Kakadu as an Aboriginal Place:
Tourism and the Construction of Kakadu National Park

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Northern Territory University, June 2001.

By

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Declaration

I declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Northern Territory University, is original and the result of my own investigations. All references to the ideas and work of others have been specifically acknowledged. I certify that the work has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or any other institution of tertiary education.

Lisa Palmer

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Note on Aboriginal Languages

The spelling of Aboriginal language and dialect names varies in both common use and academic literature. Each language has its own spelling system and each dialect has its own name for itself and for the dialects of its neighbours (Lawrence 2000). The spellings which have been used in this thesis follow Lawrence (2000). Alternative spellings that may be encountered are listed in brackets: Gaagudju (Gagudju), Gundjeihmi (Gundjeyhmi) and Kunwinjku (Kunwinjgu and Gunwinggu).

Note on Aboriginal English

Many Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region speak Aboriginal English. Aboriginal English is mutually intelligible with Standard English and is defined as a continuum of rule governed English dialects, ranging from close to Standard English at one end, to close to Aboriginal Kriol at the other (Eades 1991:57). In this thesis, where I use quotes from Aboriginal informants which deviate significantly from Standard English, I provide my own translation or summary interpretation in square brackets.
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<td>ACF</td>
<td>Australian Conservation Foundation</td>
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<tr>
<td>AFANT</td>
<td>Amateur Fishermen's Association NT</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIATSIS</td>
<td>Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALRA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANCA</td>
<td>Australian Nature Conservation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANPWS</td>
<td>Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATSIC</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BTEC</td>
<td>Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development Employment Projects scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CINCRM</td>
<td>Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DBC</td>
<td>Darwin Bushwalking Club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPIE</td>
<td>Department of Primary Industries and Energy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPIF</td>
<td>Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCAATSI</td>
<td>Federal Council for Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPS</td>
<td>Geographical Positioning System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP</td>
<td>Indigenous Employment Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>KNPBoM</td>
<td>Kakadu National Park Board of Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>KRISIS</td>
<td>Kakadu Region Social Impact Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLC</td>
<td>Northern Land Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPPAC</td>
<td>National Parks and Primitive Areas Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTTC</td>
<td>Northern Territory Tourist Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWCNT</td>
<td>Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAC</td>
<td>Resource Assessment Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUEI</td>
<td>Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SECITA</td>
<td>Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Legislation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SERCARC</td>
<td>Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSCERA</td>
<td>Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCA</td>
<td>Tourism Council Australia</td>
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<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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Abstract

In this thesis I ask ‘What kind of place is tourism creating in Kakadu National Park?’ For the non-Aboriginal public, tourism is an activity that constructs a particular reading of the region, one that is predicated on access to the National Park. In tourism discourse, Kakadu is portrayed largely as an unspoilt wilderness with an Aboriginal past, rather than a present. This discourse imposes non-Aboriginal readings of the landscape as the dominant interpretation of Kakadu National Park. From the perspective of its Aboriginal traditional owners, Kakadu is an Aboriginal place. This assertion challenges the dominant discourse of nature-based tourism, as it means that all land, resources, and intellectual property in the region are owned and interacted with according to an ontological perspective which is completely different to Western ideas about the self and about human relationships with nature.

In this thesis I examine the ‘commonsense’ ideas that non-Aboriginal Park users express about nature and Aborigines, and the historical power of these ideas to marginalise Aboriginal standpoints. I also examine local Aboriginal understandings of Kakadu, wherein place is constructed through a broad range of social relationships set within an Aboriginal system of authority. The thesis concludes that, through various processes, this Aboriginal understanding of place becomes submerged beneath an understanding of Kakadu as a discrete tract of land to be used and managed according to Western principles of conservation and resource use.

Nevertheless, I find that by continuing to assert that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place, Aboriginal people in the Park are contesting the domination of non-Aboriginal readings of their homelands. Aboriginal traditional owners are initiating their own style of tourism and are slowly working with the potential that tourism offers to change the relationships of power and tell their own stories, in their own way, about Kakadu as an Aboriginal place.
Chapter One

Introduction
Chapter 1. Introduction

The 1998 *Kakadu National Park Plan of Management* states that Kakadu is 'an Aboriginal place'.¹ This reference indicates recognition of the Kakadu area as a living Aboriginal landscape. As opposed to an interpretation of this place as a natural landscape or a wilderness, it is represented in the Park's official documentation as a place that has been, and continues to be, lived in, interacted with and managed by its Aboriginal traditional owners.

This thesis examines the relationship between the contested domains of Aboriginal traditional owners and non-Aboriginal Park users in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory of Australia (see Figure 1). It is not an examination of the institution of the national park, but of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal discourses that produce 'the Park' (Foucault 1972). Since the Park's establishment over two decades ago, Kakadu has been a place enmeshed in the politics of Aboriginal land rights, uranium mining and conservation (see Lawrence 2000). Also since this time, it has become a famous tourist destination in Australia and, consequently, tourism has become a major issue in the politics and development of the Kakadu region.

Following the creation of the National Park and the corresponding tourist interest in the area, Aboriginal people living in Kakadu National Park now share their homelands with non-Aboriginal National Park employees, non-Aboriginal residents involved in mining or tourism, and a variety of Park visitors and interest groups. Associated closely with tourism in the Park are the interests of the Northern Territory government and public, the Commonwealth government and various environment and recreation groups.

Such wide and varied interest in the Park has created a plethora of Kakadu related literature and images that influence and direct tourists' experiences of the Park, their relationships with Aboriginal people, and the way in which Kakadu is conceptualised in the non-Aboriginal domain. As a result, this thesis is also concerned with how Aboriginal traditional owners and Park users in Kakadu

¹ This statement was first introduced in the *Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management* (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996).
Figure 1. Location of Kakadu National Park (source: KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:2)
negotiate their relationships with each other and with this place in which they invest meaning.

The concept of Kakadu National Park as an Aboriginal place, actively managed by Aboriginal people, is variously received within the non-Aboriginal domain. Many people are attracted to Kakadu National Park because they know it to be Aboriginal land. However, the Aboriginal landowners are the recipients of a mass tourism they did not seek and with which, in most cases, they do not wish to interact. Consequently, even tourists who want to meet Aboriginal people will have very little personal contact with their 'hosts'.

Between June 1997 and November 1999 I undertook a series of ethnographic field trips to Kakadu National Park. My central question concerned what it means to state that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place. My main finding was that, among non-Aboriginal Park users in Kakadu, this concept was a source of significant ambivalence, tension and, at times, antagonism. Aboriginal traditional owners are recognised under Australian statute as owning approximately half the area of the National Park and, by convention, the entire Park is managed as if it were Aboriginal land. Nevertheless, this thesis finds that Kakadu remains a cultural borderland where a negotiated relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is struggling to emerge. It finds that the historical legacy of the colonial settler state, which has presumed access to territory, marginalised Indigenous people and limited their participation in the political decision-making processes of state, continues to infuse the construction of Kakadu National Park.

1.1. Park Domains

In this thesis my use of the term domain, as in the expression 'the Aboriginal domain', implies several of its senses. First, I mean Aboriginal dominion arising from pre-contact society and the continuing application of Aboriginal laws so as to form an Aboriginal jurisdiction (see Langton 1994; see also Rowse 1992). I also mean the Aboriginal people in that domain, that is the traditional Aboriginal owners of named estates who are so constituted by their traditions and customs, many of whom are recognised as such under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth) (ALRA) and other statutes. Their domain and jurisdiction is constituted, in the first instance by custom and, second, by Australian statute. The
Chapter 1. Introduction

Director of National Parks and Wildlife leases Aboriginal land in the Park from Aboriginal Land Trusts, which were established under the ALRA to represent the interests of Aboriginal traditional owners. The Northern Land Council (NLC) has the statutory responsibility of representing these Land Trusts.2

The term, ‘the non-Aboriginal domain’ is used to refer to the ‘guests’ of these traditional Aboriginal owners of the Park area, and includes all visitors to the Park who are considered as Park users under the Plan of Management of the Park. The jurisdiction of this latter domain is constituted by the terms of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999 (Cth) which gives statutory recognition to the Park Lease Agreement and Plan of Management. These documents establish the joint management scheme between Aboriginal traditional owners and Parks Australia, a section of Environment Australia, the Commonwealth department responsible for the environment portfolio. The legislation provides for an Aboriginal majority on the Kakadu Board of Management, Aboriginal involvement in and employment in the Park service itself, and establishes the access rights and responsibilities of visitors to the Park.

Kakadu National Park (Stage I) was declared in 1979. It occurred after the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry (RUEI 1977a) recommended to the Commonwealth Government that a jointly managed national park be established as a land use strategy which could balance the competing interests of Aboriginal land rights, uranium mining and an influx of non-Aboriginal people into the region. Kakadu National Park Stage II was proclaimed in February 1984. Stage III in the south of the Alligator Rivers region was proclaimed in three sections between 1987 and 1991, after the Government had responded to the Inquiry into mining at Coronation Hill (see RAC 1991). The Park now covers an area of 19 804 square kilometres (see Figure 2). It extends from the north coast 150 kilometres to the south and is made up of tidal flats, floodplains, lowlands, outliers, a plateau and escarpment complex and the southern hills and basins (see Figure 3). The Park was nominated and

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2 Aboriginal Land Councils are statutory authorities that represent and promote the interests of Aboriginal people throughout the Northern Territory. The specific functions of the Land Councils are defined in the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. (See Chapter Four and Chapter Five for more detailed discussion of the relationship between the ALRA, NLC and Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu National Park.) Further responsibilities are set out in other legislation, in particular the Aboriginal Land Act 1980 (NT) and the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth).
Chapter 1. Introduction

Figure 2. Kakadu National Park, showing stages of development (source: Lawrence 2000:94)
Figure 3. Landforms of Kakadu National Park (source: KNBoM & Parks Australia 1998:63)
Chapter Three

Kakadu National Park: Histories and Politics
Chapter 3. Kakadu National Park: Histories and Politics

3.1. Introduction

Since it was declared in 1979, Kakadu National Park has become a part of the Australian national environmental imaginary. Not only is it a famous national park famed for its spectacular landscape and biodiversity, but within the discourse of land management it is drawn on as a blueprint for the joint management of national parks on Aboriginal land (see Woenne-Greene et al. 1994). The involvement of Aboriginal people in the management of Kakadu National Park is a factor much discussed in the literature (for example see Birckhead et al. 1992; De Lacy & Lawson 1997; Lawrence 2000; Press et al. 1995; Weaver 1991; Young et al. 1991). It is a source of interest for other Indigenous peoples around the world, many of whom visit the Park to learn about the joint management process first hand.

However, when the idea of Kakadu National Park was first discussed in the Northern Territory in the 1960s, Aboriginal associations with the region, let alone Aboriginal management of the proposed Park, were not seriously considered beyond the historical concerns of rock art and archaeology. The term ‘Kakadu’ was suggested as a name for the National Park after anthropologist Baldwin Spencer’s (1914:121–122) orthography for the Gaagudju peoples, whom he located between the South and East Alligator Rivers. Nevertheless, the historical record reveals that this name was agreed to by those who were planning a national park in memorial to an Aboriginal past, rather than in recognition of the continuing Aboriginal land ownership and presence in the region.

While Aborigines in the region were imagined absent in the 1960s, in the 1970s they became a central concern of a report by the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry (hereafter Ranger Inquiry), which was set up to assess the potential environmental and social impact of uranium mining in the region. In their report the Ranger Commissioners portrayed local Aboriginal people as a group who needed to be accounted for and protected through the jurisdiction of government authorities (Von Sturmer 1984).

The creation of the Park itself was an outcome of the conflicting agendas of environmentalism and resource extraction. In the non-Aboriginal domain the area was seen by some as a place worthy of preservation, and by others as a place for the
Chapter 3. Kakadu National Park: Histories and Politics

extraction of minerals, principally uranium. The compromise between these positions was the land-use planning strategy of the Ranger Commissioners. In this debate, issues of Aboriginal land rights were, in a sense, a bargaining pawn between those who desired uranium mining in the region and those who did not. In the end, the former group succeeded in achieving its agenda (see Allen 1981).

An analysis of Aboriginal social histories in the literature (see Chaloupka et al. 1985; Lawrence 2000; Levitus 1982, 1995; Merlan & Rumsey 1982) as well as my own data, however, provide evidence of Aboriginal people as central players in post-contact developments in their region. As Gillespie writes, 'Aboriginal people were the initiators of contact and they stepped forward to do business with Europeans in a conscious economic decision' (1988:245). In the 1970s they participated in putting forward their own vision for the creation of a national park on their land. Aboriginal people saw the Government's recognition of their rights and the establishment of a national park as a way to control the encroachment of outsiders onto their land. They did not see it as relinquishing their jurisdiction over their estates.

3.2. A Social History of the Alligator Rivers Region

Aboriginal people have lived in and managed the Alligator Rivers region for at least fifty thousand years (Roberts et al. 1990). For them the region is a socialised landscape, a landscape which reflects a history of places travelled, lived and worked in (Levitus, R. pers. comm.).

As discussed, before the 1870s, Macassan traders had made annual coastal visits to the Kakadu region for over one hundred years (Macknight 1976:1–2). The region had been visited and mapped by European sea explorers from the early nineteenth century, and Aboriginal people had interacted with the English at the settlement outposts established at Port Essington and Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula. Some of them had also assisted in the overland journey of Leichhardt through the region, monitored, and in at least one case, attacked his contemporaries who came overland to the north and who established another ill-fated settlement at Escape Cliffs. By 1863 South Australia had annexed the Northern Territory, and the port of Palmerston, now Darwin, was established in 1869. The expansion of European settlement in northern Australia from that period brought about momentous changes to local Aboriginal society and lifestyle in the Alligator Rivers region (see Figure 7).
Chapter 3. Kakadu National Park: Histories and Politics

The most significant legacy of the failed British settlements on the Cobourg Peninsula was a small number of Asian buffalo stock that they left behind. By the 1880s, the buffalo established themselves in their thousands across the sub-coastal plains and river basins between Darwin and Arnhem Land (Letts 1964). In 1885, a Government surveyor, Captain Carrington, noted large herds of buffalo near the East Alligator River and suggested that these beasts could be a source of employment if men were to engage in buffalo hunting (Lawrence 2000:21). In the same period, gold was discovered south of Darwin in the Pine Creek region and this discovery triggered a mini ‘gold rush’. From Pine Creek, Chinese and European mining prospectors ventured into the Mary and Alligator Rivers regions in search of tin (Levitus 1982:23, 29). As these non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs arrived in the Alligator Rivers region and began buffalo shooting, small-scale mineral exploration, timber getting and pastoralism, Aboriginal people, too, gradually became involved in a ‘fossicking economy’ (Levitus 1982).

Keen (1980a) estimates that at the time of European contact the Aboriginal population was approximately 2000 people along the coastal strip from the Adelaide River to the East Alligator River. By 1980, he estimated that population number had decreased by 97 per cent (Keen 1980a: 171). According to Keen (1980a: 175) this population decline, evident by the turn of the century, was due mainly to introduced diseases and the loss of Aboriginal women to relationships with the predominantly male population of European settlers, as well as Chinese miners and indentured labourers.24

Aborigines from the Alligator Rivers region were visiting Darwin annually by 1882 (Levitus 1995:83). A senior Aboriginal traditional owner of the Bunitj clan in Kakadu National Park, Bill Neidjie, comments on the effects of this population dispersal which continued into his lifetime:

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24 Keen reports that the first Chinese miners arrived in the Northern Territory in 1874 and by 1879 there was an Asian population of 2800. The European population was 456. There was another large influx of Chinese indentured labourers in 1887 when the construction of the Pine Creek railway began. From 1888 the introduction of the Chinese Immigration Act saw the Chinese population gradually decline. Only 630 Chinese remained in the Territory by 1909 (1980a:174).
They used to be here; I was around. Aboriginal people been here. And I used to go to Darwin—go for smokes; opium. Chinese brought it into Darwin. They used to go for that. That's why all these Gagudju people gone; and now some are drinking. They might go one by one. Opium, even Larakeyah\textsuperscript{25} people they smoked same way. Opium, go five days smoking then go to sleep. That's why all that Larakeyah people and Gagudju people half went—nothing around here. Those young fellas around here all Gunwinkgu [Kunwinjku] (1990: 2). [Gagudju people used to be here when I was younger. Aboriginal people were here. I used to go to Darwin for smokes and opium. The Chinese brought it into Darwin and the Gagudju went there for that. That is why all the Gagudju have now gone and some are drinking. They went slowly. It was the opium, even Larrakia people smoked it. They would smoke the opium for five days and then go to sleep. That is why most of the Larrakia and Gagudju people have gone, there aren't any here. All the young men here are Gunwinkgu.]

Despite the population decline, Levitus (1982) writes that the fragmented and shifting scene that emerged in the ‘fossicking economy’ offered opportunities for Aboriginal people to gain seasonal and periodic employment. This was particularly the case in the buffalo hide industry that, from the late 1800s until the market collapsed in the 1950s, had attracted numerous European buffalo hunters to the Alligator Rivers region. Over a seventy-year period the livelihood of these European hunters depended on the availability of low-cost Aboriginal labour:

Aboriginal men worked as skinners rather than shooters in the early days, although the second generation of Aboriginal hunters, who began in the 1920s—men such as Yorky Billy Alderson and Butcher Knight—were fine shots and good horsemen... Buffalo camps were located near billabongs, where Aboriginal women worked cleaning, washing and salting the heavy hides and caring for the camps. The hides were then taken by sea to Darwin, or transported by horse, and later truck, to the rail connection at Pine Creek. Hides sent by lugger to Darwin were unloaded at the beach, carried to the railway line, weighted, loaded onto the railway, and taken to the wharf for shipment to markets overseas... On the return journey the luggers, which were often crewed

\textsuperscript{25}Larakeyah (Larrakia) is the name of a language group who are the Aboriginal traditional owners of the Darwin area.
by Aboriginal men, carried stores, cooking utensils, foodstuffs, ammunition, guns and alcohol back to the Alligator Rivers region.

The work was hard and...the general state of poverty among European shooters meant that living conditions in the camps were shared equally by boss and workers...The common diet of damper, buffalo meat, treacle, jam and tea was supplemented by bush foods collected by Aboriginal women. The hunters slept 'rough' under shelters made from tree branches; tents were more often used to store foods away from animals. Aboriginal workers were paid out at the end of the season in foodstuffs and supplies intended to last the wet season, while the white shooters returned to Darwin or to southern cities for a break. (Lawrence 2000:25)

By the late 1800s the entire region of what is now Kakadu National Park was under pastoral lease, predominantly for buffalo along the northern sub-coastal plains, and for cattle in the marginal pastoral country to the south (Levitus 1995:79–80).

One of the first buffalo hunters in the area was Paddy Cahill, who established a buffalo hunting camp on the eastern side of the East Alligator river. At Oenpelli, from the 1890s to 1924, he operated a buffalo, cattle and agricultural station, first privately and then for the government. Cahill’s operation became a meeting place for Aboriginal people, particularly the Gaagudju, Urningangk, Erre, Amurdak and others from the northern coastal floodplains and river wetlands (Levitus 1995:83). Kunwinjku people from areas east of Oenpelli had also had contact with the station seeking goods and employment. These Kunwinjku ‘migrants negotiated their relationship with existing local groups by means of ceremonial exchange and intermarriage’ (Levitus 1995:83).

The Church Missionary Society took control of Oenpelli in 1925. The missionaries encouraged the westward population movement of Aboriginal groups towards Oenpelli as they were keen to increase their brethren in the new mission. Many Aboriginal people had also left Oenpelli after Paddy Cahill’s departure. They went in search of the employment and associated goods they had become accustomed to and which subsequent missionaries could not or would not provide (Levitus 1982:59–61).

The buffalo hide industry was socially significant for Aboriginal people who migrated together from across the wider region. The era was also significant as a
period of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social interaction and collaboration. Throughout this period Aboriginal peoples from within the region and others from the east in Arnhem Land moved between buffalo camps, mining operations and population centres such as Pine Creek, Katherine and Darwin in search of European goods and new experiences. This desire for European goods by Aboriginal people was strong, as shown below in the oral history extract of a local Aboriginal woman, Carla Ngalyorrrun, who expresses frustration at the varied European sensibilities that complicated the Aboriginal procurement of tobacco. At the time, in the 1930s, Oenpelli was undergoing a transition from buffalo hunting camp to church mission. Ngalyorrrun explained to Levitus (1982) that:

Can't get em smoke. No, no. no. Everyone go longa railway way, get em smoke. No more longa fuckin Oenpelli. No. Missionary no bin all day let em.

All gone. All longa Pine Creek way. More plenty tobacco. Longa Oenpelli no. One white man been there longa Oenpelli. Campbell. [Caretaker of Oenpelli between Cahill's departure and the missionary Dyer's arrival.] That's all right. Bin all day get em smoke. Only white man. No more missionary. Him landed there, missionary, no smoke. No clothes, no tobacco. No clothes, no tobacco.
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The creation of Stage I of Kakadu National Park was also significant as the first land claim to be granted under the ALRA. The title was granted under the condition that the land be immediately leased to the Commonwealth as a national park. Since this time, two more Aboriginal land claims have been granted over land within the Park (Lawrence 2000). While only 50 per cent of the Park area is currently Aboriginal land under the terms of the ALRA, the Plan of Management prescribes that the whole Park must be managed as Aboriginal land.\(^3\) The remaining Crown land in the Park area is also subject to Aboriginal Land Claim (see Figure 4).

The ‘three major pillars’ of management of Kakadu National Park are the Board of Management, the Plan of Management and day-to-day liaison between Park staff and Aboriginal traditional owners (Press & Lawrence 1995:9). The Board of Management is comprised of fourteen people: ten Aboriginal nominees of Aboriginal traditional owners (reflecting the geographic spread of Aboriginal people in the region as well as the major language groupings), the Director of National Parks and Wildlife, the Parks Australia Assistant Secretary in northern Australia, an ecologist and a person with expertise in tourism. In conjunction with the Director of National Parks and Wildlife, the Board’s functions include the preparation of Plans of Management, decision-making consistent with the Plan of Management, monitoring the management of the Park and advising the Minister for the Environment on the future development of the Park. The Board’s chairperson is selected from the Aboriginal Board members (Wellings 1995:242).

\(^3\) The *Kakadu National Park Plan of Management* states that ‘Parks Australia consults with relevant Aboriginal people regarding the management of the whole park area, not just those parts of the park that are granted as Aboriginal land’ (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:23). To support this management prescription it notes that:

In 1978, when announcing its decision following the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, the Commonwealth Government made a commitment that ‘arrangements will be made for Aboriginals to participate in the planning and management of the whole national park and not only those areas which are to be granted as Aboriginal land’ (Australia Parliament 1978). This commitment was based upon the recommendation made in the second report of the Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry. (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:24)
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Figure 4. Aboriginal Land and land claims in Kakadu National Park (source; KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:10)
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The Park employs around seventy-five staff, approximately one-third of whom are Aboriginal. This staff implements Park management programs and is based either at one of the five district administrative centres strategically located throughout the Park or at the Park headquarters located near Jabiru. A significant proportion of the work undertaken by most staff relates to the management of tourism activities and infrastructure in the Park.

1.2. Contested Domains

This thesis is concerned with the way in which Kakadu National Park is constructed by ideas of place and identity circulating within and between two domains. In the Aboriginal domain, the area is a series of contiguous customary estates; the interrelations between which form a complex pattern of relatedness and differentiation that constitute local Aboriginal identification with place. In the non-Aboriginal domain of tourism, Kakadu exists as a discrete tract of land which people want to experience for its World Heritage listed natural and cultural values, and as a representative part of Australia’s heritage. In this way it is a commodified place, portrayed as a World Heritage wilderness with an Aboriginal past, rather than a present. These intersecting social relationships and the contest within and between ‘local’ and ‘outside’ discourses make Kakadu a complex and contested domain.

As Kakadu National Park has gradually become one of Australia’s most famous national parks and a significant international tourist attraction (Knapman et al. 1991), it has also become a palimpsest, a place where the desires of others tend to overwrite the autochthonous landscape. Cowlishaw, commenting on Indigenous peoples and the imposition of settler landscapes, writes that even as they resist, ‘[t]hose being overwritten find that their images and texts, their relationships with place, begin to merge with the imported ones and can no longer be expressed unchanged’ (1999:15; see also Baker 1990). The irony in Kakadu is that while Aboriginal people own much of the land, they still struggle to cultivate non-Aboriginal popular recognition of their social and political landscapes. In this thesis I show that tourism is a key activity in the mediation of the symbolic exchange between settler and Indigenous landscapes. As Parsons writes, ‘Aboriginal cultural tourism continues to express for both host and guest, in different ways, belonging to the land, and the longing to belong’ (1997:iv).
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While places and landscapes exist physically, what we see and the way we give meaning to what we see is always socially interpreted (Massey & Jess 1995:218; see also Gruffudd 1994; Matless 1998). As local Aboriginal people, Park visitors, and others have engaged socially in the construction of Kakadu National Park, the area has become constituted partly as a tourist place by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. Over time, this intercultural exchange of ideas has transformed the Aboriginal homeland into first, a buffalo and mining province (referred to officially at different periods as the Uranium Province and the Alligators Rivers Region) and, second, one of Australia’s most prized nature tourism sites.

1.2.1. An Aboriginal Place

For Aboriginal traditional owners, Aboriginal customary law is the foundation on which their relationships to their country and to each other rely. It is a system of law that both emplaces people and establishes a basis for broader social relationships in the region. According to local customary law, it was Ancestor beings who made known to people the social and physical universe, and who gave each clan’s place-specific language to relate to their country. People belong to their country and it is their responsibility to maintain it according to local customs and traditions for future generations. Bill Neidjie, a senior traditional owner of an estate that forms part of what is now Kakadu National Park, explained to me the relationship of his clan to their country and the way in which they get their identity from the land:

Our tribe, Bunitj tribe, coming up children. Too long we been keeping down. The country, this land, we never leave, our old people here. We sitting down wait. We never shift anywhere in the world...You [White people] don’t know yourself. Aborigine man he know. He born, he sitting on it. He know what fish, what animal, what’s what. [Our clan is becoming stronger again. We will never leave this country because our ancestors are here. We will always stay here. White people don’t understand this relationship to the land. Aboriginal people belong to their land and understand how to relate to it and how it relates to them.]

4 Country is an Aboriginal English term which refers to the collective identity shared by a group of people, their land (and sea) estate and all the natural and supranatural phenomena contained within that estate.

5 Local descent group.
Chapter 1. Introduction

A fluctuating population of approximately 500 Aboriginal people live within the Park area (NLC 1998). These people are variously Aboriginal traditional owners of estates within the Park, relatives of traditional owners or traditional owners of estates outside the immediate Park area. Others are long-term residents of the region who have been associated throughout their lifetime with people in the Park area. Some are short-term visitors of Aboriginal residents. Other Aboriginal people, with no prior connection to the area, have also been attracted to the region by the employment opportunities that have arisen since the commencement of large-scale uranium mining in the region and establishment of the National Park.

Within the Park area Aboriginal people live permanently or semi-permanently in various locations: in Jabiru, the regional township and economic centre, at the twelve or so outstations\(^6\) established within the Park, and at the five district administrative centres where Parks Australia employees and their families are housed.

In 1998, the NLC recognised 120 people as adult traditional owners of Aboriginal land within the Park (NLC 1998). Geographically, Kakadu National Park forms a meeting point for Aboriginal people from three cultural blocs to the east, west and south. These blocs are each comprised of different land tenure systems and languages and are influenced by their own particular social histories (Keen 1980; Merlan & Rumsey 1982). The basic unit of social organisation in the central, eastern and southern parts of the region is a system of patrilineal descent known in the Gundjeihmi language as gun-mogurrgurr (mowurrwurr in the Jawoyn language) which consists of members from one or more exogamous patriline who have rights and responsibilities over a contiguous area and who share a particular set of Dreamings (Lawrence 2000:129). In the northwestern region of Kakadu language group is recognised as the principle form of land affiliation.

The following local descent groups have been recognised under the ALRA as having traditional ownership rights in area of Kakadu National Park: Bunitj gun-mogurrgurr (Gaagudju language), Mirrar gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Murrumburr gun-mogurrgurr (Mbukarla and Ngomburr), Mirrar gun-mogurrgurr (Erre), Wilirgu and Marrarmu gun-mogurrgurr (Buburnidja), Rol gun-mogurrgurr

\(^6\) A term generally applied to Aboriginal homeland centres at some distance from main centres of population.
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(Gundjeihmi), Badmardi (Bardimardi) gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Dadjbagu gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Garnditjbal gun-mogurrgurr (Mayaali), Yurlmayn (Jurkmanj) mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Kodjarndi gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Manilagarr gun-mogurrgurr (Urningangk), Wun.gomgu (Wurjgomgu) mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Regolo (Derkolo) mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Djamgolor gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Wardjag gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Warramal gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Madalk (Madalg) gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Wurrkbarbar mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Bolmo mowurrwurr (Jawoyn) and Matjba mowurrwurr (Jawoyn). There are other groups of Aboriginal people who have not yet been recognised under the ALRA, but who identify as the traditional owners of land in the Park area. These include Djindibi gun-mogurrgurr (Gaagudju) and people of the Limilngan (or Minitja) language group (see Figure 5 & Figure 9).

These clans and language defined groups are linked together across the region through social, religious and historical ties. For instance, for people living around the central, northern, eastern and southern parts of the region, the known social universe, which includes people, land, plants, animals and supranatural phenomena, is divided into two halves or moieties (Chaloupka 1993:69). These moieties are patrilineal; one is Yirritja and one is Dhuwa. Furthermore, people have a sociocentric way of reckoning their relations through a division of subsections, often glossed as skins. They also have an elaborate system of kinship which is central to the configuration of particular land tenure and marriage arrangements. Aboriginal people believe that the identity of humans, nature and land is inseparable. Chaloupka writes that:

...this philosophy is expressed as a symbolic association between the social groups and the flora and fauna, other natural phenomena and their ancestral and spirit counterparts. This association is best reflected in the language of a neuter prefix, “gun” the function of which is to characterise body parts, features of the landscape and also various cultural constructs—languages, clans and customs. All of the “First People” and everything they created in the universe is somebody’s totem. Aborigines call this concept djang; in English it is called the “Dreaming”. Gadjangdi are the locus of these Dreamings, the sites where the spirit or essence remains to this day. (1993:69)

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7 Chaloupka (1993:74–75) writes that the organisational basis of these social units has changed over time as the moiety system and an associated subsection system was matrilineal until the recent past.
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Figure 5. Notional clan/language areas, based on linguistic research and maps prepared for land claims (many of these names, spellings and locations are no longer considered accurate) (source: Lawrence 2000:131, see errata)
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For Aboriginal traditional owners and other long-term Aboriginal residents in the Kakadu region, the physical landscape is interpreted through social relationships and a social history that links the identity of the self with the identity of place. At the same time as the interconnectedness and interdependencies of social relationships are woven ontologically through the landscape, Aboriginal people continually produce and maintain their connections with place through their actions, experiences, social relations and stories (see Appendix A).

The social organisation and location of Aboriginal people across the region has also been greatly influenced by the historical events of the twentieth century and social relationships formed through work and travel. In the post-European contact era, before its invention as a national park, the region was a part of a north Australian ‘fossicking economy’ (Levitus 1982; see also Chapter Four). In this economy Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal entrepreneurs worked together on projects as diverse as buffalo and crocodile hunting, pastoralism, mining, forestry and safari hunting tourism. In 1982, Levitus titled his report documenting the social history of the region, ‘Everybody Bin All Day Work’. This Aboriginal Kriol title is taken from:

...a statement made on several occasions by Carla Ngalyorrrun, one of the Aborigines belonging to the Park area...It says much about the realities of social life for the Aborigines and non-Aborigines of the Park area for the past eighty years, and carries implications for the way in which the Park is presented to and perceived by the public, including its characterisation, particularly by tourit operators, solely in terms of “untamed wilderness”. Although the region has been marginal to the mainstream of Territory economic life...there has been no lack of organised non-Aboriginal economic activity in many and various forms. The Park area, for many years, has been used. (Levitus 1982:125)

Many of the senior Aboriginal traditional owners who have been actively engaged in the management of Kakadu National Park have had diverse life and work histories. Many of these people were born in the region and, over the course of their lives, moved repeatedly in and out of the region, often towards regional centres of European activity, such as missions and cattle stations, to seek employment and access to material goods.

In the 1970s, with the success of the first land claim in the region, along with the concurrent development of mining and the National Park, Aboriginal people began
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to return to the region from other provincial population centres and places of work. The return and arrival of significant numbers of Aboriginal people into the region has involved, and continues to involve, a complex process of political negotiation between and within land-owning groups and across other fields of social relations (see Levitus 1991).

These internal negotiations have also been influenced by discourses of the non-Aboriginal domain. In the 1970s, the discourses of Aboriginal land rights and nature conservation combined to establish the National Park (see Chapter Four) and as the influence of these discourses has spread within the Aboriginal domain, they have contributed to changes in local Aboriginal social relationships and self-representation. For example, Western ideas about the conservation of nature influence the decisions of Aboriginal traditional owners as they negotiate the management of their country with others involved in the joint management of the Park. The influence of anthropological discourse, such as anthropological definitions used in the statutory application of the ALRA, has seen increasing importance placed on bounded clan-land relationships in the Aboriginal domain, rather than on the social interrelationships between clans that produce those estates. Moreover, within the Aboriginal domain, as land and resources are endowed with monetary value, clan groups have focused on the management of their own resources in a way that poses challenges to the interconnectedness of Aboriginal social relations across the region (see Chapter Five).

Immediately prior to and since its inception, Kakadu National Park has been the subject of an extraordinary number of governmental inquiries, research reports, consultancies and impact assessments relating to human and environmental management issues. The Kakadu Region Social Impact Study: Community Action Plan (KRSIS 1997b) found that, despite this intense scrutiny and twenty years of mining and tourism development in the region, local Aboriginal people were subject to extreme socio-economic difficulties and were, on average, no better off than any
other Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. This is, in part, due to the way in which development in the region has proceeded beyond the control of the local people on whose land these developments have taken place.

In relation to tourism, Aboriginal traditional owners have consistently maintained that they welcome a controlled number of visitors to their land and that they are proud to be able share their country with others. However, they have also asserted their right to 'be boss for country' and asked that visitors respect Aboriginal authority and rules for visiting Aboriginal land.

1.2.2. The Guests

Before contact with Europeans, some Aboriginal people living in the region had trading relationships with 'Macassan' trepangers who had been making seasonal journeys to the north Australian coastline from the Indonesian archipelago since at least the early eighteenth century (MacKnight 1976). Although these visits were confined to coastal regions, news of these visitors and the goods they brought with them travelled widely and some Macassan loan words are used in languages of the wider Kakadu region. During the trepanging period Macassan goods such as knives, salt, tobacco, rice and cloth were highly prized items of regional trade. The oral history of Macassan–Aboriginal relations is expressed in a rich tradition of stories and ceremonies throughout much of the northern coastal region. Despite stories of conflict and bloodshed, the Macassan period is remembered positively as a time of co-operative working and trading relations, including the 'blood ties' established by marriage and consort relations between Macassan men and Aboriginal women. One traditional owner from the coastal plains of Kakadu National Park explained his belief that:

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8 The definition of a 'local Aboriginal person' is problematic. In this thesis I follow Taylor (1996) and make a distinction between 'local Aborigines' who are traditional owners of parts of Kakadu or Aboriginal people who have residential rights according to Aboriginal custom, and 'non-locals' who are recent arrivals from outside of the region, principally in connection with employment opportunities.

9 It is unclear how many of these trepangers were actually from the linguistically defined ethnic group of Masassans from an area in what is now known as South Sulawesi. However, approximately
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Some Macassans could speak Iwaidja [his mother’s language]. My grandfather fought those people, there were a lot of fights, but we also exchanged and had family links. We made a relationship with them. They didn’t try to take over.

The first European to encounter Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region was probably the German explorer and naturalist Ludwig Leichhardt in 1846 (see Chapter Two). He recorded favourable remarks on the ‘temperament of the natives’ and the terrain of the South Alligator River catchment, referring to the ‘natives’ as ‘intelligent’ and ‘good friends’ and the vista before him as a ‘promised land’ (Leichhardt 1847). Upon his return to Sydney he recommended the region as a site for the northern expansion of European settlement. Despite this favourable recommendation, the Alligator Rivers region remained on the fringes of European settlement in the north. Most of the Europeans who came to the region before World War II were buffalo hunters and mineral prospectors. It was not until after the War that the first tourists ventured into the region in search of the romance and adventure recounted in the popular tales of the buffalo hunters who preceded them (see for example Patterson 1906, Bradshaw 1905). Tales of the lives of buffalo hunters in the region, such as those of Tom Cole whose adventures are described in his book, *Hell West and Crooked* (1988), remain a central part of the local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal folklore of the Kakadu region.

In the 1970s, road access into the region improved, title to some of the land was granted to local Aborigines, a national park was created, and a uranium mine and the mining town of Jabiru were constructed in the centre of the region. By 1995, this town had developed into a mixed mining- and tourism-based community with a predominantly non-Aboriginal population of approximately 1400 people (Taylor 1996).

In 1982, 45 000 people visited Kakadu National Park, and by 1989 this number had increased to 230 000 visitors annually.¹⁰ Events such as the Australian Bicentennial celebrations in 1988, which assisted in marketing Australia as a destination for international tourists, and the popularity of the Australian feature film *Crocodile*...
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*Dundee* (1986), which featured Kakadu's dramatic landscape, increased the number of people who came to see Kakadu. Also in the late 1980s, a market niche was created for soft adventure tours into Australia's 'outback', and it was these four-wheel-drive safaris that became popular in Kakadu with the international backpacker market in the 1990s.

Kakadu is now a major resource for the Northern Territory and Australian tourism industry. It is the drawcard that attracts people to the Top End

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of the Northern Territory (Darwin Regional Tourism Association 1995) and which helps occupy the many luxury hotels and backpacker lodges now established in Darwin.

\[12\]

Tourism has been ranked second to mining as the Northern Territory's largest export income earner, and is regarded as a 'growth' industry which provides employment and retail trade throughout the Territory (Department of Industries & Business 2000:5). In 1990, money spent on visits to Kakadu accounted for more than 25 per cent of all money spent on tourism in the Northern Territory (Knapman et al. 1991). Nationally, tourism is the fastest growing export industry in Australia and, along with other places of 'natural beauty' such as Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu has become a major tourism attraction for overseas visitors to Australia (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:20).

Tourism pervades the social and economic fabric of most regions of the world, as well as influencing the images that people from different regions have of one another. Particularly in the West, since the earliest times of travel writing (Greenblatt 1991; Pratt 1992), tourism has furnished our conversations and its discourse has filled our fantasies (Lanfant 1995b:26; see Chapter Two). As countries across the globe become increasingly urbanised, many people want to experience 'nature', and

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\[11\] The Northern Territory Tourist Commission defines the 'Top End' region as including the City of Darwin, Outer Darwin Tourism Region, the Coomalie Region, Mary River Wetlands, Jabiru and West Arnhem Land, Gove Peninsula and East Arnhem Land and the Tiwi Islands (Department of Industries and Business 2000:73). The NLC defines its jurisdiction as the 'Top End' which includes the above areas, excluding the Tiwi Islands, and also including the regions of Borroloola/Barkly, Ngukurr, Tennant Creek, Katherine, Daly/Waigait and the Victoria River District (NLC Online: http://www.nlc.org.au/).

\[12\] Approximately 70 per cent of all tourists to Kakadu are domestic visitors from other places in Australia, evenly spread across all age groups (Environment Science and Services 1994; Knapman 1990).
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places like Kakadu provide destinations to satisfy these desires. For example, after going on a backpacker adventure tour to Kakadu National Park, a young female Korean tourist expressed her thoughts to me about Kakadu, ‘That place was fantastic. It is huge and unbelievable things for me. It is bigger than my city. I was envy your country natural’. Internationally, Kakadu is significant as a World Heritage listed property that is ‘held in trust for the rest of humankind’ (Lawrence 2000:216). This World Heritage status of Kakadu National Park adds to its attraction for the international environmental tourism market. Knapman et al. also suggest that the value of Kakadu National Park extends to ‘non-site visitors who gain satisfaction from knowing that the environmental and cultural resources of the Park are protected’ (1991:1).

1.3. Research Process

I chose Kakadu National Park as my research site on the recommendation of my supervisor. I had no prior connection to the region and my knowledge of Kakadu was limited. From the outset of my research, the wealth of literature about Kakadu National Park, and the wider community interest in it suggested to me a number of questions. For instance, how does this public attention and the tourism it generates influence the imagined geography of Kakadu National Park? Given the interest in Kakadu in the non-Aboriginal domain, what does it mean to state, as the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management does, that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place? How in practice can Aboriginal people assert and communicate their own meanings of these landscapes to their non-Aboriginal ‘guests’ in the Park?

The breadth of these questions and the issues that they raise do not fit neatly within any disciplinary area. The issues that need to be dealt with lie at the intersection of concerns of a number of different disciplinary areas, principally anthropology, cultural geography, sociology of tourism, post-colonialist studies, environmental studies, conservation, and the management of natural resources. Accordingly, it is necessary to draw on the literature of all these disciplines in the analysis of the field

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13 Park users in Kakadu National Park are typically university graduates in professional jobs earning above average incomes; these visitor profile socio-economics are also consistent with general worldwide trends in leisure oriented natural environment users and environmental group memberships (Knapman 1990).

My field research and analysis involved ethnographic methods (Agar 1996). Such research, particularly when conducted under the auspices of Aboriginal communities, requires that careful attention and consideration be given to research protocols and ethics. The politics of ethnographic representation have potentially serious ethical ramifications for research populations (see Clifford & Marcus 1986). For example, in a review of Myers’s (1986) ethnography of people from the Western Desert, *Pintupi country, Pintupi Self*, Michaels is critical of a perceived lack of reflexivity by Myers and the implications of this for his ‘truth’ claims:

This conventionalized failure of ethnography to articulate its practice has a name: the “ethnographic present”. It refers to a conceit that can only arise where discourse is masked, the author disguised, and the subject objectified. It is symptomatic of a failure to admit that the fieldworker is inescapably employed in a reflexive practice, which can be obscured but not changed by writing about it.

Such criticisms necessarily lead us to consider what I take to be very similar criticisms Aborigines make of anthropologists and their models. The last chapter’s analysis [in Myers’s book] of recent *Pintupi* history will have political consequences that are difficult to assess because they interact with competing discourses being employed by Aborigines themselves. Many resent the implications of structural-functional descriptions of their tradition that may consign them (and their struggle) to a place outside history, or worse, alienate them from that history. (Michaels 1994:139)

Moreover, in the ethnographic research process the field data as 'contradictory, subjective, unruly, partial as they invariably are, provide little basis for knowing
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anything with certainty’ (Wolcott 1994:26). There is no knowledge out there waiting to be discovered, rather in any relationship which is part of the research project:

both the scholar and the respondent construct a particular version of themselves in interviews which is then re-interpreted and re-presented in different ways in future publications. (McDowell 1992:214)

With these issues in mind, between June 1997 and November 1999, I spent thirty-eight weeks doing fieldwork in Kakadu National Park, including occasional trips to western and central Arnhem Land and the Katherine region. For at least half of that time I was based at the Jim Jim ranger station near Cooinda in central Kakadu National Park (see Figure 6). I also spent time in the western Arnhem Land community of Kunbarllanjja (Oenpelli) and at Aboriginal outstations, district ranger stations and other locations throughout the Park.

I began my field research with a two-week pilot study that involved interviews with Australian tourists concerning their attitudes and perceptions of Kakadu National Park. I presented the preliminary findings of this study to the Kakadu Board of Management and was subsequently given permission by the Board to continue my research and issued with a two-year research permit by Parks Australia\(^\text{15}\) (see Appendix C). The clauses of this permit largely addressed issues of biophysical, rather than social and cultural, research. In 1998, I presented further research findings to the Kakadu Board of Management. I also presented to the Board a draft research agreement which addressed issues of intellectual property rights and research ethics that was intended to be made between the Kakadu Board of Management, on behalf of Aboriginal traditional owners, and me (see Appendix D). I drafted this research agreement, with the assistance of my thesis supervisors, in order to be consistent with the Northern Territory University’s Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management (CINCRM) research and ethics policy (see Appendix E). It was also drafted in response to concerns expressed to me by some Aboriginal traditional owners about the practices of academic researchers who extract information from Aboriginal communities, but who feel that they have no reciprocal obligation to the Aboriginal people themselves.

\(^{15}\) This permit was later extended until December 1999.
Figure 6. General map of Kakadu National Park (source: KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:4)
An intention of the draft agreement was to provide Aboriginal traditional owners with a formal degree of control over the manner in which they would be represented in a thesis. However, while this draft research agreement received in principal support from the Kakadu Board of Management, it remains unsigned. Legal advice to the Board from the Australian Government Solicitor advised that because the Kakadu Board of Management is not a statutory body it can not be a party to a legally binding agreement. It was suggested by these advisors that the agreement be made between the Director of National Parks and Wildlife and myself and declared that the Director, holding a statutory position, would act in accordance with the wishes of the Kakadu Board of Management on behalf of Aboriginal traditional owners. My supervisor advised me against signing an agreement with the Director of National Parks and Wildlife, as the intention of the draft agreement was to make a direct agreement with the Kakadu Board of Management on behalf of Aboriginal traditional owners, not to make an agreement with an Australian Government official who could not directly represent their interests in the research.

My research was facilitated through the relationships I established over time with key Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Park staff and others who supported my research ideas and felt that such research could have beneficial outcomes for Park management. As my research progressed, the ethical implications of doing ethnographic research, which I had read about in critiques of ethnography (see above), became evident in my own research process. While abiding by university research ethics procedures and my own attempts to draft a research agreement with the Kakadu Board of Management guided my approach, it was through actual field encounters that the sensitivities of doing fieldwork were illuminated and negotiated. As a researcher I was a part of the discourse of multi-layered power relationships within the Park domain, unavoidably involved in the politics and 'messiness of everyday life' (Baum 1996:130; see also Jackson 1998:Appendix B). The information I diligently gathered in each field experience and encounter was almost always a part of something else other than my own limited research agenda. Particularly with Aboriginal informants, the information generated through the research process was often of a sensitive nature, connected to other events and concerns which I was to learn about only later. In my case, the ethical application of knowledge constructed under these circumstances relied on building working
relationships and a process of negotiation with key informants and stakeholders, ensuring that I informed and discussed with them each stage of the research process and the dissemination of findings.

My ethnographic field research involved both a formal interview process and participant observation. I have documented and analysed the attitudes and perceptions of people, specifically the interaction between the traditional owners of the National Park and a select variety of Park users and interest groups. These include a broad range of tourist industry agencies, guided tourists and non-guided tourists, specifically bushwalkers and fishers. I also analysed the ways in which each group relates to and represents the other and the traditional owners of the Park in the process of attempting to achieve their own political and other goals.\(^\text{16}\)

I held separate formal interviews with 134 people on one or more occasions. This included 8 tour operators and 53 Australian tourists, 11 of whom were asked to specifically address the issue of fishing and 10 of whom were asked to specifically address bushwalking issues in the Park. I interviewed 28 predominantly senior level Parks Australia staff, 10 of whom were Aboriginal. In addition to Aboriginal Park staff, I interviewed 34 other Aboriginal traditional owners and Aboriginal residents in the Park. Seven of the Aboriginal traditional owners interviewed were also members of the Kakadu National Park Board of Management at the time. I also interviewed 10 non-Aboriginal staff members of the NLC and other Aboriginal associations in the Kakadu region. Seventy-two of these interviews were taped, notes of the remainder were written by hand either during the interview or immediately afterwards. Several of the interviews with tour operators and other individuals with interests in fishing and bushwalking were conducted in Darwin. I also attended seven meetings of a local bushwalking club and, at one of these meetings I presented a paper on bushwalking in Kakadu National Park and invited discussion and comment by those club members present.

\(^{16}\) The thesis also includes reference to policy statements from various interest groups, particularly those issued in response to the various Kakadu National Park Plans of Management (ANPWS 1980, 1986; ANPWS & KNPBoM 1991; KNPBoM & ANCA 1996; KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998) and the variety of opinions expressed in newspapers and other popular literature about the region. These works are drawn on in various sections of the thesis.
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All Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Park staff whose statements are contained in this thesis were asked how they wished to be identified—annonymously, by position or by name. Quotations referenced throughout the thesis are attributed accordingly. For a variety of reasons, including a desire to protect privacy and/or the sensitivity of some material, many people wished to remain anonymous. Some Aboriginal people were concerned that recording their statements on paper would allow others to hold them to a position which they might later wish to revise depending on the context and subsequent course of events. When referring to statements made by Park visitors, all interview material is anonymous.

Participant observation was undertaken at various locations throughout the Park including public rock art sites, campgrounds, waterfalls, the Warradjan Cultural Centre, Bowali Visitor Centre, the Cooinda hotel and the Jabiru shopping centre. It included participation in the Parks Australia Ranger Walks and Talks program held at various locations in the Park, boat cruises on Yellow Water wetlands, discussions with people protesting against the construction of the Jabiluka uranium mine, assisting and/or accompanying Park rangers on daily park management duties, and participation in various fishing and hunting trips with Aboriginal people. I participated in five Aboriginal cultural tours in Kakadu National Park, western Arnhem Land, central Arnhem Land and the Katherine region. I also participated in three bushwalks in the Kakadu escarpment with a local bushwalking club, a commercial bushwalking tour, and with a Parks Australia bushwalking surveillance trip. I accompanied Aboriginal traditional owners, along with either Parks Australia staff or NLC staff and consultants, on four research field trips during this period.

My initial entry into the field was to interview Australian tourists chosen at random in campgrounds and the hotel complex in the Jim Jim area. These interviews aimed to elucidate views about their expectations and experiences of Kakadu National Park. I established that the desire of non-Aboriginal people to ‘tour’ Kakadu is a product of the tourist fantasy of what Kakadu National Park is. Those who visit Kakadu as tourists are often fulfilling their desire to experience a famous Australian place, a place which they have seen so many images of on television and in other media. Park visitors want to experience first hand the grandeur of a remote World Heritage listed landscape, to gaze upon the gorges, the waterfalls and the birds of the wetlands. Some want to learn about the natural heritage of the area. They may also
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desire to see Aboriginal people and view rock art, to experience Aboriginal culture and achieve an understanding of Aboriginal relationships to the land. Others may be there to engage in particular recreational activities or they may be embarking on a quintessential Australian ‘outback’ journey of which the trip to Kakadu is only a part (see Appendix B). A 1993 visitor survey also found that the World Heritage status of the Park was a factor that attracted tourists and a significant majority of visitors came to Kakadu seeking a wilderness experience (Environment Science and Services 1994).

Following this pilot study, when planning and choosing which tourism issues in the Park to examine, and in my choice of informants for interviews, I was guided by the advice of two men, a senior Aboriginal traditional owner and former Chair of the Kakadu Board of Management, and the former Secretary to the Kakadu Board of Management. Initially, consultations with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Park staff were a valuable way of engaging with the tourism issues that pervade the Park’s management. At this stage my consultations with Aboriginal people were largely confined to Aboriginal Park staff. This was because of a perceived sense of ‘consultation fatigue’ felt by Aboriginal people throughout the region who, at the time, were subject to the Kakadu Region Social Impact Assessment process and associated pressures (see KRSIS 1997a, 1997b).

In the third year of my field research I expanded my research to include interviews with Aboriginal people who were not National Park employees, including both landowners and long-term Aboriginal residents in the region. In accordance with the research and ethics policies of both CINCRM and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) I negotiated to pay informants’ fees to these Aboriginal people for the time that they spent as subjects of research away from their normal personal and community activities. Interviewing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Park employees was relatively straightforward given that there was an immediate nexus between their daily practice and tourism activities. Non-Aboriginal informants were either tourists themselves or heavily involved on a daily basis in the concrete issues which my research addressed. Interviews with Aboriginal informants who were not Park employees were often fraught, as in our relationship of researcher and informant we lacked the common ground that the discourses of Park management and tourism provide. Many
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Aboriginal people I spoke with in the Park had no direct involvement with Park visitors and had limited interaction with the National Park authority itself. However, all of these people were involved in the management and use of the area and were, in one way or another, a part of the Park management discourse, although the level of their involvement varied according to their differing opportunities and inclinations to influence a given situation. The Aboriginal people I spent the most time with during my field research were working at the interface of joint management, or working in the tourism industry itself. Thus, while I talked to many people, it was the discussions and relationships I struck on a longer term basis with Aboriginal people closely involved in the daily activities of Park management and tourism that proved the most productive for my research.

I entered the field aware that the social impacts of tourism were regarded by Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park as amongst the most significant of the community development and planning issues with which they must contend (see Lawrence 2000:285–286). Almost immediately, I established that tourism was considered by some Aboriginal residents to intrude into their private social space, such as hunting grounds. Moreover, some Aboriginal people expressed the view that the Park management activities of Parks Australia had become directed towards managing tourism activities and associated infrastructure at the expense of Aboriginal priorities of ‘caring for country’ and the conservation of the Park’s natural assets. I also established that Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park wished to assert control over tourism activities in the Park and assert their own social guidelines for the management and use of these places. Moreover, it is believed by some Aboriginal people that tourism, under the control of and benefiting local Aboriginal people, can help them build a secure base for the economic future of the region.

During the research process, it became clear to me that the practices of tourism in Kakadu signify an ongoing pattern of colonial relations whereby non-Indigenous ‘guests’ prioritise their own interpretations of, and access to the landscape in a manner which marginalises the authority and decision-making processes of Aboriginal landowners. However, I also found that as Aboriginal people gain greater control over how their land and culture is represented and made available to tourists, tourism can offer them a way of developing a more constructive engagement with
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non-Aboriginal ideas about both nature and Aborigines. In this manner, tourism can be conceived anew to allow landowners the opportunity to assert their own aspirations for their homelands (see also Blundell 1995–1996).

1.4. Socialised Landscapes

Local Aboriginal people have a very different relationship to Kakadu from tourists. For local Aboriginal people Kakadu is in the first instance their home, not a national park. At the Unlocking Museums conference held in Darwin in 1997, Sandra McGregor, a local Aboriginal woman, commented that:

Kakadu is not perceived as private property but as public land. Where Aboriginal people fit in this picture is not clear. For many tourists Aboriginal people are viewed as a part of the landscape over which they have certain rights of access and privileges. This attitude can be observed in the way people are often observed in the same way as birds or crocodiles, as part of the natural environment. Aboriginal people are not perceived as active agents affecting and changing their environment because such a view does not sit comfortably with non-Indigenous conservation values (in Lancashire, McGregor & Large 1997:38)

This thesis considers the ways in which Aborigines, through the Kakadu Board of Management, are increasingly asserting their wish to manage their estates on their own terms, and the way in which this confronts Western ideas about nature, Aborigines and the identity of the self.

The critical difference between Western approaches to the environment and those of Aboriginal people in Kakadu rests upon the issue of land ownership. All land and resources in Kakadu comprise the various estates of Aboriginal people in the region. Under Aboriginal customary law, the ownership of these estates places landowners in a complex and multi-dimensional system of individual and group rights, responsibilities, social relationships and obligations. Accordingly, Aboriginal people have their own ontology of place and negotiating mechanisms for resource

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17 I am grateful to Robert Levitus for suggesting the use of this term to refer to an Aboriginal association with place. Levitus refers to a 'socialised landscape', as a 'processual, subjective, ego-centred concept', wherein the 'Aboriginal gaze is enlivened by a social history: a country lived and worked in'. In contrast he argues the idea of a cultural landscape can be conceptualised 'as existing in the objectified gaze of an outsider, reifying the sedimented values of things gone' (Levitus, R. pers. comm.).
utilisation. This approach challenges liberal Western ideals of land management based on an interest group model that relies on disengaged reason and Western deliberative norms to achieve a symmetry between competing resource users (Young 1990, 1995).

Bushwalking in Kakadu is an example of an area where modern environmental assumptions of human–land relations and interactions are under challenge by Aboriginal conceptions of place (see Chapter Six). Aboriginal people have concerns about the activities of bushwalkers conducting overnight bushwalks in the Kakadu escarpment. Bushwalkers argue that their activities are environmentally friendly and legitimate pursuits in a national park environment. However, the concerns of Aboriginal traditional owners stem from a wish to respect the broader interrelationships between traditional owners and their estates, rather than concern for bushwalkers' impacts on the physical environment of the Kakadu escarpment. On the one hand, the idea of a national park, constituted as an area of land accessible to the public and free from constraining social relations, supports bushwalkers' beliefs they should be allowed to conduct their walks. On the other hand, Aboriginal traditional owners conceive of land as alive with meaning and enmeshed in social relationships and are concerned that bushwalkers' activities intrude into areas where they are not authorised to be. In contrast to the enmeshed relationships between Aboriginal traditional owners and their estates which inform the perspectives of traditional owners, the attitude expressed by bushwalkers is a product of the Western imaginary of a discrete self, which is able to engage independently in a relationship with an equally discrete nature. In their quest for a wilderness experience, bushwalkers state that they gain a greater appreciation for Kakadu's ancient Aboriginal heritage, such as the rock art which is prevalent in the Kakadu escarpment. Ironically, at the same time as they appreciate this past, their activities override the stated wishes of the Aboriginal traditional owners of that heritage.

While bushwalking involves contested ideas about appropriate ways of relating to the land, recreational fishing is an issue in the Park that involves contested ideas about appropriate resource use (see Chapter Seven). Recreational fishers resist the

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18 In this thesis I use the term 'imaginary' as 'something constitutive of, and constituted by, ontic and epistemic commitments' (Verran 1998:238).
Chapter 1. Introduction

attempts by Aboriginal traditional owners to manage fishing activities in the Park according to Aboriginal priorities for resource management. Recreational fishers rely upon a discourse of scientific rationality to manage resource use, which through the 'language of domination' (Fitzsimmons 1989:109) marginalises the wishes of Aboriginal traditional owners. Moreover, fishers argue that as Aborigines are only one among many interests and stakeholder groups involved the management of Kakadu National Park, their wishes should have no priority. Western science and ‘open’ public processes of debate and reasoning are regarded as the ultimate arbiter between competing resource users (Willems-Braun 1997).

This Western 'culture of nature' (Willems-Braun 1997), evident among Kakadu National Park users in the preservationist arguments of bushwalkers and the sustainable resource use arguments of fishers, relies on a shared understanding of nature where it is believed that the environment can be scientifically managed and monitored in order to pursue the social objectives of environmentalists and resource users. At the same time, the way in which their own social objectives and relationships influence the epistemological basis of the Western 'culture of nature' is concealed and made invisible in the discourse of objective scientific truths (Harding 1991). Aboriginal people, on the other hand, believe that acknowledging social objectives and relationships is integral to the production of knowledge about, and the consideration of, land and resource use issues.

An Aboriginal approach to resource management relies on the fact that the unique identity between landowners and their estates is counterbalanced by a reliance on other relationships. As Swain points out, political and social structures in traditional Aboriginal societies, such as the interrelationships between the different moieties and clans, are based on finding the balance between autonomy and exchange:

It is essential to realise that the ontologic identity between a human being and an Aboriginal place does not provide him or her with exclusive social, political and economic rights to the site and its surrounding areas...it is precisely the fact that a person does not have exclusive rights over the location with which he or she is linked-in-being which ensures that places are structurally related to one another through their life manifestations...The foundation principle is: the humans who are of a land's-stuff do not, and cannot, exclusively control that site. The immediate result is a relationship. (Swain 1993:51)
Likewise, when these Aboriginal political and social structures include non-traditional relationships with outsiders, as they do in Kakadu National Park, the primacy of the relationship of traditional owners to their estates is influenced by, and dependent upon, engaging with a range of traditional and non-traditional social relationships. Aboriginal people in Kakadu recognise the necessity of nurturing and developing their relationships with the non-Aboriginal domain. Some traditional owners have indicated that they are sensitive to the fact that, as their homelands are constituted in the non-Aboriginal domain as a national park, the public will have certain expectations that Aboriginal land and heritage will be 'on show' and accessible. Thus, while the tourist interest in the National Park helps traditional owners conserve and protect their heritage, they are aware that their homeland and heritage will be read in the non-Aboriginal domain according to competing discourses of landscape interpretation. To an extent, it is accepted that their relationships with their homelands are now dependent on the commodification of the area in this way (see also Jacobs J. 1996; Massey 1993). At the same time, traditional owners remain adamant that non-Aborigines need to be willing to negotiate their position and listen more closely to the perspectives of local Aboriginal people. As Bill Neidjie remarked to me:

Well mostly the country like we want this story more than we got. That tourist, tourist coming in this country and better for them because our world, Darwin, growing up, grow, lot of people. We don’t care that because this is a story, you gotta get more, more story because Aborigine story wasn’t enough to beat government law. I think we should listen each other, that law, what’s been going on, better to this time, better government can to listen to us. [It’s good for tourists to come and experience the place. But Aboriginal people have their own ideas about tourism and the Park. The government needs to listen to what we think so that we can negotiate how things can be done.]

Many non-Aboriginal Park users value Kakadu as a place of preserved and exemplary natural and cultural heritage. In this way it imagined as a discrete landscape, frozen in space and time and available for their use and enjoyment. Yet for Aboriginal people, the social relationships which establish their various estates and management responsibilities within the Park require that ongoing attention in the management of their land be given to the fluidities and multi-dimensional social relations which influence place. Thus, in order to conceive of Kakadu as an
Aboriginal place, non-Aboriginal people need to accept their responsibility to engage with Aboriginal traditional owners' narratives of place. The relationship that will flow from this engagement cannot be assumed, but is something that has to be negotiated under the auspices of a pre-existing system of Aboriginal authority.

1.4.1. A Place in the World

This thesis aims to assess the way in which Aboriginal people can assert their meanings invested in the landscape while engaged in the wider process of tourist place-making. It does this by examining assertions of, and reactions to, the claim that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place. Jackson and Penrose (1993) state that in contrast to the humanistic celebration of a unique ‘sense of place’ (Relph 1976), place-making involves the appropriation and transformation of space and nature (see also Duncan & Duncan 1988; Massey 1993). This thesis argues that Aboriginal people in Kakadu desire an Aboriginal place that both celebrates the uniqueness of place and allows for the transformation of space and nature. Engaging in relations with the ‘outside’ world according to a system of relationships and authority based on the local Aboriginal perspectives allows for the possibility that tourism can be included within such a system of relationships. For example, in an Australia-wide context, Parsons (1997) argues that Aboriginal cultural tourism has become a currency for Aboriginal people to realise their land needs in a situation of colonial dispossession where Aboriginal tourism acts to express covert control over one’s domain. He writes that:

> Aboriginal cultural tourism may be approached as a mode of production, like traditional agriculture. This mode of production may be called “touriculture” — the “cultivation”, as it were, of the symbolic landscape in response to a demand from a non-traditional market. (1997:iii)

In a similar way, this thesis examines what kind of place tourism is creating in Kakadu National Park and the manner in which Aboriginal people in the Park are involved in this process of tourist place-making. It also examines the relation between tourism and the non-Aboriginal recognition of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place. The thesis analyses the assumptions of non-Aboriginal Park users engaged in nature-based tourism and examines the historical roots of Western ideas about nature and Aborigines. It combines a textual analysis of historical tropes and contemporary policy positions with an ethnography of tourism in the Park. This approach makes a significant and unique contribution to elucidating the fluid and contested interface
between settler and Indigenous approaches to the management and use of landscape and provides an understanding of the challenges which are involved in negotiating a way forward.

The next chapter examines the documentary history of the Kakadu region and introduces the historical tropes that continue to inform National Park users in their constructions of Kakadu National Park.
Chapter Two

The Textual and Visual Invention of Kakadu National Park
Chapter 2. The Textual and Visual Invention of Kakadu National Park

2.1. Introduction

European hopes of finding productive tropical land in north Australia were dashed in the early nineteenth century by the first sea surveyors’ reports that told of coastal landscapes resembling a long monotonous plain, particularly around an area where the surveyor King had named the Alligator Rivers (King 1827). Elsewhere in Australia, inland explorers, such as Charles Sturt, searched for a pastoral utopia in the continent’s interior. While disappointed that he found only desert, in 1849 Sturt marvelled at the vista he encountered:

Men of undoubted perseverance and energy had in vain tried to work their way to that shrouded spot. A veil hung over Central Australia that could neither be pierced nor raised. Girt round by deserts, it almost appeared as if Nature had intentionally closed it upon civilised man, that she might have one domain on earth’s wide field over which the savage might roam in freedom. (Sturt 1849:2)

This, writes Gibson, was the beginning in Australia of the trope of the unknowable landscape, an ‘enormous emblem of prenatural incomprehensibility’ (1992:16). Such an idea formed the canon of the marvellous Australian sublime predicated on the pioneer journey of heroic material failure, yet the ‘discovery’ of spiritual sanctification in the landscape. McLean writes that the sublime is the principal aesthetic trope of exploration: it ‘pacifies the unknown or newly discovered by making it an empty, silent ahistorical space, a virgin stage ready to be occupied’ (1998:23). While the settlers did eventually cross and occupy the ‘outback’ frontier, in the Australian national psyche this is a landscape that remains colonised primarily by the mind, wherein the ‘outback’ remains the preserve of nature and Aborigines. In her famous novel, We of the Never Never, Mrs Aeneas Gunn (1908) recounts passionately her year spent in the Australian ‘outback’ in the ‘Land of the Never-Never’:

...in that elusive land with an elusive name—a land of dangers and hardships and privations yet loved as few lands are loved—a land that bewitches her people with strange spells and mysteries, until they call sweet bitter, and bitter sweet. (Gunn 1908:i)
In this chapter I explore some of the non-Aboriginal discourses and images that have contributed to the construction of 'nature' and 'Aborigines' in Australia. I also examine the colonial discourses and images that have constructed the Kakadu region historically and continue to constitute Kakadu in the non-Aboriginal imagination.

While the first sea surveyors' accounts of the Kakadu region expressed disappointment at the inhospitable terrain, north Australia was a place where the prospects for settlement were desperately sought and, in part, provided by enthusiastic accounts of the region told by overland explorers. These determinedly favourable accounts of the north Australian terrain were partly due to the tendency of these explorers to interpret the landscape through a fashionably Romantic sense of wonder.

This chapter examines the aesthetic and material appropriation of landscape by Western explorers, beginning with the marvel and wonder invoked in Renaissance encounters with the New World. The chapter then examines the influence of the Enlightenment on modern explorer and scientist's accounts of the 'Other', and their interpretation of non-European nature and non-European people through the scientifically influenced discourses on knowable nature and primitives. At the same time the Romantic perspective, a product of the Enlightenment and a Rousseau-inspired reaction against the social miseries of the Industrial Revolution, also began to inform the Western understanding of the 'other' and the aesthetic appreciation of landscape.

In Australia this Romantic understanding of the 'other' and aesthetic appreciation of landscape continues to be evident in the construction of non-Aboriginal ideas about 'wilderness' and 'Aboriginality'. In this chapter I discuss how these wondrous and romantic images of redemptive nature and noble savages are shown to permeate the discourse of tourism in places such as Kakadu. This chapter concludes with an examination of the views of Jabiluka protestors who populated the Park in 1997–1998, and who, in many cases, brought with them the idea of Kakadu as a 'sacred Aboriginal wilderness'.

2.2. ‘Discovering’ the Alligator Rivers Region

The first European to complete an overland expedition through north Australia was the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt, who made an overland journey from
Moreton Bay in Queensland to Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula. On 19 November 1845, somewhere above what is now called Jim Jim Falls, Leichhardt stood at the edge of the Arnhem Land plateau gazing out from the brink of the seemingly endless rocky gullies from where his party had come, and down into a ‘beautiful valley, which lay before us like a promised land’ (1847:483). The tradition of European marvelling at Kakadu’s nature begins with Leichhardt’s journey through the South Alligator River valley, which he describes as a place of ‘remarkable and picturesque character’ (1847:493). An avid naturalist, Leichhardt had kept detailed botanical notes, collected specimens and identified many new species throughout his journey. In the South Alligator River valley he described the profuse wildlife:

The cackling of geese, the quacking of ducks, the sonorous note of the native companion [brolga], and the noises of black and white cockatoos, and a great variety of other birds, gave to the country, both night and day, an extraordinary appearance of animation. (1847:479)

As Leichhardt and his party travelled through what is now Kakadu National Park, Leichhardt records that they met with groups of Aboriginal people with whom they established friendly relations and exchanged goods. From these encounters Leichhardt’s party obtained the services of particular Aboriginal people as guides. Leichhardt referred to these people as ‘Our good friends, the natives’ (1847:495). He wrote in his journal that some of the local tribespeople he met were wearing items of European clothing and possessed goods such as tomahawks, as well as a smattering of Malay words. Leichhardt recalls the joy of one occasion when an Aboriginal man addressed the party in English:

A fine native stepped out of the forest with the ease and grace of an Apollo, with a smiling countenance, and with a confidence of a man to whom the white face was perfectly familiar. He was unarmed, but a great number of his companions were keeping back to watch the reception he should meet with. We received him, of course, most cordially; and upon being joined by another

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19 Port Essington (Victoria settlement) was an ill-fated British settlement established in 1838, one of three unsuccessful attempts at British settlement in the North since 1824 (Spillet 1972). It is suggested that these settlements were established more as an assertion of territorial rights of English settlement than in the hope of achieving success in agricultural production (Jukes 1847).
good-looking man, we heard him utter distinctly the words, “Commandant!” “come here!!” “very good!!!” “what’s your name?!!!!” If my readers have at all identified themselves with my feelings throughout this trying journey; if they have only imagined a tithe of the difficulties we have encountered, they will readily imagine the startling effect which these, as it were, magic words produced—we were electrified—our joy knew no limits, and I was ready to embrace the fellows, who, seeing the happiness with which they inspired us, joined, with a most merry grin, in the loud expression of our feelings. We gave them various presents, particularly leather belts, and received in return a great number of goose feathers, which the natives use to brush away the flies. They knew the white people of Victoria, and called them balanda. Which is nothing more than ‘Hollanders;,’ a name used by the Malays, from whom they received it. (1847:502-503)

Leichhardt had encountered people who were already adept at intercultural exchanges, and for whom travelling through the northern landscape resembled in no way Leichhardt’s ‘trying journey’. A month after entering the ‘promised land’ Leichhardt’s party eventually reached Port Essington, exhausted by the onset of the stifling humidity of the wet season which had caused skin boils and prickly heat to develop all over their bodies. Despite these traumas, Leichhardt returned to Sydney in triumph. In his tribute to Leichhardt in Sydney in September 1846, the Speaker of the Legislative Council congratulated him on a successful expedition, that he said, had placed Leichhardt in the league of pre-eminent geographical scientists such as Sturt and Mitchell (Leichhardt 1847:542). Leichhardt was then presented with a public testimonial of £1518 collected from the colonists of New South Wales to ‘evince their gratitude to you for all that you have done in behalf of this their adopted country’ (Leichhardt 1847:542). However, the more substantial reward for Leichhardt was the ‘undying glory’ of joining a league of ‘adventurous spirits’, who, it was said, will in the future be considered as Australia’s ‘first conquerors, and by whose peaceful triumphs an empire had been added to the parent state’ (Leichhardt 1847:542). Leichhardt, who was careful to emphasise throughout his journey his

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20 In any case, Leichhardt, like many other explorers (Reynolds 1982), had relied during his entire journey on the services of his two ‘blackfellows’, Charley and Harry Brown, whose tracking, hunting and gathering skills, and abilities to interact and converse with the ‘natives’ were crucial to the journey’s success (see Leichhardt 1847).
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respect for Aboriginal people and their possessions, had cultivated such an image of a gentlemanly ‘peaceful triumph’ over territory. He stated that ‘our object was to pass quietly, without giving offence to the aborigines’ (1847:30). However, imbued with the racialised scientific thought of the Enlightenment, he continually emphasised what he perceived as the ‘natives’’ inferior intellect and cowardice (Leichhardt 1847:30). While Leichhardt continually mentions his interactions with ‘the natives’, for him they are a people outside history, ‘simple children of nature’, and as such they, along with the landscape, are dehistoricised (Leichhardt 1847:507). The intellect of the ‘natives’ was, however, recognisable to Leichhardt as his party drew nearer to European settlement and the ‘natives’ showed material and verbal signs of having had previous encounters with Europeans. As his party drew even closer to Port Essington, Leichhardt felt compelled to remark in his journal, ‘natives still more intelligent’ (Leichhardt 1847:x).

Leichhardt, an educated European gentleman, was engaged in what Pratt (1992) terms ‘the scientific anti-conquest’, where expeditions drew praise not for imperial plunder, but for the scientific discovery of knowledge. Leichhardt was congratulated for his journey on three accounts: for his valuable contribution to knowledge in the sciences of botany, geology and zoology; for enabling the possession of immense territory; and for the importance of his discovery of ‘boundless extent of fertile country...soon to be covered with countless flocks and herds, and calculated to become the abode of civilised man’ (Leichhardt 1847:541). Soon after his return to Sydney, Leichhardt set out on another expedition ‘to discover the extent of Sturt’s Desert...and to observe the gradual change in vegetation and animal life from one side of the continent to the other’ (Leichhardt 1847:543). However, in the Australian explorers’ tradition of heroic failure, Leichhardt disappeared on this journey. His legend continued, however, and later his fateful journey in search of scientific knowledge inspired the Australian author, Patrick White, to cast Leichhardt ‘as an antipodean Messiah’ in his 1957 novel Voss (Keneally 1983).

Those who followed Leichhardt to settle and explore the northern region were also following dreams and ambitions for greatness. In 1862, the South Australian explorer Stuart reached the northern coastline at a place near the mouth of the Mary River which he named Point Stuart. Stuart was full of praise for the agricultural potential of the region and predicted that it could become the greatest settlement in
the world (Stuart 1864). Partly on the basis of Stuart’s report, the South Australian
government then established a settlement near the mouth of the Adelaide River at
Escape Cliffs (Levitus 1995:65). However, this settlement was abandoned by 1867
due to what emerged as the poor potential for agriculture in the area, intolerable
settlement conditions and deteriorating relations with Aborigines (Lawrence
2000:19). Before disbanding the settlement, in the January wet season month of
1866, the government surveyor, John McKinlay (1866), set out on a disastrous
expedition to survey land between the Adelaide River and the Liverpool River to the
east. In six months, travelling disoriented across a flooded terrain, his party
effectively made it only 100 kilometres due east to the East Alligator River. There,
in desperation and exposed to an attack by a large group of Aborigines, the party
shot their remaining horses and constructed a makeshift raft out of the horse hides to
enable them to journey down the river and return to Escape Cliffs. In the same way
as Leichhardt glowingly described the region, McKinlay sought in some ways to
inspire a sense of wonder and the illusion of gentlemanly triumph in his account of
the ill-fated journey. Even though his journey was one of almost intolerable
hardship, he found it in himself to remark on the lands pleasing vista, ‘a more
romantic piece of country than this, one could scarcely find’ (1866:17). Moreover,
while the attack on his party at the East Alligator was representative of the
deteriorating black–white relations at Escape Cliffs (MacKnight 1969:150),
McKinlay recorded that the attack was ‘astonishing, as up to this date, they have
appeared very friendly and are a fine lot of fellows’ (1866:21).

Dreams of wealth in the land ignited by the accounts of early explorers eventually
led to permanent European settlement of the north. The construction of the overland
telegraph from Adelaide to Darwin, which was completed in 1871, and the discovery
of gold near Pine Creek aided this process. However, pioneer ambitions to construct
a trans-continental railway to Darwin have never been satiated and continue into the
present. Like the trans-continental railway, the glittering promise of a Promised Land
has never quite been realised. In 1951, Ernistine Hill waxed lyrical in her account of
Northern Territory history about:

black men and white men riding in a world without time where sons do not
inherit, and money goes mouldy in the pocket, where ambition is wax melted in
the sun, and those who reap may not sow. I write of the Northern Territory of
Australia, problem child of empire, land of an ever-shadowed past and an ever-shining future, of eternal promise that never comes true... (1951:1)

These promises of riches and expressions of wonder in new lands have a far longer genealogy than the European encounter with northern Australia. In order to situate Leichhardt and those who followed him in a wider historical context, I now examine the emergence of European travel accounts that invoked, firstly, the experience of wonder, then combined this wonder with the acquisition of possessions and, latterly, with the acquisition of knowledge.

2.3. The Discourse of Travel

The historical roots of modern tourism are embedded in the discourses of travel and a long history of European travel narratives. Travel narratives have a discursive authority which can be traced to accounts told by the ancient Greeks, such as Herodotus who described the customs of North Africa. Greenblatt (1991) argues that from Herodotus, through to the Renaissance encounters of explorers with the 'New World', travel narratives share experiences of 'wonder' with the reader. In the thirteenth century the accounts of Italian traveller merchant Marco Polo, in the fourteenth century accounts of the ascetically inspired Englishman Sir John Mandeville, and in the fifteenth century the accounts of the westward empire-building of Columbus, all invoke the 'marvellous' as the central feature in their narratives. Greenblatt examines these accounts of wonder and the marvellous and traces the transition from the largely emotional response to cultural difference recorded in early accounts, to the cultivated intellectual project evident in later accounts. He argues that in contrast to early accounts, Renaissance wonder, which coincided with the era of oceanic discovery, was invoked as an agent of appropriation, and that the early discourse of the New World is, among other things, a record of the colonising of the marvellous. As an example, Greenblatt cites Columbus's journal entries which document him taking 'marvellous possession' of the New World. On 18 December 1492 while his ship was anchored off the island of Tortuga, Columbus, who is visited by a young and impressively dignified native 'king and several of his “counsellors”', writes:

I saw that he was pleased with the coverlet that I had on my bed. I gave it to him and some very good amber beads that I wore on my neck, and some red shoes, and a flask of orange-flower water, with which he was so pleased that it
was a marvel. And he and his tutor and counsellors were very troubled because they did not understand me nor I them. Nevertheless I gathered that he told me that if something from this place pleased me that the whole island was at my command. I sent for some beads of mine on which, as a token, I have a gold\emph{excelente} on which Your Highnesses are sculptured, and I showed it to him; and again, as yesterday, I told him how Your Highnesses commanded and ruled over all the best part of the world, and that there were no other princes as great. And I showed him the royal banners and the others bearing the cross, which he esteemed greatly. What great lords Your Highnesses must be, he said (speaking toward his counsellors), since from so far away and from the heavens they had sent me here without fear; and many other things passed between them that I did not understand, except that I saw well that they took everything as a great wonder. (1991:13)

Greenblatt writes that in this account of the other, as in all accounts of the other, we learn something principally about the self of the writer, in this case Columbus’s desire for material possession. In Columbus’s journals an appeal to wonder and recurring accounts of the marvellous are used to legitimate appropriation of the New World, ‘the wonder and marvellous stands for the missing caravels laden with gold; it is like—the ritual of possession itself—a word pregnant with what is imagined, desired, promised (Greenblatt 1991:73). Since Columbus, expressions of wonder in the discourse of travel have become saturated with the glittering promise of possession of land, of artefacts, of people and, latterly, of knowledge.

By the eighteenth century the Enlightenment beliefs of philosophers such as René Descartes had begun to dominate educated European society and knowledge had become the object of mindful activity and visual description. For instance, scientists who embarked on the great voyages of modern exploration had ‘inherited the rational enthusiasm of the Enlightenment and went to the South Seas ambitious to discover man and the world’ (Smith 1960:7). Increasingly, as the world in Europe and beyond was made intelligible by the eye (Foucault 1970), it was travel writing that bore witness to and authenticated knowledge gained through a process of representative seeing (Greenblatt 1991:122). Smith (1992) writes that the period between 1750 and 1890 is best understood as the steady, relentless and continuing triumph of empirical naturalism over classical naturalism where the systematic
account of nature and men was the triumph of the descriptive sciences such as botany and anthropology.

The modern scientific inquiry and method expounded by Enlightenment thinkers also influenced the responses of explorers to the non-European peoples they encountered (Thomas 1994). Whereas the period up to Columbus had identified the peoples of other lands as 'barbarians', this was not a difference certified on racial or national grounds. Rather the distinction was drawn on religious grounds, as against Christianity, wherein there was always the possibility that the 'barbarians' would be converted. However the modern ideas:

shifted away from a religiously framed colonialism [and] entailed new models for constructing otherness; these were couched in a narrative of natural history rather than salvation and privileged distinctiveness in character and physique rather than faith. (Thomas 1994:77)

Gradually, through the investigation of scientists and others, Europeans became aware of physical and social factors of differentiation between people, and this awareness corresponded with the emergence of the organising idea of race (Smith 1960:7, see also Hannaford 1996:187–233).

Similarly, Pratt (1992) argues that accounts of wonder and the acquisition of knowledge, which permeated European travel accounts from the late eighteenth century, were vital to the promotion of the project of natural history. She writes that, as natural scientists trained in the tradition of Enlightenment thought and Linnean nomenclature set out from Europe in the eighteenth century, their travels and travel writings functioned to systematise nature in a European knowledge building project that created a new kind of Eurocentred planetary consciousness. She argues that this:

asserted an urban, lettered, male authority over the whole of the planet; it elaborated a rationalizing, extractive, dissociative understanding which overlaid functional experimental relations among people, plants and animals. (Pratt 1992:38)

According to Pratt, it was the narrative travel accounts of the early nineteenth century, beginning with the accounts of the German naturalist Alexander Von Humbolt, that were the essential mediators between the scientific network and a larger European public (Pratt 1992:29). Humboldt's enormously influential South
American travel accounts of 'Wild and Gigantic Nature' introduced to the European public an entirely new style of nature discourse to narrate the science of the natural world. Humboldt's writings, which fused science with the Romantic literary tradition, conjured up 'a dramatic, extraordinary nature, a spectacle capable of overwhelming human knowledge and understanding' (1992:120). Moreover, Humboldt transformed the painting of exotic nature from an item of scientific documentation to an expressive form of landscape art (Smith 1992:154). Pratt argues that this era of travel writing marks the beginning of the 'scientific anti-conquest of planetary consciousness'. In contrast with an earlier imperial and pre-bourgeois European expansionist presence, it began a process of 'peaceful' conquest through the intellectual annexation of nature (1992:140). Discussing a passage from Humboldt's Views of Nature, Pratt writes that:

In contrast with strictly scientific writing, the authority of the discourse here plainly does not lie in a totalizing descriptive project that lives outside the text. Here, the totalizing project lives in the text, orchestrated by the infinitely expansive mind and soul of the speaker... A landscape imbued with social fantasies—of harmony, industry, liberty, unalienated joie de vivre—all projected onto the non-human world. (1992:125)

Both in Europe and North America, Humboldt's writings created an unprecedented excitement about tropical America and its scenery among naturalists and artists. By 1810, Humboldt was, with the exception of Napoleon, the most famous man in Europe (Smith 1992). Humboldt's accounts stimulated an interest in travel among many other artists and naturalists, most notably Charles Darwin (Arnold 1996:148). Moreover, it was these Romantically inspired naturalists, anthropologists, artists, and geographers, who set out from Europe to represent, map, categorise and 'know' the world beyond and returned with wondrous accounts of what they found, who created in European audiences the desire to likewise experience and 'know' the reality of this 'other' world.

This historically constructed narrative of travel and the desire to marvel at and 'know' the natural world has an enormous ideological force that, in turn, has come to direct the gaze and experience of present day Western tourists. Like Humboldt's

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21 See, for example, Views of Nature (von Humboldt 1850 (Gr 1808)).
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‘discovery’ of extraordinary nature, the tourism industry ‘presents itself as supporting a return to sources, a journey towards the roots and natural untouched regions’ (Lanfant 1995a:9). It is through this process that Kakadu National Park has become a place of institutionalised nature appreciation, a drawcard for ‘nature lovers’ worldwide. As such, it is promoted internationally as ‘Timeless Kakadu... a special place, a beautiful and unusual wilderness with superb scenery’, ‘the most important national park of tropical, if not all, Australia’ (Ovington 1986).

2.4. Romantic ‘Nature’

In the eighteenth century in the European ‘home’ environment the changing value of land and human labour under industrial capitalism was a significant factor in the emergent ideological appreciation of wild lands (Cosgrove 1984). Before this period, ‘wilderness’ or uncultivated land was characterised in agrarian society by the absence of culture and was hence repugnant. Gradually, land became alienated as a commodity and social relations were revolutionised as the factories and mills of industrialism demanded that labour too be alienated. Cosgrove argues that the moral order of society, its ‘nature’ as the domain of social relations, was displaced by economic order. In an ‘unnatural’ economic order, it was increasingly believed that if morality was to be discovered it must be in pure nature where human society had not intervened (Cosgrove 1984:231–232). This contrary movement of thought, which emerged alongside the process of industrialisation, was critical of the effects of civilisation and technology on human life. The idea that civilisation is a fall from nature was systematically developed in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his essay, On the Origin of Inequality among Men (1754), where he attacked civilisation as a distortion of nature. Clayre writes that from Rousseau’s writing there flowed a new concern:

even more among his followers than in Rousseau himself—for ‘the primitive man’ or ‘the savage’ as the natural man, natural because uncorrupted by the complications of civilised life, without vanity, without conflicting duties and desires, independent of other men’s help for the satisfaction of his simple needs; and a new love of nature itself—of mountains, woods, lakes, fields, the sea, the solitude in which man can rediscover his own inner life undisturbed by human society. (1977:xx)
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In the late eighteenth century, the English Romantic poets, such as Wordsworth, venerated the landscape of the Lake District, and the picturesque rural idyll combined with a mountainous wild nature became a central part of the English celebration of national pride (Matless 1995). Likewise, in the United States a Romantic appreciation of nature was an integral part of the forging of national identity. This is evident in the musings of writers such as Thomas Jefferson in the late eighteenth century, James Fenimore Cooper in the early nineteenth century, and later in the writing of Henry David Thoreau, whose book *Walden* (1965 (1854)) has become a transcendental Green classic. Eventually, natural vast landscapes known as ‘wilderness’ became a dominant imprint of national identity on the American mind (Nash 1982). Arnold writes that:

> This visual and moral delight in a distinctly American landscape extended steadily westward, an advancing cultural frontier of aesthetic appreciation and national pride, to embrace Niagara, the Great Plains, the Rockies, the Grand Canyon and Yosemite. Generations of American novelists, poets, painters, photographers and film-makers have continued to explore this powerful association of the American identity with nature and often, as in Westerns, with the Frontier itself. (1996:140)

These Romantically venerated landscapes in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere became something to be seen and appreciated by vista-seek ing tourists, a process Matless terms ‘a pilgrimage of scenery’ (1995:107).

In the twentieth century, particularly in the West, nature became a sought-after commodity. As J. Jacobs writes, ‘[p]art of the legacy of the cocktail of Enlightenment thinking and the transition to capitalism was the invention of “external”, “primordial” Nature’ (1996:135). By the end of the century this fantasy of the primordial was played out through capitalism’s appropriation and mediation of nature in the discourses of conservation, sustainability, ecotourism and environmentalism (Jacobs J. 1996:136). In Australia, a land like the United States without a long history of European occupation, subliminal geographical features, such as so-called ‘wilderness’ areas, have become integral to the national celebration of landscape. In Australia’s popular reality, nature and associated images of wilderness landscapes are treated by capitalist culture as a commodity that is both good for people and good for business.

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2.4.1. Wilderness Images

As the history of travel writing attests, the process of tourist spectatorship is generated through the pictures and discourses of others (Mitchell 1994). In Australia, both the European Romantic tradition and imperial naturalists, such as Humboldt, have inspired artists and scientists in the cultivation of the idea of wilderness (see Smith 1960:224). Bonyhady (1994) traces the history of the celebration of wilderness landscapes in art in Australia to the 1820s, examining the ‘long line of colonial art celebrating romantic nature—the richest fern gullies, the tallest palms and the most abrupt mountains and waterfalls’ (1994:171). However, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, as people were growing concerned at the loss of Australian bushland, artists began embracing through their art the conservation of native plants and animals, and concern for the wise and efficient use of resources. By the early twentieth century, the power of images to promote the idea of wilderness preservation had begun to be promulgated by a tradition of ‘propagandist’ landscape photography (Flanagan & Pybus 1990). This tradition was cultivated most famously in the early 1980s in a successful environmental and media campaign to stop the damming of the Franklin River in southwest Tasmania (Flanagan & Pybus 1990:160). Since this era, images of wilderness have dominated Australia’s environmental imagination. This has resulted in an environmental merchandise industry, with individuals and environmental organisations across the country procuring wilderness calendars, diaries and post-cards. In this way, environmental groups ‘made wilderness a commodity whose commercial nakedness they clothed in the Romantic aesthetic’ (Flanagan & Pybus 1990:161).

Like southwest Tasmania, the Kakadu region has also inspired artists to produce works of ‘propagandist’ art to ensure the region’s preservation. In the late 1960s, George Chaloupka, later to become one of Australia’s most influential rock art historians, embarked on a self-conscious campaign of art propaganda which aimed to promote the Alligator Rivers region as a place worthy of preservation. His watercolour paintings of the landscape and bird life of the region were exhibited in Darwin and Canberra and viewed by influential political figures as well as the general public. In 1972 in Canberra, he exhibited an exhibition of watercolours titled, ‘Sacred Sites’, and introduced the Australian public to the Aboriginal cultural heritage of the Kakadu region.
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From the time that Kakadu was declared a National Park, photographic images of the region, the ‘wilderness’ of the Kakadu escarpment, its outliers and floodplains, have appeared prominently in the environmental propaganda and merchandise of groups such as The Wilderness Society and the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF). As early as 1980, posters featuring Jim Jim Falls were being used to advertise Kakadu’s natural wonders overseas, and Jim Jim Falls continues to be one of the most advertised sites in the Park by the tourism industry. In 1998, the image of ‘wilderness’ and the dramatic beauty of Kakadu’s northern outliers, site of the proposed Jabiluka uranium mine, was a factor in creating public support for the fight to stop the Jabiluka mine. While it was a campaign waged primarily over the issues of anti-uranium mining and Indigenous rights, the wilderness image was a powerful influence on the political ideals of the thousands of protesters who travelled to Kakadu National Park to protest against the mine (see section 2.5 below).

Photographic books that celebrate the natural beauty of Kakadu National Park, and in most cases the cultural heritage as well, can be found in souvenir and book stores in Kakadu, Darwin and across the country (Jarvar 1988, 1998; Breeden & Wright 1995; Morris 1996; Fox & Parish 1982; Miles 1988). Some books, notably those by George Chaloupka (1982, 1993), concentrate on rock art and its place in the social, cultural and historical spheres of the local Aboriginal population, while others concentrate on the lives and knowledge of Aboriginal traditional owners themselves (Breeden & Wright 1991; Neidjie 1989; Neidjie, Fox and Davis 1985). Kakadu’s wildlife and landscape have also featured in television documentaries and advertising, as well as a number of feature films.

2.4.2. Non-Aborigines, Tourism and Primordial Nature

Within the Australian tourism industry, images of Kakadu National Park are prominent in the promotion of Australia’s ‘natural beauty’, ‘the outback’ and other distinctive iconic representations of Australia, such as Aboriginality. The fetishisation of nature and Aborigines by capitalist culture is symptomatic of the process of ideological mystification that Marx (1967) called ‘the fetishism of commodities’. Capitalism creates objectivist categories, such as primordial Nature, and encourages the culturally naive acceptance of a reified world existing outside social relationships (Taussig 1980).
Australians have increasingly drawn on natural assets such as unique flora, fauna and landscapes and emblematic images of Aborigines, the ‘first people’, to provide their nation with a sense of national antiquity and distinctiveness (Langton 1996; Lattas 1991; Simondson 1995; Waitt 1997). Morton and Smith write that Australians have a:

fascination with the primordial, be it in the form of Aboriginality—“the first Australians”—or non-introduced species of plants and animals that symbolise antipodean self-discovery in an idealised unadulterated landscape. (1999:159)

Places such as Kakadu constitute an essential link with the ‘real’ Australia and this link is increasingly made through the agency of nature-based tourism. In her contribution to the book, Nation and Narration, Gunew writes:

what, after all, differentiates a post-colonial Anglophone national culture if not “the” land, the uniqueness of the landscape. And here the colonized, the Australian Aborigines, play a crucial, if highly mediated, role. The land...“speaks” most authentically through the oral literature of the Indigenous nomads; in translation. (1990:99)

Langton (1993) writes that these translations of Aborigines are made through a process of intertextuality, an intercultural field of subjective experience that makes and remakes ‘Aboriginality’ over and over in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and interpretation. Inter-subjectivity can provide a space for mutual exchange between subjects. However, McLean (1998:164) contends that the process of colonisation effaces the dialogical space that nurtures translation. Similarly Langton writes:

Textual analysis of the racist stereotypes and mythologies which inform Australian understanding of Aboriginal people is revealing. The most dense relationship is not between actual people, but between white Australians and the symbols created by their predecessors. Australians do not know and relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists. (1993:33)

In this manner tourism in 'outback' Australia draws on the colonising acts of the explorers and pioneers, mediated by the contemporary preservationist ethos of the environment movement, and reconstitutes the colonising gaze as that of the tourist. Culturally inspired tourism becomes, in this sense, a pilgrimage to know and wonder at Aboriginal culture so as to reclaim a 'place' for the white tourist within the
identity of the nation. What is problematic in this is the fact that, as Simondson argues, the tourism industry uses this space of the ‘Aboriginal origin’ (distanced as it is from the contemporary world) as a background to the progress narrative of colonisation and ‘produces tours and advertising campaigns that represent a symbolic journey through a linear history of “Australia” the nation state’ (1995:49).

In the tourism narrative of the nation, the power of this perpetual myth (which symbolises the true origins of ‘man’ and the ‘home’ of the ‘modern’ lost soul) is strict control achieved not through cultural commodification, but corporeal commodification (Simondson 1995). For in tourism’s symbolic realm, the Aboriginal ‘body’ is created from a real corporeal body onto which power has inscribed a set of specific values and attributes (Simondson 1995:13). This is despite the fact that the traditionalists’ mythic Aborigine is to the tourist as rare as the proverbial ‘Loch Ness monster, much discussed but hardly ever sighted with certainty’ (Rowse 1988:174).

For those tourists who are seeking Aboriginality, in the absence of direct encounter with the mythic Other, the tourist may instead see themselves as taking the place of the Aborigine. Rose (1997) comments about this phenomenon as a general trend in Hollywood movies and as she observed it of tourists on an outback tour: the ‘bushman’ tour guide relates his knowledge of Aborigines to the tour group, who are then able to share with the guide both the anecdotes and superior knowledge of the primitive. Rose writes ‘[t]he relationship is linear: the ancient autochthon (belonging to the land) passes away and the settler takes his place as the new (and superior) indigene’ (Rose 1997:123; see also Langton 1996; Torgovnich 1998). This is an attempt to complete the imperialist project where physical possession is enjoined by selective spiritual and cultural appropriation (see Marcus 1988; Torgovnich 1998).

The continuum of imagined associations between nomadic tribes, explorers and tourists is a favoured tool of the industry whereby the tourist images him/herself as either one or alternately both (see Rose 1997). The paradox of the situation is that a curiously de-anthropomorphised ‘wilderness’ fetish (Dewar 1993), exists alongside the fetish of a mythologised Aborigine that passively populates the ‘wilderness’. Within this discourse of primordial Nature:

Indigenous people are placed back in First Nature, they have become the First People of the world, and are then reabsorbed into a global chronology of
planetary survival, which begins with ‘them’ but ends with an environmentally sound ‘us’. (Jacobs J. 1996:137)

Similar scenarios of tourists seeking wisdom from a ‘vanishing race’ can be found in Kakadu National Park. For example, each dry season an Interpretive Ranger is employed to interpret the heritage values of the Ubirr rock art site in the north of the Park. This ranger is usually a non-Aboriginal person, and in the absence of an Aboriginal voice, a quote from a sign at site is read out. The quote is from Bunitj elder, Bill Neidjie, a senior traditional owner for the Ubirr site:

Aboriginal people belong to their land.

The soul of a person is born from the land and returns to it after death.

‘Earth…
Like your father, or brother, or mother,
Because your born from Earth, you got to come back to Earth. When you dead…
That’s your bone,
Your blood,
It’s in this Earth.’
Bill Neidjie
Bill asks you to care
‘My people
Not many.
We getting too old.
Young people…
I don’t know if they can hang onto this story.
But, now you know the story, You responsible now.
You got to go with us to Earth.
Might be you can hang onto this story,
To this earth.
Bill Neidjie

Within local Aboriginal discourse, the first part of this quote reflects an Aboriginal ontology of human–environment relations. In the second quotation, Neidjie invokes the idea of enmeshed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations, in which the future for both groups, and the land itself, is dependent on the social relationships nurtured between people in the modern world. There is no doubt that the quote is received well by the tourists, it makes them feel a part of something special and they are
encouraged to take up the challenge to preserve places like Kakadu. However, the recitation of this quote is problematic when it is inscribed in a Western discourse fixated on primordial nature and the trope of a ‘vanishing race’. In 1999 photographer Mark Lang took a photograph of Bill Neidjie, which he then produced as a poster with a similar accompanying quote:

My people all dead, we only got few left, that’s all, not many. We getting too old. Young people, I don’t know if they can hang on to this story, but now you know this story, might be you can hang on to this story, to this earth.

The accompanying photographic image of Neidjie is reproduced in sepia and portrays a sense of melancholy as the old man sits alone by the firelight on the open floodplain. The contexts in which Neidjie’s words are presented in these situations feed a Western fantasy where the ‘wisdom of the elders’ is handed over to the dominant and superior culture. In the case of the quote at Ubirr, the final caption on the storyboard reads:

Bill Neidjie, and other traditional owners of Kakadu, have leased their lands to the Commonwealth of Australia to be managed as a national park for everybody to care for and enjoy.

To further illustrate the power of the fetishisation of Aboriginality and nature in the non-Aboriginal discourse on Kakadu National Park, the following case study of the Jabiluka protest camp held in Kakadu National Park between 1997 and 1998 is exemplary. While these protestors were not strictly tourists, they were, in part, attracted to Kakadu National Park by the same ideas about nature and Aborigines that pervade the discourse of tourism.

As has often been the case in Western encounters with the Other (Pratt 1992), the case study also demonstrates how some Aboriginal people in the Park were able to inflect the power of the fetish of ‘primordial Nature’ and ‘the primitive’ and apply it in certain instances to their own political agenda.

2.5. Protecting Kakadu

In 1997–1998 a series of protest camps were held in Kakadu National Park to protest the construction of the Jabiluka uranium mine. During this period, at the invitation of the Mirrar landowners and their representative association the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, who were also opposed to the mine,
Plate 1. ‘Kakadu Depends on You’, Australian Conservation Foundation postcard

Plate 2. ‘Ranger Uranium Mine, Kakadu National Park’ postcard

(photo: Wayne Zerbe, company: The Australian Souvenir Company)
approximately three thousand people from around Australia and overseas travelled to Kakadu National Park to protest against what they perceived as the social and environmental injustice of the mine's construction. For most of the protestors Kakadu was understood to be worthy of protection for a number of reasons—it is a World Heritage National Park, a wilderness area of outstanding significance, and 'sacred' Aboriginal land. The protest camp attracted a diverse range of people predominantly 18–30 year old environmentally conscious students on their university breaks, but also international backpackers, families, holiday-makers, long-term peace activists and ferals.22

The protest began in celebration and with a sense of a common unity of purpose between the protestors and the Mirrar landowners. In July 1997 an initial week-long camp was attended by a group of eighty environmental science students from around Australia. Conversations with some of these students revealed that, as well as concern over the development of the Jabiluka mine, the opportunity to meet Aboriginal people was a major incentive for many of the participants attending the camp. The first joint protest was held at the gates of the existing Ranger uranium mine, and about thirty Mirrar people and their families and the eighty student protestors joined together to protest against uranium mining in the region. Jacqui Katona, a spokesperson for the Mirrar told the media:

We, the Mirarr people are here today because we say no to mining on our land. No means no. Enough is enough. The benefits promised from this mine have not been forthcoming, we have only huge social problems as a result. We are here to show we will not change our position. And we are supported here today by this group of students from across the country. These are thinking people, the future leaders of Australia and they are here to support us and say no with us to further mining.

The students left this camp encouraged to establish Jabiluka Action groups in the southern cities where they studied. One protestor remarked 'I strongly feel that if

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22 The Macquarie Dictionary (1997) definition of feral includes: 'Having reverted to the wild state, as from domestication' and 'A person who espouses environmentalism to the point of living close to nature in more or less primitive conditions and who deliberately shuns the normal code of society with regard to dress, habitat, hygiene'.
these people [referring to the Mirrar] who have been oppressed for so long have hope, then we must have hope too'. Another remarked that for her the camp had provided an opportunity to meet Aboriginal people and learn from them ‘their intense relationships with their land’ and ‘be humbled and show respect through learning of their vital spiritual connection with the land’. She explained that she had learnt how ‘essentially important it is to feel with the heart. Intellectualising things has its place, but this action was about feeling with the heart and connecting with the spirit of the land. Simply being there was what was most important’. This emphasis on ‘feeling’ resonates with similar explanations of relationships to country given by Aboriginal people (c/f. Neidjie 1989). However, applied by non-Aborigines as an external discourse it contrasts simplistically with the actual application of a formal institution of land tenure and the socio-political characteristics that underpin human-land relationships in the Aboriginal domain. This essentialist grasp of the complexities of the Mirrar position, common among the student protestors, stands in stark contrast to the Mirrar spokesperson’s earlier comment that stressed the presence of ‘thinking people’ at the protest. It is a paradox perhaps symptomatic of the desires that each group projected upon the other.

Throughout the Jabiluka campaign many of the protestors were attracted by the ideology of ‘real Aboriginality’ and by what they perceived as the sacredness of the Kakadu landscape:

Kakadu is so special. This is the home of the Rainbow Serpent. I can feel how special the place is. I can see the spirits everywhere. And there are crystals. This is a powerful place. (Jabiluka protestor)

The campaign literature featured many images of the Mirrar in their fight to protect their country. The official Jabiluka campaign documentary film, Jabiluka (1997), portrays images of poverty and poor housing at Aboriginal outstations and contains an interview with senior Mirrar traditional owner, Yvonne Margarula, stressing that as long as she has bush tucker she does not have any need for ‘whitefella money’:

...money not gonna fixing anything, it’s gonna kill us...they can take him back whitefella money, it not blackfella money...blackfella we don’t have money, when we want tucker we just go and grab from tree or in the ground dig it, yam, bush tucker... (Jabiluka 1997)
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This film was shown nationally on university campuses, at film festivals and on the charter buses making their way to the protest camp from Sydney and Melbourne. The Mirrar were, wittingly or unwittingly, participating in a representation of themselves that stressed the timelessness of their ancient culture and a way of life and a land that needed to be preserved. It was a strategy similar to that of conservation campaigns in the past which have been critiqued as promoting primitivism and perpetuating ideal images of Aboriginal people as natural conservationists (Sackett 1991; Langton 1996; Anderson 1989). However, Thomas (1994) makes a distinction between primitivist representations that are externally ascribed to Indigenous people and those that are internally held and used by Indigenous people. He writes that, in any use of either essentialist or humanist discourse, these discourses have different meanings and effects in different contexts and the use of primitivist discourse by Indigenous peoples themselves should not be viewed as merely derivative of Western primitivist discourse (1994:187).

The campaign to halt Jabiluka involved both internally held and externally ascribed essentialist ideas. Both the Mirrar and environmental groups portrayed an ideal construction of Aboriginality, and this was a strategy that successfully attracted protestors to the region and engaged public support. However, it was also a practice that relied on the power of stereotypes in a situation where people would be there 'on the ground' testing imagined images against each other (Langton 1993). Moreover, as Marcus points out with reference to contested meanings invested in Uluru, the tendency of those non-Aborigines who subscribe to a primitivist essentialism is that:

> [t]he universalising and egalitarian sentiments of the mystical doctrine are used to deny the specificity of Aboriginal belief, to disregard entirely the wishes of Aboriginal custodians, and to insert settler Australians into the very heart of that secret Aboriginal knowledge on which their only recognised claim to land rests. (1997: 47)

For instance, the fact that some other Aboriginal landowners and residents in the Kakadu supported mining development in the region was difficult for protestors to comprehend against the backdrop of noble savage imagery. One protestor explained that unlike the Mirrar people, the pro-mining attitude of those Aboriginal people reflected 'an unfortunate separation from the land' brought about in recent times. Attributing support for mining within the Aboriginal domain to 'an unfortunate
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separation from the land' is an assumption based on the essentialist ideas of a primitive Aboriginal society. An assumption which neglected the fact that the conflicting attitudes expressed among Aboriginal people who supported and opposed the new mine were a social and political reality of Aboriginal polity in the region (see Chapter Four). However, both the environment movement and the New Age tradition, which many young activists at the Jabiluka protests were at least indirectly influenced by, are characterised by an attraction for images of the unadulterated primitive. Moreover, the New Age tradition is attracted to Indigenous spirituality as a way of enhancing a progressivistic interest in the self, nurturing 'the spirituality which lies within the person' (Heelas 1996:2; see also comments by Jabiluka protestors in Minds and Energy (video recording) 1998). For example, Heelas states that the lingua franca of the New Age is that people are in essence spiritual (Heelas 1996:19):

There is thus general agreement that it is essential to shift from our contaminated mode of being—what we are by virtue of socialisation—to that realm which constitutes our authentic nature. (1996:2)

Heelas states that 'New Agers see the person divided into that which belongs to the artifices of society and culture and that which belongs to the depths of human nature' (1996:28). This attitude, referred to by Heelas (1996:2) as 'the unifying theme of a diverse New Age movement', is reminiscent of Rousseau and the established order of modernity that divides constructs of nature and culture into a value-hierarchical dualism. Some of those people who expected to find in Aborigines an authentic nature and a project of common unity were disappointed. One young activist attending the Jabiluka camp explained that people came up here with the expectation that they would be blockading and protesting in coalition with Mirrar, but:

They [the Mirrar] stay away. At first when there were only twenty or so of us in the camp they would come for barbecues and bring us fish occasionally. Now there is no contact, only contact with Bininj is in the pub when they are drunk and that's crap, they are not speaking truth then. It is so hard. They are so fragile and shy.

23 Bininj is a Gundjeihmi and Kunwinjku word which can mean man, male, person or Aboriginal people depending on the context.
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[And later in the same conversation] They hate Balanda [white people], they think we are scum, but they invited us here. There are so many rules. Everything has to be checked out with Gundjehmi first. They don’t like us being in the escarpment, doing ceremony in camp, playing didj or African drumming. We were asked to stop playing the didj because one old man had died. There was 24 hour drumming session, then a curfew was put on it. As for ceremony, it is more just altars and stuff but the Mirrar don’t know much about other people’s magic and stuff and didn’t like it. They thought protestors were trying to do ceremony. In town [Jabiru] the rednecks ignore us and the Bininj ask us for money and cigarettes.

As Jacobs (1994:174) suggests, on one level the spiritualism and holistic visions of Indigenous peoples readily accord with more radical strands of environmentalism. However, the complexity of Aboriginal beliefs, cultural practices and social relationships cannot be encapsulated in the universalising principles of a common and shared cosmology. Thus, when the wishes and behaviour of the Mirrar did not correspond with those of the more radical protestors, or that of the mainstream environmentalists’ campaign, problems arose (see Chapter Five).

Kakadu National Park is more than an Aboriginal place in the non-Aboriginal public imagination, it is also a place that everyone feels they have a stake in protecting, an issue of ‘national interest’. For these reasons, the controversy surrounding the development of the Jabiluka mine has created a multitude of debates in the local, national and international community. The controversy, which continues, is framed through the discursive interspace of Indigenous rights, social inequality, sacred sites, World Heritage values, nuclear waste and environmentalism. These discourses interweave and enmesh in a political field of alliances, oppositions, ambiguity and contradiction. While the universalist agenda of some Jabiluka activists transcended the Mirrar’s place-based focus, environmentalists were able to exploit that place-based focus to mobilise support for their wider agenda of environmental protection and halting uranium mining. The Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation was also able to mobilise support for their cause in the national and international arena by highlighting the ‘scandal’ of mining in a World Heritage listed national park (see Chapter Five).

Jacobs (1994) acknowledges that the primitivist attitudes of many environmentalists towards Aboriginal people re-enforces acts of Western predation on the autonomy of
Indigenous cultures. However, she argues that Aboriginal politics in these alliance situations often unsettles any reading of Western predation, as Aboriginal people have the ability to slip into and out of universal issues which make them the loci of broader coalitions (1994:191). Sacred sites or sites of general Aboriginal significance, such as the World Heritage listed Kakadu National Park, have become powerful symbols or ‘objects of desire’ for the wider community ‘who seek ecological salvation in the wisdom of the elders’ (Jacobs 1994:191). In these alliances, Aboriginal people are able to exploit the universalist attributes of their project and strategically achieve their particular aims under that guise. As Thomas writes:

Just as colonial culture needs to be understood, not as an essence, but as a plurality of projects including, most recently, the primitivist renovation of white identity via Indigenous culture, anti and postcolonial culture cannot be taken as a unitary set of meanings or stable positions. (1994:190)

Nevertheless, such alliances are characterised by the same Rousseauean modernism that has resonated throughout the post-Enlightenment expression of European wonder at ‘nature’ and ‘Aboriginality’.

2.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have asked how ideas about both nature and Aborigines have constructed the imagined geography of Kakadu National Park in the non-Aboriginal domain. I have examined the way in which these ideas have been formed and how they are linked with historical expressions of ‘wonder’ evident in European travel narratives and encounters with the non-European world. Wonder as an expression of colonial appropriation was linked to the history of Europe’s transition to Enlightenment principles and the construction of modern Western values and beliefs about identity, nature, and civilisation. Similarly, travel accounts that document the history of European encounter with the Kakadu landscape evoke wonder at the vistas they encountered. Even people whose journey was one of immense hardship found in the expression of feelings of wonder the ‘glittering promise of possession’.

For most non-Aborigines, present-day Kakadu National Park is inscribed with both a Romantic and scientific interpretation of the ‘natural landscape’. It is a symbol of ‘nature’ and ‘Aboriginality’ which inspires in them a desire to experience, know and
preserve these iconic values. Previously the domain of buffalo hunters, the establishment of Kakadu National Park set in motion a new era of land use characterised by nature-based tourism, the outback adventure tour amid the ‘wilderness’. Like the explorers and pioneers before them, conservation agencies and the tourism industry seek wealth in the land. The difference now is that the aspiration is not to tame the land, but keep it in its ‘natural state’ and in different ways to profit from construction of fetishes of wilderness and Aboriginality.

The next chapter examines the way in which the institution of Kakadu National Park was established and socially constructed. First, Aboriginal peoples’ construction of the region through their respective social histories is drawn on to highlight local understandings of place. This is then contrasted with the understanding of ‘outsiders’ who sought to establish a national park by imposing on the region their own historically informed understandings of nature and Aborigines.
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Paddy Cahill all right. Fetch em boy and girl. Whole lot bin all taking him boy, take im down, pay all about. Paddy Cahill, him good man.


[We couldn’t get tobacco. Everyone went to the railway to get tobacco. There wasn’t any at Oenpelli any more. The missionary didn’t give them any.

So they all went to Pine creek. There was plenty of tobacco there. Not at Oenpelli. There was one white man there at Oenpelli. Campbell. He was all right. He gave us tobacco. But only white men gave us tobacco. When the missionary arrived and there was no more tobacco given out. No clothes, no tobacco. Paddy Cahill was all right. He had all the boys and girls working and paid them. He was a good man.

With the missionary there was no clothes. Only towels. Towels they gave to the women. The missionary was different to the white man. We couldn’t get tobacco off him. He only told us “bring the children to live in the mission so they can go to school”. That was it. No tobacco, no clothes.]

It was through the ability (or inability) of employers to supply such desired goods that the workers’ alliances with their European bosses were forged. In this shifting employment setting, workers were at liberty to leave in search of alternative employment. The land-based and seasonal nature of employment within the ‘fossicking economy’ of Europeans meant that Aboriginal people were able to remain living on or near their land, drawing on its resource rich harvest and at the same time having access to store goods. This ‘allowed Aboriginal people a degree of freedom, autonomy and independence not generally experienced elsewhere in the Northern Territory’ (Lawrence 2000:30).

While the European entrepreneurs themselves relied absolutely on cheap Aboriginal labour and local environmental knowledge, this contribution was devalued by the discourse of scientific racism that pervaded the tropics (see Jackson 1997). Early twentieth-century accounts of life in the Northern Territory revel in the adventurous lives of hardy European males. In most of these accounts any details of European interactions and relationships with Aborigines are largely absent (Dewar 1993).
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However, the folklore of this period is replete with accounts of the sexual relationships between non-Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women, which were as integral to the buffalo hide industry as the supply of cheap Aboriginal labour. Allan Stewart, the post-War safari hunting operator at Nourlangie Camp, in what is now central Kakadu, begins his book, *The Green Eyes are Buffaloes* (1969), with the following verse (a verse that represents a past era about which the new hunters, the tourists at the safari camp, no doubt heard many stories):

The Buffalo Shooter’s Song
(Tune Galaway Bay)

Composed by a group of World War II shooters

At Nourlangie, 1948

If you ever go up north among the buffalo,
Then maybe at the closing of the day,
You will sit and listen to those flamin’ mossies
And watch the sun go down on Fannie Bay.
For again to hear the crying of the curlew,
And the lubras in their nagas salting hides,
And to sit around the campfire by an evening
And listen to the shooters telling lies.

For the gins come down from Oenpelli Mission
All wrapped up in Jesus when they come (religion)
But they soon forget about those Ten Commandments
When you hit ‘em with a snort of O.P. Rum.
And the strangers came and tried to take our lubras—
So we waited while they had their fun,
For they might have tried to catch the old red dingo
Or rape a flamin’ emu on the run. (kiss)
And if ever there should be a piccaninny,
You can bet your boots it won’t be all real black,
For those shooters like their little bit of nonsense (romance)
Along the Alligator River Track

Allan Stewart (1969:ix)
3.2.1. Post-War Developments

Merlan and Rumsey (1982) comment that WWII was a watershed in terms of population migrations in the region. During the war the army rounded up and moved many Aboriginal people from the coastal ‘frontline’ to compounds in Katherine, Pine Creek and Adelaide River. After the war there was never a complete return to the pre-war distribution and employment of Aboriginal people. Commercial buffalo hunting had ceased during the war and in the post-war period, falling prices in the hide market brought about the decline of the entire industry. Many Aboriginal people left the region to pursue other work at cattle stations, mining camps, farms and the urban areas of Katherine, Pine Creek and Darwin. There was now more urban employment in town labour camps and easier access to goods in these areas.

Some families stayed in the region, working at local cattle stations, at the recently established safari camps catering for international game hunters, and at other jobs when they were available. Levitus writes of this period that:

Unlike other parts of the Northern Territory, in which huge areas were dominated by single employers—cattle station owners—the Alligator Rivers region was to host a disparate and changing collection of non-Aboriginal enterprises. This promoted Aboriginal mobility between jobs and employers, and offered a wide range of work experience in a life time. Toby Gangele [of the Mirrar Gundjeihmi clan] began working in his early teens, and since then has worked for about fifteen employers in about fifteen places from Darwin to Oenpelli, shooting buffalo, crocodiles and pigs, working on the railway and for the Army, in timber and safari camps, on a boat, mustering and gardening, and now for the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service...Such an employment history is not unusual (1982:51).

In the south of the Alligator Rivers region there were two cattle stations, Goodparla and Gimbat. Station work in the region was always limited in scope due to marginal nature of land for pastoralism. It did not provide continuing sites around which Aboriginal people could develop long-term stable communities (Merlan & Rumsey 1982). Aboriginal people, often in small groups, frequently moved around the Top End seeking work, returning to the Alligator Rivers region in the off season or, in some cases, finding cattle-mustering work in the region. In the 1960s Aboriginal men worked slaughtering buffalo for meat at Munmarlary and Mudjinberri stations...
in the northeast of the region. In the late 1960s, the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission granted Aboriginal people the right to award wages and, as a result, Aboriginal workers were retrenched by many employers who would not, or could not, pay the award rate. Many Aboriginal people became dependent on Government welfare payments (Levitus 1982:67–68).

One of the Aboriginal families that remained in the region throughout the period was the family of William (Yorky Billy) Alderson. Yorky Billy, son of a Yorkshire man and a Murumburr woman, was renowned as a buffalo shooter by European bosses in the region (see Cole 1988, Lockwood 1979). In the pre-war period he was employed in the buffalo hide industry and cattle mustering, after the war he worked at the Nourlangie sawmill, and later he was employed as a safari-hunting guide. He also worked as a ‘dogger’ hunting dingoes for their skins, and as a mineral prospector in the region. He eventually settled down with his family on his own vegetable and fruit garden at Spring Peak in the central part of the Kakadu region.

What follows is the account of that period from one of Yorky Billy’s daughters:

I remember being at Mamarlary [station] when my mother and father worked there. A big drought came and there was no work so we began to ride back this way. I rode with my father. My mother and grandmother walked. They walked through Woolwonga and camped there a while. Then we came across to Nourlangie. Here Dad worked at the sawmill. In early years Dad and his father had found tin in Mikinj Valley way—Tin Camp Creek—they were up there looking for gold.

When we came to Nourlangie there were only four kids—my brother, Jessie, me and another sister that died. We stayed at Nourlangie for years. My father was paid out when the sawmill closed down and with that we bought more horses from Mudjinberri [station]. My brother and Jessie were taken away to Garden Point [mission] to school while they were at Nourlangie. Dad sent them. He was encouraged to send them by the welfare officer at the time, Tiger Brennan.

Then there was only me and Elizabeth left. After we bought the horses and we left Nourlangie we rode the country on horses shooting dingoes for skins to sell to AhToy [general store] in Pine Creek. We also got crocodile skins. Our base camp was at the site of my house at Paradise now. Once we had enough skins
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we would ride to Pine Creek sell the skins and buy tea, sugar, swags and mosquito nets and ride back.

Alan Stewart had started a safari camp at Nourlangie. We stayed there too and worked for Alan Stewart taking tourists out. Sometimes they used our horses to take the tourists. I don’t know if Dad was paid for the use of the horses or not. I remember Alan Stewart showing off on one of the horses in front of the tourists and getting bucked off.

After we left Nourlangie camp [for the second time] there were more kids, so we settled down at Spring Peak. We just lived there. Then my brother came home from school. Dad and my brother helped Tom Opitz to build the Jim Jim pub. They cut the sand palms from Spring Peak. Dad helped Don McGregor build his place too [a safari camp] with Hector Djorlom. My brother worked with Don McGregor.

When we were living at Spring Peak, old people would come by on their way to get bamboo at the South Alligator. I remember Timber Camp Billy and other people from Pine Creek. They would call in for pumpkin and watermelon that we grew at Spring Peak. I remember old Nym and old Toby from the other side at Nourlangie Camp. In the wet season we didn’t see anyone. We’d stay this side for five months.

In the dry season we would go to Kapalga, to the old homestead and get mangoes. There was a big mob of buffalo then. I remember coming across all these buffalo and the horses took off and I bolted up a tree with my cat. When Dad arrived he had to ride off and bring the horses back. They were hard days. Good days. You camped wherever you wanted.

Yorky Billy’s eldest daughter, Jessie Alderson, who was sent away to school at the Garden Point mission on Melville Island, has an altogether different story:

I came back when I was 17 years old. I came back for the day. Slept a night then went back next day—I couldn’t stand it. I was working at Kormilda [secondary college in Darwin] as a domestic there. When we left the island they found work for us.

After the cyclone, in 75–76, I came back. Big meetings for land rights. There was a meeting here, a big meeting. I had no contact with my family when I was at the mission. Then when I came back I found animosity within the family because I didn’t know language. It rubbed off me over there. I didn’t know
anything. I couldn’t understand them. They couldn’t understand me. My mother
was speaking to me in language. She thought I could understand. It eventually
came back. It took ten years. I’m still learning.

I reckon they were the lucky ones that stayed behind. Like my sisters. Lucky
because they were here all the time. But I wouldn’t change it for whatever
happened. I had an extended family on the mission and we are still in contact.

The pre-war ‘fossicking economy’ and post-war employment opportunities in the
wider region had also brought the people of the Alligator Rivers region closer
together socially, as well as with their neighbours across the Top End. As people
travelled outside their normal social range, lived alongside each other in camps and
intermarried, alliances and linkages formed between groups that are important to the
social dynamics of the region today. Sarah Nabolweh, a woman from Western
Arnhem Land who is now living at Patonga airstrip outstation and who worked on a
number of cattle stations tells her story:

I knew Minnie Alderson [Yorky Billy’s wife] in buffalo shooter times. I was
just a little kid. After my mother and father were working at the Timber Camp.
Mick, Jessie, Violet, we were all kids together. Then we went to Pine Creek.
That old man and old lady they were still here and they still live here.
Everybody comes back in the end. We all come back because members of our
families had land. We have been here a long time.

Another older woman, Eileen Cahill, was born in Darwin where she grew up at the
Bagot Aboriginal community with her Murumburr father. During her early life she
worked at numerous cattle stations, in and outside the Alligator Rivers region, and at
fishing enterprises and timber mills across the Top End. After her second husband
passed away she returned to the Jim Jim Creek area with her children:

We came back when the Rangers were here. In the 1980s. I’m still here now
and staying. I didn’t know Jabiru was there till they said you gotta go there and
get your royalty in 1979. I went from Finniss River.

Many of those whose family members came to the region during the buffalo
shooting era, and who subsequently settled in the area, believe that their own family
history and associations with the area gives them certain rights to continue living in
the area. Joanne Sullivan, a Rembarrgna woman living at Mudjinberri outstation,
explained to me her situation:
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We are from Momega [central Arnhem Land]. My father was head stockman at Mudjinberri. Then he worked at the abattoir. We were born at Mudjinberri, grew up there and our father passed away there. We are staying here, not leaving. Our grandmother passed away here too. We grew up with Yvonne [Margarula] mob—hunting at Nourlangie Camp. We went with our grandmothers hunting. Our mother and father used to walk to Jim Jim and Cooinda. There were lots of Aboriginal people a long time ago at Mudjinberri. Some pass away, some go to Oenpelli. Some go back to Maningrida.

It can be seen from these accounts that the history of Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region retains social immediacy for those who continue to live within the Kakadu region today. As Levitus (1982:125) states, this is history that defies the non-Aboriginal characterisation of the region as a wilderness.

3.3. Planning a National Park

Non-Aboriginal planning for a national park in the region began in the early 1960s. Within certain sectors of the Northern Territory population the area was beginning to be recognised as a place of outstanding natural values, with Aboriginal rock art and archaeological sites worthy of preservation. In 1965, the Northern Territory Reserves Board proposed a national park in the region, and in 1969 the Northern Territory Pre-planning Committee reported that:

We are convinced that within the area there are ingredients of scenic grandeur, interesting and unique fauna and flora, and cultural and historical elements, which if blended and managed successfully will produce a great park for public interest and enjoyment as well as making a major contribution to conservation needs. This park will be unique in Australia, it will rival in national importance great overseas parks, and it will be a priceless gift from present to later generations. (Pre-planning Committee 1969:1)

Hill and Press (1993:5) suggest that while Aboriginal rock art was appreciated as an important element of the proposed National Park, the proposals were undoubtedly ‘based on euro-centric, conservative attitudes to national parks and nature prevalent at the time’. Thus, it was the focus on what was perceived to be the region’s natural values area that cemented the area’s worth in the public domain and ensured public support for the creation of Kakadu National Park. This focus on the preservation of the natural environment was consistent with other Western nations who were also
embracing a conservation-oriented ethic in the second half of the twentieth century. The 1960s, for example, mark the emergence of the modern, scientifically based environment movement. It was an era in which the publication of Rachel Carson’s book, *Silent Spring* (1963), warned the West about the dangers of pesticide use on ecological systems. Moreover, awareness of the increasing dangers of industrial pollution in Western countries resulted in the formation of the Club of Rome, a preeminent group of environmental scientists, who warned of a pending global environmental crisis. Likewise in Australia, scientists and other educated people had become increasingly concerned about the environment and the loss of native habitat.

In North America, people had begun to look for vistas of nature to escape the expanding urbanisation of the domestic landscape. What became an American ‘wilderness cult’ would heavily influence Australian attitudes to nature preservation. Lawrence writes:

> Parks were seen as places for the encouragement of tourism and the promotion of national prestige. This has encouraged the myth that national parks are unpeopled sanctuaries—almost sacred places—set apart from and unaffected by environmental impacts, resource exploitation and urban-industrial society surrounding them. (2000:170–171)

In the Northern Territory of the 1960s influential public servants and elected local members of the legislative council also held these conservation views and were determined to create a great national park in the north. However, their enthusiasm for nature preservation did not include Aboriginal people in the planning and management of national parks. Lawrence (2000:52) writes that in 1969, the Preplanning Committee which the Northern Territory Administration set up to investigate the establishment of a national park, reported that, ‘No aboriginal tribes are now centred in the park although there is ample evidence of past activity there’. In 1972, when debating the Northern National Park Bill, Ron Withnall Independent member for Port Darwin in the Northern Territory Legislative Council, made it clear that Legislative Council members were not impressed with Aboriginal claims to the area. Withnall stated that ‘since this national park will be very much concerned with wildlife...some better sounding Aboriginal name than “Kakadu” is desirable’ (Northern Territory Legislative Council 1972:398, quoted in Lawrence 2000:62).
Lawrence writes that the views of Aboriginal people from the Alligator Rivers region were never considered, or sought, at any time during the lengthy deliberations over the proposed national park (2000:62; see also Langton 1978:13). By this time, the Alligator Rivers region had become well mapped with anglicised places of significance and, for an increasing number of urban Territorians, the region had already been colonised as a place of leisure and escape. Initially, the pressure to create a national park in the region was applied to Commonwealth Government by a handful of concerned Northern Territory individuals. While their agendas for doing so were diverse, in this period and up to the mid-1970s, there was a camaraderie between all those individuals in the Northern Territory working towards the creation of a national park in the Alligator Rivers region. One of these key individuals, Graham McMahon, describes the era thus:

We felt that we had to put as much pressure on the government as we could, to get a major national park, flanking the East Alligator, before the country had all been given away for mining or pastoral activity. We were quite single minded, and we each used our contacts and whatever resources we had to get the message across. We phoned and wrote to politicians, we put stories into the media. George Chaloupka started to wake people up to the value of rock art out there, Ian Barker wrote wonderful letters, and I was always in the media. (Forrest 1999:28)

However, this camaraderie became strained in the mid-1970s as individuals were confronted with the emerging issue of Aboriginal land rights, an issue which caused divided allegiances to emerge amongst the group (Chaloupka, G. pers. comm.). By this period, the Commonwealth Government had become interested in the area and they had priorities for the region that transcended the agenda of the many local Territorians and Territory Government representatives who had been agitating for a national park. One of these priorities was the issue of Aboriginal land rights.

3.3.1. The Issue of Aboriginal Rights

A history of Aboriginal political activism was integral to the creation of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976. In the 1960s in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal groups, such as the Yolngu at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula and the Gurindji people at Wave Hill in the Victoria River District, had begun petitioning the Federal Parliament for the recognition of their right to their traditional
lands. In Yirrkala the Yolngu eventually took their case to the Supreme Court (see Williams 1986). From the 1950s, until the 1967 referendum that empowered the Federal Parliament to make laws for people of the Aboriginal race,26 the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body the Federal Council for Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) had campaigned across Australia to ‘advance the Aboriginal cause’ (McGinness 1977:32). In Canberra in 1972, Aboriginal rights activists had set up a tent embassy outside the Federal Parliament and drew national and international attention to Aboriginal land rights issues. From the 1960s, the Australian public was increasingly aware of the social injustices and institutional brutality which Aboriginal people were subjected to and, with the onset of television, images of the appalling living standards in rural and remote Aboriginal communities were televised into Australian homes (Langton, M. pers. comm.). Neate reports that there was:

...a growing sentiment among Australians that Aboriginal people deserved a better deal. In 1967 an overwhelming majority of Australian voters agreed in a referendum that the Constitution be amended to empower the Federal Parliament to make laws for the people of the Aboriginal race. The following year the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Mr E. G. (Gough) Whitlam, described the result as ‘a virtual command by 5,700,000 Australians that the national Government should take a lead to promote (among other things) the land rights of Aboriginals’. (Neate 1989:3)

Public support for Aboriginal rights was supplemented by three other factors: the ideological dominance of liberalism and faith in the remedial process of Government intervention, a prosperous economic climate, and an international focus on the post-colonial process and the rights of Indigenous and Third World peoples (Gibbins 1988:24).

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26 Langton (1997) writes that prior to the 1967 referendum the section in the Constitution dealing with the races power (which allows the Federal Parliament to pass laws with respect of ‘the people of any race for whom it is deemed necessary to make special laws’) contained the words ‘other than the Aboriginal race in any State’. Langton writes

This left the power to deal with Aboriginal issues with the State Parliaments. The 1967 referendum changed two aspects of the Constitution. First, it amended the races power to allow the Commonwealth to pass laws for the Aboriginal people. Secondly, it deleted section 127 of the Constitution, which had stated that in taking the census, “Aboriginal natives were not to be counted”. (1997:7)
As a result of these factors, in 1972 the Australian Labor Party adopted a policy that it would recognise Aboriginal land rights in the Northern Territory. In 1973, then Prime Minister Whitlam commissioned Mr Justice Woodward to inquire and report on how (not whether) to recognise Aboriginal Land Rights in the Northern Territory (Neate 1989:4). Woodward handed down a first (draft) report in 1973 and the final report in 1974. He recommended the establishment of a land claim process to assess claims of traditional ownership for unalienated Crown land in the Northern Territory. Successful land claims and those lands already reserved for Aboriginal people such as former missions and reserves were to be granted statutory, inalienable freehold title. It was recommended that with each grant of land an Aboriginal land trust be established to hold title to land for the benefit of the traditional owners of the land concerned (Aboriginal Land Rights Commission 1974). Woodward also recommended the establishment of Aboriginal Land Councils as statutory bodies to administer the Act and to give direction to Aboriginal land trusts in their area.27

Although Whitlam lost office in November 1975, the political and social processes behind the land rights legislation could not easily be reversed and in 1976 the Fraser Coalition Government passed the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Woodward 1985).

### 3.3.2. The Issue of Uranium Mining

The potential of profiting from large-scale uranium mining was the other major reason why the Commonwealth Government’s interest suddenly increased in the Alligator Rivers region in the early 1970s. Small-scale uranium mining had already been carried out in the region. Between 1956 and 1964 small deposits of ore were mined in the South Alligator valley uranium field. By the late 1960s, the focus shifted to the north, where larger deposits had been identified in the Alligator Rivers uranium field. The Ranger 1 ore body was detected in 1969 and other large deposits at Jabiluka and Koongarra were identified between 1970 and 1973 (Lawrence 2000:52). In 1971, a Planning Team established by the Commonwealth to investigate the possibility for a national park in the region had informed the conservative Coalition Government that mining and national parks were incompatible. Despite

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this recommendation, the economic value of uranium meant the Government was keen to explore the possibilities of uranium mining in the region. In order to facilitate this, in May 1972, the Alligator Rivers region Environmental Fact Finding Study was commissioned, funded on a dollar-for-dollar basis by the Commonwealth Government and the mining companies (Lawrence 2000:63).

In the same year the Federal Labor Government came to power and it continued the negotiations over the region with the mining companies. Lawrence reports that at a time of high inflation and rising unemployment, and mindful of the economic problems that arose during the 1973 oil crisis, the Labor Government supported mining development (2000:78). By 1975, Prime Minister Whitlam had made agreements with mining companies and had affirmed the Government’s intention to develop and sell uranium, following consideration of the recommendations of the recently announced Ranger Inquiry (Lawrence 2000:78). The Inquiry was to examine the proposal by the Australian Atomic Energy Commission, in association with Ranger Uranium Mines Pty Ltd, to develop the uranium deposits in the Alligators Rivers uranium field and advise the Australian Government on the potential impact of uranium mining in the region.

The Ranger Inquiry was the Whitlam Government’s response to the need to resolve conflicting land-use claims on the area. Paradoxically, these conflicts were mirrored by internal conflict within Labor Party policy (Lawrence 2000:76–77). Keen to develop uranium mining in the Northern Territory in the face of growing financial difficulty for the Government (Formby 1984:314), Whitlam had also come to power on the platform of Aboriginal rights, conservation and environmental reform. However, in September 1974 the Minister for Minerals and Energy, Rex Connor, had issued a statement that:

The Government is determined to ensure the Northern Territory uranium resources are developed in a sensible manner...The Government’s policies...are based on the recognition of the economic and strategic importance of uranium and our obligations to the owners of uranium—the Australian people...(quoted in Lawrence 2000:76)

This commitment to Aborigines and the environment, made alongside a commitment to exploit natural resources such as uranium, went as far as acknowledging Aborigines as a part of the regional landscape; however, it did not
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acknowledge them as the owners and managers of that landscape's economic resources. From this perspective, Aborigines required protection and preservation along with the natural environment, and consequently they were not ceded an active role in the debate over land management and resource use.

3.3.3. Pawns in a Power Struggle?

The intertwined and complex issues of uranium mining, environmental protection and Aboriginal rights ensured the region and its people became a focus of national attention. The public hearings of the Ranger Commission of Inquiry commenced on 9 September 1975, and heard evidence from 303 witnesses during 121 days of hearings. The Inquiry's report was delivered in two parts. The first report (RUEI 1976a) dealt with the dangers involved with uranium mining and milling and issues relating to the global nuclear fuel cycle. The second report dealt with national and local environmental aspects of the Ranger proposal. ‘Environment’ was defined as including ‘all aspects of the surroundings of man, whether affecting him as an individual or in his social groupings’ (RUEI 1977a:7). Ultimately, the Ranger Commissioners recommended, with qualifications, that uranium mining at Ranger be allowed to proceed. Although the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission recommended that Aboriginal landowners be given the right of mining veto on land they had successfully claimed (Aboriginal Land Rights Commission 1974:108), sections 40(6) and 41(2) of the ALRA explicitly removed the Ranger project area from the ambit of Aboriginal veto over mining (Levitus 1991:155). While it was recognised that the mine was against the wishes of Aboriginal people in the region, the Commissioners’ belief was that the mine proposal was in the national interest and that ‘[i]n the end, we form the conclusion that their opposition should not be allowed to prevail’ (RUEI 1977a:9).

This conclusion was offset by recommendations that a large part of the region become Aboriginal land and that this land, excluding the areas where application had been made for special mineral leases, become a national park. The Commissioners noted that ‘[p]ossibly no other part of Australia is faced with as many strong and concurrent claims for the use of land’ (RUEI 1977a:287) In the light of the evidence put before them, the Commissioners outlined a land-use plan which they believed ‘maximises the potentiality of the Region and takes full account of the position of Aboriginal people within it’ (RUEI 1977a:321). Lawrence writes that:
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The Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry was to become one of the most important inquiries in Australian environmental history. The consequences of its recommendations and the fact that the Inquiry heard the first Aboriginal land claim in the Northern Territory continue to affect the development of Kakadu National Park. (2000:73)

In the mid-1970s, during the debate over the Ranger mine, tens of thousands of people marched in city streets around Australia to protest against uranium mining. The local Aboriginal opposition to the mines’ development was supported in public demonstrations demanding the recognition of Aboriginal land rights (see Dirt Cheap (video recording) 1980). However, this widespread support for Aboriginal rights in the Alligator Rivers region was more a product of environmental concerns, peace movement activism, and trade union opposition to multinational mining companies, than a commitment to Aboriginal social justice issues. In 1978, Langton remarked that:

Aboriginal people have noted cynically that this Australia wide concern and sympathy has only arisen since uranium was discovered. This is undoubtedly the case; other Aboriginal communities are still suffering in obscurity because there is not a “cause celebre”. (1978:1)

Allen (1981), in a critique of the Ranger campaign, writes that ultimately the miners and protestors failed to support Aboriginal people’s aspirations as neither party sought alternatives for regional development on Aboriginal terms. As a result, Allen writes:

Aboriginal inhabitants of the region now have tourists, uranium mines and a national park on their land and a whole set of new pressures to contend with. They had the right to expect that the more enlightened political elements in European society would assist them in their efforts to achieve independence but instead they were embroiled in a fierce political struggle in which they were forced to carry the can. Europeans might be used to the froth and turmoil of institutionalised political conflict but the Aboriginal people of the Alligator Rivers were not.

The conflict over the Alligator Rivers region unleashed a storm on the Aboriginal population in which both sides of this primarily European conflict portrayed themselves as working in the Aborigines’ best interests. From an Aboriginal point of view both were domineering and manipulative, seeking to
use Aborigines as pawns in their own struggles and for their own European-designated ends. The "good" side, the conservationists, turned out to be just as bad as the miners in this regard. (1981:40)

The anti-uranium lobby of conservationists, peace activists and trade unionists responded with bitterness to the eventual signing of the Ranger Agreement by Aboriginal traditional owners and the NLC (Allen 1981:39–40). They saw this outcome as a 'sell-out' and believed local Aboriginal people should have held firm against the external pressure to sign the agreement. Allen states that the eventual outcome of a strategy where Aboriginal people had continued to stand firm in opposition to the mine is debatable. In any event, he writes, the pressures placed on the local Aboriginal people by conservationists and others to take up such a position were unhelpful to the local situation:

In seeking, with the government's help, to push the mining decision onto the Aboriginal owners, they placed those twenty-five people at the centre of the conflict. There they could not help but be ripped apart as they were bombarded with propaganda from all sides. (Allen 1981:39)

Aboriginal people were the participants in a battle over mining and other developments on their land that were largely out of their control. However, when the Fraser Government eventually announced its decision to allow uranium mining in the region, the Australian press focused their reports on what they imagined were the pecuniary interests of 'primitive' Aborigines who were eagerly awaiting an economic windfall. Referring to this as 'stoneage reporting', Langton writes:

The particularly racist treatment of the Aboriginal question appeared from August 26 to 29 under headings such as "Rich Fellow, My Country", "Tribe Waits For Millions", "Bonanza for Tribal Blacks", "Aborigines get $175m", "Uranium Bonanza", "Stone Age Millionaires" and "Dawn of the Uranium Dreamtime". (1977:29)

The flexibility of the historical discourse of race, with its noble and ignoble savages, allows others to construct Aborigines according to their own discursive strategies. In this way, Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region appeared to simultaneously occupy a variety of contradictory positions, none of which took account of the social history of a group of people experienced at negotiating their own futures.
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From the perspective of Aboriginal people, this tumultuous era of their history signified a frustrating paradox: on the one hand, there was the widespread anticipation that land rights now offered them the opportunity to regain overt control over their land, on the other hand, they were simultaneously being used as the pawns in strategies imposed by the external agendas of others. In this situation, they chose to negotiate and manipulate these agendas as best they could.

3.4. Aboriginal Land Rights and the National Park

The announcement in 1974 of the Ranger Inquiry, with its brief to consider Aboriginal associations with the region, provided an opportunity for Aboriginal people from the Alligator Rivers region to begin returning to their country (see Levitus 1982:68). Following Woodward’s first report (Aboriginal Land Rights Commission 1973) and in anticipation of land rights legislation, the NLC was established to consult with Aboriginal communities in the Top End about the issue of land rights. As the enactment of the ALRA was pending, the NLC approached Justice Fox with the proposal of linking a land claim hearing to the environmental inquiry. Public opinion was already inspired by the notion of a national park in the region, and it was recognised by the NLC that linking a national park with the granting of Aboriginal land rights could be an effective strategy to facilitate Aboriginal aspirations in the region. An assurance was also given that any land granted in the land claim process would be leased back to the Government as a national park (RUEI 1977a:204). The Government agreed to the proposal and, after the passage of the ALRA in 1976, the Ranger Inquiry was also authorised to hear the Northern Territory’s first land claim (see Chapter Four).

In January 1977, at a meeting held by the NLC at the town of Batchelor, a hundred Aboriginal people, including fifty-three people who were considered to be either

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28 The NLC and the CLC were established on an interim basis in 1973. Both were given statutory responsibilities under the eventual legislation (Neate 1989:4–5). The NLC is required by section 23 (1) of the ALRA to:

ascertain and express the wishes...of Aboriginals living in (its) area as to the management of Aboriginal lands...and as to appropriate legislation concerning that land; [and] to protect the interests of...Aboriginals...in Aboriginal land...

29 To allow a final decision on the Ranger proposal to be made the ALRA had been amended under s. 11(2) to allow the Commission of the Ranger Inquiry to act in effect of the Aboriginal Land Commissioner in reporting findings to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs for consideration.
closely affiliated or traditional Aboriginal owners from the Alligator Rivers region, were told by NLC lawyers:

> that they may claim the entire area as an outright claim of ownership and subsequently manage the area as they saw fit. However, it was also explained to them that Mr Justice Fox may not look so favourably upon the land claim if this option were chosen, as, consistent with his environmental concern, he appeared anxious to assure himself that appropriate land management of the area would be undertaken. (Chaloupka n.d.:2)

In some regards Aboriginal people were also attracted to the idea of creating a national park on their land. Langton writes that it was a difficult decision for Aboriginal people to make:

> Kakadu [National Park] was, however, supported by the Aboriginal people because they believed that the National Park would involve extra restrictions on the exploitation and misuse of the area and would help to either prevent the mining or to restrict its scope and damaging effects. (1978:13)

Under these circumstances, the idea of a national park was accepted by the traditional owners. At the same time, 'they put great emphasis on the fact that they must still be “boss” of the area' (Chaloupka n.d.:2). This statement referring to Aboriginal people as 'boss' would have been received with minimal regard in the non-Aboriginal discourses circulating at the time, as it was imagined that, like nature, Aborigines required protection. For instance, Aboriginal and national park interests were found by the Ranger Inquiry to be in most respects compatible. Woodward too had accepted the view that Aboriginal interests have much in common with those of conserving the environment, and he identified key principles to guide the joint management of national parks (Aboriginal Land Rights Commission 1974:93).

Along the lines of Woodward’s principles, the Commissioners of the Ranger Inquiry recommended the establishment of a large national park to include the proposed Aboriginal land. In August 1977, the Government announced it had accepted virtually all the recommendations of the Inquiry including those relating to the granting of Aboriginal title to land and the creation of a national park. In accepting the recommendations of the Ranger Inquiry the Government decided to establish the National Park in stages with the first stage to coincide largely with the area proposed
as Aboriginal land (Hill & Press 1993:4). The first stage of Kakadu National Park was declared on 5 April 1979.

In 1978, the NLC held a series of meetings with traditional owners in the Alligator Rivers region to discuss both the signing of the Ranger Agreement and any concerns traditional owners had about the National Park Agreement. At one meeting held at Mudjinberri station, two key issues were raised by the traditional owners in regard to the National Park. First, people wanted the government to provide funds for outstations in the region to allow them to resettle their homelands.30 Secondly, the traditional owners felt that the main emphasis of the Park should be on conservation rather than tourism. George Chaloupka, then employed as the regional field officer of the NLC, later informed Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service (ANPWS) that:

The second point followed from a suggestion that most of the park should be closed to tourists, and that the traditional owners would then nominate certain areas which they were prepared to allow visitors into. This developed from a long discussion about visitors' behaviour in the past. (Chaloupka 1978)

Other issues discussed at the meeting were Aboriginal concerns over the impact on their meat supply of the removal of buffalo from the Park area (as recommended by the Ranger Inquiry and supported by ANPWS), the control of alcohol distribution, and the continuation of Aboriginal fire regimes in the Park environment. The employment and training of local Aboriginal people were also discussed. In response to promises of park ranger training programs, senior Aboriginal traditional owner, Bill Neidjie, stressed that '[i]f we get taught ranger, we won't stand back watering the garden'. He also stressed that '[t]his Aboriginal land. We want our homes first, before we sign agreement' (Harris 1978:2). However, the NLC advised the group that this agreement had to be signed quickly to protect the land from coming under the control of the Northern Territory Government (Harris 1978:2). At a later meeting of the NLC at Bamyili, Aboriginal representatives from the Alligator Rivers region stated that local Aboriginal people feared that the Government had not yet explained

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30 Similarly, the provision of outstation areas where they could live outside of the control of the National Park authority was stressed as a requirement by the Aboriginal people present at the Batchelor meeting in 1977 (RUEI 1977b).
adequately what leasing the land as a national park would mean for them in practice. For instance, people were scared that non-Aboriginal park rangers would take their rifles from them and stop them going into certain areas in the Park (Finlay 1978).

Despite these ongoing concerns about the details of the National Park and what it would provide for them, the lease agreement was signed in Oenpelli on 3 November 1978, on the same day as the contentious Ranger Agreement. The traditional owners of the Alligator Rivers region, who had just been granted their land, were to immediately lease back that land to both mining and national park interests. During this period, Aboriginal people grappled with issues about which they had little information or previous experience. Only a few local Aboriginal people were literate in English and the recommendations of the Second Ranger Report which directly affected the local Aboriginal people were unknown by the majority (Langton 1978:4). Mick Alderson, a senior traditional owner and a signatory to the Kakadu National Park Lease Agreement, stated that these were hectic times for Aboriginal people in the region. He recounted the history of his involvement in that period with ambivalence: ‘Well, I signed something anyway. I don’t know if it was the Parks or the mine. There was so much going on then. Me and Toby signed’.

The lease, for a hundred years, gave the ANPWS management rights over approximately 4800 square kilometres and a number of other smaller portions of land for an annual rental of $7500 (Kakadu Aboriginal Land Trust & ANPWS 1978).

3.4.1. Territory–Commonwealth Relations

The fact that National Park Lease Agreement was signed between Aboriginal traditional owners and the Commonwealth is a source of ongoing tension in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government became self-governing on 1 July 1978, four months before the lease governing Kakadu National Park Stage I was signed. Although the new Government believed that Kakadu National Park should be managed under Northern Territory jurisdiction, the Park was established under new Commonwealth legislation (National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975 (Cth)) as this reflected ‘the wishes of traditional owners and the Northern Land Council, as expressed during negotiations with the Commonwealth’ (Carroll 1983:343). In 1972, while a national park was being planned, the Northern Territory
Administration had created the Alligator Rivers Wildlife Sanctuary in the region and placed Northern Territory Park Rangers across much of the area proposed for the National Park. However, the period of Northern Territory administrative control over their land was not remembered fondly by local Aboriginal people who worked for that administration. They felt that their opinions and knowledge were not valued and that their input into management of the area was considered to extend only to their role as labourers (Alderson, M. pers. comm.). This was a major factor in their decision to enter into an agreement with the Commonwealth. The Ranger Inquiry had also recommended that the ANPWS manage the Park (RUEI 1977a:333-334).

This decision over the management of Kakadu National Park inflamed Territory-Commonwealth relations and created tensions that continue twenty-two years later. These tensions also concern the issue of Aboriginal land rights. The fact that the key tourist sites of Kakadu and Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Parks are subject to Aboriginal title and continue to be managed under Commonwealth jurisdiction restricts the Territory Government’s own aspirations for the expansion of tourism (and mining) developments in these regions (Gibbins 1988:40-42). The Northern Territory Government and the associated Territory industries of mining and tourism remain outspoken critics of Parks Australia and continually assert their own visions for the way that Kakadu National Park should be managed (see Northern Territory Government 1994).

3.4.2. An Aboriginal Park?

It was a big change for my family when the area became a National Park. The National Park, land rights and the mining were happening altogether. We were just living here quiet and then a National Park comes in. There were a lot of meetings to talk about it, but people weren’t prepared for all the tourists and having to get rid of some of the animals, like the buffalo. (Aboriginal traditional owner, Kakadu National Park)

Despite non-Aboriginal assumptions that Aborigines required protection from the outside world, Aboriginal people were active participants in the historical events affecting their lives. As the opportunities arose they negotiated and made choices which aimed to further their aspirations for the region. However, the non-Aboriginal historical record of that period casts Aboriginal people as objects outside history.
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Von Sturmer in his critique of the Ranger Inquiry reflects on the ‘ambiguous position’ or absence of Aboriginal people in the report:

[The] local Aboriginal people always appear at a distance. Their own views are nowhere reported. They present no evidence. They continually require the interpretation of external commentary. They are problems, not participants. And they are not assigned an active role. The administrative arrangements are left to outsiders: specialists. The local people may participate as workers, but not as decision-makers, or as the makers or imposers of sanctions. They are not to have a determining voice. Their voices may be heard, but not heeded: they are nowhere decisive. Their interests are to be presented by a distant, European structured organisation: the Northern Land Council. The [Ranger] Commission did not make that decision: it had already been determined by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. But the Commission endorsed the approach. The Director of the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Supervising Scientist were also put in caretaker roles: one would control the tourists and the town residents, the other the mines; and both would care for the environment. How this could be reconciled with granting of land ownership and the fact of Aboriginal responsibilities to land, is not explained. (1984:84–85)

Many of the Aboriginal people and their supporters who were involved in the creation of an ‘Aboriginal National Park’ imagined that, while initially equal numbers of Aborigines and others would employed in the Park service, within five years the National Park would become a Park self-managed by the Aboriginal traditional owners (Chaloupka, G. pers. comm.). However, according to Peter Wellings, the Kakadu National Park Manager in the early 1990s and later the Secretary to the Kakadu Board of Management, these visions of an Aboriginal-controlled Park did not proceed to plan:

In the 1970s while dealing with issues of mining and land rights, Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region thought about the idea of a National Park to manage what they saw as inevitable change in the region. Aboriginal people had strong expectations and a vision of what that meant—that Kakadu would be in the first place an Aboriginal place and in the second place a national park. Over time other people’s expectations and visions for Kakadu have dominated. (Wellings, P. pers. comm.)
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3.5. Conclusion

The history and politics of the establishment of Kakadu National Park magnify the competing discourses that continue to construct Kakadu in the present. From the perspective of Aboriginal traditional owners, the post-contact history of the region reveals a social domain of interpersonal and intercultural relationships that have created Kakadu as a unique and dynamic place. In this way, Kakadu is a place with a social history that continues to unfold and be negotiated within the Aboriginal domain itself, and with various non-Aboriginal domains. At the same time, traditional owners have consistently asserted that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place.

However, the history of the establishment of Kakadu also reveals that the discursive strategies mounted by the non-Aboriginal parties, such as government, mining and conservation groups, drew their arguments from one of two tropes situated along a polarity of Western ‘nature’. One of these was the historically powerful trope of economic progress made possible through natural resource extraction, in this case, primarily mining. The other was the increasingly influential trope of environmentalism, which aimed to preserve the environment for future generations, and, because they were imagined to share a similar conservation ethic, recognised the rights of Indigenous people. In the establishment phase of the Park, supporters of mining characterised the Aborigines as having only pecuniary interests in land, while the conservationists imagined that economics and politics had no place in the society of Kakadu’s Aborigines. The voices and aspirations of Aborigines people were in this way marginalised in a conflict over land use.

Eventually, the Park was opportunistically created out of an amalgam of interests, yet Aborigines throughout this process retained their quiet assertion that they were ‘boss for the country’. It is only recently in the postcolonial climate of inverted power relationships where, for instance, Aboriginal land rights and governance structures have been legally recognised and entrenched, that this assertion is beginning to be accepted as an unavoidable fact by mining, conservation and government groups.

Nevertheless, the contest over the region during the 1970s continues to characterise the politics and development of Kakadu National Park. The fetish of nature as a resource to be exploited or alternatively something to be preserved were ideas that
predominated in the Park’s establishment and these ideas continue to a large extent to direct the gaze of people in the non-Aboriginal domain in the present Kakadu era.

The next chapter examines the way in which Aboriginal constructions of place have been influenced by the external discourses applied to the region to determine land claims, mining royalty payments and the management of land in the National Park. It examines the incorporation of Aborigines into the discourse of resource extractionism and environmentalism, and the way in which this ‘culture of nature’ (Willems-Braun 1997) has also encouraged the commodification of land and resources in the Aboriginal domain.
Chapter Four

The Aboriginal Domain in Kakadu National Park
Chapter 4. The Aboriginal Domain in Kakadu National Park

4.1. Introduction

As well as being constituted by local Aboriginal configurations of land ownership and social relationships, the Aboriginal domain in Kakadu National Park has also been constituted through land claim and other administrative processes that emanate from the non-Aboriginal domain. In this chapter, I am interested in how Aboriginal people in Kakadu situate and manage their various homelands within the schema of the National Park administration and the wider Kakadu region economic order. I also examine the way in which external constructions of Aboriginal relationships to land affect the Aboriginal domain.

Merlan (1997:5) refers to Aboriginal populations that have undergone long-term population migrations away from their homelands as the ‘diasporic’ Aboriginal people. In the post-contact era, the economic activities and migration of Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region have created an Aboriginal domain very different from that which would have been apparent before the commencement of a ‘fossicking economy’. Merlan refers to this process as the shift from a tradition of complete immersion in country built around a focus on the Dreaming significances of country, to a stronger relationship to other known significances, such as those that arise out of shared black–white interactions, work relations, family connections ‘and the usurpation of country that Aborigines see as having been “blackfella country”’ (1998:216). Kakadu National Park, as an Aboriginal place, is constituted by historically diverse Aboriginal relationships with each other and with various non-Aboriginal domains. Similarly, Massey writes that ‘what gives place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus’ (1993:66).

While at times the Aboriginal domain is pervaded with internal conflicts and competing agendas, on the Kakadu Board of Management there is a definite sense in which Aboriginal Board members, who represent land interests across the region, work together as a group representing Aboriginal interests in the Park. Within this forum, Aboriginal Board members disregard local antagonisms where it is necessary to retain the unity of the wider polity. Issues over which there is Aboriginal dispute, such as the future of mining in the region, are not discussed formally by the Board,
as it is felt that the role of the Board of Management is to make decisions on and monitor the management of Kakadu National Park. The Board is an example of a domain of Aboriginal decision-making that draws on an Aboriginal style of polity to negotiate and make decisions, while at the same time operating within the framework of a non-Aboriginal structure. It is an intercultural production, a joint product, which dispels any traditionalist notion of pure ‘cultural continuity’ (Merlan 1998:178).

However, as Merlan writes, in the post-1970s era, the administration of Aboriginal affairs in Australia has rested on ‘the assumption that Aboriginal cultural production continues to be autonomous from what previously sought to encompass or displace it’ (Merlan 1998:150). In the non-Aboriginal domain this characterisation of Aboriginal affairs is most obvious in public debates over the issue of land rights. Drawing on the work of Taussig (1993), Merlan argues that what transpires in the administration of Aboriginal affairs is a mimetic relationship where there is appeal to a ‘magical power of replication, the image affected by what it is an image of, wherein the representation shares in or takes power from the represented’ (Taussig 1993:2, quoted in Merlan 1998:150). In the non-Aboriginal domain, Aborigines are often required to prove their authenticity by demonstrating ‘the autonomy and long-standing nature of what is seen as their cultural production’ (Merlan 1998:150). In the political and judicial arena of land rights, Aborigines in the Kakadu region have been asked to prove the integrity of their long-standing cultural traditions to a non-Aboriginal judge. Aboriginal people have been interrogated in the attempt to reveal the extent of their knowledge about, and genealogical connection to, land estates in the Kakadu region in a way which ‘purports to operate as if it were only working to reveal something found and rescued, something old, without necessarily introducing transformation as part of its process’ (Merlan 1998:237). Merlan’s discussion of this imitative relationship within Aboriginal affairs concludes that representations of Aboriginality ‘as made most powerfully by others come to affect who and what Aborigines consider themselves to be’ (1998:150). In the light of this statement it is important to examine imitative relationships between anthropological representations of Kakadu’s Aboriginal society and the way in which they have influenced local Aboriginal considerations of their own relations to place and each other.
Within Kakadu National Park, the historical and present-day negotiations over land and Park management revolve around considerations of the physical landscape: who owns it and who has the right to make decisions about it. Ownership translates into the distribution of economic benefits to Aboriginal traditional owners. However, while the human-land relationship is integral to governance within the Aboriginal domain, this relationship is co-dependent for effectiveness on actual social relationships between people that transcend individual clan estates. Over the past twenty years of economic development in the region, an adjustment of social relationships has occurred in the Aboriginal domain that corresponds with a non-Aboriginal focus on authority derived through ownership of bounded land estates. As this shift has occurred it has happened, in part, at the expense of decision-making based on a network of social relationships. This is demonstrated by a case study of the Jabiluka mine dispute.

4.2. Alligator Rivers Stage I Land Claim

The claims of Aboriginal people in Alligator Rivers region were the first to be heard under the ALRA and for most people involved, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, there was a general optimism and excitement about the opportunities that such rights would create (Chaloupka, G. pers. comm.). The ALRA has established Aboriginal land ownership in the region through the application of criteria based on both local Aboriginal custom and tradition and on concepts which have been filtered through anthropological discourse (Keen 1984). Land claims over vacant Crown land made to an Aboriginal Land Commissioner must first provide proof of traditional Aboriginal owners under of Section 3 of the ALRA which defines ‘traditional Aboriginal owners’ in relation to land, as a local descent group of Aboriginal people who:

...have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under primary spiritual responsibility for that site; and...are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land.

31 Under the ALRA a Land Commissioner is appointed by the federal government on the advice of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. A Commissioner holds office for a period not exceeding three years (Neate 1989:191).
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As with all other land claims, the Aboriginal claimants in the Alligator Rivers Stage 1 Land Claim were required to substantiate how they fulfilled the criteria defining traditional owners. The first meeting held to give land claim evidence to the Ranger Inquiry was held at Mudjinberri outstation in September 1975. However, at this stage the NLC was not yet established as a statutory body and, consequently, was not yet fully resourced to advise on the preparation and presentation of the land claim. Following this initial meeting, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies requested that rock art historian, George Chaloupka, and anthropologist, Ian Keen, assist in the preparation of evidence relevant to land rights cases connected with the Alligator Rivers areas. Over a two-week period in late 1975, these two men travelled throughout the wider region to identify and interview traditional owners (Keen 1975). Chaloupka (1975) reported on the land-owning groups and their traditional territories and Keen (1975) concentrated on collecting evidence regarding land-owning groups and their membership. Given the time constraints, the initial research of Keen and Chaloupka relied heavily on information provided by a handful of traditional owners. Chaloupka reported that the majority of their informants had no idea of the meaning of land claims and were ‘bewildered by the knowledge that there are people making claims to their traditional lands’ (1975:13). Moreover, an examination of NLC files, from 1973 until this period, indicated to him that traditional owners had never been consulted over the issues of Kakadu National Park, the Woodward Land Rights hearings or the Ranger Inquiry (Chaloupka 1975:13).

The subsequent Land Claim hearings lasted a total of eight non-consecutive days during the period December 1976 to March 1977. Following these hearings, the Ranger Commissioners recognised that:

32 The following local descent groups claimed the Stage I area of Kakadu National Park: Bunitj gun-mogurrgurr (Gaagudju language), Mirrar gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Murrumburr gun-mogurrgurr (Mbukarla and Ngomburr), Mirrar gun-mogurrgurr (Erre), Wilirgu and Marramu gun-mogurrgurr (Buburnidja), Rol gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Bardimardi [Badmardi] gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Dadjbagu gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Garnditjbal gun-mogurrgurr (Mayaali), Jurkmanj [Yurlimayn] mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Kodjakandi gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Manilagarr gun-mogurrgurr (Urningangk), Wurigomgu [Wun.gomgul mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Regolo [Derkolo] mowurrwurr (Jawoyn), Djamgolor gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Wardjag gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), Warramal gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi), and Madalg [Madalk] gun-mogurrgurr (Gundjeihmi).
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As a consequence of the population movements, many of the people now living in the Region do not claim to be the traditional owners of land within the area. However, a number of residents of the Region do lay claim to tracts of land there, as do a number of Aboriginals living outside the region. Some residents and non-residents claim entitlement by Aboriginal tradition to use and occupancy of the land, without claiming ownership. (RUEI 1977a:39)

The Commissioners reported that about 800 people live in the Alligator Rivers region, about 600 of them at or near Oenpelli [Kunbarllanjnja] within the Arnhem Land reserve. It was estimated that about sixty-five people lived at Mudjinberri station and forty-four in the vicinity of Jim Jim creek. Other small groups were scattered around the proposed Park area. In addition to permanent residents, it was found that a number of Aborigines travel to the region every year, especially during the dry season, from centres such as Katherine, Pine Creek, Darwin, Croker Island, Goulburn Island and Maningrida (RUE1 1977a:39).

In their determination, the Commissioners identified 107 traditional owners, determined by patrilineal descent of eighteen clan (gun-mogurrgurr) territories of Stage I of Kakadu National Park (see Figure 8). In their findings on the criteria of traditional ownership, the Ranger Commissioners understood the term ‘local descent group’ to refer in the Alligator Rivers region to a group of persons who share with each other a common ancestry in the male line:

The group is commonly larger than a single family. The membership of the group is usually well known not only to members of the group themselves, but also to members of other groups. Land ownership in Aboriginal society is manifested in and determined primarily through members of local descent groups, which in Western Arnhem Land are called gunmugurgur [sic]. (RUEI 1977a:255)

The Commissioners acknowledged that the number of Aboriginals who are entitled to the use or occupation of that land is much greater than 107 persons, but stated that this figure could not be estimated with accuracy (RUEI 1977a:268). In regard to the stipulation in the ALRA that traditional owners of an area be found to share primary spiritual responsibility for that area, the Commissioners stated that:

Having carefully considered the evidence, we have formed the opinion that in general traditional spiritual affiliation with the land in the Region continues. It
Figure 8. Notional Aboriginal clan/language areas as prepared for the Ranger Inquiry (many of these names, spellings and locations are no longer considered accurate) (source: Lawrence 2000:143, see errata)
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tends to be stronger with the middle-aged and elderly, but can fairly be said to be present with all claimants, in some degree (RUEI 1977a:267).

4.2.1. Land Rights and the 'Jural Public'

The ALRA has traditionally relied heavily on anthropological interpretations to decide upon claims of Aboriginal land ownership in a region. In the Kakadu region, this claims process has further complicated diverse local Aboriginal concepts of land ownership and social relationships and has created inevitable tensions between local, outsider and emerging hybrid organisational domains. While more complex analyses of land tenure systems have now entered into anthropological discourse, the written definitions of Aboriginal land ownership enshrined in the ALRA have, to some extent, become reified concepts, interpreted through the filter of a Western imaginary. In the opinion of Keen for example, the definition of Aboriginal traditional owner, which has its origins in the orthodox model of Aboriginal land tenure in anthropology, has been 'interpreted by barristers and judges against a background of assumptions, principles and rules of statutory interpretation' which has failed to take cognizance of Indigenous criteria and resulted in arbitrary applications (1984:24).

The Kakadu region is comprised of a variety of different land tenure systems. For instance, many clans consist of more than one lineage and they may be patrilineal, matrilineal or ambilineal (Keen 1980b:66–67). Chaloupka suggests that across the Kakadu region the 'principle element of social organisation is a language group, which usually consists of a number of clans, and which is associated with more of less contiguous areas of land' (1985:54). Thus, affiliation with the Gaagudju language links clan groups across the coastal plains of Kakadu National Park, in the northwest region people are linked through the Limilngan (Minitja) language, to the east and in the centre it is the Mayali (including Kunwinjku and Gundjeihmi) language, and in the south the Jawoyn language.

Lawrence notes that at present three dominant languages are spoken in the Alligator Rivers region: Kunwinjku, Gundjeihmi and Jawoyn (2000:130). While there are nine languages identified by linguistic criteria in the region, additional language names which further differentiate these nine groups can be understood as having a social and territorial component in their meaning rather than defining a technically distinct language (Harvey 1992:11–13). See Evans (1991) and Harvey (1992) for a discussion of language groups, dialects and linguistic criteria applied in the Alligator Rivers region.
Figure 9. General indication of current language distribution in Kakadu (source: Lawrence 2000:142, see errata)
groups inter-relate, to variable extents, through shared social histories. Moreover, within these social groupings individuals have diverse social histories, reflective of the fact that the Aboriginal society in the region is a product of fragmentation and social disruption. Consequently, there are many elements that make up an individual’s social identity and many ways in which people create links with other individuals across clan, kinship, language and other social relations. The region’s social history, combined with complex cultural configurations and interrelationships, challenges the imposition of any rigid anthropological interpretations on the region.

Since the Ranger Inquiry there have been three more land claims in the Alligator Rivers region: the Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim in 1981 (Toohey 1981), the Jawoyn (Katherine Area) Land Claim in 1988 (Kearney 1988), and the Alligator Rivers Stage III Land Claims (combining two separate claims) in 1994 (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1995). These claims were heard over a period of two decades and a different Land Commissioner has heard each claim. Since the 1970s a substantial body of anthropological and legal literature, along with precedents from actual land claims, have substantially influenced the Land Commissioner’s appraisal of each of the subsequent land claims (see Neate 1989). Accordingly, the decisions made on land ownership, and the interpretations of the ALRA applied, vary markedly in each case.

In the Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim, Justice Toohey granted just 7 per cent of the total area under claim. The Land Claim heard evidence regarding land to the west of the South Alligator River (an area claimed previously before the Ranger Inquiry) and the unalienated Crown land formerly the subject of the Mudjinberri and Munmarlary pastoral leases (Toohey 1981:2). The claims were made according to models of traditional ownership based on primary land-owning units: east of the South Alligator River the claimants’ rights were based on clan affiliation: and west of the South Alligator River rights were asserted to be transferred through language group affiliation. Justice Toohey was satisfied that there were traditional Aboriginal owners, in terms of the Act, of those clan areas bordering Stage I of Kakadu National Park in the vicinity of the East Alligator River. These clan areas were identified as Bunidj [Bunitj], Mirrar Kundjey’mi [Mirrar Gundjeihmi] and Mirrar Erre. However, Toohey was not satisfied that ownership had been established in regard to the remaining sections (and the majority) of the claim. The effects of population loss
through disease and evidence of widespread population migration away from the region created difficulties for the Land Commissioner, who reported an overall 'lack of traditional owners, the absence of groups and uncertainty about country' (Toohey 1981:9). Toohey commented that the regional land tenure was subject to a considerable state of flux and that new arrangements evidenced in the land claim hearings, that assigned responsibilities for that land to certain people, were yet to become socially accepted in the wider Aboriginal community:

The burden of maintaining the land has fallen upon a few key persons and their families. In some cases, they have found the burden too hard to carry and have sought to share it or hand it over to others in the hope that the land, the places upon it, the paintings and other things of significance will continue to be cared for. Some of these arrangements are in a very embryonic stage. I agree with Dr Maddock's comment:

It may well be that this land claim has come at a time when the statutory significance of traditional ownership has stimulated some Aboriginals in attempts to determine the position of doubtful individuals but before their attempts have become generally known or accepted (Exhibit 116, p.7) (1981:41-42).

The land claim hearing for the Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim involved 49 days of hearings and intensive fieldwork (Von Sturmer 1984). Toohey's findings drew on a more thorough land claim preparation than had been possible given the time limitations in the Ranger Inquiry, and the number of Aboriginal claimants providing direct evidence in the Stage II Land Claim far exceeded that of the Ranger Inquiry. Paradoxically, given the greater Aboriginal involvement in the Stage II Claim, some of the Commissioner's findings were significantly at odds with what local Aboriginal people asserted to be their principles of land ownership. The result of this was that, despite local Aboriginal evidence to the contrary, the Land Commissioner ruled against the continuation of Aboriginal traditional ownership in the majority of the claim area. The reasons for this finding are embedded in Western concepts that deem physical presence of greater importance than local Aboriginal principles of land tenure. In 1977, Chaloupka gave evidence to the Ranger Commissioners that in Aboriginal philosophy:

...the land never becomes empty. The concept of dying out and a land being empty is our concept. Where Aborigines are concerned the land is never empty.
As soon as one clan dies out another clan assumes responsibility for that land and the sites within it. (Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim 1980:12,997)

Ian Keen (1984) writes that it was Toohey's focus on the lack of 'common spiritual affiliations' of claimants, and the lack of personal knowledge individuals had about the areas in question, that led to his rejection of the claim of traditional ownership. For instance, in his finding on the Dadjbaku gun-mogurrgurr, Toohey found the two claimants for this estate to have forfeited their right of traditional ownership as they had both effectively lived away from the Dadjbaku estate all their lives. Moreover, they had been raised in families who had affiliations to other estates outside the region. Ironically, this contradicted the finding of the Ranger Inquiry where the same two persons, who did not give evidence at that land claim hearing, were accepted as traditional owners as stated in the anthropologists' Land Claim evidence (RUEI 1977a). In 1981, after the persons concerned had given evidence at a Stage II Land Claim hearing, Toohey concluded that they could not be considered traditional owners of the land under claim as they 'possess no knowledge, physical or spiritual, of Dadjbaku except what they may have learned in connection with the hearing' (1981:25). This finding contradicted the assertions by senior members of neighbouring clans that the two claimants were members of a primary land-owning unit through patrilineal descent and, as such, were undoubtedly traditional owners for the area (1981:25). In contrast to Toohey's finding, Keen argues that:

In the Alligator River's region a person is not excluded from membership of a group, or denied rights in land on the grounds of ignorance. Infants and the senile as well as people who are incompetent for other reasons have an identity and possess rights in land on the basis mainly of filiation. Certain "spiritual connections" between a person and a site are entailed by membership of a group and in no way require that person's knowledge or belief. (1984:41)

For instance, Keen argues that the accepted doctrine of conception in local Aboriginal custom (as recognised in the Ranger Inquiry (RUEI 1977a:33)) contradicts Toohey's finding that, in order to have common spiritual affiliations to a site, members of a group must possess a level of knowledge about that site. Keen argues that Toohey's stance on this matter 'is neither internally consistent nor in accordance with Aboriginal custom' (1984:41). Keen suggests that reference to a clan group in Aboriginal philosophy 'does not refer simply to a collection of living
individuals, but to a complex abstract entity' (1984:40). As such, a variety of factors, which can include recognition of common descent, local systems of recruitment into a group by filiation and individual life histories can all determine the circumstances through which individuals are accepted as land owners under the particular Aboriginal custom of the area (Keen 1984:40). Keen defines the term *gunmogurrgurr* as ‘an entity which consists of land, a group of people and their dreamings. So that people speak of a place as being such and such *gunmogurrgurr*, and also of a person or group of people as so-and-so *gunmogurrgurr*’ (Keen 1978:1). This definition makes it clear that people, place and spirit are regarded as intimately connected in an Aboriginal relationship to *country* in the Alligator Rivers region, although these connections are made in a variety of ways and dependent on a number of factors. A common expression of collective clan identity in the region is that the individuals concerned ‘really belong to *country*’, to the plants and animals. It is this concept of ‘belonging’, to the land and each other, that ties together such social units.

In 1995, more than a decade after Toohey's finding in the Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim, a new Land Commissioner, Justice Grey, supported these local Aboriginal principles of spiritual affiliation in granting the Alligator Rivers Stage III Land Claim. Acknowledging the extenuating circumstances which had influenced the life histories of the Jawoyn land claimants and which had lead to a loss of physical attachment to the area under claim, Grey writes that:

> Ultimately, the existence of a spiritual affiliation on the part of a person is demonstrated by an assertion by that person, or by someone else who can be taken to have knowledge of the subject, of the existence of the affiliation and recognition by others who can be taken to have knowledge of the correctness of that assertion...If knowledge were the sole criterion of spiritual affiliation, it could be acquired by study, by a person who had no relationship to the land concerned by a criterion of descent. In a sense, spiritual affiliation is inherited. It may be lost or abandoned. If it is asserted, however, and the willingness is expressed to learn what that affiliation involves, then spiritual affiliation will be possessed by a person whose birth right it is. (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1995:43)

Many people considered to be traditional owners in the Kakadu region do not now, nor ever have lived in their clan estate, particularly if the estate is remote from
service centres and roads. Some younger people have never even visited their country. Others have had the chance to visit their country only when accompanying researchers for site surveys, land claims or other research trips (see for example Shultz 2000). Field-based research, including social and cultural research conducted by the Parks Australia, offers Aboriginal participants the opportunity to visit country and provide statements on historical and contemporary land ownership and, where relevant, succession to land ownership. This research is, even inadvertently, part of the political processes that position people around issues of land ownership. For example, field research which aims to record oral histories and site knowledge of an area provides opportunities for Aboriginal participants in the 'event' to influence history by making ‘truth’ statements regarding their knowledge of, and the relationship of themselves and others to, that country. In present-day circumstances meetings with others with interests in that country are often a crucial mediator between the self, country and others with rights in that country. One senior woman explained that although she was born on her country, she had lived most of her life in Katherine, Pine Creek and Darwin, so she had ‘nearly forgot that country, still go to meeting so I know that place’. She added with concern that her daughter, who was born in Darwin and now lives in Palmerston, ‘doesn’t come to meetings any more’.

Within local Aboriginal land tenure systems, which particular principles of tenure are emphasised and observed in any one instance or period of time may vary according to the context and historical circumstances. For instance, while the case of Alligator Rivers Stage III Land claim was determined through the morurrwurr system of patrilineal descent, this finding differs from the Jawoyn (Katherine Area) Land Claim heard in 1988. Claims to traditional ownership in the latter case were assessed on the basis of language group affiliation to country. The Jawoyn (Katherine Area) Land Claim evidence prepared by Merlan and Rumsey states that 'the Jawoyn are a descent group in that affiliation to Jawoyn territory (and hence membership of the group) is determined by filiation: one becomes Jawoyn by being born to (or adopted by) a Jawoyn father and /or mother' (1982:36). In part, the adoption of the language group model was a matter of convenience in the land claim process (Green Ant Research, Arts and Publishing 1994:45–46). However, the claimants in the Alligator Rivers Stage III Land Claim asserted that the land tenure principles of morurrwurr affiliation continued to apply to their region.
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Commissioner Grey accepted this and subsequently granted the claim to the Gunlom Land Trust on behalf of three *mowurrwurrs*: Wurrkbarbar, Bolmo and Matjba.

As the number of people who claim membership of one of these *mowurrwurrs* has increased, other factors have become recognised locally as important in the recognition of rights to land. For instance, since many of these people have never lived on *country* and have grown up elsewhere, senior land owners are encouraging them to learn about *country* and begin returning to establish outstations and become involved in managing the area. This trend is particularly significant in Stage III of Kakadu National Park, as there has not been a permanent Jawoyn community present in the area for a long time. By returning to live on *country*, people who have grown up elsewhere can develop their inchoate rights in land (see Langton 1999).

What are locally accepted as the principles of recognition of an individual's or group's rights in land vary according to specific contexts. Political sensitivities surround issues of traditional ownership when the claims of some people are seen by others to be marginal or simply false. It is an issue that often arises between long-term Aboriginal residents and Aboriginal newcomers to Kakadu National Park when the latter lay claim to a familial connection to *country* that is disputed by other landowners. Issues of the exclusion or inclusion of these people or families are often protracted, but are eventually dealt with in most cases by formal or informal recourse to the older generation of long-term Aboriginal Park residents who have detailed memories of the region's social history.

In making his determination in a dispute over an area of land in the vicinity of the Koongarra mineral lease in the central Kakadu National Park region, Justice Muirhead stated that determining who are traditional owners is a 'delicate and complex' issue. Keen, in his report on traditional Aboriginal ownership in the area of the Koongarra lease, refers to the notion of the jural public:

> If a person's rights or powers rest on some affiliation, identity or status it must be accorded and agreed to by some group. If that status is warranted by statements of fact about past events, human or spiritual, those statements are given their truth value by some community. Whatever form the community or group has I will call it here the 'jurid public'...A jurid public permits and
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constrains by recognising or according rights, and by withholding such recognition. Politics are involved of course, but so are rules, principles and reasons. (1982:51, quoted in Levitus 1991:165)

Anthropological determinations on traditional ownership that are made independently of what Keen has termed the 'jural public' are often a cause of friction within the Aboriginal domain and in some cases between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal anthropological 'experts' (see, for example, Media Monitors 2000). Bill Neidjie, a senior traditional owner in the Kakadu region, referring to the Alligator Rivers Stage II Land Claim and what he calls his 'argument with that judge, Justice Toohey', expressed exasperation at the land claim process as it interferes with local Aboriginal governance:

Get people, clan each why that. One clan, one clan, wrong clan, wrong clan. Our people was here no matter what clan. They used to come in, come in. You made this white man you make more trouble. You want to leave 'em, leave us alone. We know what we doing. And land claim, know lot of you, know lot of country and map and all that, all that you know, all that bullshit business. I say the first people, Macassan people, they never ask this question, business like this. [Why is there so much focus on interrogating peoples' relationship to the land. Our people were always here, moving around. White people set up all these criteria. We know our own system. In land claims white people focus on their own knowledge and maps and expect us to fit in with their way of doing things. Macassan people never asked us these questions.]

The above quote implies that the constant need for a judge to settle land claims is insulting to Aboriginal law. Similarly, another traditional owner commented, 'Why should Bininj have to prove themselves to Balanda law'. Anthropologist Nicholas Peterson (1982:455) writes that '[t]raditional owners are still in the invidious position of having their rights to land and knowledge of their own Law questioned and challenged in an adversarial situation' and that this will remain while the legal system of the majority culture determines the nature and limits of land rights in Australia. In such a situation, many Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region remain concerned that the potential for legislative change to the ALRA and other relevant

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Government legislation could see their rights in land diminished or even taken away from them.

4.2.2. Land Rights and the Domain of the National Park

While judgements made within the domain of the Aboriginal jural public may be influenced by the politics of a given situation (Sutton 1995:41), this is also true of judgements made by Land Commissioners. The Land Commissioner and associated structures of public policy validate land claimants' rights according to what they deem to be acceptable circumstances surrounding the recognition of claimants. Pressures applied by third-party claims of detriment to existing or proposed patterns of non-Aboriginal land usage in a region, and the social and political context particular to each claim, will also influence the findings of the Land Commissioner.

For example, validating the finding of a land claim subject to the creation of a national park demonstrates 'acceptable’ land rights for the majority culture. In all the land claim cases in the Alligator Rivers region, a successful claim finding has been subject to the condition that the land would be leased back to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife for incorporation into Kakadu National Park.35 Likewise, in the Jawoyn (Katherine Area) Land Claim, Justice Kearney recommended that the Katherine Gorge National Park continue to be a Park for the benefit of all Australians (Lawrence 2000:149).

In the Alligator Rivers Stage III Land Claim, Commissioner Grey cited the membership of three of the senior Jawoyn claimants on the Kakadu Board of Management as encouraging his decision to grant the land to the claimants.36 Commissioner Grey writes that, considering the issue of the claimants’ involvement in National Park management, he had the clear impression that there was ‘a strong desire to consult on the part of park management and a strong willingness to assist in the management of the park on the part of the claimants’ (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1995:59). In his finding on strength of attachment of the claimants,

35 The ALRA Section 12 (2B) was amended in 1978, making the delivery of a deed of grant in respect of land in the Alligator Rivers Region inextricably linked to the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975 (Toohey 1981:51). The grants of land in all three Alligator Rivers Land Claims were subject to the condition that the Land Trust grant a lease of the land to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife to hold as a national park.

36 The region had been declared as Kakadu National Park Stage III in 1987.
Grey found that '[t]he desire to be involved in the management of the land as a national park is indicative of strength of attachment' (Aboriginal Land Commissioner 1995:59).

The implicit assumption made by Commissioner Grey is that national park management and Aboriginal land management are harmonious processes. It is assumed that those with a strong attachment to their land will also be attached to the idea of managing it as a national park. However, linking Aboriginal land claims to participation in national park management places Aboriginal traditional owners in a potentially compromised situation. On the one hand, Aboriginal sites of significance and the traditional owners responsible for the area face potential threats from inevitable national park developments, such as tourism. On the other hand, as Robert Levitus argued in regard to the Jawoyn, traditional owners are moving on 'two rather distinct historical trajectories, one of increasing control over access to their land, the other of apparently potential access to money in the form of mining royalties after a lifetime of unpaid work' (RAC 1991, vol. 1:181). For instance, Jawoyn traditional owners on the Kakadu Board of Management place their highest priority on the establishment of more outstations in Stage III of the Park, rather than on Park management issues per se. Some of the outstations that they wish to establish are located at prime tourist locations and this fact, combined with the Jawoyn's own aspirations for the development of tourism on their land, may conflict with the conservation and tourism management aspirations of Parks Australia.

To link the granting of land claims to Western ideals of a national park places onerous expectations on Aboriginal landowners in the public domain. While the region remains leased to the Commonwealth as a national park, Aboriginal people's ability to exercise their own objectives for the area is limited. Lawrence, in his assessment of the impact of the Jawoyn Land Claim process and the trauma of the Resource Assessment Commission Inquiry (1991) into mining at Coronation Hill, concludes that:

For the Jawoyn, coordination of work on complex land management problems, such as tourism, mining and pastoralism, extends beyond the narrow confines of national park management. The dilemma continues to lie in reconciling a desire to care for traditional country, in order to maintain social and cultural identity and provide a secure base for cultural renewal, while finding a way to
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provide economic and political security within the capitalist economy of the majority culture. (Lawrence 2000:166)

Similar issues are also evident in other parts of Kakadu National Park. In 1999, the NLC made a request, on behalf of Aboriginal claimants, to the Commonwealth Government that the remaining Crown land in Stages II and III of Kakadu National Park be scheduled as Aboriginal land. It is uncertain whether this request will succeed, given that maintaining the legal status of Crown land in 50 per cent of the Park provides the Commonwealth Government greater leverage to influence the future management of the Park. There are also special purpose leases under claim within the Stage I region that are excluded from the Park proper. A successful claim over land such the Cooinda Hotel lease area would not be conditional on reversion to a lease with the Director of National Parks. In these instances, the Aboriginal claimants may or may not decide not to include this land within the Park area. A decision not to include that land within the Park lease would give traditional owners the autonomy to set their own agenda for the use and development of these areas.

4.3. Economic Development and the Domain of the Traditional Owner

As far as Land Rights goes it was strange when we heard the Government planned to give us our land back, when we saw Gough Whitlam and Malcom Fraser talking about ‘giving us the land back’. We always thought this was our land. It was always our land.

Another shock was other Aboriginal people coming in. They brought alcohol and rubbish. Patonga airstrip camp never existed before. Suddenly it was like Christmas for people with all the royalty money. It changed our life.

(Traditional Owner, Kakadu National Park)

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, successive land claims in the region, along with the development of services associated with a mining town and the National Park, attracted many Aboriginal people back to the Alligator Rivers region. Some of these people were those recognised as traditional owners in the land claims, others had familial or historical connections to the region. Some were ‘outsiders’ with no attachment to the area attracted by the developments and employment opportunities (see also Altman & Smith 1990). The growth of the region's population and economy has also been accompanied by political disputes within the Aboriginal domain. Mining, tourism and National Park developments have created opportunities
in the region for economic advancement and the politics of Aboriginal land tenure in
the region has been influenced according to these opportunities. Frictions have arisen
over issues such as which people are considered to be Aboriginal traditional owners
and who has rights to receive royalty and rental monies from the mine and the Park.

In this changed situation, where there are now very many economic considerations
relating to land claims and an individual or family's affiliation with a particular
landowning group, conflicts arise for which there are no clear solutions. The Jawoyn
Association discusses the issue of group membership in their publication titled,
*Rebuilding the Jawoyn Nation*:

> In most cases, where people have had uninterrupted contact with Jawoyn
country this has not been problematic. However for many Jawoyn people and
their descendants who were "stolen" under government policies of assimilation,
people's "Jawoyn-ness" is often uncertain. Anthropological and other
information has resolved the matter in a number of cases; in other cases
people's recognition has not been forthcoming as Jawoyn people just "don't
know" whether people are of Jawoyn descent or not. Since the availability of
park rent money and other royalties, this issue has been one of considerable
importance. (Green Ant Research, Arts and Publishing 1994:47)

Moreover, judgments on land ownership made by an Aboriginal jural public are
potentially compromised when decisions are made in the context of developments on
Aboriginal land (such as mining or tourism operations) that involve resource use and
the transfer of economic benefits to landowners. In the 1980s, Smith suggested that
in some respects the value of land in the region is no longer an Aboriginal one, but
one established by outsiders' economic interests (1984:91). Likewise Keen
(1980a:184) anticipated that in the Alligator Rivers region the influx of money
capital 'may provide the basis for more enduring and radical social differentiation'
than was the case in the past. As Keen predicted, the influx of money capital and
disputes over the distribution of the associated economic benefits has had a profound
influence in the Aboriginal social domain in the Kakadu region. Mandy Muir, a
young Murumburr descendent who grew up in the region, explained that:

> The mine is there. I don't care. It brought so much. I've been involved in
politics—I don't like what it's bringing to our people. I hate it. It divided our
community. We were like one. No enemies. We all grew up together. Then the
mine and money came. People say you can get jobs, do this and that. Personally I don’t like it. It brings some good but a lot of bad. I’ve seen a lot of good people pass away from alcohol due to the [Jabiru Sports and Social] Club.

We’re all divided now. The only time people get together is for cards. My grandmother gets us out hunting. But for other mobs life revolves around the Club.

The formation of Aboriginal associations to manage the distribution of mining royalty equivalents has at times been a subject of intense social and political dispute. In 1979, when membership was being considered for the formation of a regional Aboriginal association, the findings of the Alligator Rivers Stage I Land Claim and the criteria applied to determine traditional ownership were tested from a local Aboriginal perspective. The new Gagudju Association was to be incorporated to receive mining royalty equivalents from the Ranger mine. Association membership is not bound by definitions of traditional owners, as stated in the ALRA. Rather, membership is determined by local Aboriginal principles that allocate rights to resources; these principles may or may not accord with the definition of Aboriginal traditional owner under the ALRA. In the spirit of Aboriginal self-determination, the NLC officers facilitating the formation of the Gagudju Association took a more general approach to membership criteria than the Ranger Commissioners did in their finding on Aboriginal traditional owners (Levitus 1991). A series of advertised meetings was held to document all those with significant traditional attachments to the Alligator Rivers region. Levitus writes:

The matter of Association membership was thus brought to the attention of an Aboriginal public drawn from a very wide area. NLC field officers took the attitude that these gatherings would adjudicate fairly on the status of

37 Since 1978, five more Aboriginal associations have been incorporated to represent people with interests in the Kakadu region. These are the Jawoyn Association (incorporated 1985) that represents among its constituents the Jawoyn-speaking people connected to the south of the Park and four smaller associations: the Djabulukgu Association, the Minitja Aboriginal Corporation, the Gundjejmi Aboriginal Corporation and the Bumbartluk Aboriginal Corporation. The Djabulukgu Association (incorporated 1982) was formed to represent the interests of traditional owners of the Jabiluka mineral lease, the Minitja Aboriginal Corporation (incorporated 1994) represents the Limilingan-speaking people from the west of the northern coastal plains, the Gundjejmi Aboriginal Corporation (incorporated 1995) represents the interests of the Mirrar Gundjejmi clan in the central region of the Park and the Bumbartluk Aboriginal Corporation (incorporated 1999) represents the interests of the three Jawoyn clan groups which comprise the Gunlom Land Trust. Many members of the Gagudju Association are also members of one of these smaller associations. The Minitja and Bumbartluk Aboriginal Corporations are the only associations that have not received mining monies.
prospective members. There was no independent checking of the territorial or genealogical connections of people put forward for membership, though the second meeting rejected one large family from Darwin. The original list of 107 people [as settled by the Ranger Commissioners] was expanded to 242...Grounds for membership had thus expanded in an ad hoc and opportunistic manner, well beyond the test of primary traditional ownership applied in the Ranger land claim. (1991:157-158)

According to Levitus (1991), because of the selective recognition of external connections and the admittance of groups with tenuous attachments to the region, a geographically incoherent membership emerged in these meetings. He argues that this membership was formed by an admissions procedure driven by momentary contingencies or sectional lobbying derived from the composition of the meetings themselves. Many of the people attending the meetings came from the east inside Arnhem Land. These people constituted themselves as being in ‘company’ relationships, through shared gun-mogurrurr name or shared language, with the Constituent clans in the Kakadu Region. However, Levitus reports that ‘some local people commented with disgust that these outside groups had nothing to do with the Kakadu area or that they had ‘never set foot in this country’ (1991:159). These tensions continued until 1981 when the incorporated Gagudju Association formed a Committee led by two senior land owners who strongly resisted ‘expansionary land ownership incursions from Western Arnhem Land’ (Altman 1997:181).

While Levitus (1991) suggests that the Gagudju membership list drawn up in 1979 was badly negotiated by the NLC field officers, this situation is also an example of the complexity involved in making any determinations on ‘significant attachment’ to land and resources in the broader Aboriginal social domain. In establishing membership for the Gagudju Association, connections to the Ranger region were established through an assortment of genealogical connections, intermarriage, clan relationships or shared dreamings (Levitus 1991:157). Levitus concludes that had this approach to traditional ownership been pursued to its logical limits, not just to the east but in a number of directions outside the Park, membership would have become much larger still (1991:158). While there had been no prior agreement on the kind of traditional connection necessary to qualify for membership, other long-
time residents in the Park, such as those who had lived in the region since the era of buffalo hide industry, were not included in the Association.\textsuperscript{38}

In the 1980s, the Gagudju Association Committee was able to stabilise the Association membership by using the precedent set by land claims in relation to Aboriginal traditional ownership. This position tended towards an exclusionary approach to the recognition of entitlements to Association membership and has strengthened the requirement that ‘traditional owners’ demonstrate their direct patrilineal lineage as defined by the Ranger Commissioners in the Alligator Rivers Stage I Land Claim. However, in 1987, non-member Aboriginal residents in the Park were given access to Association services including housing, electricity, health and food delivery (Levitus 1991:161). Moreover, membership was extended to those whose long-term residence and attachment to the region was considered by the Committee to be strong enough to warrant Association membership. These attachments included an individual’s place of birth, their residential and work history, where they were married, where their children were raised and their knowledge of country. However, the establishment of the Ranger mine was taken as the cut-off date for membership granted through the recognition of long-term residence and attachment. This decision was made in order to avert claims for membership by non-traditional owners attracted to the area by post-mine developments. Despite this, Levitus argues that:

In due course all those with a substantial pre-mining residential history will die out, and the Association will have to look again at the question of acknowledging the long-standing residence that some people will by then have maintained in the mining area. Different principles may then be called for, when the mine has ceased operations, royalty income has stopped, the Association is living off its own accumulated capital base, and the principle of compensation/rent has a less direct bearing on local affairs. (1991:166)

While it is not my purpose to discuss processes surrounding the distribution of mining monies, Levitus’s argument is useful in shedding light on the interconnected

\textsuperscript{38} Although, the legal opinion of at least one expert at the time, was that the ALRA designates residence as the relevant criterion for membership of a royalty-receiving association (see Levitus 1991:160). Levitus (1991:161) states that this issue raised both legal and political issues for the newly-formed Gagudju Association.
domains of Aboriginal and European polity in Western Arnhem Land. Levitus draws on the work of Kesteven (1983, 1984a) to argue that by simply combining European organisational and economic structures with Aboriginal decision-making practices ‘the unfettered play of local processes can lead to wasteful, incoherent and anomalous outcomes from which resentments emerge’ (1999:126). Levitus argues that primacy in the instance of royalty distribution needs to be given to the ‘the imposition of an ethnographically-informed constitutionality’ to achieve a culturally relevant and administratively workable outcome (Levitus 1991:168).

An ‘ethnographically informed constitutionality’, which seeks to draw boundaries around group membership, can create its own tensions. These tensions will emerge from the imposition of ethnographic interpretations which purport to replicate Aboriginal customary law, but which in reality make ‘new demands of absoluteness and systemacity’ on Aboriginal affiliations (Merlan 1997:13). Rather than corrupting an existing system of traditional land tenure and social relationships, it imposes another layer of complexity onto an already multi-layered political process. Certain individuals or groups in certain situations will be able to employ these imposed structures effectively to achieve outcomes they desire. In other situations, conflict will arise within and between the Aboriginal and European political understandings, according to the recognised principles of each domain and the politics of the situation.

Von Sturmer (1984) writes that Woodward, and subsequently the Ranger Commissioners, did not anticipate that there would be conflicts over land. It was imagined that immutable facts or rules governed Aboriginal land ownership. The Ranger Commissioners stated that ‘evidence shows that it would be highly unusual for an Aboriginal person to lie about traditional ownership of clan areas and matters connected therewith’ (RUEI 1977a:257). Yet economic developments on Aboriginal land do introduce a new political dimension into the processes of determining land ownership. Von Sturmer concludes:

The reality is that there are conflicts; that some [people] do seek advantages over others; and that certain tracts of land become more valuable depending on the resources seen to flow from them. (1984:284)

For example, Levitus (1991) suggests that part of the explanation for the quick assertion of their rights to membership of the Gagudju Association on the part of
groups east of the Kakadu region was their prior experience with the distribution of money from the Narbalek mine in June 1979. He writes that ‘Arnhem Landers presumably had a clearer notion of what was to be gained from the new Association than did people to the south and west’ (Levitus 1991:158). After the first distribution of monies from Ranger mine, people from these other areas also sought membership of the Association.

While much has been written on disputes over mining monies (see for example Altman 1997; Kesteven 1984a; Levitus 1991, 1999), social relationships in the Aboriginal domain in Kakadu region are also strained by tourism developments and management of the National Park. This includes issues about who has the right to be consulted and make decisions about the management of different areas of the Park.

4.3.1. The Human–Land Relationship

The 1998 *Kakadu National Park Plan of Management* identified ‘local circumstances’ and Park staff turnover as issues affecting the Park administration’s knowledge about which Aboriginal people to consult in decisions affecting *country*. It states that in future, Parks Australia:

> ...will review the information it has available about traditional ownership of land in the park and responsibility for decision-making for different parts of the park. Parks Australia will ask the Northern Land Council to produce a land interest reference for Kakadu that can help park staff identify the Bininj/Mungguy39 who should be consulted about management of different parts of the park. (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:50)

The NLC declined the request to produce a land interest reference list for the use of Parks Australia. The NLC has an unwritten agreement with Parks Australia that they will assist in identifying the people which the Park administration should be consulting over any particular *country*. However, in response to development proposals on Aboriginal Land Trust land, it is the Land Councils’ statutory duty to identify traditional owners, to secure their involvement in consultations and

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39 *Mungguy* is a Jawoyn word which can mean man, male, person or Aboriginal people depending on the context.
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negotiations, and to obtain informed consent.\footnote{If the development proceeds, all these traditional owners will be entitled to share in any economic benefit.} It is impossible to draw up a definitive list of those who should be included in any given decision, as this will vary according to the type of issue being discussed and the relationship of that issue to the wider socio-political situation.

Due to constraints such as time and resources, the majority of Park management consultations between Parks Australia and Aboriginal traditional owners occur without the direct assistance of the NLC. These consultations take place with Aboriginal people believed by Parks Australia to be the constituent members of landowning groups. However, land management consultations that rely on fixed understandings of who has rights to speak for what land, along with attempts to demarcate land boundaries between social groups to provide clarity in the consultation process, have the potential to create problematic outcomes. For example, when discussing his 1998 consultancy report which sought to identify, for Park management purposes, the Jawoyn boundary area in Kakadu National Park, Levitus remarked that within the Aboriginal domain the dimension of socio-geographical relations complicates other attributes of basic language affiliation and ownership of country. Levitus found that neighbouring clan and language groups in the research area were generally imprecise in the interpretation of their respective land interests. This was due to the long history of social relationships between the Jawoyn and Gundjeihmi language groups (this issue is further discussed in Chapter Six in relation to management of bushwalking activities in the Kakadu escarpment). At times, informants expressed frustration to Levitus at the ‘un-Aboriginality’ of defining an administrative boundary to determine land ownership. Moreover, informants wished to establish the mutual exchange and social relations between these neighbouring groups, before specifying distinct rights and affiliations to particular places (Levitus, R. pers. comm.). A demonstration of the Aboriginal protocol of emphasising what is shared rather than what divides (Harvey 1992; Williams 1986).

Levitus found that the influence of these socio-geographic interpretations on the identification of people with areas of land, combined with a radical loss of traditional
knowledge due to a history of depopulation and movement in the region, made it impossible to clarify the exact location and extent of respective clan estates. While he found that there are specific claims that are, or might be, made by certain clans over particular sites in the Jawoyn/Gundjeihmi boundary zone, he found that the boundary area is generally characterised now by mixed affiliation of both Jawoyn and Gundjeihmi language groups. However, when comparing those people consulted by Park management with anthropological data regarding traditional ownership of particular sites within the boundary area, Levitus found that the Park management consultations confined the area considered to be a boundary area of mixed affiliation to a much narrower range than that supported by the anthropological data. This suggests that Park management, in seeking administrative clarity, find it easier to avoid grappling with less precise socio-geographical boundaries.

Levitus's research shows the tendency of the Park administration to make consultations based on reified notions of land ownership, which excluded the consideration of actual social relationships and arrangements between people. These management consultations carried out by Parks Australia are important as they create precedents whereby people are asked to speak for or about country, and these statements then become part of the historical record which could be used to add political weight to an individual's or group's future claims to land. The social processes and politics surrounding land ownership do not freeze with the establishment of a national park; people's ongoing involvement in the management of country in the Park is part of the personalised multi-dimensional process whereby people assert identification with country. Hence, when the same people are continually asked by Parks Australia to make management decisions, frictions may arise in the Aboriginal domain. As Lawrence writes, '[s]eniority in the park service does not provide automatic rights to speak for country and at times local Aboriginal concepts of rights and responsibilities in land management are compounded by the hierarchical nature of the bureaucracy (Lawrence 2000:280). Lawrence writes that at 'the heart of the problem is a lack of understanding, on the part of non-Aboriginal people, of traditional criteria for acknowledging responsibility for making decisions about land' (2000:248). At the same time, Levitus's informants also indicated that assigning responsibility for land management was not purely based on an assessment of primary land ownership, but
also on consideration of which individuals and families with interests in that land were capable of exercising that management responsibility (Levitus, R. pers. comm.). Consultations by Parks Australia staff with local Aboriginal people unavoidably become a part of the politics of land tenure in the Aboriginal domain.

Similarly, Von Sturmer (1984) is critical of the Ranger Inquiry's original and influential focus on what he calls the 'man-land relations' in the region, with its tendency to view issues before it in an exclusively land-based manner. He sees the focus on the spiritual or religious bond between people and land (as required under the terms of the ALRA) as unnecessarily divorced from actual social relations. In reality, he writes, people-people relations are more important than people-land relations, as the former defines the latter:

"Spirituality, religion, knowledge, affectivity, as expressed in land, can be seen as the history of practice, as the activity relations of people with each other, in the social, political and economic arenas, written onto the land. (Von Sturmer 1984:45)"

The primacy placed by the Ranger Commission on the gun-mogurrgurr and the ownership of land estates reifies the concept as one referring to a 'land-owning group', when the important function of the gun-mogurrgurr is to structure people relationships. In this way gun-mogurrgurr membership constitutes a particular focus of social relations played out in the region. Von Sturmer terms this the host-guest relationship:

"The hosts may be seen as exercising certain rights over and responsibilities for their guests. There is an acknowledgment by the guests of the owners' right to have authority and to play host; a right reinforced by the spiritual linkage which is posited between the hosts and their land. (Von Sturmer 1984:39)"

While hosts and their guests share in the land resources, there is a strong differentiation in rights and privileges. However, the inclusiveness of the founding membership of the Gagudju Association (whatever its administrative problems) suggests that local social structures and relationships are created by applying the notion of gun-mogurrgurr in a broad and opportunistic manner. Thus, there are a variety of means through which one may assert the category of host. As Keen writes:

"In my experience there are few unequivocally bounded sets in Aboriginal social organisation. Even in the clearest instances of land tenure there are invariably"
people who have dual or ambiguous status, and other groups or individuals who
can also make a claim on some basis or other. (1982:60, quoted in Levitus
1991:163)

In some senses, the post-contact history of the region brought with it such a degree
of social upheaval that the clan system has lost much of its saliency as an effective
means of social organisation (Harvey 1992). While in the 1970s and 1980s the
Aboriginal population in the region has been re-established, socio-political
organisation is largely reliant on reconstructed clan and land ownership systems.
Some traditional social structures have been drastically affected, such as the
traditional system of marriage exchanges between local gun-mogurrgurr which is
now less operative as people marry other Aboriginal people outside their region or
non-Aboriginal people (Neidjie, B. pers. comm.). In the past, the basis of land
ownership was held to a large degree in the esoteric knowledge of ceremony and it
was out of ceremony that people maintained and extended social relationships
between clans. These regional ceremonies ceased as the area suffered population
decline and as other people with different ceremonies appeared with population
migration from the east. Some families have recently renewed the practice of
travelling outside the local region to participate in ceremonies such as the Kunapipi
ceremony in Kunbarllanjnja. However, the Kunapipi ceremony itself is an
introduction brought from areas further to east by eastern Kunwinjku speakers (see

Ironically, given its present lack of social saliency as the structural basis of
exchange between groups, the clan system has in two respects become more
prominent as a means of social differentiation: at an ideological level it is a provider
of spiritual identity for its members, and at a practical level it is central to the
distribution of economic resources (see also Harvey 1992). Moreover, because the
economic developments occurring in Kakadu National Park have focused on the
exploitation of land and natural resources (the National Park and mining), it is the
links between people and land that have achieved prominence in the expression of
relationships in the administrative domain at the expense of people–people
relationships and exchanges.

Increasingly, within the Aboriginal domain itself, conflict over resource use and the
distribution of benefits has also resulted in a greater importance being placed on
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human–land relationships. Harvey suggests that when friendly social relations are
the norm, the organisational emphasis is placed on factors that unite people, ‘and
factors which divide people into segmentary property owning groups are
downplayed’ (1992:32). He substantiates this argument by drawing on the work of
Williams (1986:83–84) who comments in the context of Yolngu use of the boundary
concept that:

If a Yolngu person professes a lack of precise knowledge about a boundary or
refrains from stating its precise details, it may mean that relations between
owners on opposite sides of the boundary are amicable...Conversely,
describing a boundary in great detail may reflect a dispute about its
location...Reticence to locate precise boundaries may even indicate concern
about the consequences of doing so, that is, of challenging existing harmonious
relations.

The social and political tensions endured in the last two decades of economic
development in Kakadu National Park have culminated in these land boundaries
being drawn (see KRSIS 1997a). Relationships that clans and individuals maintained
across the social spectrum have suffered at the expense of the (public) primacy of
corporate clan affiliation and an inward gaze. This process is illustrated in an
analysis of the controversy surrounding the development of the second uranium mine
in the Kakadu region, Jabiluka.

4.4. Jabiluka and Decision-Making within the Aboriginal Domain

Since 1997, the Mirrar Gundjehmi clan, comprising twenty-seven traditional owners
whose clan estate encompasses the Ranger and Jabiluka mineral leases, and their
local representative body, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, has led a public
campaign opposing the development of the Jabiluka mine. In 1982 an agreement
authorising the development of the Jabiluka mine was signed between a now
deceased Mirrar traditional owner and the Pancontinental mining company. In 1991
the Pancontinental lease was sold to Energy Resources of Australia, the operators of
the currently operating Ranger uranium mine. In 1996 the election of a Federal
Coalition Government reversed the Labor Government’s ‘three mines’ policy, which
had previously placed a moratorium on all new uranium mining ventures in Australia
and which had prevented the development of the Jabiluka mine beyond the
agreement stage. However, a new generation of senior landowners contested the
validity of the original lease and attempted to halt the construction of the Jabiluka mine. Widespread social impacts alleged to be the result of the construction of the Ranger mine and the service town of Jabiru were, and continue to be, cited by landowners as reasons to halt the construction of the new mine. Moreover, they are concerned about the violation of a sacred site in the mineral lease area, and they have environmental concerns regarding the wastewater management practices at the two mine sites. Traditional owners of the Jabiluka mineral lease have made appeals that under Australian law (under the provisions of the ALRA) and under Aboriginal law, Aboriginal rights to speak for country invalidate the lease, which they say was signed by the senior traditional owner’s father only under severe duress. Meanwhile, there are other Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region who publicly support the Jabiluka mine development.

In 1997, when she was asked by a journalist to clarify the issue of whether or not the Aboriginal community in Kakadu was divided over mining development, Gundjehmi Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Jacqui Katona, replied that the issue was not about ‘community’. Rather, she stated, it is about traditional owners that have a right to the site as stipulated in the Aboriginal Land Rights Act of the Northern Territory (‘Radio National AM’ 21 Aug. 1997). Under this sanction, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation has led the Jabiluka protest campaign with a clear public relations strategy emphasising an unequivocal ‘no’ to the development of the mine from the Mirrar traditional owners. The Mirrar website states that:

Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation is an organisation established, managed and controlled by the Mirrar independently of any agenda influenced by mining. The establishment of the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation occurred due to our people’s dissatisfaction with the jurisdictional and institutional arrangements on our land, including our ability to exercise our rights under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Mirrar Online: http://www.mirrar.net/pages/mirrar.htm).

In 1996 the NLC decided that the ‘area affected’ by the Ranger Mine operations should be defined on the basis of direct physical impact. It subsequently determined

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41 Pan Continental mining company discovered the Jabiluka uranium deposit in 1972. It contains 90 000 tonnes of uranium and is the world’s biggest undeveloped deposit. The deposit is estimated to be worth up to $8 billion to Australia’s economy. The Jabiluka site has a 28-year mine life.
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that area as consisting of the Ranger mineral lease, the Jabiru town lease, and the Magela floodplain to the confluence of the Magela Creek with the East Alligator River (KRSIS 1997a:39). This finding, which placed the ‘area affected’ largely within the estate of the Mirrar Gundjehmi clan, allowed Ranger Mine royalty equivalent payments to be paid to, or on the financial direction of, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, rather than directly to the Gagudju Association as in the past. However, the Mirrar website makes clear that ‘[i]n exercising these rights and interests we are guided by our obligations and responsibilities to other bininj affected by Mirrar decisions about Mirrar country in accordance with customary law tradition’ (Mirrar Online: http://www.mirrar.net/pages/mirrar.htm). Despite this guarantee, the events surrounding the payment of mining royalty equivalents have generated significant tension and mistrust amongst the region’s Aboriginal population that comprise the Gagudju Association.

This tension surrounds not only the distribution of present mining monies, but also the future development of mining in the region. Some Aboriginal clan leaders have vocally supported the further development of mining in the region, regarding it as a way out of the current poverty that most Aboriginal people in the region are living in. These Aboriginal people consider mining at Jabiluka to be a fait accompli and think it prudent that Aboriginal clans in the region begin negotiating with the mining company to strike the best deal for Aboriginal regional development. Across the National Park border in Western Arnhem Land, Aboriginal traditional owners of other estates have approved exploration licence agreements, including exploration for uranium, for 60 per cent of that region (Yunupingu 1998; see also Ceresa 1998).

In a public address in Darwin in 1999, Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation CEO, Jacqui Katona, argued that any imposed European economic development is counterproductive to the needs and aspirations of the Mirrar. She argued that the Mirrar seek to ‘break the bonds of economic assimilation’, and explained that:

In fact the Mirrar are currently devising a new economic model for their country. It is an economic model which rejects the “top down” dominance of white business interests and replaces it with a system in which the main sources of economic control are individual clan groups—respecting the primacy of Traditional Owner decision-making but acting collectively to wield their yet to be realised economic power.
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The fact is that the Traditional Owners of the North Kakadu region own one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on this planet—any notion that this cannot be converted into a viable Aboriginal economy runs contrary to the very economic theories which have been used to brow beat us in the past. (1999:10)

At a surface level, the debate within the Aboriginal domain can be characterised by two opposing positions: one which sees mining as synonymous with cultural loss, and another which views the economic benefits that accrue from mining activities as a way to meet the encroaching non-Aboriginal domain on its own terms. It appears to be a debate framed, on the one hand, by cultural conservatism and, on the other, by power and progress, involving a debate between traditionally oriented Aborigines, who place religious concerns at the forefront, and modern Aborigines who are ready to embrace mining and the modern world. However, the debate over Jabiluka in the Aboriginal domain transcends development ideologies and debates about tradition versus modernity that pervade non-Aboriginal discourse on these issues. In the Aboriginal domain this is also a debate about jurisdiction and authority. The Gundjehmi Corporation emphasises the location of authority at the clan level and argues that the way forward in the region should be guided by the recognition and strengthening of clan identity and authority of the clan over their own estate (KRSIS 1997a:46). However:

Other Aboriginal observers resist what they see as the exclusive and divisive implications of the elevation of the clan as the primary locus of law, authority and political action. They regret the denial of interdependence between clans, and compare the loosely integrated but co-operative and mutually respectful Aboriginal polity of the previous generation, with the territorialism and mistrust of today. (KRSIS 1997a:46)

Some traditional owners from other clans feel that they have been excluded from the decision-making process, while at the same time being directed by the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation to conduct their own business in a manner acceptable to the Mirrar agenda. Moreover, some senior Aboriginal leaders felt that decisions made in

42 For a discussion of the non-Aboriginal application of the discourses of modernity and tradition in the Aboriginal domain, see Merlan (1991).
the past by the now deceased senior Mirrar landowner should be honoured and to do otherwise is disrespectful to Aboriginal law (Hope 1997:26).

When the present senior Mirrar landowner initiated the establishment of the Gundjehmi Association, she did so in response to her feeling that:

...her family's interests and concerns were not being given due attention by the Gagudju Association, and that she was not being accorded the same deference and respect that her father had received from the Association committee in the 1980s. (KRSIS 1997a:42)

In 1997, as a result of the increasing controversy over the future of the Jabiluka mine, the Kakadu Region Social Impact Study (KRSIS) was established to report on twenty years of economic development in the Kakadu region. The report of the Study Advisory Group, consisting of Aboriginal, government and mining company ‘experts’, found that conditions were neither demonstrably better, nor worse, than other Aboriginal communities in the rest of the Northern Territory and that key social indicators like education, health and employment were as bad as any community in Australia. Alcohol misuse and disputes over the distribution of mining royalties were found to be chronically debilitating and destructive of the social fabric of the region (KRSIS 1997b:ix–x). However, the report found that this was not a direct outcome of mining and recommended that an implementation team be established to carry out a Community Action Plan. The Study Advisory Group concluded that:

It is important to find the right and comfortable balance between “tradition” and “modernity” in this context, recognising, for example, that social and economic betterment can occur while maintaining cultural integrity. To some extent, Kakadu is uniquely placed to deliver economic betterment with cultural maintenance because of tourism, a benign national parks authority, and continual public scrutiny of this important World Heritage region. (KRSIS 1997b:45)

Jacqui Katona responded to the KRSIS by calling it a farce and a waste of a million dollars. She stated that the study had no Aboriginal voice and made recommendations of things that had been promised to Aboriginal people in the region fifteen years ago (‘Radio National AM’ 21 Aug. 1997). In 1999, she stated that the KRSIS process:
4.4.1. Jabiluka and the Park Domain

In October 1998, following a complaint by the Mirrar to the World Heritage Committee in June of that year, a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Mission team visited Kakadu National Park to provide a detailed analysis of ascertained or potential threats posed by the Jabiluka mining proposal to the World Heritage values of Kakadu National Park. After assessing background documents and stakeholder submissions, and conducting site visits and discussions with traditional owners and others, the Mission concluded that Kakadu National Park ‘is exposed to a number of serious threats which are placing it under both ascertained and potential danger’ (UNESCO 1998:6). These included threats to the living cultural heritage and the continuation of the joint management regime of Kakadu National Park. The Mission stated that Aboriginal living traditions are being directly and indirectly impacted by mining activity at Jabiluka and by other social and economic distresses. However, in reporting their findings the Mission conflated the issues of Jabiluka and joint management that were pervading the politics of Kakadu National Park at the time. The threat to joint management related to proposed changes to the Commonwealth’s environment legislation in the form of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Bill 1998. This was an issue considered by many Aboriginal Board Members to be separate from the Jabiluka mine issue. Likewise, the Australian Government stated in its reply to the Mission’s findings that it:

...understands that the view expressed in the Mission’s report is not shared by all of the traditional owners of the land covered by the World Heritage property. The Mirrar people are the owners of 2% of Kakadu National Park. To suggest that the claims by the Mirrar justify listing lands belonging to other traditional owners as World Heritage in Danger is not sustainable. The Jawoyn and other traditional owners have conveyed their concerns on this issue to the Mission. (Environment Australia 1999:115)

Mick Alderson, the Chair of the Kakadu Board of Management at the time of the Mission’s visit believed that while the National Park was not in danger because of
Chapter 4. The Aboriginal Domain in Kakadu National Park

the development of the Jabiluka mine, proposed changes to the Government's environment legislation were a potential threat to the Park. He stated that this threat was felt to the extent that traditional owners might seek to terminate the Park lease. He was disappointed that there was no acknowledgment in the Mission's report that not all the views of all traditional owners within Kakadu National Park might concur with the views of the Mirrar over the future of mining in the region. As the Mission's overall brief was to assess threats posed to the Park by mining at Jabiluka, he felt that the Mission's report incorrectly fused the two issues of joint management and mining. The Board specifically avoided discussion of the mining issue when they met with the Mission team. The anti-mine agenda was an issue advocated by one clan, whereas the issue surrounding the separate threat to joint management was a concern expressed across clan groups in the region, as represented in the Board of Management. The Government recognised this disjunction in the Mission's report and moved to reconcile the future of joint management with traditional owners:

The Australian Government agrees that the Mission's report of traditional owner concern about these proposed arrangements is an accurate reflection of their view. The Government is responding to those concerns at the highest level, including through direct Ministerial negotiations. (Environment Australia 1999:118)

This Government approach of appeasement, which at the same time sought to progress the development of the Jabiluka mine, did not always gain it automatic support from those Aboriginal traditional owners who were pro-mining: whatever their objections to the negotiation and decision-making processes adopted by the Mirrar in relation to Jabiluka were, local Aboriginal supporters of the mine maintained their fundamental respect for the primacy of the Mirrar traditional owners' rights to speak for their own country. For example, in 1998, despite holding conflicting viewpoints over the mine, traditional owners from neighbouring clans respected the Mirrar senior traditional owner's right to speak for her own country and to invite people to camp on their land to protest against the Jabiluka mine. In one instance, Mick Alderson, then Chair of the Kakadu Board of Management, acted on behalf of the Mirrar to secure a camping permit for the protestors, even though he personally supported the development of mining in the region. The Environment Minister had directed the then Director of Parks Australia not to sign a camping
permitted for the Jabiluka protestors, despite the fact they were invited by the Mirrar to camp on their land. Subsequently, the Director indicated he would give the protestors only a one-week camping permit. The Chair of the Board then intervened and pointed out to the Director that such an approach by Parks Australia, which overruled the wishes of traditional owners, was unacceptable to the Board and another threat to joint management. The permit was later signed according to the wishes of the Mirrar traditional owner.

4.4.2. The Black–Green Alliance

As discussed in Chapter Two, through the direct action of the Jabiluka protestors, who highlighted the ‘scandal’ of mining in a World Heritage listed national park, the Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation effectively mobilised support for their cause in the national and international arena. Moreover, throughout their campaign they were able to use the public construction of ‘Aboriginality’ to their advantage.

In 1997 a range of environment and anti-uranium groups throughout the country joined together to oppose the mine and mobilised around the Mirrar. These groups included the Wilderness Society, ACF, Friends of the Earth, the Jabiluka Action Group, the Environment Centre of the Northern Territory and the Mineral Policy Institute (Ryder 1998). However, after late 1998, the campaign’s focus shifted from ‘direct action’ at the mine site itself, to a battle of words waged on the international stage of the World Heritage Committee. In this arena, the debate concentrated on issues of Indigenous rights and cultural survival, rather than issues of environmental protection. However, as issues of environmental protection were the primary inspiration for their own campaigns, environmentalists were disturbed when the Mirrar chose to give far greater precedence to cultural concerns in their meetings with the Australian Government and World Heritage Committee.

In July 1999, in order to avoid the placement of Kakadu on the World Heritage In Danger list, the Australian Government successfully argued to the World Heritage Committee meeting in Paris that they would attend to all outstanding social, cultural and scientific questions surrounding Jabiluka. Consequently, rather than placing Kakadu on the World Heritage In Danger list, the World Heritage Committee’s resolution on the issue required the Australian Government to address the issues of cultural mapping of sacred sites and the implementation of the KRSIS.
recommendations. In the wake of this resolution, Mirrar spokesperson Jacqui Katona, who had negotiated with the Government in the week before the decision, reacted with cautious support. Following this, a rift emerged between Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation and environmental groups over what the environmentalists perceived as a 'sell-out' by the Mirrar, who they believed had been bought by the Government's strategy of appeasement. Accused of 'selling out' by environment groups, Katona stated "I cannot understand how they can characterise it as a betrayal when we protected our own interests...You cannot play it from a purist point of view. It's our lives on the line out here" (Hogarth 1999:6). While the World Heritage decision had outraged environmentalists, Katona remarked that 'I'm glad that Senator Hill [the Federal Environment Minister] can express the sentiment that he has taken the opportunity to listen very clearly to the Mirrar and an opportunity to learn about the fundamental issues which concern the Mirrar in relation to living culture ('7.30 Report' 13 July 1999). Later that month, Katona resigned as a councillor on the ACF Council saying that the green group had been using her as 'window dressing' (Hogarth 1999).

Environmental groups saw the World Heritage Committee's resolution as fundamentally flawed and politically compromised by the 'deals' made by the high-level Australian Government delegation. Former Tasmania Green Party leader, Christine Milne, described the outcome as a political one, 'the message globally is that politics wins and science loses, and the green light is now on for mining in World Heritage areas throughout the world' ('7.30 Report' 13 July 1999). In contrast, others argued that the outcome was a win for science. A Northern Territory News editorial argued that:

...the environmental lobby should cease exploiting the Mirrar to push their own barrow...Clearly there is no room at the negotiating table for the green lobby which remains obsessed with political ideology rather than sound environmental principles. (Northern Territory News 14 July 1999:10)

While both the pro-mining and the environmentalist lobby made appeals to the logic of 'objective' scientific truths, the Mirrar had successfully negotiated a position that placed the burden of dialogue with the Mirrar onto the government. As they cannot proceed without the consent and co-operation of the traditional owners for the site, the issue of the cultural mapping of a sacred site in the mine area continues to
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confound government attempts to provide the World Heritage Committee with a cultural heritage management plan for the mine site (Environment Australia 2000).

4.4.3. The Politics of the Aboriginal Sacred

The Mirrar believe that mining activity at Jabiluka will disturb a sacred site known as Boywek, and that such a disturbance will lead to serious environmental and human harm in the region. Katona explained the Mirrar position:

Sacred sites lie at the very heart of Aboriginal culture. Without them our culture is empty, worthless. They need protection at all costs whenever a community insists that this be the case—no matter the inconvenience this causes to mining companies—no matter what bizarre implications anthropologists may draw from previous actions or statements—no matter if “dissident” blacks are rounded up to challenge the community’s belief. To do other than to comply with the community’s wishes on sacred site protection is to be complicit in an act of genocide. (1999:12)

Meanwhile, senior traditional owners of neighbouring clan estates, contemporaries of the senior Mirrar traditional owner’s father, stated publicly that they believed that the Boywek site was not dangerous, statements which at the time echoed a considerable amount of ill-feeling between traditional owners in the region (see Shultz 1999:6). However, comments reflecting this ill-feeling which were made to me by one person in 1999 were later withdrawn, suggesting that these allegations and counter-allegations between senior clan figures were a product of the political moment, rather than any indication of long-lasting animosity in the Aboriginal domain.

While such rifts tend to heal over time, once the issue of sacred site protection enters the non-Aboriginal domain, the legacy of any dispute which surrounds it transcends local Aboriginal politics. When the Mirrar took their case to the World Heritage Committee they were subjecting themselves and their country to an international gaze. By focusing on the sacredness of the Boywek site complex within the public sphere, that site became a public issue that needed to be officially mapped and documented with the establishment of a cultural heritage management plan. Moreover, other Aboriginal people and interested parties in the region had access to this public sphere and were able to voice their concerns over the process and the actual substance of the claims. As Gelder and Jacobs (1998) point out, the modern
world demands that the Aboriginal sacred be talked about if it is to be recognised, and talk unsettles the domain from which that information emanates. For the Mirrar, reference to the sacredness of the Boywek site is a private cultural matter, yet the talk of the sacred in the public domain has made it something else, something that can never fully be reclaimed in the private sphere of the Aboriginal domain.

Since the 1970s, disputes over developments on sacred sites in the region have provided a familiar discourse in non-Aboriginal constructions of Kakadu National Park. The controversy over the potential disturbance of the Rainbow Serpent at Mount Brockman by the Ranger uranium mine in the 1970s (Allen 1991), was followed by the Coronation Hill controversy in the late 1980s and the early part of the 1990s (RAC 1991). The latter controversy was characterised by claim and counter-claim by environmentalists, miners, and anthropologists, as well as between Aboriginal people themselves, as to the importance of protecting the site from mining. At the centre of the debate was the apparent 'recentness' of claims that Coronation Hill was a sacred site and contradictory statements made at various times about the sites by its senior Jawoyn custodians. The mining company sought to discredit the authority of the sacred site and offered the expert opinion of its own anthropologists (see Brunton 1991). The two consultant anthropologists that provided reports to the Government’s Inquiry provided evidence that the dynamic Aboriginal politics of Coronation Hill, along with the fluidities in interpretation that were given by the Jawoyn custodians, lie within the logic of Aboriginal religious discourse (Keen & Merlan 1990). The Inquiry accepted the position of the three senior Jawoyn custodians opposing the mine on religious grounds and accepted the supporting evidence provided by the consultant anthropologists (RAC 1991; see also Levitus 1996). However, the decision whether or not to mine at Coronation Hill was finally made by the then beleaguered Labor Prime Minister, Bob Hawke. Hawke was, at the time, subject to a leadership challenge from within the Labor party and some Cabinet members had supported Hawke and the anti-mining option, despite holding views to the contrary, in order to strengthen the Prime Minister’s political position in a time of crisis. As Lawrence (2000:163) writes, ultimately the recognition of the Aboriginal sacred status of Coronation Hill was dependent upon internal political deliberation within the parliamentary Labor party, rather than the weight of considered opinion.
Despite the momentary contingencies of decisions made in the non-Aboriginal domain, there are constant demands placed on Aboriginal people to provide evidence to substantiate their relationships to country in a way that allows others to categorise, describe and 'know' those relationships. Objective knowledge and truths are assumed to exist within a Western liberal ideal of democracy based on a decision-making process that is publicly accountable and transparent to all 'stakeholders'. The Aboriginal sacred challenges this economy of knowledge production and dissemination; Aboriginal knowledge is owned and as such is not automatically publicly available or transmissible (Rose 1996:32). However, once it does enter the non-Aboriginal public sphere it becomes something else: on the one hand, non-Aboriginal imitative processes of administration and presumed standards of objectivity demand that proof be provided to substantiate these Aboriginal claims, on the other hand, the 'sacred' just as easily becomes a tool invoked to further the often unrelated agendas of others.

4.5. Conclusion

The entanglement of the public and private spheres of 'Aboriginality' continues to affect the Aboriginal domain (see also Merlan 1998). Publicly accepted notions of Aboriginality contest local Aboriginal notions of themselves and their aspirations for the future, although some local groups have successfully used aspects of their publicly constructed Aboriginality to aid them in achieving their own agenda. In this way the impact of public image of 'Aboriginality' inscribed into the region via land claims, Park management and economic development has had a pervasive impact on how the Kakadu region is conceived in the Aboriginal domain. Increasingly, in Kakadu, Aboriginal people are influenced by scientific categories that rely on immutable positions of Aboriginality which, while useful to some people some of the time, are largely incompatible with both Aboriginal ontology and social history in the region. For Aboriginal people, the various competing non-Aboriginal agendas and the structural requirements of the ALRA and joint management in Kakadu National Park are alienating actual social relationships. The land envisaged as a commodity, a relation which dominates non-Aboriginal interactions with land and each other, is increasingly pervasive in the tendency to reify bounded estates in the Aboriginal domain.
Chapter 4. The Aboriginal Domain in Kakadu National Park

The next two chapters will examine tourism in Kakadu National Park, an industry with an increasingly important influence on the Aboriginal domain, and an arena in which Aborigines themselves, along with their land, are regarded as a commodity.
Chapter Five

Interpreting Kakadu: Aboriginal Place or Natural Paradise?
Chapter 5.  Interpreting Kakadu: Aboriginal Place or Natural Paradise?

5.1.  Introduction

The concrete pillars that proclaim ‘Kakadu National Park World Heritage Area’ at the northern and southern entry points to Kakadu National Park are motoring tourists’ first glimpse of the famed National Park. Tourists often stop and take photographs here to mark the boundary they are about to cross, a monument to the icon of Kakadu National Park. Some traditional owners have discussed the idea of changing this sign to better reflect the reality of the boundary being crossed, ‘Welcome to Aboriginal Land, Come Share our Country’.

Some distance inside the Park boundary in the north of the Park is an entry station where tourists pay fifteen dollars per adult for a Park entry ticket, which is valid for fourteen days. In 1996, the entry station was at the centre of a dispute between Territory and Commonwealth jurisdictions. The Northern Territory MHR Nick Donadas declared that he would use a sledgehammer to destroy the entry station in protest of the Parks Australia imposed entry fee, which he believed to be an infringement on his and other Territorians’ right to free access to Territory Parks.

At the gate, visitors receive a booklet titled Visitor Guide and Maps. Since July 1997 this guide, produced by Environment Australia, has given precedence to the Aboriginal ownership and joint management of the National Park. The first page of the booklet states:

_The Board of Management and park staff welcome you to Kakadu; and on behalf of the Aboriginal traditional owners, we hope you will enjoy learning about culture, land management and caring for country_

Kakadu is a cultural landscape. It was shaped by the spiritual ancestors of Aboriginal people during the Creation Time (Dreamtime). These ancestors or ‘first people’ journeyed across the country creating the landforms, plants, animals and Bininj/Mungguy (Aboriginal people). They brought with them laws to live by: ceremony, language, kinship and ecological knowledge. They taught Bininj/ Mungguy how to live with the land and look after the country (Environment Australia 1997:1).

This chapter discusses the interpretation of Kakadu National Park according to what are perceived, in the non-Aboriginal domain, to be its natural and cultural heritage.
values. It discusses efforts made by the Kakadu Board of Management to encourage the interpretation of the Park as an Aboriginal place, and the way in which Parks Australia and the tourism industry have attempted, or resisted, interpreting it as such.

5.2. Valuing Heritage

Many Park visitors are attracted to Kakadu National Park because it is listed as a World Heritage landscape (Environment Science and Services 1994). In 2000, there were 630 properties inscribed on the World Heritage list, 480 for cultural values, 128 for natural values and 22 for both natural and cultural values. These properties were located within 118 member States of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 2000).

Kakadu National Park is a World Heritage area with dual listing for its natural and cultural values. This dual listing reflects a Western philosophical interpretation of the Kakadu landscape which makes a distinction between what is considered to be ‘natural’ and what is considered to be ‘cultural’. As such, the cultural heritage of Kakadu National Park is recognised as the evidence of archaeology and rock art of outstanding universal value. The natural heritage of the Park refers to flora and fauna considered being of conservation and scientific significance, as well as the existence of scenically spectacular scenery and a wide range of ecosystems considered to be of outstanding universal value (Lawrence 2000:217). Perhaps the most obvious irony of this separation between natural and cultural values is the fact that the range of habitats and abundance and variety of plants and animals found in the Park are, to a great extent, products of Aboriginal land management practices, such as burning. In 1995, in order to amend this dualistic Western interpretation of their homelands, the Kakadu Board of Management formally requested that the Australian Government renominate the Park as an Aboriginal cultural landscape under the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO 1992). UNESCO defines a cultural landscape as a landscape that reflects the interactions between people and their natural environment over space and time (Plachter & Rossler 1995:15). The revised guidelines of the World Heritage Convention seek to recognise cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value.

Despite its appearance as a category that overcomes the Western nature/culture separation, the decision by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and
Natural Resources (IUCN) to include the cultural landscape criteria is linked directly to the European Romantic tradition. Titchen writes that:

It was the debate concerning the nomination of the Lake District [in England] that ultimately led to the review of the natural and cultural heritage criteria and finally to the inclusion of the notion of the cultural landscape in the 1992 and subsequent versions of the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. (1996:43)

The Lake District was unsuccessfully nominated as it was considered by the IUCN to be, on the one hand, ‘too natural’ to be listed as a cultural property and, on the other, ‘too cultural’ to be listed as a natural property. The ensuing debate was the catalyst for the inclusion of the World Heritage category of ‘cultural landscape’. Following this, in 1994 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park became only the second place in the world to be inscribed in the list as a cultural landscape (Titchen 1996). It was recognised as an outstanding cultural landscape because of the continuous interrelationships between the Aboriginal traditional owners and the natural environment for more than 5000 years. Uluru had previously been inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987 only on the basis of its ‘natural’ values (Bridgewater & Hooy 1995:165).

Moreover, while the changing nature of UNESCO’s criteria for World Heritage listing allowed the inscription of a cultural landscape category, over time the revisions made to UNESCO’s World Heritage criteria as a whole, such as the deletion of references to human agency from the natural heritage criteria, have ensured that the idea of listing a wholly natural landscapes is preserved (Layton & Titchen 1995:179–180). This is despite the fact that the concept of wilderness defined by an absence of human agency is, in general, under increasing scrutiny by groups involved in natural heritage preservation (Layton & Titchen 1995:179).

Nevertheless, the traditional Aboriginal owners of Kakadu National Park requested the cultural landscape renomination of the Park’s World Heritage values in the hope that it would better reflect Aboriginal peoples’ interrelationship with their country and that these indivisible relationships would then be recognised and appreciated by Park visitors. It is hoped that such a renomination would not only explicitly recognise the land as an outstanding artefact of the long-term occupation and living traditions of Aboriginal people in the landscape, but also the position of current joint
management arrangements within that continuum (Lawrence 2000:227). The Australian government is still addressing this request (Environment Australia 1999).

While the dominant interpretation of landscape in the non-Aboriginal domain remains framed within a natural and cultural divide, the World Heritage listing of Kakadu as a cultural landscape can probably have little effect on the way it is perceived and interpreted by Park visitors and the tourism industry. While the non-Aboriginal fetishisation of nature continues to dominate the non-Aboriginal public’s reading of the Kakadu landscape, the Park will continue to be interpreted in a way which imagines nature to be a discrete entity existing independently of social, cultural and historical relationships.

5.2.1. Wilderness or Aboriginal Place?

Tourism in national parks in Australia includes a process of commercialisation and consumption of native nature (Morton & Smith 1999). In Kakadu National Park this commodity fetishisation of ‘nature’, and by association ‘Aborigines’, results in the Park being reified in the tourist’s imagination, so that the actual social relationships that constitute the Park appear to dissolve into relationships between discrete things. Kakadu National Park is imagined to be a place of nature, of scenery and wildlife. Visitors seek a landscape where nature is preserved and ‘intact’. Many visitors also seek a place where Aborigines live a ‘traditional’ nature-based lifestyle, and where they themselves can have an experience of a landscape imbued with ancient Aboriginality (see Appendix B). This is the Park ‘as given’ in the discourse of tourism, a place that represents emblematic nature, nature signified as worthy of preservation. Within this schema, the Park as a cultural artefact is recognised through the material evidence of Aboriginal culture evident in rock art. Culture is in this way viewed as a residue of the past.

In the late 1990s, through the Kakadu Board of Management, Aboriginal people were asserting their own vision of the way in which they would like Kakadu to be used and appreciated by Park visitors. The 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management, prepared by the Kakadu National Park Board of Management in conjunction with the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA [Parks Australia]), addresses these tourism issues and reiterates the desire of traditional owners to exercise greater control and influence over the management of tourism in
the Park. The Draft Plan focuses on representing Kakadu as ‘an Aboriginal place’ (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:15). It states while that traditional owners see tourism as a legitimate economic pursuit, tourism should not become more important than caring for *country* and looking after *Bininj* interests (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:16). The Draft Plan states that traditional owners want the public to recognise that:

Kakadu is more than a collection of interesting and scenic places. It is a cultural landscape that has been shaped by many generations of traditional owners. (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:43)

Aboriginal people in the Park feel strongly about this issue. Jacob Nayinggul, a traditional owner of the popular Ubirr rock art site in the north of the Park, remarked that tour guides on Aboriginal land have a duty to tell tourists more than settler myths or, as he described it, ‘more than billy tea and damper stories’. He stressed that they must recognise ‘the *Bininj* side too’. Similarly a traditional owner for the same site remarked that:

Operators have to tell the right story. They have to have the right information not just telling lies. People have lived in this *country* for thousands of years they have to be respected by having the right story told. I can tell by the way that tourists look at me sometimes that they are being told negative stories about Aboriginal people. The operators should have to meet traditional owners and get information from them and also sit a test where they answer questions from traditional owners.

Sure tourists help us with environmental issues, like looking after the place by having a National Park, but they also have to respect that this is a *Bininj* place with *Bininj* law. The places tourists use now were used by *Bininj* long before that. Like Ubirr, that was an important hunting and socialising place for people from here and Kunbarllanjnja. My grandmother’s handprint is there. My aunty used to go across from here all the time.

In order to promote the non-Aboriginal recognition of Kakadu as an Aboriginal cultural landscape and to encourage respect for *country*, the Draft Plan states that in the future *Bininj* (local Aboriginal people, but effectively the Kakadu Board of Management in this case) will exercise a greater degree of control over the appropriate images and messages conveyed by the tourism industry to the public. The Board anticipated that this would be enforced through the inclusion of
advertising criteria in the process of issuing permits for operators. In its response to the Draft Plan, the Northern Territory Government rejected this challenge to non-Aboriginal constructions of the Kakadu landscape. The Government stated that such an approach would threaten the economic profitability of the tourism industry in the Park. In its submission, *Northern Territory Government Representations on the Draft Plan of Management for Kakadu National Park* (1996:16), it states that:

> The NT Government is of the opinion the public primarily responds to images of the escarpment, wetlands and waterfalls. It therefore intends to continue to use such images in its promotion of the park, as well as images of Aboriginal art and culture...Clearly Aboriginal culture is not the main reason for visiting the Park. In the 1993 survey of the 'major reasons for wanting to visit Kakadu National Park' conducted for parks Australia, approximately 90% of respondents cited 'to appreciate the scenery'.

This statement identifies and supports the concept of 'natural heritage' as typical of the tourist interest in Kakadu National Park.43 In the popular touristic interpretation of Kakadu National Park, the image is one of a pristine wilderness untouched by modern culture (apart from the tourist facilities themselves). In 1998, the Senate Committee on access to heritage concluded that national parks are 'outdoor temple houses that house the wonders of nature' (SERCARC 1998:132). Access to these 'outdoor temple houses' warrants, in the Australian colonial tradition, free and unfettered access to them for public enjoyment and appreciation. Across the landscape of the Northern Territory as a whole, the Northern Territory Tourist Commission (NTTC) is promoting the growth of nature-based tourism. Its website states that:

> The Northern Territory is a dream come true for the avid nature loving tourist. It is a region lavishly endowed with magnificent natural wilderness attractions that have made it the envy of the rest of Australia...nature lovers will discover in the Northern Territory a truly unspoilt treasure trove just waiting to be discovered.


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43 Of the 28 respondents in my preliminary field survey of tourist perceptions of Kakadu in 1997, 22 respondents (slightly less than 80%) stated that scenery and wildlife were their primary reasons for wanting to visit Kakadu National Park.
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In Kakadu this discourse of nature-based tourism overwrites local Aboriginal constructions of place. The Kakadu region, which was once the domain of resource extraction industries such as the buffalo hide industry, mining, timber milling and pastoralism, is now being exploited as a pristine wilderness. Yet the modern history of land use in the region is an integral part of local Aboriginal social history. In my experience travelling through country with Aboriginal people in Kakadu the material evidence of this history is always a focus. The bush tracks used by those working in the buffalo industry, the remnants of pastoral stations and other historic buildings, are considered to be of great importance by long-term Aboriginal residents in the region. These places are connected to their family histories in a way that reflects their contemporary and multi-layered interaction with the Kakadu landscape. Similarly, horses, buffalo, cattle and pigs are now viewed as part of the Kakadu landscape by many traditional owners, and their presence is valued both as a resource and as a reminder of recent social history (see also Rose 1995 on central Australia). For example, wild horses roaming Kakadu are respected as the descendants of horses that Aboriginal people once used for work and transport purposes. Rather than viewing these introduced animals as an unnatural addition to the landscape, Aboriginal people in Kakadu position these animals in country through a history of interaction and co-existence in which these animals have come to 'belong' to the landscape.

In 1977, the Ranger Inquiry recommended the eradication of buffalo from the proposed Park area for conservation purposes (RUEI 1977a). While a fenced buffalo farm was subsequently created in the centre of the Park to provide meat for local people, many local Aboriginal people feel sad that there are no longer many buffalo wandering the Park. One traditional owner remarked on the connection she saw between the eradication of buffalo and the arrival of mass tourism, which she

44 This task was successfully completed by the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries Brucellosis and Tuberculosis Eradication Campaign (BTEC) which aimed to eradicate buffalo herds infected with bovine tuberculosis from northern Australia. The campaign led to the virtual eradication of wild buffalo in the western half of the Top End and Kakadu National Park and reduced buffalo densities somewhat in much of Arnhem Land. In those Aboriginal lands where buffalo remain they are seen by many landowners as a valuable food resource. They are also hunted for trophies by safari hunting clients who pay Aboriginal land owners trophy fees (see Palmer 2000). While safari hunting once took place in Kakadu, when the area was gazetted as a National Park any existing or potential safari hunting operations ceased.
said had 'ruined half her life':

It sort of changed my life, without me changing it the way I wanted it. Like the National Park had to get rid of the buffalo because tourists want it. Get rid of the horses, because tourists wanted it for their safety. And because they were big animals. Getting rid of them not just for TB [bovine tuberculosis], but because of bitumen. They built this road for the tourist. Some tourist maniac drivers. Bang in to buffalo, horse when they walk around at night. Possum they don't care because small won't make accident. So tourists don't give a damn. Don't even stop. Buffalo, boom, everyone in trouble. Animal more in trouble than the tourist.

This is a national park for animals not tourists...If a national park have to look after animals no matter big, small or half size. Shame to call it a national park if getting rid of all the animals. 'Ferals'! Twisted words, twisted minds. To me an animal an animal.

While Aboriginal people also wish to manage the negative impact these introduced animals may have on the environment, they do not share the purist environmental approach which sees these animals as having no place in the Park's 'natural' landscape.\(^{45}\)

Meanwhile, the sight of introduced animals grazing in the Park contradicts non-Aboriginal expectations of a pristine and timeless nature. In the non-Aboriginal discourse of environmental preservation the presence of introduced species in the wilderness is viewed as 'un-Australian', as mongrelising our environment (Morton & Smith 1999:154). While Aboriginal people willingly embrace this transformed ecology, according to Head, settler society in its new environmentalist guise has placed such ideological value on pristine environments that it is:

...reluctant to grapple with conceptual demands and responsibilities of new ecosystems, couching many environmental debates in terms of returning things to a previous state (Head 2000:231).

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\(^{45}\) Similarly, Belyuen women on the Cox Peninsula west of Darwin remarked on the irony of being continually asked by researchers to show them 'traditional' foods: 'All of these bush foods are Aboriginal, mangoes and everything, animals too, cows; let the researchers photograph anything now' (Povinelli 1995:128).
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From this perspective, introduced animals are not ‘natural’ and, as such, Aboriginal cultural values placed on horses, buffalo and other ‘feral’ animals in the Park are imagined to be representative of a disrupted, as opposed to traditional culture. Weaver (1984) refers to the term ‘buffalo culture’ as a disparaging label used by non-Aborigines in Kakadu National Park to refer to what they see as the disruption of ‘traditional Aboriginal culture’ as a result of post-contact history. In the same way that nature is valued in its ‘primordial’ state, Aborigines are popularly imagined to be timeless hunters and gatherers; thus to acknowledge a ‘buffalo culture’ cedes Aborigines a history, something that timeless people are not allowed (Griffiths 1996:27). Yet, like the interpretation of Kakadu as a place of pure nature or ‘wilderness’, interpreting only ‘purist Aboriginal meanings’ in the landscape renders irrelevant the major life experiences of the generation of Aborigines that presided over the establishment of Kakadu National Park (Levitus, R. pers. comm.).

The 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management states that some local Aboriginal people are considering ways in which they can commercially utilise introduced and native animals in the National Park (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:38). For example, some traditional owners would like to re-establish small cattle herds on their estates. Both environmental groups and recreational user groups, such as fishermen (see Chapter Eight), expressed indignation at this suggestion in their submissions to the Draft Plan. The ACF submission stated that such a suggestion was:

...below the bottom line of what is acceptable to maintain the natural values, biodiversity and primary objectives of a national park...ACF has no problem with a small “killer” herd being maintained by Bining [sic] in the park. However, we believe that national parks are inappropriate venues for grazing stock and therefore reject the build-up and spread of this activity as inappropriate for the maintenance of biodiversity and natural values. Similarly we believe that the eradication of other introduced animals, such as pigs, is the only appropriate nature conservation response. Of course traditional owners should be taking commercial advantage of eradication opportunities if they

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46 It should be noted also that these groups have expressed these same views orally at various meetings with Aboriginal people in Kakadu.
wish to, but we stress that eradication, not sustainable yield, must be the goal in
order to maintain biodiversity and natural values. (1997:2)

This emphasis placed on biodiversity and natural values in popular environmental
discourse is based upon the idea of nature’s inherent integrity and balance. However,
as Cronon writes, this is a deeply problematic assumption based upon the idea of
uncomplicated choices between natural things, which are good, and unnatural things,
which are bad (1995:25–26). He writes that this perspective, which views nature as
essence, ‘wants us to see nature as if it had no cultural context, as if it were
everywhere and always the same’ (1995:35). These assumptions are also problematic
for Aboriginal Park managers who value conservation as a means of ‘providing a
basis for sustainable use of resources, including both native and introduced plants
and animals’ (Lawrence 2000:249).

At the famous Yellow Water wetlands in the centre of Kakadu National
Park, the attitude of the tourism industry, which seeks to provide tourists with the experience
of a pristine wilderness, adds further complexity to the disparities between the
Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal management priorities for introduced animals. In the
dry season, the Yellow Water wetlands contain roaming herds of horses and cattle.
The cattle, as well as a couple of water buffalo, belong to a senior traditional owner
of the Yellow Water area who lives at a nearby outstation. She is extremely fond of
these cattle, ‘they are something for me. The country’, she says ‘would be sad if
there was no cattle, buffalo or horses’. While some tourists see these animals as
defiling ‘nature’, others state they enjoy seeing them as a picturesque addition to the
landscape. Over half of all visitors to Kakadu National Park participate in a Yellow
Water wetland cruise, a tourism operation which is owned by the local Aboriginal
Gagudju Association (Knapman 1990; Braithwaite et al. 1996). Aware that tourists,
in general, are seeking a wilderness experience, some other traditional owners for the
area are concerned about the public visibility of these introduced animals at Yellow
Water. The boat cruise operation generates a substantial income for the Gagudju
Association and they are worried that the sight of ‘feral’ animals may jeopardise the
sustainability of that income.

This concern felt by some traditional owners is heightened by attitudes expressed
within the tourism industry itself. For example one non-Aboriginal boat guide on the
Plate 3. Yellow Water postcard

(photo: Steve Parish, company: Steve Parish Publishing)

Plate 4. Birdwatching postcard

(photo: Steve Parish, company: Steve Parish Publishing)
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Yellow Water wetlands cruises stated that the presence of horses and cattle grazing in the area is:

...like having a milkshake shop and selling watered down milkshakes. Tourists are staggered when they see this. Their videos and photos that they take are going all around the world. It is making Yellow Waters into a joke. It will backfire on people here. Tourists come here expecting to see a pristine wilderness and instead they get a farm. It is a total contradiction to everything that biodiversity is about. I don’t mind if that’s the way people here want to go, it is their country, but pretty soon no-one will want to come here. They will lose the jewel in the crown of Kakadu. Horses and cattle! It is just rubbish.

While this guide admitted that some tourists enjoy seeing the cattle and horses, they were considered by him to be ‘the naive ones who don’t know the difference between introduced feral animals and native species’. From his perspective, the Yellow Water wetland cruises fulfil an important role by educating the wider public about the value of wetlands. He stated that over the last five years, a conscious decision has been made to foster this educative approach by the management of the operation. He cited as an example the employment of boat guides who have science degrees: ‘All of the guides now mostly have a degree in biology. Before guides were just carpenters and gardeners, anyone who needed a job. We’ve now brought a new quality to the tours, guides who appreciate natural history.’

These non-Aboriginal boat guides are generally ambivalent in their interpretation of the presence of cattle and horses on the wetlands. On the one hand, they are interpreted as pets of the local Aboriginal people, a useful way for guides to introduce an Aboriginal connection to the area. On the other hand, most guides also point out that these animals damage the wetlands and do not belong there. The boat cruises include minimal commentary on Aboriginal people’s use of the wetlands. This is despite the fact that tourist surveys completed on the Yellow Water cruises in 1996 indicated that tourists expect more information on Aboriginal culture to be relayed to them during the cruises (Braithwaite et al. 1996). Moreover, the Aboriginal owners of the cruise operation have also requested that the company’s
guides place more emphasis on the Aboriginal cultural use of the wetlands, and that prominence be placed on the Aboriginal ownership of the area. However, in 1998 there was strong resistance from boat guides to the idea of incorporating an Aboriginal cultural perspective into their commentary. As one non-Aboriginal guide said,

"We include what seems appropriate in a two-hour cruise but we won’t do any more than that. That’s not what we are here for. We are here to tell people about wetlands. We are not Aborigines and we won’t pretend we are. They can take over the boats if they want to."

Another one of the guides explained to me, ‘There is a limit to how much we can include. We are not an Aboriginal culture cruise. We are a wetlands cruise.’ Local Aboriginal people have at times been employed by the company in a training capacity to provide Aboriginal perspectives on the wetlands to non-Aboriginal boat guides. Despite this, the boat cruise commentaries are still primarily based on the identification of species of birds, information on crocodile biology and habits, and explanations of significant environmental features of the wetlands. During one tour I participated in, the guide was shocked to see a vehicle along the riverbank beside which a group of Aboriginal women sat fishing with handlines.48 ‘It doesn’t look good for the tourists to see Aboriginal people killing the wildlife they come to see’, he said. Yet fishing is a legal and frequently observed activity carried out by non-Aboriginal fishers at Yellow Water. Apparently assuming that Aboriginal fishing in the area would lead to other hunting practices, the guide added with concern, ‘what if they were to drive their Toyotas out onto the floodplain and start shooting the geese’. He stated that while tourists may be happy to see Aborigines using their land, people would be concerned by the use of ‘nylon fishing lines and Toyotas’. He added that he often hears gunshot in the nearby area when Aboriginal people are shooting magpie geese, and that these sounds ‘raise a few tourist eyebrows’. In this particular instance, however, the tourists were excited about seeing Aboriginal

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47 While the Yellow Waters wetlands cruises operation is owned by the Gagudju Association, it is managed by the same non-Aboriginal hotel management firm that manages the Gagudju Lodge at Cooinda.

48 The guide said this was the first time he had seen Aboriginal people using the area in the three years he had been guiding at Yellow Water. According to him, local Aboriginal people had given an undertaking they would avoid this area when hunting.
people and leaned out of the boat with their cameras clicking in the same manner as when they spotted a crocodile.

The tensions evident over the interpretation of Yellow Water wetlands area, wherein an interpretation of an Aboriginal cultural landscape competes with a non-Aboriginal fixation on the 'natural', is an example of the paradoxes contained within the wider ecotourism industry in northern Australia. Ecotourism is distinguished by practitioners to be nature-based, educative and sustainable (Blamey 1997). It is a non-Indigenous concept that professes respect for local communities and environments (Johnston 1998). Yet often the 'nature' that is interpreted to tourists is imagined to be free from traces of human intervention (see also Ryan et al. 2000). This is despite the fact that these tours often take place in national parks that are Aboriginal land. Meanwhile, the power of the scientific discourse and the interpretation of what are imagined to be 'objective' scientific categories, disguise the non-Aboriginal cultural construction of pristine nature. In this way the natural history that is interpreted is regarded as being outside a social history.

5.3. Interpreting the Cultural Landscape

At the Cooinda campground in central Kakadu National Park, a weekly slide show, 'Kakadu: A World Heritage Area', is presented to interested tourists, as a part of Parks Australia's Ranger Walks and Talks program conducted each dry season (see Appendix F). The slide show establishes the basis for the Park's dual World Heritage listing by presenting separately the natural values and cultural values of the Park. While different Park Rangers add their own nuances to the commentary, the presentation of natural values generally concentrates on the high conservation values and uniqueness of the Park in terms of its biodiversity and ecological integrity. The presentation of cultural values generally concentrates on rock art, archaeology and Aboriginal mythscapes, as well as providing an introduction to present-day Aboriginal hunting and gathering in, and joint management of, the Park. The final slides in the presentation sequence are landscape scenes designed to celebrate the beauty of the Kakadu. At the end of this slide show, and other walks and talks in the Park Events Program, tourists generally ask questions about the Park. These questions usually cover issues of 'feral' animal and weed management, conservation, Aborigines, and, as it was a prominent media issue in the late 1990s, uranium mining in the Park area. The rangers, who are usually non-Aboriginal, answer within their
own intellectual tradition of land management and interpret Kakadu as a mixture of separate natural and cultural elements. The following exchange between a tourist and Park Ranger is a common scenario in the Park’s Interpretative Ranger program:

Tourist: Why as we move around the park don’t we see Aboriginal people working? Is it because they don’t want to get involved?

Ranger: No not at all. Aboriginal people are very much involved in the Park. They don’t do these kinds of jobs because they are shy and don’t like being stared at. But they are off doing other things working in the Park, but they are not visible.

Tourist: Is the Park service successful in maintaining and protecting the Park’s ecology?

Ranger: Yes, things are pretty much kept intact, in their natural balance.

Despite a discussion of an Aboriginal presence within the Park, the natural landscape remains the pervasive theme, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Rangers are described as working together to keep things natural and ‘intact’. These non-Aboriginal Rangers are reproducing their own version of the phenomena that Jones (1985) noted in the first Kakadu National Park Plan of Management (ANPWS 1980), where notions of ‘untamed wilderness’ sat alongside ‘twenty-five thousand years of human occupation’. While the scientific identification of wildlife species, the ecology of river catchments, and sublime scenery all convey a contemporary settler Australian cultural landscape, within the discourse of natural and cultural values only Aborigines are ceded culture. There is no recognition of the non-Aboriginal ‘culture of nature’ (Willems-Braun 1997) implicit in the separate categories of nature and culture.

Similarly, Aboriginal Rangers, when speaking in the non-Aboriginal domain, will often represent their roles in the Park through the discourse of Western land management. For example, they might choose to discuss their role as managing a generic natural environment, rather than a people oriented country. A Ranger Walks and Talks presentation by an Aboriginal Ranger on the management of Kakadu is another example of where the authority of the Western discourse goes unchallenged in the discussion of Park management priorities. For the first half of the presentation the ranger concentrated on the ongoing use of the area by traditional owners, mentioning the lease agreement between traditional owners and the Commonwealth,
and the employment of Aboriginal people in the Park service. The second part of the talk consisted of flora and landscape slides, followed by a discussion of management challenges such as weeds, introduced animals, crocodiles and art site protection. It was explained that in the management of the Park, the traditional owners supply their knowledge and Park service supplies protection, yet the Ranger’s commentary placed all emphasis on Western conservation management. The power of Western discourse to influence what can be said in these situations means that Aboriginal rangers are constrained in what they feel they can say about the roles of Aboriginal landowners and other Aboriginal rangers in the management of the Park. The dominance of Western Park management concepts places Aboriginal people in a situation where the position that they must speak from is already defined for them. This example demonstrates the need (within the Park institution itself) to create a space for Aboriginal people to discuss and negotiate ways in which they can foreground their own ways of talking and thinking about Park issues, particularly in public forums that are currently dominated by a Western discourse of nature.

The style of interpretative services provided by Parks Australia reflects the fact that many non-Aboriginal Park staff are ambivalent about attempts to cultivate the concept of an Aboriginal cultural landscape, especially given that the Park has World Heritage listing for its separate natural and cultural values. Some Park staff believe that the joint management pendulum has already swung too far toward Aboriginal issues, and away from respecting the natural values of the Park and scientific management skills of the non-Aboriginal staff. They feel that their contribution to maintaining a national park is being devalued. Moreover, there are some non-Aboriginal staff who see the Park’s ecological integrity as spiralling out of control if full management power is given to the Aboriginal-dominated Board of Management who may not share their non-Aboriginal colleagues’ values for nature conservation. As Lawrence writes:

The move to promote Aboriginal issues over nature conservation has not been received well by all staff, particularly those who consider that the principal reason for the creation of a national park is the preservation and protection of the natural environment. (2000:278)

When developing visitor facilities for the Bowali Visitor Centre, which opened in 1994, however, the project team from Parks Australia stated that their primary aim
was to interpret Kakadu as a cultural landscape (Duigan et al. n.d.:2). Nevertheless, given the conflicting cultural perspectives on what kind of place Kakadu is, the question must be asked, ‘Whose cultural landscape does the Bowali Visitor Centre aim to represent?’ While the idea of an Aboriginal rock shelter inspired the linear design of the building itself, the design of the interpretative display is based around a river catchment. The project team’s rationale for this was that:

One of the reasons Kakadu is on the World Heritage list is that it protects one major river system, the South Alligator, and eight major habitats in the catchment area. The display concept was designed around a meander through these habitats as the river meanders through the landscape. (Duigan et al. n.d.:3)

In order for the project team to develop the themes and text for the Visitor Centre, quotes about nature were collected from Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal Park Rangers were asked to draft texts to interpret the habitats represented in the display. The project team explained that:

Aboriginal people showed great pride in their country and wanted to interpret their understanding and use of it. Non-Aboriginal people wanted to interpret the scientific fascinations of the landscape such as endemism, regeneration, migration, interdependence, and abundance. (Duigan et al. n.d.:3)

The Aboriginal quotes provided their ‘insider’ grounded knowledge of the country while the non-Aboriginal rangers provided the ‘outsider’ scientific objective knowledge. It was decided by the project team to display the Aboriginal quotes ‘like poems’ (Duigan et al. n.d.:4). The non-Aboriginal scientific texts were written in ‘the individual styles of the authors’. Two personal accounts by non-Aboriginal Park Rangers are also included to ‘add to the authenticity of the non-Aboriginal text’ (Duigan et al. n.d.:4) through a display of their inside knowledge. The project team concluded in their report, ‘Interpreting Two Views of Country’, that positive evaluation of the display from visitors ‘confirmed that the most appropriate way to interpret Kakadu’s landscape is by presenting two views of country, the Aboriginal and the non-Aboriginal views’ (Duigan et al. n.d.:5). They state that ‘by presenting both views without qualification or explanation, visitors can begin to form their own opinions about the Park’ (n.d.:5).

In this way the project team aimed to present two cultural ways of looking at the world equally. They imagined that the display objectively presents differing cultural
interpretations of the Kakadu landscape to the visitors who are then able to 'form their own opinions about the park' (Duigan et al. n.d.:5). It is clear from this that the team did not necessarily envisage interpreting the Park as an Aboriginal cultural landscape. Aboriginal quotes are displayed as 'poems', a textual style associated by the scientific meta-discourse with creative texts. In this way, to those who perceive the display through the lens of Western tradition, the Aboriginal poems are ancillary, but not authoritative. The Aboriginal 'poems' provide an added dimension of a human and spiritual aesthetic to supplement the scientific meander through Kakadu's natural habitats. In this way, the European cultural landscape interpreted through the scientific meta-discourse of ecology tolerates and indulges, yet ultimately supervenes the Aboriginal cultural landscape.

The project team’s interpretation of the cultural landscape relied on a concept of celebrating a joint ‘love of country’ (n.d.:5) that failed to take account of the power relationships through which this ‘love’ is celebrated. The external, abstracted nature of the scientific meta-discourse represents a source of authority that provides a ‘whole language of domination’ to direct human relationships with nature and each other (Fitzsimmons 1989:109). Within this discourse non-Aborigines learn how Aborigines relate to ‘nature’, but little about how they themselves construct and relate to such a category. Non-Aboriginal people can continue to relate to the Park ‘as given’, enriched perhaps with the additional knowledge of an Aboriginal cultural landscape. For example, Carment, in a paper discussing the lack of presentation of non-Aboriginal history in Kakadu, writes that at the Bowali Visitor Centre, in ‘an aesthetically pleasing series of displays, information is provided on Aboriginal explanations of Kakadu’s landscape, rock art and some aspects of recent history’ (Carment 2000:6). However, the non-Aboriginal explanations of Kakadu’s landscape, which are informed by Western science and concepts of natural history, are not included in Carment’s analysis of the way the past is presented in Kakadu. The presentation of ‘nature’ in Kakadu is not considered, by this historian at least, to be representation of non-Aboriginal history. Rather, the representation of the landscape by scientific knowledge is considered to be outside history.

In contrast to the dominance of the scientific nature perspective of the Bowali Visitor Centre, the Warradjan Cultural Centre in the central region of Kakadu places the Aboriginal view in the foreground. The Warradjan project began in 1991 and the
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Centre opened in 1995. In 1997, in a joint presentation at the Unlocking Museums Conference in Darwin, the project consultant and local Aboriginal people who worked on the project stated that:

From its beginning the Cultural Centre was intended as a place where for the first time Aboriginal people could express the meaning of their country and culture to others...One attempt to promote the reality that although Kakadu is a National Park it is also home for Aboriginal people. They work, attend meetings, shop, take the kids to school, just as people do elsewhere in Australia. Unlike the majority of people elsewhere they sometimes use the land as a resource in much the same way as they always have. These are not contradictory actions or indicators of a lack of progress and ability to adapt, but are culturally distinct features of a group of people determined to maintain aspects of a culture continually threatened by the values of non-indigenous Australians. (Lancashire, McGregor & Large 1997:39)

The Warradjan Cultural Centre presents the socialised landscape of Aboriginal people in the Park, for whom cultural heritage makes sense in a subjective and processual, rather than objective and visual way. The building design is in the shape of a warradjan (pig-nosed turtle), and the display design takes the visitor through a tour of an Aboriginal cultural landscape by following the Aboriginal calendar of seasonal change which indicates resource availability and use (see Figure 10). This choice of design for the display’s narrative construction reflects a landscape used and interacted with. This is in stark contrast to the ecological journey of a meandering river which is the basis of the design for the Bowali Visitor Centre display. The project team commented that during the design process:

It became clear that as hunting and collecting foods is an important means of maintaining and passing on Aboriginal cultural values, some examples of Kakadu’s rich resources would be an important part of the display. There is some recent and extremely thorough, detailed research on flora and fauna valued by Aboriginal people in Kakadu. But by which varieties of waterlilies and yams, or by which species of fish and reptiles, did Aboriginal people wish to be represented? Not only which one but which part. The stem, the flower, the root, the seeds; the eggs, the flesh, the habitat? Which of its uses should be shown? As a food, as a medicine, as a dye, as a raw material for making a tool like a net or spear or basket? These considerations are not merely arbitrary or
even practical, but cultural, and required extended consultation amongst Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people and the non-indigenous designers. (Lancashire, McGregor & Large 1997:37-38)

The Centre aims to present a social context to the interpretation of the Kakadu landscape, a context critical to the processes of environmental management undertaken by Aboriginal people. It does not at any time present a fantasy of a primordial non-human nature. Consequently, visitors learn about ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ through a social context. Moreover, as the following quotes taken from storyboards in the Centre demonstrate, the social context within which the display is framed also implicates the visitor in the construction of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place and as a National Park:

I can see alot of changes
have taken place over time
I could see the changes
when I was still at school
All this country was campground
for our people
Now its mostly for tourists

Jonathon Nadji, Bunitj clan

Today too many Balanda
Some alright maybe
Whitepella, whitepella
more and more,
pushing blackfella out,
maybe push him on the rock.
It was blackfella country before.
You cannot push him out
With money, or bulldozer
This is Bininj country,
we have to stay here forever.

Jimmy Wok Wok, Worgo! clan

I am proud to work with ANCA
as a Ranger
to help look after the country
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Figure 10. Seasonal calendar for the Kakadu Region in Gungathing language (source: Press et al. 1995:41)
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If they want to do something
they come and ask us first
They look after things alright
But I hope it will not keep changing
It has changed alot already
We don’t know what’s going to be next
No more changes, I hope.

Nellie Bayne, Murumburr clan

The Warradjan Cultural Centre provides Aboriginal people with a site where they can record their own histories and engage in a process of cultural resource management (Lancashire, McGregor & Large 1997). It is also an overt manifestation of an Aboriginal land management philosophy that presumes Aboriginal knowledge needs to be taught and needs to be learnt by non-Aborigines (Jacobs, J. 1996:151–153). It meets the Western desire to ‘know’ about Aborigines not with ‘naturalised’ objectivity, but through a process of personalised and overt inter-subjectivity that returns the non-Aboriginal gaze. It also makes statements that require non-Aboriginal people to respect and take responsibility for the knowledge imparted to them. The message at the exit door reads:

It’s good, you looked
and felt our culture
Look after our country

In 1985, Lawrence noted a tendency in the Park interpretative service to present the Park as a cultural creation that particularises ancient history rather than emphasising the Aboriginal living presence. This tendency focused on the cultural traditions of Aborigines in a way that overlooked their knowledge of natural attributes (Lawrence, 1985:98–105). Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu do not view their knowledge of cultural traditions, natural attributes and social history as separate domains. While Aboriginal people were involved in the interpretation of the Bowali Visitor Centre, the difference between the two Centres’ interpretations is the inclusion and exclusion of a Western discourse of nature. At the Bowali Visitor Centre, the project team’s inclusion of scientific and natural values juxtaposed with Aboriginal perspectives provides Park visitors with subtle political mapping that reinforces the Western disjunction between natural and cultural heritage. Moreover,
the overall approach of having a nature Centre and a cultural Centre undermines attempts to portray Kakadu as an Aboriginal place

5.4. Conclusion

In 1984, Von Sturmer wrote that within the Kakadu domain it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there has been 'a considerable surrendering of control, including control over the investment of meanings into the landscape' (1984:288). This remains the case some sixteen years later. Western interpretations of Kakadu National Park conceal the Western cultural landscape of nature and present Kakadu as both a natural and cultural landscape. Rather than telling these stories about a place of cultural artifacts and pristine landscapes, interpreting Kakadu as an Aboriginal place would foreground changes that have occurred over time in the region. This narrative would emphasise social relationships and place 'nature' firmly within a social context.

The power of the Western discourse on nature and Aborigines inhibits the portrayal by Aboriginal people of their own stories about themselves and their country. While increasing their involvement in tourism could lead to a greater public awareness of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place, in the late twentieth century the discourse of tourism remained firmly committed to the fetishisation of nature and Aborigines.

The next chapter examines the way in which the practice of tourism is influencing the Aboriginal construction of Kakadu. The transformative potential of tourism is examined as a way in which both Aboriginal traditional owners and their 'guests' can engage in an inter-subjective discourse that recognises Kakadu as an Aboriginal place.
Chapter Six

Engaging in Tourism
Chapter 6. Engaging in Tourism

6.1. Introduction

In the debate over mining versus conservation for the future development of the Kakadu region, conservationists have often sought to promote tourism as a sound economic alternative that complements a commitment to preserving the environmental values of the Park. From this perspective, tourism development and not mining is in the best interest of Aboriginal people, the national park and the nation (see Garrett 1998:12). Yet it can be argued that tourism, including nature-based or ecotourism, brings to the region social costs of the same order as mining (see Altman & Smith 1990; Knapman et al. 1991). In 1980, H. C. Coombs cautioned that unless tourism is closely limited and controlled in Kakadu National Park it is likely to prove more damaging than mining itself. Effective limitation of tourism, Coombs concluded, ‘can best be achieved by reliance on Aboriginal knowledge and authority’ (1980:14).

While Aboriginal people have consistently welcomed visitors to their country, the style in which others have visited has not always been conducive to the maintenance of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place. Over the past thirty years of increasingly intensive tourism, Aboriginal people have surrendered a significant amount of their privacy and social space, particularly in places they formerly used as recreational, socialising and hunting places. Many Aboriginal people feel that their lifestyle is constantly under the scrutiny of tourism and most adopt strategies to try to avoid this surveillance. While traditional Aboriginal owners have to some extent had to revise the meanings invested in their country to include tourist landscapes, this process has also brought an awareness on the part of Aboriginal people of the value of actively cultivating their own symbolic landscape for tourists (Parsons 1997). In Western Arnhem Land, old men joke and tease one another about allowing tourism into their country. Beneath the humour, however, they raise serious issues about ways they can control what they at times feel is the inevitable encroachment of outsiders onto their land. In Kakadu there is no luxury of contemplation: tourism is an entrenched economic and social reality and for Aboriginal people the question is, ‘not whether to accept or reject tourism, but how to make it work better for them’ (Pitcher et al.
1999). It is an industry that offers both promise and problems for Aboriginal landowners who are locked in the embrace of tourism.

This chapter continues the discussion of tourism in Kakadu National Park in order to examine the interplay of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social processes and perceptions of the other. In Kakadu National Park, tourism creates relationships that are fraught with tensions and frustrated desires. The tourism industry has benefited from relationships with the conservation movement and with Aboriginal people. Yet, while nature-based tourism finds a place relatively easily within the framework of conservation, tensions are evident between the agenda of the tourism industry and the idea of managing Kakadu as an Aboriginal place, an agenda that seeks to constrain non-Aboriginal tourism practices.

The chapter examines the ways in which Aboriginal participation in tourism may offer Aboriginal people a means to regain control over the meanings invested in their landscape. Parsons, for example, suggests that one way that tourism on Aboriginal land by Aboriginal people can proceed is through an approach that involves ‘the cultivation of the symbolic landscape, as part of a complex political economy of signification of place as domain’ (1997:416–417). According to Parsons, the cultivation of a symbolic landscape is embedded in the processes of colonisation and decolonisation. By reinvesting in the cultivation of an overt Aboriginal cultural landscape, Parsons sees Aboriginal tourism as an opportunity to invoke ‘the prospect of reciprocal change amongst participating parties’, which while potentially entrenching imagined positions also has the potential to ‘open them up to entirely new imaginings in a post-colonial order’ (Parsons 1997:417).

6.2. Tourism in the Pre-Kakadu Era

Tourism began to be established in the Alligator Rivers region after World War II. The focus of organised tourism at this time was safari hunting. A buffalo shooter, Jerry Randall, was the first to establish a safari camp in the region, first at Kapalga and later at Mudjinberri (Levitus 1982). In 1953 Alan Stewart (1969) established a safari camp at Anlarrh (Nourlangie Camp) after the timber mill there closed down. He relied, in part, on local Aboriginal families to work as hunting guides and as camp helpers. Two other safari hunting camps began in the 1960s, also employing local Aboriginal people. Don McGregor established a hunting lodge at Patonga in
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1962 and Frank Muir established a camp at Muirella Park in 1963, both of these areas are in the central region of the Park. The operations catered largely for an international safari-hunting clientele. In 1962, Tom and Judy Opitz established a pub at the Jim Jim Crossing and later an all seasons hotel at Cooinda where they were granted a thirty-year lease (Opitz 1984). While Nourlangie Camp closed down in 1969 and the other safari hunting enterprises established in the 1960s were short-lived, the Cooinda development continued to be successful and, in 1980, the lease was transferred to the Gagudju Association (Lawrence 2000:27).

During this early period of tourism into the region, the safari camps contained tourism within specific enclaves. The independent tourists who reached the region were mainly fishermen, and they were limited in number. However, in the early 1970s as road access into the region improved, tourism was beginning to establish an increasing presence. Fishing tourism, in particular, was becoming increasingly popular in some areas, predominantly at Yellow Water, Nourlangie Camp and the Cahill’s Crossing area near the Border Store.

A senior traditional owner, whose family was, at times, involved with early tourism operations in the region, recalls that:

> When the first tourists started coming out it was scary. Then the old Darwin road was only a bush track. When they arrived to put a new track through with all the machinery it was a shock for us.

> There were lots of overseas tourists then. Tourists used to get lost and come to our place. Us kids would hide in the grass. Dad would go out and talk to them. Nellie used to scream when she saw white people. Dad used to tell the tourists which way to go, to keep on the road. People wanted to go fishing then—at Yellow Water. Alan Stewart had a different sort of people. They came in a plane. Alan Stewart used to take them to Nourlangie. He had Aboriginal guides. Old Nym, his son, and Toby. Frank Muir started after that.

> Tourists then were interested in fishing, buffalo and looking at the bush. Not so much Aboriginal people. It was more fishing. Guides took them wherever they wanted to, there were no rules. Tourists now, some fish, but there are all kinds of tourists. Some come by bus they want to see birds, wetlands, paintings. In the old days, one way they came. For fish or hunting, game hunting. There were
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a lot of Aboriginal guides. At Muirella Park there were some. Don McGregor
had my brother.

Before, when we had the Opitzs, Alan Stewart and the others coming in and
setting up, it didn’t bother us. They were only small. They had a hard life,
isolated in the wet just like us. But the new roads changed things. Things got
bigger and bigger.

Chaloupka (1982) reports that in the early 1970s, as the number of independent
tourists visiting the vicinity of Nourlangie Rock increased, there was a
corresponding increase in the abuse of Aboriginal cultural materials. Several local
clans had used the area as a depository for burial parcels of their kin whose remains
were wrapped in paperbark or placed in dilly bags. This wave of visitors pillaged
these remains and ‘skeletal material, skulls as well as bones, and the accompanying
‘swags’—dilly bags full of meaningful possessions of the deceased—were taken’
(Chaloupka 1982:29).

From the outset of the negotiations over a National Park Aboriginal people were
worried about the ever-increasing tourist numbers they saw. In 1976, Department of
Aboriginal Affairs field officer John Hunter interviewed a group of traditional
owners from the Alligator Rivers region who were working at Annabaroo Station
(RUEI 1976b). At that time they were already concerned about the number of
tourists they had seen at the nearby Mary River. They said then that they did not
want the same for their country, that they needed a quiet place for their children. In
1978, when the terms of the lease agreement for Kakadu National Park were being
discussed at a series of meetings in the region, the NLC solicitor had explained to
traditional owners that under the terms of the proposed agreement:

...you decide how many tourists come in the dry season and the director got to
stick to that number...He’s got to watch these tourists and see they don’t
bugger up your country. (Harris 1978:2)

At one of these meetings senior traditional owner, Toby Gangele, voiced his
concerns over tourism activities already occurring on his land:

Problem is places we want to go is places tourists want to go. I remember when
I worked on safari tours. [He added that] Too many people coming and taking
too many fish in boxes. No more take big mobs of fish. (Harris 1978:2; see also
Langton 1978:3-4)
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As discussed in Chapter Three, traditional owners stressed at these meetings that tourism should not become more important than caring for *country* in the management of the National Park. This history is important because it shows that traditional owners in the region had a clear vision about what they wanted from the creation of a National Park and how they imagined, and were led to believe, the management of tourism would proceed on their land. However, tourism operates through the power of its own momentum; a power which is external to the institution of National Park management. Over time, Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park have come to understand the unrelenting momentum of the tourist industry, and the constant desire of those in it to open up new areas and to build new niches with which to create a market share. One local Aboriginal woman explained that, in her experience, new niches of tourism become entrenched as ‘People start doing something without permission, so when it gets noticed and they try to stop it, people say “we have been doing it for ages, we’ve always done it”. That is the way things get started.’

6.3. Sharing and Contesting Aboriginal Space

Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu National Park are proud of the fact that tourists want to come and see their *country* (see also Gillespie 1988:243). However, traditional owners want Park users to see the Park first as an Aboriginal place and homeland, essentially private land that they are privileged to visit. They also desire that visitors respect and learn about the *country* and the objectives of the landowners. For example, a senior traditional owner remarked that although she has concerns about recreational fishing in her *country*, she is happy for people to fish there provided they respect the land and traditional owners. She stated that:

> Before the National Park, before land rights, this has always been my land. 
> Nothing to do with land rights or National Park. Always respect it, it’s the future for kids.

Her vision of where tourism fits within this picture is for *country* to stay the same. For tourists to see natural—birds, trees, bush. Good education for people, study about the bush.’ As this statement demonstrates, Aboriginal people in Kakadu derive pleasure from seeing non-Aboriginal visitors appreciate and learn about their *country*. They also seek to share in the economic benefits that accrue from this non-traditional use of their *country*. Sharing *country* in order to receive benefit is the
standard practice based on Aboriginal concepts of land and resource use. Hunn and Williams point out that in the *Yolngu* concept of land ownership:

Owning is linked to sharing, but to own without sharing resources is to lose the full value of one’s property, since that value, over and above the satisfaction of one’s own immediate needs, is realised only by investing it socially. The power of the gift is in the giving... For the *Yolngu*, to own land is *not* to enjoy it exclusively but to have the right to allocate the use and enjoyment of its resources to others. The value of the land is thus enhanced. (1982:12)

A critical aspect of the Aboriginal political process is control over land. Myers, considering the of the ownership rights of the Pintupi in central Australia, writes that ‘to “own” something is to have the right to be asked for it’ (1982:173). Myers continues that, in ordinary circumstances of intra-kin relationships, ‘[t]he norms of kinship and general reciprocity (or compassion) force one to grant the request, but one should be asked’ (1982:185). Traditional owners in Kakadu express concern when they believe that landowners have not been asked permission for the conduct of activities on their land. This concern extends not only to tourists and non-Aboriginal people, but also to other Aboriginal people. At times Aboriginal people without the necessary family links and rights to use an area of land and its resources proceed to hunt or fish in these otherwise restricted Aboriginal hunting areas without first seeking permission from the appropriate traditional owners (see also Altman 1988:196). The importance of this issue for landowners, whoever the outsider may be, is both having their rights respected and the ability to control their own social space.

Tourists to Kakadu National Park have, through the provisions of the Plan of Management, which sets out the access rights and responsibilities of Park visitors, permission from Aboriginal traditional owners to visit their *country*. However, this matter is complicated by the tourists’ perception of the nature of that permission. Some Park visitors respect their status as guests of Aboriginal traditional owners, while others view Park access as simply their public right to use of the national estate. The disjunction between the nature of permission given by traditional owners and the dismissive way with which that permission is often received lies at the heart of the contested domain of Kakadu National Park. This contrary relationship between ‘host’ and ‘guests’ has much to do with the symbolic meaning that is
invested in the Kakadu landscape. For many ‘guests’ the symbolism invested in the landscape is one of pristine nature over and above considerations of Aboriginal ownership and management. This disparity means that Aboriginal traditional owners have yet to realise the full benefits of tourism occurring on their land.

Tourism in Kakadu National Park has undergone a history of critique. The interpretation of Kakadu National Park as a commodity in the public domain was an issue that Von Sturmer (1984) forewarned during the Social Impact of Uranium Mining Study. Von Sturmer wrote:

There must be a clear rejection of the notion held by European users that what they use habitually—a road, a swimming hole, a fishing spot—thereby becomes public land. This attitude is easy to understand and hard to suppress; but the fact remains that...[t]he major priority at all times must be to prevent this land from being simply alienated to public purposes. (1984:223)

In the mid-1980s, two anthropological reports were prepared on tourism and its impact on Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park. Kesteven (1984) found that not many local Aboriginal people had opinions to express about tourism, beyond a certain fatalism that tourism was here to stay and that tourists in general terms were okay as long as they didn’t go near sacred sites, burial grounds, private camping grounds or hunting grounds. She also found Aboriginal people feared that some tourists overfish. The need for privacy and personal space was stressed by all the Aboriginal people Kesteven interviewed, and they all felt it was important that tourism be controlled. Kesteven noted that a voluntary protocol was in place whereby Aborigines would vacate an area when non-Aborigines arrived. One senior traditional owner, conscious of the tourist gaze, had forbidden shooting on the Ngardab floodplain, because he was worried that tourists at the lookout at the popular Ubirr rock art site might witness Aborigines using ‘non-traditional’ methods of obtaining geese and judge their actions to be illegitimate (see also Altman 1988:197).

In 1985, a consultancy report (ed. Palmer 1985) to the NLC by Palmer, Lawrence and Brady found that the control of tourism and the ability to choose to have (or not to have) encounters with tourists were highly valued by Aboriginal Park residents. The report found that the maintenance of space was important to Aboriginal people. Lawrence (1985) found that while the concept of tourism invoked the notion of an
invasion, individual tourists were seen as acceptable. He found that an Aboriginal history of their encounters with tourists and actual events took precedence over discourse that reflected on tourism as an entity (1985:67–68). Lawrence found that tourists were viewed as a complex phenomenon: ‘dangerous to themselves, inevitable, unobtrusive, people driving past in cars, fun to look at, too many in number, a valuable resource, on my land and greedy fishermen’ (1985:63). He concluded that while tourists, over time, may become a theoretical entity, now they were viewed as part of a set of dispersed activities. In this way, tourists were not seen as particularly different from the outsiders who preceded them, such as explorers and buffalo hunters. Lawrence writes that:

Aboriginal perceptions of tourists are not limited to the present phenomena. It is the Aborigines’ ideas about an entire history of interlopers and the mechanisms they have advanced to either exclude or include them that are crucial. (1985:97)

By the latter part of the 1980s, Aboriginal people in the Park had developed a significant stake in the tourism industry occurring on their land (Altman 1988; Knapman et al. 1991; O’Faircheallaigh 1986). In the 1980s, the substantial royalty equivalents paid to the Gagudju Association by the company which operates the Ranger Mine and smaller up-front payments paid by Pan Continental mining company to the Djabulukgu Association were used to invest in tourism infrastructure in the Park. This included the purchase of the special purpose leases at the Cooinda Hotel, including the wetlands cruise at Yellow Water, the Border Store and, in 1989, the establishment in Jabiru of the flagship Gagudju Crocodile Hotel. These investments were intended to build an economic foundation to support the local Aboriginal economy when and if mining in the region ceased. For a variety of reasons the Gagudju Association has found it difficult to employ Aboriginal people in its tourism businesses and in 1988 Altman reported that there were very few Aboriginal Park residents employed in tourism-related activities (Altman 1988).

By the late 1980s traditional owners in Kakadu National Park were beginning to feel that events in Park were moving beyond their control (Wellings 1999). Kakadu Stage III had been created, expanding considerably the size of the Park. The rapid growth of tourism, with over 200,000 visitors per year, and the growth of Park bureaucracy were alienating Aboriginal people accustomed to drawing on personal relationships built between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Park staff in the early years of the
Park's development (Wellings, P. pers. comm.). Lawrence notes that during this time, 'management was increasingly subject to external demands, and less able to devote time to strengthening informal relationships which had meant so much to traditional owners' (2000:260). One local Aboriginal man, explained to me the sense Aboriginal people had about tourism growing out of their control:

   In the 1980s the blue paintings closed because people were stealing bones and defacing it...Pressures started to move to isolated sandstone swimming areas. Tour operators and public started to get in to these places. They turned from quiet places to get turtle, fish and swim to places where you came in and thought 'I hope there is no tourists because we want to fish' and no fishing is allowed there for tourists. Now we rarely use those areas.

In 1988, the Senate Standing Committee report, *The Potential of the Kakadu National Park Region* (SSCERA 1988), recognised tourism as one of the influences creating an array of demands on both the Park bureaucracy and Aboriginal traditional owners. The Committee's report made recommendations to alleviate the pressures of tourism on the Park and to protect the privacy and space of Aboriginal residents. It also recommended, as a matter of urgency, the establishment of a Board of Management for the Park49 (SSCERA 1988). Subsequently, the Kakadu Board of Management, with a majority of Aboriginal members, was established in 1989.

6.3.1. **Planning for Tourism**

Despite the fact that tourist numbers stabilised in the Park during the 1990s, averaging approximately 230,000 people per year (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:105), Lawrence writes that tourism has become the:

   ...largest single concern, for both park management and traditional owners, and the big increase in numbers resulting from aggressive, highly successful marketing campaigns in recent years places increasing stress on staff, residents and resources. (2000:285)

Approximately 70 per cent of people visit the Park in the dry season between May and October and, by 1995, about half of the visitors to the Park were on organised tours (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:105). Around 185 companies have permits

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49 In 1985 the *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975* (Cth) was amended to provide for Boards of Management for national parks declared under the Act.
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to operate within Kakadu, most of them owned by non-Aboriginal interests and based in Darwin, Katherine and Jabiru. The greater share of the market is dominated by 30–40 of the 185 licensed tourism businesses (Nayinggul & Wellings 1999:7).50

The 1998 Kakadu National Park Plan of Management states that:

In line with the lease agreements, Aboriginal commercial enterprises will be encouraged. Prime commercial tour opportunities...will be set aside for enterprises that involve Bininj/Mungguy. As a general rule, only those proposals by the relevant Aboriginals, their business enterprises or joint ventures involving relevant Aboriginals, or proposals supported by relevant Aboriginals and providing Aboriginal employment, will be considered by the Board for new commercial tourism activities not specifically covered by this plan. (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:129–130)

For many traditional owners in Kakadu National Park, tourism is viewed as an important industry for their future, one that can offer them control of enterprise and employment on their own land. However, one local Aboriginal woman, while agreeing with the possible future benefits of tourism, remarked:

Its all moving too fast... just as people are beginning to take control of these things the outside is changing even faster. Things keep rolling on and Aboriginal people are left behind. They need time to do things, when the time is right.

The process of Aboriginal people increasing their involvement in tourism in Kakadu National Park will take time. Kesteven (1984), after talking with Aboriginal residents of the park in 1984, stressed that people have many other priorities to discuss besides tourism. This remains the case as people continue to address basic issues of their families’ health, education and housing (see KRSIS 1997a, 1997b).

50 Business between and within these sectors is highly competitive and, as the tourism industry has grown, questions are being raised about the quality and standards of many of the operations. Currently, all you need to license a tour business in Kakadu is ‘insurance, a business plan and a guide book in the vehicle so the driver knows where to and where not to go’ (Eldridge 1997:15). In 1999, Parks Australia engaged consultants to begin the process of developing a comprehensive system of tour operator licensing and training to ensure tourism operators are prepared and qualified to operate tours and guide groups in an environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate way (Market Equity 1999). An operator accreditation scheme has been suggested for many years (see Gillespie 1988).
Meanwhile, the Northern Territory tourism industry, through their representative bodies and the Northern Territory Government itself, places constant demands on traditional Aboriginal owners and Park management to allow for the expansion of tourism activities and the opening up of ‘wilderness’ areas to tourism. These areas are often Aboriginal hunting and fishing grounds or other places Aboriginal people wish to keep free of tourism (see also Altman & Allan 1991:8–9). Parks Australia is under regular siege by the Northern Territory Government which sees it as an inappropriate body to manage land in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Government 1994). This criticism is compounded by pressures placed on Parks Australia by a vocal tourism industry critical of their management of tourism in the Park. To support their case for increased access to more of the Park, more of the time, operators cite tourism forecast figures which estimate by the year 2005, 600 000 visitors per year will visit Kakadu National Park, a threefold increase on the mid-1990s numbers (Lee-Ryder 1997:1).

Some Aboriginal residents in Kakadu see the wet season as a chance for themselves and their families to have respite from tourism and pursue other activities such as hunting and fishing without hindrance from tourists. This perspective is contrary to the stance of the Northern Territory Government and mainstream industry who want to encourage the growth of wet or ‘green’ season tourism to increase the economic profitability of ‘assets’ like Kakadu National Park (Department of Industries & Business 2000). This vision is demonstrated most passionately in the frequent demands that an all-weather access road be constructed to the popular Jim Jim and Twin Falls area. For example, in 1997 a Northern Territory News editorial titled, ‘Visiting Kakadu’, addressed this issue by stating that:

Rather than locking up the falls [each wet season], the park’s managers—or should they be renamed museum attendants—should be improving the infrastructure to allow the area to cope with increased visitation. (Northern Territory News 13 Nov 1997)

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51 The tourism industry representative organisations, such as the Darwin Regional Tourism Association, represent the hoteliers, large tour and coach companies who seek more intensive tourism development in the Park, as well as the smaller scale locally operated companies who offer their clients a ‘wilderness’ experience and who seek access to more ‘remote’ areas.
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This ongoing debate about access to Jim Jim Falls is usually framed as a development versus conservation conflict, a debate from which the views of Aboriginal people are excluded. Yet Aboriginal people who own and manage the estates in the Jim Jim Falls area have consistently maintained their desire for the area to be closed in the wet season, both to give the area a rest from intensive use and because it is used as a kangaroo hunting ground by local Aboriginal people during that time. A senior traditional owner for the area recalls her family’s trips to the Jim Jim Falls area before tourism began:

We were on horse back with about ten riding and packhorses. Dad would be going dingo scalping and we would then sell the dingo skins to Ah Toy in Pine Creek...There is a lot of bush tucker up that way, sugar bag, yam. It’s good country. We would camp between Twin Falls and Graveside Gorge, along Graveside Creek. We would get crocodiles for their skins and to eat. There was no track up to Jim Jim Falls then, that came when my father took two mining blokes up there to show them the iron ore deposit he had found. They never came back, but the track was made. After the track was there, Alan Stewart from Nourlangie Camp began taking tourists up to the falls following that same track. Slowly tourism to Jim Jim Falls began.

Tourism in the area has now increased to the extent that serious environmental and tourism management issues have arisen that need to be addressed either by infrastructure development and improved roads or by limiting tourist numbers. For local Aboriginal people this area is regarded with respect and fondness; it has a special place in their own life experiences that is challenged by the agenda of the tourism industry which seeks ever-increasing access to the area. However, traditional owners are in an ambiguous position as they, through their Associations, also have a significant stake in the tourism economy (see also Altman 1988). The Gagudju Association’s two hotels would benefit from an increase in tourists in the wet season that access to the Falls would attract. However, traditional owners are reluctant to allow the road to the Falls to be sealed for fear of losing all control over an area

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52 The multi-million dollar Gagudju Crocodile Hotel, for example, suffers from extremely low occupancy rates in the wet season months. Traditional owners also receive a third of all money paid in Park entry fees and therefore have a direct financial interest in the number of tourists who visit the Park. In 1996–97, payment to traditional owners under Kakadu lease agreements was in the order of $1.2 million (Nayinggul & Wellings 1999:7). Some 120 adult traditional owners receive income from the park through rent money and a share of Park entry fees and camping fees (NLC 1998).
Plate 5. Buffalo and magpie goose postcard

(photo: Wayne Zerbe, company: Northern Territory Souvenirs)

Plate 6. Jim Jim Falls postcard

(photo: Steve Parish, company: Steve Parish Publishing)
where tourism is judged to be already out of control. The feeling is that sealing the road would mean that they would never be able to close it. Bitumen, in the experience of local Aboriginal people in the Park, brings more tourists and ever-greater sacrifices and changes to people’s lifestyle and country. Moreover, Aboriginal people feel that their views are not taken seriously by the tourism industry and therefore that they cannot negotiate issues in good faith. Public comments made by Aboriginal people such as ‘that country is crying out for help, it needs a rest’ are meant literally (S. McGregor at the Tourism Industry meeting, Area Plan for Jim Jim Falls, November 1997). In Aboriginal ontology the environment is sentient, country is treated as a moral agent which can be happy, sad, good, bad, angry and which communicates with people (Rose 1988:381; Povinelli 1993). However, as Jackson writes, negotiations over planning:

...are severely tested when an Aboriginal person describes the intentionality of country, and attempts to create opportunities for the country to persuade planners and decision makers. (1998:280)

The demand for increased access to scenic areas is an issue that Aboriginal traditional owners are continually forced to contend with. The irony is that in a landscape fetishised for its sedimented ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ values, the values placed on the landscape by Aboriginal people themselves are marginalised. Peter, a local Aboriginal man, explains his perspective on this issue:

I feel the trend of the tourism industry is to promote unrealistic experiences in Kakadu, such as advertising Jim Jim Falls in flood in dry season advertisements. As a result of this, some tourists leave with unmet expectations and perhaps in some cases disappointment.

For Aboriginal people, when the Falls are in flood that is the time to give the area a rest. However, they face continuous pressure from the tourism industry to open these areas in the Wet. It seems that the tourism industry only embraces Aboriginal culture when it suits them.

Similarly, Povinelli encapsulates the paradox of tourism on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory by arguing that:

While in a Western political-economic tradition, the idea of a sentient landscape is preposterous, the starting point for the commoditization of the northern landscape and for the Northern Territory land rights act is the spiritual
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relationship between Aborigines and the "living landscape"...By promoting difference as a commodity value—the actual difference in perspective is threatened to be subsumed into a common market system (1993:217–218).

6.4. Engaging with the Aborigines

When the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management was distributed for public comment, ninety-three submissions were received. Most of the public submissions comment on proposed Park management policies that reflect Eurocentric understandings of what are appropriate activities and management regimes in a National Park. These ideologies are influenced by early colonial visions of national parks as places within which the hunting, capture and killing of fauna and the destruction of flora were strictly prohibited and all human activity besides tourism, which was important to the colonial economy, was excluded (Stevens 1986:8–9). The submission by the Director of the Katherine based Tour Company, Travel North, reflects this colonial history in its vision of national parks as a place for nature conservation combined with mass tourism development:

I hear you when you say that it is Aboriginal Land and they should be able to use the Park resources. But I believe Aborigines would be better served if you help them to make the tourist industry more viable...This would be so much more environmentally friendly than harvesting pigs. I don’t agree that so much of Kakadu should be closed for fishing. Also you should consider a road to the top off the cliff as it would be a big tourist asset. Another suggestion is a Gondola to the top of the cliff, either inside the cliff as it is at the Grand Canyon or outside as the new development in Cairns. (Sarny 1996:2)

Similarly, Frankenfeld & Associates suggest that the draft plan is an inadequate document to cope with the demands of over a million visitors to the Park by the year 2005. The Frankenfeld & Associates submission suggests a number of ways to address this increasing demand including the construction of more roads and the upgrading of existing ones, more Aboriginal rangers to meet tourist demands for interaction with Aborigines, artists painting in the Park area for tourists to watch and talk to, and an escarpment cafe and a ski lift operation at Jim Jim Falls to allow for views from the escarpment (Frankenfeld & Associates 1996:1–3). In this construction of Kakadu National Park, Aboriginal interests do not extend beyond the
roles of guides and entertainers there to indulge the curiosities of tourists. As Langton (1996:18) states:

Aborigines as entertainment has come a full circle from the days when Indigenous men and women were exported as trophies to imperialism. Today, we entertain the tourist who comes to see us in our natural habitat.

Many tourists to the Northern Territory state their desire to make contact with ‘traditional’ Aborigines and are disappointed when this expectation is not met (see also Gale & Jacobs 1987). A travel feature in the Age newspaper demonstrates the tourists’ fantasy for the indigene in an article titled ‘Searching for the Real Outback’. The journalist, Michael Gebicki, writes of his paradoxical quest to locate the real outback:

Strangest of all, at Uluru—one of the tabernacles of Aboriginality—there is virtually no meaningful contact with the Anangu, the traditional owners. They are there—buying Chocolate Wheetons in the supermarket, driving past on the road—yet on the Mala Walk, it was a white ranger who explained the Aboriginal myths, identified the bush plums and pointed out the paw marks of a dingo in the soft sand. (Gebicki 1997:Travel 6)

Aware of the expectations of tourists that they will meet Aborigines, various schemes have been adopted by Parks Australia each dry season in Kakadu to increase the contact of visitors with Aboriginal people. For instance, local Aboriginal people are employed on a casual day-labour basis to assist Interpretation Rangers with their walks and talks program. Once a week, Aboriginal men and women from the Kunbarillanjina community in Western Arnhem Land are brought across the East Alligator River to the East Alligator Ranger Station where they conduct painting and weaving activities with tourists. These activities with Aboriginal people are not publicised and by their nature can only be participated in by only a very small number of tourists, some of whom will feel they have had the opportunity to establish a meaningful exchange with their hosts.

Apart from these Parks Australia activities, within the tourist industry itself there are also only limited opportunities for tourists to engage with Aboriginal people. In the
mid-1980s a senior traditional owner established a tour based on taking tourists to visit his outstation (see Altman 1988:205–206), however the business later faltered due to personal pressures and other work commitments. In 2000, a senior traditional owner in the central Kakadu region began to take tour groups on a two-hour bush interpretation tour twice a week in an arrangement with an established tour company. Aboriginal artists are also employed within the tourism industry on a casual basis, often in work settings where they can demonstrate their painting and craft techniques. The Gagudju Association owned Crocodile Hotel in Jabiru periodically has Aboriginal artists painting their artworks in the hotel foyer. The hotel also employs a local didgeridoo player to perform for hotel guests. The Djabulukgu Association, which manages the Marrawuddi Gallery at the Bowali Visitor Centre, has Aboriginal artists painting there on a regular basis. These artists are employed on the Community Development Employment Projects scheme (CDEP) and are paid for each painting they produce. At the end of the year 2000, six non-local Aboriginal guides were employed on the Guluyambi Aboriginal Cultural Cruise on the East Alligator River and two others were employed in niche sector of Aboriginal cultural tours that operate in Western Arnhem Land (see below). Six Aboriginal staff, two of whom are locals, were working at the Marrawuddi Gallery and the information counter at the Bowali Visitor Centre, which is also managed by the Djabulukgu Association.

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53 Although in Kakadu National Park one-third of the 70 Park staff are Aboriginal, the Interpretation Ranger will in most cases be a non-Aboriginal person. In the dry season of 2000, of ten Interpretation Rangers employed, only one was a local Aboriginal person.

54 CDEP was introduced into the Kakadu region in 1997. Under the CDEP, communities receive a block grant equivalent to the welfare entitlements of community members plus a fee for administration (Pitcher et al. 1999). Since 1998, the Djabulukgu Association has successfully managed the program in the Kakadu region. It has also received widespread support from the local Aboriginal community. In 1998 there were more than 90 Aboriginal people involved in the program, many of whom conduct general maintenance works on their own outstations and in Jabiru.

55 The licence to operate the Guluyambi Cultural Cruise is owned by the Djabulukgu Association. The tour company Kakadu Air, under a co-operative management arrangement with the Djabulukgu Association, operates the business and Aboriginal traditional owners for the area receive 49 per cent of all profits.

56 Associated employment in the tourism industry for Aboriginal people is generated through the local Aboriginal production of paintings, carvings, baskets, mats and didgeridoos for sale at retail outlets such as the Marrawuddi Gallery, the Warradjan Cultural Centre, the Crocodile Hotel and the Border store.
Even fewer local Aboriginal people are employed in the hospitality sector in Kakadu. However, in 2000 the Gagudju Crocodile Hotel instigated a hospitality training program to address the issue of employing Aboriginal staff (Environment Australia 2000; Sykes 2000). This Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) aims to train and employ significant numbers of Aboriginal people to work at the Crocodile and Cooinda hotels, including the Warradjan Cultural Centre. At the end of the year 2000 there were six Aboriginal employees at the Crocodile Hotel, two of whom were local Aboriginal people. One local Aboriginal person was employed at the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. There were no Aboriginal hospitality employees at the Gagudju Lodge Cooinda. Several informants indicated that ‘Aboriginal people like working with other Aboriginal people’, and that the overall lack of Aboriginal people employed in the tourism and hospitality industry was, of itself, a major obstacle to long-term Aboriginal employment in that industry. In 1997, the KRSIS report stated that the low level of local Aboriginal employment in the tourism and hospitality industry was due to the differing effort and initiatives established by employers to hire local Aboriginal people, the extent of flexibility available in work practices, and Aboriginal judgements about desirable kinds of work, or of the desirability of work at all (KRSIS 1997a: 34).

The most usual sites of non-workplace or tourist oriented contact between Aboriginal people and tourists are at shops—the shopping centre of Jabiru, the Border Store at the East Alligator River, the Gagudju Cooinda Hotel and the Kakadu Frontier Lodge at the South Alligator. In Jabiru, local Aboriginal people from across the region gather to shop, access the health clinic and other services, and to socialise and play cards. Tourists often remark they have not seen any Aboriginal people in the Park, yet many tourists would have been to Jabiru. Erskine (1991) reports that some tourists experience ‘culture shock’ seeing Aborigines in the town of Jabiru, shopping in the supermarket and renting videos. These are not the traditional

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57 In 2000, 22 candidates completed the IEP training program. By November 2000 only two of these trainees remained at the Crocodile Hotel. These figures are commensurate with the high turnover rate of non-Indigenous staff working in hospitality in the Kakadu region. Both remaining trainees are local Aboriginal people. In 2001 another IEP training will take place. A similar IEP scheme based on tour guide training will be held to train Indigenous people as boat guides on the Yellow Water wetlands cruises. Priority will be given to recruiting local Aboriginal candidates to these training programs.
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Aborigines that they come to see. Erskine (1991) noted that for tourists Arnhem Land remains the abode of the mythic Aborigine. Yet many of the Aborigines the tourists see in Jabiru are actually on shopping trips from Western Arnhem Land.

Other places where tourists and Aborigines will meet in Kakadu National Park are at popular fishing locations, particularly at river crossings along the highways and in the vicinity of Cahill’s Crossing on the border with Arnhem Land. Von Sturmer remarks that Cahill’s Crossing on the East Alligator River marks the border with what non-Aborigines imagine to be the ‘Forbidden Land’:

When the tide comes up the East Alligator River and covers the concrete causeway built many years ago by the Aboriginal people of Oenpelli [Kunbarllanjna] it divides two worlds: to the east of the crossing, the Aboriginal world apparently secure and isolated in what was, until the passing of the Land Rights Act, the Arnhem Land Reserve, timeless and unchanging, land of hunters and gatherers and stone-age technology; to the west of the crossing, the world of the white man, the adventurer, the pioneer, the bureaucrat, the businessman, encroaching hi-tech, talk of development and progress...Each belongs to his proper domain: Aborigines in the European domain are corrupted, degraded; Europeans in the Aboriginal domain are corrupting, degrading. The passive need protection, the active need to be controlled. (1984:219)

During those times of the year when the fish are biting around Cahill’s Crossing, tourists can observe Aboriginal families fishing across the other side of the East Alligator River in Arnhem Land. In a travel article about Kakadu National Park, a journalist remarked on the pleasure she derived on tour gazing across the river at an Aboriginal family fishing. She described ‘little tots, shiny black and laughing, splash in the shallows, oblivious to the crocodile warnings’, and stated that she was reassured by this sighting that Aboriginal tradition continues (Tabakoff 1998:3).

These ideas of a ‘black frontier’ are a powerfully resonating trope that informs ordinary Australians’ readings of the ‘outback’ landscape. Jon Stratton writes that in the Northern Territory:

...tourism marks an important moment in the making safe, the realization of the frontier....Tourism operates as a mode of integration. It provides the opportunity, the space, for the realization of desire...as the Territory now
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Plate 7. Cahill’s Crossing postcard (looking across to Arnhem Land)

(photo: Craig Lamotte, company: Lamotte Editions)

Plate 8. Aboriginal rock art postcard (with Nipper Kapirigi)

(photo: Belinda Wright, Steve Parish, company: Steve Parish Publishing)
produces itself as a tourist site, it reworks the traditional imagery into ‘safer’, more real terms. (1989:50, 54)

Images of Arnhem Land, a place that remains ‘off the beaten track’ of mass tourism, maintain the allure of an untouched ‘outback’ mystique. To travel across the river into Arnhem Land tourists must apply for and purchase an entry permit from the NLC. Tourists must state where they intend to go and the reason why. Only certain areas, such as the Inyaluk Community Arts Centre in Kunbarllanjnja, are open for visits by independent tourists. Participating in one of the Aboriginal cultural tours available is another option for tourists. To cater for tourists expectations, a handful of tour companies offer tourists the opportunity to experience and ‘see places inaccessible to most’ in ‘a unique area where Aboriginal people live a lifestyle more closely linked to their true culture and heritage’ (Kakadu Parklink n.d.). The tours operate through financial arrangements between Aboriginal landowners in the Kunbarllanjnja area and predominantly Jabiru-based tour companies. They attract mostly international tourists who want to know if Aborigines still live ‘naturally in the bush’. The tourists travel by four-wheel-drive vehicles sightseeing and listening to a commentary on Aboriginal cultural traditions, including bush skills, hunting and food gathering and bush food preparation. Tourists may visit the Inyaluk Art Centre in the Aboriginal township of Kunbarllanjnja where they can watch Aboriginal artists painting and screen-printing and purchase local arts and crafts.

These tours provide an experience of an Aboriginal cultural landscape unmediated by a national park bureaucracy and largely removed from the discourse of nature conservation. The mystique of Arnhem Land allows tourists to feel remote, closer to Aboriginal tradition and open to the concept of an Aboriginal place. Aboriginal traditional owners do not guide these tours, but they do control the tourists’ access to the land and receive direct financial benefit through royalties paid to them by the tour companies. Aboriginal people in the area know the itineraries of these tours and plan their hunting and fishing trips around those times, in order to avoid unwanted encounters with the tourists. Non-local Aboriginal people are employed as guides on some of these tours. These Aboriginal guides provide a general commentary on Aboriginal cultural and political issues that is aimed at both teaching and entertaining the tourists. As they are not traditional owners for the areas in which they guide, they must, like other guides in the West Arnhem area, rely on the stories
for the country they have been told by landowners. However, in contrast to the commentary of most of their non-Aboriginal counterparts, the tone of the Aboriginal guides’ commentary is not tempered with regrets about cultural loss, but highlights a general Aboriginal identity. At the beginning of one such tour, leaving the mining town of Jabiru, the Aboriginal tour guide pointed out an Aboriginal community living area:

Your Aboriginal person here, like where we are going today, lives in houses, has water, electricity, healthcare, education and uses a Toyota. If he goes hunting he uses a gun. He is organised.

Those tourists who experience this style of Aboriginal tourism usually comment on the inspirational experience they feel they have had. Often tourists, especially Australians, remark on the uniqueness of the experience and the privilege they feel to have had a face to face interaction and made a personal connection with an Aboriginal person or people. Likewise, those local Aboriginal people living in Kakadu who feel comfortable working with tourists often remark on how much they enjoy and feel proud to share with tourists aspects of their culture and knowledge. Yet these experiences characterise a niche market that relies on small-scale interpersonal interaction to be effective and which places heavy personal demands on the Aboriginal guides who are continually asked to speak as a representative of all Aboriginal people. It is a niche sector brimming with both colonial and postcolonial desire and expectation. It is fraught with the tension of judgement suspended and judgement made. These tensions are a major reason why Aboriginal cultural tourism in Kakadu National Park remains the exception rather than the rule.

On a broader scale, the approach of the Northern Territory tourism industry to Aboriginal issues and the interpretation of an Aboriginal cultural landscape in Kakadu is opportunistic. The tourism industry shares with Aboriginal people a common economic interest in conducting tourism on Aboriginal land, and this common interest offers the potential for negotiated joint ventures. However, the issue of control over the direction and operation of these enterprises is problematic. In March 1999, at a Senate Committee Hearing on the Environment Protection and

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58 From general comments written in the guest book of one such Aboriginal cultural tour. See also ‘Arnhem Dreaming’ (Southerden 1998:6-10).
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_Biodiversity Bill 1998_, Kakadu National Park Board of Management members presented their concerns about the future of joint management as a result of proposed changes to the federal legislation. These concerns included the removal of the position of the Director of National Parks to be replaced by a Federal Ministerial position, and the inclusion of a Northern Territory Government representative on the Board without the consent of Aboriginal traditional owners. At this hearing the tourism industry spoke out strongly in support of the position of Aboriginal traditional owners at Uluru–Kata Tjuta and Kakadu National Parks. Paul Styles, the President of the Northern Territory peak tourism body, Tourism Council Australia (TCA), represented the TCA position:

> We are concerned that progress on this bill is continuing without the support of the traditional owners of the two Commonwealth-run national parks within the Northern Territory, and that has resulted in a breakdown of trust between the boards of those two parks and the federal minister. The tourism industry is concerned that this is occurring and, of itself, is beginning to create some uncertainty about the future of those parks. We are assured and are confident that the traditional owners do not wish to see an end to the public enjoyment of the parks...Certainly it has been the experience of the tourism industry within the Northern Territory that we can have effective consultation with traditional owners of both parks. Certainly our experience largely has been that we have been able to have much more effective consultation with the traditional owners of the park than we have been able to have with the biodiversity group of Environment Australia.

...tourism in the Northern Territory is almost exclusively in nature based tourism or Aboriginal cultural tourism to the exclusion of virtually anything else. So anything that goes towards the management of protected areas and Aboriginal cultural areas is obviously of critical interest to the tourism industry, because they are quite simply the major natural assets that the industry sells. (SECITA 1999:273, 276)

Styles argued that ‘[e]ffective joint management is a very strong representation of that contemporary Aboriginal culture’ (SECITA 1999:277). At the same time he deferred to the interests of the Northern Territory Government by adding that ‘the biodiversity group of Environment Australia may not necessarily be the best possible agency to manage the park on behalf of the board’ (SECITA 1999:277). Styles was
also concerned to note that the proposed Bill removed explicit reference to right of public access to protected areas. He stated that:

While we are not suggesting in any way that there should be unrestricted access to protected areas, obviously the areas do require protection. We are saying that appropriate sustainable and regulated public access is appropriate for those protected areas. We believe that this in fact accords with the view of this committee expressed in the access to heritage report of July 1998, which states, in part, that access to heritage is a right of all Australians...Taking the World Heritage Convention as an example, the third presentation requirement, that is, to protect, preserve and present world heritage areas, is very frequently overlooked. (SECITA 1999:273, 274)

Thus the tourism industry, on the one hand, was supporting the rights of Aboriginal traditional owners in the National Park’s joint management arrangements; on the other hand, the industry spokesman was also seeking to enshrine the tourism industry’s right of access to protected areas. To this end, they appealed to rights enshrined within the World Heritage Convention without mention of the wishes of, or need to negotiate with, traditional owners. The stance taken in this incident indicates that the tourism industry, which profits from marketing references to ‘Aboriginality’, is an ally for Aboriginal people only as long as the industry’s access to the landscape is guaranteed.

6.5. Engaging with the Tourists: Under the Gaze

For many Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park a growing tourism industry constrains the way they manage their social space and outside interactions. Local Aboriginal people generally avoid going to places for fishing or recreation, even to local shops, when they know there will be large numbers of tourists there. This pattern has become a part of people’s lifestyle, something that they now expect each dry season. While Kakadu is an Aboriginal place, within the National Park there are approximately 907 jobs and traditional owners only hold 68 (7.5 per cent) of these (Taylor 1996:24). Much of the problem is that many Aboriginal people in the Park do not feel comfortable working in a white-dominated employment situation.

Local Aboriginal people commonly divide the National Park into two zones—‘blackfella’ areas and ‘whitefella’ areas. ‘Blackfella’ areas are outstations and other places for hunting, fishing and camping where tourists are not allowed to go.
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'Whitefella' areas are places Aboriginal people will go to occasionally, but where they feel they have to modify their behaviour under the gaze of tourists. When they are out fishing on Yellow Water, the East Alligator River or along the highway bridges, Aboriginal people want to be able to get on with what they are doing, not be the object of attention. One Aboriginal woman from Kunbarllanjinja explained to me that when they go out hunting or collecting pandanus or root dyes for making baskets in the Park area they usually drive off the road so the car is hidden from tourists. She explained that if the tourists did come across them they would usually leave:

> We don't let tourists see us. It's private, we run away, we don't let them see what we are doing. When Hannah mob go with Parks on Tuesdays [to the East Alligator River workshops] that is the time for tourists.

Aboriginal people will go to great lengths to avoid the tourist gaze encroaching on their private space, but people are not averse to interacting with individual tourists when what they feel is an appropriate opportunity arises. Tourists are generally seen as okay, they come and go and are usually friendly; as long as they do not stare or ask too many questions they are tolerated and even enjoyed:

> It's all right having tourists as long as they are doing the right thing. There are not too many now. It is good to see them come and see the country. A lot come and ask “where's the buffalo?” They haven't seen them. They want to see them. (Aboriginal Traditional Owner, Kakadu National Park)

By the 1990s, Aboriginal people had become aware of a change in tourists' motivations for coming to Kakadu. Increasingly, they were aware that it is Aborigines the tourists wish to see. At the same time, some Aboriginal people were feeling increasingly alienated and excluded from tourist enclaves where they once used to go. As one traditional owner explained:

> Really they [the tourists] want to see us Aborigines. “Upper class mob” [non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal employers and decision-makers] keep us hidden—Balanda and Bininj, Cooinda, Gagudju mob. Can't even see us, black skin unless we go to the shop. Not allowed to show ourselves. At Cooinda old people used to sit down, paint, play cards under old ironwood trees there in the past. When you got green cans [full strength beer]. Talk to tourists. Now
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balanda take over Cooinda. We keep out. No black staff. They from New Zealand, everywhere.

As this quote demonstrates, whereas once Cooinda was a place for Aboriginal people to work, socialise, drink and play cards, now few ‘black faces’ are seen there, and some Aboriginal people, aware of the tourist stares, feel like strangers in their own country. One traditional owner explained that:

We used to be all in there playing cards on the floor. They stopped us because of tourists. At Cooinda they seem racist the way they treat Aboriginal people now.

While now Aboriginal people, through the Gagudju Association, own the Cooinda Hotel, it is managed by an international hotel management firm and staffed by itinerant workers with a consequent high turnover of staff. The personal relationships built up between local Aboriginal people and those non-Aborigines involved in early stages of the tourism industry, which are remembered with fondness, are increasingly a thing of the past.

Moreover, when the Gagudju Association bought the hotel lease in the mid-1980s it was decided to ban the sale of full strength beer, and limit the number of light beer takeaways, to all Gagudju members, which includes most of the Aboriginal residents in the area. In 1985, Lawrence identified drinking as a key issue in Aboriginal-tourist relations:

Drinking lies at the very interface of Aboriginal/tourist interaction, since it is primarily in drinking venues that Aborigines and tourists...currently eye one another. How these...actions are perceived is an enormously important factor in the public acceptance of an Aboriginal controlled national park. (1985:61)

Where interaction outside of structured tourism activities does occur between tourists and Aboriginal people in Kakadu and the wider region, the tourists’ experience is often informed by a belief in the dichotomy of the ‘traditional Aborigine’ and the degraded ‘urban Aborigine’. Tourists who visit the town of Katherine, for instance, are appalled at the sight of groups of Aboriginal people they characterise as drunken delinquents. One white Australian tourist, sitting post-tour in a Katherine café, surveyed the scene of Aboriginal people walking by on the main street and remarked that he had come away from his recent Aboriginal cultural tour in Arnhem Land with a heightened impression of the ‘traditional bush Aborigine’. ‘It
was so wonderful to see X [the Aboriginal guide] and his connection with the land, unlike his counterparts here. It was great to see there are still little pockets of culture'. For this well-educated Australian, ‘real Aborigines’ belong in the bush; there is no place for them in urban spaces. One of the non-Aboriginal tour guides had reinforced this message on the first day of the tour. Upon meeting the clients in Katherine, he assured them that the Aboriginal people they will be meeting ‘are so different to the people you see out here on the streets’. ‘So this is not representative?’ asked the Australian tourist. ‘Oh yes’ said the guide, ‘unfortunately it’s about 80 per cent. But the Aborigine in the bush on his own land is fantastic’. The Australians said they were going on the tour to learn about Aboriginal culture ‘or what’s left of it anyway’.

Aboriginal people in Kakadu are very aware of the schizophrenic gaze of the tourist in search of the traditional Aborigine, and the stereotyping by which every Aborigine becomes a representative of every other Aborigine.59 They are aware that heavy drinking by Aborigines in the public space of the Cooinda Hotel creates negative images of Aborigines for tourists. The limits placed on alcohol sales at Cooinda by the Gagudju Association aimed to counteract this, as well as other more serious social consequences created in the Aboriginal domain as a result of heavy drinking. While some Aboriginal people who were non-drinkers found the drunkenness of Aboriginal people at Cooinda an embarrassment, one indirect outcome of this policy has been the alienation of local Aboriginal people and the creation of another ‘whitefella’ place.

Local Aboriginal people in Kakadu are sometimes asked to work as tour guides, and while the desire is there on the part of traditional Aboriginal owners to ensure that tourists are getting the ‘right story’, many people are uncomfortable with the style of tourism that non-Aboriginal operators are accustomed to. They feel tourists ask too many personal questions and that non-Aboriginal operators try to force the

59 In November 1999, newspapers reported on the drinking habits of Aboriginal people in the region, one stating that ‘the average male consumption of beer in Kakadu is a staggering 1092 litres a year—or 56 cans a week—against a national average of 95 litres’ (The Australian 9 Nov. 1999:1). Meanwhile the Northern Territory News (10 Nov. 1999:1) headline shrieked ‘Mining millions blown on booze’. This ever-attentive public gaze directed by the media at what are purported to be Aboriginal people’s ‘wasteful’ lives implicates the entire Kakadu Aboriginal population and adds weight to the attitude in the non-Aboriginal domain that Aborigines are both inept and get ‘too much’ special treatment (see also Lea & Zehner 1986:146–150).
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Aboriginal guides they employ into interactions they are not comfortable with, especially in a situation where they are the only Aboriginal person working on the tour. Tourists ask questions about the past and present Aboriginal culture that are considered by Aboriginal people to be private and personal information. One man explained that he had been an assistant tour guide on a couple of occasions, but that the non-Aboriginal operator:

...tries to tell people what to say, what to answer. Aboriginal people want to answer how they want to. Not be told by anyone to answer in a certain way. They want to answer with their own will. Aboriginal people do it their own way. Some people say working with tourism is big money. Aboriginal people don’t see that. We do the talking, demonstrate and show traditional stuff and the operator gets the money. Bininj gets a little bit. People here sell to the Border Store. Didgeridoos take a couple of days and you only get $50. It is not easy making money. People living in the Park should be getting good money. With CDEP we get to do mowing and use machines, something else, instead of going and talking about their own things. It is not really much money but people get to learn about machinery.

For Aboriginal people in Kakadu their culture is, in one sense, a private and closely held matter of personal identity. The pervasiveness of the public domain in Kakadu has an effect on what Aboriginal people are prepared to disclose to non-Aboriginal people. Increasingly, too, in the glare of the public eye, knowledge that may once have been public knowledge, has now become redefined as sacred or private, especially for those Aboriginal people seeking to preserve their forebears’ traditions. This is also a reaction to the fact that many sacred places, traditions and objects have already become commodities in the cultural landscape of tourism. All these factors—overt racism, unintentional acts of disrespect and tourists who ‘ask too many questions’—combined with a general process of cultural commodification and outlandish stereotyping on the part of the tourism industry, currently discourage the active participation of most Aboriginal people in the local tourism industry.

6.5.1. Increasing Aboriginal Participation in the Industry

While Aboriginal people in Kakadu are generally hesitant about revealing the personal and esoteric aspects of their culture, many feel comfortable about sharing at least some of their knowledge about land management and their economic uses of
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country. Some Aboriginal people express a desire that the stone country area (associated by tourists with ancient Aboriginal culture) of Kakadu be given ‘a rest’ from tourism. They suggest that the market could be refocused on areas such as the floodplains and lowland woodlands, and that Aboriginal people become involved in providing ‘nature-based’ tourism based around their own ways of land management and land use. Inspired by the popularity of television programs such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s ‘Bush Tucker Man’, some non-Aboriginal tour guides are increasingly incorporating Aboriginal bush knowledge into their guiding repertoire. One local Aboriginal woman noted disparagingly that non-Aboriginal guides working for non-Aboriginal tour companies are increasingly ‘running around in the bush, stripping pandanus and trying to be blackfellas’ in place of Aboriginal people. While local Aboriginal people wish to encourage the interpretation of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place, they are wary of non-Aboriginal tour guides who incorporate into their tours Aboriginal knowledge of the environment which they have merely appropriated from other sources and then applied to the Kakadu region. Nevertheless, as Aboriginal people wish to benefit from tourism on their land, the existing market of non-Indigenous nature-based tourism suggests that Indigenous-owned tours focusing on Aboriginal land use and management could find a market niche in Kakadu National Park. Such an approach is advocated by Parsons (1997), who argues that a process of ‘triangulation’ of the symbolic landscape can be cultivated by creating a ‘third’ focus that creates a satisfying relationship between host and guest, a common unifying activity such as land management or wildlife viewing (1997:423). With these kinds of ideas, some Aboriginal people are deciding they wish to become involved in the industry rather than remaining on the fringes. Peter, a local Aboriginal man who has considered becoming involved in a tourism business, explained that:

At first there was a scaredness on Aboriginal people’s behalf to say no to tourism, because of a fear of upsetting people and getting bad newspaper coverage. That’s when tourism was a bad sort of thing because it was affecting people’s lives and all the concessions they have to make. Now tourism is still

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60 Les Hiddens, a retired army major, travels the bush demonstrating survival skills, many of which he learnt from Aboriginal people. In 1999, Hiddens wrote a glossy coffee-table book called, Explore Wild Australia with Bush Tucker Man.
affecting people’s lives but people are more knowledgable and know more about the tourism industry. Aboriginal people, who had always looked after their country, were now involved in looking after tourism as well through their employment as National Park Rangers.

In the 90s we saw the change. People were not only coming for beauty, wildlife, fishing but started to get heavy on Aboriginal culture. Realising Aboriginal people still lived here and are involved in looking after their country. That’s why the Cultural Centre was done to give tourists an insight into Aboriginal culture without placing unrealistic demands on local Aboriginal people, such as the expectations of tourists that they will meet an Aboriginal person during their visit to the Park.

For Aboriginal people in Kakadu, tourism impacts on life every day, so now we want to become part of it to give people a better understanding of contemporary Aboriginal culture.

If it’s going to affect you for the rest of your life you should be in it. Change attitudes. Get Aboriginal people in it. Get them working earn a living by being out bush. Blend nature and culture but not take away from it.

Some people want nothing to do with it, some people try it and decide it is not for them, but increasingly people are planning to have some kind of active involvement in the tourist industry—on their own terms.

Many Aboriginal people in Kakadu look to the way tourism is managed in other places such as Manyallaluk (Pitcher 1999), Bathurst Island, Cobourg and parts of Arnhem Land (Palmer 2000) where Aboriginal people have greater degrees of control over tourism and can receive direct benefits from operations occurring on their land. One local Aboriginal person explained that people think that this should happen in Kakadu:

People, Bininj, should control tourism enterprises through their Associations then they can decide where people can go and take them there themselves. Bininj are forced to abide by a Plan of Management to address issues. There is so much legislation and regulations that must be followed in this place. The only way for Bininj to regain control over the country is through their Associations.

The traditional owners of the Gunlom Land Trust in the south of the Park have formed their own association to manage commercial and other interests in the area.
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This includes the operation of the Mary River roadhouse just outside of the Park. Direct commercial interests such as this assist traditional owners in their desire to re-establish themselves on outstations in the region. As one young Jawoyn man explained ‘it is not enough to come back to country and sit down. People will want to work and be involved.’ The Jawoyn are interested in both Park Ranger positions and developing tourism niches. At one stage, as some Jawoyn traditional owners believed there were too many tourists camping at the Gunlom Falls site, they suggested that the camping area should be moved back to the Kakadu Highway area and nearer to the Mary River Roadhouse. This would allow traditional owners to better manage culturally sensitive areas and, through their ownership of the Roadhouse, they would receive a greater benefit from the tourism occurring on their country.

At least four other Aboriginal groups or families are considering establishing their own tourism businesses in the Kakadu region. Some Aboriginal groups are considering the establishment of economic enterprises on their lands that fit within a ‘mixed use rural enterprise’ approach\(^{61}\) wherein some style of tourism enterprise can be incorporated with other rural enterprises such as cattle grazing and crocodile egg collection (see Palmer 2000). Some groups are considering entering into co-operative management arrangements with an existing operator to establish an exclusive operation on or near their own outstations. Liam Mayer, the Executive Officer of the Djabulukgu Association, says:

> The power that the Aboriginal traditional owners have is access to the land, access to the site...[joint ventures can provide] operators that know the market place, know what marketing is all about, how to get people here, how to satisfy them...Indigenous tourism, from our experience with helping people set up tours, is to try to complement the existing tourism industry, don’t try to stand alone. The tourist industry is too aggressive, fighting for numbers; you’ve got to be a real haggler. Joint ventures are the way to go...Operations that don’t consume considerable human resources and/or dollars. You don’t need expensive vehicles, just a bit of co-ordination and the country and a commitment to employ and train Aboriginal people. Aim to complement

\(^{61}\) As recommended by the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rural Industry Strategy* (ATSIC & DPIE 1997:33).
existing operations and you have the tourist numbers, you’d also have tour companies queuing up.

Parks Australia will increasingly be expected to assist Aboriginal people to establish tourism operations so that they can directly benefit from tourism in the Park. People will need assistance to draft business plans and to implement these plans so that they can establish and maintain sustainable tourism enterprises. Despite the approach advocated in the 1998 *Kakadu National Park Plan of Management*, which aims to encourage the establishment of tourism operations by ‘relevant Aboriginal people’ (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:112–13), in a bureaucracy the size of Parks Australia the process of approving enterprises is slow. Some local Aboriginal people feel frustrated by the bureaucracy which, rather than assisting them in the process, seems to make establishing a tourism operation a very drawn-out process of approval seeking. Such constraining factors are felt to be an insult by Aboriginal people who are attempting to engage in the business of tourism on their own land.

The entry of more Aboriginal people into the tourism industry may also exacerbate existing tensions within the Aboriginal domain. For instance, many Aboriginal people already feel aggrieved that areas they have used in the past for fishing and hunting are now sacrificed to tourism. However, in order for Aboriginal operations to be successful in a competitive tourism market, they will be required to offer a unique product. Thus, as local Aboriginal people themselves become involved in tourism, they are likely to feel increasingly compelled to operate their tours in areas that are now considered to be ‘blackfella’ areas and the tourism frontier will expand even further. Moreover, while the economic success of an operation is more likely if it is a family enterprise rather than a community enterprise (Altman & Finlayson 1993:39), divisions in the Aboriginal community may be heightened if it is individual Aboriginal people benefiting from tourism operations, rather than Aboriginal people as a whole through their representative Associations.

6.6. Conclusion

In order to reclaim those spaces colonised by a brand of tourism from which they currently feel excluded, Aboriginal people will need to engage in negotiations, within both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal domains, over the future of Park use and tourism in the region. My research indicates that a predominantly non-Aboriginal Park bureaucracy is incapable of managing Kakadu as an Aboriginal
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place. Combining tourism with the management of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place can only happen when Aboriginal people have the power, knowledge and confidence to be involved in tourism enterprises and to be seen by Park visitors as gazing back and offering an alternative to the current styles of tourism in the Park.

Traditional owners believe that Kakadu is a special place and they want to give tourists the opportunity to experience it as such. The tendency within colonial discourses of nature and Aborigines is to dehistoricise, to purify and objectify people and place as if they have always been locked in a static 'state of nature'. Thus, changing the way in which narratives of people and place are presented to tourists in Kakadu is an important step in challenging these colonial assumptions.

Recognition of an Aboriginal cultural landscape entails the recognition of country, what in the Gundjeihmi language is called gunred, literally land in association with people and by extension people in association with people (see Chaloupka et al. 1985:6). Tourism may currently operate through colonial practices, but it is also a practice easily unsettled and subject to transformation. The power Aboriginal people in Kakadu have is in the potential of that transformation. One young Aboriginal man, Bradley Alderson, who is planning to become involved at his family outstation in a small-scale family tourism enterprise called Djang, remarked on the potential to harness and invert the power of tourist's gaze:

Planes flying over annoys me. Kakadu Air always fly over low. You know there are tourists in the plane. I can imagine them looking down and the pilot saying there is an Aboriginal outstation down there. It is a privacy thing. It happens a few times a day. I don’t like it. I used to get really angry. But lately I’ve thought about turning it around to our advantage. We could paint a sign on the roof saying Djang. Free advertising when they fly over.

Aboriginal cultural tours controlled by Aboriginal people in Kakadu are already highlighting the particularities of the history of people and place in a way that unsettles the prefigured categories of the colonial gaze. It is a style of tourism that has the potential to engage with the colonial imaginings of nature and Aborigines, inflect tourist practices and cultivate a symbolic landscape for tourist consumption.

To encourage a style of tourism that Aboriginal people want in their country requires that stakeholders in the tourism industry negotiate with traditional owners with an understanding of and respect for local Aboriginal protocols for speaking for
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and about country. Until this happens the power to be able to define and control the use of the landscape will remain a deeply contested issue within the management of Kakadu National Park. As one local Aboriginal woman remarked:

We are not just talking about today, we are talking about the future. Is there going to be anything left for future generations to benefit from? They may want to become involved in tourism in their own way.

The remainder of this thesis addresses the politics of land use revealed in two tourism activities in which the meaning invested in the landscape continues to be vigorously contested, resisted and negotiated. The next chapter addresses the issue of bushwalking and Chapter Eight examines fishing in the Park.
Chapter Seven

Bushwalking in Kakadu: A Study of Cultural Borderlands
Chapter 7. Bushwalking in Kakadu: A Study of Cultural Borderlands

7.1. Introduction

Bushwalking in the Kakadu escarpment, the southern part of the Arnhem Land plateau, is an example of the expanding frontier of nature-based tourism overwriting local Aboriginal meanings invested in the landscape. Informed and motivated by wilderness ethics, the stated desires of bushwalkers privilege their own imaginary of this supposed wilderness and thereby diminish the Aboriginal interests in the escarpment. These Aboriginal interests are not insubstantial: they include religious concerns about sacred places, burial sites and art sites, of which there are thousands in the Kakadu escarpment. The Aboriginal desire to protect the escarpment from tourism is not easy to characterise. The area is often referred to by Aboriginal people as ‘blackfella country’ and people emphasise the priority given to this area as a complex of highly revered places where ancestors’ presences are emblematic of the classical culture that preceded the non-Aboriginal annexation of the floodplain and savanna areas of the Park. It is envisaged as a place of privacy and safety for people’s ancestors, where things are “settled”.

Bushwalking is an activity that highlights the competing Western and Indigenous value systems over the use of protected areas. Bushwalking is a low-use activity in Kakadu National Park. Although only about 2 per cent of the annual visitor population of approximately 230,000 to the Park will participate in a private or guided overnight bushwalk, it is an issue that generates a disproportionate amount of comment and discussion. Many traditional Aboriginal owners of Kakadu National Park have related to me their concerns about bushwalking, including their anxiety about bushwalkers visiting sacred areas, removing cultural materials and disturbing the spirits of the old people who rest there. Meanwhile, bushwalkers and their organisations are vocal in their support of their chosen activity. Of a total of ninety-seven submissions to the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management, fourteen addressed the issue of bushwalking in the Park.

The history of these concerns about bushwalking activities predates the establishment of Kakadu National Park. In 1978, after an Aboriginal National Park planning meeting, George Chaloupka, then an NLC field officer, reported in a letter to ANPWS that Aboriginal people were concerned about future walking tracks and
the movement of visitors in the escarpment. He wrote that, while traditional owners
decided that Ubirr and Nourlangie art sites could be open to the public immediately
‘with the provision of Aboriginal guides’, it was decided that:

Other areas in the vicinity of and in the escarpment should be opened up
gradually as walking tracks with approval of the traditional owners for that
particular area. Even then a local guide would accompany walkers through his
land. The idea behind this was manifold—to create income, to provide walkers
with the best possible interpretation of that particular track of land and
everything within it, to improve the visitors knowledge and understanding of
Aboriginal people and to show the Aboriginal people that the parks area is
indeed their land. (Chaloupka 1978)

Bushwalking activities in the Park did proceed, however, without the involvement
of Aboriginal people. In the first decade after the Park’s creation ANPWS never
acted on Aboriginal desires that bushwalking should only take place with an
Aboriginal traditional owner present. In the 1990s, the issue has received increasing
attention, but Aboriginal concerns continue and bushwalkers’ activities are largely
an entrenched fact in the escarpment. Bushwalking is now managed to the extent that
bushwalkers are required to apply for permits to walk on the Park ‘approved routes’.
However, these routes were established by bushwalkers themselves; Aboriginal
people did not plan them and most would never have walked them.

The reasons for this situation are complex, as well as politically and culturally
sensitive. They arise from a mixed history of dialogue among Aboriginal people,
Park management and bushwalkers. It could be argued that through the permit
system, bushwalkers receive indirect permission from traditional owners to conduct
their overnight walks. However, the reality is that Aboriginal people have given this
permission constrained by wider public perceptions of what constitutes appropriate
activities in a national park. It is feared that a ban on bushwalking is ‘likely to incur
the wrath of most Australians who consider national parks as the public domain and
bushwalking a legitimate and harmless “wilderness” activity’ (Clarke 1996:47). It is
under these political circumstances that bushwalking has been allowed to take place
in the Park.

This chapter examines these competing agendas of bushwalkers and Aborigines and
the two groups’ conflicting ideas about the appropriate use of the escarpment. It
finds that the activities of bushwalkers and the concerns that these activities generate in the Aboriginal domain produce a cultural borderland, a novel space where place is contested and transformed, a space of negotiation and resistance where people's cherished values both compete with and influence one another.

7.2. The History of Bushwalking in Australia

Some understanding of the history of the bushwalking movement in Australia is necessary to appreciate the present-day contestations over the landscape of the Kakadu escarpment. Bushwalking as a sport and a recreational pastime is popular with educated middle class Anglo-Australians, and the history of bushwalking in Australia is closely connected with the emergence of movements for wilderness preservation (Hall 1992). As with early explorers, such as Leichhardt, the aesthetic tradition of Romanticism and the project of natural history influence the attitudes and activities of many bushwalkers. Many seek through the embodied experience of being in the bush a spiritual connection with the land, and bushwalkers are often keen naturalists who are proud of their nomenclatural knowledge that allows them to identify species of animals and plants on their walks. The Lonely Planet guide to Bushwalking in Australia characterises the genesis of bushwalking in a manner resonant with the Australian foundational histories of benign settler explorations of the 'new land':

Since colonisation, Australians have had an affinity with the bush. Early explorers ventured out in search of greener pastures; miners dug for gold and other precious metals and minerals, and surveyors laid the foundations for growth of towns and industry.

The mountains were explored first by the miners who pushed tracks up the large river valleys. Cattle owners seeking new pasture used these tracks to access the alpine plains for summer grazing. The cattle owners kept the tracks open, cut new routes and built an extensive chain of bush huts over the high country.

As cities expanded, people began to visit the bush for recreation and pleasure and the first walking clubs began in the 1890s. (Chapman and Chapman 1992:9)

In the early part of last century, bushwalking clubs began the first organised campaigns for the preservation of wilderness. The Sydney Bushwalkers’ Club was
formed in 1927 and ‘promoted the evolution of an appreciation of wild country by involving many people in an organisation which deliberately supported the idea of wilderness and primitive lands’ (Hall 1992: 106). In 1932, Sydney bushwalkers were involved in the establishment of the National Parks and Primitive Areas Council (NPPAC). NPPAC focused initially on the preservation of two ‘primitive’ areas—the Blue Mountains west of Sydney and the Snowy-Indi area on the Victoria/NSW border. The preservationist principles of early bushwalkers are demonstrated by Myles Dunphy, founder of the Sydney Bushwalkers and secretary of NPPAC, who valued what he saw as the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of the wilderness experience and the regenerative qualities of wild places. Dunphy wrote:

It is paradoxical that wilderness or primitive bushland should be one of the really indispensable necessities of modern existence in its soundest sense. This is the new and modern view. So far, civilisation has destroyed the greater part of what was once the primeval wilderness. But now, when mankind begins to envisage complete urbanisation and subjection of the remaining wild parts of the country, the prospect is wearisome and worrying; for where else can man go to escape his civilisation?

The thought that the country can never go wild again is positively appalling. It has resulted in this action: that all over the world forested and scenic areas have been set apart for the recreation purposes of mankind, where he can rid himself of the shackles of ordered existence. Hence the great national parks. More and more people want to get back again to the forested and mountainous wilderness which has been lost. The movement is not merely a passing phase. The more complicated existence becomes, the more necessary it is to have this wonderful palliative handy to preserve the natural balance of minds, strengthen ordinary, comradely nature, and perfect healthy physique; also to preserve for the human race that connection with things natural and wholesome which is now more than ever necessary, because of our remarkably artificial city and town environments. (Baron Thurat (pseud. of Myles Dunphy), 24 Aug. 1934, quoted in Hall 1992: 109)

Outside the Sydney area, bushwalking remained the pastime of ‘explorers’ and adventurers (Chapman and Chapman 1992: 10). In the 1960s the popularity of bushwalking increased, as did the desire for wilderness preservation. Bushwalkers, along with other conservation-minded citizens, in the populated regions of
southeastern Australia saw that the Australian bush, especially around settled areas, was decreasing and a movement began to reverse this trend. In Tasmania in 1972, bushwalkers established the world’s first Green party, the United Tasmania Group, in an attempt to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder, an alpine lake in the state’s rugged southwest. Lake Pedder, a popular bushwalkers’ destination, became a national symbol of this growing demand for the preservation of ‘wilderness’ (see Kiernan 1990).

7.2.1. Bushwalking in the Kakadu Region

In the Kakadu region recreational bushwalking began as an activity undertaken by Darwin residents familiar with walking routes through the exchange of local knowledge. Alan Moy, a founder of the Darwin Bushwalking Club says that before the 1970s:

...any mention of bushwalking in the Northern Territory implied either going fishing or swimming in a remote billabong or river, going pig shooting or perhaps going out with a metal detector looking for gold and other minerals.

However, people visiting the Top End from other parts of Australia would often contact the Darwin Environment Centre and ask there for information on going ‘out bush’. In June 1974, the Environment Centre placed an advertisement in the local newspaper calling a public meeting for anyone interested in forming a bushwalking club. Subsequently, the Darwin Bushwalking Club was formed and bushwalking began to achieve wider popularity. Within a few years there were fifty club members. The Stuart Highway was the only sealed road in the Top End at this stage and a return trip to the Kakadu Region took up to three days. Bushwalkers’ access to suitable bushwalking areas was both limited to and enabled by unsealed mining, mineral exploration and survey tracks. There were no topographical maps for most areas and the emphasis for the club was on bushwalking in unspoilt environments. Considerable enjoyment, they said, was derived from ‘discovering’ new areas.

In this pre-Kakadu National Park era, bushwalkers enjoyed virtually unimpeded access into the Kakadu escarpment country. The Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife Branch of the Northern Territory Department of Interior, managers of what was then the Alligator Rivers Wildlife Sanctuary (est. 1972), readily gave the club permission to conduct walks into the area. These bushwalks were conducted on a regular basis...
and Aboriginal art sites and archaeology were a significant part of the area's attraction. One long-time bushwalker recalls that in 1974 you could 'go anywhere you wanted, if you could find a track'. This era, from 1974 until the mid-1980s, when access to areas became more restricted, is referred to by long-time bushwalkers as the 'Golden Age' of bushwalking in the Territory. Mick Alderson, a senior traditional owner, who was at the time employed as a Ranger, recalled that to the best of his knowledge in this era of Northern Territory management over his country, no traditional owners were asked permission or consulted by the Sanctuary management about tourists' (which includes bushwalkers') access to these areas. In the 1970s, with the permission of pastoralists, bushwalkers had also begun to walk in the Jawoyn land in the south of present-day Kakadu National Park. Exploration of these areas included the search for and viewing of art sites (for examples see DBC 1974-79). During this period, it was reported that tourists, bushwalkers and surveyors had taken human remains from burial sites (Cooper 1987). Many of these areas are now restricted under the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1978.

In this era, the bushwalkers did not need to consider Aboriginal associations with the land on which they walked. For bushwalkers, contact with traditional owners was negligible. In 1976, the Darwin Bushwalking Club newsletter recorded that Club walkers had met George Chaloupka from the Darwin Museum and three of his Aboriginal guides at Djuwarr waterhole in Deaf Adder Gorge (DBC Aug. 1976). They greeted each other and the bushwalkers continued on up the Gorge. George Chaloupka claims that the Aboriginal men he was with were unhappy about these strangers walking through their land, but that they felt there was nothing they could do about it (Chaloupka, G. pers. comm.). Deaf Adder Gorge is a place of considerable religious and social significance to Aboriginal people throughout the region and it contains many sacred (andjamun) sites. Chaloupka et al., in a cultural survey of Balawurru (Deaf Adder Gorge), write that ‘andjamun sites are avoided as a prescribed act, or just a trespass at such a locality could cause harm not only to the offender, but also to a community at large’ (1985:186). After the establishment of Kakadu National Park, the area was eventually closed to bushwalkers in the mid-1980s. However, in Darwin bushwalking circles there remains a particular wistfulness attached to comments made about Deaf Adder Gorge. Many long-time bushwalkers complain that this place, as with many of their favoured walking areas
in Kakadu National Park, is no longer accessible to them. Other bushwalkers who have never been to Deaf Adder Gorge or these other areas lament the fact that they will never see these places.

In the period before the establishment of Kakadu National Park and the introduction of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, Aboriginal people in the region were unable to exercise any control over non-Aboriginal access to their land. In the discourses of authority at the time, Aboriginal voices were absent. While the Darwin Bushwalking Club supported the establishment of Kakadu National Park, on the issue of Aboriginal land rights the club remained silent and actively discouraged the expression of political views. It was felt that politics of any sort would compromise the non-partisan agenda of the club (DBC Nov. 1977). However, as Aboriginal people gained more authority in the management of the Park, it became increasingly clear to bushwalkers in Kakadu that bushwalking, in itself, is inherently political. It is a domain of land use contested by bushwalkers, who would like to continue doing what they have always done, and Aboriginal landowners, who want to reassert their control over the landscape. One long-time Darwin bushwalker concedes that:

...then the word traditional owner had not been coined, we were white supremacists [but we have] evolved a long way since the 1970s. We have begun to be aware of Kakadu and the Aboriginal presence and would like to learn about it. It is like the stolen generation issue. We need to put it aside and move on. It is part of our personal development, thinking about the balance of Aboriginal people with country.

It is also about the political reality of bushwalkers now having to negotiate with no longer silenced Aboriginal voices that seek to control bushwalkers’ activities.

7.3. **Aboriginal Identification with the Escarpment**

It is also necessary to place Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking in the escarpment in a historical context. Aboriginal people lived in various locations on the Arnhem Land plateau until the middle of the twentieth century and traversed it frequently (see Chaloupka 1981b). From the Arnhem Land coast to Katherine they followed the tracks of their ancestors, trading, visiting and meeting social obligations with other groups of Aboriginal people. With the availability of motorised transport and the increasingly sedentary lifestyle of Aboriginal people in the Western Arnhem
Land region, the pathways across the top of the escarpment fell into disuse as did much of the site-specific and detailed ceremonial knowledge associated with the region (see NLC et al. 1998). The buffalo hide industry, cattle station work, the war period, mining and the establishment of urban centres enticed the majority of Aboriginal people in the Kakadu escarpment and the wider Arnhem Land plateau region to move away for work (see Chapter Three). This has meant, particularly for 'stone country' or escarpment people, that younger generations of traditional owners were unable to learn many of the traditional practices and ceremonies once conducted in that country or gain an intimate knowledge of these vast areas of land. As a result of these modern settlement patterns, there is now a certain unevenness in Aboriginal knowledge of the landscape, particularly in these more remote areas (Merlan 1998:73).

While there are ethnographic histories of land ownership recorded in land claim research and documentation of the named clan estates within this area, the land tenure system for the escarpment area is now generally glossed through regional language affiliation, which has superseded the classical Aboriginal clan system as a practical managerial matter. Nevertheless, it is an area that in every sense is considered by Aboriginal people to be owned by Aboriginal people, including people of the Jawoyn and Mayali language groups. As discussed in Chapter Four, social interactions and continued resource sharing across the Aboriginal domain in the region continue to pervade people's statements of political alliances and personal identification with land. People often refer to the fact that such and such a mob are 'all company together'. In these cases, people emphasise not discrete estates of ownership, but other rights and entitlements that enable people to exercise management responsibility across clan boundaries.

Aboriginal people believe that the escarpment country, as elsewhere in the Park, is an Aboriginal place. While they no longer regularly visit or travel through it, it is an important part of local Aboriginal identification with place, revered as an area of powerful religious significance. Most Aboriginal people now relate to this country through stories that are told and retold about it in Aboriginal discourse. To some extent this reifies the features of the relationship between people and country, but at the same time it is a relationship that will keep changing, situated as it is within a
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wider system of Aboriginal relationships to land and each other. As Merlan writes, in discussions of Aboriginal relationships to land:

No account is necessarily final and, in some cases, an unchanging and neat character of a set of concepts about the landscape may be an indication of the rigidification, perhaps even self-conscious formalisation, resulting from the experiential remove of Aboriginal people from it, or the pressured problematisation of human relationships to it. (1997:7)

As a result of the historical movement of Aboriginal people away from the escarpment area, Levitus suggests that the escarpment is now valued by local Aboriginal people as ‘a repository of significance’, a relationship to country which has created the escarpment as ‘a zone of sacredness...a zone of insecurity, reified, distanced, and set apart as a reserve of traditional Aboriginality’ (Levitus, R. pers. comm.). However, as discussed in Chapter Four, from the perspective of traditional owners, a personal lack of knowledge and physical absence from the land does not result in a loss of identification with country. Even in their physical absence, Aboriginal responsibilities to that country continue, and it is these responsibilities that inform their concerns about bushwalking.

7.3.1. The Presence of Death

While much of the escarpment area is no longer known in geographic detail by many Aboriginal people, it is a place Aboriginal people know to be rich in cultural sites, burial sites and djang, the current spiritual power of a particular site. Anthropologist Ronald Berndt who worked in the Western Arnhem Land region in the immediate post-war era explains Aboriginal people’s understanding of djang and its influence on Aboriginal people’s use of the landscape:

The land is personified in the shape-changing mythic beings...These beings were responsible for the origin of customs and social institutions. They moved across the land in the Dreaming period, from place to place, or camp to camp, having adventures, performing various rites, and meeting others of their own kind; and they left behind them part of their own sacred essence, which is still present at certain sites...[these are] the well-beaten pads, along which people travelled like the mythical beings before them...The tracks link various sites. (1970:5–6)
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*Djang* may be present in particular rock art sites or it may be present in a particular rock or a tree or a crevice or a muddy pool. In the absence of Aboriginal people living in the escarpment *country*, it is believed that these *djang* (sites of spiritual power) are managed and cared for by the spirits of the old people who now rest there—the people who knew that *country*. While Aboriginal people may be physically absent from the escarpment *country*, the spirits of their ancestors remain and are accorded great respect in Aboriginal custom. Similarly, Langton, writing about Aboriginal people in eastern Cape York, states that:

The *Bama* concept of land estate is simultaneously a social, physical and metaphysical one. *Bama* beliefs about the nature of spiritual Beings residing in particular places articulate a core dimension of *Bama* biogeography, invoking death as a presence in places. Not death as abstraction, but death as the state of being of those ancestors from whom the living trace their own being and whose constant presence must be contended with in places. (forthcoming:451–452)

In Kakadu National Park, when people travel through areas that are not frequently visited by them, senior landowners will ‘sing out’ to the spirits, calling out their presence and asking for assistance to travel safely through *country*. The spirits of the old people are believed to reciprocate through a language of signs made visible in *country*. It is also believed that many groups of spirit people, such as the *Mimi*, *Nukdjarang* and *Nagitjigit*, inhabit the stone *country* and that these people must be respected (Chaloupka 1982:30). These spiritual considerations greatly influence Aboriginal protocols for travelling through *country*, which necessitate others asking permission from landowners and avoiding areas where they have no legitimate reason to go.

### 7.4. Managing the Stone Country

By default, bushwalking permits issued by Parks Australia replace the need for bushwalkers to seek direct permission from traditional owners to walk in the escarpment. However, this creates a significant management problem for Aboriginal people as many of the places that bushwalkers walk through are no longer known by

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62 Settlers also invoke death as significant to their own ‘necral landscapes’ (Edensor 1998:139) which instil attachment to place and relationships with the past. In the 1980s, the ashes of a bushwalker were scattered at a now off limits bushwalking site in the northern outliers of Kakadu. This event is seen by some bushwalkers as an important verification of their attachment to that area.
Aboriginal people in any detailed sense. This fact heightens Aboriginal concerns about bushwalkers' activities in the escarpment. As a senior Aboriginal traditional owner remarked:

We don't know that high country. The old people know it. They travelled it especially in the wet and during the early dry when there was a lot of water around. But now only a few old people know that country—Jawoyn and people from Oenpelli. They know the burial sites, where there are men's sites, women's sites and tracks.

R. Levitus (pers. comm.) suggests that if Aboriginal people 'knew it better, they would be able to manage it more comfortably'. He argues that for Aboriginal people now, the escarpment country is a 'generic zone containing often unlocated places of unmanageable spiritual power'. As a result, Aboriginal people themselves are hesitant about travelling in the escarpment region. Over the past twenty years, Aboriginal people who have been employed by Parks Australia or other researchers in the area of rock art or fire management research have spent some time in the escarpment. In these instances, younger Aboriginal people are often hesitant to go to art sites unless they are in the company of a person more knowledgeable than themselves as to the significance of that place. However, as senior people who are knowledgeable about the escarpment area pass away, it will be those younger people who have experience working in the escarpment on Park related activities that will carry the burden of responsibility for that country. Since the late 1990s, some of these Aboriginal people have participated in the ten or so bushwalking 'surveillance' walks undertaken in the escarpment by the Parks Australia each year, walks conducted largely in response to Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking activities. Participation in these walks allows younger Aboriginal people a chance to enhance their knowledge of that country. Thus, in some respects the concerns by Aboriginal people about bushwalking activities is reinvigorating Aboriginal knowledge of these areas that would be otherwise known only by a handful of remaining old people.

Admitting they do not know that country well does not discount future possibilities for Aboriginal people to re-implicate themselves practically in that landscape. However, currently it is bushwalkers who spend the greatest amount of time in the escarpment, and it is they who have mapped in detail pathways across the rivers, gorges, cliffs and valleys along with the art sites they find along the way (Levitus, R.
The Park service is attempting to ameliorate Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking activities by managing it better through a system of centralised bushwalking management and by endeavouring to undertake on-the-ground surveillance, but bushwalkers with their maps and compasses and networks of information know too well that they can proceed to do as they please.63

7.4.1. Negotiating a Management Policy

Progress in developing a Park-wide bushwalking management strategy is slow and inconsistent. Continual Park staff turnover results in inconsistencies in management policies that either confuse bushwalkers or allow them to exploit the apparent indeterminacies of what they can and can not do. Non-Aboriginal Park managers admit that many traditional owners may prefer that no extended bushwalks occur in the escarpment. However, they believe that a manager’s job is to work around this attitude and attempt to ‘balance’ it with the conservation and recreational values of the Park as expressed by Park users and other stakeholders. They repeatedly state that they are under considerable pressure from the Northern Territory Government and tourism industry to do this.64

In 1996, an ex-commercial bushwalking guide, Campbell Clarke, completed A Management Strategy for Bushwalking for the Plan of Management of Kakadu National Park, a project funded through the Commonwealth Department of Tourism, Forest Ecotourism Program. The 95-page document is both a review of present

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63 In reality, the surveillance walks conducted by Parks Australia are little more than uncoordinated excursions which do not include planned attempts to monitor bushwalkers’ activities.

64 The issue of tourism in the escarpment in Kakadu National Park does not involve only bushwalkers. The Northern Territory Government would like to see the Kakadu National Park boundary expanded further east into western and central Arnhem Land, forming a bloc with Nitmiluk and Gurig National Park that they would call the Greater Katherine to Gurig National Park to be managed by the Northern Territory Government (Northern Territory Government 1994). The Northern Territory Government supports the development of bushwalking in Kakadu National Park and would expand tourism activities in the escarpment and, to this end, is seeking the support of recreational groups for combining the National Parks. The Northern Territory Tourist Commission web page states that the ‘Northern Territory is becoming increasingly popular as a world-class bushwalking haven’ (NTTC Online: http://www.nttc.com.au/pfm/sites/0000828/body.htm). Meanwhile the PWCNT Masterplan (1996:30) identifies research that shows 30.2% of tourists in the Northern Territory undertake or are interested in bushwalking. The Masterplan identifies the Arnhem Land Plateau as rich in endemic species, ‘whose rugged and inaccessible nature makes it one of Australia’s last frontiers for botanical exploration’ (PWCNT 1996:4). The Masterplan also envisions a tourism strategy for Kakadu National Park that would increase visitor access to the escarpment and develop an integrated walking trail network (PWCNT 1996:47).
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policy and an examination of some of the issues and concerns surrounding bushwalking including those of traditional owners. It is a strategy that reflects the changing Park emphasis on Aboriginal priorities, perspectives and participation in Park management. To address Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking the strategy suggests several approaches to preserve the integrity of the living Aboriginal culture and its sites. Clarke advocates involving Aboriginal traditional owners in the management of bushwalking and facilitating improved communication and participation between Aboriginal traditional owners, ANCA [now Parks Australia] and bushwalkers regarding bushwalking management strategies. He also recommends that the education of bushwalkers concerning Aboriginal culture and minimal impact walking be encouraged through appropriate management and interpretive material (1996:9).

In April 1999 for the first time a meeting of Aboriginal people, Park staff and bushwalkers, who were represented by a member of the Darwin Bushwalking Club, and the operator of a commercial bushwalking operation was held. Accounts of this meeting given to me by Aboriginal people stressed the fact that because they had now had the opportunity to express to bushwalkers how they felt about the issue, they expected bushwalkers to respect their wishes. People discussed the issue of visitation of rock art sites, photography of these sites and the desire on the part of Aboriginal people that bushwalking in the escarpment not be encouraged. A senior traditional owner explained that there are many art sites in the escarpment country that are not to be sighted by Aboriginal people, nor by bushwalkers (DBC 1999). Another senior traditional owner expressed concern that bushwalking guides and party leaders should explain to bushwalkers that the escarpment area is Aboriginal land that is of important and continued significance to Aboriginal people. A summary of this meeting was published in the Darwin Bushwalking Club monthly newsletter in September 1999. The meeting was envisaged by Park management as the first of two or three meetings in 1999 that would develop a unified approach to the development of a bushwalking policy. However, by the end of 2000 no further meetings had been held due to Park staff turnover.

Among non-Aboriginal Park staff, there are different levels of awareness of Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking. There is a perception among some Park staff involved in the management of bushwalking that bushwalking receives a
significantly greater amount of management attention than is necessary given the number of people who actually go bush walking compared with the total number of visitors to the Park. Moreover, non-Aboriginal Park staff often play down Aboriginal concerns about bushwalking management by stressing that bushwalkers are 'generally good people who just want to get away from it all', people who 'care more for the land' than do other tourists.

Non-Aboriginal Park managers are concerned about the protection of Aboriginal heritage such as the rock art and archaeological heritage of the Kakadu escarpment. Moreover, they are concerned to protect the integrity of Aboriginal sacred sites in the area. In an attempt to protect these areas and address Aboriginal concerns over bushwalking, Park planners produce maps of bushwalking routes which they use to consult with traditional owners to decide whether approved routes are in need of revision—in case important sites have been missed in a previous consultation. These European maps then become an authority to which Aboriginal people are expected to defer in order to facilitate the bureaucratic management of country. Moreover, the practice of site identification allows bushwalkers to continue establishing their own cultural landscape around discrete parcels of land identified on maps as having contemporary Aboriginal significance (see Jackson 1998 for a discussion of this issue in relation to land planning).

7.5. Aboriginal Perspectives on Bushwalking

Depending on their own knowledge and understanding of the escarpment area, of bushwalking activities, and of what the Parks Australia does to manage it, Aboriginal opinion on bushwalking activities varies from person to person. While there is a general feeling that bushwalkers do in fact go to areas where they should not go, many people believe that there is nothing Aboriginal people can do to stop it. However, there is a general consensus that bushwalking needs strict management. Mandy Muir, a descendent of the Murumburr clan, explained:

I don't mind bushwalking. They should do it. I love the bush, its good for people to go out. Make sure those areas are protected. Make sure people do the right thing. People take things from our country to the other side of the world. There are skulls and bones all over the rock country. Aboriginal people worry about bushwalking. Because of the fact there's a lot of bones, ceremonies there. A lot. Main concern because a lot of skulls and bones and because ceremonies
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happened there. That’s the real reason why people are concerned. But bushwalking is a very important way to discover the bush. Rangers should be with them. But hard to police. Another concern people have is people hurting themselves.

Aboriginal landowners feel a strong duty of care for the well being of visitors, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to their country. Some Aboriginal people are adamant that bushwalkers should not be going to the escarpment area without an Aboriginal guide, if at all. These people feel strongly that the escarpment is an area that needs to remain as Aboriginal country, not the preserve of bushwalkers. One local Aboriginal man, Arthur Corrigan, who has experience working in the escarpment on rock art maintenance, commented that:

I’d like to see Aboriginal people go too. Not just Balanda. I think it would be good if Aboriginal people were going with Balanda. It is not Balanda country, it’s Aboriginal country. What if they get lost. Aboriginal people know the country better. Show them bush tucker as they walk, hunting grounds. Balanda could be walking on top of sacred site, need Aboriginal people there to guide them. No good Balanda going themselves. Need Aboriginal people with them doing the talk for rock art, tell the story of that art. No good one Balanda talking to another Balanda (need old Aboriginal people or young person who knows about that art). If take Aboriginal people out in the escarpment that is okay, bushwalking.

Similarly, senior traditional owner Mick Alderson stated that ideally a Jawoyn person should accompany bushwalkers on the Gunlom Land Trust lands and a member of the northern clans should do likewise in the areas of the Gagudju Land Trust responsibility. Other Aboriginal people feel that bushwalking is acceptable as long as bushwalkers go where the say they are going and that Parks Australia monitors their activities closely along the routes.

Public submissions to Clarke’s (1996) bushwalking strategy made it clear that many bushwalkers believe that Aboriginal people are concerned about bushwalking because they do not understand the reasons why bushwalkers appreciate being in the bush. My data suggest that Aboriginal people do understand bushwalkers’

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65 Landowners are responsible for the welfare of visitors to their land and any harm that they may come to is a threat to the wellbeing of landowners.

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appreciation of the bush and are encouraged by that appreciation of their country. They nevertheless express concern about the distances that bushwalkers travel and exactly what it is that bushwalkers do in that country. For instance, in the northern outliers of the Kakadu escarpment bushwalking has been banned since the early 1990s. A traditional owner for this area, Samson Arablda, explained that:

Bushwalking alright this way [day walks along the East Alligator River] but back towards Jabiru all the escarpment too many sacred sites. No walking there should be allowed. They want to find sacred sites so we don't let them.

In areas where bushwalking continues to occur, it is very difficult for Parks Australia to manage bushwalking activities according to Aboriginal people’s wishes. This is demonstrated in the case of a 1997 Parks Australia surveillance walk of a popular bushwalking and day-tour area. The group consisted of a Jawoyn traditional owner, two Aboriginal rangers, a non-Aboriginal ranger and two other non-Aboriginal people. For the two Aboriginal rangers it was their first experience of European style bushwalking. Fifteen minutes after the group had begun walking up the gorge, a small tour party was found in an art site believed by the Jawoyn man present to be part of a restricted sacred site. While the site is outside the boundaries of the restricted sacred site area marked on official maps, this man was shocked to find the tour group there and maintained that the tour group definitely was within a site which was off limits, restricted even to the Aboriginal men present. In 1999, Parks Australia were in the process of consulting with senior traditional owners to establish and clarify whether the site should be accessible or formally included in the restricted area. Tour operators have been asked not to go there pending negotiations with the Jawoyn. The staff of the tour company involved maintain that they were unaware of any traditional owners’ concerns regarding their access to this site. They take their clients to the site as it is a place that gives people a special experience:

It gives them a feeling some Aboriginal people might have had there and also the feeling that the first non-Aboriginal people might have felt when they saw these things...it's an untouched, unmodified site. (Company Director)

The issue for Aboriginal people in this case was not only what feeling their ancestors might have had there but what feelings they themselves do have there. The Jawoyn man present on the walk remains adamant that this site is (or should be) restricted from tourist use. The other Aboriginal men present on the surveillance
walk explained to me their feelings over the incident and bushwalking tourism generally:

Ranger A: The tour guide should know better. Talk from here, site is over there. That’s all right. My country back up this way. I don’t like tourists going in sacred site in my country. Makes me feel bad.

We have enough controls, but they keep going back for more and more. Keep humbugging you. Little bit, little bit all right. Not big mobs. Don’t know what’s going on.

You’ve got to know areas very well. All these old people they know. They be dying now. Up to young people to listen to them.

X goes out walking with Mary River Mob [rangers]. He knows Jawoyn country. Old people send him out. Better way [for bushwalkers]. People with you. They know country. Tell you can’t go here, there. Watch what they doing. They should look at it long time ago (Traditional Owner, Kakadu National Park).

Ranger B: They [bushwalkers] must have feelings about walking in some areas. It’s not my country up there. Sometimes I get a feeling I shouldn’t be there. Most people must get a feeling. (Traditional Owner, Kakadu National Park)

Many of those Aboriginal people who have been actively involved in Park management for many years feel a sense of resignation over issues such as bushwalking. One senior traditional owner summed up this attitude and at the same time expressed her expectations of what the National Park should be:

Park’s job is to protect our culture. I don’t see them doing that just talking and saying they will do this and that and then nothing. The Board too may react to things and say they will change it but in the end nothing changes. I’ve been telling them too long. I’m sick of saying the same things over and over.

7.5.1. Rock Art Tourism

I want to have a look at that place, see the painting. Might be something there. Maybe I have to explain to them that they are not allowed to go there. Maybe it’s okay. I have to go and have a look. Tourists can’t go there themselves. They don’t know. (Rodney Nelson, Jawoyn man)

In a bushwalking information booklet published by ANCA in 1996 and on an information sheet distributed with bushwalking permits, bushwalkers are asked not
to try to find rock art sites. The bushwalking tour guide on a 1998 commercial walking tour in which I participated carried this booklet and read out parts of it to the tour group, including the text referring to traditional owners’ request that bushwalkers not visit art sites. The booklet explains that, ‘Some sites are sacred and under traditional law have restricted access. If you accidentally come across art sites please do the right thing and view them from a distance’ (ANCA 1996:5). On the following day, art sites were visited along the route and tourists clambered up rock ledges to take photographs. The blatant disregard for the wishes of traditional owners occurs because Aboriginal rock art and other sites of Aboriginal cultural significance are often imagined to be part of a generalised and accessible Australian heritage. One client on the tour explained that while she would respect traditional owners’ wishes in relation to sacred sites, ‘I couldn’t accept a blanket ban on all sites. Maybe some of the Aborigines don’t want you to go there. It doesn’t bother me; I go to churches of all denominations’. Many bushwalkers consider Aboriginal rock art to be primarily an example of Australia’s antiquity. One bushwalker explained:

It is amazing to think that it still exists after thousands of years. So much of the culture in Australia is so short. You go overseas to the Pyramids and places and its thousands of years, well we’ve got that here too. I didn’t fully appreciate that until I came here.

While large rock art sites such as Ubirr and Nourlangie Rock are open to the public, many bushwalkers desire to seek, see and experience this heritage first hand in an unmediated environment. Bushwalkers who have walked in Kakadu often swap information on the location of art sites and as equipment such as Geographical Positioning Systems (GPS) becomes more accessible, art sites in the escarpment are being mapped to record the exact satellite locations of these sites. In a conversation I had with a bushwalker in a Kakadu campground, he revealed that he had a topographical map onto which a bushwalking acquaintance in Darwin had plotted for him some 30 to 40 GPS locations for art sites.66 These sites were in and around well-known restricted areas in the Jawoyn country. The bushwalker, from Queensland,

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66 As a result of Aboriginal concerns about this issue it is now to become a permit condition that GPS not be carried by bushwalkers in the Park. However, this does not stop the information from simply being plotted by hand onto topographical maps at the time of ‘discovery’.
Plate 9: Bushwalkers survey the vista from the Kakadu escarpment

(photo: Lisa Palmer)

Plate 10: Bushwalkers viewing rock art, Kakadu escarpment

(photo: Lisa Palmer)
did not realise the significance of the information marked on the map,67 and had only a cursory interest in visiting these sites on the walk he was going on. However, he said he might come back next year when he was fitter. The bush walker who passed him this information was an organiser of training sessions for novice bushwalkers in conjunction with a local bushwalking club.

The Internet is also becoming a forum for the exchange of information in the bushwalking fraternity. In July 2000 when I was searching the Internet for information on Kakadu National Park, the fourth site listed by the search engine was titled, ‘Jim Jim Falls walk’. A Northern Territory couple, who had completed this walk in September 1999, had created a file on their web page (which highlights their personal experiences and travel advice for visitors to the Northern Territory) containing information about the area above the Falls including the route, a map, a description of their activities and approximately fifty photographs of rock art, along with photos of themselves photographing the art. Their journal entry for the first day of the walk states that ‘[w]ith Aboriginal Art at nearly every outcrop it made you realise just how much this place was utilised by Aboriginals over many thousands of years’. Their description of the second day (when they left their base camp well above the Falls and headed away from the approved route to explore for rock art) reveals the ‘discovery ethic’ that impels many bushwalkers:

A few kilometres on we hit the long wall of rock which hides the entrance into the rocky country. We searched high & low around rock overhangs taking the odd photo as we walked along this mighty wall of rock. Then we came across an opening to what appeared to be an amphitheatre and maze of rock outcrops and overhangs. It was in this ‘secret’ opening we explored the lost art of the Jim Jim Region. We found no silicon here as this place is a speck in the ‘stone country’. It will be many years before a team of dedicated University Archaeologists will venture here, if ever.

On day four the party headed across country off approved routes and ‘spent many hours exploring ‘a massive outcrop of rocks which held a thousand ancient aboriginal rock art paintings’ of which they provide nineteen photographs. The site is

67 Under the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Act 1978, visiting these sites without the approval of Aboriginal traditional owners is a criminal offence.
not only off an approved route, but is in the middle of an area identified in Clarke’s (1996) bushwalking strategy as being strictly out of bounds to bushwalkers. By September 2000, this website had registered 1240 hits since its establishment in February 2000. Some of those who signed the site’s guest book were enthusiastic about doing the same bushwalk in Kakadu.68

These examples give substance to traditional owners’ ongoing concerns about bushwalkers’ behaviour in Kakadu and the inability of Parks Australia to manage bushwalking to Aboriginal people’s satisfaction. While these may seem like two isolated events, bushwalkers through their networks have access to a wealth of information on art site locations and Park management is not in a position to curtail it. One frequent bushwalker in the Park explained to me that:

Art sites give me a purpose. I’m not into flora and fauna so I find and identify art. I’ve seen bushwalking guides’ notes on art sites in Koolpin Gorge and I’m keen to check them out. I wouldn’t go to them if Aboriginal people gave me a sound cultural reason.

This non-Aboriginal cultural mapping of the landscape and the increasingly entrenched nature of bushwalking activities is built on a wilderness ethic and, ironically, an appreciation of Aboriginal heritage that is overwriting, and in many cases disregarding, Aboriginal people’s relationships to the escarpment.

7.6. Bushwalking and the Cultural Landscape

Many bushwalkers remark on differences between walking in Kakadu and bushwalking in other areas in Australia. For instance, two people who frequently bushwalk in Kakadu remarked:

I walked for twenty years in the Blue Mountains, an Aboriginal presence never crossed my mind. It is a privilege to see rock art. There is not a lot of great art but it is good to see it out there. It is a spiritual experience in many spots in Kakadu.

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68 In order not to promote this type of website I have not provided its web address. By the end of the year 2000 this website had received over 2000 hits.
There is an incredible sense of history in geology and shelters. Kakadu puts the history of Australian landscape in perspective. Kakadu integrates three billion years of history you don’t feel that walking in southeast Queensland. The link with people is also incredibly ancient. Now when I go home I see these places with different eyes.

According to another man, ‘bushwalking in Kakadu gives you a glimmer of understanding of what it is like to be possessed by the country’. Some bushwalkers are puzzled by Aboriginal requests that they do not view rock art, especially given the fact that Aboriginal people want Park visitors to recognise Kakadu as an Aboriginal cultural landscape. One man stated that ‘It is a catch twenty-two, if you have an interest in culture and art you will seek it. If you have no interest in culture, you won’t seek it.’ Another woman thought that exploring the landscape for rock art is ‘part of an inquiring mind, to want to know more and want to go further’. However, another woman who had been a client on a commercial bush walking tour in the Park expressed her disappointment at the lack of information that had been provided on the tour relating to an Aboriginal cultural landscape:

I was hoping to find out what was the significance of these places to Aboriginal people. At the beautiful pools I was thinking “well the Aboriginal people must have used these for something ceremonial or celebratory”. I’d like to know what is the meaning for the original inhabitants, how did they use those beautiful places that we now enjoy.

I do feel an intruder. But you could say that about all tourism in the park in a way. But I suppose we just think that well we don’t spoil the landscape as we pass through—that’s our aim. Experience it and hopefully learn a bit more about it.

I don’t know about biology like other people do on this trip. As I trudge along with my heavy pack I’m dreaming about the social history. How did people live here. Obviously it is wilderness now, but that is what is going through my mind.

In 1999, partly in recognition of the potential market niche for bushwalking tours that would interpret the Aboriginal cultural landscape, a bushwalk was organised by the NLC’s Caring for Country Unit to trial an idea for Aboriginal-led walks in the Western Arnhem Land plateau. The two-day walk followed a ‘blackfella track’
between two outstations and was conducted by Aboriginal landowners, their relatives, non-Aboriginal researchers and NLC staff. The following excerpt is taken from one of the non-Aboriginal bushwalker’s field notes:

It was late in the morning before the others arrived from Maningrida and Manmoyi outstation. They [the Aboriginal men] emerged from the plane looking to me like an army platoon ready to fight in the Vietnam jungles—bristling with guns, ammunition belts and big knives, a .303 or .308 on every shoulder. It reminded me that we were in the company of a hunting people and made me realise that there were probably two different sets of expectations here, those of hunters and those of the bushwalkers. The hunters carried a gun and, apart from an item or two of clothing, nothing else—and it soon became clear that they were going to travel fast and want to get to the destination as soon as possible—especially as no one had thought to bring any tobacco.

So, we finally set off at noon, with Jacky [the senior traditional owner] and the yawurrinj⁶⁹ setting a smart pace. After an hour and a half of walking in the early afternoon heat, a couple of creek crossings, and a one or two kilometre trudge through several ankle deep swamps with my high-tech sponge-comfort walking shoes each weighing a couple of extra kilos, I was ready for a good rest and a leisurely bushwalkers’ lunch. However, after we’d all shared my fruit-cake out and a packet of “trail mix” fruit & nuts, Jacky was up and ready and anxious to get going again. “Come on! We can’t stay here. We’ve got this forest to walk up through, and then another one, and then a climb up through some stone country—and we don’t want to get stuck THERE at night—so come on! We gotta go!” So it was up and off. It was now that I envied his bare feet and sensibly light load (a blanket stuffed into a shoulder-bag and a CSR sugar tin).

We were now on the trail of some buffalo. The yawurrinj went off ahead with their guns. We could smell the strong smell of buffalo on their disturbed camping area, so we knew they weren’t far ahead. As Jacky, David, Murray and I walked through a scrubby, jungly patch close to a river bank, there were suddenly bullets flying everywhere and we seemed to be surrounded by cracking loud rifle shots. A buffalo came flying over the bank towards us and Jacky yelled out, and kept yelling out, to the unseen yawurrinj not to fire in our direction. David hit the ground, deciding that was the best option. As we

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⁶⁹ Young men.
emerged from the jungle patch and onto the river-bank we saw two buffalo lying dead on the other side of the river. Now there were knives being sharpened and the boys soon had the two tongues cut out and a number of strips of meat—enough for the evening meal—tied into an old piece of sheet.

Meanwhile another non-Aboriginal person on the walk mused that:

The traditional route was interesting because it avoided things an urbanite would be attracted to such as the waterfall. I would have liked to have spent about four days doing the walking so I could 'experience' the place. By “experience” I mean sit thinking beside a pool of water, wondering about ants while having a cup of tea, puzzling about the landscape while studying a map, hearing a bird call and sensing music, viewing rock art and allowing it to ask the profound questions about meaning, dreaming about clouds, marvelling at the glint of specks of sand, being moved by the natural beauty of the dawn, apprehending the gestalt of tree in an unexpected sideways glance and sensing perfection in the sound of running water...I sensed that the Aboriginal members of the party were more pragmatic and wanted to efficiently get from one place to another. Perhaps they are less hung up about place, being, and origins and destiny than psychically damaged urbanites.

The above quote makes it clear that bushwalkers are directed and influenced by their own cultural landscape whilst moving across the land. While some seek to view rock art, other bushwalkers are attracted to the Kakadu escarpment by the opportunity to experience the different landscapes and variety of vegetation, to swim in the waterholes, to enjoy the peacefulness of the bush where they can contemplate nature, and to bask in the sense of being many kilometres from roads and crowds. Most of these bushwalkers are attracted to the idea of having a ‘wilderness experience’. They engage in a style of bushwalking that is dependent on high technology equipment, such as waterproof tents and packs, freeze-dried food, topographical maps and maybe GPS equipment. These materials allow bushwalkers to move through the landscape without need to engage in the instrumental use of the environment. They are guided by the idea of ‘treading softly’, which is based on a code of bushwalking etiquette referred to as ‘minimal impact bushwalking’—a

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70 This code of conduct aims to minimise the impact which bushwalkers have on the environment and on other visitors (see for example Australian Alps Liaison Committee n.d.).
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style of bushwalking that is believed to be ecologically and socially appropriate. In this way, bushwalkers create ethical codes from which a ‘moral vocabulary of landscape emerges, a language for harmonious human–environment relations’ (Matless 1995:96). When discussing the concerns expressed by Aboriginal people about bushwalking activities in Kakadu National Park, a high degree of anxiety emerges in the attitudes of some bushwalkers. Many bushwalkers in Kakadu National Park assume that they, like Aboriginal people, share an affinity for the land, a relationship that cares and nurtures the environment and fosters a better human relationship with it. As already discussed, bushwalkers have been closely involved in campaigns for nature preservation, and bushwalking attracts many people who are personally committed to promoting a community and intellectual shift towards what they perceive as a more sustainable land ethic. For example, feminist environmentalists, Fullagar and Hailstone, highlight the embodied experience of bushwalking and write that it is:

...the wonder of the outdoors, the pleasure we feel in encountering nature’s otherness, which inaugurates a different sense of self...it is through the body that we are able, potentially at least, to reconnect with the natural world that we so desire to experience the wonder of. (1996:25–26)

They write that the body is an intermediary between the self and the natural world, ‘an otherness we pass through and which passes through us’ (1996:25). To hear that Aboriginal people in Kakadu have concerns about their bushwalking activities in the Park is personally confronting for many bushwalkers, who might otherwise have thought that Aborigines would share their perspectives on nature.

Dr Geoff Mosely, former Director of the ACF, in a letter to the Kakadu Board of Management Chairman expressed his disappointment in the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management which proposes a revision of the concept of wilderness zoning in the Park and stricter controls on bushwalking. Industrialised non-Aboriginal people, he claims, have been ‘wrenched’ from the land and need wilderness and wilderness activities to re-establish these links. He writes:

Wilderness needs to be managed in a way which as far as possible meets its usual objectives (maintaining wilderness conditions, and allowing study and experience of wilderness). I realise that in this case there may need to be some variations to meet Aboriginal cultural needs but in a situation of comanagement
there should be a possibility for compromise by both cultural groups...While I concede that walkers should not visit culturally sensitive sites it is bad for the enjoyment of wilderness and the protection of the wilderness environment to confine wilderness visitors to specific routes. (Mosely 1996:2)

Mosely is disappointed because he, along with the ACF, 'fought hard' in the 1970s for Aboriginal land rights and the establishment of the Park, and against mining interests. He sees these attacks on the concept of wilderness as a regressive trend in Park management.

While many conservationists and bushwalkers may generally support Aboriginal people's land rights, when culturally specific Aboriginal demands become awkward, difficult, and impinge too greatly on bushwalkers' own cultural landscape, their commitment to Aboriginal rights is challenged. Ultimately, many claim that the positive aspects of an 'environmentally sensitive' activity such as bushwalking transcend Aboriginal concerns. 'If only we could get the Aboriginal people to understand bushwalking', they imply.

7.6.1. The Presence of Nature

Inherently linked to the issue of bushwalking in Kakadu is the issue of wilderness perception. Environmental theorists aware of the postcolonial debates generated over the meaning of wilderness are attempting to address the many issues that wilderness raises (see Calicott & Nelson 1998; Cronon 1995; Gill 1999). Some argue that the concept of wilderness, as a place of nature, is incorrectly envisioned as the opposite of the garden, a place of culture. Feminist theorist Val Plumwood is one such critic of the colonial concept of wilderness. Plumwood (1998) concurs with Aboriginal critics of wilderness (see for example Langton 1996, 1998; Mansell 1990) who criticise its emptiness and its affirmation of the terra nullius concept which envisions Indigenous people as part of nature rather than culture. She seeks through a process she terms 'critical ecology' to rework wilderness and to resolve the set aside approach to nature as it is dualistic, colonising and political. In a paper titled, 'Wilderness Scepticism and Wilderness Dualism', she begins with an account of bushwalking in the 'wilderness' of Prion Bay in southwest Tasmania. In such wild places, she writes 'travellers seek the wisdom of the land, carrying survival on their backs, and measure themselves as limited and only half-hardy animals' (1998:653). Through her practice of bushwalking Plumwood seeks a continuum of nature and
culture. She maintains that the wilderness quest of bushwalkers, in contrast to working out in a gym, ‘has a content, is dialogical, has an orientation to knowledge of another set of presences’, the presence of nature (1998:683).

These prior presences provide the cultural landscape and narrative material through which bushwalkers can understand their experience. Plumwood writes, ‘[w]ilderness in the full sense of the wild other cannot properly be specified as an absence of human; rather it is the presence of the Other’ (1998:681–2). This recognition of Other presences, she believes, creates:

...a conceptual space for the interwoven continuum of nature and culture, and for that recognition of the presence of the wild and of the labor of nature we need to make in all our life contexts, both in wilderness and in places closer to home. (1998:684)

She argues that as non-human nature is a collaborator in everything we do, we need to ‘end the opposition between culture and nature, the garden and the wilderness, and to come to recognise ourselves at last at home in both’ (1998:684).

Plumwood (1999) recognises and attempts to rework the concept of wilderness, partly in response to what she calls ‘Indigenous wilderness scepticism’, which she says reflects the concerns Aboriginal people have about the way in which the wilderness narrative erases Aboriginal people from the landscape. She suggests that these concerns also stem from an Aboriginal denial of the human paradigm of destruction which is implicit in the notion of wilderness as human absence. However, while Plumwood’s reconfiguration of wilderness addresses some Aboriginal concerns about the concept of wilderness, in contrast to her conceptualisation of a homely universal nature, land conceived of as property inseparable from a spatialised self is central to Aboriginal ontology (Langton 1998, forthcoming; Stanner 1966; Tamisari 2001; Williams 1986, 1998). Like the backyard garden, ‘wilderness’ in Kakadu National Park belongs to somebody.

7.6.2. A Sentient Landscape

A crucial aspect of the Aboriginal social universe is land ownership and identity, and the social and biogeographical rights and responsibilities that this generates. In this universe, particular aspects of non-human nature are inseparable from an individual’s identity. Ontologically, Aboriginal people in the region relate to each
other, nature and places through kinship and moiety, which provide the basis for identity, ownership, rights and authority. In contrast to a Western fantasy of the embodied self that assumes land relations to revolve around transactions between humans and other nature, for Aboriginal people land is integral to corporeal identity, it is part of the self. Myers, in reference to the Pintupi, writes that they:

Seem to view an individual’s internal states as extensively connected with a web of significant others or with “objects” that Western observers would describes as external to the self. The special identification of persons with place...should be considered part of this web...individuals come to identify places and ancestors as parts of themselves, referring to them in the first person. (1986:108–109)

Within social system of moiety exclusivity, relatedness, and varied responsibilities, people have highly differentiated identities and rights. Aboriginal relations with the land are characterised through a corporeal connection wherein ownership, rights and authority are established through a process of self identification based on the socio-physical relationship of an individual with place (Stanner 1979, Tamisari 2001). However, while within a region some land, like some people, are ‘other’; a person’s identity is dependent on relations with important others who are kin and who are an integral part of the self (Myers 1986:124). This is the basis of what Myers calls the ‘dual unity’ (1986:110) expressed, for example, through the Yirritja/Dhuwa moiety system that continues to exist across Arnhem Land and most of the Kakadu region. It is a system that underpins land and social relations in which kin ‘should and do help each other’ (Myers 1986:111).

As in relationships with other people, Aboriginal relationships with country involve observing particular protocols wherein the presence of ancestor spirits in place are of pervasive concern. The continuity of an Aboriginal ontological status which is manifest in country is clear, even in cases where the activities of outsiders have become entrenched and disrupt that relationship. At Gunlom, now a popular waterfall for Park visitors in Jawoyn country in the south of Kakadu National Park, Aboriginal people had no control over the early development of tourism in the region. The plunge pool below the waterfall was generally considered by the traditional owners to be the home of a Rainbow Serpent ancestral being and an area in which swimming and fishing are forbidden, yet by the 1980s it had become
increasingly popular with tourists. The fact that Europeans were swimming in the plunge pool demanded an Aboriginal response and rationalisation. In 1984, George Chaloupka recorded that several versions of a story about the removal of a Rainbow Snake from the pool involving Europeans were told throughout the region:

In one example a bulldozer was used to pull out the great snake after it had been lassoed. Another described divers spearing it. The unrestricted activities of European men, women and even children, at this once sacred waterhole had to be explained. (1981a:22)

In 1999, a Jawoyn woman explained to me her feelings about tourists visiting and swimming at Gunlom. ‘Gunlom okay but danger place. Rainbow there. One [tourist] been swimming finished [died]. They [tourists] still go see water, they go footwalk up top. I’d swim there on the sandy place, not deep water.’ Francesca Merlan (1998) writes that it is a common Aboriginal response to attribute unusual, gusty storms to the Rainbow’s anger at extensive use of the pool at Gunlom. However, she also notes that:

...curiously, on other occasions it is said that greater tourist use of the pool may have helped to make the rainbow “quiet”, to make it “settle down”. A feeling—nothing as definite as a clearly formulated idea—is perceptible among Aboriginal people that outsiders settle and defuse the power of the rainbow, so that it reacts in its accustomed manner only to the difference between known and unknown Aborigines. This notion, as I say, has not become routine or universal. But it is not simply an extension of a “traditional” thought: it is a tentative reformulation of ideas about behaviour of the rainbow in a changed situation. (1998:71)

A Jawoyn man, Rodney Nelson, explained that while local Aboriginal people continue to follow certain protocols for moving through areas of his country (in this case referring to abstaining from cooking and eating meat after dark in an area of the escarpment) it is impossible to expect the same behaviour of tourists: ‘can’t stop tourists they go anywhere’. He indicated that country does not respond to tourists in the same way as Aborigines. When I asked him if he was worried about bushwalkers’ activities in the escarpment, he replied:
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Yeah that’s the really main part Gunlom way. Really dangerous things, Bula site. I found one person’s initial on the rock painting. Up Koolpin, when we went up on a patrol, cooking meat, boom, boom, boom. Bula was talking. Wait till morning to eat. I don’t know about tourists. [It’s] especially if you have one Aboriginal bloke up top. If tourists go themselves they be all right, cook at night, [but] not if you have an Aboriginal bloke with you.

Like Aborigines, bushwalkers may have their own narratives to interact with the Kakadu escarpment. Plumwood, for example, relates to ‘the presence of the long-evolving biotic communities and animal species which reside there, the presence of ancient biospheric forces and of the unique combination of them which has shaped that particular, unique place’ (1998:682). Place, in Plumwood’s configuration, also needs to be cared for, which in the Kakadu escarpment is something that bushwalkers imagine they do, while Aborigines are largely absent. Yet as the above quotation demonstrates, from the landowners’ perspective, bushwalkers are incapable of caring for country as they are unable to properly communicate with the sentient landscape.

7.7. The Escarpment as an Aboriginal Place

Prioritising their own transactions with nature, bushwalkers can resent Aboriginal claims to prior and sustained decision-making rights over an Aboriginal cultural landscape. An initial experience dealing with what they considered the ‘unhelpful’ managers of Kakadu National Park led the Darwin Bushwalking Club in 1983 to oppose the granting of the Jawoyn (Katherine) Land Claim over Katherine Gorge National Park. In a notice of intention to be heard, the Club President stated that:

As “traditional” users of this area, we would oppose anything which would unduly restrict our access...We would hope that the traditional Aboriginal ties to the land in the Park could be recognized in some way other than by granting this claim...[to] areas of natural beauty which we consider to be part of the heritage of all Australians. (Jawoyn (Katherine Area) Land Claim 1983)

Although nearly two decades have passed since this submission, bushwalking club submissions from other parts of Australia to the 1996 Draft Kakadu National Park

71 An apocalypse-causing figure called Bulardemo is linked by the Jawoyn with various sites in this area of the escarpment (see Merlan 1991).
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Plan of Management continue to express antagonism towards issues of Aboriginal ownership and decision-making in Kakadu National Park.

Some bushwalkers express the view, based on the fact that they do not see Aboriginal people walking or living in the escarpment, that the extent to which they know about and appreciate the escarpment gives them as much right to go there as Aborigines. One long-time bushwalker in the Kakadu region admitted that:

Restrictions have increased over the years. I was fortunate to see areas, but now sometimes resent not being able to go there. I don’t go but I feel resentful as I walk past. I wonder do traditional owners know this place, have they been there. The young people?

Other bushwalkers present at the time agreed with her sentiments and rejected the idea that younger Aboriginal people go to these places. ‘I don’t see why we are so worried about bushwalkers’ remarked another woman:

...when we should be worried about these kind of people who go out on four-wheeler adventures and ruin the bush. On a recent trip to Graveside Gorge we were fed up and depressed to find so many other people there. They didn’t have permits, what were they doing there. Anyone goes in.\footnote{72}

While non-Aboriginal people are often prepared to recognise and embrace the idea of a ‘special relationship’ between Aboriginal people and their land, Gelder and Jacobs (1998:63–64) write that people’s ‘primitivist’ perception:

...yearns for an arrangement in which Aboriginal people have spiritual belief (sacredness) but no property rights—which would distinguish them from modern non-Aboriginal people, who have property rights but no spiritual beliefs (secularity). But when this structure is disrupted—in particular, when modern Aboriginal people have spiritual beliefs \textit{and} property rights (a marriage that ‘Aboriginal bureaucracy’ encourages)—then a certain form of resentment materialises. Aboriginal people become the same as non-Aboriginal people in that they, too, are identified through property (the rights of which are bureaucratically mediated).

\footnote{72} Aboriginal people express the same feelings about finding Park visitors in areas where they want to hunt and fish (see Chapter Six).
In Australian national imaginary the doctrine of terra nullius has now been overturned and it is widely recognised that before the presence of European settlers the land was owned and occupied by Aboriginal people. This historical understanding of Australia as an Aboriginal landscape is, however, less widely applied in the management and use of the present-day landscape, particularly in the non-Aboriginal domain of nature conservation. Lesley Head (Second Nature) asks, 'Why have disruptions to colonial thinking been so partial' in relation to the Australian discourse on the environment and conservation (2000:6). She locates her answer in the fact that:

...colonial heritage is more deeply embedded in contemporary environmental attitudes and debates than we have acknowledged; many of our own attitudes can be shown to derive from exactly the same dualistic cultural history for which we berate our forefathers. If terra nullius (land belonging to no one) was a myth to be discarded in discussions of the ownership of the continent, then it must be similarly discarded when we create and preserve landscapes. (2000:6)

Aboriginal people remain concerned with maintaining the integrity of the Aboriginal domain in the Kakadu escarpment. This includes concern for the material culture such as the rock art, the health of that environment and the less tangible aspects of a person's responsibility to look after country. Within this Aboriginal schema, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people can only create a respectful and mutually satisfying relationship that recognises Kakadu as an Aboriginal place as the land becomes understood as owned, and is interacted with in a manner consistent with local Aboriginal ontology. While Plumwood argues that people need 'to find cultural ways to recognise and celebrate the play of intentionality and agency in the world (and for regaining sensitivity to the particularity and agency of place)' (1993:136), in Kakadu at least, bushwalkers can locate this sensitivity to place by recognising and abiding by the pre-existing authority of Aboriginal ways. These Aboriginal ways function through an already established system of recognising, celebrating and respecting the agency of place in Kakadu.

7.7.1. The Way Forward?

Aboriginal people may not currently visit most of the escarpment with any regularity but although they are certainly aware that this is of importance to non-Aboriginal people, the concept of country implies far more than the physical
presence or absence of people. At a meeting to discuss future management on the Arnhem Land plateau, Peter Biless, a senior Kunwinjku landowner, told other landowners from the plateau that, ‘We Aboriginal people want to go back and grab our own country so if Balanda come they can see that Aboriginal people are there everywhere’ (Cooke, P. pers comm.). Aboriginal people in western and central Arnhem Land are thinking about ways to reinscribe themselves physically in the plateau environment, perhaps guiding bushwalkers themselves (see Buckley 2000; Cooke 2000).73

As the idea of Aboriginal-led bushwalks in the Arnhem Land escarpment is in its infancy, the potential for this idea to help resolve traditional owners’ concerns about bushwalking in Kakadu National Park is difficult to assess. It could, however, possibly be a way of offering bushwalkers a compromise that maintains the opportunity for them to walk in the escarpment, while at the same time privileging landowners’ rights to control the material and symbolic use of their country. One local Aboriginal woman in Kakadu National Park stated that:

Aboriginal people should stand strong on not letting bushwalking push through just because tourists want to do it. This is about our culture. We should be waiting for the time when people are ready to take this on. Maybe the young people when they learn from the old people will decide to use that knowledge to do something like a bushwalking tour. But tourism shouldn't come before people are ready, especially not in such a sensitive area.

Bushwalking tours guided by Aboriginal landowners could also be an important demonstration of the ways in which Aboriginal people conceive of and relate to their cultural landscape. The following quote is an excerpt from the post-walk account of a non-Aboriginal bushwalker on the trial ‘footwalk’ mentioned earlier in the chapter:

73 While it is not focused specifically on the Kakadu region, since 1999 a scheme coordinated by the NLC Caring For Country Unit has been attempting to find ways to allow people to move back into country in the Arnhem Land plateau, in part to counteract moves by the Northern Territory Government to enact their plan for a Greater Katherine to Gurig National Park. The NLC project is funded over three years through a Commonwealth-funded proposal by the Northern Territory Bushfires Council, and also aims to re-establish Aboriginal fire regimes in the Arnhem Land plateau. With funding guaranteed for three years, it is also a way for Aboriginal people to reimplicate themselves in that country through fire-related projects that could create the impetus for Aboriginal people to re-establish their presence in the plateau. Part of the project includes the idea of allowing paying bushwalkers to accompany Aboriginal people on extended walks to enable the reinstigation of traditional practices of early dry season burning by foot on the plateau—‘firewalking’.
Suddenly I realised how grateful I felt to Jacky and Maxie for having taken me through their country. And grateful to their country itself for having, so it seemed to me, generated this experience; grateful to Jacky for having called out to the spirits, to the ancestors along the way as we entered into particular locations, letting them know who we were; grateful for his having sung *yarrida* and so, through the spiritual power of the songs, kept the rain at bay for that night; grateful simply for his having cared for us. We travelled as introduced guests through this country, never felt we were intruders. In fact, I felt I walked as an honoured guest... we were walking through a landscape still fully peopled with meaning.

### 7.8. Conclusion

Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region who are concerned about bushwalking continue to resist appeals to western ecological rationality which seek to assert a common human relationship with a universalised concept of ‘Other’ nature. These appeals are viewed as environmentalists’ attempts to persuade Aboriginal people to forgo their rights and responsibilities to their *country* and accede to the demands of a Western environmental land ethic that seeks to subsume an Aboriginal landscape within its own cultural reality. These rights and responsibilities inherent in Aboriginal land relationships may not always correspond with the Western environmental theorist’s or the bushwalking practitioner’s versions of what are appropriate ecological practices to forge human relations with the environment. However, in order to do more than only ‘partially disrupt colonial thinking’ (Head 2000) about the Kakadu landscape, bushwalkers need to rethink their own identity in relation to the land and the place of this identity within the context of wider social relationships. It is not enough to appreciate a reified Aboriginal culture and heritage, bushwalkers need to find ways to acknowledge and begin the process of negotiating respectful relationships with Aboriginal people on whose land they currently walk and in which bushwalkers invest their own cultural meanings.
Chapter Eight

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As long as they go to areas where they are allowed to go it’s all right. The limit is good. Before they could take as many as they like. Most people like fishing. We do too. I’d like them to take a fish each as long as they respect the land and stuff. I don’t like [catch and release]. If we go and try to get a fish it won’t bite. Don’t really like sport fish—some might die. Catch catfish chuck back in they’ll float up end. (Traditional Owner, Kakadu National Park)

8.1. Introduction

Fishing is an activity enjoyed in Kakadu National Park by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents and Park visitors alike. Of this latter group, it is a particularly popular activity with Northern Territory Park users from Darwin and Katherine where fishing is asserted to be integral to the ‘Territory Lifestyle’. In 1999, in an advertisement in the Sunday Territorian the Northern Territory Government identified six key areas ‘that will underpin its policies, plans and actions into the 21st Century’ (31 Oct. 1999:42). The first key area to be listed was to ‘Preserve and Build on the Lifestyle of all Territorians’ and featured a colour photograph of two such ‘Territorians’ proudly holding up their barramundi catches in a remote river location. A major goal identified in this key policy area was to ensure ‘our natural environment is largely undisturbed and readily accessible to the public’ (Northern Territory Government 1999:42). No reference was made to the fact that more than 50 per cent of ‘our natural environment’ is held under inalienable Aboriginal freehold title. In 1998, the Northern Territory Government placed a similar advertisement in the Sunday Territorian (Northern Territory Government 1998:12) promoting the need for Northern Territory Statehood to protect the ‘Territory Lifestyle’. This advertisement was critical of Parks Australia, a Canberra bureaucracy, controlling fishing management in Kakadu National Park (see Figure 11).

In this chapter the discourse of fishing is examined from the perspective of non-Aboriginal fishers and Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu National Park. It is shown that while the agenda of the ‘Territory Lifestyle’ is supported by the discourse of science and ‘best practice’ fisheries management, fishing is also an activity integral to an Aboriginal lifestyle in Kakadu National Park. Fishing in Kakadu is an issue about which the local knowledge and rights of ‘Territorians’ are continually
"Statehood Protects My Lifestyle"

Like your fishing? Reckon it’s our right to cast a lure?
Imagine if the Senate in Canberra decided to set the bag limit for barras and told us we shouldn’t catch as many fish.
Unless we become a State, there is nothing to stop the Commonwealth Parliament from forcing ridiculous laws on Territorians.
Canberra already imposes a smaller barramundi bag limit in the Commonwealth-controlled Kakadu National Park than exists at nearby Corroboree Billabong.
Becoming a State means our own laws, such as the Northern Territory’s Barramundi Management Plan, cannot be overruled by Canberra.
As the moment Territorians don’t have the same rights as the rest of Australia.

Your rights can be taken away by Canberra with the stroke of a pen.
They’ve done it once. There is nothing to stop them from doing it again.

Except Statehood.
Statehood means your rights are protected from any more interference from Canberra.
Statehood means equality with other Australians. Nothing more. Nothing less.
Do your bit for the Territory lifestyle in the referendum!

Figure 11. ‘Statehood Protects My Lifestyle’ (source: Northern Territory Government advertisement in the Sunday Territorian, 6 September 1998:12)
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pitted against the local knowledge and rights of Aboriginal traditional owners. Considerable controversy was created over this issue when the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management proposed additional restrictions on access for recreational fishing in the Park. In the debate that ensued, the issue became one of contested knowledges between non-Aboriginal fishers and conservation science on the one hand, and, on the other, traditional owners’ knowledge and management of the resource base. It was a debate that revolved around who has the right to make decisions on resource and land use. In 1997, the conflict between these two ‘local’ knowledges and agendas was the source of a heated public campaign waged by the recreational fishing lobby in the Northern Territory. These fishers argued that proposed changes by the Kakadu Board of Management to fishing access in Kakadu National Park were unacceptable without scientific proof, such as a proven decrease in barramundi stocks, to validate the decisions being made. These objections received considerable support from both Northern Territory and Federal politicians.

From the perspective of Aboriginal traditional owners, these decisions about fishing management in the Park encompassed broader issues than a concern over the health of barramundi stocks. However, the power of the state in the support of the discourse of conservation science acted to obscure the complexities of a situation characterised by differences in cultural values and constructions of knowledge. This unequal power relationship created though the alliance between science and the state leaves the situated knowledge of Aboriginal traditional owners with a limited field of authority in the non-Aboriginal domain. Moreover, the complex and multi-dimensional nature of Aboriginal concerns for country renders these concerns invisible or incorrigible to government, science and fishers who are guided by are very different set of epistemic commitments. The responses from the fishing public to proposals to curtail their activities in Kakadu National Park and the subsequent Aboriginal revision of these proposals frame the analysis of this chapter.

8.2. The Territory Lifestyle

Lure fishing for barramundi is one of the most exciting and spectacular forms of fishing available. The fish are often seen before they strike. A huge shape appears behind your lure. You keep winding and give the lure a little extra life with a quick flick of the rod tip.
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The barra, excited by the twitch surges forward and engulfs the lure in a flash of white as the cavernous mouth pops open and absorbs it.

You keep winding and lift the rod to set the hook. The fish stops momentarily, shakes its head and then explodes across the surface, running, jumping and head shaking. You must stay calm, keep pressure on the fish, control loose line in the jumps and watch the fish does not run for snags.

The words above are all compressed into about three seconds when the fish hits, but it is what really happens.

Once the fish is hooked it usually fights courageously for a few minutes, then tires rapidly and can be brought to the boat for release or capture. (McEnally & McEnally 1994:17)

For the majority of recreational fishers in Australia’s Northern Territory, fishing is a sport. As a sport, it is also permeated with the discourse of resource conservation and ‘commonsense’ environmentalism. Some fishermen refer to themselves as ‘sportsmen’ who practice catch and release fishing, rather than catching fish to eat. In this ‘sportsmen’s’ discourse, other cultures of fishing, such as that of Indigenous groups, are often rendered invisible, or alternatively, denigrated for fishing practices seen as either technologically simplistic or environmentally harmful by the dominant group of sports fishermen. In 1994, the Northern Territory Government Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries commented that:

For many Territorians, the pursuit of fish is more than just a sport or pastime; it is a way of life, one which forever offers new and enriching experiences. The reason is that the thrill of the catch, and the encounters with great fish, take place amidst a unique natural environment which lends itself to adventure. (DPIF 1994:i)

In 1996 a survey by the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries (DPIF), Fish Count, surveyed recreational fishing in the Northern Territory. Fish Count estimates that over 42,000 non-Indigenous Northern Territory residents (35 per cent of the non-Indigenous population) go fishing at least once in the Northern Territory annually (Coleman 1998:i). The report also shows that fishing is important for the Northern Territory’s tourism industry. Over 50,000 visitors (6 per cent of all visitors to the Territory annually) fish at least once during their stay (Coleman 1998:i). Over $30 million in total annual expenditure is directly attributable to recreational fishing,
Plate 11. 'They've got some bloody big barra up here!' postcard

(photo: Wayne Zerbe, company: The Australian Souvenir company)
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with residents accounting for a major proportion of expenditure (over $23 million or 77 per cent) and visitors close to $7 million (23 per cent) (Coleman 1998:ii). The majority of both residents and visitors target barramundi (Lates calcarifer) as their preferred species. McEnally and McEnally, authors of a fishing guide book to Australia’s north, remark that:

Internationally recognized as one of the world’s top sport and game fish, the fighting barramundi is the glamour catch of Australia’s tropical north...as a sport fish, barramundi do have peers, but few superiors. (1994:5,7)

Fish Count specifically excluded Indigenous fishers in its survey of recreational fishing, proposing a separate study of Indigenous fishers requiring different methodologies (Coleman 1998:6). The decision to exclude Indigenous fishers from the Fish Count survey raises important questions about the criteria and categorisations used to define fishing practices in the Northern Territory. While Indigenous fishing can be categorised as comprising a complex of cultural, subsistence, commercial and recreational aspects, the exclusion of Indigenous fishers from the Fish Count survey also has implications for how the rights of Indigenous fishers are represented. The recreational fishing sector in the Northern Territory is politically influential. Excluding Indigenous fishers from a survey on participation and commercial interest in the recreational fishing sector may actively assist political campaigns that seek to exclude Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory from an economic stake in fisheries resources.

Recreational fishing in the Northern Territory is a politically emotive issue and the Government regularly issues press releases critical of attempts by Aboriginal Land Councils to charge permit fees for recreational fishing access to Aboriginal land. In 1997 the Minister for Fisheries, Mick Palmer, issued a press release stating:

They want the land, and they will then charge a premium price to a chosen few for the right to access what is a part of our Northern Territory...The NLC wants Territorians to have to ask the land council for permission before they can take their families away fishing. (Palmer 1997)

Such statements demonstrate that the Northern Territory government often continues to treat Aboriginal freehold land as though it were public land.
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The Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT (AFANT) is constituted to represent NT recreation fishers and has established itself as an organisation of some political significance. The Northern Territory government funds AFANT's executive officer position. AFANT is generally critical of Aboriginal land and native title rights and applies significant pressure on the Northern Territory political parties to support its agenda for increasing access to fishing areas on Aboriginal freehold land and other areas across the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory's political arena has always been pervaded by a belief in the potential for economic growth through access to 'frontier' land and resources. Aboriginal assertions of land and sea rights disrupt this frontier mythology and are constituted as a threat to the Territory lifestyle. As Jackson writes:

During what are presented as oppositional clashes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups over land and resources, the Territory lifestyle can be evoked and used as a defense against the claims made by Aboriginal people. (1997:1)

Within this discourse 'Territorian' is a code word for non-Aboriginal settlers (d'Abbs 2000). As Aboriginal people are excluded from the category of 'Territorian', the 'Territory Lifestyle' does not seek to include consideration of Aboriginal lifestyles. This is also an effect of the frontier mythology in which 'Aborigines have never been considered "Territorians" at all because 'Territorians' means 'frontiersmen/women'—those 'special' hardworking people who have pioneered the outback' (Stanton, S. pers. comm.). These frontiersmen and women have an immediate interest in Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory both in the resources that land contains, and through the economic and recreational interests that they pursue (Gibbons 1988:21; see also Altman & Allen 1991:13).

8.2.1. Fishing in Kakadu

Non-guided recreational fishing in Kakadu National Park is primarily a social event, an outdoor activity enjoyed with family or friends. Fishers are generally well-informed about their pastime and spend considerable time and money accruing the skills, equipment, and information necessary to facilitate an enjoyable fishing trip; this includes knowledge of the local area and environment gained through fishing guide books, magazines, brochures, regular newspaper columns, and word of mouth. Fishing is an activity that attracts a variety of people. These include all-male groups going out for a social fishing trip, family groups, and high-technology oriented
sports fishers who only practice catch and release fishing. Fishers also suggest that a small minority of fishers keep too many fish for later sale on the black market. Over the past twenty years since the inception of the National Park in the region fishing has progressed from ‘open slather’, where no rules and restrictions were applied, to a situation where there is a general acceptance of and support for fishing regulations by recreational fishers. Recreational fishers do not require permits to fish in Kakadu, but are required to purchase Park entry tickets.

As with bushwalkers, the 1970s and the pre-Kakadu National Park era is looked back on by fishers as the ‘Golden Age’ for fishing in the Alligator Rivers region (see for example Eusson 1988). This is particularly so for those ‘Territorians’ who fished in the region then and continue to do so now. One group of ‘Territorian’ families whom I interviewed in the East Alligator Area of Kakadu National Park had been coming to fish there for the past twenty years. They explained that twenty years ago there were few people who came there to fish and no restrictions, ‘it was open slather’. These families used to come and camp along the edge of the East Alligator River at time when crocodile sightings were so infrequent that they felt comfortable enough to go swimming in the river. Now the increasing infrastructure development in the area and what they see as ‘sanitisation for tourists’, annoys them:

Of all the boats today we recognised about four of the people. The rest would have been touristy type people. We have been in Darwin since 1971...We were coming out here when nobody really was, including the Aboriginals. It’s alright to say ‘well what about the Aboriginals’, but we would drive out here and apart from the odd pile of green cans [full strength beer cans] you wouldn’t know that Aboriginals had been around.

They were also frustrated that they as ‘locals’ were being forced to pay considerable entry fees to ‘come in and use our own backyard’, as well as ‘being hit with more and more restrictions on fishing and access each year’. They felt that their lifestyle was under threat and while they supported restrictions that protected the fisheries, they questioned just ‘how much further can you go?’ For these ‘local’ families, relations with Aboriginal landowners in Kakadu National Park were characterised by

74 Lindner (1999:32–33) writes that in the post World War II era, commercial hunting of crocodiles brought about a rapid decline in population numbers. Crocodiles were given protection in the late 1960s and early 1970s and there has since been a rapid increase in populations.
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an 'uneasy alliance'. While they believed that Aborigines 'do get a raw deal in life', they stressed that 'they weren’t to be seen anywhere when we first came out here'.

The Fish Count survey found that 8 per cent of all recreational fishing effort in the Territory (i.e. hours fished) is attributable to the Alligator Rivers region contained within Kakadu National Park. This area was particularly popular for visitors to the Territory (19 per cent of all hours fished) (Coleman 1998:17). In 1986, the Kakadu National Park Plan of Management stated that 37 per cent of all private visitors (at that time 85 per cent of the total visitor number) brought fishing gear with them to the park, while 12 per cent brought a boat (ANPWS 1986:124). However, by the early 1990s, the relative importance of recreational fishing compared with visitor interest in other activities appeared to be declining (ANPWS 1991:30).

Despite the fact that most visitors to the Park are now attracted by non-fishing activities, local and interstate fishers continue to view Kakadu National Park as an important area for recreational fishing. The region contains four major rivers, the South, East and West Alligator and the Wildman River. Fishing effort is concentrated on the South and East Alligator systems (Duff 1989). The Alligator Rivers region includes vast floodplains, numerous creeks and billabongs. All of the region’s rivers are heavily influenced by the tide and all except the East Alligator River stop flowing in the dry season with water remaining in intermittent billabongs. Most of the fishable waters in Kakadu are easily accessed via roads that lead from one of the two main highways that dissect the Park. The Park is also recognised as a place with good facilities, scenic landscape and excellent river fishing during the wet season months of March, April and May, shifting to billabongs the later months of the dry season.

Several companies hold permits for fishing tour operations within the Park. In January 2000 a new tiered permit and fee system for fishing tour operators in the Park began. This caps the number of permits issued to companies and the number of fishing days operators are allowed to fish in the Park. A permit costs between $200 and $500 a year and Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu National Park receive 38.8 per cent of the permit revenue. In future, fishing tour operators will be encouraged to establish joint ventures with Aboriginal traditional owners, subject to approval by the Kakadu Board of Management.
8.3. Fishing Controversy and the 1996 Draft Plan of Management

Since 1991 the areas upstream of the Kakadu Highway along with the West Alligator River have been closed to recreational fishing (see Figure 12). The 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management proposed further controls and restrictions in relation to fishing and boating in Kakadu National Park. These included the need to obtain permits for boating in the lower reaches of the East and South Alligator River, a ban on fishing in the area of the East Alligator upstream from Cahill’s Crossing, a ban on fishing competitions and a reduction of the bag limit for barramundi from five to two fish per person.

The reasons given in the Draft Plan for these proposed changes and restrictions on boating access to other areas included: general safety and monitoring in remote areas, protecting cultural sites, reservation for local Aboriginal use, protecting bird rookeries and channels where fish migrate, and restricting access to areas where there are weeds or a high risk of being attacked by crocodiles (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:107). In the specific instance of the closure of recreational fishing access upstream of the upstream boat ramp near Cahill’s Crossing, the reasons given were to limit fishing activity in this part of the River, to reduce the impact on other Park visitors, and to limit unauthorised access onto Aboriginal land adjacent to the Park (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:65). The reason given for banning fishing competitions was that the Kakadu Board of Management ‘believes that fishing competitions that encourage large numbers of anglers fishing at any one time are inappropriate in the national park’ (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:66).

In the same section of the Draft Plan, under the heading, ‘Managing Habitats’, it is stated that:

A cultural landscape approach based on Bining [sic] knowledge of managing habitats will be adopted for management programs...Bining will be encouraged and supported to use traditional knowledge and skills relating to managing animals and their habitats. (KNPBoM & ANCA 1996:65)

In 1996, for one traditional owner in particular, there was a great deal of concern over the increasing number of fishers accessing the East and South Alligator Rivers. Already at certain periods fisher numbers were at the top of the range of what he considered to be acceptable use of the area. It was, in his opinion, now time to put
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Figure 12. Areas closed to recreational fishing (source: KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998:82)
fishers on notice of restrictions before the numbers increased even further (Wellings, P., pers. comm.). The other Aboriginal members on the Kakadu Board of Management supported the assertive stance of the traditional owner from whom these proposals came. The Board felt that traditional owners have a right to make their own decisions about their areas of jurisdiction. However, while other Aboriginal Board members supported the decision of that traditional owner, some were concerned that the process of change was been pushed too fast. From of a total of ninety-seven submissions to the 1996 *Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management*, thirty-one representations primarily addressed their comments to their discontent over fishing and boating issues. These proposals also generated significant newspaper, radio, and television coverage, particularly in the Northern Territory and in national fishing magazines.

The subsequent controversy over the proposals for fishing management in the Draft Plan highlighted to traditional owners the continued belief in the community that Kakadu is public property, not private Aboriginal land as they conceive it. This belief by some sectors of the public is based on the notion that when traditional owners entered an agreement with the Commonwealth Government to establish the National Park they relinquished their decision-making rights over that land. It also highlighted to the Board the fact that the government sees public interests as important as those of traditional owners. The community support generated through ‘Canberra bashing’ among recreational fishing interests also made it clear that if Aboriginal members of the Kakadu Board of Management wished to carry through these proposals there was an increasing need for them to be seen publicly engaging in decision-making and defending their decisions. For example, the AFANT submission to the Draft Plan blamed the decision on a remote bureaucracy that is insensitive to the local Territory lifestyle:

*The Kakadu Draft plan of management 1996 is a document that deprives all Territorians and visitors to the Northern Territory with their basic right to enjoy one of Australia’s greatest pastimes, Recreational and Sports Fishing. Every 5 years all recreational fishermen and Territorians wait for another set of restrictions placed upon them by a bureaucracy in Kakadu and Canberra...AFANT sees this Draft as a negative step in the reconciliation process between recreational fishermen and the Aboriginal communities.*
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ANCA must take into account the Northern Territory lifestyle when managing the park and obviously this has not happened in this instance. (1996:18, i)

Throughout the public debate about the proposals in the Draft Plan it was the non-Aboriginal Secretary to the Board of Management who presented the public face of the Board. Traditional owners in Kakadu are often reluctant to stand in the front line of criticism from other stakeholders and when they do, they prefer to operate in a manner that avoids confrontation. By choosing not to defend their decisions personally, traditional owners are either targeted as unaccountable or dismissed as having been manipulated. The fishing lobby frequently portrays the decisions that they are unhappy with as those of a ‘manipulative white adviser’, such as the Board Secretary or the National Park manager.

8.4. Concepts of Land and Sea

Among the non-Aboriginal Australian population generally, there is strong belief in the communal ownership of both fish stocks and waterways and the need for government to regulate this (Jackson 1995; Keen 1984–1985). As one fisher from NSW commented to me:

It might be my land, but it’s not my river and my fish. Nobody should be allowed to own rivers. I think rivers, the ocean and the beaches should be everybody’s...water has a more recreational thing about it.

Currently, in the Northern Territory, exclusive rights to fish and to water belong to the ‘community as a whole’ and to no one person or group specifically (Pyne 1996:80). However, it is only the relatively recent history of European state-controlled landscape construction that has provided the foundations for an ‘elemental distinction between land and sea’ in Western culture (Jackson 1995:87). In Europe, before the seventeenth century, locally based heritable sea tenures and marine rights were widespread in communities along the coastal fringe (Sharp 1996). Likewise, the customary territory of coastal Aboriginal peoples in Australia is made up of a combination of land and sea (Jackson 1995; Cooke & Armstrong 1998). Palmer, writing about Yolngu ownership and use of the seas along the coast of northeast Arnhem Land, states that:

The principles of local organization reflect the balance between these two environments. An estate is made up of both land and sea and myths relate to
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both...any separation of land and sea arbitrarily divides a territory into two parts. It is almost inconceivable to a Yolngu that such an act of division could be accomplished. Yet, according to European Australian law enacted in the Northern Territory, this is exactly what has happened. (1984–1985:354–355)

Like their land, the sea for coastal Aboriginal people is something that must be respected and cared for. ‘Disturbance of sacred features in the sea, such as reefs and tides, can lead to illness, death, storms, and a change in the availability of marine species’ (Jackson 1995:90).

Similarly, in Kakadu National Park, marine and freshwater areas and the aquatic species contained within them are treated by Aboriginal peoples as integral to their customary estates and identities. Many people in the Kakadu region refer to themselves as either ‘saltwater’ people or ‘freshwater’ people. Bill Neidjie, discussing his concerns about recreational fishing along the East Alligator River, explained that ‘[a]ll along river all this Dreamtime, this water running down sea, Dreamtime story’. Berndt and Berndt (1970:27–28) write that it is the Barramundi fish heading to the sea that in some local clan narratives is responsible for the creation of the East Alligator River and whose actions stipulate taboos and prohibitions for the use of that river. Tacon (1989:313) also examines the various creation stories that surround the East Alligator River. He finds that the creator beings are referred to in different versions as the Ancestral Barramundi fish, the Rainbow Serpent and a mythical woman parting her legs and releasing a rush of water. Tacon notes that these stories, rather than being contradictory are complementary of the same metaphysical ideas where:

There is a correspondence between the rainbow, Rainbow snakes, women and fish, especially the barramundi. All are symbols of powerful creation...Rainbow serpents are related to fish, including the barramundi through the colours of their skins...The three are interchangeable in this context as fertility-creation symbols. (1989:238–239)

Spencer (1928) wrote that for the people of the Kakadu tribe there are extremely elaborate restrictions in regard to food generally and that this is related to totemic beliefs involved in increase ceremonies. Bill Neidjie explains that in the past there were restrictions on who could eat fish:
Fish they used to get him and cook, when I was younger. They never get many because they follow law. I said that woman, young woman, if she eating fish big trouble. Not happen nowadays. Me I last one. They cook that fish. I never touch anything. I was sitting down and they tell me that fish you can’t have him fish, you young yet. I might be 17 or 16 they gave me fish.

Spencer (1928: 128) links fish with beliefs about the spiritual conception of children, where in many cases it is a fish imbued with the child’s spiritual essence that will be caught by the father of the future child, and that fish will be the child’s totem. While the elaborate food restrictions referred to by Spencer and Neidjie may no longer be operative, fish continue to be viewed culturally, as well as economically, as an important resource by Aboriginal people in the region. As do non-Aboriginal fishers, Aboriginal people like going fishing to relax and enjoy themselves. However, for traditional owners and other Aboriginal residents in the Park, fish and fishing constitute more than a recreational activity. As well as being food, fish, as discussed above, are also permeated with totemic essences.

In 1998 a young Aboriginal man explained to me his belief and ideas on what constitutes proper fishing practice:

> We eat it there, cook on the coals or take it back home. Fish or turtle for our family. We eat whole fish—bone and skin throw back in the fire. We burn bone, skin, shell so that next time we can catch fish. If we go there and have bad luck it is because we are not doing the right thing. Bininj cook it all up—burn to keep away ginga [crocodile] too. For fishing you need a quiet place. Sometimes I don’t catch fish in another country only if I’m luck. Got to speak to the old people, talk, they might say ‘we’ll take you out’. They tell you not to waste it, show respect, share it around, not just there for a good time. Might be sacred site, Rainbow there, might never come back. Got to tell other local people. If I go to Arnhem Land or salt water I don’t know that country. Speak to the locals, share fish, if old people they might invite you go back.

Fish they are our totems. If we see them go for waste make me bad feeling. That’s my Dreaming. Look can’t touch fish in spring water, its a Dreaming place. If you eat them you get sick…Sometimes injured fish in the water, swimming sideways, sick. Hard one, but maybe released by fishermen. Poor fish keep going back biting at those lures. But they learn to keep away from lures…Balanda say “you got your law, okay we got ours. You can’t stop us
going on there. There are two laws on fishing”. I think you shouldn’t waste fish or catch too many fish. Fish a species just like us, sad to see them dying or getting a hard time. Got to keep it under control. We all like fishing.

For many Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park fishing is part of a lifestyle of hunting. They generally fish from the bank with a handline and the preferred species for many people is not barramundi, but catfish, saratoga, black bream and turtle. A senior traditional owner explained that:

We fish to catch food. Also goanna and turtle. We look at the whole food chain, the whole experience. Don’t waste any part. Look after country and it will look after you. Don’t kill everything. Get enough for the table.

This local Aboriginal sense of ethics and protocols in relation to fisheries management are of course based on ideal principles of appropriate behaviour. Like any principles they are not immutable and change over time and according to different situations. Moreover, as Johannes writes about Indigenous marine conservation systems:

...environmentally destructive practices coexisted, as in most societies, with efforts to conserve natural resources. But the existence of the former does not diminish the significance of the latter. (1978:355)

Johannes (1978:356) points out that in Indigenous coastal societies in Oceania customary principles have suffered under the breakdown of the completeness of these traditional conservation systems caused by the introduction of money economies, the breakdown of traditional authority, and the imposition of new laws and practices by colonial powers. Jacob Nayinggul, a senior traditional owner for the land including part of the East Alligator River, explained his views on the management of recreational fishing in the area:

You can’t stop it. People don’t like it when you stop them doing something they have been doing a long time. Some Bininj are the same. Just last week an old man passed away. We had his funeral on Sunday. That man used to walk all this country from here to the Border Store, fishing, hunting, everywhere. I asked people here not to fish that country until after the funeral, after smoking, after dirt has been thrown in the water to cleanse things, until it is all completed. The old people used to tell me to wait one full wet season for the rain to clean the area off, his footprints, camp ashes. Even to rub red ochre
around all the tree trunks to mark respect through that area. But people here don't listen. They were out fishing, shooting geese before the funeral even. I go around and growl people but they don't seem to care any more. Now that is a better reason to stop fishing for a while than a complete stop. Balanda too.

We got cultural rules for using that river all right. Strong ones. But sure we used to have real strong law on using that river back when there was no Balanda. Sure there were a few buffalo hunters but they were too busy to beat the Wet [season] to fish. But now full of Balanda sports fishing for barra over the top of Bininj law.

It a big story this fishing one. People have to talk about it, traditional owners, Parks, researchers. I don't think we can stop recreational fishing it has been going on too long. Bininj law will be finished. We all need to look at this, traditional owners and Parks. I mean the words are there to protect Bininj way of doing things but not the action. Big story.

He is also worried about the use of technology such as fish finders by recreational fishers. 'Those machines that can find out where the barramundi are straight away. I don't like it. If Bininj start using it they will lose their hunting techniques.'

8.4.1. ‘Commonsense’ Nature and Resources

It can be seen then that for Aboriginal people in the Kakadu region, fish constitute more than a natural resource in the Western sense of resource management. It follows that Indigenous management of fisheries, riverine environments and coastal areas will incorporate Aboriginal perspectives and beliefs in a way not necessarily commensurate with Western notions of resource management (Johannes 1978). Likewise, Western resource managers operate and justify their management decisions within their own ‘commonsense’ notion of resources. However, while Aboriginal 'commonsense' views reflect socio-physical interrelations between people, land and resources, the Western 'commonsense' views are based on a belief in a reified external reality from which one can measure the degree to which management decisions conform with an objective truth. In 1997, when Robert Hill, Federal Minister for the Environment, spoke to the Kakadu Board of Management on the issue of fishing management he maintained that to put in place the proposed management changes there needed to be ‘rational reasoning’ from the Board to give firm justification for the decisions made. Hill was echoing the view of a politically
powerful fishing lobby that relies on their own culturally sanctioned institutions of conservation science, and expects decisions to be based on scientific proof that fishing is causing detriment to fish stocks. Similarly, a letter from the Federal Minister for Resources and Energy, Warwick Parer, to the Federal Minister for the Environment, Robert Hill, commented on several representations received by the Minister from fishing organisations concerning the Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management. The Minister wrote:

I have some sympathy for the points raised in the representations, especially as there appears to be inadequate justification for such measures within the draft plan document. I note that some research is proposed to further our knowledge of the impact of recreational fishing. However, at this stage there is no evidence that suggests recreational fishing is having a detrimental impact on fish populations in the Park.

Recreational fishing is a sport enjoyed by over 5 million Australians and overseas tourists, and creates significant employment opportunities and other benefits in areas such as national parks and marine reserves. Most fishermen are environmentally aware and keen to ensure that their activities do not damage fisheries habitats. (Parer 1997:1)

In contrast to the scientific rationalist approach to decision-making and resource management, Aboriginal people within the Park recognise that it is the primary right of the traditional owners of the fishing areas concerned to make decisions on the management of their country. One senior traditional owner, Mick Alderson, commenting on the fishing lobby’s outcry over proposed fishing management stated that, ‘They think this Park is for everybody. This is Aboriginal land. They should respect the wishes of the owners. They don’t have to give a reason.’

However, intensive lobbying of Commonwealth Ministers by Territory recreational fishing interests, as well as public meetings to protest proposed changes to fishing restrictions within the Park have resulted in revision of the Board’s original draft proposals (in effect maintaining the status quo). The Board revised the Draft Plan, and the Kakadu National Park Plan of Management (KNPBoM & Parks Australia 1998: 83) refers instead to plans to engage further research to monitor and gather information on recreational fishing in the Park. This will include monitoring of fishing impacts through fisheries surveys and consultation with interest groups.
This outcome essentially conforms to a Western scientific epistemology that naturalises ‘nature’ and imagines it to be an empty space free of social relations. Canadian geographer Bruce Willems-Braun, writing on the politics of nature in (post)colonial British Columbia, examines the Western commonsense categories of ‘nature’ and ‘resources’ whereby nature is made to appear an empty space to be accounted for, where the authority of Western science becomes the basis for moral and political rationalities of resource use and conservation. In this schema Indigenous peoples’ concepts of nature (replete with an integrated social system) linked with local cultural and political contexts are displaced in favour of the authority of the ‘nation’ or the ‘public’ to speak for and manage an unmediated nature. Willems-Braun writes that:

...this abstraction displaces discussions of authority from questions of territory, tenure, and rights of access (and their constitutive colonial histories)...By staging the nation-state as accomplished rather than continually articulated [management regimes] are rendered transparent and thus ‘commonsense’. (1997:11)

Willems-Braun examines the epistemological basis of both Western extractive resource use and environmentalism and finds that these apparently oppositional concepts are in fact complementary:

Nature is never a ‘pure’ category. It is always invested with, and embedded in social histories. From an anti-colonial perspective, extractive capital and environmentalism are in many ways mirror images, sharing common elements of a culture of nature. Taken together these rhetorics constitute a ‘natural’ field and divide it between opposing non-native interests. (1997:25)

The product of colonial histories is a ‘natural’ space that authorises ‘certain voices—resource managers, bureaucrats, nature’s defenders—to speak for nature’ (Willems-Braun 1997:11). The authority of the Western culture of science allows a ‘commonsense’ view of what constitutes resource management to prevail.

8.5. Fishing Lore

A large number of non-Aboriginal fishers in Kakadu can be characterised as sports fishers. According to one Northern Territory fisher, while fishers in the Northern Territory target barramundi they rarely eat it. He explained ‘I don’t like barramundi, it is an over-rated fish, unless I take it from the salt water...the emphasis on fishing
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is on the skill and experience necessary to be an effective fisher'. Moreover, he stated that the catch and release ethic is so strong amongst Northern Territory fishers that, 'If I want to take a fish for the table I'd have to fight with my kids. And my kids aren't much different to others. They all have the same attitude.' He believes that this is something fishers:

...have to try to get traditional owners to understand—we put it back

[Similarly, the slogan on AFANT rugby tops reads “put a barra back”]. It is a hard thing for us to get across to them. We don’t keep them. In their culture fish are caught and they’re dead.

Another fisher in Kakadu told me with pride that he had caught and released 700 barramundi in his six-week stay at Yellow Waters.

In 1985, Dick Eusson prepared a submission on behalf of AFANT as to why people should be allowed to fish in the Kakadu National Park. The submission was prepared at the request of the then Director of ANPWS, Professor Ovington. He asked recreational fishermen to justify why they should be allowed to fish in Kakadu National Park. Eusson’s (1985:2) submission argues that ‘man’s primitive instincts are to hunt and fish’ and while the need to hunt for food and clothing is no longer the motivation in many countries, this has been replaced by a keen sense of sportsmanship which in many cases has been instrumental in game conservation.

Similarly, Campbell (1989) examines the sub-culture of sports fishing in his paper ‘Fishing Lore’. In his Californian study, he found that white fishermen use fishing lures to emulate natural baits (in physical appearance or in movements) where the intent is to recreate nature through a process of ‘lure surgery’ (1989:83). Technologies such as sonar fish finders are used to allow fishers greater access to the realm of nature. Campbell argues that ‘the sportsman is characterised by his privileging of nature and his attempt to engage it at what he perceives to be its level. Fishing, for the sportsman, is concerned with his ability to model nature’ (1989:86). Campbell, examining the fishing practices of a variety of socio-economic groups, notes that ‘fishing practices are uniquely suited to reveal contradictions in the natural/cultural oppositions and hierarchy’ (1989:77). Analysing the tendency for Western culture to privilege the natural over economic and social forms, he writes:

The concept of the ‘sportsman’ encourages the fishermen to adopt increasingly "natural" methods in blurring the man/fish polarity...By assuming natural
"methods", the sportsman believes himself to be reaffirming nature by imitation, when in fact he merely tends to control it. The sportsman does not catch fish to keep them. Proponents of the "catch and release" method attest to the importance of catching fish, that is, of rendering them powerless, by distinguishing between catching and killing fish. (1989:86)

Campbell argues that the manipulation of nature is the fundamental principle of sports fishing (1989:87). Moreover, he suggests that in the social discourse of sports fishing, where white Californian fishermen often travel huge distances at great cost to fish, the capitalist values of individuals, who in reality have quite high status in the socio-economic hierarchy, are inverted. Campbell suggests that the mask of the sportsman allow the white fishermen to readily accept a non-linear relationship between their labour and production and in doing so they take on the character of a fake-primitive in their performance (1989:88). Their reliance on cultural elaborations—rod, lures, boats, fish finders and other fishing technology—is used to both manipulate and gain access to 'nature'. Fishers also pride themselves in their ability to read nature. Two fishers I interviewed over a busy Easter fishing period in Kakadu were particularly disdainful of 'copycat fishers who manoeuvre their boat next to yours if they see you catching fish. These fishers are novices', they explained, 'they are not people who read the river looking for signs that the fish are on the surface or assessing the structure of the rivers and creeks for snags or whatever'.

While sports fishing methods of catch and release fishing are argued by proponents to be best environmental practice, fishing methods practiced by Aboriginal people within Kakadu, who are fishing for food, are often asserted by non-Aboriginal fishers to be illegitimate. For fishers, the mask of the 'natural' and the power of western conservationism have effectively removed their recognition of their own cultural practices. As sportsmen do not catch fish to keep them they retain the power and moral authority attributed to pure unmediated nature. In 1994, a prominent Northern Territory fishing writer, Alex Julius, expressed amazement in his weekly fishing column at his observation of an Aboriginal fishing practice:

There's good news and bad news about the culvert next to the South Alligator River. It seems hundreds of barra about 15cm long were congregating on both sides of the culvert—a very positive sign for the future. But then a car load of
local Aborigines came in and wiped the lot out with cast nets. It seems they're allowed to do this in Kakadu or anywhere else in the Territory. I could understand if they were using traditional methods such as spearing fish, but clearing out significant numbers of this year's barramundi crop with Taiwanese made cast nets is not on. At how many other places in Kakadu is this practice taking place undetected? (Julius 1994:19)

This non-Aboriginal fisher's criticism of this incident assumes the superiority of sports fishers own 'natural' fishing methods to the extent that he feels justified in criticising the 'unnatural' practices of others. Referring to this incident, one fisher stated his belief that in Kakadu 'there's a lot of cake and eating going on...They want to protect wildlife and then the Aborigines are allowed to shoot anything that moves from the back of Toyotas, like geese any time of the year'. From this perspective 'genuine' Aborigines are somehow located back in nature, 'as undeveloped primitive precursors to modern culture' (Willems-Braun 1997:24) who do not use technology such as nylon fishing twine, cast nets, guns and motor vehicles to hunt their food resources. Moreover, the fact that local Aborigines in Kakadu do utilise this technology is seen as obviating their rights to be 'traditional' users of their estates, and their ability to maintain the resources of those estates. In these instances, the social context in which Aboriginal people use and manage their resource base is ignored or dismissed, whilst the social context of sports fishers is implicitly elevated as the universal benchmark to guide the relations between humans and what is imagined to be an unmediated 'natural environment'.

8.5.1. Science and Social Relations

Fishers continually assert their authority as responsible maintainers of resources. In 1996, in relation to a proposal to ban fishing competitions in Kakadu National Park, Julius wrote, '[t]here is probably no more appropriate form of fishing when you consider that all competitions nowadays encourage conservation in fishing' (1996: 18). In a letter to Kakadu National Park Management supporting the right of fishing organisations to stage fishing competitions in the Park, AFANT President Brian McManus (1997) wrote that, 'competitions are seen as a training ground for fishermen of all ages to learn about the handling techniques of fish'.

Despite the wishes of the Kakadu Board of Management that fishing competitions be banned in the Park, in October 1997 an annual fly fishing competition was
inaugurated by the Darwin Game and Fly-fishing Club at Yellow Water and nearby billabongs. It was held again in 1998 and over the two days of competition 351 fish were caught and released by thirty-one teams. Fishers refer to these statistics to demonstrate that no resources are taken from the waterways in these situations and to argue against a ban on fishing competitions. Fishers who support fishing competitions point to scientific surveys that show that places like Yellow Water are at maximum carrying capacity for fish stocks.

Traditional owners, on the other hand, worry that fishing competitions cause unnecessary stress on fish that are already stressed during the late dry season when the weather is at peak humidity and the water level is low. The fish are out of condition and Aboriginal people do not like to see them stressed unnecessarily. Mick Alderson, a senior traditional owner and former Kakadu Board Member, commented that:

- **Bininj** catch fish and go home and cook them. For some people that is their totem they respect these animals. If you catch them they need to be eaten, fish, turtle or crocodile. **Bininj** know that in October the fish are weak and bony, they don’t hunt them. **Bininj** fish for feed, for **Balanda** it is a sport. They shouldn’t be using fish as a sport. Trapping and stressing them out. People here worry in October/November. Why go out and fish when the fish are sick?

When food gathering there are different times and ways to do it. We are closing areas for reasons not to hurt people. We don’t force fish...Fish are half dead anyway when you catch them. There should be no catch and release fishing except with undersized fish. The rangers here are starting to learn from us; what to do, when to do it, how to do it.

While scientific evidence that recreational fishing is having a detrimental effect on fishing populations is demanded by the fishing lobby before fishing restrictions in Kakadu will be seen as valid, the knowledge and concerns expressed and felt by traditional owners about their own resource base is not recognised to carry any authority. In 1989, a consultancy report to ANPWS on the impact of recreational fishing in Kakadu National Park found that at that time overfishing within the park was unlikely (Duff 1989). The report did note that recreational fishing numbers were increasing and recommended ongoing monitoring in order to identify and demonstrate any undesirable trends, as well as noting the need for effective
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enforcement and education of existing fisheries regulations. While the report excluded Indigenous perceptions of fisheries management needs, it noted the need for the coordinated management of barramundi fishing throughout the Northern Territory. It also argued that stopgap measures such as closing certain areas to fishing would only shift the fishing pressure to other sites. However, the concerns of traditional owners extend beyond concerns about a sustainable yield of barramundi stocks. They include a desire to manage the diversity of species and habitats according to Aboriginal people's own management philosophies that draw on an epistemology of oral tradition and life experience. ‘We don’t need surveys’, one Aboriginal person explained to me:

> We know ourselves, we can see with our own eyes what’s going on. We see the land and that’s what is important to us. The things the old people have told us about the country and the way it used to be. We got our own science about how to manage the land. We know to take enough fish for the table not to go back everyday and get 7 or 10 fish. It is not right.

Another traditional owner remarked that his decision to increase the management of fishing in his country was partly based on the idea of giving some areas a rest from disturbances, as well as boating and associated problems such as bank erosion, and to more closely manage the use of other areas. He stressed that you can not look at isolated evidence such a barramundi numbers; you need to know the full cycle of environmental interdependence and change in the area. However, the local knowledge of traditional Aboriginal owners is challenged by the local knowledge of non-Aboriginal fishers whose authority, in this case at least, is sanctioned by the power of the State and Western conservation science.

Mick Alderson, who was at the time the Chair of the Kakadu National Park Board of Management, told me that when the Board was discussing the issue of increasing fishing restrictions he was 'afraid of it when it first came up. Surveys had shown no decline of fish.' He was well aware of the authority attributed to those surveys by scientists and non-Aboriginal fishing interests. While Aboriginal people often counter scientific claims to the sole expression of an objective truth by appealing to their own situated knowledge base, their knowledge of country is seen as additional, rather than integral, to scientific management strategies. Some scientists are now realising the extent to which Aboriginal knowledge of complex ecological cycles,
environmental changes and species knowledge can significantly inform, influence and challenge Western science. Aboriginal people in Kakadu enjoy telling the story of the scientific ‘discovery’ of the pig-nose turtle in Australia. The turtle was recognised by scientists from a painting at a rock art site as the Fly River turtle, a species that they had thought was only found in New Guinea. Local Aboriginal people then took the scientists to show them this same turtle that they know as the warradjan, one of their favourite food resources. While scientists generate accepted concepts of resource management by imagining that they represent a transparent impartial reality, Aboriginal people in Kakadu find the notion of a distant science that excludes culture from an understanding of that ‘reality’ an alien concept. To protest against mining in the region a local Aboriginal organisation displayed a banner outside the Environmental Research Institute of the Supervising Scientist in Jabiru which read ‘Scientists can’t speak language, can’t speak for country’.

Aboriginal people in Kakadu do not reject the potential of Western science or scientific surveys to be beneficial to either their interests or knowledge base (Lindner 1999). Aboriginal people are proud that science continues to make new ‘discoveries’ of species and ecological processes in their country. For example, recent fisheries surveys undertaken by the Park have identified several new species of fish (Environment Australia 2000). But Aboriginal landowners want to be able to control the way that scientific research is conducted on their country and the way that knowledge is subsequently used. While they respect scientific knowledge, they also desire to negotiate the research processes and the respective contributions of Indigenous and Western knowledge. Lawrence (2000:281–282) writes that even in collaborative research between Aboriginal people and Western scientists, fundamental questions about research ethics and responsibilities remain. Moreover, the issue of having traditional ecological knowledge recognised within scientific Western culture must include the serious consideration of intellectual property rights and unequal power relationships. Knowledge production and negotiation in the regional Aboriginal domain involves addressing the epistemological principles through which knowledge is both generated and situated within a specific context. The production and negotiation of this knowledge is based on the right of the landowners to speak first, and the understanding that in decisions about their country landowners’ wishes will be respected (see Christie 1992). This is a process of
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knowledge production that is generated self-consciously out of, and through attention to, social relationships rather than a belief in the existence of an objective reality waiting to be ‘discovered’.

While they are concealed through the reification of a field of ‘nature’, these social relationships are also present in the discourse of Western science. Science philosopher Stephen Jay Gould states that ‘science, since people must do it, is a socially embedded activity’ (1984:22). Similarly, Harding writes that it is ‘contemporary social relations that create and recreate science and knowledge today’ (1991:ix). She writes that:

Science is politics by other means, and it also generates reliable information about the empirical world. [Science is a] contested terrain...And yet sciences created through political struggles, which are the only ones we have ever had, usually do produce reliable information about nature and social relations—reliable, that is, for some group or another’s purpose. They are no less sciences for being driven by particular historical and political projects. (1991:10)

The practice of science is thus inherently linked with the politics of authority—who has the right to tell the story. The fishers depend on the power of an authority that ascribes to their own standards of truth seeking—the health of barramundi stocks. In 1997, an AFANT press release quoted the then Association President, Alex Julius, who remarked:

It’s great that everyone who we talk to who counts can clearly see the unnecessary detriment that would result from this unwarranted ongoing attack on anglers in Kakadu...by proposing more illogical and self-serving restrictions on anglers in Kakadu...There is now an overwhelming case for the responsibility for managing the aquatic resources of Kakadu to be handed over to the NT Primary Industry and Fisheries Department which is an acclaimed world leader in managing sustainably our valuable fish stocks. (AFANT 1997)

‘Everyone who counts’ is, in this case, code for white male scientists and politicians. In order to challenge the authority of a male dominated Western science, Harding states that what is needed is for people to relinquish the scientific fiction of ‘truth’ seeking, whilst at the same time engaging in a scientific project aimed at less partial and less distorted beliefs. She argues for a theoretical framework that will ‘enable us to understand sciences-in-society and the consequent society-in-science’ (1991:14).
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In regard to the contested terrain in science between the West and Others, Harding states:

...attempts by European Americans to dismiss the Other story on the grounds that it is not consistent with "the best opinions" in the West will not convince the unconvinced, because the Western standards for best opinions are exactly what the alternative accounts put at issue. Anyone who might think that he or she could claim an impartial, dispassionate, disinterested, value-free perspective on these issues is not only deluded but has also already sided with the West and its standards for finding the "best opinion". (1991:238)

However, Harding (1991) argues against epistemological or judgemental relativism or alternatively 'going native'. While she acknowledges the use-value of highlighting competing claims to authority through arguments of cultural (or historical, or sociological) relativism, she believes that ultimately one inclusive epistemological standpoint [grounded in lives] is needed to reinvent a less partial objectivity. An inclusive epistemological standpoint would allow for a critical evaluation of social situations by exposing socially situated knowledge claims and their historical location.

8.6. Decision-making and Ambiguous Spaces

Over the last two decades the Northern Territory fishing lobby has used their voice in the media to gain significant political influence. One Northern Territory fisher explained:

If the government does something good pat them on the back. They like that, they get credit points so they'll do it again. So we developed an approach. The CLP has no doubt that the resounding victory in the last couple of elections had a lot to do with the fishing vote. Perron's last election victory was a classic example. He said it was because of two things—the Aboriginal issue, the usual stuff, and the fisherman.

The Aboriginal issues (land rights, native title) and recreational fishing signify contrary versions of the 'Territory lifestyle', where the former is invoked as the threat to the uniqueness of the frontier lifestyle, while the latter is the populist embodiment of 'Territorian' values.

To an extent, senior Aboriginal traditional owners in the National Park now choose to construct their arguments and provide 'reasonable' justification for their decisions
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within this dominant framework, adopting arguments that fit in with the rationale of fishers and conservation management and leaving other considerations unexplained. Arguments that recreational fishing, or at least fishing competitions, are not appropriate in a national park appeal to particular conservationist rationales. However, these same arguments used by traditional owners to justify their decisions are easily exploited by disgruntled stakeholders, especially those as politically powerful as the fishing lobby. They focus on the contradictions in the argument of this 'nature-based rationale' by pointing out that Park management allows domestic cattle and wild horses in 'wilderness' areas like Yellow Water. AFANT, in their submission to the Draft Plan, responded in outrage to suggestions that commercial exploitation of feral animals in a national park should be tolerated while what they see as their legitimate right to free and open access to recreational fishing in Kakadu is being denied.75 They comment that:

The idea of conservation in a National Park also appears to be at odds with aboriginal people utilising the park boundaries to breed and harvest feral animals such as buffalo and cattle. There has also been allegations that the feral pig population is not in a management state of containment but of harvest for profit. This is allegedly being achieved through selective culling...As recreational fishermen and environmentalists AFANT objects strongly to these allegations and proposals. (1996:8)

A non-Aboriginal Park Ranger, involved in fishing management 'on-the-ground' in the East Alligator district, explained that he supports the land management decisions traditional owners wish to make on their land. However, in relation to fishing proposals in the 1996 Draft Plan, he believes the decision-making processes and the justifications given to the wider public for these decisions were inadequate. He says:

The landowners have the right [to make the decisions]. But to use certain reasons to come up with that, like “we are going to preserve fish stocks”, when to date there is no scientific evidence that it’s [recreational fishing] having an impact, or much evidence of impact on Aboriginal sites. You leave yourself open. Or you leave me open [to criticism from the fishing public]...Certainly

75 Out of a total of ninety-seven submissions to the 1996 Kakadu National Park Draft Plan of Management, ten addressed a combination of fishing, boating and the potential commercial use of native or introduced wildlife by Aboriginal people.
there is always going to be aggro, there is aggro now. The fishing lobby is strong and local. Traditional owners have to weigh it up. I've heard stories from different traditional owners in that country. Some traditional owners don't have a problem with fishing upstream. Others want people out of there. They have to weigh up what it means to them to get people out of that area fishing to the outcry of people who will complain "all they are doing is taking away my right to recreational fishing". You have to get a strong decision from traditional owners. They have to present their case to other people why. "For privacy" or whatever, "preserve for future generations", "we have always fished here". It may not be accepted by whitefella culture. But Park management has to get along with the job the best way they can. Follow decisions and advise people as to why that has happened.

While there is a need for traditional owners to engage strategically with the wider non-Aboriginal political processes, there also needs to be an increased understanding, both from the public and within the Parks Australia itself, of the decision-making processes in the Aboriginal domain. The reasoning behind the Board’s fisheries management designs was also a source of considerable confusion among Parks staff, some of whom were disillusioned with what they perceived as a lack of staff input into the decision-making into the Draft Plan. Some staff were upset that whilst they had to deal with criticism from angry anglers they had no idea why the fishing restrictions were imposed. There was also a perception that because of the political sensitivity of the issue, effective debate within Park management over these management prescriptions had been suppressed. Meanwhile, Parks Australia’s attempts to cultivate a working relationship with the fishing lobby had suffered a considerable setback.

The fishing lobby exploited what appeared to be internal dissonance within Parks Australia over the fishing management issue. Julius writes:

I wouldn't be surprised if the administration and rangers at Kakadu would secretly prefer that the majority of these restrictions were not imposed...After all, the administrators of the park, who have been there for a few years now, seemed to have developed considerable empathy with our Territory lifestyle. (1996:18)

Other fishers thought that the decisions had come only through the upper ranks of Park management. A local Jabiru fisher explained that:
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A lot of people have a lot of access to Aboriginal people and a lot of people
who live in Jabiru play sport with Park Rangers. Park Rangers didn’t know it
was coming either.

One traditional owner and Park Ranger, Fred Hunter, explained that a lot of people
he knows in Jabiru, friends and others, were approaching him and saying:

“Why the bloody hell are you doing this for?” I said, “Hey, that’s not my area.
That’s not my idea.” I was probably half-and-half actually. I was against it and
I thought well maybe you know, we have got to start to look at things like that.
Just saying how lucky people are to be able to fish in the Park, like some other
Parks you are not allowed to fish there at all.

The Northern Territory amateur fishing association put a lot of blame on the
Park I suppose. Traditional owners. I don’t know. I think that’s something that
will never change. People are screaming about billabongs that used to be open
years ago to be open. You know I’ve read articles in the newspaper people
fishing on bridges and stuff you know and seeing traditional owners with throw
nets and stuff, catching fish and...I remember reading that in an article you
know. “How come we can’t do this and they can”, you know. “They’re
catching undersized barras” and stuff like that. They are just lucky to be able to
fish here really. Shit. It is their [Aboriginal traditional owners] backyard if they
want to do that they can do that.

A main source of the confusion generated over the decision-making processes in
Kakadu National Park is the ambiguous role of Aboriginal organisations, such as the
Kakadu Board of Management. Sullivan (?1988), writing about Aboriginal
Community Representative Organisations and intermediate cultural processes in the
Kimberley Region of Western Australia, provides a thesis on the ambiguous
character and space of Aboriginal organisations. Sullivan claims that Aboriginal
community organisations are inherently ambiguous, situated at the intersection of
cultural systems and occupying positions within two incommensurate structures at
the same time. Aboriginal organisations are expected to be variously advocates of
Aborigines, facilitate consultations and liaise with outside demands, and have a
decision-making role. Sullivan argues these ‘requirements are generated within, and
responsive to, demands formulated in European cultural terms’ (?1988:4). At the
same time, demands are placed on these organisations from within the Aboriginal
community to meet the demands of Aboriginal culture. Yet, Sullivan continues,
they do not reflect indigenous systems of authority or organisation' (?1988:4). Senior traditional owner, Bill Neidjie, reflecting on the role of the Board and fisheries management stated that:

I'm telling you Board, I been working on Board. I try work with them I said no. That Board wasn't any Aborigine law there...Too much word no good. But got me beat that Board. The Board is good, but *Balanda* knowledge I don't get in that. So I don't want it. I don't want to stop 'em because I don't want it. *Balanda* knowledge too far and I'm talking something else all right. *Country*...But fish, no I can't do it. Try ask [my son]. Work it out he young.

The ambivalent role of the Board, representing Aboriginal people but not representing Aboriginal law, compounds the difficulties for Aboriginal land managers. Sullivan states that while Aboriginal organisations function as intermediates between cultures the denial of intermediate processes compounds their difficulties and the ambiguity is never directly addressed. While Park staff state that they are unclear on the reasoning behind the changes to fishing management in the Draft Plan they have no doubt that these decisions were made and endorsed by the traditional owners on the Board of Management. They do not, however, emphasise this in their communication with other stakeholders. A senior Park manager, referring to communication with recreational fishing groups, states:

A lot don't believe the changes in the *Draft Plan of Management* came from traditional owners. They think it is all from whitefellas. We have to be careful we don't paint Aboriginals as the bad guys. The fishermen can't believe that Aborigines are the powerbrokers. It is a foreign concept to them. "No one takes black fellas serious" is the response. They can't come to terms with it that Aboriginal people call the shots in Kakadu.

This attitude is unfortunately reinforced in fishers’ own negotiations with Aboriginal people. In their negotiations with non-Aboriginal people who imagine the common reference point to be an objective scientific truth, Aboriginal people may choose to remain silent, not in agreement, but in the absence of a space and discursive position to effectively speak and respond from. In Aboriginal negotiations, attention is typically paid to the landowners’ primary rights to speak for *country* and resources, while at the same time respectfully recognising the perspective of others. This requires tact, patience and time (Christie 1992:27). In this
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way the negotiation practices between Aboriginal groups involve attention to both the legitimacy of individuals representing groups of others, and 'an acceptance of the rights of participants to speak for their own territories—and for the people, resources, cultures and histories of those territories' (Christie & Perrett 1996:59). It is a style in which ideological and other differences are seen as constituting partialities of ex-centric perspectives, not competition for an objective truth (Christie 1992). However, ignorant of this inclusive Aboriginal style of negotiating, fishing interests see Aboriginal recognition of their perspective as part of a process where Aboriginal people 'see the light' and accede to the fishermen's 'commonsense' view of the world. One Northern Territory fisher explained to me his experience of negotiating resource access with Aboriginal traditional owners:

I mean they've got their issues and their concerns but it's being actually able to get to them and present your side of it. We had a meeting a year or so ago with a couple of traditional owners on the Board...I forget their names...I think that was successful, it generally is when you go and talk...they weren't strong about it [their concerns] they sort of accepted what we said. That's where you think there's been some manipulation.

The 'bottom line' for the fishers' argument is that Kakadu's waterways and fisheries belong to 'the community as a whole'. However, the rational 'commonsense' approach and the 'bottom line' of Western resource managers fails to see the constructedness of their own imaginary, which hinders any negotiations that challenge Western epistemic commitments (Verran 1998). In the liberal public sphere, the model of stakeholder negotiations aims to balance competing interests through a rationalist appeal to a 'common good' and disengaged reason, an appeal that lacks both the recognition of ontological difference and the unequal power of symbolic privilege (Young 1995:141). Similarly, in a critique of joint management, Lawrence writes:

Joint management operates within, not apart from, the social, legal and administrative structures of the dominant culture...The question of whether joint management involves a fundamental mutual understanding and acceptance of different values and approaches to land management in national parks or whether it is simply a compromise between differing value systems that continue to revolve uneasily around each other remains unanswered. (2000:246–247)
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Third-party interest groups, such as the tourism and fishing industry, which are outside the formal joint management arrangements, assert their own ideologies and environmental management visions on the Park and complicate the joint management situation by demanding even further compromises by Aboriginal traditional owners.

However, the process of negotiation of different interests does not have to be bounded by confrontation and appeals to disengaged reason. Young suggests that in cross-cultural situations, the narratives of situated knowledge which includes the expression and extension of shared understandings, where they exist, and the offering and acknowledgment of unshared meanings, are a useful tool of negotiation (Young 1995:149). She writes that within the pluralist politics of divergent cultural assumptions:

...narrative can serve to explain to outsiders what practices, places or symbols mean to the people who hold them. Values, unlike norms, often cannot be justified through argument. But neither are they arbitrary. Their basis often emerges from the situated history of a people. Through narrative the outsiders may come to understand why the insiders value what they value and why they have the priorities they have [as well] listeners can learn about how their own position, actions and values appear to others from the stories they tell. (1995:148)

Fishers' narratives that engage with people and place respectfully are also more likely to be effective when negotiating with traditional owners. In contrast to the sometimes aggressive style of the AFANT representative, the presentation to the Board of Management by a local Jabiru resident (and the tourism representative on the Board), focused on the relationships between Jabiru residents who like to fish and the traditional owners, and how this would be affected by proposed fishing restrictions. He explained that the fishing issue was a very emotional issue among Jabiru residents that had created much animosity. He said people go fishing to enjoy the park not just to catch fish, and explained that Jabiru residents like to go fishing and enjoy the safety of the upstream area of the East Alligator, as it is a place where they can go with their families. The argument about quiet enjoyment of the river and fishing as family recreation was compelling to many of the Aboriginal Board members (Wellings, P., former Secretary Kakadu Board of Management, pers.
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Traditional owners are proud of the fact that many tourists who come to Kakadu are thrilled to have a chance to catch a barramundi and they enjoy sharing their country with those who may not otherwise have these opportunities in their everyday lives. For example one Aboriginal man commented about recreational fishers in the Park:

They good people too. Family mob come and talk to you, want to ask you about country. Some good people too. Have a beer in the pub with them. Tell them about fishing and they listen to you. We tell them there are spots they can’t go—sacred site or just for Bininj. They find it hard to understand.

Assertion of primary responsibility for country and land ownership does not mean that traditional owners are not prepared to negotiate and accommodate other interests. Aboriginal people are generally amenable to share their country with others, as long as traditional owners’ rights are respected.

8.7. Conclusion

While there are significant differences as well as similarities in the conceptualisation of fishing as a part of local lifestyles, it is in the discourse of resource use and management that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledges appear the least commensurate. While Western science conceives of fish as a resource to be sustainably managed, Aboriginal people view fish and their harvest not only as a significant source of food, but also as part of a wider system of interconnected socio-physical relationships. Salt and freshwater resources in Kakadu National Park are part of Aboriginal social identity and Park management will increasingly have to acknowledge that issues that pervade the Kakadu domain in relation to land are no different for aquatic areas.

While Aboriginal people in Kakadu National Park have so far chosen to constitute themselves in negotiations with fishermen according to the rationalities of a discourse of science, this approach creates contradictions that have been successfully exploited by the fishing lobby. Meanwhile the fishing lobby cannot see the contradiction in the ‘objective reality’ of its own imaginary and the way in which it forces Aboriginal people to respond according to fishers’ own ontological and epistemological commitments.
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Like bushwalking, fishing is an issue that raises crucial questions about communicating and negotiating across an ontological divide of land considered as country through an inter-subjective social reality, and land and resources cared for as 'other' in an objective reality. Finding ways of answering these questions will continue to be central to the process of negotiating joint Indigenous and non-Indigenous management and land use in Kakadu National Park.
Chapter Nine

Conclusion
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9.1. Tourism and the Construction of Kakadu National Park

Tourism is acknowledged to be a practice that draws on and subverts older histories of place and ways of being, as well as changing the terms of our understanding and interaction with place and each other (Morris 1995). In this thesis, a study of tourism provides an examination of a range of constructions of Kakadu National Park.

Tourism, and the changes it is bringing, is not new to the Alligator Rivers region. It is part of a process of social and economic change in the region that has been occurring since the arrival of Europeans. However, tourism is an important practice to examine because it is now the defining influence on the way that Kakadu is constructed in the non-Aboriginal public imagination. For those who have visited Kakadu it is, of course, a place they relate to largely through personal experience. For people who have never visited the Park, the visual and textual images of Kakadu produced in an array of documentaries, films, tourism literature, environmental campaigns, calendars, posters and books enable them to place and give meaning to Kakadu. ‘Kakadu is sacred’ the Jabiru protesters’ anthem declared in 1998. This ‘sacred’ place has also been referred to by a representative of the Mirrar Gundjeihmi clan as ‘one of the most valuable pieces of real estate on this planet’ (Katona 1999:10). Currently this land, which is both ‘sacred’ and a ‘valuable piece of real estate’, is managed as a national park. In interpreting it as a national park, literature that is geared towards tourism and environmentalism combine to construct Kakadu as a (sacred) place for the conservation of natural and cultural landscapes, a symbol of Aboriginality and environmental preservation, of nature ‘wild and free’. Kakadu is internationally famous because of an increasingly global desire to value and appreciate those parts of nature and culture considered as exemplary.

Tourism in Kakadu is changing many things: the type of interactions with the landscape, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people’s understandings of each other. Tourists who come into contact with Aboriginal material culture and Aboriginal ways of thinking about the land often remark that they feel privileged to have had a special experience. Other tourists may also desire that experience, but for various reasons leave with unmet expectations. Still others may not consider Kakadu an Aboriginal landscape at all, but through their experience may come to a greater
appreciation of what they perceive as the natural landscape, the varied habitats of Kakadu. Whatever the case, the Kakadu that is experienced by most Park visitors is a sensory event ranging from a collection of sites that are visited hastily from the comfort of an air-conditioned tour vehicle, to a more complete outdoor experience absorbed through extended bush camping. Like other national parks, Kakadu is constructed as an ‘outdoor templehouse’ (SERCARC 1998:132). Yet the avenues for personal experience available to Park visitors come with some cost to the lifestyles of local Aboriginal people. Places where Aboriginal people lived, hunted and that they otherwise frequented in recent memory are now tourist places. Some Aboriginal people say they now feel uncomfortable in these places. In some cases, these places are used or interpreted by the tourism industry without mention of the history of Aboriginal use of that area or its continuing significance to local Aboriginal people. For local Aboriginal people, the place they call home is now inextricably shared with others who see this place as an exotic location.

9.2. Traditional Owners and Tourist Place-Making

Despite this tourism ‘invasion’, in one sense the practice of tourism offers Aboriginal people a way of enhancing their cultural traditions by sharing a part of them with tourists, reinvigorating them for tourist consumption and for themselves. This is the case with tours that include Aboriginal demonstrations of their traditional ecological knowledge such as bush foods, crafts and medicines. Employment such as this offers Aboriginal people a forum to publicly express pride in their history and share their culture with others. Likewise, Parks Australia has been engaged in incorporating local Aboriginal traditions and knowledge into Park literature and interpretive services. In other instances, tourism is encouraging Aboriginal people to return to areas now seldom visited. For instance, because of Aboriginal concerns expressed over the activities of bushwalkers, Park Rangers have increased the number surveillance bushwalks in the escarpment and have actively sought to include Aboriginal people in the monitoring activities. This has increased the number of young Aboriginal people who have travelled through and learnt about the escarpment area through personal experience.

Although tourism can enhance local cultural traditions, in encounters between tourists and Aboriginal guides there is an inevitable tension between what cultural traditions are imparted and what the tourist wants to know. Aboriginal people are
wary of non-Aboriginal people who seek their own fantasy of 'traditional culture' and desire esoteric Aboriginal knowledge of rock art, sacred sites and Dreamtime stories. It was this type of knowledge, 'authentic Aboriginal culture', that captured the imagination of most Park visitors with whom I spoke. Meanwhile, most Aboriginal people in the region whom I spoke with have had life experiences or a recent family history that involves working in the buffalo-hide industry or on cattle stations and in the other bush industries that once characterised the fossicking economy of the region. The family traditions of these people and their knowledge of the landscape incorporate from the recent past as much as, or more than, traditions adapted from the ancient pre-contact Aboriginal population. Aboriginal people interact with the land as part of the daily experience of living in country, of driving through it, fishing, hunting, working and relaxing. They also have diverse lives which often include the struggle to overcome the social problems of poor health, housing, education and unemployment. The warm glow of Kakadu presented by the tourism industry can offer some Aboriginal people a diversion from these issues, but often the diversion is too far from the reality of daily life in the Aboriginal community to be sustainable. Nevertheless, in order to provide for an avenue for their economic future in the region, Aboriginal people are now seeking a greater stake in the tourism industry.

At the same time, traditional owners wish to see tourism develop according to their own needs and aspirations. This thesis identifies aspects of current tourism practices that Aboriginal people are unhappy with, for example, aspects of bushwalking and fishing practices and the encroachment of tourism into their private spaces. However, the details of these concerns vary, according to the context and the time that such management issues arise. At the core of these Aboriginal concerns is frustration with the way in which tourism activities have proceeded in the Park and what assumptions have been made about the landscape to allow them to take place. Aboriginal people are concerned with the manner in which tourists have been allowed access to certain areas, whether or not they have sought permission from landowners and under what terms landowners have had to make decisions. Their central concern involves issues of rights and process: whether it is thought to be the right of fishermen to fish in Kakadu, or the right of bushwalkers to walk through the escarpment, or whether it is recognised to be the right of landowners to allow them,
or not allow them, to undertake activities according to their own system of land use and land values.

Local Aboriginal people have generally seen the growth of tourism in Kakadu as inevitable. The land, in which they have historically invested social meaning, is now increasingly the object of monetary investment by non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people. The biggest issue for Aboriginal traditional owners in Kakadu National Park as they try to shape the development of Kakadu in a way that meets local Aboriginal community needs is the compatibility or incompatibility between the management of 'real estate' and the management of 'country'. Under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, Aboriginal people own all the prime tourism real estate in Kakadu—Jim Jim Falls, Ubirr Rock, Nourlangie Rock, Yellow Water, Maguk and Gunlom. They own two of the four major hotel facilities and, in the case of Yellow Water, they own the means by which the majority of tourists will experience the landscape—the wetland boat cruises. Yet despite their ownership of these sites, the way in which Kakadu is constructed as a tourist place ensures the meaning which Aboriginal traditional owners invest in their landscape remains peripheral to the general tourist experience.

9.3. Kakadu as a Place of Nature

This thesis has shown that tourism activities in the Park often interpret the landscape within the logic of a comforting cocoon of Western conservation. For example, the guides on the Yellow Water cruises, who wish that the horses and cattle would be removed from defiling the wilderness, effectively ignore the significance of these animals to local Aboriginal people and the history of land use in the area. The coach and four-wheel-drive tours that ponder and marvel at an ancient Aboriginal past prefer to focus on the history of Aboriginal tradition distanced from the political reality of present-day Kakadu and the real lives of local Aborigines. While Parks Australia promotes Aboriginal cultural traditions and the idea of a cultural landscape, it also provides Park visitors with an interpretation of the Park based upon an invisible 'culture of nature' (Willems-Braun 1997). At the Bowali Visitor Centre, for example, the Park's 'natural landscape' is interpreted as existing independently of the social and historical assumptions that have informed that particular Western interpretation of place. Bushwalkers, who seek a wilderness experience, walk through the escarpment firm in a belief in the moral worth of their activity,
dismissing Aboriginal concerns as a misunderstanding of bushwalking activities. Fishermen, who talk about conservation and putting their fish back, justify their continued right to fish on the basis of scientific evidence that Aboriginal traditional owners are required to disprove if they are to be taken seriously by fishers.

In these ways the complex and multi-dimensional nature of Aboriginal concerns about the landscape are often overlooked or treated as invisible by interest groups and government agencies who are firmly guided by their own understanding of natural resource management. 'Nature' becomes a space free of social relations, an empty space to be accounted for by the authority of science to preserve, monitor and manage natural heritage. While concepts of a traditional Aboriginal relationship with the land, their 'spiritual connection' to the landscape, may be embraced in this nature based discourse, in many cases the actual property relations which authorise Aboriginal land owners to speak for that land are overlooked. Nature becomes something to be debated by scientists and managed by those groups established within the scientific discourse as the knowledgeable and responsible maintainers of resources. This thesis has shown that in its interpretation of the Kakadu landscape, the tourism industry and associated interest groups reinforce this approach.

Landscape mediates the tourist's experience of Kakadu and is the object of most tourism activities that take place in the Park. It has been suggested elsewhere that by engaging local Indigenous people in tourism activities, the way in which a landscape is managed and used, perceived and respected, can be built into the itinerary of visitors, as it is for local inhabitants (Jacobs, P. 1996:73; Parsons 1997). Yet, as Aboriginal people are currently not directly involved in most of the tourism that occurs in Kakadu, tourism activities proceed in a manner whereby the values and uses of the Kakadu landscape are interpreted largely from the perspective of non-Aborigines.

### 9.4. Kakadu as an Aboriginal Place

Traditional owners want Kakadu to be acknowledged and experienced by Park visitors as an Aboriginal place. What does this mean and how can it be enacted? While traditional owners welcome the fact that others derive pleasure from experiencing their *country*, tourism is a practice that for most Aboriginal people remains outside their daily lives. If Aboriginal people do not feel comfortable in the
presence of large numbers of tourists, if they actively avoid the places where tourists frequent, then how can the tourists recognise their hosts in absentia? In any case what is the difference between tourism imposed on the landscape from the perspective of a Western history of landscape values, and tourism directed towards an appreciation of an Aboriginal landscape? Both strategies open up a place to the outside world and bring changes and encounters beyond the control of local inhabitants and those who visit (Jacobs, P. 1996:73). Yet, Aboriginal people have consistently welcomed to their land those people from elsewhere who have sought to negotiate and build a relationship with them in a way that respects the primary right of the landowners to give or withhold permission to use their land. To envision Kakadu as an Aboriginal place requires consideration of the wider social relations that intersect and interact to make Kakadu what it is now. The way in which these relationships are incorporated into the management of Kakadu will be decisive in whether or not tourism is accommodated to the satisfaction of Aboriginal traditional owners.

Non-Aboriginal visitors can be told they are visiting Aboriginal land, and the Park can be re-nominated as a cultural landscape on the World Heritage list, but this means little to the practice of tourism in the Park. To call Kakadu an Aboriginal place refers as much to the behaviour that is expected of people in that place, as to the clear-cut reality of land ownership under the ALRA or the niceties of joint management. For Aboriginal people in Kakadu their country is inseparable from their own identity. What they do to their country, they do to themselves. What they do to the country of others, they do to others and vice versa. Country is considered sentient, communicated with and related to according to an ontology of spatialised selves. Within this system of interrelationship, to visit and use the land of others, people are obliged to seek permission from landowners before they proceed to use it in any way. It is through this process that people earn the trust and respect that comes from others knowing that you know what to do and when to do it. This relationship of rights and permission seeking lies at the core of statements that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place. This appears to be an unbreachable impasse when most tourists are, understandably, ignorant of these protocols and it is unlikely that the vast majority will ever have a chance to meet any local Aboriginal people.
Chapter 9. Conclusion

The key to imagining Kakadu as an Aboriginal place lies in the relationship people construct with each other through their relations with the landscape. If the landscape is viewed as a living subject, where relationships to the land and to each other continue to change with time, a new construction of Kakadu can emerge, one that is firmly anchored in the memory and method of dwelling in an Aboriginal place (Jacobs, P. 1996:73). To support Aboriginal people in the promotion of this method, there needs to be a greater awareness amongst Park staff and visitors of the interconnection between people, the land and each other. This ontological approach to the landscape could then begin to infuse both Park regulations and management.

To neglect to view our relations with the land as bound within social relationships means that any promotion of the idea of Kakadu as a cultural landscape will function only as an addition to the Park as a natural landscape, an exotic cultural overlay on a Western 'culture of nature' (Willems-Braun 1997). This amounts to little more than a continuation of the colonial relationships that allowed men such as the explorer Leichhardt to simultaneously marvel at the natives and recommend their land for white settlement. While the scientific knowledge of a 'culture of nature' can offer useful perspectives for Aboriginal traditional owners as they make their management decisions, their decisions will be made according to a range of influencing factors relevant to the situation and social context. Scientific knowledge will be only one consideration within a pre-existing system of authority and social relations of Aboriginal traditional owners.

There is concealed ambiguity in the role of decision makers such as the Kakadu Board of Management. On the one hand, they need to balance the wishes of interest groups and their use of the land, and on the other hand, they must react to Aboriginal priorities for the management of their own land. In many ways this unrecognised ambiguity produces 'geographies of rejection' (Sibley 1988), a result of the fact that the complex and multi-dimensional nature of Aboriginal concerns for land management are not readily amenable to an interest group model of land management. This lack of mutual recognition between decision makers and other interested parties results in assertions of exclusivity rather than inclusivity in their negotiations with one another over place.
Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.5. Conclusion

The idea of the cultural landscape can offer non-Aboriginal people a way of understanding and thinking about an Aboriginal infusion of culture into the landscape. It can help people to recognise the inseparability between an Aboriginal understanding of nature and culture. It is the way in which this idea is incorporated into non-Aboriginal viewpoints that is most crucial to an understanding of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place. To reflect on what Aboriginal people mean when they state that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place requires not only that non-Aboriginal people begin to reflect on how Aborigines relate to the land, but a reconfiguration of how non-Aboriginal people relate themselves to the land. This requires reflection on the position of outsiders within the pre-existing Aboriginal relationship to the land. To acknowledge the primacy of the local Aboriginal relationships to place, and then aim to work within that system will enhance the quality of negotiations at the Park management level and eventually the quality of the experience of those Park visitors who also want to experience Kakadu as an Aboriginal place. Otherwise, for non-Aborigines, Kakadu may be recognised as a National Park, a World Heritage area, a cultural landscape or Aboriginal land, but it is not interacted with and understood as a place where the local Aboriginal society weaves a social system through relations with each other and the land. In short, Kakadu will not be understood and experienced by non-Aboriginal stakeholders as the ‘Aboriginal place’ which the 1998 Kakadu National Park Plan of Management celebrates and promotes.

Tourism which interprets and understands Kakadu as a living Aboriginal landscape could be a valuable industry in assisting Aboriginal traditional owners to satisfy their social and economic needs in the future. However, while tourism practices in Kakadu remain ensconced in interpreting and experiencing the wonders of purified nature and ancient Aborigines, it will remain a frustrating burden for traditional owners whose main hope is that others will see and appreciate their home as they do—as an Aboriginal place.
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Legal

Appendix A. An Aboriginal Place

The following quotes are taken from discussions I had with Aboriginal people about their associations with the Kakadu region and the changes that they have seen as tourism has developed in the region over the years. These quotes, from traditional Aboriginal owners and other long-term Aboriginal residents of the region, invoke country as used and related to socially, and make testament to the importance of the history of relations through which people have engaged with one another and with the landscape itself.

- This law, it’s very hard to see him law. Take that red lily, you look that red lily, we used to eat that before, but red lily you can go there and look, no more rush, you sit down, think about, think about what they been growing there. This another sort of lingo [language], but it’s your body, really know yourself, you might learn or something like that. People don’t know this story because hard...I take them and teach any tree or plum, tree that better. Slow, sit down, look that tree, he got meaning that tree.

- This is my favourite time of year for bush tucker; there’s a lot of it—especially yams and fish. At the end of the dry, it is a good time then for goose and turtle. But now is coming on to the time for fish, something everyone looks forward too. It is also the time for long yams, when you hear the green grasshopper calling out.

- Gimbat way. We used to walk up top. Make a bark house. Wet season holiday time. Didn’t worry about look paintings [rock art]—go hunting kangaroo, sugar bag. Dry season. Go back work. Hard work. Hand washing. Wood collecting.

- They [people working in the Park] should have to meet traditional owners. Jimmy Wok Wok got booked at the campground for sleeping there. Things have changed a lot for those old people. I don’t know if they, like Jimmy Wok Wok, understand how, because they were the people that used to walk through this country and hunt.

- I lived here all my life, only been to Jim Jim Falls once. We normally drive up and down the road [that leads to the Falls] looking for kangaroo.
Appendix A. An Aboriginal place

- We learn as we are living from a lifetime of hunting. Like when you see the spear grass seeding you know the fish are coming up from downstream.

- I was born in my country in Arnhem Land. I came here with my mother and father. My mother died. She was visiting over this side. I stayed here and got married here. We camped here, no people, no ranger, no tourists. We camped at Yellow Water, big mob geese and file snake.

- We know everything here in this country. Now big mob food—red apple, green apple, green plum. Wet season, food in the stone country.

- If it is a special place, djang, we can go there and have a look quietly. Not talking too much and laughing because that Dreaming over there.

- In Darwin in the 1970s people didn’t talk about Kakadu. I remember Nourlangie being mentioned. There was no such word as Kakadu. People [tourists] were always coming in small way, then shock. We had Cooinda [hotel] to ourselves then next minute we had to share it. It changed. We lost a meeting place. People started keeping to themselves.

- Jabiru Lake used to be a spring there. Used to camp there sometimes. A lot of buffalo, pig, bullock. Used to walk. No bitumen between here and Jim Jim Falls. Walk to Spring Peak past Nourlangie Rock—there was nothing at Cooinda. Camped up in escarpment. Big mob people came from Maningrida, sometimes Oenpelli, walked right through to Jim Jim cutting bamboo spears. Sometimes go to Pine Creek. Walk in escarpment. Young people walk through with father, grandfather—they’d tell them as they went about places and dangerous places. People were okay to go through because know one another. All families. Jawoyn, Dangbon, Ngalkbon. Still hang around here. They talk. Always go across to Bulman, Eva Valley.

- My father a croc shooter. He worked croc hide and buffalo. Stayed at Mudjinberri. All dead now that buffalo shooter mob. We would take hides to Pine Creek and put it on the diesel train. Today car everywhere.

- I was born Pine Creek way. Grew up on stations. Mary River way—Gimbat, Goodparla. Mother and father worked at Barramundi Springs. Worked at Gimbat stockcamp, cooking, washing for stock boys. Joe Callanan boss there.
Appendix A. An Aboriginal place

- Working Jim Jim mustering cattle. Then went back to Dorisvale [station]—other side of Pine Creek. Holiday at Pine Creek. Then back to Goodparla. Back to Dorisvale. Went to Douglas station, Ban Ban station. Annabaroo when Robinson was the Manager. Back to Mudjinberri working with Sunny Smeeton mustering cattle. Oenpelli breaking in horse, mustering cattle. Then Jim Jim. I used to live and work at Cooinda with old Tom Opitz—clean up, mowing, raking up. A lot of Bininj at Cooinda. It was a good time. Left when Tom Opitz left.

- Slowly the place started changing. More and more people started coming in the dry. With bitumen on the Kakadu Highway more and more people came. Camping areas put in. Walkways. Road access to Jim Jim Falls. When they made the whole road it cut off our privacy. Tourists come all year. Changed a lot probably keep changing as years go. No people at all, now heaps. It doesn’t really bother us, but it is a lot of changing.

- In my *country* I don’t let tourists go where my heart is. Not that I don’t value those places where they do go.

- People come here because they see things in books and want to come and see it for themselves. I’m never a tourist, because you stay in the place where you’re born. Only thing else might go to hospital.

- Aborigine we was live on here, we never change that place. Different language they used to come to visit this place, but they never change it...before long time I was kid they explain to me, any people, this your cousin this you uncle, father, aunty, that right. But other people like visitors, they’ll come in, you can’t be hard. You gotta be kind and help them, they will help you. Otherwise you’ll be hard. A lot of trouble for you.
Appendix B. Kakadu Images

Kakadu National Park is a complex site of desire. While it is a place valued most prominently as a scenic national park situated on the Australian frontier, what gives it its mystique and allure for many people is its 'tribal' connotation. It is a place where non-Aboriginal Australians can seek out, in a safe setting of a national park, knowledge about Aboriginal people, their culture and their relationships to the land. Ideas about Aborigines and nature are a powerful combination in colonial images of the frontier, the 'real' Australia.

Below I have set out the representations of Kakadu National Park that emerged in my discussions with tourists in the Park between 28 June and 14 July 1997 in research aimed to ascertain Australian tourists' use, perceptions and understandings of Kakadu National Park, cultural landscape and land rights issues. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted as open-ended conversations, using a general set of questions as a guide. The interviews were conducted either in the grounds of the Gagudju Cooinda Lodge or the nearby Mardugal campground in the central region of Kakadu National Park. The Gagudju Cooinda Lodge is a central point from which to visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and embark on a Yellow Water boat cruise. Taken as a whole these representations paint a picture of a famous national park which people desire to experience for a number of reasons: for its scenery and wildlife, to connect with its 'Aboriginality', and for its outback connotations. Some respondents were sceptical of the notion of Kakadu as an Aboriginal place, either because they did not see Aboriginal people in the park or because of their general disdain for contemporary, as opposed to 'traditional' Aboriginal culture.

The dot points set out below are extracts, key words and phrases taken from each one of the twenty-eight interviews I conducted. While most respondents mentioned Aboriginal culture as part of their Kakadu experience this was due in twelve cases to my own prompting as to whether or not they had seen any Aboriginal cultural products during their time in the Park. Seventeen respondents immediately mentioned Aboriginal culture, such as rock art, the Warradjan cultural centre, Aboriginal spirituality or way of life, as a part of their Kakadu experience or prior expectation. Whether or not respondents immediately mentioned Aboriginal people
or culture independently of prompting did not necessarily indicate their views on Kakadu as an Aboriginal place. In subsequent questions respondents were particularly careful to construct a particular version of themselves in interviews on issues of Aboriginal ownership of the park and land rights issues. There was a varied amount of passion, ambivalence and coyness expressed over the politics of this issue, responses seemed to depend a great deal on the impression of themselves they wished to convey.

I provide this material as a reference point to allow the reader to assess tourism discourses of colonial and postcolonial desire about Kakadu National Park. It also frames the discussion in Chapter Two on the historical construction of nature and Aborigines in Western discourse. The extracts set out below are from responses to questions about why visitors came to Kakadu National Park, what they have experienced and the concept that Kakadu is an Aboriginal place.

* An asterisk after the response indicates that the respondent is a Northern Territory resident.

- Scenery; I saw this glamorous video; it looks stunning.
- Spirit in the landscape; bushwalking; interested in the Aboriginal relation to the land; want to know how Aborigines see the world.
- The ‘Dreaming’ is about making money; they didn’t talk about it in the past.
- Kakadu is a ‘must see’, I will be able to tell people I’ve been there; scenery, crocodiles, find out how Aborigines live.
- Isolated terrain; the Northern Territory is connected with Aborigines, the Park interpretation has softened my heart to Aborigines; national parks are important to fence off natural habitat.
- Scenery, waterholes, camping, I appreciate the Aboriginal story written on the land in the art etc., the story comes out when you are swimming, fishing etc.; coming to Kakadu gives you an appreciation of why Aboriginal people want their land. You don’t get that from papers but you could come through the park and not realise it.*
- I’m passing through the area and heard about Kakadu.
Appendix B. Kakadu Images

- World heritage; I like the rock art, increased awareness of the need for land rights because of the fragility of the area and the way it is threatened by mining.

- Powerful experience, good for city people to get in touch with how Aborigines deal with their land; red centre; Aborigines say 'we don’t own the land the land owns us', we should all think about that; this is the cultural centre of Australia; on bus tours they tell racist jokes; national parks are essential to get in touch with the self in a natural setting; educational visit.

- Waterfalls, crocodile hotel; at Mataranka we reflected on "We of the Never Never" and the pioneering side; Kakadu is promoted as Aboriginal and it’s given it that magical, mystical ring about it

- It is the most well known national park in Australia; crocodiles; we spend all our leisure time in national parks; a family holiday

- Wildlife, Arnhem Land; sense of land and seeing Aboriginal culture humanises it, educational.

- Living in Jabiru, to get away from life down there [Melbourne]; Parks just burn everything, it’s becoming like a desert.

- Waterfalls, gorges, Aboriginal art; I was in the Top End so I had to come here; I’m Aboriginal, it’s great to see the high profile of Aboriginal people but we would like to see more employment; good to educate people; Kakadu is important to all Australians.

- Fishing, relaxing; the art doesn’t interest me; I’d like to know who gets the dollars we pay to come into Kakadu, it’s a bit rich for a national park; Aborigines have got enough land, I’m worried they’ll ban fishing.*

- It’s a famous national park, it used to be more rugged, it’s lost its sparkle a bit, commercialisation; Aboriginal people are not welcome at tourism sites in the NT so I don’t like tourism sites much; Kakadu is an example of a group of Aboriginal people who are comfortable with both cultures; there’s a lot of places we can’t go, but maybe Aboriginal people would like to save places for themselves.*
Appendix B. Kakadu Images

- Rivers, crocodiles and swamp; Aboriginal culture has impacted on me, interesting, educational; national parks and Aboriginal people are well suited both aim to conserve.
- Birds, wildlife, educational; amazed by Aboriginal culture, but not changed attitudes.
- Scenery, camping; I have been interested to hear about Aboriginal culture, creation stories etc., it has strengthened my history; national parks are essential but have to be managed properly, respect Aboriginal controls.
- We are on a trip around Australia; Kakadu is well known on TV etc.; scenery; I liked the variety of Aboriginal views given at the cultural centre; I worry about the invasion of Aboriginal privacy, we have had contact with Aboriginal people everywhere during our trip North; national parks are good but we shouldn’t go too far with restrictions.
- Seen documentaries on Kakadu, birds, Aboriginal culture; educational, complexity of culture, learn from them, the more you know about the relationship with the land the more you understand the struggle against mining and what Aboriginal people are fighting for; it is important that the place is world heritage and good that Aboriginal people are involved, I’ve always thought of nature and culture as separate before.
- Landscape, art, scenery; the art is ancient not related to the present; we have to pay to come here now; I’d like to see more Crown land which people could use not private land or national parks; I like the horses here.
- I heard about Kakadu from travel agents; I expected to see more Aboriginal people doing craft or talking, I haven’t seen any; I’ve got nothing against traditional Aborigines; Kakadu has no problems with drunken Aboriginals; at home I live next door to a one-eighth caste, he’s nice.
- Saw Kakadu on TV and advertisements; Aboriginal culture good, but I shouldn’t have to ask permission to walk on land; national parks are good for Aborigines because the land is in a natural state, but whites have rights too.
- Kakadu is expensive; I’m anti-Aboriginal they are lazy and racist and have lost their culture, they are too lazy to run the Park, they take over and put up the
prices; we have bought this country in handouts, Kakadu is a whiteman’s land, we paid for it and we’re running it and others in the caravan parks feel the same.

• Wetlands, wilderness, amazing escarpment country and Aboriginal significance; we are bushwalkers, it gives us increased understanding about the Aboriginal relationship to the land, it is an honour to come here, bushwalking we feel the Aboriginal presence and think about how Aboriginal people used the land; you can usually get permits to go onto Aboriginal land unlike pastoral stations.*

• We always heard the word ‘Kakadon’t’ but that’s because people don’t stay long enough; bird-life and natural surrounds; the rock art is a highlight and the cultural centre; we were disappointed on the cultural cruise the Aborigine was shy; Aborigines should stick to traditional culture; Aboriginal people are manipulated by white lawyers to claim land; I saw Aborigines throwing rubbish; it is important we know our history and our own backyard; national parks and Aborigines are suited as long as they look after the land.

• I heard about Kakadu first at school, on TV, advertisements; here to have a look around, fishing; we tried to go to Koolpin Gorge but it was booked out, but parks are for people; Aborigines don’t bother us and we don’t bother them, they keep fencing off Arnhem Land—leave them there; for white people there are too many rules ‘don’t do this, that etc.’, we only want to look; I don’t like the burning.
Appendix C. Parks Australia Research Permit
Ms Lisa Palmer
NT University
Faculty of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies
Darwin NT 0909

Permit Number: RK 446a/98

Date of Issue: 12 February 1998

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN KAKADU NATIONAL PARK

Permittee: Lisa Palmer of NT University is/are hereby given permission under Regulation 27 of the National Parks and Wildlife Regulations to conduct scientific research in Kakadu National Park.

Research permitted: Research in relation to Masters thesis "Land Rights, Land Ethics and the Tourist Interest: Some tourist encounters with the cultural 'other'" as per application of 7 October 1997

Period of permit: October 1997 to October 1999 - subject to annual review

Area in which activity permitted: Kakadu National Park

Access to specific locations requires the approval of relevant District Supervisor/s. Permit holders must obtain such approval before commencing work.

Please note that failure to adhere to the conditions attached may result in the withdrawal of this permit.

DELEGATE
DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL PARKS & WILDLIFE
Conditions of Permit to Conduct Scientific Research in Kakadu National Park

This Permit is only issued subject to the observance of the conditions set out herein.

1. The Permittee and a Witness shall have signed and attested the indemnity, a copy of which shall be lodged with
   Park Manager
   Kakadu National Park
   PO Box 71
   Jabiru NT 0886
   Telephone 08 6938 1140
   Facsimile 08 6938 1115
   before any activity dependent upon this Permit shall be lawful.

2. The Permittee undertakes to ensure that all licenses and authorities required by law are held for the conduct of this activity
   and will abide by the provisions of all Commonwealth, State or Territory laws relating to activities the subject of or ancillary to
   this Permit. Your attention is drawn to the effect of this condition being that any breach of the National Parks & Wildlife
   Regulations constitutes a breach of the conditions of this Permit.

3. The Permittee shall contact the relevant District Supervisor on each occasion before starting work in the Park, give details of
   the vehicle(s) and personnel the Permittee will be using, and must comply with the District Supervisor's instructions.
   East Alligator (08) 8979 2391 Nourlangie (08) 8938 1180 South Alligator (08) 8979 0194
   Jim Jim (08) 8979 2038 Mary River (08) 8975 4578 Headquarters (08) 8938 1100

4. The Permittee shall ensure that vehicles keep to public roads and tracks unless otherwise authorised in writing by
   the Park Manager.

5. The Permittee shall not enter restricted areas, including Aboriginal living areas and sites of significance to Aboriginal people,
   unless authorised in writing by the Park Manager.

6. The Permittee shall notify the Park Manager if the permittee's vehicle(s) has recently been driven in areas of Mimosa pigra
   infestation. All vehicles entering the Park may be subject to washdown procedures, at the discretion of the Park Manager.

7. The Permittee shall arrange for pressure washing of all vehicles and trailers prior to transit from a location of known Sabinia
   molesta infestation to an area considered to be free of this species, to the satisfaction of the Park staff. It is the Permittee's
   responsibility to familiarise him/herself with the locations of these areas known to be infested with Sabinia molesta.

8. The Permittee shall cause the least possible environmental interference to the Park.

9. The Permittee shall provide a report to Parks Australia on the work carried out under this Permit. The Permittee shall
   also provide copies of all other reports and publications arising from research work undertaken in the Park to Parks
   Australia. The reports are to include a plain English summary (approx. 1 page) suitable for distribution to Kakadu
   field staff and traditional owners and to interested members of the public. The summary is also to be provided on
   disc in IBM format, ASCII text or MSWord.

10. The Permittee shall provide biannual written progress reports in plain English suitable for distribution to Kakadu field
    staff and traditional owners. In addition, the Permittee shall provide annual presentations to the Kakadu Board of
    Management. This Permit is subject to review in accordance with the reports and presentations received from the
    Permittee.

11. The Permittee shall lodge holotypes of any undescribed taxa collected in the Park with the relevant body. Holotypes of
    the plant kingdom must be lodged with the Australian National Herbarium, holotypes of the Class Insecta must be lodged
    with the Australian National Insect Collection, and all other holotypes must be lodged with the Northern Territory Museum.

12. The Permittee shall lodge with the Park Manager a full list of specimens taken noting the locations from which they were
    obtained, as soon as possible following completion of work under this Permit.

13. The permittee is required to facilitate the involvement of Kakadu staff and traditional owners in fieldwork when requested to do
    so by the Park Manager.
14. The Permittee and associated staff are exempt from Park use fees and camping fees, at designated camping sites, when in the Park for the purpose of undertaking research as approved by this Permit.

15. This Permit may be varied or cancelled at any time in accordance with regulation 74 of the National Parks and Wildlife Regulations.

I fully understand and agree to abide by these Permit conditions.

Signed: ___________________________ Dated: 11/02/99

Reg 23 Permit No. __________________

In the presence of: __________________ Dated: 11/02/99

INDEMNITY

THIS DEED made the __________ day of __________ 1999

WITNESS as follows:

in consideration of the above grant of permission, the Permittee indemnifies the Commonwealth of Australia, the Director of National Parks and Wildlife and their servants and agents against any liability and costs whatsoever arising out of any act or negligence of the permittee or its servants or agents in the course of the activities authorised by this permission.

SIGNED SEALED AND DELIVERED

by the Permittee ___________________________ ___________________________

in the presence of: ___________________________ ___________________________

NB: A copy of the above indemnity form must be signed, witnessed and returned to the Park Manager, Kakadu National Park prior to a permit being processed.
Appendix D. Draft Research Agreement

AGREEMENT

between

The Kakadu Board of Management,

on behalf of the Aboriginal traditional owners,

and

Lisa Palmer (the Researcher)

Introduction

a. Various lands throughout the Kakadu region of the Northern Territory are owned by Aboriginal people under Aboriginal laws and also under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* (Cth). Parts of such lands have been leased to the Commonwealth as a National Park, and a Board of Management established to manage the Park under *the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975* (Cth). The Board of Management consists of a majority of Aboriginal traditional owners.

b. The researcher has discussed with a number of Aboriginal traditional owners, members of the Kakadu Board, and other relevant individuals and organisations, her interest in undertaking a research project as described in Schedule One.

c. The research project is being conducted with financial assistance from the Northern Territory University and the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management.
Appendix D. Draft Research Agreement

d. The Northern Territory University will provide to the researcher reasonable access to office facilities in Jabiru, including some office accommodation, and the use of communications equipment.

e. The research is to be conducted with a view to completion by the researcher of a doctoral thesis which is to be registered with the Northern Territory University, Darwin, NT.

f. The purpose of this agreement is to set out the terms and conditions of the research conducted with Aboriginal traditional owners by the researcher with respect to

   i. That part of the thesis which consists of material relating to interviews with Aboriginal traditional owners
   
   ii. The content and ownership of copyright in the thesis as a whole
   
   iii. Any future public use of the thesis, or any part of it, by the researcher or any other person or institution.

Terms

1. The Kakadu Board of Management, on behalf of the Aboriginal traditional owners, agrees to the researcher conducting the research project as set out in the research proposal (Schedule One).

2. The researcher will meet the cost of her research activities.

3. The terms and conditions of this agreement may be varied by mutual consent, and confirmed through an exchange of letters.

1. General

a. Intellectual Property and Ethics The researcher agrees to respect, generally, the principles underlying the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management’s policy on intellectual property and ethics issues (Schedule Two).

b. Confidentiality The researcher undertakes to respect the confidentiality of individuals and organisations (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) where information collected is regarded by the relevant individual or organisation as sensitive. The researcher will consult the informants in order to identify any confidential, sensitive or restricted material and to determine the conditions of access and other restrictions
on the use of this material. The issue of confidentiality will be determined by the informants and respected by the researcher.

c. Access to information The researcher will make available to the relevant Aboriginal traditional owners and the Kakadu Board of Management copies of any information or materials (including cassette recordings, photographs, and literature) collected during the course of this research as requested, and subject to imposition of confidentiality or privacy.

d. Acknowledgment The researcher will acknowledge the assistance of the Kakadu Board of Management, participating Aboriginal communities, and individuals and organisations which have assisted with the research, in publications arising from the research.

2. Interviews with Aboriginal traditional owners. Copyright in interviews (in any material form) with Aboriginal traditional owners is jointly owned by participating Aboriginal traditional owners and the researcher. Either party, that is, the relevant Aboriginal traditional owners and the researcher, may use interviews as they think fit, but each must consult the other party and acknowledge the other party’s assistance in doing the interview.

3. Content and ownership of thesis. Prior to completion of the final draft of her thesis the researcher will seek the views of (i) relevant Aboriginal traditional owners concerning portions of the thesis which draw upon material that they have contributed, and (ii) the Kakadu Board of Management, concerning the thesis as a whole, and will comply with any reasonable directions given by them. The decision whether to comply with any direction, and all decisions relating to the final content of the thesis will, however, remain with the researcher. The researcher remains the sole author of the final thesis; however her right to exercise copyright ownership rights, including particularly her right to reproduce the thesis and make it publicly available, are restricted as set out in point (4) below.

4. Public use and reproduction of the thesis. Either party may use the thesis and any related reports as they think fit, but must consult the other party and acknowledge the other party’s assistance in any such use. The researcher will comply with any reasonable directions of the traditional owners relating to any proposed public use of the thesis or any part of it. The researcher will draw to the
Appendix D. Draft Research Agreement

Attention of the Northern Territory University library any restrictions imposed by the Aboriginal traditional owners pursuant to this agreement in relation to access and use of any information contained in the final thesis which is registered with the university.

Arbitration

If the parties are unable to resolve any differences that arise in the public use of the thesis or the public use of any interview material, then a person who is acceptable to both parties may be appointed as arbitrator. Any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with procedures agreed beforehand by both parties. Both parties agree to abide by the arbitrator’s decision.

Signatures

The signatures below, as well as the initialling of each page (including Schedule One) by the parties to this agreement, constitute agreement to the terms and conditions included in this document.

Signed on behalf of the Researcher

Date

Witness

Date
Appendix D. Draft Research Agreement

Signed on behalf of the Kakadu Board of Management

Date

Witness

Date
Appendix E. CINCRM Research and Ethics Policy
Research Ethics

CINCRM is committed to research activities which advance the processes of empowerment and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and which promote reconciliation between indigenous Australians and the wider community. The Board of Management has approved policies relating to:

- Research ethics
- Research protocols
- Intellectual and cultural property
- Recruitment and professional development
- Recognition of indigenous scholars

These policies have been developed using existing policies and best practice adopted by a range of organisations including Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Batchelor College, Northern Territory University and other Australian universities. The policies are:

ETHICS POLICY

1. Introduction

1.1 Ethical clearance of research proposals and other projects of the Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management, hereafter referred to as the "Centre", relates to those which involve living subjects, including animal species. This does not include archival research based on information in the public domain, unless this involves material likely to affect living individuals or statistical data from which the identity of an individual may be inferred. Research involving living subjects will require the approval of the relevant Northern Territory University or other committee, in accordance with the relevant institution's policies.

1.2 The ethics policy of the Centre requires that all staff, students, grantees, members of research teams hosted by the Centre and Fellows, comply with Australian laws and relevant policies of the Northern Territory University relating to ethics in carrying out their work under the auspices of the Centre, whether in connection with research, publication, archives, copyright, intellectual and cultural property, privacy, confidentiality, access to restricted materials or places, and related matters. This policy especially requires that they take the utmost care to avoid any detriment - or risk of detriment - to any person or entity involved, however directly, in the Centre's activities.

1.3 Research carried out under the auspices of the Centre should endeavour to secure the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Centre will not sponsor research which conflicts with the rights, wishes, beliefs or freedom of the individual people who are the subjects of the research. The Centre expects researchers to adhere to a code of behaviour which reflects credit on themselves, as well as on those institutions responsible for their training and research support.

1.3.1 This policy has been developed on the basis of existing research and ethics policies and requirements of the Northern Territory University, in particular its human Ethics Committee, and the policies and discussion papers of other institutions which have played a key role in research and scholarship in indigenous Australia, including the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Batchelor College, a key partner in the Centre, and the Menzies School of Health Research.

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1.3.2 The Centre requires that researchers in the presentation of their project proposals must address issues of ethics and sensitivity of subjects and information and provide adequate guarantees in relation to these issues. They must present written permission of those who may be the subject of that research and/or the relevant people or bodies acting on their behalf. The guidance of research advisory committees and supervision committees will be of assistance to associates of the Centre in this regard.

2. Northern Territory University Ethics Policy and Approval Required by NTU Ethics Committees

2.1 All researchers and students are required to comply with NTU ethics policy and to have the approval of the appropriate ethics committee for their research proposal before proceeding with their subjects. (See NTU human Ethics Committee guidelines etc). Dates of meetings of the committees are listed in the NTU Calendar. Assistance will be provided by Centre staff to researchers and students in submitting proposals and complying with the relevant guidelines.

3. Other Research & Educational Institutions: Their Ethics Policies and Requirements

3.1 Other research and educational institutions in northern Australia have research and ethics policies and requirements and, in particular circumstances, the researcher or student may be directed to their policies. Such institutions include some of the partners of the Centre, such as Batchelor College, the North Australian Research Unit of the Australian National University, Dhimurru Land Management Aboriginal Corporation and the Yothu Yindi Cultural Studies Institute. Other relevant institutions which have ethics policies and procedures include the Menzies School of Health Research of the Sydney University, which is based in Darwin, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and corporations.

4. Other Ethical Requirements

4.1 Legislation exists requiring permits to enter Aboriginal land to carry out excavations or to remove artifacts or samples in several jurisdictions, Commonwealth, Northern Territory and State. Prospective researchers must acquaint themselves with this legislation and comply with its requirements where relevant.

5. Special Requirements of the Centre

5.1 The special ethical requirements of the Centre, which are additional to the NTU policy, aim to avoid detriment - or risk of detriment - to any person involved, however indirectly, in the Centre's activities. They are set out below:

5.1.1 Evidence must be provided that the research proposal has received the informed consent of the appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community or organisation. Normally this consent should be in writing and demonstrate that the following steps have been completed:

- a reasonable summary explanation of the research, its purposes and procedures
- an estimate of the total amount of time required on the part of the subject/s
- a description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subject/s
- a statement that participation is entirely voluntary, that the subject/s may choose not to participate at all, or may discontinue participation at any time
- instructions on whom to contact with questions regarding the research
- information about, and clarification of, the proposed use of the research information about, and clarification of, ownership of the results of the research, consistent with the Centre's policy on intellectual property rights
5.1.2 The research proposal must address the issues of confidentiality, privacy and sensitivity of subjects and information and provide a commitment to guarantee them to the legal and practical limits of which the researcher is capable.

5.1.3 The research proposal must address the issue of the involvement of the members of the indigenous community where the research is being carried out, where they are acting as collaborators or co-researchers, in those cases where this is viable.

5.1.4 The researcher/s must provide a satisfactory explanation of how the research is likely to benefit either the host community or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in general.

5.1.5 The researcher/s must explain how they will make available the results of the research to the host indigenous community in an appropriate form.

5.1.6. It will be the responsibility of the Director, or the Deputy Director if so directed, to ensure that there has been compliance with clause 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.5 of this policy and other relevant ethics guidelines.

5.1.7 In the case of consultancies carried out by the Centre, either by staff or by consultants sub-contracted by the Centre, it will be the responsibility of the Director or the Deputy Director, if so directed, to ensure that the issue of consent and compliance with other relevant ethical guidelines is appropriately addressed.

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**RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

*This document draws significantly on protocols adopted by the Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.*

The Centre for Indigenous Natural and Cultural Resource Management supports high-quality research that will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in accordance with international standards of human rights and scholarship.

Ethical research involves a number of fundamental principles:

- informed consent to the research by the individuals/community either where or with whom the research is to be carried out, or by their representatives;
- benefit to the local community, as well as to the broader community of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- acknowledgement of ongoing indigenous ownership of the cultural and intellectual property rights in the material on which the research is based;
- appropriate use of research results and/or publication of material as agreed with the community or community representatives.

The Centre implements these principles by requiring the adherence of researchers to its ethical guidelines and by requiring clearance for proposed research projects by an institutional ethics committee, whether from another organisation or from the Centre itself.

**Ethical Guidelines**

The Centre will not approve research activities that lead to, or in its opinion are likely to lead to, offences against Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people living in the area. The Centre further recognises that:

- neither it, as a corporate body, nor any worker that it supports, has any undeniable right to be given access to information about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander life or
culture;

- it is only with the co-operation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that it is able to fulfil its aim of pursuing research into Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures and ensuring its documentation for future generations;

- it is the obligation of the intending researcher to convey to the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people concerned the purpose of the work and to obtain their agreement to it;

- failure to respect Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custom can disrupt the life of the communities within which the Centre is sponsoring research or curtail the researchers' work and hinder possible future research.

**Preliminary requirements**

Researchers and post-graduate students must consult relevant Centre research staff prior to commencing their project. Researchers must also consult the Centre to discuss their proposals for photography, sound recording and filming. All research projects supported by the Centre will be drawn up in a project charter detailing research activities to be carried out prior to the commencement of the project.

All States and Territories have legislation controlling activity at (and sometimes access to) archeological sites and permission is required to excavate and/or conduct surveys. Information is available from the Centre about such legislation and about the State and Territory authorities from whom guidance should be sought regarding regulations applying to research permits as well as requirements for consultation with relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities and agencies.

Intending researchers should also consult the ethical guidelines or codes of ethics adopted by relevant professional bodies and/or associations and their host organisations, for example:

- Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists: Code of Ethics
- Australian Anthropological Society Code of Ethics; Consulting Work
- Social Research Association Ethical Code of Ethics
- Professional Ethics: Statements and Procedures of the American Anthropological Association
- The Aboriginal Languages Association: Resolutions
- National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines on ethical matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.
- NTU human and animal experimentation ethics policies.

**Informed consent**

It is necessary to establish the groundwork for a research project. This requires:

- Informing the appropriate organisations as soon as possible;
- Discussing the proposed research program with the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and informing them of their rights and access to the results of the research;
- Prior to fieldwork, obtaining permission from the relevant individuals, communities or organisations to visit the proposed locality and to conduct research.

The ensuing arrangements must be fully understood by, and be acceptable to, those people concerned. This may entail a preliminary visit to the proposed research area.
including by scholars from overseas, in addition to making contact by writing. The applicant must provide evidence, usually in writing, of relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support for the project in circumstances where such support is relevant. This may be obtained from:

- The council (or similar governing body) of the local community in which the work is to be done or a relevant local organisation;
- The relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, local council or organisation in cases where a permit is required to enter designated Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander land to carry out the project;
- Appropriate Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander umbrella organisations, where such organisations exist.

Evidence of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support will not guarantee that the project will be funded, and applicants are asked to ensure that any organisation or community that is approached is aware of this. The evidence must be lodged with the Centre at the time the application is submitted, or as soon as possible after that time.

In seeking relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support, researchers should be aware that those people relevant to the project may not always be equally represented on community councils, land councils and in umbrella organisations. For example, the owners of a particular area may live outside their traditional land, and women may be under-represented. In such cases, permission may also need to be sought from these individuals, or in the case of children, from parents or guardians, on the basis of a personal explanation to them.

Researchers using film, photography, audio and video recording must take special care to obtain the consent of those recorded. The researcher must explain the uses to which the films/photographs/audio and video recordings will be put and the conditions under which access to, and use of, them may be controlled.

Particular attention should be paid to the problems of visual images and sound recordings of deceased persons and of areas of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander life to which public access is normally restricted. A thorough understanding of these matters must be acquired prior to beginning the research, and intending researchers are strongly urged to discuss them with relevant Centre staff.

An individual (or his/her parents or guardians) must be free at any time to withdraw from the project, and the investigator must discontinue or modify the research if it becomes apparent that continuation may cause conflict. Should there be an overall lack of support for, or acceptance of the project, the investigator must discontinue the research until such time as the issues causing this lack of support or acceptance are resolved.

Significant changes to a research project, including a change in the research location, must be approved by the Centre prior to the change or changes being made. In general, researchers are urged to maintain regular contact with the Centre through relevant staff members for the duration of the project in order to minimise problems for the researcher and for the Centre in its relations with communities.

All information regarding the procedures, use of results and aims of the research must be given in an appropriate manner to the relevant community council/organisation and to individuals involved in the research project, and no procedures should be added to, or fundamentally altered, after consent has been obtained. Any changes thought necessary because of unforeseen problems or change of interest must be the subject of advice to, and consent from, the council/organisation and individuals concerned, in the same ways as with the initial project.

Researchers are expected to observe the normal proprieties in respect of the personal privacy of individuals, and practices such as concealment techniques should normally be avoided. If such practices appear necessary for the research, they must be fully explained, understood and agreed to in advance by the people involved with the research.
The researcher is encouraged to submit publishable material to the Centre for consideration. If the Centre does not intend to publish, it will not, without stated and reasonable cause, withhold permission for the report or study to be published elsewhere and will inform the author normally within a maximum or six months of the submission of the manuscript of its intention to publish or otherwise. It is a requirement that researchers acknowledge Centre support in relation to material published, in whatever form, by non-Centre publishers.

The publication of audio-visual materials (photographic illustrations, films, video and audio recordings) requires the informed consent of the individuals concerned. "Informed consent" implies that the indigenous people concerned fully understand the extent of the potential distribution and have the opportunity to decide whether they wish to include a warning relevant to showing or playing them in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. As a general principle, the showing of a film or video should be carefully discussed with a group of senior Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders from the community before any screening is contemplated. In the case of audio recordings in particular, and in some cases other audio-visual publications, royalties or lump sum payments may be paid to those with rights over the material.

No restricted material shall be distributed without the people who provided the material clearly understanding and consenting to its use.

The onus is on the researcher to identify what is restricted material. However, Centre staff will carry out their own inquiries if it is believed that material not so identified may be restricted.

In the case of specific problems related to a researcher's involvement in matters which may impinge upon restricted knowledge or topics, the Centre will, wherever possible, either advise the researcher or refer the researcher to an appropriate authority. The Centre will seek to provide upon request similar assistance to any other researcher's or group's not sponsored by the Centre, but it cannot assume responsibility for such research.

The Centre may withdraw financial support from any research worker if it considers that its policy on restricted material has been violated.

If the publication of data collected by a researcher is considered to be prejudicial to the interests of those among whom the work has been carried out, the Centre will direct the author's attention to any offending section.

Films, video and audio recordings containing restricted material should be shown or played only to:

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons who would within their own culture normally be privy to the material shown or played;

- other persons, or persons within special categories, authorised by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners with rights in the restricted material to see/hear the films or recordings.

Within Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, films and video and audio recordings containing restricted material should never be shown or played except with the explicit request of senior aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who would have been permitted to witness the actual events or other material portrayed. Showing or playing of this material should only be undertaken by persons with extensive knowledge of the society and community, in order to be able to judge accurately the legitimacy of the request. The viewing or hearing of restricted material by the wrong persons, even if inadvertent, can result in deep offence, emotional stress and lasting social hardship for the individuals concerned.

No material known or thought to be restricted in presentation in its original context should be publicly displayed if there is any likelihood of its display causing offence to
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. It is the duty of those considering such displays to determine whether there is such a possibility.

On request, the Centre will offer advice to any individual or group whenever possible on the likelihood of offence to indigenous people of publication, distribution or display of material by virtue of its possible secret/sacred nature. For this purpose, the Centre will consult the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individuals or groups if appropriate, as determined by the Centre Director. However, neither the Centre nor the indigenous people consulted can assume responsibility for the offensiveness or otherwise of the dissemination or display of the material.
### DAILY ACTIVITY GUIDE

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Key: W = Walk, T = Art site talk, S = Slide show, A = Campground activities

Please Note: Due to circumstances beyond our control activities may need to be cancelled at short notice.

### WHAT’S ON

**GUIDED WALKS AND TALKS**

- Provided by Kakadu National Park Rangers

**WHAT’S ON**

- **GUIDED WALKS AND TALKS**
  - **DAILY ART SITE TALKS**
  - **NATURE WALKS**
  - **SLIDE SHOWS**

From 25 May to 29 September 1998

**LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE**