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Place-making in the East Kimberley: a
study of land interests and symbolic
capital in North West Australia

Ruth Lane
University of Wollongong

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PLACE-MAKING IN THE EAST KIMBERLEY

*A study of land interests and symbolic capital
in North West Australia*

Ruth Lane

BSc Hons, Grad Dip Museum Studies, MA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
AWARD OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY FROM THE SCHOOL OF GEOSCIENCES,
UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG, 2003

Certification

I, Ruth Lane, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of Geosciences, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ruth Lane', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ruth Lane

25 February, 2003

Abstract

This thesis addresses the relationship between representations of place and embodied activity and experience. To translate this question into the context of the East Kimberley in the late 1990s, I focus on the manner in which planning processes since the 1960s have represented the East Kimberley as a place and ascribed value to land. Employing the concept of 'land interests', I describe in detail changing relationships to land for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists since the 1960s. I focus on mobility, as an indicator of their embodied experience, and tease out aspects of the social identities of these groups that are produced through their changing relationships with land. Each land interest has produced representations of place, and I explore the paths by which these representations have gained a public or political audience over time.

In the late 1990s two developments dominated spatial politics in the region. A significant Native Title claim was lodged in the Federal Court of Australia by the Miriuwung and Gajerrong Aboriginal groups, and the Wesfarmers-Marubeni consortium put forward a proposal to greatly expand the existing area of irrigated agriculture in the Ord Valley for corporate farming of sugar cane. At the same time the region's tourism industry continued to expand. I analyse these developments in order to expose the iterative processes that operate between the production of place-images and rhetoric about place, and changes to land tenure, land use and management. In particular, I show how place-images, narratives and discourses about ~~change~~ and the past are mobilised in the context of contemporary spatial politics and planning processes.

Central to my analysis is Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital'. Contemporary planning processes deploy specific forms of symbolic capital that align more closely with the interests of farmers and tourists than with Aboriginal people. In Chapter 8 I concentrate on 'authenticity' as a form of symbolic capital operating in both tourism and native title. In Chapter 9 I focus on the Ord Stage Two proposal, highlighting the manner in which 'productivity' and 'sustainability' are deployed as key forms of symbolic capital that justify why the scheme should proceed. The legal concepts of Aboriginal Land Rights and Native Title generate a new form of symbolic capital associated with continuity of Aboriginal cultural traditions and relationships with place. I analyse the potential for this to influence the way concepts such as 'authenticity' and 'sustainability' are interpreted. Planning associated with Ord Stage Two and with the various national parks in the East Kimberly relies on a notion of bounded or stratified space, which may be challenged by the recognition of co-existing Aboriginal land interests.

In conclusion, I consider how planning processes might better accommodate the fluid nature of people's relations to place and to each other. The history of unequal power relations and the differential influence of some representations of place over others structures the spatial politics in which any planning occurs. However, processes that recognise emerging forms of symbolic capital that are shared by different land interests are more likely to allow synergies to occur. A 'progressive sense of place' (Massey 1993) could then develop in which both places and social relations would be recognised as always in a state of becoming.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been produced without the support of a range of institutions and individuals. An Australian Postgraduate Award provided me with a living allowance for three and a half years. Fieldwork was supported by a grant from the Environment Research Institute at the University of Wollongong, and by an ARC Large Grant awarded to Lesley Head and Richard Fullagar (No. A59905957). Particular thanks are due to the Northern Territory Archives Service for their sponsorship of the interview component of the project. Interviews were recorded on digital audio tape recorders lent by the Northern Territory Archives Service. Recordings were subsequently lodged with the Archive where they were transcribed in full. The Archive then assumed responsibility for contacting interviewees to ask them to set the conditions of access for both audiotapes and transcripts. The Native Title Transcripts were available for public access at the Federal Court Office in Perth, and I am grateful to staff there for their assistance. The State Library and Information Service of Western Australia permitted me to make copies of archival films relating to the East Kimberley. Other archival films were obtained through the Australian Broadcasting Commission and Screensound Australia.

I am most grateful to Bruce Shaw for making available his field notes from a sociological research project conducted in Kununurra in 1970. Various scholars with lengthy experience working with Miriung and Gajerrong people provided valuable perspectives that assisted my interpretation of material in the Native Title transcripts, particularly Patrick Sullivan, Frances Kofod and Ken Mulvaney. Further assistance was drawn from scholars who had engaged extensively with the complex issues of Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights. Tim Rowse was particularly helpful with this aspect of my work. In 1999 I participated in a

Visiting Scholars Program at the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research at the Australian National University. I drew further inspiration from various conferences and seminars at which I presented papers during the course of the work.

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List of Acronyms

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
CDEP	Community Development Employment Program
CSIR	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
EIS	Environmental Impact Assessment
ERMP	Environmental Review and Management Plan
FCA	Federal Court of Australia
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
KRS	Kimberley Research Station
KST	Kimberley Specialists in Tourism
NLC	Northern Land Council
ORIA	Ord River Irrigation Area
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service

PART I

INTRODUCTION AND FRAMING

Chapter 1: Introduction

In May 1998 I embarked on a flight from Darwin, Australia's most northern city, to the town of Kununurra in the Ord Valley, 800km to the west. We flew over tree-covered country with large rivers and very few roads and bridges. The big rivers were milky with silt carried down in recent monsoonal floods. The Ord valley, as we descended, stood out in striking contrast from the surrounding landscape with its flat irrigated farmlands carving out a patchwork of farm boundaries and different crops, a small outpost of geometric order in a landscape otherwise dominated by meandering watercourses, striking rock formations and scrubby tree cover. As I disembarked and walked across the tarmac to the terminal, a large sign greeted me and my fellow travellers with the words, 'WELCOME TO THE SHIRE OF WYNDHAM-EAST KIMBERLEY - THE LAST FRONTIER' (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Welcome sign greeting visitors arriving at Kununurra Airport.

As a human geographer resident in southeastern Australia, and a former curator at the National Museum of Australia, the word 'frontier' conjured up images of nineteenth century pastoral outposts and a history of conflict between Aboriginal people and

European colonisers. It seemed that in the East Kimberley this term was being used to define and promote a contemporary regional identity.

1.1 Research question and scope

This thesis addresses the relationship between representations of place, time and change and the spatial politics of land tenure, land use and land management. Underpinning my enquiry is a broader question about the relationship between symbolic engagements with place in the form of rhetoric, narrative and place-images, and material engagements through land use practices. As a consequence, I focus my analysis on the iterative processes that link representations of place with human activity and material changes, and that link ideas of place with the way in which place is experienced by different people in their daily lives. These concerns are central to the discipline of human geography within which this work is situated.

In translating these theoretical questions into the context of the East Kimberley in the late 1990s, I focus on the manner in which contemporary planning processes represent the East Kimberley as a place and define different groups of people as having specific interests in land. Contemporary planning processes make reference to three distinct sets of land uses – agriculture, Aboriginal land use and tourism. Because of their significance in planning these three categories shape the structure of the first part of my thesis. However, I employ a more critical approach than that of contemporary planners, examining how these externally imposed categories relate to the way people identify themselves and how they understand difference.

By focusing on the four decades since the beginning of irrigated agriculture in the East Kimberley in the 1960s, I expose the dynamic nature of social identifications and their

implications in place-making processes over time. I am particularly concerned with the relationship between representations of the past produced within formal planning processes and the memories of those who now live in the East Kimberley. In other words, between those representations of the past validated by institutions and those which inform individual or collective memories.

1.2 Rationale

My interest in the East Kimberley was prompted by two significant developments that frame the contemporary context of my thesis. One was the proposal put forward by the Wesfarmers-Marubeni consortium to greatly expand the existing area of irrigated agriculture in the Ord Valley for corporate farming of sugar cane. The other was the ruling by the Federal Court of Australia in 1998 (Federal Court of Australia 1998) that Miriuwung and Gajerrong people hold Native Title to large areas of land in the region, including land proposed for the new agricultural development.

The Ord Valley (Fig. 2) is the site of one of the first attempts at large-scale irrigated agriculture in tropical Australia, with the creation of the first stage of the Ord Irrigation Scheme during the 1960s. There have been several attempts at large-scale irrigated agriculture in northern Australia. They include rice growing at Humpty Doo, south of Darwin, and less ambitious enterprises on the Daly River and elsewhere. So far none has been a success, although small-scale horticultural enterprises involving irrigation appear to be flourishing. For governments and agriculturalists, irrigation provides a means of harnessing the otherwise 'wasted' floodwaters of the monsoons for year round use (Arthur 1997). Water, stored in dams and moving, regulated through irrigation pipes, becomes a commodity and measures out a new kind of time in the tropics, the time of modernity.



Figure 2. View of Ord Valley looking north from Mirima National Park.

The East Kimberley as a region throws up particular challenges for contemporary land use planning (Fig. 3). Remote from major population centres, European influences on both the land and its Aboriginal societies are relatively recent. They began with the arrival of pastoralists and their cattle in the 1880s and accelerated rapidly with the development of irrigated agriculture and tourism since the 1960s. The influx of new settlers associated with the formation of Kununurra and the Ord River Irrigation Area in the 1960s coincided with other significant changes at that time. Up until then Aboriginal people resided in ration camps on pastoral stations, forming a pool of labour that maintained stations and homesteads. During the 1960s this situation changed. As the town of Kununurra was built Aboriginal people took up residence there, eventually moving into a designated reserve area on the outskirts of the town. During the 1980s several national parks were created which provided tourism destinations. Improved transport associated with developments in agriculture, and later mining, facilitated access to the East Kimberley by tourists (see Appendix C). Tourism is now a significant industry, and Kununurra offers a range of accommodation for both domestic and international tourists who pass through the region and visit its national parks.

Please see print copy for image

I am struck by the clumsiness of the social categories employed in contemporary planning processes and the need for a more sophisticated understanding of difference. Difference, in the context of land use and representations of place, occurs on a number of planes. Cultural difference remains a deep divide between Aboriginal people and those of European background resident in the East Kimberley. However there is a marked contrast between the way this divide was experienced by older Aboriginal people who grew up on pastoral stations speaking traditional languages and the way it is now experienced by younger people who have grown up in towns and speak mainly English. Among the farming community in the Ord Valley, there has been almost no continuity between the first generation of farmers, who arrived in the 1960s, and those now farming in the Ord Valley. Similarly, the tourists who now visit the East Kimberley have no connection with those who visited in earlier decades. Gender is another form of difference that cuts across all the categories of subjects in this study and I am conscious that my own age and gender influenced my interactions with those I met in the course of fieldwork.

1.3 Implications

The implications of the politics of difference in place-making and planning processes has been more widely taken up in studies of urban contexts than in rural post-colonial contexts such as the East Kimberley.¹ While my approach is informed by postmodern understandings of social identifications as fluid and dynamic, I am conscious that these understandings are largely derived from urban examples. In the East Kimberley, cultural difference is embedded in the historical experience and memory of Aboriginal people, and continues to structure their social and political positioning in a way that has no equivalence for farmers or tourists. Given this situation, I am concerned to expose the way in which

¹ See for example Fincher and Jacobs (1998).

planning processes either fail to acknowledge difference, or assume fixed identities and reinforce stereotypes that do not allow for change over time. I propose options for an alternative, less prescriptive, approach to land use planning that employs a more sophisticated understanding of difference as a dynamic rather than a fixed quality.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines my theoretical positioning and relates it to the methodological approach employed. The remainder of thesis is then divided into two further parts. In Part II (Chapters 3 to 6) I employ a historical perspective in order to identify and describe patterns of change and continuity in the development of land interests since the 1960s for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists. Chapter 3 provides a brief historical background to my study, summarising the way in which the East Kimberley was represented in government reports from the exploratory expeditions of Alexander Forrest in the 1870s to policy and planning associated with rural reconstruction in the wake of the Second World War. It traces some of the patterns and contradictions in policy making regarding the Kimberley that provide an important underlying context for the approach of contemporary governments to land use planning in the region. Some of these issues have continuing relevance in the present day. Chapters 4 to 6 interrogate the development of land interests of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists respectively. I describe the ways in which people involved in different forms of land use have experienced the East Kimberley as a place and understand change over time. In each of these chapters I trace prominent themes in how values are ascribed to land use practices, and in the assessment of aesthetic qualities of land. I also trace the contribution of different forms of

land use to the development of place-images (Shields 1991), narratives and discourse about change, and their circulation in public media since the 1960s.

The dramatically different temporal dimension of the life experience of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists in the region would seem to have significant implications for the construction of subjects in relation to place, a theme which forms an ongoing line of questioning throughout the thesis. I explore aspects of identity and mobility for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists in the East Kimberley during the 1960s and contrast these with the situation in the 1990s. It then becomes possible to interpret how identity has been implicated in processes of change in the past in which Aboriginal people and farmers engaged, in very different ways, with legislation, government policy and land use. Mobility as a form of spatial practice is both an influence and an outcome of these processes, and can be understood in Doreen Massey's terms as a 'progressive sense of place' (Massey 1993).

In Part III of the thesis, I bring these understandings of the dynamic qualities of land interests, place and identity to bear on two kinds of places, the 'Project Area' proposed for Ord Stage Two, and national parks on both the Western Australian and Northern Territory sides of the border. Rather than entities, I conceive of both the Project Area and the national parks as 'place-making processes'. I revisit the theoretical framing presented in this introduction and develop the concept of land interests as a tool for understanding the connections between spatial politics on local, national and global scales.

Chapters 6 and 7 draw on aspects of non-representational theory to interpret the interface between different land interests, teasing out the spatial politics that have played out over

time and allowed the voices of some land users or groups to gain a wider airing while other voices do not. This allows me to examine how place-images, narratives and discourses about change and the past are mobilised in the context of contemporary decision-making about land tenure, land use and management. I analyse contemporary planning processes as examples of iterative processes operating between representations of place in public and political arenas and the lived experience of different land users, and speculate on possibilities for the future. Using this framework I interpret the connections between the production of place-images, narratives and discourses of change, and actual change to land tenure, land use and management. Finally, in conclusion, I reflect on the particular challenge of incorporating relational understandings in future land use planning for the East Kimberley.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framing - a relational approach to place

... The presence and circulation of a representation (taught by preachers, educators, and popularizers as the key to socioeconomic advancement) tells us nothing about what it is for its users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization (de Certeau 1984: xiii).

2.1 Relational approaches to place

Since the 1960s, a growing body of work in human geography has interrogated the dynamic between ideas or representations, practices that are both embodied and emplaced, and the material environment of both natural and human origin. Human geographers such as Massey (1999), Whatmore (1997, 1999) and Thrift (1996), understand place as both a domain of social action, and produced through social action. In order to focus on experiential and sensory engagements with place they have revisited the tradition of phenomenology, first posed by Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century (Husserl 1982) and taken up by his student, Heidegger, in the early twentieth century (Heidegger 1977). It was further developed by Merleau-Ponty (1962) in the context of the post-structuralist movement in the 1960s. Phenomenology had a strong influence on the development of hermeneutics by Gadamer (1975) which in turn, came to inform interpretive approaches in anthropology (eg. Geertz 1973, Ingold 1995, Strathern 1992) and, more recently, archaeology (eg. Tilley 1993, 1994).

An extraordinarily diverse range of approaches has resulted, arising from markedly different understandings of what it is to be embodied and emplaced. Underpinning these different approaches are very different understandings of the human subject, articulated

most clearly by feminist scholars such as Butler (1990), hooks (1990) and Grosz (1994).² While some of this scholarship focuses specifically on the relationship between the 'self' and place (Casey 2001), reflecting the concerns of humanistic geographers such as Relph (1976) and Lowenthal (1985)³, my own interpretation emphasises social relations as part of the phenomenological experience of place (Whatmore 1997), following a broader move in human geography to think 'in terms of relations' (Massey and the collective 1999). This involves 'the relational conceptualization of entities themselves' (Massey and the collective 1999: 12) in which the production and experience of place is connected with the production and experience of social identities. Massey (1993) argues for a 'progressive sense of place' that allows an understanding of changing relations over time.

Scholarship in this vein draws on contributions of social constructions to invoke new forms of epistemology that diverge from the Enlightenment tradition which still informs many aspects of institutional-based regional planning. The Enlightenment tradition assumes a pre-existing order in both the social and natural world that can be 'revealed' through analytical activity and modelled through the creation of systems of representation (Shotter 1993). By contrast, the concern of constructionists is with how,

... without a conscious grasp of the processes involved in doing so, in living out particular forms of *self-other relationships*, we unknowingly construct different, particular forms of what we might call *person-world relations*: the special ways in which, as scientists, say, we interact with the different worlds of only theoretically defined entities; the routine ways in which as ordinary persons we function in the different 'realities' we occupy in our everyday social lives; as well as the extraordinary ways in which we act, say, when in 'love'... (Shotter 1993: 12).

² Longhurst (2001: 14-16) provides a useful summary of the influence of phenomenology on humanistic geographers in the 1970s.

³ For a feminist critique of Casey's abstractions of the embodied self in his phenomenological approach, see Hooper (2001).

Pursuing a similar epistemological interest, Thrift (1996) traces the development of forms of theory that are non-representational and seek understanding through a focus on relations rather than representations (Fig. 4).

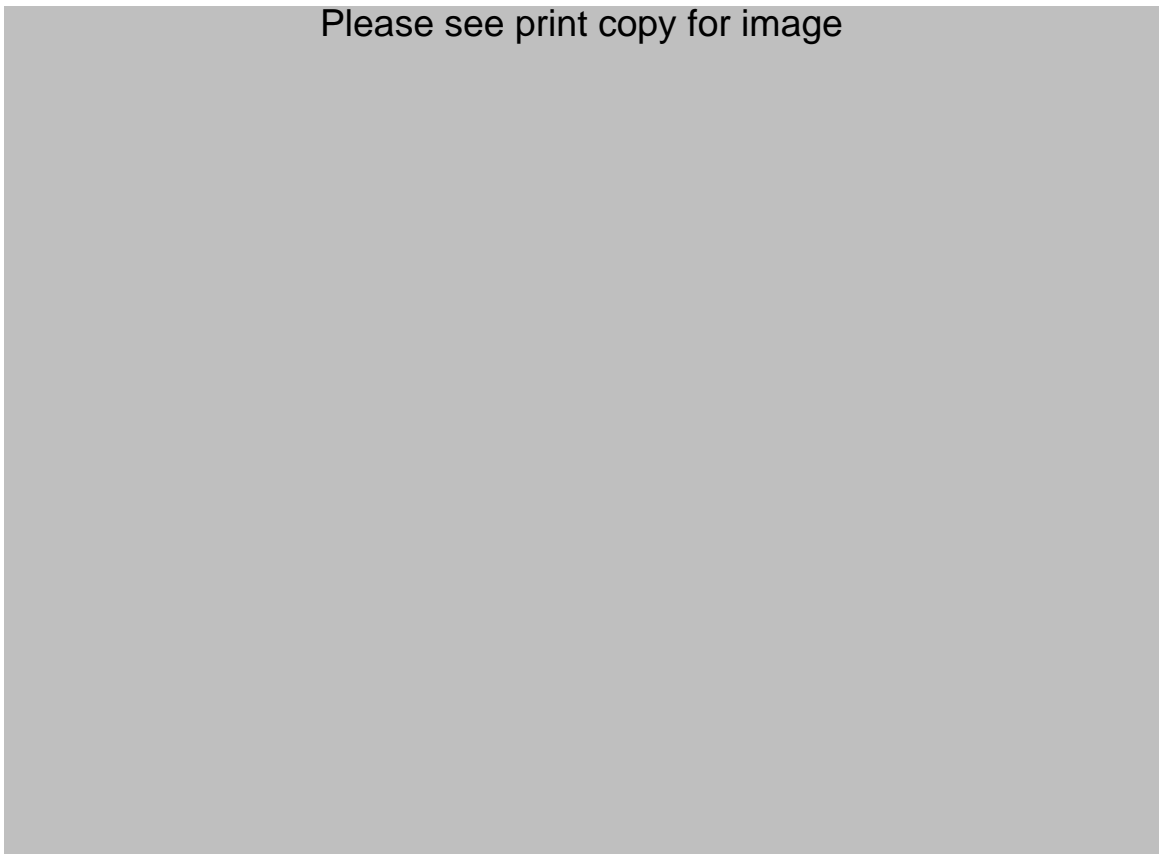


Figure 4. ‘The life-time-lines of non-representational theory’ (Thrift 1999: 303).

Thrift demonstrates the influence on these theorists of Wittgenstein’s model of ordinary language that asserts the importance of context to understanding the meaning of any speech act and ‘brings words back from their metaphysical to their everyday usage’ (Thrift 1996).⁴ Linking non-representational theory with Haraway’s concept of ‘situated epistemologies’, Thrift argues for a ‘relational materialism’ founded on an ontology that works through things in a world made up of encounters:

⁴ Curry (2000) provides a good discussion of the implications of Wittgenstein’s ideas for thinking about space as finite and delimited as opposed to the Newtonian conception of space as infinite and abstract.

This irreducible ontology is paralleled by a 'situated' epistemology which recognizes very strong limits on what can be known and how we can know it because of the way human subjects are embodied as beings in time-space, because of their interconnected position in multiple social relations, and because there are numerous perspectives on, and metaphors of, what counts as knowledge, or, more precisely, knowledges (Thrift 1999: 303).

Further parallels can be drawn with Bakhtin's focus on the utterances of dialogic speech in constituting a two-way flow between speakers that is always both individual and contextual (Bakhtin (1986: 88) cited by Shotter (1993: 24)).

Parallel to developments in relational approaches to place are understandings of social identity as a process, influenced by material relations but inherently fluid. The work of Anderson (1983) on the role of print media in creating 'imagined communities' can be understood in this vein. Whatmore (1997) contrasts the Cartesian notion of the individual as an autonomous unit exercising abstract reason with communitarian notions of the individual as situated, and explores their differing implications for understandings of ethics.

Drawing on feminist encounters with postmodernism, she poses

... a notion of *difference in relation*, as intersubjectively constituted in the context of always/already existing configurations of self and community (Whatmore 1997: 43).

The 'de-centring' of the subject and the consequent recognition of both internal and external influences on social identifications, opens up new understandings of iterative processes at work in identity formation and the connections between representations of social identities and lived experience.

Bondi (1993) explores the relationship between essentialist and constructionist notions of identity with reference to enlightenment views of the subject and to the perspectives of interiority and exteriority put forward by Freud and Marx. While acknowledging that identity is 'always both internally fractured and externally multiple' (Bondi 1993: 97), she

highlights strategic values for oppressed groups in assuming 'subject-positions' at certain times for certain purposes. This is an important point to make. It is reinforced by Whatmore (1997) who notes the propensity of a 'postmodernist insistence on the radical instability of the individual, divested of material fabric or context' to 'evoke highly disembodied, as well as disembedded, social agents' (Whatmore 1997: 41).

The body has been the focus of some of the most long running tensions between essentialism and constructionism. Feminist scholars have attempted to grapple with this tension by distinguishing between sex, a physical expression of difference, and gender, its social manifestation (Butler 1990, 1993, Irigaray 1985, Grosz 1994). Similarly, ethnicity can be seen to have physical manifestations, such as skin colour and facial features, as well as social and cultural ones (Docker and Fischer 2000). Less well studied but also important in the East Kimberley context is age and generational difference⁵. This is particularly significant in Aboriginal communities where the lives of young adults may be dramatically different to those of their parents who grew up within a colonial regime, controlled by station managers and police.

2.2 Social relations and place making processes

My particular concern with the way in which social identifications are constructed through relations with land requires a specific theoretical framing. Central to this is the concept of 'land interest', which I develop below. Because of my focus on the iterative connections between phenomenological experiences and representations of place, I locate my work within the body of recent scholarship that links phenomenological and constructionist approaches to place. My relational approach highlights the dynamic aspects of social

⁵ Laws (1995) is a good example of a study that contrasts essentialist with constructionist approaches to age.

identifications in the context of changing experiences of the East Kimberley over time. It requires me to engage with historical sources that allow different land interests to be traced over time.

Place-making processes operate at different scales that can be crudely summarised by the terms local, national and global. Massey (1993) defines place as a moment in time that is characterised by a particular set of social relations,

... its specificity ... is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus. ... The uniqueness of a place, or a locality, in other words is constructed out of particular interactions and mutual articulations of social relations, social processes, experiences and understandings, in a situation of co-presence, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are actually constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, a region or even a continent (Massey 1993: 66).

My approach reflects Massey's but draws more heavily upon the relationship between social actors and their material environment, because of my concern with the way people experience their physical as well as their social environment.

2.2.1 Social identifications as 'land interests'

'Land interests' are produced by the construction of social identities through relations with land. Land interests engage people in relationships with others and with their material environment, in ways that change over time. My use of the term 'interest' is informed by Bourdieu's formulation of 'interest' as historically contingent,

... the concept of interest, as I construe it, is totally disjointed from the transhistorical and universal interest of utilitarian theory. It would be easy to show that Adam Smith's self-interest is nothing more than an unconscious universalization of the form of interest engendered and required by a capitalist economy. Far from being an anthropological invariant, interest is a historical arbitrary, a historical construction that can be known only through historical analysis, *ex post*, through empirical observation, and not deduced *a priori* from some fictitious – and so evidently ethnocentric – conception of "Man" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 115).

Following Bourdieu then, interests in land can only be understood through historical enquiry.

Land interests as social identifications produce and frame categories of subjects. The categories I employ in my enquiry – ‘farmers’, ‘Aboriginal people’ and ‘tourists’ – can all be understood in this way. While I use these terms throughout the thesis, my historical approach is intended to demonstrate their fluidity over time.⁶ I explore the development of land interests for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists since the 1960s. Each of these groups has a very different temporal presence in the East Kimberley. In Aboriginal traditions, people trace their ancestry to the Ngarranggarni, a term used to refer to a time when ancestral beings created the landscape. Ngarranggarni or ‘dreaming’ stories are associated with features of the material landscape and bind living people in kin relationships with specific places, plant and animal species, and with ancestors. By contrast, almost all the farmers active in the Ord Valley in the late 1990s had travelled to the region as adults from southern Australia and few expected that their children would remain in the area. Tourists, both international and domestic travellers, provide yet another contrast in that the majority spend no more than three days in the region during the dry season between June and August.

The notion of land interest addresses the need for planning processes to be underpinned by concepts that allow greater recognition of the historically contingent and fluid aspects of social identities in relation to place. Currently, these processes are more likely to be driven

⁶ Foucault’s (1982) analysis of the role of power relations in the construction of the subject has been influential in drawing attention to the placement of the subject in relations of production and signification. It has some relevance to understanding the relationship between the categories of subjects employed in this thesis and forms of land use.

by notions of both places and social identities as static and ahistorical. They employ a Cartesian notion of place as being composed of a set of essential properties, expressed through a scientific discourse that is more suited to addressing geological time frames than historical ones (Trigger 1997). All this results in an artificial separation between the material environment and human experience, society and culture. Because it incorporates both material and symbolic dimensions, the notion of 'land interest' integrates the economic, social and environmental aspects of relationships with place that are often maintained as distinct in government policy frameworks. It offers a different approach to planning that is more sensitive to both differences and commonalities among various groups of land users.

2.2.2 Mobility

A focus on mobility provides a means of connecting the material and historical dimensions of spatial practice with the formation of land interests. It assists with understanding how people construct relations between places and highlights connections between land use practices in the East Kimberley and broader economic and social systems linked with the flow of goods and people. Pragmatically, mobility can be traced over time through documentary sources. Contrasts between the mobility of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists over time highlight differentials in knowledge, power and wealth that circumscribe experiences of place.

Mobility should therefore be viewed as an aspect of spatial practice that contributes to the production and experience of land interests. As Cresswell notes,

Movement (when it becomes mobility) is socially produced, is variable across space and time and has visible effects in people, places, things and the relationships between them (Cresswell 2001: 20).

Studies of mobility have proliferated in postcolonial and postmodern studies, with one stream of scholarship focusing on forced displacements of people through war, persecution

or famine, and a separate one focusing on voluntary displacements in the form of tourism. The very different social, political and economic circumstances of these two forms of global mobility have prompted calls for materially grounded approaches that examine the circumstances of 'home' for each group, as well as travel destinations. Specific critiques have been levelled at MacCannell (1976) for postulating the tourist as an archetypal postmodern subject (Morris 1988, Kaplan 1996).

Recently, a number of cultural geographers have cautioned against the propensity of some postmodern studies of mobility in the context of globalisation, to defeat their own purpose by generating new grand narratives built on metaphors that have no spatial grounding (Mitchell 1997, Smith and Katz 1993, Kaplan 1996). They warn of the danger of essentialising space through the development of a 'travelling theory' founded on 'free floating' spatial metaphors. Their recent critique contains elements of an earlier concern expressed by Lefebvre (1991) of the dangers of theory that is based in language alone.

Every language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space. Distinctions must be drawn between discourse in space, discourse about space and the discourse of space. There are thus relationships between language and space which are to a greater or lesser extent misconstrued or disregarded. There is doubtless not such thing as a 'true space'. As once postulated by classical philosophy – and indeed still postulated by that philosophy's continuation, namely epistemology and the 'scientific criteria' it promotes (Lefebvre 1991: 132).

The Cartesian notion of 'true space' or 'absolute space' still finds expression within scientific and legal rhetoric employed in contemporary land use planning processes, such as the Ord Stage 2 proposal in the East Kimberley. Smith and Katz (1993) warn of the politically charged nature of such conceptions despite their apparent neutrality and assert that this notion of space works against the comprehension of different interests in land,

Meanwhile, the uncritical appropriation of absolute space as a source domain for metaphors forecloses recognition of the multiple qualities, types, properties and

attributes of social space, its constructed absolutism and its relationality (Smith and Katz 1993: 79-80).

I address this concern directly by focusing on the material dimensions of mobility and linking these with a notion of land interests, understood as historically contingent, dynamic and relational. I then demonstrate the value of this alternative conceptual framework for posing a less prescriptive approach to land use planning that engages with the web of changing relations and spatial practices in the East Kimberley over time.

2.2.3 Representations of place and people

For each group of land users addressed in this study, I examine the way in which aspects of their experience of place come to be portrayed in a public context, whether through public media such as newspapers and television documentaries, tourism promotions, popular literature, or public documents. Rather than analysing these representations as texts in themselves, I am concerned with understanding how specific experiences of place gain a public airing. I trace patterns of change over time, in relation to shifts in political contexts at both local and national scales.

Representations that fix place and social identities in time are readily available to land use planners in the context of tourism, agriculture and Aboriginal land use. A good example is the representation of the landscape within tourism promotional imagery as a timeless pristine wilderness. Another is the representation of authentic Aboriginal culture as residing in the pre-European past. A key concern of my enquiry therefore is with understanding how a relational approach to place can identify connections between the material and the symbolic domains that transcend the nature/culture binary underpinning many tropes of representation currently operating in the East Kimberley.

2.3 Methodological strategies

In keeping with an epistemological approach that takes all knowledge to be situated (Haraway 1991, McDowell 1992), my sources must also be understood as *partial* and situated, with their meaning to be sought in relations and contrasts between different sets of materials. For this reason, I provide considerable information about the context in which each of the sources relied on was produced and reflect on my relationships with the various subjects identified in the course of the work. Shotter proposes a concept of metamethodology as an appropriate framing device for non-representational scholarship. Metamethodology requires consideration of ‘investigatory devices and practices’ employed in the production of data or source materials, in addition to the analysis of the data or source materials collected (Shotter 1993).

Recognising that no external position exists where we do not influence the material we gather, Shotter emphasises the need for a more interpretive approach in which the role of field work is to ‘make sense’ of experiences and social interactions with reference to broader contextual knowledge.

Please see print copy for image

Figure 5. 'Two-way, interactive mode of investigation' (Shotter 1993: 26).

According to Shotter, a hermeneutic or interpretive methodology must recognise two interdependent aspects of the research process and of knowledge creation generally. One, depicted by the lower arrow in Figure 5, is the more conventional empirical approach to finding pattern in the world. Agents find pre-existing causality and meanings by interrogating the external world. The other, depicted by the upper arrow, indicates the contribution of 'ways of talking' or interpretive frameworks in constructing pattern in the world. The methods and purpose of their enquiries contribute to the construction of meaning in the external world. In this model, the 'agent', depicted on the right, may refer to the researcher as well as those who form the subjects of the research. Sympathetic with phenomenological approaches, Shotter's model assists with understanding the iterative processes that underscore human engagements with the material world.

Ley and Mountz (2001) note that interpretive methods have a long history in human geography. However, the 'crisis of representation' (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993) has prompted increased concern about the need for rigour in qualitative research methods. This concern is specifically addressed by Baxter and Eyles (1997) who describe a set of

principles employed by social geographers to enhance rigour and ensure meaningful inference. Like most qualitative researchers, I allowed the unfolding of the research situation to guide both the sources and methods used. In accordance with the first of the principles espoused by Baxter and Eyles (1997), I describe the context and rationale each time I introduce new sources and methods.

A key form of validity throughout the range of methods I employ is the grounding of the concepts informing my analysis in concepts with meaning to the various people I worked with. In the case of interview techniques, this was achieved by maintaining an open approach which used a set of predetermined questions as prompts to encourage interviewees to raise issues themselves that they felt were important. 'Participant concepts' were then distinguished from theoretical or 'researcher-derived' concepts (Baxter and Eyles 1997: 510-1). The correspondence, or difference, between the two then forms the focus of my analysis of these sources. The use of different methods and sources to address the relationships between the various land interests and representations of place provides a form of triangulation which I consider essential for ensuring rigour in addressing such a complex research question. It also provides some scope to discuss the wider implications of my findings.

While I draw inspiration from various aspects of Bourdieu's work in developing my relational approach to place, my epistemological positioning diverges from his in taking knowledge and meaning to be produced through the interaction of scholars with the sources or subjects of their work. Bourdieu's conception of the scholar as necessarily outside of the subjects of study maintains an Enlightenment perspective of research as revealing of pre-existing order in the world (Shotter 1993). Critics, Alexander (1995) and

Sayer (1999) have cautioned against the reductionist tendencies of this positioning which is especially problematic in his concept of the 'field'. My interpretive approach requires that I reflect on the way my relations with others evolved during the course of my work. In describing the approaches and methods employed, I also consider how these relationships affected my own 'interest' and their hermeneutic implications.

The different time-scales of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists required that I employ a diverse range of methods and source materials, which includes recorded interviews, a survey, field observations and archival records including film. The sources used and methods of analysis differ for each category of land use. This not only reflects the temporal context but also the political context that frames different groups of land users. For this reason, I have included a more detailed description of methods at the beginning of each of the three chapters dealing with land interests since the 1960s – Chapters Three, Four and Five. Sources I draw on for information about lived experiences, such as recorded interviews and Native Title transcripts, are frequently the same sources that I draw on for representations of place and people. As a consequence they provide important material for understanding the relationships between lived experiences and representations.

'Representations' are produced in the form of narratives, rhetoric and imagery. At an individual level, they may be expressed through memory of past experiences and places, or through speculations about the future. At a more collective level they may be expressed through the circulation of representations that are shared among specific groups of land

⁷ Painter notes that although Bourdieu uses a spatial language, his terms do not necessarily correspond to equivalent spatial concepts in geography, and this is particularly the case with his notion of the 'field'. In maintaining a separation between social space and geographical space, he is at odds with geographers who pose a relational approach to place (Painter 2000).

users. Imagery used in tourism promotion is a good example of this. Heeding the warnings of de Certeau cited above, I take care to distinguish between the representations produced by land users who form the subjects of my study, and those produced or circulated by agencies or organisations involved in land use planning.

As my research was supported in the context of a broader research program at the University of Wollongong, its conduct was influenced to some extent by the work of other researchers. My field work connections with the Aboriginal community at Marralam were framed by prior relationships of that community with Dr Lesley Head, Dr Richard Fullagar and research student, Jenny Atchison. My work in surveying tourists in Kununurra in 1999 was conducted in collaboration with Dr Gordon Waitt, who designed the questionnaire and provided the statistical analysis of results. Two joint authored papers were produced from that collaboration prior to submission of this thesis (Lane and Waitt 2001, Waitt et al. in press). However all interviews with farmers and tourism operators were conducted entirely independently of other researchers (see Table 1), as was all archival research involving film, historical documents and native title transcripts.

Table 1. Summary of fieldwork conducted

Interviews recorded by me and lodged with the Northern Territory Archives Service, Darwin			
Interviewee	Subject matter	Interview date	Interview location
Don Beach	CSIRO Crops Research, Kimberley Research Station in 1957	17 August, 2001	Bellbowrie, Queensland
Andy Chapman	CSIRO Crops Research, Kimberley Research Station 1945–1961 & 1971–1984	July 30, 2001	Darwin, Northern Territory
Bill Withers	Kununurra town	21 November, 1998	Kununurra,

	and tourism in the 1960s		Western Australia
Judy Withers	Journey to Kununurra in the 1960s	21 November, 1998	Kununurra, Western Australia
Kenton May	Tourism (backpackers)	March 17, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Lynne Bunney	Tourism (backpackers and adventure tours)	March 18, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Jeff and Jenny Hayley	Tourism (boat tours)	March 23, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Andrew McEwan	Tourism (fishing)	March 19, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Kevin Kelly	Aboriginal art	August 4, 2001	Kununurra, Western Australia
Barbara Dickey	Farming in the 1960s	19 November, 2001	Kununurra, Western Australia
Di Oliver	Farming in the 1960s	23 June, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
John Mack	Farming in the 1990s	23 March, 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Jill Parker	Farming in the 1990s	23 March 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Elaine Gardiner	Farming in the 1990s	17 March 1999	Kununurra, Western Australia
Spike Dessert	Farming in the 1970s and 1990s	24 November 1998	Kununurra, Western Australia

Hand written interview

Rosalie Hamilton	Farming in the 1960s	20 November 1998	Kununurra, Western Australia
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Survey

A survey of 336 tourists jointly conducted with Dr Waitt in Kununurra in 1999. Dr Waitt designed the format of the survey with my input. Results of the survey are described in detail in Waitt et al (in press). Interpretation of results was made collaboratively with Dr Waitt.

Notes and journals recorded during fieldwork

(see Appendix A)

2.3.1 Relationships and ‘interests’ on my part

My fieldwork was conducted between May 1998 and August 2001, and consisted of five visits, the longest of which was thirty-one days and the shortest five days duration (see Appendix A). The first visit was made in June 1998 as an assistant to Jenny Atchison, another PhD student who was conducting an ethnobotany and archaeology project in collaboration with senior Aboriginal women living at Marralam Outstation near the Keep River (Fig. 3). I stayed at Marralam ‘Outstation’ for three weeks, and travelled to various rock shelters in the surrounding country to assist with vegetation surveys. Residents of the Marralam Outstation had long standing experience with assisting researchers. Lesley Head and Richard Fullagar have conducted research in this region since 1987 and their ongoing relationship with community members clearly influenced my own relationships. Researchers pay rent for accommodation and also pay a daily rate for assistance from community members (Head et al. 2002). Throughout my subsequent interactions with Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley, I was regarded as being associated with the Marralam ‘mob’.

On subsequent field trips, I stayed in Kununurra in caravan park or backpacker accommodation. My status as a fleeting visitor put me, in my temporal encounters with place and people, in a position that had many elements in common with the experiences of tourists. However, repeated visits over time and continuing interactions with East Kimberley residents enabled my relationships to develop and become much richer.

The practice of sending drafts of my publications to individuals and agencies in the region assisted in developing my credentials as a ‘useful’ researcher and prompted other forms of engagement conducted through correspondence and telephone communication. I also

made valuable connections with other scholars who had conducted extensive fieldwork in the East Kimberley over a long period. Linguist Frances Kofod, and anthropologists Patrick Sullivan and Kim Barber were particularly important in this regard. Almost all scholars who had worked with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people for any length of time were called upon to provide reports as expert witnesses in the 1997 Native Title hearings. However, as this material was subject to 'Court in Confidence' provisions that restricted access until final resolution of the case at an unspecified date, personal communication was particularly important.

In a special edition of the journal *Progress in Human Geography* in 1994, a number of geographers reflect on the importance of understanding the political context in which field work is conducted and the nature of the engagement between researchers and subjects.

... the "field" is always politically situated, contextualized, and defined and its social, political, and spatial boundaries shift with changing circumstances or in different political contexts (Nast 1994: 60).

In undertaking a project about social and cultural dimensions of land use change in the East Kimberley in 1998, I encountered a tense political environment surrounding the Miriuwung and Gajerrong Native Title claim and other claims made under the Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NT). Proposals for regional development, specifically in relation to the Ord Stage 2 project, also generated tensions and ongoing community consultations. Because of this underlying political context, certain lines of fieldwork that I had originally proposed were not possible to pursue. This included plans to conduct interviews with officers of the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory who had worked in the Keep River National Park since its creation in 1980⁸, and to

⁸ The then Director of the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory, Dr Bill Freeland, refused me permission to interview staff of the Commission and required that I not contact staff by phone. As instructed, I addressed my questions to the Director in a letter but received no response.

conduct interviews with Aboriginal people that would have formed part of an extensive social impact assessment for the Ord 2 proposal.⁹ As a result, I abbreviated the fieldwork component of my study and drew more heavily on documentary and archival sources, including film. My decision to rely more heavily on the court transcripts of the 1997 Native Title hearings, rather than on fieldwork interviews with Aboriginal people was made in this context.

⁹ The context of this social impact assessment is described at some length in Chapter Three.

PART II

DEVELOPMENT OF LAND

INTERESTS

Chapter 3: Becoming a region

The explore [sic] journals describe the country in its pre-mapped state: but this state is soon superseded, not only by the explorers' own draft charts, but by later travelers linking up their routes to other routes. Before long the one-sidedness of the first journey has been replaced by the ubiquitous view of the map. The explorer's heroism remains and can be annexed to the national destiny, but his experiences along the way are now historically obsolete. His day-by-day narrative, with its uncritical detailing of local conditions, survives, if at all, as an index of one man's experience – a fertile source for biographers and film-makers, but without any practical effect on people now living in the country he first traversed (Carter 1992: 9).

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the circumstances in which the 'East Kimberley' became a named place in government reports and surveys prior to the 1960s, establishing the historical context for its treatment as a distinct region requiring government planning. I draw out themes in explorers' journals, scientific surveys and reports by officials of the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments that connect with broader discourses of race, nature and nationhood that are more visible in popular literature of the time. Some of these representations have had a remarkable persistence and provide important context to the land use changes introduced since the 1960s and the associated development of interests in land.

I am concerned to trace the interplay between the way place is experienced by various surveyors and the way it is represented. These early representations set in motion a chain of effects that influenced the experiences of those who followed. In the quote above, Carter (1992) describes a transition from the more phenomenological or interpretive accounts employed by explorers to describe and make sense of their encounters with new places and people to the abstract systems of representation that come into play as soon as an area is

mapped. Taking a cue from Carter, I pay particular attention to the circumstances in which various aspects of the East Kimberley were mapped, and to the way in which maps then came to influence the preconceptions and expectations of those who came later.

3.2 Approach and methods

I begin by looking at some of the descriptive accounts of the area made by explorers in the late nineteenth century, which encouraged pastoral settlement and other land speculation. By the early twentieth century however, pastoralism in northern Australia was in difficulties, prompting governments to fund land surveys with a view to alternative land use, particularly agriculture. These surveys and inquiries provide further source materials for this chapter. Following the threat of invasion during the Second World War, and renewed interest in regional development in the post-war economic environment, the Commission for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) commenced an extensive land survey of northern Australia using newly available technology of aerial photography and developing a new approach that mapped the country into land systems. Although the survey was not published until 1970, it ensured a platform of authority for the senior scientists involved, who subsequently played a critical role in influencing Commonwealth government initiatives in the region.

In 1946 the CSIR established a research station on the Ord River in order to conduct experiments into irrigated agriculture. I recorded interviews with two agricultural scientists who had worked at the Kimberley Research Station in the 1950s, Andy Chapman and Don Beech. Andy Chapman commenced work at the Kimberley Research Station in 1954. He outlined major differences between the scales of the earlier survey exercises, which classified land into general categories, and the much finer detailed mapping of soil and vegetation features that was required for agricultural endeavours. Don Beech arrived in

1957. When the first five farms were opened for selection, he and three other agricultural researchers obtained one as a private commercial venture, which they developed and maintained while employed at the Kimberley Research Station.

I briefly consider how representations of the East Kimberley produced by planners and scientists contrast with those prevailing in popular literature at the time. Popular representations of the Kimberley as a 'frontier' and as 'cattle country' posed a challenge for those who wished to offer an alternative vision of a modern agrarian landscape.

3.3 Nineteenth century exploration

Journals of explorers funded by colonial governments to survey land and recommend on its economic potential provided the first representations of the East Kimberley available to governments and potential settlers in the nineteenth century. Throughout these records are notes and speculation about the potential for irrigated agriculture, along with more personal responses to the material environment. As this period has been the subject of several substantial academic theses, I provide only a summary here drawn largely from secondary sources. In particular I draw on Clement's study of European exploration of north west Australia (Clement 1991), Bolton's study of the Kimberley Pastoral industry (Bolton 1954) and a more general text by Holmes (1963) on land settlement in northern Australia.

Fears of Dutch interest in northern Australia prompted the British Colonial Office to commission Captain George Grey to explore the coastline of the north west of Australia (Bolton 1954: 8). He made two expeditions. On the first expedition in 1837, experimental plantations were made on the Glenelg River consisting of breadfruit, coconuts and cotton. In the journal of this expedition, published in 1841, Clement notes that,

The warm climate and abundant rain - 46 wet days in four and a half months - struck Grey as ideal for tropical agriculture (Clement 1991: 48).

Grey proposed the cultivation of cotton, indigo, sugar and rice with prospects for trade in the 'East Indian Archipelago'. He made no comment on prospects for pastoralism.

While Grey encountered Aboriginal people in the course of his travels, he could not reconcile his impressions of these people with either the vibrant rock art that captured both his attention and imagination, or the land itself, which he understood to be fertile and suited to tillage. In a study of the inscribing practices of colonial exploration, Carter (1992: 55) describes Grey's encounter with Wandjina rock art on this expedition and his attempt to render this alien image into something familiar through speculation of an Asian origin,

I sat in the fading light, looking at the beautiful scenery around me, which now for the first time gladdened the eyes of Europeans; and I wondered that so fair a land should only be the abode of savage men; and then I thought of the curious paintings we had this day seen, - of the timid character of the natives, - of their anomalous position in so fertile a country, - and wondered how long these things were to be (Grey 1841 cited by Carter (1992: 55)).

The report of Gregory's overland expedition fifteen years later, in 1855-6, makes specific comments on the fertile soil and abundant grass in the East Kimberley. However Clement (1991) highlights a note of caution in his descriptions of the Victoria River area,

After examining the Victoria River closely, Gregory noted that the soil in one area, although rich, crumbled into small pieces beneath the summer sun, becoming so soft that livestock sank deeply. He noted, too, that the rains created deep mud, which bogged the animals (Clement 1991: 111).

The De Grey and the lower part of the Sherlock River, however, were assessed as ideal for growing cotton (Clement 1991: 140-142), a crop then in demand in colonial markets.

The expeditions with the most direct influence on land settlement were those made by Alexander Forrest between 1875 and 1879. Clement claims that,

The government's¹⁰ publication of Forrest's journal with its many references to splendid grassy plains, water and 'good feed', fuelled public interest in north-western Australia (Clement 1991: 271).

It influenced the parliamentary decision to open up the land for pastoral leases. The publication of the report by the WA Parliament in 1880 was mainly aimed at pastoralists. It proclaimed that '... an extent of country equal to about 25 millions of acres has been opened up for pastoral and agricultural settlement' (Forrest 1880 cited by Holmes 1963: 85).

A subsequent report produced in 1883 by John Forrest, Surveyor General and Commissioner of Crown Lands in Western Australia, provided a more measured synopsis of the prospects for cultivation in the region,

I do not feel that I can report with any authority on the fitness of the country for the purposes of cultivation. The land in the valleys of the May, Meda, Lennard and Fitzroy, and in fact all the rivers of the district, consists of splendid alluvium, and is therefore magnificently suited; but the question of climate, the amount of rain and the regularity and extent it falls in the winter months, the number of months in which it generally does not fall, and the state of the land in the dry season, are all questions that require determining before a reliable judgement can be formed of the fitness of the country for the growth of particular products ... (Forrest 1883: 8).

Suitability of the monsoonal climate for agriculture was clearly a concern. While the various rivers mentioned were all considered to have rich fertile alluvial soils, the Ord was considered most suitable for cultivation because of the superiority of Cambridge Gulf as a deep-sea port. Various commentators viewed the absence of an agricultural labour force as a serious problem. In 1885, James E. Coghlan, reporting on the capabilities of Cambridge Gulf as a port, speculated about prospects for initial development of an agricultural area by Chinese,

Should gold actually exist on, or adjacent to the shores of Cambridge Gulf, there will doubtless soon be a considerable population on its shores. The fine vessels of the

¹⁰ The Western Australian Parliament.

China Steam Navigation Company, and other ocean-going steam ships, which call at Port Darwin, would bring thousands of Chinese into the Gulf in a short time, to work as miners and agriculturalists, in addition to a white mining population (Coghlan 1885: 12).

Government concerns about a few pastoral companies monopolizing the land and 'locking it up', stalling development and settlement, were reflected in successive changes to pastoral leasing arrangements. However, Bolton (1954) observes that these initiatives were unsuccessful as large landholding interests, such as the English companies Vestey's and Bovril, were able to lease vast tracts of land regardless.

Speculation about the potential for cultivation clearly played a role in the perception of the economic or productive value of the East Kimberley, as did other attributes such as the potential for a deep-water port at Wyndham. However, question marks hung over whether the monsoonal climate was suited to agriculture, the costs associated with the distance from other European settlements, and the absence of a suitable agricultural labour force. In portraying the East Kimberley as remote and empty of people, these explorers dismissed its Aboriginal occupants as irrelevant to future land use.

3.4 Early twentieth century scientific surveys

In 1909, concerns about problems in the pastoral industry prompted the Western Australian government to engage a tropical agriculture expert to visit the North West and report on opportunities for tropical agriculture. Despeissis had some experience of agricultural experiments in north Queensland. He considered that there were good prospects for growing cotton in the northwest but expressed concern about the unsuitability of Aboriginal people for agricultural labour and the consequent lack of a cheap agricultural labour force,

The country is at present committed to a policy which precludes the introduction of indentured coloured labour, and for that reason the development of the tropics by the whites alone will be slower. The utilisation of the aborigine blacks, ... for some special work, has been found disappointing. Past experience has shown that even this quantity is a vanishing one; it would take generations to make trained farm labourers from the ranks of the Australian blacks ... (Despeissis 1921: 4).

He described the Kimberley as 'a raw and empty tropical wilderness' and suggested importing agricultural labourers from southern Europe as a solution to the labour problem. In his report he claims that tropical Australia need not be 'the White Elephant', perhaps repeating a phrase already in popular usage with respect to northern Australian development proposals.¹¹

In 1920, the Western Australian Government established a Department of the North West and appointed Frank J.S. Wise as Tropical Adviser. Part of the Western Australian Government's stated rationale for this was its concern about invasion by people from populous south east Asian countries to the north. Attempts at agriculture were focused on the area around Derby but were not successful. After six years the Department was disbanded.

In a 1929 report titled 'Report on the Possibilities of Growing Fodder Crops in the Kimberley Districts of WA and Eastwards to the Victoria River in the Northern Territory', Wise provided a detailed assessment of the suitability of various soil types in the Ord and Keep River flood plains for cultivation. He was clearly impressed by the vigour of the native grasses growing on the flood plains and saw this as an indicator that lucerne, introduced pastures and a range of crops could all grow there. Local pastoralists, keen to promote agriculture and closer settlement in the area, guided him through the country and

¹¹ Walker (1999: 141-153) provides a useful summary of early twentieth century debates about climate and race in the context of a suitable workforce for tropical Australia.

provided their own perspectives on the various soil types. Wise's report represents the first attempt at a scientific classification of soils in the area.

Soils.

The agricultural survey made would indicate possibilities with certain of the soils, which, for agricultural purposes may be placed in four classes, viz. The black soils of Argyle, Ivanhoe and Auvergne, and the black peaty soils of the Pandanus Springs. To particularize the areas of promise in each station they are here-under dealt with in detail.

... The brown alluvials of the Ord River are probably the most fertile in any part of the area under review, but although capable of producing heavy crops of certain fodders the possibility of periodic flooding inhibits their use for agricultural purposes. This flooding may not occur on the higher levels away from the river for many years, but though very periodic could cause disaster to agricultural development. An extension of these soils but more sandy in character occurs on the Southern side of House Roof Hill where the plains extend for several miles towards the limestone ranges (Wise 1929: 1-2).

The seasonal flooding of the Ord River, while responsible for the deposition of rich alluvial soils, represented a major threat to agriculture. Wise concluded that,

It would appear of natural importance that certain phases of agriculture, particularly those more closely allied to the interests of the pastoral industry be given a thorough tryout in the Kimberley district of Western Australia and in the adjoining areas in Northern Australia. It is very essential that these lands be more efficiently occupied than is compatible with purely pastoral pursuits. The growing of cattle being a well established and proven industry, the improvement of that industry, by any form of agriculture, is justified and advisable and the scope for demonstration work with crops suited to the locality and experimentation with all classes of fodder crops, grasses, edible shrubs, herbage etc. would be unlimited ... (Wise 1929: 11).

These comments indicate that during the 1920s agriculture was mainly viewed as a support activity to prop up an ailing pastoral industry. However, pastoral land use was considered inefficient for the purpose of promoting European settlement.

During the 1920s concerns were expressed through other channels about the overgrazed condition of pastoral lands in the Kimberley, prompting a series of State government inquiries. Pastoral land use had nevertheless divided the country into stations and paddocks, which eventually came to be fenced, giving material expression to these demarcations on the ground. Scientific surveys such as that made by Despeissis created a

more detailed classification of country into areas of different soil types, and marked out the alluvial soils of the Ord Valley as having particular potential for irrigated agriculture.

Within the accounts of the East Kimberley made by explorers and early government scientists, the country was represented as empty, but with potential for productive use and economic gain with the aid of scientific knowledge. The climate and soils were seen as mysteries, awaiting scientific understanding. The very 'emptiness' of the country was presented in contradictory ways. On the one hand, as a benefit, in that vast expanses of land were available for European entrepreneurs. On the other hand, as a threat or problem, because it lacked a pool of cheap indigenous labour for agriculture such as existed in other British colonies and there was a danger that it could be colonised by a south-east Asian country first.

Early twentieth century debates about development and European settlement of tropical Australia were influenced by deeper concerns about whether white races could prosper in the tropics. Particular questions were raised about whether white women could remain healthy and bear children, and about the danger of racial deterioration of Europeans in the tropics. In 1911 the Ninth Australasian Medical Congress authorised an inquiry into the 'permanent settlement of working white race in Tropical Australia' (Walker 1999: 147). The consensus of medical opinion was that European men and women could adapt to heat but that tropical diseases required constant vigilance.¹² Fear of an 'empty north' being subject to invasion from Asian nations fuelled popular fiction at the same time as it influenced government policy. In the late nineteenth century, William Lane's *White or Yellow?* published

¹² These concerns informed debate about the appropriateness of the White Australia Policy, maintained by successive Australian governments since the Federation of Australia in 1901. The policy promoted selective immigration and was not fully dismantled until the early 1970s.

in 1888, and Kenneth Mackay's *The Yellow Wave: A Romance of the Asiatic Invasion of Australia* published in 1895, both depicted scenarios of northern Australia colonised by Chinese (Walker 1999: 98-107). A number of fiction writers in the early twentieth century continued this theme, sometimes implicating Malaysians, sometimes Japanese.¹³

In 1918 Edwin James Brady published an influential volume titled *Australia Unlimited*. Its thesis, popular among politicians and administrators, was that Australia had been undersold and that the sparsely settled areas of inland and northern Australia contained rich resources awaiting exploitation (Brady 1918). The British trained geographer, Griffith-Taylor, raised a less popular counter argument. Throughout the 1920s he argued that Australia's European population would always be determined by environmental factors, particularly climate (Powell 1992). There was a racial dimension to his environmental determinism, as he argued that tropical Australia was more suited to settlement by Asian races, at that time excluded by Australia's immigration policies.

Popular writer, Ion Idriess, became a zealot in promoting the need for development of the inland through irrigation and water diversion schemes. These themes were developed in his book *Flynn of the Inland* (Idriess 1932), and reached their peak in *The Great Boomerang* (Idriess 1941). His travellers' tales, *Over the Range* (Idriess 1937) and *Outlaws of the Leopolds* (Idriess 1952), were set in the Kimberley. Successive print runs indicate their popularity. These and other works by Idriess dramatised the outback and frontier settlements of Australia for an urban readership and contributed to the promotion of prevailing stereotypes of Aboriginal

¹³ In a serialised story that ran in the *Lone Hand* magazine from 1907, Ambrose Pratt, journalist with *The Age* newspaper and popular writer, depicted a party of adventurers travelling to the Northern Territory, only to find the beginnings of a Malaysian colony there (Walker 1999: 118-9).

people as a primitive people destined to die out following contact with whites.¹⁴ His works consistently asserted the importance of development schemes and closer settlement for the interests of the nation.

From the 1930s onwards Mary Durack, sometimes writing with her sister, Elizabeth Durack, published prolifically. Her short stories appeared in newspapers and in magazines such as *Walkabout*, and she also published popular children's stories. Mary Durack set many of her writings around places and people in the East Kimberley. Her books were highly influential in depicting the East Kimberley and its pastoral history for a wide readership. They contributed to popular understandings of the north west of Australia as 'cattle country' and connected with prevailing ideas of a national identity based in the 'outback' regions of Australia.¹⁵

3.5 The 1940s – rural reconstruction, water resources and scientific surveys

Federal government¹⁶ interest in the Ord and northern Australia more generally gathered force in the course of the Second World War. The Japanese bombing of Darwin in February, 1942, and of Wyndham in March, 1942, prompted renewed concerns about the capacity to defend a relatively 'empty' north, highlighting that it was only partly colonised and retained only a marginal status within the Australian nation state. Threat of invasion invoked a renewed sense among government planners of the north as a frontier.

¹⁴ Bonnin (1982: 243) argues that the concept of 'Time', rather than white society as the destroyer of the Aborigines was developed in Idriess's works, but reached its height in Daisy Bates' *The Passing of the Aborigines* in 1938 and Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land* in 1941.

¹⁵ Parallels can be drawn between the role of frontier narratives in contributing to ideas of national identity in Australia, and the United States (White et al. 1994) and Canada (Shields 1991).

¹⁶ In the Australian context, the terms 'Federal' and 'Commonwealth' may be used interchangeably.

Fresh considerations of a specific agricultural scheme in the Ord region were ensured by the efforts of Isaac Steinberg in lobbying for a Jewish agricultural settlement in the Ord Valley. In 1939 Steinberg, a member of the Freeland League for Jewish Settlement, visited the East Kimberley as a guest of the prominent Durack pastoralist family with whom he had made connections in London. The Freeland League sought to assist Jewish refugees fleeing anti-Semitic regimes in Europe to resettle in other countries. Steinberg developed a proposal for a Jewish settlement based on irrigated agriculture. In his publication promoting the scheme (Steinberg 194-?) Steinberg's descriptions of the attractions of the East Kimberley reflects the experience of persecution in Europe. The emptiness of the country is seen as a key attribute,

... First, the area in question is wide enough to absorb large numbers of immigrants, if necessary. Second, it is but sparsely populated, so that there would be no question of friction or conflict with established inhabitants. Third, it offers possibilities of sound economic development with a decent standard of living; it possesses sufficient water and fertile soil, and the climate (political as well as physical) is propitious. Last, but by no means least, the government is democratic and progressive.

The territory under consideration occupies some seven million acres (about 10,000 square miles). It is roughly the size of Belgium, and is merely one portion of the huge province of East and West Kimberley, an area which comprises altogether 135,000 square miles. At the present moment, the area in view serves as pastureland for some 40,000 heads of cattle; but its population is sparse, consisting of a handful of white persons and a few hundred coloured natives. The climate is tropical, but mild and not torrid, and water - as stated - is plentiful. In a word, it is a region that cries out for colonization (Steinberg 194-?: 3).

Steinberg spent several weeks in the East Kimberley in May 1939 in the company of pastoralist and agricultural experimenter, Kim Durack. He concluded that,

... "the land would take care of its inhabitants." It possesses, to be sure, its own peculiarities and is different, both in setting and climate from the more familiar European countries. Nevertheless, it is a fertile and - as the estate agents would say - "highly desirable" plot. All it needs is labour, capital, scientific planning and the inspiration of corporate endeavour (Steinberg 194-?: 4).

He cited prominent CSIRO agricultural scientist, J.A. Prescott, who in 1940 claimed 'I have no doubt that Europeans could adapt themselves to such climatic conditions. This area is

exceptionally well placed with respect to the distribution of useful soils.' (Steinberg 194-?:

4). Steinberg dwelt in particular on the favourable prospects for water conservation in the Ord Valley,

... So we stood on the high, radiant green banks of the Ord, gazing down the majestic stream. We were only 30 miles from Wyndham, the soil around us was fertile both for pasture and tillage. And here was the mighty source of water that could be turned into a generous source of food and livelihood. Large irrigation works could be built on this site as well as others, if competent engineers confirmed the presence of the necessary natural conditions. These engineers could also easily provide the reservoirs for the collection and storing of the torrential rains. Moreover, the depths of the Kimberley soil would yield fresh water wherever we sank a well. No need here to resort to the miracle of Moses and strike water from a stone for an unbelieving flock (Steinberg 194-?: 20).

The proposed scheme was eventually dismissed by the Commonwealth government at the end of World War Two, due to a policy against the establishment of separate settlements within the boundaries of the nation state. However Steinberg's energetic lobbying of politicians and organised labour associations, his impressive personal connections, his speeches at public functions, and his determined efforts to raise public awareness of his proposals through writing to newspapers no doubt helped to bring the agenda of irrigated agriculture on the Ord River to the attention of decision-makers. Local pastoralists such as M.P. Durack and W. Weaber were also keen to promote agricultural development. Kim Durack, the son of M.P. Durack, obtained a degree in agricultural science from the University of Western Australia and commenced his own experiments on the banks of the Ord River. In 1941 he published a detailed proposal for government-funded research into irrigated crops and pastures in the Ord Valley (Durack 1941).

3.5.1 Rural reconstruction

Even before the War had ended the Commonwealth government began planning for the return of soldiers and for incentives to boost a post-war economy. In 1943 a Rural

Reconstruction Commission was constituted to devise policies for revival of the rural sector. Butlin and Schedvin note that,

The preoccupation of rural policy was the placement of a limited number of ex-servicemen on the land together with the avoidance of uneconomic agricultural development (Butlin and Schedvin 1977: 712-3).

Post-War reconstruction brought with it a strong emphasis on regional planning, and assumed a central role for government in the development of infrastructure that would create an industrial base allowing regions to become self sufficient (Brown 1995, Gibson 2001). A significant program of public works distributed on a regional basis was central to this agenda and a National Works Council was created to advise and coordinate the new initiatives. Butlin and Schedvin link this with an agenda for regional employment,

An additional planning objective was the classification of works on a regional basis so as to ensure that works were sufficiently dispersed geographically to enable a uniformly high level of employment to be maintained throughout the country. The emphasis on regional full employment was not only important for its own sake. It meshed with a number of other policy objectives such as decentralisation, population growth, the promotion of water conservation, and the control of land settlement schemes. Moreover, the need for the “balanced” regional development of the continent had been a deep Australian conviction ever since the arrival of the First Fleet. In the nineteen forties the conviction was sharpened because regionalism was fashionable internationally, and because the fear of a renewed “yellow” invasion from the north (Butlin and Schedvin 1977: 712-3).

Models for regional planning and development were available from both the United States and the United Kingdom (Auster 1987). Between 1943 and 1944 a series of conferences were held between the Commonwealth and the States to discuss a regional development agenda. While irrigation schemes featured significantly within these meetings, they were not universally recommended. Concerns were expressed about silting of the existing Hume Dam on the Murray River in southeastern Australia, attributed to extensive tree clearance in the catchment. This experience fuelled Commonwealth government concerns about further investment in irrigation infrastructure in northern Australia (Butlin and Schedvin 1977: 715). The Western Australian Government’s proposal for an Ord River irrigation

scheme was criticised for being too vague and inadequately researched. However a revised and more modest proposal was finally agreed to in 1947.

The Eighth report of the Rural Reconstruction Commission published in 1945 with the title, *Irrigation, Water Conservation and Land Drainage*, expressed a view that 'water will ultimately be one of the most important of all commodities in the Australian economy' (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 7). However it also expressed a clear concern about the need to avoid repeating irrigation mistakes of the past and to avoid creating further economic liabilities for the Commonwealth,

It has been gradually appreciated that there is no point in developing large areas for irrigation unless there is a reasonable prospect that those who settle on them will in the course of their agriculture perform a new and useful function in connexion with the national economy as a whole or can improve the economy of industries already existing in the district. The development of large-scale irrigation schemes is expensive and although they may be almost essential in the satisfactory development of agriculture in some regions it is also highly desirable that they should be as nearly as possible self-supporting. In the past there have been too many cases of unwise development of unsatisfactory irrigation. These are a warning that in the future no scheme should be undertaken without the most careful investigation and planning (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 5).

While the Ord was seen as the most promising of the northern rivers of Western Australia, a strong emphasis was placed on the need for detailed soil surveys. The report recommended a ten-year interval between acceptance of any large irrigation scheme and the development of the full production of the area affected (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 24). It specified the need for a range of technical and scientific expertise,

...before irrigation farming can be effectively introduced into a climatic zone for which irrigation knowledge and experience are lacking, it is necessary to have technical advice not only from engineers and soil scientists but also from agronomists who must be expected to provide a detailed scheme of the methods of cultivation and management which, if adopted, will lead to success. Unfortunately the necessary basic information is not yet available in the northern half of the continent (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 25).

The report signalled the need for erosion control measures in catchments where dams were planned. It warned of the risk of salinity, resulting from poor water use on farms causing water tables to rise, and noted that problems had already been identified with flood irrigation of rice on the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 31).

The Ord River Valley, as the first large-scale irrigation project in this type of climate in Australia, was presented as a site for invention and development of a new system of agriculture. The closest parallel was considered to be irrigation areas in French and British Sudan. However in these areas, unlike the Ord, the indigenous population provided a pool of cheap agricultural labour. The report recommended use of the Ord irrigation area in connection with the cattle industry and emphasised the importance of the proposed Kimberley Research Station – ‘If the irrigation scheme is accepted its whole success or failure will be bound up with the vigour and efficiency of this research station’ (The Rural Reconstruction Commission 1945: 63).

Defence considerations underpinned much of the emphasis placed on northern development. These concerns were clearly voiced in the 1947 Report of the Northern Australia Development Committee titled *Development of Northern Australia*. This committee was appointed following the States and Commonwealth meetings in 1944 and 1945 in which attention was drawn to ‘the fact that it was essential to the future security of Australia that renewed efforts should be made to develop the sparsely populated areas of Northern Australia’ (Northern Australia Development Committee 1947: 2). Concern was expressed about a decline of the non-Aboriginal population in northern Australia since 1933. In this context it recommended the development and closer settlement of specific

regions including the Ord-Victoria River region and the Darwin-Katherine region. A high priority was placed on both ground surveys and RAAF air photography in northern Australia, recommending that,

... reconnaissance surveys should be undertaken as a matter of urgency in the coming dry season, and that necessary funds should be made available to the CSIR to undertake the work, without encroaching on the normal funds of this body (Northern Australia Development Committee 1947: xiii).

Recommendations were also made for pastoral industry facilities, town facilities at Wyndham and, 'subject to the satisfactory conclusion of the investigations on the Ord River, construction of a dam and development of irrigation areas.' (Northern Australia Development Committee 1947: 49). With regard to the Ord River Project, it recommended,

that the Commonwealth and Western Australia Governments share all future costs of investigation on a fifty-fifty basis, the Commonwealth Government to collaborate with scientific, technical and economic personnel and to be kept fully informed regarding all features of the investigation (Northern Australia Development Committee 1947: xiii).

Emphasising the need for long-term planning drawing on scientific and engineering expertise¹⁷, it recommended expenditure in the order of 5-10 million pounds over a ten-year period, with three million earmarked for the construction of a dam, hydro-electric and irrigation works.

3.5.2 Land surveys and scientific initiatives

In 1941 a survey party, which included R.J. Dumas, the Director of the Department of Public Works of Western Australia, visited the Ord Valley and identified suitable sites for the proposed dams (Dumas 1944). A major survey of soils in the region, published in 1945

¹⁷ Specific concerns were raised about the extent of erosion in the catchment area of the proposed dam, estimating 'that, unless active steps are taken to prevent further soil erosion in the Ord River valley the river and valley will be so eroded in the course of approximately 25 years as to be beyond reclamation' (Northern Australia Development Committee 1947: 48).

(Burvill 1945), drew particular attention to the potential of soils in the Ord Valley and Mantinea Flats areas, named 'cununurra clays'.¹⁸ In the same year the Western Australian Government Entomologist was dispatched to assess the potential for insect pests in crops (Garden 1944). The Government Botanist emphasised the need to ascertain whether irrigated agriculture and crop production was possible there before making any commitment. He stressed the uniqueness of the agricultural situation,

Climatically the area is comparable with the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, parts of India, and South West Africa, and perhaps part of Mexico, and especially with northern Nigeria. As far as I can ascertain irrigation has not been practised in any of these areas except on the Deccan. The irrigation scheme of the Nile is almost, but not quite comparable (Garden 1944: 74).

He also noted that,

There is no cheap local labour available, and this to my mind constitutes one of the major problems if crop plants are to be considered, apart from those which are reaped mechanically (Garden 1944: 74).

This last comment echoed the concerns of earlier commentators about the lack of a suitable labour force in tropical Australia. While Aboriginal labour was critical to the pastoral industry by this time, Aboriginal people were never regarded as suitable for agricultural labour. Some attempts had been made to enlist them for this purpose in other parts of northern Australia but they could not be forced to work the regular regimented hours deemed necessary for farming.¹⁹ Although agriculture was portrayed as a means of populating the land, Garden conjectured that future agriculture would have to be heavily mechanised.

¹⁸ The term Cununurra is drawn from Miriuwung language spoken by Aboriginal people living in the Ord Valley region and residing at the time in station ration camps. It refers to the Ord River (or any large river) and was supplied to Burvill by Mary Durack (Millington 1994).

¹⁹ Bauer (1964) provides an account of experiences of agricultural scientists with Aboriginal labour on experimental farms in the Daly River area of the Northern Territory.

Garden expressed concerns about aridity of the overgrazed and eroded country at the source of the Ord and the potential for silting of the proposed dam. The main advantage of the Ord was the suitability of the topography for a dam site. However, Garden considered the Lennard and Fitzroy Rivers to be more suitable for agriculture. He voiced particular reservations about prospects for irrigated pastures along the Ord River given that native grasses there were adapted to a long dry season.

In 1946 the newly established land resource survey unit of CSIRO commenced work on a comprehensive survey of northern Australia, using a large-scale survey approach that drew on aerial photography techniques developed during World War Two. Country was mapped out into 'land system units', based on associations of topography, soils and vegetation such as that shown in Figure 5.²⁰ The key proponents of this innovative approach were the senior CSIRO scientists, C.S. Christian and G.A. Stewart. They promoted it in international forums as a tool to assist natural resources assessment in developing countries around the world,

This concept was developed specifically for the purpose of land-resource surveys in undeveloped areas, and was based on the use of aerial photographs combined with field surveys. It has now been applied by CSIRO to a wide range of terrain types ranging from arid central Australia to the wet tropics of New Guinea and has been applied by FAO and Unesco in other countries (Christian and Stewart 1968: 242).

While a crude technique, the classification of land systems became a standard approach used in Australia until the 1970s when the capacity for enhanced satellite imagery and computer power allowed for much larger data sets and a more rigorous statistical treatment

²⁰ Christian and Stewart identified the genesis of their approach in the activities of members of the Association of American Geographers in the late 19th and early 20th century (Christian and Stewart 1968: 241-2). In 1916 the Association of American Geographers established a special committee to define the physiographic regions of the United States based on 'topographic types', and describing relationships between topography and land use. This approach influenced many land classification surveys prior to World War II, when aerial photography techniques became available for land survey.

of plant and soil associations. Because of its practical land use objectives, it was influenced by ecological, agricultural and climatological considerations as well as geomorphology.²¹ In conjunction with the aerial photography, teams of scientists surveyed specific transects of land identified from the photographs, mapping out soils, vegetation, geology and topography as a form of 'ground truthing'. The land systems approach employed an obvious utilitarian agenda in its classification of land and consequently reveals something of the 'interest' of resource scientists at the time. In promoting the methodology of 'integrated surveys' to a UNESCO conference in Paris in 1968, Christian and Stewart explained the context of these surveys in terms of stages in the process of modernisation, leading to national development.

Advancement involves a change in the existing use of resources to higher levels, or more economical methods, of production, or the more complete use of resources which are at present only partially used or completely neglected. ... To make these decisions wisely, and to establish an order of priority for national efforts, a thorough knowledge of a country's national resources, their nature, geographic distribution and magnitude, limitations, present stage of utilization and scope for further or better use is essential (Christian and Stewart 1968: 233).

They comment on the importance of technological knowledge in adding value to natural resources noting that,

The particular advantage of aerial photography is that it provides a rapid and direct approach to the sub-division of the land surface into discrete areas, each with its own array of natural resources, each with its own particular possibilities and problems for development, and each requiring consideration individually as well as in the context of over-all national development (Christian and Stewart 1968: 239).

²¹ There is less need to define land system units in an a priori way now as computing power allows for multiple ways of viewing plant soil associations depending on what factors are considered of greatest interest. A good example of a contemporary approach to the mapping of natural resources is the Biophysical Mapping Project developed for the management of national parks in Central Australia (Pitts and Matthews 2000).

(43) ARGYLE LAND SYSTEM (450 SQ MILES)

Several medium and small areas of gently undulating “black soil” plain in the north-central part of the area.

Climate.—Wettest locality: mean annual rainfall 25 in.; mean agricultural growing season 13 wk; mean pasture growing season 17 wk. Driest locality: mean annual rainfall 24 in.; mean agricultural growing season 11 wk; mean pasture growing season 15 wk.

Geology.—Calcareous, dolomitic, and shale sediments of Middle Cambrian and Adelaidean age.

Geomorphology.—Coastal erosional plains.

Drainage.—Widely spaced dendritic stream pattern; the lower slopes near drain lines may be waterlogged or flooded for short periods after heavy rain.

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Figure 5. ‘Argyle Land System’ reproduced from (CSIRO, 1970).

The priority placed by the Commonwealth government on the East Kimberley is clear from the fact that it was only the third area to be covered in the land survey series. As a result of survey work conducted between 1949 and 1952, fifty land systems were described as components making up the ‘Ord-Victoria Area’. However, the results of the Ord-Victoria survey were not published until 1970 (CSIRO, 1970). Scientists working in the 1950s and ’60s had to rely on the advice of C.S. Christian or G.A. Stewart in person.²² By

²² The only explanation for the delay in publishing these results was provided by Andy Chapman, who explained that long delays in publications of results were common as key scientists spent extensive periods in the field at that time (interview, Andy Chapman, Darwin, July 2001).

the time the results of the survey were published, Western Australian government scientists had mapped soils and vegetation of the Ord Valley to a much greater level of detail than the CSIRO land survey. Andy Chapman, a scientist involved in crop research at the Kimberley Research Station from 1954, explained in an interview in 2001 that although the CSIRO survey maps were not available, staff at the Research Station did have access to the soil maps made for the Western Australia Department of Agriculture in 1944²³, and to botanists in Perth who had conducted vegetation surveys.

When scientists at the Kimberley Research Station finally saw the CSIRO survey results they were struck by major errors resulting from its scale. Andy Chapman gave as an example a particular assessment of the soil type labelled 'Cununurra clay',

... [the report] claimed that it was one of the most uniform blocks of soil, of cracking clay, that you could find anywhere. Although we didn't realise just how wrong they were, I suppose, in the 1950s, we were aware even then that, on Kimberley Research Station, there were some bits of soil which were different from what Cununurra clay was thought to be. But, in the 1960s, when farmers started to grow crops in different parts of the Ivanhoe plain in particular, then it become very obvious that the soils were more variable than the soil surveyors had initially judged. But it wasn't until much later that there was a more detailed soil survey made, of the Ivanhoe plain (interview, Andy Chapman, Darwin, July 2001).

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, successive surveys scanned the land of the Ord River Valley, describing and mapping its resources of soil, water and vegetation. However the experiences of the first farmers, working particular areas over several seasons, showed yet greater complexity than any modelled by scientific surveys. Their experiences will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Scientific surveys ushered in new representations of land in the East Kimberley that supported the new emphasis on regional development and modernisation. Scientific

²³ Burvill (1945)

knowledge inscribed new values on the land and marked out specific places as suitable for agricultural development. Technology and mechanisation were held to offer opportunities for harnessing the seasonal floodwaters of the Ord River, together with the newly valued attributes of the soils in the region, for a more productive agricultural future. The realisation of such interests in the land would secure the East Kimberley as a true part of the nation state, where pastoral land use had only maintained a frontier status.

3.6 Conclusion

During the 1940s, a significant shift occurred in government planning about the future for the Ord Valley from an emphasis on the pastoral industry to one on cultivation. In the post-war period, the Commonwealth government funded a major program of public works around Australia in order to boost regional economic development and regional population and employment. Prompted by fears of invasion during World War Two, it placed a particular emphasis on developing and populating the north of Australia. Irrigation was seen as playing a particular role in regional development, with water defined as a key national resource. Water was a key element in the agenda of creating economically self-sufficient regions. However, various reports and recommendations expressed concerns about irrigation mistakes elsewhere in Australia, cautioning about the potential for erosion and salinity. As a consequence an emphasis was placed on the need for scientific and technical expertise to inform decision-making. In this context government funds were allocated to the survey and classification of land in the East Kimberley and to a program of agricultural research at the Kimberley Research Station.

While early pastoral settlement and land speculation was informed by the descriptive accounts of explorers in the late nineteenth century, air photography and scientific surveys produced new place-images of the East Kimberley. The descriptive travellers' narratives

produced by explorers were replaced by graphic representations derived from scientific surveys that promoted a bird's eye perspective of the land. The role of these surveys was to make the land understandable to government planners by reducing it to discrete units that displayed certain patterns. Prior to the arrival of farmers, the East Kimberley had already been mapped out as a potential agrarian landscape by the classification systems employed in each successive land survey. These classifications helped to define an agricultural land interest in the region prior to any actual engagement by farmers, and to pose a new place image and rhetoric to counter that of the colonial frontier, as represented in popular literature. The new agrarian vision developed as a progressive sense of place, with each survey informing its successors. Systematic representations contained in survey maps, particularly those resulting from the CSIRO Ord-Victoria Land Survey, informed Commonwealth government decision-making and subsequent investment in the construction of dams and irrigation works.

Chapter 4: Aboriginal land interests

4.1 Introduction

Aboriginal survival through over 100 years of occupation by Europeans relied on both continuities and adaptations in spatial practices and social identifications. Contemporary Aboriginal land interests are framed by a history of unequal power relations and the dominance of European forms of land use, especially pastoralism. This history can be understood in Massey's terms as a 'power-geometry' that contributes to a 'progressive sense of place'.

In this chapter I trace patterns in Aboriginal land use, mobility and social identifications, beginning with a brief summary of the situation during the 'station times', particularly since the 1940s. I then focus on the experiences of Aboriginal people in the 1960s as they left the stations and moved into Kununurra, and their responses to environmental changes associated with the damming of the Ord River and the creation of farmlands. The largest section of this chapter is dedicated to describing changes since the 1960s that have given rise to contemporary land interests, through engagements with changes in legislation and government policy as well as new land use industries. Each industry has made different demands on the land, with consequences for Aboriginal spatial practices. In order to demonstrate how spatial practices are influenced by changes to the political and legal context, I focus specifically on patterns of mobility.

The ways in which Aboriginal land interests have been represented to the outside world have also changed, influenced by the emergence of a political voice since the 1960s. I trace

these developments also, describing some of the channels through which Aboriginal representations of their connections with land enter the public arena. This allows some reflections on the iterative processes that link representations of place and social identities with the phenomenological experiences of Aboriginal people.

4.2 Sources and methods

I draw on a combination of sources in order to understand Aboriginal land interests over time. My primary source was the transcripts of the 1997 Native Title hearings, which I describe below. Next most important were the notes I recorded of my interactions with Aboriginal people during fieldwork. A detailed understanding of cultural practices in the East Kimberley requires some understanding of local languages and lengthy fieldwork interactions. As the scope of my study did not allow this, my interpretation of both these sources relied on reference to existing literature. It was also informed by discussions with other scholars, and professionals working for Aboriginal organisations or representative bodies in the region.

4.2.1 Fieldwork

My most important connection for fieldwork was Biddy Simon, a Murinpatha woman born at Legune Station in the mid 1940s (Fig. 6). Although her genealogical ties are stronger to land around Port Keats to the east, she grew up on Legune Station and now plays a caretaker role for this area by agreement with its Miriwung and Gajerrong traditional owners. My designated kin ties were to Biddy Simon and her family. I made a point of bringing gifts of clothing and tobacco when I visited. Polly Wandanga, a senior Jaminjung woman whose husband had played an important role in lobbying for the pastoral excision, often resides there. Both she and Biddy Simon and their extended families have contributed to a number of research projects over the years. They are the two main family

groups that formed what was referred to as the 'Marralam community' or the 'Marralam mob' (Head and Fullagar 1991). Paddy Carlton, a senior Gajerrong man now resident in Kununurra, is the traditional owner for the country around Marralam, extending into both Legune and Carlton Hills Stations. When staying in Kununurra I visited the Marralam people staying at Mirima Village – Paddy Carlton and his wife, Katherine Yarrbi. I also visited their relatives Peggy and Alan Griffiths, and had a number of exchanges with senior Miriwung women – Sheba Dilngari, Mignonette Djarmin and Blanche Flying-Fox.



Figure 6. Biddy Simon, May 1998.

Initially, I attempted to obtain a research agreement with the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) and the Northern Land Council (NLC), which, along with the Aboriginal Legal Service, were representing Native Title claimants in the court proceedings. There were many tensions between these agencies, reflecting conflicts between different family groups within the community as well as a broader political environment in which the status of the representative bodies was subject to change (Altman et al. 1999). A Northern Land Council coordinator, who was supportive of my work, took the research agreement I had drafted to several joint meetings of the two land councils. However it never seriously made the agenda as more urgent issues dominated the meetings.

Among the pressing issues was the social impact assessment with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people. Because the Ord Stage Two proposal involved land subject to Native Title claims a specific social impact assessment was required as part of its broader Environmental Impact Assessment. Consequently I reframed my research proposal as a consultancy for the social impact assessment. In my capacity as a potential consultant, I was invited to two preliminary bush meetings convened by the Northern Land Council with senior Miriuwung women in June, 1999. However, the social impact assessment never eventuated in the form in which it was originally conceived. That process, like most other consultative processes involving the Miriuwung and Gajerrong community, was affected by the appeal and counter-appeals to the 1998 Federal Court ruling, and the requirement under the *Native Title Act 1993* to form a Prescribed Body Corporate to represent the interests of Native Title holders (Mantziaris and Martin 2000). It became clear that the creation of such a consequential legal entity would be a protracted process that could take some years of negotiation. As a consequence, I relied more heavily on documentary sources than I might have otherwise, in particular the transcripts of the 1997 Native Title hearings.

In August 2001 I recorded an interview with Kevin Kelly, a local dealer in Aboriginal arts and crafts who arrived in Kununurra in 1992 to work as a coordinator for Waringarri Aboriginal Arts. He later established a private gallery, Red Rock Arts, in Kununurra. Because of his established connections with local artists, he was well positioned to answer my questions about the history of the arts and crafts industry in the region.

4.2.2 Native Title hearings and transcripts

While the political climate surrounding a significant Native Title claim influenced the kind of sources I relied on, it also highlighted the significance of Aboriginal relationships to land in the contemporary spatial politics of the East Kimberley. My decision to draw on court transcripts as a primary source was influenced by the politically charged nature of conducting any interview-style original research with Miriwung and Gajerrong people while the issue of Native Title remained before the courts. Care was needed to ensure I did not produce the kind of records likely to be subpoenaed as part of these proceedings. Instead, I chose to concentrate my analysis on the court transcripts that were already in the public domain. This material proved to be a tremendously rich source of information about the diverse range of relationships between people and between people and places in the East Kimberley. The numbers of people who gave evidence to the court were far greater than I could have hoped to interview myself. Translators present at the hearings interpreted terms given in Miriwung, or other languages, and assisted with the clarification of statements made in Aboriginal English or Creole, facilitating my own comprehension of the evidence provided.²⁴

The transcripts of evidence taken in the 1997 Court hearings are held at the office of the Federal Court in Perth and consist of over 5,000 pages. Apart from five days of restricted sessions, when witnesses spoke about matters and places subject to cultural taboos of secrecy, all transcripts of the hearings were available to me.²⁵ A great deal of other evidence, including the reports of expert witnesses, was not available. While it was clear that a considerable amount of research went into the preparation of reports by expert witnesses

²⁴ The court transcripts were subject to the ethical procedures established by the Federal Court that restricted public access to material deemed by the claimants to be of particular sensitivity.

²⁵ Four of these days related to men's only evidence and one to women's only evidence.

and by professionals working for the various representative bodies, this material was subject to 'court in confidence' provisions until the final resolution of the case at an unspecified date. It took twelve days to read through the material that was available. I chose to focus primarily on evidence relating to patterns of land use associated with the pastoral era, and on subsequent changes since the formation of Kununurra. I particularly focused on evidence given regarding the introduction of irrigated agriculture and tourism, and the establishment of outstations. Included in these accounts is a great deal of detail about changes to the country itself and to the distribution of plants and animals.

The hearings were conducted by Justice Lee of the Federal Court between 21 July and 26 November. Three groups of applicants were represented by legal counsel provided by the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Northern Land Council and the Kimberley Land Council respectively. In the material cited below, witnesses respond to questions from the following lawyers supporting the claimants –

- Mr Barker QC and Ms Kelty (both from the Aboriginal Legal Service),
- Mr Howie (Northern Land Council),

and from the following lawyers opposing the claimants –

- Mr Pullin QC and Mr Pettit (both representing the Western Australian Government),
- Mr McKenna (representing two pastoral companies with holdings in the claim area).

The full list of parties opposing the claimants is provided in Appendix B. It includes the majority of business enterprises based in Kununurra.

Approximately sixty men and women from Miriuwung and Gajerrong and neighbouring language groups gave evidence to the 1997 Native Title hearings. Particularly prominent in the material that I cite are senior Miriuwung women, Sheba Dilngari, Blanche Flying-Fox and Mignonette Djarmin. Each of these women had spent her childhood and early adult life living in ration camps on pastoral stations and attending to domestic tasks around the station homesteads. Among the younger generation, Carol Hapke was particularly vocal. Her early childhood was spent on Ivanhoe Station and she later attended high school in Perth, returning at the time Kununurra was under construction. Her family now lives at Yirralalem in the Ord Valley and she plays a significant role in the Gawooleng Yawoodeng Women's Cooperative. I also cite evidence given by senior Miriuwung and Gajerrong men including Peter Newry, J.W., Toby Banmar, Danny Wallace, Gerry Moore, George Dixon and Dodger Carlton. These men were accomplished stock workers and worked on a number of stations in their youth. John Toby and Chocolate Thomas, also cited below, are senior Kija men whose traditional lands are south of Kununurra in the vicinity of Halls Creek.²⁶ Of the younger men who gave evidence, I cite Douglas Boonbi who lives in an Aboriginal settlement within the Keep River National Park.

The proceedings entailed a total of nine weeks of actual hearings. The substantial part of these hearings took place on lands under claim in and around Kununurra, and the majority of evidence was taken in the field. Aboriginal witnesses to these hearings understood the purpose of the hearings and knew that their statements would become a public record, unless it was deemed to be restricted for cultural reasons. There was a strong performative

²⁶ The full lists of claimants and respondents and their respective legal counsel have been reproduced from the Judgement and are provided in Appendix B.

aspect to the hearings, which sometimes included the staging of dance and song cycles in Aboriginal languages.

The information content of the transcripts was framed by the social and cultural context of the court hearings as well as by the legal requirements of the *Native Title Act 1993*. Some anthropologists who have become involved in land claims under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* provide insights into the way these formal legal processes are regarded by Aboriginal claimants. Rose, for example, describes land claim hearings as cultural practice,

For them a land claim hearing is a ritual, and many Aboriginal people are masters of the arts of ritual. In the best land claims, the claimants seize the hearing, develop their own structure of action which runs in tandem with the formal hearing, and transform the hearing itself into a ritual over which, from their position as apparent supplicants, they preside. Their ownership of country is performed; the performance is a ritual act which generates the 'proof' of ownership and ultimately opens the Australian legal system to enable Aboriginal Freehold Title to be handed over to them (Rose 1996: 49).

Many of the elements Rose describes seem to apply equally to the Miriung and Gajerrong Native Title hearings. J.W.²⁷, a senior Miriung man, explained at the beginning of the hearings that he wouldn't talk about 'law business' with a white man unless it was at a formal meeting such as this (Federal Court of Australia 1997: 983).²⁸

While the transcripts provide a glimpse of Miriung and Gajerrong people's perspectives on land use change in the East Kimberley, they also are framed by the explicit focus of the hearings on maintenance of traditional culture and relationships to land (Sutton 1995,

²⁷ As this man is now deceased, I have used initials only in order to respect cultural sensitivities concerning the naming of recently deceased persons.

²⁸ In citing from the court transcripts I adopt the following conventions – 'Federal Court of Australia' is abbreviated to 'FCA'. This is then followed by the year of the hearings, the initials of the witness and the page number in the transcripts. The transcripts form a single document with consecutive page numbering.

Attwood 1996, Merlan 1998).²⁹ As a consequence they present a retrospective view of relationships to land and focus much less on future aspirations and orientations to a market economy. However, for those very reasons they provide an important record of the political dimensions of cultural practices and are critical to understanding the political positioning of contemporary Aboriginal land interests. Within the constraints posed by Native Title legislation, the hearings provided a forum in which Aboriginal people provided accounts of their history, memories and cultural traditions. The record produced is therefore critical to understanding contemporary land interests.

²⁹ The emphasis on maintenance of traditional practices in Native Title was highlighted by the case of *The members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v. The State of Victoria & Others* [1998] 1606 FCA (18 December 1998). This involved a claim to land and waters along the Victoria and New South Wales borders. In 1998, Justice Olney determined that it was not possible to trace a continuous link between the claimants and the occupants of the land at the time of European sovereignty, thereby ruling out the notion of maintenance of traditional customs. On these grounds he ruled against the existence of Native Title for the Yorta Yorta (Fullagar and Head 2000). See Postscript at the end of the thesis for an update on the Miriung and Gajerrong legal proceedings as they stood at the end of 2002.

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Figure 7. The East Kimberley region, showing pastoral stations, Aboriginal settlements, existing irrigation areas and new irrigation areas proposed for the Ord Stage Two development.

4.2.3 Narrative forms and performative contexts

Questioning by lawyers in the court proceedings gave particular emphasis to the activities of Aboriginal people during the station times. Although it is difficult to place the witness' responses within an exact calendar or date reference, it is possible to characterise patterns in how people interacted with land during the period between the 1940s and the early 1960s. They describe the sorts of work they undertook while living in the ration camps on the stations, the movements of people between ration camps on different stations, and the paths they travelled and the places they lived in during the wet season. Witnesses were asked to identify their mother and other close relatives, provide their Aboriginal name, their 'skin' name and the skin name of each of their parents, and to say where they were born. They usually provided additional details about where they grew up and described various places where they lived and worked during the station times. Sometimes information was presented about their parents or grandparents, including where they lived and died, and the manner of their death. Many deaths were caused by shootings by police or spearings by Aboriginal men.

One approach to questioning focused on the immediate locality in which each hearing took place. Part of the rationale for holding the court proceedings at sites of cultural significance was to elicit stories about each locality (Rose 1996). In response to questions about the immediate locality or about specific landscape features, witnesses usually began with accounts of Ngarranggarni (dreaming) stories in which specific ancestral figures passed through, leaving an impression in the landscape. In some places dreaming figures turned to stone, thus becoming a part of the material landscape, a process referred to by the Miriuwung term 'mamma-ed'. Because of the emphasis in Native Title legislation on the maintenance of traditional links with land, activities during the wet season became

important evidence supporting the claim. Witnesses provided extensive details of the routes taken for wet season journeys and of places where different groups met up, camped for a period and performed ceremonies.

Rumsey (1996) identifies accounts of journeys as a distinct narrative form among Aboriginal people who lived and worked on northern Australian pastoral stations. Similar narratives framed by a detailed orientation to place can be found in historical accounts of Aboriginal people from the East Kimberley recorded by Shaw (1981, 1983, 1986) and Bohemia and McGreggor (1995). Merlan (1998) describes this orientation among older Aboriginal people around Katherine in the Northern Territory as a characteristic cultural form which she refers to as a 'travelling mode of experience and knowledge', and notes that it shows 'the same sort of sequencing typically found in some accounts of the travels of Dreamings over country' (Merlan 1998: 106).

I experienced something of this in interactions with Paddy Carlton, a senior Gajerrong man and law-holder for much of the country along the Keep River. On one occasion, when I was assisting Jenny Atchison with a vegetation survey, Paddy Carlton requested that he accompany us to Granilpi, one of the sites that Jenny wished to survey, explaining that he wanted to tell us the story for this place. We drove north on the rough road along the Keep River. On arrival, we all got out and Paddy told the story of the quail dreaming. In the story, Djibigun, a male ancestral being chases Jinmium, a female. He catches her at Granilpi and she turns to stone. He turns himself into a small bird and travels on to other sacred sites on the other side of the river, leaving marks in the form of rock outcrops at each place where he rests. It was a very abbreviated version of the story which Jenny had heard at greater length through other sources. However its meaning seemed to inhere in the

performance of the telling. He paused, and then went on to tell another story, about the massacre that had occurred at this place, inflicted by white stockmen from Carlton Hill Station, who chased a group of Aboriginal men and caught up with them here and killed them. The stockmen were on horses with guns and the Aboriginal men were on foot and couldn't escape. Paddy finished, saying, 'that's all,' and would have climbed straight back in the vehicle to return to Kununurra, had we not been thwarted by a flat tyre. Both the dreaming story and the massacre story now form the stories for Granilpi that should be told to anyone who goes there.

4.3 'Station times'

Aboriginal experiences of pastoralism, until recently the dominant post-colonial land use, provide important context for their contemporary interests in land. From 1886 a legislative framework that regulated mobility, employment and other forms of interactions with Europeans underpinned the relationship between Aboriginal people and pastoralists in Western Australia (Bolton 1981). Police collaborated with station managers to coerce Aboriginal people to work on stations (Shaw 1981, Rose 1991). In the early years of pastoralism, many Aboriginal people spent part of their lives evading capture in bush camps and part of their lives in station ration camps.

Interviews recorded by Shaw in the 1970s with senior Aboriginal men provide evidence of much violence in the early twentieth century. Pastoralists and police pursued and sometimes killed men who evaded station work or who were accused of killing cattle. Drawing on records of the Wyndham Courthouse, Shaw notes that European police roundups of 'bush' Aboriginal people for spearing cattle reached a peak in 1909 with ninety-five arrests and sentencings (Shaw 1986: 292). Corroborating oral accounts provide evidence for massacres of groups of women and children by station managers in the early

years of the twentieth century. In an interview with Bruce Shaw, Grant Nabadj described a massacre he witnessed as a child at Ningbing (Fig. 7), instigated by the station manager, W. [Billy] Weaber, in 1907 or 1908 (Shaw 1981: 36-40). Shaw's informants also described killings as a result of the distribution of poisoned food (Shaw 1986: 62, 178-9). Further to the west, at the Forrest River Mission (also called Oombulgurri), at least eleven Aboriginal people were killed by police in 1926 in retribution for the murder of a white man. The incident prompted a much-publicised Royal Commission of Enquiry and the trial of two police constables for murder.³⁰ Violence was not only inter-racial but also occurred between Aboriginal people. Men interviewed by Bruce Shaw commonly referred to this period as 'wild times'.

Mobility, while constrained, endured as part of the seasonal cycles of the monsoonal climate. By the time of the Second World War, a pattern had developed of living in ration camps on pastoral stations (Fig. 8) throughout the dry part of the year and moving to bush camps during the wet season, referred to as 'holiday time'. Work on stations ceased during the wet season and Aboriginal people were required to fend for themselves. They travelled through surrounding country staying in caves and rock shelters. Groups from different stations travelled vast distances on foot to attend major ceremonies and to participate in other religious rituals (as described in the following sections).

³⁰ See Royal Commission of Inquiry into Alleged Killing and Burning of Bodies of Aborigines in East Kimberley and into Police Methods when Effecting Arrests (1927).



Figure 8. Ration camp at Ord River Station, 1938. Courtesy, Battye Library, 50202P.

4.3.1 Seasonal mobility and social groupings

Researchers employing a life-story approach have generated a number of narratives that indicate the patterns of residency of individuals during this period.³¹ Aboriginal people would often live and work at several different stations within the region. Mobility of men in the course of their stock work was greater than that of women, who mainly attended to the houses and gardens (McGrath 1987: 32-35) (Fig. 9). During the 1950s, some men travelled as far as Queensland or distant areas of the Northern Territory to work (Shaw 1986, 1992).

Other forms of mobility included forced transportation to the leprosy hospital operating at Derby. Mignonette Djarmin explained that her stepfather Wadi, head stockman at Carlton Hill Station, walked out when he became sick with leprosy. To avoid being sent to the leprosy hospital he moved to a bush camp near Bubble Bubble Springs. She lived with him there for a period, sheltering in a cave and feeding on yams, porcupine, goanna, sugarbag, bush plum, 'midjerin' (black plumb) and 'dalung' (green plumb) (FCA, 1997, MD: 2296).

³¹ Good examples are provided by Shaw (1981, 1983, 1986), Sullivan (1996: 12), Bohemia and McGreggor (1995) and Ross (1989).

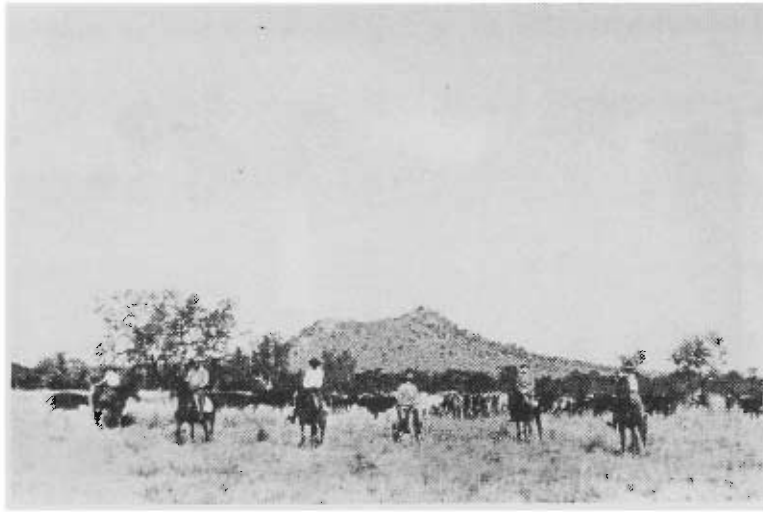


Figure 9. Aboriginal stockmen at a cattle camp on Argyle Station 1930s, photograph Reg Durack. Courtesy, Battye Library, 61513P.

While station ration camps could include people from different language groups who may not have resided together prior to European contact (Kolig 1981: 25, Sullivan 1996: 14), the wet season became characterised by a different pattern of social relations, as family groups travelled in different directions and joined with other groups independently of those they resided within the ration camps (FCA, 1997, CT: 4792). Kolig (1981) describes how station ration camps formed a new overlay of identity founded more strongly on place than kinship,

Part of the community in each case may consist of transients, but there is always a relatively stable nucleus of persons who think of themselves as belonging to a particular locality and in whom the particular group identity is invested. After a while, newcomers accept the locally relevant identity and come to be considered an integral part of the community in which they live (Kolig 1981: 25).

Kolig argues that 'The mob' associated with a residential settlement became a significant social unit that assumed many functions previously held by other social units, especially the clan, partly as a result of residential mobility. It is,

... primarily based on residence and is therefore conspicuous in everyday life; it is fairly amorphous and fluid with individual membership highly changeable (Kolig 1981: 29).

Mr Pullin, counsel representing the Western Australian Government, questioned Chocolate Thomas, a senior Kija man who had worked at Lissadell Station, to explain the mixing of people that occurred on stations. His aim was to show evidence of fragmentation of Miriuwung and Gajerrong culture during station times,

CHOCOLATE THOMAS: Yes, Miriuwung been working the old Lissadell and mix up with the Gija³² people, and every holiday time they all split up.

MR PULLIN: Do you remember in those days whether the Miriuwung people who worked on that station with you, did they say that that was their country?

CT: That was time, long time, we didn't bother about country or these things now. We were just like travel together like that. Never talking anything about, only for the culture, Ngarranggarni side and them things, all done things.

MR P: But people didn't bother?

CT: No. Was like that, like a handshake, going like that, fast one, be a friend all the time, go out way bush we always follow in the bush and that (Federal Court of Australia 1997: 4792).

This mixing of people can also be understood to reflect the pragmatism necessary to station life where individuals were not free to live where they pleased. Other evidence indicated considerable fluidity in how people might come to identify as Miriuwung, for example, by residence rather than descent (FCA 1997, JJ: 794).

Williams and Kirkby (1989) also reinforce the significance of language in both defining social groupings and conveying information about the area of country which its speakers traditionally own. They note that,

Within the general area thus identified, individual families or lineages (sometimes referred to by the name of a present or immediately past head of such a group) have stronger and more precise proprietary interests. Thus in terms of the primary rights in land the speakers of each language within the East Kimberley form localized groups within larger language-labelled country area. Rights to specific local areas and the resources within them may be subject to negotiation by the traditional owners ... (Williams and Kirkby 1989: 3).

³² Also spelt Kija.

Thus, social identification occurs at different scales and entails a degree of fluidity. Rumsey (1993), in relation to Jawoyn people in the Katherine region, comments that, 'The relevant relationship to language is not one of speakership, but one which is better glossed as language ownership' (Rumsey 1993: 199). He emphasises that there are, '... direct links between particular languages and particular tracts of country' and that 'people may relate to particular places through language ownership and kin ties' (Rumsey 1993: 199).

Because of the emphasis in Native Title legislation on the maintenance of traditional links with land, activities during 'holiday time' became important evidence supporting the claim. Detailed descriptions were given of the routes taken by people walking during holiday time and where they met up with other groups and camped for a period. For example, J.W. described walking down the Behn and Ord Rivers from Argyle Station with his mother and father during holiday time. He described their campsites at the junction of the Behn and Ord Rivers, at Long Michael Plain and at Carlton Reach. They fed on fish, kangaroo, goanna, bush plum and sugarbag and used hunting spears with shafts made from both bamboo and wood from a tree that grew along the river. He recalled meeting up with other groups of people from Newry and Auvergne Station at a large camp at Ivanhoe Crossing (FCA, 1997, JW: 949-952). Wet season journeys usually involved following watercourses and camping at specific waterholes. Land surrounding these paths and campsites was used intensively for bush foods. Each time a significant site was discussed, witnesses were asked about the foods that could be obtained there. One senses a level of enthusiasm among the witnesses at this opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge.³³

³³ Fullagar and Head (2000) note that while evidence of maintenance of food gathering traditions was deemed by J. Lee to support the Miriwung-Gajerrong Native Title claim, only evidence of the maintenance of religious traditions was considered acceptable by J. Olney in the Yorta Yorta Native Title claim in south eastern Australia.

4.3.2 Ngarranggarni, ceremony and religious life - station times

In the various languages spoken in the East Kimberley, the term 'Ngarranggarni' is used to refer to 'dreaming stories' associated with different parts of the country, which bind people in kin relationships with specific places. Peter Newry made this connection in evidence to the Court when he explained that the 'skin name' that each person carries, comes 'From the mother and from the land' (FCA, 1997, PN: 1762). Segments from various ceremonies associated with places visited by the court were performed as part of evidence for maintenance of traditional relationships with land. Ceremonies, like Ngarranggarni ancestors, travel through country. They may be 'found' by clever people with knowledge of law, or passed on by older people to those younger people who inherit responsibility through ties with both kin and place.

During the station times, ceremonies were held on most of the stations. Ceremonies for young men were held at Newry Station, Argyle and Rosewood Stations (FCA, 1997, BFF: 1847). Sheba Dilngari referred to a women's law ground at Ivanhoe Station. Another reference was made by Blanche Flying-Fox to ceremonies at Larragan (Keep River Gorge). Mignonette Djarmin referred to people from Carlton Hill Station gathering for a 'wangga' ceremony held at the big spring at Ningbing Station (now part of Carlton Hill Station). Another kind of ceremony, called 'pandami' was held for young people at Damberalm (also known as Bubble Bubble Springs) (FCA, 1997, BFF: 1848). This is doubtless a very partial account and it is likely that many other places were also significant sites for what was

clearly a very active religious life during the station times. References were also made to places where there are specific food taboos for young people or for women. Some ceremonies and some places are particularly secret and are considered dangerous to speak of. Ceremonies pertaining to men are kept secret from women and those for women are kept secret from men. For these reasons, some court sessions were for men only and others for women only. Because of the sensitive nature of sacred sites and ceremonies, some of the information presented to the court was not made publicly available in the court transcripts.

One ceremony associated with Argyle Station was described in more detail in the court transcripts and segments were performed for the court. It was called 'Ngalwirriwirri' and was described as a 'Joonba' ceremony. J.W. explained that it was 'found' by Boxer and Daylight, two Aboriginal stockmen who travelled from Queensland with the Durack family in 1885 and subsequently held key roles in supervising stock work at Argyle Station (FCA, 1997, JW: 954). The ceremony refers to the waterhole on the Behn River called Ngalwirriwirri, upstream from the old Argyle Station homestead. The site is now beneath the Argyle Dam. Ngalwirriwirri started at Argyle Station and travelled north to Auvergne and Carlton Stations, the town of Wyndham, then south again to Lissadell, Texas and Rosewood Stations and eventually returned to Argyle Station. Marjorie Brown explained her personal connection with this ceremony to the court and described some of its content,

MARJORIE BROWN: It's about the country. And it sings about my sister and I when we playing down at the old yard. When we been playing down la yard, they sang a song. The dark man, joonba people will travel with this corroboree. They're the mob that saw me and Myrtle playing and they sang about us. Our song is in this Ngalwirriwirri corroboree and also my brother, Nayi-Nayi.

...

I was running around la yard, la station, la Bilbiljim and these joonba people, they travelled with this corroboree. They're the ones that saw me and sang it. They come to this old people, down here and old Boombawoo in their dreams. They're clever people, all these old people and they can see them and talk to these spirit people. They carry this Ngalwirriwirri. They leave there to come out from Ngalwirriwirri. They sing about the homestead and everything that they can see in the homestead. They sing about that white tank, that tank there where that buoy is. They sing about Bilbilki.

You people will hear this, this corroboree. It sings about this place. It sings about the whole of the Miriuwung country. It travels from Ngalwirriwirri and goes right round, right up halfway la Gajerrong country, la bottom side Gajerrong country, la Ningbingi, - la Jigoomirri and Boolgoomirri, la Carlton Station, Gajerrong country, right through like that. Come out la Wyndham. He sing about everybody la Wyndham. He sing about the courtroom where black fellas been outside the courtroom and policeman – black fellas had chains on their legs. This corroboree been sing it out to them.

All these strong men been on top of the Five River Lookout, or whatever they call them there. When they been look down, he been find all this – in the court house, he been find – Aboriginals in chains and he sung about them. You will hear this when we sing Ngalwirriwirri. From there, he been go right up la Gulalawa country, Wyndham country. From there, he been come back this side, right back to Ngalwirriwirri and go back. You got to put them back. You start them up Ngalwirriwirri, take them out, you come back la Ngalwirriwirri.

MR M: You put him back where. Where does he end up?

MB: The waterhole. Right la waterhole, the station here, down here.

(Federal Court of Australia 1997, MB: 1204)

Although the ceremony is clearly owned by Miriuwung and Gajerrong people and concerns places in their country, neither Boxer nor Daylight, who were referred to as having ‘found’ it, were Miriuwung or Gajerrong people themselves. The cultural ties between place and people clearly contained the flexibility to accommodate new people and new experiences, as argued by Merlan (1998).

There are some similarities in form between this ceremony and one ‘found’ in 1975 by Rover Thomas, a senior Kija man and prominent artist at Turkey Creek, approximately 140 km south of Kununurra. It focuses on journeys made by the spirit of Rover Thomas’ classificatory mother who died in a road accident. Christensen describes the form of the Kurirr-Kurirr³⁴ ceremony as follows,

The songs are cryptic and evocative rather than discursive. They call forth mythological, historical and personal information about the places mentioned and personalities encountered. Memories and acquired knowledge of a massacre of local Aborigines at Mount King (Gananganja) in the 1920s, for example, are evoked by mention of the ‘shadows’ or spirits near that place. Similarly, recollection of the devastation wreaked by Cyclone Tracy is prompted by the rather bald song relating to Darwin (Christensen 1993: 32).

³⁴ Also spelt Gurirr Gurirr.

Both the Kurrir-Kurrir and the Argyle Joonba play a role in linking contemporary people with the realm of the dead. In the Kurirr-Kurrir, songs relating to places are sung in the language associated with each place,

This in itself underscores the notion that the knowledge relating to places is pre-existing and not the product of human discovery or invention. (Christensen 1993: 33)

Christensen's interpretation of the Kurirr-Kurirr explains how language and ceremony operate together to codify knowledge and history associated with specific places. Knowledge and history reside in particular places and may be drawn out and strengthened through ceremonial practices. The Ngalwirriwirri ceremony can be interpreted as performing a similar role. Marjorie Brown and others presented it to the court as an Aboriginal record of East Kimberley history.

4.3.3 Environmental changes associated with pastoralism

Pastoral land use introduced many changes, and evidence of severe soil erosion is clearly visible along the Keep River (Fig. 10). Few people still living could remember country before cattle. However, Biddy Simon's mother, aged around eighty years when I met her at Marralam Outstation, was one of the few who had experienced living in bush camps away from the station herds in her youth. In May 1998 I accompanied her on an expedition hunting turtle in dried billabongs that had been extensively trodden by cattle. She found very few turtle and exclaimed with some bitterness that the country was only good for cattle now whereas in the past it was good for Aboriginal people. Her sense of country seemed to differ from that of younger generations who had only ever known it as cattle country. There may also have been other differences in appreciation between men and women. Men who had been competent stock workers clearly took pride in this aspect of their lives. Associations with stock work carried a continuing status among Aboriginal

families, apparent in the pride with which Biddy Simon explained that her son, Maurice, was often called on to assist with stock work at Legune Station.

Accounts of older people who remembered the bombing of Wyndham by Japanese planes in 1942 indicate a considerable degree of dependence of Aboriginal people on station rations by the 1940s. Sheba Dilngari lived at Ivanhoe Station when Wyndham was bombed. The manager asked all Aboriginal residents to leave. They walked to Yirralalem, camped there for some time, and then went on to Argyle Station, camping at Emu Creek on the way. She recalled that they relied completely on bush food for about a month. She recalled being pleased to return to the station after that,

Plenty bush tucker all right, but too much hunting, not like la station, we have 'em tucker there. We don't go hunting again (FCA, 1997, SD: 3521).

It may be that the impact of cattle on bush food species made it difficult to survive solely on bush foods by the 1940s.³⁵



Figure 10. Evidence of soil erosion due to grazing at Keep River National Park.

³⁵ Rowse (1998) analyses the move from 'wild' times to the 'quiet' times on the stations in terms of the institution of rationing.

In the course of the Native Title hearings, references were made to various ecological changes that occurred during the pastoral period. For example, Toby Banma described in some detail the procedure for making hunting spears called 'ngawaleng' from a cane that grows along the river called 'milinyim'. These spears had been significant trade items but were no longer made because the cane could no longer be found. Some ecological changes were specifically attributed to the presence of cattle. Thelma Birch explained that a particular kind of yam, described as 'dangara' or 'sweet potato', does not grow where there are bullocks but can still be found at places where cattle are excluded. Head et al (2002) comment on some of the impacts of cattle grazing on yam sites, noting that cattle trample the stalks so that it becomes impossible to trace the tendrils. Changes like this are sometimes expressed in ways that link historical experience with Ngarranggarni stories. In the following extract, Sheba Dilngari was quizzed about foods she used to get at Jiboodboodgem, but could no longer find,

MS KELTEY: All right. Sheba, these rocks that we're sitting around now, what have they got to do with Jibijgeng?

SHEBA DILNGARI: This the tucker.

MS K: The tucker.

SD: All around here him been trap him, he been got him up, cut him paperbark, Dreamtime, you know.

MS K: He was carrying them in paperbark.

SD: And he been drop them all the way now.

MS K: He dropped –

SD: Jiboodboodgem been drop them

MS K: He dropped them.

SD: Did all of them.

MS K: These rocky outcrops that we can see scattered around this area.

SD: You can see him get on shelf, shelf here, see?

MS K: And Sheba you said it was a sort of tucker; what sort of tucker was that that he dropped.

SD: Oh that him, him get out la ground. I never see him any more that tucker.

NIDA BIRRWI [BIDWE]: Sweet potato but round one.

SD: Sweet potato.

MS K: Sweet potato Nida is suggesting?

SD: Yes. Big mob from here, but he gone now. When old people been die well all the tucker gone too.

MS K: Can you find that sweet potato anywhere else?

SD: Nothing, I never find him. Not like before, plenty bush tucker, you know, we been having out la bush. Not this time, nothing. Nothing growing. I been every place for tucker, you know, la tucker, bush man tucker, nothing. All gone. I don't know what been finish him up. Might be old people been take it away. Yes, nothing, you know (FCA, 1997, SD: 3755-7).

In referring to the ‘old people’ taking the tucker away, she is linking environmental change with social change, in terms of the disappearance of former generations who were connected through Ngarranggarni stories with plants such as this one.

4.3.4 Burning practices

A great deal of questioning in the Native Title hearings was devoted to the practice of burning country, the places where this was done and the purposes for which it was conducted. Mr Barker QC, representing the claimants, aimed to show continuities of traditional burning practices throughout the station times. In contrast, Mr Pullin, representing the Western Australian government, aimed to show that burning during station times was primarily directed by station managers to assist stock work. The evidence seemed to indicate both continuity and change.



Figure 11. Grass fire on road to Wyndham. Fires from a range of sources are common occurrences during the dry season.

A great deal of evidence presented indicates that Aboriginal people negotiated with station managers over burning of country. Carol Hapke spent her early childhood on Ivanhoe Station. She recalled the manager requesting Aboriginal people to burn in places that they travelled to on weekends,

When I was a little girl on the station the Manager used to often say to my grandfather, he used to pack us up all weekend, on the weekends and take us bush, you know, a lot of people from the station used to pack up onto an old Blitz truck and take us bush and often the Manager used to say "Oh where you going?" and he used to say "I'm going down here, might be Mantinea way or somewhere" and he'd say, "Oh that country's pretty scrubby there, burn it while you're there," you know? (FCA, CH, 1997: 2780).

Burning before mustering was a common practice and was among the instructions given by Station managers to Aboriginal stockmen. Dodger Carlton described this practice occurring on Carlton Hills Station,

DODGER CARLTON: They used to burn when Manager told them to go and burn around the country, you know.

MR BARKER: Yes.

DC: Before we muster (FCA, 1997, DC: 2992).

However, he also explained how Aboriginal people burned country to assist hunting bush foods,

MR BARKER: Right. And did they ever burn just for their own purposes?

DC: Oh, we used to burn la bush for hunting.

MR B: Why did that help the hunting?

DC: So we can see kangaroo, goanna, porcupine, burn grass (FCA, 1997, DC: 2992).

Sheba Dilngari was quizzed in some depth about negotiations about burning between the Ivanhoe station manager and Aboriginal people living on the station,

MR BARKER: All right. Now, just another little question, Sheba, just another little question about when you were on Ivanhoe, did you or did Aboriginal people ever burn the country around Ivanhoe?

SHEBA DILNGARI: Well, Manager he be burn 'em. Manager used to burn 'em, grass, yes.

MR B: Manager used to burn them? What about Aboriginal people, did they burn the country?

SD: Well, Manager, when him be tell him the fellas to burn him, right, we go burn 'em grass, clean him up.

MR B: And did the Manager ask the Aboriginal people to burn the country?

SD: Yes.

MR B: And why did he ask them to burn it?

SD: Well, we had too much grass. We want to go hunting, we been tell him we go get him goanna or anything like that, la bush.

MR B: Yes.

SD: And when he say all right, then they come and burn 'em.

MR B: The Manager would say it was all right for them?

SD: Doesn't matter, yes.

MR B: So they'd ask him—

SD: He used to go burn 'em too, grass.

MR B: Yes? And Aboriginal people burnt the grass?

SD: Mm.

MR B: Why did they burn it?

SD: Burn 'em for walking about in it. If we go out from the station now walking about, we got a clean place to walk around. Too much snake, no tucker

(FCA, 1997, SD: 3437).

Sheba Dilngari's account stresses that the manager at Ivanhoe burned country himself but also told Aboriginal people that they could burn country for their own purposes to facilitate access, hunting and reduce the risk of snake bite. The counsel representing the Western Australian government, Mr Pullin QC, then cross examined her. His line of questioning attempted to establish the extent to which burning was prescribed by the manager to promote feed for stock,

MR PULLIN: And can you tell me were there any places where you ever did any burning with the permission of the Manager? From Ivanhoe Station, was it which direction where you ever saw any burning?

SHEBA DILNGARI: Burn 'em this end. And the rockhole way.

MR P: On the western side of the river?

SD: La Gap.

MR B: Including, the witness pointed to – approximate to Button's Crossing as marked on the map inside the yellow boundary line.

MR P: Yes, did you ever do any burning near Button's Crossing?

SD: Yes.

MR P: All right. And was that – you asked the Manager for permission to burn there, did you?

SD: Yoowayi.³⁶ Him and he say all right, burn 'em off.

MR P: And he said all right, okay.

SD: Plenty cloud, plenty cloud and might be rain well burn 'em grass, Ivanhoe that side.

MR P: All right. But you never did any burning over the other side of the river?

SD: Nothing, not this side. All the stockmen, they burn 'em, while they been there go la Nheligam, stockmen.

MR P: What was that Sheba?

SD: Ivanhoe stockmen all there, stock camp, you know. They been go Ngeligam, and they been burn 'em this grass everywhere.

MR P: They burnt in the stock camps?

SD: Manager. Manager, yes, in those stock camps.

MR P: So that was where the Manager said to burn around the stock camps?

SD: Yoowayi (FCA, 1997, SD: 3515-6).

In this passage, Sheba Dilngari indicates that different burning regimes occurred on different sides of the Ord River. On the western side, near Buttons Crossing, Aboriginal people were permitted to burn for their own purposes. On the eastern side where there was a stock camp, the regime was determined by the manager to facilitate the movement of stock. Older men who had worked as stockmen, such as Toby Banma, described burning grass as part of their stock work (FCA, 1997, TB: 3596). Head (1994a) also documents

³⁶ Yes.

negotiations between station managers and Aboriginal people about burning. She notes that,

A consistent theme of discussions with older people, both black and white, in the East Kimberley is that in 'station times' there seems to have been a commonality of interest between pastoralists and Aborigines in the ways fire was used. More recently the disparity has broadened with changing technology in the cattle industry, such that fire is now seen as a threat (Head 1994a: 180).

The degree of hesitation detectable in Sheba Dilngari's responses to questions from both lawyers is possibly explained by the contemporary antagonism towards Aboriginal burning practices. Because of this, Aboriginal witnesses may have been wary of admitting to burning.

Relations between station managers, white stockmen and Aboriginal stockmen clearly took different forms on different stations. Some managers were not at all interested in Aboriginal knowledge (Lewis 1985). Willis (1980) describes a range of attitudes among station managers in the 1960s. These varied from paternalistic responsibility to treatment of Aboriginal people as sub-human. A similar picture emerges from Head's survey of patrol officers' reports for Legune and Carlton Hills stations (Head 1994a). If a similar range of attitudes existed in earlier years also, then it is difficult to make general speculations about the incorporation of Aboriginal knowledge into pastoral practices.

Watercourses were commonly referred to in relation to Aboriginal burning. Land along the banks of creeks and rivers was burnt to facilitate access for fishing and hunting. Carol Hapke's description of her mother's burning practices illustrates this point,

CAROL HAPKE: Well, when she'd go for goanna country, where there's a lot of – an abundance of goanna and stuff, she's burnt that country to make it easier to hunt goanna. She's burnt country where there's good fishing, when it gets too scrubby after the wet and stuff like that, down near the river to get in there; she's burnt that country. She's burnt country just to make green grass come back up too.
MR BARKER: And can you indicate what country you know she burned in relation to having access to a water place for fishing?

CH: Yes, she's burnt up into the Wawoolern Spring there and little areas round there where she's fished up there. She's also burnt on the Ivanhoe way as well, down near the Crossing area, past there. She's burnt down that way to get in to do fishing.
MR B: When you say Ivanhoe, the Crossing way –
CH: Yes, below the Crossing.
(FCA, 1997, CH: 2778)

Nancy Dilyayi also described Aboriginal people burning along the banks of the Ord River at Ivanhoe station to facilitate hunting activities there. Burning also occurred for other purposes, as illustrated in Danny Wallace's account of the use of fire during station times to signal to other groups about ceremonial activities,

MR BARKER: And what was the burning of the grass done for?
DANNY WALLACE: Oh, for kangaroo, anything, burn grass for goanna, anything, when you burn it in hole in ground. Sometimes they been only made big fire to call everybody up you know, from other place.
MR B: Would they?
DW: Call them up people.
MR B: It would be like sending a message, would it?
DW: Yes. Say from Bubble Bubble, everyone sees that smoke, well all the black fellas go there.
MR B: And what would they all go there for?
DW: For corroboree, big meeting now
(FCA, 1997, DW: 1105).

In summary, it seems clear that station managers used fire as a tool for the management of stock and promotion of pastures. However Aboriginal people simultaneously used it for promotion of bush foods, the maintenance of access to land, to deter snakes around campsites or living areas and to signal to other groups over distances. They made clear distinctions between burning for stock work, which took place around stock camps and for the purpose of mustering, and burning for their own purposes, mainly along the banks of the Ord River and its tributaries. Some attempt was made by the lawyers to establish seasonal patterns in burning. However, the only clear distinction made was between the wet season when Aboriginal people did not burn (FCA, 1997, SD: 3438) and the dry season. This pattern also corresponded with movements of stock.

4.4 1960s experience of town and farms

During the 1960s, changes in the pastoral industry associated with the introduction of helicopter mustering and compulsory award wages meant station managers dismissed the extended family groups residing in ration camps and retained only a few skilled stockmen. At the same time, legal constraints on movement and employment were lifted. In 1954 some of the more restrictive provisions of the Native Administration Act were removed, ending altogether in 1963. In 1972 the Department of Native Welfare, which carried the responsibilities for administering the legislation, was abolished (Sullivan 1996: 6-7). In the early 1960s Aboriginal people began leaving the stations and moving into Kununurra, lured in part by access to work on cotton farms and construction work in the new town. Employment on cotton farms was seasonal, with most of the weeding required at the end of the wet season in February and coinciding with the station lay-off (Willis 1980: 19). The extension of social security benefits to Aboriginal people in 1960 also influenced residence and mobility (Williams and Kirkby 1989: 16-17, Sullivan 1996: 8). Many of those who had worked for rations on stations became unemployed and dependent on social security payments administered by government officers in Kununurra.³⁷

Peter Willis, a Catholic priest based in Kununurra in the 1960s and early 1970s, described the transition between station life and Kununurra as a gradual one. Aboriginal people moved between stations and the Kununurra Reserve, working on one and holidaying on the other (Willis 1980: 42).³⁸ Willis (1980: 20) cites evidence from records of the Native

³⁷ Impacts of the introduction of compulsory award wages on Aboriginal employment have been described across Australia eg. Altman and Nieuwenhuysen (1979), Peterson (1991), Rowse (1998).

³⁸ Willis asserts that the migration to Kununurra was different from 'the brutal banishment' that occurred in other places, such as Fitzroy Crossing, because of the availability of employment and of the richness of the local environment for bush foods (Willis 1980: 35).

Welfare Department indicating a shortage of seasonal labour in 1965/66. In that year farmers and station managers competed for Aboriginal workers,

Between 1963 and 1973 there were approximately 20 farms on which farmers grew and harvested cotton (D.N.R.1976). At the beginning of each year after the rain, Aborigines were employed to weed the cotton fields. In the early years when the area under cultivation was small, the employment available for Aborigines at the farms coincided with the station lay-off. With the increase of area under cultivation more workers were needed. By 1964 there were 20 farms under cultivation and the farmers were finding it difficult to attract enough cotton chippers to weed the young crop.

The Native Welfare Department was then called on to help provide Kununurra cotton farmers with weed chippers in the early months of the year. The reports of the Native Welfare Department in 1965/66 indicate that a severe shortage of unskilled seasonal labour had developed and at the end of the rainy season, February to May, farmers and station owners were competing for the services of Aboriginal workers (Willis 1980: 19-20).

Further, Willis notes that there was

... evidence in Native Welfare Area Officer's Report of 1962 that Aborigines were often not dismissed from stations as a result of the introduction of the Pastoral award but that many had already left in search of better wages on the cotton farms at Kununurra, the Wyndham wharf and similar forms of employment where they shared the employment conditions and pay of whites (Willis 1980: 30).

In the 1960s, while men found employment on farms or in the new town, employment of Aboriginal women diminished.³⁹ Willis (1980:33) notes that by 1968/69 the number of women employed on stations as domestics dropped from over 100 to nil. He argues that this played a critical role in the desire of family groups to move into Kununurra. While some men maintained a degree of mobility between Kununurra and the stations through continued casual employment, women's access to pastoral lands was greatly reduced.

4.4.1 Residence and land use around Kununurra

Witnesses to the 1997 Native Title hearings described how they first lived in canvas shelters beside Lily Creek near the town centre, but moved to the reserve area when it was

³⁹ Rowse (1998: 164) highlights the gendered dimension of waged labour at that time in Central Australia, noting that the 'award' wage was intended as 'family' wage.

designated in 1963 (Fig.12). Carol Hapke recalled the movement of Aboriginal people into Kununurra as follows,

CAROL HAPKE: There was small camps right around Kununurra that I remember. Like, for example, we first started living straight across from Kona Park.

MR BARKER: Straight across from which place?

CH: Kona Park, that Caravan Park there. We started living there first and then we moved to Lakeside there, just across the Lily Creek. But there was a lot of families. The Greens used to live around here near where the Showgrounds are. There used to be families living there. There used to be families living in that Ngaliwa area.

MR B: What areas is that?

CH: Branch area, you know the Ngaliwa – area behind where Waringarri is.

(explains that this is the area at the end of Speargrass Road – it used to be called the Reserve and is also known as the Garden area)

(FCA, 1997, CH: 2707).

Social groupings associated with station ‘mobs’ appeared to be maintained within residential patterns in the town and ‘Reserve’.⁴⁰

Sheba Dilngari recalled that during the early years in Kununurra they hunted and fished at the Junction and Lily Creek (FCA, 1997, SD: 3387) (Fig. 12). Others specifically described hunting around Ivanhoe Crossing and at Mirima. While fishing had been common in the river before there were farms at Packsaddle Plain, the creation of farms prevented access to this section of the river (FCA, 1997, ND: 2559-2669). Prior to the construction of the Diversion Dam, a stretch of the Ord River known as Jalinem, which had sand banks and a billabong, was a favoured fishing spot (FCA, 1997, SD: 3887). Throughout the 1960s as Aboriginal people moved into Kununurra, bush foods and other resources were obtained from the surrounding land. However these activities were increasingly curtailed by expanding farmlands. In 1963 the construction of the Diversion Dam flooded favoured fishing sites.

⁴⁰ Kolig (1981: 25) describes the social makeup of the station ‘mob’ in greater detail, noting its fluidity and relationship to a particular locality.

Please see print copy for image

Figure 12. Kununurra town layout, 2002. Based on information from the Department of Land Administration, Western Australia.

In 1972 the construction of Argyle Dam inundated 980 square kilometres of Miriwung lands beneath Lake Argyle. Sacred sites, objects and ceremonial areas were submerged, along with land beside the Ord and Behn Rivers that had supplied bush foods throughout the station times. One of the court sessions for the 1997 Native Title hearings was held in a boat on Lake Argyle. Witnesses described the cultural significance and history of the submerged country below. Aboriginal responses to the damming of the Ord were documented in a submission made by the Moongoong Darwung Association to a 1979 review of the Ord Scheme. The following summarises the key points of that submission,

It is the main contention of this submission that the impact of the ORIA has been to exacerbate the problems created for Aboriginals by Europeans by the dispossession of their land. The ORIA's specific contribution to this process has been in,

- The destruction of a large proportion of Miriwung land by inundation, irrigation etc.;
- The rapid introduction of large numbers of Europeans to the area increasing the rate of social change and the social and psychological pressures on Aboriginals and making them fringe dwellers in their own country.
- The destruction of their land has threatened with virtual destruction the Aboriginal people for whom this land is a part of themselves, of their religion and social and economic organization ...

(reproduced from Appendix to Young (1979).

Shaw (1986) records Bulla Bilinggin describing his feelings about the inundation of sacred objects for which he was custodian,

I wanted to get it out. I didn't know they were going to put this backwater right up to Argyle [the Argyle Dam and Lake]. I should have shifted that Thing myself but I was too late behind. The water was all over then. No good looking. Yes it made me feel sorry for that. I had a feeling for that. ... My private Law is under water now (Shaw 1986: 171).

In the course of fieldwork I found that many older people were still reluctant to speak about the flooding of Lake Argyle because they still felt a strong sense of grief and loss.

Media reporting of the opening of the Argyle Dam made little reference to Aboriginal people. In the midst of criticism of the Ord Irrigation Scheme after the failure of cotton in

1974, one current affairs film made reference to the loss of pastoral heritage associated with the flooding of Argyle Station and the Argyle homestead. Yet no reference was made to the loss felt by Aboriginal people. It was not until the mid 1980s and controversies surrounding the Argyle Mine and the creation of Purnululu National Park that Aboriginal people appeared on current affairs programs expressing their sentiments about these schemes.

4.4.2 Mobility in employment and education

New patterns of mobility came into play after Aboriginal people left the stations in the 1960s and '70s. The following accounts indicate some of the mobility associated with men's working lives. Toby Banma, Sheba Dilngari's son, was born at Ivanhoe Station in 1949. He went to school at the Kimberley Research Station and left at the age of thirteen to work as a horse tailer. He explained that he 'lived in the bush with the stock boys'. He also worked on a cotton farm for Tony Morrison picking weeds (FCA, 1997, TB: 3573-4). Gerry Moore, who was born at Goose Hill in 1938, worked as a casual employee on the wharfs at Wyndham and at various stations throughout the Kimberley. He worked with a plumber in Kununurra for eight years, during which he lived at Lily Creek with his children (FCA, 1997, GM: 4274). George Dixon, who was born in 1932 and spent much of his working life on stations between Wyndham and Lissadell, worked in Kununurra between 1972 and 1974 picking weeds on cotton farms (FCA, 1997, GD: 4884). He then moved to Kildurk Station for a while before returning to Kununurra where he worked making brooms. Peter Newry moved from Newry to Ivanhoe Station in 1965 and worked there till 1970. After that he worked on a farm at the Kimberley Research Station for three months and then at Hooker's farm, growing cotton for a year. He then moved back to Newry Station and remained there for another three years before moving back to Kununurra (FCA, 1997, GD: 1731).

While farm work may have paid better, it did not become a form of social identification in the way that stock work had. Bill Lawrie, an Aboriginal man interviewed by Shaw in the 1970s, compared the work on cotton farms unfavourably with the cattle work with which he was more familiar,

I used to follow up this cattle game all my life and enjoy it for everything. That was our life (Shaw 1992: 95).

While Aboriginal workers on stations often retained lifelong associations with specific properties⁴¹, no equivalent personal association developed with farmlands. Aboriginal men rarely worked for one farmer for more than a few years.

Another form of mobility was introduced with secondary school education during the 1960s and 1970s. Carol Hapke was born in Wyndham in 1955 when her mother was working at Ivanhoe Station and her father at Rosewood. She first attended school at the Kimberley Research Station and completed primary school at the newly built school in Kununurra. She moved to Perth to attend secondary school and then returned to Kununurra and lived at Hidden Valley (FCA, 1997, CH: 2707). Douglas Boonbi was born on Newry Station in 1964. Most of his early schooling was at St Joseph's Catholic School in Kununurra. During that time he used to go on holiday with Peter Newry. He went to high school in Broome, then studied cabinet making at Pandelmurra in Port Hedland (FCA, 1997, DB: 10919).

⁴¹ Station managers often ascribed the names of their stations to Aboriginal workers as English surnames.

4.4.3 Summary

The 1960s were experienced by Aboriginal people as a period of significant change. Their movement into town was accompanied by their exclusion from pastoral lands. Aspects of the social groupings associated with station ration camps were retained in the new residential circumstances. While men and women continued to access lands around Kununurra and the Ord Valley for collecting bush foods, the expansion of farmlands and the flooding of Lake Argyle severely restricted these activities. While mobility on surrounding pastoral leases was curtailed, other forms of mobility developed, as increasing numbers of young people travelled to Derby, Perth and Darwin to receive education or seek employment.

The experience of this transition differed for men and women. Able-bodied men found new forms of work on farms and on construction sites. Both allowed a degree of mobility and paid cash wages. There was no such employment for women and their mobility was greatly reduced during the 1960s. For those women and elderly people unable to participate in the local labour market, social security payments replaced station rations as the key means of economic subsistence. Alcohol abuse became increasingly prevalent for both men and women – both a symptom and a cause of social stress.

4.5 Contemporary land use and mobility

Mobility of Aboriginal people in the 1990s displayed different patterns to that of the 1960s. I concentrate here on two different forms of mobility, the first associated with family groups living on outstations, the second associated with large groups attending ceremonies and meetings. Together, they help to illustrate some significant changes since the 1960s.

It is clear that many Aboriginal people were strongly motivated to regain the access to land that was lost when their employment on pastoral stations ceased during the 1960s. This agenda is reflected in the formation of representative bodies from the late 1960s. Willis (1980) and Shaw (1986) have traced the origins of the Mirima Council in Kununurra in the late 1960s and its subsequent emergence as a key representative body for Miriung and Gajerrong people. In an interview with Bruce Shaw (Shaw 1986) Bulla Bilinggin described his aspirations to obtain access to land at Dingo Springs as a key motivation for his involvement in the Mirima Council during the 1970s. With the election of the Federal Labor government in 1972, a new government policy environment provided financial and political incentives for Aboriginal people to form representative organisations. The establishment of the Kimberley Land Council in the late 1970s was driven by the need to translate Aboriginal land aspirations into European political processes (Sullivan 1996).

4.5.1 The outstation movement

Exclusions from pastoral leasehold lands, the sites of places important for both long term cultural connections and recent social memory, were and are greatly resented by Aboriginal people. In the 1970s and early 1980s, a strong movement developed to obtain community living areas or 'outstations' on land with cultural connections. While Shaw recorded aspirations to obtain land in the early 1970s (Shaw 1986: 11-12), it was not until the 1980s that the movement gathered momentum, assisted by changes in government policy and legislation, particularly at the Commonwealth level. With the passage of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, there was also political value in demonstrating

ownership and continuing interest in land (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs 1987: 16-17).⁴²

From around 1980, small groups began camping on land where they hoped to establish settlements. After often-lengthy negotiations with government authorities and pastoral leaseholders, they obtained leasehold tenure to small living areas that formed excisions within existing pastoral leases. Prior to Native Title, a range of options was available to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory to obtain access to pastoral lands (Head and Fullagar 1991). Access to land in the Northern Territory was facilitated by the enactment of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* in 1976, and some pastoral excisions have been converted to freehold title. However in Western Australia applications for excisions from pastoral leases were more readily thwarted by objections from lease-holders and other interested parties (Head and Fullagar 1991). Sullivan (pers. comm. 2002) comments that there is no Aboriginal freehold worth noting in the Kimberley in Western Australia. Many of the claimants to land in Western Australia who gave evidence in the 1997 Native Title hearings spoke of their aspirations for obtaining living areas and clearly hoped that native title would assist them.

A 1995 study of the Aboriginal labour force across the Kimberley found that fifty-three per cent of the Aboriginal population lived in 200 remote communities and outstations. This figure included sixty per cent of people aged between fifteen and twenty-four years and

⁴² Various studies conducted since the 1980s have addressed the movement of Aboriginal people from towns to outstations and homelands throughout Australia but particularly in northern and central Australia eg. Young and Doohan (1989), Baker (1999), Altman and Taylor (1987), Cane and Stanley (1985). This literature shows that the motivations given by East Kimberley Aborigines for seeking land for outstations are shared by Aboriginal people elsewhere.

forty per cent of those under fifteen (Dixon and Christophersen 1996). To the south of Kununurra, Aboriginal groups have acquired leases to Bow River and Glen Hill pastoral stations on lands of cultural significance (Sullivan 1996: 25).

Outstations in the 1990s were frequently located at the site of old station ration camps, stock camps or wet season camps (Fig. 7). These locations held many memories for older residents. Marralam Outstation, for example, was formed by families who lived on Legune Station and worked there for rations between the 1950s and the 1970s (Head 1994a: 179). A social identity embedded in land, kin relations, memory and cultural knowledge, linked outstation groups with the ration camps from the station times (Sullivan 1996: 13-14). Sometimes men resident at Marralam Outstation were hired for casual assistance with stock work on Legune Station. Although usually encompassing no more than a few hectares, the presence of outstations introduced new forms of mobility. Head and Fullagar (1991) made a detailed analysis of the significance of bush foods in the economy of the Marralam Outstation in the Northern Territory in 1990. They recorded extensive mobility in hunting and gathering activities on the neighbouring pastoral leasehold lands, and noted the influence of access to vehicles, the location of roads and fences, and the attitudes of station managers. Williams and Kirkby (1989) also commented on the precarious nature of maintaining an outstation and the importance of relationships with local station managers for permission to access surrounding pastoral leases for hunting and fishing. They noted the influence of the recent history of violence associated with the pastoral regime on relationships with station managers,

Thus even in cases where nominal agreement has been reached for the establishment of an outstation on a pastoral property, the manager's attitude and style of interaction with Aborigines have a direct bearing on the development of the outstation and

whether Aborigines will work or reside on the outstation for any length of time. The salience of the negative effects of bad relations between Aborigines and station managers is also revealed in the readiness with which Aborigines characterize in positive terms the station managers who are well disposed or even generous in dealing with them, expressed for example in comments which name the managers who never refuse access to the lease, do not lock gates, or even voluntarily provide them with killer⁴³ beef. (Williams and Kirkby 1989: 22)

Sullivan (1996: 29) comments on the severe restrictions on Aboriginal access to pastoral leasehold lands in Western Australia. He notes that the situation has deteriorated over the last fifteen years, partly due to pastoralists' response to the 'threat' of Native Title (Sullivan pers. comm., 2002).

Unlike the 1960s when many Aboriginal men worked on cotton farms, few have sought employment in the horticultural ventures of the 1980s and 1990s. The policy shift to self-determination allowed alternatives for economic survival outside of mainstream employment. However, these were often at odds with other policies aimed at promoting the absorption of Aboriginal people into paid employment (Altman and Taylor 1987).⁴⁴

4.5.2 Ceremonies and meetings

Mobility associated with ceremonies and meetings changed significantly between the 1960s and 1990s. During the 1970s more expansive social networks developed among Aboriginal communities throughout northern and central Australia, facilitated in part by access to vehicles (Akerman 1980). Kolig (1981: 49-50) described increasing geographic and social inclusiveness of religious activity in the Kimberley, with people travelling much greater distances by road to attend major events. Sullivan describes the emergence of the 'bush meeting' from the early 1970s as a new form of cultural practice promoted by the newly

⁴³ 'Killer' is the term in Aboriginal English used to refer to a cow killed for meat for consumption.

⁴⁴ In a recent review of the resourcing of indigenous communities, Altman et al (1998) highlight the many social and economic values of outstations, including alcohol rehabilitation, art production, and an alternative means of economic support based on subsistence (1998: 6).

formed Kimberley Land Council that combined Aboriginal and European elements (Sullivan 1996: 106-7). Kimberley Land Council meetings were usually held on the traditional land of a host community and those attending from distant places may travel for up to three days to get there. Sullivan comments on the social and cultural significance of the 'sudden and regional mobilisation', in which the journey itself may take longer than the meeting. In explaining the expansion of the catchment of initiation ceremonies in Central Australia, Peterson (2000) argues that government inspired regional meetings for policy issues and for major sporting events also played a role in expanding the social networks that could be drawn on for ceremonies. These meetings were associated with the shifts in government policy that followed the election of the Federal Labor government in 1972.

In the Miriwung and Gajerrong Native Title hearings, senior Miriwung women explained that exclusion from pastoral lands meant that no women's ceremonies were held locally for a period after they moved into Kununurra. During this time they travelled to Turkey Creek, Christmas Creek and Mulan for ceremonies. Later, they began holding ceremonies at Migeme near Kununurra, a place where people from Carlton and Ivanhoe stations used to camp during holiday time (FCA, 1997, BFF: 4037-8). Photographs were presented to the court of women dancing Moonga-moonga, a ceremony dating from the first World War, at a site called Moongoom behind the convent at Kununurra (FCA, 1997: 2537). Sheba Dilngari and Blanche Flying-Fox led a group of women in performing this ceremony to the court (FCA, 1997: 4046).

When questioned about the maintenance of ceremony and religious life, it was clear that some of the senior Miriwung women were particularly active in this and keen to pass on

knowledge to younger generations (Fig. 13). Blanche Flying-Fox referred to a women's dance called mungamunga. She explained that she, Sheba Dilngari and Mignonette Djarmin and other women named Dinah, Phyllis, Marie Dilyayi and Judy all hold that dance since the olden days (FCA, 1997, BFF: 1812). She went on to explain that while she herself operates within Aboriginal cultural traditions, many children have an option to learn both Aboriginal and 'gardia' (European) culture. She is active in teaching younger women aspects of Miriuwung law and ceremony.

BLANCHE FLYING-FOX: Yes, we can't go gardia way. Kids can go gardia way, school kids. Me fella still all in the black fella way.

MR HOWIE: All right. And are you passing it on to young women?

BFF: Yes, we learn them.

MR H: You're learning them?

BFF: Mm.

MR H: Where are you doing that?

BFF: Migama. But you can't come there.

MR H: I can't come; don't worry, I'm not intending to.

BFF: No, might be danger for you.

MR H: Migama.

BFF: Next here.

MR H: M-i-g-a-m-a. All right. And you say you're hanging onto that?

BFF: Yes, keep it.

MR H: Can you tell me, is that important for you?

BFF: Important place, all them place. That's what I been doing this country, all over, right down here, every way, Victoria, Nicholson, Port Keats, Ivanhoe, Carlton, Wyndham (FCA, 1997, BFF: 1814).

A video presented to the court showed a large women's ceremony held recently at Migama for which women had travelled from Ringer Soak, Malan, Balgo, Turkey Creek, Kununurra, Timber Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, Kildurk and Yuendumu (FCA, 1997, SD: 4027). Young and Doohan (1989) described the emergence of large women's ceremonies such as this across northern and central Australia during the 1980s. A meeting held at Malan in 1985 'attracted at least 300 women, representing well over thirty different communities and Aboriginal organisations in the Kimberley's Northern Territory, and Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia and Western Australia' (Young and Doohan 1989: 96-7). Funerals or mortuary ceremonies may also attract large numbers of people from a very wide region.



Figure 13. Miriuwung women performing a public ceremony at the Women’s Crisis Accommodation Centre in Kununurra, 1999.

4.5.2 Contemporary land use practices

Patterns of contemporary land use are influenced by access to land and resources, which differs for different groups, different generations and according to which side of the state border the desired lands are located. The Native Title transcripts provide evidence of environmental changes that affect contemporary Aboriginal land use practices. A sense of aesthetics is conveyed when people talk about environmental changes. They articulate a range of ways in which land is valued, that can be interpreted within a broader notion of interest in land. In Part III of the thesis I will revisit the theme of land interests in the context of contemporary planning processes and draw more heavily on my fieldwork experiences.

4.5.3 Outstations, land use and mobility

The extent of mobility between outstations and Kununurra is influenced by a range of factors, including access to vehicles, medical needs associated with poor health status, and requirements that children attend school (Head and Fullagar 1991, Sullivan 1996: 28). Shop foods are important. At Marralam Outstation, a commercial-sized freezer room allows

storage of both shop foods and animal carcasses, but this does not appear to reduce the frequency of trips to town (Head, pers. com., 2002).

A more detailed picture can be provided of the pattern of resource use at Marralam, drawing on extensive research by Head and others at Marralam Outstation (Fig. 14), and on my own observations during fieldwork in 1998. Head (1994a) traces the origins of the Marralam Outstation among the Aboriginal families who resided on Legune Station and worked there for rations between the 1950s and the 1970s. She describes constraints affecting contemporary land use,

The terms of the lease required the community to fence the area and install cattle grids on roads, maintain a firebreak along the boundary and prevent accelerated soil erosion. A covenant precludes the keeping of cattle, pigs or goats. Conversion to freehold after five years was dependent on continuous occupation. So the area is clearly not large enough for forty people to live a hunting and gathering lifestyle, even presuming that was their goal and that a century of pastoralism had not irrevocably altered the available resources. But the terms of the lease specifically prohibit land use options that are open to others, such as animal husbandry (Head 1994a: 179).

Head and Fullagar (1991) made a detailed analysis of the significance of bush foods in relation to shop foods in the economy of the Marralam Outstation and its inhabitants during the 1990 dry season. They concluded that the families associated with the outstation have a much more nutritious diet during the times they spend at Marralam than they do when resident in town during the wet season. They note the mobility involved in hunting and gathering activities on the neighbouring pastoral leasehold lands and the way in which Aboriginal people synchronise their activities with the burning conducted by pastoralists prior to mustering.



Figure 14. Marralam Outstation, May 1998.

Head et al (2002) provide a detailed description of Bidy Simon's garden at Marralam. Domestic plantings include yams, as well as edible and ornamental exotic plants such as mango, cashew, bougainvillea and chilli pepper, and cumquat and bamboo. They note the influence of the station experience, when Aboriginal women, employed as domestics, often worked in the kitchen gardens,

In constructing a garden at all, Bidy is reflecting a number of influences on her life, as well as the pragmatic need to create a cool outdoor place for her extended family. In bringing bush plants back to her garden, Bidy seems to us to be actively maintaining connections with different parts of country; she remembers and talks about when and where she got them. From her garden, she observes many details of her environment, such as the number and type of birds visiting the adjacent billabong. Although this looks like an enclosure of space, a creation of 'inside', we interpret it as just another aspect of Bidy's close engagement with country. Plants are often referred to in relation to their smell eg. 'smellem from long way'. Country also talks: 'Listen all the sugarbag [bush honey] singing out' in reference presumably to the bees. Since country has an active presence, and is engaged with using all the senses, it must also be part of domestic space. (Head et al. 2002: 185)

Resource use at Marralam Outstation is framed by the lived experience of pastoralism, the pragmatics of contemporary living, and by a desire to maintain a relationship with country that engages cultural knowledge through sensory experience.

Please see print copy for image

Figure 15. Aboriginal settlements or ‘outstations’ in the Ord Valley.

4.5.4 Around Kununurra

Sheba Dilngari expressed her frustration at not being able to gain access to areas around Kununurra that they once used extensively. She remarked that there are too many mangoes and bananas in the Ord Valley now (FCA, 1997, SD: 3350). She commented that there was too much grass at the Junction (Fig. 15) to be able to walk around safely. Consequently, she only goes there when she has access to a car (FCA, 1997, SD: 3555). She expressed particular concerns about pollution from chemicals used in the irrigation areas, which drain into the Ord River from runoff channels on the farms,

SHEBA DILNGARI: ...That water proper white from channel. They use too much poison la channel, the garden everywhere.

MR BARKER: You're talking about today are you?

SD: Mm.

MR B: It's affecting the water, is it?

SD: Not before. It was good water all the way.

MR B: It used to be good water but you say it's not good water now?

SD: Not now. Water white from here right down
(FCA, 1997, SD: 3392).

In 1997 a significant fish kill was reported in the lower Ord River and attributed to release of endosulphan from farmlands in the Ord Valley (Waters and Rivers Commission 1998). This was the subject of concern among all anglers in the region and was discussed extensively within the local Aboriginal community. It raised the spectre of the damage caused by pesticides and defoliants in the first stage of the Ord Irrigation Scheme in the 1960s.

4.5.5 Too many people

Groups now residing at outstations may restrict the numbers permitted to stay there. Blanche Flying-Fox was questioned by Mr Barker QC as to whether community members at Bindjen would allow other Miriuwung people to hunt and fish there,

BLANCHE FLYING-FOX - They got to ask them

MR BARKER: Who would they need to ask?

BFF: Boys with the house, asking permission right way or they might be want to go. Might be they let them just go and not camp but. They might let them go.

MR B: If they weren't camping here would it be all right to come and fish?
 BFF: Fish or hunt.
 MR B: Bit of hunting?
 BFF: Hunting, for one night maybe.
 MR B: Hmm?
 BFF: Because got house, might be one night they'll camp for.
 MR B: Okay.
 BFF: Because all this mob got house here. I don't think they let them in there.
 MR B: So do you think there's not enough room for everybody else?
 BFF: Yes, not enough room.
 MR B: What, because these houses have been built now?
 BFF: Well, they took - they might finish all the goanna, kookaburra
 (FCA, 1997, BFF: 1858-9).

Her response indicates a concern about the need to regulate the exploitation of bush foods in the area to preserve populations of food animals. It may also reflect an emerging sense of private property among Aboriginal outstation communities.

4.5.6 'Too much grass'

The phrase 'too much grass', used frequently by Aboriginal people to describe the condition of particular places, is potent in meanings about land management, aesthetics and values in country. It relates to burning practices and assertions of the right of Aboriginal people to manage country through fire, set against a background of antagonism by contemporary pastoralists towards Aboriginal burning (Head 1994a, b) (Fig 16).



Figure 16. Road sign erected by WA Bush Fires Authority. The use of a hand print and the red, yellow and black colours associated with the Aboriginal land rights movement indicates that the sign is directed at Aboriginal people.

Topsy Aldus described contemporary land use around Ribinying (Mud Springs) (Fig. 15), explaining that the grass was too long to collect bush foods in the way that they used to but that they still go fishing and collect turtle,

MR PETTIT: When Mr Barker was asking you about bush tucker you said the grass is too much, grass is too long?

TOPSY ALDUS: Yes, it grows too much all right.

MR P: What do you mean, there's too much grass around?

Can I have some help with that answer.

THE INTERPRETER: Meaning when the grass is too long it's too much, maybe snakes might be crawling.

MR P: So with the long grass you don't go for bush tucker?

T.A.: No.

MR P: Not so much as you used to, is that right? You live at Mudd Springs now; do you go for bush tucker now? This last year?

T.A.: Yes, they want fish, we go more. We go fishing, that's all.

MR P.: Fishing, that's all. It's only in the old days you went for goanna, kangaroo, is that right? Not now?

T.A.: Not now (FCA, 1997, TA: 1057).

Tommy Barney explained that he still burns country to make it easier to hunt and to teach his children about hunting (FCA, 1997, TB: 1440). However Ben Barney explained that although in the past he used to burn country to assist with hunting he doesn't really engage in that activity very much now,

BEN BARNEY: No, I don't do them sort of thing any more because - or somehow I don't want to do a bit of killing; only killing when I'm a bit hungry that's all (FCA, 1997, BB: 1355).

The extent to which people harvest bush foods in the vicinity of outstations varies greatly but is affected by their capacity to manage land through fire.

The lawyer representing the Northern Territory Government, Mr McKenna, questioned Dodger Carlton about the seasonality of contemporary burning practices, invoking the interests of pastoralists in preventing burning at inappropriate times of year for cattle. However, Dodger Carlton's response to this line of questioning was to assert the traditional authority for Aboriginal people to burn country as a practice that began in the Ngarranggarni,

MR McKENNA: Do you burn only at the end of the Wet? Would you burn now if you wanted to go hunting?

DODGER CARLTON: Anytime. I can go out then and strike the matches now.

MR M: So you would burn anytime of year?

DC: Yes.

MR M: Do you know if the station people try and put fires out?

DC: They tried to.

MR M: They do?

DC: They tried to stop us but that being on from early days, from Ngarranggarni, burn and hunt. Never stop for anyone (FCA, 1997, DC: 3085).

Mr Pullin QC, the counsel representing the Western Australian Government, quizzed John Toby about burning practices at Glen Hill station, attempting to establish their non-traditional nature,

MR PULLIN – Okay, but the burning of the country is not a good thing for you as a station owner, is it, running the station you don't want people burning your pasture for your cattle?

JOHN TOBY: Well, I mean we run our station and we do run our cultures, and we run the rule that how we wants to run it here. And we don't want gardiya to dip in here and tell us what to do and we're happy the way we run it.

MR P: But burning, you don't burn the country just at any time, do you?

JT: No.

MR P: Dodger Carlton said up at Ningbing that he can burn the country any time, but you don't agree with that, do you, here?

JT: Well, country like Carlton it's different from here.

MR P: All right.

JT: Over in Carlton country you got the moist of the salt all the time and the grass, about week or two weeks after you see the green seeds come out, where country like here, very dry country, you got to wait a long time before the green seeds come out.

MR P: And it can be dangerous if a fire gets away?

JT: Well yes.

MR P: Okay.

JT: That's the good time to burn early in the year and late in –

MR P: But you only burn here because of your cattle management, for the cattle? Is that right, for getting feed and that kind of thing?

JT: Yes, not only that and for your hunting grounds too, see, that area.

MR P: But you don't go out hunting now and burning areas of land to go hunting?

JT: Oh, we do that. But you do that early in the year, and late in the year.

[reference to the stock side]

...

JT: I mean if cattle now, even the cattle itself, especially for Brahman cattle and they're grazing it right down, just that you don't have to burn. They're just grazing it right down, just right to the stone.

MR P: But the burning, you now look to burning your station country depending on whether or not the stock requires burning for feed for the stock, is that right?

JT: If we have to burn, we'll burn, early in the year and late in the year.

MR P: And you decide that depending on what you want to do for your stock, is that right?

JT: Yes (FCA, 1997, JT: 4666).

In this exchange the lawyer tries to contrast burning practices at Carlton Hill Station near the coast with those at the Aboriginal owned Glen Hill Station, further inland to the south. John Toby points out that the country is so different in these two areas in terms of its

response to fire that it makes little sense to compare them. He then explains that they burn for two different purposes at Glen Hill – to facilitate hunting and to facilitate feed for stock. Further, he asserts their right to do both, and their expertise in assessing when and how to burn for each purpose.

4.5.7 Arts and crafts production

The production of artworks for a commercial market provides one of the few avenues by which Aboriginal relationships to place in the East Kimberley are expressed to audiences outside the local community. A key milestone in the emergence of commercial Aboriginal art in the East Kimberley was the 1981 purchase by Mary Mácha of a series of painted boards used in the Kurirr-Kurirr ceremony for the Aboriginal Art and Crafts Board (Fig. 17). This ceremony was initiated in 1975 by Rover Thomas, who subsequently became a well-known artist. The purchase prompted an interest in paintings from the East Kimberley in the new market for contemporary Aboriginal art,

... reaction to the art of the Kurirr-Kurirr was intense and had dramatic ramifications. Artists other than Jaminji, including Rover [Thomas] himself, began to paint pictures that were not derived, in terms of their content, from the Kurirr-Kurirr. While much of the early work was created in a genre similar to that of the Kurirr-Kurirr artists, it was not long before individuals such as Rover, George Mungmung, Queenie McKenzie, Birribi and Hector Jandany set their own styles and standards. The 'Warmun School' was established. With the development of Miriuwung artists such as Paddy Carlton at Marralam, this soon broadened into a wider, 'East Kimberley School' of contemporary art. This school is highly innovative, yet at the same time it is directly connected to the Indigenous theatre of the region and ultimately it is derived from paintings found in the caves and on the rock walls of the Ord and Victoria River watershed (Akerman 1999: 30).

The Kurirr-Kurirr boards are now held by the National Museum of Australia and have been displayed in prominent exhibitions at both the Museum of Victoria in Melbourne (Ryan and Akerman 1993) and the National Museum of Australia in Canberra (Akerman

1999). The establishment of Waringarri Arts in 1986 further supported the training of local artists and the promotion of their works to tourists, galleries and museums.⁴⁵

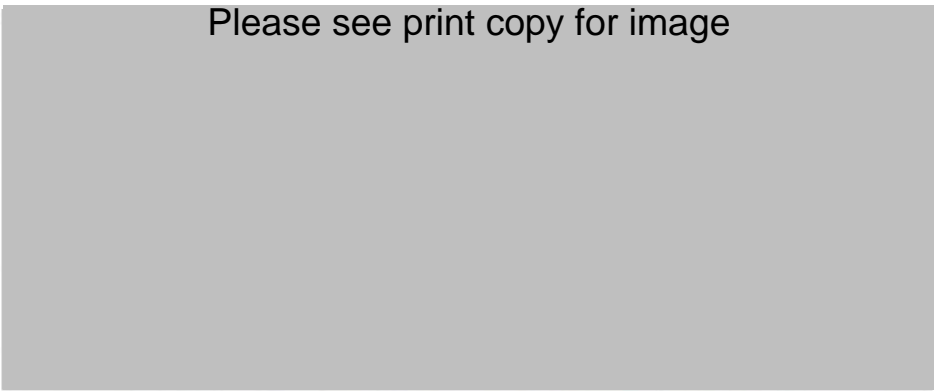


Figure 17. Performance of Kurirr-Kutirr ceremony by Kija men in 1978. Courtesy, Kim Akerman.

Paintings and artefacts, both contemporary and historical, were used as evidence in the native title hearings for ongoing relationships to country. Some court sessions were held at rock art sites where witnesses gave evidence as to who had put the paintings there and the relationships between those artists and Miriuwung and Gajerrong people alive today. They were also questioned about the collection and use of ochre in both art and ceremony. Ochre became another line of evidence linking people with religious traditions based in the Ngarranggarni, and with specific places. Mulvaney (in press) describes the relationship between rock art traditions and contemporary commercial artworks in terms of the maintenance of religious life by adapting art forms to contemporary circumstances,

It is the knowledge of place-based narratives that the artist draws on for inspiration in their works. The canvas forms the space for a creation about ancestral domains, the totemic landscape is reproduced in a two-dimensional form. Information is encoded in the painting, meaning is presented to the viewer for those that have the knowledge to understand. It is this artistic formula that has its parallels in the rock-art. In knowing the mythologies, in knowing the sacred sites are the means to understanding the particular paintings. Symbolic expressions of sacred sites and travelling mythologies are modes of reinforcing personal authority both in

⁴⁵ Kevin Kelly, Interview Kununurra, 4 August 2001.

establishing affiliation to particular country and in expressing social and ritual knowledge. For although the artworks are produced for commercial sale, the underlying structure in their creation is the cultural traditions and ritual positioning of the artists (Mulvaney in press).

Significant artworks by traditional owners of land in the East Kimberley are found in offices of various government agencies and some private businesses in Kununurra (Fig. 18). Others have been acquired by national institutions, such as the National Gallery of Australia and the National Museum of Australia. Yet others are now in the hands of private collectors or in significant international collections. While the meaning of the art for its creators resides in its connections with specific places, people and Ngarranggarni stories, once it leaves the region and enters private, national and international collections, it acquires meaning in a wider context of art collections.



Figure 18. Artworks by Paddy Carlton, on the wall of the Kununurra Police Station. Local Aboriginal youth have frequent interactions with police.

4.5.7 Summary

Ceremonial places near Kununurra have become more significant due to increased use. Other places, which were used intensively during the station times, are no longer used. Change is also occurring in the social dynamics associated with ceremonial practice, reflecting changes to residential patterns and mobility since the station times. Road

networks and access to vehicles clearly contribute to this story, as does the removal of legal constraints on Aboriginal movement along with increased access to cash. There are many common elements between the patterns of mobility in the East Kimberley and those described in more detail by Young and Doohan (1989) for Central Australia. Consultative processes such as the 1997 Native Title hearings and those associated with the Ord Stage 2 proposal also involved travel, contributing yet another form of mobility focused on traditional country.

Use of country around Kununurra and at outstations is constrained in many ways, some of which are encapsulated in the phrase 'too much grass'. The range of plant foods harvested is much less now than in the past. Contemporary Aboriginal people are much more likely to participate in hunting, assisted by vehicles, than in gathering. Were it not for the constraints posed by the small size of the pastoral excisions and the conditions restricting the activities that may be conducted there, it is likely that livestock would also be a significant feature of outstations. However, outstations remain significant as places where older people will share their knowledge of country and its produce with younger generations.

My own observations from fieldwork at the Marralam Outstation in 1998 confirmed the importance of outstations for health, alcohol rehabilitation and access to bush foods. Biddy Simon, a diabetic herself, constantly asserted the healthy qualities of bush foods as opposed to town foods and drinking water. The educational requirements of children played a critical role in determining who could stay living at Marralam. There was a constant quest

for qualified teachers prepared to live at Marralam to conduct a school there.⁴⁶ The establishment of the Marralam Alcohol Education Centre in 1995 brought additional resources in the form of accommodation and professional assistance for clients and their relatives. Sales of arts and crafts provided further income. Researchers also contributed by paying rent for accommodation and fees for assistance with work in the surrounding country.

When asked in the Native Title hearings about their reasons for wanting to live on outstations, most witnesses framed these in terms of protecting children from troubles associated with alcohol consumption in the town, the desire to pass on cultural knowledge to younger generations, and to provide children with a sense of purpose and economic self sufficiency. Carol Hapke outlined the connections between visiting traditional lands, eating bush foods and spiritual well being. Her work for the Gawooleng Yawoodeng women's cooperative involved driving elderly women, confined to living in town for health reasons, around their traditional country to get bush foods,

A lot of these old people are getting really old now and they need to see a lot of their country before they die, and plus they go back to country and eat bush tucker; it gives them strength; it's like medicine to them (FCA, 1997, CH: 2782).

The language of nurturing, preservation and protection was used to describe the connections between older generations, younger generations, Ngarranggarni stories and the country that both the people and the cultural traditions relate to. The older generation was keen that their children learn how to sustain themselves in the bush, indicating a strong scepticism about reliance on a cash based economy.

⁴⁶ In their assessment of mobility of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, Young and Doohan (1989) made similar observations about the role of school education.

4.6 Conclusion

Themes of both change and continuity characterise Aboriginal land interests over time. In the early twentieth century the threat of violence by pastoralists and police, in combination with changes to the physical environment associated with pastoral land use, constrained Aboriginal people to station ration camps during the dry part of the year. Pastoral land use resulted in a reduction in vegetation cover, the loss of plant species due to grazing by cattle, soil erosion and the silting of watercourses and billabongs.

While Aboriginal burning practices were adapted to support the needs of pastoralists to promote the growth of grass rather than other vegetation, many forms of traditional land use, knowledge of country and relationships with land were maintained. Aboriginal languages and ceremonial life continued, although clan-based identifications evolved into less exclusive social groups that more readily accommodated newcomers from other regions and language groups. Aspects of the landscapes and way of life of pastoralism were absorbed into social identifications of older generations of Aboriginal people and internalised in their values and aesthetics.

Since the 1960s, some forms of mobility have increased due to access to cash and motorised transport. However access to land within pastoral leases has been significantly curtailed. The construction of the Ord Irrigation Area, the flooding of Lake Argyle and expansion of farmlands have all served to further restrict access to land. The impact has differed for men and women and created a situation where the experiences of younger generations diverged greatly to that of older relatives.

The outstation movement is a key expression of Aboriginal political aspirations concerning land and an attempt to reconcile contemporary lives with the experience and social identifications of earlier times. It can be viewed as a form of cultural renewal – an attempt to revitalise the relationship between people and country and to bridge the schism between older and younger generations. It must also be recognised as a survival strategy offering a healthier alternative to town life and a refuge from the associated traumas of substance abuse. Some Aboriginal families have acquired leases to pastoral stations and now exercise management practices that incorporate cattle grazing along with the harvesting of bush foods. In the late 1990s, differential access to land by different family groups was the source of much social conflict and influenced the conduct of the 1997 Native Title hearings.⁴⁷

Representative organisations such as the Mirima Council and the Kimberley Land Council can be understood as hybrid cultural and political entities that reflect the legislative structures concerning Aboriginal land title and conditions for Aboriginal access to land, as well as more traditional influences that recognise the authority of senior men and women responsible for maintaining cultural knowledge of places and practices.⁴⁸ Since the 1980s, Federal government grants have been available to assist aspects of cultural maintenance. Community organisations, such as the Mirima Council, have engaged linguists, teachers and anthropologists in various support roles. In Kununurra the Mirima Woorlab Gerring Language Centre supports the recording and documentation of Miriuwung language and provides assistance to younger people who wish to learn it.

⁴⁷ Miriuwung and Gajerrong people were represented by three different legal entities, the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Kimberley Land Council and the Northern Land Council.

⁴⁸ Sullivan (1996: 71-102) provides a detailed account of these dual qualities of community councils and community-controlled resource agencies in the Kimberley region.

In the late 1990s Aboriginal land interests were presented to the outside world mainly through formal processes of legal representation. The Native Title transcripts I refer to can be understood as a representation of land interests mediated by legal practices and frameworks. Even artworks produced for tourist and gallery markets were incorporated for the purpose of legal evidence of relationships between people and land. Legal representations of Aboriginal land interests have the potential to alter the political positioning of Aboriginal people, giving them a more significant voice in debates about contemporary land use planning. The practical implications of the legal recognition of aspects of Aboriginal land interests are addressed in the second part of this thesis.

Chapter 5: Land interests of Ord Valley farmers

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with land interests of farmers associated with irrigated agriculture in the Ord Valley since the early 1960s. Since then farmers have arrived and departed. Consequently, the concept of a progressive sense of place for farmers differs substantially to the situation for Aboriginal people outlined in Chapter 4. Beginning in the 1960s, I trace patterns in mobility and social identifications among farmers. In line with my relational approach and my focus on place-making processes, I explore the links between the experiences of farmers and the portrayal of the Ord Scheme, particularly in public media.

Three distinct periods in the region's agricultural history provide a chronological structure for this chapter – the 1960s, the 1970s and the late 1990s (see Appendix C). In the 1960s the first dam, the Diversion Dam, was constructed on the Ord River, thirty-one farms developed, and the new town of Kununurra constructed. Planning regulations only permitted the construction of residences within the town precinct, so that farmers were required to live in houses in the town and commute to the farmlands. By 1972, when Argyle Dam was completed, most of these farms had failed. Throughout the 1970s the scheme was depicted as both an economic and environmental disaster in the national press. A halt was made to the second stage of the Ord Scheme, which would have involved the development of a further 60,000 ha of farmland in the lower Ord and Keep River valleys. During the 1980s, a new set of farmers began moving into the Ord Valley to establish small-scale horticultural enterprises. However they did not attract extensive media

attention. By this time, planning regulations had changed, allowing residences to be constructed on the farmlands.

My purpose in comparing the lived experiences of Ord Valley farmers with media representations of the Ord scheme is to identify which experiences contribute to the spatial representations conveyed by public media. Who is interviewed, and how are particular accounts imbued with authority? More sophisticated questions can then be framed about the relationship between the experience of place as both a physical and social environment, the rhetoric of planners and policy-makers, and media representations that potentially influence the way place is imagined by those who have no direct experience.

5.2 Methods

In order to address connections between the lived experiences of farmers in the Ord Valley and the representations of farming produced for public audiences over time, I drew on source materials that required different interpretive approaches. For each of the three periods addressed in this chapter, I outline the context of government policy and planning decisions, present an analysis of the experiences of farmers drawn from the interview materials, and contrast this with representations in public media at the time.

Face-to-face in depth interviews provided the main source for assessing the experiences and perspectives of those involved in irrigated agriculture in the Ord Valley. These were conducted during three visits to Kununurra in November 1998, March 1999 and June 1999. A total of six people were interviewed and of these, five were recorded on tape and the interviews fully transcribed. Interviews took place within either the interviewee's home or place of work. The duration ranged from 30 minutes (Dickey) to 140 minutes (Oliver). The interviews were guided by a broad check-list of questions that were deliberately open

ended so as to encourage interviewees to speak more on subjects that were of greater interest to them (Appendix F). Recordings were lodged with the Northern Territory Archives Service, and transcribed in full. The Archives Service assumed responsibility for checking the accuracy of the transcripts with interviewees and provided them with a permission form in which they could specify public access provisions for both recordings and transcripts.

The selection of interviewees drew on two separate approaches and is summarised in Table 1. Firstly, to identify people associated with the first wave of farming in the 1960s, I approached the Kununurra Historical Society for a list of names. Some of those listed agreed to speak with me or suggested others I could approach. As most of the first generation of farmers on the Ord no longer lived in the area, the numbers were limited. Only two agreed to participate in a recorded interview. They were Barbara Dickey and Di Oliver. While their husbands, Carol Dickey and Ian Oliver were present, they declined to be interviewed, either reflecting a distrust of my motives for research or a simple discomfort with speaking to a younger female researcher. Rosalie Hamilton agreed to be interviewed but not recorded so I took extensive hand written notes instead. Locations of the 1960s farms they refer to are shown in Figure 19.

The second approach consisted of writing letters to the various growers' associations in the Ord Valley, describing the project and asking for names of people who would be willing to be interviewed. Three contemporary farmers responded positively to this approach and agreed to be interviewed. They were Jill Parker, John Mack and Elaine Gardiner. Each was involved in a formal capacity in one of the growers' associations and farmed land along Packsaddle Plain. The locations of these 1990s farms are also shown in Figure 19. All three

identified as farmers in their own right. I was unable to interview melon farmers as my visits coincided with the more demanding times of the year for their farming cycle.

One further interview was conducted with Spike Dessert, at the suggestion of members of the Ord District Cooperative. He has a seed producing enterprise on Ivanhoe Plain (Fig. 19) that forms part of an American-based agribusiness. As he arrived in the Ord Valley in 1973 and remained there, he bridged the period between the first and second-generation farmers. He was also a member of the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley Council at the time of my fieldwork and was actively involved in planning processes in the region.

Table 2. Summary information about interviewees and associated farms.

NAME	ARRIVAL YEAR	CROP	SELECTION PROCESS
Di Oliver	1967	Cotton	Referred, Kununurra Historical Society
Rosalie Hamilton	1963	Cotton	Referred, Kununurra Historical Society
Barbara Dickey	1963	Cotton	Referred, Kununurra Historical Society
Spike Dessert	1973	Seeds	Referred, Ord District Cooperative
Jill Parker	1986	Mangoes, bananas, paw paws, capsicum etc.	Referred, Kununurra Horticultural Producers Assoc.
Elaine Gardiner	1988	Bananas, sugarcane	Referred, Kununurra Horticultural Producers Assoc.
John Mack	1991	Bananas, sugarcane, citrus	Referred, Kununurra Horticultural Producers Assoc.

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Figure 19. Farm locations for interviewees showing 1960s and 1990s farms.

For understanding the experiences of the first generation of Ord Valley farmers an additional source of information was generously made available to me by Bruce Shaw, who conducted fieldwork for a sociology PhD in Kununurra in 1970. He used an interview/survey approach in which 100 people living and working around Kununurra were asked a series of questions relating to attitudes, motivations and experiences of life in Kununurra. The interviews were less open in their format than mine. Responses to each question were hand written in field notebooks that I was permitted to copy and use. This survey included four interviews with practising farmers - Mick Kimpton, Pat Ryan, Clive Massey and Ian Oliver (Di Oliver's husband). It also included interviews with Barbara Dickey and Di Oliver, then young mothers with farming husbands, whom I interviewed myself in 1998 and 1999. Given the bias of my own interviews towards women, Bruce Shaw's notebooks indicated the extent to which the perspectives of the women I interviewed could be generalised to the wider farming community of the 1960s.

The Ord Irrigation scheme has attracted media coverage since its inception to the present day. Across the three time periods presented here, the significance of various public media changed. My analysis of these sources specifically focuses on the narrative, rhetoric and place-images employed. It identifies who is interviewed and who is attributed with authority about irrigated agriculture in the East Kimberley at different periods. Finally, I reflect on the contrast between media representations of place, and the experiences and perceptions related by those whom I interviewed.

I compiled a chronology of government decisions that had an impact on farming in the Ord throughout the 1960s and the 1970s, primarily based on the summary made by Graham-Taylor (1982) which is reproduced in Appendix C. I then surveyed media

reporting around specific events listed in Appendix E. In particular, I focused on the opening of the Diversion Dam in July 1963, and the opening of Argyle Dam in June 1972. In 1963 the only national newspaper was the *Australian Financial Review*. I sampled this and the state newspaper, *The West Australian*. For reporting of the opening of Argyle Dam in June 1972, I scanned *The West Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review* and *The Australian*.⁴⁹ Additional miscellaneous newspaper reports were identified in a collection of newspaper clippings from *The West Australian* compiled by Don Beech, a CSIRO agricultural scientist who worked at the Kimberley Research Station during that period. During the 1960s, television news and current affairs gained increasing audience reach among Australia's urban population.⁵⁰ I located archival film footage relating to the Ord through searches of the collections of ABC Television Archives, Screensound Australia and the Library and Information Service of Western Australia. For contemporary reporting of the Ord Stage Two proposal, I focus on two feature articles written by different journalists and published in *The Australian* in 1999 and 2001.

5.2 1960s – Diversion Dam and the first farms

The physical changes associated with the construction of the Diversion Dam, irrigation works, new farms, and the town of Kununurra in the 1960s ensured a new phase of place-making in the East Kimberley (Fig. 20). With these changes came a large influx of people, mainly itinerant construction workers, but including others who came to take up new farms and start businesses in Kununurra.

⁴⁹ *The Australian*, the second national newspaper, commenced publication in 1964.

⁵⁰ A small body of published work addresses the history of communications media and audiences in Australia, and traces the relative significance of various public media over time. Most useful is the work of Mayer on the press (Mayer 1964), Osborne and Lewis (Osborne and Lewis 1995) on communications media more generally, and a recent review of Australian scholarship in this area provided by Curthoys (1999).

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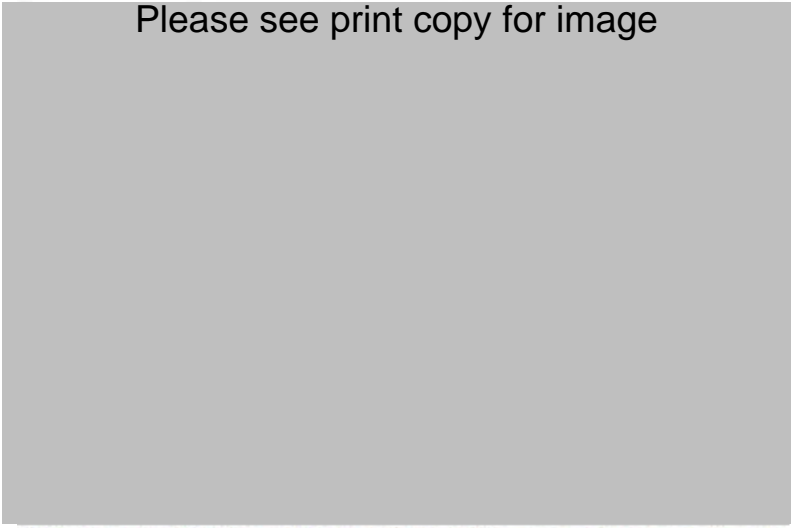


Figure 20. Ploughing Pilot Farm, 1965. Courtesy, Kununurra Historical Society.

5.2.1 Economic rationalism versus ‘the national interest’

Tensions between economic arguments against government investment in northern Australia and boosterism, promoted as ‘the national interest’, continued throughout the 1960s. Governments were held to be responsible for the economic development of northern Australia, but could it be made more productive? Was the climate suited to agriculture? Would sufficient numbers of European Australians ever want to live there? Could major development initiatives ever be cost effective? Would northern Australia drain the resources of taxpayers in the south of the continent? When the Commonwealth government approved expenditure of funds on the Ord scheme in 1959 under the Western Australian Grant (Northern Development) Act 1958-1959, Prime Minister Menzies voiced concern about the economic soundness of the scheme.

It is one thing to feel reasonably satisfied that certain commodities can be grown under irrigation. It is of course, quite another to determine whether they can be profitably grown. (Correspondence from Menzies to Premier Brand, 24 Aug 1959, cited by Graham-Taylor (1982: 32)).

These concerns were to be addressed through a Commonwealth government commitment to continue funding agricultural research at the Kimberley Research Station.

In the early 1960s, two influential texts were published that addressed issues of northern development. They were *Australia's Open North* by J.M. Holmes and *The Northern Myth* by B.R. Davidson. These texts provide an indication of the range of views about northern development at that time and suggest that the opposing positions taken by Brady and Griffith Taylor in the 1920s continued to inform debates about northern development. J.M. Holmes, Professor of Geography at the University of Sydney, promoted a scheme for new political boundaries that would facilitate northern development (Holmes 1963: 449) which he framed in terms of 'national destiny'. In his proposal the East Kimberley featured as a miniature state with the nominal title of 'Durack', after the influential pioneering pastoral family. Echoing the themes promoted by popular writers such as Ion Idriess in the 1920s, Holmes argued that,

Great empty spaces are not a handicap, but a challenge to producers of large-scale commercial enterprises on the land, whereby men and machines and modern technology will maintain the empty space, empty of people, but full of production ... (Holmes 1963: 450).

This argument abandoned the rhetoric of populating the north that was central to post War regional planning initiatives by the Commonwealth government, and instead emphasised the potential for economic productivity as a sufficient goal in itself. *Australia's Open North* received some newspaper coverage and was promoted by some Queensland politicians.

The most controversial work by far was *The Northern Myth* by B.R. Davidson, first published in 1965. Davidson mounted two kinds of arguments against government investment in northern Australia. The first was on economic grounds, based on an assessment of the relatively high costs of production and services in northern Australia compared with southern Australia.

It is a mistake to regard the higher costs of farming in northern Australia as temporary and to think they will vanish as the area develops. Many of the resources used, particularly machinery and chemical insecticides, can only be produced by

large-scale industry, which is unlikely to be established in the north. Unless development in the region is on a large scale, services supplying requisites will always be more expensive because of the small market offered. Additional charges resulting from high freight charges from the south will remain (Davidson 1965: 28).

He presented a detailed analysis of the extent of government subsidy for farms in the Ord Valley. For each crop, he tabulated costs of production and compared outputs with returns. He concluded that,

Experimental work on the Ord River has established that cotton, safflower, linseed, sugar cane and rice can be grown under irrigation in the Kimberleys, but at present prices and using existing methods of production these crops could only be produced at subsidized prices (Davidson 1965: 192).

And,

The only rational explanation of the Western Australian government's determination to proceed with the Ord River scheme is that Commonwealth capital would be granted for this purpose and not to finance development schemes in the south of the state (Davidson 1965: 201).

This conclusion closely echoes the view expressed by Griffith Taylor in the 1920s that it was more cost effective to concentrate development and population growth in the southern part of the continent (Powell 1992: 36). Having dismissed the rational/economic arguments for investment in agricultural schemes, Davidson then turned his attention to the political arguments framed around the defence of the north from potential invasion from an Asian nation. This argument he also dismissed, claiming that no nation would wish to invade an undeveloped north, because it would be viewed as a liability rather than an asset. The risk would be higher if more infrastructure was built in the north.⁵¹

Funding of the Ord Scheme was to be shared between the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments, as initially proposed by the Rural Reconstruction Commission in

⁵¹ Davidson's second book, *Australia Wet or Dry*, published in 1969, presented economic arguments against irrigation developments in Australia more generally (Davidson 1969). Although his vitriolic public persona attracted the attention of the media, there were other voices during the 1960s also critical of the extent of government subsidies associated with irrigation schemes, including the Snowy Mountains Scheme and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area.

1945. Following the Commonwealth government's financial commitment to the Ord Scheme in 1959, under the *Western Australian Grant (Northern Development) Act*, almost five million pounds of Commonwealth funds were allocated to construction of the Diversion Dam, the first stage in a plan for staged development of the larger project (Graham-Taylor 1982). Further Commonwealth funds were injected into CSIRO's role in the Kimberley Research Station.⁵² In 1964 the Western Australian government presented a *Case for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government to complete the Ord Irrigation Project*. However it was not till 1967 that the Commonwealth responded with a grant of \$48,180,000 to assist with the construction of the main dam and irrigation works (Graham-Taylor 1982). Graham-Taylor (1982) speculates on the role played by the public critiques of B.R. Davidson and Dr Patterson in deferring the funding decision. Given the lack of clear evidence that any of the trial crops on the Ord could be commercially profitable, she concludes that the Commonwealth decision was influenced by the popularity of northern development among voters in the lead up to a Senate by-election for the marginal Queensland electorate of Capricornia (Graham-Taylor 1982).

Tensions between the Commonwealth and Western Australian government agencies plagued the Ord Scheme. After commercial farming commenced in the Ord Valley in 1963, serious conflict developed between the CSIRO and the WA Department of Agriculture over the role of the Kimberley Research Station, its research priorities and the nature of its research activities. The Western Australian Department of Agriculture asserted the need for research of immediate relevance to farmers in the Ord Valley,

⁵² From 1945 funding for the Kimberley Research Station was shared between the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments. A Supervisory Committee and a Policy Committee, each with representations from both State and Commonwealth governments, advised on the management and research agenda for the Kimberley Research Station respectively.

Being directly responsible for the success of agricultural development the Department considered that most – if not all – research effort at KRS should be devoted to tackling urgent local problems. On the other hand CSIRO argued that KRS should have a wider role in providing research back-up for agricultural and pastoral development throughout northern Australia and in contributing to general scientific knowledge of tropical agriculture (Basinski et al. 1985: 28).

In 1968 the CSIRO Executive appointed a committee, known as the Underwood Committee, to review the role of the CSIRO in the Kimberley Research Station. The Underwood Report (1968) concluded that,

... the time has come for the W.A. Department of Agriculture to attend more to the direct needs of (local) producers and for CSIRO to engage in its accepted role of studying the more deep seated problems of irrigated agriculture in the north (cited by Basinski et al. 1985: 29).

It recommended that 'the joint agreement between the Commonwealth and State Governments should be terminated and that the joint operation of KRS be discontinued' (Basinski et al. 1985: 29). The agreement was finally ended in 1974. After that, the Western Australian government assumed responsibility for research concerned with day-to-day problems of farmers in the Ord Irrigation Area.

5.2.2 The farmers

Only a handful of those who came to the Ord to farm in the 1960s remained in the area in the late 1990s. However the three women I interviewed in 1998 and 1999 had each formed a strong bond with the Ord Valley and identified with it as home. Di Oliver, Barbara Dickey and Rosalie Hamilton, all came to the Ord with their husbands to take up farms in the early 1960s. They were in their twenties, just starting families, and the Ord provided a unique opportunity to carve out new lives. They referred to themselves as 'pioneers' and described the hardships of the early years with a sense of pride and humour.



Figure 21. Di Oliver outside her home on Ivanhoe Plain, Ord Valley 1999.

Di Oliver (Fig. 21) came from a well-to-do professional family in Sydney and her husband, Ian Oliver, from a farming family in Cowra NSW with experience working with wheat and sheep. Ian Oliver first came to the Ord in 1962 and worked as an agricultural assistant at the Kimberley Research Station. He applied for and obtained an irrigated block in the Ord scheme and his wife, Di, joined him there in 1967. As a farmer, Ian Oliver maintained strong connections with agricultural scientists at the Kimberley Research Station and conducted his own cropping experiments. Di Oliver recalled the enthusiasm and optimism they felt in the early years. She explained that the farmers had come with a dream, founded on the reliability of basic natural resources – sun, water and good soils.

Barbara and Carold Dickey grew up in a small town in Arizona in the USA. They were among a group of five American families who immigrated to the Ord Valley between 1963 and 1964 with the aim of taking up cotton farms. In the interview she described how they came to hear about the Ord and their decision to move there,

A friend of my husband's had an older friend, who'd been in the service, who had actually been in Australia, and was quite taken with it, [and] thought if he was younger, he would come over. And he had often talked about this. And then there was a *National Geographic* article on the Ord project, that this friend happened to see. So that was a little bit of background (Interview, Kununurra, November 1998).

These women had all identified as farmer's wives during the 1960s. They had carried the responsibility for maintaining the home and caring for young children. They and their husbands regarded the Ord as an opportunity to become latter day pioneers and to carve out new lives for themselves and their young families through the unique opportunities provided by the irrigation infrastructure. Barbara Dickey and Di Oliver saw themselves as pioneers at that time, and retained this view in the late 1990s. The self-identification of the first generation of farmers as pioneers is also evident in the records of interviews with farmers by Bruce Shaw. For example, Mick Kimpton, interviewed by Bruce Shaw in 1970, referred to a 'spirit of pioneering' among the early farmers. These accounts suggest some correspondence between 1960s farmers' sense of themselves and media representations of the Ord Irrigation Scheme at the time.

The rhetoric of the settlers of the 1960s as 'new pioneers' was reinforced by the Kununurra Historical Society. A large part of the material held by the Kununurra Historical Society relates to the construction of the dams and the creation of the first farms in the Ord Valley and the first businesses in Kununurra. Among those involved with the running of the Kununurra Historical Society are several older residents who held prominent positions during the 1960s and 1970s.³³ Among the more significant collections are photographs documenting the construction of the two dams. A separate historical society at Wyndham operates a museum dedicated to preserving records associated with pastoral land use in the area and the 'old pioneers'.

³³ Key position holders in the Kununurra Historical Society were Roy Hamilton, the Public Works Senior Engineer who supervised the construction of the Diversion Dam and Bill Withers, a local businessman who became a Member of Parliament for the North West of Western Australia during the Court liberal government in the 1970s.

Di Oliver described the physical environment of the new town of Kununurra (Fig. 22) and recalled what it was like living in the newly built houses there,

... with each farm, the government allocated two houses, which we'll call State houses. ... They were pretty small, I mean, 10 squares. (I used to live in a 50 square house.) 10 squares — there was a kitchen and there were metal louvres between the kitchen and the one living room/sitting room (that's all you had). A stove — the windows from the kitchen looked out to the laundry trough and there was a lavatory and a separate shower out there. A little bathroom with a bath and a cabinet. Another bedroom to the left of that with louvres between that and another bedroom, and there was another bedroom with louvres between that and the kitchen — metal louvres.

The powers that be decided — these were the houses for the tropics. And as you opened the house up during the night and closed it up during the day to keep the cool air in. So there'd be hopper windows at the end of the house that you pushed out. You had to undo all the flyscreens to get to these hopper windows but nevertheless. And they weren't cool houses at all and they were — Everyone was built on top of everybody. And as there was no noise at night — because we didn't have any television, we didn't have any radio, there was nothing. There was no privacy. If you opened your windows at night, no privacy. No-one had air conditioning but there were ceiling fans in the houses (interview Kununurra, 23 June 1999).

She was also critical of the selection of the town site,

... And the town was built I think in the *worst* possible place. We were locked in by Kelly's Knob and Mount Cyril. You drive out of town, just past now where the new caravan park is, Hidden Valley Caravan Park, there's always a breeze there. But apparently it was a psychological thing to build the town, nestled beneath the hill so that we would not feel like we were completely isolated. That was, we'd be nestled beneath something, where no air flowed through at all.

It was built on sand. The township of Kununurra was built on sand. So in the wet season, our septic systems would flood and we couldn't use our loos and they would come in and pump out the septic systems and you couldn't get out your front steps. And the roads, when they did bituminise the roads, the roads were higher than the original house blocks so the water would just run back in again. That was another little joyful thing (interview Kununurra, 23 June 1999).

These criticisms are reinforced in published reminiscences by businessman Bill Withers (Withers 1997) in which he relates his own experiences in Kununurra in the 1960s. His reminiscences first appeared in serialised form in the local paper, *The Kimberley Echo*.

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Figure 22. Kununurra township, January 1967. Courtesy, Kununurra Historical Society.

Rosalie Hamilton recalled the irrigation farms in 1963 as hard black soil that had been totally cleared of trees as part of the preparation by the authorities. She remembers the farmlands as a bleak and somewhat desolate landscape. In contrast with Di Oliver and Rosalie Hamilton, Barbara Dickey's first impressions of Kununurra were of arriving in 'paradise', by comparison with her home town in Arizona in the USA. She was absorbed with her young children and the supportive social environment she experienced rather than the physical environment dominates her memories of this period.

These accounts suggest that 1960s settlers regarded the natural environment as harsh but full of potential that could be realised through the labour of farming. The residential dwellings and the design of the town appeared very rudimentary. However each person's initial responses were strongly influenced by comparisons with the places where they had lived before.

Social divisions were experienced in the town from its beginning. The women I interviewed described a strong social division between the farmers and the government officials,

especially those employed by the Public Works Department. Barbara Dickey described the social divisions in the following way,

The two main groups were farmers and government people — and it was frequently said [laughs], by other farming people, that they felt there was a bit of a divide, between government people and farmers. Certainly we all socialised, we all went to the same functions. I really didn't find that noticeable. I think it's just human nature that you probably spend more time with people you've got the most in common with. Business people were a rather small group, and I just don't particularly remember interaction there, very much — not, you know, the early years. But it certainly was — here, there were no 'levels of society', so to speak, in that sense, that any and everyone came to any social functions. I think the one thing that we noticed was that the important government people had high-level houses, and the rest of us had low-level houses [laughter] (Interview, Kununurra, November 1998).

Farmers resented the subsidies that government employees received and commented on the high turnover among this sector of Kununurra's population. The farmers from this period identified themselves as the ones who added value to the community. In contrast they considered that short-term government employees exploited the situation for personal economic gain. As Di Oliver put it,

And I think we were farming the place, we were just doing it. Whereas the other people who were here, the Public Servants came and went. They came in, schools had to be filled or hospital ... came and went, came and went. Whereas we were here forever and I don't think there was the assistance given in those early days, to the farmers, that we needed (interview, Kununurra, June 1999).

The 'assistance' she referred to took the form of special allowances, such as those for air conditioning and travel.⁵⁴ Similar tensions were revealed in criticisms made of the research agenda pursued by government agricultural scientists at the Kimberley Research Station. Farmers interviewed by Bruce Shaw in 1970 felt that the scientists were no more knowledgeable about what crops were viable than they were themselves. Instead of scientific research, they stressed the need for continuity of farming over time and an accumulation of knowledge among farmers in the Ord (interview with Pat Ryan, Kununurra 1970).

⁵⁴ Bruce Shaw's interviews in 1970 also record tensions between farmers and Public Works Department employees.

It is clear that the design and layout of the residences within the town and their relationship to the farmlands enshrined social divisions (Fig. 19). A common theme among the farming community was frustration with a planning decision that prevented the construction of residences on the farms. Rosalie Hamilton explained that one of the main reasons for this was official concern about the possible health effects of chemical sprays used on the farms. The policy, however, served to exaggerate the division between the domestic lives of women in the town and the working lives of men on the farms. The women wanted more involvement with the farm and their husbands' working lives but felt they had no capacity to influence decisions made by government planners. It introduced a pattern of daily mobility as farmers drove from their houses in town to their farms every morning and returned every evening. The instrumental approach to planning extended to the agricultural areas too. The Western Australian Government advised new farmers to grow cotton, with financial incentives provided by a Commonwealth government bounty (Graham-Taylor 1982).

The layout of the town also enshrined racial divisions. With the creation of Mirima Reserve in 1963 Aboriginal people living at Lily Creek, near the town centre, relocated to the outskirts of town where they were less visible (Fig. 12). Di Oliver recalled that her husband employed Aboriginal men, who resided at the reserve, to pick weeds on their farm,

And so Ian would go out very early in the morning and go to the reserve. There was a reserve here in those days. Collect them, put them in the back of the truck. Go out, make a big fire, cook them a great, big mess of baked beans and hot tea and fresh bread. He'd collect fresh bread from the bakery. Give them breakfast then they would go and chip at the farm. Old Alfie Deakin – oh lots of – George Brumby. Lots of these old, Aboriginals worked out there. All men used to work out there. ... And then when cotton finished, well we didn't use them any more (interview Kununurra, June 1999).

While interactions between farmers and Aboriginal people took place around the school, and on the farms, the town precinct seems to have been experienced as a predominantly white environment. Barbara Dickey reflected on this,

Um, one of ... the things ... thinking back, that I notice now, is that within the town area, I can't remember seeing Aboriginal people very often. And as over the years they've come into town, that's quite a change now, to have them, to see lots of Aboriginal people in the town. (interview Kununurra, November 1998)

5.2.3 Media reporting of the Ord Scheme

The construction of the Diversion Dam on the Ord River, and the first irrigated farms attracted considerable media attention, particularly in Western Australia. Scholarly critiques of the Ord Scheme made during the 1960s received a wide public airing, facilitated by new forms of public media. Television gained a place in many suburban households. News and current affairs programs were among the highest rating television (Osborne and Lewis 1995). The first national newspaper in Australia was *The Australian Financial Review*, published by the Fairfax group from 1951 (Mayer 1964: 32). Osborne and Lewis (1995: 5) note that the Australian press had assumed a role in promoting national development from the early years of Federation. This tradition continued through the twentieth century. In the following paragraphs, I contrast reporting of the Ord Irrigation Scheme in *The West Australian* with that in *The Australian Financial Review*.

The West Australian newspaper maintained a strong campaign for the commitment of Commonwealth funds to the second stage of the Ord scheme. Graham-Taylor (1982) elaborates on the role of *The West Australian* in lobbying the Western Australian Government to spend moneys allocated by the Commonwealth government for development north of the 20th parallel on the Ord. The Western Australian Government seriously considered spending this grant elsewhere (Graham-Taylor 1982: 31). About a month after the opening of the Diversion Dam in 1963, a feature article in *The West Australian* asserted in a self-congratulatory manner that the role of the press in lobbying for northern development throughout the 1950s was significant to government support for the Ord scheme (*The West Australian*, 25 July, 1963).

The Australian Financial Review, at the time of the opening of the Diversion Dam, quoted Prime Minister Menzies' call for a 'national consciousness of the need for development in the north' (*The Australian Financial Review*, 23 July, 1963: 8). *The Australian Financial Review* published a regular column by Sir Douglas Copland, a University of Melbourne economist influential in post-war reconstruction policy, in which he proposed means by which the development of resources across northern Australia could be facilitated and cautioned about the threat posed by expanding populations of south-east Asia. Copland argued the need for a Northern Development Corporation to co-ordinate the development of essential services across northern Australia.

On 16 October 1963, B.R. Davidson delivered a report to the Agricultural Economics Society in which he criticised the rationale for irrigation development as a defence against invasion from Asia and developed an economic critique of the level of government subsidy for the Ord scheme. His address received detailed coverage in *The West Australian* the next day under the heading 'Doubts expressed on Ord River Project' (*The West Australian*, 17/10/1963, p.2). However an editorial published on 19 October 1963 rebutted his claims about the futility of irrigation as a defence measure, and asserted that 'Australia has an inescapable duty to develop its empty areas even if it has to dig deep into its pockets to do so' (*The West Australian*, 19/10/1963, p.6). The editorial implied that to oppose the Ord Scheme was to oppose the national interest. In the same issue, a brief report summarised statements made by Davidson in an ABW2 television interview. Davidson claimed that he had left the CSIRO because it would not publish the results of his research into the economics of developing the north because his findings conflicted with Federal government policy. Over the ensuing months the paper went on to publish statements

made by Charles Court, then Minister for the North West and Industrial Development in the Western Australian Parliament, that aligned closely with the newspaper's editorial position. Themes in the published debate that surrounded Davidson's controversial statements were whether or not investment in northern development was purely for economic reasons, or whether the nation also carried a moral imperative to expand agricultural production in order to contribute to world food supplies. Davidson's address was also covered by *The Australian Financial Review* but in a less polemic manner.

Concerns were expressed about the cost of eradicating insect pests in Ord crops, including cotton. The failure of the first safflower crop due to attack by *Prodenia* caterpillars was reported in the *The Australian Financial Review* on 27 November, 1963. Both *The Australian Financial Review* and *The West Australian* published articles about the efforts by scientists to control insect pests of Ord crops, presenting this using rhetoric of scientists at war with an unruly nature. Reports also covered concerns in the United States about harmful effects of pesticides and weedicides on human health. Other themes in newspaper coverage of the Ord scheme at that time included criticism of the way in which the Commonwealth government's subsidy for cotton farmers was administered. The Queensland Minister for Agriculture published a letter to the editor of *The Australian Financial Review* expressing concern about proposals to grow sugar on the Ord and the potential impact on the Queensland sugar industry. Broader issues concerning the management of water resources were also reported at this time. In 1963 *The Australian Financial Review* carried reports of various scientific congresses addressing a range of issues relating to water supply, irrigation, and related problems of salinisation.

In 1963 the Western Australian Department of Industrial Development published a series of advertisements in *The Australian Financial Review* advertising the land ballots for farms in the Ord Irrigation Scheme and promoting development in the region to investors. These advertisements employed imagery that featured the engineering works and presented the Ord Scheme as part of the new modernised north (Figs. 23 and 24).



Figure 23. Advertisement by the Western Australian Department of Industrial Development in *The Australian Financial Review* in May 1963, advertising the land ballots for the Ord Irrigation Scheme and promoting development in the region to investors.

Please see print copy for image

Figure 24. Advertisement promoting investment in the Ord Valley cotton industry, published in *The West Australian* in September 1963 by the Department of Industrial Development, Western Australia.

Private corporations also sought to benefit from the promotional imagery used by the Western Australian Government. Advertisements for Fibrolite Pipes that ran in *The Australian Financial Review* in 1963 and 1964 employed the modernising imagery and rhetoric of the Ord Scheme to market irrigation pipes,

Taming the turbulent Ord will unlock the vast, untapped potential of the Ord Valley black soil plains and provide a major breakthrough into irrigated agriculture for the Kimberleys ... Water is at work in the north, a spectacular breakthrough in our immense water problem and one which is vital in the national effort to meet the challenge of our time ... (*The Australian Financial Review* 1963, 18 June 1963: 13).

Reporting in *The West Australian* newspaper in the 1960s largely reflected the promotional rhetoric of the Western Australian Department of Industrial Development. In contrast, reporting in *The Australian Financial Review* was more cautious, identifying potential risks to

investors in the scheme and carrying critiques of government policy concerning subsidies paid to Ord Valley farmers.

Two films made about the Ord Irrigation Scheme in the 1960s provide further evidence of the emphasis of government promotion of both the Ord scheme, and northern development generally, in futuristic nation building terms. One film was made for the Australian Broadcasting Commission's *4-Corners* program and screened in 1962 (Australian Broadcasting Commission 1962). The other, 'Ord River Project', was commissioned by the Western Australian Department of Industrial Development specifically for promotional purposes (Western Australian Department of Industrial Development 1963).

The *4-Corners* program contrasted 'the old north', represented by the 'seedy and decayed' town of Wyndham, with 'the new north' upstream in the Ord Valley where the new town of Kununurra was being built and modern scientifically informed irrigated agriculture was being developed. The program went to air prior to the arrival of the first farmers. It depicted the heart of the scheme to be the Kimberley Research Station, where 'the future of Australia's north' would be determined by a 'handful' of scientists. Two scientists working at the Kimberley Research Station were interviewed who gave optimistic assessments of the capacity to eventually reduce production costs through mechanisation and of the potential for markets in Asia. Wives of government officers who resided in Kununurra were also interviewed, along with a number of residents relaxing at the Ord River Club. These interviews focused on quality of life, especially for women, and on the rigours of the climate. A further interview was shown with Roy Hamilton, the chief engineer with the Public Works Department who was responsible for overseeing the

construction of the Diversion Dam. He voiced the opinion that the land must be very quickly populated to deter invasion by another nation.

The promotional film *Ord River Project*, commissioned by the Western Australian Department of Industrial Relations, gives a clear indication of how the Western Australian Government wished to promote the scheme and what they thought would attract people and businesses to the Ord. In this film, it is not just the agricultural scheme that is promoted as new and modern, but also the approach taken to planning,

Kununurra is a new concept of living in the north, planned as a key feature of the Ord Project. The basic idea is simple – instead of living on their properties the farmers will live in town. Thus a community is formed. A community that can be served economically with electric power, with water, with good roads and public services. Secondary industry can also begin, construction materials can be made, and farm products processed. Already a cotton ginnery is being established.

This account reveals a highly instrumentalist approach to town planning, in which the physical infrastructure was perceived to determine social and economic aspects of the town, in the same way that the irrigation infrastructure was presented as determining the economic success of agriculture. Interviews were conducted with women living in Kununurra who are asked about the quality of their lives, with a range of responses.

The following passage from the script of the film is interesting in its reference to a new generation of pioneers in the north, replacing the earlier pastoral pioneers,

In these quiet streams are realised the dreams of the pioneers. Water and men, men with experience at irrigation, men with pioneering spirit, who can see the high returns to be won from an efficient and intensive irrigation program.

The film dwells on the potential of the 'Cununurra clay' which 'closely resembles black cotton soils of many other parts of the world'. There is a clear agenda here in generating a new place-image of the Ord Valley as productive farmland and as 'cotton country' with similarities to cotton country elsewhere in the world.

5.2.4 Summary

During the 1960s a new agrarian place-image of the East Kimberley emerged in connection with financial commitment by both the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments to the development of major irrigation works. The irrigation scheme brought material change in the form of a new town, cleared farmlands, a dam and irrigation channels and levees.

Farmers who moved to the Ord in the early 1960s saw themselves as a new generation of pioneers, replacing the pastoralists of the 'old north'. While media representations emphasised a central role for science in modernising the Ord, farmers themselves placed a greater emphasis on their own labour. The films described above presented the voices of government planners and scientists, and present the Ord Valley as a discrete region where modernisation, globalisation and scientific progress support a new generation of pioneers. The rhetoric of farmers as new pioneers was common to both my interviewees and to media representations.

The most obvious discrepancy between media representations and the experiences of the farming families was to do with the design of the town, promoted as modern and efficient in documentary films but experienced by residents as the opposite. Included in this was the separation between men and women during the working day, with men on the farms and women in the town. The films seemed to question whether women could live comfortably in the Ord, echoing themes of race and gender in the frontier rhetoric of earlier years discussed in Chapter 3. However for the women I interviewed, the issue was not whether they could live there but the need to have an input into planning issues that affected their

quality of life. Because of these frustrations, Barbara Dickey became an active member of the local ratepayers association, and later a member of the Shire Council.

Through media coverage and government promotion 'the Ord' acquired status as a discrete region in the public imagination. Prior to this it formed part of 'the Kimberleys' or 'the north west', regions of Western Australia, usually associated with pastoral land use and wild empty country. The image is presented in modernist and futuristic terms, with scientific research cited to lend it authority. The construction of the dam is presented as a feat of modern engineering. It gave a physical form to the ideas of rural reconstruction in the 1940s and linked the agrarian future of the region with the 'national interest'. Despite the economic arguments levelled by B.R. Davidson against investment in irrigation infrastructure, public media such as *The West Australian* newspaper, *The Australian Financial Review* and the ABC all highlighted the importance of such development in terms of nation building, for which the Commonwealth government carried a special responsibility.

5.3 1970s – Argyle Dam and failure of cotton farms

Despite initial optimism surrounding the opening of the Argyle Dam in 1972, the farming community in the Ord dwindled throughout the 1970s as bankruptcies forced farming families to leave the region. A number of the cotton farmers who left the Ord Valley in the early 1970s moved to the district of Wee Waa in the north-west of NSW and took up new cotton farms there. The main reason for the bankruptcies was a declining crop yield due to damage by the insect pest, *Heliothis armigera* (Graham-Taylor 1982). The insect became increasingly resistant to D.D.T, the main insecticide used to control it. Increasing quantities of pesticide were used, contributing to higher costs of production. Further, in 1972 an export ban was placed on cattle grazed on irrigated pastures in the Ord Valley due to high D.D.T. concentrations (Graham-Taylor 1982). On 12 November 1974, the premier of

Western Australia announced that no commercial cotton crop would be produced next season. Only a handful of the original cotton farmers remained to try alternative crops or turn their hands to other enterprises centred on the town of Kununurra.

5.3.1 Ord River Irrigation Area Review

In 1977, the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments established a joint review committee to investigate the Ord Irrigation Scheme. Its purpose was to advise on future government expenditure and planning for the area. The key recommendations were as follows,

As further research work, is crucial to the assessment of the potential of the Ord, the Committee recommends that:

- the Western Australian Government should consider an expansion of agricultural research in the ORIA
- the Commonwealth Government should reappraise its commitment to agricultural and environmental research in the ORIA, recognizing that by and large the research programs of the CSIRO do not have a direct relevance to the immediate problems of the ORIA.

If a proper judgement is to be made about the potential of the ORIA as a suitable base for commercial agriculture, it is essential that further information be gained from farming experience and the testing of research results on a commercial scale. If this is to be done, recognizing the unprofitability of farming on the ORIA in recent years, some form of assistance is required to retain an active farming presence in the area.

- The Committee recommends that the WA Government should provide support for commercial farming in the ORIA for a specified period.

This support should be available in a consistent form for a period of at least five years in order to introduce a measure of financial stability (Young 1979: 3).

The committee concluded that agricultural development had three negative environmental effects –

- the build up of pesticide residues
- the infestation of abandoned land by weeds and,
- the encouragement of avian pests (Young 1979: 113).

It also found that the scheme had beneficial environmental effects – the regeneration of eroded land in the catchment area, the aesthetic appeal of the Lakes and the recreational benefits they provided (Young 1979: 115).

5.3.2 Farmers

The farmers who remained experienced the departure of other cotton farmers as a severe social disruption. Di Oliver described the trauma she and her family felt when their closest friends all left the region.

Absolutely broke and their farms were just left there. It was terrible! Lots just walked out with nothing. And ones that could afford to, um, I can't think if they sold their farms or they left and they went to Wee Waa. (interview Kununurra, 23 June 1999)

New arrivals to the region at that time were more likely to be government employees on two-year contracts. Di Oliver recalled that she and her family felt reluctant to form new friendships with these people because of the short-term nature of their stay. Some of the cotton farmers who did stay, such as Americans Barbara and Carol Dickey, left farming to start other businesses in the town.



Figure 25. Spike Dessert, Ivanhoe Plain, Ord Valley, November 1998.

Spike Dessert (Fig. 25) was one of the few people who arrived to farm in the early 1970s. He took up land on Packsaddle Plain in 1973 in order to establish a seed growing enterprise as part of a California-based family owned agribusiness. After three years he left and went back to the USA, but returned again in 1986 to start another seed farm on Ivanhoe Plain. At the time of my fieldwork this remained an active business concern. Spike Dessert was disparaging about the condition of the pastoral lands he encountered in the Ord Valley in 1973,

The farm we started with was three thousand acres with an overgrazed system of trees, of Savannah type, on the Ord River (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

However he saw many parallels with the irrigation areas he was familiar with in southern California,

The area I came from is very similar to this area. Almost the same, identical irrigation system — a winter growing area, except that it frosts there, and we were looking for a frost-free area (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

By 1973 the Ord River and associated farmlands had started to resemble irrigation areas in other parts of the world, in terms of the layout of farms and irrigation channels.

The social division deepened further between farmers who struggled to remain on the land and itinerant government officers. However, farmers who left, leaving their land degraded also came in for criticism. Spike Dessert expressed a strong view about the short-term vision of the first generation of farmers on the Ord,

The early farmers that came to this valley, their basic thing was, was that they were gonna come here, grow cotton, make a fortune and sell the farm, and move off some place else. And if you look around the old [farms] – There's one right across the street. Down [at] my old shed site (this is not the original shed site of this farm), the bulk of all the sheds for the cotton farmers, might have one tree. They weren't gonna plant trees, because they weren't gonna be around to see them. There is a difference in the farming mentality of, let's say back then, when the cotton failed in the mid-early seventies, those farmers left (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

By the 1970s, local people were becoming concerned about the potential health hazards associated with sprays. Insect pests were becoming resistant to pesticides and farmers responded by using them in greater quantities. The costs of chemical sprays became overwhelming and contributed to bankruptcies among cotton farmers.



Figure 26. Aerial spraying of cotton crops, Ord Valley 1960s. Courtesy, Kununurra Historical Society.

Rosalie Hamilton retained vivid memories of crop spraying. She claimed to always suspect that the chemicals used were dangerous (Fig. 26). She could still recall the smell of pyrethrin, one of the chemicals used. Prior to the cotton harvest they used a defoliant that

she learned was used in military operations in Vietnam and known as 'Agent Orange'.⁵⁵ She recalled that it made the crops look terrible. Mechanical pickers were then driven through to take off the cotton heads and trash would fly everywhere. She described how the planes sprayed eight rows at a sweep and a person would stand at either end of the eight rows holding a flag. They then had to run across the rows that had just been sprayed to take up positions for marking the next eight rows for the next sweep. No one wore protective clothing, and there was little comprehension of possible long-term effects. There were many incidents when men, particularly those dealing in the chemicals, were put out of action for a while by overexposure. It was assumed that they were fully recovered when they were able work again. Initially Rosalie's husband prospered from cotton and had good crops, however insect pests gradually developed resistance to pesticides and the cost of spraying became exorbitant.

Di Oliver also described her concerns about the health effects of the sprays in use during the 1970s,

And the chemicals they used to have on that airstrip out there, I mean we weren't allowed to – the children were not allowed to get out without sandals on, I don't think. But you could smell it going past. But there was no real safety thing about chemical in those days. You'd put on overalls when they'd mix it up but none really. There was no great *warnings* of chemical in those days either – of the chemicals they used on the cotton. And I used to go out and mark the crops, you know when I was pregnant. No one said: 'Well don't be out here with an umbrella while the chemical's spraying down – but it didn't really have any effect. ... Well yeah, when the cotton was ready they'd spray the defoliant on so the leaves would drop off and then the pickers would go through. And we didn't have air-conditioned pickers or anything in the tractors. No air-conditioned tractors in those days. And then the pickers would just go through and pick the cotton. When the big case in the back of the picker was full, then it would tilt over and fill up the trailers and then they'd be driven into the gin (interview Kununurra, 23 June 1999).

Spike Dessert explained that the attitude towards the use of chemical sprays began to change during the 1970s.

Finally you realise that – you know, you wake up in the morning, and you've got a splitting headache: well, it was the chemical that you worked with yesterday. It wasn't that you had five beers the night before, or you got a flu or – And so, people, I think, started – farmers started changing when we really

⁵⁵ Agent Orange was a 50-50 mix of two chemicals, known conventionally as 2,4,D and 2,4,5,T.

got better educated. And it was probably then, in the mid-seventies, when DDT was finally banned (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, farmers became increasingly critical of the research agenda pursued by scientists at the Kimberley Research Station. In an interview with Bruce Shaw in 1970, Ian Oliver expressed his view that CSIRO scientists were driven by the motivation to conduct publishable research while farmers increasingly demanded immediate practical assistance. Farmers felt that the scientists were no more knowledgeable about what crops were suited to the local climate and ecology than they were themselves.

Di Oliver voiced this opinion in her interview,

I don't know why they didn't do more research on any other crop. It wasn't until later when Andy Chapman, CSIRO, was doing rice. They sort of really didn't look majorly at anything else and we really had to look for it ourselves.

And the Ag Department would make recommendations, which was good, but they were only growing theirs on small trial basis. It wasn't until for a while later, that they started doing some on a broader basis. So the farmers really, had to research themselves (interview, Kununurra, 23 June 1999).

Pat Ryan, also interviewed by Bruce Shaw in 1970, stressed the need for continuity of farming over time and an accumulation of local knowledge about farming.

A shift occurred in the way farmers saw themselves between the 1960s and the early 1970s. Increasingly, they viewed themselves as victims of bad government planning and failed agricultural research. Some were concerned about the possible effects of crop spraying on the health of their families. The promotion of a cotton monoculture by both the Western Australian and Commonwealth governments was widely criticised. When Bruce Shaw asked farmers in 1970 for their opinion on monocultures, all those interviewed expressed the view that diversification of crops was important, as monocultures left them too vulnerable to failures of either crops or markets. This view was echoed by those I spoke with in 1998 and 1999 who had experienced the cotton-growing period. Di Oliver felt

strongly that there was a need for diversity of land ownership as well as crops, and that monopolies should be avoided.

5.3.2 Media reporting

While press coverage of the opening of the Argyle Dam in 1972 still promoted the potential productivity of the Ord Valley, by 1974 the emphasis of media representations had changed dramatically. Cotton had ‘failed’. The ecology was threatened by chemical sprays used to control weeds and insects. Worst of all, the Ord could be ‘abandoned’.

In 1972 a segment was screened on the ABC current affairs program ‘This Day Tonight’ that described a collaborative project by wildlife authorities to rescue and release wildlife stranded by the flooding of Lake Argyle called ‘Operation Noah’, (Australian Broadcasting Commission 1972). The film began by depicting the ‘engineers’ perspective’ in which the Ord River was a natural resource being wasted and just waiting to be harnessed by a dam. It then contrasted this view with one that depicted the Ord Valley as a remote ‘wilderness’ under threat from rising waters of the dam,

... it now laps quietly against a rugged wilderness that will never be the same again.

After outlining the financial cost of the scheme, the narrator went on to state that,

... part of the price too has been an essential piece of the Kimberley’s heritage, historic Argyle Downs Station. This was Durack country ... Its history brims with colour in stories of hardship and human achievement. Then there was the wildlife and with the rising dam waters came Operation Noah, a rescue expedition by wildlife authorities keen to preserve the land’s ecology.

Included in the film was an interview with Harry Butler, a high profile naturalist and television personality.⁵⁶ Other commentators from Operation Noah commented on the potential for Lake Argyle to develop as a major refuge for waterfowl in the summer

⁵⁶ Throughout the 1970s, Harry Butler compered a popular television series titled ‘In the Wild with Harry Butler’. One of these shows featured wildlife rescue scenes from Operation Noah.

months. Reference was made to the ecological damage caused by the cattle industry, and to the scope for a major ecological changes due to the dam.

The film signalled regret for the end of the pastoral pioneering era. The flooded land was described as 'Durack country', but no mention was made of its Aboriginal cultural connections. What were lost were relics of the pastoral era and, potentially, wildlife and ecology. Attempts to save wildlife were depicted in spectacular film footage of scientists leaping out of a boat to catch animals caught by the rising waters of Lake Argyle.

In 1973, a documentary film called 'Irrigation: The Ord River Scheme and the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area' was produced by the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit as part of a series in Australian geography (Australian Commonwealth Film Unit 1973). This film, (probably made for high school geography courses) presented a critique of the concept of large irrigation schemes in Australia, emphasising the costs to governments and the agricultural failures.

The Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area's big weakness was that it was carried out primarily as an engineering project. Agricultural research was too late and too weak to be of any help to farmers.

It then stated that the scheme was a social experiment aimed at closer settlement. The farm sizes were too small and eventually many went bankrupt. Others amalgamated to form larger and more viable farms. Implicit in this narrative is a critique of instrumentalist approaches to planning irrigation areas that emphasise infrastructure over other aspects of farming. The film then moved on to the Ord River scheme and the narrator explained that cotton was the only profitable crop but that it still relied on a government subsidy.

Only twenty-two farms exist and they are still in an experimental stage. The cotton yield depends heavily on chemical pest control. The long-term effect on insect and bird life of the region is impossible to predict. Insects are becoming immune to pesticides such as DDT and year round growing alters ecological regimes creating bird and insect pests.

The film ended with the following narration,

Australians have always believed that the vast arid inland areas should be settled. But to date major irrigation schemes have been largely trial and error. Economic agricultural or environmental problems have not always received enough attention or have been bypassed for political reasons. The Ord River Scheme at present supports only twenty farms. Costs so far for preliminary works, irrigation works, investigations and the main dam - over \$45 million. Possible future costs to establish the very large number of farms originally planned, up to \$20 million more. Can we afford it?

The value of large irrigation schemes throughout Australia was questioned for ecological and social concerns as well as economic reasons.

In 1977 another documentary critical of the Ord scheme was screened as an episode of the ABC's Horizon 5 program, titled 'A Dream Gone Wrong' (Australian Broadcasting Commission 1977). It introduced the subject as follows,

The dream of turning the Australian outback into a garden, always free from the menace of drought has been dreamt a thousand times over by anyone who's ever been crippled by one of those sapping disasters. Those same fantasies have never escaped those politicians who've seen the chance of having their name immortalised just by spending a few hundred million dollars trying to make the desert blossom forever. That sort of vision appeared at the top of Western Australia back in the early '60s when the nation was rich and virile and the catch cry was to develop the north. And so the idea of irrigating crops in this country's most remote farming area on the Ord River was born. But, sadly, ever since the birth of that scheme, the hopes and plans of turning water and bank balances into gold have gone down the drain.

The film described the Ord scheme as 'Australia's greatest dream gone wrong'. One farmer interviewed, Danny Clune, says 'the knockers at the time and the knockers since have so far turned out to be right.' The film emphasised that 'the water has not been enough.' It explored Ian Oliver's predicament with having to do his own experiments with rice crops, as the research conducted by Kimberley Research Station scientists had not resulted in identifying any crop that was clearly viable for the region. The film was highly critical of the role of government scientists at the Kimberley Research Station,

So far their research has produced nothing, not a single profitable crop. But in a strange twist these men of facts and not of dreams have become dreamers themselves. Despite their thirty fruitless years they still have a strange unfounded faith in the future of the north.

In emphasising the faith of the scientists, it effectively undermined their credibility. The interviewer suggested that the Ord was developed too soon, before an adequate research base existed. One of the scientists countered this, explaining that it was necessary to risk the development of commercial farms because the research could never be adequate

without an accompanying industry. The film ended with speculation about the prospect that the Ord may one day be deserted.

Unlike the documentaries of the 1960s that emphasised the views of government planners, agricultural scientists and engineers, these films gave much greater emphasis to the perspectives of farmers and to scientists studying impacts of the irrigation scheme on the region's wildlife and ecology. In posing the possibility of the Ord being abandoned, they engaged some of the rhetoric of earlier periods that questioned the ability of Europeans to prosper in the tropics.

5.2.3 Summary

During the early 1970s profound changes occurred in both the social and physical environment of the Ord Valley. Many farms within the irrigation area were abandoned as no longer viable. The population of Kununurra diminished, and existing divisions between long-term and short-term residents deepened. Farmers felt let down by the agricultural scientists and questioned the practical value of their research. Concerns developed about the environmental and health impacts of chemical sprays. The visions and dreams held by those who came to the Ord in the early 1960s were replaced by desperation and, in some cases, destitution. Farmers who had identified as pioneers of modern agriculture in the 1960s came to identify themselves as victims. Farms were deserted and weeds grew unchecked on abandoned land. By the early 1970s, the long term pattern of mobility among farmers was that of leaving the region altogether as their cotton farms failed. New arrivals at that time were more likely to be government employees on two-year contracts.

In documentary films portraying the Ord, the emphasis shifted. While 1960s films presented the voices of agricultural scientists as authorities on the prosperous future of the

Ord, 1970s films presented the voices of ecological or wildlife scientists as authorities on a natural environment that had been lost or damaged. Farmers also appeared on film presenting their experiences of failure. The films reinforced the perspectives held by farmers themselves that they were victims of bad government planning and political expediency.

In 1978, the Ord Irrigation Area Review, which informed the policies of both the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments, considered the option of withdrawing all government investment in the region and decided against that. Instead it recommended that remaining farmers receive low-level financial assistance and that further government investment be made in agricultural research. The agrarian dream did not die with the failure of cotton.

5.4 1990s farmers

In 1997 the Western Australian Department of Agriculture produced a promotional brochure to encourage more farmers to move to the Ord. It stated that ‘The success of the ORIA relies on the production of high value niche markets, on diversity rather than monoculture’ (Agriculture Western Australia 1997: 17). The majority of farmers in the Ord Valley in the 1990s arrived after 1980 to establish small-scale horticultural businesses. In this section I draw more extensively on interview materials to identify themes in the spatial practices and social identifications of contemporary farmers, and their perspectives on change over time in the region. In the course of my interviews, farmers reiterated and expanded upon the value of crop diversity. As contemporary farmers have received little media attention in their own right, I briefly note themes in recent media reporting of Ord Stage Two and contrast the place-images and rhetoric employed with those of the farmers I interviewed.

5.4.1 Background

Like the cotton farmers of the 1960s, most contemporary farmers tended to be nuclear families whose relatives lived thousands of kilometres away in the south of the continent. They moved to the region during the 1980s and 1990s to establish small-scale horticultural businesses. Unlike the earlier cotton farmers, they resided in houses on their farms and husbands and wives frequently operated as business partners, both identifying themselves as horticulturalists. At the time of my fieldwork women were prominent in horticultural growers associations in the Ord Valley. While the Ord River District Co-operative played a significant role in marketing produce from the region, many individual growers had identified niche markets and transport methods for their own produce (Agriculture Western Australia 1997). This task involved travel both within Australia and to Southeast Asia, networks among growers and marketing organisations and extensive use of communications technology.

Elaine Gardiner grew bananas and sugarcane and was involved with the Kununurra Horticultural Producers Association. She also represented the region in a national banana marketing organisation. John Mack grew a mix of bananas, sugarcane and citrus. He was involved with the Kununurra Horticultural Producers Association, the Tropical Agriculture Team and the Ord Sugar Industry Board and the Kununurra Horticultural Pest Control Committee. He is also a member of the Wyndham-East Kimberley Development Council. Jill Parker and her husband Quentin Parker grew bananas, paw paws and mangoes and were diversifying into a range of small crops such as capsicum, small melons and apple cucumbers. Jill Parker was involved with a mango marketing organisation. All three interviewees resided on farms on Packsaddle Plain. The interviews were recorded in their homes.

5.4.2 Motivations and first impressions

Some of those currently farming there came to the region for other purposes, liked it and purchased land. John Mack (Fig. 27) came from South Africa in 1981 to work as a production manager at the Argyle Diamond mine. He bought land in 1991 to establish a farm prior to his retirement. John Mack is now active in lobbying for local farmers through the Kununurra Horticultural Producers' Association. Elaine Gardiner and her husband George arrived in 1988. George was appointed as an extension officer for the Agriculture Department at the Kimberley Research Station. Like many of the present horticulturalists, they came to the Ord with some experience of farming elsewhere but with no experience of irrigation. Jill Parker and her husband, Quentin, knew very little about the region before they arrived in 1986, apart from what was mentioned in school geography lessons. However, friends of theirs had visited the Ord some years earlier and spoke of it with enthusiasm. While Jill Parker had no prior farming experience herself, her husband had a background in wheat and sheep farming at Wongan Hills, north of Perth.



Figure 27. John Mack, Ord Valley 1999.

The vast expanse of water suitable for irrigation was the prime attraction of the East Kimberley for these people. Elaine Gardiner described the tremendous potential she equated with a constant year round water supply,

Oh, just irrigation, I mean, irrigation makes all things possible for all people you know. And we have, in the dry season; we have basically sunlight all dry season. So we have the optimum temperatures for lots of things and water, and we can't go past water. And the soil types are extremely good too, most of the areas. There are odd areas where there's problems but most of the areas have got good soil, so you really can't complain. (interview Kununurra, 17 March 1999)

Elaine Gardiner has now established a very successful banana farm and is actively involved with various horticultural organisations.



Figure 28. Jill Parker, Packsaddle Plain, 1999.

Jill Parker (Fig. 28), another horticulturalist, also listed water as the main reason why she and her husband moved to the Ord. It was the aesthetic qualities of the vast expanses of water in an otherwise arid landscape, and what that symbolised in terms of irrigation potential that motivated them to move to the region,

The water. It was just – you come over that diversion dam after driving from Broome, or from Port Hedland even and the water's stunning. You just realise that huge scope of being able to irrigate land with that much water. So that was the main issue. Um ... anyhow it was nice. We enjoyed ourselves, we had a good holiday here and it was an environment that we thought we could live in. I don't think we anticipated how hot it was going to get. But yes, mostly you'd just say the water (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

5.4.3 Changes over time

While most farmers used the 1960s landscape as their historical reference point, Spike Dessert speculated about water and vegetation in the region's longer term past,

My personal feeling is, that this country was a lot greener a thousand or ten – five thousand years ago, than what it is today, and could actually be returned to it – to slow down the water. So certain, which some people call weeds (cumbungi; para grass [*Brachiaria mutica*] growing in some of these rocky areas or creeks that have holes, and then these create dams, filter out sediment, and then start establishing another ecosystem behind them.

Cause there is one station who's been doing some work on his own – not a government thing – and he's starting to put it back. When he got there – I saw it probably a couple years after he first got there, and I saw it again after he'd been there for quite a few years. It's starting to be a different thing, and it is all sustainable. It's not that he has pumps or using diesel to use – to move water, he's basically damming it with vegetation, and the vegetation then collects sediment and holds back more water.

So, maybe, with the right care, this country had year-round creeks. With the advent of the Aborigine, and then of course, the coming of cattle, I think this country before cattle was a lot greener than what

it is today. That's a personal feeling. Because I can show you areas where there's no cattle, and areas that there is cattle – they're night and day (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

He went on to explain that he had drawn some of these convictions from reading a report by a government survey team from the 1890s, soon after the first stations were established,

One was a article written, where a government survey team, or appraisal team, or something, came out for the stations (and this was only something like five years after, or so, that they were here), went to one of the Durack stations – and I think it was Ord River Station – and made a comment in his report, that within fifty miles of the station, there's basically – there was no more – it was already overgrazed within ten years.

And you can see this even today. Last year, I drove out through what used to be Dunham River Station, which is now Doon Doon Station. And you start at the road there, and it was totally overgrazed. We drove through the station, and on a track out to what they call Spearwall Yard, basically very much to the west, and every ridge you crossed, there got to be more and more vegetation. To the point that we got right out to Spearwall, which is about the end of the track, and it is entirely different then what you were seeing closer to the station. And that country out there being so inaccessible, basically has not been near as overgrazed (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

He was convinced that the country could be restored to a former wetter landscape by holding back water throughout the dry season.

All the longer-term residents mentioned changes to the Ord River, particularly with the growth of cumbungi⁵⁷ and other vegetation along the riverbanks. Spike Dessert described changes along the river since he arrived,

The biggest change has probably been the river, from the top dam down to the lower Ord. Before, when the top dam was filled in '73, it was basically very little growth along the river – and it was rock right down to the *water*. There was very few trees along the banks, as compared to today. There was no Cumbungi, and the river flowed a lot faster and actually shallower, and wider than it is today. Today, you drive a – or fly up the river, and it's an entirely different river than twenty-five years ago. I flew up in '73, with a good friend of mine, Stewie Scoglan, who is a pioneer helicopter pilot here (since died about a year ago), and a couple of times, we actually flew the whole length of the river, and all the way out, over the top dam to the stations and back again, and it was basically this rock and water. Today you fly there and there are – the river has eaten into older sandbanks, so there's erosion now, with trees. There's areas of very thick Cumbungi, and very narrow (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

He thought that the Ord River was beginning to resemble the lower Colorado River in southern California -

Yeah, a continuous water now, but the lower Colorado was growth right along the river. It's been, you know, pretty well used – the water's been slowed down. They look very, very, similar – except the trees are bigger here. But similarities is – like, the Colorado River has been turned – there is no

⁵⁷ *Typha spp.*, also called 'bulrushes'.

longer big floods that wash out the trees and the channels and stuff, and the Cumbungi, to flush the river out. The original Colorado River, they used to take paddle steamers all the way to a place called Parker, and today you – now there's three dams in the way. And now there's trees and Cumbungi, and irrigation all along it - they're very, very, similar (interview Kununurra, November 1998).

Di Oliver also commented on the increase in vegetation growth along the river banks.

While she felt that the cumbungi should be managed better she felt the growth of vegetation in general made the river more aesthetic,

On the edges of the river whereas twenty years ago there was nothing growing on Lake Kununurra, the river has become really beautiful. The natural vegetation has just come down the river which is beautiful. Going up this river here, where we live it was just sheer banks of just nothing. But over the years some that – the banks have eroded away and even with animal life going up and down, and there's now – there's a tremendous amount of trees and bamboo, and shrubs and *Leucaena*, and everything growing up there (interview, Kununurra, 23 June 1999).



Figure 29. Carlton Reach, Ord River 1953, prior to dam construction.



Figure 30. Dense vegetation and cumbungi along the banks of Lake Kununurra, Ord River 1999.

Figures 29 and 30 provide photographic examples of the changes described above. The damming of the rivers and associated changes were viewed by most settlers as improvements on the existing landscape, making the country of the Ord Valley more aesthetic, useable and accessible. These alterations to the East Kimberley landscape precipitated the movements of successive waves of settlers.

5.4.4 Seasonal fluctuations

An important aspect of farming in the Ord was the need to adapt to seasonal climatic fluctuations and to be prepared for the wet season storms. Banana farmers were particularly vulnerable as the storm season coincided with fruiting. Jill Parker explained,

And the other problem that we've found in the region, is we get these enormous winds that come through. Sort of like a willy-willy if you like, or I think they've been re-dubbed as touchdown tornadoes. And they've been occurring ever since we first came.

We got hit very badly in one year with it and lost the whole farm, all 12 hectares with *very* little that we could salvage. And in subsequent years, we've been hit maybe three or four times, during the course of the year, to a much lesser extent. And we work on a situation of only getting away with not being hit, maybe one year in three. So, you've got to coincide that good year of not having the wind damage, with the good year in the prices, in order to make some money (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

John Mack felt that it was possible to plan for the storm season,

We **have** got a good climate, its **predictable** climate. We know the wind's going to bloody blow and – anywhere from about November onwards, until April. We get storms so you try and grow crops that don't produce then. Um, bananas grow very well if you grow them – we grow them very differently to Queensland but they grow very well here. But yeah, they're a bit of a high risk crop. But we're looking at some strategies now, and amongst the banana growers, who are saying: 'Okay, well let's look at possibly growing them as an annual crop.' And people say: 'Oh, it's too expensive.' But when you really sit down and analyse, you cut a huge amount of labour costs out. All that sort of trashing and desuckering. You basically grow one crop and then it doesn't matter if the storms come and blow it down because you're going to put a dozer through it anyway (interview Kununurra, March 1999).

Jill Parker explained that the intense heat and humidity between October and February has a major impact on worker productivity,

It's very hard to work hard, from October through to say, February, which is *very* hot, humid and sort of – Your productivity rate is probably down around about 50 percent of what you would be anywhere else (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

The horticulturalists were heavily reliant on the pool of seasonal labour provided by backpackers. Elaine Gardiner explained that the itinerant nature of this labour force worked against the development of skills and productivity,

To get a good banana packer, it'll take you maybe two or three weeks to get them packing – bring some speed and then they leave within some six weeks after that. So, it's really not a good system (interview Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

5.4.5 Social identifications

Social identifications and values were articulated most clearly when farmers contrasted their own approach to farming with that of past land use. Elaine Gardiner and Spike Dessert emphasised the poverty of the grazing lands as they existed prior to irrigation farming. They regarded their cropping activities as more sustainable than grazing, and a more productive use of the land based on a much greater investment in labour and infrastructure. Elaine Gardiner expressed a pragmatic view of the history of land use and management,

Realistically, I think a lot of this country probably shouldn't have ever been settled because it's very delicate, very fragile country. But having said that, the change has already occurred so now, in our time, in our life-time, I think the best thing that we can do now, is to manage the change as well as we can. And make sure that it doesn't either get worse if that's the way you perceive the change or – and try and – or sort of keep the status quo (interview Kununurra, March 1999).

However farmers generally viewed the damming of the rivers and associated changes as improvements.

Some farmers voiced strong views about the negative role played by government subsidies for cotton in Ord Stage 1. Spike Dessert and John Mack both felt strongly that the subsidies had worked against farmers making long-term investments in the Ord Valley and taking their own initiatives in experimenting with different crops. Spike Dessert contrasted what he regarded as the short-term outlook held by farmers who went to the Ord to grow cotton with the longer-term outlook of those who have arrived since the mid 1980s. While the arguments different farmers made about the failure of cotton vary in the way they

ascribe blame to government authorities, they all featured a narrative critical of those who only planned to stay in the region for a short time and asserted the importance of longer term commitments. This narrative was very similar to the criticisms that 1960s cotton farmers made of government officials on short-term postings who they contrasted with cotton farmers who planned to stay in the region.

1990s horticulturalists were conscious of different time frames needed to establish different crops and to develop markets for their produce. Elaine Gardiner contrasted the time frame for farming bananas, which are a perennial crop, with that of melons,

Bananas to me are a challenge because they're a perennial crop. Rockmelons, if you have a problem with the crop you can plough it in. You lose money but you can plough it in. You can plough bananas in but your whole irrigation infrastructure and things like that – and it takes 12 months for [a] banana plant to produce, whereas a rockmelon takes 9 to 12 weeks. So, realistically a lot of us in bananas are keen to stay in bananas. Those in melons, they think we're all mad, so you know [laughter]. And you can't jump in and out of bananas because of the infrastructure that we have to have in place, for the irrigation. Whereas you can jump in and out of other crops.

If melons are bad for the year, if the price is low there's a —it's — you know, too many melons on the market, then they just don't plant the next planting, they plant something else. Whereas with bananas, we're basically [laughs] stuck with them. If the market's down because there's too many, well as in that's just tough. Then you just sent your good stuff — you know that you don't ever send seconds or all the small fruit ... You send big, extra large ... and go for the top line all the time (interview Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

Elaine Gardiner felt that sugar cane, her other crop which is much less labour intensive than bananas, made a good complement to them. The only problem was the difficulty of rotating around sugar cane, as each planting is retained for five years.

John Mack talked about the time frame for trialing new rootstocks for citrus trees,

Um, with citrus up here, there is — I mean there is one, main variety which is Eureka, which is probably 80 percent of the commercial sales — and that's what I've planted. And they've been around since 1870, or 1880, so there's a fair body of knowledge about how to get them to produce at optimal levels. How to manage the [integrated] — there's a full history of integrated pest management control for them, so there's good information there.

There are new varieties coming in and we've got a one hundred tree trial down there, which is sponsored by the Department of Agriculture. They supplied the trees and we have about five varieties on five different rootstocks, including some new varieties that have recently come in from Spain. And that's going to be quite interesting — that'll be about a 10 year program that trial. To sort of — to grow them right through into a number of successive harvests and see how they perform (interview Kununurra, March 1999).

Jill Parker described the importance of the time frame needed for the markets for different fruits to mature and change,

You know sort of ten years ago, it was not viable to grow paw paws – now it's very viable to grow them. So, you've probably got to be in things for quite a while to actually watch the market mature (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

She emphasised the need for longer-term experience in farming in the region, giving the learning process she and her husband have been through as an example,

We have found that we know very little – basically [that] probably sums it up in a nutshell, is that you start farming in Kununurra and within in a year you are an expert. You know it all, you're growing fantastic crops and *everything* is working well. After three years, you've worked out that you're a complete idiot and you have no idea how you got there. And then after about five years, you start to work out that the soil doesn't behave as it should do. It reacts very differently to anything that – probably – I mean, as a wheat and sheep farmer, it doesn't behave like it should. Um, some of the [recommendations] – all of the recommendations that you get from fertiliser companies and from soil analysis, leaf analysis, all this sort of stuff, actually have very little bearing in this area.

For instance, we constantly get told that we're using too much potassium, but the potassium actually isn't available to the plant. So yes, there's masses of it there but the plant is not taking it up – and it's only recently that we've started to twig that the magnesium is actually locking up a lot of products within the soil. We've got very high magnesium levels in our soils and in some areas that's really desirable. In our area, it's actually a bit of a hindrance because it doesn't allow for the uptake of calcium and then you've got this imbalance. It's very, very, hard.

And I think probably one of the biggest things is experience. No-one up here has long term experience, so you're all newcomers. I mean even the oldest farmers have only been doing it for 20 years. And then it varies from different soil types because you've got the clays, the levee soils, the black soils, the sand, and everything is a different story (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

All horticulturalists I spoke with emphasised the time frame needed to gain local farming experience. They asserted the importance of maintaining a degree of flexibility to allow for fluctuations in the physical environment as well as in markets. Horticulturalists also expressed concerns about the potential for environmental degradation and the importance of monitoring environmental changes to ensure the productivity of their family farms.

I asked a number of the farmers whether their children were interested in remaining in the area and possibly farming themselves. Only a few farmers had children who intended to follow them onto the land. They described a pattern of families leaving the Ord when their

children reach the final years of high school, as the local school only teaches up to year ten. Elaine Gardiner's daughters had both obtained university degrees in biological sciences and were keen to do something on the land. One of them, Marie Gardiner, works with her father, George Gardiner, as a consultant managing the development of the Ord Land and Water Management Plan. Di Oliver has a daughter who lives on a cattle property near Katherine in the NT.

Horticulturalists identified themselves as innovators and placed great value on crop diversification. They saw themselves as having a capacity to learn about and adapt to both the land and fluctuating markets, due to the small scale of their farming enterprises (some farms were no more than eight hectares). Because of their personal investment they had strong motivations for making their farms profitable. If one crop or variety failed they cut their losses and tried something else. They attributed the success of the Ord Valley farming in the 1990s to crop diversity.

5.4.6 Media reporting of Ord Stage Two

The Ord Stage Two proposal has attracted considerable media attention. I focus here on two feature articles from *The Weekend Australian* newspaper. They signal the persistence of rhetoric and place-images from earlier periods in contemporary reporting of the proposed expansion of the irrigation scheme.

On 19 June 1999 *The Weekend Australian* published a feature article by Nicholas Rothwell titled 'Valley of Dreams', part of a series by Rothwell about rural Australia called 'New Nation'. In his article, Rothwell painted residents of Kununurra as adaptable, socially progressive and ready to embrace a future that includes the new dimensions of Ord Stage Two and Native Title,

Indeed, Kununurra has made itself a virtual laboratory for sophisticated northern progress – and one with some intriguing lessons to offer the rest of the nation. For a place that once had a fairly dingy reputation – they used to call it a frontier toy town fastened to a white elephant, in the days when the Ord scheme was unprofitable – this has been quite a change, brought about as much by the men and women in the community as by any natural advantages (Rothwell 1999: 26).

And

Stage II is a tantalising prize. If it goes ahead the region will boom and the town's population should jump by as much as a quarter. But it is far from the only promising prospect. Tourism already earns as much money a year (\$60 million) as fruit growing and crop farming in the East Kimberley, and other ventures are on the drawing board ... No longer is this the rough, racially tense back of beyond. Gradually the face of the Australian far north-west is being remade, as technology and intellectual force are brought to bear on an environment previously attacked chiefly with willpower and resolve (Rothwell 1999: 26).

Rothwell's portrayal of modernisation emphasises individual enterprise, adaptability and ingenuity. These qualities are contrasted with the earlier government-driven initiatives. Technology and intellectual force are seen as the new motors of modernity, forces employed by smarter and more sophisticated people who are also socially progressive in their preparedness to negotiate with native-title holders. The frontier, with its racial tensions, has become a thing of the past. Rothwell's rhetoric fits well with the 'nation-building' agenda that Osborne and Lewis (1995) trace as a theme in Australian commercial press from the early twentieth century.

Some of Rothwell's statements resonate with comments made by horticulturalists. John Mack, for example, also portrayed the new generation of farmers as smarter and less reliant on government subsidies than the earlier cotton farmers. It is clear that Rothwell spoke with horticultural farmers as well as local government officials in preparing his article. They may have provided some of the rhetoric he used. However, the horticulturalists I interviewed were more cautious about the proposed scheme and expressed reservations about the prospect of large-scale corporate farming based on a single crop.

Another feature article by the environment writer for *The Weekend Australian*, Amanda Hodge, provides a marked contrast with Rothwell's portrayal. Titled 'Top End Fever' and published on 24-25 November 2001, Hodge portrays a pristine and remote environment under threat from land clearance for agriculture, and doomed to repeat the mistakes of the past,

A century after its southern neighbours first grew fat on the proceeds of irrigated agriculture, northern Australia is heading the cargo cult call of cane and cotton and ignoring pleas from scientists and green groups to learn the lessons of the past.

...

Now, as the south grapples with critical land degradation and water shortages, agricultural entrepreneurs are crossing that line and cutting a path through the northern wilderness to fresh country, water and the open arms of struggling communities (Hodge 2001: 19).

Unlike Rothwell, Hodge makes no mention of Native Title issues relating to the East Kimberley, concentrating solely on threats to the natural environment and ecology. Her rhetoric has more in common with the television documentaries of the 1970s that portrayed the East Kimberley as a threatened wilderness. As in the 1970s, environmental science is portrayed as an important moderator and check on change. While the horticulturalists I interviewed voiced similar concerns about the need to monitor water tables and the importance of not repeating mistakes of the past, and even invoked terms derived from environmental science, they did not engage the rhetoric of pristine wilderness. In contrast with the implication of Hodge's article that irrigated agriculture should be prevented, they advocated cautious and gradual opening of new farmlands.

5.4.7 Summary

Contemporary farmers identified themselves as innovators in horticulture. Compared with the past land uses of both pastoralism and cotton farming, they considered their own land use as more sustainable in both environmental and economic terms. A key to this was their

capacity to adapt to seasonal fluctuations in the local environment and in national and international markets for their produce. The value placed on crop diversity was reinforced to some extent in both government publications and media reporting. To some extent their social identifications were bound up with the crops they grew and national networks of growers' organisations. Unlike the cotton farmers who did not market their own produce, some horticulturalists travelled extensively in both Australia and Southeast Asia in order to secure sales. While they emphasised the importance of continuity of farming practices, it was unlikely this would transcend generations. Their children were likely to leave Kununurra to finish their schooling and to eventually obtain employment elsewhere.

Horticulturalists in the late 1990s used professional growers' associations to lobby for their interests in regional planning processes. Rothwell's feature article demonstrates they also had the capacity to present their views in public media, gaining authority for their land interests as a form of smart, adaptable agriculture that was both economically and environmentally sustainable.

5.5 Conclusion

Farmers who arrived in the Ord Valley in the 1960s saw themselves as establishing a new frontier, with all its implications of restarting history from 'Year Zero' (Rose 1997). Mobility took the form of travelling to Kununurra from southern Australia, and later leaving to return to the south. The spatial practice of daily life was dominated by journeys between the town and the farms. Despite asserting the need for social continuity, they failed to achieve it. Those who did stay identified as battlers and criticised decisions of government planners that imposed social divisions that were unwelcome, and promoted crops that failed.

Media portrayal of the Ord Scheme since the 1960s has invoked imagery of modernisation, presenting the East Kimberley as a region marked out for irreversible change. In the 1960s, this change was presented as positive and necessary, replacing the 'old north' with a new north founded on efficient mechanised agriculture that would support a larger population with modern amenities. The voices of farmers were dominated by those of scientists and engineers in the 1960s, but gained greater prominence during the disasters of the 1970s. With the failure of cotton farming in the 1970s, change came to be represented as loss. The local ecology was threatened by farming practices, particularly extensive use of chemical sprays. Aspects of the region's pastoral heritage were lost through the flooding of Lake Argyle. However government planners simply deferred, rather than abandoned the idea of an agrarian future for the Ord Valley. Media representations in the 1990s were likely to draw on rhetoric from earlier periods in either supporting or condemning proposals to expand the Ord Irrigation Area. In Part III of the thesis I further explore the interplay of developmentalist and preservationist themes in planning rhetoric associated with the Ord Stage Two proposal and with planning associated with national parks and tourism.

The most striking aspect of social identifications among 1990s horticulturalists was the extent to which they distanced themselves and their farming practices from cotton farmers of the 1960s. By contrast, they presented themselves as smart, efficient, flexible, entrepreneurial and environmentally responsible. Horticulturalists arrived with land interests they had developed in other farming areas and adapted these to the new circumstances they experienced in the Ord Valley. While their relationship to land was founded primarily on the requirements of commercial productivity they linked this productivity to a concept of good environmental management. Their aesthetic appreciation of the East Kimberley environment was vested in the presence of water and its potential

for future productivity. While horticulturalists stressed the importance of social continuity for the development of both crops and markets, the continuity they envisaged began and ended with their own working lives, as they expected their children would leave the region and find work elsewhere.

Chapter 6: Tourism land interests

6.1 Introduction

Tourism differs from other forms of land use in that representations of place produced by tourism promoters become saleable commodities in themselves, based on their emotive and aesthetic appeal. Tourism is founded on a set of relations between the producers of tourism products (i.e., experiences, images and souvenirs) and the tourists who consume them. Along with tailored experiences (and to a lesser extent, souvenirs), the place-images of tourism form the currency of tourism land interests. While individual tourists have only a transitory presence in the East Kimberley, the representations of place and people generated and circulated by the tourism industry have a much more enduring existence. Further, the proliferation of tourism place-images may exert wider influence on perceptions of the region held by people who never gain direct experience of it. For these reasons, this chapter interrogates the motivations of tourism operators for creating tourism experiences, and explores the relationship between tourism promotional imagery and the motivations and expectations of tourists who visit the East Kimberley.

Scholarship in tourism studies has described tourism in semiotic terms as a system of signification and place-making (MacCannell 1976, Culler 1981, 1988, Selwyn 1996). It generates a plethora of iconic images of landscape in the form of advertising materials and postcards that become spatial metaphors and potentially, signifiers of the essential character of the place (Shields 1991: 47). In promoting a specific aesthetics of place, tourism products contribute to fixing understandings of the East Kimberley in both time

and space. However, as I will show in summarising historical developments, the imagery and rhetoric used to promote tourism has changed over time.

In addition to signs and signifiers, tourism has produced a new category of subject, 'the tourist', which is recognised by contemporary planners. Because of the brevity of the actual experience that individual tourists have in the East Kimberley, their social identifications are more likely to be influenced by their generic experience of tourism than the specific interaction they have with the East Kimberley. Mobility clearly plays an important role in defining this identity. In order to understand the subjectivity of tourists, I focus on the way in which tourists see themselves and on the frames of reference they deploy to make sense of the specific experiences on offer. To what extent do tourists express a pre-existing internal desire in selecting tourism destinations and to what extent do they assume the desires and needs that are portrayed by the tourism industry?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first outlines the history of tourism in the region since the 1960s. I describe the kind of tourist experience on offer during the 1960s and '70s, and then trace the diversification that occurred in the 1980s with the promotion of national parks and four-wheel drive wilderness adventures. The second and major section addresses contemporary tourism. For this I employ two distinct approaches: recorded interviews with tourism operators and an extensive survey of tourists. The combination of qualitative and quantitative information about contemporary tourism provided rich materials for an interpretation and analysis of the relationship between the production of tourism place-images and the way tourists experience them.

6.2 Methods

6.2.1 Historical sources

My focus for understanding tourism developments prior to the 1990s is primarily on portrayals of the East Kimberley in film and print media for tourism promotion. Because tourism was only a minor venture in the 1960s and '70s, tourists were most likely to have heard about the East Kimberley from the media portrayals of the Ord Irrigation scheme discussed in the previous chapter. I examine what promotional material did exist and give some consideration to the influence of more general media coverage of the Ord Scheme on early tourism land interests. This material is supplemented by recollections and local knowledge, drawn from interviews I recorded with Bill Withers, who established the first souvenir shop in Kununurra around 1965, and Kevin Kelly, a contemporary dealer in Aboriginal Arts and crafts in Kununurra (referred to in Chapter 4). They described the kinds of souvenirs produced for the tourism market during the 1960s and '70s. Further reference is made to information recorded by Bruce Shaw in interviews that he conducted with an airline employee, an employee at the Ord River Visitor Information Centre and the manager of the Ord River Motel in 1970.

During the 1980s the Kimberley became more accessible as a tourist destination and began to experience larger numbers of tourists. For this period, I specifically concentrate on the portrayal of the newly formed Bungle Bungles National Park⁵⁸ in television documentaries. As with my analysis of other film material, I describe the place-images and rhetoric deployed in documentaries and reflect on the selection of interviewees. Contemporary

⁵⁸ It subsequently became known by the Aboriginal name *Purnululu*, from the language of the Kija people. In the late 1990s the two names were used interchangeably.

tourism operators regarded this portrayal as particularly influential in attracting a new wave of tourists interested in wilderness and adventure.

6.2.2 Interviews with tourism operators

Because of the small number of tourism operators in Kununurra, recorded interviews and field notes were sufficient to gain a cross section of their perspectives and experiences on contemporary tourism. I recorded interviews with five local tourism operators between November 1998 and June 1999. Each was asked what drew him or her to the region and what he or she felt were the key tourist attractions. Tour operators were asked to describe the tourist profiles they encountered and their experience of tourists' interests in the physical environment and in Aboriginal culture. Finally, questions explored their perspectives on future development of tourism in the region (see Appendix F for check list of questions). Recorded interviews were fully transcribed and lodged with the Northern Territory Archives Service in Darwin. Field notes from participant observation of guided tours and from discussions with a wide range of tourism operators provided additional information that assisted in interpreting the interview material.

The interviews highlighted specific concepts that had meaning to contemporary tourism operators. For example 'ecotourism', 'adventure tourism' and 'cultural tourism' were all terms that had meaning for them and informed the design of their tours and the way they marketed them. These concepts consequently informed the development of the questionnaire for tourists.

6.2.3 Tourist survey

In June 1999 Gordon Waitt and I approached over 1000 tourists in backpackers' accommodation and caravan parks in Kununurra and invited them to participate in the survey (Fig. 31). In total 338 questionnaires were completed. The eighteen-page survey required time and a high level of English literacy skills. For these reasons, it carried a bias against elderly tourists with poor literacy skills (usually Australian), those travelling on bus tours with tight schedules and international travellers who lacked fluency in English (Lane and Waitt 2001).

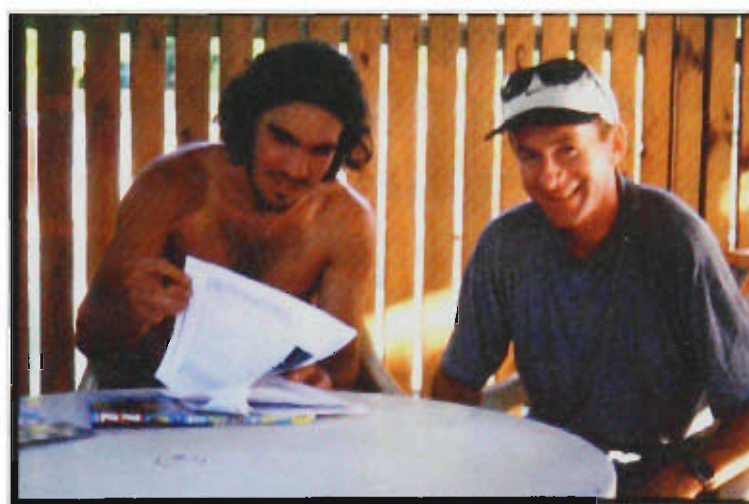


Figure 31. Gordon Waitt conducting the survey with a tourist, Kununurra 1999.

The survey was developed by Gordon Waitt at the University of Wollongong with my input. I contributed background information based on my interviews with tourism operators and personal observations of tourists during my first two fieldtrips. The survey (reproduced in full in Appendix G) consisted of the following five sections,

- Holiday Motivation
- Holiday-maker Classification
- Source of Holiday Information
- Personal Background
- Holiday Feelings

The section addressing holiday motivation comprised a series of statements that tourists were asked to respond to on a six point scale ranging from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The section addressing holiday-maker classification consisted of check boxes of pre-defined terms that tourists were asked to tick if they felt the description fitted their own self-identification. The section addressing holiday information provided a list of possible sources of information and asked tourists to indicate how important each was, on a scale of one to three, corresponding to 'very important', 'slightly important' and 'not important'. For the final section of the questionnaire that addressed personal background, tourists were asked to provide details of where their home was, their mode of transport, sex, age, education, occupation and income. The terms and statements used in these three sections of the questionnaire were informed by my interviews and fieldwork in the East Kimberley, as well as by existing tourism research. In particular, they drew on classifications developed by Pearce and Caltabiano (1983) and Yiannakis and Gibson (1992).

The section that addressed 'holiday feelings' employed a technique adapted from clinical psychology, known as personal construct analysis (Kelly 1955). It provided a valuable tool for examining how tourists construct and ascribe meanings to tourism place-images (Pearce 1982, Walmsley and Jenkins 1993, Walmsley and Young 1999, Young 1999). Gordon Waitt developed a version of this technique expressly for the purpose of gauging the frames of reference that both motivated tourists to visit the East Kimberley and influenced their interpretation of the place and their experiences there. It is described in full in Waitt, Lane and Head (2003 in press). This approach allowed us to draw out the way in which tourists ascribe emotive and symbolic meanings to stereotypical images of the East Kimberley.

Following a standard procedure, tourists were asked to respond to a set of ten images drawn from locally available postcards and brochures by rating each image according to a polar scale to describe the feelings that it elicited. An extensive review of imagery in tourist promotional materials ensured that the images selected were representative of those in circulation and already familiar to tourists. They were drawn from tour operator brochures – Triple J Tours, Duncan’s Ord River Tours, Alligator Airways, Slingair, R & B Kimberley Ecotours, Lake Argyle Cruises – and various postcard series – The Essential Australia, Murray Views, Kimberley Visions, Ken Duncan Photographs and Red Dirt Arts. They portrayed images of wildlife (Figs. 32 and 33), scenic attractions in national parks (Fig. 34), tourists fishing (Fig. 35), the Ord Valley farmlands (Fig. 36), Lake Argyle (Fig. 37), the Ord River between the dams, mustering cattle, the Argyle Diamond Mine, and an Aboriginal corroboree (see Chapter 8).

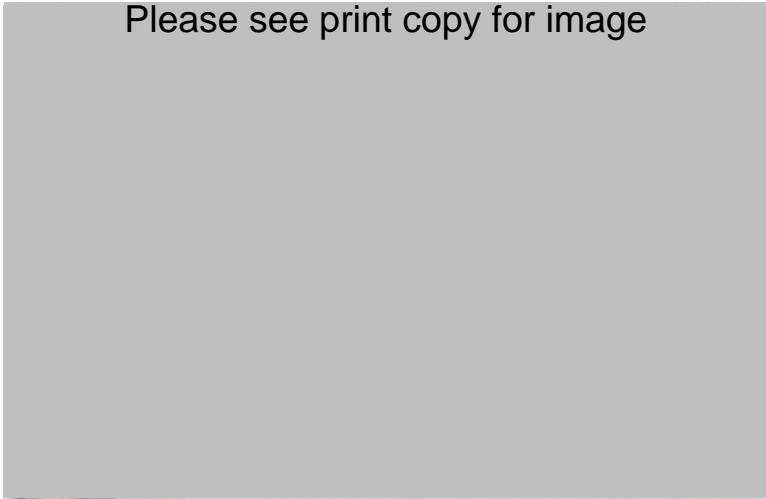


Figure 32. Image of Rock Wallaby from postcard produced by AUSCAPE PRINTS (no date).

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Figure 33. Image of crocodile from AAT King's Australian Tours Brochure, 1993/94. (AAT King's Australian Tours 1993/94: 21)

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Figure 34. Image of Parry's Lagoon from postcard produced by AUSCAPE PRINTS (no date).

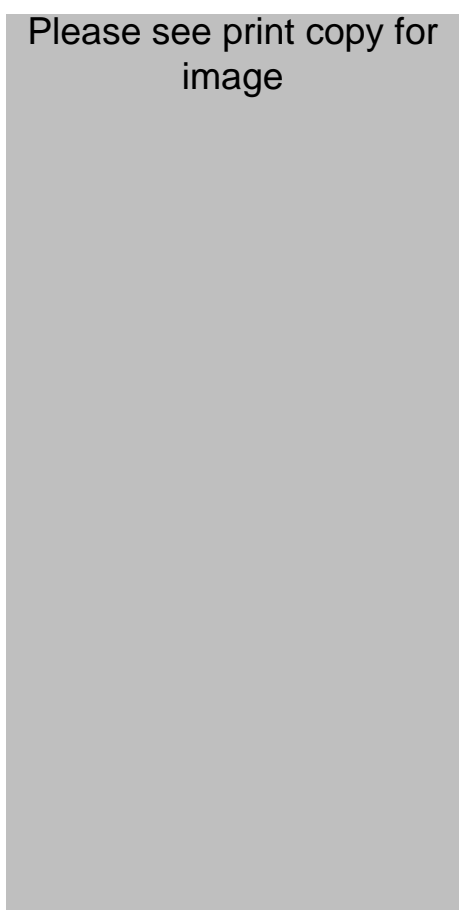


Figure 35. Tourist with barramundi fish. From travel brochure (The Sinnamon Family 1994: 4)

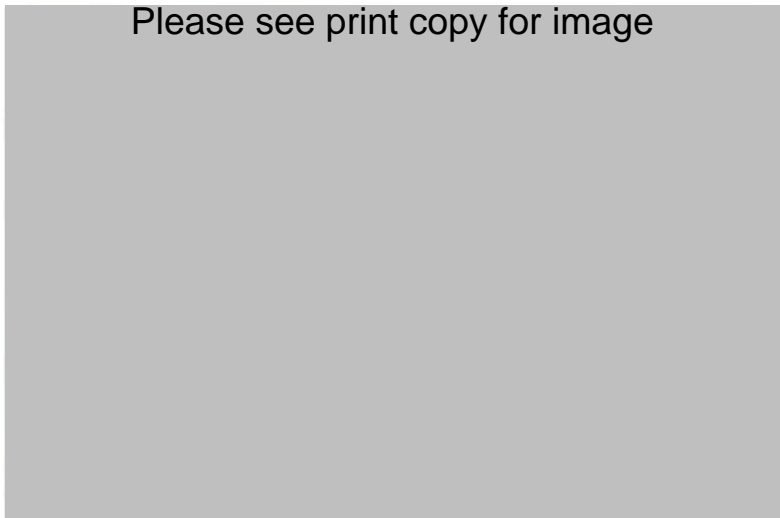


Figure 36. Ord valley farm lands. From postcard produced by AUSCAPE PRINTS (no date).

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Figure 37. Argyle Dam. From postcard produced by Red Dirt Arts (no date).

The set of terms used in the scale (Table 3) was derived from emotive words that tourists themselves volunteered in a preliminary survey, conducted by Gordon Waitt and me, which is described in detail in Waitt, Lane and Head (2003 in press). Our approach to the design of the holiday feelings section of the questionnaire ensured that the terms used had currency among tourists themselves. These binary terms provided a set of constructs that could be analysed statistically.

Results for each respondent were expressed as a numerical value indicating the degree of similarity between different constructs. A matrix of scores was then calculated for each construct and mapped onto a 'repertory grid'. Grids from all respondents were then combined to form an aggregated 'supergrid', which allowed us to distinguish between constructs understood within the same cognitive framework and those understood within different frameworks. Construction of the supergrid and its subsequent analysis was conducted by Gordon Waitt using the replicated multidimensional unfolding solution available in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This technique examines the disparities among elements of the supergrid and uses them to create an n-dimensional

space. The dimensional ranges of this space correspond to the aggregate personal constructs used to differentiate between the responses to different images.

Table 3. List of binary terms used in questionnaire.

Threatening	Safe
Uncaring	Caring
Lethargic	Exploratory
Refreshed	Tired
Reflective	Unmoved
Mystical	Mundane
Past	Present
At one with nature	Domination over nature
Simplicity	Grandeur
Crowded	Isolation
Freedom	Trapped
Tranquil	Turbulent
Stress	Calming
Unusual	Ordinary
Boredom	Amazement
Worried	Happy
Beauty	Grotesque
Excitement	Dullness
Significance of humanity	Power of nature
Fascinated	Uninterested

6.3 Historical developments

6.3.1 Tourism in the 1960s and '70s

The widely publicised Ord Irrigation Scheme generated both interest and controversy. A staff member working at the Ord River Visitor Information Centre, interviewed by Bruce

Shaw in 1970, explained that most tourists taking bus tours were aged between forty and sixty years. They had come to the area specifically to see the Ord Irrigation Scheme. An operator of MacRobertson Miller Airline Services (MMA) explained that the public controversy over the scheme was a key reason why people wanted to visit. He gave figures of 10,000 tourists passing through Kununurra in 1968 and 7,000 in 1969. Most of these were Australians, with only a small number of overseas tourists. The manager of the Ord River Motel reaffirmed that the main attractions for tourists were the irrigation scheme as a whole and the cotton ginnery. She also listed the scenery, climate and friendliness of local people as a draw. Popular souvenirs at that time included minerals, fossils and Aboriginal artefacts.

The first gift and souvenir business was established in Kununurra by Bill Withers in 1967 and opened as a shop in 1969. Its stock included zebra stone jewellery, Aboriginal artefacts (especially carved boab nuts), and artworks painted by new settlers resident in Kununurra (pers. com. Bill Withers 1998). Mandi Munniim, a senior Miriuwung man interviewed by Bruce Shaw in 1976, described making and selling didgeridoos, carved boab nuts, boometangs and spear heads in the 1960s to supplement income from pulling weeds on farms and clearing new blocks in the town (Shaw 1986: 209). Kevin Kelly, a contemporary art dealer selling the works of local artists, explained that throughout the 1960s and '70s a cottage industry of Aboriginal artefacts existed in Kununurra and other towns in the region,

Well, talking to people like Hugh [?] ..., and Alan Griffith, and Peggy Griffith, over the years, there was, like, a cottage industry, what we would call a cottage industry in the cities, where tourism had an interest in picking up things, basically off the street. The butcher would have a shelf of boab nuts, Doreen's flower shop would have, you know, some paintings on unstretched canvas, and that type of thing, and you can still see a bit of that around town (Kevin Kelly, Kununurra, 4 August 2001).

Along with locally quarried zebra rock, Aboriginal artefacts were among the first local souvenirs to be sold to tourists by business enterprises in Kununurra.

A television advertisement for tourism, probably made in 1963, shows images of crops at Kimberley Research Station, water flowing through the sluices of the new Diversion Dam, Aboriginal rock art, gem stones (including zebra rock), and Aboriginal people with painted artefacts (MacRobertson Miller Airlines and Ansett-ANA 1968). Similar imagery appeared in an advertising clip produced by MacRobertson Miller Airlines and Ansett-ANA promoting travel to northwest Australia. This 1968 advertisement included images and sounds of an Aboriginal corroboree, stockmen on horseback, wildlife, and water-skiing on the Ord River Diversion Dam.

A travel documentary produced for promotional purposes by Northwest Tours in 1967 emphasised the remoteness of the region, promoting it as a frontier experience and characterising the land as 'cattle country'. In this film Aboriginal people are portrayed as part of the frontier experience (Northwest Travel 1967). It shows images of Aboriginal stockmen on horseback and tells the story of 'Pigeon the Outlaw' in connection with Windjana Gorge. The narrator refers to the novel, *Outlaw of the Leopolds*, written by Ion Idriess in the 1920s and discussed in Chapter 3. Lake Kununurra is portrayed as a 'man-made sanctuary in the wilderness', given emphasis by film footage of waterbirds. The Ord River Irrigation Scheme forms a specific focus of the film, and modern agriculture is presented as the inevitable future for the region,

As the first of its kind in the north, the Ord River Scheme shows us the shape of things to come. With such changes on the horizon, viewers are urged to see the Kimberley while it remains in its 'untamed' frontier state, before modernity sets in with its civilising and homogenising influences,

For Australians, this is wonderful country to explore. A land of mountain ranges and big rivers, of pioneering families like the Duracks and the MacDonnalds who carved out cattle kingdoms against

fire and flood and spear. And though the early stages of big developments are here, for a few years more it will remain untamed – Australia's last frontier, the Kimberleys.

The rhetoric employed in this film displays a similar trope of modernity to media portrayals of agriculture in the Ord Valley discussed in Chapter 5. It asserts that time is linear, it is running out, and modernisation represents an inevitable separation of the past from the future.⁵⁹

6.3.2 Tourism in the 1980s

During the mid 1980s, the numbers of international tourists visiting Australia increased by 25% per annum (Hall 1994: 139) making international tourists a more significant segment of the overall market than previously. Devaluation of the Australian dollar contributed to Australia's attractiveness as a destination. Governments around Australia began to focus more attention on tourism as a potential income earner (Craik 1991) and both State and Commonwealth governments inserted tourism into ministerial portfolios. With the development of the Argyle Diamond Mine in the early 1980s came an investment in roads and in facilities in the town of Kununurra. This infrastructure facilitated the mobility and comfort of tourists. Increasing numbers visited the area in their own vehicles. Four-wheel drive vehicles became increasingly popular throughout the 1980s and air-conditioning improved the comfort of driving in a tropical climate. The stretch of Highway One between Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek was finally sealed in 1986. Kununurra then became a logical stopover for the increasing numbers of tourists travelling between Darwin and Broome. Local tour operators began offering scenic flights over the Bungle Bungle ranges, about 200 km to the south of Kununurra from the early 1980s.

⁵⁹ Although the temporal dimension of modernity is most often addressed in the context of modern cities as in Benjamin's allusion to 'The Angel of History' (Benjamin 1973a), these films indicate its currency in developmentalist rhetoric in rural Australia.

In 1981 the Western Australian Department of Tourism employed a high profile photographer, Roger Garwood, to photograph the Bungle Bungle Range. These images were used to promote tourism in the Kimberley. In 1983 the Bungle Bungles were profiled in a television program called *Land of Timeless Beauty* (Australian Panoramic Series 1983). In 1984 a 'Nationwide' program screened by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) portrayed the concerns of Aboriginal groups about the Argyle Diamond Mine (Australian Broadcasting Commission 1984). This program showed dramatic footage taken from aerial flights over the Bungle Bungles and interviewed Kununurra tourism operator, Greggor McQuie. He spoke of the aesthetic values of the area and the need to protect it as a national park.

Table 4 summarises the dates of formation of national parks throughout the Kimberley that are now key tourist attractions. The unsealed Gibb River Road began to be promoted in four-wheel drive magazines during the 1980s. It became a tourist attraction in its own right, attracting increasing numbers of rough-road tourists. In the East Kimberley, three key national parks created in during the 1980s provided a focus for nature-based tourism. Mirima National Park on the outskirts of Kununurra (formerly known as 'Hidden Valley') was gazetted in 1982. The Keep River National Park, 100km to the east of Kununurra on the Northern Territory side of the state border, was gazetted in 1981, and Purnululu National Park (formerly known as the Bungle Bungles), 160km to the south of Kununurra, was gazetted in 1987 (Fig 37).

Table 4. Dates for gazettal of national parks in the Kimberley

Geike Gorge National Park	1967
Windjana Gorge National Park	1971
Drysdale River National Park	1974
Keep River National Park	1981
Mirima National Park	1982
Purnululu National Park	1987

During the 1980s, developments in Aboriginal arts and crafts expanded the range of materials available for purchase by tourists. In 1986 Waringarri Arts and Crafts was formed by Joel Smoker from Fitzroy Crossing, as a business of the Waringarri Aboriginal Resource Agency (interview Kevin Kelly, Kununurra, August 2001). It moved to the current premises on Speargrass Road near Kelly’s Knob in 1988, which provided a shop front for sales to tourists passing through Kununurra. Artworks on sale ranged from large acrylic or ochre paintings on stretched canvas to carved boab nuts or bead necklaces. Later, Kevin Kelly as coordinator at Waringarri Arts introduced local Aboriginal artists to printmaking techniques with the express purpose of creating an art medium more affordable for the tourist market than paintings.

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Figure 38. National Parks in North West Australia.

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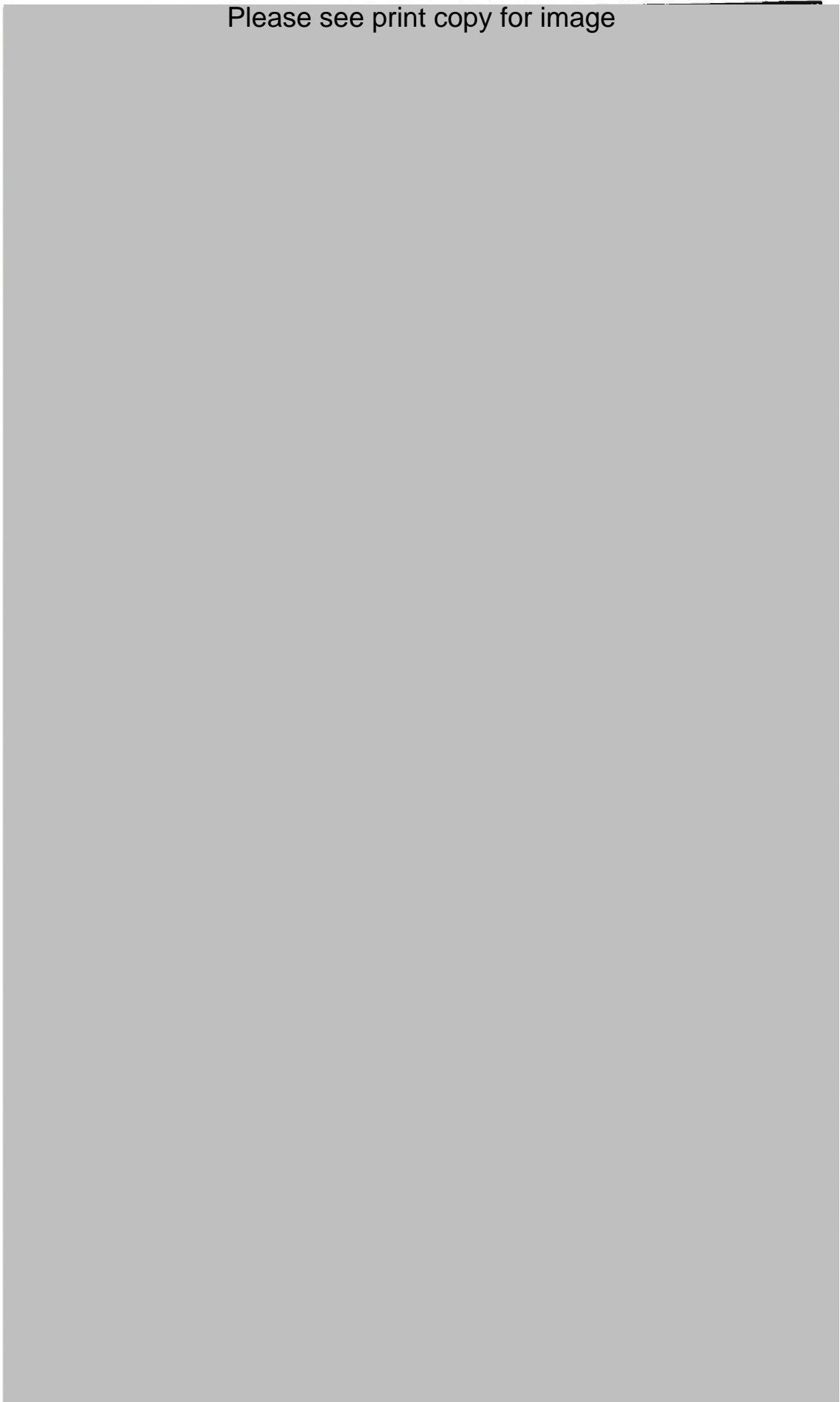


Figure 39. National parks and nature reserves in the East Kimberley

The emphasis of the expanding tourism market in the 1980s shifted from the focus on the Ord Irrigation Scheme and its infrastructure to the natural environment of the East Kimberley. The sealing of roads and the gazettal of new national parks assisted both the capacity and the motivation of tourists to visit the region. The new form of mobility permitted by four-wheel drive vehicles became part of the desired tourist experience. Nature became the primary focus, replacing the earlier emphasis on the irrigation area and dams. Media representations of Purnululu National Park portrayed a pristine wilderness rather than a pastoral frontier. Aboriginal perspectives received some coverage in public media and Aboriginal arts and crafts gained a specific niche as a commodity for tourists.

6.4 1990s tourism

Tourism continued to expand in the Kimberley during the 1990s. A study conducted in 1996 estimated that visitor numbers doubled between 1981-82 and 1994-95, and reached around 108,000 in 1997 (Focused Management 1998). The study estimated that future visitor numbers would grow by 5% per annum between 1997 and 2005. Over the same period the average length of stay was forecast to increase from 2.2 days to 3 days. This suggests an increase in visitor arrivals from 108,308 in 1997 to 160,020 in 2005. The study described the tourist profile as mainly comprised of transient (average stay of three nights), independent tourists who often tour in off-road vehicles during the dry season between May and October.

Throughout the 1990s Australian tourism segmented into specific market niches (Craik 1991, Hall 1994). In northern Australia, these included 'adventure tourism', 'ecotourism', and 'cultural tourism' – terms all used within the tourism industry. International tourism increased in proportion to domestic tourism, and backpacker accommodation developed in response to the increasing numbers of young international and domestic travellers on low

budgets or working holidays. These themes are all reflected in the kinds of tourism promotion and the products on offer in the East Kimberley.

In the late 1990s, a range of brochures and publications were available to guide tourists to sights and activities around Kununurra, the Ord River and its lakes, and further to the south in Purnululu National Park. Tours on offer included a boat ride on the Ord River, boat rides on Lake Argyle, scenic flights over the Bungle Bungles and guided walks through Mirima National Park. For the more adventurous, there were four wheel drive safaris to Purnululu National Park and along the Gibb River Road, canoe trips down the Ord River, bird watching tours at Parry's Lagoon nature reserve, barramundi fishing tours, abseiling, caving and horse riding. Most of these tours were marketed as 'ecotours' and promoted opportunities to view unique scenery and native plants and animals (Fig. 40). The only 'industry' tour on offer was a highly organised guided tour of the Argyle Diamond mine. Five caravan parks with camping grounds, two backpackers' lodges and various forms of motels or hotels were available to accommodate tourists.

The overwhelming emphasis in contemporary tourism promotional materials is on presenting the East Kimberley as a 'wilderness experience' and 'last frontier' (Lane and Waite 2001, Waite and Head 2002, Waite et al. in press). A report commissioned by the Kimberley Development Commission and the Western Australian Tourism Commission in 1997 characterised the market niche for the East Kimberley as 'nature-based tourism' (Focused Management 1998), and tourism operators working in Kununurra in 1999 confirmed this synopsis.

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Figure 40. Brochure obtained from the Kununurra Tourist Information Centre in 1999 promoting ecotourism in the Ord Valley.

In 1999 a new building was constructed to house the Kununurra Tourist Information Centre and souvenir shop. It also housed Kevin Kelly's 'Red Rock Art Gallery', which displayed and sold artworks by prominent East Kimberley Aboriginal artists. By 2001 the Red Rock Gallery had moved premises to another part of town, away from the town centre. In the main shopping centre in the town there were two other souvenir shops. All the souvenir shops stocked similar merchandise, which included postcards, books about the region (including novels by Mary Durack), souvenir printed clothing, polished pieces of locally quarried 'zebra rock', and Aboriginal artefacts such as carved boab nuts and painted didgeridoos and boomerangs. A shop dedicated to the sale of diamonds from the Argyle Diamond Mine marketed 'Argyle diamonds' to wealthier tourists.

Waringarri Arts and Crafts (Fig. 41) and the Red Rock Gallery (Fig. 42) were the two main retail outlets for Aboriginal art in the town. Each marketed the work of artists based in both Kununurra and Turkey Creek. While Waringarri is a community owned interest, the Red Rock Gallery is privately owned. Its owner, Kevin Kelly, worked as an arts coordinator for Waringarri, prior to establishing his own business. The most expensive paintings by well-known artists were in the order of \$10,000, and more likely to be purchased by galleries and museums than tourists. However a range of prints and smaller more portable works could be purchased for between \$200 and \$300. A visit to Red Rock Gallery in 2001 could include being ushered into the artists' studio and workshop at the back of the gallery to meet the artists and watch them work. Both galleries also sold smaller items such as carved boab nuts, paintings on slate and bead necklaces.



Figure 41. Waringarri Arts, Kununurra 1999.



Figure 42. Kevin Kelly at the Red Rock Gallery, Kununurra 2001.

The key tourist attractions within reach of Kununurra were national parks and nature reserves and the Ord River and its dams. Mirima National Park is the only park accessible to tourists staying in Kununurra without motor transport (Fig. 39). It is walking distance from both the backpacker establishments and adjoins the Hidden Valley Caravan Park and camping ground. Parry Lagoons Nature Reserve is approximately 20 km south of Wyndham and is accessible by a dirt road that comes off the sealed highway connecting Wyndham and Kununurra (Fig. 39). A boardwalk, bird watching hide, and shade shelters encourage visitors to attend to the waterbirds and look out for both fresh and salt-water crocodiles that inhabit the lagoon. Interpretive signage along the access road to Parry's Lagoon describes the pastoral history of the area, noting that it was the main stock route and holding paddock for cattle en route to the abattoir at Wyndham and was heavily eroded as a consequence. However, the lure for tourists is clearly the wetland viewing area. Both Lake Argyle and Parry Lagoons have been listed as 'wetlands of international importance' under the Ramsar Convention.



Figure 43. Distinctive 'beehive' rock formations in Purnululu National Park, 1999.

Purnululu National Park (Fig. 43), approximately 200 km south of Kununurra, is only accessible by off-road vehicles (Fig. 38). The rough roads are unsealed and several creek crossings must be negotiated to reach any of the camping areas. A number of tour operators in Kununurra offer specialist four-wheel drive camping tours to Purnululu. This is the main way that backpacking tourists access the park. Four-wheel drive vehicles can be hired in Kununurra by those on less stringent budgets. Scenic flights depart from both Kununurra and Turkey Creek to fly tourists over the impressive honeycomb-like rock formations that make Purnululu so distinctive. They pass over every few hours during peak season and are visible and audible to tourists exploring the ranges on foot, and to Aboriginal people residing within the park and at settlements near Turkey Creek (Warmun) (Fig. 38).

The Keep River National Park may be accessed by most vehicles throughout the dry season (Fig. 39). There are several camping grounds within the park and extensive interpretive signage and trails have been developed featuring detailed information about geology, flora, fauna, Aboriginal history and pastoral history. Specific trails guide tourists to

rock art sites, some of which have been interpreted with the assistance of Aboriginal people associated with the area (Fig. 44). The park encompasses land that had once been part of Newry Station and interpretive signs explain this part of its history.



Figure 44. Rock art site with interpretive signage. Keep River National Park, 2001.

6.5 1990s Tourism Operators

Gail Eastaway, manager of the Kununurra Tourist Information Centre at the time of my fieldwork, explained that the number of tour operators had remained much the same in the nine years since she first came to Kununurra. Some businesses had changed hands or folded up but new ones had started. The main change was in the amount of choice now available, with many operators offering ecotourism and adventure tourism as well as more standard boat tours. She stressed the significance of media publicity, particularly television travel programs. Like most of the tourism operators I spoke with, she felt that this publicity was far more important in attracting tourists than any marketing conducted by local businesses.



Figure 45. Jenny and Jeff Hayley of Triangle Tours, Kununurra, 1999.

Jenny and Jeff Hayley (Fig. 45) run scenic boat tours on the stretch of the Ord River between the dams, mainly catering to older domestic tourists doing bus tours or travelling by caravan. They moved to Kununurra from Geraldton in 1986 when Jeff Hayley was employed there as Post Master. They began their tourism enterprise in 1988 in collaboration with Jenny's brother Jamie, building it up slowly and learning as they went. They explained that since 1988, the ratio of tourists arriving by car and caravan, aeroplane and bus, had remained the same. However the numbers of tourists visiting Kununurra had nearly doubled in that time, increasing from about 70,000 in 1988 to about 120,000 in 1999. They described the appeal of the physical environment to them to be centred in the water and the open spaces and also spoke highly of it as a healthy social and economic environment by comparison with other towns they knew -

[Jeff]: Oh well, like I love the environment here. Like I like the wide open spaces, I like going out whether it be in the four wheel drive or in a boat and the fact that you won't see anyone all day. It's pristine environment - like it's totally unpolluted and I believe it's a good place to bring up kids.

[Jenny]: It's very, very – not so much the environment, but the town is very young and vibrant. Um, it has a lot going for it and when the southern states are suffering from declines in their economic position, we're sort of hanging in there and it's a good feeling about the place. It helps you conquer the weather [laughs] (Jenny and Jeff Hayley, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

The seasonal influx of tourists between June and August has a huge impact on the population and demographic characteristics of the East Kimberley. Tourism operators do most of their business during this period as Jenny and Jeff Hayley explained,

It's very hard work in the three months of the tourist season [but] I won't get started on that [laughs]. I have problems – you know this total shutdown of – it's just work, nothing else you can do. You just survive for those three months [laughs], when it peaks out but – And you've got to do it. You've got to earn every cracker you can to get yourselves through the long off season, so –

[Jeff]: That's right . . . between November and March, we'd be doing about seven percent of our turnover. So yeah, you've got – whereas like in that peak three months, the June, July, August, you're probably doing about 65 percent of your turnover, so yeah, it's – that's when the pressure's on (Jenny and Jeff Hayley, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

The seasonal tourist influx coincides with the fruit-picking season and tourism operators, particularly those running backpacker accommodation, are keenly aware of this relationship,

The farmers rely on the backpacker industry to get that fruit out of the ground – there's hundreds of jobs. Some farmers can go through 400 staff in a year. . . . Beginning of the season when they're screaming for work, they're upping their hourly rate. At the end of the season when they're screaming for workers, they up their hourly rate but when it's full-on, it's only about 10 bucks an hour, less 15 per cent tax because it's seasonal work. But that means that somebody who does seven days a week, can still earn good money if they're doing 10 to 12 hour days (Kenton May, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

Some farmers posted job advertisements in backpacker magazines, and on notice boards in the backpacker premises.



Figure 46. The Desert Inn Backpackers, Kununurra, 1999.

Lynne Bunney set up The Desert Inn, the first backpackers' accommodation in Kununurra, in 1990 (Fig. 46). The second backpackers opened in the same year. She explained that initially, most tourists would simply use Kununurra as an overnight stop over, but now they are more likely to stay longer and do tours. She emphasised the significance of television documentaries in raising public awareness of the East Kimberley as a tourist destination. Consequently, more people have now heard of the East Kimberley and seen film and photographs of its spectacular scenery. She describes the tours she runs as follows,

Um, well with Desert Inn [laughs] and Desert Inn Four Wheel Drive, we offer two and three day Bungles trips - and they're overnight camping tours. More sort of for the adventure market. Um, we say on our brochure that it's not necessarily for the under thirties because we don't really care, as long as people are fit and they're quite happy to get out and have a camping and sort of adventure-type tour.

And we do a five-day, Gibb River Road tour this year. Um, that last year was combined with the Bungles as a six-day, but we're doing them separately now. So, the five day, Gibb River Road trip goes from Kununurra to Broome, or reverse from Broome to here. And that covers all the gorges and it's a fairly adventurous, active tour as well (Lynne Bunney, Kununurra, 18 March 1999).



Figure 47. Kenton May at the Kununurra Backpackers, Kununurra, 1999.

Kenton May (Fig. 47) first visited Kununurra in 1989 because his brother had heard about the Bungle Bungles in the early 1980s and wanted to see them. They took a scenic flight over the area and were very impressed. Later, Kenton moved to Kununurra in 1996 with

his brother and his brother's wife. Together they purchased the second backpackers and developed a thriving adventure tour business. Kenton explained the attraction of Kununurra as lying in its frontier location and consequent appeal to adventurers and ecotourists.

I suppose when we found out that the backpackers was for sale, we liked the idea that it wasn't one of a hundred backpackers in Sydney or one of 30 in Adelaide. It was one of two in a last frontier area, dealing with the people that wanted to be in that area - adventurer, eco-tourist, that type of thing (Kenton May, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

He described their clientele as primarily international tourists on their second or third visit to Australia,

In a nutshell, a lot of them are, they've done their first tour of Australia and they've drunk their VBs⁶⁰ up and down the east coast. All right, they've gone to the main attractions; probably slipped around Melbourne; Adelaide; up to Ayers Rock; probably done Darwin and Kakadu. But the west coast, the Kimberley, right down to Perth, etc, is a lot of the time, their second or third visit to Australia. So, they're now concentrating on doing that west and doing it well – and they're pleasantly surprised you know, because of the pristine coastlines, beaches, etc. It's not built-up as yet (Kenton May, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

He described the backpacking tourists as a mixture of three distinct groups, those who came seeking fruit picking work, ecotourists and others breaking the journey between Broome and Darwin. Their adventure tourism business catered for the ecotourists,

And for those people we provide our three day self-guided canoe safaris. We provide just afternoon canoe hires – it all depends on the time frames they have. And two day, three day, or four day Bungles trips. And then of course, others that will promote as well. You know, if we can't put them on our tour, we'll definitely promote somebody else's – but obviously we're in business [laughs]. Putting bums on seats is what we're trying to do – and in beds I suppose (Kenton May, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

⁶⁰ 'Victoria Bitter' beer



Figure 48. Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 1999.

Andrew McEwan (Fig. 48) came to the Ord in 1996 to set up a charter fishing operation for tourists. He grew up in Armidale, NSW, and moved up to the Northern Territory to work as a fishing guide. Prior to coming to Kununurra he worked at Bathurst Island at a barramundi fishing camp geared for tourists. He recalled first hearing about Kununurra in geography lessons at school and also from Harry Butler's 'In the Wild' program, of which he was an avid fan. He described his first impressions of the Ord as follows,

Um, when I first came, I think seeing the amount of fresh water they had, I was very impressed – I thought it was marvellous, I thought it was wonderful. And being a person that loves being on the water in the fishing side of things, when I saw the Ord, I was really impressed because it's just a marvellous environment. It's constant fresh flowing water and heaps of fish, which is obviously what you look at from a fishing guide's perspective – and it was pretty easy to fish too, so my first impressions were great (Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

In his fishing tours he tries to cater for those interested in nature and photography as well as specialist fishing interests,

We basically – we can offer something for everybody. I mean I try to – the guys that I employ, I try to make sure they're very fluent with their bird life – and they're not afraid to say when they don't know something or carry a reference book with them. And we push that side of the flora and fauna. So there's your bird watchers, and I'm very shortly about to go into a wholly, solely eco-tour as well. So there's that side of things we offer. So a day on the water fishing, is always very much an eco-tour at the same time – for photographers, bird watchers, crocodile watchers, or just general nature lovers, or scenery lovers, it's all there. Plus, we've got – I mean I've been doing, guiding for a long time. I

can cater for an American fly fisherman who comes over and wants to solely book a boat and fish hard on fly. Where you know, we've got the expertise that can cater for that sort of market (Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

Fishing tours may incorporate an overnight stay at a bungalow on the river bank at Carlton Reach, below the Diversion Dam. When asked about the profiles of his clients he explained that they were primarily domestic tourists and outlined several categories,

Obviously there's the – you know the classic example for overnightriders we get are your wealthier farmers, businessmen, 40s – You know, 35 to sort of 55, that'll come up in groups and travel together and they'll do their sort of male bonding thing so to [laughs] speak, for a couple of days out at the camp. That's one group of clientele. There's an executive market, which we certainly get a little bit of. And they can come from El Questro Homestead – they fly in and do tours with me. I'm starting on an American executive tour hopefully this year. And there's a few Australians that you get that are certainly up in that style of market. Then there's your day-trippers, which are your average retiree. There's a lot of older people and the sort of people who are travelling around the countryside in their caravan, and that's mainly in the middle of the year, basically from May till the end of July. You get a lot of them. And then there's – there's a lot of the younger couples who have worked hard and are travelling around and – you know, single guys and often just young couples. So there's a big range of it that you see, but they're the sort of groups. And those people are from all over Australia. A lot from New South Wales, Victoria and that sort of area – and Perth ... (Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

The common themes that link all these tourism operators in their enthusiasm for the East Kimberley are water, open space, a relaxed lifestyle, and a sense of being on the frontier. In developing tours, they incorporated experiences that they themselves enjoyed. They were particularly conscious of the growing market niche for nature-focused or 'ecotourism' and developed products with this in mind.

6.4.1 Values and aesthetics

All the tourism operators I interviewed were conscious of increasing environmental pressures associated with increasing tourist numbers. Lynne Bunney had joined with two other tourism operators to form a group called 'Kimberley Specialists in Tourism'. Its purpose is to lobby for better infrastructure and improved environmental practices in the industry,

And we can see the impact of the growing numbers and yeah, there really isn't anything – There's things happening but they're just – it's a problem now. Like it's a really big problem and we have to – We felt that if we started taking on some of the issues and doing some management plans and those sorts of things - and perhaps working with some of those organisations that should be involved [laughs], we can get things done a bit faster on a private level. And we can also – by the accreditation

that we're setting up, hopefully that will influence more of the tour guides that are out there. Most people are okay, but you still – you know once you get out bush, some people think they're a law unto themselves. And by having that sort of accreditation there, those people that are involved in it will become more responsible and professional (Lynne Bunney, Kununurra, 18 March 1999).

In particular, they were concerned about the lack of a service infrastructure along the Gibb River Road, which was used by increasing numbers of four-wheel drive tourists.

But a few years ago, I pulled up with a group of people and – at this little spot that we've been camping at for a while and we couldn't even lay our swags out. There was just like [pause] – um, dunny mines everywhere and toilet paper. And there's no way I was going to lay my swag out anywhere there [laughs] (Lynne Bunney, Kununurra, 18 March 1999).

Concerns also arose about the impacts of fires lit by tourists -

Also, fires, people having fires and tourists have been found with – where they've been camping and fires have been still alight. And that's really dangerous out in that country. So it's an education thing, as well as an infrastructure thing that needs to be looked at (Lynne Bunney, Kununurra, 18 March 1999).

Lynne Bunney and another tour operator, Lee Scott-Virtue, together initiated a fire forum in February 1999. Invited speakers addressed tourism operators on a range of issues relating to fire in the East Kimberley landscape.

Jenny and Jeff Hayley also voiced concerns about the Gibb River Road and about increasing tourist numbers generally. Jenny had been involved with the Kimberley Tourism Association over a number of years,

[Jenny] So yeah, it – I suppose my other concern is the – in years to come, the Kimberley won't be able to handle the number of tourists that are going to come to the area. Already we're having problems along the Gibb River Road, where there's no infrastructure, to cater for the people going along there. And basically people are – or tourists are doing the Gibb River Road trip and saying: 'What a horrible experience.' Yeah, there's too many people out there - there's no toilet facilities, no infrastructure. And that's the thing that worries me, is that tourism is going ahead too quickly (Jenny and Jeff Hayley, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

Jeff Hayley speculated about how they could raise money for improving facilities by placing a toll on the use of the road. Jenny had tried lobbying for this at meetings of the Kimberley Tourism Association but felt there was too much resistance to the idea. They saw a need to strike a compromise between the numbers of tourists and maintaining the quality of the tourism experience,

[Jeff]: See, it's a bit like our Bungle Bungles. Like the Bungle Bungles can go in two directions. They can put a sealed road into the Bungle Bungles with a five star motel in there and open it up to the masses, or they can leave it as it is and put a quota on the number of people going in there. Because if you open it up to the masses, it means you're going to have to have walkways going up into the gorges, so people stick to the defined track. So yeah, there's— The Kimberley's at that point now where we've really got to look to the future as far as tourism goes, because we don't want to make the same mistakes that have been made like in Kakadu for example. Um, where a lot of people are coming through here and they [are] calling it Kaka-don't, which is unfortunate because Kakadu is spectacular in its own right (Jenny and Jeff Hayley, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

Kenton May confirmed that tourists enjoy the experience of seeing beautiful places without having to deal with crowds of other tourists,

Is it growing too fast? I don't know. I don't think we're a Cairns or a Darwin yet, and I'd hate to see it go the way of a Darwin, where you've got forty operators trying to get into the Bungles. There's nothing better than taking someone to somewhere that is a public viewing spot, on sunset, but nobody else is around. And when we do our trips out to the waterfalls and stuff on the day tour, one of the great satisfactions is rocking up to all these places when everyone else has gone, or arriving when [they're] just leaving – so the guests have had it to themselves (Kenton May, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

Andrew McEwan was particularly sensitive to environmental impacts of recreational fishing,

Tourism can be very damaging I suppose in a lot of ways. Managed correctly, I don't think you've got too many problems. Unless it's a resource that can be depleted, such as a fish or something like that, there's where, to me – To me with tourism I mean, your problems are sort of access and how the environment can be debilitated by too much access - and pressure on stocks (Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

He has been involved in lobbying for bag limits to regulate the size and numbers of fish that can be taken from the Ord River,

Fish, um, it's probably your only commodity that's actually taken sort of, that are directly under threat from tourism. And in this particular area, we're – we have a committee, that reports back to the Minister, basically and we're able to put in a bag limit a couple of years ago, which makes us unique on the Ord River. It's only – you're only a possession limit of one fish per person, at any one time, which is a very harsh bag limit - it's normally five. And we put an upper size limit on the barramundi because all large barra are female and potential breeders. And so there's an upper size limit of 80 centimetres and the standard lower size limit stayed in place (Andrew McEwan, Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

Lynne Bunney's views about regulating the numbers of tourists, managing the impacts, and keeping a particular focus on what she regards as the wilderness qualities of the region, seemed to echo those expressed by other tourism operators I interviewed. They all seemed keen to develop and maintain a tourism niche which they described using the terms

‘ecotourism’, ‘adventure tourism’, and ‘wilderness experiences’. They preferred to regulate the numbers of tourists rather than compromise the unique quality of the tourist experience in the East Kimberley,

... I'd like to see the Kimberley really attracting – marketing and promoting itself as a wilderness adventure destination. And therefore, you would market the kind of people that would appreciate what is here, rather than attracting the bulk and any kind of tourist, if you know what I mean. You know – yeah. And that way, we would be able to keep the Kimberley more natural. Because those kinds of people won't expect 5-star accommodation out on the Gibb River Road, they will expect it's an adventure wilderness destination and if they've just got a cabin with a fan and flyscreening around it, then so be it [laughs] (Lynne Bunney, Kununurra, 18 March 1999).

6.5 1990s tourists

6.5.1 Demographic characteristics of tourists

The demographic characteristics of the tourists sampled are shown in Table 5. Other than a slight under representation among persons in the 35-44 age cohort (28 or 8%) due perhaps to the survey coinciding with the school-term, the sample was evenly divided by age, sex and education. Respondents were primarily Australian (62.1%), almost evenly distributed between the states of Victoria (18%), New South Wales (18%) and Western Australia (17%). Most of the overseas tourists were from the UK (21.3%) or Europe (8.7%) with smaller numbers from Japan (2.1%), Canada (2.1%) and New Zealand (1.5%). Their occupations were diverse, including retirees wintering in northern Australia, student/backpackers often seeking seasonal employment, unemployed ‘explorers’ travelling around Australia, as well as those in various categories of paid and unpaid employment on more conventional long term vacations. The income profile is notable for the absence of high-income earners. This is explained by our focus on caravan parks and backpackers accommodation for sampling. However Kununurra lacks the luxury accommodation available at centres such as Broome and Darwin.

Table 5. Respondents' demographic characteristics (reproduced from Waitt et al. in press)

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6.5.2 Holiday-maker classification

Most of the tourists surveyed identified themselves as independent travellers who set their own travel agenda. Of the fifteen options for holiday-maker classification provided in the questionnaire, the three most frequently checked by respondents were 'Independent Tourist', 'Explorer' and 'Escapist' (Table 6). The majority of respondents arrived by car or four-wheel drive vehicle (78.2%) with a lesser number, predominantly backpackers, travelling by bus (13.5%).

Table 6. Top three holiday-maker classifications derived from respondents' rank order of importance

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Generally caravan parks or camping grounds had a different social ambience to the backpackers' accommodation. Those travelling with caravans and campervans were primarily older domestic tourists, in many cases retirees. Sometimes I encountered a group who had met at a different caravan park and were synchronising their travel schedule as they enjoyed one another's company. However there were many husband and wife couples who appeared to keep to themselves. A number of British and European tourists with hired campervans were also staying in caravan parks. They were more likely to be older than backpacking tourists, and to be travelling in couples rather than singly.

The ambience of the backpackers was very much one of young international tourists embarked on an adventure. In the mornings and evenings they traded information about places they had been, tours they had participated in and accommodation in different towns. I met various long-term residents at the backpackers who were working picking fruit. These people sometimes formed friendships among themselves and kept a little apart from

those who were just passing through. At the larger of the two backpackers, tourists were encouraged to participate in various local festivities, including a boat race between the two dams and the Kununurra 'Mardi-Gras' Parade, an annual festival that had originated to celebrate the cotton harvest and had since developed as more of a country show. While there were carnivalesque elements, particularly surrounding the involvement of backpacking tourists, some of whom cross-dressed for the occasion, it was generally a rather ordered event.⁶¹ Some backpacking tourists who arrived by bus stayed at camping grounds, the cheapest available accommodation. At one point I was invited to join a group of these campers who were having a communal drinking session in the evening. They were a mix of international and Australian travellers who were all working picking fruit. They wished to make money and live cheaply. The hard work of the day was followed by an unwinding session in the evenings.

The mobility allowed by vehicles may in part explain the self-identifications as 'independent tourists', 'explorer' and 'escapist'. Many of the tourists sampled engaged actively with the local environment, through camping, fishing or canoeing trips. In tourism studies literature, a distinction is made between the category of 'traveller' defined as one who engages actively with people and places they encounter, and 'tourist', used to describe more passive experiences such as those provided by guided tours with a prescribed itinerary (Cohen 1979, Buzard 1993). The survey respondents more closely fitted the category of traveller, as they made their own travel arrangements. The majority spent no more than three days in Kununurra, and some only stopped overnight while driving between the more prominent tourist destinations of Broome and Darwin (Kenton May pers. comm. 1999).

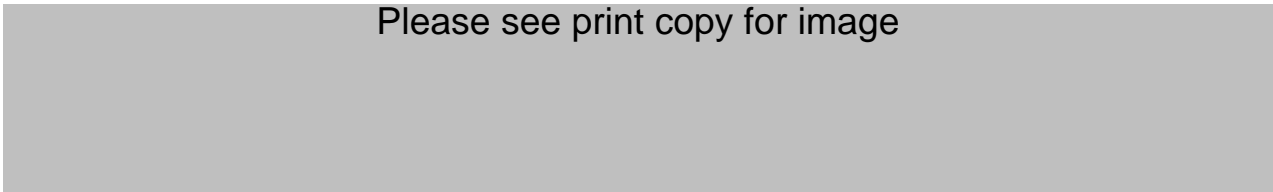
⁶¹ I witnessed two of these festivals, one in 1998 and one in 1999.

6.5.3 Holiday Motivation

Analysis of responses to the Holiday Motivation section of the questionnaire identified four motivations as equally important for the decision to travel to the Kimberley. They were -

- to develop relationships
- to be stimulated
- to relax and
- to develop self-esteem (see Table 8).

Table 8. Respondents' mean motivation scores for visiting the Kimberley by order of importance (reproduced from Waitt et al. in press). The mean motivation score was calculated by averaging respondents' scores on an attitudinal Likert scale for several questions, where 1 is strongly disagree and 6 is strongly agree.



Statistical tests (Wilks Lambda) described in Waitt, Lane and Head (in press) suggested that sex, age and occupation influenced differences in motivation. For example, women were more likely to be motivated by the desire for discovery and adventure. A Bonferroni-Dunn post hoc test suggested three distinct categories of motivation by age. Those aged between 18 and 34 years were more likely than others to be motivated by a desire to test their physical abilities. Those between 35 and 54 years of age were more likely to be motivated by a desire to relax. The eldest group, aged over 55 years, was more likely than others to be motivated by a desire to gain a sense of self-esteem and fulfilment (Waitt et al. in press). Across all groups however, the desire to develop relationships with friends, partners and others appeared as the most important motivation. Social relationships with fellow tourists formed a key part of their desired experience of tourism.

6.5.4 Sources of information

Table 9. Sources of information about the Kimberley (reproduced from Waitt, Lane and Head (in press). Information sources were ranked according to the scale: Rank 1 (very important), Rank 2 (slightly important) and Rank 3 (not important).

Respondents' information sources by rank order of importance

Please see print copy for image

Travel books/Guides as tourist information sources by respondents' rank order of importance between domestic and international tourists

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Television as a tourist information source by respondent's rank order of importance between domestic and international tourists

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Table 9 shows that the main sources relied on for information about the Kimberley were guidebooks, especially *The Lonely Planet Guide* (14%). Learning from another person was also important. Among domestic tourists, television was also a principal information source, especially travel programs such as *Getaway* (8%) and *The Malcolm Douglas Adventure Series* and serialised documentaries such as *The Bushtucker Man*. International travellers, by contrast, were more likely to have obtained information about the Kimberley from guide books than from television programs, the most widely consulted books being *The Lonely Planet Guide to Australia* (Finlay 1998), *The Rough Guide to Australia* (Daly et al. 1993) and *The Kimberley – An Adventurer's Guide* (Moon and Moon 1997).

6.5.5 Personal constructs of tourists

As described in the Methods section of this chapter, results of the personal construct component of the survey are presented in the form of repertory grid. Grids from all respondents were then combined to form the supergrid shown in Figure 49. Tourist attractions form elements within the supergrid that are distributed in accordance with the cognitive set common to all respondents. Waitt, Lane and Head (in press) provide a more in depth description of the statistical solution used to construct the supergrid.

Within the configuration of this abstract space, distances between the point elements correspond to the aggregate personal constructs used in differentiating between tourist attractions. We then labelled the dimensions of the grid based on our interpretation of tourists' conceptual structures. The loadings on the first dimension suggested a pattern in perception of tourist attractions that differentiated 'domesticated' from 'natural' places. We therefore labelled the x-axis 'domesticated-natural'. The second dimension suggested a distinction between 'familiar' and 'alien' experiences. We chose to label the y-axis 'safe-danger', accordingly. These two bipolar dimensions explained a high proportion of the variance in all grids. The thirteen tourist attractions depicted in the questionnaire were widely distributed across the area of 2-dimensional space, indicating that the key evaluative constructs forming the dimensions of the supergrid effectively described the range of perceptions of tourism promotional imagery.

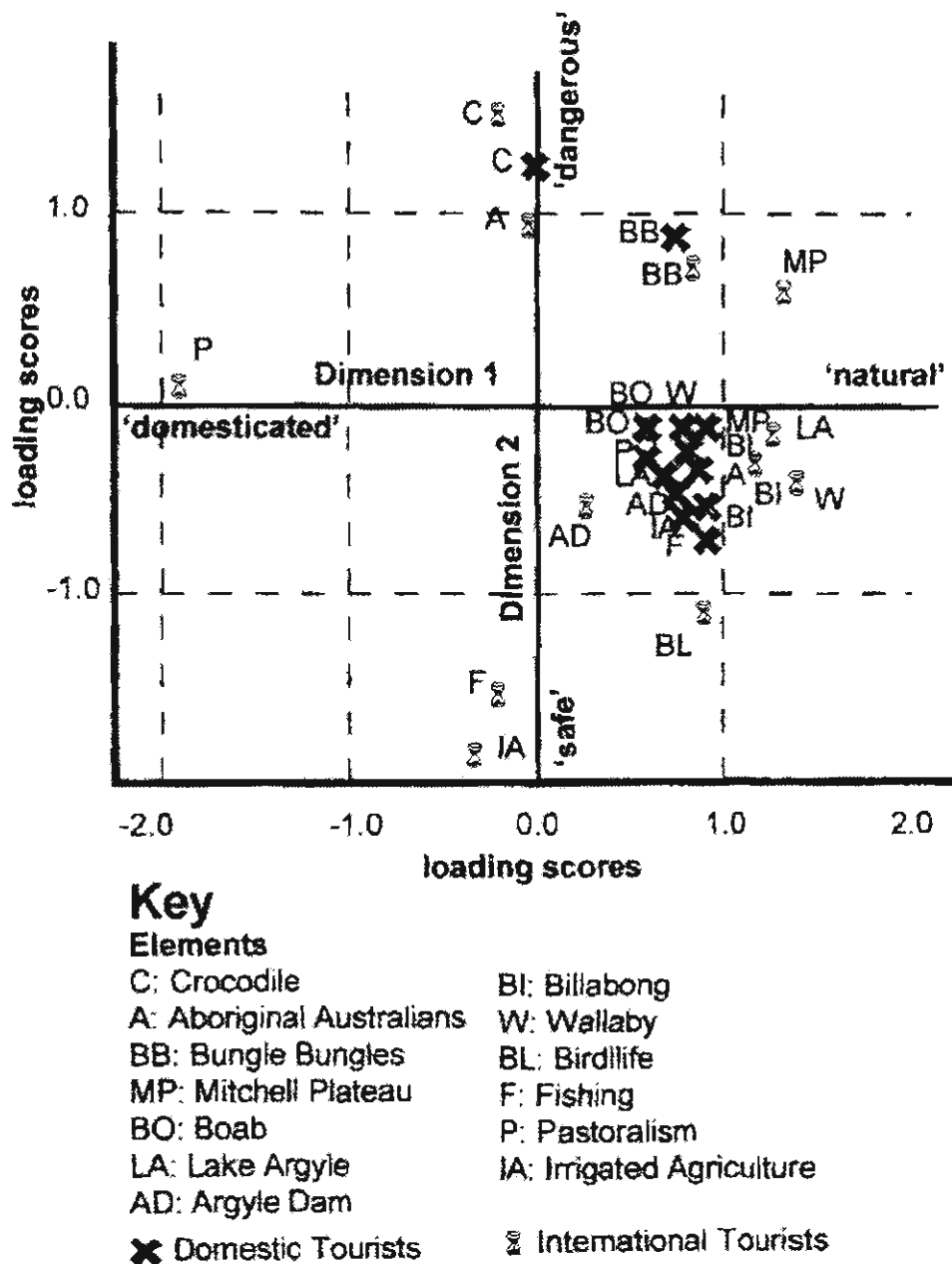


Figure 49. Responses to tourist attractions mapped onto the repertory grid.

Given the emphasis on wilderness and adventure in contemporary tourism promotional materials, our analysis of these results was concerned with understanding how concepts of wilderness and adventure framed the way in which tourists perceived different aspects of their surroundings. Distances among the tourist attraction elements suggested that irrigated

agriculture was perceived differently from the Argyle Dam, which was in turn perceived differently from both the Bungle Bungles and the Aboriginal corroboree. However, certain point elements clustered together, suggesting a common cognitive set. For example, the Argyle Dam, Lake Argyle, billabong and wallaby shared the cognitive sets defined by the dimensions of 'natural' and 'safety'. Both irrigated agriculture and fishing shared the cognitive sets of 'domesticated' and 'safety'. Finally, the Mitchell Plateau and the Bungle Bungles shared a common cognitive set of 'natural' and 'adventure'.

These results suggest that the nature-focus in tourism marketing of the East Kimberley has resulted in tourists perceiving the two dams constructed for the Ord Irrigation Scheme, Lake Argyle and Lake Kununurra, as timeless wilderness, despite their recent human origin. By contrast, the farmlands that are serviced by these dams are perceived as a domesticated agricultural landscape. These findings are supported by a recent study of ecotourism at Fogg Dam in the Northern Territory (Ryan et al. 2000). As with Lake Argyle, the predominantly domestic tourists surveyed at Fogg Dam seemed oblivious of the human origin of Fogg Dam as part of a failed rice-growing scheme and appraised it as natural and timeless.

My experiences as a participant observer of tourists taking boat tours on both Lake Kununurra and Lake Argyle suggested that the presence of large expanses of still water connected with a pre-existing aesthetic among tourists. They commented on the serenity of the water and reflections, and observed the contrast between the densely vegetated waters edge and the dry rocky hills visible in the distance. For tourists, the presence of water was experienced as though it was an oasis in a desert. It was a source of adventure too, because it allowed tourists to visit places they could not otherwise reach by car. Tour guides pointed

out wildlife, particularly birds and the occasional fresh-water crocodile, and provided information about the construction of the dams. On the Lake Argyle boat tour, tourists were encouraged to jump off the boat and swim in the lake while a considerable distance from the shore. This was clearly a new and enjoyable sensation for the tourists I observed.

Since the 1980s, the spillways, reservoirs, diversion dams and wetlands have been marketed as an integral part of the Kimberley's 'wilderness experience'. Waitt, Lane and Head (in press) argue that by portraying the lakes as wilderness and natural beauty, tourism operators have promoted them as a setting for exploration and adventure, sport fishing, wildlife viewing, and romantic sunset tours.

6.6 Conclusion

Tourism has introduced new forms of mobility into the East Kimberley, along with a land interest that is based on emotional and aesthetic responses to place. Whereas tourism in the 1960s and '70s was limited to bus tours of the farmlands and boat tours on Lake Kununurra and Lake Argyle, by the 1980s tourists were becoming far more mobile and autonomous. This was largely facilitated by improvements in roads and vehicles and the creation of national parks. It reflected developments in tourism at both national and international scales. Tourists surveyed in 1999 classified themselves as 'independent tourists', 'explorers' and 'escapists'. Their social identifications as tourists seemed closely connected with the experience of mobility they shared with fellow travellers.

While tourism marketing since the 1960s has promoted the Kimberley as 'the last frontier', representations of the frontier have changed. In the 1960s the frontier was mainly associated with pastoralism. Aboriginal people were portrayed to tourists within that context. Tourism marketing in the 1960s and '70s promoted a trope of modernity in which

places such as the Kimberley were seen as destined for irreversible change associated with urbanisation and industrialisation, and emphasised the need to visit before it was too late. However, in the 1990s the landscape was promoted as timeless. In highlighting the wilderness qualities of the natural environment, little reference is made to pastoralists or to Aboriginal people. Even major human influences such as Lake Argyle are perceived as a pristine wilderness or a natural oasis. Far from being threatened by these changes, tourism promoters seemed to appropriate major landscape changes into place-images of timeless wilderness (Waitt 1999, Head 1999). They considered the presence of large bodies of still water to enhance the wilderness experience by creating an oasis that attracts both waterbirds and tourists. In the late 1990s, the frontier is promoted as a remote place that lies outside of time, providing an antithesis to urban places. In these portrayals, time is not running out but standing still.

By contrast with both Aboriginal and farming land interests, the land interest associated with tourism is more strongly influenced by representations of place than by the fleeting material engagements of tourists with the East Kimberley. However, it clearly has impacts on the local environment. The personal constructs of 1990s tourists suggest that they had to some extent internalised the imagery of timeless wilderness promoted in guidebooks and television programs about the Kimberley. They sought an experience of an authentic nature and an essential or 'outback' Australia. The East Kimberley appealed as a place of relaxation existing within a different time zone. This experience contrasted greatly with their predominantly urban lives in which the pace of living and of technologically induced change is a source of stress.

PART III

CONTEMPORARY PLACE-MAKING PROCESSES

Chapter 7: Introduction to Part III

My argument is that borders in space and place are tied up with social boundaries (the formation of identity and its complement, the production of difference) but that there are multiple grids of difference and complex and varied links between place and identity formation. It is important to understand these processes of boundary formation in order to create opportunities for imagined and actual alliances across them (Pratt 1998: 27).

Having demonstrated the fluid nature of social identities and spatial practices in relation to the development of different land interests over time in Part II of my thesis, this third part focuses on the contemporary place-making processes that framed my historical enquiries at the outset. Like Pratt, in the quote cited above, my aim is to understand how to recognise and engage with the dynamic relationship between place and social identities in planning processes.

I approach this by analysing some of the ways in which contemporary place-making processes intersect with the life-worlds of individuals as expressed through memory, self-identifications, emotions and aesthetics, and the material engagements of individuals with specific places. I maintain my focus on mobility as a materially grounded and embodied experience of place (Merleau-Ponty 1962) as it highlights some critical differences between the motives of tourists, farmers and Aboriginal people for travelling in the East Kimberley and provides some comprehension of the diversity of experiences within these categories. The place-making processes I describe each have consequences for mobility and access to land in the region, and they help to demonstrate the manner in which subjects and places are constituted through relationships between interests at local, national and global scales.

7.1 Land interests and symbolic capital

I now return to the concept of 'land interest' to explore its utility in understanding contemporary spatial politics. In Bourdieu's work, the term 'interest' signals an intentional strategy employed to better position the user within a specific field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). While his purpose is to highlight the presence of the economic sphere within the cultural sphere, it has the effect of presenting an overly economistic view of society in which the strategies of the market provide models for other aspects of social practice (Alexander 1995, Sayer 1999). Anderson expresses her desire that,

Systems of signification (such as those surrounding race) and economic and political structures of inequality are taken as being thoroughly interdependent, and there is a refusal to oppose the positions of culture and economy (Anderson 1998: 201).

I share Anderson's concerns and my use of the term 'interest' is consequently much broader than that of Bourdieu. It consciously embraces both cultural and material aspects of the experience of place.

Bourdieu's concept of 'symbolic capital' provides a useful tool for understanding iterative processes in which representations, practices and interests contribute to either change or continuity, within an always-emerging politics of land ownership, use, and management. It encapsulates the notion that knowledge and status can accumulate like capital. This recognition that capital can assume different forms that deliver different resources to the holder is integral to Bourdieu's theory of power. He stresses the cultural and symbolic aspects of power that manifest in relations of dominance and subordination. Bourdieu also maintains that symbolic capital can be converted into other forms of capital (Painter 2000).

In Chapter 8 I concentrate on 'authenticity' as a form of symbolic capital operating in both tourism and Native Title. I explore the capacity for Aboriginal people and tourism

operators to influence the way in which authenticity is understood through an examination of their ideas and motivations for Aboriginal cultural tourism. In Chapter 9 I focus on the concept of the 'Project Area' proposed by the Wesfarmers-Marubeni Consortium as an approach to the construction of the second stage of the Ord Irrigation Scheme. Here I examine the responses of Aboriginal people and Ord Valley farmers to the proposal and speculate on the likely response of tourists. The notion of the Project Area put forward in the Draft ERMP/EIS document promotes 'productivity' and 'sustainability' as key forms of symbolic capital that justify why the scheme should proceed. I argue that the legal concepts of Aboriginal Land Rights and Native Title introduce new dimensions into place-making processes, and generate a new form of symbolic capital associated with continuity of Aboriginal cultural traditions and relationships with place. In both chapters I analyse how this new form of symbolic capital intersects with other forms at work within contemporary place-making processes.

Because of the relational nature of symbolic capital (it inheres in relationships between social entities) the concept works well within the non-representational approach to place outlined in my theoretical strategy in Chapter 2. For example, the notion of 'sustainability' can be viewed in a constructivist sense (Bruner 1994, Harkin 1995, Wang 1999) as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) that fuels a socially negotiated process in which competing interests argue for their own interpretations of place, time and change. In this usage, the concept of sustainability provides an avenue for understanding how certain views of place, time and change gain more authority than others, and come to inform decision-making processes about land use and tenure. In turn, these decision-making processes may influence the ideas of place, time and change that enter into wider circulation.

7.2 Role of boundaries in place-making processes

Land use planning decisions may also be decisions between geographical integration or separation of different groups of land users. In planning contexts, land interests may be recognised through dividing land into new geographical entities. The distinctions made by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) between smooth and striated space are helpful for understanding some of these tensions at work in the East Kimberley. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) contrast spatial practices that are characterised by boundaries, stratified ordering of landscapes and mobility of people through them (associated with the State), with those characterised by flows and unrestricted mobility (associated with nomads),

...sedentary space is striated, by walls, enclosures, and roads between enclosures, while nomad space is smooth, marked only by “traits” that are effaced and displaced with the trajectory (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 381).

They hasten to emphasise that each of these forms is contingent upon the other and occasionally they merge. It is simply posed as a way of looking at space and material relationships of people with place that provides useful metaphors for interpreting spatial practices.⁶²

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) make the process of ‘becoming’ the model for spatial understanding, rather than a focus on a fixed or ‘essential’ entity.

The model in question is one of becoming and heterogeneity, as opposed to the stable, the eternal, the identical, the constant. It is a “paradox” to make becoming itself a model, and no longer a secondary characteristic, a copy ... (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 361)

This focus on interactions and dynamics offers some value for my relational approach to place. Doel (2000) argues that this approach highlights the role of space as a differential as well as a unifying element in social enquiry. It serves to divide people just as much as to

⁶² Stephen Meucke was among the first to explore the value of nomadology in the context of Aboriginal Australia (Benterrak et al. 1984, Muecke 1992).

unite them. Closure, in the form of striated space, and openness, in the form of smooth space, are posed as two phases in a single process which is in a constant state of disequilibrium (Massumi 1996). Conceptually, all components of spatial practice are understood as inherently fluid. However, representations of both place and social identities become crystallised in certain material contexts, contributing to a politics of space.

In the following chapters, I interpret both national parks and the proposed Ord Stage Two Project Area, as attempts to create bounded (striated) places that are challenged by the notion of co-existing Aboriginal interests, as defined through Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights legislation. The proponents of the Ord Stage Two 'Project Area', and East Kimberley tourism operators, each deploy rhetoric and place-images that define places as striated, marked out in contrast to the surrounding country. Entry into such spaces is regulated and roads structure the mobility of people within them.

The notion of bounded spaces relies on a paired notion of an autonomous individual as the basis of society, as outlined in my theoretical discussion in Chapter 2. Drawing on the work of Rose (1999) and Levinas (1989), Howitt (2001) highlights the way in which the philosophical notion of the self as a bounded individual has supported exclusionary practices in land use planning. Alternative understandings of human subjectivity as formed and re-formed in relation to both social and physical environments allow a more sophisticated interpretation of spatial politics. However, Kaplan (1996) highlights that not all identities are liberating,

Each interaction with the institutional and cultural and, especially, governmental operates in tandem with our varied participation in economies of production and consumption to foster myriad possibilities of identity, not all of them liberating.

These possibilities are not reducible to either “choice” or “freedom” even as they are not always equal to “coercion” or “imprisonment.” They are the articulated evidence of the limits and possibilities of the age in which we live (Kaplan 1996: 9).

I argue that the bounded spaces posed by the Project Area and national parks could be posed in a more fluid way, to accommodate the land interests of Miriuwung and Gajerrong people and to incorporate more dynamic understandings of social identities. However, Kaplan’s comments signal the need for caution in such an analysis.

7.3 Spatial politics, social identifications and difference

Consideration of the connections between land interests and symbolic capital requires some reflections on the role of difference within spatial politics. In the first part of the thesis I concentrated on tracing the history and fluidity of different categories of subjects identified in contemporary planning processes – Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists. I focused on mobility as embodied practice through which people are involved in an ongoing relation with the world and with other people. I traced connections between social identifications and spatial practices, and showed their implications for a process of subjectification and becoming that drives a politics of space (Thrift 1997).

Some attempts have been made by human geographers to link Deleuze’s ideas of boundaries and flows with processes of subjectification. Anderson’s ‘sites of difference’ and Pratt’s ‘grids of difference’ in Fincher and Jacobs (1998) represent two recent attempts to engage with this issue in urban contexts. Pratt (1998) focuses on the role of boundaries, describing the persistence of hierarchical grids of difference in urban place making. She demonstrates,

... how bounded places can stabilize identities or, alternatively, open up the potential for cross-cultural communication. Some individuals are contained by places; others move across boundaries and enact different aspects of their identity in different places. Crossing boundaries can have transformative effects or protect the status quo (Pratt 1998).

This reflects a more open view of spatial structures than that entailed by Bourdieu's concept of the 'field'. Bourdieu poses the field as a social space that is conceptually different to the material world and thereby maintains a division between the two (Painter 2000). By contrast, Pratt poses an iterative process of subjective becomings reminiscent of Massey's concept of a 'double articulation' (Massey 1993), which refers to relations of people with place and with other people, in particular places at particular times. Anderson is anxious to recognise difference within marginalised urban groups in order to avoid reifying terms 'that obscure the subjectivities internal to those categories' (Anderson 1998: 205) and reinforce 'modernist premises of an ordered (racialized) reality whose subject positionings are, for the most part, fixed and undifferentiated ...' (Anderson 1998: 206). Citing Haraway's work on positionality (Haraway 1991), she notes that 'The multiple axes of identity that constitute subject positions and never neatly align in stable and coherent ways are thus explained away' (Anderson 1998: 206).

Another example is provided by Gibson (2001), in a study of regional planning and contemporary subjectivities in the La Trobe Valley in south eastern Australia. She demonstrates how subjects are made through the discourse and practices of governmentality, and shows how these have changed over time. In a similar way, I argue that subjects (and places) in the East Kimberley are made through the discourse and place-images of tourism, government driven planning processes, and the legal process of Native Title. As in Gibson's study, relationships between representations of place and social identities structure my enquiry.

In concluding my thesis, I cast back once again to the 1960s and '70s and consider how the perspectives developed through my analysis of contemporary spatial politics inform a

reading of the past in terms of relations between different interests in land. Considerations of the temporal dimension to spatial politics in the East Kimberley then inform my speculations on how planning processes in the future might incorporate a relational approach to place. I then question what it might mean to contemporary planning processes if the categories of subjects that they encompass are understood to be fluid rather than fixed. What might it mean to assume that spatial and social entities are always in a state of becoming, boundaries are always permeable, and there is always leakage between local, national and global scales? How do existing spatial concepts produced through planning processes relate to the practices of people whose lives intersect with planned spaces? Alternatively, how might the spatial concepts of planning processes be reconsidered as malleable in space and time, and constructed as much through the actions of those who use these spaces as those who plan them? Once the logic of Cartesian space is surrendered, what new rationales might be released?

Chapter 8: 'Authenticity' as symbolic capital in tourism and native title

8.1 Introduction

Tourism is and will continue to be an influential industry in the East Kimberley with increasing numbers of tourists likely in the future. Symbolic capital associated with tourism therefore plays a significant role in place-making processes. In this chapter I examine the forms of symbolic capital that contemporary tourism promotes. I explore the potential for change in the future through connections with other land interests, and specifically examine the consequences of legal recognition of Aboriginal land interests through both the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993*. As symbolic capital associated with tourism operates at local, national and international scales, each of these scales must be addressed in order to understand the potential for change.

I focus on national parks as tourism places and interpret them in terms of smooth versus stratified space. In what ways do contemporary national parks frame the spatial practices and subjectivities of those who enter them? What types of relationships do they promote between people and place and how has this changed over time? What role do they perform in contemporary place-making processes and what potential is there for change in the future?

In Chapter Five I described the emphasis of tourism imagery and rhetoric in portraying the East Kimberley as wilderness and a land without time. Geographers such as Lowenthal (1985) and historians such as Griffiths (1996) have traced the history of portrayals of this

kind to nineteenth century colonial thought. European colonisers understood Australia to possess a natural history rather than a human history. Scholars concerned with the shifts in geographic perspective associated with modernisation have focused on nineteenth century travellers' accounts and the anthropology of colonised peoples. Fabian (1983) argues that the nineteenth century became the century of 'spatialised time' where 'difference was increasingly converted into history and history explained in terms of evolution' (Duncan 1993: 46). In this context, nineteenth century travel narratives were critical to projects of colonisation (Buzard 1993, Pratt 1992). Concurrent scientific narratives of progressivism contributed to the conversion of geographical difference into temporal difference (Thomas 1994). The cumulative result was the emergence of a geographic perspective in which 'different places are seen to share fundamental characteristics and potentialities but are separated by occupying different temporal locations' (Duncan 1993: 40).

Anthropologist Jeremy Beckett, drawing on earlier work by Australian historian Chris Healy, highlighted the contribution of travel writing to the construction of a national identity for Australia in the later part of the twentieth century,

Following World War II an ever increasing flow of travel books introduced a mainly urban readership to the bush. What they celebrated as 'the real Australia' was no longer hostile, so much as a stimulating challenge to the resourceful traveller, and far from being a wildness to be tamed, it was a wilderness to be preserved. In the old natural history mode, but in anticipation of the ecology movement of the 1970s, Aborigines were included along with the flora and fauna, as part of a seamless web of life (Beckett 1988: 205).

Beckett argues that within this framework, authentic Aboriginal people exist simultaneously in the remote past and the outback, caught in a different time zone to Europeans (Beckett 1988: 194).

In a recent study of the representation of indigenous people in Australian Tourism Commission marketing strategies, Waitt (1999) found that images of Aboriginal people are used to signify three potential tourist desires: escape to a primeval world, adventure in an unexplored frontier and ecotourism. These findings suggest that tropes of modernisation, colonialism and progressivism are still at work in the tourism industry at a national scale in Australia. During the 1990s, tourism agencies of both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments began to promote Aboriginal culture as one of the unique attractions of a visit to Australia (Waitt 1999, Craik 1991, Young 1999, Walmsley and Young 1999). Along with unique features of the Australian environment, it was seen to contribute to a niche market for Australia in international tourism.

8.1.1 Authenticity and land interests of tourists and Aboriginal people

Concepts of authenticity are produced in relation to both the land interests of tourists and of Aboriginal people, as recognised through the Native Title process. They contribute to symbolic capital in each of these contexts. I will explore this connection in some detail, because it provides a useful tool for understanding how the tourism industry relates to the politics of land use and tenure. I employ the concept of 'authenticity' in a constructivist sense (Bruner 1994, Harkin 1995, Wang 1999), as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984), that fuels a socially negotiated process in which competing interests argue for their own interpretations of place and time. Grids of difference (Pratt 1998) structure the spatial context in which these competing interests play out. While these grids are historically contingent they are not fixed in time and space. Changes associated with legal recognition of Aboriginal interests may alter their configuration, influencing views of place, time and culture that inform decision-making processes about land use and tenure. In turn, these decision-making processes may influence ideas of place, time and culture that enter into

wider circulation, affecting what different groups at particular times understand to be authentic.

8.1.2 National parks as bounded places

My analysis of the tourism survey data in Chapter 6 suggests that the land interest associated with contemporary tourism is quite compatible with an approach to planning in which designated tourism places are marked out as separate to places for other purposes. In many ways, tourism promotions of the East Kimberley as a place frozen in time and remote from the rest of the world have been supported by the creation of national parks from which other forms of land use are excluded. However, the legal recognition of Aboriginal interests in land has the potential to intersect with tourism interests, promoting the coexistence of Aboriginal interests in places currently marked out for tourism. Native title rights seem likely to endure on land currently gazetted as national parks even if they are deemed extinguished on land used for agriculture or other more intense forms of land use. The development of Aboriginal cultural tourism is one way in which connections may develop between the land interests of tourists and those of Aboriginal people. However, such connections could either reinforce prevailing stereotypes of place and Aboriginal culture, or contribute to change.

Some sense of the potential for change can be gained by contrasting the involvement of Aboriginal people in the Keep River National Park in the Northern Territory with their lack of involvement in national parks in Western Australia. The contrast reflects the longer history of land rights in the Northern Territory compared with the recent and unresolved status of Native Title affecting national parks in Western Australia. At the local scale, legal recognition of Aboriginal land interests has differing implications for the mobility of tourists and Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley.

8.2 Approach and methods

To understand how authenticity in Aboriginal culture is interpreted in legal contexts, I analyse the transcripts of the 1997 Native Title hearings for relevant discourse and narratives. My interpretation of this material is informed by reference to critiques made by Australian anthropologists of both Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights legislation. To understand how authenticity has been interpreted within the tourism industry, I refer to the materials analysed in Chapter 6. Responses to the Holiday Motivation section of the questionnaire indicated the nature of tourists' pre-existing interests in Aboriginal culture. Personal construct analysis of responses to the corroboree image in the questionnaire indicated the frame of reference used to appraise tourism representations of Aboriginal culture.

To identify the range of perspectives and experiences of tourism operators in relation to Aboriginal cultural tourism, I draw on the interview material described in Chapter 6. Tourism operators were asked to describe their interests and aspirations for cultural tourism. I analysed the transcripts of these interviews for discourse and narratives used to define authentic Aboriginal culture. Reference to tourism studies literature provided useful frameworks for interpreting these findings.

My interpretation of Aboriginal experiences of tourism and national parks drew on several sources. A report commissioned by the Western Australian Museum in 1987, surveyed the experiences of Aboriginal people with national parks during the 1980s. For contemporary experiences, I drew on the transcripts of the Native Title hearings, as well as field notes recorded from conversations with Aboriginal people in Kununurra and the two bush meetings organised by the Northern Land Council in 1999. In analysing all this material, I

identified recurring themes relating to access to land and relationships with tourism operators and park rangers. I also identified a range of contrasting experiences of Aboriginal people with contemporary tourism and national parks.

8.3 Authenticity as symbolic capital in tourism and Native Title

8.3.1 Authenticity in tourism

Authenticity has been a central concept in research into why tourists travel. The desire to travel is largely attributed to the experience of alienation in modern urbanised societies. Travel is explained as a search for an imagined authentic world and authentic experience that has been lost (MacCannell 1973, 1976). MacCannell (1992) argues that tourists are engaged in a spiritual search for qualities of place and time that were lacking in their ordinary lives. In a similar vein but focusing on the sensory aspect of tourism, Stewart argues that the desire for exotic experience arises from bodily alienation from the phenomenological world,

As experience is increasingly mediated and abstracted, the lived relation of the body to the phenomenological world is replaced by a nostalgic myth of contact and presence. 'Authentic' experience becomes both elusive and allusive as it is placed beyond the horizon of present lived experience, the beyond in which the antique, the pastoral, the exotic, and other fictive domains are articulated (Stewart 1993: 133).

Here, themes of melancholy and alterity derived from psychoanalysis are invoked to explain the embodied and emplaced experience that feeds the desires of tourists.

Others, such as Rojek and Urry (1997), have highlighted the role of travel in reference to different conceptions of time within western cultural traditions,

Places such as major cities appear full of 'instantaneous' time while other places appear empty of time. Some places attract visitors because they are almost timeless, they have (it seems) not been ravaged by time, or at least not by instantaneous or clock times. They represent 'glacial time' – a feeling that the place has endured and

will persist as a distinctive entity even though the world around may change (Rojek and Urry 1997: 15) .

This analysis reflects a trajectory of thinking about modernism and mass culture that reaches back to the writings of Benjamin in the 1920s and '30s (Baudrillard 1988, Benjamin 1973b, Berman 1970, Boorstin 1962, Debord 1977, Giddens 1991, Trilling 1972). It assists with understanding why tourism place-images portray the East Kimberley as 'The Real Australia'. The 'authentic' Australia that is commodified for tourists is remote in both time and space, fitting with Rojek and Urry's description of glacial time.

Interpreting authenticity as a psychological motivation helps to understand why tourists travel to the East Kimberley and provides insights into the strategies employed by tour operators to meet tourists' demands for an authentic experience. Early work in this vein treated 'authenticity' as a pre-existing commodity to be discovered by tourists. Concepts such as 'front and back regions' and 'staged-authenticity' (MacCannell 1976) were invoked to contrast genuine with contrived experiences of cultures and places. More recently, researchers working in a constructivist vein have conceived authenticity as a social value that arises through negotiation between various stakeholder interests in a particular locality rather than as an absolute or quantifiable commodity (Bruner 1994, Harkin 1995, Wang 1999). As a social value, different interpretations of authenticity arise which are spatially and temporally embedded.

Authenticity also features in literature analysing the tourists' experiences of places. Cohen (1979, 1988) emphasised the need to consider the experiences of tourists and to examine what authenticity means to both the consumers of tourism experiences and to members of the toured cultures. In early work addressing tourist experiences, authenticity was conceptualised as operating along a continuum from falsehood to the 'real' with mass

tourism experiences occupying one pole and individual backpacking adventures the other. The distinction between the production and consumption of authenticity in tourism experiences is further developed by Harkin (1995) using a semiotic framework. Harkin argues for a relationship between authenticity in objects and authenticity in experience, claiming that toured cultures may represent both of these dimensions for tourists:

What is involved is precisely a semiotic system, whereby a set of signs marks the object as authentic, both with respect to the markers themselves and to the outside world. This markedness frames the sight and focuses attention; this semiotic framework is directed toward the production of a valorized and authentic touristic experience (Harkin 1995: 653).

Drawing on an earlier semiotic analysis made by Culler (1981), Harkin emphasises the fluid and unstable relationship between marker and sight, and signifier and signified. My own description of the workings of authenticity as symbolic capital relies on a similar constructivist understanding of authenticity. I focus on experiences and expectations associated with tourism, acknowledging that these are framed and directed by a semiotic system operating through the production, proliferation and consumption of place-images.

8.3.2 Authenticity in Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights

Within the legal domain of indigenous land claims very specific conceptions of authenticity are produced and debated in relation to Aboriginal culture. In judgements ruling whether or not native title has been retained, courts lean more towards the absolute sense of authenticity as it was understood by modernist scholars such as Trilling (1972), Boorstin (1962) and Berman (1970). The Commonwealth of Australia *Native Title Act 1993* is the second significant piece of legislation that addresses the rights of indigenous peoples to land in Australia. Like the earlier *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, it requires that claimants prove their prior and continuing association with the land they are claiming by producing evidence of the maintenance of traditional religion, community structures and relations to land.

Anthropologists involved in assisting Aboriginal land claims have critiqued the way in which definitions of land owning groups are produced through both these processes (Edmunds 1995, Merlan 1996, 1998, Rose 1996). A narrow and static definition of a 'traditional land owning group' serves to exclude people whose life circumstances have distanced them from country and culture (Rose 1996). Such definitions reflect not just the pragmatics of winning cases in the courts but also the emphasis of past anthropological work in Australia on traditional culture (Attwood 1996, Merlan 1996, 1998). All cultural forms and productions may come under scrutiny in Native Title or Land Rights claims, including language, material culture, religious and ceremonial practices, use of indigenous plant and animal foods and patterns of movement through traditional lands. The critique offered by Fabian (1983) of the role of nineteenth century anthropology in maintaining a temporal distance between the culture of the observer and the cultures under study has some relevance to the role of both Land Rights and Native Title process in affirming traditional culture over hybrid forms.

However, there are significant differences between the two forms of legislation, both of which have been informed by the perspectives of Australian anthropologists. The passage of time between the two pieces of legislation is reflected in a move away from the structuralist approaches to social formations reflected in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, to the recognition of more fluid, dynamic ways in which people relate to one another and to places. Rumsey (1996) notes that anthropologists played a key role in asserting the need for the broader concepts underpinning the *Native Title Act 1993*. He outlines a difference between the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, 1976* and the

Native Title Act 1993 in the kinds of relationships with land that are considered valid grounds for a claim. The former requires that,

Claimants must comprise a 'local descent group' with 'common spiritual responsibility for the sites and for the land'. ... amongst all the kinds of affiliations and responsibilities a group may have, the only relevant ones are those which are 'spiritual' (Rumsey 1996: 3).

In contrast, the Native Title Act,

...does not try to define the relevant indigenous form(s) of title, but leaves them to be set out case by case. ...there is no necessity here to prove that the claimant group share common descent, or common spiritual affiliations, nor that they share any rights-in-common over the whole claim area. For the concept of 'communal native title', I would argue that the relevant kind of 'commonality' consists rather in the sharing of particular culturally specific forms of social identification – ways of making relationships to country – according to which a set of people can be specified, each of whom holds traditional rights, even exclusive rights – over at least some of the claim area, and who, amongst them, hold traditional rights over the whole of it (Rumsey 1996: 3).

The Miriuwung and Gajerrong claim is an important test case with implications for other cases to follow. Rumsey's assessment cited here explains why so much attention is given in the proceedings to the range of ways in which people relate both to one another and to specific places. Legal debates over Native Title reflect scholarship in which ideas of cultural authenticity are both contested and evolving.⁶³

8.4 Contemporary tourism experiences and motivations for visiting the East Kimberley

Few of the tourists surveyed in 1999 listed indigenous culture as a primary motivation for travelling to the Kimberley. However, international tourists were significantly more likely to list it among their motivations than were Australian tourists (Wilk's Lambda, analysis of variance result: $F\text{-value} = 3.54$, $df = 249$, $P\text{-value} > 0.0001$). This finding is in keeping with

⁶³ Clifford (1988) identified similar issues arising in the context of a 1977 Native American claim to land title in Mashpee on Cape Cod in the United States where the claimants had maintained ties to a traditional place and associated social identity but had incorporated many non-traditional elements into their lives.

research conducted by the Northern Territory Tourism Commission between 1988 and 1992 (Altman 1993).



Figure 50. Corroboree image from questionnaire

There was a striking difference between international and domestic travellers in how they responded to the corroboree image in the 'Holiday Feelings' section of the questionnaire (see Figure 50). International travellers appraised this image in terms of both adventure and exotic experience, using similar terms to those used in appraising images of a crocodile and the Bungle Bungle Ranges (Fig. 51). Aboriginal culture seemed to appeal to their desire for adventure and exposure to the alien.

Domestic Tourists

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International Tourists

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Figure 51. Personal constructs of domestic tourists compared with those of international tourists. Reproduced from Waitt, Lane and Head (in press).

By contrast, domestic travellers appraised the corroboree image in a similar way to all other tourism attractions including images of Lake Argyle, boab trees and wallabies shown in Chapter 6. For domestic travellers Aboriginal culture seemed to be experienced within a reference system bounded by flora, fauna and elements of the physical environment (Fig. 51). They saw the corroboree image as reasonably familiar but associated it more with

pristine nature than with a human presence in the landscape. Both the corroboree image and Lake Argyle, the huge body of water created by damming the Ord River to service the irrigation area, were associated with pristine nature in much the same way. Waitt, Lane and Head (in press) suggest that these findings are evidence of considerable flexibility in what may be understood as part of nature.

In Chapter 6 I attributed the differences between domestic and international tourists in part to the different sources of information they relied on, with domestic travellers more likely to have listed travel programs shown on Australian television. These television programs portray the Kimberley experience as an immersion in an unspoiled and, by implication, 'authentic' nature, of which Aboriginal culture is a part. Domestic tourists were also likely to have encountered representations of Aboriginal people and culture from other sources, and their responses to the corroboree image may have reflected a much wider range of media coverage of Aboriginal issues in Australia. While beyond the scope of my own study, Mickler (1998) provides an analysis of media representations of Aboriginal people that highlights the prevalence of negative stereotypes in Western Australian news reporting. While conducting our survey of tourists in Kununurra, Waitt and I encountered a number of Australian tourists who expressed negative opinions of Aboriginal people. Such views were most likely to be voiced by older tourists staying in caravan parks.⁶⁴ International tourists listed fewer sources of information and mainly relied on guidebooks such as *The Lonely Planet Guide to Australia* (Finlay 1998), *The Rough Guide to Australia* (Daly et al. 1993) and *The Kimberley – An Adventurer's Guide* (Moon and Moon 1997). These guides

⁶⁴ In the lead up to the Australian Federal election held in 1998 considerable media attention was devoted to Pauline Hanson's 'One Nation Party' which argued against all government expenditure on Aboriginal health and welfare on the grounds that Aborigines should not receive benefits unavailable to other citizens. These arguments are addressed by Mickler (1998) in *The Myth of Privilege*.

highlight the unique natural environment of the Kimberley, suggest a range of activities for independent travellers and most commonly refer to Aboriginal culture in terms of rock art sites that signpost their journey in a timeless land.

Tourists do seem to frame their emotive responses to places in the East Kimberley in line with tourism industry portrayals of both place and Aboriginal people as occupying a different time zone. This framing supports understandings of authentic Aboriginal culture as located in timeless traditions that remain unchanged by contact with Europeans. The experiences they have of the East Kimberley and of Aboriginal culture do not seem to unsettle the expectations they bring with them, a finding similar to that of McCarthy in research on tourism in Bali and Eastern Indonesia (McCarthy 1994). The survey results confirm wider concerns about the role of the tourism industry in circulating particular stereotypes of both place and Aboriginal culture (Crough and Christophersen 1993, Waitt 1999).

While international tourists interpret images of Aboriginal culture in terms of exotic experience, Australian tourists incorporate these images into a framework of nature as wilderness. However, the frameworks of both domestic and international tourists serve to interpret these images, along with images of tourist destinations in the Kimberley, as remote and timeless. All this suggests that within the East Kimberley and perhaps northern Australia more generally, the tourism industry perpetuates the nineteenth century practice of converting geographical difference into temporal difference (Fabian 1983, Pratt 1992, Rojek and Urry 1997, Thomas 1994).

8.5 Tourism operator perspectives on cultural tourism

8.5.1 Tourism operators

In the interviews I conducted with local tourism operators in 1998 and 1999, I asked them to describe their interests and ideas about incorporating Aboriginal cultural tourism as part of their business. Local tourism operators varied greatly in their interest and knowledge of Aboriginal culture. Some, aware of a particular interest among international tourists, perceived a market niche for cultural tourism awaiting exploitation, and described their ideas and aspirations for developing new tourism products in this area. In describing their experiences and aspirations, they articulated specific understandings of authenticity in relation to Aboriginal culture. In the following section, I present some of their descriptions and contrast the different understandings of authentic Aboriginal culture they encompass.

Jenny and Jeff Hayley, of Triple J Tours, were aware of an interest in Aboriginal culture among international tourists and planned to establish a new Aboriginal cultural tour in collaboration with the Bell Springs Aboriginal community. They hoped to draw interest among domestic tourists also but anticipated that would be more difficult,

[Jenny]: Like this year, we are starting an Aboriginal cultural tour and that's going to be the first one in the area. And um, yeah, I can see the most potential for that from the overseas market, not necessarily the Australian market. But we're trying to make it appeal to the Australian market, by -- well, including things in it which people come along to do anyhow. Like the boat ride to the Aboriginal community and then it's going to be, jump on the back of a horse and cart. So, these are the things that'll appeal to the average Australian and hopefully then, they may appreciate the Aboriginal cultural side of it as well (Interview, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

They planned to take tourists by boat to a place upstream on the Ord River where they would be picked up by members of the Bell Springs Aboriginal community and given demonstrations of gathering and preparing bush foods by senior Miriuwung woman, Sheba Dilgnari. Jeff articulated his motivation for creating this kind of tourism experience as follows,

[Jeff]: And why it appeals to me, like this particular venture, because like – well, we are having some influence over what's going to be the – I wanted to get away from the corroboree stuff, which is purely a tourism thing. Like Aborigines don't have a corroboree every day of the week and it'll be more into the lines of the traditional food
(Interview, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

In describing their ambitions for a cultural tourism venture, Jenny and Jeff Hayley articulated their understanding of authentic Aboriginal culture,

[Jenny]: Most of this family have grown up around here. One of the old – who's – Sheba the Grandmother –

[Jeff]: Yeah, Sheba.

[Jenny]: Yeah, she's one of the elders of the Miriuwung Gajerrong people, so she knows about there.

[Jeff]: And she goes right back into the Durack era.

[Jenny]: Yeah, so they've got some pretty interesting experiences to talk about, as long – it's just going to be a thing about drawing them out and just getting that interaction going between the tourists and the community people. Um, – but, no, we're looking forward to that.

[Jeff]: Well I – it's the sort of Aboriginal cultural tour that I'd like to do. Like I know years ago I went to New Zealand on the North Island – the way they were flogging the Maori culture over there, it was painful. I'd hate to be involved in anything like that. All I want to do is show people Aboriginals, the way they live, their cultural lifestyle
(Interview, Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

It is clear from this exchange that Jenny and Jeff Hayley recognised the continuity of Miriuwung and Gajerrong relationships to land in the area and saw this as part of authentic Aboriginal culture. In drawing links between members of the Aboriginal community and the pioneering Durack family, they also articulated an understanding of Aboriginal people in connection with European history that was somewhat out of keeping with the representation of Aboriginal people in tourism promotional materials as part of a wild and timeless nature. However, 'the Durack era' that Jeff Hayley referred to may be timeless in a different way, invoking popular stereotypes of frontier pastoralism that persist in the imagination of many Australians. The proposed enterprise did not eventuate in 1999 due to conflict among Aboriginal community members over who had rights to the land where tourists were to be taken. In 2000 however, the tour was up and running successfully (Bentivoglio pers. comm. 10 December 2000).

Kenton May of the Kununurra Backpackers was also keen to collaborate with the local Aboriginal community to establish a tourism enterprise. He was very conscious of a market niche among the backpacking international tourists,

KM: Um, the Europeans are right into Aboriginal culture. You see them get off the Greyhound, they've got a didge under their arm. Now, there's a certain amount that would buy it for sticking over the mantle-piece and then there are those that play didge better than some of the local Aborigines, you know [laughs]. They – well from my experience of taking them out to the Bungles and explaining things like the marriage cycles in – when – what cycle you grow up in. How you can't marry somebody from your same cycle and stuff like that, they're fascinated by it – ask a lot of questions. They're very interested in going out to Waringarri Arts and having a look at stuff like that (Interview, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

When asked about his ambitions he outlined a plan for a staged corroboree similar to those held at the Frontier Motel in Darwin,

Yeah. Yeah. Um, look, I've had thoughts of things that I could do across the road in – at the base of Kelly's Knob, creating a cultural corroboree set-up, right. Where we can do a meal, a barbecue meal, a show, for a set price. Now – [PAUSE] The corroboree idea obviously would have to have the backing of the Aboriginal people who look after Kelly's Knob. I would want them to be involved. I mean, there's so many things behind the scenes.

Now okay, it's a servant situation right, and by no means does it have to be subservient as in like, you know, I am lower than you because I'm dishing up your barbecue – or it could be just along the line. An Aboriginal cook behind there – big smile, big laughs. You've got your dancers, you've got your lighting people, you've got your techno. There's enough that know what they're doing from the radio station and stuff, that would be able to work within it (Interview, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

His idea anticipated tourist engagement through a stereotypical, staged performance of Aboriginal culture. However he had not found any enthusiasm for this kind of activity among the Aboriginal community.

In the past Kenton May led walking tours in the Mirima National Park, but he stopped this after learning that the area they walked through was sacred to the local community. His remarks express disappointment and frustration that the experience of 'authentic' Aboriginal culture that tourists had clearly enjoyed was not one that the Aboriginal community condoned,

So, it's frustrating that we can't do it but I don't want to tread on any toes. But I just wanted to do it as, yes, I'd make a dollar. And if we worked together, so would they. Um, we show them the area, show them some artwork in there and teach them about the area. But a sacred site's a sacred site and I honoured that. And there is a way we can go in that – would – completely avoids it but walking up the creek and [padding] through water and stuff like that, is part of the adventure that people like – but we don't do that any more (Interview, Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

The Western Australian Conservation and Land Management authority subsequently closed the part of the park where Kenton May had run his tours following consultation with traditional owners. The entire park area now forms part of the successful Native Title claim. It is possible that Miriung and Gajerrong people will eventually be involved as members of the board of management and exercise more control over the activities of tourists in the park.

Jenny Wilksch, a ranger working for the Department of Conservation and Land Management of Western Australia, conducted a bush foods tour in Mirima National Park during the 1999 tourist season. I joined one of these tours as a participant and remained behind after it finished to ask questions about her approach to presenting Aboriginal culture. She explained that Miriung and Gajerrong people are not currently interested in sharing their cultural knowledge about plants and animals with tourists. Because of this, her guided tour mainly addressed generic northern Australia species and more generic Aboriginal uses of plants. She expressed a desire to see more Aboriginal involvement in the tourism industry and in national parks. In time the Miriung and Gajerrong community could become more interested in the industry but she felt this was dependent on them gaining more authority in the wider community in Kununurra. Her views suggest both an ethical position on the involvement of Aboriginal people in presenting their own culture and a desire for a more authentic tourist experience that such involvement could bring about.

I have so far concentrated on those tourism operators who expressed interest in cultural tourism in order to explore the nature of their interest. However, most had very little involvement with the local Aboriginal community, reflecting a marked racial segregation

within the town of Kununurra. Andrew McEwan, who incorporated information about local plants and animals into his barramundi fishing tours explained that he obtained his knowledge of local plants and animals from scientific sources rather than local Aboriginal people. When asked in a recorded interview whether he had any dealings with the local Aboriginal community his response was as follows,

Not here. When I was in the Northern Territory, *yes*. Yeah, I lived in a small community that was very much Aboriginal oriented and they were great people. Still got quite a bit of rapport – I was over there recently and had a lot of contact with them. It was a very – it wasn't a black and white community. Kununurra's very segregated and yeah I don't – I have very little to do with the local Aborigines (Interview Kununurra, 19 March 1999).

He also expressed a view that Miriuwung and Gajerrong people had lost much of the traditional culture that had allowed them to manage land well in the past and, as a consequence, was opposed to them holding Native Title rights. This view of authentic Aboriginal culture as located in the traditional past before European contact was widely expressed among those non-Aboriginal residents of Kununurra who discussed their opposition to Native Title with me.

The range of views presented here indicate a degree of flux in the way local tourism operators understand authenticity in relation to Aboriginal culture and in the kinds of experiences they would like to create for tourists. First there is a division between those who understand authentic Aboriginal culture to exist among contemporary people in the East Kimberley and those who see it as located in the past, prior to corruption by contact with Europeans. Among the former, there is consensus that authentic Aboriginal culture is related to continuity in relationships to land. Some, like Kenton May, would prefer to offer the contrived spectacle of a staged 'front region' for Aboriginal culture. Others, such as Jenny and Jeff Hayley and Jenny Wilksch would prefer to provide tourists with access to the more ordinary 'back regions' of Aboriginal culture, particularly in relation to harvesting bush foods. Their differing understandings of authenticity inform the sorts of engagements

that tourism operators seek with Miriung and Gajerrong people for tourism enterprises. Their understandings of authenticity also influence their acceptance of Native Title, with implications for whether or not they are prepared to collaborate with Miriung and Gajerrong people on their terms.

8.5.2 Aboriginal perspectives on tourism

Until recently, Miriung and Gajerrong people limited their interactions with tourists to the production of art and craft items for sale – a major source of income for many Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley since the 1980s (Committee of Review into the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry 1989). Some senior Miriung and Gajerrong men and women are well-established artists with work represented in national collections. Large acrylic paintings by Paddy Carlton sell for ten to fifteen thousand dollars to major museums and art galleries. At the other end of the scale, small items, such as carved boab nuts or bead necklaces, sell for around twenty dollars and are purchased by hundreds of tourists as souvenirs.

Paintings and artefacts, both contemporary and historical, were used as evidence in the 1997 Native Title hearings in order to demonstrate ongoing relationships to country. Some court sessions were held at rock art sites where witnesses gave evidence as to who had put the paintings there and the relationships between those artists and Miriung and Gajerrong people alive today. Aboriginal witnesses were quizzed extensively about the use of materials from the local environment in the production of traditional artefacts such as spears and coolamons. Links between these artefacts and the country where resources such as wood and ochre were found were provided as evidence of continuing relationships between people and land and consequently, as evidence of authenticity.

Notions of authenticity were central to the debate over what constituted material evidence of continuity of traditions. At one stage, Nida Bidwee, a Miriwung woman from the Emu Creek Community, presented the court with a carved boab nut and a painting made of ochre on slate, which she explained were produced for sale to tourists. While she presented these artefacts as evidence of cultural maintenance and survival, Mr Witthuhn, a lawyer representing the Northern Territory Government, objected,

MR WITTHUHN: Your Honour, it's been put forward, in my submission, by the applicants that the practice of carving boab nuts and other artefacts represents an expression of traditional culture. The questions that I would seek to put may well show that that's been a recent innovation.

HIS HONOUR: A recent innovation? You mean an innovation?

MR W: An innovation, certainly – an innovation within perhaps the last 20 or 25 years.

HH: Well, what if it is?

MR W: Well, if it is, your Honour, then –

HH: I mean, I haven't got a boab nut before me. It's nothing more than a statement of occupation saying that it's carving slate or doing anything else. I don't know that anything turns on it, does it?

MR W: To the extent, your Honour, that it's put forward as being an indicator of continued spiritual affiliation with the land through the carving of, for example, Dreamtime figures. It may well emerge that the carving of Dreamtime figures was a recent innovation.

HH: Yes. But so what? I mean, culture isn't an immutable thing even if you were right in that. If there were means of expression that developed as influences came in, so what?

MR W: Your Honour, my questions may also be directed to the reason why that particular innovation came about, and if there's been some external influence, then it may be the case that it doesn't represent an authentic expression of a naturally developing and evolving culture.

...

HH: But so what? I mean, it's the same as artwork of any description that now has a market and may be regarded as a commodity. But the fact that this person or others are engaged in it doesn't really have much bearing upon the existence of a community structure or the maintenance of links with the land that that community group has. Why do you need to go down this path, the path being the whole of the access to, if you like, western means of acquisition of money through the marketing of artistic commodities?

MR W: I won't persist with that line of questioning, your Honour
(FCA, 1997: 3878-9).

The exchange between the judge and the lawyer is interesting for the different interpretations of authenticity and tradition involved. Mr Witthuhn argued that the production of artefacts for the tourist trade necessarily made them unauthentic cultural forms and therefore evidence of the loss or discontinuity of traditional culture. Justice Lee refused this logic, countering that the way people access a market economy has little bearing on the existence of traditional community structures or relationships to land (FCA, 1997: 3878). However the witness had presented these artefacts as evidence of cultural maintenance and survival. Neither the judge nor the lawyer accepted that these artefacts

provided evidence of continuity with the past in the same way that rock art did, or the large paintings on canvas produced by well-known older artists who employed more complex traditional symbolism in their work. In Native Title claims, only cultural forms based in the past accrue symbolic capital for Aboriginal people.

Legal structures fix a specific definition of authenticity that must be engaged in order to gain land. Merlan (1998) drawing on the ideas of Taussig (1993) argues that European law, which attempts to model aspects of Aboriginal culture, may itself create a hybrid cultural form that influences how Aboriginal people understand and express their own social identity. She describes the relationship between the two in terms of a two-way 'mimicry'. As a form of symbolic capital, legal recognition of authenticity has clear connections with social status and bargaining power. More than for tourists or tourism operators, the symbolic capital associated with establishing authenticity in Aboriginal claims to land relates directly to material wealth and empowerment.

National parks

The experience of Aboriginal people in relation to the formation and management of national parks forms important background to their involvement with the tourism industry. In the 1980s, a study on tourism and Aboriginal heritage throughout the Kimberley was commissioned by the Western Australian Museum (Senior 1987). The study indicated that a wide range of perspectives existed on tourism at that time, despite many stories of negative experiences including the desecration of culturally important sites by tourists. In relation to the East Kimberley, it concluded that the creation of Mirima National Park (then known as 'Hidden Valley') was a negative experience for local traditional owners. Miriuwung and Gajerrong people were not consulted and rules restricting camping, litter, fires and hunting effectively excluded their use of the area (Senior 1987: 69). Visitor pressures led them to

hold ceremonies elsewhere and to remove sacred objects from the park. Throughout the 1980s the Kimberley Land Council, a key representative body for Aboriginal groups throughout the Kimberley, maintained a cautious position on tourism. It emphasised the need for Aboriginal control of national parks, input into management plans and access to all areas within national parks with allowance for traditional hunting and gathering of plant and animal foods (Kimberley Land Council 1986, 1991).

In the late 1990s, the Keep River National Park in the Northern Territory had by far the most Aboriginal involvement of the three major national park tourist destinations in the region. This reflects the existence of Land Rights legislation in the Northern Territory since 1976 and the consequent rights of Aboriginal people to live on traditional lands in areas such as national parks where land is not alienated by pastoral leases. Relationships between rangers and Aboriginal people in the Keep River National Park were more fully developed than they were in national parks on the Western Australian side of the border. Tourists following walking trails in the north of the park were likely to encounter Aboriginal people resident at one of the two outstations within the park. Policeman's Hole, in the Keep River, is a favoured fishing spot for outstation residents but is not signposted for tourists. When I visited the park in July 2001, one trail had been closed off to the public and a sign erected saying 'Closed for Ceremony'. While the 1995 Plan of Management for Purnululu National Park outlines a proposal for joint management with traditional owners (Department of Conservation and Land Management 1995), in 2002 this goal had not been achieved and competing claims for native title made by different Aboriginal groups remained unresolved. Visitor interpretation within Purnululu National Park provided only minimal information to tourists about local Aboriginal history and culture.

Mobility

In the late 1990s clear conflicts of interest over mobility and access to land were evident between the tourism industry and Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley. Peggy Griffiths, a Miriuwung woman with traditional land within the Keep River National Park, had sought permission to establish a living area at Flying-Fox Springs. The Park authorities refused as the area was designated a tourist site and had invested in the construction of an access road and facilities for tourists. Although told that she could live in other places within the park where there were no tourist facilities, this posed problems for her. She explained that Flying-Fox Springs was a good place to live precisely because of its accessibility and facilities. Her grandfather's heart condition meant that she needed good road access. It was difficult for her to find an alternative site because she had no car of her own.

Sheba Dilngari expressed envy and frustration that tourists in some respects now had better access to land than Aboriginal people did. Since being forced to leave the pastoral stations she felt they had been 'locked out' of the land. They 'sat down' in Kununurra observing white people getting vehicles that improved their access to country. It was common to find tourists camping in important Aboriginal campsites and sacred sites. In the course of the 1997 Native Title hearings, Miriuwung and Gajerrong people expressed concern about the impact of tourism on their land and described a range of negative experiences.

When witnesses were questioned about why they wanted to live on their traditional country and what constituted looking after it, some responded that they wanted to protect country from tourists and expressed their concern about tourists removing objects and leaving

rubbish at important sites. Carol Hapke, a Miriung woman in her forties, explained that her mother was responsible for the spring at Wawoolem under Miriung law and used to remove tourists' rubbish to make sure that the water remained clean (FCA, 1997: 2780). Carol Hapke also described how her brother had removed a burial from a cave site that tourists had been interfering with and taken it to a less accessible location (FCA, 1997: 2780).

Mobility and access to land, as well as being a source of conflict, also formed the main area of common interest between Aboriginal people and tourists. Both sought improved access to country. Several younger women with responsibilities for both young children and ageing relatives expressed their interest in proposals to upgrade roads as part of the Ord Stage Two development in terms of improving their own access to country.

Promoting or protecting culture?

Among the Miriung and Gajerrong community there seemed to be a range of positions about sharing culture with tourism promoters. The Mirima Council, the local Aboriginal body which in addition to managing Aboriginal housing runs the Mirima Woorlab Gerring Language Centre in Kununurra, was more concerned to protect culture from misuse by the tourist industry than to promote it in the form of cultural tours or staged events. The focus of the language centre is on keeping the Miriung language alive by teaching it to young Miriung people. In 1999, David Newry, then chairman of the Mirima Council, explained that the language centre had recently compiled a dictionary of Miriung words but decided against publishing it. The reason for this was a concern among some community members that if white people could consult a book for information about words and place names they would always do this in preference to consulting Aboriginal people themselves. They could therefore use Miriung language inappropriately. These

views seem to represent a fear of corruption or appropriation of traditional culture that could threaten the status of local community organisations as custodians of cultural knowledge and authenticity.

In contrast, during the Native Title hearings residents of outstations within the Keep River National Park outlined a number of ways in which they interacted with park rangers. A government funded Community Development Employment Program operated within the national park and rangers frequently approached the Aboriginal community for labour needed to help maintain tourist facilities (FCA, 1997: 1937). Rangers sought assistance from the Aboriginal community for the reconstruction of a 'bronco yard' (horse paddock) that had been part of the old Newry pastoral station as a historical monument (FCA, 1997: 1916). One of the rangers had established a particularly good rapport with outstation residents who responded positively to her interest in learning about bush foods, medicines and Miriuwung language. The visibility of Aboriginal people residing in the Keep River National Park and their intersection with tourist places and contributions to tourism interpretations of the park's history may assist in mediating the experience that tourists have of the park as a place outside of time.

Some explanation for these differences may be found in the work of Altman and Finlayson on the relationship between land tenure and indigenous tourism (Altman 1988, 1989, Altman and Finlayson 1992, Finlayson and Smith 1996, Altman 1993). While emphasising that land tenure is not the only issue affecting Aboriginal participation in tourism, they present a range of comparative case studies that demonstrate its significance as a structuring factor that determines the range of choices available to Aboriginal people and the benefits that may be drawn from their involvement (Altman and Finlayson 1992). In

Northern Territory national parks such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta (Ayers Rock) and Kakadu, Aboriginal traditional owners hold majorities on the boards of management and are able to pass rules regulating tourists' activity within these parks (Altman 1988, 1989). Lease-back arrangements of Aboriginal lands to parks services can deliver rental income to land holding groups as in the case of Kakadu National Park. While Miriuwung and Gajerrong people have negotiated living areas in the Keep River National Park in the Northern Territory since the 1980s, in Mirima National Park they had little formal negotiating power until the 1998 Native Title ruling. In Purnululu National Park where competing claims to land are unresolved, negotiating power is less clear.

8.6 Conclusion - authenticity within grids of difference

I have examined how ideas of authenticity generated within the tourism industry may intersect with those generated by the legal processes of Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights. Travellers to the East Kimberley bring with them an understanding of authentic Aboriginal culture as a timeless entity, only to be found in frontier and wilderness settings. Their emotive response to tourism imagery appears to reflect the broader stereotypes described by Beckett (1988) in which both place and Aboriginal culture are seen to exist within a different time zone to their own where wilderness and frontier may still be experienced. While the survey shed light on how tourists respond to promotional imagery, it could not indicate whether or not they were changed by their experiences on arrival. However, their experiences were mediated through tourism operators and the tours they offered. Some tourism operators acknowledge and express interest in Aboriginal history and culture and a desire to collaborate with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people in business ventures but are uncertain as to how to go about it. The ambitions that tourism operators describe for Aboriginal cultural tourism enterprises reflect their own understandings of

authentic Aboriginal culture, and the nature of their own interactions with Aboriginal people.

Whether or not Aboriginal cultural tourism becomes slotted into the prevailing schema as part of the pristine nature or frontier adventure that tourists seek, or whether it unsettles these stereotypes, will be influenced by the way in which Miriuwung and Gajerrong people become involved in the tourism industry and the kinds of engagements they have with tourism operators and tourists themselves. Tourism operators have the potential to either mediate or reinforce the stereotypical expectations of tourists.

An iterative process is at work whereby the Federal Court's ruling on Native Title legitimates traditional Aboriginal culture and rights to land, which in turn prompts some tourism operators to seek collaborative relationships with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people for cultural tourism enterprises. Potentially, Native Title may influence the level of involvement of Aboriginal people in national parks as well as the way in which park interpretation addresses the human history of the region. The outcome of all this affects the kinds of tourism experiences that are produced for consumption by tourists. Throughout the process, authenticity operates as a form of symbolic capital. For Native Title claimants, it is a commodity required to substantiate their claims to the court. Where Native Title is ruled to exist, tourism operators seeking to commodify authentic Aboriginal culture for consumption by tourists must collaborate with Aboriginal people on their terms.

Some researchers have portrayed tourism as a form of 'neo-colonialism', with inevitable damaging consequences for indigenous people and cultures (Nash 1978). Research in

Australia has highlighted the propensity for the tourism industry to promote stereotypical images of both place and Aboriginal culture (Craik 1991, Rose 1997, Waitt 1999, Head 1999). Crough and Christophersen (1993) expressed concern that the wilderness emphasis found in tourism brochures available in hotels throughout the Kimberley and others produced by government departments could play a negative role in reinforcing stereotypes about the region to policy-makers. More recently however, Hollinshead (1996: 309) has argued that tourism can serve as a communicative lifeline 'by which indigenous community pride and corporate health may be appropriately maintained'. The optimism expressed by Hollinshead (1996) about the potential for a more responsible tourism that benefits indigenous Australians must be qualified by acknowledging the critical role played by indigenous land tenure.

The findings presented here and in Lane and Waitt (2001) strongly support those of Altman and Finlayson in this respect (Altman 1988, 1989, Altman and Finlayson 1992). Miriuwung and Gajerrong people are particularly nervous about tourism and protective of their cultural knowledge in places where they have not yet secured rights to land. While the infrastructure of roads associated with national parks may facilitate their own access to land, there are clearly conflicts of interest when tourists occupy desirable campsites or gain access to sacred sites. The prospect of Native Title existing within national parks suggests that Aboriginal people may gain greater control over the activities of tourists in these areas as they have in national parks elsewhere. Rangers working within these parks now demonstrate greater sensitivity towards Aboriginal culture and interest in Aboriginal history than may have been the case at the time of the Western Australian Museum's study (Senior

1987).⁶⁵ Greater involvement of Aboriginal people within national parks may influence the way in which park interpretation addresses the recent human history of the region, and the portrayal of Aboriginal people as contemporary rather than a vestige of the ancient past.

The idea of grids of difference is important for understanding the conflicts that arise between Aboriginal and tourism interests in land. For example, while roads have the potential to improve mobility and access to land for everyone, in practice they do this more effectively for those who have access to vehicles than those who do not. The colonial legacy has left its imprint in structuring differentials of power and wealth between Aboriginal people and tourists. As Kaplan argues,

The tourist, then, is not a postmodern cosmopolitan subject who articulates hybridity for anxious moderns but a specifically Euro-American construct who marks shifting peripheries through travel in a world of structured economic asymmetries (Kaplan 1996: 63).

The legal processes of Aboriginal land claims contribute to defining grids of difference among Aboriginal people, validating some people's claims to land as authentic but not others. Differential legal rights on either side of the Northern Territory/Western Australia border contributes further to these grids, with claimants on the Northern Territory side having clearer rights and a longer history of access to claimed lands.

Both Native Title and tourism contribute to spatial politics as socially negotiated processes in which understandings of authenticity of both place and culture are produced, contested

⁶⁵ A study of the first ten years of joint management arrangements between the then Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory (CCNT) at Gurig National Park traced significant changes in the corporate culture of the CCNT between 1981, when the park was formed, and 1991, when the study was conducted (Foster 1997). Park rangers initially understood their role to be one of protecting the natural attributes of the park from Aborigines. Foster (1997: 72) notes that 'Staff who were sympathetic to Aboriginal causes often felt quite ostracized, particularly in the early 1980s.' Adams (2001) provides an in-depth analysis of institutional changes associated with the recognition of Aboriginal interests within the national parks services of Queensland and New South Wales.

and played out in practice. The Native Title process defines cultural authenticity in terms that give greater credence to traditional cultural forms over hybrid or innovative forms, as seen in the example of the carved boab nut. However, the existence of Native Title in the East Kimberley has direct implications for the involvement of Miriung and Gajerrong people in the management of national parks and, potentially, for their increased involvement in tourism. In consequence, it may serve to change the conditions in which Aboriginal culture is represented to the outside world.

The extent to which Miriung and Gajerrong people become involved in tourism is likely to be influenced by the outcome of the Native Title process in determining the nature and extent of rights to land. In turn, the nature of their involvement in tourism has implications for the kinds of place-images used to promote the area to tourists and consequently, for the expectations and experiences associated with East Kimberley tourism in the future.

Chapter 9: The Ord Stage Two 'Project Area' in contemporary spatial politics

Despite initial set-backs, the scheme has developed into an agricultural oasis in what was an extensive cattle grazing region. Success in the development of a viable agricultural system on the Ord could provide the basis for the establishment of many more irrigation areas on rivers throughout the north of Australia.
(Agriculture Western Australia 1997: 5)

9.1 Introduction

The quotation above is taken from a brochure produced by Agriculture Western Australia to promote the Ord Irrigation Area to potential farmers and investors in the late 1990s. It is indicative of developmentalist rhetoric in which intensive land use is valued more highly than less intensive use, and portrays the Ord Irrigation Scheme as the forerunner of irrigated agriculture throughout northern Australia. The themes of progress and productivity are continuous with the rhetoric associated with the push for agriculture in the 1940s and its tenuous beginnings in the 1960s.

During the 1990s, the Western Australian government, with support from the Northern Territory government, stepped up its push to develop the second stage of the Ord Irrigation Area that had been thwarted by the failure of cotton in the 1970s. In 1998, the Western Australian Government engaged the Wesfarmers Sugar Company Pty Ltd (Wesfarmers) and the Marubeni Corporation (Marubeni) as a consortium to conduct a feasibility study for a proposal to transform a further 32,000 hectares of land, currently leased by pastoral companies, into intensive irrigated agriculture focused on corporate farming of sugarcane. In parallel with the Wesfarmers-Marubeni feasibility study, the Water

Corporation of Western Australia investigated the feasibility of providing the irrigation infrastructure required to service the proposed farmlands.⁶⁶

Government policy and legislative frameworks obliged the consortium to conduct an Environmental Review and Management Plan (ERMP) under Western Australian legislation and an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIS) under Northern Territory legislation. In 2000, a draft report to serve both these requirements was produced by consultants Kinhill Pty. Ltd. for the consortium, referred to subsequently as the ERMP/EIS. The 1998 ruling by the Federal Court of Australia that Miriwung and Gajerrong people hold Native Title to part of the country being proposed as the 'Project Area' for the Ord Stage Two development (Federal Court of Australia 1998), required the consortium to negotiate with Native Title holders who are described as 'stakeholders' in their proposals. This provided an additional legislative context that influenced the conduct of the impact assessment study. The Draft ERMP/EIS document presents the developers' perspective on how they will meet their various legal and policy requirements. It articulates the proposal in considerable detail, and presents it within a broader context of land use planning for the region. Its scope and detail make it a valuable source for understanding 1990s development rhetoric, linking the East Kimberley with broader themes of global economy and environmental sustainability.

In this chapter I explore the way in which different land interests and subjectivities are articulated within the concept of the 'Project Area', as outlined in the ERMP/EIS

⁶⁶ In 1999, the Waters and Rivers Commission of Western Australia produced a Draft Interim Water Allocation Plan (Waters and Rivers Commission 1999). This report estimated the amount of water that could be allocated to the new farmlands while maintaining adequate flow to allow for maintenance of the existing riverine environment.

document. I begin by examining the similarities and differences between the rhetoric and values associated with the Ord Stage Two proposal and that of the earlier period of agriculture in the Ord Valley, presenting the comparison in terms of the forms of symbolic capital promoted in each. I examine the relationships proposed between the Project Area and other land interests and categories of land users as they are defined within the ERMP/EIS document.

I then return to the range of sources outlined in Part II of the thesis to describe the responses of Aboriginal people, horticulturalists and tourism operators to the proposed expansion of the irrigation area, and consider the likely responses of tourists. In Part II I demonstrated many ways in which land interests have changed for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists since the 1960s, as they have engaged with changes in legislation, government policy and the material environment. The responses of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourism operators to the proposed Ord Stage Two 'Project Area' demonstrate the influence of their respective histories on the way in which they either assume or challenge the subjective entities of place and people circumscribed by the proposal.

Finally, I consider the proposed Ord Stage Two Project Area as a place-making process that engages specific forms of symbolic capital and frames specific subjectivities. Grids of difference are evident in the responses of Aboriginal people and farmers to the proposal. I analyse the proposed Project Area, and the responses to it, in terms of a tension between a bounded or striated space and a smooth or flowing space (Deleuze and Guattari 1988), each with implications for social identities and spatial practices.

9.2 Approach and methods

My approach in this chapter is framed by the draft ERMP/EIS document. I consider the text of the draft ERMP/EIS as a representation of place, people and land interests and identify the rhetoric and narratives it contains about agricultural land use in the past and present. I begin by teasing out the specific values in land that are either explicitly identified or implied by the rhetoric used, identifying the source of these values in either government policy or legislation, or in the arguments made by the developers for why they should proceed. I then compare these with the values and rhetoric of earlier periods identified in the first part of the thesis. In particular, I draw on the rhetoric and place images in the 1960s media portrayals of the Ord Irrigation Scheme analysed in Chapter 5.

The Northern and Kimberley Land Councils prepared a joint response to the draft ERMP/EIS, following consultations with Aboriginal community members that included the two bush meetings I attended in 1999. This, combined with references to my own field notes, allowed some interpretation of issues posed by the proposal for Aboriginal people.

In the recorded interviews described in Chapter 5, farmers were asked about their views on the proposal. I reproduce some of their responses and analyse the discourse and rhetoric they employ for indications of their values in land and their views on how the proposal could affect their own land interests in the future.

Similarly, tourism operators were asked about their views of the proposal in the recorded interviews described in Chapter 6. I show both common and divergent themes in their responses. Again, I analyse the values implicit in their discourse and rhetoric. I draw on the

personal construct analysis outlined in Chapter 6 to suggest the likely response of tourists to the proposed landscape changes.

9.3 Ord Stage Two versus Ord Stage One – change and continuity

In January 2000, the draft ERMP/EIS for the proposal was released for comment. Its starting point was that,

Despite the completion of the Ord River Dam in 1972, the Ord River Irrigation Area (ORIA) has not yet been developed to its full potential (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: ii).

There is an echo here of the argument by Graham-Taylor (1982) outlined in Chapter 5 that development of the Ord Scheme from its beginnings has proceeded through a process of incremental decision making. The investment outlay by governments in Stage One formed the justification for the next phase of development. In introducing the Draft ERMP/EIS document, the history of farming practices in the Ord Valley is summarised in the following manner,

Early development of ORIA Stage 1 was beset with problems associated with control of pests which had a detrimental effect on farm economics. Current farming activities have benefited from the experience gained during those difficult early years to the extent that they are now profitable. As a consequence, there is now a shortage of developed irrigation farmland in the region (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: v).

In Chapter 3 I showed how surveyors of the East Kimberley, from the nineteenth century explorers to the scientists undertaking the CSIRO Land Surveys, depicted the country in terms of exploitable resources. From the post-war reconstruction period, the government emphasis was on investment in irrigated agriculture to promote economically self-sufficient regions. In the 1960s, documentary films about the Ord Irrigation Scheme employed a rhetoric of colonisation to portray agriculture as ‘the new north’, requiring a new generation of pioneers. At the same time, planning for the first stage of the Ord Irrigation

Area emphasised the work of engineers in building the dams and irrigation channels. Farm planning was informed by surveys that mapped soil types and vegetation complexes.

Continuities between the colonising rhetoric prevailing in planning and promotion of the first stage of the Ord Irrigation Scheme (Department of Natural Resources 1976), and that associated with proposals for Ord Stage Two have been noted by various researchers. Head (1999) identifies the persistence of three colonial themes in the Ord Stage Two proposal – the empty landscape, the invisible Aborigine, and the idealisation of agricultural land use. She notes that ‘when expressed together these three help to naturalise the development process as both inevitable and strategically implemented’ (Head 1999: 141). McLean (2001) examines the discursive orientation of maps produced by the Waters and Rivers Commission in their *Draft Water Allocation Plan* and by developers in the Draft ERMP/EIS. She highlights the way in which both documents portray the unfarmed areas of the Ord Valley as empty. Similarly, Arthur’s analysis of the lexical maps implicit in documents discussing the Ord Valley before and after dam construction highlighted a specific rhetoric of an uncompleted landscape awaiting the damming of the river and establishment of agriculture (Arthur 2002). This rhetoric of an incomplete landscape can also be found in discussions of the potential benefits of the proposed expansion of the Ord Irrigation Area in Stage Two.

In addition to the obvious values placed by the consortium on commercial productivity, legislative and policy frameworks identify a range of other values. Table 10 shows the range of issues considered important for addressing the impacts of such a proposal.

Table 10. Framework of government policy objectives and legislation structuring the impact assessment for the Ord Stage Two Project Area (Reproduced from Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: iii)

Please see print copy for image

In 2001 the WA Environment Protection Authority approved the proposed development on the grounds that it met the established criteria for environmental sustainability. Values identified for preservation in Ord Stage Two include biodiversity, endangered species, environmental flows⁶⁷, representative habitats and sites of cultural significance. These, together with requirements for sustainable groundwater management necessitate a program of ongoing environmental monitoring. The detailed modelling of environmental processes associated with the Ord Stage Two proposal, particularly hydrogeological processes involving movement of groundwater through different soils and substrates, provides a sophisticated contrast to earlier farm planning. It is clear that contemporary planning places much more emphasis on modelling environmental processes associated with agricultural practices than in the 1960s.

⁶⁷ The term ‘environmental flow’ has been incorporated into policy frameworks for river management by relevant government agencies in Australia. It refers to the amount of water necessary to maintain riverine flora, fauna and environmental processes, sometimes referred to as ‘river health’.

The rhetoric employed by the developers to promote the proposal harnesses key forms of symbolic capital encapsulated by the terms 'productivity' and 'sustainability'. Promotion of the first stage of the Ord Irrigation Scheme highlighted the need to increase the population of northern Australia through the creation of economically self-sufficient regions. Population growth and the establishment of new regional economies were both portrayed as being in the 'national interest'. The Ord Stage Two proposal emphasises the relationship between the region and global markets and with other land uses in the Kimberley. Rather than 'national interest', the rhetoric of 'sustainability' is employed to justify the need for development that will ensure the future productivity of the land.

9.4 How 'The Project Area' defines land interests

I will now turn to the detailed proposal for the development of 'The Project Area' described in the Environmental Impact Assessment, ERMP/EIS for Ord Stage Two (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000). This document outlines an approach to regional development in which pastoral land use is phased out and irrigated agriculture and tourism are expanded (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: xxviii). It recommends increasing the area of nature reserves in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory in conjunction with new infrastructure associated with expanded irrigation areas. Proposals to upgrade and seal the road through the Keep River National Park to connect with Kununurra from the north would have the added benefit of providing a scenic circuit for tourists (Fig. 7). In this scenario, tourists seeking wilderness and adventure would travel through intensively cultivated (modified) lands to reach national parks where the 'original' or 'natural' environment is preserved. The proposed road would form a conduit through a place designated for future agricultural productivity to reach one identified as timeless 'authentic' nature and managed to prevent change. By proposing an expansion to the land reserved as national park, the proposal

suggests that the designation and demarcation of 'the Project Area' is linked with nature preservation and an increase in the region's tourist amenity.⁶⁸

The developers' proposal poses different relationships with the project area for Miriuwung and Gajerrong people, farmers and tourists, that discursively frame land interests for each. While these interests are presented as static, they nevertheless entail a particular interpretation of land use history in the region. Such representations, if given material form in the design and management of new farmlands, have implications for relations between Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists in the future.

The ERMP/EIS emphasises the continuity of farming practices in the Ord Valley, asserting that current farming practices have benefited from the experience of the first cotton farmers,

ORIA Stage 1 has been operated continuously for the purpose of irrigated agriculture since 1963. Over that period, a wide range of commercial crops has been grown and farm management practices has evolved in response to the new crops, improved knowledge of local conditions, and improvements in agricultural practices generally.

The ongoing practice of irrigated agriculture in ORIA Stage 1 provides evidence that the environmental impacts are manageable in key areas such as pesticide and chemical usage, and the containment of groundwater, salinity, sedimentation and weed infestation (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: v).

However the continuity portrayed here does not entail social continuity, but rather a continuity of certain land use practices. The first farmers who came to the Ord Valley in the 1960s grew cotton but, after initial optimism, were beset by a range of problems including insect and bird damage. Most had deserted their farms by 1972 due to financial

⁶⁸ The Northern Territory Government acquired the lease of Spirit Hills Station in anticipation of the proposed development. It subsequently requested that the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory advise on whether or not the portion of the lease not required for the irrigation area had values for conservation and biodiversity (Woinarski and Connors 1997). The response was unenthusiastic.

difficulties. The horticulturalists who arrived later to grow crops such as bananas, mangoes and melons had no prior experience with farming in the Ord Valley. The category of 'farmer' is used in the document in a generic sense, referring to agricultural practice rather than to specific groups of people at specific times. This allows the success of 1990s horticulturalists to be presented as evidence of the potential of the area for large-scale sugarcane farming. In the project plan, 3,000 hectares of the total of 32,000 is designated for sale to independent farmers to grow crops of their own choice (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: 3-1). In time, the project planners anticipate that other land, initially established as corporate sugarcane plantation, will eventually be 'sold-down' to independent farmers as smaller farms. Horticulturalists currently established on lands developed in Stage 1 of the Ord scheme, are thus envisaged to have a potential future role in the Ord Stage Two Project Area.

The consortium emphasise their desire to negotiate an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) in which Native Title rights and interests over land would be surrendered in return for a benefits package. They present a view that Aboriginal land use is incompatible with the proposed agricultural land use. The Project Area must be controlled by a single management structure representing the interests of the consortium and relevant government agencies. 'Miriuwung and Gajerrong people', defined legally through the Native Title process, could continue to gain access to areas designated as 'Conservation Areas' for either cultural or environmental reasons (Fig. 52). These areas would be excluded from the Project Area and would be important 'buffer zones' mediating impacts. The proposed benefits package could include,

... compensation for the loss or temporary impairment of native title rights; management and protection of cultural heritage and environmental values; training and employment; establishment of business opportunities; and improving the social

and economic development of Miriuwung and Gajerrong people (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: 12-8).

The exclusion of Aboriginal people from the new farmlands while permitting access to land in the Conservation Areas, and the staged inclusion of horticulturalists into the new farmlands, indicates a highly structured approach to planning. It can be interpreted as emphasising stratification of space, in the terms used by Deleuze and Guattari (1988). The proposed project area would be controlled by an 'Environmental Management Entity', jointly owned by the developers and the Water Corporation of Western Australia (Kinhill Pty. Ltd. 2000: 16-9). Access to land within its boundaries would be restricted and regulated.

Please see print copy for image

Figure 52. The proposed Project Area for Ord Stage Two, showing farmlands, conservation area and Aboriginal land claims.
Compiled from Figures 3.2 and 12.3 in Kinhill Pty.Ltd. .

9.5 Responses to Ord Stage Two

9.5.1 Aboriginal people

The range of sentiments expressed by Aboriginal people about the Ord Stage Two proposal was clearly influenced by their experiences of the first stage of the Scheme. In the government-driven planning for Ord Stage One, Aboriginal people were not consulted and no assessment was made of potential environmental or ecological impacts.⁶⁹ Older people still grieved for the loss of land associated with the flooding of Lake Argyle.⁷⁰ Witnesses in the Native Title hearings expressed concern about the impacts of the existing irrigation area on fish and vegetation along the Ord River.⁷¹ Sheba Dilngari was particularly concerned about recent fish kills resulting from farm runoff carrying endosulphan pesticide. She explained that she now only fishes in the Ord River upstream of the channels that drain the farmlands. The growth of vegetation along the water's edge was commonly referred to as 'rubbish'. David Newry explained that it hindered access for fishing and made the risk of crocodile attack much greater. In a 1999 documentary film about proposals to dam the Fitzroy River in the West Kimberley⁷² (Hughes 1999), Ben Ward described damaging ecological consequences of the damming of the Ord River,

Before this river used to flood right over on top of all these banks and by [the time] the dry season come, all this'd be lush and green and new topsoils and everything you know, and a lawn'd grow here. Look at it now. It's all dying. There's no space. Look at the weeds behind you. They're all dying because everything's cramped up. See this bloke [his young son], when he grows a bit bigger, might come down here to do fishing. Where the hell he's gonna go?

⁶⁹ Attention was drawn to both these issues in a 1979 Joint Commonwealth and Western Australian Review of the Ord River Irrigation Area, (Young 1979).

⁷⁰ In an interview with Bruce Shaw in the 1970s, Bulla Bilinggin described his grief at the loss of sacred objects for which he was personally responsible, under the rising waters of Lake Argyle (Shaw 1986: 171-2).

⁷¹ During the cotton growing period in the 1960s and early 1970s, large quantities of DDT were used to deter insect pests and herbicides such as 245T were used in the harvesting process. Both these chemicals have since been banned due to harmful environmental impacts of residues.

⁷² The film 'River of Dreams' was screened on SBS TV in 2000. The interview with Ben Ward was made in the context of comparing the impacts on Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley of damming the Ord River with the potential impacts on Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley of a proposal to dam the Fitzroy River to create water storage for irrigated farming there.

The same changes that horticulturalists saw as making the landscape more aesthetic, usable and accessible, as articulated in Chapter 5, were perceived by Aboriginal people to be detrimental to the resources of the river, restricting their access.



Figure 53. Bush meeting of Miriung women convened by the Northern Land Council to discuss the Ord Stage Two proposal.

In the course of my fieldwork, I attended two different kinds of consultative events. One consisted of bush meetings initiated by the Northern Land Council and the other, regular meetings conducted by the Wesfarmers project manager and anthropological consultant to brief local Aboriginal people on progress and seek their participation in impact assessment work. Each can be understood as a context of performance. Sullivan (1996: 107-113) describes the origins of community consultative meetings conducted by the Kimberley Land Council as a form of cultural practice, with differing meanings for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. These comments have relevance to a wide range of consultative practices, and inform my interpretation of the consultations outlined here.

Wesfarmers meeting about Ord Stage Two

The meeting I attended at Ski Beach on 22 March 1999 formed one of a series of community meetings convened by the consulting anthropologist to Wesfarmers, Nic Green, and addressed by the Wesfarmers project manager, Andrew Hopkins. Both men and women attended, sitting on opposite sides of the gathering. Two Miriuwung people, Ben Ward and Carol Hapke, were employed by Wesfarmers as interpreters and go-betweens assisting the communications between the company spokesmen and the Aboriginal people in attendance. My own attendance was in the capacity of providing transport to Alan and Peggy Griffiths and their relatives. Biddy Simon chose not to attend, commenting that other forms of consultation included payment of Aboriginal people for their time.

The Wesfarmers project manager began by outlining a time frame for conducting a social impact assessment, followed by a cultural heritage assessment and finally, negotiation of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement. Ben Ward then responded by asserting the need to establish a Prescribed Body Corporate under the *Native Title Act 1993*, which would then be the appropriate body to approve terms of reference for the social impact assessment. Carole Hapke explained that it was not possible to progress this work until unresolved issues were addressed concerning Aboriginal Living Areas within Western Australia. The Aboriginal Legal Service, acting for some of the Native Title holders, had taken this position. Ben Ward also raised the issue of the difference between 'cultural' people and 'modern' people when speaking for specific areas of country. Katherine Yarrbi emphasised a desire to have everyone present at meetings to discuss certain areas and noted that the Marralam mob should be present as well as various other relatives with ties to the Keep

River country. The issues of who could speak for country were clearly very complex but were highly relevant to any such consultative process.

When Nic Green spoke of the desire to incorporate Aboriginal input and traditional knowledge as part of a forthcoming fauna survey associated with the environmental impact assessment work that was currently underway, Carol Hapke raised concerns about ownership of Aboriginal intellectual property in that context, explaining that many people within the community were anxious about appropriation of traditional knowledge by outsiders.⁷³ Ben Ward raised concerns about the potential for salt and rising groundwater, and highlighted the problem of silting in the lower Ord.

I met with Nic Green the following day to explain the nature of my work. He was fairly pleased with the meeting and confessed that he had been concerned at first that no one would come, because attendance was impossible to predict. He was also relieved that people from groups within the community who were often in opposition had attended. He explained that the current low sugar prices made Stage Two an uncertain project. Wesfarmers would not mount further legal challenges against Native Title holders to facilitate the project. He explained that Wesfarmers was currently working out a balance sheet for the project. This would establish what they could afford to offer to Aboriginal interests. When I asked what the status of the impact studies would be if Wesfarmers withdrew, he responded that a lot of this information would remain in the public domain. If the price of sugar became more favourable in the future, another proponent might be encouraged to pick up the project. It was Nic Green's personal opinion that the project

⁷³ In Chapter 8 I described similar concerns about intellectual property that arose in the context of Aboriginal cultural tourism.

should include an area of land that Miriuwung and Gajerrong people could own and manage. He thought they were ideally placed to play a role in ongoing management and monitoring of environmental issues. There were also important biodiversity issues that Wesfarmers were obliged by law to respect, which necessitated setting aside land within the Project Area for conservation. He stressed that Native Title legislation forced the company to negotiate with Aboriginal people, because the consortium could not legally exclude them from land in the Project Area.

Northern Land Council meetings about Ord Stage Two

In 1999 I attended two bush meetings convened by the Northern Land Council in anticipation of the need for a social impact assessment for the Ord Stage Two proposals. Cath Elderton, the Northern Land Council project officer convening the meetings, explained that the purpose of conducting consultative meetings at that time was simply to communicate details of the proposals and initiate discussions among Aboriginal people with ties to the region.

On 20 June 1999 a meeting was held at Bullocks Crossing, a place north of Kununurra where stock had been forded across the Ord River prior to the dams. The main speakers at this meeting were Sheba Dilngari, Mignonette Djarmin and Katherine Yarrbi. Frances Kofod, a linguist engaged by the Northern Land Council who had worked with these women since the 1970s, prompted the women to talk about the prospect of having farms in the surrounding country. They began by talking about the two dams on the Ord River and how white people had never asked them about that land. The first farm was located close to Bullocks Crossing and triggered recollections of Kim Durack and his farm.

On 22 June 1999 a second meeting was held at the Keep River, at a site near to Kneebone and Marralam Outstations (Fig. 53). The Kneebone Outstation is the site of the proposed new service town for the new farmlands (Fig. 52). The journey from Kununurra to Kneebone took around one hour. En route the women in the vehicle I travelled in discussed different bush foods that could be obtained in places that we passed along the way. Occasionally they broke into songs in Miriung language, making hand motions as they sang. They clearly enjoyed travelling through familiar country. Like the Bullocks Crossing meeting, this one was also structured as a picnic, with beef and bread supplied by the convenors. Frances Kofod prompted a discussion of 'bush tucker' available in the immediate vicinity of the Keep River.

The discussion then moved on to considerations of which people could talk about which places and of taboos associated with men's and women's places. Cath Elderton put forward the idea of assembling a book in order to convey Aboriginal stories about that country to the consortium. She showed the map of the proposed new farmlands and explained that this was how the developers had put down what they wanted to do with that country.

Cath Elderton explained that the consortium considered the country to be empty and thought they were opening up land for their use. In response to this explanation, Sheba Dilngari talked about how the country used to be open and now it is closed to Aboriginal people. Station managers had put padlocks on the gates that restricted their access. She explained bitterly that white people built Kununurra and the two dams without consulting any Aboriginal people and had provided no compensation. She expressed her concern about the prospect of farms along the Keep River near where the meeting was being held, saying,

That's important country for me. Goannas all up that side. They have to ask. Maybe they'll do it anyway. The manager at Legune puts padlocks on the gates. He can't do that. This isn't his country. It belongs to Aboriginal people.

She was not convinced that consultation exercises would make any difference to the decisions made.

It became clear in the course of both these meetings that none of the women was comfortable in making any statement about land for which she was not specifically responsible. Much of the discussion seemed to revolve around the affirmation of which individuals had rights to speak for certain areas, and which areas were associated with men's business as opposed to women's business. While there were clear concerns about the proposals, some women felt cynical that they would be able to wield any influence, in keeping with their past experience. As social events, the meetings were clearly enjoyed and provided an opportunity to experience and relate stories about the country. Women from different generations interacted with each other and with the various children who accompanied them.

Issues of representation characterised every form of consultation with Aboriginal people over the Ord Stage Two proposals and posed a broader challenge for putting the legal concept of Native Title into practice. Provisions are made within the Native Title Act for the establishment of a Prescribed Body Corporate to represent the interests of Native Title holders. However, in the East Kimberley, this requires a broader form of social and political identification than the more common affiliations based on loose family groups that characterise the makeup of outstation groups. As described in Chapter 4, groupings may connect with specific places that kin groups were associated with during the station times, as well as to places for which people hold specific cultural responsibilities through Ngarranggarni traditions. Given that the Native Title ruling recognised diverse ways in

which people relate to places, the process of forming a representative organisational structure also needed to reflect the diverse interests among the Native Title holders.⁷⁴

Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council response to Draft ERMP/EIS

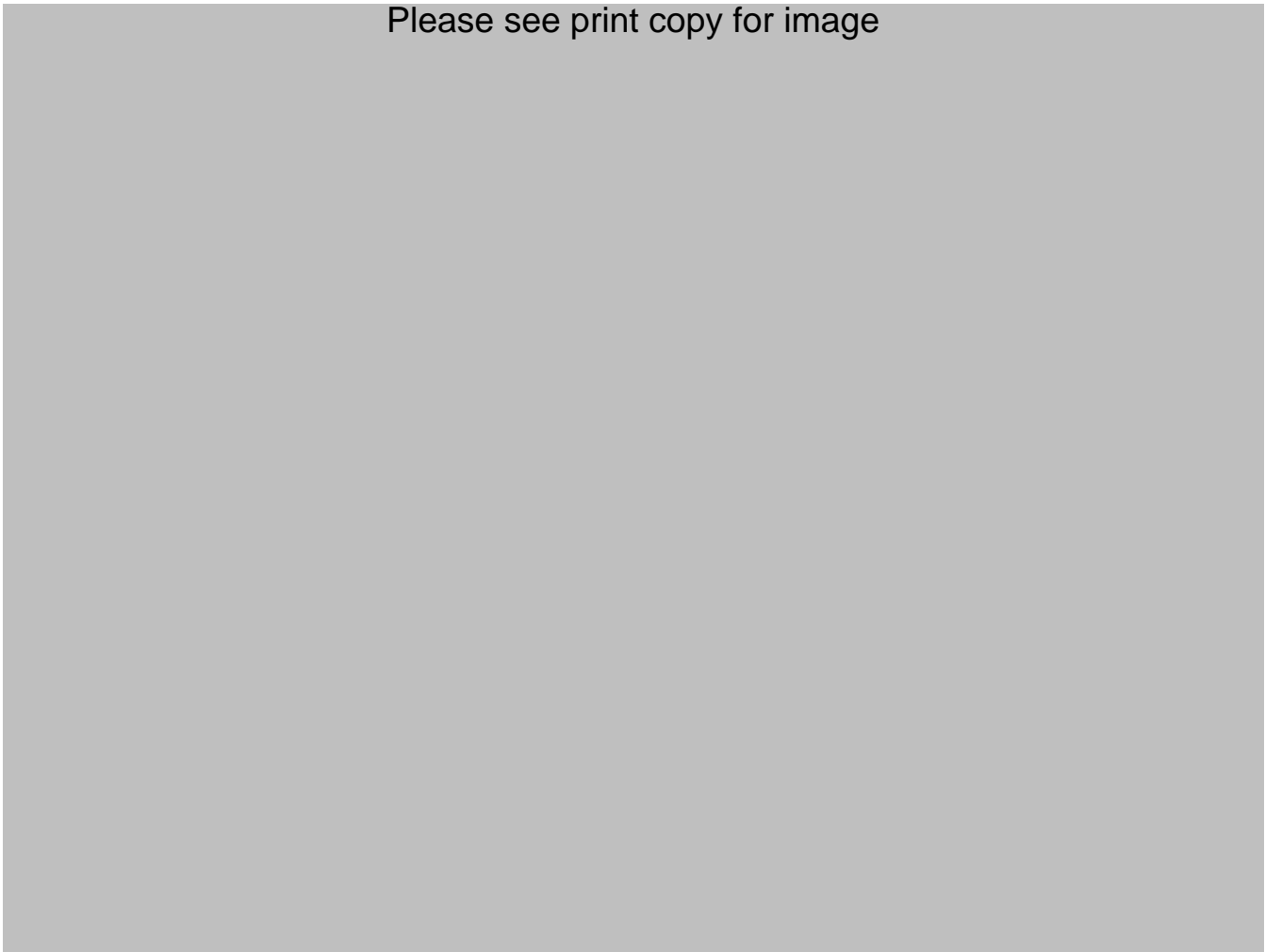
Based on a range of consultations with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people, the Northern Land Council and the Kimberley Land Council prepared a joint response to the impact assessment for the Ord Stage Two proposal. Their submission contested the assumption of incompatibility between Native Title and the management of the Project Area and suggested an alternative approach in which Aboriginal interests would be maintained throughout the Project Area (Table 11). The model they propose is more like a patchwork or mosaic patterning of different land uses throughout the proposed Project Area, in which Native Title holders would co-manage a shared space along with the consortium and the Water Corporation. Their proposal for co-existing interests in land can be described as a form of smooth space in Deleuze and Guattari's terms. Access would not be restricted and Aboriginal people would maintain their existing interests in the land and interact with those involved in the agricultural land uses.

Further criticism was made of plans for the role of environmental management to be vested in an authority representing only the consortium and the Western Australian Government. The Northern Land Council and the Kimberley Land Council expressed concern that the concept of environmental management would be framed entirely in terms relating to the physical environment (Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council 2000: 10). Instead they asserted the need for a more socially oriented understanding of the

⁷⁴ For further discussion of this issue framed in terms of a comparison between the *Native Title Act 1993* and the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, see Rumsey (1996). A discussion of the legal provision for establishing a Prescribed Body Corporate to represent the interests of Native Title holders can be found in Mantziaris and Martin (2000).

‘environment’ that takes account of the different world view of Aboriginal people (Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council 2000: 45), the impacts on ‘bush tucker habitats and the use and management of terrestrial vegetation by Aboriginal people’ (Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council 2000: 31).

Table 11. Contrast between the Wesfarmers/Marubeni proposal and an alternative model for Aboriginal involvement and land use in the Ord Stage Two project. Reproduced from the NLC and KLC report with permission (Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council 2000: 8).



Close scrutiny of the discourse and rhetoric used in the Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council response reveals their sources of authority. The 1998 judgement

on the Native Title claim clearly provides authority for their description of Aboriginal interests in land. However the authors of the report also employ a rhetoric of sustainability to validate their arguments. Given that the terms of reference for the ERMP/EIS shown in Table 11 referred to concepts of 'sustainability', biodiversity, and traditional Aboriginal land uses, it was expedient for the authors of this report to use these terms in making their counter-arguments. However, they attempt to expand the meaning of these concepts in order to put forward Aboriginal perspectives on the proposed changes. In particular, they argue that 'sustainability' should be understood as including social as well as environmental sustainability, so that the long-term wellbeing of the Aboriginal community would be considered.

9.5.2 Horticulturalists

In recorded interviews and other interactions with horticulturalists, I sought their views on the Ord Stage Two proposal and prospects for the future of the region. While some expressed concern about the prospect of Ord Stage Two developing as a large corporate sugar plantation, all were interested in the potential of the proposed new farming areas to increase economies of scale for horticultural produce. Their enthusiasm about increasing the areas of irrigated farmlands was tempered by fears that it might be difficult for small-scale businesses to buy land if they had to compete with large corporations. These concerns were voiced at a public meeting addressed by the Wesfarmers project manager in August 1998 (*The Kimberley Echo* 1998: 3). The project manager explained that this strategy was considered necessary to establish the project economics but stressed that some blocks would be available for independent farmers and that the farm design would allow for future subdivision and sell off.

John Mack was generally positive about the Ord Stage Two development and confident that land would eventually be released for horticultural blocks, but felt it was likely to take much longer than the three to four years estimated by proponents of the development,

I think – my sense is the time frame will be a bit longer than is – you know, they're sort of talking about [in] three or four years you'll be able to buy farms. I don't think that'll happen. I think probably if you looked at 70 or 80 per cent development in farms on the ground in a 10-year time frame, I think that'll be pretty accurate (interview Kununurra, March 1999).

However he was closely scrutinising proposals relating to use of irrigation water and remained wary of the concept of large-scale corporate farming in the region,

Unlike here on a lot of the M-2 [the proposed new channel to service a new irrigation area on the flood plain of the lower Keep River to the east], they've got salt. So rising ground water would be a really significant problem out there, because it will bring up salt. So they're looking at alternative types of irrigation, that minimise that impact.

And I – I can't say that I'm ecstatically happy about the idea of a super mill. Um, or any large corporate farm on that sort of a scale, taking up 80 or 85 per cent of the land, albeit – maybe for five or 10 years, until they've recouped their capital. I just have some concerns (interview Kununurra, March 1999).

A powerful narrative that underlies the accounts of both first and second generation irrigation farmers is that the cotton monoculture was a disaster and that crop diversification has saved the Ord. Contemporary horticulturalists Jill Parker and Elaine Gardiner both expressed concerns about a sugar cane monoculture in the context of Ord Stage Two, referring to the disastrous history of cotton monoculture in the 1960s and 1970s. Jill Parker articulated her concern about monoculture primarily in terms of vulnerability to both disease and market fluctuations,

I dislike the concept of [monoculture]. It breeds disease, it means that everyone is – got all their eggs in one basket so you – and with our world economy, or what you'd call a global economy, you aren't in control of it. So to have a whole region reliant on one single crop, which you can't control the market of, and never will be able to, I think is a very false economy. I'd prefer to see a spread of crops in the area and sugar cane can be one of them. I don't really have a problem with it (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

John Mack invoked a historical perspective in order to assert the importance of farmers taking their own initiatives rather than being directed by government policy,

I mean one of the things [about] the history of the Ord is, that twice they've gone down the monoculture track and twice it's been a bloody disaster. I believe, the reason that the Ord is successful now is twofold. One, the West Australian Government said: 'No more white elephants, no

more subsidies.' And a lot of the smart but albeit lazy farmers that were up here playing around but making a good living out of collecting government subsidies, pissed off.

And smart farmers came in who saw good soils, excellent access to very high quality water, potential to grow out of season crops. The ability to have four or five hundred million people, [closer] to us than Perth – huge potential market. Um, good soils, predictable climate, few risks, low pest pressures – hey, it's got to be a good place to farm. We've just got to find out what grows there. And I think last year, there was a count. There was something like in the high thirties or early forties, different commercial crops being grown in the valley. And I think that's one of the reasons why it's successful. There's a lot of smart, innovative farmers that come in, that are prepared to try all sorts of things (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

The subsidies he referred to were those paid by the Commonwealth government between 1963 and 1968 associated with the *Raw Cotton Bounty Act* 1963, and employed as a policy instrument to promote the cotton industry around Australia (Graham-Taylor 1982).

All the contemporary farmers I spoke with expressed enthusiasm about the potential for better economies of scale that expansion of the irrigation areas could deliver. Jill Parker was particularly enthusiastic about opening up the Mantinea Flats area for farming,

Mantinea Flats looks – I think looks fantastic. I believe that the expansion of the irrigation scheme is a must. It's ridiculous to have this potential. It's crazy to be so close to Asia and not be growing enough of a product. A conversation I had with a particular importer in Hong Kong, was that: Why would I make one phone call to get one sea container of grapefruit? For instance, for Western Australia, when I can make one phone call and get fifty from Florida? While we remain very small in our products, we limit greatly what we can do with our export. And Asia's next door, it's three days from Wyndham by boat. It's a crazy thing to do, to keep our crops so small with this mentality that we're going on. The only way to do that is to have good land that's available. Mantinea Flats, looks absolutely wonderful, as far as I was concerned. I'd love to see it developed but I would like to see some of these environmental concerns looked at. I would prefer to see things work on under tree sprinklers rather than flood and things like that, but that's only my opinion (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

Di Oliver, now jointly managing a mango farm with her husband Ian Oliver, considered the Ord Stage Two project to be in keeping with the original progressive vision for the region that the earlier pioneering farmers brought with them,

The overall future I think for Kununurra, has always been immense. The potential here in the early days was huge. There was nowhere else in Australia like it. It was the last frontier, where you could come and develop something and make money. You know, they were like gung-ho, young people that came here and developed the Ord. The original pioneers. No-one will *ever* thank them. I don't think anyone will ever say well – because if there hadn't been the original farmers here, this place would never have been developed. And also we were a defence. There were people living in the north — we were a defence aspect as well I think. ...

We've got a port right there. We're close to Asia for exports. Tourism, everything, the town has to go ahead. I mean, it certainly will. It's a very fast growing area. You've got to learn to cope with the

climate but today you can all have air conditioners. And everyone gets paid a decent amount so, I think there's – the expansion of Ord Stage Two and with the involvement with Northern Territory Government, the cattle industry is going to be still as buoyant and bigger. Everything will improve (interview Kununurra, 23 June 1999).

These perspectives suggest that some aspects of the place-images and rhetoric of earlier years persist in the East Kimberley. For Di Oliver at least, the proposals to develop Ord Stage Two continue the initiatives of pioneering pastoralists who first made the region productive as 'cattle country'. The pioneering farmers in the 1960s then laid the groundwork for making the region eventually productive as an 'agricultural oasis' in the 1990s. Tropes of colonisation and modernisation persist in the development ideology portrayed here.

Elaine Gardiner asserted the need to maintain a focus on the existing farms rather than directing all planning efforts to Ord Stage Two. She was mainly concerned that care was exercised in allocating water to the irrigation areas and environmental changes were monitored,

But I think in the valley now, that, over the last few years the issues have become a lot clearer, and the consequences of not doing something have become a lot clearer. And because we're a young irrigation system, it's important that we do address these issues as we're going [through] them ... and come up with some sort of solutions to them. So that we don't because like the east and have all the problems with salt and – and all allocated rivers and all the problems that goes with them.

At Ord Irrigation we've pushed very hard with Waters and Rivers Commission, who are the people that divide up the lake into who gets what, that we get our allocation plus a little bit, so that it'll never be over allocation. And it's our ... well, it's Spike Dessert and my goal in life that the lake will not be over allocated, that there will always be water for people for use.

Now, everyone goes on about stage two or M-2, or whatever you like to call it. It's still coming – we're here, we're irrigating, we need to have security. So we've pushed very hard to make sure that Waters and Rivers know that we know, [laughs] about everybody else in the world and how irrigation systems work (interview Kununurra, 17 March 1999).

The horticulturalists saw themselves as having a capacity to learn about and adapt to both the land and fluctuating markets, due to the small scale of their farming enterprises. Because of their personal investment they had strong motivations for making their farms profitable. If one crop or variety failed they could cut their losses and try something else.

John Mack described his trials with losing banana crops in the wet season storms and his subsequent shift to farming citrus,

In fact one block, we'd only been picking three weeks, so you know, a whole year's work and cost had gone into it and it took three minutes and [makes splat sound] it was flattened. And the year before we were hit, so we said it's too high risk and we're getting too old for it – it's a young man's game. So we're swinging over into citrus now, predominantly into lemons which are a tree crop similar to mangoes. You can spend a fair bit of time watching them growing or going fishing and still make a reasonable return off them (interview Kununurra, 23 March 1999).

The value that horticulturalists placed in the flexibility and adaptability of small-scale farming operations seemed to be in tension with their desire for better economies of scale. The consortium used the issue of economies of scale to argue for larger scale corporate farms based on single crops. Horticulturalists also emphasised the uncontrollable aspects of farming in the East Kimberley, both in terms of the physical environment and fluctuating markets. These aspects were less prominent in the ERMP/EIS document.

9.5.3 'The Project Area' and tourism land use interests

Tourism operators

Tourism operators diverged widely in their responses to the proposed Ord Stage Two Project Area. While some perceived it as a business opportunity, others were concerned about potential environmental impacts that would diminish the attractiveness of the region for tourists.

Kenton May viewed the Ord Stage Two proposal as a potential business opportunity, and contemplated setting up worker accommodation if a new service town was constructed in the region. Because the ecotourism operations that he and his brother Scott operated were focused on the Ord River and the Bungle Bungles he didn't see a particular conflict with the expansion of agricultural areas. He felt that the seasonal work associated with the agricultural areas was beneficial to tourism as tourists could pay for their adventure with

money earned by picking fruit. Despite the farmlands, tourists still felt they were having a frontier experience. Jenny Hayley, however, expressed some concerns about the expansion of agriculture and was particularly concerned about proposals to include some areas of transgenic cotton as part of Ord Stage Two. However, she was aware that the continued existence of Kununurra and its associated tourist industry relied on agriculture,

Well naturally there is agriculture in the area and for the farmers to be viable, they've got to use chemicals and while I don't like chemicals, I can't come up with a better system to make it viable. And basically if the agriculture's not viable it'll close down and we will no longer have Kununurra. So, I think whichever way you go, it's a case of finding the ideal compromise.

One of my concerns in the irrigation is if cotton does go ahead. Cotton depends a lot on chemicals and even though they've developed these hybrid strains of cotton which are resistant to this *Heliothis* moth, they still require spraying as the moth builds up resistance to the chemical.

Gail Eastaway, from the Kununurra Tourist Information Bureau, expressed her concerns about expanding agriculture and monocultures in emotive and aesthetic terms. She hated the thought of vast expanses of sugar cane in the Ord Valley and didn't like the prospect of cotton either. She thought that mixed crops made a far more interesting landscape and commented that the cane was detrimental to the aesthetics of the Ord Valley. She was annoyed that cane farmers had reneged on a promise that they would plough in the trash rather than burn it, explaining that after burning it rains black ash for several days. She was also worried about the pesticides and fertilisers. She found Mantinea Flats to be a beautiful area and believed that carefully managed tourism would have much less impact than the agricultural proposal. She mentioned the potential for organised trail riding in that area.

Fishing tour operator Andrew McEwan was very conscious of the impacts of effluents from existing agricultural areas on the Ord River,

You know it's not necessarily chemical use that I turn round and say is a major worry. I mean, in general there's any one of a number of different things to do with agriculture that are damaging to the environment. There's siltation sediment, there's nutrient level, there's all sorts of things that are running off farm, that end up in the river.

But you know, it – again, that was one particular incident when we were having endosulphan related fish kills in the lower Ord, I was noticing up to 10 per cent of the population of pop-eyes that were

affected with cancerous type lesions, that weren't a red spot disease,' as I was told by some people. They were actually lesions which sort of – that level in a population, denoted that there was certainly something out of whack and is a chronic level, that was obviously affecting a susceptible population.

And that bothered me but I mean that's just the tip of the iceberg. We see a result from a fish kill, and it means very little, the floating fish that are there, I mean they're the other end of the food chain. Although some fish are very susceptible to chemicals that other animals aren't to, but I mean it's what we don't see that are causing a lot of problems, you know potentially a lot of problems.

He played an active role in a forum addressing management problems in the lower Ord River (McEwan 1998). He was also very concerned about the proposed changes to the Keep River,

I mean, you can't go pumping saline water out of an agricultural area and just because you're putting it into the tidal area of the Keep, expect everything in the garden to be rosy, but you'll be made to swallow that. I mean that's – As far as they're concerned, that's fine.

You know, there's a lot to it. You're completely changing the environment. Those saline plains are flat. If you look at the sustainability of agriculture on a saline flat, it's – in an arid area, you really tend to wonder where their motivations are coming from. I mean, obviously the short-term monetary gain is going to outweigh any long-term damage. Or who knows, maybe if they keep pumping the water out, maybe it will be sort of viable for a long term but again, it's a tragedy to see that area being treated in that regard.

It is interesting to note that he expressed his concerns in terms of longer-term detrimental environmental impacts versus short-term economic gain. He saw an inevitable conflict between maintaining a healthy environment and the expansion of agriculture,

And the way I look at the environment in the area and the way I sort of judge an area, is by – a lot of the time I'm going back to a fishing sense. You judge something by its – how it fishes. I mean the closer to virgin territory it is, the better off it is and that's the way you sort of look at how healthy an environment it. So, you move further and further away from that when you increase agriculture and you increase population, and all that accessibility and everything else to go with it.

The concept of a pristine or 'virgin' river appeared to be more important to Andrew McEwan than to other tour operators I interviewed.

Tourism operators readily acknowledged that the damming of the Ord River and the creation of Kununurta had precipitated the local tourism industry, creating amenity for tourists in the form of an infrastructure of roads and services and expanses of still water that attracted bird life. I asked Jenny Hayley whether some tourists seeking a 'wilderness' experience saw the damming of the river as a contradiction in terms. She felt that tourists

were impressed, as she was herself, by the positive effects of permanent water on local wildlife populations. But she added that she did not know what the effects of the dams would be in a hundred years time. She thought that the Fitzroy River in the West Kimberley should be left as a wild river and not dammed. The constant flow of fresh water in the Ord had facilitated Andrew McEwan's business based on barramundi fishing. Like Jenny and Jeff Hayley, he promoted his tours as a wilderness experience and ensured that the tour guides he employed were familiar with local flora and fauna. He explained that he was about to start up a new eco-tour specifically targeting tourists interested in wildlife.

The tourism operators I interviewed were conscious that the alterations to the river had facilitated their ecotourism operations but were not really troubled by this as a contradiction in terms. They were more interested in their capacity to navigate through the environment with ease and in opportunities for tourists to view wildlife.

Personal constructs of tourists

Some sense of the potential responses of tourists to an expansion to the Ord Valley farmlands could be gained by assessing the way in which tourists perceived existing farmlands and the associated infrastructure of Lake Argyle and Lake Kununurra. I draw here on analysis of the section of the tourist questionnaire that addressed 'Holiday Feelings' and employed personal construct analysis. I compare the frame of reference that tourists engaged when appraising attractions related to the dams and farmlands with the frames of reference employed for other attractions. The findings summarised here are described in greater detail in Waitt, Lane and Head (in press). I then relate the personal constructs of tourists to the statements made by tourism operators presented above and speculate on the effects of Ord Stage Two on both the practice and experience of tourism and the place images generated by the industry.

In Chapter 6, analysis of the personal constructs of tourists surveyed indicated that the irrigation areas were perceived within a different cognitive framework to that associated with Lake Argyle. While the farmlands were perceived as a domesticated agricultural landscape, Argyle Dam was perceived as part of the natural landscape. Regardless of sex, motivation or holiday-maker classification, images of irrigated agriculture were appraised along with images of fishing and pastoralism as familiar and domesticated. In strong contrast, appraisals of Argyle Dam clustered with billabongs and rock wallabies suggested that the dam was perceived as part of the natural environment.

Tourists in the East Kimberley seem to absorb place-images produced by the tourism industry that portray the Ord River and Lake Argyle as wilderness. While international tourists perceived all attractions except agriculture and fishing as indicating adventure, domestic tourists, exposed to Australian television programs, regarded many of these same images as familiar, but still identified them as part of nature. The survey results confirm the significance of the tourism industry in circulating particular stereotypes of wilderness, which then influence the way that tourists understand their own experiences on arrival (Waitt et al. in press). While the presence of irrigated agriculture is not regarded as an adventure setting in the same way as the modified Ord River or landscape features within national parks, it does not seem to compromise the experience of other aspects of the Kimberley as 'nature'.

Tourism contributes to contemporary forms of symbolic capital that attribute value to the wilderness and frontier qualities of the East Kimberley. In the proposals for Ord Stage Two, tourists would experience these qualities within the demarcations of national parks

and the expanses of water created by the Ord River dams. The obvious relationship of the dams to the irrigation areas does not detract from the emotive framework that tourists use to appraise them. However, tourism land interests are unlikely to coincide with farmlands. As a consequence they may rely on a clear separation between places that can be classified as nature-focused and those where agricultural pursuits dominate. In this scenario then, place-making for tourism contributes to the striation of space in the East Kimberley in the sense outlined by Deleuze and Guattari (1988).

9.6 Conclusion

The proposed Ord Stage Two Project Area can be understood as an exercise in boundary making. The proposal calls for a clear geographic demarcation between land interests of agriculturalists, Aboriginal people and tourists. To date, the history of relations between Aboriginal people and farmers in the East Kimberley has largely been characterised by exclusions, and the consortium's preferred model for negotiating a surrender of Native Title rights in the Project Area would continue this tradition. In legislation and policy frameworks for environmental impact assessment, 'environment' is discursively framed as external to human subjectivity. Given the nature/culture binary thus engaged (Proctor and Pincetl 1996), it is hardly surprising to find a lack of fit between the framework for environmental impact assessment and the approaches suggested by the NLC and KLC for incorporating social and cultural values of the land for Miriwung and Gajerrong people.⁷⁵ Ben Ward contrasted the continuing land use interests of Aboriginal people with the transient history of farmers in the East Kimberley, and of non-Aboriginal people generally,

⁷⁵ Similar issues concerning policy and legislative frameworks have been raised in the context of cultural heritage assessments made by the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (Byrne et al 2001). A more in-depth analysis of the situation for national parks services in both Queensland and New South Wales is provided by Adams (2001).

We live here. I don't go to England. I don't go to any other country. We live right here. This is where we belong, here. And this is where my kids are gonna be (Hughes 1999).

Terms such as 'sustainability', central to the rhetoric of contemporary environmental impact assessments, have a very different meaning for Aboriginal people. For them, environmental issues and social issues cannot be addressed separately.

By contrast with Aboriginal land interests, the land interest currently associated with tourism seems largely in keeping with the geographic demarcations proposed for the Ord Stage Two Project Area, in which places for tourism are kept separate to those for agricultural land interests. However a blurring of the boundaries of tourism and agricultural interests already takes place in relation to the Ord River and its dams. The contemporary focus on nature-based attractions stands in contrast to the early history of tourism in the region. Representations of the East Kimberley as wilderness, adventure and frontier proliferate in imagery circulated by the tourism industry. These qualities now contribute a form of symbolic capital that influences contemporary planning processes.

While there are some parallels between the Ord Stage Two proposal and instrumentalist approaches to agricultural planning in the 1960s, the 1960s rhetoric of modernisation has been replaced by one of economic and environmental sustainability. A new geographical entity, 'the Project Area', would be excised from the surrounding country and managed according to scientifically informed guidelines for sustainability. Horticulturalists, unlike Miriwung and Gajerrong people, are envisaged as owning land within the Project Area in the future, bringing with them a diversification of land use and ownership and potentially a new set of social relations.

The concept of sustainability envisaged for the Project Area clearly fits more closely with the land interest of horticulturalists than with that of Aboriginal people, as validated by Native Title. Horticulturalists identify themselves as entrepreneurial, efficient and environmentally conscious. The link they make between aesthetics and commercial productivity strengthens their position in a political economy that links economic with environmental sustainability. While the nature-based aesthetics promoted by tourism do not engage with agricultural productivity, they too harness the symbolic capital of sustainability. Tourism places are sustainable because they are preserved within national parks and reserves. For Aboriginal people whose lives, and those of their children, are bound up with the longer term future of land use in the East Kimberley, sustainability must be also be socially grounded.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

The arguments of this thesis address the concerns of de Certeau outlined in Chapter 2 about the relationship between the production of representations and the experiences of those who use them or are affected by them. I have demonstrated the iterative nature of the relationship between lived experience, land interests, representations and symbolic capital. Together they function as a place making process in which a change in one aspect may affect the others. The relationship between them occurs within a spatial politics structured by grids of difference.

The first part of this thesis traced aspects of the lived experience of farmers, tourism operators and Aboriginal people since the 1960s and contrasted these with representations of the East Kimberley that have entered public discourse over time. My relational approach (Massey and the collective 1999) allowed me to show how the production and experience of place connects with the production and experience of social identities. Employing the notion of 'land interests', I teased out aspects of social identities produced through relations with land. My historical analysis highlighted the dynamic aspects of land interests, associated with fluid social identities and changing spatial practices such as mobility. For example, the responses of Aboriginal witnesses in the Native Title proceedings to questions about their burning practices in the past and the present indicate a complex relationship between interests in accessing country and bush foods, interests in promoting cattle fodder and restrictions on their burning activities over time. Burning practices have both accommodated to and become part of landscape change associated with pastoralism.

Some interests have contributed more significantly than others to representations in public media, providing place-images for public audiences who have no direct experience of the region. Prior to the growth of tourism in the 1980s, agricultural land interests dominated the representation of the region in public media. Contemporary public media is likely to reflect the portrayal of the East Kimberley by tourism and to a lesser extent, agriculture. In tourism, the East Kimberley is portrayed as both wilderness and frontier, and as remote in both time and space. Developers and governments promoting agricultural expansion continue to portray the East Kimberley as an empty place, not inherently productive, but able to be made productive through the investment of labour and infrastructure. By the late 1990s Aboriginal people had gained a much stronger political voice than in earlier years, with new requirements that Miriuwung and Gajerrong people be consulted over contemporary land use planning issues affecting areas subject to land claims. Representations of place deriving from Aboriginal land interests were mediated through legal processes, such as the Native Title proceedings or through structured consultations for specific purposes, such as those conducted for the Ord Stage Two proposal. Artwork produced for sale to tourists or galleries provided one of the few means by which Aboriginal people communicated their land interests directly to a wider public audience.

10.1 Dynamic subjects

The representations of place associated with the different land interests portrayed in Part II of this thesis to some extent reflect the very different subjective relationships that Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists have with the East Kimberley. I have concentrated on the way in which these relationships give rise to social identifications, and how these identifications change over time along with changing spatial practices.

Mobility provided my key focus for understanding changing spatial practices for Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists since the 1960s. For each of these social categories, mobility is indicative of their differing phenomenological relationships with place. For Aboriginal people, mobility is important for maintaining cultural memories embedded in places. For tourists, by contrast, mobility can be interpreted as a form of escape from familiar places.

Changing patterns of mobility contributed to the shaping of land interests over time, influencing social groupings and structuring social encounters in place. Patterns of mobility for farmers, Aboriginal people and tourists changed significantly between the 1960s and the late 1990s. Physical infrastructure associated with the construction of Kununurra and farmlands, the damming of the Ord River, and new roads and national parks influenced the patterns of mobility for each group. For Aboriginal people, these changes were magnified by the significant impacts of government policy changes. To some extent, these changes have maintained separations between different land users, so that the categories of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists retained meaning in the late 1990s. However, the land interests of each were expressed very differently to those identified by these categories in the 1960s. Aboriginal people were more likely to access country using roads and vehicles and their social networks were more extensive geographically than in the 1960s. Farmers frequently travelled extensively to market their produce in southern Australia and south east Asia. Tourists visited in much greater numbers as part of broader travel itineraries that included other places within Australia or overseas. As a consequence of all these changes, land interests in the 1990s were constructed on a much larger spatial scale.

A focus on mobility also indicates differential power relations operating at any one time. Gender, generational and racial differences contribute to embodied experience that has

expression in patterns of mobility. For example, for both farmers and Aboriginal people in the 1960s mobility differed significantly between men and women. Exclusion from pastoral lands in the 1960s brought a sudden and dramatic change to the mobility of Aboriginal people in relation to ceremonies, and other practices such as gathering bush foods. The outstation movement of the 1980s and 1990s can be understood as an attempt to recapture some access to important land that held memories and social identifications associated with an earlier period. It is the prospect of regaining access to country that motivates Aboriginal claimants to put their case to courts addressing Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights. In the late 1990s, tourism operators and the location of national parks shaped the mobility of tourists. While for tourists, mobility is voluntary and understood as a form of liberty and adventure, for Aboriginal people, it has sometimes been experienced as involuntary displacement and a form of constraint.

10.2 Contemporary spatial politics – symbolic capital at work

In Part III of the thesis I analysed the Ord Stage Two Project Area and East Kimberley national parks as examples of place-making that rely on a concept of bounded or stratified spaces. However, these place-making activities are potentially challenged by the concepts of Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights if the latter are interpreted as forms of co-existing interests in land. The land interest associated with Native Title introduces a new kind of symbolic capital based on continuity of traditional relationships to land. Miriwung and Gajerrong people now have a recognised legal and political interest in land and a platform from which to express concerns about proposed land use change. They have an unprecedented ‘power to define’ (Anderson 1986, Mitchell 1993) interests in land, provided that these interests fit with social identifications acknowledged in the Native Title process.

The example of Aboriginal cultural tourism, developed in Chapter 8, indicated that many Aboriginal people are reluctant to engage with the land interests of tourism. In a context of spatial politics in which tourists are more likely than Aboriginal people to have the mobility that vehicles allow, the co-existence of Aboriginal people's and tourists' interests in land may not be viewed by Aboriginal people as beneficial. Miriuwung people acknowledged as traditional owners of land in the Mirima National Park chose to assert their own boundaries by excluding tourists from important sites within the park.

Contemporary place-making processes more readily align with the land interests of farmers or tourists than with Aboriginal people. This is reflected in the forms of symbolic capital harnessed in planning processes. As demonstrated in Chapter 9, 'productivity' in the sense of production of commodities for sale to global markets, is a key form of symbolic capital that drives the agendas of governments, corporate developers and farmers alike. However, while developers emphasise that maximising productivity requires economies of scale based on corporate farming of sugarcane, farmers stress the importance of crop diversification for long-term productivity and a capacity to adapt to fluctuations in both markets and the local environment.

The impact assessment for the Ord Stage Two proposal employs a particular interpretation of 'sustainability' as a form of symbolic capital that frames decisions about land use and management in the 'Project Area' and associated 'conservation buffer zones'. However, I showed in Chapter 9 that the definition of sustainability in relation to the physical rather than social environment was at odds with Aboriginal land interests. In place-making associated with tourism, 'authenticity' provides a key form of symbolic capital, influencing

both the kinds of experiences produced for tourists and planning associated with tourism places such as national parks.

10.3 Methodological reflections

Grappling with the complexities of dynamic land interests, representations and spatial politics required an interpretive approach capable of incorporating a range of methods to analyse different kinds of source materials. The approach unfolded throughout the course of the study, and not all materials that I hoped to use at the outset were available. The availability of source materials however, was also a reflection of the region's spatial politics. For example, my reliance on Native Title transcripts rather than recorded interviews with Aboriginal people reflected the political tensions associated with the Native Title claim. The refusal of permission to interview (or even converse with!) park rangers associated with the Keep River National Park probably reflected the same tension.

In introducing my methodological strategy in Chapter 2, I referred to Shotter's model which described interpretive or hermeneutic approaches as a two-way interaction between the researcher and the subjects of study (Shotter 1993). While I applied empirical techniques to seek pattern in my source materials, I also imposed my own interpretive frameworks when selecting which sources to draw on. This iterative engagement structured my approach, because I brought a revised understanding of what was important to my research question to each selection of source material. Baxter and Eyles (1997) highlight the importance of reflexivity to attain rigour in interpretive methodologies. In keeping with this advice, each chapter where I introduced new source materials included a detailed description of how the materials were selected and the form of analysis applied to them.

My own identity, as a white female university-based researcher from southeastern Australia, clearly influenced my relationships with those I worked with. The selection of interviewees was a two-way process as I could only interview those who agreed to work with me, and some people were clearly more comfortable with me than others. In writing about the mobility and social identities of those I worked with, I was provoked to reflect on my own social identity and experience of mobility in the course of this work and to consider how my own 'interest' in the East Kimberley evolved. I travelled between Canberra (my residence), Wollongong (my university), Darwin, Kununurra and Perth. I frequently stayed either in backpacker accommodation or with friends, and to some extent my life resembled that of the tourists I met in transit. I identified as part of a community of scholars, especially in cultural geography, with no particular spatial affiliation.

I hoped my work would have meaning to those I worked with as well as contribute to broader understandings of social and cultural dimensions of land use change and place-making processes generally. At times I questioned whether research for a PhD, necessarily addressing an academic audience and engaging with theoretical arguments, could have practical meaning or utility for those I encountered in the East Kimberley. However, interactions with young professionals working for land councils or government agencies in the region reassured me of the practical value of the work for their activities. In 2000 and 2002 I dispatched drafts of publications to some of these people for comment and lodged copies at local venues such as the Mirima Woorlab Gerring Language Centre, the Kununurra Tourism Association and the Department of Conservation and Land Management office in Kununurra. The work was particularly welcome among those engaged in consultative processes with Miriuwung and Gajerrong people. They found it to contain useful perspectives and overviews that would have been difficult for them to frame

themselves, as they were immersed in the issues in their day-to-day working lives. I was reassured of the value of the more distanced perspective permitted by academic work, grounded in theory but engaging with practical problems.⁷⁶

I am conscious that the different sources used for addressing the land interests of Aboriginal people, farmers, tourism operators and tourists, exert different cadences in my interpretive 'voice'. For example, the quantitative parts of the tourism survey required a more removed and seemingly 'objective' analysis than the interpretation of interview materials. Recorded interviews were different again to interpretation of film media and to Native Title transcripts. While my consistent emphasis on discourse, rhetoric and place-images allowed comparisons to be made between the different sources, the knowledge of land interests produced within this study remains uneven. For example, interviews and Native Title transcripts provided a useful source for understanding the experiences of farmers, tourism operators and Aboriginal people in the East Kimberley. The survey of tourists, however, allowed me to interpret their responses to the promotional imagery they encountered but did not assist with understanding their actual experiences on arrival. Further, the sources I examined for representations of the East Kimberley and its various land interests over time, differed in significant ways. While media representations were produced for public audiences, Aboriginal representations of land interests within the Native Title transcripts were presented in a formal legal context for a relatively small audience.

⁷⁶ In 2000 a major research program aimed at informing land use planning in 'the Ord Bonaparte region' was launched, with funding from Land and Water Australia and participation by the Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation (CSIRO) and various Western Australian government agencies. As the bulk of my fieldwork was completed by the time this project commenced, my engagement with it has mainly taken the form of distribution of publications and occasional telephone communications with those involved.

Some of these issues could be addressed through further research. For example, a more specific assessment of the experiences of tourists and their social identifications while visiting the East Kimberley could be obtained through conducting interviews or surveys of tourists arriving in the East Kimberley and following through with interviews or surveys of the same individuals after their visit. Themes in contemporary news and current affairs reporting could be analysed more fully by conducting in-depth research into reporting on the region in newspaper and television media.

The unevenness that characterises my interpretive voice in this thesis, however, highlights the partial qualities of knowledge formation generally. In the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2, I linked my relational approach to place with an epistemology that takes all knowledge to be situated (Haraway 1991, McDowell 1992). The various strands of non-representational theory outlined by Thrift (1996), respond to the epistemological difficulty of modelling the real world. Interpretive approaches offer an alternative in which meaning and knowledge of the world is derived through relations and contrasts between different sets of materials.

10.4 A relational approach to land use planning?

The situation I encountered in the course of my fieldwork suggested a range of possibilities for how Aboriginal, agricultural and tourism land interests might intersect in the future. The new dimension of Native Title opens up the possibility for coexistence of Aboriginal land interests with other interests. Some of this potential can be seen in the arguments made by the Northern Land Council and Kimberley Land Council in response to the Draft ERMP/EIS commissioned by the developers, as outlined in Chapter 9.

Symbolic capital associated with Native Title and Aboriginal Land Rights has the potential to engage with notions of 'sustainability' and 'authenticity' and influence the way in which these forms of symbolic capital are defined. In Chapter 8 I showed the potential of those Aboriginal people, defined as authentic holders of Native Title or Land Rights, to intersect with and perhaps influence the way authenticity is interpreted in the tourism industry. There is similar potential for Aboriginal land interests to contribute to broadening the concept of sustainability as a key form of symbolic capital in planning processes so as to include the maintenance of social and cultural relationships to land. However the extent to which Native Title allows the development of 'a progressive sense of place' (Massey 1993) with diverse engagements between land interests of Aboriginal people, farmers and tourists in place-making in the future remains to be seen.

The history of unequal power relations and the differential influence of some representations of place over others, structures the spatial politics in which any planning process takes place. However, planning that relies on symbolic capital that is common to different land interests is more likely to allow synergies between them and to create spaces of flow rather than bounded spaces. Such spaces could better reflect the dynamic nature of social identities, rather than fix them in specific relationships with place. Both places and people would consequently be recognised as always in a state of becoming.

Postscript

In December 2001, the Wesfarmers-Marubeni Consortium announced they were withdrawing from the Ord Stage Two proposal, after completing a three-year feasibility study. They cited volatile sugar prices as the key reason for this decision, but indicated that a number of other significant risks had been identified. Despite the withdrawal of this consortium, it seems likely that other proposals for agricultural expansion will be made in the future, perhaps based on different crops. I consider that the issues raised in my research will continue to have relevance for such potential futures.

In October 2002 the High Court of Australia upheld the 2000 ruling by the Federal Court of Australia that Native Title was held to be extinguished on much of the land covered by the original successful claim on behalf of Miriuwung and Gajerrong peoples. The original successful ruling in November 1998 (Federal Court of Australia 1998) was considered to be affected by *The Native Title Amendment Act 1998*, passed by the Federal Parliament in September of that year amidst much publicity about its intent to limit Native Title. While the full implications of all this were still being discussed by legal experts at the time of writing, it appears unlikely that Miriuwung and Gajerrong people will have any say in what takes place on land that has been covered by pastoral leases in Western Australia. It is possible that Aboriginal land interests will only be recognised on crown lands, such as those forming national parks in the region. This could bring further pressure to bear on management of national parks to reflect co-existence of Aboriginal interests in land.

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Appendix A: Field work schedule

May 29 – 28 Jun 1998	Marralam, Kununurra	Assisted with vegetation survey work at rock shelters on Legune Station and Carlton Hills Station; made initial contacts with government officials in Kununurra.
18-27 Nov 1998	Kununurra	Initiated contacts with people who came to Kununurra in 1960s to farm or to establish businesses in town. Recorded interviews, made initial contacts with tourism operators.
11-28 Mar 1999	Kununurra	Conducted preliminary work for design of tourist survey, recorded interviews with tourism operators, attended 'Ord Land and Water' public meeting, attended Wesfarmers consultative meeting with MG people, attended fire forum.
14-29 Jun 1999	Kununurra	Conducted tourism survey, participated in NLC organised meetings about Ord 2 proposals, attended COVE (Care of Ord Valley Environment) meeting, recorded further interviews with farmers, surveyed collections of Wyndham Museum and Kununurra Historical Society, participated in guided tours by tourism operators.
1-4 Aug 2001	Kununurra	Recorded interview with Aboriginal art dealer, meetings with officers of Waters and Rivers commission and Ord Bonapart Project, photographed signage in Keep River National Park.

Appendix B: 1998 Federal Court of Australia determination

for the claimants –

- **BEN WARD** AND ORS ON BEHALF OF THE MIRIUWUNG GAJERRONG PEOPLE
- CECIL NINGARMARA AND ORS AND DELORES CHEINMORA AND ORS ON BEHALF OF THE BALANGARRA PEOPLES

opposing the claimants –

- STATE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA AND ORS
- CHIEF MINISTER OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
- CONSERVATION LAND CORPORATION
- KIMBERLEY LAND COUNCIL AND ORS
- ALLIGATOR AIRWAYS PTY LTD AND ORS
- CARLTON HILL PTY LTD AND ORS
- AMITY OIL NL AND ORS
- CALYTRIX INVESTMENTS PTY LTD AND ORS
- KIMBERLEY SPORTFISHING CLUB AND ORS
- SHIRE OF WYNDHAM-EAST KIMBERLEY
- PACIFIC HYDRO GROUP TWO PTY LTD
- INNES HOLDINGS PTY LTD
- MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS

Legal representatives

Counsel for the First Applicants

- M L Barker QC
- A M Sheehan
- H W Ketley
- R H Bartlett

Solicitors for the First Applicants:

- Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (Inc)

Counsel for the Second Applicants:

- K R Howie
- R M D Levy

Solicitors for the Second Applicants:

- Northern Land Council

Counsel for the Third Applicants:

- G M G McIntyre
- J M Melbourne

Solicitors for the Third Applicants:

- Kimberley Land Council

Council for the First Respondents:

- C J L Pullin QC
- K M Pettit
- K H Glancy

Solicitors for the First Respondents:

- Crown Solicitor's Office

Counsel for the Second Respondent:

- T I Pauling QC
- R J Webb
- S Begg

Solicitors for the Second Respondent:

- Solicitor for the Northern Territory

No appearance for the Third Respondent

Counsel for the Fifth Respondents:

- G M G McIntyre
- J M Melbourne

Solicitors for the Fifth Respondents:

- Kimberley Land Council

Counsel for the Sixth Respondents (Alligator Airways Pty Ltd & Ors; Telstra Corporation Ltd/Telecom Australia):

- D W McLeod
- P L Wittkuhn
- N Johnson

Solicitors for the Sixth Respondents (Alligator Airways Pty Ltd & Ors; Telstra Corporation Ltd/Telecom Australia):

- McLeod & Co
- Holding Redlich
- Counsel for the Seventh Respondents:
- R A Conti QC

- M T McKenna

Solicitors for the Seventh Respondents

- Hunt & Humphry

Counsel for the Eighth Respondents

- K R Jagger

Solicitors for the Eighth Respondents

- Freehill Hollingdale & Page

Counsel for the Ninth, Tenth and Thirteenth Respondents

- D W McLeod
- P L Wittkuhn

Solicitors for the Ninth, Tenth and Thirteenth Respondents

- McLeod & Co

Counsel for the Eleventh Respondents

- A G Castledine

Solicitors for the Eleventh Respondents

- Minter Ellison

No appearance for the Twelfth Respondent

Counsel for the Intervener

- J D Allanson
- P R Macliver

Solicitors for the Intervener

- Australian Government Solicitor

Appendix C: Timeline for Ord River Irrigation Scheme

(compiled from Graham-Taylor (1982), Basinski et al (1985) and Dixon and Dillon (1990))

1928 Report by F.J.S. Wise, agricultural advisor to the Western Australian Government, on cropping potential of Ord Valley.

1939 Isaac Steinberg visits the Ord Valley and proposes a Jewish Settlement based on irrigated agriculture.

1941 R.J. Dumas, director of Works Western Australia, investigated and reported on possible dam sites.

Establishment of Kimberley Research Station by Kim Durack and commencement of experimental work on irrigated pastures.

1944 Report on Surveys and Soil Classification of the Ord River Valley and Watershed by A.H. Richter, Department of Lands and Surveys Western Australia

Entomology survey of Ord Valley by Western Australian Government Entomologist, C.H.F. Jenkins

- 1945 Committee established by Western Australian Government to report on options for development of the North West
- Recommendation by the Commonwealth Rural Reconstruction Commission to proceed with the Ord Irrigation Scheme as a 'national goal'.
- Formation of new permanent research station known as the Kimberley Research Station with joint Western Australian and Commonwealth administration.
- 1949 Request by Western Australian Government for Commonwealth financial assistance to improve beef industry in East Kimberley.
- 1951 Kimberley Development Committee (Commonwealth-State) appointed to review development of north west. It recommended an entomological survey, land use survey and farm scale trials with rice and sugar.
- 1955 Presentation of development proposals to Prime Minister Menzies and his Treasurer, Fadden.
- 1956 Detailed submission made by Western Australian Government on the proposed Ord Irrigation Scheme to the Commonwealth Government.
- 1957 Prime Minister Menzies announces a general development grant to Western Australia

1958 Federal election campaign profiling development of northern Australia as an issue. Commonwealth commitment to development of the north west for the purpose of national defence and population growth through closer settlement.

1959 Kimberley Research Station Policy Committee recommended that a pilot farm be established in the area. A contract was given to Northern Developments Pty Ltd.

Commonwealth approval for the Ord Irrigation Scheme under the *Western Australia Grant (Northern Development) Act 1958-59*

Ord Cabinet Sub-Committee (Western Australia) recommended an organizational entity for coordination of the project.

1960 A pilot farm of 1000ha established and planted with rice.

1963 Arrival of the first five farmers in the Ord Valley.

Diversion Dam completed.

Kimberley Research Station Policy Committee informed of Prodenia problems in cotton, safflower and linseed.

Wesfarmers (Westralian Farmers Cooperative) assumed management of the Ord River District Cooperative.

Ord Valley cotton ginnery commenced operations.

Kununurra township established.

1964 *A Case for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government to complete the Ord Irrigation Project* submitted by the Western Australian Government to the Commonwealth Government.

1964 Creation of North West Planning and Coordinating Authority with membership including Ord Project Committee members.

1966 Thirty farms operational.

1967 Commonwealth Government approved financial assistance for Ord II.

1968 End of the *Raw Cotton Bounty Act 1963*.

Underwood Report recommended termination of the joint operation of the Kimberley Research Station by the Western Australian and Commonwealth Governments.

1971 Ord Project Committee reconstituted as a sub-committee of the North West Planning and Coordinating Authority.

- 1972 Opening of the Main Dam by Prime Minister William ('Billy') McMahon.
- Export ban on cattle grazed on irrigated pastures, because of high DDT concentrations.
- 1974 Premier Court announced that no commercial cotton crop would be produced next season.
- 1975 Western Australian Government commissioned CSR to undertake feasibility study into sugar industry in Ord and allocated more funds for research.
- 1976 Meeting of Premier Court and cabinet members in Kununurra recommended a pilot sugar farm, an expanded research program by the Western Australian Department of Agriculture, and continuation of rice growing.
- 1978 Joint Commonwealth and Western Australian Review Committee established (known as the 'Young Review').
- 1979 Publication of the Young Report and Commonwealth Government agreement to support the scheme for a minimum of five more years.
- Argyle Diamond Mine commences operations.
- 1980 Contraction of cropped area to 4800ha mainly comprised of sorghum, sunflower and hay.

- 1985 Control of Kimberley Research Station passed to Western Australian Government.
- 1994 Western Australian Government commences investigation of extension of the Ord River Irrigation Scheme.
- 1995 Agreement between the Western Australian and Northern Territory Governments to develop the whole scheme.
- 1996 Completion of hydroelectric power station at the spillway for Argyle Dam.
- 1997 Western Australian and Northern Territory Governments call for Expressions of Interests from developers for feasibility studies including a draft Public Environmental Review.
- Preparation of Lower Ord Management Plan.
- 1998 A joint venture between Wesfarmers Sugar Company Pty Ltd and the Marubeni Corporation awarded an exclusive mandate to investigate the feasibility of development of the M2 Development Area for the purpose of broad acre irrigation.
- 1999 Draft Interim Water Allocation Plan for Ord River released by Water and Rivers Commission of Western Australia.

2000 Release of Environmental Review and Management Programme and Draft
Environmental Impact Statement

Appendix D: Check list of questions for farmers

- Where was your family from and where did you grow up?
- How did you first hear about the Ord Irrigation River?
- What made you and your husband decide to come here?
- What year was that?
- What were your first impressions of the country and the town?
- How old were your children at the time?
- How did they settle in? (schooling and what they did after, where they now live)
- What were the places you became most familiar with and that were important to you? (has this changed?)
- Can you describe the social makeup of the town during the 1960s?
- What are some of the key developments that brought about changes in the social makeup?
- What places do you visit today?
- What sort of connection do you retain with the place that you came from?

Additional questions asked of contemporary farmers:

- What crops do you grow?
- What are your main concerns about land use planning in the region?
- Seasons?
- Labour?
- What sort of knowledge is important to farming in the Ord?
- What pesticides do you use?
- What do you think the future prospects are for the Ord Valley? (positive and negative) What will Ord Stage Two mean to you?

Appendix E: Key dates for media reporting

(from Graham Taylor 1982)

Mar 1963	Arrival of first 5 farmers
May 1963	922 acres safflower planted - problems with <i>Prodenia</i> caterpillar
Jun 1963	KRS Policy Committee informed of <i>Prodenia</i> problems in cotton, safflower and linseed.
Sep 1963	Wesfarmers assumed management of the Ord River District Cooperative on behalf of the farmers
Oct 1963	Cotton ginnery commenced operations
Feb 1964	<i>Case for financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government to complete the Ord Irrigation Project</i> submitted by WA Govt.
Sept 1964	creation of North West Planning and Coordinating Authority with membership including Ord Project Committee members
May 1965	PM Menzies announced decision to defer decision on Ord Scheme
Nov 1967	C'wealth govt approved financial assistance for Ord II
1968	end of <i>Raw Cotton Bounty Act 1963</i>
1971	Ord Project Committee reconstituted as a sub-committee of NW Planning and Coordinating Authority
Jun 1972	Opening of Main Dam
1972	export ban on cattle grazed on irrigated pastures, because of high DDT concentrations (Aust Financial Review 19 Aug)
12 Nov 1974	Premier Court announced that no commercial cotton crop would be produced next season.
1975	WA Govt commissioned CSR to undertake feasibility study into sugar industry in Ord and allocated more funds for research.
Feb 1976	meeting of Premier Court and cabinet members in Kununurra to discuss future of the Scheme.
Jan 1978	Joint C'wealth and WA Review Committee established

Appendix F: Check list of questions for tourism operators

- When did you first come to the East Kimberley?
- How did you first hear about Kununurra?
- What did you know about it before you came?
- What sort of businesses had you been involved in before this?
- What interests you in this kind of business?
- What is the appeal of the East Kimberley for you?
- What aspects of the business do you find difficult?
- What aspects do you find enjoyable?
- What do you think the tourists who come here are mainly interested in? (wildlife, landscape, adventure, culture)
- What do you think is the particular niche you cater for in your business?
- Can you describe the kinds of tours that you run?
- Could you give an overview of the kinds of tourists you meet here? (nationality, age, working/leisure, income, repeat visitors, length of stay, means of transport, range of tours they take)

Appendix G: Tourist Questionnaire

Please see print copy for image

1. Holiday Motivation

1. Thinking about why you travel for pleasure, the factors listed in the following table relate to why people go on holiday, and what they find there. If you had an entirely free choice as to destination and type of holiday, could you please indicate how important the factors are to YOU, personally, by circling the appropriate number.

Motivations - while you are on holiday you like to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Weakly disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Increase my environmental knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Increase my historical knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Avoid the hustle and bustle of daily life	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Build friendships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Challenge my abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Do nothing at all	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Use my imagination	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Be in a calm atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Develop close friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Use my physical abilities/skills in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Gain a feeling of belonging	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Discover new places and things	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Experiences new cultures	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Experience a sense of adventure	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. To relax physically	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. To relax mentally	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. To be with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. To have 'a good time' with friends	1	2	3	4	5	6

Motivation Questions

2. Thinking about why you travelled to the Kimberley, again we have a list of factors that people say are important reasons why they go on holiday, and what they find there. What *specifically* motivated YOU, personally, to travel to the Kimberley for pleasure? Could you please indicate how important the factors are to YOU, personally, by circling the appropriate number.

During your holiday to the Kimberley you are/were able to:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Weakly disagree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Increase my environmental knowledge.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Increase my European, outback historical knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Increase my indigenous peoples historical knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Avoid the hustle and bustle of daily life	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Build friendships with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. Challenge my abilities	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Do nothing at all	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Use my imagination	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. Be in a calm atmosphere	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Develop close friendships	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. Use my physical abilities/skills in sport	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Gain a feeling of belonging	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Discover new places and things	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Experience indigenous cultures	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Experience a sense of adventure	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. To relax physically	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. To relax mentally	1	2	3	4	5	6
18. To be with others	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. To have 'a good time' with friends	1	2	3	4	5	6

2. Holiday-Maker Classification

Still thinking about why you travelled to the Kimberley read the following list of holiday-maker classifications. Please **RANK** from 1 - 3 the three best descriptions of yourself. Please rank in *descending* order, giving the number 1 to the best description of yourself.

Rank	Self Assessment Holiday-Maker Classification
	1. Sun lover - interested in relaxing and sunbathing in warm places with lots of sun, sand and ocean.
	2. Party seeker - mostly interested in partying and going to night clubs.
	3. Anthropologist - mostly interested in meeting local people, trying the food and speaking the language.
	4. Archaeologist - mostly interest in archaeological sites and ruins.
	5. Organised tourist - mostly interested in organised vacations, packaged tours, taking pictures and buying souvenirs.
	6. Thrill/Adventure seeker - interested in risky, exhilarating activities that provide emotional highs.
	7. Explorer - prefers adventure travel, exploring out-of-the-way places and enjoys challenges of getting there.
	8. Jetsetter - vacations in elite world-class resorts, and goes to exclusive night clubs.
	9. Seeker - seeker of spiritual and/or personal knowledge to better understand self and meaning of life.
	10. Independent tourist - visits regular tourist attraction but makes own travel arrangements and often 'plays it by ear'.
	11. High-class tourist - travels first class, stays in the best hotels, goes to shows, and dines at the best restaurants.
	12. Drifter - drifts from place to place in a hippie lifestyle
	13. Escapist - enjoys taking it easy and getting away from it all in quiet and peaceful places
	14. Ecotourist - most interested in responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people
	15. Sport lover - primary emphasis while on vacation is to remain active engaging in favourite sports

3. Holiday Information

Instructions:

These questions are interested in discovering why you, personally, chose The Kimberley as a holiday destination. What information sources informed your visit to The Kimberley? Could you please indicate the importance of the different information sources about The Kimberley by circling the appropriate number. Where asked, and if you can remember, please specify the name of an important source of information.

Circle one answer for each question

	Very important	Slightly important	Not important
1. Travel agent/tour operators	1	2	3
2. Travel books/guides (please specify)	1	2	3
3. Friends/relative that live in the Kimberley	1	2	3
4. Friends/relative that visited the Kimberley	1	2	3
5. Previous personal experience in the Kimberley	1	2	3
6. Airlines	1	2	3
7. Television (please specify)	1	2	3
8. Film (please specify)	1	2	3
9. Advertising (please specify)	1	2	3
10. Newspaper/magazine articles	1	2	3
11. Books/novels (please specify)	1	2	3
12. Others (please specify)	1	2	3

4. Holiday Feelings

Instructions

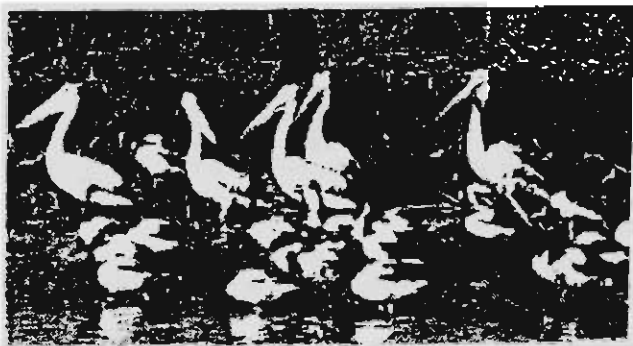
This section of the questionnaire is interested in the feelings you experience whilst on holiday in The Kimberley. Images have been selected of some of the tourist attractions of the region. The images are included to help you place yourself at a particular tourist attraction and generate the feelings associated with each particular tourist site. Each tourist attraction is accompanied by a list of opposite feelings. Thinking of the opposite feelings in terms of a continuum from feeling one to another, for each of the opposite feelings please indicate your level of feeling for each tourist attraction by encircling the figure to the right or left depending upon the amount of the right or left feeling. An example is provided below.

An Example of How to Complete The Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feelings							
FEELING	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	FEELING
Threatening	1	2	3	4	5	6	Safe
Uncaring	1	2	3	4	5	6	Caring
Lethargic	1	2	3	4	5	6	Exploratory
Refreshed	1	2	3	4	5	6	Tired
Reflective	1	2	3	4	5	6	Unmoved
Mystical	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mundane
Past	1	2	3	4	5	6	Present

Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

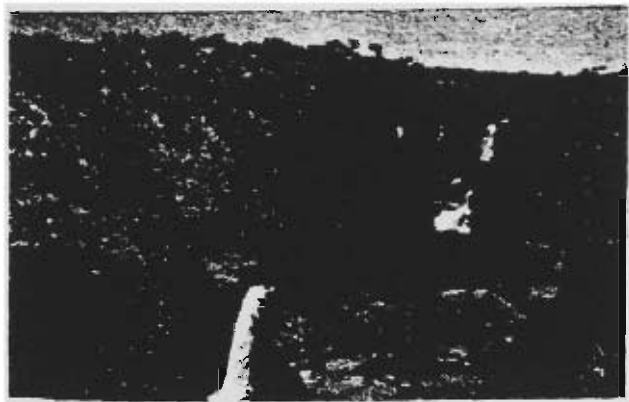
FEELING	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	FEELING
Threatening	1	2	3	4	5	6	Safe
Uncaring	1	2	3	4	5	6	Caring
Lethargic	1	2	3	4	5	6	Exploratory
Refreshed	1	2	3	4	5	6	Tired
Reflective	1	2	3	4	5	6	Unmoved
Mystical	1	2	3	4	5	6	Mundane
Past	1	2	3	4	5	6	Present
At one with nature	1	2	3	4	5	6	Domination over nature
Simplicity	1	2	3	4	5	6	Grandeur
Crowded	1	2	3	4	5	6	Isolation
Freedom	1	2	3	4	5	6	Trapped
Tranquil	1	2	3	4	5	6	Turbulent
Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	Calming
Unusual	1	2	3	4	5	6	Ordinary
Boredom	1	2	3	4	5	6	Amazement
Worried	1	2	3	4	5	6	Happy
Beauty	1	2	3	4	5	6	Grotesque
Excitement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Dullness
Significance of humanity	1	2	3	4	5	6	Power of nature
Fascinated	1	2	3	4	5	6	Uninterested

Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling							
FEELING	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	FEELING
Threatening	1	2	3	4	5	6	Safe
Uncaring	1	2	3	4	5	6	Caring
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Crowded	1	2	3	4	5	6	Isolation
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Tranquil	1	2	3	4	5	6	Turbulent
Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	Calming
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Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

FEELING	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	FEELING
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Fascinated	1	2	3	4	5	6	Uninterested

Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

FEELING							FEELING
	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	
Threatening	1	2	3	4	5	6	Safe
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Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

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Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

FEELING	Strongly agree	Agree	Weakly agree	Weakly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	FEELING
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Excitement	1	2	3	4	5	6	Dullness
Significance of humanity	1	2	3	4	5	6	Power of nature
Fascinated	1	2	3	4	5	6	Uninterested

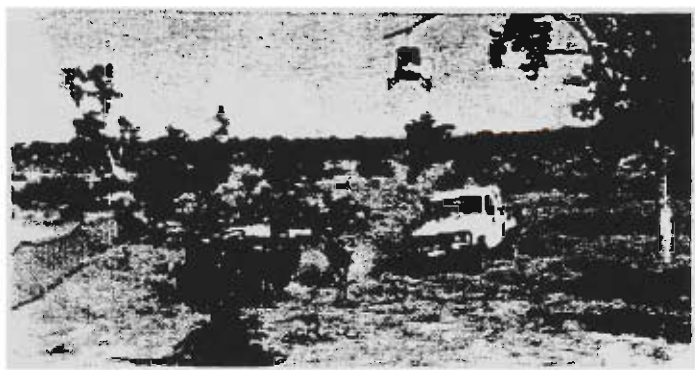
Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

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Uncaring	1	2	3	4	5	6	Caring
Lethargic	1	2	3	4	5	6	Exploratory
Refreshed	1	2	3	4	5	6	Tired
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Crowded	1	2	3	4	5	6	Isolation
Freedom	1	2	3	4	5	6	Trapped
Tranquil	1	2	3	4	5	6	Turbulent
Stress	1	2	3	4	5	6	Calming
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Fascinated	1	2	3	4	5	6	Uninterested

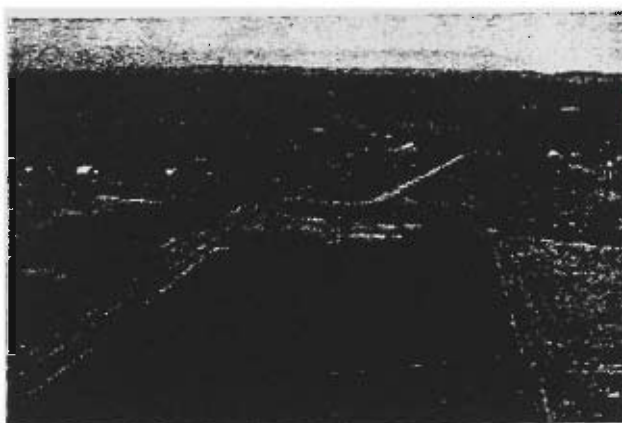
Holiday Feeling Questions



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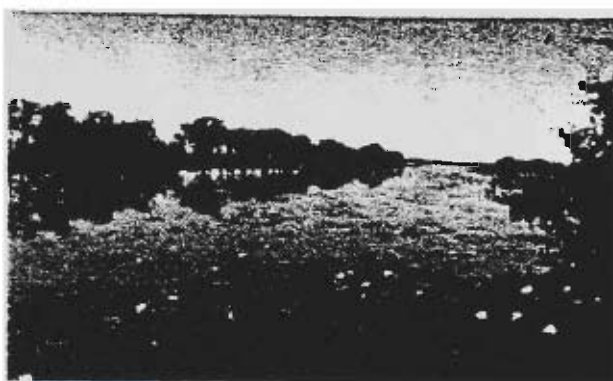
Holiday Feeling Questions



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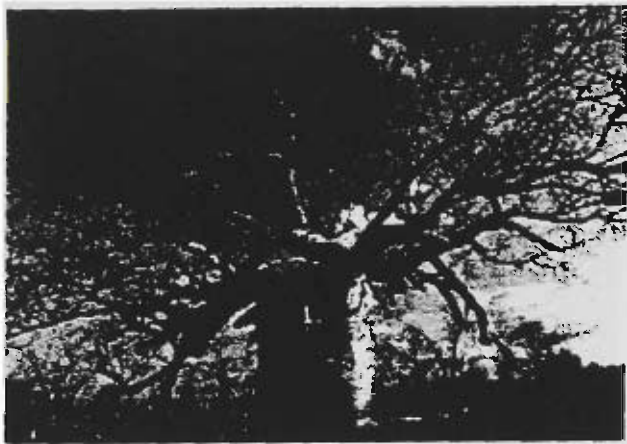
Holiday Feeling Questions



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Holiday Feeling Questions



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Holiday Feeling Questions



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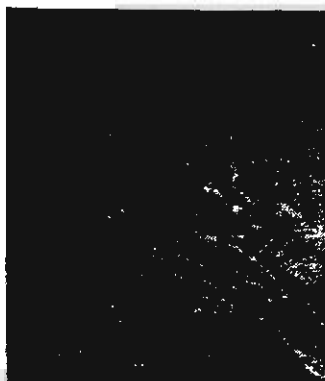
Holiday Feeling Questions



Continuum of Feeling

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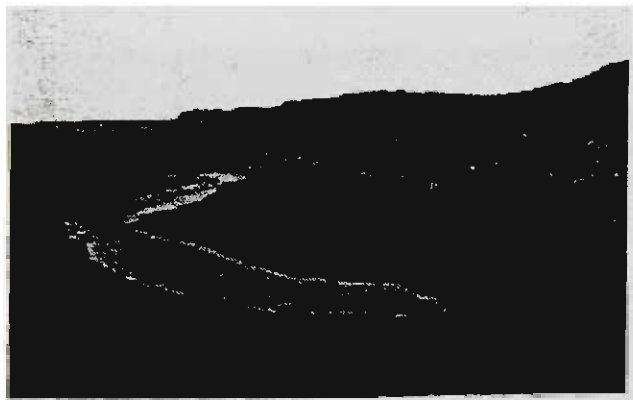
Holiday Feeling Questions



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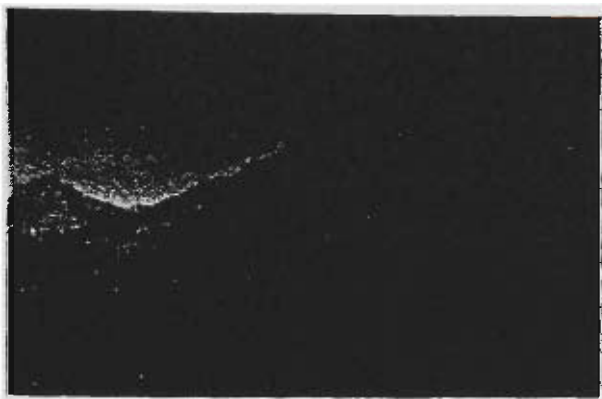
Holiday Feeling Questions



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Holiday Feeling Questions



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5. Personal Background

Instructions:

The following groups of questions are about your personal background. These questions are designed to provide information about your socio-demographic status including education level and employment. Please answer each of the following questions by providing a one word response.

- 5.1 What is your country of birth? _____
- 5.2 What language is commonly spoken at home? _____
- 5.3 In what state is your home? _____
- 5.4 In what country do you permanently reside? _____
- 5.5 What was your dominant mode of transport whilst visiting The Kimberley? (for example, tour-bus, four-wheel drive, car-hire) _____

Instructions:

For each of the following questions please circle only one response

- 5.6 Sex: (a) Female (b) Male
- 5.7 Age: (a) 18-24 (b) 25-34 (c) 35-44 (d) 45-54 (e) 55-64 (f) 65 and over
- 5.8 What is the highest level of education you have attained? (a) none (b) primary (c) secondary (d) TAFE or university
- 5.9 What is your present occupation?
- | | | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| (a) home duties | (d) clerk | (g) unemployed | (j) student |
| (b) retired | (e) sales and personal service | (h) professionals | (k) drivers, plant and machine operators |
| (c) tradesperson | (f) labourers and related workers | (i) manager | (j) other |
5. 10 Individual income before tax for the financial year 1998-99 :
- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) below \$16,000 | (c) \$30,001 to \$50,000 | (e) more than \$70,000 |
| (b) \$16,001 to \$30,000 | (d) \$50,001 to \$70,000 | |