closely with kinship (Berndt 1964: 48-9). The terms and relationships between these social categories were explained in detail by some Noongar convenors. For example, at one of the workshops organized by Noongar people for non-Indigenous government employees, David (Noongar convenor) explained the four-section kinship system of the Nyiyaparli people of the Newman region. As this is not a Noongar practice, David indicated to the audience that he had asked for authorisation to use the diagram (comparable to that on Figure 6.2). Using it on PowerPoint, he explained to the workshop attendees that if Karrimarra marries Milangka, the child will be Burungu. If Panaka married Karrimarra, the child will be Milangka, and so on. David also discussed the relationships of avoidance between the mother-in-law and son-in-law (see, for example, Sutton 1982 for details). Whereas this is an important rule of kinship in some areas, it is not in use in Perth. David, however, did not mention this element. He ended his presentation by emphasising to the audience the complexity of kinship organization and pointed out a cross-cultural misapprehension:

Aboriginal rules of kinship are very complex but Westerners saw Indigenous cultures as so simple (3: 29).

On a different cross-cultural occasion, Michael, the Noongar speaker for a workshop set up for the employees of a government art agency, recounted to the audience (seventeen people) one of his work-trips in some remote areas and spoke about the importance of kinship in Aboriginal society by saying, for example:

The kinship system is real, it gives me access to the community. Being given a skin name means that you are accepted [in the community]. You’ve got your
Chapter Six — Kinship and History

sisters, your uncles. “The little girl sitting over there is your grandmother”. Age is not an issue. You’re told who you are allowed to speak to (9: 35).

Michael explained to these attendees how he was given a ‘skin’ name before people could start dealing with him when he went to the Pilbara to visit a community for government purposes (see Maddock 1972: 45 for kin-based social positioning). He gave detailed information about the four ‘skin groups’ of the Pilbara region and showed, with the support of a diagram, who should marry whom in accordance with his/her kin category. He told the audience that there is a penalty of death if people do not respect the cultural prescription of marriage, but did not specify if this practice was in the past or now, nor if ‘wrong’ marriages were common. Every non-Indigenous person in the audience appeared to listen very attentively to this. Although nobody (except myself) was taking notes, people followed quietly Michael’s presentation, sometimes nodding their heads. When Michael said to the audience that a young girl could be his grandmother, people laughed with amusement. Later, attendees asked questions and a man voiced his appreciation about Michael’s talk, ‘Thank you, we were privileged to come into your world.’ One man sitting next to me asked me with a thrill, ‘That’s very interesting. Is this the kind of thing you’re studying?’ These quotations represent a few of the comments that illustrate how non-Aboriginal people enjoyed learning elements of Aboriginal kinship.

At some workshops, speakers briefly told their audiences that contemporary Noongar practices were different from both the four-section system that they had just been told about, as well as the Western model with which the audience was familiar. At three workshops, the convenors did not mention this point to the attendees. In all cases, Noongar practices of kinship remained unaddressed. Indeed, I have not observed Noongar kinship organization being communicated, within a variety of cross-cultural settings, such as workshops, schools, and Noongar tours where I conducted participant observation. Noongar kinship in its contemporary everyday practice remains largely unknown to non-Indigenous people, and this includes all the non-Aboriginal persons who have attended cultural awareness workshops and with whom I spoke.

Noongar kinship practices, or knowledge of them, seem to be absent from the intercultural body of knowledge. Indeed, I observed that the complexity of kinship divisions in remote Aboriginal Australia is more widely known among non-Indigenous
Kinships exist in every Aboriginal community throughout Western Australia. Social structures and organisations also exist within the Aboriginal communities, including social and cultural obligations, traditional laws and cultural values that are binding in all communities. Skin groups regulate this social organisation that involves many family groups.

Western Desert skin groups of Nyiyaparli people whose country is around the Newman region.

Western Desert model used by Noongar convenors at cultural awareness workshops to explain the complexity of Aboriginal kinship systems.
people in Perth (at least in terms of the differences) than is the Noongar system. By identifying kinship systems that are very different from those of non-Indigenous people, some ‘exotic’ expectations of Westerners may be directly fulfilled, as Peter (Noongar) noted:

The difference with the Northern Territory and Western Desert is that they are places where White people do not tend to live, so Aboriginal people are more evident in those areas, whereas in the cities, where Noongar people live, we kind of blend in, so we are not really seen. In terms of kinship, Aboriginal people from those areas are looked upon as something special or unique because of where they live (Notebook 8).

Reading his last sentence, Peter did not indicate that he felt Noongar kinship practices are less Aboriginal than the ones of remote areas; rather, he put the emphasis on the way non-Aboriginal people might perceive such areas. Whereas cultural awareness workshops failed at communicating features of Noongar kinship, they have contributed to the assertion that Noongar culture is part of the diversity of Australian Aboriginal cultures, as well as being something different from the wider society. This may, however, result in maintaining the enduring image of a ‘traditional’ Aboriginal Australia, rather than recognizing contemporary Noongar cultural practices. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that Noongar people have commonly asserted a different cultural identity to the one of the broader society; nevertheless, this assertion of difference was preferably based on their own culture. The practice of Noongar kinship is not any more in its pre-contact traditional form. I have suggested a few times in this thesis that non-Aboriginal people have an interest in different, thus exotic, practices. Whereas an ‘exotic’ practice certainly asserts Noongar culture as being different to the broader society I also observe that Noongar people appreciate talking of their culture rather than the ones from other areas, as evident with the intercultural body of knowledge that concerns the themes of tradition, spirituality and land, for example.

**Noongar family names**

The Noongar practices of kinship are organised around categories such as uncles, aunties, grannies, and family names that are known widely throughout the South-West (see also Sutton 1998: 59 for a more general Australian perspective). This practice is identifiably different from the Western practice, but it still makes sense to people from Western cultures. One example to illustrate this point is the use of family names as a means of locating Noongar people within their community, as family names are an
important feature of Noongar identity (see also Birdsall 1988: 139, 141; Wilson 1958; and Schwab 1988: 80 for Adelaide Aboriginal people). I gained my first awareness of the importance of family names when I did some volunteer work for a Noongar organization a few years before I started my PhD. One of the roles of this organization was to provide support to Noongar teenagers. One of the first questions the officers asked teenagers whom they did not know was their name, as the knowledge of an individual’s family names is the means of locating the person within the Noongar community. During my fieldwork, Ron, a Noongar participant, explained to me a number of kinship practices. Often, he detailed his kin relationship with people in terms of their family name. For example, he spoke to me about Pat Jones [pseudonym] who had married his second cousin, Alex Brown [pseudonym]. I asked him how he was related to Pat? In his response, he emphasised the importance of family names:

Pat has got no relative lines to me at all. It’s the Jones. If one of my cousins had married one of my uncles, I would still call her “Cousin” and not “Aunty”. The bloodline is that the Jones married into the Browns, so I am now related to the Jones distantly, but still from a distance, you still are family (Notepad 7).

One non-Aboriginal participant, Sophie Earls [pseudonym] is in a relationship with a Noongar man, John Patterson [pseudonym]. They had twins together at the time of my fieldwork. Sophie expressed concern for the name of their sons, as having the father’s name would identify the boys as being Noongar and she was keen to acknowledge her non-Aboriginal family heritage:

His family name is important to John. The babies, what surname? Patterson? Patterson is an Aboriginal name! I don’t want an Aboriginal name! (6: 67).

Jane Green [pseudonym] is another participant who told me about the importance of family names:

As an Aboriginal person, you’re not an individual, you are a member of a family, so your whole reality is based on who your family is, and who you are related to. I am a Green (16: 109).

Sutton (1998: 48) provides some background information in regard to this use of family names. Discussing more broadly the usage amongst Aboriginal people in Australia, he noted that ‘[b]ureaucratic considerations encouraged the use of surnames among Aboriginal people from quite early in the history of colonization.’ Whereas this feature

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4 ‘It is not known how many contemporary Nyungar names are derived from Aboriginal names.... While the early records contain listings of Aboriginal names, over time the later records show an almost total abandonment of this practice, and a shift from using Aboriginal names or words as surnames, to using them purely as personal names’ (Tilbrook 1983: 77).
of Noongar kinship could be easily communicated cross-culturally, this was never the case. Most non-Indigenous people with whom I discussed the issue did not seem to be aware of the importance attached to family names, with the exception of people like Sophie and others who have personal engagement with Noongars.

Noongar kinship practices are absent from the intercultural. I therefore pose the question: Why is Noongar kinship not discussed at a cross-cultural event? Is it because kinship systems from remote areas may provide a more exotic illustration of the embedded cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous societies?

The difficulty of explaining Noongar kinship principles

In this section, I refer to extensive statements by two participants, Ron and Barbara, who have spent time explaining to me some Noongar kinship practices. My intention is not to provide a detailed analysis of Noongar kinship per se, although I suggest this needs to be done by another researcher in order to facilitate Noongar cross-cultural communication of kinship. Here, however, I am illustrating the problem of communicating kinship today, given the lack of clarity in this issue, as evident in the following ‘raw’ data. It is not always easy for people who have not attempted to analyze the complexity of their social practices to convey these Noongar kinship practices in a clear way to cross-cultural audiences. There is no diagram of Noongar kinship available that people can take to put on a screen for a PowerPoint presentation at cultural awareness workshops, as they can do for the Pilbara or the Western Desert where kinship has been schematized by anthropologists in diagrams and sets of social rules that provide material for communicating knowledge about culture. Because of the complexity of these schemas, audiences rarely understand the detail, but nevertheless grasp a clear sense of kinship relations as being something highly organised.

I suggest that if such diagrams were available, people would probably use them and take them as a valorization of Noongar culture.

The intercultural body of knowledge on the theme of kinship is not focused on Noongar kinship, but on elements of Aboriginal kinship practices from other areas. From my fieldwork experience, I argue that the absence of contemporary Noongar kinship
practice from the intercultural does not solely result from the fact that these latter were not ‘exotic enough’. Such understanding would be an over-focus on the notion of ‘exoticism’ and would fail to grapple with the plurality of factors that shape the content of the intercultural body of knowledge, as I discuss below. Indeed, I now show that cultural communication sometimes requires some anthropological, or more generally scholarly, support. This is, of course, in the contemporary context where the outcome of applied anthropology has moved away from serving ‘colonial administration’ (Keen 1999: 35) to being involved “‘with a community or people who s/he [the anthropologist] believes will be empowered by knowledge and ideas developed in interaction with them’” (Gordon 1991: 149, cited in Keen 1999: 44).

The relative absence of documentation explaining past or contemporary Noongar kinship practices makes communication of this feature to a non-Indigenous audience very difficult. After a Noongar convenor had detailed the example of the Western Desert to the twelve government employees attending a Noongar cultural awareness workshop, he said to the audience:

Here, in the South-West region, it’s all mixed up. People don’t know their rules (Notebook 4).

Whereas the ‘rules’ no longer operate as they did in the pre-contact era, from my fieldwork, I have no doubt that Noongar people are aware of the way contemporary Noongar cultural practices operate. Moreover, Noongar people have often spoken to me about these contemporary kinship practices as being different to the broader Australian society, indeed stating explicitly this point.

Having an awareness of Noongar ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu 1977) of kinship does not override the difficult task of explaining in a simple way rather complex everyday cultural practices.

The lack of an attractive diagram about Noongar kinship, such as that illustrated in Figure 6.2, may constrain its communication cross-culturally. Although I was able to grasp the everyday Noongar kinship system from my fieldwork, in a kind of intuitive

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5 Some of the literature dealing with the ‘expert witness’ and the role of anthropologists in the Native Title Tribunal has also discussed the difficulties inherent in cross-cultural engagements in the court (e.g. Black 2002: 17; Wootten 2003: 26; Trigger 2004; Rummery 1995). See also Berndt for an earlier reflection on the role of anthropologists (Berndt 1977: 5).
and orally informed manner, I have realised in writing this section the difficulties of communicating some characteristics of Noongar kinship practices to the reader. No wonder it could be a problem for Noongar speakers at cross-cultural awareness workshops. I have no doubt that showing a schematic diagram of Aboriginal kinship, arranged by an anthropologist, conveys more readily some differences in kinship structure between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians than does a speaker’s personal experiences of everyday Noongar kinship practices.

Noongar people have an awareness of this cultural difference, as was clearly expressed by a Noongar participant who had a young son by his former non-Indigenous wife, Helen:

- I don’t know what Helen would do [regarding her son’s use of kin terms for her side of the family]. She operates differently to me.
- Do you think it’s a difference of culture? I asked.
- Bloody oath, it’s a difference of culture, yes. It’s not a difference of personality. It’s a difference of culture (Notepad HS2).

I was already aware of some variations in kinship relationships between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people, but Barbara kindly taught me more precisely about her own family insights and explained:

The way things work with us, and I’m just speaking about my own experience as a Noongar woman, and I’m sure other Aboriginal tribal groups have their own way, or maybe the same thing. Janine [her daughter] calls me ‘Mum’, but culturally, my first cousins, like my mother’s sisters’ girls [MZD], would be not only her aunties but also fulfilling a mother role as well (14: 95).

Although Barbara’s comment could readily be mentioned at a cultural awareness workshop without alienating the audience, the classification of various women as ‘mothers’, as shown in her following explanation, is more confusing. Barbara referred to the upper generation of her family:

Rather than her just having a straight, ‘My mother is her Nana [MM], and her Dad’s mother [FM] is her Nana’, she’d have lots and lots of Nanas. As ‘Nana’, she would have my mother’s first cousins [e.g. her MMMZDs], and my mother’s sisters are her ‘Nana’ [her MMZs]. My mother’s second cousin [e.g. her MMMMZDD] would probably be like a Nana as well, we don’t identify with that second cousin kind of thing, so all my Mum’s generation would be Nanas (14: 96).

The brackets are my own interpolations, and these could help a non-Noongar audience to understand Barbara’s comments. However, the knowledge she conveyed is, so far, quite straightforward. Detailing some differences from the Western model, Barbara
suggested that Noongar organization impacts on the whole classification of relatives, the way relatives are classified:

All my first cousins’ children call my mother ‘Nana’, and Janine [her daughter] calls their mother [first cousins’ mothers] ‘Nana’ as well. For my mother, my first cousins’ children will be her grandchildren (14: 98).

As Keen (2004: 176) noted in a more general view of Aboriginal kinship, an illustration of the principle of classificatory relationships is that: ‘If one’s mother’s sister is also one’s “mother”, then her children are one’s “brothers” and “sisters”.’

In the following quote, Barbara raised the importance of Janine’s grandmother being in a maternal role6 as well as detailing further some features of Noongar kinship (Figure 6.3):

My first cousins [MZD] would be Janine’s ‘Aunties’, and as well as my sisters. Only me, I’m called ‘Mum’. With our situation, where we’re living in a nuclear family, it’s just Philip, me and the kids. I’m her ‘Mum’, but she sometimes calls my Mum, ‘Mum’ as well. When she was little she spent a lot of time with my Mum. Philip’s cousins would be her uncles, but their parents would be her Nanas and Pops. Even with older people, when we’ve got as strong connection with them, then she would call them ‘Nan’ and ‘Pop’. If they are very good family friends or people we’re really close to that we respect, we might have old family links, like Philip’s best friend’s mother would be her ‘Nana’ (14: 100).

As Noongar practices were not conveyed at cultural awareness workshops, I lack data that would allow me to illustrate an audience’s reaction. I suggest that if Noongar kinship was told in a ‘raw form’ (as it appears here), the best outcome would be that audiences may remember that Noongar kinship is complex, as many people already appreciate this about Aboriginal kinship in ‘traditional’ societies. However, people may think of it as confusing, if not unintelligible, quite unlike the four-section diagram shown in Figure 6.2 that has impressed the attendees of many workshops. My suggestion is that, in the case of Noongar kinship, diagrams are needed to help the cross-cultural communication of these everyday practices. Despite anthropological interest in such detailed narratives, these may not have the same appeal to a lay audience that an illustrative kinship diagram has.

With the notion of scholarly didactic presentation of Noongar kinship, I am not only thinking of diagrams, but also of ways to bring in what would be otherwise raw data, gained through everyday practices of the speaker—in other words, their cultural habitus.

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6 Toussaint (1987: 86) noted the role of the grandfather as being paternal.
Figure 6.3 Noongar kinship structure

Figure 6.4 Noongar kinship structure

Figure 6.5 Noongar kinship structure
For example, introducing the complexity of some Noongar practices in terms of inter-generational classification of relative would, at least, provide a heading to a category of knowledge and may give the illusion that people are learning some expertise (see Chapter Nine for free expert talks). Barbara’s mother terms her sister’s children’s children “Grandchild”; however, when I asked Barbara’s mother how many grandchildren she had, she answered “Three” because, as Barbara said, ‘It’s something people don’t articulate, it’s an assumed thing.’ However, ‘My mother calls all of her grandchildren [not just the three biological ones] “her Grannies” and they call her “Nan” or “Nana Pamela”.’ This would also be the case for great-grandparents who would be called “Nan” and who would refer to their great-grandchildren as ‘Grannies’. A great-grandmother who wants to communicate to a questioner the fact that she is a great-grandmother will, however, make the point by saying that she has ‘great-grannies’.

Barbara has an older son, Syd, who is a teenager. She explains the linkages between generations with references to relatives who live outside Perth whom Syd had just met (Figure 6.4):

My first cousins [e.g. MZDs] are like my sisters, we call each other “Sister”, and their children call me ‘Aunty’. Funnily enough, Philip [her husband] just took our boy to meet some family up north, and he met some grannies that he’s got. It is my son’s first cousin [Philip’s sister’s daughter HZD], who has grandchildren, and those grandchildren are my son’s grannies. So these little kids walk around calling him ‘Pop’. One of them had three Pops in the car with him: he had his own Grandfather, he had Philip who is like a Great-Grandfather, and he had my son, Syd, who is his Grandmother’s first cousin (14: 103).

There is no doubt that Figure 6.4 is needed to illustrate Noongar kin relationships from Barbara’s example. There is no easy way of illustrating in a graphic form the nature of Noongar kinship and the way it applies to everyday life. Before I added the plates, it may be interesting to quote the comment of the postgraduate coordinator, Lyn [pseud.] when she read this:

This sounds messy. You need to organise it better. I’m not very good at kinship but I just don’t get it.

In quoting Lyn, I was guided by a desire to demonstrate an interesting example of the construction of cultural communication, that is: when the knowledge is too confusing to be communicated, it alienates people from the topic. I pose the question: Without the support of some diagrams, can Noongar kinship be conveyed to a lay audience?
Further illustrative cases include Ron, who was married to a non-Indigenous woman. He expects that their daughter will have a different range of experiences from his own because only one side of her family is Noongar, unlike the case of his own up-bringing:

My daughter is a different example to what I am. I grew up with all Black people being around. My daughter’s not going to have that. I don’t know whether she’s going to have Noongar ways or going to have Western ways. She calls people like my Mum’s brothers, and cousins even, ‘Pops’ and ‘Nan’. She does that, out of respect, even though they might be on the Western side classified as an uncle or an aunt, or even a cousin, which confuses the hell out of me because they’re not my cousins. That’s what I grew up with, calling my immediate grandfather and grandmother by ‘Grandfather’ and ‘Grandmother’, and their brothers and sisters the same. For Westerners, your cousins could be your first or second cousins, but your cousins could also be your Mum and Dad’s cousins as well, which to me they are really your uncles and aunts, because they are your Mum’s line of family, they’re not your line of family. All my family work along these lines as well (16: 47).

Seeking further detail on the nature of Noongar kinship, as it operates today, I asked Ron who his cousins were. He answered by referring to Pat Jones and her daughter Julie. His comment, however, also requires a diagram (Figure 6.5):

Julie (6 years old) is my cousin, that’s Pat’s girl, and Julie is my daughter’s ‘Aunty’, because her father is the same generation as my Mum, even though he is actually closer in age to me. It doesn’t matter about age, it’s about generations. Julie is my cousin, and Alison [Ron’s daughter] is the niece of Julie. Julie is the ‘Aunty’ of Alison, and she calls Pat and her husband ‘Nan’ [Grandmother] and ‘Pop’ [Grandfather]. I call Pat’s husband ‘Uncle Clem’, but I don’t call Pat ‘Aunty Pat’, just Pat. I suppose because I work with her. If we weren’t working together, I probably would, in time (16: 49-50).

From my fieldwork, I noted that there is a degree of personal preference in addressing kin, as I observed with both some Noongar and non-Aboriginal families. Following on Noongar kinship practices, it seems that for some Noongar families the use of personal names predominates in address; in others, kin-based relationships are emphasised. Ron mentioned this to me:

I’m not related to Bill, but I call his Dad ‘Uncle’ as a matter of respect. It’s an age factor, but there’re also families who don’t do it. The parents might tell their kids just to call me ‘Ron’, but I wouldn’t do that. I would use ‘Uncle’ (16: 51).

I know, for example, of two Noongar Elders, a man working at AAS Ltd [pseud.] and a Noongar woman working at BBU Ltd [pseud.], who are called Auntie Alice [pseud.] and Uncle John [pseud.] by their Noongar work colleagues. This is as a sign of respect, even though people have no kin relationships with either John or Alice.
Chapter Six — Kinship and History

It is difficult to draw some generalised patterns of terms of address about the use of ‘uncle’ and ‘auntie’. For example, Harry, a non-Indigenous participant who works extensively with Noongar people in the South-West, noted that for some younger people, relative age is beginning to take precedence over generation:

Among the younger generation, today’s twenty- and thirty-something, people are less likely to use kin terms [e.g. uncles and aunties] for age mates (Notebook 6).

However, when I asked Harry if he could help me to clarify some points about Noongar kinship, he said that although he could understand it, he was not really sure how to articulate clearly the details. In the early stage of writing this section, when I showed participants’ quotes to two persons who have done post-graduate studies in anthropology, they commented: ‘I believe you, but kinship is so difficult to understand’.

How therefore, can people communicate this cross-culturally, knowing that there are no available documents that have analysed Noongar kinship?

Noongar practices are absent in the intercultural body of knowledge, and non-Aboriginal people were not familiar with them. In the context of cross-cultural engagement, the Noongar community treats their interaction with non-Indigenous people in a different way, as was expressed to me by many people throughout the course of my fieldwork. In the following quote, Ron expresses this in terms of kinship, as Noongar people are more likely to apply fictive kin relationships based on respect (e.g. Uncle) to Noongars than to non-Indigenous people (see also Toussaint 1987: 84).

Ron explained to me that non-Aboriginal people were more likely to be outside the kin system, even in courtesy terms:

You have it built into you that the older people should be respected. Not necessarily White people, because White people work on a different system, so Blackfellas don’t really consider that, it’s totally different. Whereas Noongars have a very common experience, you know that respect is there. My Mum had to respect people who weren’t her kin by calling them ‘Uncles’ and ‘Aunties’, whereas she wouldn’t call the White butcher man or the policeman ‘Uncle’ such-and-such. But if the policeman was Noongar, this could change, definitely (16: 52).

In cross-cultural settings, I observed that both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people tended to retain their respective cultural practices. For example, Barbara’s closest

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7 Fictive kin are people who are assigned kin relationships even though they are not in a demonstrated genealogical relationship.
girlfriend is Italian. Janine [Barbara’s daughter] calls her ‘Aunty’ and her husband ‘Uncle’. I asked whether, if her best friend was Noongar, would her daughter still call her the same way? She said she would still be an ‘Aunty’, but added: ‘Funnily enough, her [the best friend’s] children don’t call me “Aunty”, even though I have known them since before they were born.’ Janine refers to the children of her mother’s best friend as ‘cousins’ whereas they never call her ‘Cousin’. From Barbara’s perspective, the reason for this lies with the fact that her friend’s family are migrants and have lost their sense of family linkages as a result of their move to Australia, and consequently focus on a more nuclear family. From my own understanding, however, I suggest it is more a matter of Noongar-Western differences. With my extended family in France, for example, I am aware that my nephews [BSs] address their father’s best friend only by his given name, never as ‘uncle’ and never refer to the children’s of their father’s best friends as ‘cousins’. The account of Barbara show clearly that Noongar kinships practices are indeed different to the wider contemporary Australian society.

People in cross-cultural marriages with whom I raised the matter said that they use their own cultural practices with their own side of the family. For the Noongar side of the family people follow the Noongar way of practising kinship, whereas for the non-Indigenous side people follow the Western way (all respondents involved in cross-cultural marriages were from European and Aboriginal backgrounds). One participant suggested that this is ‘because there’s probably not that awareness’ [on the other side]. Another Noongar participant commented:

I call ‘Sister’ my own biological sister and my first cousins like my mother’s sisters’ children, and not necessarily my father’s side, because I don’t know a lot of my father’s family, and because they are non-Indigenous anyway. I’d probably just call them cousins (Notepad K)\(^8\).

The parallel-versus cross-cousin distinction (see Keen 2004: 176) is deliberately omitted from my discussion here, as the ‘equivalence of siblings’ (e.g. M equivalent to MZ) has been clearly demonstrated by Barbara and Ron; however, it remains unclear if the ‘bifurcated merging’ feature was still operating and my informants did not raise the parallel/cross cousin distinction\(^9\). However, as I noted earlier, my intention here is to illustrate that Noongar kinship is unknown to non-Aboriginal people. It is totally absent

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\(^8\) Parallel cousins were privileged in this account; unfortunately I have no data to indicate if Noongar cross-cousins would also have been termed sisters and brothers (e.g. MBD or FZDs).

\(^9\) The book *Nyungar—our way* (1992: 166), makes a brief reference to Noongar kinship but, like Barbara, focuses on parents with same-sex siblings.
from the intercultural, which is completely unlike the theme of history that I discuss in the following section.

I urge that there is a need to record Noongar kinship practice in order to teach it cross-culturally. As this is not referred to or communicated within cross-cultural settings (e.g. workshops, schools), another family where both parents are Noongar experienced firsthand some of the difficulties of sharing the features of the Noongar kinship system with non-Indigenous people. Their son tried repeatedly to explain to his school friends why, at the age of eight, he was already called ‘grand-dad’:

He tried to explain about his first cousin’s grandchild, but they couldn’t get it. How could an eight or nine year old kid be a pop or a grandfather? It’s one of those things, he has a lot of problems with that, he’ll come home and get really upset about it and says to me, “Mum, you know people don’t believe what I’m telling them.” It’s very frustrating for him, and I say, “It’s true, that’s our culture, that’s our belief and our understanding, and if people aren’t prepared to listen to you and accept that this is your way, then that’s just bad luck for them.” But there are other friends who are understanding and want to know, embracing it, but these other kids just make fun of him, and it’s hard to cross between the two worlds (5: 140).

His mother feels disappointed about this lack of understanding and said that the closed minds of some people towards cultural differences can be found among people from a variety of ethnic groups, as at her children’s primary school there was a strong multicultural mix, with pupils from Africa, Asia, India and different European countries. Following the issue of cultural differences between Noongars and Westerners in the South-West, ‘it is quite common in the South-West to hear children referred to by their parents, or their grandparents, as “Grannies” or, more accurately, “Little Grannies” which some anthropologists have identified as a remnant of an alternating generation structure within the Noongar kinship system’ (pers. com. John Stanton, an anthropologist who has carried out research in the region). Talking of his experience, Harry commented:

Sitting on the verandah with a Noongar family, the mother said in reference to her four young children, “I’d better get the Little Grannies to the Kindy [Kindergarten] before it’s too late.” They’re called Little Grannies because they are “the same” as their grandparents; that is, they are of the same generation pair as their grandparents and they share the same term. A child is a Little Granny until they reach adulthood or have their own child, whether or not their Grandmother is still alive (Notepad HS).

The focus of this section is to illustrate how Noongar kinship is not an example of cross-cultural communication. People cannot rely on the literature, or anything else for
that matter, which could provide some assistance in communicating Noongar kinship as it is practised today, or as it was in the past. In the contemporary context, people can only rely on their own set of experiences. This is not always easy. Firstly, it is not a Noongar practice to speak on the behalf of the whole community, with the exception of Noongar Elders who are in a social position to do this. Secondly, some questions may be challenging. For example, I asked Barbara the following questions by phone at the time I was first writing about Noongar kinship:

1: Will Philip’s sister [Barbara’s HZ; Janine’s FZ] be like a ‘mum’ or like an ‘aunty’ for Janine [Barbara’s D]?
2: Would Philip’s brother [Janine’s FB] be like an ‘uncle’ or a ‘dad’?
3: Would your sister [Janine’s MZ] be like a ‘mum’ or ‘aunty’?
4: Would your brother [Janine’s MB] be like a ‘father’ or like an ‘uncle’?

As with many Noongar people, Barbara is constantly engaging cross-culturally between her own cultural patterns and the non-Indigenous ones, which are actually predominant in Australia. Having finished my fieldwork, and with these four questions in mind I was aiming to gain immediate knowledge on particular points, something that some non-Aboriginal people could ask while attending a cultural awareness workshop. Barbara has been keen to tell me about some elements of Noongar kinship organization, but she could not answer what I was asking her now as I lacked of specificity in my request. Indeed, with my words ‘be like a …’ I was confusing in my question between terms of address and terms of reference. Nevertheless, lay people at a workshop may similarly lack of specificity. Because of a general dearth of available data in the South-West, there are a number of issues that need clarification, such as the distinctions between terms of address and terms of reference. A number of Noongar kinship practices should be packaged in order to be explained to cross-cultural audiences. These concern, for example, a need for clarification of whether Noongar practices operate both matrilaterally and patrilaterally or only matrilaterally. For example, in regard to the latter, Crawford and Crawford (2003: 22) have mentioned:

[According to Ken Colbung [a contemporary prominent Noongar Elder in Perth] maternal descent applied on the Warren River…. The Murrum followed maternal descent—at least on the Warren—for their moieties, and this distinguished them from the groups to the north and east. These regional differences have led to considerable confusion in the literature, but Aboriginal people were able to reconcile their differences by applying a system called ngulingbara or walangalang—‘changing from one side to another’.

Cultural awareness events (e.g. workshops, tourist tours, schools) require that the culture be ‘packaged’ in a way readily accessible to learners. Tour guides that I know in
France used the support of documents to communicate French heritage, and Noongar convenors of cultural awareness workshop were also in possession of constructed programs to facilitate cultural communication. It is easier to spoke about packaged practices than to discuss 'unspoken' habitus.

The theme of kinship sheds light on the need for Noongar practices to be 'packaged' in a way that facilitates its cross-cultural communication and reception. I observe from my fieldwork that that some non-Indigenous people were willing to learn about Noongar culture; nevertheless, the complexity of kinship practice, combined with a lack of documentation about it, keep this knowledge outside the intercultural discourse. Whereas the preconceptions held by some people may limit their openness to Noongar cultural difference, it is vital to take into consideration the lack of communication concerning knowledge about the day-to-day reality of contemporary Noongar society as it can also inhibit non-Aboriginal people to gain such awareness.

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**History**

The recent recognition by the broader Australian society of Aboriginal historical experiences has provided a common ground for cross-cultural communication. The standpoints of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are merging increasingly together. A Noongar woman felt that more and more non-Aboriginal people are gaining awareness and knowledge about Noongar past experiences, mainly in regard to the Stolen Generation. One of her comments was:

> Sometimes at dinner parties, you get people talking approvingly about Aboriginal experiences. Mostly, their knowledge is on the historical situation and they may talk about that (4: 143).

This section shows that historical knowledge is becoming intercultural, as both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are now recognising Noongar historical narratives. Interestingly, Attwood (1996a: xxxviii) highlights the need for a dual recognition of history, and observed (Atwood 1996a: xv) that 'over the last 25 years or more ... historians have sought to address the great Australian silence'. He (Attwood 1996a : xxxi, 1996b) noted the role of the Keating government and the Mabo decision in transforming Australian history (see also Morton 1996: 118 for similar comments),
which ‘augur’ the end of the division between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in Australia (Attwood 1996b: 115).

**Brief overview of two standpoints**

The history of Western Australia started over 50,000 years ago, according to the Department of Indigenous Affairs Heritage and Culture flier. Noongar people have often mentioned during cross-cultural awareness programs the enduring occupation of Australia, as for example:

> People have lived for 68 000 years at Lake Eyre, 38 000 in Perth, 90 000 years in the Kimberley, and it’s always older. It could be that Aboriginal culture is over 100 000 years old (2: 150).

Throughout my fieldwork, I had varied opportunities to learn about Aboriginal settlement in the South-West. The long and continuous occupation of the land by Aboriginal people is never contested, although there is disagreement about the precise length of time. For example, a Noongar cultural centre, Wardan Aboriginal Centre, at Yallingup, informs visitors about the ‘continuous occupancy’ that ‘has been traced back for 55,000 years in archaeological sites such as Devil’s Lair’, to quote the flier. However, the PIAF (2006: 3) booklet about Noongar culture that circulated at the time of the 2006 festival, for which the theme was ‘Noongar country’, suggests a date of 29,500BC as the earliest for artefacts in the region, with Devil’s Lair occupied as late as 6,000 BC. When I went with a Noongar woman who wanted to show me some places of significances around the metropolitan area, she took me to a site close to Guilford and said, ‘This site was used by Noongar people 60,000 years ago.’ (Notepad HS). To add further confusion about the length of settlement, Green (1984: 3)\(^\text{10}\) observed:

> [The] current estimate of Aboriginal occupation of the south-west corner of Australia is beyond 40 000 years.

On the other hand, it was only in 1829 that the British Government settled the Swan River Colony, although non-Indigenous contacts with the land of Western Australia started earlier and sporadically through encounters with sailors (Meagher 1973b: 3-8; Bloomfield 2004). Cross-cultural interactions between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in the South-West are, and have been throughout 178 years, of a very different nature. As early as in the nineteenth century, explorers have mentioned some rather

\(^{10}\) See also Flood (1983).
friendly interactions (e.g. Moore 1884); however, many historians who research the frontier period quote accounts that inspire deep horror: massacres, ethnocide and human rights infringements resulting from the cultural clash (on the frontier period in the South-West, see: Green 1984; Tilbrook 1983; Hallam 1998; Statham 2003; Fletcher 1984). Historical engagements between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in the twentieth century have been heavily influenced by the legislation that has regulated every aspect of Aboriginal people’s lives, such as marriage, cultural practices, economic resources (Haebich 1982, 1984, 1988; Edwards 1982; Maushart 1993; Mia 2001; Host and Milroy 2001; Crawford and Crawford 2003).

From the early days of non-Aboriginal settlement until quite recently, official documents were all recorded by and for non-Indigenous people. Noongar people had no power of shaping the course of the ‘history’ of neither the region nor its official recording. This has had significant outcomes in the making of the State identity, which encompasses Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people, as Friedman (1992: 837) suggested in a general perspective about the role of history:

Making history is a way of producing identity insofar as it produces a relation between that which supposedly occurred in the past and the present state of affairs. The construction of a history is the construction of a meaningful universe of events and narratives for an individual or collectively defined subject.

Around the world, many scholars wrote similar comments about the historical influences. In the context of California, Haley and Wilcoxon (1997: 761) observed:

All peoples employ myth/history as a charter of their collective identity… and all engage in selective remembering, forgetting, and imagining of that myth/history.

For many years in Western Australia, there were, on the one hand, the Aboriginal experiences that remained un-heard by many non-Aboriginal people and, on the other, non-Aboriginal history that was taught at school. Many participants commented about this. Rebecca, for example, recalled her school years in the 1970s:

We didn’t learn anything about Aboriginal people, just about Captain Cook and people on the cliff standing with a spear (16: 4).

Another participant commented in a similar vein:

We did do a social project at school and Aboriginal people were depicted as natives with spears (2: 117).

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11 For a more general Australian perspective, see Yarwood and Knowling (1982).
Whereas a number of historians have investigated Aboriginal history and the impact of government policies on Aboriginal people (see, for example, Haebich 1988; Maushart 1993; Carter 2006), it was the *Bringing them home* Report (National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families 1997) that brought awareness of these issues directly into the non-Indigenous community.

Some non-Indigenous participants in their sixties and seventies, who are now aware about the details of the stolen generation, felt that, at the time, they were poorly informed. I spoke with some people who yet had an ambiguous understanding of what was happening. Shirley, for example, recalled that she had a vague awareness about Noongar children being taken away when she was living in the South-West in the 1950s:

> We knew things were going on with Aboriginal children, but we didn’t really know (12: 5).

Some non-Indigenous people may have turned a blind eye upon, or even approved of, the government’s policies of coercion towards Aboriginal Australians. During my fieldwork, I had a conversation with a non-Indigenous participant who was in his early thirties. Whilst we discussed his experience of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction, he shared his perception about historical events and mentioned the opinion of his parents on the removal of children:

> They [Aboriginal people] have to stick together. Their history is shooting, poisoning, that was happening 30 years ago. That’s ridiculous. We are not the good guys, as a community we repressed them. We took children away, but people felt that this was for their own good. They think that these kids would get better jobs. If you ask my Mum and Dad, that’s what they would say (17: 122).

I have met some non-Indigenous people who still do not accept Aboriginal historical accounts of colonial conflicts, some who felt that these are exaggerations and challenge the lack of precise facts. A well-known extremist view on this matter is the so-called ‘Windshuttle’ approach of history. It denied the negative impact of colonisation in Australia, and this is similar to the revisionist history of the Far Right in Europe that refuses to recognise the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis. One non-Indigenous participant spoke to me about her sibling who is unwilling to acknowledge Noongar experiences. She showed me her sibling’s letter, with which she totally disagreed. The writer has a pro-colonisation view of the past and the quote below contests the contemporary ethos of multiculturalism. In part, the letter reads as follows:
We do live in a lucky country but our first thought should be to preserve it from foreign takeover by stealth both financial and migratory. We should preserve our Australian culture that is based on White European ancestry and be proud of it.... We colonised this country and made it European and it is now Australia.

By contrast to Shirley, the elderly non-Aboriginal participant who was ill-informed about past discrimination, for Noongar people, Noongar history has never been hidden. However, historical narratives were oral and beyond the knowledge of many non-Aboriginal people; partly because many people not really engage with Noongars (Tonkinson 1962; Wilson 1958; Harrison 1960), which resonates with participants’ recollections of the 1940s and 1950s. Today, a number of non-Aboriginal people are still lacking social relationships with Noongar people but now, people can hear Noongar historical accounts in settings that aimed at communicating these past experiences. Prior to discuss the ‘intercultural’, it is important to illustrate the importance of Noongar historical experience within the Perth Aboriginal community.

Mistakes of the past have been recognised by the Government well before non-Indigenous public consciousness was broadly raised in the late 1990s, following the publication of the Bringing them home report. A number of government organizations addressed issues surrounding Noongar history. For example, in 1986 in Western Australia, the Family History Unit was established in the then Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (today’s Department of Indigenous Affairs) to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal family members to research their own history through earlier Departmental records:

*Family history is very important to Indigenous people. It helps form their identity and provides a sense of belonging to their unique culture and heritage, both past and present.*

*From 1910 to 1970, thousands of Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities and raised in institutions or fostered out to non-Indigenous families (Department of Indigenous Affairs Family History flyer).*

Some participants are in contact with their extended families. Their forebears’ experiences of working on stations, of being coerced under the 1905 Act, of being removed from their parents and extended families to be placed in an institution, of having lived on a reserve and of not being paid for labour is knowledge transmitted from generation to generation. To her granddaughters, Libby (Noongar) recalls her early childhood in the 1940s:

*The block of land I thought had to do with the railway, but they told me, ‘No, Libby, it’s a Noongar reserve.’ We lived in this reserve. The bus didn’t pick me*
up, I had to walk [to school]. My Dad asked the bus driver, but he couldn’t because he would have lost his job. It was a terrible town (13: 156).

Noongar people often talked to me of their interactions with the non-Indigenous community in the past. I recall some ‘long yarns in the kitchen’ (the Noongar way of referring to it), with Noongar friends who told me long historical narratives of their extended families. Noongar people discuss these on an on-going basis. Sutton (1989:265) noted:

[Traditional Aboriginal approaches to myth and remembered events and the newer Aboriginal understandings of history, resemble each other. Both are heavily constitutive of identity, and charged with strong feelings.

I started many of my conversations with participants by discussing their memories of childhood. As a result, I have a large amount of data that deals with what is now an historical period as the two older ones responded by recounting their experiences in the 1930s. A Noongar participant, who is in her sixties, recalled the 1950s:

I always knew I was Aboriginal, but Grandma was secretive about it and wanted to hide it from White people. She would hide us in the kitchen, except when she knew who it was. At the time it was a very bad time. The 1905 Act. Fair skinned kids were taken away. We didn’t mix with [White] people in town. We were ashamed of being Aboriginal. We were sometimes allowed to sit on people’s veranda, but not to use the toilet. In the 40s and 50s, we accepted that (6: 88).

Within the Perth Aboriginal community, references to historical experiences emerge on various occasions as explanations for contemporary issues that people are now facing. For example, a Noongar woman working for a health agency sees on a daily basis the impact of the Stolen Generations on the upbringing of many of today’s youth. She said to me:

Parents were taken away and can’t rely on their own experience of being raised in a family (Notepad 5).

A Noongar man observed that older people are more reserved in their manner and explained this as a consequence of their upbringing on the Mission. He added:

It does impact on the way people interact with people nowadays. The old people, they’ve grown up in concentration camps, so they were away from their families, away from education. People were forced into labouring as kids, and didn’t have the opportunity to go to school, to choose later on (11: 105).

In above quote, the participant compared the everyday life of Noongar children in institutions to a concentration camp. This perception resonates with a few Noongar people who recounted about Carrolup, Sister Kate’s and Moore River Settlement in similar words. Some older participants who have spent their childhood in these
institutions being taken away from their parents have, however, at least a few happy memories of this period. The historian Maushart (1993) noted that strong childhood friendships were developed at Moore River Settlement and the Aboriginal writer, Ward (1991), also mentioned peer solidarity within institutions. Below, is the cheerful recollection of a participant who went to Moore River and New Norcia in the late 1930s, although he felt he had gained an early awareness of Aboriginal disempowerment:

I’m born in a Native settlement, not a church one. It was a government settlement. Others were run by the church. I knew the people in charge were White people. The kids were kept in the compound. It was funny because parents could pick up the kids outside the order set up by Neville and Native Welfare. I left in the late 30s and came down to Sister Kate’s Home (7: 95).

The coercive nature of past policies affected many aspects of people’s lives around the State. In Perth, Aboriginal people were reportedly not allowed to remain in the city from 6pm to 6am, and many participants remember this very clearly (see also Howard 1979: 96). Aboriginal people had to return to Armadale (25 km from Perth’s CBD), the nearest town they could live in—right up to the early 1950s when Allawah Grove was established in the Perth metropolitan area (Smith Walley and Pushman 2005: 12). A Noongar woman in her thirties described her grandmother’s experiences about the time when the curfew following the 1936 Act forbade Aboriginal people with no exemption certificate to stay in the Perth metropolitan area from 6pm to 6am:

My grandmother was working as a conductress on the trams, the only Noongar woman doing this, and she often helped other Aboriginal people who needed a ride to get out of town before the curfew started at 6.00pm but who didn’t have the fare. They couldn’t stay in town overnight in those days (2: 29).

People who had an exemption certificate, the so-called ‘dog-tag’\(^\text{12}\) (see also Colbung 1979: 102), were permitted to live in town, but not allowed to interact with their own people, including their own extended families. Two Noongar people have clearly indicated to me that possessing the certificate did not always stop family interactions, but it obliged people to keep these hidden from the government authorities. I met a Noongar woman who showed me, and a Yamitji man who read me, their forebears’ Native Welfare files. Aboriginal people’s lives were recorded in these Native Welfare files in such great detail that today they are viewed as both indecent and offensive (e.g.

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\(^{12}\) The Aboriginal ‘dog-tag’ was a colloquial reference to the passport-like document that exempted certain Aboriginal people from the parliamentary acts that regulated Aboriginal people in Western Australia. I was told, ‘It was like a dog tag. It made us feel like dogs’, which resonates with the military American dog tag that hold soldiers’ medical information.
concerning intimacy\textsuperscript{13}). Families can now obtain their own files\textsuperscript{14}, and these provide a means of gaining knowledge of their ancestors every day’s life. For the following participant, it was both his family’s Native Welfare file, combined with his own recollection of his childhood that helped him to understand better the complexities of past Aboriginal/non-Indigenous interactions:

I grew up in the Pilbara. Yinjibarndi people, Mardu, Bandjima, a lot of different Aboriginal tribes. When Mum and Dad got citizenship papers they were told not to mix with their people, they were encouraged not to speak their own language. I remember as a kid visiting a lot of people at night, it was to avoid the authorities. My grandparents were good friends with the station owner [this information was in the file]. A lot of old people were humble people. He was a good station owner who realized the difficulties and maybe didn’t agree with the policies (7: 82).

The 1905 Act, the Referendum of 1967, Sister Kate’s and the Moore River Native Settlement are amongst many benchmarks of past cross-cultural interactions that illustrate the oppression of Aboriginal people\textsuperscript{15}. As anthropologist Myrna Tonkinson (1990: 192) wrote on the issue:

Aborigines share a history of exclusion from white society, subjection to special laws... a history of oppression by white society.

**Cross-cultural awareness of Noongar history**

In terms of cross-cultural dialogue, fortunately, more and more people now hear an Aboriginal standpoint on Australian history. This could be an important step in the process of Reconciliation, as some people with whom I talked during my fieldwork felt that this would help to blur the dichotomy of an Aboriginal Australia versus a non-Aboriginal one. History has a vital role to play in bringing Australians together, as Howard (1990: 263) clearly expressed:

Individuals are alike if they share a common history, if they are ‘people’ who have the same story.

\textsuperscript{13} Native Welfare officers have recorded with a distressing level of detail what people were doing, in some cases their sexual activity and the moral judgement of the government on the issue. I saw this when a Noongar family showed me their forebears’ files.

\textsuperscript{14} The Department for Community Development’s Family Information Records Bureau and the Department of Indigenous Affairs’ Family History Services Unit are working jointly to help people to access their ‘personal records and family history’ (DIA officer 2004, personal communication).

\textsuperscript{15} It is noteworthy to refer to Burns (1995: 78) who observed similar features in the context of Black and White American historical interactions. He wrote ‘The profundity of African Americans’ concerns about interethic relations can be seen in narratives like [the] one about Lynch Hammock. Although the event took place over seventy years ago, the regularity of its retelling in family conversations makes it a benchmark in the history of black and white relations.’
The concern for the recognition of Aboriginal experiences in Australia's historical narrative has been expressed through the slogan 'White Australia has a Black history', widely used by Aboriginal activists and their supporters in a variety of contexts, including at the Survival Concert 2003. The commemoration of the Stolen Generation on National Sorry Day each year is an opportunity for both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians to acknowledge the sorrow caused by the forced removal of children from their families. Statements about individual Aboriginal experiences now reach a much broader non-Indigenous audience than in previous decades. For example, at a seminar 'Speaking from the past: Indigenous biographies', offered by UWA Extension Services in January 2003, one of the speakers shared his insights with a non-Aboriginal audience, which listened carefully to him. People present were concerned to learn more about Noongar experiences and, at times, the supportive audience laughed its approval, whilst learning the grim reality of an aspect of history that has remained unspoken until recently:

I have a different perspective on tourism at New Norcia Mission. I learnt how to write there, this gave me my power. I used that pen to crucify those monks. I learnt *Dick and Dora* [Australian school book for learning to read English] very young [the audience laughed]. At the Mission, we were never allowed to talk in the Aboriginal tongue. We were taught at the Mission that the Noongar tongue belonged to the Devil. A boy was talking in Noongar. He was flogged. They taught us to learn Latin, though [the audience laughed] (2: 3).

In several cross-cultural settings (workshops, cultural awareness lectures, art openings, for example), I heard Noongar and non-Aboriginal speakers or artists talking about Noongar historical experiences. They aimed to increase the general cultural awareness of the non-Indigenous audiences towards Noongar culture. One of them, a Noongar artist, said:

Art is part of our tradition, such as story telling and dance. In our art, we deal with our history, the removal of children, the missions, the experiences of contemporary life (9: 41).

I have numerous ethnographic accounts where non-Aboriginal people were exposed to Noongar experiences. The plurality of occasions that communicate Noongar historical narratives to the broader Australian public slowly increases the awareness of the non-Aboriginal communities about Noongar experiences, sometimes integrating it into the non-Aboriginal standpoint from which people already know (e.g. Noongar soldier in the Kokoda track during the second World War).
Noongar artist Norma MacDonald focuses consistently on issues surrounding her experience of being part of the Stolen Generations. Her regular exhibitions represent a way of communicating Noongar history. Her paintings frequently deal with issues surrounding the loss of home, mission life, the lack of recognition of Noongar culture imposed by White policies, and her family’s experience of the 1905 *Aborigines Protection Act*. In Norma’s exhibition, *Coming Home*, in October 2003, one of her paintings depicts her grandmother standing in a church doorway. She is barefoot, indicating her contact with the land, and is dressed with clothing of the early twentieth century, as Norma explained to a group of us at the gallery opening. A number of moons represent the passing of time. The white faces on the left represent the parliamentarians who made the laws that resulted in the Stolen Generations. A second of Norma’s paintings shows two young girls, with their handkerchiefs pinned to their smocks (Plate 6.1). They were removed from their own family, and the other girls at the Mission became their family instead. The background of the painting depicts government documents, rubber stamps, and files. A third painting speaks for itself. Finger signs on two posts point in every direction, with just one word on each of them, ‘home’, as Aboriginal children were institutionalised from all over the State. The paintings in this exhibition were bought by non-Indigenous people, one of whom was a Supreme Court judge who had been touched by the experiences of those who were part of the Stolen Generation. People visiting the exhibition learnt about Norma’s family’s experiences, but, just as importantly, people gained some more general insights of Noongar experiences about the Stolen Generation. This latter is becoming an important benchmark in the history of the nation; however, the details were unknown by many non-Aboriginal people less than two decades ago, as I learnt in the field.

It is essential to refer to the plurality of examples that allow a cross-cultural recognition of Aboriginal history, as this defines the intercultural body of knowledge concerning this theme. The multiplicity of historical events contributes to inform non-Aboriginal Australians on how past policies have shaped every day life of Noongar people in a very different way to that of the experiences of non-Aboriginal people. For example, the commemorative walls at New Norcia (138 km north of Perth) and the former Marribank Mission (230 km south-east of Perth, near Katanning), where children were institutionalised, now bear brass plaques containing the names of the children who lived in the settlements’ dormitories. I have a few fieldwork accounts that concern a group of
Plate 6.1  Noongar artists reflect on the Stolen Generations.

Best Friends, Norma MacDonald, Perth 2003
Norma’s mother and her best friend had to wear handkerchiefs pinned to their school clothing at Moore River Native Settlement.

Stoker Hill, Sandra Hill, Mandurah 1996
Sandra’s father could not even go to the pub for a drink with his Digger mates when he returned from the War.

Jigsaw, Norma MacDonald, Perth 1999
Norma’s grandparents were married at Moore River: fitting the pieces of her family together was like a jigsaw.

Reproduced courtesy of Berndt Museum of Anthropology
non-Aboriginal people learning about some historical experiences of Noongar oppression and discrimination and a number of these people seemed to be deeply touched. For example, a group of thirty non-Aboriginal people visited Marribank (Carrolup), some males and females were visibly moved, a couple to tears, as they stood in front of the plaques, looking at the names.

Engagement around the theme of ‘Aboriginal history’ has significance for both Noongar and non-Aboriginal people. Many cultural heritage institutions are seeking to enhance wider knowledge about Aboriginal history through exhibitions, publications and the like. The Berndt Museum of Anthropology holds 11,000 photographs and the Battye Library of Western Australian History holds 20,000 (Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts 1999). In 2005, the Berndt Museum mounted an exhibition of photographs relating to Perth’s first Aboriginal suburb, Allawah Grove, which opened in 1949. This exhibition provided another face of Noongar history, an account of the period before families were permitted to settle wherever they wished in Perth. The strong input into the exhibition by former residents contributed to the veracity of the account. Visitors to the exhibition, Noongar, other Aboriginal and non-Indigenous, were able to learn in greater detail about this important element of Perth’s Noongar history. Historic photographs provide a tangible link with the past for many Noongar families, as they are frequently the sole visual record of their forbears. They have become treasured possessions, as two Noongar scholars (Smith Walley and Pushman 2005: 10) noted:

The images talk to us about aspiration, a will to achieve against immeasurable odds. They speak about family relationships, inter-racial relationships and strength of community. They give us an insight into the amazing spirit of Aboriginal people.

In such ways, Noongar historical experiences have started to be unravelled and exposed to all Australians. This process defines an intercultural body of knowledge on which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can engage easily, as they begin to share a common knowledge of historical events—the emotions held about this past, however, may remain different for members of the two communities. Discussing internal features of Wiradjuri history in NSW, Macdonald (2004: 22) wrote: ‘A shared history is something people have gone through together, even though individuals have responded to it in different ways.’

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16 For a Koori perspective on comparable issues, see Macdonald (2003).
The corpus of knowledge on Aboriginal history that is communicated to all Australians is steadily increasing and participants have commented about this. Individual experiences of gaining knowledge of Aboriginal history varied according to people’s opportunities, hobbies and interests. A non-Indigenous participant, who is a political activist on Aboriginal rights, went to Rottnest Island with a few Noongars and other Aboriginal people from the Kimberley. The island has been used as a jail for Aboriginal people. She wrote in her diary, which she lent me for my research, what she learnt of the past at Rottnest Island:

In a walk along the beach front with John [Noongar], he showed us the cell where new arrivals were put and told us the ghastly story of about 30 men incarcerated there for three days over Christmas — with no food, water (or sanitary facilities). When the cell was unlocked many were dead so they were thrown into the sea. About one third survived. Above are the gaolers’ cottages overlooking the sea (Melody-Anne’s diary).

The theme of history is fully becoming intercultural, as Noongar and non-Aboriginal participants seem to agree about incorporating Noongar narratives in the official history of the state. I am not aware of historical events that are not accepted by the wider Australian society, the issue primarily concern the way Perth people are learning about Noongar recollections of historical discrimination. In July 2003, the Department of Indigenous Affairs organized tours along the Swan River for NAIDOC week. Many people (both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous) enrolled—mainly though the email lists of several government agencies. Near Perth CBD, the Noongar Elder, and convenor of the tour, spoke about the time when the only toilet Aboriginal people could use (despite there being 25 other toilets in the city that White people could use) was at the corner of Wellington Street and Barrack Street (7: 38). Some people in the audience knew of this practice, but most non-Indigenous people did not. Two people sitting behind me were very upset learning of such a restriction, and expressed delight that this was not happening any longer.

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17 'Ten Aboriginal prisoners were brought to the Island in August 1838. After a short period when both settlers and prisoners occupied the Island, the Colonial Secretary announced in June 1839 that the Island would become a penal establishment for Aboriginal people.... Closure of the Aboriginal prison was recommended in 1902. It officially closed in 1904 although prisoners were used to build roads and other works on the Island until 1931.' (www.rottnestisland.com/en/History+and+Culture/Penal+Settlement.htm); see also Kwaymullina (2001); Wiltshire (2004: 15-17); and Green (1984: 167-71).
Whereas it is Noongar experiences that are often told to Perth people, there are also opportunities for more and more people, including Aboriginal people, to learn about the experiences of other Aboriginal people. I recall, for example, the play *Mamu*, which dealt with the nuclear missile testing in Central Australia in the 1950s. A Noongar woman who attended the play said she did not know the details of this historical issue. She, as well as other non-Indigenous respondents, was very interested to hear about this element of Aboriginal history.

Year after year, people are gaining more and more knowledge about Aboriginal history, including overseas visitors. Some university exchange students from overseas (Europe, Canada and America) told me that they did not know anything about the Stolen Generations before it was discussed in lectures in the UWA History department. Two publications were given to students: *Ngulakj ngarnk nidja boodja: our mother, this land* (Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts 2000) and *Echoes of the Past: Sister Kate's Home revisited* (Centre for Indigenous History and the Arts 2002).

History provides the possibility for a cross-cultural sharing of experiences. It is commonly acknowledged that historical narratives are selective; some events become constitutive of the history of the group, whilst others remain hidden and untold. This is nothing new to Western cultures. Discussing historical records in the context of early European history, Foucault (1997: 63) observed the occurrence of un-told events and linked un-spoken aspect of history to the attribution of power. In today’s post-colonial era, non-Indigenous Australia has lost some of its political hegemony over Aboriginal affairs. Since Aboriginal people are not des-empowered by state policies, it seems that Aboriginal voices and historical narratives are publicly spoken, respected and recognised. At a public talk, a Noongar speaker denounced the past ‘politics of the colonisers’ and celebrated the fact that: ‘Now our story is allowed to be told’ (12: 107).

I have no data that illustrate that some contention may remain in the body of knowledge that enter the ‘intercultural’. Many difficult topics have been mentioned during cross-cultural events; these include: child abuse in Christian and state institutions, unpaid salary, sexual abuse by stations’ workers, for example. The way the two sides of historical narrations are interweaved in an ‘intercultural’ discourse is more problematic as it seems that non-Aboriginal people referred of Noongar experiences as being
‘Noongar experiences’ and do not really interweave them with their own, albeit accepting them as being part of Australian history. It is noteworthy to quote Aboriginal writer, Kurtzer (2003: 181) who noted18:

The desires of Indigenous authors to speak on their own behalf, with their own stories and their own histories, simultaneously meet with, and are constrained by, the desire of the hegemonic “white culture”. A process of negotiation takes place between the desires of “white” Australians and those of the Indigenous population.

From my fieldwork, however, I observed that many non-Indigenous people have been listening to the Noongar stories of the past, Noongar history, and were willing to engage with it.

A playwright said in 2003 at the premier of the play *Incognito* in regard to Aboriginal Australia:

As a non-Aboriginal person, I wanted to write a play about the concealed histories of Australia (2: 14).

These changes are significant for cross-cultural engagements. Non-Aboriginal people are listening to Aboriginal voices and are now reflecting on the past. A participant whom I met at a tour that raised the topic of Noongar history voiced his approval:

I’m 71. White settlers pushed down Aboriginal people, called them awful names. Boongs. Australia does things much better now. Things started to change 10 years ago (4: 17).

As people have now the opportunity to hear Noongar historical narratives, some non-Aboriginal community members challenged their own participation in this exclusion, even if they were not really in a position to act. The following elderly speaker stated this strongly:

In Australian history, Aboriginal people were treated as not being there. They did not count, and I’m just as guilty. I’ve never done anything about it. I was part of the scene (2: 127).

There is little doubt on the importance that history has for both non-Aboriginal and Noongar people. At a cultural awareness workshop, for example, one of the Noongar speakers advised the participants:

History is important in cultural awareness. How can we move on if we don’t know the real history of Australia? (2: 160).

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18 Commenting on Kurtzer’ paper, Moreton-Robinson (2003: 130) noted: ‘She argues that the dominant culture requires Indigenous writers to conform to a white genre of writing that enables the manufacture of acceptable representations of Indigenous authenticity for its white audience.’
It is on the basis of the dual Aboriginal/non-Indigenous recognition of Noongar history, of its significance but more importantly, on the shared recognition of Noongar experiences exchanged in cross-cultural setting, that the theme of history is becoming intercultural. Previously, this history was not acknowledged in Australian history books, it was even dismissed by some people. To follow on with the Venn diagram, in the past each standpoint was located apart from each other (i.e. outside the intersection of the two sets), whereas they are now joined together to form an intercultural agreement about historical narrations.

Throughout Part Two, I have shown a plurality of processes that are participating in the communication of Noongar culture and its reception by non-Aboriginal people. I have illustrated how non-Aboriginal cultural patterns are actively influencing the reception of Noongar culture. Indeed, the convergence of cultural patterns facilitates the understanding of a practice (e.g. past tradition, bush knowledge, spirit beings), whereas divergence of ideology limits cross-cultural appreciation of a feature (e.g. Aboriginal English and gender-based knowledge). Through the Noongar Welcomes to Country I have argued some issues concerning the ‘invention of tradition’, whilst in addressing the notion of pre-contact cultural practices I have brought to the forefront the existence of a dialogical process. The theme of kinship has focussed on the need to ‘package’ cultural habitus in order to facilitate its communication, whereas the notion of a ‘mysterious’ tradition has allowed me to point out that some people who involved themselves in the interface privileged some practices that are not part of Noongar/Aboriginal cultures or not spoken about. The theme of history, sometimes ‘packaged’ by historians, is a now a prolific field for cross-cultural engagements.
The Constraints Imposed by the Australian Economy in Shaping Cross-cultural Engagement

Part Three

Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine
Chapter Seven — The failure of the free market in enhancing cross-cultural engagement: media and advertising

Having discussed the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge and brought into light the range of cultural constraints that influence this, I now focus on some cross-cultural settings that allow Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to engage with each other. I observed that the nature of people’s interactions is influenced by economic factors; in other words, people’s engagements are constrained by an economic rationale. In this chapter, I discuss the way the free market economy impacts on the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interface. I investigate the highly competitive industries of the media and of commercial advertising, which are economically linked to each other, since advertising spots finance commercial television. This is a focal characteristic of the economic sustainability of the media, and it is far from being a peculiarity of the Western Australian media-scape. Indeed, Henderson and Baldasty (2003: 98) noted this key economic dynamic in the United States media industry:

Television advertisements merit particular attention because they are a key component of television (both in terms of content and economics).

My main focus here is to analyse how those enterprises that are constrained by free market logic (economic rationality, maximisation of profit, taking over competitors) can unintentionally influence the communication of knowledge about Aboriginal people and cultures to their audiences. Advertising and commercial television are probably the best exemplars of this issue. Indeed, both sectors of activity are ‘vehicles of cultures’, since they ‘provide audiences with ways of seeing and interpreting the world’ (Spitulnik 1993: 294), including ‘the understanding of cultural difference’ (p. 300). Turner and Cunningham (2002: 12) also argued this particularity of the media industry:

The media are not like any other industry.... The media have been called the ‘consciousness industries’ because what they sell are ways of thinking, ways of seeing, ways of talking about the world.

Broadly discussing the media, Hartley (2000: 4) observed in a similar vein that the media shape public opinions:

Media are primary and central institutions of politics and of idea-formation; they are the locus of the public sphere.

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1 Journalists, marketing directors and creative designers enunciated this point very clearly during my fieldwork, as I discuss later.
Within the particular context of Western Australia, Mickler (1998: 58) noted the influence of the media in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships:

The role of mass media in shaping the relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians had by the early nineties [i.e. 1990s] emerged as a significant aspect of contemporary race relations.

On a slightly different issue, commercial television broadcasts many advertisements. Each of them only lasts a few seconds, and are comparable to billboards that are mostly seen for an instant, while viewers are passing in the street. Nevertheless, advertisements are influential in shaping public opinion and cross-cultural understanding, as they are often seen by large audiences. Entman and Rojecki (2000: 162) defined television commercials as ‘indicators of the culture’s racial heartbeat’ and suggested:

Television commercials are leading cultural indicators. There are no people more expert in a society’s cultural values and taboos than those who create television advertisements.

It is not an overstatement to suggest that the media and the advertising industries play a significant role in shaping non-Aboriginal perceptions of Aboriginal cultures and people. Many participants were aware that Aboriginal affairs become a topic of conversation after a television program deals with the issue, especially on news bulletins. Conversation often occurs during dinner parties, at work, and so on. One participant said:

Once every two months, we have a conversation about Aboriginal Australia; it’s often triggered by the news (17: 109).

I divide Chapter Seven into two main sections that illustrate how the media and the advertising industry fail to enhance cross-cultural engagements because of the economic constraints under which they operate. I firstly investigate commercial television, principally news reports, and secondly the advertising industry. Both sectors of activity are subject to the monetary dynamics of a competitive free market, which are influencing the communication of Aboriginal cultures and perpetuating some misapprehensions. A fundamental rule of the free market economy is that both supply and demand meet and determine the prices of goods and services. As there is no government intervention to supplement relative loss of profit, businesses acting in a free market economy aim to increase consumers’ satisfaction in order to maximise their sales. Moreover, the constant search for market efficiency and rationality gives to their ‘producers’ (i.e. journalists, creative designers) very few opportunities to learn about
Aboriginal cultures and to compensate for their lack of cultural awareness. I illustrate throughout this chapter that the free-market economic setting, within which commercial media and mass-advertising industry are operating, constrains (restrains) Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal engagements. This is far from being unimportant. Indeed, the role of media in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal engagement merits particular attention because, as Hartley and McKee (2000: 6)\(^2\) wrote:

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australian 'speak' to each other via media coverage of Aboriginal affairs.

Their comment is mirrored in Henderson and Baldasty (2003: 98), who noted the role of advertisements in cross-cultural engagements:

Television advertisements.... representing both cultural norms but also having the potential to improve racial relations.... are part of a media system that influences how people see themselves and others.

Part Three illustrates how the Australian economy strongly influences the nature of cross-cultural engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; I now discuss the first setting.

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Commercial television\(^3\)

During my fieldwork, I held many conversations with non-Indigenous people about the ways they, their friends or their families have learnt about Aboriginal cultures. A number of participants informed me that they, and many of their friends, had neither worked nor socialised with Noongar people. Many non-Indigenous adults with whom I

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\(^2\) See also Craig (2004: 4), who noted, 'the media are the sites where politics and public life are played out, the sites where the meanings of public life are generated, debated and evaluated.'

\(^3\) I use the terminology 'commercial media' as opposed to 'non-commercial media'. The relevance of this dichotomy could easily be debated. Commercial media rely predominantly on commercial advertising to finance them, while most non-commercial media rely on government funding. In reality the dichotomy is not clear-cut. The differentiation of commercial versus non-commercial media results from my fieldwork investigation. It appears that commercial enterprises are seeking a profitable budget line as the major goal. They provide to their audience different representations of, and knowledge on, Indigenous cultures of Australia. In this section I will analyse commercial television and newspapers. In the following chapter, I will investigate non-commercial media enterprises. In his research on the influence of media on politics and public life, Craig (2004: 10-4) also raised the importance of media ownership 'because it raises issues about the diversity of voices in a society and the nature of political culture.' Craig (p. 10) made a similar dichotomy of commercial media as opposed to ABC and SBS, while Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 21) wrote '[o]wnership and control obviously affect media production and practice' (see also Turner and Cunningham 2002: 16; Jagtenberg and D’Alton 1992: 172).
talked during my fieldwork have also commented that they had not received any education about Aboriginal cultures. Television programs were, for a number of these people, a major means by which they could access knowledge on and about Aboriginal Australia. There are, however, many contentious issues concerning the role of the media in this process. Indeed, this chapter will demonstrate that the coverage of Aboriginal affairs tends to pertain to negative stories, whereas there is still an under-representation in regard to positive stories, and those depicting, in a non-exotic manner, Aboriginal people engaged in mainstream Australian life.

**The positive outcome of commercial television**

Aboriginal people or references to Aboriginal cultures are shown only sporadically on Australian commercial television. For audiences who do not ordinarily seek out Aboriginal programs, television is, nevertheless, a source of knowledge on Aboriginal life. High profile Aboriginal people (television presenters, actors, football players, Elders, for example) appeared from time to time on television. Some sports events began with an Aboriginal performance (the Rugby Cup Opening Ceremony displayed Aboriginal dances, as did the 2000 Sydney Olympics), and various programs focussed on Aboriginal Australia. Sometimes Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who have been invited on television shared their personal experiences of interaction. For example, a Channel 7 morning newscast had a guest who discussed her holidays around the Top End and her brief journey in an Aboriginal community. Some more indirect references are to Aboriginal paintings or artefacts that are, sometimes, displayed on a background wall of a television drama (e.g. *Blue Healers, Sea Change*); sometimes an Aboriginal painting is hung on the wall of a government office and appears during an interview. Australian and Western Australian media have the ability to inform people about Aboriginality (see also Trigger 1995: 120; Mickler 1998), and this is recognised in respondents' comments.

One person was a man in his late fifties who worked as a labourer. I met him at the Perth Royal Show, when he stopped to look at the Noongar display⁴. When I asked him if he was interested in Aboriginal cultures, he answered:

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⁴ For more details on the display, see Chapter Nine.
I have a superficial interest. No more than they are in mine [Southern European]. I watch TV, but I don’t read books. I look for the easy things. If there is an Aboriginal program, I might watch it (Notepad PRS).

While I conducted fieldwork at a performance of *Black Chicks Talking*[^5], I spoke with a non-Indigenous Yuppie in his late twenties, during the intermission. I asked him what motivated him to come to the performance. He replied:

It got my attention. I didn’t know a lot about Aboriginal women, about Aboriginal people in general. I saw a documentary on television. It’s amazing what they are like. We have more in common than we think: we are all hung up with parents, we make mistakes in life, how we deal with it and move on... I have no contact with Aboriginal people at work or in private life (1: 54).

Another non-Aboriginal participant grew up in England before migrating to Australia at the age of eighteen, around twenty years ago. In the past, she relied on the media to gain knowledge about Aboriginal cultures (later in life she worked with Aboriginal communities in remote Australia):

Until I left Perth to work at Balgo, my information was from books and the media (5: 74).

Like television, newspapers provide their readers with information about Aboriginal Australia as, from time to time, travel sections promote Aboriginal tours to the outback, the art section has Aboriginal book and exhibition reviews, and the education section mentions Aboriginal educational programs and/or successes.

**The negative outcome of commercial television**

Beyond the positive role of mainstream media in cross-cultural learning, commercial media can also increase the feeling of separation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities by transmitting essentially mainstream perspectives on Aboriginal affairs and sometimes triggering racist feelings. The most illustrative field example of this occurs when I did some volunteer work for a Noongar organization. I went straight from there to a friend’s party wearing a polo shirt that had the logo of the organization. One woman queried only few minutes after I got inside the house, ‘Do you feel sorry for the Aborigines with all the money we give them? ... the other day on the news...’ and guests started complaining about ‘handouts’ given to Aboriginal

[^5]: Aboriginal play directed and co-written by Leah Purcell and Sean Mee.
people. A few days later Emily, a non-Aboriginal participant, spoke to me about the role of the media in conveying negative images about Aboriginal people:

For people who haven’t been out there to Kakadu or Uluru, their understanding is through the media. My husband’s brother was ignorant. When he went to the Kimberley, he loved the culture. Now he’s more open to accepting Aboriginal culture as another part of Australian culture. Travel breaks down the myth. Before the myth was created by the media. The media confer the myth of people drunk, taking the land, and they don’t put in cultural context (3: 2).

Indeed, mainstream media are often blamed for encouraging racial hatred. During my fieldwork, I occasionally noticed but was more commonly told by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants that racist comments at barbecues, parties or at work tended to be triggered by recent crime reports on television and/or in newspapers concerning Aboriginal affairs. Whereas Dan (non-Aboriginal) only remarked: ‘If you want to make a party go quiet, talk about Aboriginal issues’ (16:17), Auntie Vanessa gave more details on her experiences of interacting with non-Indigenous people. She spoke about the negative influence the media have in her social life, as our conversation spontaneously shifted to the topic. Auntie Vanessa has experienced two kinds of responses, from time to time, at dinner parties she attended with non-Indigenous people. She found both of these types of comments offensive:

Something is in the newspaper and it triggers something. People are aware of being politically correct but after few drinks some get angry and say awful things. Others are idealistic, which is in some way worse. They are very paternalistic and sometimes they encourage more criminal behaviour. They are making too many excuses and contribute to the wrong perception (4: 130).

Some scholars have also observed that the media are often presenting Aboriginal people in a negative way. In the mid to late eighties, Trigger (1995) observed that the negative coverage of Aboriginal affairs was more than double the positive coverage in the West Australian, Perth’s major daily newspaper. This remained the case in the early nineties, when Mickler and McHoul (1998) also investigated the high coverage of Aboriginal youth crimes in Western Australian newspapers. In a broader Australian context, Haralambos et al. (1996: 666) noted about Aboriginal people’s representation in the media:

Many ethnic groups in Australia consider themselves to have been victims of media stereotyping... However, it is media coverage of Australian Aborigines which has aroused the greatest controversy. Aboriginal groups claim that they are

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6 Discussing the coverage of Aboriginal affairs, Mickler (1998) and Hartley and McKee (2000: 49) commented on the over-representation of Aboriginal Australia in Australian media.

7 Everyone called her ‘Auntie’ in the Noongar community, but Vanessa is a pseudonym.
persistently portrayed in a negative light by the media and that the media reinforce popular prejudice about them.

In the field, I discussed with a Noongar political leader the influence of the media on Noongar and non-Indigenous race relationships. He explained to me how he felt about racism perpetuated by some journalists who over-emphasised Aboriginal ethnicity and, by doing so, encouraged racial hatred and perpetuated negative views of Aboriginal Australia:

Journalists get police information and crime or gang-related stories on the news. One morning we woke up with the news that Aboriginal gangs were terrorising the suburbs. That was in 1984, maybe late 1980’s. Everyone got hysterical. When the story got analysed, the gang was just four youths, with just two of them Aboriginal people. There was no truth, but the hysteria was generated (15: 21).

Karina, a young Noongar mother, held the media responsible for the negative attitudes of some non-Indigenous Australians:

I think of lot of people who discriminate ...judge from what they hear in the media.... After meeting me they change (13: 150).

Some non-Indigenous participants were also extremely concerned about the influence of the media in enhancing racism. They denounced commercial media for spreading negative perceptions of Aboriginal Australia. Two journalists told me that, every so often, their Channel received phone calls of complaint from viewers upset by a negative report on Aboriginal affairs. Simone, a non-Indigenous woman, is another of these Australians who is critical of media representations of Aboriginal people:

It strikes me, the non-awareness of some people who can be so ignorant. Media can be so biased. It incites racism through bad reporting and by playing on people’s misfortune. I find it disappointing that people choose to be ignorant (5: 128).

In the political context of Reconciliation, at a time when racism is actively discouraged and discrimination legally unacceptable, in a society that promotes multiculturalism, I am puzzled: why are the media enhancing cross-cultural misapprehensions about Aboriginal affairs? Is it because there is more Aboriginal crime and issues of ‘rights’ are controversial? I argue that the contentious references to Aboriginal Australia by commercial media (see also Langton 1993) result from economic factors imposed by the competitive market economy on commercial channels—as observed in my ethnographic investigation conducted amongst both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous journalists.
What sells? The economic constraints of commercial television

This section aims to explain some of the reasons that make some people feel the media are encouraging non-Aboriginal people to express racial antagonism toward Aboriginal communities. These findings are not based on my own observations, but I learnt this perspective from nine journalists, who gave me detailed explanations about the way the financial pressures shape the content of their news reports. This section is at times disturbing, as it illustrates that economic factors imposed on these commercial channels are, indeed, responsible for perpetuating negative reports about Aboriginal affairs. From my discussions with some journalists, it became clear that the media do not intend to be ‘racist per se; however, in order to maintain their flow of revenue, the commercial media are predominantly broadcasting negative coverage about Aboriginal affairs and, by doing so, may enhance racial antagonism. Broadcasters and journalists spoke to me about the way the media seek to attract audiences and elaborated on the content of news coverage that appeals to large audiences. The fact that the media tend to encourage negative views about Aboriginal Australia seems to be a consequence of the financial constraints that drive the media, rather than their intention of being harmful to the interest of Noongar and, more generally, Aboriginal people. It was out of such research findings, put into perspective with other of my data, which I have come to understand how economic constraints influence cross-cultural engagements.

Many commercial enterprises operating in a free-market economy aim to increase their clientele. Businesses often achieve this goal by selling products that appeal to their customers. Broadly speaking, the commercial profit of most businesses is calculated by the difference between production costs and sales revenue, or sometimes by purchase costs in the case of successive trade operations. Television programs, however, are financially calculated in terms of running costs and audience ratings. Economic concerns drive commercial broadcasters, and audiences are media customers. Channels seek to take over their competitors by maximising their audience ratings, as highly rated programs attract most of the advertising that finances the channel. In order to position their news and current affairs bulletins in front of their competitors, commercial media are seeking to optimise their audience ratings with ‘good stories’, as journalists named news bulletins that appeal to a large audience. Every participant working in the media
spoke about this; their comments are mirrored in Mickler (1998: 61), Turner and Cunningham (2002: 18) and Radford (2003: 65-74) for the United States.

Henderson and Baldasty (2003: 100) discussed the ‘[p]olitical economy of television’ and noted ‘[f]or broadcast the only substantial source of revenue is advertising’ (see also Spitulnik 1993: 293). The profit of commercial television requires the maximisation of customers (large audiences) and revenue (advertising income) and the minimisation of production costs in completing programs. Journalist-participants spoke about the financial dynamics of the media; Australian economists (Terry, Jones and Braddock 1988: 9-10) observed:

[C]ommercial radio exists because program sponsorship and advertising have replaced the user charge, or price, which is actually the basis of exchange. In this instance, the cost of sponsorship and advertising is related to the level of demand for each radio program and therefore serves the role that would be otherwise played by prices.

Participants working for commercial television explained to me that some stories attract big audiences, large audiences attract advertisers, advertisers scrutinize ratings and are willing to pay a high price for a prime-time advertising spot.

**First economic constraint: increasing the channel revenue**

All journalists with whom I talked have commented similarly that the channel relies on advertising for funding. Channels increase their revenue by attracting advertising, especially when the price of advertisements is high during the prime-time television slot—that is, between 5 pm to 8.30 pm. Programs and advertisements screened on commercial television during this period are likely to be seen by wide audiences. The one-hour news programs occur, indeed, during this prime-time television.

Most of the participants who have blamed commercial television for communicating misapprehensions about Aboriginal affairs had held the news bulletins responsible for this. This is evident in some of the participants’ comments I have mentioned above; investigating the news values, therefore, became one of my fieldwork inquiries. I asked Christopher, a non-Indigenous manager of the newsroom of a commercial channel: ‘What drives the news on commercial television?’ His reply unambiguously indicated
that the priority of commercial media is to entertain the audience rather than to inform people:

We want sensational and entertaining stories. We are not looking to inform people or to educate people. We are not here for education. The role of the ABC or SBS is to inform; their stories are dull but wordy. In a land rights story, there are no pictures, just people talking in the empty bush (9: 25).

Christopher’s answer is far from being trivial in regard to the issue of the expression of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal race relations through the news. What kind of knowledge about Aboriginal affairs is communicated during this prime-time television slot if news bulletins are ‘sensational and entertaining’ rather than informative? News and current affairs programs on commercial television reach wide audiences in terms of the number of people, and also in terms of social, economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, participants-journalists have indicated that news and current affair programs focussing on Aboriginal issues are dominated by negative reports. A non-Aboriginal journalist working in the newsroom of a commercial channel told me that, once every six weeks on average, the evening news refers to Aboriginal Australia in a negative and controversial way—for example, Noongar children involved in a car chase. In the following sections, I discuss a variety of economic constraints that influence the content of news bulletins.

Journalists and broadcasters who explained to me the format of the news and current affairs bulletins (e.g. Today Tonight, Australian Current Affair) said that these were composed of a variety of topics, which include court cases, government and political stories, disasters, sports, famous peoples, tragedies, health, and various social concerns. Albert (journalist) elaborated on the issue and explained me that two-thirds of the new bulletins are about all kinds of events that are tragic and have occurred within the last 24-hours. These are, for example, stories about storms, shark attacks, car accidents, crime, or terrorism. The remaining thirty per cent are more discriminating bulletins and are selective in their topic. These latter reports investigate, for example, the rich and famous, the price of housing, how to improve investments, travel concerns, and so on. Patrick, another non-Aboriginal journalist, clarified the format of commercial news in relation to Aboriginal affairs:

70% of bulletins are straightforward and tragic. The truth is not suffering. But in the 30%, you see the bias, and very rarely it raises Aboriginal issues, except if something is colourful. A lot of court and police stories involve Aboriginal people. That’s in the 70% of tragic news (5: 57).
Although none of the other journalists with whom I spoke detailed the format of the news, they all mentioned that they were looking for a ‘good story’. One journalist clarify the meaning:

A good story... people talk about it at work, and if it is a really unusually good story, viewers call a friend (8: 7).

Whereas Jakubovicz et al. (1994: 159) noted, ‘News values are a highly complex set of codes by which newsworthiness is judged’, I observe from analysing journalist-participants comments, that there are four major criteria to which journalists are adhering in producing a ‘good story’ for screening during the one-hour news. ‘Good stories’ require death, controversy, good images, and the audience should have a certain degree of familiarity with the topic. All of these attributes contribute to attract wide audiences; some of which would rely on the news to form their opinion about Aboriginal people.

Attracting audiences with images of death and morbidity

Journalist-participants have spoken about stories that tease the morbid interest of television viewers. They elaborated by explaining that audiences love a high-speed car chase because it is visually tragic. Christopher explained to me that morbid bulletins provide good pictures that feed ‘the fascination of the viewers with death’, as ‘an helicopter crash’ would also do. To me, the morbid fascination people have with death is the driving force behind many popular detective stories. Journalists clarified that morbid curiosity seems to be part of human nature and is not only directed towards Aboriginal Australia: crying parents having lost a child, husband or wife of victims of terrorism, and the like are also appealing news for audiences.

Such stories sustain a broadcaster’s financial revenue, according to journalists. They also informed me that bulletins which are about teenage Noongar boys, who steal cars and sometimes subsequently die in car crashes, or who kill people when speeding while escaping the police, were ‘good stories’ that have the potential to increase revenue.

In the newsroom, journalists listen to the police scanner, so the channel can send a car to film the action when there is a potential story—this requires although that an event
last more than twenty minutes if journalists are to reach the spot before the event is over. Car chases are difficult to cover because most do not last very long; nevertheless, they are appealing to audiences\(^8\), as all journalists to whom I have talked have commented. It is disturbing to foresee the impact that such screenings may have on cross-cultural relations; however, journalists explained that when they have managed to capture a story of a tragically ending car chase, the footage of the car crash is likely to be screened throughout the day to promote the evening news on prime-time television.

Journalists with whom I spoke were well aware that news bulletins showing a car chase involving Noongar youths were likely to encourage derogatory comments at work or at parties on the following days, and to promote racist fears. However, they realised that such stories would be talked about with others (friends, family members, work colleagues, for example) and that these people’s relatives would be more likely to watch the channel the next day. A good story attracts audiences through a snowball effect. Patrick, a non-Aboriginal journalist whose wife and children are Noongar, was aware of the economic impetus that commercial media impose on cross-cultural relations by emphasising morbid stories. He sadly commented, however:

> I have no say in these reports. At the end of the day you have to do the job, like a soldier (5: 67).

A Noongar journalist who works for mainstream media shares this point of view, but accepts it because it is the economic rationale for the media industry:

> We can’t put our opinion in a story. People form their own views. It’s not the media’s fault (11: 19).

Out of my research findings, I became aware that the primary intention of the media was not to encourage racial distrust; however, the main concern of commercial television is to increase audience ratings. Beside the factor of morbidity in news reports, all journalist-participants have also commented that controversial issues indeed attract audiences and bring revenue. This is a matter of consequence, deriving from the competitive market, rather than resulting from intent.

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\(^8\) The issues such as level of the water dams, football, celebrities’ income and gossip are also appealing stories.
Controversial issues that tease audiences

Christopher, Patrick and Aurora spoke about news reports that play on the dichotomy of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’, on people who follow social normality and those who do not. Patrick mentioned to me that journalists attend court hearings to find appealing controversies about the anti-social actions and behaviours of some people. He added:

Major crime stories, we have overdone them, but we still do it, because it interests people. It’s controversial and people like to watch (5: 58).

Commercial news bulletins do not seek to provide answers to controversial subjects, only to tease out both sides of the debate, according to journalists. Journalists making a bulletin on Aboriginal affairs are likely to give voice to both non-Aboriginal government spokespeople and Aboriginal representatives, especially when comments diverge or, even better, are opposed. Clare, a Noongar journalist, suggested that Noongar children involved in car chases trigger reactions from Noongar political leaders and provide a window of opportunity for media reporters to obtain controversial coverage:

If a car loaded with White people [who have stolen it], we’re still covering it and people would still be interested. But with Aboriginal kids, it becomes a follow-up story. ALS says ‘it’s not the kids’ fault’ (11: 6).

Most reports of car chases involving Noongar teenagers (and young adults) tend to become a political controversy because the crime is followed up in public debate between Noongar organizations that seek to explain the crime according to inter-ethnic relationships (for example, difficulty in getting jobs and housing, marginalisation of the Noongar community) and mainstream government agencies that interpret the events in rather different terms (social disruption). Journalists who elaborated on the issue argued that this contrasts with the case of non-Aboriginal children involved in car chases because there is less of a controversy on which to build up a ‘good story’, with follow-up bulletins over a few days.

During the winter of 2003, a curfew was imposed on children being in Northbridge, an inner city area of Perth with many restaurants and nightclubs. A number of Noongar youths come to Northbridge on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, and some Noongar Street Patrol teams are always present on these nights to act in case of street problems
and social needs. Many Noongar participants felt the curfew targeted Noongar children in an unfair way. The Northbridge curfew was a topical issue on the news that was followed up over many days, and debated between mainstream government departments and Aboriginal Legal Services. Aurora, a Noongar journalist, was bitter that the issue made the news, day after day, encouraging non-Aboriginal people to fear Noongar youth as a social threat. She felt the news failed to provide background information on the Noongar community. Despite their resentment, Aurora, Clare, Patrick and Joel (journalists) were aware that, the way the Northbridge curfew was reported resulted from to the economic dynamics of mainstream television, which is seeking to attract an audience. At times, Patrick has a strong negative opinion about media reports:

You don’t want to scratch below the surface, because you’ll find a dislike towards Aboriginal people. Things are crudely motivated by racism. The ways we present the news reflects a white Catholic and Protestant mainstream view of Australia. There is no search for the truth, but just good images, violence, and clashes. We look for that. It's sensational. Rape allegations against the ATSIC chairman, it's news, it’s controversy (5: 61).

Journalists who discussed the issue agreed that controversial stories catch audiences; however, journalists clarified to me that, in order to achieve this goal, a controversial story needs to mirror the cultural values of mainstream Australia. Patrick, for example, thinks that the Northbridge controversy has promoted the values of the broader community, and maintained ethnic marginalisation:

It reflects the belief system of the non-Indigenous people, who represent 97 % of the Australian population. There is a wide belief that there is a problem [with Aboriginal Australia], and with the Northbridge curfew, the government is doing something, finally. It gives a fairly imbalanced view of an issue, as it reflects the narrow view of the norm, it reflects the mainstream community and its ‘wisdom’ (12: 25).

In a similar vein, another journalist-participants said, ‘We [the media] reflect what we think is the popular view’ (see Jakubowicz et al. 1994: 24; Hartley and McKee 1996: 10 on the Australian media; Bird 2003: 23 and Radford 2003: 70 for North American media). Aboriginal stories tend to be controversial, as an Aboriginal spokesperson is often opposing non-Aboriginal government representatives. Many people have the awareness that a number of Aboriginal issues are difficult and complex to resolve, and many journalists rely on this well-established viewpoint to secure a ‘good report’. However, controversial stories, like those involving death, increase audience ratings and therefore attract more advertising. This is what finances the media, although controversial stories have some negative outcomes on cross-cultural understandings.
Increasing audience ratings with good pictures and familiar topics

There is not much to discuss about good pictures. Journalists explained to me that a plane crash, scenes of a town destroyed by a cyclone, burnt houses after the Canberra bush fires, wrecked cars after a tragic chase, and the like, appeal to audiences more than ‘a bare landscape with people discussing a Native Title agreement’, as one journalist voiced it. In other words, tragic images are, somehow, inherently visual and attract a good rating.

There is more to say about ‘familiarity’ with the topic. The market economy often imposes on enterprises a need to minimise their costs of ‘production’. Each day of the week, journalists are under the constant pressure to complete, in a very short time (to minimise the cost), reports that appeal to broad audiences. Apart from a shockingly new scoop (e.g. tsunami, plane crash), journalists tend to report on issues with which audiences are familiar. This practice is not restricted to Aboriginal issues. Drug smuggling stories bring more drug smuggling reports, fire reports bring more fire reports, as news topics snowball with each other (5: 12). Christopher and Joel said that audiences tend to be more interested in topics that have already triggered their emotions. Aurora (a Noongar journalist) indicated her concern and elaborated on this issue in regard to Noongar affairs:

The negative image, it’s easy. We are fair game. There are a high number of Aboriginal people in jail. The current issue is the Noongar kids in Northbridge. The stories are easy and a journalist with a strict deadline goes for the easy stuff (4: 73).

Aurora raised an interesting aspect of the media when she referred to the ‘easy stuff’. By this she means a quick and easy way to complete a ‘good story’. In terms of the coverage of Aboriginal affairs, there is much more to say. Although some events are not often mentioned on the news, such as suicide, Aboriginal deaths in custody (mostly suicide) are widely reported (7: 154). Audiences are familiar with the topic because the issue has been discussed on the news over the years (5: 12). A journalist suggested to me that this is because:

Since the Royal Commission [investigated death in custody], it is a topical issue. We show it because that works on the news (6: 18).
In a similar vein, another journalist voiced the opinion that suicides by Noongar people in custody are, without a doubt, material for a story that increase the number of viewers; he explained that this is because people have already a degree of familiarity with a topic that has previously triggered their emotions:

If a Noongar kid is picked up by police and kills himself in custody, then it is a big story (7: 65).

Monetary dynamics within the media means that journalists are inclined to develop reports on the issues of Aboriginal death in custody, and other controversial stories. A consequence of this media attention to Aboriginal affairs is that some viewers come to perceive Aboriginal Australians as a social and government problem; Mickler (1998: 16) has noted this latter point, ‘Aboriginality has figured in news journalism broadly as a problem of social governance’.

Prime-time television is the financial backbone of the money-making industry of commercial media. Its financial imperatives shape news reports and over-communicate a negative image of Aboriginal affairs that influences non-Aboriginal people’s perception. Some Noongar participants were, like George (Noongar father and Yamatji mother), aggrieved that the broader Australian society has so much misapprehension about Aboriginal people and cultures. George blamed prime-time television programs because they influence a wide audience and play a significant role in cross-cultural communication of Aboriginal cultures.

Indeed, I have a few ethnographic accounts that illustrate the dismissive attitudes some non-Aboriginal Australians have towards Noongar people, resulting from negative coverage of Aboriginal affairs. For example, in the following extract of my field notes, I recall a conversation between a non-Indigenous man (M) and a non-Indigenous woman (W). It exemplifies the opinion of some non-Aboriginal participants who saw Aboriginal Australians as a social problem, not to say a dangerous threat (e.g. stealing goods, attacking people)—although W held the media responsible for enhancing such feelings:

M: People tried to break into my parent’s car. They assumed it was an Aboriginal person. An Aboriginal guy with pliers trying to do anything.... More Aboriginal people in the country and they might behave differently. In the city, they are hostile and associated with theft and many are unreliable.
W: I agree with M. A lot of Aboriginal people in the city are scary. Is it safe at night, with empty streets, and groups of people? It’s probably coming through the
news. They are the ones who get the publicity. We don’t hear about the family where the children go to school (13: 33-4).

I have investigated the predominantly negative media coverage about Aboriginal affairs; however, an issue remains un-answered: Why do some people accuse commercial media of over-emphasising negative representations of Aboriginal affairs, if this is just the way the industry works? This is because there are very few positive bulletins about Aboriginal people, quite unlike topics that concern the interests of the wider society, as I now discuss.

**Economic marginalisation of Aboriginal Australia**

Two journalists described programs such as *Today Tonight* and *Current Affair* (6.30 pm to 7.00 pm) as ‘light entertainment’. The audience demographic of such programs is also the major index that channels are, strategically and carefully, aiming to be as representative as possible of the Australian population, as some journalists explained to me. The rating system looks at the age and gender of viewers to avoid omitting either females, or males, or elderly, or youths, for example (6:17). If a commercial channel is losing its female audience over 40 years old, a report on hormone replacement, or something similar, is likely to be included in this light entertainment news, said the head of a news room (Notepad 6). He added that similarly, commercial channels grasp the youth audiences by showing music programs, fashion shows or skateboard competitions; they attract the elderly with reports on how to save money.

Indigenous Australians represent around 3% of the population of Western Australia (ABS Census 2006). Journalists explained to me that 3% is not a substantial segment of the Australian population, and advertisers were not fearful of losing Aboriginal viewers through negative reports. They elaborated on this issue, indicating that Aboriginal people draw little interest from advertisers because people remain, on average, with a lower socio-economic status. Despite the economic success of some

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9 Teenagers attract marketers’ attention as ‘they are society’s trendsetters in fashion, music, entertainment, ideas, and attitudes. Marketers also know that if they attract someone as a teen, there is a good chance they will keep the person as a customer later in life’ (Kotler 2006: 89).

10 Unlike Aboriginal Australians, both African Americans and Hispanic Americans represent numerically a large segment of the U.S. consumer market, which leads to the development of new advertising strategies targeting these consumers: ‘Ads (and media more generally) are more segmented than ever…. new ethnic advertising agencies have emerge to conceptualize and direct these niche campaigns (Hoynes 2001)’.
Aboriginal individuals in various sectors of activity (e.g. government, tourism, art, media, private commercial enterprises), the economic wealth of the Aboriginal population remains largely lower than non-Aboriginal people (Taylor 2006a, 2006b; Sanders 2008; Australian Bureau of Statistics). In other words, the spending power of Aboriginal people is more limited than that of the wider population\textsuperscript{11}. More precisely, two journalists and one marketing executive said that many Aboriginal people do not have a high spending power that would attract marketers selling goods and services of mass production (e.g. orange juice, rice, hardware). They unambiguously commented that during the decision-making process of selecting ‘light entertainment’ news bulletins, commercial television managers were not really concerned about losing Aboriginal audiences, as advertisers were not targeting them. This is unlike the 97% of the population that is non-Aboriginal and has, on average, a higher economic income.

The major consequence of this lack of concern about losing the Aboriginal audiences is that non-Indigenous people do not get an opportunity to learn about issues of everyday life that concern Aboriginal people more specifically—in a process similar to that of males who can gain knowledge about hormone replacement medication through the news, or adults on youth-specific interests. The large absence of ‘light entertainment’ news reports on Aboriginal interests has a significant consequence: on prime-time television, Australian audiences (from all ethnic backgrounds) learn to regard Aboriginal affairs as primarily a problematic issue, unlike those topics of non-Indigenous Australia, where morbid or anti-social reports are counter-balanced by more positive stories that inform all people about the everyday concerns of a category of viewers (e.g. the elderly, women over 40). In other words, non-Aboriginal people do not get the opportunities to see reports that discuss topics that have an interest for Aboriginal communities (e.g. successful Aboriginal people, issues concerning Aboriginal languages, an Aboriginal art centre).

I just add briefly some clarification provided to me by three journalists. They elucidated that newspaper journalists are in a position to investigate social issues more deeply than their colleagues on commercial television, whose reports are mostly less than two minutes long (see also Mickler 1998: 181). Jill (newspaper journalist) said that readers

\textsuperscript{11} Broadly speaking, ‘the number of consumers in the market’, as well as ‘the money incomes of consumers’ are determinant factors in defining consumers’ demand (McIver 2001: 76)
have also the freedom to select stories that appeal to their own interest. *The West Australian* and *The Australian* newspapers have an average of one hundred stories in each issue, whereas televisions news has less than ten bulletins, explained Amelia (non-Indigenous newspaper journalist). Newspaper reports are less inclined to represent Aboriginal issues in a negative way, she said:

A good story is about issues that matter to people. We try to look at what is behind the story. For Aboriginal juvenile crime, we look more at the context of an event. Channel 10 or 9 look at news coverage, but we are able to do all the social issues. We look at how the child was removed from his family; we look more at the context. We can go beyond two minutes, what and how it happened (12: 100).

However, newspapers’ audiences have ‘dropped dramatically since the Second World War’ (Hartley and McKee 1996: 10) and print media may be less influential in shaping people’s opinion about Aboriginal affairs than television now is.

There is an absence of reports on everyday Aboriginal people’s life and cultures; most reports are about crime, car-chases, deaths in custody and the like. Whereas monetary dynamics drives the media industry, which is influencing the imbalance between positive stories on Aboriginal Affairs and negative ones (the latter dominate), there is more to consider regarding this issue of economic constraints imposed on commercial television in promoting Aboriginal cultural awareness.

**Cultural issues and economic pressures**

Beyond the advertising revenue of the media, it is important to address how journalists’ practices can also influence the content of their reports. Indeed, journalist-participants have spoken to me about the short time frame available for the preparation of media reports, which does not offer sufficient opportunity for familiarisation with the cultural context. Clare, Aurora, Anita, Patrick and Joel said that some of their colleagues have little contact with the Noongar community and lack knowledge about Noongar culture. They observed that, without a degree of cultural awareness, it is sometimes a difficult issue to produce stories on Aboriginal affairs. Therefore, I discussed with some journalists how the profession could gain better Aboriginal cultural awareness. Christopher explicitly opined that journalists are facing some real economic constraints concerning time and costs:
In journalism we have strict deadlines. We don’t have time to turn around and learn. We are not academics. We have limited time to complete a story. We are talking of thousands of dollars. There is no time for cultural awareness (5: 38).

In the following chapter, I illustrate how the government provides some funds to increase Noongar cultural awareness. However, this is not the case for commercial media that are driven by, and have to answer to, some specifically economic factors. As Christopher, the head of a newsroom, has clarified above, the media have strict deadlines and thousand of dollars are at stake in programming prime-time television. There is very little time for gaining awareness about Noongar culture.

**Lack of training**

Senior journalists were trained years ago. Aurora deplored that they have little insight into Aboriginal cultures, which would inform their program decision-making. She blamed the WASP-ish profile of the middle management and their poor awareness of Aboriginal cultures as a cause of the predominantly negative representations of Aboriginal people in the media. Aurora voiced her concern strongly:

> The media are controlled by people who haven’t got a clue on Aboriginal cultures, and who are not interested. The average senior management is pushing 55 years old, is White Anglo-Protestant and lives in nice suburbs. They don’t have any ideas and they make decisions on programs. They’re fat middle-aged pigs! (4: 79).

This lack of cultural awareness was hardly surprising, given that knowledge of Aboriginal cultures was not included in Media Studies courses less that a decade ago, according to several locally trained journalists (see also Hartley and McKee 2000: 329). It was only in 1998-1999 that the Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University enrolled its first Noongar student. I spoke with her and she told me that she wanted to be a journalist because it is a means to communicate cultural awareness in an ‘easy way to understand’, as she said. She felt that her attendance at the Academy might have given her fellow non-Aboriginal students an unprecedented and valuable opportunity to learn about some common misapprehensions concerning Aboriginal cultures, because they had an opportunity to engage directly with a Noongar student:

> I break down some myths, like the one that ‘we all drink alcohol’. I did an assignment on Native Title. Native Title knowledge is zero. They thought it is about getting people’s backyards, until you tell them that so many areas of land

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12 See Jakubovicz et al. (1994: 34) on Australian minorities and the media.
are not under Native Title. They had no idea it was like that. It was a big education trip for them (11: 1).

Some journalists felt that a degree of cultural awareness is necessary to conduct good reports and have discussed the issue with me.

**Lack of cultural awareness: the issue of questioning**

A key element of high-quality journalism is an ability to conduct rigorous enquiry that results from thorough investigation (3: 2). Joel, a non-Aboriginal journalist with a high degree of cultural awareness, felt he knew how to gain information from Aboriginal people in a culturally appropriate way. He elucidated his point by recounting one of his experiences. When he went to the fringe of the Western Desert to conduct a report on Aboriginal affairs, he did not ask any questions. He and his interviewee remained silent for a while. Joel said he knew he was acting in a culturally appropriate way by allowing the Elder to speak in his own time. Joel clarified that he did not feel awkward about the silence. By following this cultural code, Joel wanted to show his respect to the Elder, and felt he gained the necessary insight to inform his audience:

I went to Wiluna to interview a senior elder to talk to me for an Indigenous newspaper. I told him what I wanted. Nothing was said for 20 minutes, after that he spoke. I knew he'd speak to me when he was ready. It's cultural awareness (16: 23).

In Western-based society the notion of asking questions to an interlocutor is seen as an expression of interest. Learning from someone by questioning conveys a form of respect to the person who has the knowledge. In Aboriginal cultures, learning is in control of the people who hold the knowledge. It is not always culturally appropriate to ask direct questions. From my own personal experience, both in the South-West, especially with older people, and also in the Western Desert, direct questioning is not culturally appropriate. This social code of behaviour is more obvious in remote Australia (see Myers 2005: 3 for a comment on the issue), as people are crossing the boundary line between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures less frequently. Nevertheless, this is also a cultural practice relevant for Noongar people. A Noongar woman told me:

With an older Noongar person I wouldn't talk. I'll listen. I do this as a person. I listen to Elder since I'm a kid. To non-Aboriginal people you talk to them. It's the way it is (7: 35).
Matthew also commented on the different ways of learning between his Noongar and non-Aboriginal cultures:

The Western way of learning is to learn the whole thing. With Aboriginal cultures, it’s a different way of learning. People are talking only what is taught to them. It’s different ways of learning. You learn and get told what you need to be told, you don’t just ask and ask. I felt stupid to ask questions (4:3).

I suggest that Noongar and, more generally, Aboriginal ways of engaging can be disorientating for non-Aboriginal journalists who lack cultural awareness. This presents a significant problem to journalists who, in their work, have to make reports based on direct questioning.

The notion of cultural sensitivity is central to Aboriginal cultures, and can sometimes impinge on topics that involve sensitive knowledge. Some individuals cannot answer particular questions. It is not that the person does not know the answer; it is that they cannot give the answer. This principle is not so pervasive in Western cultures. Amelia, who was aware of this cultural practice, said she did not misunderstand the reason for silence on a particular matter when she investigated a story in a remote community:

In community you’ve got feelings that people don’t tell you. I’d love to learn about Law business, but people say, ‘It’s Law business’, so off limits (12:109).

Journalism as a profession is slowly developing an Aboriginal cultural awareness over the last decade. Events such as a National Media Forum held in February 1996 in Perth (Hartley and McKee 1996: 11; Hartley and McKee 2000), which resulted from The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody of 1991, aimed at increased cross-cultural awareness and the reporting of Aboriginal affairs. The Commission investigated the influence of the media on deaths in custody and made a number of recommendations (Hartley and McKee 1996: 3; Hartley and McKee 2000). While a number of recommendations aim to facilitate the relationships between Aboriginal Australia and the media industry (see Recommendation 205, 206 and 207 in Hartley and McKee 1996: 3 and 2000: 11), Recommendation 208 encourages non-Indigenous journalists to develop contact with an ‘Aboriginal media organization’. Alan, a Noongar Elder who is also a spokesperson in Western Australia when Aboriginal people are involved in legal cases, is fully aware of the real need to bridge the cultural gap by informing non-Indigenous Australia about Aboriginal issues. He has witnessed first-hand the poor cultural awareness of some journalists, and wishes to solve the biased perception of Aboriginal Australia that he felt results from their lack of familiarity with
the culture. Alan wished that journalists were providing a cultural context and objective reports, with the aim that Aboriginal people would gain stronger and more widely spread respect from non-Indigenous Australians. Reflecting on his experience, Alan strongly suggested to me that poor journalistic cultural awareness impinged seriously on cross-cultural relations. Alan’s priority to promote cultural awareness amongst journalists led him to set up cross-cultural workshops. He also congratulates journalists who files good reports:

When X [a non-Indigenous journalist who works on Indigenous affairs] does a good story, we encourage her (15: 32).

Some journalist-participants have indicated their concerns about a real need to provide cultural awareness to some of their colleagues. Some Noongar journalists and Noongar Elders—strongly supported by some non-Indigenous journalists—had since the late 1990s set up a handful of cultural awareness workshops, said Alan. A Noongar participant clarified that these workshops were intended to explain to non-Indigenous journalists how to work in a culturally appropriate way in regard to Aboriginal affairs. Awareness about the Noongar protocol of having the appropriate persons to talk to, who are the Elders of an area, was one of the priorities of such trainings. Acknowledging Noongar cultural values in journalism is not against the practice of conducting informative stories. Participants who have discussed the issue have indicated that this mainly concerns the need to be aware of ‘who to talk to’.

‘Who to talk to?’

Competitive enterprises often aim at reducing production costs as much as possible. In media practice, journalists have to finalise their reports quickly. Knowing that, in Aboriginal culture, not everyone can discuss a particular topic or speak on behalf of others, journalists face the issue of finding with whom it is most appropriate to talk. I understand that, most frequently, this will be Noongar elder from the area; however, this can be a contentious issue amongst some members of the community, who may disagree about who has the authority to speak on the matter. This was an issue that Aurora raised with me:

There is distrust between the Noongar community and the media. When we argue there is a misrepresentation, it is not always the media’s fault. There are no contacts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and journalists don’t know who is the right person to talk to (4: 93).
Clare, a Noongar journalist, told me that she has between thirty minutes to just a few hours to be on the spot to conduct a report. She has linkages with the Noongar community and felt she is in a good position to conduct her investigation because she knows whom to contact when she does a bulletin on Aboriginal affairs. Clare acknowledged to me that some non-Aboriginal journalists understand Noongar protocols and know people who ‘to go to and to talk to’ in the community, but some do not. Clare spoke in detail about the issue and explained that it is customary to give voice to Noongar Elders and community leaders, as other people ‘could only speak for themselves’ and would not be willing to be spokesperson for the community. She clarified that Noongar Elders are respected for their experience and seniority, and are promoted as public representatives of their own communities (see also Howard 1981: 97, 146 on leadership; and Norst 1999 on a Koorie experience). Clare spoke to me about reporting the Sorry Day event at the Midland Oval (Perth metropolitan area). She mentioned:

There were Noongar people, non-Indigenous guest speakers, and invited guests. A journalist from the West knew a lot of people from the [Noongar] community. There were journalists from the ABC. They walked and hugged uncles and aunts.

Other journalists were observing and not being part of it. It was outside their comfort zone. Covering any story you need to start from scratch. People need to know the basics of where to start (14: 79).

By contrast, Clare explained herself own position, due to her cultural awareness:

I know the best person to interview, the significance of the Noongar welcome, I had a real understanding of the importance for history, and I could tell people how to celebrate it [Sorry Day] (15: 138).

Clare recalled that, for Sorry Day, she gave voice to Noongar Elders and showed footage of Noongar children anchoring the multi-coloured plastic commemorative hands in the ground—these hands being symbolic of all the children who were taken away from their families during the era of the Stolen Generations. Clare knew that Elders are spokespeople within the community and that the children are the future; therefore, she felt it was culturally appropriate to show both on the media report she filed. As Clare works for commercial television, she incorporated a non-Aboriginal point of view; she gave voice to White spokespeople who told of the importance the

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13 See Jakubovicz et al. (1994: 163-4) on the issue Aboriginal journalists and the coverage of Aboriginal affairs.
event had, how to celebrate it, and explained it in a more ‘academic way’, as Clare put it; a way that appealed to people with a White cultural background. However, Clare told me that she is not always covering Aboriginal stories:

The bottom line [in mainstream media] is to get an audience, to get the Aboriginal community, the Indian community, etc. They [the media] don’t want to pigeonhole me on Aboriginal issues because then people would think I was just for this sort of story. Italian journalists are not just on Italian stories (11: 2).

Clare’s knowledge in both Noongar and non-Indigenous cultures enhances her media reports on Aboriginal stories. She conveys them in an appealing way appropriate for commercial television, which is neither dull nor boring. Her bulletins appeal to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences, as some people have told me during my fieldwork.

Patrick has personal connections with Noongar people through his Noongar wife who helps him find out ‘who to talk to’. More significantly, she increases his cultural awareness on an everyday basis, because they often discuss differences in cultural values:

You don’t see us the way we see ourselves. It’s how Aboriginal people themselves want to be represented and that includes our values, the way we communicate, our cultural protocols, our tradition and the way of life.
I understand very clearly a White system of values because I live with it: the job, the car you drive.
That kind of status is important for White people. For Aboriginal people it is who you’re related to, who you are. It’s a very different system of values. The Noongar idea of success is to raise happy, healthy kids, to be well respected in the community, to be able to speak language, cultural ownership and who can tell the story. There is no recognition of the alternate way of learning. Our traditional knowledge is not recognised except as a curiosity and as tourist projects (4: 88).

Unlike other non-Aboriginal journalists, Patrick has gained an awareness of some of the readjustments required when crossing the cultural boundary that separates Noongar and non-Aboriginal cultures. Not all journalists have this opportunity, however. Christopher, a non-Aboriginal journalist, recalled one of the very few engagements he had with an Aboriginal man in one of his reporting assignments. Although Christopher was concerned to express respect toward the man he was interviewing, he admitted he had no knowledge of the protocol for what was an otherwise basic interaction:

14 Qualitative investigation of media audience-reception is an important field of research in media studies and anthropology (see Hall 1973; Morley 1981; Ang 1985, Alasuutari 1999; Bird 2003). Despite not conducting an audience-reaction investigation, I was able to gain some insights as, throughout the fieldwork, many participants spontaneously talked about their opinions on media programs.
At the time I didn’t find it difficult. I wasn’t aware. I didn’t treat him as Aboriginal, I wasn’t sure if I stepped on cultural protocol. I learned Aboriginal people have different priorities, for example time-keeping. I didn’t know what to call them. Mister? How to show respect? How to shake hands? I still don’t know (4:67).

The monetary pressures of the commercial free market put short deadlines on its agents and provide no time for gaining cultural awareness. In other words, people have to finalise their reports quickly, because ‘time is money’. While the media provide a means of gaining knowledge for people who have no particular interest in Aboriginal cultures, some of the economic reasons I have discussed result in the media failing to communicate Noongar, and more generally Aboriginal, cultural issues to the broader Australian society.

Are there some solutions to the issue?

George (Noongar/Yamatji) is concerned about the lack of Aboriginal bulletins screened on mainstream television. He says he would appreciate seeing Aboriginal people on television and cultural differences acknowledged as part as of today’s Australian cultures, as opposed to what Willis (1993:102) has described as: ‘[t]he internal Others’ that are ‘a matter of one culture inventing the other for its own gaze’15. George strongly resents the everyday marginalisation of Aboriginal cultures, and blames the television industry for casting Aboriginal people only on cultural Aboriginal programs (see also Langton 1993:27):

To tell you the truth, there are more Asians and Greeks on television than Aboriginal people. Even if we love telling our story, we’d love other roles, but we don’t have opportunities, we are marginalised. Australia accepts other cultures but not the cultures of Aboriginal people (18: added sheets).

Aurora shared a similar point of view. She is distressed that Aboriginal people were still struggling to put an end to ‘exotic’ representations on television16:

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15 See also Hartley and McKee (2000:243-7).
16 Such comments mirror the empirical analysis of advertising campaigns by Jakubovicz et al. (1994:60, 75), who wrote about a campaign referring to Indigenous Australia: ‘The thrust, therefore, of even the most positive images is to trap Aborigines in the most remote, ‘ancient’, ‘rugged’ place as well as the most remote cultural time, and as objects of the white gaze. The symbolic use of landscape in advertising imagery fixes Aborigines as distant and iconic, rather than people here and now and real (p. 60).... Non-Anglo Australians are often portrayed as marginal to the fundamental unit of the family.’
We never get Aboriginal stuff on TV, but it's better that we don't, as Aboriginal people are often represented as curiosities: The silent noble savage or a typical Aussie with bush craft skills that says 'the Aboriginal people used to do this'. This is an appropriation or misappropriation of lifestyle (4: 94).

This dichotomised appreciation of Aboriginal Australia, in contrast to the wider Australian society, is illustrated by what Hartley (1999: 224) termed:

'[W]edom' and 'theydom' [that] are domains of inclusion (wedom) and exclusion (theydom) in the characterization of communities in news and other media.

Because of their wide reach in terms of audience, the media could play a stronger role in enhancing Aboriginal awareness among the broader society. George reflected on an Aboriginal play, *Yandy*, which was performed in Perth in 2004. The play was a great box office success with nearly a full house every day; the audience was mainly non-Indigenous. The outreach was, however, limited in terms of the Perth population in comparison to the media:

Theatre gets to people, but I believe it is preaching to the converted. Even if people come to see a wonderful performance, Aboriginal people are still struggling. I'd like to see Aboriginal people on television shows. I'd like to see Aboriginal actors acknowledged as actors. We need to break the bad stereotypes of being lazy and drunk. We need to see on television more references to languages, on cultures, on names of animals and trees. That will change a lot (18: 149).

A number of changes have emerged through the role of some journalists (see also Hartley and McKee 2000). Twelve years ago, for example, Joel (non-Indigenous journalist) was keen to bridge the cultural gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. He was very well embedded in the local Noongar community and tried to develop television programs about Aboriginal people. He was fully aware that his cultural awareness was an asset he could bring to such television programs. Joel aimed to use his personal knowledge and connections, as he told me:

I thought about my own experience. I had knowledge and desire and I wanted to give it a go (16: 18).

He contacted a number of television channels. Today, he remains disappointed at the lack of interest that that they had expressed at that time:

I wrote to Channel 7 and 9. 'Abo stories don't rate,' I was told. The ABC was reluctant. Early 1990's there was a cultural cringe about Aboriginal inhabitants of this country. White Australia isn't comfortable talking about Aboriginal Australia. Just the negative side. They know nothing else. Out of sight, out of mind. Aboriginal people are looked down on by a lot of the population (16: 19).
Despite a disregard for Aboriginal topics amongst some broadcasters, partly explained by economic pressures, I met throughout my fieldwork a number of Australians who were interested in Aboriginal cultures. Some people were seeking to bridge the gap between the two groups and some journalists were amongst these people. They aimed to respect and acknowledge Noongar culture, and to share contemporary cultural issues with all Australians in order to position Aboriginality within Australia society, as an integral part of it.

Robert is one of these journalists. He is a non-Indigenous man who grew up in a ‘very tolerant family of several generations’, where children were taught to be ‘generous’ and who, as a child, ‘stood up for Aboriginal children’, as he described it. Robert was fully aware that his interest in Noongar culture came from his long-term family linkages. When he started his career in journalism in a country town of the South-West, he was also advised that ‘Aboriginal stories never sell’. Nevertheless, he ‘felt they were interesting stories that can be told’. Through his work in the South-West, Robert developed some close linkages with the local Noongar community. He published a number of Aboriginal stories in the local newspaper, because it is ‘part of Australia’, as he put it. He was committed to give pride to Noongar people:

People need the opportunity to be proud of having black skin. Their ancestry with the place, the land. It’s a tragedy not to be given enough importance to be proud (15: 117).

When Robert left the newspaper, the coverage on Noongar stories reduced, he said. Reflecting on his commitment to Noongar culture, Robert felt his desire to write about local Aboriginal people and Noongar culture was very unusual, as his friends used to remind him:

Some of my friends used to laugh at me. They said, ‘I know you’re editing the paper, it’s full of boong stories’ (15: 115).

Having discussed how the free market fails to enhance cross-cultural engagement, I now turn to another question. Is there a way of producing and marketing Aboriginal stories that can attract the audience of commercial media and inform the wider Australian society? Whereas such a question mirrors the insights of Hartley and McKee (1996: 11), who discussed Australian media in general and noted ‘the age-old problem of telling stories which are both true to the facts and appealing to the audience’, they did not

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17 Despite being racist and derogatory, some participants have told me of occasions when they have used this term.
provide an answer to the issue. However, some journalist-participants discussed their experiences (below), and I suggest there is some hope for the future.

Amelia (non-Indigenous journalist), who reports on Aboriginal affairs for a commercial newspaper, is slowly gaining cultural awareness through her work and her passion for learning. Most of her knowledge comes from her contacts with the Noongar community in Perth. However, from time to time, she reports on remote Aboriginal communities and is exposed to other cultural areas of Western Australia. Amelia told me about one experience in the Western Desert, when she went to Punmu to report on the end-of-school-year celebration. She was pleased to learn, first hand, some features of Mardu culture (Tonkinson 1974, 1991). To me, she explained it was her first sustained experience in a remote community. She learnt that Mardu people speak a plurality of languages and about name avoidance, nabaru:

Traditional Law business was going on. It was my first experience in a community. All the kids speak English, as well as four or five languages. The Mardu people are regarded as the most traditional people in Australia. Children talk about their traditions. For example, some words are not said when people have died. A lot of people are called nabaru, because the name cannot be mentioned. Eleven people died. Now the number eleven can’t be mentioned. Kids say, ‘I’m double one’ [eleven years old] (9: 25).

Mardu people have impressed her, she told me. She felt she had time to engage, unlike previously, when she ‘just visited communities for two hours’, as she said. Amelia spoke with delight about getting a glimpse of cultural knowledge, as well as an awareness of contemporary health and lifestyle issues:

It was such an experience to see a community really together, really working well. The shop encourages people to buy healthy food, to do sport activities and to have strong Elders (9: 29).

Amelia was able to share her enthusiasm about the Punmu community with readers. She mentioned to me that the journalist crew ‘took beautiful photographs’, and ‘one made the front page’. She felt the report broke some negative feelings toward Aboriginal Australia because the newspaper received emails and phone calls from readers who enjoyed the ‘refreshing’ and ‘uplifting’ story of the Mardu people.

Tim, a journalist working for Channel 10, recounted to me his convincing experience that Aboriginal stories can sell. He covered the story of the Young Australian of the Year three years before I met him. The report was screened at peak hours, a prime
advertisement spot. In 2001, an Aboriginal young man won the Award. The Channel aimed to conduct the report in an appealing way in order to reach broad audiences. It was marketed in a catchy report, as Tim explained:

We were producing prime time television [7.30 pm]—the report was about the winner of the young Australian of the Year. His journey has become a journey of bringing two cultures together. It gave us a great vision. But I had to make it great, I had to make it appealing for the audience, colourful. I had to show the positive aspect of Aboriginal culture. To a lot of people, the place where he was living looks like a place of desperation. But we showed it as friendly as possible. We showed happy children who were interacting. We showed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people learning culture, Aboriginal men playing the didgeridoo in a sacred place. We made a visual feast of a sad story. We caught it.

We looked for colourful things. For Channel 10, one hour of prime television is a lot of money, $30,000 dollars to make the program, but it brought a lot of ads. We needed to make it watch-able. It was a window of opportunity, and we reached a lot of people. We had many emails from people [the audience] (15: 107).

Some journalist-participants felt that Aboriginal cultures and people are slowly gaining some presence within the commercial media-scape—by this they refer to stories on Aboriginal people performing in everyday Australian life18. Changes occur slowly, partly through the initiative of some commercial channels. Albert, a journalist, recalled one of these changes:

The bigger step the media need to take is to have Aboriginal people in real situations and not working in token or stereotypical situations. Channel 10 is one of the few TV stations that has taken a big step with the Secret Life of Us [a sitcom with an Aboriginal actress in one of the leading roles]. Debra is great. She is a normal person. That was deliberate. That’s an important step not to see Aboriginal black trackers. Debra’s playing that role. It’s not a token role. It’s a mainstream role. It was a deliberate decision (16: 3).

There is some optimism about the future, as it seems that Aboriginal stories can be conducted in a way that attracts audience ratings. However, in a free market setting, the maximisation of profit remains an essential feature that drives commercial enterprises. Whereas some positive changes slowly occur, as more and more journalists gain cultural awareness, it is essential to bear in mind that morbid and controversial stories of Aboriginal affairs are not offset by positive bulletins during the ‘light entertainment’ section of the news. Whereas more and more programs featuring Aboriginal people or Aboriginal Australia may be screened on commercial television, the lack of Aboriginal

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18 Hartley and McKee (2000: 209) noted, ‘Aboriginality is over-represented in the Australian news media in factual stories. While Indigenous fictional characters portrayed in popular culture are quite rare, Aboriginality turns out to be a massive presence in Australian journalism.’ [emphasis in original]. However, in the light of what I discuss in this chapter, this ‘massive presence’ is economically driven and comprises negative reports and very rarely stories of the everyday lives of Aboriginal people.
bullets in the light entertainment (e.g. the *Today Tonight* and *Australian Current Affairs* programs) section of the news may not significantly change unless the Aboriginal population becomes economically and numerically more significant in Australian society. There is no way of guessing the future, however; and there may be other unforeseen factors that will influence this process of change.

Out of my research findings, I observed that the economic forces that drive commercial media constrain the broadcasting of programs featuring Aboriginal people in their everyday life. I suggest that this has some cross-cultural consequences: some of my participants who had no contact with Aboriginal people said they gained their information about Aboriginal Australia through the media. It seems, indeed, that the less contact participants had, the more the media shaped their opinions on Aboriginal affairs.

During my fieldwork, I witnessed that many non-Aboriginal people have never engaged with Noongar people. One of many examples I have recorded about this particular issue was a cultural awareness workshop organised for people working for a government agency. One of the convenors asked the attendees: ‘Who has never shaken hands with an Aboriginal person?’ Twelve people out of fifteen raised their hands up.

### The advertising industry

In March 2003, Naomi (an Aboriginal friend) asked me the following question:

- Do you ever wonder why Aboriginal people never appear in advertisements?

[I recall a trivial reply] Naomi added:

- It’s just another example of the lack of respect for our people and our cultures that comes from mainstream Australia.

Racial minorities are generally misapprehended and stereotyped in advertisements (Cortese 1999; Henderson and Baldasty 2003); however, the relationship between ethnicity and the advertising industry has been understudied in Australia (Turner and Cunningham 2002: 3). Indeed, Hartley and McKee (2000: 267) referred only to a McDonald’s advertisement and a Kelloggs Sustain ad (featuring Cathy Freeman), on

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19 African Americans represent 13 percent and Latinos 11 percent of the American population (Kotler 2006: 81); therefore, research about ethnicity and consumption is predominantly based on the American market (e.g. Radford 2003; Lury 1996, Grier and Deshpande 1999).
which they wrote that Cathy’s ‘Aboriginality was used to signify Australianess, youth, and achievement.’ Mickler (1998: 238-9) investigated briefly a political advertising campaign for Land Rights that failed to help me answer Naomi’s question. Jakubovicz et al. (1994: 54-60) studied a few advertising campaigns containing Aboriginal references, while Sinclair (2002: 200-16) only provides an overview of the advertising industry. During my fieldwork, however, people working in the advertising industry provided me with answers to Naomi’s question and, as a result, enhanced the scarce literature, as indeed references to Aboriginal cultures and people are rare in advertisements (Jakubovicz et al. 1994: 57).

Out of my research findings, I suggest that the advertising industry contributes to distinguish Aboriginal people and cultures from the broader Australian society, as advertising campaigns do not feature Aboriginal Australians in everyday activities (e.g. banking, consuming goods). The issue of ethnicity in regard to advertisements has become more and more significant with the increased evidence of multiculturalism within Western-based societies. Scholars of marketing research (Wheatley 1971; Green 1999; Whittler 1991; Grier and Deshpande 1999) have, over the last decades, investigated the topic. Some marketing research has examined how an actor’s ethnicity influences the audience response to an advertisement campaign (Green 1999; Henderson and Baldasty 2003; Whittler 1991), and has often concluded that people who are highly aware of their ethnic minority status are more likely to identify with an actor of the same ethnicity and to respond positively to the advertising message.

Researchers in cultural studies have also analysed race relations in advertisements, often suggesting that these mirror the power relations of the society.

My goal here is to understand some of the dynamics that drive the advertising industry to leave out Aboriginal people from everyday life activities. I explore the symbolic values attached to Aboriginality from the perspective of mass-advertising campaigns and illustrate how constraints of time and money contribute to this absence. Because advertising campaigns communicate social meanings and representations, the industry

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20 See, for example, Berkman (1963), Kassarjian (1969), Wheatley (1971) for early research on the topic.
21 The research of Grier and Deshpand (1999) based on Distinctiveness Theory (McGuire 1984) investigates the efficiency of consumers’ responses to an advertisement that features the same ethnicity, as ‘for distinctive consumers, similarity between a consumer’s ethnicity and that of a character in an advertisement resulted in the character being seen as more trustworthy, which led to more positive brand attitudes’ (p. 5), as Deshpande and Stayman (1994) had suggested earlier.
Chapter Seven — The failure of the free market in enhancing cross-cultural engagement: media and advertising

could play a role in promoting cross-cultural engagement—since the absence of Aboriginal people appearing in advertisements underscores the notion of marginalisation in the mind of the broader community.

Advertising campaigns communicate cultural values. I suggest that the low visibility of Aboriginal culture and people in advertisements would have some impact on cross-cultural perception, as it contributes to the broader lack of cultural awareness. I propose to examine how the advertising industry deals with Aboriginal cultures through an ethnographic investigation conducted amongst advertisers, people working in marketing, and Noongar actors. It is worthwhile reiterating the introduction of the chapter and quoting Tse, Belk and Zhou (1989: 459) who wrote, ‘advertising appeals reflect the values of the culture that creates them.’ This is because, as the chief reference book in marketing has noted on the behaviour of consumers, ‘[c]ulture is the fundamental determinant of a person’s wants and behaviour’ (Kotler 2006: 174). In other words, consumption reflects social and cultural features (Kotler 2006: 87). However, advertising campaigns themselves are predominantly an economic activity, driven by monetary constraints.

Indeed, advertising campaigns are very costly. Both advertisers and marketers are carefully investigating how they can best use and shape people’s desires, in order to maximise their wants: they are persuading us to buy more. The industry achieves this by using humour, controversial images, endearing attributes or cultural signifiers that, sometimes in a rather subliminal way, convey strong advertising messages (see Campaign Brief magazine for an Australian professional perspective). As Jakubovicz et al. (1994: 54) noted:

Advertising relies on myths and symbols that can draw from the consumer the appropriate response—purchase of the commodity advertised.

Television commercials, billboards and print advertisements are vehicles for the transmission of symbolic information and use culturally coded forms of knowledge in order to communicate effectively the advertising message (Kotler 2006: 539). As viewers have only a few seconds to grasp the message, it needs to echo in some way the cultural values of the targeted population. Good messages trigger consumption, which is, from an economic perspective, the priority of advertising and marketing campaigns.
I have discussed in Chapter Five how the wider Australian public commonly sees Aboriginal people as ‘carers for the environment’. As the lack of water resources is a major concern in Perth, the Water Corporation began in 2002 a water-saving promotion through print media, billboards and television advertising campaign. Although the Corporation’s commercials were not designed to promote sales, the campaign still aimed to maximise the reception of its message. The Corporation chose Ningali Lawford, an Aboriginal actress from Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley, Western Australia, to feature in all the advertisements that were part of this coordinated plan, each of which focussed on a feature of water-saving (Plate 7.1). The messages encouraged people to be ‘garden water-wise’ by limiting reticulation watering to 15 minutes per station and to be ‘environment-wise’ by making new homes or industries more water efficient. Adrian was one of the executive directors behind the campaign. When I spoke to him regarding his decision to employ Ningali, he replied:

Why an Aboriginal person? I wanted someone from Western Australia and Aboriginal people are seen as caring for the environment (4: 56).

How did the Water Corporation persuade the suburban Western Australian audiences to save water? In one television advertisement, Ningali is wearing a laboratory coat, a suggestion that her advice is of a scientific value—an illustration that the advertising director has made a clever reference to the two cultural standpoints. Ningali comes out into her suburban garden and turns off the reticulation. Then her alter ego appears behind her (dressed in black trousers and a pink top) and turns it on again. Then we see these two standing on the front verge, mirrored in every front garden down the street. In the 30-second-long advertisement Ningali says:

You might think that watering your garden twice on your watering days won’t make that much difference to our water supply, but when everyone does it, our outdoor water use doubles. You may only water your garden on your watering days. Our water future. It’s up to you. [last two sentences were also written on the screen].
Plate 7.1 WA Water Corporation advertising campaign with the image of Ningali Lawford

Water your garden more than every second day and you’ll drown it.

Are you over-watering?

In Western Australia, 19% of all water used is lost in evaporation. To help reduce this loss and have a greener looking garden, try watering every second day. The rain water on your plants will help create a much more lush garden. So next time you water your garden, don’t waste it! Instead, use a water saving device such as a Mulch-Mist. Switch off the tap and make sure your water is not used for washing clothes or drinking.

In summer, up to 75% of Perth’s water intake is lost in evaporation! You can help reduce this loss by only watering every second day. The rain water on your plants will help create a much more lush garden. So next time you water your garden, don’t waste it! Instead, use a water saving device such as a Mulch-Mist. Switch off the tap and make sure your water is not used for washing clothes or drinking.
Another television advertisement in the series aimed to limit excessive hand watering. It shows Ningali standing in a suburban garden with one hose in her hands, then a second, then a third, then a fourth, then a fifth... While doing this Ningali says:

You might think that hand-watering your garden or hosing down driveways doesn’t make much of a difference to our water supplies, but when everyone does it, the effect is enormous. Let’s keep hand-watering to a minimum. If you do hand water, direct the hose at the base of the plants, and you must not use your hose to wash down paved areas. Our water future. It’s up to all of us [the last two sentences were on screen].

The intercultural knowledge that Aboriginal people respect the environment is widely held by most non-Indigenous people in Australia (see Chapter Five), partially reinforced by the rhetoric of some Aboriginal people who promote this perception. As Adrian informed me, the Water Corporation’s campaign used this belief in the hope that it would enhance the campaign’s effectiveness because an Aboriginal person’s assertion of the urgent necessity to save water is likely to be perceived by city dwellers as ‘a truth’. Believing Aboriginal cultures to be environmentally aware is a narrow view of Indigeneity, which is based on a stereotypical representation, albeit a positive one. It does not overcome some prejudicial attitudes, however.

Lacking in trust? The sad outcome of a common misapprehension

People working in the advertising industry spoke to me about their perception of featuring Aboriginal people in advertisements. These participants thought that there is a general lack of respect toward Aboriginal people amongst the broader population. Participants who elaborated on the issue indicated that, as a result of such misapprehensions, advertising designers prefer to avoid referring to Aboriginal people as role models in everyday life activities, because some viewers might be blinded by their resentment toward Aboriginal people; that is, their lack of trust in Aboriginal people and stereotypical marginalisation of Indigenous Australia, as marketers explained to me.

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22 Bird (2003: 87), investigating the imagery of North American Indians in US media, noticed a similar process and wrote: ‘images of Indians in contemporary popular culture are limited and one-dimensional, with a heavy over-layer of romanticism’. She added, ‘[t]he message is clear—mainstream society loves the Indian in his proper, mythical place, but in real life, Indians are still second-class citizens’ (p. 91).
People working for the advertising industry, and with whom I talked, said that Aboriginal people are conspicuously absent from most marketing campaigns because many non-Indigenous people ‘do not trust them’ and would resent being told by an Aboriginal person what to buy for everyday consumption. Such a viewpoint is distressing, but participants from the advertising industry who kindly gave details about the reasons for such absence raised it because marketing campaigns are extremely costly and advertisers would not dare taking any kind of financial risk. As a result, I suggest that the advertising industry perpetuates some misunderstandings about Aboriginal Australia by exploiting some sets of meanings and assumptions and by ignoring others. This could have some consequences for the perception of Aboriginality among the broader population, as it maintains a degree of segregation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.

Jonathan, a participant who works in the advertising industry, also spoke about this upsetting issue that concerns the negative reception by audiences of advertising messages featuring Aboriginal people. Although he would be pleased to involve Aboriginal people in campaigns, he was aware of some symbolic positioning that Aboriginal people may have among the broader community. This is the way the industry works under the constraint of shared symbolic representations:

> The use of Ningali was quite a good thing because of the connection that Aboriginal culture has with the land. The message is straightforward. I suspect that the underlying feeling is that Aboriginal people have got their place, and if advertising campaigns put them in their place, it’s okay. With Ningali’s saving water, saying how to live with the landscape is good because people would think ‘I’m happy to take this message from an Aboriginal person’. If an Aboriginal person is in an advert for a financial institution, people would think, ‘why is an Aboriginal person telling me this?’ ‘It is not their place to tell me what sort of fruit juice, bank, or car to buy’. Ernie Dingo, in some respects, has been able to transcend this kind of prejudice (3: 139).

While I was conducting my fieldwork, another advertising campaign referring to Aboriginal cultures came on the market. The advertisement for the Northern Territory Tourist Commission encouraged Australians to go there for holidays. One television commercial showed a White Australian man in his bathroom. The voice-over said in English, ‘When last did you have an experience you’ll never never forget?’; some footage followed of landscape and wildlife. Back in the bathroom the basin over-

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23 Broadly speaking, this also echoes my experience of marketing in France.
Chapter Seven — The failure of the free market in enhancing cross-cultural engagement: media and advertising

flowed, as the man daydreamed. The advertisement ended with an Aboriginal voice speaking in his language, while, simultaneously, the following text appeared on the screen: ‘The Northern Territory. It'll never never leave you.’

A second advertisement for the same product was in a comparable format: a White woman standing on an underground railway’s platform starts to daydream. Instead of a normal train, a camel train stops at the station. Again, the commercial ended with the voice of an Aboriginal man speaking in his language. Having an Aboriginal person speaking his own language was a very unusual feature in an advertising campaign. I therefore investigated the behind-the-scene story of the advertisement and located the creative team. One member elaborated about the advertising intention of the campaign:

I believe this is the first time a commercial has ever had an Aboriginal voice speaking in his language. One of the specific attributes of the Northern Territory is Indigenous culture. That doesn’t apply to most products, but here Indigenous culture is part of the product. It’s very rare to see Aboriginal references in commercials. An ordinary family who’s at home watching TV, most commercials are screening Anglo people, because if you put an Indigenous person, their reaction would be: this must be to do with Aboriginal culture (10: 107).

From my data (including participants’ comments) it is clear that most references to Aboriginal cultures in commercials concern cultural tourism and environmental issues. Participants working in marketing and advertising explained to me that Aboriginal references inserted into an advertisement remain a courageous creative decision, even when they are based on well-known ecological representations of Indigeneity. Adrian spoke emphatically about the risks:

A black woman saying to use less water, that was a risk.... The choice of an Aboriginal woman from Fitzroy was challenging.... When the name came up, I was happy to take the risk (4: 65).

Advertisers are sometimes making references to other cultures by drawing on what Mathews (2000: 1) defined as ‘the information and identities available from the global supermarket’. One problem faced by advertisers, however, is finding the right balance by using cultural otherness as a marketing tool to boost sales without alienating consumers who have their own racial prejudices. The line that separates a successful advertisement from one that attracts complaints is ‘the difference between seduction and rape’, said Jonathan. He recalled that after a listener heard a radio commercial where the voice was the one of an English man:
A fellow rang me and asked: ‘Why did you use a Pommy? You could have used a good Aussie voice’ (3: 148).

Participants spoke about how advertising agencies and the clients that commission the campaigns are wary about referring to Indigeneity, concerned that it might trigger some negative responses or ‘link’ the product to Indigeneity. Two people in charge of marketing campaigns insisted that advertising promotions are constrained by considerable financial pressures. They explained to me that no marketers would ever take the risk to encode their campaign with images that could convey the wrong message for their product, and strongly suggested that Aboriginal references may be negatively appreciated in Australia. An unsuccessful advertising campaign ‘cost us thousands of dollars’, said one creative designer.

Aboriginal footballers appear from time to time in advertisements, however. This is because their high sporting profile takes precedence over their Aboriginality, as Jonathan suggested:

> David Wirarpunda was the voice on a radio commercial the other day. He introduced himself as being with the West Coast Eagles, but it’s his footballing celebrity, not his Aboriginality (3: 143).

Whereas Aboriginal footy players have earned a wide recognition in Australia, they have not gained yet the same attractive image in advertising that Black American sportsmen have in America. Jonathan elaborated on this issue. He explained how he perceived that this results of misapprehensions by some audiences toward Aboriginal people:

> I think the difference with Black US sportsmen, especially basket-ballers, is that they are the best and there is a certain coolness associated with Black US culture: hip-hop music. It’s not the same with Australian Aboriginal culture… in Western Australia what image comes when you talk about Aboriginal people? Hand out, youth crime, car thieves…. (3: 151).

Ernie Dingo is a nationally known Yamatji man who presents a television travel program. Many Western Australians would know ‘Ernie as Ernie’, as an advertiser said to me. Two people working in advertising elaborated on the issue. One said that Ernie’s

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24 On the issue of ‘the relationship between race and the development of consumer culture as a two-way process’ in American advertising see, for example, Lury (1996: 156).

25 In the context of the North American advertising industry, Henderson and Baldasty (2003: 102) are, however, quite dismissive: ‘The only African American celebrities who appear are athletes, suggesting that sports is the only means of achievement for Blacks (while a wide variety of White celebrities endorse products).’
smile was more convincing than that of an unknown person and ‘for Ernie it is not his Aboriginality that is important’, as he put it. Since 2006, Ernie is one of two key faces for the up-market jeweller Linney’s. The other model is a young and pretty non-Aboriginal woman. With the exception of commercials featuring Aboriginal high profile persons, Aboriginal people appeared to absent from most advertising campaigns.

As far as I know, at the time of my fieldwork, no Aboriginal people were working within the advertising industry in Australia. I was therefore unable to obtain their insights into these issues. I desired a Noongar point of view on this, and discussed with George the absence of Aboriginal references within advertisements. He had already reflected on the issue because this has been a handicap to his career. He was dismayed that he and his fellow Aboriginal actors were cast only for ‘cultural references’ in advertisements and never for the activities concerning everyday consumption. George elucidated his point by reflecting on an English advertisement:

In London I saw a commercial with Negros, just playing. No big deal, just being actors doing their things. That’s what we want to see more…. England is different than Australia, because here we know the land was stolen... It’s a shame thing. They need to acknowledge that and then we’ll maybe move on and things will be better. That’s a start (18: 135-6).

He expressed concerns about the continuing marginalisation of his people, which he regards as symptomatic of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships in Australia, something to which he felt that the advertising industry contributes. He was concerned that the absence of Aboriginal people in mundane everyday activities makes non-Aboriginal people think that Aboriginal Australians are set apart from the wider society. Indeed, a number of non-Aboriginal participants spoke about their lack of interaction with Aboriginal people, and many respondents with whom I superficially

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26 Two participants working in the advertising industry were from the Eastern States and they spoke to me by telephone. We booked an interview, and in both cases we discussed the advertisement and some advertising practices over the course of an hour-long conversation.

27 This is the term George used.

28 Mickler (1998) investigated the media in Western Australia and suggested an interesting representation of Aboriginal people that has emerged over the last fifteen years. According to Mickler, despite their ethnic diversity, non-Indigenous Australians see themselves as ‘ordinary’ people living their everyday life, while Aboriginal Australia is perceived as an ‘extraordinary’ and different population within Australia: ‘...the public idea that Aborigines are an advantaged class within, and at the same time apart from, Australian society as a whole (p. 13)…. Aborigines were perceived by many “ordinary” non-Aboriginal citizens to be extraordinary (p. 214)…. The principal disadvantage of these “battlers” [non-Indigenous people who provide their point of views on Indigenous issues on talkback radio] was not only that they were poor, humble or modest, but that they were ordinary, not special (p. 252)….incapable of including indigenous people in the ranks of ordinary people, citizens and “battlers” (p. 264).’
engaged throughout my fieldwork said they had never socialised nor worked with Aboriginal people. In a similar voice, Auntie Vanessa (Noongar) reflected on her everyday life experience and indicated her feeling of being perceived at times as an oddity:

At picnics there is always someone who stares at you, doing the zoo thing. There are 386,000 Aboriginal people and 21 million non-Aboriginal people. For most White Australians, Aboriginal people are hidden. People have never seen an Aboriginal person. Many people have no contact, have never shaken hands, have never done anything but all have an opinion of what to do (4: 142).

Cast in marketing terms, many people cannot identify with Aboriginal people because they do not have an Aboriginal friend, an Aboriginal family member or an Aboriginal co-worker. There is a broad lack of contact and cultural awareness albeit many social misapprehensions (e.g. concerning handouts).

Madeleine was a middle-aged lawyer born and raised in Perth who had no contact with Noongar people and no knowledge of Aboriginal cultures. She was, however, aware of a large corpus of misinterpretations about the contemporary everyday life of Aboriginal Australia. In Madeleine’s words:

In some way, I always knew that some Aboriginal people do not fit the stereotypes, but I never came across them (10: 98).

For the following Noongar participant, though, many people remain unaware of vast misapprehensions about Aboriginal people:

I come across as articulate, I don’t fit the stereotype people see on TV (4: 97).

This is because people working in the advertising industry think that the wider population would not self-identify with Aboriginal people. As a result, they tended to avoid featuring Aboriginal actors and referring to Aboriginal people in advertisements. Broadly speaking, Green (1999: 49) observed that ‘[a]n individual’s identification with his or her ethnic group is likely to play an important role in how information is processed and how marketing-related decisions are made’ (see also Whittler 1991). It is fundamental to keep in mind that Aboriginal people only count for 3% of the Australian population and represent a small number of consumers, unlike the Black American market, which is 13% of the American population (Kotler 2006: 81). Advertisements are based on shared representations. Symbolic meanings used in commercials have to convey very quickly a message to the viewers. The advertising industry leaves Aboriginal Australia marginalised from various day-to-day activities of consumption,
such as banking\textsuperscript{29}, fruit juice or mobile phones. By doing this, I suggest that the industry perpetuates the distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. This could well impact on cross-cultural relationships, as ‘[t]he easiest and most “natural” form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible’ (Langton 1993: 24).

Prior to ending this section, it is worth noting that advertising designers refer to the boomerangs—although highly identifiable as an Aboriginal artefact\textsuperscript{30}—without fearing a negative response from the public. The image of the boomerang is commonly used on labels (e.g. Foodland shopping centre) or in advertisement campaigns (Plate 7.2). A boomerang’s iconography in an advertisement illustrates visually and ironically the idea that something hurled at a target would also return in a more valuable form. Boomerangs seem to have become disengaged from being simply an Aboriginal tool and are, therefore, used ‘safely’ to advertise products that have no particular link with Aboriginal cultures (e.g. Lotto). Indeed, the Commonwealth Bank issued a number of pamphlets in order to inform customers about their products. One of these\textsuperscript{31} was about an ‘investment strategy’ based on borrowing money in order to achieve a bigger return on the investment, as the leaflet explained. The front cover image of the pamphlet was a boomerang, painted with an Aboriginal design, and it accompanies the text: ‘Maximising your returns’. Using a similar value, the Lotto commission launched a campaign that used the boomerang iconography because players aim to get big returns from the small investment of the Lotto ticket.

\textbf{Cultural awareness, Aboriginal protocols and economic constraints}

Good trademarks and potent advertising commercials are significant features of business performance. For a long time, Aboriginal images have been used in advertising. At the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Australian trademark designs referred to Aboriginal people and cultural practices for many and diverse products like soap,  

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{29} For a perceptive discussion on banking issues in Aboriginal communities, see McDonnell and Westbury (2002).
\textsuperscript{30} See Mulcock (2003: 358) and Meekison (2002) for controversial Indigenous responses to the use of boomerang imagery.
\textsuperscript{31} The other pamphlets were about: 1) ‘Life insurance’ and the front cover image was a life-buoy; 2) ‘Travel’ and the image was suitcase label with the text ‘Helping you to get away from it all’; 3) ‘Financial advice’ with multicoloured lollies to refers to the multicultural Australian population with the text ‘Financial advice for all sorts of people’.
\end{footnotesize}
medicine, or tea (Plate 7.3). This kind of commercial imagery would not be acceptable today, as it exoticised Aboriginal cultures in the ‘noble savage’ mode, such as portraying a naked Aboriginal man with a spear in his hand. Past inappropriate and offensive references to Aboriginal people have led Aboriginal Australians to develop ethical guidelines for the respect of their cultures.

In Australia, it is no longer Aboriginal people who are portrayed for some ‘exotic appeal’; however, this is still happening in Europe with Aboriginal Australian signifiers, or in Australia with signifiers of more distant cultures (Plate 7.4). Advertising directors and designers choose cultural signifiers from the ‘cultural supermarket’ (Hall 1992, Mathews 2000). Reflecting on images that are available to ‘pick and choose’, Mulcock (2002:90) wrote:

Consumer culture transforms ‘cultures’ into artefacts and images that can be easily, comfortably, consumed, into objects that signify entire cultural complexes, or perhaps just the stereotypes associated with them in Western settings.

In contemporary society, Aboriginal people have achieved a situation where public representations in advertising are respectful. Aboriginal bodies are ensuring that Aboriginal cultures and protocols are respected. Non-Indigenous creative designers are aware of advertising ethics about racial stereotyping, as several designers told me. This is not solely occurring in Australia, as evident with Zinkhan’s (1994: 1) comment about the American market: ‘a wide variety of rules and laws have been enacted to regulate advertising activity’.

Some non-Aboriginal marketers and designers have spoken to me about their concerns of respecting Aboriginal protocols in communities around Australia. This concern was not restricted to the advertising sector, however. Many people felt ill at ease with appearing publicly offensive to Aboriginal Australians, and this has been clearly expressed by a significant number of non-Indigenous participants at cross-cultural awareness workshops, which were conducted for employees of various economic sectors. The desire to respect Aboriginal cultures led some non-Indigenous people to overly fear being politically incorrect. I recall a field engagement I had with the airline company Qantas. In late 2003, I tried to investigate a Qantas in-flight magazine campaign portraying Aboriginal children decorated with body paint. Although I never saw the advertisement, I was aware of the campaign because a French tourist coming to
Borrowing to Invest
Plate 7.3 Examples of early Australian trademark designs
Swiss advertising for sun-cream that 'fits the Australian standard'. A friend sent it to me because it depicted Aboriginal people or, at least, this was the intention of the marketing campaign.

The use of stereotypical 'exotic' cultural representations for the Nissan advertising campaign in Australia.
Chapter Seven — The failure of the free market in enhancing cross-cultural engagement: media and advertising

Australia and a Noongar person going overseas, both knowing of my PhD research, had mentioned it to me. I phoned Qantas in Perth with the hope of discussing the advertising campaign. I was redirected to the Marketing section in the Eastern States and I reiterated my request. I was asked to write an email to John Smith [pseud.], an Equal Opportunity Officer. Three weeks later, having not received a reply, I decided to phone John, who told me that he had forwarded my email to his boss. He then redirected my call to him. The boss told me that he could not give me the information that I was asking for, because it ‘is a very sensitive business’, quoting his words. I asked him if he could explain me in which way it was sensitive, and he replied: ‘by explaining I’ll give you some things, a lot. I’m wary’. I then asked him if it would be possible to email me a digital copy or send me a hard copy of the advertisement, but his answer was that he could not do it because it was ‘sensitive’. I then replied that the images had already been published and were public documents, but he would not do it. I had obviously touched a sensitive issue for Qantas. I can only speculate that this was the case, rather than a lack of cooperation in the research, as John’s boss sent me extensive documentation on Qantas policy for promoting Indigenous employment.

Participants who elaborated on the issue of ethical conduct for advertisers wanted to act in a way that conformed to restrictions on filming and were aware of the need of getting access permits from land councils. However, these participants also acknowledged their lack of cultural knowledge and were concerned about unintentional misconduct. Antoine, for example, explained to me that he fears legal threats from Aboriginal organizations if he or his team act in a non-appropriate manner, but he did not really know what the cultural protocols were. He was aware that this inhibits the representation of Aboriginal cultures in contemporary advertising campaigns. Two other creative designers said that they were unfamiliar with what may be regarded as offensive by Aboriginal people. Jonathan also elaborated on this issue, explaining that economic pressures leave little time for cultural enquiries, something that mirrored a journalist’s comment earlier in this chapter:

Perhaps the biggest problem is that there is not really a good awareness and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures and Aboriginality. Advertisers would not feel confident to put the culture in an advert without research. They have a degree of familiarity with White culture. The advertising ethic is competitive, and there is no time to do research. People know about White culture, but not about Aboriginal culture. There could be complaints from Aboriginal groups (3: 27).
Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultural protocols are very different. Advertisements that involve Aboriginal knowledge and people need to be discussed with the Elders of the relevant group. Not all non-Indigenous marketers and designers have knowledge of how to get in touch with them, nor even who the Elders are. Getting a permit to access Aboriginal land can also become a barrier in the competitive sector of advertising, given the short-time schedule of most campaigns:

I would like to show more of Indigenous cultures in ads, but getting access is not easy. There are a lot of layers you need to go through, the land body, there are lots of barriers to film Indigenous cultures. If you’ve got a lot of time, you can do it. Permits take time (7: 61).

Filming or photography can also be, in some areas, a contentious issue. People working for the industry were aware of this cultural protocol and discussed the issue. For example:

‘There are very complicated issues of what you can and cannot show, you cannot show everything. In fact, a lot of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory are not interested in being filmed (10: 104).

In the following Chapter, I discuss the role of government intervention. I illustrate that a number of government agencies funds cultural awareness workshops for their employees, in order to provide them with an opportunity to learn cultural protocols, for example. Such opportunities are often out of reach of people working in businesses that are under the economic constraints of a free market economy.

Whereas some participants indicated their concerns in making advertising campaigns that are respectful to Aboriginal people, but lack cultural awareness to evaluate whether they are, I also met some people who were more confident in referring to Aboriginal cultures in advertising. This was because they have had close friendships and/or close working relationships with Aboriginal people. It was the case with the Water Corporation’s campaign that employed Ningali Lawford in the advertisements. A key person involved in the campaign had had extensive contacts with Noongar and Kimberley people, and this gave him some confidence in bringing an Aboriginal component into the campaign, as he hinted it. It was a similar situation with the Northern Territory tourism campaign:

It appears Rhodes [creative Director of the NTTC campaign] has made his mark in the Northern Territory.... He’s reluctant to talk too much about his own

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32 I heard similar comments many times while I was conducting participant observation at cross-cultural awareness workshops.
experience in the Territory but those around him say that he was deeply moved by the landscape and culture (Campaign Brief April 2003: 29).

In the cases of both the Water Corporation and the Northern Territory tourism advertising campaigns, two individuals with a degree of cultural awareness were confident enough to make advertising decisions that showed cultural respect.

With the exception of some specific topics of advertising (e.g. ecological awareness, remote Australia), Aboriginal people have been marginalised from advertising campaigns, as some audiences are not willing to take advice from an Aboriginal person on issues such as everyday retail consumption, according to marketers and advertisers. It is a fact that the monetary pressure of a very competitive industry does not allow marketers to take risks. Whereas the advertising industry is an indicator of cultural values (Entman and Rojecki 2000: 162), it does not yet aim at educating people. This stance might change when more Aboriginal people will work for the industry. Processes of change and transformation will then, perhaps, take another step, as one participant observed about an Asian presence in advertisements:

Asian people also are under-represented in ad communication. As the Asian population increases and a lot of Asians with MBAs find their way into the industry, more and more commercials [with Asian signifiers] will get produced (3: 146).

People working in the advertising industry have spoken about their lack of cultural awareness that counters the representation of Aboriginal people within the industry; in part, this is due to their concern about being respectful to Aboriginal people. The advertising industry, as well as commercial media, is generally failing to provide some cultural knowledge about, or visibility for, Aboriginal societies. Commercial broadcasters, as well as marketing executives and creative designers, have clearly indicated their concerns about seducing their audiences (their customers). Whereas commercial television has been little concerned about losing an Aboriginal audience that counts for only 3% of the population, along with an average economic income lower than that of the wider society, people working in the advertising industry were more concerned about the way non-Aboriginal people could perceive a campaign featuring Aboriginal actors in mundane everyday activities. Moreover, people working in both sectors of activity have spoken about their lack of time to gain cultural awareness, as they have to complete their tasks under tight schedules. Commercial enterprises act in a free-market economy and have to maximise their revenues, as well
as minimising their costs, all in order to increase their profit. This is very different to agencies funded by the government, as I discuss in the following chapter where the argument comes from a fundamentally different standpoint—that is, to inform and teach rather than focussing on the balance sheet of commercial enterprises.
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement

My fieldwork data show that State and Federal governments are funding projects that help to communicate Noongar, and more generally Aboriginal, cultures to the wider community. Market viability is not the prime concern for the initiatives of most governments, as they are not constrained by the same need for economic sustainability as commercial businesses are, if they want to survive in a competitive market economy. State and Federal governments have the monetary power to educate people (e.g. Keating 1998) and do not seek consumer satisfaction. The contrast between a focus on the state as an economic aggregate versus competitive commercial enterprises, as investigated previously, echoes a fundamental distinction of economic sciences, which is the macro- versus micro- economy. Indeed, as Chamberlin and Yueh (2006: 4) noted, ‘[a]n important aspect of macroeconomics is the role of government policies’, which include education (p. 95). Today, government intervention in social affairs is an uncontested feature of political economy within most, not to say all, capitalist settings (for Australia, see for example Castles and Uhr 2005; Quiggin 1996, 2004)\(^1\). Broadly discussing the ‘role of the state in delivering social programmes’, Australian economist Michael Keating (1998: 39) noted that the ‘modern nation state’ is concerned to address ‘differing needs’ and ‘local needs’. This chapter takes more of a macro-economic approach, although I have only discussed a range of interactions that have occurred because of the availability of government funds. These are diverse and concern the sectors of the media, education, art and government workshops provided for and by government officers.

Government intervention is, somehow, well embedded in people’s expectations about social government responsibility, and this ranges from the Executive to the lay public. This is evident in the following comment of a ministerial politician who said to me, while discussing state intervention in Aboriginal affairs, ‘the government has responsibility to break down prejudice’ (18: 131). A number of respondents clearly

\(^1\) This chapter focuses on government intervention as a means of promoting Noongar cultural awareness; however, for discussions on government intervention from the perspective of economic growth, wages, unemployment or trade see, for example, the papers in *Australian Macroeconomic Policy Debates: Contribution from the Shann Memorial Lectures 1991-2000* (Crompton 2004).
voiced their views that the government has a social role to play, which they felt is not the responsibility of individuals, as one man suggested:

> People have negative views about them [Aboriginal people], which is unfortunate, because it brings out the worst. But if I have a house to rent and an Aboriginal family comes, I don’t rent it to them. It’s a Catch-22. Negative stereotypes make them feel aggressive. We might soon need to rent a house but I wouldn’t rent it to Aboriginal people, I’d be worried about them trashing it. The government, they take the risk, but when it’s your own property, it’s different (17:112).

It is worth noting that Foucault (1991) brought a different perspective on the social role of government. He argued that today’s notion of government emerged in the eighteenth century when it shifted its focus from the monarch’s interests, as suggested in Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, to a new concern about the wider population. He noted that the ‘population comes to appear above all else as the ultimate end of government’ (p. 100), also suggesting that the welfare of the population is dependent on another variable, ‘what we now call the economy’ (p. 100). Foucault (1991: 101) attributed this shift to ‘the birth of political economy’, whose father is widely thought to be Adam Smith (Altman 1988: 23). Smith focussed his work on the free market regulated by the well-known and so-called ‘invisible hand’, which is the self-regulation of the free-market, articulated mainly around supply and demand, and setting of prices.

In the thesis, I see more the intervention of the government in promoting public projects and social welfare as being essentially a legacy of British economist, Keynes—an approach of the economy that is today known as Keynesianism². Giddens (2000: 73), however, suggested that the Keynesian model belongs to the ‘Old-style social democracy’ and that education should be ‘the main public investment that can foster both economic efficiency and civic cohesion’. This latter point mirrored my observations. Throughout of my fieldwork, I noted that the State provides varied opportunities for educating people about Noongar concerns, with the aim to improve the well being of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, as well as the nature of their engagement.

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² Keynes’s model originally suggested that a government would intervene in the economy in order to compensate insufficient business investment in times of recession (Keynes’s model reflected the experience of the Great Depression).
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement

Government commitment

The State is regulating people’s lives ‘in most liberal democratic systems’ (Considine 1994: 4). This occurs through social policies that, ‘codify social norms and values, and articulate fundamental organizing principles of society’ (Shore and Wright 19997: 6). The role of the state in cultural engagement should not be under-estimated. In the past, the state was an agent of exclusion for Aboriginal people; today, it takes a role of informing the wider Australian society about the nature of Aboriginal issues in a way that commercial enterprises cannot achieve. Discussing Giddens’ book, the Constitution of Society, Cassels (1993: 16) commented on the role of government in bringing social change and noted ‘the ability of institutions to bring about change by employing knowledge of how the social world operates’.

During my fieldwork, I interviewed three state politicians and five senior executives working in various government departments. All of them mentioned that today’s government is committed to find solutions that would enhance the well-being of Aboriginal communities within the broader Australian society. Government intervention in Aboriginal affairs is far from being new to the political agenda (e.g. Assimilation, Self-determination, Reconciliation). For more than two centuries, different policies have been developed to regulate the Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interface. Many non-Indigenous people are well aware of the mistakes of past policies that are now appreciated as an unpopular legacy of the colonial area. Since the early 1990s, the Australian government has formally acknowledged Aboriginal people and is committed to a better engagement through ‘Reconciliation’. A politician shared with me his personal thoughts on the issue of past policies and his faith in today’s direction:

There have been attempts by previous governments to ‘de-Aboriginalise’ Aboriginal communities, attempts to assimilate, and that Aboriginal culture means nothing. Terra Nullius…. I am a person of my time, with a general realisation that Aboriginal communities have been left behind. The government has to assist Aboriginal communities…. The Noongar welcome, it’s symbolic, but it shows we respect Aboriginal people, and that we are different. In our Department, we set funding aside for it (18: 131).

It is important to recall the plurality of voices, even when echoing each other, because the personal views of senior politicians and government executives about the state’s initiatives in Aboriginal affairs are an important statement for understanding government intervention. One senior executive said about his work:

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We are a state government agency that enhances the impact of the government of the day. Now, there is an effort to recognize the importance and centrality of the first people of the state. When the Gallop government came to power, there was a strong statement on Aboriginal art, and this creates a strong obligation. Before the Gallop government, people saw things with a different perspective. This government has more an approach of recognizing the rights and respect of Aboriginal people (8: 127).

Today’s government is concerned with the recognition of cultural differences through the policy of Multiculturalism, something that a senior government executive described, during one of our conversations as, ‘a celebration of diversity’. Some government departments and ministers are, however, more committed than others to Aboriginal communities. This is the case with the Department of the Arts:

The current government is certain that it wants to progress the Reconciliation agenda in relation to Indigenous art. Aboriginal culture is incredible and very unique. We integrate Aboriginal art in entrances of foyers and outside. There are 80 art-works in a prison, some in hospitals, in police stations. When we promote Indigenous art, Australian Aboriginal people are enabled to excel in a way that is accepted by the society, and that creates pride.... Before this job, I was aware of structural problems. Through this job I become more hopeful. It has brought some measures of respect and hope (9: 127).

Although it is not the only one, the Department of the Arts acknowledges strongly Aboriginal cultures. The various institutions under its mandate are given clear direction on the issue. The Western Australian Art Gallery, for example, has put in place an Aboriginal policy that provides guidelines in dealing with Aboriginal communities. It also flies the Aboriginal flag every day as a public recognition of Aboriginal people, a government executive told me. The Western Australian Museum works in consultation with the Aboriginal community, and the Battye Library has produced a guide for Indigenous people. During my fieldwork, I was invited to a workshop organized by Community Arts Network WA in order to improve cross-cultural work engagement within the art industry.

Government intervention also occurs partly through allocation of resources to institution and government bodies that focus solely on Aboriginal communities. Such agencies act with the aim of improving the personal, social and cultural wellbeing of Perth Aboriginal people. They provide a variety of services for Aboriginal people, often because non-Aboriginal counterparts may lack cultural and social understanding to supply an adequate service to Aboriginal customers. This is the case for Aboriginal Legal Services or Aboriginal Medical Services, for example. Another, PEEDAC, helps
Aboriginal people in the Perth metropolitan area on issues of employment opportunities, work skills, training opportunities, the creation and development of Aboriginal enterprises, and the administration of CDEP (Community Development Employment Projects). Peedac Pty. Ltd also runs a number of enterprises staffed with Aboriginal people, mainly Noongar. One of them, Boola Wongin Nursery, has specialised in the commercialisation of native plants and provides to its wide range of customers some Noongar botanical knowledge (e.g. about Noongar seasons). The First Australian Shop (PEEDAC) used to sell merchandise promoting Noongar culture, and sought to stock a variety of high quality goods, ranging from necklaces to sofas, from calendars to boomerangs, didgeridoos, scarves and lampshades (6:75). Peedac also aims to promote ‘Aboriginal culture within the Perth Metropolitan region’, as a participant commented. The Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) is another government organization that aims to ‘improve social, cultural and economic well being of our people’ (said to me a Noongar participant) on issues such as heritage, cultural and cross-cultural awareness, and family issues such as finding missing members of the Stolen Generations.

Sometimes the State is funding an Aboriginal unit that is part of a larger government organization. This was, for example, the case with the Aboriginal units within Conservation and Land Management (now DEG) and the Department of Education and Training. These agencies are also key actors in implementing cross-cultural awareness programs and demonstrate the role of government in Aboriginal cross-cultural communication. It is worth noting that some city councils and a number of government departments do not have an Aboriginal unit per se, but employ Aboriginal officers to provide cultural awareness for their clients, their non-Aboriginal employees and to ensure that local Aboriginal communities are not overlooked. Bronwyn is the Noongar officer in a mainstream government organization promoting regional development. She explained to me how she promotes the economic and social well-being of Aboriginal communities in the region by developing cross-cultural awareness and breaking down stereotypes:

My job is to oversee the development of plans and strategies for the future of the region and Indigenous involvement. We are making sure that Aboriginal people are included in the region’s developments. It’s our job to see if it’s working. It’s a priority. This area is booming. There are restaurants, markets, offices and holiday resorts. Non-Indigenous people target career opportunities. Most businesses are privately owned. Unless you throw the idea to them, they don’t see where Aboriginal people can be involved. You need to plant the idea. Very few
Aboriginal people got jobs in retail outlets. I said to the manager “Tell us what is bothering you in employing Aboriginal people and we will provide an answer.” Government agencies have responsibility for not offering adequate support. We supply funding to compensate the loss of income in the first six months before the position becomes sustainable. Five Aboriginal people work at ALCOA out of 2000. It should be 2 to 3%.... By law 3% should be Aboriginal staff. I can be bombastic but we need to make it happen (8: 75).

Rose (Noongar) works for a city council and, like Bronwyn, raises awareness about Aboriginal issues.

This is a very affluent government. Before I started, people had no idea about Aboriginal history. The Council history book had no reference to Aboriginal people. Me, coming on board, I changed all this. I change people’s minds. For the Noongar community, I explain what the Council has to offer, and I advocate to the Council for them (14: 63).

I have mentioned only a few examples from my field data that concern government funded initiatives; but all have valuable outcomes in different social settings (Plate 8.1). This is not to suggest that all government departments or city councils are taking action and demonstrate their commitment towards Aboriginal communities, nor that they aim to enhance cross-cultural understanding of the wider community. I spoke with some employees who were working for Federal, State or Local government agencies and observed that such commitment was still relatively rare.

Perception of government by the public

While the government’s intervention is not driven by financial profit, popularity polls drive politicians. Quiggin (2006: 529) defined the scope for maneuvering in government intervention, as needing to be located within ‘the art of the possible’ or resulting from a ‘bargained consensus’. Indeed, bureaucrats have to balance the satisfaction and the needs of all communities. A politician told me that an 80-million-dollar government-funded Aboriginal cultural center in Western Australia would be a political disaster in the election polls, even though he supported such a project. He added, ‘other institutions would be afraid that Noongars have everything’ (On this point, Mickler 1998 observed that the media often communicate a sense of Aboriginal privilege).

A number of participants blamed the State and the Federal governments for the way they deal with Aboriginal affairs. Some respondents complained about ‘the hand-outs people get’, ‘the money attached to policies’, of the ‘nanny state that gives everything
Plate 8.1 Today local government is committed to acknowledging Noongar culture. Government-funded public art is an example of this.

Street banner with Noongar season, South Perth.

Mosaic outside Public Library, Midland.

Forrest Place mosaic, Perth.

Section of wall mural painted by school children, Midland.

Architectural mosaic in retail centre, Cottesloe.

Mosaic at Buckland Hill lookout, Mosman Park.

Street mosaic in retail centre, Subiaco.
for free to Aborigines', as some voiced it. A number of activists have an opposite view, however. They denounced some government malpractices and its lack of understanding of Aboriginal affairs. Some respondents have accused the government for its alliance with commercial developers and mining companies. Some people were really distressed, as they see the State supporting 'the greed of developers who go to sacred sites and destroy Aboriginal artefacts', as participants have said about a Noongar site in the Wheatbelt, and the tuart forest of the South-West. Another group of participants, who were political activists, reproached the government's attitude toward the Noongar community:

Where is the justice? This Government doesn't care about the rights of Aboriginal People. This Government has no understanding of the culture of grassroots Aboriginal people. It is attempted genocide (18: 73).

This view echoes another participant who also blamed the Government for not doing anything. She suggested that the political climate has not change since the time were Aboriginal people were politically disempowered by the state, 'It's still there, it's a worrying thing, and it will never end' (17: 42). Thus, discussing public policy, Considine (1994: 47) observed that, 'policy never merely allocates the things people want.'

During my fieldwork, I also met Noongar people who have very little confidence in government commitments and who also criticised the government. On different occasions, I have been told, 'Reconciliation is to make the Wadjela happy', as one Noongar man commented. A Noongar Elder was more dismissive in his comments:

Reconciliation means nothing to me. It's just a word. Wadjela give you a little bit of this a little bit of that. I have no trust in the Whiteman system, never did, never will. When they opened the Art Gallery, the Minister was there. There were Aboriginal speeches, they thought they were doing something for Aboriginal people, but they are not (11: 38).

Whereas I spoke with a number of people who were unhappy with the way the government intervenes in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal dialogue, I also acknowledge that, during my fieldwork, I met some decision-makers who had no reservation in sharing with me their uncertainty and lack of knowledge about 'what to do and how to do it' in regard to government policy about Aboriginal affairs. Policy- and decision-makers remain unclear in articulating practical solutions to improve cross-cultural engagements. A positive government contribution to Aboriginal affairs is still relatively new (just over
three decades)\(^3\) and many actions still lack a clear sense of direction. A senior government officer said to me:

> There is a lot of good will, a lot of good intentions. People want to advance Reconciliation and to promote Indigenous cultures and heritage, but it’s often unfocussed. We need to bring focus (11: 86).

Two senior politicians have also indicated some anguish that they are establishing policies that may subsequently be regretted or condemned for failing to address, in a culturally appropriate way, the issues that really concern Aboriginal people. To quote one:

> Issues of status are also important. There is a high level of burden. How can you still be there and optimistic. I get emotional about some social issues in Aboriginal communities. I don’t really understand why it catches me the way it does, but it does. I’m better at dealing with White people. I’m more comfortable in Western conditions (17: 80).

During my fieldwork it became clear that government policies are influenced by the agency of senior executives and the Department Minister. I met current and former government ministers who felt concerned that the State set up efficient policy that meet the needs of Aboriginal communities, although anxious of un-foreseen outcomes. I cannot identify the function of these interviewees; however, their insightful comments need to be heard. One put it:

> It’s a shadow story, in the sense that in Perth there are rabbits and foxes that live in the city but you don’t see them. That’s the same way non-Indigenous city-dwellers interact. Very few Europeans have penetrated the Aboriginal world. Most White people wouldn’t know anything about it. It wasn’t until I began to penetrate this world that I gained some insight. Without this insight, how would some of the state policy I initiated have been developed? There were many areas in which we made policy decisions. We tried to recognise the rights of Aboriginal people in Government planning. We had successes and failures, but they were part of a process (14: 140).

In talking with some decision makers, I understood that their personal commitment remains a key push in the government’s acknowledgement of Aboriginal people. Discussing the general theme of public policy, Cochran and Malone (2005: 10) noted, ‘It is important to emphasize that choices are ultimately made by individuals’. So I interviewed a range of those influencing the development and execution of state policy. In all these cases, the personal experience and empathy of individuals has had a significant outcome in Government intervention.

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\(^3\) Since the Native Welfare act was revoked in 1972.
A senior Federal politician discussed his personal motivation in influencing the course of Aboriginal affairs:

We were motivated by the principles of Civil Rights. I'm still struggling with the true solution in dealing with the lives so many Aboriginal people have. The Government is still struggling with what to do. It's all part of the same thinking, the ideological view that you can change things very quickly. The Government has to be engaged in a very broad and connected way. I have a bad conscience about the effect of some Government policies (15: 33).

An executive manager in the public service shared his vision with me and why he tries to encourage his cabinet minister because:

This is my dream. We need to honor the First People. We need to respect their place. We need to say “Sorry”, to respect the richness of their culture (8: 137).

When such people are moving into other departments or the Cabinet, their successor may not necessarily have the same commitment. For example, when one government executive left his position, his replacement failed to keep Aboriginal issues on his Department’s agenda (Notebook 9).

In the light of the government desire to find appropriate solutions in regard to Aboriginal affairs, some Noongar people have a role as key actors in helping the government. However, within the blur of seeking solutions, one Noongar participant attended a United Nations meeting, as these issues are also part of a global concern. She said to me:

I went to a First Nations meeting and there were some Indigenous women from Finland with their traditional costumes. Nice costumes. I did not know that there were some Indigenous people over there, but it’s incredible what they are doing. It gave ideas (14: 146).

It is complex to grasp in a short section of this thesis the diversity of actions and outcomes of the State and the Federal government in the area of Aboriginal affairs. Whereas the Australian government is sometimes seeking inspiration from overseas, it is worth noting that the Department of Foreign Affairs educates people living overseas about Aboriginal cultures; however, this is not always without future financial risk. Indeed, government intervention is not totally removed from the surrounding free-market economy, as Natasha explained:

An Embassy is promoting a positive image to encourage trade, investment, good feeling. Positive positioning abroad is our political interest. We hosted the launch
of *Rabbit Proof Fence*\(^4\). We were wary of the public reaction to the film and the damage it could do. This film could have opened Australia to criticism. An Embassy responsibility is to look after the image. But it was important in recognising our past. We did it with a French charity. The event was held in a big cinema on the Champs Elysées. In the speeches everyone commented on how positive it was. Australia has gone forward in recognising its past. This is an example on how we can educate people (8: 105).

Government departments that have obliged themselves to bring cultural awareness to the wider community often provide an environment that increases cultural awareness for those working within their own organizations. The decision-makers are also gaining cultural awareness that, as I noted earlier, impacts on policy-making. Discussing this issue, one of these participants discussed his experience:

I spent 30 years in Finance. I was in the Executive. In Finance, I had very little contact with Aboriginal people because lot of Aboriginal people don’t run businesses. In the last two years we recruited Aboriginal people but it didn’t work well. There were just one Aboriginal person and we wondered why she didn’t fit in. There was no employment policy for Aboriginal people, no friendship, no casual meeting. . . . My role here is to resource all these areas of the Department of the Arts and to deliver government policy... It was a big change going from Finance to the Arts. 25% of visual artists are Aboriginal.... I’ve been to a remote Aboriginal community. We stayed there overnight. We were able to observe a bit of the culture. I have a deeper appreciation of what the issues are and the connection with the land.... Every time we have speeches for an Aboriginal art show we recognize the Aboriginal owners. It gives great cultural awareness. This Department has a focus on Aboriginal cultures (15: 121).

This was not the only Department that aimed at acting in culturally appropriate ways with local Aboriginal communities, as indeed, I met a few government employees from other departments who have also spoken about the issue. In response to improve the outcomes of government initiative in working in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, some government departments provide workshops to increase the knowledge of their employees, as many non-Aboriginal Australians have a limited degree of Noongar cultural awareness—and more generally Aboriginal cultural awareness.

**Cross-cultural workshops: developing respect and better understanding**

During my fieldwork, I participated in eight cross-cultural awareness workshops organised by state agencies to increase Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions within

\(^4\) Film directed by Phillip Noyce (2002) and based on the autobiographic novel of Doris Pilkington.
the workplace. Workshops are one example that shows how the state can help to bring together Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. Workshops are not solely set up under the umbrella of the state; however, the state has often the financial power to organise cross-cultural awareness training that may be too expensive for many commercial businesses to undertake. Small businesses act in a competitive market economy and cannot afford to spend time learning about something that does not generate income. In the course of my fieldwork, I encountered only two small business managers attending a cross-cultural workshop provided by a regional development authority. The motivation of Tom (small business manager) who runs a liquor shop for attending the workshop is worth noting, 'I want to understand what's going on in the [Aboriginal] community, because we have a lot of Aboriginal clients.' Large corporations, like mining companies and universities, are the only non-government institutions (of which I am aware) that have organised workshops for their staff. Like the state, these organizations are conscious of acting in culturally appropriate ways that enhance the well-being of local Aboriginal communities, whether this results from the recognition of Native Title or from embracing today's ideology of acknowledging cultural diversity. There are many workshop organisers. Four agencies kindly welcomed me to conduct fieldwork at their meetings; however, they also expressed some concerns regarding issues of confidentiality. I therefore remain deliberately vague in some of my field accounts of which agency is organising a workshop for whom. This does not alter the focus of this section, which illustrates how the government promote cultural awareness in the public service—in ways that is beyond the reach of most employees of commercial business.

I met Sophie at a cross-cultural awareness workshop. She was working for a Cabinet minister and needed for her work some background information about Noongar culture. While the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) was located a few floors below in the same premises and could have provided her with all the information she needed, Sophie went through a complicated course of investigating where she could go to find out, as she did not know about DIA. Sophie had no Indigenous friends and colleagues, so she opened the phone book and looked for the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council. It was the only Noongar organization she could name. She was directed and redirected from one department agency to another, and finally found the organization that conducted a cross-cultural awareness workshop few days later. As she was working for a Cabinet minister, she could easily enrol.
Workshops were aimed at communicating to the participants a better understanding of Aboriginal cultures and experiences. The intention that drove a government agency to arrange a workshop was often triggered by the realisation that a lack of Aboriginal cultural awareness can impact on either people’s work-efficiency or on the well-being of the local Aboriginal communities. Given the issue of anonymity, I now present my data about the different workshops I went to in order to convey a sense of the general format, focussing on cultural communication.

Workshops were held in the conference room of the clients or in a venue rented for the occasion. The number of participants varied from 10 to 35, with an average of 15 to 20 people for those I attended—35 was most unusual. The rooms were decorated with Aboriginal artefacts (see Chapter Nine) but the whiteboard was probably the most frequently used item. Workshops aimed to encourage the group of participants to reflect on their own experiences and their sets of values, as well as to learn from their colleagues, as people have different experiences and varied perceptions of the interface. People said to me during or after workshops that it was always enlightening to get the plurality of perspectives. At one workshop, a participant recounted that he had been ‘beaten up by Aboriginal people to within an inch of life and robbed of valuables at the age of 17’. Another attendee discussed his positive experience, ‘I was given accommodation by Aboriginal people when I was working up north’. One person ‘has Aboriginal family friends’, another a ‘friendly next door neighbour who is Aboriginal’, but a third one found it difficult to interact with Aboriginal people and wondered, ‘Why don’t they respect Western values?’ Someone responded to him saying, ‘Aboriginal people are very accepting of white people.’ Convenors often divided the group into smaller sections to encourage participants to be more at ease in reflecting on their own experiences. This was a means to diffuse any sense of blame and increase honesty in people’s participation and their expression of values and beliefs. Workshops are more than just a learning experience; they provide a rare opportunity to discuss stereotypes and misconceptions that are ‘just under the surface’ and may be raised in work conversations. Some participants said they were ‘afraid at night in town … all the drunks were begging [from] the young kids’, ‘fed up of being asked for money and cigarettes’, ‘the anti-social behaviour of Aborigines’, ‘truancy’ or the allocation of.

Attendance was encouraged, but never compulsory.
'huge resources for Indigenous people'. One convenor showed me his file on conducting workshops. It contained a session that aimed to 'break the stereotype of how s/he [non-Aboriginal people] sees Aboriginal people'. After every small-group discussion, each group told the others their points of view. The convenor listened and gave his or her input by reflecting on a Noongar experience.

In some workshops, all speakers were Aboriginal, mainly Noongar but not exclusively; in other instances, non-Indigenous speakers discussed their own cross-cultural experiences in working with Aboriginal people. The Noongar content of the workshops always involved the input of Noongar people. Workshops also acknowledged and discussed the notion that 'Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have different sets of experiences', as one convenor said. This was, by no means, a major theme that convenors communicated to participants. Past coercive government policies have resulted in major trauma for many Aboriginal people who are still experiencing the consequences of these policies in their current everyday life. One convenor explained that the local Aboriginal community might be resentful to government employees because of their bad experiences when Native Welfare officers removed people from their families. Whereas the Perth Aboriginal community is very much aware of these sad and enduring aspects of history, many non-Aboriginal people remain less familiar with the way the State legislated on all aspects of Aboriginal people’s life (i.e. marriage, education, work, access to public spaces, etc.). All workshops I attended have discussed extensively the historical facts and the consequences of these on Noongar/Aboriginal communities. Indeed, historical experiences are an important feature in defining cultural background, and it is not surprising that cultural awareness programs deal with this intercultural knowledge. With the support of video recordings, photos on Power Point presentations and a few speakers who have shared their own experiences, those attending cross-cultural workshops became familiarised with Aboriginal history. One convenor cited some attendees’ reactions:

We show videos and we have discussions. Some people cry and want to say, ‘I’m sorry.’ They didn’t realise the rules and regulations (18: 95).

The contents of all workshop programs were very well documented and delivered in a relatively short time (one to three days). Most people do not take notes, so the format needs to be attractive enough for people to remember easily.
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement

Video clips are also a means used by convenors to communicate the role of the State in regulating Aboriginal people’s lives, as well as the assumptions that underpinned the policy of Assimilation and the 1905 Act. Some workshop convenors showed for a few minutes a video clip of the film *The Coolbaroo Club*[^6], as one sequence deals with the Assimilation policy. At some workshops, footage about the 1905 Act was screened. It was about the removal of children. At two workshops, convenors showed the short feature-film *Babakuaria*, which is an inversion of white colonisation of Aboriginal land, with Aboriginal people landing and colonising White Australians in their barbecue area. Many workshops screened a documentary on ‘traditional culture before settlement’, as one convenor introduced it, which showed hunter-gatherers in a desert region during the 1930s. Historical documents, photos and quotes of A.O. Neville (Chief Protector of Aborigines) on Power Point also had a strong impact on audiences at the various workshops. Workshop convenors also explained what Aboriginal English is, often by showing a video, in order that attendees value the way Aboriginal people talk and to raise their awareness of this very different manner of communicating. Beyond the speeches, power-point presentations, video recordings and story telling, all of which convey cross-cultural awareness, coordinators employ a variety of different techniques to invite people to engage with, and reflect on, the notion of culture. In lay terms, ‘how does culture affect what we do?’ Techniques varied from role-playing, brainstorming, story telling (Plate 8.2), small-group discussions and quizzes, for example.

Guest speakers and convenors have mentioned different aspects of Aboriginal cultures, often along the six themes that I discussed in Part Two (i.e. plants, traditions, language, spirituality, kinship and history). More interestingly in regard to contemporary notions of culture, convenors invited the audience to consider, as one speaker said, ‘the recognition of cultural differences’. The message is relatively pragmatic. People are guided on the way they could engage ‘to fit a different cultural situation’, as one convenor put it. Workshop participants were advised on how to adapt their behaviour to issues such as gender, dress codes and ways of communicating, as these can influence cross-cultural perceptions and, subsequently, affect harmony within the work environment. In other words, non-Aboriginal people are encouraged to have ‘work practices that are culturally appropriate’, a convenor mentioned. The main issues were

[^6]: Directed by Roger Scholes (1996), this film portrays Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions throughout the 1950s. The Coolbaroo Club was the only Aboriginal-run dance club in Perth in the post war period.
THE ALLIGATOR RIVER STORY

Once upon a time there was a woman named Abigail who was in love with a man named Gregory. Gregory lived on one shore of a river. Abigail lived on the opposite shore. The river which separated the two lovers was teeming with man-eating alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory. Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed out. So she asked Sinbad, a river boat captain, to take her across. He said he would be glad to, if she would consent to go to bed with him before the voyage. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to be involved at all in the situation. Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad’s terms. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory.

When she told Gregory about her amorous escapade in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside with disdain. Heartbroken and dejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tale of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally. Abigail was overjoyed at the sight of Gregory getting his due. As the sun sets on the horizon, we hear Abigail laughing at Gregory.

THE CROCODILE CREEK STORY

Many years ago, there was a woman named Mabel who worked as a station cook. Mabel was in love with a stockman named Dave. Dave lived on one side of a creek. Mabel lived on the opposite bank. The creek which separated the two lovers was chockers with man-eating crocodiles when it overflowed in the rainy season.

Mabel wanted to cross the creek to be with Dave. Unfortunately, it was in the middle of the wet season, and the bridge had been washed out. So she asked Bluey, a wealthy but lonely station owner who had a boat, if he would take her across. He said he would be glad to, if she would consent to go to bed with him beforehand. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Bert to explain her plight.

Bert did not want to be involved at all in the situation. Mabel felt her only alternative was to accept Bluey’s terms. Bluey fulfilled his promise to Mabel and delivered her to into the arms of Dave.

When she told Dave about her amorous escapade in order to cross the overflowing creek, Dave cast her aside with disdain. Heartbroken and dejected, Mabel turned to her mate Digger with her tale of woe. Digger, feeling compassion for Mabel, tracked down Dave and gave him a good belting. Mabel was overjoyed at the sight of Dave getting his due. As the sun sets on the horizon, we hear Mabel laughing at Dave’s misfortune.

(Acknowledgements for this 1996 updated version to Dawn Beiserab and Ross Humphries, 1996)
'how to communicate', 'how to work together' and 'how to overcome problems of interacting', to quote the most frequent speaker's comments.

As workshops are aimed at involving attendees, not simply imparting knowledge passively, people were invited to discuss and reflect on cultural matters. One convenor asked them to think about 'the similarities and differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures'; another sought to 'provide a greater understanding of Aboriginal people and culture'. On some occasions, people were encouraged to discuss issues of cultural relativism, for example, the supposition 'why can't Aboriginal people be more like us?' Attendees have voiced 'a clash of culture' or a 'lack of mutual understanding'; these two quotes express cogently people's sentiment that the interface remains problematic. At a workshop, a participant expected 'to understand what Indigenous people feel and think' and another one was pleased to gain 'knowledge from Indigenous people', as nearly all of them lack opportunities to achieve this in their everyday lives. People were seeking answer to ameliorate the nature of future interactions. One person complained that 'understanding of cultural difference has to be reciprocal' and another was concerned about 'managing expectations between cultures'. Cross-cultural awareness trainings were centred on the notion of culture and the quandaries of crossing boundaries. Discussions about issues of racism, 'inverse racism', paternalism and the like were also common themes. Workshops communicated in a quite appealing manner the notion that culture underpinned every social act. Participants were not anthropologists so, for some of them, the workshop was a first realisation of their ethnocentric perceptions of Aboriginal people.

The recognition of differences in cultural practices, beliefs and experiences was central to all workshops. Some convenors held a booklet that gave them detailed guidelines to conduct workshops. It helped them to explain to workshop-participants that there are differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social practices and statuses (e.g. traditional law as marker of adulthood versus Australian law). Diverse aspects of Aboriginal cultures were emphasised at different workshops. People whose work led them to engage with an Aboriginal community on environmental issues were told about the necessity to 'find the local Elder', in order to set up educational panels for national parks. Workshops for art institutions provided some answers on issues of cultural

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7 Discriminating positively to promote Aboriginal interest.
protocols; which seem to be a concern for people working in the art industry, raised less often in other sectors of activity (tourism, industry, employment). Workshops for health and education emphasised different methods of childcare. All workshops encouraged people to break the barriers between themselves and the local Aboriginal communities. At one workshop, participants working within the environmental sector expressed concern and asked ‘where are the sacred sites?’ as they felt a ‘lack of cooperation from the local Aboriginal community’. Miscellaneous concerns also emerged at workshops. For example, one attendee wondered:

Why was there some rubbish around communities as Aboriginal people were so concerned with the environment? (3: 29).

There was a limit to the depth of cultural awareness that could be conveyed in the available time frame. People were not necessarily able to grasp the extent of cultural protocols and the different ways of interacting; nevertheless, people gained awareness that their own set of experiences and values might be different to those of Aboriginal Australians. In other words, people might still not really know what to do, but they realised that their own ways might not be culturally appropriate.

A recurrent question was: ‘who can we talk to?’ The answer was ‘you need to contact an Elder’, and guidance was provided on ‘how to put this into practice’. People were advised to ‘develop a regional network with Aboriginal people for the best possible outcomes’, ‘to get a clear understanding on how local Aboriginal people want to be involved’, and what is ‘the right way to involve Indigenous people at work.’ In response, someone suggested that s/he would contact the right person to ‘allocate appropriate travel budgets to allow appropriate consultation’. The range of issues was broad and varied according to the activity.

People who participated in cross-cultural awareness workshops were very responsive to them. At the end of many workshops, participants’ suggestions included a desire to ‘undertake more workshops’; some proposed that ‘senior management and executive directors should undertake awareness training’; some people thought of ‘expanding the cultural awareness workshop to a Level 2’ or suggested ‘that it should become compulsory’. In a workshop organised by and for a government department, attendees at the end suggested that the ‘legislation is revised to include cultural needs’, as they realised the irrelevance of some of the current policies in accommodating Aboriginal
needs. This shows a degree of willingness to enhance cross-cultural wellbeing. After the workshops, I had one-on-one discussions with some of the people, seeking their views about their experience of cross-cultural training. All respondents said they had enjoyed their learning experience. One emphasised the educational outcome and added, ‘I think everyone should do it’ (5: 21).

It would be an over-interpretation of my data to suggest that responsibility for creating genuine cultural awareness relies solely on the government. This is only one element in the succession of instances and opportunities from which people are learning from each other and engaging together; however, the government provides some significant opportunities that need to be discussed in further detail.

**Western Australian Department of Education and Training**

The Western Australian Department of Education and Training is a State institution that has a broad impact on the community, as school is compulsory for all Australians. What does the Department achieve in the communication of Noongar/Aboriginal cultures?

**Schools: a cross-cultural environment**

Throughout my fieldwork, I started many conversations with participants by asking, ‘When was the first time you learnt something about Aboriginal people?’ or ‘When did you first realise you were Noongar/Aboriginal?’ Most participants answered the question by referring to their school years. The comments varied widely, as some had a degree of interaction during their school years, while others had none. The following participants represent the diversity of experiences that I recorded during my fieldwork.

Madeleine (45 years old) is a lawyer. I met her for the first time through a mutual friend. I knew she had no contact with Aboriginal people, and was not interested in learning about Aboriginal cultures. We discussed her lack of contact, which she partly attributed to her upbringing:

I went to a private school. Most Aboriginal people have no means to send their kids to private school (10: 93).
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement

Her experience is very different to Dan's. He is a Noongar man (50 years old) whom I met during NAIDOC week. He went to a boy's private school, comparable in terms of academic achievement and fees, to the one Madeleine went to:

The local teacher asked me if I was interested in continuing with education. They organised my moving to Perth and I went to a private school as a boarder. I went to the school because of a scholarship (7: 141).

Jonathan now works for the art industry and went to a State school in the early 1960s. He recalled:

I grew up in a suburb where there was a large Aboriginal population, went to school with Aboriginal children, played football, I've been associated with them a lot as a kid. When I went to high school we drifted apart. They didn't go to high school (8: 96).

His experience is different to Sandra, who I met at the time her daughter was in primary school. Her daughter never had Aboriginal children in her class and Sandra recalled her own youth in Narrogin in the 1970s:

At school I had no Aboriginal friends, I didn’t see them out of school. They didn’t come to my house, they had their friends and I had mine. My parents wouldn’t have been happy if I had brought Aboriginal people at home (17: 119).

Indeed, many Noongar and non-Aboriginal families told me that, although they engaged with each other as children within the school environment, these interactions were often constrained to this particular setting, as Dan added:

When I grew up in the country, the Aboriginal community was a close community. If you run out of tea or coffee, you go next door. You wouldn't do it with a White person. We borrowed from the extended family. We wouldn't borrow from White people, because we didn't have much to do with them, just at school (7: 141).

This pattern of separation endured into the 1990s, as Stephanie (26) recalled:

I grew up in a remote country town where there were a lot of Noongars. I grew up in a racist family. A third in my class were Aboriginal. We sat in the same class and played sport together, but White kids stuck together, Noongar kids too. We weren't part of the same group (17: 132).

Judith is a Noongar woman in her mid-60s. At the time she went to school, Noongar culture was sidelined under the Assimilation Policy. This was long before the Department of Education provided cross-cultural awareness to teachers. Judith lived in two different country towns in the South-West and recalled two sets of very different experiences:
I haven’t been taught anything. I haven’t learned anything at the first school. All White kids were here, and Aboriginal kids there, you never mixed. Later, we moved to another town. It was a lovely town. It didn’t matter, everybody was welcome, everybody was friendly, there were no problems at school. Everybody mixed, it didn’t matter what colour you were (13: 118).

The plurality of experience is crucial in grasping the diversity and complexity of cross-cultural engagement in Perth’s schools (on the cultural interface within the Australian education sector see Nakata 2007 or Minnicon, Franks and Heffernan 2007). For a long time, schools have provided a setting where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children could engage; however this is very different to the educative role that this State government is now facilitating. My data confirm the Department of Education is committed to improving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction within all its schools. I now present another means that illustrate the government input in increasing cultural awareness to improve social needs of the local Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal children and teacher’s cultural awareness

Unlike the past where minority groups were expected to assimilate into the school system, which reflected dominant cultural values (Brennan 1998: 154), the Department of Education is now committed to supporting Aboriginal students and acknowledging their cultures. Participants⁸ indicated to me this has been at a greater level over the last decade. This is partly achieved by the creation of the Aboriginal Unit that employs a number of Aboriginal staff⁹. The Department of Education aims to ‘be seen as an agency that employs Aboriginal people at all levels and in all areas, not just those designated as “Aboriginal education”’ (Department of Education Services 2001: 50). In 2001, however, there were ‘only 65 Aboriginal teachers and administrators in a teaching force of around 17 000.’ (Department of Education Services 2001: 49). This State institution is progressively offsetting this crucial imbalance in the demography of its

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⁸ This section is based on participant observation at two conferences organised by the Department of Education for its employees, on extensive conversations with five Aboriginal people working for the Aboriginal section of the Department, and with two non-Aboriginal district officers, on conversations with parents of children in primary and high school, on a two-day cross-cultural awareness workshop and on miscellaneous field opportunities.

⁹ More precisely, the performance of Aboriginal students is facilitated with the input of the Aboriginal staff such as executive directors, district director, AIEO (Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer) whose role is to liaise between the schools and the local communities, AEM (Aboriginal Education Manager), a position of Level 7 which has existed since 2003, AEC (Aboriginal Education Coordinator), and ALO (Aboriginal Liaison Officer), as an officer from the Department of Education told me.
employees through improving Aboriginal participation. A participant from the Aboriginal Unit told me:

Now, there is a District Director in the Kimberley, it’s a Level 9. Previously, there was no Aboriginal person in the job. This represents a commitment to have Aboriginal people. It is important that strategic decisions include Aboriginal voices. Before Aboriginal education and training was marginalised—special money, now it’s mainstream money. That has been pushed up in 2001 (15: 125).

Whereas Aboriginal staff members focus on the well-being of Aboriginal students, they also inform and advise non-Indigenous staff on Aboriginal matters. Indeed, they provide some answers when cross-cultural issues emerge within the schools. For example, Elliot (Aboriginal Unit) discussed with me some of the questions with which teachers are confronted. Following are some of his comments: the ‘mobility of kids in the Perth district’, ‘issues about attending funerals’ and ‘how to manage with students speaking Aboriginal English’. Taking Noongar culture into account within the school is a relatively recent change. Elliot informed me about programs such as the ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness) that aims to enhance the performance of Aboriginal pupils. The Department also seeks to facilitate the well-being of Indigenous parents as some ‘do not feel welcome and get used to a lack of school success’, as Chris (Aboriginal Unit) told me before adding ‘before, it was left to the school to decide what to do with Aboriginal kids. Some schools did not welcome them’ (15: 126). In the past, there were some non-Aboriginal schoolteachers who already had a degree of cultural awareness and were keen to provide support to Aboriginal pupils. Jennifer, for example, worked in country areas in the early nineties. She recalled an interaction involving an Aboriginal family and an inconsiderate principal:

I spoke to an Aboriginal boy who wasn’t going to the Year 7 camp. They had no money. I knew there was special funding for Aboriginal kids. I said to the principal that a kid wasn’t going to the camp despite special funding. He said, “I’m not going to let him have any funding except if his mother comes and asks.” But there was no way his mother asked. She was very shy and felt threatened, because of the unspoken antagonism (15: 72).

The government-funded Aboriginal Unit encourages all schools to deal appropriately with Aboriginal students and their families and ‘if a school did well [with Aboriginal students], we congratulate the school’, as a participant from the Unit told me. All of this involves a degree of cross-cultural engagement between the school and the Aboriginal community (see also Craven 1998: 200). Aboriginal staff working in education run a
cultural awareness-training program, named *Our Story: Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Training Program for the Education Sector*. One of the initiators of the project told me:

*Our Story* was prepared by a range of people. It’s particularly for non-Aboriginal staff. Schools are required to do it. Up to last year [I meet with him in 2004], two thirds of our school has done it. If they haven’t, they are required to do it (18: 92).

The Aboriginal officers rely on all kind of problems that emerge within schools to develop the cultural awareness of teachers. One officer told me:

It could be the school who would say, ‘this kid can’t go to camp in Kal [Kalgoorlie], because he’s in mourning in Yamatji country’. Individual issues that come up in a school can be used as a means to increase cultural awareness of the teachers (17: 21).

One AIEO recalled a family from the Kimberley who came to Perth for medical reasons. He informed teachers about some cultural values that they could face with the children. This was, for example, the students ‘who did not want to look you in the eyes’ and ‘the shame factor, by doing something good or bad.’ One of the Department’s executives commented about this cross-cultural commitment:

Headmasters and teachers are still learning, but it’s more notable than it was five years ago. 2001 was a noticeable change. Schools are engaging more fully. We are looking for Aboriginal people to fill in positions. We make particular effort. Aboriginal teachers are feeling more integrated and staff can influence policy-making (16: 74).

Whereas Aboriginal officers increase cultural awareness of the teachers in order to maximise the performances and the well-being of the Aboriginal students (for a perspective on Koorie students and their teachers, see Munns 1998), the Department of Education and Training contributes to bringing Aboriginal knowledge into the school curriculum. This is a fundamental issue in terms of increasing Aboriginal cultural awareness within the broader Australian society. Indeed, the relatively recent commitment to the need to address some cross-cultural issues demonstrates a *prise de conscience* in a major government agency, for which the State allocates financial resources.

*Teaching Aboriginal cultures in the school curriculum*

I am particularly interested in the role of the Department in communicating, and teaching, Noongar, and more generally Aboriginal, knowledge to all students. The year

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10 Aboriginal people commonly do not wish to stand out from their peers for either excellence or failure. They feel embarrassed or 'shame' with this.
2003 saw the implementation of Aboriginal knowledge within the school curriculum in a more applied way. One participant pointed out:

This is now compulsory in Year 8 and 9 and covers issue of traditional Aboriginal society, the interactions between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people (17: 35).

There are many features of Noongar culture that are brought to the knowledge of pupils. It is worth noting that the content of the knowledge communicated is always defined in consultation with the Elders of each area who provide specific input. Other knowledge is less locally grounded. For example, the making of tools or use of generic plants found all around the South-West (Balga tree) concerns Noongar culture as a whole. Sometimes it is more broadly relevant to Aboriginal cultures in general. This is the case, for example, for the significance of NAIDOC week.

The Department's policy implementation is far from being a trivial move. Schools, more than any other institutions, have the power to communicate to people 'what they should know' to successfully fit within their social environment. The Department of Education and Training's commitment to teach all Australians about Aboriginal cultures could increase considerably the awareness of the broader population over the next few years. All participants in my research had left school; for one this was one year ago, for others over fifty years ago. Very few respondents, and none who were above 25 at the time of my fieldwork, had learnt about Noongar/Aboriginal cultures at school. Only one girl (21) who went to a private school in Perth had more lessons about Aboriginal Australia than her friends who went to other schools. She described her school as being 'pro-Aboriginal', which by itself indicates that it was unusual.

School education is compulsory, and whether parents agree or not, Aboriginal Studies is taught in the classrooms. One of the major issues that school teachers face is 'how to do it?', as several commented. In other words, how could they implement Aboriginal Studies in the school curriculum? 'This was a dilemma for some schoolteachers', as an Aboriginal officer put it, reflecting on his experience that many of the teachers have only a superficial familiarity with Aboriginal cultures. Although Aboriginal staff can

11 However, responding to questions about cultural details is not always easy. During my fieldwork, a friend's daughter of nine years old called me. She said she had an essay to do 'on Aborigines' and asked if I could answer some questions about it. The first was, 'What is the name of the religion of Aboriginal people?' I answered, 'The Dreaming.' She asked 'What do they believe in?' I blanked out. I did not know where to start without being simplistic or inaccurate. A lot of things came to my mind. How could I describe the basis of Aboriginal spiritual beliefs to somebody who did not know anything about
inform teachers, some have developed their own strategies to increase their knowledge. At the Perth Royal Show, I engaged with a schoolteacher who was taking photos of the Aboriginal display (more details in Chapter Nine). She also attended to the ranger’s talk in order to obtain more knowledge about Noongar culture and to be able to teach something that ‘I’m not really into’, as she said. On another day of the Show, the Noongar ranger displayed a kangaroo skin and explained how Noongar people used to protect themselves with layers of oil and kangaroo skins. He then showed a bag made of kangaroo skin with the fur in the outside, but explained that, when carrying a baby, it was turned inside out so the infant was against the fur. Another teacher was taking photos for her file, and when I engaged with her, she said this is ‘because Aboriginal culture is in the school curriculum now’.

An Aboriginal Liaison Officer informed me that teachers are by no means left on their own to gain cultural awareness. He recalled, ‘In the Pilbara, the local teachers went to the bush and eat kangaroo’ (16: 139). In 2003, I went with the schoolteachers in the Ngaanyatjarra homeland on a two-day cross-cultural awareness programs for the teachers. People were taken cross-country and were shown a waterhole, they drank from it, ate damper. A woman showed them how to collect ochre and we all slept under the sky. Teachers were told some stories of the Mission days. The content of cultural awareness workshops, of course, mirrored what I discussed in Part Two when I analysed the intercultural body of knowledge.

Whereas the Department of Education has, over the last decade, taken more seriously its role of facilitating cross-cultural awareness, it is worth noting that other government agencies are also helping the schools (see Plate 8.3). Bronwyn, who works for a South-West government agency, advised me that part of her job was to encourage cross-cultural engagement within the schools:

We assist the schools with the Indigenous curriculum. We provide assistance and community members go to schools. We encourage [Aboriginal] parent involvement at school (8: 78).

Rose works as an Aboriginal Officer for a city council in Perth. She also introduces Aboriginal culture into local schools:

Aboriginality without any time to think just where to start? At least the girl whispered a suggestion: ‘The spirits come from the water’. That was a start anyway, the Waygul.
We had some activities for Reconciliation Day. We also created some banners, message sticks for all kids to give to their parents. Now we celebrate NAIDOC Week in all local schools. Some ask me to go to talk in their schools, and if I can't do it, I tell them who to go to. We celebrate NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation. It makes people proud. There's a great response from the Noongar community. People are pleased that we go to the local schools. And a lot of schools want to be sure that they do the right thing (14: 63).

Noongar people are sometimes coming to schools to tell stories or to show elements of Noongar culture. Some schools took pupils to places such as Yanchep National Park (North of Perth), where rangers told them about animals, plants, some tools and Noongar lifestyle.

Although the Department of Education and Training has the goal of increasing cross-cultural awareness, it could take some years before every teacher and student become knowledgeable about Noongar culture. Government initiatives represent only one feature of cross-cultural engagements; however, the influence of the state in education and training could greatly contribute to the awareness of the general population. This is because, in Western culture, the state has an educative and social role to play, a productive role which is also a result of the coercive power of state institutions. A multiplicity of government departments contributes to this educative role.

Some participants discussed with me their views about changes in the school curriculum. A number of non-Indigenous parents were very pleased that Noongar culture is now being taught in schools. One of them has two children in primary school, and they had to do a project in social studies on Aboriginal people. He compared this to his own childhood where such topics were never taught. He grew up on a farm and gained some knowledge because Noongar people were working with his parents. He is aware that many Australians would not have the same opportunity and think that the Department of Education has a role to play:

Aboriginal history is fundamental for me. It's part of Australia. I went with Noongar people to a big rock where people used to sharpen spears. A lot of Australian people don't understand what was going on in the bush or rivers. That's the education system to blame (15: 116).

Noongar participants, with whom I discussed the issue, were gratified that Noongar traditions, history and Dreaming stories were now being taught at school. This is quite

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12 For a discussion on the power of policies in a broader sense see, Shore and Wright 1997: 29; Levinson and Sutton 2001: 1; Foucault 2000: 341.
Plate 8.3 A school seeks advice on teaching the Aboriginal Studies curriculum

S __________ Primary School
Z __________

Aboriginal Heritage Unit
Sharing the Dreaming

Pointers for Heritage Officer to Consider

• Is it appropriate to compare Aboriginal culture to other cultures? E.g Aboriginal culture to an African tribe.
• Stereotypes – how do we tackle this as teachers as we may be dealing with stereotype influences at home?
• Locations of different Aboriginal clans through WA/Aust. And how do they differ – what are their cultural beliefs?
• Do you have any ideas on what aspects of contemporary Aboriginal culture would be appropriate to explore that the children can relate to?
• Would it be appropriate to have our own small collection of Aboriginal artefacts within the school library that the children can access? If so where could we get these?
• Do you know of any teacher/children resources that we could buy for the school? E.g Books, stimulus pictures, games, hands-on activities.
• Names of known places within WA that have Aboriginal meaning. E.g Spearwood, Bibra Lake. What is the cultural significance of these areas?

Regards,
unlike their own personal experiences. They wished that they had had more opportunity to learn about their culture at school, in the same way that they did about the wider Australian society.

It is a fact to acknowledge that some people are racists and do not approve of these changes. For example, I met a schoolteacher and the parent of a pupil who had stereotypical and very negative views about Aboriginal people. However, I can only reiterate that the Western Australian Department of Education and Training has the power to legitimate knowledge. In the present context, Noongar culture will increasingly become part of what people learn at school as part of being Australian. This is because the State government is providing funds to facilitate such programs.

**Tertiary Education**

Tertiary education is also a means for people to access Noongar culture and gain awareness about it, even to share this with their peers and families, as the following mature-aged student, who had completed a course on Aboriginal history at a Perth university, mentioned to me:

My husband was fascinated during my degree. He was amazed how the White policy worked (2: 122).

In the Indigenous Unit of DEC (at the time, CALM), a number of Noongar rangers conduct cross-cultural awareness events for university courses communicating elements of the intercultural body discussed in Part Two. For example, at a two hour Noongar awareness tour in a national park (2: 89), the ranger Mike welcomed in Noongar language the group of university students. He talked about how Noongar people used the boomerang, the different types of spears used for different kinds of fish and the range of food that people ate (e.g. kangaroos, birds, eggs, snakes, goanna). Mike explained the six Noongar seasons and gave details on the different hunting gathering habits according to each season. He told people about the boundaries of Noongar country and the interaction with Yamatji and Wongai neighbours. He talked about the burning of the land to allow regrowth, showed a mia mia and explained how it was built to shelter people from the prevalent wind. He gave a number of Noongar words, explained how to make tools, discussed edible plants and healing plants. Here, this mainly concerned the themes of tradition, the environment and Noongar language.
Tertiary education has sometimes a global reach, to use a marketing term. Serena, for example, came from Reunion as an exchange-student in Arts. Along with many of these students, she took a unit about Australian society. The unit coordinator organised a half-day trip in a national park where a Noongar ranger from CALM provided a cultural awareness talk. I did participant observation at the tour and a few days later I discussed it with Serena who recalled:

He showed us the kangaroo tracks and how to make tools. We looked for the stones to make a knife. For ten minutes we lived like people in the bush. He wanted to tell us a lot. He was keen that we learnt about his culture. I found it super that he was so keen to teach us. In Reunion we kiss all the time. If people here were the same I would have kissed the Aboriginal man because I really enjoyed meeting one. I learnt about the stolen generation before but I never had the human contact. I never met an Aboriginal person and by having gone to that day-trip, I understand better. I now have a human side of it, not just through books (5: 12).

It is worth noting that another student had a pessimistic view of the long-term future for Noongar culture:

I learnt today that Aborigines are people like everybody else, not exactly like everybody else. All people are different, all cultures are different. I always knew that but today I benefit from experiencing it first hand. Before today, I thought they were a dispossessed minority group in front of a cultural collapse.

Q: And now?
I can’t imagine how they are going to preserve much of their traditions. The pressure of development is high, too high. The lifestyle, the diet, the technology… all that would quicken its [Noongar culture] death. It’s sad but the world is about to lose everything that is traditional. I hope it won’t be the case but I imagine the world with one culture and maybe some regional variations (3: 76).

People form their own points of view; nevertheless, such government-funded opportunities contribute to slowly increasing the general public awareness through the policy of employing Aboriginal staff who have the responsibility of informing the wider community about Noongar culture.

**Public broadcasters**

In this section I discuss the non-commercial media. Unlike their commercial counterparts, non-commercial media rely on government funds and do not rely on

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13 I conducted interviews with journalists working for ABC television, SBS television and radio, the DIA newsletter, and WAAMA radio station.
audience rating and advertising revenue to finance their running costs (e.g. producing programs).

**ABC and SBS**

Some media are not driven by the same market logic as commercial ones. Non-commercial media do not seek to maximise their audience rating, as public funding partly replaces advertising funding; however, the audience rating of ‘Channel 7 is twice that of ABC’, said James (journalist). In this section, I show that government funds given to public broadcasters provide different broadcasting opportunities to their commercial counterparts. Unlike commercial media, the Public Service Act obliges ABC and SBS to be more concerned with cultural diversity and the participation of Aboriginal people in the media, which is acknowledged in their respective charters (Jakobovicz et al. 1994: 35)\(^{14}\). Ginsburg (2002: 47) noted that the participation of Aboriginal people in mainstream media offsets the invisibility of Aboriginal life (as raised in Chapter Seven) and may have a political impact on broader Australia. Addressing the issue, Indigenous journalist, Moylan-Coombes (cited in Hartley and McKee 2000: 193) observed:

> How do you indigenize the mainstream? Having Indigenous people employed in institutions like ABC will create a change. It’s going to be very slow.

Whereas the government provide such support, what are the outcomes in term of cross-cultural awareness through media reporting of Aboriginal affairs?

I discuss the role of the Indigenous Unit within the ABC and SBS respectively with Alan (Noongar journalist), who reported:

> Over the last ten years real changes occurred. SBS has its own Indigenous unit and broadcasts Indigenous programs. ABC has its own Indigenous journalist. There are plenty of positive stories, and with Reconciliation, there is a real effort to have Aboriginal people (15: 26).

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\(^{14}\) ‘The assertion of Aboriginal identities in contemporary Australia is greatly strengthened by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control of their own media, and the inclusion of Aboriginal programming in various other community outlets. Both the national broadcasters—the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)—have developed specific programming for Aboriginal productions. The ABC has established an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Production Unit in television, and SBS commissions Aboriginal current affairs programs and has a code of conduct for media workers who want to make programs with or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.’ (Jakobovicz et al. 1994: 35)
Many non-Indigenous journalists have limited contact with Aboriginal communities, and only superficial cultural awareness. Some journalists of ABC and SBS said that the Indigenous units provide them with easy access to answering questions they might have about Indigenous cultures. One of them added about the ease of access, ‘it is in the same body’. As a result, for these journalists, ‘we are less and less ignorant on Indigenous issues than before’, as one put it. Government financial support is a resource that journalists are using to improve the quality of Aboriginal reports, something that is absent in commercial media.

There are various subtle illustrations that show that Aboriginal people are more ‘visible’ on ABC and SBS. ABC television, for example, screened 32-second channel identifications depicting Aboriginal children performing an Aboriginal dance accompanied by clapping sticks and a background of didgeridoo music. Another promotion showed Aboriginal people gathering bush tucker. These promotions acknowledged people’s diversity (‘every beat’, ‘every taste’) and ‘one television’ (ABC). From my discussions with journalists, it quickly became clear to me that ABC and SBS see themselves as having a social responsibility rather than focussing on audience ratings.

Robert is a journalist who works for a commercial channel. We discussed an ABC feature that follows some young Aboriginal men who cross the central desert to go to the coast. They travel in wrecked cars and in each episode they faced some problems. The series provides an accurate insight into mechanical breakdowns and innovative outback solutions (using fencing wire to fix the clutch, spinifex grass to re-inflate a wheel), as well as providing some cultural information (e.g. spirituality, gathering food, language, community lifestyle). Robert said about the program, Bush Mechanics (Film Australia 2001) that it would not appeal to a broad audience.:

ABC, I think it’s wonderful but it has a different charter. ABC has more of a social responsibility than Channel 10. It hasn’t got the same commercial imperative. Bush Mechanics, in my opinion, would be marginalised. We would have advertised it differently. We could have done it, but we would have had a young and dynamic Aboriginal presenter. The program is not dynamic enough for Channel 10. We would have used a helicopter more, we would have gone to unbelievable places, to make it more of an adventure (18: 4).
The Federal government is funding ABC and SBS, which have a role in education, but what are the cross-cultural outcomes, in term of cultural awareness? I discussed with James, a non-Aboriginal journalist, some of the ABC and SBS programs. He raised the example of *Message Stick* and was quite disenchanted about the program's outreach as a means to increase cultural awareness within the wider communities. He said:

*Message Stick* is a ghetto programming. It's like a women's program. It's like saying, "this stuff is not for the wider audience but for Black people". There is a place for this program but Indigenous things should be exposed to a wide audience (15: 118).

Aurora (Noongar journalist) also commented about ABC and SBS programs focussing on Aboriginal topics. Although these channels are not commercial, she thinks that they still aim to seduce their audience:

Mainstream media [as opposed to Indigenous media] is travel, cooking, comedy and it’s run by conservatives. And there is a risk doing a program dedicated to 2% of the population and the lowest socio-economic group of the country (4: 73).

Moreover, ABC and SBS broadcast programs dealing with social issues, and these are rarely viewed as being up-lifting stories. A journalist from a commercial channel who was making a report on Aboriginal issues was alerted by his director that:

We were told not to make ABC types of program, to show kids sniffing glue, to show kids with malnutrition (18: 23).

A Noongar journalist expressed concern that there is a down-side in reporting some of these social issues. She felt that some television investigations in remote Indigenous communities may be disturbing for some viewers as these reports may communicate a sense of hopelessness for an Aboriginal future:

The stories are easy to beat up.... the disturbing images of kids in shabby clothes, looking stuffy and people playing cards (4: 75).

During my fieldwork, I recorded such perceptions of despair in regard to Aboriginal affairs. The following is an extract of a conversation that I heard among Honours students in Anthropology during my fieldwork:

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15 *Message Stick* is an ABC half-hour program broadcast every week dealing with 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifestyles and issues. It features profile stories, interviews, video clips and cooking segments and provides a slot where special half-hour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander documentaries can be shown. It allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to tell their stories in their own way. The program delivers articulate, contemporary human stories from around the country and features engaging, inspirational local characters. It gives our audience intimate access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lifestyles, perspectives and aspirations' (www.abc.net.au/message/: 2005).
Nothing can be done to solve Aboriginal problems, because Black and White Australia don’t understand each other. There’s no solution and no future (Notepad 5).

When I discussed this issue with a journalist working for ABC, his response showed that he was aware of some negative outcomes; nevertheless, he realised that it was still necessary to provide a general understanding on Aboriginal affairs:

There is more coverage of Indigenous affairs in Australia media, particularly since the 70’s on. *Four Corners* [ABC program] going to communities and looking at degradation, the physical condition there. The reports have continued the awareness even if it’s added to the sense of hopelessness. There wouldn’t be a general awareness that something needs to be done if we didn’t keep doing reports about trouble (18: 11).

Non-commercial media are more critical, less entertaining and more informative. During my fieldwork, there was a media story of an Aboriginal boy who had brain injury from substance abuse and died. One ABC journalist discussed with me his report on the incident. He thought it had been conducted in a different way to that of commercial channels. He said that ABC news provides a level of information closer to written media, where the investigation is deeper and aims to give voice to the plurality of people involved in the case order to grasp the multiple influences that have led to a horrible ending. The mother and the uncle of the dead child had been interviewed in order to ‘give nuance’, unlike the other commercial channels that are ‘a bit more tabloid’, as he put it. ABC journalists with whom I spoke, see themselves are being more critical, ‘looking for conflict and ideas in their reports’, unlike the ‘6.30 Report [commercial channels 7 and 9] that is less critical’, said one of these journalists. Hartley (1999: 155) posed the question, ‘If television is a transmodern teacher, the question of what it teaches has eventually to be addressed.’

Each year, James tries to put out a story from one of the PIAF shows on the 7.30 Report that follows the news on ABC. In 2004, the story was about a show bringing together Aboriginal children from Derby (Kimberley), an Indigenous musician Jimmy Little and a hip hop artist Morganic. James told me:

I look for something filmic and intriguing. Western Australia has an element of the outback, it is exotic for people living in big cities. Few years ago there was a theatre group from the Northern Territory doing a corroboree modified for theatre. It was about a massacre and it was performed in the Quarry amphitheatre. Next year Anthony sculptures had a strong Aboriginal element because all models were Aboriginal residents from Menzies. I didn’t choose this year Aboriginal story
because it was Aboriginal, but because of it being unique and very filmic (16: 135).

The filmic character of the story was, as James said, 'the exuberance of the Aboriginal kids interacting with the musicians'. Because it was a PIAF event it attracted an audience interested in Indigenous issues as well as people with an interest in arts. To James, the story plays on an important part of the city dwellers' identity as it brings out the stereotype of country versus city dwellers, the 'naïve country kids who come to a big city. It's intriguing to city dwellers. It's a clash of culture'. A drunk man appeared in the story, but as James added:

> It is the difference between social work and journalism. It would be dishonest for the audience not to show this aspect. We are here for the audience, not to do social work for people. We are not going to hide this, but this is different than going around town to find a drunk person. We wouldn't do that (16: 137).

I asked James if there are some differences between a 7.30 report and a more Aboriginal program like *Message Stick*. He said:

> We need a counter view. We showed the negative element of the Derby community. *Message Stick* is after a different truth. Their audience knows only too well the negative bit, so *Message Stick* doesn't show it. They just want to show the positive aspect (16: 135).

Public broadcasters such as ABC and SBS are different from schools and government workshops in that they have a concern about consumers (audiences). They do not solely focus on providing a cultural awareness that the Aboriginal communities may want to communicate local cultures.

*Indigenous media*

Other media, also financed by the state, are produced by and orientated toward the Aboriginal communities. This is the case of what is known as Indigenous media (see Ginsburg 2002 and Michaels 1986 on Aboriginal media in Central Australia). Broadly speaking, the producers of indigenous media are empowered 'to produce their own cultural mediation' Turner (2002: 80), something that I observed in respect of Indigenous media in Perth. Aurora told me that from the late 1970's in different areas of Western Australia, Indigenous people were increasingly involved in setting up Indigenous media as a means to transmit their culture. Whereas Indigenous media are an expression of cultural activism (e.g. Ginsburg 2002: 47), I illustrate through my data that Noongar expectations about the media are different to those of the broader society.
I observed that Indigenous media focus on different topics than mainstream media, as their main thrust is towards subjects of interest to Aboriginal people.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) produces an electronic newspaper that is distributed nationally to various government agencies. The newsletter reports on positive events in Indigenous communities across the state, as Juliet, a Noongar journalist said to me:

The idea of the newspaper is to give a positive spin. If you want the controversy, watch Channel 7. We'll be more likely to have Indigenous people subscribe if there is no controversy. Indigenous people have got enough of that (8:148).

More and more Indigenous people around Western Australia have access to Indigenous media, and some Noongar participants were very pleased about this. Two Noongar journalists and Alan, a prominent Noongar man, briefed me on the history of WAAMA, as the radio-station became an important feature of the city media-scape for some Noongar people (see also Hartley and McKee 2000: 183-7):

The first move for Noongar radio was originated in 1978, when radio 6NR started to broadcast an Aboriginal program with music and interviews. A year later Ken Colbung started another Aboriginal program on radio 6NR, ‘that was to put a positive image and to promote our culture’, as Alan told me. In 1984 ABC Radio broadcast the Aboriginal programs to remote communities. In 1986 WAAMA was funded and produced their own programs, distributed to ABC radio and SBS radio. It started in Wellington Street on the Native Welfare premises with the goal of training Aboriginal people in media and to encourage Noongar broadcasting programs on AM.

WAAMA broadcasted cultural information (e.g. language) and stories that provide ‘a positive image of Aboriginal culture’, as a Noongar participant said. WAAMA mirrored many other initiatives around the State. A Perth-based Noongar journalist compared WAAMA with the setting up in 1989-90 of an Indigenous radio station at Fitzroy Crossing (Kimberley):

The radio was set up by an old man who was not sure the kids were learning the language. He learnt to broadcast and he broadcast in language. That is the experience of the outback, to put culturally appropriate way to pass the information (15:30).

During my fieldwork, WAAMA held two community meetings (at Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service and NASAS, East Perth) to discuss the future of the Aboriginal radio station. The Noongar community was deeply concerned about the new format of WAAMA, since it has recently gone from AM to FM, and felt that cultural Noongar values were lost. Transmitting Noongar culture was not a priority any longer for the
radio station. At the meetings, Noongar journalists spoke about how felt they were excluded from the choice of programs to broadcast and that the recently appointed non-Indigenous management team was choosing programs based on financial concerns rather than cultural issues. Most of the people who attended the meeting were Noongar, and many were current and former journalists. From my participant observation of meetings at WAAMA, followed by dialogues with participants, it was obvious that Noongar people have specific broadcasting expectations for Aboriginal media than the broader community seems to have for mainstream media. Aboriginal media bind the community together, transmit everyday knowledge and allow people to catch up. A Noongar journalist said at WAAMA:

Aboriginal media is a way to catch up with people. Lot of listeners in prison send a message. It doesn’t occur to non-Indigenous people to do this. Aboriginal people are tuning into the program to see what community groups were doing, it’s a way to catch up. Non-Indigenous people watch TV for the news and entertainment, but not for community communication (14: 27).

WAAMA meant a lot for the Noongar community. Many Aboriginal people have, at various occasions, shared with the WAAMA audience the pride of being Aboriginal and the importance of keeping a strong Noongar culture, as people expressed clearly at the meetings. FM broadcasting detracted from the transmission of culture, agreed people at the meetings, because the larger non-Indigenous audience was not really interested in gaining knowledge about Noongar interests. People at the meetings preferred the old format of WAAMA and strongly resented that going to FM has led the radio to compete with other stations, and aimed to attract the largest audience possible and to appeal to advertisers in order to generate more income to employ more people. As a result, Country and Western music has largely replaced Indigenous music, as people bitterly commented. For many Noongar journalists, the radio-station ‘has lost its soul’, as one woman put it. WAAMA on FM did not focus on cultural broadcasting in the way Noongar people wished.

People felt that the radio fails to bring issues to the community, such as informing about HIV, diabetes, lower life expectancy, for example. Attendees of the meetings deplored that, because of the new commercial format, reports need to fit within a three-minute slot, and anything longer qualifies as ‘boring’. Attendees also reflected on Noongar culture and added that story telling is an important feature of Noongar culture, that the radio had been a means of adapting cultural tradition to features of a modern urban way
of life, such as informing people spread over a larger area, as well as informing a non-Indigenous audience interested in cultural diversity. One woman remarked that the radio was used as a means to talk to old people and many attendees nodded their heads with approval. A journalist, then, spoke about audience members who are illiterate and relied on the radio to gain awareness about local Aboriginal affairs, such as the closing down of a day care facility used by Indigenous people and the death of activist and Elder Clarrie Isaacs\(^\text{16}\).

The media illustrate that the government has a social commitment and the monetary means to address this goal. For example, WAAMA was supported by ABC radio, ‘who saw a role to play from the early days’ and provided ‘a lot of technical advice on the right type of equipment. There was a big effort from the ABC’, said a Noongar journalist. However, one journalist deplored that mainstream Australia often considers that ‘Aboriginal media are for Aboriginal people’, whereas one of his colleagues has a different point of view:

I think people are more interested [in Indigenous informative stories] than the media think. White people are interested because it’s come from Australia. It’s part of this country and because of Reconciliation (18: 141).

By contrast, Aurora and two Noongar participants complained that programs on everyday Noongar social affairs are rarely broadcast on television. They think that Aboriginal Australia is seen as being something ‘exceptional’ by non-Aboriginal city dwellers and that it concerns only a special area of knowledge. Aurora said:

What does it mean to be Aboriginal or non-Indigenous? With Aboriginal Australia, people want the ‘true’. They want to see people speaking language and talking about bush tucker or the silent noble salvage. Being Noongar is not sexy on TV. People are not interested (5: 76).

Whereas Aurora acknowledged the change in the way Aboriginal people are perceived and integrated within all of Australian societies, she does not attribute it to the media. For Aurora, the media, including ABC and SBS, are failing to transmit Noongar cultural awareness to the broader society:

We are in a better position than we have ever been, but I don’t think it’s come from the media. We are never going to fit in how society sees us. We need to accept we are different. We shouldn’t rely on media to provide education because they don’t. Things are the way they are; there is always going to be a sense of us and them. That Aboriginal media are for Aboriginal people (4: 94).

\(^\text{16}\) WAAMA closed down in 2006 and just re-opened in 2008.
As the data has demonstrated, the expectations are divergent and the scale of the local community is vastly different. Nevertheless, ABC and SBS remain through government financial support committed to accommodate a variety of cultural perspective. However, commercial television has access to greater resources because of the market economy and advertising revenue; this in turn allows them to allocate more money to create appealing programs for a wider range of people.

A government funded art exhibition

This section analyses the role of the State Government by focusing on the Aboriginal arts (see also Altman 2003). The State participates in the communication of Aboriginal cultures by promoting Aboriginal art, which occurs through various initiatives and projects. There are many examples: street art (Plate 8.1), touring exhibitions, and others.

In the town of Narrogin in 1962, Tonkinson (1962: 46) noted a lack of engagement between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Five participants from Narrogin, told me there are still not many cross-cultural interactions between the two communities, with the exception of primary school and football events. However, state-funded organizations such as Art On the Move bring their touring cultural program to country towns, sponsoring regional programs that include travelling photographic and art exhibitions, public lectures and the like which encourage cross-cultural awareness.

Indeed, the State is educating people about Aboriginal cultures as evident through many art projects. For example, in 2004, the Government of Western Australia commissioned the Berndt Museum of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia to develop an exhibition of contemporary Western Australian Aboriginal art. This was part of the state’s 175th Anniversary Celebration of non-Indigenous settlement. The Premier, the Hon. Geoff Gallop, initiated the project as a means of respecting publicly the Aboriginal contribution to the state’s history, as well as to the present day. A catalogue (Stanton 2004) accompanied the exhibition and was distributed free to some government agencies.

The nature of the works included in this exhibition was very different to that of any commercial art gallery in Perth. The works represented each region of the state, but also
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement

reflected cultural diversity in a different manner than commercial exhibitions. Trying to pinpoint these differences, I asked the curator of the exhibition, John Stanton, what the intention of the exhibition was. This project was mounted at the end of my fieldwork and I was aware of some difference between commercial exhibitions and government-funded projects. Indeed, the state provides some opportunities to promote cross-cultural awareness in a very different context to that prevailing in commercial art galleries, which are concerned with commercial viability. I asked John about the kind of cultural awareness he intended to provide with this exhibition:

I wanted regional diversity, to show people that there are regional differences and differences between artists. There are also commonalities between regions and between artists (18: 91).

These regional communalities and differences are well acknowledged within the market niches of Aboriginal art (e.g. Sutton 1998). I asked John whether the exhibition could have been intended as a commercial exhibition? He said:

No, I included art works that were not highly artistic, which is pretty much the sole criteria for a lot of commercial galleries. They think works must have an aesthetic appeal (18: 91).

In order to increase their sales, commercial enterprises focus essentially on satisfying consumers' demand. The State, however, is focusing on social issues. In this particular instance, the State aimed at acknowledging and teaching matters of Aboriginal settlement, the enduring presence and the differences between cultures. Some of the works may not have been aesthetically pleasing for a commercial market, but they still communicated an important message. Broadly reflecting on the reception of Aboriginal art, without dichotomising commercial and non-commercial, Fink and Perkins (1997-8: 63) noted, 'it contains an element of social activism and expression that is informed by living in Australia now and is essential to the dialogue of conciliation.' From the evidence of my fieldwork observations, state-sponsored exhibitions achieve the goal of informing the public on such issues, whereas commercial art focuses more commonly on meeting consumers' expectations of Aboriginal art, even often enhancing the 'authentically primitive', as Langton termed it (2003: 87)17. This mirrors John's comment:

One was the painting of the boy with the roller toy talking to his mother18. It is a highly stylised image. It was not the kind of image that people would imagine

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18 The painting, titled Station Life, depicts a young boy talking with his mother, who is at the kitchen sink. He is pulling a toy made from an empty milk powder tin attached with a handle made from fencing wire.
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buying as an example of Aboriginal art. It doesn’t match their preconception about what Aboriginal art is. It’s a personal narrative about a man’s childhood, his experience of living on the edges of a pastoral station (18: 94).

One of the works in the exhibition depicted a group of people sitting under a tree across from a fast food shop, eating junk food. Two of them were overweight. The painting was called *The Big Fill* (Plate 8.4). From my own experience, I guessed that this painting would be unlikely to be included in a commercial gallery. We discussed this issue:

Definitely not. It was roughly executed. It was not a topic that people would imagine as the subject of art. It was painted to communicate a good health message. The dialogue associated with the painting was mundane. It wasn’t anything to do with history, or with an exotic other world. It was to do with people’s contemporary living experiences of obesity and ill health (18: 95).

Some artworks included in the exhibition could have been for sale in a commercial gallery. They were either created by well-known artists or concern the Desert and Kimberley regions, which are at the high end of the fine art market (Plate 8.4):

I included a work by Boxer from Balgo. He is a very well known painter. I selected a recent work because it was startling, visually extremely strong. It was the kind of image that would attract people’s eyes from across the room. I wanted to grab people into the exhibition (18: 91).

John and I agreed that at least two thirds, if not more, of the works were the kind of thing that would not have been recognised as saleable items; however, all the works were communicating a variety of social and cultural issues that are important to Aboriginal people around the State. I raised this issue with John, who said:

Aboriginal people are talking through their art about contemporary issues, which are family histories, family stories, family experiences, linkages with land, health issues, Stolen Generation issues, finding money for food. These are mundane things. Many non-Aboriginal people don’t appreciate that what a lot of Aboriginal artists are talking about is their everyday lives. They think it’s wrapped up in exotic things (18: 90).

This large touring exhibition only occurred because it was funded by the State. The public response to the exhibition was extremely positive, both in Perth (as I experienced) and in the country, as others told me. Primary and secondary school children and members of the public (including many Aboriginal people) attended the exhibition at different venues. This exhibition was the first of its kind in Western Australia and, for many people it was their sole point of accessing some cultural knowledge that they would not normally get from the visual arts. I suggest that this touring exhibition has communicated elements of Aboriginal cultures by focusing on
the artists’ everyday concerns rather than on the external demands and expectations of a
cross-cultural audience. Because it was a touring exhibition, it penetrated the remote
regions in a way that would be impossible had there had been a commercial intention. It
would have been too costly. The government’s goal was to inform the public, not to
promote the sale of the art works. During our conversation, John made reference to the
educative role of the state and, when I probe him suggesting a comparison with
commercial businesses, he replied:

The state can take a risk, because it’s not going to loose anything (18: 94).

Whereas the state has the financial power to educate people and communicate
Aboriginal cultures to the wider society, it is worth noting that Aboriginal art was/is
traditionally a vehicle of cultural knowledge within particular groups. The state can
allow the communication of values in a way that is not so dissimilar to the original
purpose of Aboriginal art; however, the state focuses also on non-Aboriginal audiences.
The features that were communicated through this exhibition were everyday social
issues, and not only artistic visual depictions of selected Dreaming stories, unlike
commercial exposure of Aboriginal art. I asked John to comment on the role of art in
Aboriginal society:

Certainly, in the past, visual expressions of culture were very much tied up with
the transmission of knowledge in an oral tradition. For many Aboriginal people, a
lot of the story telling is still maintained in a non-written tradition, and
contemporary art has fitted perfectly with established patterns of oral
communication. This is visual communication, but it is always associated with
stories. But the focus of commercial galleries is to sell (18: 90).

This very last point represents the fundamental difference between commercial intent
and government funding opportunities for cross-cultural engagement. It is on the basis
of a number of comments along the same lines that I have examined the need for careful
consideration of how different economic settings shape cross-cultural engagement. By
contrast to commercial enterprise for which cultural awareness is basically limited by
the ability of the vendors to find appropriate markets, the state can afford to act as a
pedagogue, as a teacher and to engage with a wide range of people—and not only
potential consumers. As the state is not constrained by the immediacy of sales, it can
develop longer-term programs, whether these be school curricula, museum exhibitions
or whatever, to get the message across. The state has a role to educate and inform the
populace about Aboriginal cultures. However, this poses a problem: how does the state
ensure that the message that it communicates is culturally grounded? This was one of
Plate 8.4 Telling culture and selling culture

*The Big Fill '94* by Geoffrey Fletcher, Halls Creek. This painting communicates a message promoting health, which was the main concern of the artist. (Image courtesy of Berndt Museum of Anthropology)

*Oolaign* by Boxer Milner, Wirrimanu Balgo Hills 2001. This painting represents a mythological landscape and fits more closely the expectations of consumers within the commercial art market. (Image courtesy of Berndt Museum of Anthropology)
the questions I posed to myself in the field\textsuperscript{19}. A participant told me, 'this is a very good question, because there have been instances where government departments have failed in that process.' From my fieldwork, I noted that the increased participation of Noongar people through various government agencies or Aboriginal units provides a guarantee that the knowledge cross-culturally exchanged is suitable to Noongar people—that is controlled by Noongars and exclude, for example, what I had called 'the mysterious tradition'. In the South-West, this control over suitable knowledge is often decided in consultation with Noongar Elders (I have not addressed this Noongar input in my investigation of the intercultural) but the intercultural body of knowledge also result from the intercultural engagement and shared expectation, as I discussed in Part Two.

Before concluding my examination of the role of the government as opposed to free-market settings, I would like to mention that this distinction is, in reality, not as sharp as it may appear in my analysis. For example, the state shapes popular opinion and even changes the nature of consumer demand in the Aboriginal art market. As John informed me:

Some of the lesser-known artists who appeared in the show now have this on their CVs, and some of them are more active now, they are using their inclusion in the show as part of the validation of the value of their work. The exhibition has influenced and provided a gateway to the emergence of new artists in the commercial sector. It is a way of incorporating greater numbers of Aboriginal people in the process. A Noongar artist said to me, 'You know, by doing this exhibition, you have authenticated South-West art, so now it's being respected and accepted in a way that it was not in the past' (Notepad 9).

The role of the state is still essentially dependent on the personal commitment of its officers. Today, cooperation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities is still relatively under-developed, and personal commitment appears to be an important trigger within this interface. However, I observed during my fieldwork that each opportunity for Noongar cultural awareness has the potential to make people aware of 'what Noongar people do, did or value'. This is, I suggest, an expression of cultural strength to have people knowledgeable about one's culture. And without a doubt, the state is contributing to this.

\textsuperscript{19} See Clifford (1997b: 191, 213) on the role of museums as 'contact zones' between minority indigenous people and the broader Western society.
Chapter Eight — Government intervention: an ameliorating influence on cross-cultural engagement
Chapter Nine — Cross-cultural dialogues through non-monetary consumption

I was having dinner in a Perth pizzeria when another patron arrived. He was wearing a promotional black polo shirt bearing a red, yellow and white logo advertising an Aboriginal golf event1. Although I did not know the man, his outfit made me wonder: Was he Noongar? I thought he might be, because of his polo shirt. The man walked in and passed our table. John, my husband looked at him. They knew each other. The man was Noongar. On another occasion, I was in Adelaide (South Australia), again having dinner in a restaurant. The identity of the young waitress would not have attracted my attention if I had not seen the colours of the beaded bracelet she was wearing. They were the colours of the Aboriginal flag. I thought: ‘Is she Aboriginal?’ I discreetly asked her if she was. She said no, but that her partner was. He had given her the bracelet.

This chapter focuses on a different type of economic process that highlights the dynamics of the interface, that is, the role of various goods and services2 that have been acquired without monetary transaction. In my investigation of the role of the economy in shaping cross-cultural dialogue, I now explore whether non-monetary transactions may influence the nature of these engagements, as I have shown that the search for profit and competitiveness in the free market economy restricts the communication of Aboriginal cultures? What is the effect of gift economy-type settings? Do these free transactions allow better communication by being disconnected from monetary pressures or government policies? Do goods or services acquired without monetary cost allow further kinds of cross-cultural engagements? Do these provide an additional avenue for engagement?

1 While a higher percentage of Aboriginal people play Australian Rules Football compared to non-Indigenous people, this is not the case for many other sports. Golf is one of them, as two Aboriginal participants pointed out. One is a Noongar Elder (Michael) and the other a Koorie woman living in Perth (Libby). Michael told me: ‘Go to a Golf course, that’s where the white middle-class is. My nephew plays golf. He finds a lot of racist attitudes there. He has to struggle to get a fair go at the course’ (7: 89). Libby was working in a golf course pub and commented in a similar vein: ‘In the Pub I have never seen an Aboriginal person. Aboriginal people don’t go to the golf course and this one is a public golf course. The patrons are mainly English. They are all high middle-class’ (9: 156).

2 As Appadurai (1986: 56) noted, ‘In contemporary capitalist economies ... it is difficult to separate the commoditization of goods from the commoditization of services.... It is only in complex postindustrial economies that services are a dominant, even definitive, feature of the world of commodity exchange.’ In my fieldwork, both goods and services were present in non-monetary consumption.
Throughout my discussion on the role of non-monetary goods and services in shaping Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultural dialogue, I focus on commodities that were free at the final stage of their trading circuit. In other words, these were goods used, consumed, enjoyed or displayed that have been acquired for free, albeit that such goods may have had a cost of production or trade earlier in their life.

The non-monetary circulation of goods has been analysed in a variety of non-Western societies (e.g. Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1925; Sahlins 1972; Bourdieu 1977). Altman (1989: 27-9) provided an overview of non-monetary exchange in the customary economy and discussed the nature of customary economic process in the Aboriginal setting. He also made a reference The Elementary Structures of Kinship of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1949), who developed ‘his theory of gift from an analysis of kinship’, and another to The Great Transformation of Karl Polanyi (1944), who inspired a number of prominent anthropologists, including Marshall Sahlins (1972), to take up this debate on the gift economy. Within the specific focus of Aboriginal Australia in customary Aboriginal societies, Berndt (1964: 111-3) defined economic transactions through ‘six main kinds of gift exchange’ (p. 111). These were based on kinship, on settling grievances or debts, in return for services or goods, in two different kinds of trading (between specified individuals and between groups). For other specific examples of non-monetary transactions in Aboriginal Australia, Mulvaney (1996) has traced patterns of trade across Australia, Glowczewski (1983) and Weiner (1992) investigated the trading of hair-string, and Akerman (1979) considered the circulation of pearl shells.

Berking (1999) discussed the gift economies in both Western and non-Western societies (see also Carrier 1995: 86). Non-monetary exchange in Western societies (Cheal 1988), often known as gift-giving, is commonly associated with the circulation of ‘presents’. These include birthday gifts, Christmas gifts (Caplow 1984; Cheal 1986; Kuper 1993; Carrier 1994), various celebrations (e.g. Mothers and Fathers’ Day, house warmings, baby showers) or wedding gifts (Wilding 2002). Some anthropologists discuss the relationship between gift and commodity, the gift being of a more personal nature (Gregory 1982; Carrier 1995: 86-8, Jaffe 1999: 118-22). Gifts are associated with the

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3 Although not specifically relevant in this context, Musharbash (2004) discusses the significance of birthday parties at Yuendumu, NT.
individual givers and strengthen bonds of kinship and friendship in Western cultures (Caplow 1984; Cheal 1986). By contrast, commodities are located outside the sphere of private relationships and lay within the largely impersonal economic realm of monetary transactions (Carrier 1993: 56-7). Marketing research also constitutes an important body of literature on gift giving in Western societies, with key references such as Sherry (1983) and Ottes and Beltramini (1996). Marketing researchers often investigate consumers’ behaviours and/or the cost of such commodities, as most gifts were originally purchased through the circuit of monetary trading. This is not to suggest, however, that marketing research does not include an awareness of social practices of reciprocity associated with gift giving in Western societies (e.g. Ruth, Ottes and Brunel 1999).

In this chapter, I investigate a diversity of features that involve products that were obtained for free by the recipient. Through four sections, I illustrate four different themes that are discreet but together illuminate further aspects of the interface. The first section shows that Aboriginal Australia can become an icon of ‘Australia-ness’. Whereas the tourist industry (in the free-market) partly relies of such distinctive Aboriginal cultural features to market Australia, the following section demonstrates that although this may work in the overseas context, it does not appear to seduce the local Australian market.

**Cross-cultural awareness through gifts**

Any products bearing Aboriginal iconography (i.e. dot design, cross-hatching, colours of the Aboriginal flag, Plate 9.1) and sold in Perth’s shops may be purchased for used as a future gift (thank you, birthday, Christmas). These may have the potential to increase the cultural awareness of the recipient. During my fieldwork, I observed the diversity of opportunities for people to buy Aboriginal items as gifts. Some of these ‘gifts’ were to be sent overseas, as buyers often viewed these as an icon of Australia. For example, one day I noted a woman buying some fabric at Spotlight, a shop in the Perth metropolitan area. The material was decorated with a background of dots and concentric circles, on which there was a composite pattern of dotted elements representing the outline of the Australian continent. On this were superimposed x-ray style designs of kangaroos, fish,

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dolphins and boomerangs. When I asked the woman why she was interested in buying it, she said:

My son is married and settled in America. This is for my grand-child, it's to make a cot cover for Christmas. It represents Australia, but the soft colours will suit a baby more than the strong ochre colours (Notepad NN).

This case is not unique. Toward the end of each year, Post Offices sell a variety of calendars, with varied themes to match the interests of their diverse customers. As some of these calendars include Aboriginal designs, I asked a Post Office employee what kinds of people bought them and why. He replied that calendars with images referring to Aboriginal Australia tended to be bought as presents by people who have family in England, because they are archetypal images of Australia. These calendars are representative of Aboriginal ‘cultures’ and, therefore, unique to Australia. These gifts provide cultural awareness to the recipients who may not have the opportunity to gain access to such products. I sent some calendars to France, and one of my friends expressed her appreciation about the gift, which subsequently pushed her to enquire about Aboriginal people here in Perth:

I did not know anything about the Aborigines before. These are great photos. Now, I want to go to Australia. Are there Aboriginal people in Perth?

This resonates with the comments of John, a tourist shop manager. When I asked him about his customers’ profile, he answered that Perth people buy gifts having Aboriginal iconography because these items ‘represent Australia and are great presents to send to relatives left in Europe.’ These customers tend to be recent migrants as, he said, ‘they’ll be the first generation of Australians, not the fifth’ (17: 54). His products ranged from ties, light boomerangs, calendars, scarves, and the like. ‘They tend to be small and light in order to minimise the cost of postage’, John added,

For many Australians and those residing overseas, Aboriginal designs are iconic images of Australia, very different to what can be found elsewhere in the world; such a view was evidently stated by participants working for the Department of Australian Foreign Affairs, as well as those employed in the tourism industry. Carrier (1990: 581) noted that gifts ‘need to bear the identity of the giver’ and, I suggest, these kinds of iconic images of Australia bear the identity of the ‘Australian’ givers, as opposed to the recipient who lives overseas.
Mainly tourists, especially European and Asian, buy these shoes. Tourists see the pattern as unique and valuable. They are like a souvenir of their travel to Australia, seeing as though Aboriginal are the first Australian. Australians may find goods from other cultures and from other countries as being more unique, more valuable and also different. It may also be due to the conflict between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Australians—people may avoid them to save being noticed.' (Birkenstock's shop assistant, 2004)
Gifts can also be a memento of an important event (a trip overseas, sealing a partnership) and of a less personal nature. Corporate gifts represent another market for Aboriginal objects that are being sold in Perth and contribute to cultural awareness, as some recipients have indicated to me. When I discussed the choice of corporate gifts with the CEO of a company, he acknowledged that the most appreciated of their corporate gifts is an Aboriginal diary with images of Aboriginal art. The manager of a shop selling Aboriginal tourist goods and fine art observed comparably:

We have several mining companies who buy corporate gifts here regularly, $1000 worth of gifts, for example. Before Christmas, one company bought 50 unframed fabric prints as gifts. The corporate gifts are also bought by government departments—from Indigenous departments to the offices of Ministers⁵. Lawyers and accountants rarely buy corporate gifts from here, but engineering companies are buying Aboriginal gifts for overseas. 95% of Aboriginal presents are gifts for overseas (17: 134).

All commodities have symbolic values that result from trends in fashion (including branding) or miscellaneous symbolic meanings associated with them (e.g. Appadurai 1996). Aboriginal products given as a gift, as with any genre of product, may trigger in the recipient some likes and/or dislikes⁶. One participant, for example, was a woman who worked as a manager in an Aboriginal tourist art gallery shop in Perth. Her comment explicitly captures this viewpoint:

I’ve got a friend who lived up-north. She thinks my job is fantastic, because she’s got a previous exposure to Indigenous cultures. She’s the only one I could buy a gift for from this shop. I could also buy something for my mother and my brother. I could buy him a painting. For the others, Aboriginal Australia is not exotic enough, unlike Moroccan artefacts, and it’s not trendy enough, unlike Freedom or David Jones [both larger stores selling fashionable brands] (17: 136-7).

This example is one of many I recorded that shows that cross-cultural awareness resulting from gift-giving is limited in Australia, as many people would not give an item that refers to Aboriginal cultures because, ‘it is not exotic enough’ or, ‘it may trigger some political statements’, as some participants said to me (Plate 9.1, bottom right). However, the annual display of calendars at Post Offices and various large stores (e.g.

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⁵ Another Noongar retailer who sold similar items told me about corporate gifts purchased by government agencies: ‘Some of our clients are people employed in the Indigenous service industry, who want to get an Aboriginal corporate gift. They buy lots of scarfs and ties. Sometimes they get ceramics, but they are more difficult because they are bulky and they break.’

⁶ Everyone may have a memory of gifts they strongly disliked because they did not match their tastes.
Myers), along with the large variety of Aboriginal products that can be given as presents, may slightly increase the visibility of Aboriginal cultures.

Whereas I have just shown that gifts may expose additional people (mainly from overseas) to an awareness of Aboriginal presence, I now turn to some non-Indigenous respondents who have had extensive contact with Aboriginal people over the years. They have been given items such as boomerangs, clapping sticks, didgeridoos or acrylic paintings. Merryn is a non-Aboriginal woman born in a small country town in New South Wales. I met her in Perth, where she lived after having worked in the Kimberley and the South-West. When she worked in Derby more than thirty years ago, Merryn got to know Jacko, a local Aboriginal man:

> The old man Jacko used to teach me some of the Dreamtime stories. He was one of the Elders up there. Jacko gave me his hunting boomerang when I left there. It's very heavy (11: 72).

The boomerang was on display in her living room. Another gift decorated Merryn’s home. It was a very large painting done by Philomena, a Noongar artist whom Merryn met years ago. The painting hangs behind her couch and constitutes an important feature of her furnishings. For two hours, Merryn shared with me her experiences of interactions with some Aboriginal people she met. During our conversation she identified by name only two persons: the old man Jacko and Philomena, the Noongar artist. Only these two people were ascribed a personal identity. It appears that to Merryn, the two gifts created a kind of special bonding with the givers. Whereas the personal bonding does not spread to others much cultural awareness, the display of such a large canvas of Noongar art in her home reminds visitors (her friends and family, as well as the overseas students to whom she rented accommodation) of Noongar people.

I have shown one aspect of the non-monetary economy in promoting a degree of cross-cultural awareness to the receiver, albeit the original intention was often to personalise the gift with an element of Australia. I now focus on two different kinds of free products. The first category comprises free talks provided by experts to audiences, primarily non-Indigenous in composition. The second are goods for which the design,

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7 It is worth noting that Aboriginal people are also buying such goods as presents, but less frequently, because 'people are more likely to have a relative who can make one', as a Noongar shop manager told me. However, such buying does occur, and a non-Aboriginal tourist shop manager said during one of our discussions, 'Once a month, I see Aboriginal people coming to buy a scarf, or a gift for a relative, from here.'
logo and/or colours are overt signifiers of Aboriginality. These were most frequently displayed and carried by Noongar (and Aboriginal) people.

Learning about Aboriginal cultures: the free expert talks

This section, along with the next that deals with the assertion of Noongar cultural identity through free goods, addresses the underlying motivations that lead Noongar and non-Aboriginal people to bring to the forefront notions of Noongar culture. Indeed, the desires of these two groups are quite different, as I now discuss with reference to a non-Aboriginal standpoint.

At the Survival Concert 2004, didactic panels were displayed in the tent containing all the stalls. A non-Indigenous woman was standing in front of one of the panels that referred to *This Sacred Earth*, copying the text into her diary:

I really like the wording. It’s about the spirituality of the land. I feel strongly about that. As a spiritual person I want to connect with the spirituality of other people. I don’t want to see any separation between different spiritualities. I experience Australian land, the tangible spirituality of outback Australia. The land has a quality, a mystery that evokes something very deep in me. It is similar to my Christian experience. I’m a Christian (Notepad Survival 2004).

Throughout my fieldwork, I observed that some non-Indigenous people were very keen to learn about Aboriginal cultures. In this section I discuss some of the free (without direct cost) opportunities that have allowed some people to gain Aboriginal cultural awareness. Delivered by expert speakers with a high degree of cultural awareness, these talks tend to provide accurate knowledge on Noongar/Aboriginal cultures. There is no cost constraint involved in attending; this may be seductive, especially as people may not be willing to pay for something they are ‘not into’, as one participant said to me at the Perth Royal Show. Whereas free expert talks gave people some additional opportunities for learning something about Aboriginal Australia, these free events highlighted more than any other setting the motivation of many non-Aboriginal people I met and who involved themselves cross-culturally.

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8 *This Sacred Earth*. We the Aboriginal people, welcome you and visitors to our land, the land of the eternal spirit, the land of God. We welcome your quest for justice, well-being, truth, peace and enlightenment for all mankind, and care for creation. As guests and passing over our lands, you will feel the whispering wind of the holy creative spirit. You will take in the fragrance that heralds enlightenment and, however you choose, you will never be as you were before. You will never be the same again, for here, you walk on sacred ground. Kevin Gilbert.
I attended sixteen free events at which speakers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, promulgated expertise and information about Aboriginal Australia to the audience through their public presentations. These talks occurred mostly within the context of the art industry (e.g. gallery openings, Perth International Art Festival); however, events such as the Perth Royal Show or a free public talk in a city council library provided different opportunities of gaining knowledge and expertise about Noongar/Aboriginal cultures. In all cases, attendance was free and open to the public and the audiences were mostly non-Indigenous. These talks rely on the insights of experts, both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous, who are recognised as being in a position to either share their knowledge about Noongar/Aboriginal cultures or to reflect on their experience of the interface. While Aboriginality seems to automatically certify the veracity of this knowledge to non-Aboriginal audiences, only a limited number of Noongar people involve themselves in such public presentations. The authoritative delivery of knowledge is customarily limited to a few Elders, which limits the number of Aboriginal experts. Non-Indigenous people require a specific kind of credibility that is only gained through years of experience, sustained involvement with Aboriginal communities and skills at bridging the two cultures. Very few non-Indigenous people have gained such experience.

It is noteworthy to specify that while some people are keen to learn about Aboriginal cultures, this does not apply to everybody. For example, Jessie (non-Aboriginal) spoke to me about her family:

> My family is typical Aussie. They are early baby boomers. They struggle with the changes, they haven’t grown up with Indigenous people. Society has changed a lot and for people in their late fifties, life isn’t turning up so well. For them, they think, ‘Aboriginal people drink and don’t really contribute’ (17: 54).

Audience members at free talks tend to be reasonably well-off and mostly female. Very few people are in their twenties, and most are middle-aged and above. While I am not focussing on the issues of class (as Bourdieu did in his study conducted in France, The Distinction), age and gender in exploring people’s desire to learn about Aboriginal cultures, I wish to quote a non-Aboriginal participant whose view may explain the class- and age-profile of audiences. She explained why she does not attend these kinds of talks and her view on the issue resonates with a couple of other participants:

> Middle class people tend to have a high level of education. They are more isolated from seeing the bad aspects. They’re not living in Balga [a well-known ‘rough’ suburb]. They don’t have to see it first hand. Working class people see first hand
what’s happening to Aboriginal culture. I don’t know any middle-class Aboriginal people. The middle class lives a bit in a cotton wool environment, so we can talk about Land Rights at dinner parties. People I know tend to be lawyers. With my friends, we talk from the political angle, there’s no desire to experience Aboriginal culture. Maybe if it was presented to us, why not? But we don’t look for exposure, not now, because we are busy in our own little world. We prefer to go shopping in Melbourne, we are establishing our careers, we are working long hours, getting money. We have a social conscience in a theoretical sense rather than an active sense. Our conversations will be banal, superficial. We are superficial. I don’t think I’ll have this life style for ever, but for now, I’m job focussed (17: 132).

This quote reiterates the relationships between structure and agency that I have discussed in Chapter Three. Indeed, despite some surroundings opportunities for gaining Aboriginal cultural awareness, the above participant chose to focus on her career and shopping activities, at least for the moment. People pick and choose from amongst a variety of choices for cross-cultural engagement that are provided by the society. In this section, I reflect on data gathered at the sixteen free talks, but I refer in detail to five specific ones. These free talks are additional means through which non-Indigenous people are gaining Aboriginal cultural awareness. For example, participants who have left school before Aboriginal studies came into the school curriculum, people with no children in school, people who have never had the opportunity to attend to a cultural awareness workshop, were generally appreciative to learn about Aboriginal cultures through such free talks.

Noongar experiences of the Stolen Generation

The first event I discuss was the Writers Festival held on 16/02/03 and organised by PIAF. Four speakers sought to enlighten Western Australians about past policies toward Aboriginal children. Fifteen people, of whom only one was male, attended this event. After the chairperson introduced the theme of the Stolen Generation, the first speaker, Ralph Taylor, a Noongar writer, read some of his poems. He shared with the audience his experience of having been removed from his family to New Norcia, 132 kilometres north east of Perth. Ralph Taylor recounted his personal experience of being part of the stolen generation:

The boys in the Mission were often wetting at night.... I used to cry.... Thirty kids in the dormitory, crying for mother and father, but not making any sound.... You should not use your Noongar tongue, “It’s the Devil’s language”, said the Brothers. If you speak [your] language, your hands will be caned, God is going to
The audience was listening carefully, silently, but smiled at the irony of past policies such as the requirement to learn Latin for the Mass. Ralph also talked about the 1967 Referendum (Attwood and Markus 1997) and how it improved the status of Aboriginal people:

In the Referendum, we became citizens of Australia; before, we were fauna and flora.

Despite the poor condition of life on a mission, Ralph remained positive. Toward the end of his presentation, he commented on his role in sharing his story:

In my life I have no regrets, no bitterness. My ancestors put me here to record about this and tell it to the world. Reading and writing was the only weapon I had.

Ralph's presentation was centred on the Noongar world. It was delivered in a format that met the expectations of those non-Indigenous people who wished to see Aboriginal people as being knowledgeable about their own cultures. Ralph's speeches are appealing to audiences seeking a sense of engagement and an understanding of Noongar experiences, since he is not angered by his experience. As a result, Ralph is often invited to give such guest lectures. By contrast, at another cultural awareness workshop a Noongar speaker expressed strong feeling of resentment toward non-Aboriginal people and, at the following tea break, attendees voiced, among themselves, dismissal toward her. During my fieldwork I also met Alicia whose comment echoes this point of view about cross-cultural engagements:

I don't want to sit close to a drunk Noongar. You don't want to look at him in case it starts an argument. A lot of people would like to see them educated in their own culture and having a way of existing in the Western world. To focus on their own culture and to reduce anger against the Whites for taking away their culture. But it needs to be done in a way that doesn't create further segregation.

The second speaker at the Writers Festival was a non-Indigenous scholar, Anna Haebich. She encouraged the audience not to shut themselves off from debating the Stolen Generation issue, suggesting, 'If you say, "I didn't know", you simply don't move on.' Anna suggested to people that they should 'keep informed' by grasping insights from everywhere: the media, movies such as Rabbit Proof Fence, or by joining

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9 Although it is a common misconception, the 1967 Referendum did not, in itself, bring citizenship to Aboriginal people, nor the right to vote. Rather, it gave the Federal government the right to enumerate Aboriginal people in the Australian Census and to pass laws with respect to Aboriginal people (see also http://www.naa.gov.au/fsheets/fs150.html).
Sorry Day on 26th May. She also told the audience where they could find details about Sorry Day. Anna raised the issue of compensation for past wrongs and asked Ralph if he wished to add anything. He replied:

I remember my mother. People had control of my money. In 1964-1965 the Church was in control of our money. The Church’s got a lot to answer, God’s got a lot to answer (2: 11).

In more general terms, free talks provide a social setting for the increasing demand for cultural awareness and sometimes speakers have reminded people of the need to gain it. Ralph reinforced this by making reference to how the topic is perceived overseas:

When I was in India, I was surprised. People were knowledgeable about the Stolen Generation, Deaths in Custody, and they wanted to know more about me (2: 12).

Whereas this Writers Festival session focussed on historical events, each expert talk I attended had highlighted a particular aspect of Aboriginal cultures that matched the orientation of the event. These themes focussed on the art world, or were orientated towards tradition and material culture during the Perth Royal Show. Some talks had more of a regional stance as, for example, the 2004 PIAF festival that brought few Kimberley performances to Perth.

**The art world**

**Cross-cultural awareness through Aboriginal art**

A one-day seminar took place at the Art Gallery of Western Australia and aimed to help people to learn more about, and appreciate better, the Gallery’s important collection of Indigenous art (9: 40-63). Most of the audience comprised volunteer guides, many of whom were elderly, middle-class women.

The first speaker was Sandra Hill, a well-known Noongar artist, who introduced herself using a Noongar term by saying: ‘I’m a yorga (woman) of the Noongar people.’ Sandra’s talk went far beyond the well-known trope of art as bridging a cross-cultural barrier (Dussart 1997; Morphy 1983; Myer 2005). She emphasised the cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous cultures. She discussed her own experience as a university lecturer in applied art, and the kinds of issues faced by her Aboriginal students:
I tell my students, 'It's an alien experience to work at uni or at art college where people [ie the institution] are set in the mainstream way. It can be scary. It's not easy.'… The experience of struggle, of cultural alienation, for those who were placed in institutions find it difficult to cope with the protocol of learning. For Indigenous students, I need to be like a counsellor, a real estate agent, and if I don't do it I lose the student. It's difficult for them to be taken out of their comfort zone and to take them into an alien environment (9: 45).

The maintenance of an identifiable Noongar style creates a highly valued artistic form (based on culture) that Westerners appreciate. To achieve this, she explained to the audience how she encourages and supports her students in a way that is culturally appropriate. Sandra spoke about her mentorship, which provides a means by which the essence and distinctiveness of Noongar art can contribute to the vitality of the Gallery’s Australian collection, as non-Indigenous people want Aboriginal art to be ‘cultural’ (see also Langton 2003: 111). To achieve this artistic cross-cultural communication, Sandra encourages her students and, below, her statement captures elements of her cultural mentoring:

To learn art and to be creative is just half. The most important is to relate to the world. It’s self-esteem, becoming strong and to maintain integrity as cultural heritage, so when you go to third year, you don’t conform, you blow everyone away and maintain your cultural identity and continue to tell our story, we’re going to become our historians (9: 46).

Talks like Sandra’s address a multiplicity of contemporary Noongar cultural elements (self-esteem, maintaining cultural heritage, mentorship). Historical experience was, however, a focal point of Sandra’s talk, as many of her artworks deal with the issue (Plate 6.1, bottom left). Many non-Aboriginal people are also becoming more knowledgeable about Noongar historical experiences (see Chapter Six) and are often prompted to ask questions to increase their knowledge. For example, after Sandra showed photos of some of her paintings, one woman asked, ‘The painting with the little girl in front of the house, can you tell us more about this one?’ Sandra replied:

It’s me, part of the Stolen Generation, in my foster home. I’m half painted because I didn’t know at the time who I was. Feet on the ground, that’s my Aboriginal history. The broken red line is my bloodline broken up. The background is grey because there was no love (9: 48).

Question time enhances understandings among the audience of what has occurred, and most free talks allow time for questions. Reflecting on my field notes gathered at this function, it is fair to comment that people were very appreciative of gaining such cultural awareness.
Expert speakers provide audiences with a framework to increase their cultural awareness, which is a significant change from the past. A woman in her late 60s, for example, indicated to me how pleased she was that Sandra was invited to talk at AGWA, and that is was quite unlike the experiences of the previous generations of Aboriginal people who were totally disempowered. She added that she had fought against this. By talking to the audiences during breaks, and before and after the talk, it became clear to me that they were learning new information. Many, not to say all, respondents with whom I talked during the intervals have valued having the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal societies. A number of those audience’s members said to me that they have extremely superficial levels of interaction in their everyday lives; however, I observed a real concern amongst most non-Indigenous people who attended these kinds of free-expert-talk-meetings to become more familiar with the details of Aboriginal cultures.

I observed that members of audiences often listen quietly, some nodding their heads, most appearing to focus on the talk with a great sense of attention. I very rarely saw individuals taking notes, but people often asked questions at the end of the presentation or after the session—sometimes they went to talk to the speaker directly. Academic deliveries of Aboriginal experiences and knowledge, followed by questions and answers, seemed to be appealing to these people who aimed at gaining knowledge.

Speakers provide multiple perspectives on cross-cultural issues. A non-Indigenous speaker, John Stanton, Director of the Berndt Museum, used his cultural insights gained through the course of his anthropological career to provide further details on Aboriginal cultures. He focuses most of his free expert talks on Aboriginal art. In one of these, he emphasised that ‘art reflects social values, social ideas’ and that ‘art was a mark of adulthood’. John always grounded his comments in his own experience to inform audiences, as most (not to say all) non-Aboriginal speakers do in such settings. At the AGWA cultural awareness seminar, he raised an important characteristic of today’s political climate: the need of involving Aboriginal community members in decision-making processes, which emerges from the assertion of principles of self-determination. For example John highlighted that it is essential to know both cultures in order to deal competently and culturally with the art works. He noted:

We don’t know if two works of different communities can be hung together if we haven’t asked the communities concerned for advice (9: 58).
A notable non-Indigenous misconception about Aboriginal Australia is that there is little cultural diversity across the continent. Again, free talks provide the vehicle through which such stereotypical ideas may be negated. John, for example, explained this in terms of spirituality. He referred to the diverse manifestations of the Dreaming, according to places and languages. He elaborated on the theme by telling those present that, in some cases, the subject matter of paintings retains its spiritual association. The power of these spirits is manifested in the painting:

Because of this, care has to be taken to respect the spirituality of paintings and to display them in a culturally appropriate manner. Some things belong together, other things do not (9: 58).

Later, he gave precise examples of this feature and raised the enduring power of the Dreaming in people's lives today:

In one situation we could not hang two paintings together that belonged to different Dreamings, because these two spirit beings fought in the past. To have done so would have brought spiritual danger (9: 60).

Ten days later, I spoke with one attendee about the program. He commented with great enthusiasm about his recent learning experience, even saying that he shared this knowledge with some of his peers:

I never appreciated how complex Indigenous societies are... I spoke to my mates about it. They were very interested. No one had any idea. I think you need to be willing to receive it. Before my interest in Aboriginal art I probably was not as open and receptive (9: 137).

**The Ngurrara canvas**

PIAF 2004 had as its theme: people and cultures of the Kimberley. PIAF used the Ngurrara canvas as a central piece of its 2004 Festival. The canvas was painted as part of a Native Title Claim and presented to the National Native Title Tribunal to convey the continuing cultural significance of the country to the claimant groups. Albeit presented in front of Parliament House in 1999, the Ngurrara canvas was only revealed to a very large public at the Official Opening Ceremony of the Festival. PIAF focused several free events on the Ngurrara canvas.
Fred Chaney\textsuperscript{10} gave a free talk that was followed with three dances by Kimberley men and one by Kimberley women, performing on the canvas itself. Lindy Hume, Director of PIAF, introduced Fred Chaney by noting his involvement with Aboriginal people. This introduction was a means of asserting his specific expertise in cultures that, for most Australians, remain mostly unknown. Fred started his presentation by referring to historical interactions between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people since the period of first settlement in 1788 on the East Coast, and, later in 1829 here in Perth. Many expert talks, I observed, highlighted the differences between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous experiences. Some speakers, like Fred, urged the audience to find a shared understanding, as a new cultural interface.

For example, Fred told the audience that interactions between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people have been ‘a journey of misunderstanding’ and that, ‘I have been a close observer of this journey’. He located himself within the interface of engagements, which he grounded in a life-long commitment towards Aboriginal societies. Fred communicated a positive perspective on the future and added, ‘We’re going toward Reconciliation’. In less than ten minutes, the quiet and attentive audience had received the message that the nature of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous interactions was changing, and that they could become part of these changes by gaining knowledge and being able to apply this learning to their own experiences. This self-selected audience becomes itself part of the changing framework, a seductive role for those seeking engagement between Aboriginal communities and the broader society.

Fred’s speech also focussed on the Wangkatjungga culture in regard to the Native Title Claim. He explained to the audience,

\begin{quote}
People.... painting their country and explaining it to the Government of Western Australia, how they see it, how live on it...The canvas explains the Great Sandy Desert (Notepad PF).
\end{quote}

Whereas he highlighted cross-cultural understanding on the specific issue of Native Title Claims, he emphasised the need for better cultural understanding and broader cross-cultural communication. He invited people to take into account an Aboriginal standpoint:

\begin{quote}
For the first time the White fellow have to hear what they’re saying (Notepad PF).
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Deputy Chairman of the Australian Native Title Tribunal until 2007.
Fred did not underestimate some difficulties of cross-cultural engagement. He pointed out some of the problems non-Indigenous people may have in grasping an Aboriginal sense of country, and referred here to language issues. The woman sitting behind me said, ‘It’s fascinating’, and her friend replied, ‘I love it’. At the end of his speech, he responded to a question from a non-Indigenous person who expressed concern at the cultural sensitivity associated with the use of photographs in his PowerPoint presentation. He replied:

It [a photograph] might not be the most cultural artefact, but it’s the most important cross-cultural artefact (Notepad PF).

The non-Indigenous audience responded extremely well to this delivery of cross-cultural knowledge, as I understood from conversations with audience members.

**Bringing a Kimberley Dreaming to Perth**

Ningali Lawford is an actor and an Aboriginal woman from Fitzroy Crossing, Kimberley. She was the Master of Ceremonies for the dances performed for PIAF on the Ngurrara canvas at the Perth Concert Hall. She explained to an essentially (maybe exclusively) non-Indigenous audience the cultural significance and background of this free performance where Kimberley singers, musicians, dancers and story-tellers re-enacted the Dreaming Stories of the canvas:

The dances and canvas were used for a Native Title Claim. I was privileged to represent my people in this. This piece of work speaks of the Creation, giving us a link through culture and heritage. It’s a privilege for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to listen to our songs of the Kimberley. We have a lot of Law people here. These are all Creation stories: men walking across country, the rain clouds, dealing with the waterholes. We can see there’re a lot of waterholes in the painting. These are stories to keep us alive in the desert (Notepad 02/2004).

At this event, the audience learnt about some aspects of Wangkatjungga spirituality. Ningali explained the story of the Two Snakes, a Dreaming story of Creation, before two male performers, decorated with body painting and wearing head-dresses, started to dance the same story on the canvas. In the Perth CBD, on this summery evening, the Dreaming was danced and sung on a canvas depicting an area of Wangkatjungga landscape. This was a reactivation of the Dreaming (e.g. Berndt, Berndt and Stanton 1982: 50). This free event was not simply about sharing knowledge, but Ningali used
the opportunity to reinforce the living vitality of Indigenous Australian cultures, and to position these within the world's Indigenous cultures:

Culture is very important to Indigenous people across the world, and teaching the young ones who they are, and where they come from, teaching the young to learn from the old is vital for Indigenous people (Notepad 02/2004).

I observed repeatedly that during free expert talks, speakers encourage the non-Indigenous audiences to accept the legitimacy of Aboriginal cultures. For example, when John Stanton talked to an entirely non-Indigenous audience about the bark paintings of North-Eastern Arnhem Land (at the Holmes à Court Art Gallery), he emphasised the living nature of the art:

It's there, living in the painting, living on the ground. It's not just a painting, but something alive with the spirituality that created it. And it's just the same for Desert art, too.... (5: 27).

In a similar vein, when Ningali explained to the audience that the Dreaming Being Kurtal was 'a cheeky Water Snake who stole sacred objects', and that Kurtal bunda is sung by the people of the Great Sandy Desert to bring the rain, she concluded by legitimising the nature of Aboriginal knowledge and its efficacy:

So don't be surprised if it rains tonight11 (Notepad 02/2004).

Free events communicate glimpses of Aboriginal cultures. While this particular presentation focussed on just one Kimberley culture, it is the multiplicity and the diversity of these kinds of events that contribute to a repositioning of Aboriginal cultures, away from marginalisation, emphasising their enduring strength and their complexity. They acknowledge, at the same time, the distinctiveness of each of these cultures from each other and collectively from the world of non-Indigenous Australia. Above all, I suggest, these free expert talks provide people with opportunities to satisfy their desire to learn about aspects of Aboriginal cultures in the contemporary political ethos of reconciliation. Below, is a cameo of cross-cultural interactions, articulated around free goods that I encountered at the event:

Laura is a non-Aboriginal woman who had just moved from Sydney to Perth. She read in the newspaper something about a free dancing performance. It was her 'first Aboriginal ceremony from the Kimberley', as she said to me before Ningali started her presentation. Laura had come to the performance with a hula-hoop she had made for the occasion. It was bound with insulating tape in the colours of the Aboriginal flag. Her hula-hoop intrigued me, so I probed her to discuss it further, explaining my research interest in cross-cultural engagements. She worked in

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11 It rarely rains during a Perth summer, but it became stormy the same night.
circus and theatre and felt concerned about Aboriginal health and wanted to express her respect for Aboriginal people.

- I bring it [the hula-hoop] as a sign of respect. I don’t know who I’ll give it to. Maybe to the lady who hosted the ceremony. What’s her name?
- Ningali, I replied (Notepad 02/2004).

Laura gave Ningali the gift, the hula-hoop. Ningali then gave the hula-hoop to her daughter and, a few minutes later, the daughter was playing with the hula-hoop, standing on the canvas of her country. Laura’s action was unexpected and resulted from her own personal agency.

**Perth Royal Show**

During the Perth Royal Show in October 2003, I conducted participant observation at the display mounted by the former Department of Conservation and Land Management. This is a very different environment from that of an art event, as the Royal Show attracts an enormously varied audience from both country and metropolitan areas, as well as the full range of social backgrounds.

Throughout each day CALM displayed a *mia mia*, Noongar artefacts, and regular performances, such as dancing, didgeridoo playing, tool making, and a ‘show and tell’ with Noongar artefacts. Most of the people who passed by the *mia mia* were non-Indigenous; some stopped and looked at it, commenting variously, ‘I wouldn’t sleep in it for the night’, ‘that’s what the Aborigines built’, ‘all made by traditional Aboriginal people’ or ‘it’s a tepee’, for example. Some took photos, especially those accompanied by overseas visitors. The comments were brief and more from a personal perspective.

While the *mia mia* and a bland display of wooden and stone tools did not attract more than casual attention, there was very real interest in and engagement with the Noongar rangers by the visitors who passed by the exhibit when they were giving the free talks. When one of the rangers, Benjamin, talked about the artefacts, the objects he held in his hands intrigued non-Indigenous people. People asked many questions about their fabrication and use. Later, one Noongar family stopped, and Benjamin said to them, ‘I show to Wadjela how to make tools, the dancing and the didgeridoo.’ He showed a club to them, and the Noongar man grabbed it and pretended to use it. Benjamin said, ‘Careful, I don’t have any bandages’. Although this Noongar man associated the club straight away with being a weapon, most non-Aboriginal people did not know anything about it, and asked questions about its function. Benjamin showed the club to one non-Indigenous man and said, ‘It’s made with grass tree gum’. The visitor replied, ‘What do
you use it for? What would an Aboriginal person use it for?" Benjamin showed several
different knives and explained the variation in design by commenting, ‘In the kitchen
you have different kind of knives’, a reference that make sense for city dwellers. A man
in the audience asked how the sharp edge was made, and Benjamin replied, ‘I made it. I
broke up the rock and used the flakes.’ Another man in the audience commented, ‘Here
it’s a sand plain, so people must have walked from different areas [to find suitable rocks
for stone tools].’ This prompted Benjamin to talk of the many different Noongar groups
and their different dialects.

What attracted the largest audiences was the manufacturing of tools by members of the
public. Another subject of great interest was the translation of Noongar words into
English. Benjamin explained that some Noongar names are used for the names of Perth
suburbs. For example, in the name Mirrabooka, mira means ‘spear thrower’ and buka
means ‘kangaroo skin cloak’. While he gave the Noongar words for objects such as
boomerang and axe, the audience showed most interest in learning about the English
translations of suburbs that have Noongar names. In the audience, I heard a few people
saying, ‘It’s incredible’, ‘It’s amazing’. Humour peppered Benjamin’s presentations. He
joked, ‘Kylie means “boomerang” in the Noongar language. Kylie Minogue, that’s why
she keeps coming back to Australia’. Audiences seem to respond very well to humour,
and Aboriginal people are known for their sense of humour—as people attending
Aboriginal drama often told me, in totally different contexts.

These free talks at Perth Royal Show provide passers-by the opportunity to get some
Noongar cultural awareness. It offered people an additional opportunity for learning
about Noongar culture. Whilst the silent display of Noongar artefacts beside the mia mia
did not cause much response from non-Aboriginal passers-by, Benjamin’s expert talks
on language and tradition attracted large audiences—at times, over fifty people.

**Strategies for cross-cultural communication**

In the free expert talk I mentioned earlier, Chaney explained Aboriginal cultural
features by using references that made sense in a Western setting. For example, he
introduced the Dreaming and the creation of the landscape by comparing it to Christian

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12 I am not sure whether the visitor had failed to identify Benjamin as Aboriginal or not.
notions of the creation of the world in six days. Fred appeared to be acutely aware that, in order to optimise cross-cultural communication it is essential to use references that make sense to audiences.

This is an important mechanism for communicating culture cross-culturally and Australian diplomats use this technique. For example, I discussed with staff of the Australian Embassy in Paris the ways in which they communicate Australian culture overseas. As I was in Paris just prior to the 2003 Rugby World Cup that was being held in Australia, a huge banner was draped over the Australian Embassy building. An Australian staff member called my attention to the player on the banner as the choice resulted from a carefully thought through decision to sell the Australian sport event to a French audience—that is, a cross-cultural engagement:

On the outside banner is a French Rugby player. We didn’t use an Australian player. Why a French player in France? We are trying to sell the Rugby Cup with the banner. If we put an Australian player on it, there is less interest for the French public than if it’s a well-known French player. You need to think of the audience. And for all the Embassy exhibitions in the foyer, it’s the same. You need to find what is going to interest the French public (8: 37-8).

I have a number of field accounts that illustrated how people are using references that resonate with the knowledge held by cross-cultural recipients. For example, David (Yamatji), whom I met in Perth, ran a tourist enterprise in Yamatji country. He said to me that a number of stories could not be told to tourists, either because they are culturally sensitive or part of an existing Native Title process (they ‘could be held against people’); however, he clarified that some stories are in the category of knowledge that can be shared to a broad audience. David then expanded, ‘Rainbow Serpent water holes are easy stories for tourists, because they are national, not local knowledge’. In order to communicate clearly his culture, David added:

What we’re doing is using Europe as a sort of analogy. For example the Greeks and the French. It’s a way of sharing our culture (Notepad TC).

Reflecting further on this point, I presume that David made a reference to France because of my French identity. On three occasions during my fieldwork, persons who were adept at transmitting knowledge cross-culturally illustrated their point by referring to France as a way of maximising my own understanding.

In July 2003, free Noongar heritage tours were organised by DIA to celebrate NAIDOC Week. For most of them, the audience was mainly non-Indigenous, but all the speakers
were Noongar Elders. Some tours were held in Kings Park, others at Fremantle, and on two boat tours on the Swan River. Investigating the communication of Aboriginal culture to non-Indigenous audiences, I recorded my perceptions on two of these NAIDOC tours. My field comments provide an illustration of how such information is transmitted:

In Fremantle, the Elder talked of the caves used in the past by Noongar people, the jail, the trails that he used to take with his parents, the beginning of the Colony from the Noongar perspective. In Kings Park, the Elder (Max) refers to initiation, to scarring, but also to Land Rights and Aboriginal heritage. Unlike the Fremantle tour, this one is more accessible to Westerners, as the Elder made numerous references to Western culture. It's just a different way of delivering information, the Noongar way or the Western way. When the Elder in Kings Park put his artefacts back in the boot of his four-wheel drive, he said, 'Pandora's got a box, I've got a car'. To all of his jokes, the audience laughed. That's true, he's excellent. He is comparing and illustrating with images that make sense in Western culture. Max explained the Wagul by referring to God, he talked of God and then the Wagul. Looking in his plastic shopping bags for more artefacts to 'show and tell', he said, 'In which dilly bag did I put it?' He's making fun of Aboriginal culture, of Western culture. He's comparing and making analogies. When he's talking of the mia mia, he referred to the thatched cottages of England. He is creating parallels, and that work well. He showed to the audience some boomerangs and explained how the aerodynamic features of them had been used by NASA to send men to the moon. Max put Aboriginal culture in a scientific dimension. The non-Indigenous audience responded well, people liked it.

Is the Elder at Kings Park doing a Noongar corroboree, a show, or is he a master in cross-cultural communication?

Another example is when he talked about balga [grass tree] nuts, and said, 'The British thought we didn't have any alcohol in Australia. In fact, that's false. Balga nuts soaked in water make an alcohol of 16%. Banksia flowers can also make alcohol, but only Aboriginal people would think of making alcohol out of banksia!' The audience laughed, and obviously appreciated his sense of humour. The speech is very funny, and there is constant reference to Western culture. Then it started raining, heavily; the noise of the rain falling on the corrugated iron roof covered his voice, and he referred to Rain Making ceremonies. Suddenly his mobile phone rang, and Max said, 'My message stick, the Wagul is trying to contact me!' The audience laughed again. He doesn't give either more or less knowledge than the Elder at Fremantle, but his dialogue is more in the cross-cultural setting (6: 111-3).

When expert speakers talk to audiences, they do not intend to fulfil some misapprehensions or exotic expectations; rather they aim to find some common grounds to enhance cross-cultural understanding—unlike some enterprises in the competitive economy. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives may differ, and both need to be taken into account in order to improve the outcomes of the engagement13. Today's

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13 See Nakata (2007) for a Torres Strait perspective.
interactions are not devoid of cultural relativism and some expert speakers are in various ways suggesting pathways to bridge the cultural gap (as David and Max also did). In this respect, Fred Chaney said during the PIAF talk on the Ngurrara canvas:

I'm going to tell you a White fellow perspective. Why not Blackfellow? Because there is no Blackfellow in the audience, which speaks for itself.... Today we are in a fog, it's not always an easy matter, and we continue to make mistakes (Notepad PF).

Fred led the audience to understand just how ethnocentrism pushed settlers towards cultural dispossession, as he described past engagements in the historical records:

It's a wonderful account of miscomprehension (Notepad PF).

He made a separation between the 'wrong attitudes' of the past and today's 'understandings' and yet, in doing so, did not apportion blame to the audience.

Are free expert talks culturally grounded? Hartley (1999: 41-3) suggests that today's media may communicate knowledge in a comparable way that the Church did in the pre-modern era14. Prompted by Hartley's comment, I pose the question: are free expert talks a means to deliver knowledge that is not so different to the preaching of the Church in the past? Hence, I question whether the practice of transmitting and asserting cultural values through free expert talks could be culturally grounded within the long-established tradition of Church teachings, through which audiences were provided with direction for life's practices. Formal school education for the wider population is a relatively new social feature, barely one hundred years old in Australia. Nevertheless, these free talk were all within an 'educational' context. As politicians now talk about Reconciliation, cultural minorities, multiculturalism, and Aboriginal Australia, there is now a demand by non-Indigenous people for a new direction in the interface. Fred Chaney's comments exemplify this:

There is a huge shift in the way we are looking at these things. Now we are not a more moral country, but we have adopted new attitudes.... In the past we rejected taking into account Aboriginal visions but the world has moved on and now those [non-Indigenous people] who have in the past rejected Aboriginal input are now accommodating it (Notepad PF).

Many participants commented about the changes. Gabriel (non-Aboriginal), in her late twenties, is one of those participants who feel that people of her generation are now more interested in learning about Aboriginal cultures:

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14 '... the part played in the medieval period by the church has been taken over in the modern era by the media, culminating in television...' (Hartley 1999: 42).
A lot of people over 50 have racist views. The generation below this has changed. They have different views because the world is different. Being racist doesn’t help anyone, and to close off the issue is not going to improve the situation (17: 138-9).

From my own engagement with Australians in the field, I encountered a number of people of every age group who were keen to gain Aboriginal cultural awareness. In my Introduction, I have argued that the contemporary notion of culture is brought to the forefront, acknowledged and valued. Such a desire to learn elements of Noongar/Aboriginal cultures is likely to be attributable largely to this appreciation of cultural difference, probably encouraged by the government push towards cultural liberalism, which is an only exemplar of the world’s appreciation of indigeneity.

**Asserting Noongar cultural identity through free goods**

I now turn to Noongar people’s stance about free goods bearing an Aboriginal signifier (the colours of the Aboriginal flag or an Aboriginal design). Whereas non-Indigenous people could well collect them in the same way that I did during my fieldwork, it is mostly Aboriginal people who seem to desire these free products. In this section, I argue that such goods do not create a definite context for cross-cultural awareness; however, it potently illustrates that Noongar people have a strong sense of their culture being different to the broader Australian culture and some participants have asserted this with pride. Such cultural consciousness is essential in understanding Noongar motivation to be involved in the interface. In Part Two, I have argued the notion that the intercultural knowledge results from some overlapping and shared concerns (Figure 1.3). I am far from suggesting that Noongar and non-Aboriginal motivations in engaging cross-culturally are identical; indeed, they are different. For example, I have just shown that non-Aboriginal participants enjoyed learning about Noongar culture and I now give voice to Noongar participants whose focus seems to lay in cultural recognition rather than solely in a philanthropic concern for teaching their culture.

**Free goods and cultural festivals**

During fifteen months in the field, I gathered together a significant collection of free items bearing an Aboriginal logo, image or iconography (Plate 9.2). These gifts were
given always by Aboriginal organizations and some government agencies and were purchased by the organization before being given away. Elma, a Noongar woman who sold some of these products, spoke about the items for sale in her shop:

Indigenous corporations buy the flags, flag magnets, flag pins, they buy a large quantity to give away to their staff and visitors (6: 74).

I collected most of the free items at Indigenous festivals: the Survival concert, the Wadarnji celebration, and on the NAIDOC opening day. However, I encountered many other opportunities to get free goods. When I visited participants working for government organizations I was sometimes given free goods. For example, on one occasion I commented on several attractive ATSIC prints displayed on the venue wall, and my contact presented me with a set (Plate 9.3). As Australian Breast Cancer Day is on the 27th of October, Derbal Yerrigan organised in 2003 its first barbecue to bind together Aboriginal women who are facing the disease and helping them to go through issues that result from cultural differences between Aboriginal patients and non-Indigenous medical practitioners. The event was held in Kings Park and each attendee was given a calico bag containing a T-shirt, a pin, an enamel mug, and various pamphlets (see Plate 9.2 for the mug).

I firstly want to make the point that there is no circulation per se of these free commodities—quite unlike the case of birthday or Christmas gifts, for which reciprocity is an essential element of the exchange (Sherry 1983: 158-9; Cheal 1988: 21). In 2003, ATSIC distributed a show bag, which included a good quality black woollen beanie

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15 The goods I collected were given by the following organizations: Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Services, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Services, NASAS (Noongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services), Yorganop Childcare Aboriginal Corporation, ALSWA (Aboriginal Legal Services of Western Australia), OAED (Office of Aboriginal Economic Development), SWALSC (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council), Indigenous Land Corporation, and Aboriginal Education Training and Services.

16 Because the public performance aspect is central to the Survival concert and the Wardjarni event, a significant number of non-Indigenous people attend both of these events. Survival is also held on a public holiday and Wardjarni on a Saturday, unlike the NAIDOC opening celebration, which was on a weekday. The annual NAIDOC celebration is primarily attended by Aboriginal people; with fewer non-Indigenous attendees, mostly government public servants. In this sense, the NAIDOC Opening Day ceremony held in 2003 in Wellington Square, Central Perth, was essentially an Indigenous event. Some people attended wearing work clothes and came by in the morning for the speeches and something to eat, as a free lunch was provided. Others came for the whole day with their children, grandparents and/or aunts and uncles.

17 I wish to note that a number of the items that I collected in the field were produced by ATSIC. This raises questions for what is happening now, as the government has abolished ATSIC, but I can only reflect on my data collected in 2003-4. The Australian Journal of Anthropology published in 2004 a number of papers concerning the implications of the abolition of ATISC the same year. Authors debated the relationship between ATSIC and the government (Austin Broos 2004, Beckett 2004, Cowlishaw 2004, Macdonald 2004) and the context in which it was originally created (Altman 2004).
Plate 9.2 Examples of free goods collected during the fieldwork

Some of the free goods I collected during the fieldwork: three fabric bags, two tee-shirts, two hats, a bonnet, two baseball caps, a number of pens, an enamel mug, three or four lapel pins, four wooden message sticks, a engraved piece of stone jewellery bearing the ATSIC logo, images that represent multiple aspects of Aboriginal Australia, posters, postcards, stickers, fridge magnets, removable tattoos, informative booklets and pamphlets, a video tape, two mouse pads, a drink coaster, two water-bottles, nine balloons, three badges, a desk blotter calendar, a wall calendar featuring Indigenous models, a ruler, a small jigsaw, a drug awareness booklet with condoms, three notepads, two book-marks, two post-it notes.
Plate 9.3 Attractive posters from ATSIC
with the red and yellow logo (as shown in Plate 9.3, top left), stickers, pamphlets, a pen with the colours of the Aboriginal flag, and other items representing Aboriginal Australia. Only a limited number of show bags were available to those who had gathered to get them; however, I was lucky enough to get one. Ten minutes later, I went to another stall to see someone I knew and, seeing the bag, she said how disappointed she was to have missed out, as she was too busy at her stall at the time they were being given out. She was interested in the beanie, so I gave it to her. She was really pleased and thanked me.

On a previous occasion, when I was with a Noongar participant who had an attractive pen decorated with the colours of the Aboriginal flag, I commented on how nice it looked. She said she had got it from ATSIC and then gave it to me (Plate 9.2). I thanked her but lost it just a couple of days later. These two examples reinforced to me the notion that these were simply free goods, they do not circulate via financial transactions per se, they do not induce any reciprocity and, in some ways, they could be totally trivial, nothing more than a promotional item¹⁹ easily forgotten had Noongar people not expressed their interest in the symbolic significance of them, which I discuss below.

It is worth noting that Derrida (1992)²⁰ discussed the notion that a true gift cannot actually exist, as he suggested that a true gift should not involve any reciprocity, which is never the case. Indeed, as scholars (Gregory 1982; Carrier 1995; Jaffe 1999) have noted, a gift creates a relationship between the giver and the recipient and it is given as an expression of special bonding. While I do not discuss these free products as gifts, in Derrida's terms, they actually are 'true gifts'.

During my fieldwork, I collected many free goods at cultural festivals²¹. For example, the Wardarnji²² celebration (Plate 9.4) was originally developed by a small group of

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¹⁸ So-called 'Show Bags' derive from the bags of manufacturer's samples originally given to patrons of the Perth Royal Agricultural Show. Today commercial show bags are sold, and many visitors to the Royal Show save money to buy them for their children. Show bags distributed at Indigenous festivals are made freely available by Aboriginal organizations and government departments, as listed in footnote 3.

¹⁹ Whereas the concept of 'promotional item' is a notion taken from Western marketing, these 'freebies', as they are often termed, are more than simply promotional items. Noongar people value them.

²⁰ See also Laidlaw (2000: 621).

²¹ Festivals are laid out in a typical pattern: the stage faces a large lawn area and on the side a series of tented stalls representing different Indigenous organizations and some government departments, most of which give out free show bags.

²² Wardarnji means 'beside the sea' in Noongar, as declared at the event by two speakers.
Noongar people to promote Reconciliation, but it is also a means to communicate Noongar culture. A Noongar Elder said during the Noongar Welcome to Country:

A lot of Noongar come from Albany, Noongar come along from the Kimberley, people come from everywhere, up-north, east to learn about our culture (12: 115).

A number of Noongar people wore items bearing the colours of the Aboriginal flag: a little girl had a bracelet made with beads; a man wore a tee-shirt with the flag printed on the front; some men wore head bands or hat bands; some women’s hats had the flag reference. Only a very few non-Aboriginal people wore items like these. My observations and participants’ comments suggest that free items bearing Aboriginal references allow an affirmation of cultural pride, which can be encouraged early in life.

At Wadjarni the children were invited by the master of ceremonies to come to the stage. They were each given a small toy in the colour of the Aboriginal flag to make soap bubbles. Later the master of ceremonies again called for the moorditj koolangka, the ‘excellent children’, as he translated, to come close to the stage. He gave out more free goods, stickers with the colours of the flag. The MC pointed out to the public, while the children were collecting their gifts:

It’s good to see all these Noongar kids. Next time folks, when you see negative stories in the media, remember all these moorditj Noongar kids (12: 119).

During the Survival concert, people also celebrate the strength of Aboriginal cultures and, for some, the pride of being Aboriginal through the appeal of what could be seen as a free promotional item. I asked Sonia (Noongar) if she could explain to me the reasons for which she was getting the free products given at the stalls of Aboriginal government organisations:

I get the information stuff [show bags, pamphlets, etc.] because it’s free and the balloons are catchy for kids. Kids like to have something in their hands. Coloured balloons, badges, bits and pieces to put on them. It’s a sort of identity thing, being proud, going to an event that is positive. The experience is pretty positive, I’ll get them out of the bag, I’ll put on a hat with a Noongar logo (Notepad 1).

Free products with an Aboriginal reference (often colour of the flag) are a ready means of expressing cultural identity. For many Noongar people, Aboriginal cultural festivals provide an opportunity to obtain these goods, as well as asserting publicly and proudly their cultural identity.
Plate 9.4 Audience at Wardarnji Festival, Fremantle
Claiming cultural identity through free products

The display of free goods by Noongar people is much more pervasive, going far beyond the moment of a festival. Free goods are also used to claim Noongar culture in a context of minority status. This was, for example, noticeable with Albert, a Noongar man who I met at a workshop that aimed to facilitate intercultural relations between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. He was wearing a business suit, a white shirt, a tie printed with Aboriginal designs and on the lapel of his jacket he had pinned a badge with the Aboriginal flag, a free product 'from ATSIC' as he said to me. During the workshop, Albert also took some notes with a pen bearing the colour of the flag and identical to the one I had lost. When I spoke to him about my research interests and such free goods, Albert replied by suggesting that he was using these free items to assert proudly his own cultural identity. These kind of promotional items (notepad, pen, and alike) acquired for free had a symbolic significance that was discussed by other Noongar participants. Indeed, this practice of displaying such items was not unusual amongst Noongar people I met during my fieldwork. The non-Indigenous wife of a Noongar man also corroborated this claim when she commented to me that her husband had acquired a number of these free goods through which he asserts his cultural identity; which she labelled 'cultural ownership':

All my husband’s stationary has an Indigenous logo or an Aboriginal flag. He’s proud of being an Indigenous person. He’s taking ownership of his own culture. For me, if I like the design and find it attractive I might keep one, but for my husband it’s an assertion of his cultural background (Notepad C).

Noongar participants often commented that such free products provide a means to assert their sense of identity. That the gifts do not cost anything is an added attraction, as nobody is excluded. Why are Noongar people keen to use Aboriginal products that assert Aboriginal identity?

During the second week of my fieldwork I attended the Survival Concert. I visited every stall, gathering show bags. I was intrigued with the contents of my collection, with many items useable at home, in the office or that I could wear. Six months later I went to the NAIDOC opening day celebration, and wrote in my field notebook:

It’s by observing the stalls and their contents, by collecting some show bags, and by seeing just who among Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people interact with the paraphernalia of the stalls that I am even more clearly aware that there is something of importance with free items. I cannot, at this point, clearly define
what it is and if they have any cross-cultural outcome. All the NASAS caps were
given out by late morning and I can see Noongar people wearing them. All the
ATSIC beanies were given away in a few minutes and I could see some of these
on Noongar people’s heads. None of these freebies were being worn by any of the
very few non-Indigenous people who were there. White people listen to the
speeches, to the music, visit the art gallery stalls and/or talked with friends, but
none seems to have collected any show bags, posters, pamphlets or stickers. Why?
(6: 99-100).

Whereas this contemporary practice of using free items bearing Aboriginal references to
assert cultural pride was never mentioned in cultural awareness settings (comparable to
the hugging and kissing business mentioned in Chapter Four), it actually shows that
Noongar people value their culture, and are pleased to remind themselves that they are
Noongar, or more generally Aboriginal, as I detail below.

The Aboriginal flag is a strong statement of Aboriginal identity throughout Australia
that Moreton-Robinson (2003: 127) noted as being:

> In our communities, through the vehicle of oral history, social memory is
developed, reproduced, changed and maintained. The message of resistance is
embedded in local histories and is performed in embodied daily practices such as
the public display of the Aboriginal flag and colours on Indigenous bodies and on
buildings in cities, country towns and remote communities.

In Perth, Balgo, Warburton, Warakurna, Derby and Fitzroy Crossing, I saw Aboriginal
people wearing shirts, necklaces and earrings bearing the three colours of the flag—
even a table at the Halls Creek Hotel was painted with the flag. On a field trip to the
Kimberley, the Berndt Museum of Anthropology collected some of these items for
display. I was working at the time for the Berndt Museum, assembling a display of
items bearing the colours of the Aboriginal flag. Although the comments of a couple of
non-Indigenous University people were, to say the least, dismissive of these items,
several young Yamatji Aboriginal students who visited the Museum at that time
responded very positively to the display. One said, ‘That’s our culture, I like the
earrings’. For Aboriginal people, the Aboriginal flag is more than just a political
statement of a nation-state; it is also a cultural statement. Pauline (Noongar) told me
about the significance of the flag when we talked about the free goods given at cultural
festivals:

> You know what the flag represents. It’s about identity, the Aboriginal nation. But
it’s cultural, wearing a T-shirt, a necklace, this is saying who I am. Who I
represent? It’s a pride thing (16: 74).
I observed this kind of emblematisation of culture through such material items many times during my fieldwork. People have spoken about themselves using products bearing the colour of the flag or the logo of a government organization directed toward Aboriginal needs. Noongar people who have discussed this practice (and Aboriginal participants who were not Noongar) have described their action as being an expression of ‘our culture’, ‘cultural ownership’, ‘pride in our culture’, and ‘the strength of Noongar culture’, as they voiced it. This echoes Macdonald’s (2004: 35) observation that the Wiradjuri people of NSW are using cultural referents (totem) and the colours of the flag in ‘developing symbols for a new Wiradjuri identity.’

It is noteworthy to comment that sometimes Noongar people purchase items guided by their wish to assert their Aboriginality. After I finished my fieldwork, I saw a Noongar woman pull a pen out of her bag to take the address of another person. The pen was white, orange and had multiple coloured concentric circles on it. I am not sure if her friend commented about the pen, but I heard her saying to him:

I bought it in a computer shop. It looks like Aboriginal design. I know it’s not.

During my fieldwork, a Noongar singer gave a concert at Kulcha, a multicultural performing arts centre. She wore a black shirt decorated with silver dotted designs of concentric circles for her performance. The pattern was repeated all over the shirt, strongly reminiscent of Western Desert iconography. She made the following comment to me as soon as I greeted her:

My dot-painting jacket is from Myers. It’s look like a dot painting, but it’s not (11: 47).

The dot design is, without a doubt, an icon originally from the Western Desert, but it has now become a broader icon of Aboriginality. The artist who identifies herself as a Noongar singer purchased it for this very reason. Her songs are about Noongar culture, her experiences as a Noongar woman, about past government policies and about Noongar children. Her lyrics refer to Noongar culture: the shirt is just another statement of her identity.

Perhaps, when these Aboriginal markers are worn, they can be considered as being similar to expressions of cultural ownership articulated through body painting elsewhere.

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23 All these other aspects refer to Noongar identity; however, the dot design is not Noongar. I have discussed the dynamics of shifting between these identities in Chapter Two in the section ‘The Participants’.
or in the past. People paint(ed) their bodies for ceremonies as a cultural claim and an assertion of territorial rights (see Morphy 1983 on Arnhem Land). My fieldwork photographs illustrate that body painting is still in use today by Noongar dancers in public performances. Many male Noongar dancers are performing their culture using the colours of the flag as adornment, an integral component of representing themselves as Aboriginal performers. The display of cultural signifiers is not so far removed from this, although the practice occurs in relation to cultural outsiders rather than for kin and other Aboriginal people (as it is the case for ceremonial body painting). This assertion of cultural identity through promotional items displayed on people’s bodies (flag, necklace, tee-shirt, for example) may thus be a contemporary manifestation of a long-standing tradition—albeit it is now more of an assertion of Aboriginality (the flag is a symbol for all Aboriginal people across Australia and ATSIC was an organization at a Federal level) rather than an assertion of local culture and territorial rights. Indeed, I suggest that promotional items given out at festivals and by government agencies allow contemporary practice to occur.

The displaying of cultural identity through the use of free goods has limited impact in terms of creating cross-cultural awareness. I asked some non-Indigenous respondents if they had noticed people wearing clothes, jewellery, headbands, and the like with the colours of the Aboriginal flag. While all of them were aware of the Aboriginal flag as a symbol of Aboriginal Australia, they had not noticed people wearing any items bearing its colours. This is very different from the response of Noongar people who noticed straight away those who wear them. Very few non-Indigenous people wear items having the Aboriginal flag colours. When they do, despite differences in gender, age, and social background, non-Indigenous participants who wore such items told me they did so as a political statement of Reconciliation or to show their support to Aboriginal communities.

At the Survival Concert 2004, I met a man wearing a hatband made from woollen plait with the three colours of the Aboriginal flag. He was non-Indigenous. When we talked about the hatband, he spoke about it as a means to display his support toward Aboriginal Australia:

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24 Women of the South-West cover their breasts, unlike Kimberley women when they performed in Perth in 2003 and used body painting on their breasts.
I’ve got a lot of Aboriginal friends. With the hatband I want to give them a bit of support. It’s their country, not ours. My friendships started 40 years ago when I came to Australia. I’m from England. I lived in a gold mining town [for many years] (Notepad Survival 2004).

A year earlier, at the Survival Concert 2003, I met a non-Indigenous woman who was dressed from top to toe with the colours of the Aboriginal flag (as in Plate 2.6). I asked her if she could tell me something about her outfit. As in the case of the man quoted above, she explained that it was a sign to express her ‘support’ for Aboriginal people, indeed using the same word:

I wear the bracelet and the necklace every day, but I wear the shirt on special occasions like today, or on any occasion for Aboriginal people. I also wear the hat on special occasions, the badge every day, and the bag on special days. Since 1974 I’ve been wearing things like this. I wear a band around the hat all the time. Because I always support Aboriginal people, I always wear something (1: 10).

These people were rather atypical and were not representative of the most people I met, before, during and after my fieldwork. Olivia is a non-Indigenous woman who never wore such items. When I asked her what she thought of non-Aboriginal people with an item bearing the flag colours, she said:

If the person is not Aboriginal, I associate this with the hippies, with activism. For me it’s a bit of a fashion statement. But if I know the person is Aboriginal, I find it rather good that they’re affirming it, it makes sense, it’s pride (15: 29).

Lizzie is another non-Aboriginal participant with whom I spoke of this issue. She has a more positive appreciation of non-Aboriginal people who wear paraphernalia with the colours of the Aboriginal flag:

I think they are politically conscious, pro-Aboriginal rights, pro-recognition of what happened. They are aware and express compassion and understanding. It’s a passive activism. That’s an oxymoron! [she laughed] (6: 83).

Nevertheless, I met such people every so often, who were very keen to demonstrate their awareness of Aboriginal affairs, although focussing on political issues.

I saw Anthony for the first time in a café. He was sitting at a nearby table and I could see his bag with a fabric badge of the Aboriginal flag. We spoke about it:

As a Quaker, it’s fundamental that I see all people as equal. But the flag is just saying, “I’m validating another person’s story”. John Howard invalidates the suffering of Aboriginal people by refusing to say, “Sorry”. The flag is not just a political statement for me or about Land Rights, but it’s to see a White bloke who’s moderate in his views and who is stating that the story should be taken seriously (17: 18).
Amelia (Noongar) is heartened to see non-Aboriginal people wearing such items:

I think it’s a good thing. Non-Indigenous people wearing the flag, I think it’s wonderful. Sometimes people go over the top and wish they were Aboriginal. But we need more understanding, so it’s wonderful (Notepad FV).

In the past, Noongar culture has been dismissed and this attitude was clearly expressed by past policies—especially the removal of children. Seeking cultural recognition from mainstream Australia is a major concern for many Noongar people I have met, and for most Noongar respondents any sign of support was valued.

These free goods are something not to ignore as they represent a statement of cultural that can be expressed publicly. They intend an assertion of identity rather than a communication of Noongar cultural practices *per se*, as the workshops funded by the government and the free expert talks were.

**Asserting a sense of place**

I now discuss the way in which the use of free goods provides a sense of an Aboriginal place within the broader Australian non-Aboriginal society. The wording of this section came from the comment of Philip, a non-Indigenous speaker at a workshop that intended to enhance Aboriginal employment in a Shire. Philip gained a strong cultural awareness through personal friendships and by working with Aboriginal people over a lengthy period. He reported on the working environment he had created for Aboriginal people and elaborated on the importance of creating a sense of place for Aboriginal people:

One [Noongar] kid said he has a sense of place in his job. He felt part of the community. As Wadjela, we need to create a sense of place (10: 79-80).

Later, at the same workshop, the Noongar facilitator reflected favourably on Philip’s comment:

Philip has created a sense of place, a nurturing environment, where people can come and feel safe (10: 87).

This section discusses free products that are decorating the walls of offices, conference facilities and even homes. Indeed, I observed the prominence of such cultural identifiers from the time of my first field event. The lecture theatre was decorated with an Aboriginal flag and a Torres Straits Islander flag, as well as Indigenous paintings. From this first day on, I noted that most events organised by Aboriginal people that were
aimed to communicate some features of Noongar cultures were decorated with either flags, paintings and/or artefacts (e.g. boomerangs and didgeridoos), posters from government organizations, and sometimes branches of natives trees or bushes (see Chapter Five).

Some Noongar participants displayed at their home and/or at work goods they received for free: fridge-magnets representing the Aboriginal flag; magnetic photo frames from Yirra Yarkin (Noongar Theatre Company) to display photos on fridges; small stickers representing the flag placed on walls, windows and computers; posters representing paintings or images of Aboriginal Australia; ATSIC computer mouse-pads; displaying maps and postcards. When I asked Greg if I could talk to him about the wide spread Noongar practice of using free items, he replied:

We have several flags at home. It’s a sense of pride, a sense of country. They’re symbols that are part of our culture (Notepad 7).

For some Noongar respondents, placing such items in the workplace generates a feeling of security. This is even more significant in unfamiliar surroundings, as Anna (Noongar) explained below:

I’m [working] in an environment where I don’t need to express it. Here I’m surrounded by Indigenous people. People know what we are doing. If I was the only Aboriginal staff member, I’ll decorate my work-station (Notepad HS).

Not all participants may share this last point: I met some Noongar people who had decorated their workstation albeit they were surrounded by Noongar work-colleagues. During my fieldwork, I also encountered some Indigenous people from other areas (e.g. Wongai, Yamatji but also a Torres Strait Islander) who had decorated their workplace with such free items.

Many free products were also commonly utilized by government agencies to indicate, without ambiguity, that their are focussing on Aboriginal clients. AMS or ALS, for example, provide support exclusively for Aboriginal people and free products are a means to indicate this to their Aboriginal ‘clients’. This occurs with posters and flyers displayed and available in the reception-waiting room and throughout the premises (Plate 9.5). I discussed with Wendy the reason for an Aboriginal element on the premises:

I do feel, if we didn’t display these things a lot of Indigenous people wouldn’t go in, because of racism.... If just non-Indigenous people were working there, then
Aboriginal people are less likely to open the door to go in. But if you see a black face, a poster in language, people go in. It's a cultural protocol: a bit of language, Aboriginal designs and something quite easy to read. If the flyer has a White Anglo-Saxon face, people are less likely to pick it up. The way women are dressed in this book [pointing to the kind of clothing that women commonly wear in remote communities], that's how people dress (12: 80-1).

The *Koori Mail* and newsletters from other organizations were often placed in the reception areas of many Aboriginal organizations. Posters with Aboriginal references commonly hung in many foyers and often in people's offices. Some Noongar participants were very keen to assert an Aboriginal presence in their work-place. For Karina, this is to make Aboriginal people entering the premises feel more welcome:

> There are Aboriginal posters around the office, because we work for Aboriginal people and it makes it more welcome (11: 110).

Karen, who works for another Noongar organization, has a very similar comment:

> People can identify that we are an Indigenous service. Some people would go and be happy with a non-Indigenous service. If Indigenous people feel ownership, if people feel that they belong to the organization, people have a feeling of ownership and respect. Noongar know that people here respect the culture and are dealing with people in culturally appropriate way (Notepad LS).

Another field account that illustrates the prevalence of this practice concerns Samantha, who I met when she was working for a non-Indigenous organization in Perth. She was employed previously by an Aboriginal agency in Adelaide, where all staff members were Indigenous from all around Australia. Samantha is Noongar. She pointed to the influence of the oppressive past policies that has left bad memories about government buildings in Aboriginal people's mind:

> In Adelaide we dealt with a lot of Aboriginal issues and clients. We made the office appealing with posters. The receptionist was aware that a lot of clients didn’t want to go into government buildings because of the oppression of the past (11: 77).

The recognition of cultural differences (language, clothing and iconography) comforts Aboriginal people, communicating that the service has cultural awareness and deference, unlike the alienating situation that Aboriginal people sometimes face when dealing with non-Indigenous services. Aboriginal organizations provide a cultural understanding for people, and this is partly communicated to their clients through displaying material mostly obtained for free.
Plate 9.5 Using Aboriginal imagery

Latest legal education pamphlets from ALSWA are now available on the following topics:

1. Blood Pressure
2. Aboriginal Imagery
3. HIV/AIDS
4. Stress and Diabetes
5. On Track & in Business
6. The Little Black Book
7. Mungari Country

What can I do if I have high blood pressure?
1. Try to achieve and maintain a healthy weight
2. Restrict the amount of salt you eat
3. Eat a healthy and balanced diet
4. Try to meet your physical activity recommendations
5. Stop smoking
6. Limit alcohol consumption

What is high blood pressure (hypertension)?
Blood pressure is a measurement of the force of blood passing through blood vessels. It is measured in millimetres of mercury (mmHg) and is divided into two numbers:

1. Systolic blood pressure: The pressure in your arteries when your heart contracts and pumps blood throughout your body
2. Diastolic blood pressure: The pressure in your arteries when your heart relaxes and fills with blood

For most adults, the normal blood pressure is 120/80 mmHg or lower.

Indigenous Employment Strategy: Document
Indeed, Noongar participants have recalled some experiences of feeling unwelcome, not to say the subject of overtly racist attitudes. People said, for example, 'I won’t go in that pub, because they are racist', ‘If I go to a shop and I’m not served, I stand up for myself and say, “Sorry, I was here first”' (7: 124), or ‘When I go with my family and stop for petrol with a car full with Noongar, people can be very rude, negative, dismissive’ (4: 135). It does happen that a non-Indigenous person who is ill at ease with Noongar people may behave in a patronising manner:

My husband went to the bank to get his account balance. The bank person spoke loud and slowly. He told her, “I’m black, not deaf.” As a White person, I was shocked, but my husband wasn’t. I didn’t really believe people would do that (14: 108).

Within this cultural climate of proclaiming culture to avoid misunderstanding, some non-Aboriginal people have been encouraged to follow this practice of asserting a sense of place, often by an Aboriginal officer or the Aboriginal unit within the organization.

Tara, for example, works for a government employment agency that has both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous clients. I saw an unplugged computer sitting on the floor of her office. It had a sticker of the Aboriginal flag in one corner. I asked Tara if it was her old computer that had just been replaced. Tara was non-Indigenous and from my research I knew that such ‘Indigenisation’ is often done by Aboriginal people. She replied:

No, it’s not mine. It comes from the Armadale office, from one of their Aboriginal staff members.…. In the Armadale office there is an Aboriginal flag and pictures at the reception, representations of Aboriginal art and people. Here we have just one Indigenous staff member. Our Aboriginal worker recommended the Koori Mail and there [pointing] is the [Aboriginal] picture behind you (11: 129).

Cross-cultural workers and Aboriginal officers together contribute to making non-Indigenous people aware of the cultural importance of establishing a welcoming environment through the display of such items. These free products communicate to Aboriginal clients a sense of cultural awareness in what would otherwise be a more hostile non-Aboriginal environment. Indeed, some Noongar participants have spoken about the feelings of alienation that many Aboriginal people experience in government departments.
The decoration of workplaces is primarily intended to help Noongar people to cope better with an unfamiliar setting but the goal was not to increase cross-cultural awareness to the wider community. In a society where over 97% of the population is non-Aboriginal, asserting cultural identity can become essential, especially because of the colonial past. Whereas this practice results from a cross-cultural context, it does not aim at cross-cultural communication per se; however, it points out clearly Noongar pride for their culture. Most Noongar people, and maybe all of those who acknowledge their culture, felt they are culturally different to the broader society and were happy to be in settings that recognise this difference.

It is worth noting that I also met a few non-Indigenous people who had decorated their home or workstation with free goods bearing a reference to Aboriginal affairs, people or culture (e.g. gallery opening invitation showing an Aboriginal art work). As I started my fieldwork, I saw a free Avant Card postcard pinned to the office door of a non-Indigenous academic. I asked her where she found the card and she told me it was one of those free cards available at cafes. I went to a place that I knew had a presentation case of free cards, but they did not have the card for which I was looking, so I went to the nearby cinema that also displayed them. It was not there either. I described the card (Plate 9.4) to the clerk who replied, indicating a strong dismissal toward expression of racism:

Oh, yes I know which one you mean. I got it a couple of weeks ago and put it on my fridge. I got rid of my flatmate after that. We had an argument about it. I found out she was racist (Notepad 2).

The expression of cultural awareness through the utilization of free goods can have unexpected outcomes! Nevertheless, this demonstrates that some members of the wider Australian community are committed to acknowledging the weight of Aboriginal issues. Throughout Part Three, I explore the plurality of settings that contribute differently to

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25 The decoration of the workplace with Aboriginal signifiers provided freely by most Aboriginal organizations is not the only solution to erase feelings of disempowerment associated with government buildings. Having Noongar staff members is perhaps the most important response that minimises alienation in such contexts: 'If there are no Noongar people, it feels uncomfortable. More comfortable if there are Noongar people, it's more inviting. Government places can be sterile and they can be daunting. It's nice to see a Noongar face. Here, there are 200 people and I am the only Aboriginal worker' (13: 148).

26 'Avant Card is an innovative promotional postcard printing and distribution service. ... Established in Australia since 1992, Avant Card now prints 1 million postcards per week. Clients use our service for: product and services promotion, events marketing, new product releases and launches, brand awareness, social issues and messages, profile building, community announcements, competitions and direct response such as subscriptions & reply paid cards' (www.avantcard.com.au, 14/05/2004).
raise, or otherwise in some cases, cross-cultural awareness. The free market focussed essentially on consumer satisfaction, the government took more of an educative stance, and free commodities enhance the expression of cultural identity or political awareness. By contrast, free experts talks brought to the forefront the notion that non-Aboriginal people sought for a more educative stance.

Cheryl (Noongar/Yamatji), who worked as an Aboriginal officer for a non-Indigenous organization, was the only participant who has decorated her workstation specifically to inform her non-Aboriginal colleagues:

I downloaded it [the map] from the Web [www.dia.wa.gov.au/Maps/] because it’s a source of information for people to have a look. I hung it there because it provides on the spot information to show to people different Aboriginal groups throughout the continent (3: 88).

The predicament of crossing culture: the example of customary giving

This final section illustrates some limitations on the degree to which non-Aboriginal people are willing to accommodate themselves within what they perceive to be challenging forms of cross-cultural engagement, as people found difficult notions of the Aboriginal customary economy of exchange. It also demonstrated the dialogical processes in Part Two, as Noongar participants have expressed how they feel ill at ease at discussing practices that is not at all shared by the broader Australian society.

Hinkson and Smith (2005: 157) wrote, ‘even as the imagined boundary between Aboriginal and European worlds became ever more permeable, these worlds were still separable’. Merlan (2005: 175) has also pointed out that ‘modes of practice differ; frames for action and modes of thought differ.’ I now discuss how cultural domains are observable in the use of free commodities, which increase awareness of those people who are moving between the two cultural worlds. This is, however, limited to a handful of participants who have very close cross-cultural connections—often family linkages.

From participants’ comments, it is apparent that there are some cultural differences in the degree of comfort Aboriginal and non-Indigenous family members feel in taking things for free from other kin. Non-monetary transactions of goods or services in a domestic setting occur mainly through help and assistance (i.e. providing
accommodation for kin, food, clothes). They are potent acts that make people aware that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people maintain some distinct social practices, two different cultures. The customary economy provides an additional means to gain cultural awareness, but this only occurs for participants who have close cross-cultural engagements; however, it also shows some difficulties in accepting a ‘foreign’ cultural practice that challenge people’s sense of etiquette and the notion of a well-mannered behaviour.

The customary practice of giving material possessions to kin relatives is fully disengaged from pleasing the consumers of the purchased goods as this was fully evident with commercial enterprises, but to a less extent with government opportunities. Nevertheless, workshops, for example, are still concerned with the well-being of their attendees and communicate cultural awareness on the content of intercultural knowledge. Whereas some attendees were very distressed to learn about coercive past policies, about the physical and psychological consequences of the removal of children, the practice of delivering knowledge in a workshop was not deeply culturally disturbing. None of the participants ever mentioned this issue. By contrast, participants explained how they found it difficult to feel comfortable with the customary practice of giving cross-culturally. This may underscore that the economy constrains cross-cultural engagements. In other words, customary giving provides an opportunity for gaining some Noongar/Aboriginal cross-cultural awareness that people have found deeply challenging and such experiences never occur in the two other settings.

During my fieldwork, some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants mentioned that they had to adjust to the Noongar/Aboriginal practice of giving as opposed to the non-Indigenous practice. Sharing among kin is a feature of Aboriginal cultures around Australia, and some non-Aboriginal people are unwilling to incorporate this strong cultural ethos of sharing and giving. While Weiner (1992: 6) wrote, ‘Some things, like most commodities, are easy to give. But there are other possessions that are ... not easy to give away.... these inalienable possessions are kept...’; she observed that ‘the Aboriginal cosmology is a fertile source of inalienable possessions’ (Weiner 1992: 11). I now show through several respondents’ comments that some material possessions that might be easy to give within one cultural context might not be in another one.
Anna is a non-Indigenous woman who was raised on a farm in the Wheatbelt region. She worked in Perth, and then in the Kimberley, where she met her husband, who is from the Nyikina language group (West Kimberley). She has lived in Darwin and Alice Springs, travelled around Australia and is now settled in Perth. Anna became familiar with Aboriginal cultures through her work and her marriage. She reflected on the giving-sharing aspect of Nyikina culture:

I had a lot of contact with my husband’s family, and still do. One of the cultural differences was the way people are not materialistic, very giving of extended family, everyone looking after everybody. If aunts and uncles were coming into town, they were helped, looked after. I admire it, but I found it hard that the money is not paid back, it is more given (11: 58).

Emma (45 years-old) is Yamatji, but she grew up in Perth. Since she was a child she understood that her parents’ way of living was different from that of her uncles and aunts. Both of her parents were working, she had her own bedroom, there were only four people living at her home, her parents were buying new clothes—unlike many Aboriginal people who wear second-hand clothes. However, she learnt early that she had to share:

In our family, there are just two kids. My mother married at 17. She had no kids for four years and this was unusual in an Aboriginal family.... I like it on holidays, with ten kids around, it’s never lonely. If you went to my cousins’ house, there were always a lot of people.... I didn’t have my own bedroom.... I learnt the obligation of not turning away the family just because I didn’t want to share my bedroom or my belongings (9: 30).

People with cross-cultural kin have gained an understanding of the different practices and how demanding these can sometimes be, as cross-cultural engagement requires some adaptation. Greg is a non-Aboriginal man who mentioned to me that his non-Indigenous teenage daughter finds it to adapt to her Wongai (Eastern Goldfields) cousins’ approach to personal property. The teenager could not accommodate the customary Wongai practice of sharing with kin. One day, when her uncle J. (married to a Wongai woman) came to visit:

My daughter rang me and said, ‘Can you pick me up? J. is here with all the cousins, they want to take my clothes, make a mess, take the place over’ (12: 85).

Greg also indicated to me that his brother J. has faced a difficult dilemma regarding the Aboriginal practice of giving and taking from relatives:

If a kinsman has money, everyone has the right to share it. When J. got married, he lived in town and other people were coming in to sleep there, they had the right to eat the food in the fridge. I remember talking to J., that either his wife had to make a break with her culture, or he had to accept significant changes (12: 84).
As this social feature is not part of the mainstream Australian way of life, it has become a significant marker of cultural difference. It is a practice that some Noongar people find difficult to talk about with their non-Aboriginal friends—it is, indeed, an aspect of contemporary Noongar tradition that does not enter the intercultural body of knowledge. Julia, for example, is a forty-year-old Noongar woman. She switches on a regular basis between Noongar and non-Indigenous cultures. She engages through both her work and her friends with non-Indigenous people, while most of her kin are Noongar. Julia says that she finds it difficult to talk about her Noongar obligation to give to her kin, even with her best friend, who is from an Albanian background. Julia felt non-Indigenous people would not understand the rationality of her actions. As Julia and her partner are comfortable, but not well-off, constant requests for money, goods and assistance impact directly on their disposable income. As Julia said, this is sometimes very draining, but there is no escape, as it is a cultural practice.

In a similar vein, Maggie, a Noongar woman in her early thirties, told me that her family came to camp in her house when she was a child. She had thought that she could not bring her non-Indigenous friends home because she was ashamed—even though she was fully at ease with her Noongar friends. She added that her non-Indigenous friends probably would not have minded, but she just felt embarrassed because this was not part of their culture.

This practice of customary economy is often difficult for non-Aboriginal people to appreciate. For example, I distributed an early version of this section to some UWA postgraduates as part of the ‘Postgraduate Reading Group’. Among three people who came back to me with comments, one wrote, ‘Is this about the notion of free gifts or theft, which is how I see it?’ Indeed, some cultural practices (those which are not part of the intercultural discourse) are not always easy to discuss with outsiders, and these problematic cross-cultural issues may often remain silently exercised, with very few knowledgeable outsiders being aware of them. Whereas this section illustrates that Noongar, and more generally Aboriginal, practices of giving-taking may remain outside

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27 For Noongar support between kin, see Toussaint (1987: 88-9) and Birdsall (1990: 228-232) regarding sleeping arrangements at home.
the intercultural body of knowledge, it shows the need to consider different economic settings in order to understand the complexity and the plurality of opportunities through which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people engage with each others. I suggest that monetary transactions constrain cultural awareness, as people are unlikely to purchase something that deeply challenges them culturally, and puts them in a situation of being ill-at-ease. Indeed, the commercial enterprises tend to satisfy their customers in order to increase their demand of goods and services. Federal and State governments fund opportunities for cross-cultural engagements and seem to be less concerned with the appreciations of their audiences than commercial businesses were. However, looking at my research findings, it appears that only the non-monetary transactions I have discussed in this section, have provided this kind of strong and antagonist responses from participants.

Some non-Aboriginal people who also have the cultural obligation of sharing with their kin may engage rather more favourably with this practice. Jalal was born in Iran and migrated to Australia in his thirties. Jalal was proud of asserting a cultural proximity with Noongar people, with whom he is working, by mentioning the obligation of kin giving:

There are similarities with the culture of Aboriginal people and my own cultural background: the extended family brings a collectivist culture as opposed to Western individualism. In my culture, we have an obligation of sharing. For individualist based-cultures, family dependence doesn’t make sense, but it does for Aboriginal culture and also for my own culture (13: 71).

Jalal set his culture in opposition to what he terms the ‘Anglo-Australian way’, which he resents because:

A lot of Anglo-Australians have racist attitudes. I was ready to merge in Australian culture, but in vain. I had to stick with my own identity. I’ll never be considered as an Australian (13: 72).

Reflecting further on bringing cross-cultural awareness through customary transactions, I now recall one of my own experiences. Carol, a Ngaanyatjarra friend, commented one day on a gift-wrapped pot plant that was sitting on the middle of my dining room table, ‘Did somebody bring that when they came to dinner, because we don’t do that?’ We then discussed ‘thank you’ gifts, which are not part of Ngaanyatjarra culture. A couple of years later, Carol invited me to stay with her and her classificatory sister. She knew

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28 See also Chapter Three, Coskun’s story.
that at this time, I had no idea of the cultural protocols associated with staying with members of an Aboriginal family living on their remote homeland, so she suggested I bring some second-hand blankets and second-hand clothes as gifts for her mothers and aunties. I took her guidance, and whenever we visited a relative or they visited us, she would prompt me when to make a gift. My experience with Carol highlighted to me that such opportunities for cultural awareness require a degree of personal interaction.

To restate, non-Aboriginal participants who discussed these cultural differences associated with giving had close friendships or family linkages with Aboriginal people. Looking at my data, it seems that such cultural awareness had not resulted from interactions occurring within the market economy, where customers seek their own satisfaction—which is what motivates their purchases (e.g. Kotler 2006 on consumers’ behaviour). The free market setting has not given opportunity for people to experience the practice of customary exchange, nor government funded opportunities. The communication of Noongar culture discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight shows that the content of cultural awareness was, to some extent, socially accepted by the broader society.

Whereas I wrote in Chapter Two, reflecting on my own experience, that engaging cross-cultural in an everyday basis can generate a disorientating feeling (that I named the washing machine syndrome), I have focussed the thesis on analysing the processes that influence the interface (political economic and cultural). In Chapter Seven, I have shown that the communication of Noongar/Aboriginal cultures to the wider community by the media has been unsuccessful because commercial enterprises have been constrained by the free market economy. Private businesses seek to optimise their revenue by maximising their number of consumers—in the case of the media this was achieved by satisfying the expectation of broad audiences. In Chapter Eight, I have illustrated that the State and Federal governments are funding some projects that allows Noongar/ Aboriginal people to communicate their culture(s) (e.g. workshops, schools); as well as some non-Aboriginal people who aimed at increasing the cultural awareness of the broader Australian society (e.g. the 175 years exhibition). A number of government-funded opportunities are often conducted in consultation with the Noongar community that demonstrate a commitment to cultural respect. In Chapter Nine, I observed the divergence in motivation between Noongar/Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
people to bring to the forefront element of Noongar culture. The last section of this chapter provided me with an opportunity to illustrate not just the difficulty of engaging cross-culturally, but also to indicate that I have only focussed on some aspects of Noongar/Aboriginal cultural awareness. I suggest there are probably many other cross-cultural processes and features that will require further investigation.
Chapter Nine — Cross-cultural dialogues through non-monetary consumption
Chapter Ten — Conclusion: exploring the multiple determinants of intercultural dialogue

By drawing on the concepts of structure and agency, by investigating the co-construction of an intercultural body of knowledge, and by highlighting the various constraints imposed by the Australian economy, I have sought to comprehend the multiple factors involved in articulating cross-cultural communication and its reception. I have examined the processes through which non-Aboriginal people have been gaining an awareness of Noongar (or, more generally in some cases, the broader Aboriginal) culture. This case study of Noongar/non-Aboriginal interactions sheds light on recognising that the way non-Aboriginal people are learning and experiencing Noongar cultural awareness is dependent on their own cultural values and on Australian politico-economic structures, all of which act in concert with people exercising their agency. From my data, I observed that it is only by taking into consideration the plurality of these forces that I could apprehend the social processes at stake in producing contemporary cultural relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in an Australian city. As I noted in the Introduction, I do not suggest that any one of these forces is more significant than any other.

A plurality of interrelated influences

I graphically illustrated the objectives of the thesis by providing a diagram representing each of the three factors as an equal wedge of a pie. This was, indeed, solely a heuristic device that allowed me to illustrate the plurality of influences. I now gather these three parts together as a means of emphasising that the processes I have discussed throughout the thesis are not independent determinants but, rather, individual components interacting within a complex situation—the engagement between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people (Figure 10.1).

I found case studies to be the most potent means of revealing some details of the underlying socio-cultural patterns. I, therefore, now refer to an example I encountered during my fieldwork. It illustrates clearly unity of the societal processes represented in the diagram and reiterates my understanding that the three parts I discussed throughout
the thesis are all relevant and mutually influencing in the broader processes of Noongar/non-Aboriginal interactions.

The case study comprised six government workshops that people attended in order to learn about Aboriginal cultures. The workshops were organised by a government department for those working for a number of State Government agencies. It took place because the state is committed to increasing cultural awareness (Part Three). Indeed, I have illustrated that State and Federal governments are funding projects that help to communicate Noongar, and more generally Aboriginal, cultures to the wider community. By contrast to commercial businesses, market viability is not the prime concern for the initiatives of most governments, as they are not constrained by the same need for economic profit. Australian governments have the monetary power to educate people and facilitate programs that enhance such opportunities. In terms of structure and agency, discussed in Part One, the workshop occurred because of the over-arching structure (i.e. the Australian government) that allowed it to take place by funding it. However, participation was left to people’s personal desire to enrol; in other words, they exercised their own agency. Part One has demonstrated that some cross-cultural engagements can occur without politico-economic structures to prompt them; however, this is not to understate the observation that participants’ agency can be highly constrained by the structural opportunities— that is, in this particular context, the funding of cultural awareness workshops provided by the State Government.

As I noted in the Introduction, the analysis of the economic settings discussed in Part Three specifies in greater detail some of the structural constraints that I outlined in Part One. For example, in Chapter Three, the stories of Sarah (Story Three) and Leila (Story Ten) concern the issue of Aboriginal education, a topic that I discussed in further detail in Chapter Eight when I investigated government-funded opportunities. In a comparable manner, the aspect of the cultural structure referred to in Part One was investigated in Part Two. For example, the story of Jo (Story Four) dealt with a non-Aboriginal person being given, at one of these workshops, affiliation to the Whale Dreaming. This is an unusual, yet expressive, illustration of how such a feature of Noongar spirituality is part of an intercultural body of knowledge that some non-Aboriginal people appreciated (as discussed in Chapter Five, Part Two). More broadly, the kind of knowledge communicated by Noongar people at these workshops provides me with elements of the
Figure 10.1 Visual representation of the three components of the thesis
material I was able to use to define the intercultural body of knowledge, and to illustrate the need for a common ground of understanding, the co-construction of which was discussed throughout Part Two. It is on the basis of what I discussed in Part Two that Noongar people successfully assert cross-culturally the strength of Noongar culture.

To summarise, the thesis has been organised in three parts, each of which highlights an aspect of the broader process of cross-cultural engagement. Indeed, the cultural interface occurs because some individuals have the aspiration to make it eventuate; however, this is possible only within cultural and economic constraints. The different forces that drive the Australian economy, as I have analysed, influence this over-arching structure, which itself prompts cross-cultural interaction. The interface produces (and requires) the existence of a shared body of cultural knowledge that is the subject matter of cross-cultural communication; this latter occurs, or is maintained, only because of this common ground of understanding. In other words, individuals have aspirations (Part One), prompted by economic factors (suggested in Part One, analysed in Part Three), but the interface brings into existence the shared knowledge (Part Two), resulting from the cultural communication by Noongar people, and its reception by non-Aboriginal people. These complex processes cannot be reduced solely to an assertion of Noongar culture. Intercultural knowledge depends on dialogical engagements between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people who all shared an interest in the notion of Noongar culture: asserting its strength for Noongars whereas non-Aboriginal participants sought to learn something about an Aboriginal culture.

**Methods and analysis**

Reflecting on the material collected during my fieldwork, I aimed to understand the factors that shape cross-cultural engagements between people, all of whom are repositories of different sets of experiences, values, practices and cultural beliefs. As I discussed in the beginning section of Chapter Two, my fieldwork methodology was strongly influenced by the discussion of multi-sited ethnographies by Marcus (1995). I conducted my fieldwork with the notion in mind that social processes are located within particular contexts that are sometimes highly specific: ‘tourism’, ‘art’, ‘government departments’, ‘everyday life’ and the ‘media’. Looking at a common thread to grapple with the plurality of these social contexts, and the processes influencing each of them, I
came to a realisation that the influence of the Australian economy was actually more potent than the theme of each separate setting in which intercultural dialogue occurs (i.e. tourism, art, media). Reflecting on my tertiary education background in economics and business, I understood that the matrix at stake was more economic than thematic (e.g. media versus art). For example, there was more commonality amongst public broadcasters, government-funded art exhibitions and government workshops (Chapter Eight) than there was between public broadcasting and commercial media, albeit these originally were included under the same analytical rubric of 'media'. Consequently, I dealt with commercial media in Chapter Seven, which discussed the issue of the free-market economy in regard to broadcasting of Aboriginal themes. There, I argued that economic factors imposed on these commercial channels tend to produce negative stories, whereas there is still an under-representation in regard to positive ones. From my discussions with some journalists, it became clear that the media do not intend to be 'racist' per se; however, in order to maintain their flow of revenue, the commercial media are predominantly broadcasting negative coverage about Aboriginal affairs and, by doing so, may enhance racial antagonism.

The fact that the media tend to encourage negative views about Aboriginal Australia seems to be a consequence of the financial constraints that drive the media, rather than their intention of being harmful to the interests of Noongar and, more generally, Aboriginal people. It was on the basis of such research findings, put into perspective with other aspects of my data, that I have come to understand how economic constraints influence cross-cultural engagements. Although a common thread was provided by the wider constraints imposed by the Australian economy on cross-cultural engagements, for which I had enough material in itself to write a thesis, I was unwilling to ignore the two other factors that appeared to be also highly influential in the analysis of the cultural interface.

As I briefly noted in Chapter Two, I started most of my field-discussions by encouraging people to talk about their own experiences and their own understandings of cross-cultural engagements. Out of numerous people with whom I engaged cursorily at many events, functions and the like, all of the 158 participants were affable in responding to my requests, and spoke openly about what they did. Analysing their conversations, I came to understand that the cultural-politico-economic structures were
more than just an underlying feature. Certainly, such structures seem to have strongly influenced people’s actions, as I discussed in Chapter Three. Participants are embracing surrounding opportunities and re-interpreting them in order to exercise their personal agency. Participants have spoken about different standpoints and varied sets of experiences; how they were juggling between their personal insights, the opportunities presented to them, and their own aspirations. With the twelve stories of Chapter Three, I attempted to unpack the complex relationships between structure and agency (Giddens 1982, 1984; Archer 2000; Layder 1981; Elster 1989). The stories of Part One illustrate that some cross-cultural engagements have occurred without social structures to prompt them; how some participants have chosen to participate in social structures that enhance cross-cultural engagement as soon as they had the opportunity to do so; how some participants brought to the forefront their cultural identity to assert either sympathy or antagonism toward Aboriginal people. I also show that the reproduction of cross-cultural communication is influenced by people’s agency—that is, the individual’s commitment to cultural communication. However, one of the stories argues that a structure that no longer exists can influence people’s agency today. The last four stories turned to examine how Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people negotiate their identities with each other whilst engaging cross-culturally.

I could have focussed my discussion just on these two elements, which were, on the one hand, people’s actions and, on the other, the analysis of the social structure, which I understood as being economically driven. I mentioned in the Introduction that culture and structure are of a similar nature. How, therefore, could I have analysed cross-cultural engagements without looking at cultural meanings that were being exchanged between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people? Moreover, my fieldwork was centred on the communication of Noongar culture to non-Aboriginal audiences. I was engaging extensively with non-Aboriginal people who sought an understanding of Noongar culture. During my fieldwork, I repeatedly attended events that aimed at increasing cross-cultural awareness. How, therefore, could I ignore the body of knowledge that was communicated and received, as it was such an important part of my data? Could I argue about cross-cultural dialogue without talking of the cross-cultural meaning associated with the notion of Noongar spirituality, Noongar language and the like, as discussed in Part Two?
Beyond ‘domains’: ‘culture’ as an intercultural dialogue

As I noted in my Introduction, Geertz (1973: 5) observed the importance of meaning in defining the concept of culture: ‘The concept of culture I espouse... is... not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.’ In the context of the Australian Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interface, Merlan (1998, 2005) noted the importance of the notion of meaning in discussing the ‘intercultural’, by referring to Sahlins’s (1976) idea of approaching culture as ‘a system of meaning’, for which she suggested: ‘Meaning values exist in relation to each other rather than directly to “the world”’ (Merlan 2005: 173). Cross-cultural interactions between Noongar and non-Aboriginal people concern economically driven settings. The range of social opportunities available to people, however, communicates meaning because there is ‘meaning’ in cultural knowledge; consequently, this request for cultural meaning shapes the content of the intercultural body of knowledge. I discussed in Part Two how the body of knowledge exchanged at the cultural interface has meaning for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. This is a co-constructed knowledge that concerns the six themes discussed over three chapters.

Reflecting on the field data included in the thesis, I now review the subject matter of culture that I started to discuss in the Introduction. First of all, it was clear through the diversity of material provided in my ethnographic recordings, that the notion of culture is now brought to the forefront—and this is, as I suggested in the Introduction, not restricted to Aboriginal people alone. It appears that many people, from very different backgrounds, are now talking about culture as a means of asserting their sense of identity in what may appear to be the globally connected world of the 21st century. I noted that this even includes such example as naming a shop Kitchen Culture in order to indicate its retail focus. However, in regard to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social relations, the notion of culture seems to have significant implications. Indeed, portraying aspects of culture can be seen as a means to increase the recognition of the Noongar community by the wider public. In other words, the assertion of Noongar culture to the broader Australian community allows Noongar people to position
themselves in a way that was much less common, or even entirely unthought of, only a few decades ago as, for example, Elizabeth explained in her story (Part One).

Elizabeth’s story exemplifies my notion that the relationships between structure and agency also contribute to the reproduction of Noongar culture. She is aware that having a Noongar cultural identity is valued amongst at least some people, her ‘cultural friends’ as she put it, with whom she shares cultural knowledge. Elizabeth uses the surrounding opportunities that are provided by the State Government to communicate cultural knowledge to the wider society. Because past policies have imposed cultural disruptions in the trans-generational transmission of Noongar culture, she consults Elders, since these are the individuals who are seen by the Noongar community as holders of cultural knowledge and the people who define the content of knowledge that can be communicated. In other words, as it was in the pre-contact past (albeit the context appears to be now cross-cultural), the Elders hold the key to cultural reproduction. The cultural reproduction of Noongar society is now linked with the expectations of non-Aboriginal people, because it now lies in the cross-cultural context of such issues as Reconciliation and Native Title claims.

In this thesis, I have not focused my argument on cultural continuities, even though there are clearly enduring cultural features that have persisted from the time of researchers’ observations in the late fifties (e.g. Wilson 1958; Tonkinson 1962) to my own. There have also been disjunctions in knowledge between these periods, as Elizabeth spoke of in her story. I have not been trying to grasp the politics of culture from an approach that privilege the idea of continuity. Instead, I have analysed the nature of processes occurring at the interface by taking the notion of culture for granted (whether in terms of ‘continuity’ or ‘revitalisation’). Whereas I did not foreground the notion of cultural continuity, this was due to the intellectual focus of my thesis and did not result from any romantic approach to indigeneity. My dissertation is well embedded in the contemporary politics of culture, and I made clear in Parts One, Two and Three that Noongar people are gaining broader recognition because of the surrounding opportunities that facilitate the interface.

I have illustrated that the assertion and reception of a distinct Noongar cultural identity have been occurring through a plurality of factors. This thesis provides some answers to
the question of the conditions that are required for the assertion of Noongar culture and how non-Aboriginal people respond—that is, the notion of structures that prompt individuals' actions, the constraints of the economy that facilitate or limit the communication of Noongar cultural awareness, and the intercultural body of knowledge that is co-constructed from both communicators' and recipients' cultures. It is through the notion of the intercultural body of knowledge that I have come to understand some of the processes influencing the definition of the knowledge exchanged with 'outsiders'. There is a paradox here in regard to the notion of the 'intercultural'. On the one hand, I have shown the need for finding a common ground of understanding in order to facilitate the interface, as people understand better each other when they hold something in common. On the other hand, this commonality is also a means to foreground cultural differences.

I have been focussing on the ways that non-Aboriginal people are receiving Noongar cultural knowledge. I have sought to understand the processes enacted in communicating Noongar culture to non-Indigenous audiences, seeking to apprehend how non-Aboriginal people may be more or less receptive to some features rather than others, according to their own respective cultural backgrounds. Indeed, in the politics of culture—that is, here, the assertion of cultural differences and its negotiation with non-Indigenous Australians—Noongar people have underlined unambiguously these differences. In Part Two, I aimed to comprehend the content of this body of knowledge by investigating the processes that influence non-Aboriginal understandings of Noongar culture. The idea of tradition, for example, constitutes an arena of knowledge that is recognisable as 'cultural' by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, despite its emphasis on the past. It denies certain aspects of modernity (or change) and seeks to represent a 'timeless' culture that is set apart from non-Aboriginal influences (see Trigger 1997 and Merlan 2006 for similar comments in other areas of Australia).

Part Two provided a template that facilitates an understanding of how non-Aboriginal people appreciate Aboriginal cultural features that are communicated to them by Aboriginal people when, for example, the latter engage cross-culturally. In my conceptualisation of the intercultural body of knowledge, within which the politics of cultural assertion occurs, I explored the theoretical terrain by investigating a plurality of cultural features that were often brought to the forefront when Noongar people were
asserting their identity as being different to that of the broader society yet, simultaneously, seeking a broader public cultural recognition.

I demonstrated the role of the over-arching Australian-non-Indigenous cultures in order to understand how the intercultural body of knowledge is constructed during cultural dialogues between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. I have shown that some cultural features and practices seem to be more readily apprehended than others. An example of this is the use of Noongar language or of individual Noongar words. Although Noongar language is not spoken in everyday life as a means of communication, Aboriginal English is. Indeed, this is probably a more readily observable expression of a strong cultural difference from the wider society, but was not perceived as an expression of ‘real’ Noongar culture by non-Aboriginal people. This sentiment was evident in some of my ethnographic accounts; however, in Chapter Four I referred to a participant who felt that Aboriginal English is ‘a disadvantage to achieve economic success’ and did not appreciate the cultural and identity issues of Aboriginal English. For her, Noongar language was the only language that should be encouraged within the Noongar community. This attitude was pervasive with many non-Indigenous people as they responded much more positively to the use of Noongar words by learning what they regard as a ‘legitimate’ cultural feature. This section illustrated that non-Indigenous people accept Noongar words as being a signifier of ‘culture’; by contrast, Aboriginal English was only seen as a way of speaking.

I have demonstrated that Noongar participants have sought to gain a wider cultural recognition and, in some cases, they have been concerned that the wider Australian society continues to marginalise them without recognising their needs—an issue that is offset, for example, by the presence of Aboriginal iconography and Aboriginal staff members in certain organisational settings (Part Three). This concern illustrates that memories of past discrimination may still cast a shadow on the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface. However, many of the non-Aboriginal people whom I met were very keen to acknowledge and recognise Noongar culture as an essential part of South-West Australian cultural landscape, and expressed a keen willingness to learn about it. Indeed, I have observed a strong sense of cultural consciousness amongst many Noongar and non-Aboriginal participants: that is, a shared desire to acknowledge Noongar culture. The intentions of these participants diverged because their cultural
standpoints were different (as Nakata 2007 discussed this notion of cultural standpoint in relation to the Torres Islander/non-Indigenous interface), but it appears that many of these had a comparable level of interest in engaging with Noongar culture; thus I worked essentially with people seeking to be involved in cross-cultural engagements.

As Alan noted, in Story Twelve in Part One, 'The White people are becoming disenchanted with the White system, and are looking for anybody to be an example. It's time for Aboriginal people to reach the White community...'. Alan concluded, 'Australia needs to respect Noongar culture, to give recognition to traditional owners and respect the Elders'. From his perspective, it appears that non-Aboriginal people are seeking something emerging from their sense of disenchantment, while Noongar people are more orientated towards achieving recognition of their culture. I dealt with this issue further in Chapter Nine, where I investigated the issue of non-monetary consumption. There, I illustrated that Noongar and non-Aboriginal motivations for participating in the cultural interface are slightly divergent; an account that I could not identify so clearly when I analysed the optimisation of economic performances imposed on commercial enterprises by the free-market or various government opportunities, which facilitate communication of cultural awareness to non-Aboriginal listeners. In Chapter Nine, I argue that Noongar people have a strong sense of their culture being different to the broader Australian culture and some participants have asserted this with pride. Bearing in mind such cultural consciousness is essential in understanding Noongar motivations to be involved in the interface. In Part Two, have illustrated how the intercultural knowledge results from some overlapping and shared concerns (Figure 1.3). I am far from suggesting that Noongar and non-Aboriginal motivations in engaging cross-culturally are identical; indeed, they are different. For example, non-Aboriginal participants enjoyed learning about selected elements of Noongar culture (Noongar language, past tradition) and Noongar participants seemed more focussed on achieving cultural recognition rather than solely fulfilling a philanthropic interest in teaching their culture. This is essential in understanding the content of the intercultural as I suggest it emerged because people have strong interests in the notion of culture. In other words, non-Aboriginal people seek knowledge that is specifically Noongar, and Noongar communicate it as it suits their agenda of being culturally recognised. By contrast, failure in the communication processes may halt the recognition of Noongar culture by the broader society; this failure may also frustrate non-Aboriginal people who are keen
to learn something that is identifiable as being ‘Noongar culture’. This is essential in understanding the content of the intercultural and the politics of the cultural interface.

Some issues remain unaddressed in this thesis, however. As I noted in the Introduction, I have chosen not to investigate how Noongar culture shapes the intercultural body of knowledge: the issue of how Noongar people are incorporating non-Aboriginal cultural features into the intercultural or how Noongar people define the knowledge that is communicated, for example. I have constrained, for reasons of space and time, the definition of the intercultural body of knowledge by focussing on non-Aboriginal responses to this process. In other words, I solely analyse the nature of the non-Aboriginal cultural standpoint in defining the communication of Noongar culture—the kind of knowledge pushed to the foreground within the cultural interface.

Trigger (1997: 100) observed that culture became a ‘currency’ in the politics Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal negotiations over land, government projects and mining. He suggested that the idea of ‘culture’ could be used to ‘assert indigenous rights’ (p. 84) and that it ‘distinguishes [Aboriginal people] unambiguously from other Australians’ (p. 87). This notion of ‘culture’ as ‘currency’ is a metaphor that resonates within my own research, since it clearly articulates the idea of ‘culture’ circulating between parties during a transaction or negotiation. Broadly speaking, a currency acts as a medium in a transaction. Following the economic metaphor, how can we understand most effectively the factors that influence the efficiency of such a currency?

There is little doubt, as I noted in the Introduction, that the notion of ‘culture’ has dominated contemporary discourse of inter-ethnic engagements and, moreover, as Trigger (1997: 90) observed in the Gulf country, there is a ‘growing local political consciousness about identity and “culture”’. However, the processes through which ‘culture’ is negotiated have been understudied. For example, Merlan (1998, 2005) foregrounded the concept of the ‘intercultural’, discussing the way in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people perceived the myth of the Rainbow Snake at Katherine, Northern Territory. However, Merlan did not focus her research on analysing the plurality of cultural themes that are often emphasised during cultural negotiations. In Part Two, I focussed on investigating methodically which Noongar cultural features are understood by the wider Australian society (e.g. Noongar language, Dreaming stories, history) and
which remain largely unspoken (e.g. Noongar kinship) and the reasons for this. Having in common topics on which to articulate cross-cultural engagements and cultural negotiations is fundamental, in order to obtain agreement (cultural recognition), which is essential to obtain government funding for cultural programs, to attract customers for cultural tourism or to lodge a native title claim, for example. Indeed, culture itself asserts Aboriginal politico-economic rights and is a vehicle for others to assert such rights.

I also saw ethnographic value in defining the characteristics of the parties involved in the interface—this thesis focuses on the non-Aboriginal aspect of it. So, I have aimed to determine the characteristics of these non-Aboriginal cultural recipients, such as the ‘economic profiles’ of the cultural recipients, or the ‘cultural customers’, as they may be more metaphorically termed. One element concerns commercial enterprises that seek to maximise revenues and are, therefore, likely to only engage with Aboriginal cultures when they are monetarily profitable, otherwise they tend not to. The second kind of ‘cultural recipients’ concerns the Australian government that, on the contrary, promotes a wide diversity of Aboriginal projects and enhances cross-cultural engagements. I also investigated the specific context of non-monetary consumption, which clearly indicates that the motivations of cultural ‘customers’ (non-Aboriginal) are different to those of cultural ‘providers’. Indeed, distant from the constraints of the broader Australian economy, I was able to illustrate that non-Aboriginal participants were prepared to engage in such cultural transactions as long as this does not interfere with their own priorities.

This thesis has reflected on why and how non-Aboriginal people can appreciate elements of Noongar culture. I have shown that this is not simply a matter of Noongar people establishing an authoritative communication of culture; it is also influenced by the broader Australian economy that shapes the settings, by people’s own agency within the context of the surrounding structure, as well as by non-Aboriginal understandings of Noongar culture that accord with their over-arching cultural framework. We need to understand such processes if we are to master more efficiently the politics of culture today.
Indeed, during the era of assimilation (Haebick 1988, 2008; Rowse and Nile 2005), Australian policies aimed at incorporating Noongar people, like all Aboriginal people, into the broader Australian society in a very different manner to that of contemporary thought. Aboriginal cultural practices and values were considered to be a handicap to economic and social well-being as part of the national ethos. Practising Noongar culture was not encouraged, sometimes it was even banned, and this situation applied in many areas of Australia (Rowley 1971). However, Aboriginal people have maintained their own cultural practices, as well as a sense of distinctiveness from the broader Australian society. In the 1980s researchers conceptualised these differences in cultural practices, values and beliefs in terms of an Aboriginal domain that was opposed to the non-Aboriginal domain, that which concerns the values, practices and beliefs of the broader society (Rowse 1992; Tonkinson 1978; Trigger 1992). The Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface has been analysed through either a focus on Aboriginal responses to colonialism (McGrath 1995) or an adaptation to the ‘new’ cultural and social setting imposed by the non-Aboriginal society (Kolig 1981) or through a focus on resistance (Keen 1988). In terms of Aboriginal cultures, the focus was more a matter of identifying a certain cultural continuity with a pre-colonial past or understanding the processes of cultural re-vitalisation. In the demonstration of defining Aboriginal cultures, the notion of cultural continuity has been a key feature, albeit acknowledging the notion of change that has long been accepted in anthropology (Langton 1994: 3-4; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Ritchie 1999: 268; Bergmann 2003: 45; Giddens 2003: 40), national legislation (Wright 2003: 15, 18; Avery 1993: 125), and the like. This demonstration of continuity has been clearly opposed to the notion of cultural fabrication, which has sometimes led to a heated debate, as in the case of Hindmarsh Island (Brunton 1992; Weiner 1995, 1999, 2002; Fergie 1996; Bourke 1997; Tonkinson 1997; Rose 2000; Ogle 2002).

Indeed, over the last few decades it appears that the focus has been on identifying the Aboriginal domain, or what lay people and some scholars are discussing in terms of culture at the beginning of the 21st century. In terms of politics of culture, the focus has been on getting a broader cultural recognition (Trigger 1997; Merlan 2006), which was a significant social change compared to the colonial era. My data resonate with this earlier research that asserts the maintenance of an Aboriginal domain or culture. In the contemporary context, the recognition of a distinctive Noongar culture is a means for
Noongar people to achieve broader recognition and, in some cases, to pursue revenues through tourism, government-funded projects and commercial art, for example (Myers 2002; Morphy 1991; Burns Coleman 2004; Dussart 1997; Altman 1988; Hinch and Butler 1996). In other words, it is because Noongar culture is now asserted as being something rather different to the broader Australian society that Noongar people are able to gain such recognition.

Having discussed in this thesis the input of people’s agency, and the role of the Australian economy in prompting cross-cultural engagements, I now conclude on the notion of the ‘intercultural’. Unlike the notion of domain, which I see as focussing on a sense of culture in a context of other influences (such as the non-Aboriginal presence), I suggest that the intercultural (at least in the way I approached it) is more a matter of a dialogical process, a zone of engagement that represents the dialogue between two cultures. I took for granted the notion of two cultures that I saw as equally influential in this process of defining the content of the intercultural body of knowledge. The intercultural is a zone for negotiation, where Noongar culture is set in dialogue with that of non-Aboriginal Australian culture.

As I noted in the Introduction, I investigated the intercultural body of knowledge from a non-Aboriginal standpoint. It would be, though, most appropriate for the intercultural to be also studied from a Noongar perspective—that is, how Noongar culture shapes and influences the content of Western knowledge that enters the intercultural. When I referred to a dialogue, I understood it in the way I noted in Chapter Four, where I referred to Bakhtin’s investigation of dialogical engagement (1981, 1986). As he argued (1986: 146), ‘[a]ctual contextual meaning inheres not in one (single) meaning, but only in two meanings that meet and accompany one another.’ Such dialogical interface resonates with the comments of other scholars, such as Giddens (1998: 83), who noted the importance of shared meanings in social engagement: ‘People can only act conventionally because of mutual understanding of convention’. More directly relevant to the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interface, Rummery (1995: 44) has observed in the context of Australian Native Title claims, ‘Some communication difficulties arise from cultural differences and from a lack of shared understandings.’
Chapter Ten — Conclusion: exploring the multiple determinants of intercultural dialogue

It is difficult to position the notion of ‘domain’ in respect to the intercultural. Whereas I apprehend the intercultural as being more a matter of putting the focus on dialogical engagement, I also acknowledge that understanding the position of the Aboriginal domain versus the non-Aboriginal domain only results from the existence of a cultural and social interface between the two groups, each of which has its own domain. Thus, I suggest that it is the concept of ‘how do outsiders appreciate your/my culture’ that is discussed and negotiated between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians when investigating the intercultural, whereas, to me, the focus is more on cultural continuity and change when understanding a notion of domain.

In the 21st century the concept of culture has become ‘a currency’ (Trigger 1997: 100) because ‘nowadays all culture is “power” ’ (Sahlins 2000: 507), and the notion of local identities has become more widely acknowledged. This was also argued by Sahlins (2000: 513) through his notion of the ‘indigenisation of modernity’. Whereas the search for a cultural continuity versus its antonym of the individual’s fabrication remain key values in asserting culture, another concept may now be required—that is, grappling with the way outsiders apprehend someone else’s culture as this seems to affect cultural communication and its reception (as I discussed throughout Part Two). I have argued in my Introduction that people’s cultures are now put to the forefront and I illustrated this through the Noongar/non-Aboriginal case. Indeed, Noongar people assert a sense of cultural distinctiveness and this (distinctiveness) may be fully understood only when set into perspective with the others parties for whom the claim of distinctiveness is intended. I now conclude by re-quoting the words of Clifford (1988: 14) who suggested that ‘ “[c]ultural” difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than essence’. In Cultures in Dialogue, I have aimed to analyse and appreciate some of the processes of such cultural rhetoric.
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