

# 13. A Genealogy of ‘Demand Sharing’: From pure anthropology to public policy

Jon Altman

The Australian National University

In 1993, Nicolas Peterson introduced a novel concept—‘demand sharing’—into the anthropological lexicon via his article ‘Demand sharing: reciprocity and the pressure for generosity among foragers’ (cf. Gomes, Kwok, Martin and Saethre, this volume). The article is Peterson’s most cited work,<sup>1</sup> and the concept has been quickly adopted and adapted by anthropologists in Australia and abroad. ‘Demand sharing’ has also been influential in Australia outside academic domains as it has been used to explain the absence of individual or household control over resources, thereby (partially) justifying the quarantining of Indigenous people’s welfare income by the state (on welfare, see also Martin, Ono and Saethre, this volume). In this chapter, I trace the genealogy of demand sharing since 1993 as it has evolved from a purely anthropological concept to one that is dominant in popular discourse about Indigenous Australians and that is being harnessed to legitimate actions taken by the Australian Government to improve the lives of Aboriginal subjects in the Northern Territory.

Demand sharing was initially deployed within the academy as an important corrective to the notion that hunter-gatherers today share game, cash and commodities altruistically. The term ultimately became a gloss, however, for either the dominant mode of distribution or all Aboriginal forms of sharing. Using my own ethnographic data, I critically challenge and complexify this gloss by tracing the early adoption and modification of the concept by anthropologists and its later use and transformation by other social scientists, commentators, activists, development bureaucrats and ultimately the state apparatus itself. My analysis contributes to debates about the production and reproduction of knowledge within the academy and then beyond (Foucault 2002). I also examine how the term demand sharing has been mobilised in particular forms of state governance, when normative practices of the marginalised challenge the dominant neo-liberal sensibilities that valorize the right of the individual to control resources (Hardt and Negri 2009). My focus on ethnography and the matching of interpretation with evidence honours a

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<sup>1</sup> According to Google’s *Scholar* citations index.

particular form of empirically based critical scholarship that Nicolas Peterson encouraged me to adopt when he was my principal doctoral supervisor. He facilitated my professional transformation from economist, remotely analysing secondary data, to anthropologist, collecting and analysing primary data using ethnographic methods. Peterson is also an advocate for the linking of pure anthropological work with policy applications, and one of my aims here is to show how such linking processes can occur, and some of the pitfalls when such links do not receive consistent critical interrogation.

## The New Concept of Demand Sharing

All societies need institutions for the distribution of goods and services. In general, hunter-gatherer societies have been viewed as egalitarian with limited material accumulation and associated stratification (cf. Allen, Kwok and Martin, this volume). Peterson's 1993 article is an attempt to understand how goods were distributed pre-colonially, colonially and today. He is not the first to note that distribution in hunter-gatherer societies can be hotly contested and highly political, but he is the first to highlight a form of distribution that occurs in response to direct verbal and non-verbal demands. Referring to his fieldwork among the Yolngu (Murngin) in the 1960s, Peterson describes how such spoken demands for food and other items were common. Such demanding could also be unspoken, as when one loitered close by when food was being prepared and eaten and so, in a kin-based society, indirectly indicating that one had to be included (Peterson 1993: 862). Such direct and indirect demanding is something that had been observed by other ethnographers working in contemporary Aboriginal Australia, but it was not called demand sharing. It can be readily juxtaposed with the notions of unsolicited generosity, sharing and redistribution, with Sahlins' (1972) concept of generalised reciprocity and with Hiatt's (1982) notion of generosity as the highest secular value.

Making a direct and very explicit claim for an item—as in 'give me a smoke!'—is an unusual form of request, especially in societies such as those in Arnhem Land where such direct requests can be considered 'face threatening acts' (Brown and Levinson 1978; Garde 2002: 242–3). Yet demand sharing is executed in a disarmingly aggressive manner and, as Peterson notes (1993: 862), it is commonplace behaviour in Aboriginal societies throughout Australia. Until he highlighted it as a distinct institution, however, it had been largely neglected ethnographically.

In analysing the practice ethnographically, Peterson actually focuses far more on strategies that people adopt to avoid demands than on actual instances of demanding. He examines how people are socialised to share, the relationship

between sharing and scarcity, the rich literature on game sharing according to normative rules, the exchange of non-foods and accumulation, and on the question of sharing and social relations. In his article, Peterson grapples with the reasons for the ethnographic neglect, suggesting that it might be because of particular ethical constructions Westerners place on generosity, and seeks to understand the possible economic and social roles of demand sharing within the ethnographic context.

Peterson ends his influential article by noting that demand sharing is complex behaviour. It might be in part 'testing behaviour' to establish the state of a relationship in a social system where relationships are constantly renegotiated; it might be in part 'assertive behaviour', coercing a person into making a response; it might be in part 'substantiating behaviour' to make people recognise the demander's rights; and it might be a gift, creating a status asymmetry that makes the giver both feel good and have the upper hand (cf. Gomes and Kwok, this volume). The final category—unsolicited giving—could perhaps be queried, as it would seem difficult to define such an act as demand sharing. Nevertheless, the suggestive and unresolved question in Peterson's analysis is whether demand sharing exists in diverse forms (an issue taken up later by Macdonald 2000) or whether it is one of a number of identifiable allocative institutions in Aboriginal societies. The implications of this question are important; if the term is to be used as a gloss for a range of sharing practices, the diversity of meaning must be maintained, particularly if the term is to be used extensively in policy and popular discourse.

## Demand Sharing: An ethnographic challenge

I now want to problematise Peterson from my own ethnographic perspective from western Arnhem Land, northern Australia, where Kuninjku people, with whom I have worked since 1979, hunt and distribute game, produce art for sale and distribute earnings, and where cash income from welfare and from paid work is distributed. My key contention is that demand sharing, while very evident in this society, is but one of many forms of distribution.

Among Kuninjku there is an institution that could be termed demand sharing. In the vernacular, people use the term *kan-wo* ('give it to me') followed by the name of the item claimed. I have termed this form of distribution 'direct claiming' (Altman 1987), but it is behaviourally identical to direct verbalised demand sharing.<sup>2</sup> As a normative rule, however, such direct claiming is limited only to people with whom one shares everyday space or who are close

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<sup>2</sup> In an article, co-authored with Peterson, we discuss the role of claiming among Kuninjku and what happens when normative rules are transgressed (Altman and Peterson 1988).

family or ceremonial allies or partners. This form of direct request is practised only between socially and genealogically close kin who are not in an affinal relationship of constraint (like between ego and mother-in-law) or in ritually superior positions; and, at times, with non-Aboriginal people with whom there is a degree of familiarity, but where there is little risk of embarrassment from rejection. It is most explicitly, publicly and humorously evident in reciprocal male joking relationships (see Garde 2008), as in a request such as '*Kakkak ngarduk kan-wo kun-kanj ngudda yi-berdnganabbarru*' ('my mother's mother's brother, give me meat, you with the penis of a buffalo'). In other words, the most recognisable form of sharing that would fit the term 'demand sharing' is that which occurs among a relatively clearly defined set of close kin and co-residents. There are many other forms of request including highly indirect and polite forms—some in the mother-in-law avoidance register. Murray Garde (2002: 242–4) provides examples of indirect forms of requests including false debates within earshot of requestees; or being present but saying nothing at all, hence eliciting a query: 'do you want something?' Such indirect forms of request could fit within a broader yet still relatively confined definition of Peterson's initial formulation.

In practical everyday life, most subsistence distribution or sharing occurs at the time of production, which is undertaken mainly in groups. Game is divided between all participants in a hunt, generally irrespective of who is the successful hunter. Division is undertaken according to normative customary rules with large game; and with large quantities of small game either the hunters decide on division or a senior person adjudicates and takes responsibility for handing out game that can be subsequently redistributed when either raw or cooked. Distribution is generally verbally negotiated, and there might or might not be direct prompting as part of the negotiation. This suggests that the mode of distribution cannot be isolated from production, from the nature of the product, or from the status of the hunter, especially given consumption restrictions that are linked to ritual, gender and seasonality (Altman 1987; Altman and Peterson 1988). Sharing is a complex phenomenon, and overt 'demand sharing' is only one aspect of that complexity.

Besides direct claiming and division at the point of production, a further form of sharing can be termed unsolicited giving. *Kan-won* or 'giving' is often linked to affection for family and mutual obligation; giving because 'we are feeling compassion for each other' (*karri-worren bu karri-konggiburren*) (Murray Garde, personal communication, 20 July 2008). At times people go to great lengths and much personal cost and effort to make unsolicited prestations, sometimes leaving a large piece of meat or a spare feral pig for kin, and people might transport game over great distances, generally in vehicles, to kinfolk residing elsewhere (see Altman and Hinkson 2007). Such gifts might be left anonymously as an

unexpected surprise, although for the recipient the identity of the giver will usually come from a limited field of possibilities. This kind of sharing clearly does not easily fit within a standard definition of demand sharing.

A second clearly identifiable form of sharing behaviour is perhaps closer to current meanings given to Peterson's term. People can make incessant demands, generally referred to in Aboriginal English as 'humbugging' or in Kuninjku as *-kilekme* ('to fiddle with, to take hold of, to interfere with'); *ngan-kilekmeng* refers to being taken hold of, interfered with, having one's peace and autonomy invaded (Murray Garde, personal communication, 20 July 2008; cf. Martin and Saethre, this volume). Such aggressive demanding relies on the fact that refusing to give is regarded as socially embarrassing. In order to avoid the embarrassment, people prefer to lie creatively rather than give an outright denial to the person making the demand. Lying to close kin might seem to represent a negative element of the practice of sharing, but there is a degree to which such deflection is permitted especially when the sharing protocols are being exploited by a persistent drunk imbued with aggression. It is this last image that has had significant traction in recent policy debates, and has contributed to sharing being defined as 'the problem' in policy terms.

My main point here is that demand sharing or direct claiming is but one of many institutions for distribution. From my field observations, it is most commonly exercised in situations where surpluses are very visible, as when someone is smoking a cigarette and presumably has more, or when someone has a wad of cash, or an excess of hunted game, so a demand creates not embarrassment but rather, when met, social closeness or solidarity. In other circumstances, sharing is shaped by conventions, by the authority of elders, or by deflection of the unwanted request, to cite just a few examples.

From his 1993 analysis, it would seem that Peterson and I are in fundamental agreement on two counts. First, there is a range of sharing practices that could be identified with the term demand sharing. Second and more importantly, there is nothing inherently negative about the practice, as Peterson (1993: 870) notes: 'the morality of demand sharing is as positive as that of generosity.' Nevertheless, we are at odds on one important count. Peterson (1993: 862) notes that there is no measure of the frequency of demand sharing as opposed to unsolicited giving, yet he begins his article by noting that '[d]espite the prevalence of an ethic of generosity among foragers, *much* sharing is by demand rather than unsolicited giving' (Peterson 1993: 860, my emphasis), and later: 'Why do recipients *often* have to demand generosity?' (p. 860, my emphasis). I query the 'much' and the 'often' because Peterson gives us no sense of how he has evaluated the relative proportions to arrive at these statements. My field observations of the every day among Kuninjku suggests that most sharing occurs within the household and that social constraints on demand sharing from a significant portion of one's social universe structurally limit the extent that such practice is possible.

## Disciplinary Adoption

Just as Peterson (1993: 861) ponders why anthropologists ethnographically under-reported demand sharing before him (at least as an explicit institutional form), I ponder why so many anthropologists since have overemphasised this institution, often leaving the impression, with far greater certainty than Peterson, that it is the only mode of distribution in contemporary Aboriginal Australia. This suggests to me that others who, like me, have seen that his concept has intuitive appeal as a means to explain and to simplify a complex social phenomenon, have not paid enough attention to the qualifications he made in his formulation.

Let me demonstrate the issue of change in emphasis with some highlighting using italics. Only two years after Peterson's article, David Martin (1995: 9) notes the role of pressure in the sharing of resources and states 'Peterson (1993) has argued that such "demand sharing" underlies *much* of social transaction in Aboriginal societies'. Martin, drawing as Peterson did on the work of Fred Myers sees such practices in terms of the unresolved tension between autonomy and relatedness. Schwab (1995: 8) notes that 'Aboriginal people *often* say that sharing is a fundamental and inflexible feature of Aboriginal culture. Yet... seldom does generosity spring spontaneously from the recognition of need, *more often* it is sought or demanded from another party.' Julie Finlayson, Anne Daly and Diane Smith (2000: 45) note that '[t]he cultural mechanism of demand sharing, by which cash, resources, and other forms of practical assistance are exchanged and redistributed within and across households, *is well established* in Indigenous communities', and is based as much on a strategic calculation of reciprocity as on altruism. Musharbash (2000: 59) is a little more circumspect and notes that '[i]n the anthropological literature, the term "demand sharing" is used to describe important cultural practices relating to resource distribution... Resources like money, food, and clothes are seen not only as personal possessions, but also as social capital, because to have them has clear social entailments.'

I use these four illustrative examples in part because the anthropologists among them (Anne Daly is an economist) were all students of Peterson at one time or another. I also use them because the papers were all written at the intersection of anthropology and public policy, to inform and influence policy makers (the writers were employed, at one time or another, at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research [CAEPR] at The Australian National University, with all these works published by the centre). Unfortunately, it proved too easy for users of these texts to unproblematically conflate the broad notion of kin-based distribution with demand sharing, so that Peterson's (1993: 860) '*much* sharing is by demand' inadvertently becomes '*all* sharing is by demand' (my emphases).

Of equal significance, the notion of demand sharing has increasingly been imbued with moral dimensions, positive and negative. On the positive side, demand sharing can be a mechanism for the redistribution of scarce resources. But on the negative side its operation can result in excessive demands generating hardship. Often the term demand sharing is interchanged with its negative extreme, called 'humbugging'—a term that I believe was first introduced in the anthropological lexicon by Grayson Gerrard (1989). As noted above, such negativity is not unfamiliar to my Kuninjku collaborators who are quite comfortable using the term. In the literature, however, there has again been a slippage that highlights the negative manifestation of demand sharing. For example, McDonnell and Martin (2002: 5) talk of 'humbugging' or 'demand sharing' as if undifferentiated and state: 'A primary mechanism through which the flow of goods and services is realised is what anthropologists (following Peterson) have termed "demand sharing", and which Aboriginal people in central Australia call "humbugging"' (p. 10). The acquisition of a moral dimension for the concept is significant and deserves further elucidation. In undertaking that, I would make two primary observations.

First, in his critical and insightful analysis of the CAEPR literature, Tim Rowse (2002: 162–6) noted the various ways that CAEPR researchers used the notion of demand sharing in discussing gender relations, ranging from its egalitarian effects to the contemporary strains and difficulties the institution generates between Aboriginal men and women. In summary, he made the observation that 'when all the evocations of demand sharing were assembled within the space of a few pages...it became clear that interpretative choice (predation or reciprocity? equilibrium or anarchy?) enjoyed a high degree of autonomy from [the] evidentiary base' (Rowse 2002: 234).<sup>3</sup> In other words, in analysing the field context of CAEPR, it was clear that the term provides considerable leeway for placing value judgments upon the activity it purports to describe.

Second, from a theoretical perspective, discussions of social capital provide a further lens for viewing the institution of demand sharing. Musharbash (2000: 59) refers to social capital in her analysis, and elements of Putnam's (1995) bonding and bridging roles of social capital could be interpreted as analogous to the positive egalitarian effects of demand sharing, especially for a relatively cash-poor section of Australian society. But as Putzel (1997) notes, social capital can also have a 'dark side', which can manifest itself when the normative rules that govern its proper operations break down—for example, when alcohol is a factor. Boyd Hunter (2004) has teased out some of these negative and positive aspects of social capital theory, including reference to demand sharing. It is noteworthy that Peterson, by and large, avoids moralising commentary in his article—something that has not always been apparent in later discussions.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that Rowse's comment should not be read to mean that CAEPR researchers have a common line, which they do not, but that the ethnographic evidence to support particular lines might be insufficient.

Peterson's construct has been used in a somewhat different way by researchers at the University of Sydney. Working with the Wiradjuri in New South Wales, Gaynor Macdonald (2000) mobilises the notion of demand sharing in her analysis of sharing practices and their significance 'in the ways they give expression to Wiradjuri understandings of personhood and the social, and hence of power' (p. 89). Macdonald provides a detailed analysis of Wiradjuri demand-sharing practices, their transformations and their impact on development focusing on the notion of 'allocative power'. Austin-Broos (2003) similarly deploys demand sharing as a frame for her analysis of the articulation of Arrernte kinship with welfare and work. In this vein, Peterson himself (2005) has further refined his use of the term, subsequently linking it to his recent characterisation of kin-based societies as constituting a form of domestic moral economy. These more recent contributions demonstrate the complexity of the demand-sharing phenomenon and its theoretical utility. Nevertheless, despite Musharbash's (2008) reminder that the Warlpiri, like the Kuninjku, possess a number of institutions for allocating resources in everyday practice, it is true to say that Peterson's original query about the overall significance of demand sharing vis-à-vis other forms of distribution has not been adequately addressed (cf. Saethre, this volume). I have focused in this chapter on one form of disciplinary adoption of the notion of demand sharing because, as will become apparent, it has been highly influential in public policy debates, allowing me to most clearly trace the line of evolution from pure anthropology to public policy.

## Knowledge Adoption Beyond Anthropology

In the twenty-first century, the terms 'demand sharing' and 'humberging' have been increasingly adopted in broader academic, popular and policy discourse as a shorthand for 'kin-based sharing' in order to highlight apparent incommensurabilities between kin-based and market-based societies. The project of improvement and modernisation, especially for remote-living Aborigines, is broadly perceived to be greatly hampered by this social institution, and a wide selection of people beyond anthropology, including the mainstream media, is using 'demand sharing' to describe kin-based sharing.

Some accounts use the term as an institutional explanation for slow Aboriginal integration into the Australian mainstream. Hence, in employment, academics such as Brereton and Parmenter (2008: 86) suggest that pressure to share with kin or 'demand sharing' could influence the desire to enter and remain in the mining workforce. In enterprise development, bureaucrats have highlighted CAEPR research by McDonnell and Martin (2002) and noted that:

Demand sharing is where employees are pressured into sharing the business's earnings, assets or stock with relatives or esteemed members of the community. One example of demand sharing is where an Aboriginal checkout operator is confronted with relatives who have a full shopping trolley but no money. In these circumstances, the checkout operator might feel pressured into giving the trolley full of goods to the relatives who haven't paid because it is more important to gain the approval of his or her social networks than to generate a profit within the business. Another common problem is when a manager, who was appointed directly by a store committee, is pressured into channelling funds among community members in various ways without leaving adequate resources to reinvest back into the business.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, a parliamentary inquiry into banking and finance titled *Money Matters* in the Bush, in a section called 'Money Dreaming', refers to the institution of demand sharing to explain the difficulty that Indigenous people face in saving (Australian Senate 2004).

Influential conservative commentators have also used the term. Referring directly to both demand sharing and CAEPR research whilst demonstrating the slippage between demand sharing and humbugging I noted previously, Gary Johns (2008: 68) writes that

it has been recognised for a long time that Aboriginal economies in remote areas operate by 'demand sharing' or 'humbugging' (that is, where kin demand the immediate use of whatever a person owns), rather than by individual accumulation of physical or financial capital (Martin 1995: 19). Yet there is no suggestion Aborigines should be advised that this is why they are poor, or that this aspect of the culture must change.

Similarly, Noel Pearson, who has ready access to the dominant national print media in Australia, frequently refers to demand sharing when describing the situation in Cape York:

Aboriginal culture is permeated by the strongest of cultural imperatives: demand sharing, whereby one is obliged to share material goods with one's kin. Demand sharing served us well in classical times. It seems to have been relatively compatible with life in Cape York settlements during the 20th century. Demand sharing was ultimately reciprocal and underpinned generosity and mutuality. But when demand sharing came into contact with passive welfare, alcohol, drugs and gambling, what

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<sup>4</sup> The piece titled 'Outback Stores' is dated 10 February 2007 and is provided by the Australian Retail Association at <[http://www.retailtimes.com.au/index.php/page/Outback\\_Stores](http://www.retailtimes.com.au/index.php/page/Outback_Stores)> (viewed 13 February 2010) without an author attribution.

was a valuable cultural tradition was highly susceptible to corruption and exploitation. Demand sharing when it comes to addictions is now a pathological culture. ('An abyss beyond the bottle', *The Australian*, 14 July 2007)

As is clear from these quotes and examples, much of the public policy discourse about demand sharing views the practice in highly moralistic negative terms and links it to the rhetoric of failure in Indigenous affairs; it is seen to slow integration into the mainstream individuated economy, to perpetuate poverty and disadvantage, and/or to aid and abet risky behaviour such as drinking and drug taking that results in costly social pathologies such as violence and child abuse. This discourse calls for an elimination of the practice of demand sharing—a fundamental change to culture—so as to empower Aboriginal individuals for advancement and modernity.

The terms 'demand sharing' and 'humberging' were significantly mobilised in the rationale for the Northern Territory Emergency Response Intervention in June 2007 and used regularly during its aftermath by the then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, the task force commander, Major General David Chalmers, the task force chairwoman, Aboriginal Magistrate Sue Gordon, Commonwealth bureaucrats and the government business managers placed in prescribed communities. The most neo-paternalistic and interventionist measure of the intervention—the compulsory quarantining of welfare recipients' incomes—was justified by views that a combination of access to welfare cash and the institution of demand sharing allowed accumulation of funds for expenditure on the alcohol that is at the heart of remote Aboriginal community dysfunction. This is a view that remains ubiquitous in policy and popular discourse today.

I do not want to say much here about the Intervention, nor for that matter do I seek to deflate the problems that might arise when some individuals mobilise demand sharing as a strategy to resource personal pathologies such as drunkenness and associated violence and disorder. Rather, I want to point to the use (and/or misuse) of a nascent technical term from anthropology—demand sharing—in rendering the messy problem of Indigenous dysfunction, where it occurs, technical (following James Ferguson 1994) thereby making that problem amenable to a technical solution: 'income quarantining'. If nothing else, it is unclear how quarantining 50 per cent of the income of all welfare recipients might eliminate demand sharing in the form of verbal claiming that might be directed as much to goods as to cash. It is also unclear, for that matter, why claiming might be directed more to welfare than to non-welfare cash.

## Conclusion

Our dream, as social scientists, might be for part of our research to be useful to the social movement instead of being lost, as is often the case nowadays, because it is intercepted and distorted by journalists or by hostile interpreters, and so on. (Bourdieu 1996: 58)

In this short essay, I have undertaken just a preliminary survey of academic and public policy uses of the concept of demand sharing. My starting point was 1993 and Peterson's attempt to give critical clarity to an allocative institution—demand sharing—that had possibly been previously concealed by an overemphasis on the institution of sharing as generalised reciprocity. The concept of demand sharing was intended to grapple with the complexity of a particular form of distribution. In taking up Peterson's concept, some academics began to simplify that complexity. Further, in the translation from the academic world to policy practice, all the ambiguity and complexity disappeared and the most negative aspects of demand sharing were emphasised and, at times, taken to represent the whole of Indigenous Australian sharing behaviour.

Bourdieu highlights what is at stake in this process. Powerful state forces can take hold of academic debates for their own purposes, and this is clearly demonstrated in the case of demand sharing. It is as though powerful elements within the bureaucratic field sought out social science scholarship to justify a predetermined agenda that regards some forms of economy and society as superior to others. Significantly, such processes now continue during a time when the Australian state discursively champions evidence-based policy making. One is left to ponder the inherent dangers of scholarship being manipulated in such ways and how academics might respond.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank: Murray Garde for discussions about 'demand sharing' among Kuninjku and assistance with *Bininj Kunwok* orthography; Kuninjku and Ndjébonna-speaking collaborators in Maningrida, especially Deborah Wurrkidj, Janet Marawarr and Lauri Magaldagi who revisited issues of normative distribution practices with me during fieldwork in July and October 2008 as I revisited the issue of demand sharing; and Tim Rowse, Nicolas Peterson, Yasmine Musharbash, Marcus Barber and especially Melinda Hinkson, for comments on an earlier draft.

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