CHAPTER EIGHT

Blurring the boundaries: Fish Camp gives a barbecue.

8.1 Introduction

In earlier chapters I have recounted the consistent Burarra attempts to engage with the town on their own terms. I have adapted the Yolngu metaphor of *ganma* to an urban metaphor of 'merging', or attempts at engagement, which takes the form of resistance in response to the state's hostility to fringe dwellers' needs. My examples of the conflict between fringe dwellers and the state and with other Aboriginal groups in the previous two chapters contrast with Sansom's study of fringe dwellers in a separate Aboriginal domain, and indicate that fringe dweller resistance remains outside state organisations of control. In this chapter, I examine the more successful interaction between sympathetic non-Aboriginal people in Darwin and the fringe campers that occurred during my fieldwork experience. My examples suggest that accounts of a closed Aboriginal domain as a strategy 'to resist incorporation into an encompassing state system' (Morris 1988:33) are less applicable to fringe dwellers.

In the fifties and sixties, within the bounds of assimilationist values, there have been sympathetic Whites in Darwin who worked alongside Aboriginal people to defend their rights as citizens within Australian society (see Rowley 1972b:292; Markus 1978:152-3). From the late 1960s, as part of a wider social movement for change, alternative lifestylers and activists from the south began to challenge, in a different way, the structures of a racially stratified Darwin society. In a continuity of the movement of the late sixties, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate, alternative lifestylers and

activists in the 1990s continued to find commonalities with fringe dwellers in their resistance to the values of settler society.

Firstly, I briefly discuss descriptions in the literature of a closed Aboriginal domain maintained by Aboriginal communities encapsulated within the invading White society. Secondly, from the perspective of my own participation, I examine the experience of the 'hippie' camp on Lameroo Beach in Darwin, in 1969, for an understanding of changing attitudes that blurred the boundaries between subaltern and dominant cultures. I then give examples from my fieldwork experience of the alliance of fringe dwellers, alternative lifestylers, activists and others during fringe dweller activism in Darwin in the 1990s. I suggest that these alliances, from 1996 to the present, support my contention that fringe campers do not construct a closed Aboriginal domain as a means of defence. Finally, I examine the role of music and alcohol in blurring boundaries to create spaces in which a form of 'merging' can occur.

8.2 An Aboriginal domain?

An 'oppositional culture', as described by Cowlishaw (1988a:232, 1988b:99, 1993:185, 1994:81), is the 'active creation and protection of an arena of social meaning which asserts itself as legitimate in the face of attempts at suppression' (Cowlishaw 1994:81). Cowlishaw (1993:185) adds: 'The attempt to achieve closure, that is to retain a separate social domain free from Whites' intrusion and scrutiny, faces challenges both from within and without the black community' (see also Kolig 1989). Trigger (1986:115, 1992:79-103), Tonkinson (1974, 1991:164) and Morris (1988:60, 1989:225) also describe a closed Aboriginal domain, or arena of meaning, as a defence against white hegemony on fundamentalist Christian missions and 'total institutions' established to transform Aboriginal people. Berndt (1969:7) comments on the Aboriginal response to 'tightening mission and administrative control':

> When opportunities for positive and constructive action were lacking, the only hope of achieving satisfaction was through withdrawal - attempting to escape from harsh reality, or putting up with that reality as an inevitable condition of contemporary living that had to be accommodated to, and accepted, but not openly combated.

At Doomadgee, Trigger describes how he was one of few Whites to cross the extreme social distance between the White and Black domains (Trigger 1986:104-5, 1992:85-86). Since the 1980s, the departure of the missionaries and the arrival of television preceded a greater engagement with the broader Australian society, alongside an increasing politicisation of Aboriginal culture at Doomadgee (Trigger 1997:90). At Jigalong, Tonkinson (1991:173) notes: 'The barrier between the two domains has been steadily crumbling'. In Arnhem Land, as I have related, the Burarra sought contact with Europeans by moving to the government settlement at Maningrida or into Darwin. In a counter move in the 1970s, they were forerunners of the homelands movement back to traditional lands. Today, Burarra people predominate in the Darwin fringe camps where I conducted my fieldwork, where they have been able to choose their associates, within a limited social range.

Unlike Cowlishaw (1997b:105), I did not sense that an anthropologist in an Aboriginal fringe camp was 'breaching their defences' by 'interfering with a boundary which was useful to them'. Amongst the Burarra fringe dwellers I felt very welcome, as did many other non-Aboriginal visitors during my fieldwork. A traveller in Darwin wrote: 'I've now spent seven consecutive days at [a Darwin Aboriginal fringe camp] and have had the best week of my life in my 32 years on earth and my travels in 18 countries' (McPhee 1997:7). Indeed, I often felt that many of the non-Aboriginal visitors were accepted more enthusiastically than I was, and as a non-drinking anthropologist living in a fringe camp I became the 'exotic other' (see Day 2000:66).

Collmann (1979a:45) describes a greater 'structural flexibility' in a fringe camp, which results from the range of alternative opportunities away from control by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal administrations. Sansom (1980a:74) also emphasises the autonomy of a Darwin camp and the value the members place on 'freedom [from] moral condemnation' (Sansom 1977:60, 1980a:51; see also Scougall and Osborne 1998:61). He also describes how Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin engaged with 'frontiersmen' (Sansom 1980a:179) and officials from which they drew their 'boss-brokers' (Sansom 1980a:183). The relationship with these brokers was often 'crucial' (p.83) for protection from hostile, or 'hardfella', Whites who endangered the security of the fringe camp.

Unlike Trigger, Cowlishaw (1988a:233) says she did not bridge the two domains and states that '[I] would have required at least a doubling of my fieldwork to become a participant observer with this oppositional culture'. In rural New South Wales, 'most whites have no personal, domestic or social familiarity with blacks' (Cowlishaw 1988a:214). Those that attempt to cross the divide are mostly what Cowlishaw (1988a:219) calls 'blow-ins', or temporary residents, who become 'do-gooders' (Cowlishaw 1988a:215) or 'stirrers' (Cowlishaw 1988a:221). Stirrers are not popular amongst Aborigines, who do not trust their motives (Cowlishaw 1988a:225). 'Do gooders' who attempt to help Aborigines are described as: 'The purveyors of the new enlightenment theories ... struggling in the pool of their own middle class mores' (Cowlishaw 1988a:221). As Rowse (1990:186) notes in his criticism of Cowlishaw: '[The do-gooders'] activism not only often embarrasses residents of all colours but also, in its own way, re-affirms dominant White values and institutions'. In this chapter, I give examples of groups with their own oppositional culture, who are not necessarily 'do gooders', and do not seek to transform their Aboriginal allies.

8.3 'The white Aborigines of Darwin'

In 1969 a new type of homelessness appeared on Lameroo Beach, at the base of jungle-clad cliffs fringing the Darwin inner city. While Aboriginal people in the north were still being indoctrinated by assimilationist policies, non-Aboriginal people from other parts of Australia and overseas began to experiment with alternative lifestyles that challenged the hegemony of the dominant White society in Darwin. The Darwin newspaper called these longhaired newcomers the 'hippies'. They slept on Lameroo Beach, where the indigenous Larrakia people had camped before the coming of the colonisers.[1] Although the Larrakia people had been harassed from their camps at Lameroo by 1911 (Wells 1995a:21), in 1969 'the hippies' began to resist attempts by the Darwin City Council and police to remove them from the beach.[2]

The tropical north was the beginning and the end of the backpackers' overland trail through Asia and a refuge from the southern winter for dissatisfied youth. In the streets of Darwin the travellers, who the media later called 'Darwin's white Aborigines' (*Advertiser* September 17, 1981), contrasted with the Territory 'redneck' frontiersmen and women and the city's neatly dressed bureaucrats. In a year of full employment, each weekday morning almost all of the Lameroo campers who reported to the crowded Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) office were assigned casual labour in the town. At night the Lameroo campers mingled with Aboriginal people from remote hinterland communities, to spend their pay in the sprawling beer gardens of Darwin hotels, where they danced to the music of local mixed-race rock and roll bands. It was in these bars with their Aboriginal patrons that I first heard of the surviving Larrakia elders in their fringe camp behind the drive-in cinema.[3]

Before its destruction by Cyclone Tracy in December 1974, the Star Cinema in Smith Street, Darwin, was popular with Aboriginal people. By 1969, mixed-

race or 'coloured' patrons, as they were known, could sit on the canvas seats in the covered stalls or upstairs in the dress circle while 'full bloods' sat in the low-priced front rows close to the open-air screen, separated from the stalls by a flat concrete area where families could sit on blankets to watch the films. Little children scampered about as cowboys galloped over the dusty plains on the screen above them. The Star Cinema was a survivor of the stratified colonial Darwin lifestyle, while vast changes were taking place around the world. However, change came to the Star in 1969, as 'the hippies' demanded the right to sit in the cheap front rows with the Aboriginal customers.[4]

In October the monsoon storms arrived and the Lameroo campers returned to the south or took a flight to Asia, leaving their litter along the beaches and rocky coves at the base of the cliffs. Like some others, I found a job in town and moved into rented accommodation. However, for six years, while there was a shortage of casual labour in the north, every dry season campers returned to Lameroo to defy the Darwin City Council warnings that a forty-dollar fine was the penalty for illegal camping and that the camps were a health risk.

A 1972 press report described the unsanitary tin humpies of Daly River Aborigines camped at Knuckeys Lagoon, near the Berrimah crossroads on the highway leading out of town (*NT News* March 4). The Lameroo campers asked why the council was evicting the hippies while Aborigines lived in worse conditions in camps hidden in bush around the town. Sensing a double standard and defending their right to live on the beach, the hippies asked the council inspectors: 'They say the beach is dirty but what about the Aboriginals at Berrimah? They live in worse circumstances than we do, and what conveniences have they got?' (*NT News* June 29, 1972).

A southern journalist described the 'liberated area' of Lameroo Beach, 'the only legal nudist beach in Australia ... population 700 heads and 200 yards from the main shopping centre' where '[t]enuous structures grip the trees and rocks, delicate fabrications of driftwood and plastic held together with good intentions' (Stocks 1973:6).[5] The article, titled 'Adventures in paradise', inferred there were parallels between the lives of the hippies and the fringe dwellers with a photograph showing 'the white squatters at Lameroo' above a photograph of the Knuckeys Lagoon self-made iron shacks captioned, 'black squatters at shanty town'. 'Only the heads and the blacks have that existential sense of place', enthused the report (Stocks 1973:6).

At a time when Aboriginal women in white-controlled areas had 'little hope of aspiring to anything more than the supposed egalitarianism of the nuclear family' (Hamilton 1975:178), the hippies and the homeless Aborigines demanded the right to live communally, outside the isolation of a suburban block and the economic system which is inferred by that lifestyle. Their 'alternative lifestyles' placed them in conflict with urban planners, as the hippies pointed out in their confrontation with authorities in 1975:

> [T]he big trouble started when the Travelodge was finished. We became very much a thorn in the sides of the establishment. There was the nice, expensive Travelodge Hotel and here, only a few hundred yards away [on Lameroo Beach], was a bunch of people living in nothing, living with nature ... They can't tolerate people saying, 'I don't want to conform to the system'. This is a contradiction they can't handle (*NT News* July 30, 1975).

Alternative lifestylers in Darwin claimed: 'Aborigines especially like us because they feel we treat them like people'(*NT News* July 30, 1975). This mutual support had been demonstrated when a group from Lameroo joined Aboriginal protesters on National Aborigines Day 1972, in a march through

the city streets (*NT News* July 15, 1972). In return, the Lameroo dwellers received support from the Larrakia people of the Darwin area. Visiting Lameroo Beach from the Aboriginal camp at Kulaluk behind the drive-in cinema at Nightcliff, Johnny Fejo for the Larrakia traditional owners confidently assured the hippies that the city council could not evict them because Lameroo belonged to the Larrakia tribe (*NT News* August 7, 1972). The campers were reported as responding: 'to us this land belongs to God, who is not a white man, but if we the present dwellers are to recognise proprietorship then it is the black people to whom we look'.

By the end of 1975 the demand for transient labour had abated in Darwin, the public conveniences at the top of the cliffs had been demolished and Lameroo Beach was deserted again. Cock (1979:244) claims that there would have been 'a national outcry' if the harassment of the Lameroo Beach hippies 'had been done to an Aboriginal tribal community'. He believes the hippies' lifestyle and values had more in common with the indigenous Australians than with the majority of Whites and their culture (p.244). Certainly, the NT Administration's opposition to the Lameroo campers contrasted with the apparent tolerance of unserviced Aboriginal fringe camps around Darwin.

Newton (1988:61) describes the 'naive and romantic' notions of 'tribal living' amongst alternative lifestylers at Nimbin, in New South Wales, seeking a sense of belonging, or communitas, outside their perception of the oppressive structure of the dominant society. According to Newton, alternative lifestylers have looked to non-industrial societies for new models of living. At Lameroo in 1969, the predecessors of Nimbin danced to the song 'Age of Aquarius', from the anti-establishment American 'tribal rock musical', *Hair*, as they improvised new rituals beside their campfires on the beach (Day 1994:1). However, the naive and romantic notions of Aboriginal culture described by Newton (1988) in southern communes were difficult to sustain in the north, where there was daily and unmediated contact between

races. A journalist wrote of my first encounters with Aboriginal people: '[H]e did not know that much about Aborigines when he first arrived. [He said,] "I was amazed when I found out they didn't speak English and that they had their own languages"' (*Sunday Territorian* October 7, 1984). In the north, my examples suggest that the finding of common ground by fringe dwellers and other groups in an oppositional culture ensures a respect for Aboriginal culture, rather than the appropriation of it.[6]

Although Newton (1988:58) argues that 'the countercultural movement' in Australia is 'strongly derivative of the movement overseas', my experience on Lameroo Beach suggests that from 1969 to 1975 the bush worker tradition described by Ward (1958) and Rowley (1972a:234) was a homegrown oppositional lifestyle as influential amongst the beach dwellers of Lameroo as the idealistic movements of the 1960s. That is, by their dress, binge drinking, values of mateship, suspicion of authority, insubordination and hatred of police, many of the young southerners were emulating the Australian traditions of their bush worker forebears that Ward (1958:84, 100, 127, 258) describes. Also, as Ward (p.76-7) notes, labour shortages enabled the bush workers to value an independent lifestyle, 'albeit, at what was, from a middle-class point of view, a relatively low level'. Since European settlement, liminal locations that were similar to the fringe camps and the Lameroo camp have been meeting spaces for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal bush workers (see Cowlishaw 1988a:97). In my view, these traditions became integrated with the ideology of the North American hippies in Darwin in from 1969 to the mid-1970s.

During my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001, , references to Australian bush traditions were frequently used by activists who became involved with the struggle of fringe dwelling Aborigines. I will suggest that many of these activists were the present-day successors of the hippy movement of the 1960s. In 1996, an artist/protester sat a plaster, wire and fabric life-sized

dummy on a bench in the Smith Street Mall. In the dummy's mouth was a cigarette and on its chest was printed: 'There was once a jolly swagman but he was arrested in Darwin for anti-social behaviour' (*NT News* May 18, 1996, p.3). In the mall in August 2001, a young traveller named Truce and his friends from their shared house laid a be hatted dummy of a swagman inside a swag between two printed signs which connected the 'long grassers' with 'Australian icons' and traditions of anti-authoritarianism. The idiosyncratic wording on the placards is reproduced below without changes or additions:

A Waltzy long-grass SONG
Once a jolly swaggies (original Australians)
camped by the foreshore (coast and beach)
under the shade of a coconut palm
and they sang and danced as they loved their cultural lifestyles
you'll come a waltzy Matilda with us!
Down came a Rich Yob (overseas businessman)
To develope all the foreshore dreamin
up jumped the polititon (CLP Government)
and grabbed him with greed.
and they partied and committed genocide as
they shoved money into their Bank Accounts.
you'll NOT come a Waltzy Matilda with US!
down came a ranger mounted in a Council vehicle
up sprang the Coppers, one two, Fifty.
there will be no more here Corobborries
in this here tourist monopoly
you'll Not come a Waltzy Matilda at here
up jumped the swaggies and said "this
here Larakia Land, you'll Not move
us away so easily you see", and
the Larakia are still there as you

> pass by the Darwin foreshores
> you'll COME A WALTZY MATILDA WITH US!

The second sign stated in part:

> Why is it a CRIME to be homeless in Darwin?
> C.L.P. Laws attack AUSTRALIAN ICONS!
> The Jolly Swagman goes to Jail: Anti-social Laws.
> Darwin City Council steal our swags - HOMELESS [are]
> CHARGE[D] $50 to RETURN [the impounded swags]!

Similarly, Caroline, who defended Bob Bunduwabi before the Anti-Discrimination Commission in 1996, forwarded a message to me in October 2001:

> ... a part of cultural diversity [which] is continually recognized in the wrong way [is] of course the long-grassers. To think that this nation once wanted Waltzing Matilda as our/their anthem is amazing. In art and prose the life of the vagrant/itinerant has always been conveyed as *joie de vive* with Shakespeare, Banjo [Patterson], H Lawson and etc all have their seminal works steeped in the mystery of the streetsleeper/longgrasser.[7]

Darwin remains a popular location for activists and alternative lifestylers who live in shared and communal housing in the city and rural areas. These groups resist the policies of unrestrained economic development and opposition to Aboriginal claims propounded by the Northern Territory Government.[8] Homeless Aboriginal people have been particularly vilified, and have been left with few options but to resist state policies. Their resistance has brought the fringe dwellers into contact with a widening group of non-Aboriginal people in a process that continues today. For the

remainder of this chapter I describe some of the contacts that occurred during my fieldwork and their continuation to the time of writing.

8.4 Fish Camp holds a barbecue

The publicised actions of the Fish Camp and Lee Point people had aroused the interest of activists who were to act as brokers with the government, media and the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission. A few, like Caroline and her friends from the Resistance group in Darwin had been deeply involved in Gojok's conflict with the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, as I have described in Chapter Six. However, in general the public reputation of fringe camps as violent and drunken hangouts for demoralised Aboriginal people who have 'lost their culture', ensures that they attract few casual visitors. Politicians do not usually 'door knock' these potential voters, doctors rarely check for the contagious diseases rampant there, and the young American missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) were the only regular representatives of the Christian churches to visit the drinking camps during my fieldwork. Like the Mormons, those who visit with good intentions are received cordially and seem to enjoy the experience.

Sitting on the ground with a community around a fire, cooking shellfish and listening to a talented didgeridoo player under the starry sky is the closest most Darwin non-Aboriginal people will come to sharing the life of an Aboriginal community. After a few drinks there may be dancing and story telling with instruction in language and culture. Honoured guests may be given one of the sixteen 'skin names', which place them in the classificatory kinship system. McPhee (1997), who was a guest of fringe dwellers on a Darwin beach writes: 'Amazingly in the middle of a modern city, one can live traditionally, how it was done thousands of years ago - cooking and sleeping under the stars, living off the land'.

Following the march on Parliament House in March, 1997, there were visits from journalists, students and a few activists to Fish Camp. They all expressed incredulity to see people living in this manner in the heart of Darwin. Channel 8 news came to film and showed images of men sitting by the fire crafting a fishing spear (April 4, 1997). As the campaign grew and supporters asked how they could help, I suggested to the people at the camp that they host a barbecue one night. I photocopied invitations for Sunday April 27 from sunset to moonrise (6.30-10.30pm). The invitation suggested, 'Bring your own water, booze, meat, etc', and noted an added attraction of viewing the Hale-Bopp comet, which was at that time visible from the darkness of the camp in the clear dry-season night-sky.

Six carloads of visitors associated with an East Timor support group attended the barbecue. They happily sat by the fire sharing songs and stories with their Aboriginal hosts, although some of the single Burarra men uncharacteristically stayed back in the shadows, perhaps because of the presence of young women. Friendships between the fringe dwellers and the activists that were formed or strengthened that night have continued to the time of writing this thesis. There were several reciprocal parties in the activists' shared houses and Fish Camp people began to visit a nearby home to use the washing machine, or just to talk. In return, the fringe dwellers invited their activist friends to attend ceremonies in Arnhem Land in 1998, 1999 and 2000.

8.5 May Day

A week later, ten people from Fish Camp caught the minibus taxi together into the city for the annual May Day march. They had nowhere to wash and had had no breakfast; however, clean clothes appeared from their kits for the occasion. Another bus brought Burarra people from the scattered camps in the northern suburbs, assembled by an able Burarra leader. Wearing red headbands, the fringe dwellers were photographed in the forefront of the

Aboriginal section of the union-organised march through the city streets carrying the wide Larrakia banner and the signs they had used in their Parliament House protest (*NT News* May 6, 1997; *Land Rights News* June 1997). They remained sober, and desperate for cigarettes, to hear a program of speakers followed by the Wild Water Band performing songs in Burarra language and English. From the stage, with some emotion, Djulpa dedicated the song 'Sunset Bay' to his mother and her community at Fish Camp.[9]

8.6 The Arafura Games

A common complaint of homeless Aboriginal people is that the NT Government spends money on tourism to 'make people welcome from overseas but not Aboriginal people'. The fringe dwellers talked about banning government workers travelling to Arnhem Land, where often public servants lived in accommodation that is superior to Aboriginal housing. I suggested that they might protest to highlight their poor living conditions during the biannual Arafura Games in Darwin from May 10 to 17, 1997. Following a media release expressing the campers' views, television and newspaper journalists visited Fish Camp to interview Gojok's niece and the camp's leader, Dulcie Malimara. Dulcie was pictured in front of her shelter at Fish Camp to illustrate an article stating that: 'Protesters will target next month's Arafura Games opening ceremony to show millions of TV viewers the poverty of Darwin's indigenous people' (*NT News* April 11, 1997).[10] Channel 8 news also suggested the small group of homeless Aborigines could disrupt the games (April 4, 1997). Besides a common reaction condemning the mixing of politics and sport (*NT News* letters, April 17 and 18, 1997), offers of support came from activists and other Aboriginal people in Darwin.

Demonstrating the power of fringe dwellers to use the 'politics of embarrassment' (see Dyck 1985:15) to 'shame' governments, on the international scene at least, all the media reports emphasised the possible

effects the protests could have on the Arafura Games. This response empowered the homeless beyond their already substantially debated everyday resistance. A letter to the editor (*NT News* April 18, 1997) expressed the public fear of the potential of protest while demonstrating the reasoning that excludes people like Dulcie from the general Darwin populace:

> The article in the *Northern Territory News* (April 11, 1997) with the photo of an Aboriginal lady sitting in her environment stating it is her intention to be part of a protest group targeting the Arafura Games because of poverty is straight-out blackmail to all Australians.
>
> Many [sporting groups] will be using their hard-earned money to get to Darwin to compete, only to be confronted by people who choose to sit on their backsides, doing nothing and getting paid to do it and we are going to be made feel sorry for them.

8.7 The second return to Lee Point, May 1997

On May 10, 1997, after leaving the house in Ludmilla I shared with four activists, I set up my camp under a tarpaulin at Fish Camp. I was prepared to support any action the campers might take to draw attention to their cause during the international Arafura Games in Darwin. My experience of the resultant protest, as told in the following brief account, confirms the political consciousness of the fringe campers and their openness to those who show an interest in their struggle. I suggest that this is additional evidence that fringe dwellers do not rely on a closed Aboriginal domain as a tactic of resistance.

Day 1: On May 11, the day after the opening of the Arafura Games, seven Aboriginal campers from Fish Camp and I return by minibus to Lee Point and are photographed setting up a protest camp on the lawns of the grassed area beside the public amenities (*NT News* May 12, 1997). Len and his

partner, Peppi, had been with their close countryman, Gojok, at Lee Point from November 1996 until his death in January, 1997.

Day 2: 9.15am. In response to the newspaper article, officers from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment come with police to speak to protesters in the park. The two police say they can find no evidence that we are camping. At 10am, Len's brother Lewis arrives with boxes of food he has bought with his unemployment benefit. He pays the minibus driver $40. At midday two Burarra women and three men come to drink with the protesters. People come and go, including six activist supporters bringing three campers who stayed behind at Fish Camp. Dulcie said she would look after the dogs there. We sleep in swags on the lawns while Burarra men continue drinking and loudly condemning the politicians who refuse to listen to them.

Day 3: Breakfast and discussions over black tea made on the public barbecues. Lucky says everyone should move from the park to Gojok's old camp, which is the land they are claiming. At 5pm, two police stand beside three government officers who sit down on the lawns with the protesters and say, 'You said you were picnicking, but it has now become clear that you are camping'. The government officers hand out six copies of a letter stating:

> You are illegally camping on vacant Crown land.
> Notice is hereby given to vacate this land immediately.
> If you are found to be present on this property within 24 hours, the Northern Territory Police will be authorised pursuant to the *Trespass Act* to do all things necessary for your removal as prescribed under *Act* [sic].[11]

The possible penalty under Sections 7 and 8 of the *Act* is $2000.

Day 4: Some of the protest signs were stolen from the roadside during the night. Tommy, the almost blind invalid pensioner, says we should move out of the park to the bush across the road. During the afternoon, the protest campers discuss what they will do if the police come. More White supporters and all of the remaining Fish Camp residents come to Lee Point for a meeting at the 5pm deadline which was given in the 24-hour eviction notice yesterday. 'I can feel the people getting strong', says Dulcie's eldest daughter excitedly. Aboriginal speakers questioned the government's right to evict them when Aborigines had been using the area through living memory and beyond. Referring to a politician's statements claiming that the Lee Point campers have a home at Maningrida, protesters asked, 'Why doesn't the Minister go back to where he comes from?'. Fish and meat are grilled on the public barbecues while others listen to Djulpa, sing 'Yanguna', which was composed by Duncan Dennis of Fish Camp.[12] There is no appearance by police. ABCTV film and interview the protesters for the Stateline program (May 23, 1997) while two of the activists make videorecordings. 'We sleep in the scrub like pig and like dog. We are treated like dogs taken to the RSPCA', says one of the campers to the ABC cameras (Stateline May 23, 1997). The short statements recorded by the media reflect the intense political debate amongst the campers, their supporters and visitors that continues, much of it in Aboriginal languages, throughout nights and days of the protest. A White social worker who organised a previous protest against fines for the homeless sleeping in a public place (*NT News* April 3 and 4, 1996), says in support: 'I'm worried that these people don't have a place to live. It makes me feel ashamed that I've got a decent place to go home to each day and other people haven't' (Stateline May 23, 1997). Ten protesters, all Aboriginal except for me, stay overnight.

Day 5: The ABCTV crew visit and interview the Aboriginal protesters who burn copies of the eviction letter in front of the cameras with defiant shouts directed to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment (*Green Left*

Weekly May 28, 1997). The ABC reporter, Natasha Belling, asks me to telephone 'anytime' if the eviction is beginning. Later, government and police officers return to the camp that has moved into the bush on the site of Gojok's old camp and has become more established. They ask if we are refusing to leave. I telephone Natasha and she rushes out with a film crew but the police have gone. Natasha suggests that I borrow a video camera. A minibus taxi brings several family groups who dance and sing happily until arguments begin. Len's sister screams that the protesters are drunken long grass people. She lives in a house in the suburbs, and it is her drunken behaviour that disrupts the celebrations. At night six men and one woman sing in Burarra language to the accompaniment of a guitar by the campfire.

Day 6: The men set off to walk to the bank and shops. The Mormons discover the new camp and help collect firewood, which is a chore few men are prepared to do. Kevin, who pushed Gojok's wheelchair during the first Lee Point protest, returns from Bathurst Island and joins us at Lee Point. He did not know about Gojok's death and is very upset. Burarra men confidently discuss future plans for the Lee Point camp. During the night it rains and we all run for shelter in the public facilities.

Day 7: Six Mormon missionaries visit, hoping someone will take them fishing with the cast net and fish spear. Minibuses and cars shuttle back and forth with Black and White visitors bringing supplies, including the ubiquitous four-litre 'yellow suitcases', as the yellow cardboard casks of moselle wine are called. George, with a party from Fish Camp pays the minibus driver $70 for a return trip, to ensure that the driver to comes back for the group at 5pm. Two keen White supporters, Tim and Stella, bring photographs they have developed of the sleepover, and a mobile phone to call the media in the event of a police raid. Tim has composed a song 'for Fish Camp and Lee Point people' (Walsh 1997):

We are all one people, though we are many families;
We are living together now, we can work it out.
Many obstacles to peace now, I hope that we can find a way,
To show our respect for the land, yeah, to share a brand new day;
This old war been goin' on yeah, for freedom and for peace.
We don't need no cruel politicians, we don't need no cruel police;
People need somewhere to live, yeah, it's the government got to give...

Day 8: At the shops, I meet a medical doctor who has worked at Maningrida. He helps deliver boxes of groceries. He believes the problem of homeless Burarra people in Darwin has its origins in the Arnhem Land township. The Mormons return with food and fishing lines. While the others are away fishing, one man from the camp sets fire to the dry grass around the camp. The spreading fire is put out by the fire brigade from Casuarina, who say nothing to us.

Day 9: Three high school girls with their teacher come to ask the protesters for permission to videotape an interview with the campers for a school debate. They will defend homeless Aboriginal people's rights. I prepare a lecture I am due to give for a unit on Aboriginal studies at the Northern Territory University the next day. The grass fire is relit in the afternoon. Men who have received their unemployment benefits bring more supplies to camp. Despite the hard ground, there is traditional dancing by the men besides the fire until late. The mobile telephone is out of range, and cannot be used at Lee Point.

Day 10: Andrew, who spoke on ABCTV News at the ceremony for Gojok last January, has joined the camp. He insists on coming in the taxi to my university lecture. 'I want to hear what you say about us', he says. Together with two others from the camp, we make a presentation in the lecture theatre, illustrated by a twenty-minute video of television new items.

Andrew answers most of the students' questions very confidently from the lectern. Back at camp, Denis is making a didgeridoo out of piping for the schoolgirls' return tomorrow. The Mormons are back in camp having a lesson on Aboriginal culture from Len. Tommy, the invalid pensioner, is drunk and says he has come to Lee Point to die like his uncle, Gojok. 'I'm the boss now. I take over this place for my uncle. Nobody kick me out', he says emotionally.

Day 11: Just as the schoolgirls arrive with the video camera, the men return from the shops with three casks of moselle. A Burarra woman (one of the three campers later hospitalised with TB) is shredding long leaves to make a pandanus-leaf basket, while one man is making a three-pronged fish spear. The schoolgirls' questions are answered politely and the interviews stimulate more political debate among the campers. Lucky asks me rhetorically, 'Who was first, Captain Cook or Aboriginal people?'

Day 12: Early in the morning Len returns from the beach carrying two buckets filled with turtle eggs, which are eaten before I get up. He found the nest by following fresh tracks on the sand. While I cycle to Fish Camp, the ABC television crew return and interview the men again. The ABC wants more film for the Stateline program. With the people from Fish Camp, I arrange for a meeting with Department of Lands, Planning and Environment at 8.30 am tomorrow. Gojok's brother arrives to join the protest, bringing his brother's black hen that had been the 'mascot' of the last protest. Tommy cries to see the hen back on its favourite roosting place - the seat of Gojok's wheelchair, which Tommy is now using.

Day 13: More than ten Aboriginal campers from Lee Point and Fish Camp arrive, accompanied by a television crew, at the Department's conference room in the city. The bureaucrats insist that only three people can be admitted for the talks. The Aboriginal protesters heatedly insisted that they

should all hear what is to be said. Due to their determination and refusal to accept restrictions on their number, the campers are all admitted into the conference room, on the provision there are no cameras. They are joined by myself and another White supporter. After lengthy debate with the Assistant Secretary, the campers are promised that all their grievances will be considered. Apart from the previous Anti-Discrimination process, the talks are the first opportunity by the Lee Point and Fish Camp people to meet with government representatives and have their case heard.

Day 14: Sally Ann, an activist who had attended the meeting, composed a follow-up letter to the Assistant Secretary, on behalf of the people at the meeting.[13] Three of the Fish Camp residents signed it. The letter stated:

> You said that you have no authority to make any decision about whether or not our people can stay living at Lee Point. So you said you would pass what we have said to you today, on to your people, and that what we have been talking about would go through a 'process'. You explained that this process would involve meetings.
>
> One person said that it might be a good idea if two representatives from the Lee Point community were present at any meeting about whether or not we would be allowed to stay at Lee Point, and you said 'Yes, that sounds like a good idea'.
>
> It was a good meeting. But it needs to be followed up by your people and ours. We want to know the names of the people who will be involved in any decisions about us staying at Lee Point. We would like to know when the first meeting of the process is. We expect that we will be invited to send someone to speak on behalf of the people of Lee Point.[14]

The letter is an indication that the process begun by the open protests has gathered a momentum beyond my influence. At Lee Point it is a very quiet recovery day. Duncan reading the newspaper. Gojok's brother returns with his Central Australian Aboriginal wife and their two young light-haired sons. They have come to stay and bring two boomerangs as clapsticks to accompany the singing tonight.

Day 15: Five of the men, including the brothers Andrew and Len, go with the Mormons to their Sunday service. Most of the more extreme talk by the protesters was not used in the Stateline program. But the statements by the minister in the program could be grounds for another Anti-Discrimination complaint. Supporter Tim, the songwriter, comes out to Lee Point to suggest various legal defences against the Trespass Act that is being used to evict the protesters.

Day 16: The women have made a large damper. Two non-Aboriginal foremen from the Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF) drive into camp in an ADF truck. They say that the ADF has been asked by the NT Government to find out what the protesters want. With them are two middle-aged traditional Larrakia women, Kitty and Kathleen, who I have not met before. The men ask the people how much land they need. The women offer their support. More White supporters, Stella, Dave and Tim, arrive to visit the camp in their old van.

Day 17: More coming and going of campers and kin. A new group from Gojok's clan arrive with picnic supplies for an impromptu party of traditional dancing and singing. Eighteen Aboriginal people stayed the night. As usual, a meal is prepared for everyone, somehow, from the supplies we have in boxes and lying around the fire.

Day 18: Gojok's brother organises minibuses for everyone's trips to the city. I telephone the *NT News* from the caravan park which is 500 metre up the road, but they are 'waiting for something to happen', as they put it, before sending out a reporter. The editor has seen an Aboriginal man wading with a fish spear and wants me to arrange a photograph. 'What other city in Australia do you see Aborigines hunting?' he asks. Although it was probably one of the protesters he saw, it seems that the cultural continuities of fringe campers fascinate him more than the needs of homeless Aborigines in a modern city. That night Gojok's brother asks us all to hold hands in a circle and say a Christian prayer because he is feeling anxious.

Day 19: On May 29, at 7.30am, a long procession of vehicles is seen coming down the bitumen towards Lee Point. Police and government officials, videotape the scene as they surround our group of five adults and two children sitting by the breakfast fire (*Green Left Weekly* June 18, 1997). There is no resistance. I am the first to be asked to vacate the area, but I refuse to leave my Aboriginal friends. I am quickly arrested and locked in the paddy wagon. After I am driven away, the others are persuaded to leave peacefully in a minibus that is called by the police. The media arrive late and interview Gojok's brother. He is not happy that one of the officials who evicted us was the man who gave the protesters a hearing at the meeting in town and promised to see what he could do for them. Gojok's brother states on the television news that night: 'This morning there was a convoy came. Everyone was still sleeping ... I'm not trespassing, I'm an indigenous person of this country' (ABCTV News May 29, 1997). After a few hours, some of the supporters of the campers collect me from the police cells and one drives me back from the police lock-up to a hero's welcome at Fish Camp, where the Lee Point group is gathered. The *NT News* (May 30, 1997) reports next day:

> While police said the group left peacefully, Darwin anthropologist Bill Day - who was among those camping in the area - was arrested. He

> was later charged with trespass and for failing to leave at the direction of police.

After referring to the NLC Aboriginal land claim, 'slapped on' Crown land at Litchfield Park to the south of Darwin the previous day, the *NT News* editorial (May 30, 1997) supported the police action. The editorial echoed the government position that Aboriginal campers must be treated 'like everyone else'. As I have discussed in Chapter Six, the government view ensures the continued marginalisation of traditionally orientated people from remote areas who move to Darwin, where they must join the queue for a style of housing which many of them may not want. The editorial states:

> It is not the first time this group, which has been as large as 30, has been evicted from the Lee Point camp.
>
> They were told to leave last year and moved to Fish Camp at Kulaluk, near Nightcliff, but had to endure atrocious living conditions without power, toilets or running water.
>
> No one should be forced to live in these conditions.
>
> Importantly, the Lee Point campers have not been forced to live anywhere.
>
> They are from Arnhem Land which is inalienable freehold Aboriginal land - the strongest form of land tenure in the country.
>
> If these people want to leave their homelands and live in the city and want public housing then they join the queue like everyone else.

> Illegal camping anywhere in the Territory must be stopped - whether it's on Aboriginal land in Arnhem Land or crown land near Darwin.

Two weeks later, the Lee Point protesters, residents from Fish Camp and several of the activists sat in the court gallery as the charges against me were read. Three of the men wore tee shirts with a message, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us', printed on the front with felt pens.[15] After pleading guilty to the charges, I defended myself by explaining my fieldwork methodology of 'participant observation' to the magistrate:

> Day, doing a postgraduate doctorate, said students were expected to live with the people they worked with as part of their fieldwork. He chose his topic 'The homeless Aboriginal people of Darwin' because he had worked with them for 15 years, he said (*NT News* June 11, 1997).

As a result of my plea, the magistrate recorded no conviction against me (*NT News* June 11, 1997; see also Day 2000:62). I was then released on a $500 bond to be of good behaviour for eighteen months. Under the Trespass Act, everyone who was at the camp on the morning of the raid was barred from re-entering the area for twelve months. Outside the court Gojok's unrepentant brother said, 'That's whitefella law - under blackfella law we can go there' (*NT News* June 11, 1997).

8.8 The Mormons

Mormon missionaries visited regularly and continuously during my fieldwork. They were usually young North American men in pairs dressed in dark trousers and long-sleeved white shirt with a tie. They would park their car away from the camp and walk in, then sit down on the beds or mattresses and talk and pray with the people or offer Christian instruction if there was

interest (Plate 12). When I first arrived, there were many copies of the Book of Mormon lying about the camp in the dust. On my first day at Fish Camp I was shown a note written by a friend of Dulcie's family, to be given to the Mormons. It stated in part:

> I have been told by the people at this camp that you have been coming and annoying them almost daily, searching for them in the bush and giving them a hard time. They want you to stop coming here. This is their home - you are invading their privacy. They have their own beliefs.

Out of respect for the missionaries' vocation, no one in the camp could bring themselves to deliver the note or ask the Mormons to leave. However, the Mormons became more welcome when they began using their vehicle to carry water when the water containers were empty. While some remained opposed, others in the camp began to accept the visits and encouraged them by showing an interest in the teaching. The next year, I attended the baptism of Dulcie, one of her sisters and a Burarra man from the 'Spot On Marine' camp. After a Sunday morning of instruction, the three candidates changed into white robes and were immersed into a baptismal pool at the church. Although many fringe dwellers had been similarly baptised into membership, they rarely attended services and did not give up alcohol and cigarettes, although these substances are strictly forbidden amongst Mormons.

The Mormon missionaries were transferred elsewhere every three months. Each team claimed to enjoy their time with the fringe dwellers. When welcomed into the camps, as they usually were, the young missionaries sat down with the campers without any displays of superiority. However, they did not actively support fringe dweller resistance as the Mormons believe 'in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates in obeying,

honouring, and sustaining the law'.[16] That they also sometimes overstayed their welcome is shown in the following argument that I hastily transcribed in January 1998:

> Tommy, who had been drinking, to Mormons: 'You coming sitting down like this is your home - this is my home. You coming, you fucking missionaries like you looking for women. Fish Camp is my home, government give it to me. You didn't fight over land. You can't help me. Just go. Always you two coming. You sitting down like this is your home. Why don't you move away and go back home. Just loaf around from here'.
> Tommy's 28 year-old nephew, apologising to Mormons: 'He's mad!'
> Mormons to Tommy: 'You've been drinking'.
> Tommy: What you reckon you're wonderful? Just fuck off from here. Move away early part. I mean it. I don't give a fuck'.
> Niece who is talking to Mormons: 'Shutup'.
> Mormon makes a joking remark.
> Tommy: 'I'm not your father. I'm not your son. Only my God I love. Just my God. I love God, not any man. You just coming looking for women. Just pray and go back. We don't like no more, we don't like that business. You can go back to your place where you living. I'm a Christian man too. I love my God and he loves me. We different people, you Mormons. Why don't you move away from Fish Camp? Dulcie and me and Bill, we fighting over law. You Mormons don't fighting over law'.
> Niece to Mormons: 'See you tomorrow. Bye bye'.
> Mormons, cheerfully: 'See you Tommy'.
> Tommy: 'Why you coming? It's not your camp. This is my home, I'm fighting for law. Not you. You don't asking me. You stupid. Fuck you cunts. Just fuck off'.

(Ten minutes later the Mormons were still in the camp, talking to other residents).

Although Tommy had been drinking, he was expressing the opinions of many in the camp. His language could be interpreted as an example of the 'demystifying language' of everyday resistance, noted by Scott (1985:41), and the 'counter strategies' of interruptions and vulgar language used by subordinates to reject the hegemony of speech styles that are noted by Vike (1997:210).

Tommy's complaints had little effect, but the Mormons respected my rule that an area around my shelter was a 'Mormon free zone' for myself and any Aboriginal campers who took refuge there. Shortly before I left Darwin, an Aboriginal man who regularly visited his grandfather acted on the complaints he had received from some of the campers and aggressively insisted that the Mormons leave and not return. After asking each person in the camp if they wished them to leave, the Mormons accepted the majority opinion and did not return to Fish Camp.

8.9 Senator Bob Brown launches the Greens election campaign at Fish Camp

The day after a Darwin reconciliation 'Walking Together' march and rally, attended by five residents from Fish Camp, the Greens launched their campaign for the NT elections at Fish Camp. It was a novel idea suggested by June Mills, a Larrakia woman and candidate for the Greens. As I described in Chapter Seven, the Mills family had supported Fish Camp after some unknown persons had made threats against the campers. Another member of the family regularly took the campers shopping in his car and several members of the Greens had also been involved in the Lee Point protests.

After the threats, a rough fence had been erected to protect the people sleeping on the ground at Fish Camp. For the campaign launch on August 3, 1997, the fence was decked with colourful flags, while anti-uranium activists from Jabiru set up a surreal display of mock yellow-cake drums topped by a man in gas mask and protective suit. Cars began parking along the track as an audience gathered to sit on tarpaulins on the ground. As the senator arrived, George fell from his chair, his body clenched in a fit. Senator Brown, who is also a medical doctor, rushed to help. Another White friend of the campers, who is a high-ranking federal public servant, used his mobile telephone to call an ambulance.[17] As the senator was treating George, another of the Fish Camp residents collapsed in a similar fit and needed attention before being taken to hospital in the ambulance.[18]

Eventually, the serious business began, with introductions and speeches by the Greens sitting on the ground amongst the shelters of the camp. Although no media attended, several activists recorded the campaign launch on their video cameras (Plate 11). During the formalities, speakers revealed conflicting interpretations of Fish Camp. Sitting cross-legged on the ground next to the senator, the Green candidate for the district of Millner, which includes Fish Camp, described the site of the campaign launch as 'a beautiful little camp in the middle of suburbia, a nice remote little area away from the hustle and bustle of the city'. She advocated that town camps be seen as 'an integral part of Darwin life' and spoke of the need for an Aboriginal cultural centre in Darwin (Tapp 1997).[19] In his speech in support of the candidates, Senator Bob Brown expressed two views of the camp. Firstly, he spoke of the connection to the land that the camp seemed to signify:[20]

> Parliament might have no spiritual affiliation with the land, which is something we need in the White community, so far as we have lost it, to get it back, and the best way of getting it back is sitting with the

> people who have been so long in that spiritual affiliation with the land.

Prompted by one of the activists, the senator switched to a social justice theme:

> Being in this place, the fact that there isn't any water for any Australian in this rich wealthy country, on tap, is a symbol of something very wrong where there's millionaires and billionaires who put more water through their swimming pools and under their yachts than is available for some people to drink.

Essentialist references by the speakers to the evidence of Aboriginal spirituality and life in harmony with the natural surroundings at Fish Camp conflicted with their appeals for equal rights for fringe dwellers as deprived Australians. One was an image of conflicting cultures - the other of class conflict. As the meeting progressed, it became clear that the campaign against the poverty and lack of services at Fish Camp was being subsumed to images of the camp as an example of Aboriginal self-determination. As Beckett (1988:12) comments:

> Ironically, although no one may have intended it, [the recognition of Aborigines as a culturally distinct people] provided a charter for Aborigines to live at a lower material level than other Australians: Their poverty had been rendered exotic and so no longer comparable to other forms of poverty.[21]

In the camps out of public view it was the invited media that brought the private realm into the public view, with the intention of making the public aware of the lack of services in the camps. In oral and written reports, some control could be retained over the message, but in pictorial representations

the squalor of the camp easily became an exotic 'otherness' that contrasted with the 'ordinariness' of neighbouring suburbs.[22] Sympathetic activists, and sometimes journalists, appeared impressed by the cultural expressions of Aboriginality displayed in the bushland setting. They also had good intentions in accepting uncritically what appeared to be a particularly Aboriginal way of life. In this way, it appeared to me that Fish Camp was being transformed into a public 'theme park' for reconciliation. On several occasions, visitors were brought to the camp 'to meet Aboriginal people' and take photographs, if permitted.

8.10 'Rights On Show': The Human Rights Art Exhibition

Against the growing emphasis of Aboriginality-as-persistence at Fish Camp there were four entries in the annual Human Rights Week Darwin Community Legal Service arts awards on December 8, 1997 that had universal rights as their inspiration.[23] To make the installation titled 'Please explain', the artist used blackened cooking utensils borrowed from the camp, placed beside a reconstructed open hearth of ashes and charcoal. Stained plastic water containers, an empty wine cask and other items given by the camp were placed around a soiled foam mattress and bedding on red dirt to create a reflective view of homelessness in Darwin. The artwork was intended as an answer to a comment by a national right-wing politician who had spoken out against Aborigines receiving special privileges. The title of the work referred to that comment.

A minimalist painting of a tap, titled 'A denial of justice', by an activist art student who was very close to the fringe dwellers, symbolised the conversion of natural resources into a controlled commodity that was denied to Aboriginal fringe dwellers at Fish Camp. Access to natural water sources is now restricted for Aboriginal campers in Darwin and water comes through a metered pipe. The same artist also entered a clay sculpture of a tap with one sculptured drop falling on dry sand. He called this work 'No water, no

life'. Lastly, the winning entry was an edited video of scenes and interviews at Fish Camp filmed by Stella (Simmering 1997), whose involvement in Fish Camp affairs began at the Parliament House protest. She has continued to make videos of life in the camps (see Simmering 1998, 2000a, 2000b).

Marcia Langton (1993b:33) writes:

> 'Aboriginality'... is a field of intersubjectivity in that it is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people create 'Aboriginalities'...

Langton's comment was illustrated as five of the fringe campers sat on the floor of the gallery beside the representations of their camp, watching the video of themselves, shortly before the awards were presented. As critical viewers of the exhibits, they subverted any decontextualised, distanced representation of them as an exotic 'other', and confirmed the political reality of the art works. While 'Stereotypes abound where there is distance' (hooks cited in Langton 1993b:38), installations made by White artists and Aboriginal fringe dwellers in dialogue for the Human Rights on Show awards sought a commonality in the resistance of Aborigines and activists while offering a critique of the lives of most other Darwin settlers.

8.11 Waak Waak Jungi at the Festival of Darwin

When an innovative Aboriginal performance group arrived from their Ramingining homelands in northeast Arnhem Land for the annual Festival of Darwin in August 1997, the Fish Camp people and their friends provided dancers and a leading male ceremonial singer for several of the shows. The dancing and singing at five various performances to enact the sometimes amusing, sometimes sacred stories sung in Gunmalbingu language by the group illustrated the versatility of the campers and their unrecognised

contribution towards Darwin cultural life.[24] The group is a unique experiment in collaboration with white musicians and poets who effectively reconstruct songs in the Woiwurrung language from Victoria and Yolngu people who perform traditional songs and dances of northeastern Arnhem Land to a mixture of Aboriginal and European instruments (see Waak Waak Jungi 1997; *Age* August 29, 1997; *Sydney Morning Herald* August 29, 1997; *NT News* September 9, 1997). The media reported on the concert:

> Meanwhile, black women from deprived Fish Camp danced barefoot on the marble floor of the Supreme Court foyer, while one of their number with a wooden leg clapped.
>
> With [George] Banbuma, [two Europeans in the group] are campaigning for water for Fish Camp. They point out that when Banbuma and the dancing women went back to their camp, they had no water to wash the [clay] paint off (*Sydney Morning Herald* August 29, 1997).[25]

At night members of the group celebrated their successes with dancing and singing in the dust at Fish Camp and for months later their cassette tape was played repetitively at high volume in camp (Waak Waak Jungi 1997). Songs like 'Jumbucco'[26] and 'Kava song' invariably stirred listeners to get up and dance to the music from the cassette player.

8.12 The role of music

It is notable how often it is that music features in the above interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In the camp, the didgeridoo, tapes or guitar accompany most gatherings. Fringe dwellers otherwise mix with townspeople at musical events, particularly if either of the popular Burarra bands, or groups like Waak Waak Jungi with Arnhem Land musicians and singers, are playing. Although these bands mostly sing in

their own language, I suggest that music and dance creates a space where merging can occur. As Breen (1989:143) cites, 'Music in any society helps us to communicate on a different plane with each other'.

According to Davies (1993:356),'the Aboriginality of black Australian rock is a form of empowerment accomplished through a reversal and decentring of colonial social relations'. Davies (1993:357) writes: 'listening or dancing to an Aboriginal band enacts a whole different set of pleasures within colonial relations from those elicited by bands with "white" faces. They play, you dance'. Beckett (1958) previously noted song as an expression of Aboriginal resistance to White exclusion of Aborigines. Aaron Corn (ABC 1999), who emphasises the cultural continuities in Aboriginal popular music, concedes that the expression of religious ties to land in song is also an expression of Aboriginal resistance, as the Burarra Letterstick Band recently confirmed in an interview during a visit to Perth for the Beyond the Bridge Walk for Reconciliation. Commenting on the traditional dance before each performance, the keyboard player said: 'I'm dancing to protect my land, to stay and remain strong... The music is about getting together, no matter what colour you are' (*Xpress Magazine*, November 11, 2000, p.7).

In Darwin, when Aboriginal singers celebrate their home country, an alternative Australian history or their unique identity and culture, an audience of mixed races mingled in the dance space of various locations during my fieldwork. In these places, the colours and images on the clothing popular amongst northern Aboriginal youths, and the reggae beat of many of the songs, emphasised identification with the late Bob Marley's songs of resistance.

Corn (1999a:3), who conducted some of his research with the Burarra residents of the Darwin fringe camps during my stay amongst them, concluded that popular Western music forms in the 1990s, 'through their

recontextualised local uses, have been acculturated to accommodate local Aboriginal concepts, values and beliefs concerning family, country and spirituality'. Corn (1999a:18) notes that 'Aboriginal musicians imbue their own musical creativity within the simultaneous contexts of the contemporary world and the ever-present Dreaming'.

Corn's observations are particularly noticeable in songs like 'An-Barra Clan' (Letterstick 1999; see Corn 2001) and Black Crow (Waak Waak Jungi 1997). Other songs like 'Land Rights' (Sunrize Band 1989) emphasise engagement with the invading society. Another theme helps people cope with change by 'enshrining elements of the foreign culture in traditional song and so rendering them less disruptive' (Breen 1989:13). The popular 'Jumbucco' (Waak Waak Jungi 1997), about cigarette smoking, and 'Yanguna' (Wild Water 1996), about kava, are two examples of the use of song to integrate introduced elements into Aboriginal cultural systems.

Although singing to the accompaniment of didgeridoo and clap stick was the preferred style at Fish Camp, the campers followed the three bands of countrymen and women that gave many performances during my fieldwork. Drinking and dancing to Aboriginal rock music provides a space where the intermingling of fringe dwellers and their non-Aboriginal sympathisers can occur. By temporarily subverting structural and linguistic authority during the 'heteroglossia' of these occasions, Aboriginal bands allow a form of 'merging' to occur between fringe dwellers and others.[27]

When understood in relation to others, fringe dweller drinking cannot be interpreted solely as facilitating internal Aboriginal social relationships, as Collmann (1979b:209, 1988:151) suggests. According to Brady and Palmer (1984), marginalised Aborigines also drink to gain access to the power of the dominating society. I also suggest that the Fish Camp fringe dwellers interpret alcohol drinking as a form of engagement with the invading

society, like the man at 'Wallaby Cross' who tapped on a can of beer to indicate his citizenship (Sansom 1977:59, 1980a:49). While Brady and Palmer (1984:77) believe that the altered mind-state of drinking gives only an illusionary access to power and the dominating structural framework remains unaltered, I suggest that the suspension of the authority of the dominant society provided by alternative voices during performances of Aboriginal rock bands is a more than illusionary and that slight structural shifts do occur.

Corn (1999a:18) concludes that 'it is necessary to move beyond analyses [of Aboriginal rock music] that rely too heavily upon the interpretation of musical elements within the theoretical constructs of Western discourse'. However, in my experience Corn's association of rock music with expressions of Aboriginal traditional beliefs neglects the destructive influences associated with rock culture on Aboriginal society. The transformation of an essentially urban anarchic form, with all its associated values, into an indigenous culture is more problematic than shown by Corn's analysis. And because the bands must achieve acceptance to successfully 'crossover', their resistance role is muted and easily expropriated, as is occurring in the appropriation of the didgeridoo as a popular instrument (Corn 1999b).

As much as they enjoy the events where their kin are playing, by their lack of material possessions the fringe dwellers are insulated from the disruptive effect the intrusion of the rock music culture might have on the camps. On one occasion at Fish Camp, a dispute occurred over the playing of loud music on a large portable radio/tape cassette player. The young man was considered mentally damaged by petrol sniffing which was rife at Maningrida before being eliminated in 1993 (see Burns et al 1995:84). He became more unpredictable after smoking 'gunja' (marihuana) or drinking alcohol. He could not understand why he should not play his favourite tapes

at top volume late at night. Radios and tapes are not popular in the camp at night. The control of music that can be turned to high volume by any unskilled person is a problem not easily resolved by traditional sanctions. In addition, unlike the didgeridoos lying about the camp, the radio is accepted as a private possession. Although he eventually took his player further away until only a distant booming could be heard, the incident showed how intolerable life could be in the camp if such possessions became commonplace. Instead, radios or tape decks are often smashed by the owner in anger, which has a levelling effect by removing the object of dissension.

Unlike the examples of institutionally encapsulated Aboriginal societies given by Tonkinson (1974), Morris (1985, 1988, 1989) and Trigger (1986, 1988a, 1992), fringe dwellers do not resist by affecting a form of closure in an Aboriginal domain. While it is true that they have 'retreated from a relationship of authority characteristic of inter-racial dealings' (Sansom 1980a:8; see also Collmann 1979a:50, 1988:10), their world is not wholly 'blackfella business' as Sansom (1980a:8) leads us to believe. The form of resistance I describe by Burarra fringe dwellers is open to allies in their attempt to find space in Darwin. Unlike other Aboriginal groups in controlled environments in towns, including rented housing and town camps, fringe dwellers are able to welcome outsiders, on their own terms. Although Local and Territory Government and an unsympathetic public fail to acknowledge or understand fringe dwellers' attempts to 'merge' with the dominant society, fringe dwellers have more success dealing with non-Aboriginal groups with whom they perceive a shared interest. In the next chapter, I examine the place of alcohol as a marker of difference between groups in Darwin and its role in fringe dweller resistance.

Endnotes:

[1] Wells (1995a:21) states that the park in front of the new NT Parliament House, above Lameroo Beach, has been named 'Demeora Park' in recognition of the Larrakia name for the area.

[2] My connections with the Aboriginal fringe dwellers of Darwin began with friendships formed while camping in the open on Lameroo Beach from June to October in 1969. At that time, prior to Sansom's (1980a) groundbreaking ethnography on fringe dwellers in Darwin, most anthropologists had little interest in Aboriginal fringe dwellers (see Sansom 1982b:118).

[3] In 1973, Woodward (1973:26) was told that there were 'eighteen members of the [Larrakia tribe] now left'. He says that many more could trace maternal links. A 1973 Welfare Branch report, cited by Cooper (1985), claims that only seven Larrakia people of paternal descent survived.

[4] As a result, the cheap seats were discontinued, and all tickets in the stalls were the same price.

[5] 'Heads' was a synonym for 'hippies', referring to their reputed liking of marihuana.

[6] The 'hippies' who lived at Lameroo Beach in 1969 had successors in the 1998 Jabiluka anti-uranium activists' protest camp, which supported the Aboriginal traditional owners.

[7] Email sent to Caroline Tapp, forwarded to Bill Day October 25, 2001. Re: The Diversity Conference November 2001: redefining the mainstream - Local Government, inclusive communities.

[8] These policies also place most anthropologists who represent Aboriginal people in the NT in an oppositional role (for example, see Trigger 1998b). However, Sansom told the 1998 Ethnographic Forum that he was about to leave for Darwin to represent the Northern Territory Government in the Kenbi land claim hearing.

[9] Many of Wild Water's songs, like 'Diff'rent Colours' and 'Blak History' are defiantly political. The videorecording for the song 'Diff'rent Colours' on *Land Rights Views* (Northern Land Council 1996b) shows the group singing with the Lee Point camp behind them, before the July eviction, as though to illustrate the lyrics:

> We are black, we are white, we are many races living together now,
> We live in this world of misery where there are wars that really can hurt.
> There is racism and prejudice but we must go on,
> Life was never easy, life is so tough.
> Chorus:
> We are diff'rent colours but we are one people
> We are diff'rent colours but we are the world.
> In our society we have random violence and stressful drinking.
> There are drug dealers and alcoholics - this must be stopped.
> Why must life be so rough? Lets all stop and come together now.

[10] See also the NTU student newspaper *Deli*rra* May 1997, p.17.

[11] Letter from Assistant Secretary, Land Administration, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment 'To Whom It May Concern', 13 May 1997.

[12] The song celebrates kava drinking and is performed on cassette and CD by Wild Water (1996). Duncan Dennis (Manalpuy), whose homeland is near Maningrida, was a founder of the popular Letterstick Band and co-starred with Nicole Kidman in the 1983 Australian film, *Bush Christmas* (Baron Films, 1983). He was based at Fish Camp and stayed at Lee Point throughout the protest.

[13] In a review of *Bunji: the story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*, Sally-Ann wrote: 'It's only since last year that I've become good friends with some of the Aboriginal people living at

Fish Camp, in the Kulaluk Reserve, and begun to see some of the problems facing Aboriginal people living in official and unofficial town camps in Darwin' (Watson 1997:18).

[14] Letter from George Banbuma, Dulcie Malimara and Billy Cooper 'on behalf of the people of Lee Point' to A/Secretary of Land Administration, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 23 May 1997.

[15] Although I made the shirts, the campers proudly wore them in court and on other occasions as a conscious gesture of resistance, as can be seen in the film, *A dying shame*, in the opening scenes which were filmed a Fish Camp (Roy 1997).

[16] Article 12 of 'The articles of faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints'.

[17] At first the ambulance refused to attend, claiming they had just come from the camp. Over the mobile phone they asked if a doctor was present and were told 'Yes, and he is also a senator!'

[18] Sometimes these fits may be caused by withdrawal from alcohol, particularly on Sundays when licensed stores do not sell alcohol.

[19] June's election campaign publicity included a photograph of 'June Mills and Senator Bob Brown at Fish Camp, August 1997', but the policies did not specifically refer to the fringe dwellers (Mills 1997).

[20] In the video of the meeting (Tapp 1997), most of the residents of Fish Camp are sitting on beds, while the visitors sit on the ground. I purchased three strong plastic-backed chairs for my side of the camp during my fieldwork. I was continually retrieving them from around the camp as they were in great demand. The point is, sitting on the ground is not always the preferred style, although the people are accustomed to it.

[21] I suggest that Sansom's ethnography *The camp at Wallaby Cross* also treats Aboriginal poverty in this way.

[22] See 'In the heart of Darwin', (*AustralAsian* 1(2):11) for examples of controlled images like, 'George and Dulcie cart water to drink, cook and wash' and, 'Humpies and the flag, but no water'.

[23] The exhibition is held in conjunction with the 'Living with Alcohol' program. The entries listed in the 1997 catalogue of *Rights on show 97: an exhibition of art from the community with a focus on human rights issues in the Territory* are: 28 'A denial of justice' by Darren Kane; 34 'No water, no life' by Darren Kane; 43 'Fish Camp' by Stella Simmering; 44 'Please explain' by Penny Campton and Caroline Tapp.

[24] In August and September 1997, Fish Camp was involved in music and dance performances at the Supreme Court, the festival concert on the Esplanade, a Myilli Point restaurant, a high school and the album launch (Waak Waak Jungi 1997. See *NT News* September 9, 1997).

[25] At another concert, Banbuma politicised 'a song about rain' when he announced, 'We all need rain. Water comes from rain but we do not have water at Fish Camp'. As a result of the Waak Waak Jungi concerts, an anonymous Darwin lawyer donated a small water tank to Fish Camp (see *Green Left Weekly* September 24, 1997).

[26] The title of the song refers to tobacco. The song tells of sharing, exchanging and asking for something from another (Waak Waak Jungi 1997). At Fish Camp, and at public performances, dancers move from person to person with hands outstretched for gifts of cigarettes.

[27] In the Bakhtin School of literary criticism, the interplay of alternative voices is termed 'heteroglossia' (Selden 1989:17-18). In my metaphor of merging traffic, in the case of music, the rules are suspended and space for merging is made in the resultant confusion.