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The Contested Domain of Pastoralism: Landscape, Work and Outsiders in Central Australia

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Publication Details

The book chapter was originally published as Gill, N, The contested domain of pastoralism: landscape, work and outsiders in Central Australia, in Rose, DB and Clarke, A (eds), Tracking Knowledge - North Australian Landscapes: Studies in Indigenous and Settler Knowledge Systems, North Australian Research Unit, Darwin, 1997, 50-67.

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Abstract
Extensive cattle grazing has long been the dominant land use in Central Australian rangelands. Today, however, the pastoral landscape is increasingly fractured and contested by indigenous and environmentalist claims on land. Pastoralists in Central Australia are responding to environmentalist claims by reasserting territory. Territory is being constructed with reference to to particular forms of social nature and social space. Identities of insider and outsider have developed. These identities commonly correspond to pastoralists and others, such as conservationists and government, but the place specific nature of pastoralists' environmental knowledge has the potential to render pastoralists as outsiders as well. Moreover, as debates over rangelands are about creating new places, such knowledge may become less effective in resisting non-pastoral valuations of rangelands.

Keywords
pastoralism, land, culture, outback, work, landscape, northern territory

Disciplines
Life Sciences | Physical Sciences and Mathematics | Social and Behavioral Sciences

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The Contested Domain of Pastoralism: Landscape, Work and Outsiders in Central Australia

Extensive cattle grazing has long been the dominant land use in Central Australian rangelands. Today, however, the pastoral landscape is increasingly fractured and contested by indigenous and environmentalist claims on land. Pastoralists in Central Australia are responding to environmentalist claims by reasserting territory. Territory is being constructed with reference to to particular forms of social nature and social space. Identities of insider and outsider have developed. These identities commonly correspond to pastoralists and others, such as conservationists and government, but the place specific nature of pastoralists' environmental knowledge has the potential to render pastoralists as outsiders as well. Moreover, as debates over rangelands are about creating new places, such knowledge may become less effective in resisting non-pastoral valuations of rangelands.

Forthcoming in Rose, D.B. and Clarke, A. Tracking Knowledge - Northern Landscapes, Past, Present, Future, North Australian Research Unit (ANU), Darwin.

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The arid and semi-arid grazing lands of Australia are in a state of flux and contention. Since European settlement the dominant land use of these rangelands has been extensive pastoralism, mainly involving grazing of cattle and sheep. Over the 1980s and 1990s, however, the pastoral landscape is showing cracks in the face of reassertion of Aboriginal rights to land, the conservation movement and questions regarding the economic returns from pastoralism relative to benefits from alternative uses and tenure regimes (Heathcote 1994; Holmes 1994). The National Strategy for Rangeland Management (NSRM), set up by the Commonwealth government in 1993, is one reflection of concerns from land administrators, conservationists, Aboriginal people and organisations and scientists that current tenure and management arrangements for rangelands are inadequate for the realisation of diverse values and aspirations regarding rangelands (National Rangeland Management Working Group 1996). No longer can it be said that the dominant conception of Australia's arid and semi-arid lands is as pastoral land. These landscapes are being rewritten in indigenous and ecological terms and the legitimacy of pastoralism is being challenged.

The significance of these challenges is not lost on pastoralists. In a survey of South Australian pastoralists[1], Holmes and Day (1995) found that 'unrealistic demands from the conservation movement' ranked highest amongst perceived threats to pastoralists, outranking even 'poor market prospects'. 'Aboriginal land claims' ranked third as a perceived threat, narrowly outranked by 'increase in lease rentals'.

The challenges to pastoralism come in a variety of guises. In Australia as a whole Aboriginal title to leasehold land has been reaffirmed in the High Court Mabo and Wik decisions in 1992 and 1996 respectively. As a result of these decisions pastoralists cannot assume sole rights to the land they lease from the crown as native title has been held to remain in existence under common law. At the time of writing (February 1997) this issue is high in the national political agenda as the National Farmers' Federation seeks a legislative response to override the Wik decision and "to give Australia's pastoralists the exclusive occupancy on their leases" (Weekend Australian, February 1-2 1997: 2). In the Northern Territory land rights legislation has been in place since 1976 and as of 1994 twenty-one pastoral leases had been

purchased by Aboriginal interests (Central Land Council and Northern Land Council 1994). About half of these are operating as fully commercial enterprises and many have been converted to Aboriginal freehold title under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976[2]. Pastoralists in the Northern Territory view Aboriginal ownership of land as an erosion of the pastoral estate, as undermining the viability of the pastoral industry and as a loss of productive land (for example see the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association Yearbook 1991/92: 57).

Pressure on the pastoral industry from conservationists has also intensified in recent years. This pressure has come in the form of specific proposals such as those for World Heritage listing over parts of the Nullarbor Plain and the Lake Eyre Basin (see Wood 1993 for a pastoralist's view on these issues) and in the form of programs for systematic reform of rangelands tenure and use throughout Australia. Based upon concerns about land degradation and reductions in biodiversity on pastoral lands conservationists are calling for a representative reserve system in arid and semi-arid Australia and the 'identification, reorganisation and implementation of new management systems' (Ledgar and Stafford-Smith1996: 21). According to Ledgar (1995) the development of such systems would include ensuring that pastoral land use is based upon land capability assessment and ecological criteria; the immediate removal of non-native grazing animals from known marginal areas; the removal of the massive subsidies that still characterise Australian agriculture; and ensuring that Aboriginal people are able to resume their role as land managers. Conservationists also believe that the 'views of the whole of the Australian community' should be taken into account 'when assessing priorities for land use allocation and the protection of biodiversity' (Ledgar 1995: 44). Conservationists have been able to realise this view in the political arena. The Arid Lands Coalition[3] (ALC) was one of three interest groups, along with the National Farmers' Federation and Aboriginal interests (the Central Land Council co-ordinated the submission from Aboriginal interests) to receive federal government funding to enable them to participate in the NSRM. They were also represented on the working group for the NSRM.

In this paper I look at some of the strategies employed by pastoralists to deal with these challenges to their place in the rangelands. I do this by drawing from a case

study of settler or non-indigenous pastoralists in the southern Northern Territory in the Alice Springs pastoral district (hereafter referred to as Central Australia - see figures one and two). I will focus on how pastoralists have responded to perceived threats from the conservation movement over the 1980s and 1990s. I use the term 'conservation movement' to refer to the Australian Conservation Foundation, the ALC, the Environment Centre in Darwin (ECNT) and the Arid Lands Environment Centre (ALEC) in Alice Springs. There are a number of strategies that pastoralists have employed to deal with the challenges from conservationists. The most well known action by pastoralists is the formation of a Landcare Group, the Centralian Land Management Association (CLMA). This group has its origins in a 1988 meeting on Mount Skinner station. In this paper, however, I want to focus on strategies that are more diffuse and which are embedded in discourses produced by pastoralists and by the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA). The strategies encompassed in this paper are those through which Central Australian pastoralists draw upon knowledge of land gained by working and living on it to demarcate boundaries and construct territory, about which are structured insider and outsider identities. In these strategies socially constructed nature and space come to inscribe boundaries of territory and social difference.

SPACE, NATURE AND EXCLUSION

Social construction of space is a process charged with relations of power. Demarcation of space and inscription of meaning onto space are processes in which social relations and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are both played out and constituted (Jackson 1989; Sibley 1992; Anderson 1993; Gelder and Jacobs 1995; Jacobs 1996). Similarly "socially constructed nature is involved in the production and reproduction of unequal social (power) relations" (Silvern 1995: 269). In recent years overcoming the divide between nature and society has become a significant focus of both theoretical and empirical research (for example, Fitzsimmons 1989; Katz and Kirby 1991; Dake 1992; Evernden 1992; Rose 1992; Simpson 1992; Whatmore and Boucher 1993; Harrison and Burgess 1994; Anderson 1995; Castree 1995; Silvern 1995). This work has shed light on a wide range of social relations ranging from development and natural resource management conflicts to gender and race relations.

In this paper I want to enlarge on Silvern's (1995)study of a conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous Americans in Wisconsin over fishing practices and rights. In doing so he builds on the theme of 'the mutually constitutive relationship of nature, cultural identity and territory [space]' (Silvern 1995: 268). Part of his agenda is to examine how social nature is 'incorporated into the resistance strategies of politically and socially marginal groups' (Silvern 1995: 269). In this paper I undertake a similar task but with respect to a relatively powerful group, settler pastoralists in Central Australia. I will show how pastoralists draw on a form of social nature constituted through labour to construct space/territory and identities of insiders and outsiders.

KNOWING YOUR LAND

Pastoralists have responded in a number of ways to the reimagining of Central Australia. One of the more common responses of Central Australian pastoralists to criticism of their land management practices, as is often the case amongst rural landholders, is to assert their right to manage their land as they see fit. The corollary of this is that others, such as bureaucrats, conservationists and academics have no right to say how pastoral land should be used or managed. In the following sections I consider, at least in part, the basis amongst Central Australian pastoralists of their assertion to sole decision-making rights on pastoral lands. I rely on information gathered during fieldwork in Central Australia in 1996 and on texts produced by pastoralists and the NTCA. I look at two scales, that of the individual property, and that of the Alice Springs pastoral district as a whole.

PROPERTY BOUNDARIES/SPACES OF SELF

At a Northern Territory Landcare meeting south of Alice Springs in August 1996, the chair of the NT Landcare council, John Lugg, a pastoralist from the Darwin area, noted that one can read a lot about biodiversity. He went on to say that this material comes from people who haven't experienced it and intimated that their view of biodiversity derived from computer-based mapping and modelling, conducted in

places distanced from the daily landscapes of rural people. He said that there are, however, things that one cannot put on a computer screen, and these are people's feelings. In calling for speakers at an after-dinner discussion, Mr Lugg said he wanted to hear first from those with 'dirt under their fingernails'. In this he was making a clear distinction between the pastoralists present and others such as government staff, representatives of ALEC and ECNT, and academics like myself.

Work is fundamental to human relations to nature, it embeds us in nature, and is implicated in where boundaries are drawn, if at all, between nature and society, by different groups such as loggers and wilderness bushwalkers (White 1996). Work and nature are also implicated in drawing social boundaries and constructing space. John Lugg's comments above are doing precisely this in relation to a specific type of work. Pastoralists' work does embed them in nature, and nature in them ("dirt under their fingernails") in a fundamentally different way from how non-pastoralists are embedded in nature - a nature captured by satellite images and mapped in a GIS system. In the following section I discuss the nature of pastoralists' work in order to illustrate how it engenders environmental knowledge and how the nexus of work and knowledge in a particular place embeds pastoralists in nature, an embeddedness they carry into debates over the future of rangelands.

Pastoralists value particular forms of work, physical labour expended in managing cattle properties, over other forms of work, such as the predominantly office based work of government staff and conservationists. This contrast has been mobilised previously to fend off conservationists. For example, in the 1987/88 Annual Report of the NTCA, the association's executive director lambasts conservationists.

It is about time for the folks who purport to have an interest in our environment - "Greenies" - to come down from their ivory towers and dismount the bloody great white horses they ride and get out and do some constructive work for a change...either GET ON with helping to solve the problems (instead of redefining them ad nauseum) or GET OUT of the way (Emerson, 1988, p.24).

It is not just that pastoralists' work is valued over other forms of work. Crucially, pastoralists' work generates environmental knowledge that is both specific to a property and its owners/managers and to Central Australian pastoralism.

Knowledge of their stations if vital to the financial survival of pastoralists.This is not to say that sound knowledge of one's land will prevent problems; many factors may cause the demise of a cattle business, but such knowledge is necessary for the possibility of financial survival. Pastoralists' knowledge of their stations is gained largely through their work. Station work is physically demanding, potentially dangerous (Plate One), occurs in extremes of temperature, is often repetitive, and involves long days and long weeks, immersing people in their properties. The day typically begins before dawn, and depending upon the time of year and the work being done, may not end until after dark. The tasks that are undertaken on a station are many and varied and often involve moving around the station, or camping where work is being undertaken (Plate Two).

One regular feature of life on Central Australian stations is driving around the station. Pastoralists will drive hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres per week in the normal course of running a station. Bore runs, whereby pastoralists check each bore on their station, are a weekly task, and provide a means by which large areas of the stations are regularly seen under a wide range of conditions. The main purpose of a bore run is to check the functioning of bores, tanks and troughs. Such travel, however, also facilitates observation of the property as a whole, be it pasture condition, soil erosion, water flow or changes in the land due to rainfall or changes in management practice. It is possible that as bore runs typically follow roads and tracks on the stations they may in fact provide only a limited perspective on the station. However, on bore runs pastoralists may also check property features not on the tracks, driving cross-country to reach them. Furthermore, other station activities, such as mustering, doing bores runs by plane, or moving cattle facilitate observation of areas of the station away from tracks.

This sort of travel and work around stations facilitates time on the land and intimate contact over long periods. Bill Waudby, former owner of Central Mount Wedge Station discusses this process below in an interview with myself;

> *N.G.: So what did looking after your cattle involve?*
> *B.W.: Well it became a matter of once you came through the boundary gate you were back on the job again, you had to look after your waters, you had to look after your stock. You had to maintain this, that: yards, fences, and the waters. All this had to be taken into account. It was a twenty-four hour job, three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. It was a way of life; it was a good way of life.*
>
> *N.G.: To what extent did managing your pastures come into looking after your cattle?*
> *B.W.: Well, if you've got country that - well I will say this, that you've got the big areas and you can move your cattle around if you're managing your pastures properly. If this area is getting eaten out and hasn't had any relief from rain and that, if you're on the ball you'll move them to somewhere else, you know, on to feed, and also you must have water there. So you've got to look ahead a bit. Quite a bit, actually.*
>
> *N.G.: So how did you keep an eye on how the pastures were going around the property?*
> *B.W.: Well you'd be going around all the time, looking here, there. You know, you'd never really let up, you just had to - you know, you had to be very observant and on the ball.* (Interview 10/10/96)

In the course of such contact with land, pastoralists are able to observe how their land responds to their management practices - to their work. In observing their land and how it responds to their actions, such as rabbit control by shooting or warren ripping, or changes in stocking rates, pastoralists accumulate environmental knowledge that is vital to managing their stations. However, this knowledge is not simply a useful resource in station management. It also plays a key role in pastoralists'

response to conservationists in that this knowledge is a key symbol in constituting self/insider and other/outsider. This environmental knowledge is a means through which to explore the relationship between identity and landscape.

There are two basic ways in which pastoralists have communicated their environmental knowledge to me. One is in terms of explaining particular phenomena on their properties, the other is in terms of dealing with complexity in the land around them.

The knowledge that people have of their properties is intimate in its detail. As one moves around a property one sees grasslands, woodlands, areas of dead trees, dense stands of particular trees, bare areas, erosion gullies. Everywhere there is evidence of rains, floods, fire, lack of fire, rehabilitation work, too much stocking, light stocking, no stocking. Yet much of this is invisible to an observer unless one asks, particularly the signs that are related to management actions of the pastoralists themselves. Ecological, or expert, knowledge of how particular land systems respond to various grazing regimes will assist a trained or experienced observer to infer what has transpired in a particular place, but it does not provide access to personal landscapes of work. To the pastoralist everywhere they go, there is evidence of past work - they know they spent months shooting rabbits here five years ago, they know they have been stocking this paddock lightly for a few years, they know after which rains stands of trees came up, they know that on this bore the previous owners ran three times the number of cattle they now run. They know what has happened on their property in some detail and they know how their land responded to various events and processes. This is a landscape of work and activity, of successes and failures that is known only to them.

The second aspect of pastoralists' knowledge of land that I want to mention is complexity. The biophysical landscape processes of arid lands are highly variable in time and space (Griffin and Friedel 1985; Friedel, et al. 1990; Stafford-Smith and Morton 1990). The pastoralists are dealing with this in their daily lives and seeing changes in the land as a result of their own actions and as a result of biophysical factors. They are not always able to explain what they see happening but they are

always watching and as one older man put it to me "things change, you never stop learning".

I have found this same view across properties in Central Australia, sometimes stated clearly as above, sometimes implicit in how people talked about their land and how they watch it in order to make decisions.

On one property a low flat-topped hill was pointed out to me and I was told that the sediments that form the hill are what's left of an ancient lake bed, the remainder of which has now been eroded away and may be found scattered across the Simpson desert. The point of this was to illustrate to me that change is always occurring in the biophysical landscape. They were not saying that erosion should not be worried about, rather they were illustrating their view that one shouldn't look at the land and form views based on the here and now. Rather one needs to return or remain a while to appreciate that the landscape is dynamic, everchanging and hard to pin down. Understanding is gained by sitting in one spot and watching to see what happens. Without knowing what has gone before in a particular place it is hard to make judgements about the current situation and it makes certainty a faint possibility. As the same man I quoted previously also said to me "who can say if you are doing the right thing - the country's too young for anyone to know".

Amongst pastoralists this highly specific knowledge has engendered an ethic that one doesn't talk about anybody else's properties or pass comment on what other pastoralists should or should not do. Pastoralists will often end a comment on their views on land management with the qualifier that they are of course speaking only in relation to their patch, and I would have to talk to others about their property. To presume to speak for another's property is not only to speak for land you do not know, but is to ride roughshod over the knowledge and experience of another. One does not only transgress property boundaries but also social and personal space. To speak for another's land is to intrude on that person's or family's self. Respect for these boundaries is strong amongst the pastoral community and this informs the response of pastoralists to outsiders who criticise their land management practices.

WATCHING THE WORLD GO BY

In formulating the NSRM the working group held thirty workshops throughout Australia as part of their community consultation process. In the draft report on the Alice Springs workshop (August 1994) all participants are identified, in part, by 'years of experience in the rangelands'. This identifier reflects the importance attached by pastoralists to the stability of themselves and their industry over time.

In the time that pastoralists have been in Central Australia they have seen many people, ideas and projects come and go. Through this they have remained, as an industry, even if not as individuals and families. Those who have remained carry forward the memories of events and people that have come through in the past, touched the pastoral world and moved on. One such passage through the pastoral world occurred in the late 1950s and 1960s. At this time the Animal Industry Branch (AIB) of the NT administration appointed a botanist, George Chippendale, to its staff. This appointment was concurrent with an emerging concern amongst the bureaucracy about the effects of grazing upon vegetation and soils in Central Australia and with a prolonged drought.

At the time of Chippendale's appointment little was known of the vegetation of Central Australia and even less was known of the effects of cattle and sheep grazing upon it. Chippendale embarked upon a program of ecological research which led him to criticise the pastoral industry's land management practices (Chippendale 1963; Chippendale 1965). Such comments did not endear him to the pastoralists, and according to his assistant, Des Nelson, his views did not find favour amongst some of his colleagues at the AIB (Interview 14/11/96).

This time is commonly referred to by pastoralists when I speak to them. For example Bill Prior, former manager of Hamilton Downs station, said in relation to recent allegations of overgrazing (for example see Letters to the Editor, Centralian Advocate, 31/5/96):

this is the only group left that are making those allegations. Now if you go back ten years ago you even had government people saying, like Lands Department people, saying this. I remember in our sixties drought - which was very bad, worse than this one - we had botanists saying the country's buggered.....they were stationed here at the time, working out of probably Lands Department, one of those departments, telling us how the country's been buggered by overstocking and it would never ever recover. And of course, the funny thing, none of them came back afterwards. When it did rain, well towards the end of the sixties, and then it really started to rain in the seventies, this country came back better than it ever was. Now, the old, old fellows that were here in the thirties drought used to say: 'Don't worry boy, she'll recover. It's good country. When the rains come she'll come back.' And it did[5] (Interview 11/10/96).

For the pastoralists it is an example of a situation somewhat analogous to the one they now see. As they put it, they were being criticised by outsiders with little experience of the country and who possessed knowledge derived from books and theory, rather than from intimate knowledge of country gained by working it over many years. This distinction is drawn on by Bob Waudby (son of Bill Waudby quoted above) when addressing a CLMA field day at Central Mount Wedge station in November 1990. In relation to his family's observation of native fauna on the station he says many animals "are observed by the people living here, and rarely seen by the untrained eye of the passerby" (Waudby 1991: 73).

Today pastoralists see conservationists from 'down south', NT government employees who roll through in a succession of white Toyotas and Canberra bureaucrats who control the purse strings of Landcare and drought relief, and who run processes such as the NSRM[6]. The pastoralists remain, many remember the late 1960s and what occurred. They also remember that rains came after the drought, exceptional rains that justified their views of themselves, their cattle, their faith in the land. These rains resonate today among pastoralists for, in their view, the rain and the growth it produced proved the experts wrong; the country was not flogged, the country comes

back, cattle had not damaged it. For the pastoralists the inability of outsiders to understand the land, its cycles and its bounty was confirmed.

These events, the prophesies of doom and the subsequent rains, are not mere relics of the past for the pastoralists. That the country came back, that the experts were wrong in the 1960s are fundamental to contemporary understanding of the pastoralists' views of the land, themselves and outsiders.

CULTURES OF EXCLUSION .....AND SLIPPAGE

Julia Kristeva (1993) writes of a 'cult of origins', a 'defensive hatred' of others 'who do not share my origin and who confront me personally, economically, and culturally' (p.2-3). Kristeva is writing of nationalism and hatred of foreigners or rival ethnic groups, yet this notion of a cult of origins may be useful in conceptualising the reaction of pastoralists to those deemed to be outsiders. Jacobs (1996) finds it a useful point in her analysis of how both powerful and marginalised groups seek to fix indentity and place in the course of struggles over space in urban areas. More specific to this paper is the observation concerning South Australian pastoralists by Holmes and Day (1995). They conclude that pastoralists 'are a cohesive reference group with a strongly developed, tightly shared value orientation, founded upon a clear sense of identity and self-worth' (Holmes and Day 1995: 211). They go on, however, to argue that 'this distinctive value orientation has for long proved highly effective in ensuring survival in periods of economic and environmental stress’. It may be less effective in meeting emerging challenges where pastoralists must adjust to a more complex decision context, in which other influential interest groups have values and goals markedly at variance with those held by pastoralists' (Holmes and Day 1995: 211). The comments refer both to pastoralists' strong sense of identity and social cohesion, which I have explored from one angle in this paper, and somewhat more obliquely to how their sense of identity may influence their response to outsiders[7].

Knowledge of their land and of personal landscapes of work, and the view that the industry ha survived while its critics have passed on, has engendered an exclusionary culture among pastoralists. One that exists alongside their social

cohesiveness. Close association with their land and the development of personal and property specific knowledge plays a role in defining which spaces one is qualified to speak for. As noted above to speak out of place, as it were, is as much about crossing personal and cultural space as about crossing property boundaries.The survival of the industry and of the land despite criticism from non-pastoralists who have moved on leaves pastoralists sceptical of contemporary critics and of the value of their views. For pastoralists it is not so much the state of the land that provides an indicator of sustainability, as their continued presence.

Yet the identities of insider and outsider are not necessarily as fixed as my dicussion of these terms in relations to pastoralists and others, particularly conservationists, may indicate. There are areas in which slippage of these indenties may occur, revealing them as not essential, but more fluid and more open to contestation. One such slippage is that of Aboriginal pastoralists in Central Australia. Where does their cattle work leave this analysis, and perhaps more importantly for the struggles over rangelands, where does such work leave the view that only those 'with dirt under their fingernails' have a claim on the land? To what extent does this view encompass a racialised notion of work?

With respect to this paper's focus on the conservation debate, another slippage of the identies relates to the possibility of pastoralists themselves becoming outsiders. The culture of exclusion also operates within the pastoral world and pastoralists who step outside the sanctioned parameters for public comment may find themselves ostracised. In this way the limits of public discussion on land management issues are set and the CLMA itself may well be limited in the actions it can take and the comments it can make. The CLMA exists within a world of power relations amongst the pastoralists, and pastoralists involved in the CLMA themselves tread a fine line between being insiders and outsiders as the CLMA is not universally popular amongst the pastoral community. There have been occassions, when in talking with pastoralists I have been unsure as to whether their comments about 'greenies' refer to conservation groups, government land managment departments or the CLMA. It is clear from discussions with pastoralists that they have strong views on which among them are not managing their land well and are overstocking. In the context of the pastoral

culture which encompasses both exclusion and cohesion the possiblity of this being publicly articulated by pastoralists is remote.

CONCLUSION

Pastoralists construct identities for themselves and others such as conservationists according to how one is embedded in nature. Embedding is a process that occurs through work and in time. Pastoralists' everyday life working on their properties creates a nature in which is inscribed their labour, their sweat, their plans and their past and future. Through this work over time they gain an intimate knowledge of their properties that is unique to them. This knowledge gained through work on the station is one means by which pastoralists construct a sense of place, a sense of self and and a sense of others. While this paper has concentrated on non-domestic labour it is not the only means through which such a sense is generated It should be noted that bringing up children, developing gardens, burying family members, picnics etc can also play a role in developing a sense of place and in articulating claims on land, at times in opposition to Aboriginal associations with land (for example see 'Spirit of the land touches graziers' in The Weekend Australian, February 1-2, 1997: 2; 'Women of the Wilderness' in The Advertiser Weekend Magazine, December 23, 1995: 6-8).

Work and knowledge are spatially constituted, informing the demarcation of territory and underpinning an authoritative discourse in articulating property rights. Those with 'dirt under their fingernails' are embedded in a landscape that is about them, at both a personal scale and at a regional scale. From the pastoralists' point of view outsiders are embedded in a nature that is distanced, non-personal, aspatial and abstract. This is a nature of biodiversity, representative reserve systems and regional planning. There is some irony in this as resistance by conservationists to planning processes, impact assessments and development proposals that invokes abstracted and geometric notions of space and nature for their authority has frequently relied upon themes that include social relationships to landscape, aesthetics, uniqueness and context. In this situation however, they find themselves drawing upon discourses that are abstracted from place and context to advance their cause. In turn, however, the

pastoralists' are invoking a sense of place and attachment to land to fend off Aboriginal claims on land, particularly as native title assumes greater relevance in Australian land tenure systems.

To what extent can the pastoralist strategies and arguments outlined here successfully meet the diverse agendas now being articulated for rangelands? Central Australian pastoralists draw heavily upon the 1960s experience when outsiders criticised their management practices to meet current challenges from the conservation movement. In the 1960s the rains finally came, the industry survived and many of its critics moved on. However, in the 1960s the conservation movement did not exist as it does today, nor was there such a body of ecological research on the effects of grazing in arid lands as now exists. Moreover, it is unlikely that singular forms of knowledge can alone adequately deal with contemporary land management needs. The goals of land management have shifted significantly in the last two decades, including, for example, that of regional, cross-boundary management for conservation. Arguments that depend heavily on attachment and committment to land are not likely to meet the concerns of contemporary environmentalism. As White (1995) notes such arguments have a lot of history going against them, and they avoid the fundamental, and not necessarily convergent, questions posed by Aborigines and the conservation movement concerning the future of rangelands. Furthermore, the efficacy of such arguments may also be eroded when compared to earlier and still extant Aboriginal relationships to land, which now find support in legislative and common law.

Acknowledgements
This paper is based upon work funded by the Land and Water Resources Research and Development Corporation and the Cooperative Research Centre for the Sustainable Development of Tropical Savannas. This work is also supported by University College (UNSW) at the Australian Defence Force Academy and NARU. Kay Anderson, Richard Baker, Elspeth Young, Catherine Mobbs and the editors provided useful comments.

NOTES

1. The sample for the survey by Holmes and Day (1995) was drawn from a random sample of South Australian Farmer's Federation members who are rangelands pastoralists, thus they are not necessarily from northern South Australia. It is worth noting that there are strong links between pastoralists in northern South Australia and those in the southern Northern Territory. These links comprise social links as well as industry focussed links. For example, pastoralists from northern South Australia participate in Landcare activities organised by the Alice Springs based Centralian Land Management Association.

2. As outlined by Rose (1995) the reasons behind decisions by Aboriginal people whether to run cattle can be complex and are influenced, among other things, by the level of past involvement in the industry and preferences for alternative land uses which may be exclusive of pastoralism.

3. The Arid Lands Coalition (ALC) was formed in 1993 and comprises the Arid Lands Environment Centre (Alice Springs), the Cairns and Far North Environment Centre, the Conservation Council of WA, the Environment Centre NT, Friends of the Earth Adelaide and Melbourne, the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Queensland Conservation Council, Conservation Council of SA and the World Wide Fund for Nature. It is supported by the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, Australian National Parks Association and the Threatened Specis Network. The ALC aims to ensure the 'ecologically sustainable management of Australia's arid lands' (from ALC briefing notes 1994) and campaigns at both state and federal levels. As well as participating in the NSRM the ALC has also campaigned for the reform of Landcare in rangelands, arguing that the production focus of Landcare is inappropriate in rangelands where the issues go beyond reform of existing land uses to more fundamental questions about which uses should be practised and by whom.

4. Research concerning the influence of modes of transport on knowledge of land may be worth pursuing in more detail. For example, did the transition from use of horses to the use of four-wheel drives influence pastoralists’ knowledge of their stations?.

5. Pickup and Stafford-Smith (1993) note that the view that the 'country always come back' (ie. the biophysical environment is resilient and able to remain productive despite even heavy grazing pressure) has become one of a set of 'convenient myths' (p.479) which have endured mainly because they cannot be readily disproved. As James et al (1995) summarise, the impacts of grazing in arid and semi-arid rangelands can be more complicated than allowed for by such one dimensional 'myths'.

6. Here I use some of the characterisations of outsiders employed by pastoralists.

7. See also Heathcote 1969.

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Plate One: Drafting cattle on Lyndavale Station. Photo: N. Gill

Plate Two: Repairing a damaged tank on Lucy Creek Station. To undertake such jobs pastoralists regularly drive long distances. Photo: N. Gill

Figure One: Northern Territory of Australia

Figure Two: Alice Springs Pastoral District (Source: Pastoral and General Tenure Map, NT Department of Lands and Housing, 1990)