CHAPTER FOUR

Revisiting *The camp at Wallaby Cross*: a definitive work or 'jus lotta talk'?

4.1 Introduction

Basil Sansom's ethnography, *The camp at Wallaby Cross: Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin* (Sansom 1980a) portrays the everyday concerns and activities of Aboriginal people living in tents and rough shelters in bushland beside the Stuart Highway on the outskirts of Darwin in the mid-1970s.[i] Sansom (1995:283) describes his text as 'the definitive book about fringe dwellers in Darwin'. The book, and many subsequent articles have 'systematically generated a processual approach' to the analysis of Aboriginal social structure (Moore and Dyck 1995:158), by arguing that 'Aborigines of the Australian North' (Sansom 1981a:279) order their everyday lives through flexible and changing social processes which are uniquely Aboriginal.

Sansom presents his work as corrective to the 'negativism [in the literature] that makes people of labile social groupings sociological have-nots' and 'deviants of comparative sociology' (Sansom 1981a:278).[ii] Others agree that many anthropologists viewed fringe dwellers as 'marginal ethnographic subjects' (Merlan 1995:162) until Sansom's realistic, lively and sometimes moving descriptions demonstrated that Aborigines in the camps are a rule-bound community (Langton et al 1998:28), and not stereotypical demoralised fringe dwellers who have 'lost their culture'. Clendinnen (1999:90) describes the camp at Wallaby Cross as 'an example of modern Aboriginal culture in creative action, and [a] social and political tour-de-force: the maintenance of effective group autonomy in the face of deeply hostile circumstances'.[iii]

Although Sansom successfully locates fringe dwellers in the centre of debates on Aboriginal social structure (see Shapiro 1997:208), Merlan (1995:166) suggests that he retains a view 'that the form of life worthy of ethnographic treatment is that which remains in essence unchanged by our own'. Sansom (1988b:159, 1987:10) claims that the people at Wallaby Cross maintain cultural continuities which 'belonged to the hunter-gatherer forebears of the fringe dwellers of today. Handed down through generations [as] a heritage preserved intact'. Not surprisingly, Merlan (1995:176) notes, 'his work is much more a literature of persistence than resistance'. In this chapter I suggest that the persistence of the Wallaby Cross community was intertwined with resistance as the mob struggled for space on the outskirts of Darwin in the 1970s.

In the next section of this chapter, I use empirical evidence and my experience of over thirty years of engagement with the people at 'Wallaby Cross' to suggest that the concentration on an 'internal dialect' within 'a segregated social field' (Sansom 1980a:265; 1981a:275) has marginalised the wider political, social and economic interests of the fringe campers.[iv] Secondly, I emphasise the role of kinship and religion amongst fringe dwellers, supported by evidence of their importance in Sansom's texts. Thirdly, I give evidence of the commitment, aspirations and attachment to place shown by a group who continue to maintain an Aboriginal presence on contested land in a hostile social environment. This

appears to contrast with Sansom's (1980a:137, 258) insistence that a labile fringe dweller society in Darwin is a 'synthetic realisation' of indeterminate futures. Finally, a detailed analysis provides alternative readings of Sansom's 'definitive' texts.

As I will describe, 'Wallaby Cross' was, and remains, a fringe camp which is very different to the camps where I conducted my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001. At Fish Camp, English is not the main language used in everyday communications and the form of Kriol that Sansom describes is used even less. At most times, Fish Camp is not a mixed community like Wallaby Cross. With rare exceptions, those who use the camp speak the same languages, are relatives and come from the same area of central Arnhem Land or nearby regions. In the 1990s, unlike the 1970s, most Aboriginal people in the camps have an independent income of either a pension or unemployment benefit and none of the Fish Camp people have experience of working on cattle stations. However, as I describe in the next section, the people at Fish Camp and other fringe camps in Darwin in the 1990s shared with the people at 'Wallaby Cross', as I knew them, a preparedness to defend their rights for space in the City of Darwin.

The camp that Sansom calls 'Wallaby Cross' takes its name from a chain of small seasonal lakes near the site that the fringe dwellers chose for their camp. They are people from a hinterland of cattle stations and reserves to the south of Darwin, across to the Daly and Moil Rivers to the southwest (see Sansom 1980a:iii) who speak Kriol, English and tribal languages and have 'whitefella names' as well as less-publicly used Aboriginal names. For the remainder of this chapter I use the 'whitefella names' of sites and people, where they are known to me, instead of Sansom's pseudonyms. This is in keeping with my argument and follows the publication by Sansom (1995:308) of a key name that unlocks 'the code' to unravelling the textual representations of his interlocutors, as I explain at the end of this chapter.

4.2 The Knuckeys Lagoon mob: 1971-1997

When I first met the fringe dwellers who Sansom calls the 'Wallaby Cross' mob, they were living in abandoned sheds and self-built humpies along the Stuart Highway, twelve kilometres from the city centre, near the Berrimah crossroads (Map 2). I was introduced by one of their kin as a 'union man'(Day 1994:28), in recognition of the leading role of unionists in the campaign for citizenship, of which many of the mob were veterans. Members of the group began building shelters on an area of vacant Crown land at Knuckeys Lagoon that was first claimed by them in 1971 (see *Bunji* January 1972; Day 1972, 1994:14). This signalled the beginning of the protracted campaign, already discussed, by Darwin fringe camps at Nightcliff (Kulaluk), Railway Dam (in the inner city), and Knuckeys Lagoon.

In October 1971 the Knuckeys Lagoon mob joined other fringe dwellers sitting across Bagot Road, blocking commuter traffic; they were pictured with other fringe dwellers blocking traffic again in November; on December 13, 1971 the Knuckeys Lagoon mob gathered beside the nearby railway tracks to stop a goods train but were restrained by

police; on May 1, 1972 they were pictured in a sizeable contingent of what the papers described as 'the best May Day march for years'; various members of the mob - men, women and children - were photographed with placards along the route of the visiting Prime Minister; marching in protest on National Aborigines Day; camping overnight outside Government House in protest during the visit by Princess Margaret 'with equal numbers of police'; blocking the iron ore loading equipment at the wharf 'closely watched by an ever growing number of police'; picketing the Darwin prison; 'invading' the army barracks; and camping outside the Supreme Court in February and August 1974.[v] The newspaper also reported that the group planned to start a pet food business (*NT News* April 16, 1973).

Members known to me signed petitions for a treaty (Wright 1985:15-16; Buchanan 1974:11) and distributed the newsletter *Bunji* in hotels and in the streets. Eight men from the camp who signed a letter threatening to cut the overland telegraph lines were taken to the police station for questioning (*Bunji* January 1972; Buchanan 1974:5). Most of these actions and others, including the meeting of fringe dwellers with Judge Woodward in June 1973, were televised locally.[vi] In the face of hostile public and police reaction, the three-year commitment by the Aboriginal fringe dwellers suggests more than 'notions of futures which are indeterminate [in] the Darwin hinterland' (Sansom 1978b:107, 1980a:258). It was a further eight years before their aspirations for title to their land claim were realised.[vii]

Following the election of the Federal Labor Government in December 1972, the newly-incorporated GDA received a grant of $10,350 from the Aboriginal Benefit Trust Fund (see Buchanan 1974:25). The grant was used to purchase a work vehicle, pay casual labour and commence a building program at the three camps using salvaged materials (*NT News* October 30, 1973). At Knuckeys Lagoon, the GDA began a rubbish collection service and built a yard for a horse to be used by the campers. Additional huts, an ablution block and a shed for ritual use were also built and a pipe was connected to the nearby water main to provide the first reliable water supply for the camp.

In 1973 the group decided to bring sacred objects from the hinterland, to be wrapped and stored at the camp for showing to male initiates after their period of isolation in a fenced-off area of the claim hidden by the thick eucalyptus, pandanus and cycad forest. I was involved in negotiations with the NT Museum, which was anxious to store the rare objects safely. However, the Knuckeys Lagoon leaders refused to entrust their objects to the museum. In 1973 I was present when young men in their twenties were shown the objects before being brought out of seclusion and led in a ceremonial procession to women waiting at the camp. Considering the age of the men, I suspect I was witnessing a revival of interest in ceremony. Sansom (1980a:200) also notes that fourteen young men were initiated at Knuckeys Lagoon in January 1976 and four more in 1977.

In April 1974 the Knuckeys Lagoon mob attended a meeting of the GDA at Railway Dam to discuss the lengthy delays in welfare funerals and the recent welfare burial of a loved member of the mob without notifying his family. One man who had died had been in the

morgue for months. I reported in *Bunji* (March and April 1974):

> On April 26th the Brothers and Sisters from Knuckeys Lagoon drove to the hospital with John Crosby [a GDA member]. They were looking for the body of [the deceased man]. When they came to the funeral directors, there were twenty police around the building. Even when we are dead we are wards of the state. Let the Gwalwa Daraniki bury their own dead, our way' (see also a report in the *NT News* April 13, 1974).

I stayed behind at the meeting point, but I later heard from the morgue attendant that a note left on the locked door by the Aboriginal delegation had alarmed him. After the confrontation, the funeral director came down to address the meeting. I include detail of this protest because of its similarities to the story of a visit to the undertaker during Sansom's fieldwork (Sansom 1995:276). When Sansom drove seventeen of the mob to the funeral parlour to forcefully lodge a complaint concerning the funeral of Ol Luke, the undertaker 'flanked by two muscled mutes' threatened to call the police (p.276). This is a rare portrayal in Sansom's texts of the militancy of the mob as I knew it. In contrast to my analysis, Sansom uses Aboriginal militancy at the funeral parlour as an example of cultural continuity involving the choice of a coffin to suit allegedly uniquely Aboriginal aesthetics.

Following the incident at the morgue in 1974, and the release of the positive Woodward Report (1974), I flew to Indonesia for a holiday. On my return, I visited the mob at their regular 'pitch', or daytime 'sit down camp'. Major Bangun, the camp leader in Sansom's texts and during my involvement until I left Darwin, told me that representatives from the fringe camp had attended a meeting at 'an office' in Darwin while I was overseas and had been warned that I was 'trying to start a war'. Major apparently seriously claimed that my visit to Indonesia was to organise bombing raids on Darwin. Taking the advice they had been given, the group had decided not to work with me or the GDA in the future.

The group made a pragmatic decision to switch allegiances to the Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF), which was funded to assist town camps. Although the relationship was responsible for the building program that followed and therefore proved beneficial for the mob, I was disappointed that they would dismiss me on the basis of such an outlandish story. The 'performative relationships' formed by acts of 'helpin out' that Sansom (1988b:167-8) discusses in his essay, 'A grammar of exchange' did not affect my abrupt dismissal, after years of closely working with the campers. In contrast, Sansom (p.168) become 'linked in special and particular association' to a man called Paulie, after assisting him in a medical emergency.

Duncan (1975:66) offers an explanation in his analysis of factionalism in Aboriginal protest movements. He suggests that there is 'a constant need for innovation, for new strategies or new emphases'. Within these groups 'the skills of a particular individual may offer the necessary leadership to meet a given situation but not be appropriate in other

circumstances' (Duncan 1975:67). As a result of the split, I had little to do with the mob at the time of Sansom's fieldwork; however, 'Tommy Atkins' and others from the camp were pictured leading a protest against uranium mining in 1978 (*Bunji* April 1978) and residents of Knuckeys Lagoon joined protests in 1997 and 2001.

At the beginning of the wet season of 1974/75 the three main Darwin fringe camps were relatively secure on the land that they had claimed, with the moral backing of the final report of the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission (see *NT News* May 13, 1974). As the monsoons approached, I reported in the newsletter, *Bunji*:

> Bernie Valadian and the ADF are helping the Nine Mile mob with their land claim. Bernie is talking about a fifty-year plan! Lucky for Major and his big family, stage one is a house before the wet season! (*Bunji* October 1974)

4.3 Cyclone Tracy, the mob and Sansom

Basil Sansom began his fieldwork in 1975 in the months following Cyclone Tracy that devastated the City of Darwin on Christmas Eve 1974. The events would have endangered Sansom's fieldwork plans before he began his research in April 1975.[viii] Despite the effects of the cyclone on the scene at Knuckeys Lagoon, including evacuations, travel bans and the loss of all the structures and much of the vegetation (see *Bunji* January and April 1975), there are only brief passing references to the event in *The camp at Wallaby Cross* (Sansom 1980a:191, 222, 236). For example, there is no explanation that the tents the people were using (Sansom 1980a:87, 111, 221) were post-cyclone emergency accommodation.

None of the fringe camps were prepared for the cyclone, which was not unusual - I had relayed warnings to them in the past. At Knuckeys Lagoon, Major's father was killed by a falling tree and was incorrectly listed amongst the casualties as 'Major Bangun' in the first reports. In a tape-recorded interview, the Darwin Aboriginal activist and welfare worker, Vai Stanton, told Kevin Gilbert (1977:24) some of the immediate concerns in early 1975:

> [The man was] the only man I know called Major and he was on the death list and funnily enough he was the leader of the [Knuckeys Lagoon] community there and myself and others had been very involved at that time with the fringe-dwellers because we were trying to get them tarpaulins for the wet season because we were expecting a very wet 'Wet', you know. The tarps were an interim thing before they got houses. They'd been building shacks you see.[ix]

After the cyclone the GDA vehicle, which had been at a local service station, was stripped of wheels and parts by looters. The camp areas were bare and the people scattered (*Bunji* January 1975). At Railway Dam, the people had moved into two old classrooms behind the Cavenagh Street Woolworths store. The bare concrete rooms were unserviced but drier than any of the pre-cyclone shelters in the camps. It was at a meeting of homeless Aborigines held outside the classrooms that I first saw Basil Sansom with the Knuckeys Lagoon mob. I reported in the newsletter *Bunji* (May 1975) that 'Sixty-five brothers and

sisters were there' to express concern that no Aboriginal representatives were on the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Reconstruction Commission. The meeting nominated Major Bangun, from Knuckeys Lagoon, and Bernie Valadian, the executive secretary of the ADF, as two of the proposed representatives (*Bunji*, May 1975).

After Cyclone Tracy, consultants were employed by the Darwin Reconstruction Commission (DRC) to plan for Aboriginal housing on land it was presumed would soon be granted to the three camps. The Aboriginal people in the camps who had experienced the cyclone now had a wariness of using loose corrugated iron for self-made humpies and of building under trees. Tents at Knuckeys Lagoon were an interim measure indicating the undecided status of the land. In answer to complaints from the GDA about the living conditions in the camps, the DRC replied in September 1975: 'You will appreciate that the construction of permanent works on the site [at Railway Dam] has to await the deliberations of the judicial body that is examining the title to this portion of land' (*Bunji* September 1975). In contrast, contracts had been let for 1,600 new houses in the suburbs of Darwin by this time (Bauer 1977:31).

The Gwalwa Daraniki Association began its own appeal for emergency funds: 'We hope no *Bunji* readers gave money to the Cyclone Relief Appeal', stated the organisation's newsletter, 'That money will not be helping many blacks' (*Bunji* April 1975). A donation of $40,000 from the Papua New Guinea Government which the Minister for Northern Australia was pictured presenting to Bernie Valadian, 'for a shelter for Aborigines at Knuckeys Lagoon' (*NT News* September 4, 1975), joined other funds for fringe dweller reconstruction and emergency relief which were frozen by a bureaucracy worried about a lack of legal title. In addition, there were to be no grants of leases for Aboriginal town camps while the future plans for Darwin were being debated (Henderson 1984:27).

The evacuations and destruction also caused severe dislocation to the camps. Checkpoints were set up on the highway at Noonamah, sixteen kilometres beyond Knuckeys Lagoon, to prevent anyone returning without a permit and guarantees that they had accommodation (*Bunji* April 1975). A study later found 'those who were evacuated suffered more severely than those who remained in familiar surroundings' (Cole 1977:132). At the very least, there was uncertainty as the pre-cyclone fringe dweller communities were broken up. In 1975 Kevin Gilbert (1977:25) asked Vai Stanton, 'Do you think they will use the excuse of the cyclone to exclude Aborigines from the Darwin area?' Vai's reply expressed some of the anxiety of the time: 'If they can change the people, send them away from Bagot or Kulaluk or Fishcamp or the Brinken sit-down area [of Knuckeys Lagoon], the people will be further displaced' (p.25).

4.4 The Interim Aboriginal Land Commission

When the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Judge Ward, began his hearings in mid-1975 it became crucial to prepare claims for the fringe camps, to take full advantage of Federal Government goodwill and the recommendations of the first and second Woodward Reports (1973, 1974). Sansom states that in 1975 he gave evidence 'at a court

hearing in Darwin where supplication was made to gain tenured right to land for fringe dwellers' (Sansom 1980a:266). He also explains that he was 'recruited to prepare a statement of claim on behalf of Aborigines associated with Humpty Doo [on the outskirts of Darwin]' (Sansom 1985:77; see also Sansom 1980c) and that in May 1975 he 'sat in a Darwin courtroom and watched lawyers press a claim to the town land of Kulaluk' (Sansom 1984a:38). The Humpty Doo claim failed to reach a court hearing (Sansom 1985:77), presumably after the sudden dismissal of the Federal Government in November 1975. Events were already moving fast in Canberra when I wrote to the *NT News* (August 7, 1975):

> The Australian Government set up the Interim Land Rights Commission in May so that Aboriginal land claims could be heard without delay until the Act of Parliament is passed establishing a Commission and procedures for returning land to Aborigines.
>
> It is scandalous that, in three months, the Interim Commission has only had five claims presented to it. All these claims were fully prepared by the Gwalwa Daraniki Association

According to Campbell et al (1979:93):

> In November 1975, reports on four Land Claims heard by Judge Ward were tabled in Parliament. Due to the double dissolution of Parliament on that day no action was taken. The claims were for Kulaluk and Railway Dam (town claims which could not subsequently be heard by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Mr Justice Toohey), Goondal at Emery Point [inside the Army Barracks in Darwin] and Supplejack Downs. [x]

After November 11, 1975 the Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Bill lapsed with the change of government, the Federal Minister who had taken a personal interest in the town claims was replaced and 'the momentum was lost' (Henderson 1984:33). The struggle then shifted to preserving the 'needs claims' provisions of the Land Rights Act that faced an uncertain future. Despite protests and lobbying by NT Aboriginal groups throughout 1976 (Eames 1983), when the Act was ratified in January 1977 there was no provision for needs claims and land within town boundaries could not be claimed (Rowley 1981:77; Sansom 1985:77; Merlan 1994:15).

The Knuckeys Lagoon mob continued to agitate for a decision on their land claim. In mid-1978, they were pictured amongst a group of up to forty Aboriginal fringe dwellers occupying the corridors of the Darwin branch of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in a sit-in lasting three days and two nights, broken only briefly by a bomb scare (*Bunji* June 1978; see also NT News May 17, 1978, p.1). Amongst other demands, 'Major Bangun wanted an answer about the land at Knuckeys Lagoon (they have been waiting for five years)' (*Bunji* June 1978).[xi] This followed a picket of the office of the Chief Town Planner by

fringe dwellers in March (*NT News* March 29, 1978; *Bunji* April 1978). At the March protest, the executive officer of the Aboriginal Development Foundation told the *NT News* (March 29, 1978) that the $40,000 for cyclone relief donated by the Papua-New Guinea Government in 1975 for a 'brick and mortar building' had yet to be used because fringe dwellers did not own land on which to build permanent structures.

4.5 The Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF) and fringe dwellers

Before Sansom arrived in 1975, the Knuckeys Lagoon mob was involved in the ADF building program and remained confident of achieving a 20.56-hectare lease over the vacant Crown land they had chosen in 1971. The daily life of the camp at 'the pitches' and elsewhere continued as before, as experienced by Sansom, but a process was beginning of increased involvement with government-sponsored agencies and the ADF. Sansom mentions the growing relationship between the fringe camp and the ADF only in obscure and brief references to 'the increasing help and attention from a welfare agency' (Sansom 1980a:110, 248). I maintain that the description is misleading, because prior to 1979 it was my impression that the Knuckeys Lagoon mob believed themselves to be equal partners of the ADF, rather than recipients of welfare.

Woodward had left open the question of who was to hold the title to the town leases. He believed the GDA, which represented all the camps in 1974, was too small and 'its dependency on its white adviser too great' to be the land-holder (Woodward 1974:54). For Railway Dam, Woodward repeated his doubts about 'the strength and permanence of the applicant Association' (Woodward 1974:55). I later describe how this widely-held view of the fringe dwellers' suitability to hold the title led to disputes and the title to Knuckeys Lagoon eventually being held by the ADF.[xii]

More substantial buildings at all three Darwin camps were built by the expanding ADF before the leases were eventually granted in 1979. By 1978 the dreams of those who first made the claims were coming into realisation, as I described in *Bunji* (June 1978; See Illustration 3):

> Knuckeys Lagoon is a land claim for camping. It is about ten miles down the highway from Darwin, near Berrimah. This camp of iron huts is popular with people from cattle stations like Gilbert Knowles[xiii] from Finniss and Ronnie Yates from Annaburroo.
>
> On this day, Major Bangun[xiv] has taken a mob out fishing at Shoal Bay in the community ute. Neil Dargie, the camp's bush mechanic had been working on the ute. Today Margaret is giving Neil[xv] a haircut under the shade of the gum trees. Roy Kelly[xvi] is cooking some kangaroo. 'Long Willie' Gaydon cut up the kangaroo. Sitting on old beds under the verandah are Joseph Bishop with May and Helen Stevens,[xvii] little Tania and a boy, Neville Morton,[xviii] out from Bagot for the day. The camp is very proud to have its own clinic where Major's wife Sally, looks after the first aid.[xix] They have slashers to keep down the high grass, and a quiet place for

ceremonies . . .

The Muddi Community[xx] ute comes back in a cloud of dust. Young Raymond Bangun,[xxi] Hector and all the boys have been sent back to fetch more water to Shoal Bay . . . The community is also angry that they haven't got the lease after so many years.[xxii] Without the lease papers for the land, they are told they cannot build better facilities.

One thing is for sure, whatever happens, the Knuckeys Lagoon mob will never be shifted!

By afternoon time, about half the people had walked the mile down to the Berrimah crossroads. It had been a quiet, lazy day.

While the determined claimants were alive, the residents maintained some control of future directions in partnership with the ADF. Although the title to the lease was presented to members of the community with a photographed handshake from Marshall Perron, the Minister for Lands and Housing on December 14, 1979, [xxiii] the official leaseholder was the ADF. As leaders died over an eight-year period, power was increasingly held by the ADF, until, by 1997, the Knuckeys Lagoon residents complained that they had little input into the management and planning of the site, or the ADF.

Bernie Valadian, who has been the executive officer of the ADF for over 23 years states:

Our main concern right from day one was to worry about the fringe camps - town camps - the transients coming to Darwin...

We believed that if we could stabilise the communities maybe we could get some help from government. We set up temporary camps and applied for land, which took us another ten years to get, in which time we developed programs for the people...

We help improve the effectiveness of other government programs in that the infrastructure which we have established allows for more effective delivery of other programs, such as health and education... (ATSIC 1991:16-17).

It was during Sansom's fieldwork that future directions were being decided with the increasing control of funding to the town camps by the ADF. Only the residents of the 301-hectare Kulaluk lease held out against pressure to have the ADF hold the title to their land. When it was announced the title for the Kulaluk area would be handed to the ADF by the end of March 1979, the Kulaluk residents insisted the title should go to those who fought for the land (*Bunji* 1, 1979). Henderson (1984:49) quotes a March 23 public service memo: 'The [Kulaluk] group were still adamant that the ADF should not be involved with the handling of the land title issue. The ADF advised that that did not worry them and

they would be happy to withdraw from the nastiness of the Kulaluk scene'. In 1998, the Kulaluk community remains independent of the ADF and has developed commercial projects on their lease. The closely clustered housing at Kulaluk, shaded by trees and serviced by an office and telephone, with a full-time manager employed by the association, has a vibrant community atmosphere that is lacking at Knuckeys Lagoon.

4.6 The mob in 1997

The size, dependency and permanency of the community at Kulaluk that concerned Judge Woodward were not an issue by 1979. After the organisation of residents, the GDA, was given the lease to Kulaluk in 1979, the number of residents increased from twenty-five in 1980 to 'eighty to one hundred' in 1995 (Wells 1995a:62). However, at Knuckeys Lagoon the number of 'countrymen' and women using the camp appears to have decreased. The 'mob' is not incorporated and has no official name. The residents live in three large iron huts in a barracks-like village of numbered huts spread widely over the lease, which is mowed and kept free of litter by outside workers. The lease is almost entirely cleared of trees and many of the huts appeared to be empty in 1998. Despite the remoteness of the site, there was poor lighting, no telephone and no on-site presence of the management.

High-voltage power lines are suspended from huge pylons across an easement that dissects the land. The electric cables are a constant reminder of the tragic death of Louise Bangun's son who died after climbing a pylon. A white cross amongst the huts marks a fenced grave where Louise's brother, who was accidentally electrocuted as a boy, was buried by their parents beside the family hut, since demolished (Plate 7). Gaining permission for the burial at such a location was a remarkable indicator of the community's attachment to the site. Louise's father, Major Bangun, is also buried on a corner of the lease beside the grave of Roy Kelly, the second of Sansom's three 'masterful men'.[xxiv] In 1997, a timber frame, used to support a bough shade, marked the site of the ceremony held to burn Major's grandson's possessions and smoke the houses on May 30, 1996.[xxv] In late 1996, Louise suffered a stroke and was confined to a wheelchair. Despite her difficulties, Louise Bangun is the undisputed leader and spokesperson for the community, although Roy Kelly's widow, Helen Stevens, is more senior.

The graves and the succession of leadership through the Bangun family at Knuckeys Lagoon suggest that Sansom's (1978b:107) description of instability and indeterminate 'futures' at Wallaby cross was premature.[xxvi] At Kulaluk, succession is even more pronounced. When the founding elder died in 1984, his niece succeeded him until her sudden death in 1986. Her son then became president of the GDA until he also died suddenly in 1993. His sister then took office until a shooting incident a year later but remains a powerful figure, with all her extended family, at the community. The sister of the original claimant and member of the Larrakia *danggalaba* clan remained the matriarch with power of veto in Kulaluk affairs until her death in 1999 (see Heffernan 1996; Secretary and Heffernan 1996).

4.7 Sansom's 'anthropology of return'

After his ten-month absence from the field, according to Sansom, there was a three-day process for him to go through before re-entering the world of the fringe dweller. In stages, the returnee is given 'the word', the agreed accounts of missed events, by Aboriginal fringe camp residents 'to put that fella right back in' (Sansom 1980e:2, 1981a:263, 1983:30).[xxvii] I suggest that Sansom's description of re-entry to the field through a form of 'Tardis' time-warp[xxviii] maintains the illusion of separateness, through disjointed time, which is necessary to explain the contradiction of a fieldworker in what Sansom maintains is a 'segregated social field'. That is, the device neatly avoids the necessity of exploring links between two separate worlds.

Discussing entry and exit narratives in ethnographies, Lissant Bolton (2000:3) makes the point that 'a boundary is in fact a link - by separating two things a boundary connects them'. In this regard, two of Sansom's articles on return are illustrated by a sketch by George Chaloupka of the Darwin Museum, showing a hand-painted sign nailed to a tree in the foreground stating: 'Aboriginal land. Keep off. Trespassers enter at own risk' (Sansom 1980e, 1983). Although there is no mention of the sign or its political context in the articles, the sign could be read as a marker of a separate Aboriginal domain. The inclusion of the illustration could also be seen to emphasise the anthropologist's privileged position as an insider within that domain.[xxix] However, following Bolton's point, I suggest that the sign can be read as a boundary marker testifying to wider aspirations of the fringe dwellers and greater conflict than is portrayed in Sansom's decontextualised observations.

In keeping with Sansom's other texts, his articles (Sansom 1980e, 1983, 1995) and keynote address (Sansom 1998) on 'the anthropology of return' have nothing to say about the political setting at 'Wallaby Cross', including what changes might have occurred ten months, ten years or twenty years after his original fieldwork. For example, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976* that covers areas from which the 500 'countrymen' at Knuckeys Lagoon are drawn has had a significant impact.

As keynote speaker at a forum on ethnography in Fremantle, Western Australia, Sansom (1998) indicated how he was introduced to the mob in the 1970s. He said that a 'semi-retired' public servant from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), Anita Campbell, had introduced him to a new bureaucrat who would 'take you around and teach you the skin system'. The revelation of involvement by a government department further blurs the illusion of separate worlds and of the ethnographer as neutral observer. I believe it is also possible that the activism and land claims described at the beginning of this chapter aroused the interest of the Department, and others, in the previously unrecognised fringe campers as a community, and may have had some bearing on how Sansom 'found' his fieldwork site. I suggest that an entry narrative in Sansom's ethnography that revealed these connections would have weakened his thesis by making problematic an overly sharp distinction between the camps and the broader society.

Consistent with his theory of parallel worlds, Sansom (1998) gave the example of his fieldwork in South Africa where 'a race filled scene' made participant observation 'a

joke'.[xxx] According to Sansom (1998), in Australia the anthropologist cannot become 'the Other', and so it is presumptuous to worry that the fieldworker's presence as observer might change the cultural world of the people with whom they work.[xxxi] I suggest that this argument justifies his role as a neutral participant observer who does not need to explain his role. I also suggest that without the need for reflexivity on his role, the anthropologist has less cause to qualify the truth of his representations. In contrast, I argue that fringe dwellers are engaged with the town and that, as a fieldworker, I am a part of that process. Knowing the fringe dwellers, and noting Sansom's observation that running with more than one mob is not possible without one's hosts questioning the loyalty of 'their' anthropologist, I suggest that the Knuckeys Lagoon people agreed to host a fieldworker for an extended period of time to advance their cause.

4.8 A segregated social field?

The 'balancing of anthropological books that is long overdue' is a recurring justification by Sansom (1982b:118). He criticises the portrayal by Sharp (1968) of the 'ripple effect' that the introduction of steel axes had on Aboriginal society, supposedly leading to 'cultural dissolution' and 'demoralisation' with 'broken natives huddled on cattle stations or on the fringes of country towns' (Sansom 1982b:119). Having established a negative baseline, including a criticism of Rowley (Sansom 1988a), Sansom then argues for persistence of Aboriginal ways in a 'parathetic' side-by-side world. By discrediting the studies of Sharp, Rowley and others that examine the interaction and responses between Aborigines and invaders, Sansom legitimates his use of a segregated social field with an internal dialectic (see Sansom 1980a:265).

According to Merlan (1995:165) who met Sansom in the field, he likened his writing to a report by 'a war correspondent from the battlefield'. However, the correspondent's reports from the troops in camp never take us to the front lines. Merlan (1995:174) comments:

> Basil does not simply choose not to elaborate the interconnections between Aborigines and others in their situation of encapsulation. In many places he expressly denies any profound inter-relation of the outside with what is essentially Aboriginal in social action.

In Merlan's opinion, the failure to examine the relationships with the wider society has the same purpose that I imply in my criticism:

> Denying significant effect upon Aboriginal modalities of action and, even more to the point, not examining the ways in which today these modalities are problematic for Aboriginal people, makes it possible to treat them as part of a bounded-off life-world (Merlan 1995:175).

Like Sansom, Collmann (1988:228) criticised anthropologists who 'outdo the average layperson in labelling [the camps] as aberrant'. If anthropologists were wrong to write of tribal Aborigines in Australia until recent times as 'self-contained, self-producing social

units', says Collmann (p.228), specifically referring to Sansom, 'one can only marvel at the obscurantism of anthropologists who must deny the reality they perceive in an effort to legitimate its analysis'. Brady and Palmer (1984:66) also believe the impression of autonomy in Sansom's text is deceptive in a situation where Aborigines are economically and socially lacking in power.

Austin-Broos (1998:296) writes, 'Sansom clings tenaciously to the view that certain types of underlying social relations ... continue unaltered by urbanisation or even the cash economy'. However, it is not that Sansom denies change as a result of contact. He does mention the dislocation of cattle station work (Sansom 1980a:13, 1980c:6; 1988b:162), the depression in the industry during his fieldwork (Sansom 1980a:245), the Aboriginal total dependence on cash income (Sansom 1978b:91, 1980a:245) and many other influences. Even the 'hinterland Aboriginal community' (Sansom 1980a, 1980c, 1981, 1982b, 1985) 'originated in the Aboriginal response to the initiation of the demand for Aboriginal labour' (Sansom 1980c:6). The contradiction in his texts is his claim of an inheritance intact in a segregated social field (Sansom 1980a:265). For example, when Sansom writes of indeterminacy in the fringe camp society, he looks more to a pre-colonial past than historical change for explanations (Merlan 1995:167). As Myers (1984:258) says, '[*The camp at Wallaby Cross*] is about time, but it lacks history'.

Sansom (1980a:185-186) notes: 'In 1975 one of the permanent camps of Darwin was spectacularly raided'. In a detailed account of a raid by a White gang, Sansom describes injuries to a female pensioner and 'several tents fired with aid of petrol'. Curiously, he fails to mention that the attack took place at Knuckeys Lagoon amongst his interlocutors (see also *Bunji* August 1975). The *NT News* (July 21 1975) reported:

> Two elderly Aboriginals claim they were bashed and their tents set alight by a group of men at Knuckey's Lagoon on Friday night. The men, alleged to be Europeans, arrived at the campsite late on Friday night. Most of the camp's population had left for the weekend to attend tribal ceremonies at the Daly and Finke Rivers [sic]. Only four pensioners and two young men remained.
>
> The men, who arrived in a four-wheel drive vehicle, approached one of the tents and poured petrol over it. It is claimed that before setting light to it, they dragged out [a pensioner,] Dolly Knowles, knocked her to the ground and kicked her in the face.
>
> Mr Bernie Valadian, executive officer of the Aboriginal Development Foundation, [pictured nursing a baby outside one of the destroyed tents] said he believed the attack on the camp had been premeditated.[xxxii]

Although the association is not made in the ethnography, the raid appears to have occurred towards the end of a period of 'organising for ceremony' between June and August 1975 described by Sansom (1980a:218), and before a period at Wallaby Cross 'that

began in August 1975', of 'camp siege' from a rival, though related Aboriginal group known as 'that mission mob' (Sansom 1980a:133). Connecting the incendiary raid to the 'Wallaby Cross' camp, and relating the incident to other events of August 1975 which are well documented by Sansom, may have further made a segregated social field difficult to sustain.

4.9 Process over structure

Sansom (1981a, 1985) claims his studies of fringe dwellers question the structural functionalist analyses of Aboriginal society already questioned by Hiatt (1965, 1982, 1984) and others (see Sutton 1999b). Sansom often generalises his findings, as in the claim that 'Aborigines in the Australian North' are people of labile groupings who 'give the lie to Radcliffe-Brown's (1952:10) assertion that social continuity "depends on structural continuity..."' (Sansom 1981a:257). He makes the point that the flexibility of Aboriginal groupings has been 'the bane of Anthropology' and explains that: 'In the Darwin hinterland ... the search for order of continuity is pointless and unreal' (Sansom 1981a:278). However, in a study of fringe dwellers, Layton (1986:30) states that Sansom's generalisations are applicable only 'to selective aspects of traditional life: the parallels are to be found in traditional foraging patterns'. Layton (1986:32) concludes that the 'particular anarchic pattern at Wallaby Cross is not a complete reflection of traditional Aboriginal social life'. Sutton (1999a:21-22) claims that:

> [A]s generalisations about all Northern Australian Aboriginal groups over time and in relation to country, and even merely as generalisations about Wallaby Cross people as whole persons, the generalisations [as above] from Sansom's work are in my view unjustifiable...
>
> What is not made clear in Sansom's work is the extent to which these same people whose urban fringe-camp daily lives were dominated by discontinuity and fluidity also identified with enduring totemic estate-holding descent groups associated with mostly stable areas of country, on other days and in other places.

Shapiro (1997:209) describes Sansom as 'de-reifying the local organisation controversy'. However, the debate is ongoing (see Sutton 1999a; Sansom 1999). For Myers (1984:258), a criticism is that Sansom's departure from 'traditional forms found in Aboriginal ethnography (clan, land, marriage, kinship, religion)' downplays kinship as 'a long-term objective reality'. White and Bain (1981:189) also believe Sansom (1980a) underestimates the importance of kinship. Evidence supporting Sutton comes from Sansom's own texts, as I will show, and from the hinterland land claims since prepared by anthropologists. Many of the fringe campers are named in the Daly River (Malak Malak) Land Claim (Sutton and Palmer 1980; Toohey 1982), the Upper Daly Land Claim (Chase and Meehan 1983), the Finniss River Land Claim (Toohey 1981), the Alligator River Stage II Land Claim (Toohey 1981), the Jawoyn (Katherine area) Land Claim (Kearney 1988) and the Kenbi (Cox Peninsula) Land Claim (Brandl et al 1979; Walsh 1989; Olney 1991). More will be involved in the Litchfield Park Claim which was lodged in June 1997 before the sunset clause of the

Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976 came into effect.

Sansom's inclination towards poststructuralism, emphasising social action and the unstable signifier over 'concrete forms' is noted by Merlan (1995:167). In this manner Sansom (1985:92) claims 'models of process' are useful because 'incursive Europeans' did not recognise indigenous land rights due to the 'flexible social arrangements' of hunter gatherers and the 'lability and impermanence' of indigenous social forms. That is, he suggests Aboriginal claims were not recognised by the invaders because of the labile nature of Aboriginal groupings. However, the historian Henry Reynolds (1987) shows that Aboriginal social structures and attachment to land were recognised by colonial authorities but ignored by land hungry settlers. Though clearly unintended, there is a risk that Sansom's defence of labile groupings begins to read like an argument defending the dispossession of Aborigines by those who chose not to recognise Aboriginal land tenure systems. As this is a process that is ongoing in Australia, it has political ramifications for the fringe dwellers.

4.10 Sansom and Rowley

In the 1970s Charles Rowley produced three influential volumes (1972a, 1972b, 1972c) that belatedly placed Aborigines into the context of Australian history. In 1978 Sansom wrote: 'the strength of Rowley's books comes from his ability to identify underlying trends and social processes that will be relevant over years and even decades of development' (Sansom 1978a:108). However, in later articles, Sansom (1982b:117, 1988a) is critical of Rowley's reduction of Aborigines to 'class actors' who 'reacted as other groups have done in similar circumstances' (Rowley 1972a:353). Sansom (1988a:148) distinguishes his work from Rowley's: 'The task I have set myself is to discuss the effects of the centrality of different doctrines of person - one seated in the practise of a scholar [Rowley], the other vested in cultural practice among the Aborigines I know'.[xxxiii] With some justification, Sansom (1988a:150) claims Rowley's sociology 'remains determinedly culture free', whereas Sansom aims to establish the 'resilience of cultural practice' (Sansom 1988a:152). However, instead of creating a dichotomy, it is my argument that more insight comes from balancing the two approaches.

4.11 Witnessing

Sansom (1980a:105) notes that the openness of life in the camps ensures that violence is controlled. In another Aboriginal community, Burbank (1994:156) agrees 'that the public nature of fighting provides [the women] with an important safeguard'. Sansom (1980a:104) describes going apart to speak as 'sneakin' and a denial of mob jurisdiction, making privacy 'the enemy [of] collective representation'. In the Darwin fringe camp 'most of the time everyone knows what everyone is doing' (Sansom 1980a:103). However, Burbank (1994:9) found that 'in informal conversation, often in my own home at Mangrove', women gave more personalised accounts of violent encounters than the consensual 'verdicts', or group determinations, that Sansom (1980a:128) described at 'Wallaby Cross'.[xxxiv]

While elsewhere is Sansom's texts there are indications of conflict between genders (see Section 4.18 this chapter) which might make agreed verdicts of happenings difficult, the different accounts may arise from the nature of housing design at Mangrove compared to the relative absence of enclosed shelters in a fringe camp. Although the constructions were used creatively and 'people refused to allow the fact of created housing to pin them down' (p.111), I suggest that the building program (p.11) and tents (pp.87, 221) at the time of Sansom's field work were reducing the opportunities of 'witnessing'. During my fieldwork in 1997, at Knuckeys Lagoon the iron houses that were widely spaced across the lease meant 'witnessing' was restricted to extended family groups. In the 1990s, at night the remaining members of the 'Wallaby Cross' mob locked themselves in their homes behind arc-mesh grills.[xxxv]

4.12 'Living longa grog'?

Although Sansom makes no moral judgments on the drinking style in the camps, his account of the reliance on pensioners' money to buy alcohol were reported in the Darwin media after the publication of *The camp at Wallaby Cross*. Pseudonyms do not protect fringe dwellers in a relatively small city, and I was told after the reports by someone closely involved that the Knuckeys Lagoon people felt betrayed by the news items purporting to represent Sansom's description of them. Sansom (1980a:266) describes how pensioners guarantee a steady flow of cash into 'a community devoted to a pattern of consumption whose focus is bought liquor' where they announce fortnightly, 'Here we all live longa grog' (Sansom 1977:58). In my view, observations of drinking in a fringe camp without an analysis of the political context could be damaging to the community, as Sansom might have anticipated. Furthermore, the damage may extend to all Aboriginal people, if, as Sansom has done, 'grogging' style is interpreted as a form of cultural continuity (see Gibson 1991).

Merlan (1995:165) suggests 'dimensions of human suffering' are overlooked by Sansom's analysis of Aboriginal drinking behaviour, including 'shortened lives, ill-health, the take-over of bodily praxis, the routinisation of drunken violence and the linked abdications of responsibility'. Others, like Room (1984), Brady (1991:188), Gibson (1991:187), Bolger (1991:51) and Hazelhurst (1996) are similarly critical of anthropological explanations for drinking behaviour. However, Brady (1991:193) acknowledges Sansom's work as a corrective to ethnocentric and moralistic descriptions of culture loss amongst Aboriginal drinkers. According to Brady (1991:190), the analysis of Aborigines and alcohol by Sansom (1980a) is 'a welcome change from the entirely problem-oriented approach of many earlier writers'. Similarly, Saggers and Gray (1998:79) defend Sansom on the grounds that the objective of his study was not the *problems* caused by alcohol. Sansom (1977, 1980a) and others 'act as a refutation of the view that indigenous people misuse alcohol because they had, or developed, no mechanisms to control its use' (Saggers and Gray 1998:79).

4.13 Did the mob at Knuckeys Lagoon use the 'skin system' of social categories?

In his address to the Fremantle forum in 1998, Sansom (1998) made admissions that on his return to Darwin in 1988 with his 'new and pregnant wife' and step-son (see Sansom

1995:294), he had to learn the 'skin system' of the Darwin hinterland through his wife who was quickly given a skin name by Sansom's interlocutors. Sansom (1998) admitted his return as a married man with a child 'invoked a different kind of system' at Knuckeys Lagoon.[xxxvi] During his fieldwork he had mixed freely as 'one of the blokes' and was apparently unaware of underlying systems. He now believes he was kept out of the social category subsection system deliberately in 1974-76 because the chain of implications and obligations associated with being categorised would have hindered his usefulness to his Aboriginal interlocutors. For example, certain people would not be able to ride with him in his vehicle (Sansom 1998).

Although describing a different culture bloc, according to Tonkinson (1991:77), skin categories 'have little relevance to the mundane hunting and gathering activities of the Mardu band'. They are most useful when placing strangers into the kinship system and in larger gatherings and rituals (p.77). Subsections are not 'on the ground' groups and although they are exogamous, they are not 'marriage classes' (p.72). Tonkinson (p.73) adds:

> Social categories are very much less important than kinship in everyday life, but there is a significant correspondence between the two. The categories, by lumping together sets of kinship terms within each, do provide individuals with rough guides to the kind of patterned behaviour expected of them.

If skin categories were present in the 1970s as Sansom now claims, they would be evidence of predetermined social structures he has ignored to strengthen his argument that 'social continuity vests in cultural forms rather than in structural arrangements' (see Sansom 1981a:258). Indeed, Sansom (1998) has since made the claim that Aborigines recognised the inflexible nature of this structure and deliberately excluded the anthropologist from its obligations to facilitate his usefulness to them. He adds, that as 'one of the blokes' in the 1970s he operated in a freer domain. Apparently these important revisions only became evident when Sansom returned with his new wife, otherwise observations of his position 'as one of the blokes' would warrant mentioning in the original texts.

Several questions are raised by Sansom's admission. Firstly, in my experience with people from Arnhem Land who use social categories, being placed into the skin system is not restrictive for a White anthropologist in a mixed urban situation. As far as I could tell, having a skin name did not prevent anyone sharing a meal or riding in the vehicles I regularly rented on behalf of the fringe dwellers. It is difficult to understand how anyone accepted into the mob could have been kept out of something as basic as the skin system, solely for materialist purposes, because to have been outside it while joining a wide range of activities would have caused even more complications than the supposed decision by the 'masterful men' to exclude him. Secondly, Sansom's interpretation rests on the secondary nature of fixed structures in the fringe camp mobs, so the presence of a previously unmentioned skin system that can regulate relationships and roles, questions that supposition. Thirdly, if a skin system was present at Knuckeys Lagoon in the 1970s, a

trained anthropologist accepted into the mob could not miss it. Therefore, if Sansom, as an observant fieldworker, was unaware of its presence in the 1970s, and he makes no mention of it, the skin system probably was not in use at the time.[xxxvii]

Sansom told the Fremantle forum in 1998 that nobody put him into the 'skin' system when he began working with the fringe dwellers. Sansom added that one of his informants of that period, Norbett, when asked about his skin category, said ironically it was 'black'. Sansom continued, 'northerners' did not have 'skin', or subsection categories, as this social form was an innovation spreading from 'the Gurindjis' in the south (see also McConvell 1985). Brandl et al (1979:15) note that the Larrakia people of the Darwin area could have easily incorporated the section and subsection system into their kinship system but did not do so. According to Stanner (1933:389), the 'complex sectional, subsectional, or moiety organisation characteristic of so large a part of Australia is not found among true Daly River tribes'. People moving up from the south into the region were spreading the subsection system (Stanner 1933:384) but this was so recent in 1932 that, in Stanner's experience, the 'new form of organisation is not yet fully understood' by the Aborigines who had incorporated it. Amongst the Malak Malak people of the Daly River region 'there is no evidence, past or present, that moieties, semi-moieties, sections, subsections, or so called "owner-manager" relations' are part of the traditions (Sutton and Palmer 1980:47). A little to the south the system is in use for convenience where it 'provides a formal mechanism for social interaction beyond the Wagiman social boundaries' (Chase and Meehan 1983:17). Merlan told the Aboriginal Land Commissioner (Kearney 1988:23) that, in the 1980s, the Jawoyn people of the Katherine area used subsections in a 'neo-traditional' way. The usage was primarily to facilitate action between Jawoyn and neighbouring groups, particularly in ceremony and intermarriage (see McConvell 1985:21).

It would be in keeping with anthropological evidence that the skin system be little used or understood at Knuckeys Lagoon in the 1970s. Instead, Sansom (1980a:182) claims that in the fringe camp, 'status titles belong wholly to events' and are 'contextual and situational' amongst consociates who have shared experiences of 'running together'. 'For Aborigines of the Australian North, social continuity does not vest in "the arrangement of persons in relation to one another". It vests instead in conceptual order' (Sansom 1981a:279).

4.14 Performative relationships and the Dreaming Powers

As Merlan (1995:178) points out: 'Unlike most works on Australian Aborigines, there is no entry "kinship" in the index to *The camp at Wallaby Cross*', although Sansom's book and articles have many references to kinship, totems, rituals and Aboriginal religion. Although he describes more flexible systems more than these bodies of knowledge and behaviour, Sansom also discusses the 'Dreaming Powers' (Sansom 1988a:153) and in a more recent article foregrounds these beliefs as 'a massive apparatus of unfreedom' (Sansom 1995:266). It is ironic that having limited Aboriginal initiative to 'a segregated social field' (Sansom 1980a:265), Sansom now attributes the inhibition of Aboriginal initiative to Aboriginal cultural continuities - specifically their belief in the Dreaming Powers.

Using semiotics, the meanings laid down by the Dreaming beings are likened to the *langue* or code of meaning, in contrast to the *parole* of human action (Sansom 1995:272). Meanings are attached to signifiers by the Dreaming Powers in what Sansom (1995:269) calls 'metonymic enchainments' that are fixed and not available for alternative interpretations. (The other force inhibiting individual creativity, although a human one, is 'the word' as the expression of agreed 'verdicts' of 'what bin happen'). However, Sansom (1995:306) believes the fringe dwellers seek to avoid the confining structure of the Dreaming Powers, or 'the Law' as Tonkinson (1991:143) calls it, by the use of creative invention, through an Aboriginal concept which Sansom (1995:297) terms, 'the fancy'.[xxxviii]

Sansom maintains his thesis by creating a dichotomy between the Law and the everyday actions of the fringe dwellers, as he does between structure and process, despite the general belief that Aboriginal beliefs act as a 'blueprint' for every aspect of their life (Tonkinson 1991:143; see also Stanner 1963). It is not my purpose to follow the debates over the separation of the sacred and the profane in Aboriginal culture, and Sansom does not refer to them. He brackets off Aboriginal 'High Culture', conducted in an Aboriginal language, while pidgin, or Kriol, is used in the camps for 'organizin for business' (Sansom 1980-82:5). The dichotomy of two worlds is emphasised by the shift that occurs as people change from one language to another - 'an adventure in which a person leaves one country of action ... to enter another' (p.5). The device is useful to bound a study for someone who admits he was assessed as 'notta law man really' (Sansom 1980a:153, 1988a:153), but little evidence is given to show that the division reflects Aboriginal views and actions.

'In the Australian north', 'structured indeterminacy' begins with the nature of kinship, which Sansom (1988b:170; Sansom and Baines 1987:350) insists is 'effective' or 'performative' kinship (see also Sansom 1981a, 1982a). Although the previously mentioned Paulie, 'the dancing man of renown' (Sansom 1988b:167), was a master of 'High Culture' (p.167), his relationships with the rest of the mob are presumably 'characterised by structural indeterminacy'. How that indeterminacy relates to the 'Dreaming Powers' is not explained because Sansom (1988b:175) adds:

> Further to parade the Aboriginal glosses [for performative relationships], I would have to deal with religion. Those evident affinities between persons which cause them to favour one another above and beyond the call of rational recompense are realities which Aborigines refer to the Dreaming - to the sharing of totem and the sharing of spiritual concerns that endow persons with like will.

In my view, based on my own fieldwork experience, as well as my earlier involvement with Darwin Aboriginal people, in an article about indeterminate social structure amongst northern Aborigines, the Dreaming warrants more than the above brief endnote.

Knuckeys Lagoon was a 'major regional centre' (Sansom 1980a:10), and references to

ceremonies re-occur in the text (Sansom 1980a:10, 74, 138, 200, 220). It is difficult to imagine the organising of ceremonies celebrating links between people, land and the 'Dreaming Powers' without the usual well-documented Aboriginal kinship and other ascribed roles. However, ritual was of minimal interest to Sansom, because he believed the 'stultification of the transfiguring vision makes the intricacies of its performance intellectually unchallenging' (Sansom 1988a:153). For Sansom (p.153) ceremony 'does not generally celebrate originating charisma'. Yet ritual would hardly appear to be irrelevant to the lives of his research subjects.

More recently, Sansom re-examines the role of Aboriginal beliefs. He originally dedicated *The camp at Wallaby Cross* to a 'Singing Man', Sansom's 'brother and namesake' (1980a:119), to whom he was close 'in positional and structural terms' (Sansom 1980a:120).[xxxix] Sansom missed the funeral after the 'singing man' died, but he gives a moving description of how he was consoled by the community on his return (Sansom 1980a:120). In his revisionary article, Sansom (1995:260) laments the suppression of the singing man's songs after death as 'a betrayal of expectations that admired creations be allowed to continue'. The suppression returns the songs to the Dreaming, from where they came. This denial of human creativity extends to 'a storied landscape' that is part of 'a total system'.

Ol Luke, one of the three leading men at the camp in 1976, whose funeral is described by Sansom (1995:274-6), 'ran a small business dedicated to giving town dwelling Aborigines their respective pasts' (Sansom 1988b:156-7; see also Sansom 1987). Sansom's account suggests that the 'stolen generation' from the Daly River region were placed into the kinship system of their people by Ol Luke. This is an intriguing but passing reference to a highly political aspect of social dislocation and the land claim process,[xl] as urban Aborigines who had been removed from their mothers sought to retrace their inheritance.

Ol Luke represents a region 'assimilated to a man' continuing his hunter gatherer heritage through kindly acts, despite his obvious position of authority, and the evidence of a structural relationship connecting person to place. In this way, Sansom portrays Ol Luke as a unique individual *earning* his reputation as 'the Daly' through 'the culmination of individual rendered testimonies to the nature of his being' (Sansom 1988a:158). He was 'made the Daly' and 'won' respect by 'always helpin'. The failure to elaborate the political aspects of Ol Luke's actions, distancing him from the land claim process with its emphasis on succession, is made explicit by Sansom's use of Ol Luke's story as a refutation of Rowley's historical and materialist analysis (Sansom 1988a:158). Even the pseudonym which Sansom has given the old man has none of the connotations of the 'whitefella name' he was known by, which was 'Moses'.[xli] More recently Ol Luke, or Moses, is described as 'the last person to know "all that Daly business" ... a strict man who made sure that youngsters kept the law' (Sansom 1995:279).

Sansom (1980a:16-19) claims it is a person's history of shared experience with others that decides their 'close-up' status as consociates. The shared experience of earlier struggles was also a factor in the formation of a fringe dweller organisation to campaign for land in

Darwin, as I have already related. At Knuckeys Lagoon in the 1970s, these shared experiences begin on cattle stations of the hinterland: 'It is individuals taken on their own who command the past and can give experiential depth to time. Individual pasts are as distinguishing as the ego-centred networks that adults develop for themselves' (Sansom 1980a:139). However, the references to kinship at Knuckeys Lagoon that have survived in Sansom's texts suggest that there is more to the structure of a mob than the ego centred groupings described by Sansom (1980a:16-19). The grid devised by Schutz, used by Sansom (1980a:137), with the ego at the centre, cannot in itself explain Aboriginal relationships to each other. As Sansom (1995) has gone to some length to explain, Aboriginal beliefs are amongst the least egocentric.

The mob is 'mixed', speaking fourteen different languages (Sansom 1980a:11), but is held together by 'that Darwin style' and a history of 'runnin' together' (p.11). Tonkinson (1974:41) and Stanton (1982:85) also describe the emergence of mobs, or 'residential identity groups', which they note as originating in centralised camps in response to disruption of the Aboriginal connection to traditional lands. In the Western Desert, the classificatory nature of the kinship system allows the possibilities of 'an almost unlimited' extension of Aboriginal relationships in mixed groups (Tonkinson 1974:41).

Other bonds for mixed groups are discussed by Brandl and Walsh (1983:154), who list ten 'sociocultural links' that are likened to the branches of a tree attached to the roots in the earth. Where those links are found in Sansom (1980a), they are not expanded. For example Mrs Nevill provides access to clay and sandalwood at a love-magic sacred site that is used for trade with other groups (Sansom 1980a:198). The giving of a tuft of a child's hair, known as *mipil*, leads to exchange ceremonies between groups ensuring: 'Visitors to Darwin could come into the camp to claim special relationship on the grounds that "you bin get *mipil* longa wefella"' (Sansom 1980a:220). These are just two of many examples from Sansom's texts, of Aboriginal relations to each other and to the land that appear to play an important part in the cohesion of a mob.

4.15 Fringe dwellers and the economy

Sansom (1980a:244) claims that 'an eighty year history of dependence on the white supply of rations and wages' now means the '[d]ependence on cash income is total'. Despite this alleged dependence, in a later article Sansom (1988b) constructs a case for 'service exchange' where money is transformed into peculiarly Aboriginal values 'blackfella style'. Austin-Broos (1998:296) is critical of Sansom's argument that 'exchange or "helping" relations, for instance - continue unaltered by urbanisation or even the cash economy'. However, Merlan (1991:262) believes the concept of service exchange, not present in Sansom's original ethnography, is more useful 'than the opposition of symbolic and material "economies" in his earlier work'. While I agree with Sansom's (1988b:159) statement that, 'while in Aboriginal possession, the dollar is a thing both transformed and ambivalent', my own findings would indicate that the transformation is because reciprocity and exchange are dominated by structural and ritual obligations, more than egocentric performative service.

Another view comes from an Alice Springs study by Drakakis-Smith (1981:41) who claims that Aborigines have become 'an important consumption group' where the 'old natural economy ... has disappeared almost completely'. I believe that Sansom's emphasis on a parallel economy, which is centred on the purchase of alcohol, fails to situate Aboriginal fringe dwellers in the general Darwin economy. For example, the fact that the Wayside Inn at the Berrimah crossroads sold more wine than any liquor outlet in Darwin in the 1970s is significant (see *Bunji* May 1973). More relevant is the question asked by both Langton (1993:199) and Saggers and Gray (1997, 1998): 'Who benefits from the sale and distribution of alcohol to Aboriginal people?'

Sansom does not examine the articulation of the two economies because he claims Aborigines do not do so. That is, writing of the seasonal lay-offs in the cattle industry that gave Knuckeys Lagoon a reputation as a dumping ground for redundant stockmen (*Bunji* May 1973), Sansom (1988b:164) observes the self-evident nature of the exploitation. However, he does not pursue this point because '[no one] charged whitefellas with the imposition of seasonal alternations'. It is remarkable that in 1988 Sansom (p.164) could make the following generalisation about an Aboriginal acceptance of the sequence of lean times:

> Proponents of direct action would find it difficult to persuade countrymen that by joining in combinations (whether lawful or otherwise) they might work against government or the collectivity of their sporadic employers to alter these experienced givens of subsidence.

Sansom's statement is contradicted by the involvement of many of the people at Knuckeys Lagoon in campaigns for equal pay and citizenship in the 1960s and the whole mob's active support for land rights in the 1970s. Although those generations are rapidly passing, I know that during Sansom's fieldwork the fringe dwellers remembered that wage rises and citizenship were not given without long struggles which involved most Aborigines in Darwin who were classified as 'wards of the state' until 1964 (see Rowley 1972b:293; Bandler 1989:18; Wells 1995b). In a telling moment, after a fringe dweller associates alcohol with the 'time we got that citizen[ship]' in Sansom's book, 'this man's further conversation concerns grogging not at all for it is part of his already launched discussion of work and cattle station wages' (Sansom 1977:59, 1980a:49).

4.16 The fringe dwellers' attachment to place

Sansom (1985:83) states that he worked on the Humpty Doo land claim and 'a previous needs claim'. Judging by the evidence, where Sansom (1980a:266) argued there had been a mob presence on the urban fringe for over forty years, that 'previous needs claim' was on behalf of Knuckeys Lagoon. However, in his texts Sansom does not strengthen the claims of the group by asserting 'continuity of mobs in time must be fictions' (p.266).[xlii] Images of turtles and water lilies in paintings by the fringe dwellers are glossed over by Sansom (1995:295) as 'cheeky ... snatching and grabbing appropriation of the lagoon by ... fringe

dwellers who have now used the lagoon for decades. As things used to be, native title in the lagoon vested in the Larrakiiya, Darwin's original inhabitants'. However, I do not believe that the mob's long attachment to the nearby lagoon can be dismissed as 'cheeky appropriation'. Layton (1986:24) says that Sansom told him there is evidence of the fringe dwellers claiming secondary rights to local [Larrakia] sites on the grounds that these had links to sites in the Daly River area. Layton (1986:25) also reports that Sansom said: 'In one instance men claimed legitimately to have succeeded to custodianship of a local [Larrakia] dreaming'.[xliii] In addition, the mob's protests for land rights in the 1970s suggest that a large number of pensioners, families and unemployed Aboriginal people strongly identified with the fringe camp. The sign at the entrance to the camp (Sansom 1980e:1, 1983:30) is also an expression of ownership. This evidence appears to contradict Sansom's portrayal of a people without futures, 'corporate existence', property or succession (Sansom 1980a:7, 19, 239, 132, 262, 258, 265; 1981a; 1982b129; 1985:83; 1988a:158).

Based on my fieldwork in the fringe camps, I find Sansom's thesis to be confused by his division of residents into fringe dwellers as the 'privileged elite' who regard the camp as home (Sansom 1980a:9), fringe campers who maintain some independence from the first group and fringe clients who rely on the patronage of fringe dwellers. If a section of the mob regards the camp as home, why are they included as people without futures? And why should 'fringe campers' be separated from 'dwellers', particularly if they are kin, as they usually would be? In the open fringe camp, I found that people claim their kinship rights and are welcomed into the camp.[xliv]

4.17 Bush workers and army camps

In her foreword to *Being Black: Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia*, (Keen 1988), Reay (1988: x) warns:

> In discovering continuity with the past we need to be wary of attributing facets of contemporary Aboriginal culture to tribal antecedents... It may sometimes be difficult to determine whether a shared trait originated in precolonial Aboriginal society, colonial white society or the shared experience and situation of itinerant rural workers.

I believe many of the group dynamics Sansom describes in the private domain of the fringe camps, including the value placed on consociates (see Sansom 1982a), are specific to the camps of the Aboriginal cattle station workers because they come from the shared cultural traditions of bush workers. If the drinking styles of urban nomads and bush workers and the fringe dwellers at Knuckeys Lagoon are 'independent replications' as Sansom (1980a:177) believes, it would be an incredible but convenient example of parallel evolution to fit with his thesis of 'Aboriginal understandings that are uncompromised' (Sansom 1980a:74). My point is that Sansom has not considered enough the enmeshing of fringe dwellers and invaders in his detailed defence of the cultural legitimacy of Aboriginal fringe dwellers against those who view Aboriginal drinking as 'a distorted development, or a pathological condition, of general [Australian] culture' (Rowley

1972a:234), or allege Aboriginal 'intelligent parasitism' (see Sansom 1985:40).

Trigger (1994:33) gives an example of how 'the culture of pastoralism has become enmeshed with the culture Aboriginal people have inherited from their forebears'. At Robinson River Station, in the NT, Aboriginal stock workers' cultural connections to the land encompassed not only spiritual ties, but were constructed around the cattle industry. Although Sansom (1980a:12) says, 'Those Aborigines who dominate the fringe camps of Darwin all have cattle station backgrounds', I can find no evidence of this. I believe that Knuckeys Lagoon was distinct in character from Railway Dam, Kulaluk and camps of Arnhem Land people. Each of these groups has their separate histories and population pools. For the men, the distinguishing markers at Knuckeys Lagoon were the slang, tight jeans, riding shoes and sometimes the cowboy hats or shirts of the stock workers or 'ringers' from the cattle stations and buffalo camps (see Sansom 1980a:12).[xlv]

Rowse (1991:8) suggests that male Aboriginal stock workers hold this clothing in high regard because it symbolises the shared ethos of male Australian bush workers. He considers it likely that Aboriginal men used cowboy clothes to harness the colonists' authority to their own interests (Rowse 1991:9). Rather than examine similar possibilities, Sansom (1995:282-4) looks for Aboriginal cultural continuities to explain the value put on a colourful, but sweat and dust ingrained, 'Rodeo shirt'. He does not expand on the observation that the Aboriginal owner had 'the right to wear a drover's hat, riding boots and the full issue of stockman's gear' (Sansom 1995:283). Elsewhere, Sansom (1980a:222) also implies the importance to the men at 'Wallaby Cross' of the accoutrements of the stock worker.

Another point of difference between 'Wallaby Cross' and other fringe camps was the ownership and sharing of 'three small trucks' in the 1970s (Sansom 1980a:224-5) and the strict management of those 'camp vehicles'. No other fringe camp in Darwin has been able to manage a single vehicle for an extended period, to my knowledge.[xlvi] The experience of station workers might make this possible, while, for cultural reasons, in other camps vehicle ownership would be difficult. Finally, in the days when most of the residents of Knuckeys Lagoon had pastoral worker backgrounds, which is no longer the case, I was struck by the mob's singular purpose and willingness to accept orders from their leaders, named by Sansom, and to organise for protests.

Sansom (1980a:179) and Beckett (1964:37) note that the 'work and bust' habits of Aboriginal drinkers follows the pattern set by the Australian bush worker (see Ward 1966:100). Rowley (1972a:234-6), Eggleston (1974:56), Collmann (1979b:212), Sackett (1977:93) and Hunter (1993:96) are others who note the connections between Aboriginal drinking patterns and frontier lifestyles.[xlvii] Although Sansom (1980a:49) found an 'absence of alien and externally imposed ideologies' in the camps, he admits: 'Aboriginal stockmen in the Northern Territory are the functional equivalents of the men who worked a century ago in New South Wales as shearers, ringers, fence builders and so on' (Sansom 1978b:91, 1980a:244).

The non-Aboriginal bush workers had more opportunities and reasons to cross racial barriers in the course of their work and in leisure than other White Australians. For one, as Sansom (1980d:110) notes: 'The relationship between black and white in Australia is associated with asymmetrical sex', which has often been a motivation for interracial meetings (see Rose 1991:179-188). Therefore it is not surprising that the 'close up' and 'helpin out' performative relationships documented by Sansom (1980a:139, 1988b) and the 'service economy' (Sansom 1984a:42, 1988b:174), which Sansom claims are Aboriginal continuities, resemble the bush workers' values of mateship. 'Close up' countrymen are indicated as 'me real mates' (Sansom 1982a:194), whereby '[the] closeness to a "mate" is reckoned from and out of some remembered occasion' Sansom (1982a:195).

Ronald and Catherine Berndt (Berndt and Berndt 1987) did research in the army camps established for Aborigines in the Darwin hinterland during the Second World War. The tribal demography they recorded in the camps parallels that of 'Wallaby Cross'. It is likely that patterns learnt in the camps have been incorporated with more traditional ways for social control in mixed locations and activities.[xlviii] Berndt and Berndt (1987:208-10) give models showing how a 'European blanket of authority variously affected Aboriginal traditional life' in the region. In the army camps, missions and cattle stations, work patterns and a sexual division of labour interfered with Aboriginal socialisation. Stanner (1963:250-3) also describes the outside pressures against traditional life in the area and the Aboriginal strategies for revival of rituals.

Berndt and Berndt (1987:206) gained an impression of 'great vitality' in the mixed army camps of the Darwin hinterland where, unlike the racially divided cattle stations, missions and towns, 'army rules applied equally to all persons' and established a 'sense of solidarity' (p.177). 'These features together with material benefits presented a view to which over 1,000 or more Aborigines were exposed. And there is evidence to support the contention that they left a lasting impression' (p.177). In the 1970s some of the older fringe dwellers had a shared background of wartime employment . The number of older Aborigines from the hinterland area with military names like 'Captain' and 'Major' also suggest the influence of the war years.

4.18 On-and-off marriages

To apply theories of flexible social structures to the marriage ties between men and women and commitment to children, is more difficult than accounting for the bonds between the 400 or 500 'countrymen' who make up a fluctuating mob. This conflict between Sansom's theory of mob construction and the more classical forms based on kinship finds a parallel in the mob, where 'women "worry for" their 'lations, men "worry for" mobs' (Sansom 1978b:101, 1980a:253). However, a dichotomy between fixed relations and flexible mobs is partly avoided by Sansom in finding that gender relationships are unstable and subsumed to mob interest. According to Sansom (1978b:89, 1980a:242, 1984b:5, 1988b:171) the release of married women 'to become girls again' is described as 'that on and off business'. In the region 'they do not entertain time-bound definitions of

relationships and endow them with futurity' (Sansom 1978a:106) because many marriages are sacrificed in bad economic times when the relationship is 'no longer self-sustaining' (Sansom 1978b:93).

In my experience, the description of on-and-off marriages and breaking-up in hard times does not correspond to the many relationships in the camps around Darwin where couples remain together under extreme circumstances. In addition, in attempting to fit marriage into his theories of labile groups Sansom highlights several contradictions in his text. Firstly, the importance of kinship in holding a mob together, especially in times of crisis, is confirmed (Sansom 1978b:101, 1980a:253). Secondly, the analysis of the opposition between the wage dollar of the men and the pension dollar of the women (Sansom 1978b:102, 1980a:254) suggests the shortcomings of examining fringe dweller social structure in a segregated social field outside the wider economic context (see Collmann 1979a).[xlix]

In the context of the difficulties of life in the fringe camps, a fuller analysis is needed before attributing unstable gender relations to supposedly Aboriginal cultural continuities where 'many (but not all) people change sexual partners with frequency' (Sansom 1995:291). For example, Queenie, who Sansom (1984b:5) interviewed on a Darwin beach for the 1976 census, had seven children to three partners. She was said to be in an 'on-and-off marriage' (Sansom (1984b:5), as her present husband was with another woman somewhere out of town. I maintain that many factors other than supposed Aboriginal cultural continuities need to be considered for explanations of the relationship between Queenie and her spouse.

At the Fremantle forum, Sansom (1998) said that aspects of kinship relationships remained largely hidden from him at Wallaby Cross until he returned with his wife and stepchild in 1988. Accepted as fictive kin to the fringe dwellers, Sansom (1998) says his wife and the child became the 'leading persons' of the family while Sansom 'walked lonely' as 'one of the blokes'. Perhaps this explains the earlier lack of analysis of the kinship bonds that are emphasised by the women and are said to provide succour (Sansom 1980a:253).

Sansom (1987:350) came to the view that 'Aborigines of the Darwin region do indeed live in a world in which all significant others are allocated kinship positions', although he argues for the predominance of 'effective kinship' (p.350). 'Continuity over time', concludes Sansom (1978b:101, 1980a:253) is found in 'the set of a women's female 'lations'. These 'women-to-women ties transcend the fleeting though absorbing unity of mobs'. Sansom (1978b:101, 1980a:253) claims women are concerned for kin while men gain status from the stockman's wage dollar. As the men in the cattle industry cannot avoid being 'inconsistent providers' (Sansom 1980a:253), there is an underlying social structure that nurtures the needy. According to Sansom (p.253) it is the pattern of food preparation and distribution by the women that provides the 'template for all relationships of sharing within a grouping centred on a hearth'. Those with a guaranteed pension on which the camp leaders rely are 'no chance combination but a group of older men and women who

are all "lations"' (p.253).

4.19 Analysing Sansom's texts

I have argued that Sansom denies or filters out indicators which do not support his argument 'that activity conducted within a world of Aboriginal business ... is distinct from the domain of black-white relationships' (Sansom 1980a:250). My criticism is based on my own experience, both prior to and during my PhD fieldwork, and a careful reading of Sansom's often contradictory texts in which the role of the anthropologist, his entry to the field and exit from it, and his 'writing up' of field notes are only selectively revealed. In my analysis, Sansom's creative ethnography and essays become key evidence in themselves of an articulation between the Aboriginal domain and the wider world. Furthermore, just as Sansom has deconstructed 'the word' of the fringe campers as an Aboriginal 'social construction of reality' (see Sansom 1985:91), his texts, as a 'construction of reality' are available to be scrutinised, towards an alternative interpretation of life in the fringe camps.[1]

Sansom's graphic descriptions often give the reader a sense of 'being there'. Readers feel familiar with characters in the texts like Norbett, Mrs Nevill, Tommy Atkins, Ol Luke and others. As Marcus and Cushman (1982:33) suggest, realist techniques validate the sense of an ethnographer's intimacy with his interlocutors. In my analysis, I use Sansom's realistic representations of fringe dwellers' concepts as a basis to analyse his texts. By critiquing the texts according to fringe dwellers' values, as portrayed by Sansom, I attempt to reveal the observer/author behind the textual 'Wallaby Cross' and to restore the 'real' Knuckeys Lagoon as the referent.

In a similar manner, Merlan (1995:165) uses the vocabulary of the fringe campers to ask of Sansom's text: 'Are we all ultimately restricted to just being "peepers"?' A peeper in the camp is one who takes an unwarranted interest in private affairs (Sansom 1980a:159). Merlan accepts the text as the referent, or as a reality in itself, to make the reader complicit in the fringe camp politics as a 'peeper'. In addition, I ask, 'Is the text "jus lotta talk"?' According to Sansom (1980a:205) a story of 'what bin happen' remains 'jus "lotta talk"' until it is confirmed by witnesses. Agreed statements then become 'the word' of the mob which must be adhered to by those claiming affiliation. In the mob, 'withdrawal into a private language is a movement into a separate jurisdiction' (Sansom 1980a:103). Therefore, *The camp at Wallaby Cross* remains as 'lotta talk', or 'humbug' disconnected from its source, the agreed word of the Aboriginal mob, and claiming acceptance as 'the word' in another mob, the remote circle of academia.

The text can be viewed as what the fringe dwellers call 'serious gammon', because the anthropologist is in a position of power 'writing up' after fieldwork, and able to shape what has been observed without the 'witnessing' crowds of the camp. As Sansom (1980a:171-2) notes, 'serious gammoning can only begin when the intended gammoner already enjoys clear political advantage'. Like Ted Wolsey in *Wallaby Cross*, the anthropologist has to gammon because 'details of past events are owned' (Sansom

1980a:174). To 'write up' a book which is not the mob 'word', the anthropologist contests the mob ownership and asserts his power in doing so. Serious gammon is 'political argument in the absence of political evidence' (Sansom 1980a:175) and my critique has attempted to make this point about Sansom's texts.[li]

Sansom (1980a:160) claims that the opening of issues which have been closed is a serious threat to the constructed reality of the mob where 'raising problems from a finished past is egotistic *post hoc* aggression' which defies a mob's 'synthetic realisation'. If this is the case, does not this statement equally apply to a text that raises mob disputes that have been resolved in the anthropologist's presence? But the term, 'synthetic realisation', is more appropriately applied to the textual representation of a fringe camp society written as 'the word' of the anthropological 'mob', and I suggest it is my opening of issues that defies that constructed reality.

The camp at Wallaby Cross, describes how Aborigines 'use words in order to create and establish social forms' (Sansom 1980a:4). Having described a model of social process at the expense of evidence of pre-existing social structure in the fringe camps and ignoring or downplaying evidence of links to the surrounding socio-economic systems, Sansom (1995) later developed a theory of 'pro-metonymic formations' typical of Aboriginal beliefs through which meanings are 'chained down' and 'massively preconditioned' (Sansom 1995:272). He now claims the Aborigines of labile groups are locked into a system of meaning that denies human initiative. Previously, descriptions of ceremony as 'stultifying' and 'intellectually unchallenging' and a Dreaming that does not encourage innovation (Sansom 1988a:153) have been asides to the main argument for processual modelling, but now Sansom (1995) tackles this central contradiction.

A revisionary essay by Sansom (1995) on the 'anthropology of return' shifts the emphasis to traditional structures amongst the fringe dwellers, but provides clues as to how Sansom was able to write his original analysis without seriously considering more fixed traditional Aboriginal structures and beliefs. Sansom's creative solution comes from Aboriginal concepts of 'the fancy' as an 'assertion of individual vitality' (Sansom 1995:297) in contrast to the Dreaming Powers which 'extinguish human initiative' (p.297). Sansom (p.298) adds that displays of fancy draw attention to 'the message of the code'. Therefore, I maintain that an interpretation of Sansom's writing as 'the fancy' provides clues for a decoding, or deconstruction, of his descriptions of life at Wallaby Cross/Knuckeys Lagoon.

Sansom (1995:294) describes the distribution of cloth hung on lines during the 'burning rag' ceremony when possessions of the deceased are burnt, the ashes buried and participants cleansed by smoke and water. After the ceremony, when the spirit is returned to the dreaming, pieces of the lengths of 'mitril' (material) are distributed. Sansom (p.294) interprets these actions as an attempt to overcome the 'human predicament' of a Dreaming identity 'whimsically visited on people'.[lii] Sansom (p.294) adds that people act like Dreaming Powers in sending pieces of fancy cloth out, at the time the spirit of the deceased returns to 'the whole cloth of undifferentiated Dreaming origins' (p.294).[liii]

Similarly, I suggest that the text of the anthropologist is sent out as 'fancy', enabling the author to avoid the so-called 'stultifying' structures laid down by the Dreaming Powers by acting as a creative power himself.

Sansom (1995:290) claims that rituals after death ensure 'authorship, design, ideolect, record, biography' are enveloped by the 'devouring Powers of the Dreaming'. Typically with Sansom's theorising, an opposing position justifies his own. In this case, people have no lasting agency or biography and are virtually erased after death, but his textual piece of 'fancy' exists outside those realities. The deceased of Wallaby Cross cannot speak, Ol Luke can have no successors (Sansom 1988a:158) but Sansom can create a work of fancy that lives on.

I was often asked by the people at Knuckeys Lagoon for photographs taken in the 1970s and passed the requests on to Sansom. When I provided photocopies of newspaper photographs of the 1970s protests, the relatives of those pictured eagerly received them. Often my book *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement* (Day 1994) was referred to by more literate 'mob' members. Other mob members referred me to the video made by the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (1996) during the 'burning rag' rituals at Knuckeys Lagoon for Louise Bangun's son. I consider this to be evidence in the camp of a need, politically and emotionally, for the story of their struggle to be told and remembered.

The video shows the dead man's belongings being burnt in the ritual described by Sansom (1995:291-2). Women dance with men and sometimes lead the very physical grieving and wailing. The men's 'cock rags', or red triangular loincloths, are loose fitting and young dancers mix with the older dancers. The relatively modest dress of the men can hardly be described as 'revealing' and I believe Sansom's other description of the covering as 'decorated genitalia' (p.291) does not do service to the mourning dancers. Similarly, I find it difficult to view the tragic dance sequences as displays of sexuality, or the emotion-charged ritual as 'a celebration of freedom for the widow or widower', with 'Nod, nudge and wink' flirting between the young men and women as Sansom (1995:292) suggests.

Sansom's analysis of the ceremony proposes a strong opposition between the pure fancy of 'desire unmodified' in 'unformed youth', against the commitments of 'a compromised life' of 'achieved acts and accomplished things' of their elders. As Sansom tells it, human vitality struggles against the Dreaming Powers in the ceremony, as do Sansom's texts over a period of twenty years. In *The camp at Wallaby Cross* the only tension which is described between the codes of the Dreaming Powers and process of human vitality is in Sansom's mind, as the Aboriginal fringe dwellers recognise when they call Sansom 'notta law man really' (Sansom 1988a:153). In the latest revisionist article (Sansom 1995), the conflict that existed in Sansom's mind, between structure and process is projected onto the Aborigines who are portrayed as struggling against the Dreaming Powers.

Sansom's criticism of other writers is directed at those like Rowley who 'render both

description and interpretation over to a Western world of discourse' (Sansom 1984a:40). Unlike Cowlishaw (1988a, 1988b, 1993, 1994), he does not interpret Aboriginal contemporary values within 'an oppositional culture', but seeks to express 'Aboriginal doctrines' (Sansom 1995:281) which he argues are examples of cultural continuities. Ironically, for the Knuckeys Lagoon residents, who were known for their determined resistance, the image of Aboriginal opposition that Sansom (1995) paints is in opposition to their own allegedly restrictive 'Dreaming Powers'. In a reversal of Rowley's elimination of cultural factors, Sansom (1995) has eliminated political and economic factors from his research that a multi-sited study would include.

Sansom's texts can be likened to rare 'stripy bamboo' that he describes being traded across Aboriginal jurisdictions for spear shafts (Sansom 1995:304). As the bamboo is traded from hand to hand it becomes estranged from its originating story as it becomes disconnected from the custodians of the Dreaming associated with the place of origin. In this way: 'When some of these unknowns arrive amongst us, they may, like stripy bamboo, come to us as imported fancies' (Sansom 1995:301). I suggest that Sansom's description perfectly parallels how *The camp at Wallaby Cross* as a fancy signifier has become detached from its signified, the mob at Knuckeys Lagoon. Sansom (1995:305) explains how the rattle sound made by the thrower of a stripy bamboo spear is associated with the 'taking out of the victim's voice box' to leave them as 'wordless dead [who become] perpetually discontent and wandering spirits'. Again, to follow my deconstruction of the texts, the parallels are intriguing. Perhaps, complimented by my corrective critique, Sansom's text, as 'stripy bamboo', can be appraised in the context of its origins and be admired as the artefact of a skilled craftsman, with more practical application than as an object of fancy.

In his journal article, Sansom (1995:308) admits: 'I wrote this essay to render up an artefact of parting... It had to be a fancy one'. For all ethnographers, the crossing over from fieldwork into 'writing up' is difficult because it requires the participant observer to rise above the social body in which he or she has been immersed. Sansom, who believes it requires a strong sense of person to write successfully (Sansom 1998), rises above the mundane of the Dreaming Powers, fixed social structures, history, the wider economy - 'one's spirit is moved in mindfulness of art to craft an object out of the fancy of one's very own things found' (Sansom 1995:308).

'Always the flash of the fancy flags a place where two paths cross', claims Sansom (1995:307). Although the fictional place name 'Wallaby Cross' also suggests the intersection of two paths, instead of analysing conjunction of Western and Aboriginal societies Sansom (1982b:135) describes a 'parathetic', or side-by-side (see Merlan 1995:164), existence. In my reading, Sansom releases his text, as a 'flash of the fancy', from the need to engage with the meeting of Aboriginal and invader by arguing that art defeats history by remaining forever contemporary (Sansom 1995:301). He also states: 'a mob must be taken out of time for its form to be examined' (Sansom 1980a:260).

To place the mob back into history, I have suggested an alternative reading of Sansom's

texts. Finally, it remains to flag where these alternative realities meet. In the last paragraph, perhaps intentionally, the ethnographic text, as the fancy, 'draws attention to the code' as the 'real' Knuckeys Lagoon intersects with the textual 'Wallaby Cross'. In the last paragraph Sansom reveals for the first time that Roy Kelly, who is given his proper name throughout the essay, is the same man as 'Tommy Atkins' of *The camp at Wallaby Cross*. From that point the code that naturalises the fiction of *Wallaby Cross* begins to unravel.[liv]

Endnotes for Chapter 4:

[i] Sansom (1980c:2) states his evidence was collected from April 1974 to July 1976. In other places the period varies, from 'sixteen months of fieldwork in the camps' (Sansom 1980a:97), 'fifteen months in 1975 and 1976' (Sansom 1980a:9, 1980e:2), 1974-1976 (Sansom 1995:286), to 'April 1975 to July 1976' (Sansom 1980c:2).

[ii] See also Sansom 1982b:118.

[iii] Clendinnen (1999:88-93) gives a very positive interpretation of Sansom's text.

[iv] As a pupil and colleague of Max Gluckman, Sansom comes from the 'Manchester School' of anthropology (Merlan 1995:167), which is described by Werbner (1984:159) as being within a paradigm which was:

> limited to the internal dynamics of small-scale societies ... missed too much, was tied to the status quo and suffered from being applied too often to the microhistories of village life, mainly the passing moments of micropolitics, such as the petty squabbles of headmen and their rivalrous relatives.

[v] Plates 5.1 to 6.3. See also *NT News* October 4, 1971, November 23, 1971, December 14, 1971, May 2, 1972, June 30, 1972, July 15, 1972, October 17, 1972, November 30, 1972, January 15, 1973, August 1, 1973, February 19, 1974, August 20, 1974; *Australian* August 1, 1973; Buchanan 1974; *Bunji* 1971-74; McNally 1974:84-5.

[vi] Many of these television news items have been compiled into a videorecording titled *Stand strong together: fighting for Aboriginal rights in Darwin 1971-1997* (Day 1997e).

[vii] In 1972, three representatives of the camps were pictured complaining of police harassment. The newspaper claimed: 'Spokesman for the Brinkin people at the lagoon and the Larrakias at Nightcliff, said the same men were visiting both camps and asking questions. Mr Fred Waters of Knuckeys Lagoon, said there were now about 40 men, 15 women and 50 children in the camp, and his people were claiming ownership of about 20 square miles there' (*NT News* May 29, 1972. These figures appear to be inflated).

[viii] Sansom (1980c:2) mentions in the Humpty Doo Land Claim Report that he began his research 'of Darwin fringe camps and the Aboriginal camps and settlements of Darwin's immediate hinterland' in April 1975, although he had 'tenure of a Research Fellowship of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974-77' (Sansom 1988a:158).

[ix] According to the *NT News* (July 21, 1975, p.1), the possessions of the man who died in the cyclone remained stored at the camp in July [during Sansom's fieldwork], awaiting final rituals. The newspaper reported that items were in a tent destroyed by a White gang during an attack on the camp. The attack appears to be the same incident mentioned by Sansom (1980a:133, 185).

[x] I was involved in preparing three of these claims (Day 1994). Toohey was appointed in August 1976 (Eames 1983:270).

[xi] I had no involvement in this protest, which was organised by a group pushing for an Aboriginal medical service in Darwin and land for town camps. The *NT News* (May 17, 1978) reported that the executive director of the ADF did not support the protest and that his wife had interrupted the protest shouting, 'Southern Blacks go home'.

[xii] In May 1981 the NT Government approved a policy where 'title will be issued only to umbrella organisations or incorporated bodies affiliated with such organisations' (NT Government 1981a:2168).

[xiii] I met Gilbert Knowles again at Knuckeys Lagoon in 1997.

[xiv] Major Bangun is buried on the Knuckeys Lagoon lease.

[xv] Margaret and Neil Dargie's daughter, Marlene, still lived at the camp during my fieldwork in 1997.

[xvi] Roy Kelly is buried on the Knuckeys Lagoon lease.

[xvii] Helen Stevens and May Stevens were still living at Knuckeys Lagoon in 1997.

[xviii] Neville Morton still visited kin at Knuckeys Lagoon and Bagot in 1998.

[xix] Sansom (1980a:248) noticed the respect given by members of the mob to a woman appointed 'Hygiene Lady' at Knuckeys Lagoon by 'welfare authorities' (the ADF).
[xx] 'Muddi Community' was the name chosen by the Knuckeys Lagoon residents for their group.
[xxi] Raymond Bangun was still living at the camp in 1997.
[xxii] On March 17, 1997 a group from Knuckeys Lagoon joined a protest by fringe dwellers outside the NT Parliament House, and presented a petition calling for title to the land on which they live (*NT News* March 18, 1997; *Green Left Weekly* March 26, 1997; *Land Rights News* June 1997:19).
[xxiii] NT Archives photograph 06204.
[xxiv] The burial of the third 'masterful man' in the Darwin general cemetery is described by Sansom (1995:274).
[xxv] The ceremony was videotaped for the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (1996).
[xxvi] Sansom (1980a:202) describes how Major's children would negotiate with whites when their father was absent, talking 'High English' on behalf of the community. Sansom (p.202) reports that this was possible because Major had ensured his children had 'some schooling'. Major's priorities appear to conflict with Sansom's (1980a:190) descriptions of a people 'with futures which are indeterminate because not meaningfully contained in any projections of likely career courses...'
[xxvii] The process of being 'put back in' does not seem to have occurred in 1988, after more than ten years absence (see Sansom 1995). On his return, Sansom (1998) says he 'walked lonely' for six months.
[xxviii] The television time traveller, Dr Who, enters the 'Tardis', which looks like a London police telephone box, to re-emerge in another era.
[xxix] See the account by Trigger (1992:86) of a 'whitefella' crossing into the Aboriginal domain at Doomadgee.
[xxx] For a discussion of the influence of Sansom's African work, see the summary by Merlan (1995:168) of Sansom's 1972 paper on uncertain relationships amongst the Pedi of South Africa.
[xxxi] According to Sansom (1998), Povinelli said it is presumptuous to think that her presence would change the senior women's world at Belyuen.
[xxxii] The Knowles family still use Knuckeys Lagoon town camp.
[xxxiii] The detailed obituary to Rowley by Young (1986) shows that his involvement in Aboriginal affairs far exceeded that expected of 'a scholar'.
[xxxiv] As I will explain, Sansom's texts reveal a male-female opposition (Sansom 1980a:254, 1978b:101) which suggests that coming to the sorts of shared and binding determinations he describes may often be difficult in a fringe camp.
[xxxv] In a history of the Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services (CAAPS), Barbara Nasir (1998:12) recounts that the organisation established a 'Treatment and Training' facility on the Knuckeys Lagoon lease in 1992. By 1994, 'CAAPS realised that it could not co-exist with the "wet community" on Knuckeys Lagoon and the break-ins, vandalism and violence to staff and clients' (p.12). During my fieldwork, the Knuckeys Lagoon community did not appear to have any direct involvement in CAAPS, which finally moved from the lease in 1998.
[xxxvi] Sansom's changed status in the mob because of the presence of his second wife and stepson did not cause him to question his thesis of performative kinship or consosciate relationships. Sansom (1998) said his new wife's acceptance and his isolation was an example of the 'transitive nature of kinship' as relationships change through life. Sansom (1995:295) states that, during his original fieldwork: 'Despite the presence of a wife in Darwin, my legal marriage (its earnest was a wedding ring) had no relational and social reality for the fringe dwellers. So, even though I "ran with the mob" for two whole years, I was a man who yet "walked lonely" and was counted a "single fella really"'. However, on his 1988 return, he was presented with a 'divorce painting' done by one of the masterful men (Sansom 1995:294), which suggests a deeper consideration of his relationships by the fringe dwellers.
[xxxvii] I have no recollection of being placed in a skin system at Knuckeys Lagoon between 1971 and 1975, whereas I was given the social category, or skin name, of *bulany* very early into my fieldwork at Fish Camp in 1996.
[xxxviii] In this chapter, I suggest that Sansom uses this same device in his writing.
[xxxix] Sansom (1995:260) describes his relationship to the singing man as a *ngirriwat* partner.
[xl] *Bunji* (January 1982) printed a letter from the son of a Malak Malak woman from the Daly River region who 'grew up at the Retta Dixon Home' and was 'in town for the Daly River land claim'.
[xli] If pseudonyms are used, I maintain that they need to be in keeping with the original names. Instead, Sansom has chosen the name 'Tommy Atkins' (colloquial for a British soldier) as a pseudonym for Roy Kelly (with Celtic associations) and 'Denton Pollock' (a South African cricketer family name) as the 'whitefella name' for Major Bangun.
[xlii] In another article, when Sansom (1981b) discusses the case for a treaty he questions how it is possible to regard Aborigines in towns as an entity for such a document. In 1997 a debate began in the letters column of

the *NT News* (March 29, April 2, April 7, April 11) after I claimed that four generations had lived at the Knuckeys Lagoon camp. C V Hee claimed: 'Knuckeys Lagoon was my favourite shooting and fishing spot... I have never seen an Aboriginal camp there. We used to take truckloads of Aborigines to Shoal Bay fishing and camping but they were transient and soon went "walkabout"'.

[xliii] In Chapter Seven I discuss the relationship between fringe dwellers and Larrakia people.

[xliv] Division between visitors and permanents does seem to develop when families are allocated rental housing, as at Bagot Reserve, and begin to resent transients (see Woodward 1973:25).

[xlv] In the fringe camps, shirts are slept in for days in a row like the fabled rodeo shirt in Sansom's story (1995:282-3). I washed abandoned shirts as spares for shirtless men catching public transport. I gave away many of my own shirts and watched their progress from torso to torso. I was warned that burning old shirts could harm the past user because of the sweat in it, but I found no evidence that a dirty, sweaty shirt was desirable for exchange because of the experiences of its past owner, as Sansom claims.

[xlvi] The Gwalwa Daraniki vehicle did not survive long after the keys were given to the Kulaluk residents (see Day 1994:67, 83). Few fringe dwellers have a drivers licence. Possibly the three vehicles at Wallaby Cross during Sansom's fieldwork were purchased from recent cyclone compensation funds. At other times it appears that Sansom's vehicle was the only one available (Sansom 1980a:198, 1988b:167, 1995:276)

[xlvii] Layton (1986:31) suggests the congruence is an adaptation to irregular supplies. Stanner (cited in Beckett 1964:37) says of Daly River people, 'Aboriginal alcoholism is... part of a natural caricature of Europeanism'.

[xlviii] According to Read (1995:281): 'The most significant effect of the Second World War probably was to integrate Aborigines of both full and part descent into the European mainstream'. Aboriginal aspirations were also raised by the experience of being treated with respect during the war (p.282)

[xlix] As I note in Chapter Five, most fringe dwellers now receive a reliable income from social security payments.

[l] An example of poststructural deconstruction is Muecke's (1992:34-5) brief analysis of the sentence, 'I have written [*The camp at Wallaby Cross*] to show how a set of people who live in poverty on the marches of a city order their experience' (Sansom 1980a:3). Muecke (p.35) demonstrates how poverty and location, on the edge of the city, are ranked grammatically lower than anthropological subject matter expressed in the clause, 'a set of people ... order their experience'. Muecke claims it is this clause that dominates the statement, to the detriment of the other issues mentioned.

[li] According to Tyler (1986:131): 'The true historical significance of writing is that it has increased our capacity to create totalistic illusions with which to have power over things as if they were things'. If Tyler's point is accepted, then Sansom's (1980a:172) point about gammon: -'Its contents are spurious though arranged to present a form of declarative political truth' - might apply to all ethnography.

[lii] Sansom does not give evidence that ascribed identity is viewed as a 'predicament'. I have the impression that Aboriginal men and women feel empowered by their 'Dreaming', which associates them with a particular place.

[liii] Tonkinson (1991:111) describes how the Mardu attempt to manipulate the Dreaming Powers by the performance of rituals, but this appears to be in recognition of those powers, rather than an attempt to escape the confines of them. See the discussion in Sansom (1995:310).

[liv] Once it is known that Roy Kelly is 'Tommy Atkins', an informed reader can deduct that 'Wallaby Cross' is Knuckeys Lagoon, 'Denton Pollock' is Major Bangun and so on.