

**ABORIGINAL FRINGE DWELLERS IN DARWIN,
AUSTRALIA:
CULTURAL PERSISTENCE OR A CULTURE OF
RESISTANCE?**

William Bartlett Day BA(Hons), UWA

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ABSTRACT

From 1971 to 1979 I supported the campaign for land and housing by homeless Aboriginal fringe dwellers from many language groups who were living in on vacant Crown land in unserviced shelters they had constructed of scavenged materials in Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory, Australia. Many of them had been born in the city, while others had migrated from surrounding areas or more remote regions of the Territory. During the 1970s, and until I left Darwin in 1985, I was impressed by the courage of these Aboriginal people in confronting public and government hostility to their claims.

I returned to Darwin in 1996 to begin fieldwork for a PhD thesis, to determine how Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin order their lives in their bush land camps. Was this ordering best described as 'cultural continuities in a world of material change', as Basil Sansom claims in his 1980 ethnography, *The camp at Wallaby Cross: Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin?* Or is cultural reproduction amongst Aboriginal people in towns always in a context of opposition, as Gillian Cowlishaw concluded in rural New South Wales? Can Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin be better understood through theoretical frameworks that stress cultural persistence or those which emphasise resistance?

In academic debates, these dichotomous perspectives are sometimes referred to as the 'cultural' and the 'political' approaches. The former approach is criticised for neglecting indigenous people's engagement with the wider social, economic and political world. The latter is criticised for incorporating indigenous people into a Western discourse by prioritising a materialist analysis. My intention was to examine the appropriateness of these approaches amongst the Aboriginal people of Darwin who had continued to maintain camps in urban bush land and on town beaches despite harassment campaigns by Local and Northern Territory Governments.

My study is in the context of an invading socio-economic system rather than the segregated social field described by Sansom. In a critique of Sansom's conclusions after his fieldwork amongst Darwin fringe dwellers between 1975 and 1977, I find that relatively fixed traditional Aboriginal social structures account for cultural continuities in the fringe camps more than the flexible processes described by Sansom as typical of Northern Australia. Traditional values are also the basis of the 'oppositional culture' amongst fringe dwellers. I also suggest that resistance by Aboriginal fringe dwellers involves a greater political awareness than is apparent in the everyday Aboriginal 'oppositional culture' described by Cowlishaw in New South

Wales country towns.

My evidence suggests that, rather than constituting a closure of the Aboriginal domain, as described in other studies, resistance amongst Aboriginal fringe dwellers can be interpreted as engagement with the dominant society, in a process which I describe as 'merging'. My conclusions are drawn from fieldwork examples of conflict between the Northern Territory Government and Aboriginal fringe dwellers and the more successful interaction between sympathetic non-Aboriginal people in Darwin and the fringe campers that continued into late 2001.

The struggle by fringe dwellers for space in Darwin is placed in the context of the native title claim over vacant Crown land in Darwin made during my fieldwork by the Larrakia people, who claim to be the Aboriginal traditional owners of the Darwin region. Despite a supposed conflict of interest between the fringe dwellers and the Larrakia people, I suggest that the interests of the two groups are not necessarily in opposition under Western law or in Aboriginal customary law.

Finally, I focus on the opposition between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal drinking in Darwin and its association with dispossession. I argue that a study of the origins of the Darwin Beer Can Regatta gives insights into this conflict. I suggest that the festival serves to distinguish non-Aboriginal drinking as controlled and purposeful, in contrast to 'antisocial' fringe dweller drinking. In my analysis, I use Charles Rowley's division of Australia into 'settled' and 'colonial', or 'remote' regions, and argue that Darwin is now an enclave of 'settled' Australia in the remote north. I suggest that this characterisation provides a useful framework for interpreting the position of fringe dwellers in Darwin.

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CONTENTS

List of maps	ix
List of illustrations	ix
List of figures	ix
List of photographs	ix
Acknowledgments	xi
CHAPTER ONE	1
Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin: cultural persistence or a culture of resistance?	
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The influence of the Darwin area on anthropological theory	3
1.3 A multi-sited study	7
1.4 Cultural continuities or culture of opposition?	9
1.5 The 'political' and the 'cultural'	12
1.6 Transitive and intransitive resistance	13
1.7 The politics of culture	15
1.8 Essentialism	16
1.9 Why do fringe dwellers resist?	19
1.10 Resistance in 'colonial' Australia	29
Endnotes	31
CHAPTER TWO	34
'Itinerants' or at home in their land? Defining the fringe.	
2.1 Introduction	34
2.2 Clarifying definitions	34

2.3 Long grass people	36
2.4 The itinerants and transients	38
2.5 Media representations of 'itinerants' from 1996	40
2.6 'Transients', 'itinerants' and 'homeless drifters'	41
2.7 'Sit down' and 'lie down' camps	42
2.8 Reserves	43
2.9 Town camps	44
2.10 Fringe or town camp?	45
2.11 Fringe dwellers	47
Endnotes	48
CHAPTER THREE	50
Locating the field: Fish Camp in context	
3.1 Introduction	50
3.2 Fieldwork and the 'itinerant problem'	50
3.3 The role of the anthropologist	50
3.4 'Finding' a field site	57
3.5 The establishment of Fish Camp	58
3.6 Fish Camp and Lee Point 1996	61
3.7 Making contact	63
3.8 Fish Camp and the media, 1996	66
3.9 Legitimation: the case of the Railway Dam camp	70
Endnotes	72
CHAPTER FOUR	74
Revisiting <i>The camp at Wallaby Cross</i>: a definitive work or 'jus lotta talk'?	
4.1 Introduction	74
4.2 The Knuckeyes Lagoon mob: 1971-1997	75
4.3 Cyclone Tracy, the mob and Sansom	79
4.4 The Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner	80

4.5 The Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF) and fringe dwellers	82
4.6 The mob in 1997	84
4.7 Sansom's 'anthropology of return'	85
4.8 A segregated social field?	87
4.9 Process over structure	89
4.10 Sansom and Rowley	90
4.11 Witnessing	91
4.12 'Living longa grog'?	91
4.13 Did the mob at Knuckeyes Lagoon use the 'skin system' of social categories?	92
4.14 Performative relationships and the Dreaming Powers	94
4.15 Fringe dwellers and the economy	98
4.16 The fringe dwellers' attachment to place	99
4.17 Bush workers and army camps	100
4.18 On-and-off marriages	103
4.19 Analysing Sansom's texts	104
Endnotes	109
CHAPTER FIVE	113
Reaching across difference: the Burarra people of central Arnhem Land	
5.1 Introduction	113
5.2 Some observations of life at Fish Camp: 1996-8	117
5.3 Early contact	122
5.4 The Reserves	123
5.5 The 'drift' to Darwin.	125
5.6 Maningrida 1957-1999	126
5.7 Maningrida and assimilation	128
5.8 The outstation movement	129
5.9 Unrest amongst Darwin Aborigines in the 1950s	133

5.10 The An-barra <i>Rom</i> exchange ceremony	135
5.11 The Burarra fringe dwellers in Darwin	137
5.12 Resistance as engagement	141
5.13 <i>Ganma</i> and merging	141
Endnotes	144
CHAPTER SIX	147
Fringe dweller engagement with representatives of the state.	
6.1 Introduction	147
6.2 Previous contact with government and its agencies	148
6.3 NT Government, Local Government and fringe dwellers	149
6.4 Bob Bunduwabi at Lee Point	151
6.5 Bob Bunduwabi's complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Commission	155
6.6 The Lee Point protest, 1996	158
6.7 Fighting the threat of eviction	162
6.8 The reply from Lands, Planning and Environment	166
6.9 How notions of equality discriminate against fringe dwellers	167
6.10 The death of Bob Bunduwabi	168
6.11 The combined fringe camp protest at Parliament House	172
6.12 The return to Parliament House	176
6.13 Another Anti-Discrimination Commission complaint	178
6.14 The NT Health Department, a TB outbreak and fringe dwellers	182
6.15 The struggle continues	183
6.16 Another Parliament House protest: August 3, 2001	186
Endnotes	192
CHAPTER SEVEN	196
'A conflict of interest': Fringe dwellers and Aboriginality	
7.1 Introduction	196
7.2 Fringe dwellers in the context of the Sutton vs Sansom debate	198

7.3 Fish Camp and the Kulaluk land owners	201
7.4 The Larrakia.	206
7.5 The Larrakia native title claim	209
7.6 Supporting the Larrakia	213
7.7 Native title extinguished	215
7.8 Fish Camp and representative groups	217
7.8.1 Northern Land Council	218
7.8.2 North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service	220
7.8.3 ATSIC	221
7.9 Conclusion	223
Endnotes	225
CHAPTER EIGHT	228
Blurring the boundaries: Fish Camp gives a barbecue.	
8.1 Introduction	228
8.2 An Aboriginal domain?	229
8.3 'The white Aborigines of Darwin'	230
8.4 Fish Camp holds a barbecue	235
8.5 May Day	237
8.6 The Arafura Games	237
8.7 The second return to Lee Point, May 1997	238
8.8 The Mormons	245
8.9 Senator Bob Brown launches the Greens election campaign at Fish Camp	247
8.10 'Rights On Show': The Human Rights Art Exhibition	249
8.11 Waak Waak Jungi at the Festival of Darwin	250
8.12 The role of music	251
Endnotes	254
CHAPTER NINE	257
Alcohol and race in the Territory: the case of the Beer Can Regatta	

9.1 Introduction	257
9.2 Alcohol and citizenship	258
9.3 The decriminalisation of drunkenness	260
9.4 The Beer Can Regatta	262
9.5 The Beer Can Regatta in 1996 and 1997	266
9.6 The 2-kilometre law	268
9.7 An Aboriginal Club	269
9.8 Profiting from Aboriginal drinking	271
9.9 Drinking on the fringe in the 1990s	272
9.10 The 'spin dry'	274
9.11 The ethnography of Aboriginal drinking	275
9.12 Alcohol and resistance: another view	279
Endnotes	282
CHAPTER TEN	285
Persistence or resistance?	
10.1 Introduction	285
10.2 Summary of chapters	285
10.3 Persistence or resistance?	288
Endnotes	291
REFERENCES	292
Appendix I	321
Letter by Bill Day to the Anti-Discrimination Commission in reply to the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment.	
Appendix II	326
'The problem now'. Extract from 'Statement of aims and objectives - Fish Camp community housing project' (Simmering 1999).	
Appendix III	333
Health assessment of Fish Camp population: World Vision Australia (Darby and Wenitong 1998).	

Appendix IV

Examples of Darwin newsletters for 'long grass' Aborigines 337

LIST OF MAPS

Map 1: The Northern Territory. xiii

Map 2: Darwin and suburbs. .. xiv

Map 3: Fish Camp and environs, 1996-8. xv

Map 4: Australian land tenure, 1992 (Trigger 1994:38), showing Rowley's boundary between 'settled' and 'colonial' Australia (Rowley 1972b:2) and "Aboriginal" Australia' (Drakakis-Smith 1981:35) after 70

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Illustration 1: Cartoons from the *NT News* after 70

Illustration 2: Cartoons from *Sunday Territorian* and *NT News* after 70

Illustration 3: A page from *Bunji*, 1978 after 94

Illustration 4: Newspaper report of the Darwin Beer Can Regatta after 266

Illustration 5: Report from the *Koori Mail* July 2001 after 284

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: A fringe dweller's map of cultural regions in Darwin after 48

Figure 2: The 'recognition space' of native title after 48

Figure 3: Fish Camp residency over time after 143

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Plate 1: Bob Bunduwabi (in wheelchair) leads the return to Lee Point
(*NT News*) xvi

Plate 2: Gojok's possessions are burnt at Lee Point after his death
(*NT News*) xvi

Plate 3: Fish Camp, September 1996 (Sally Mitchell) after 62

Plate 4: Katie Fry cooking shellfish at Fish Camp (Bill Day) after 62

Plates 5.1 - 6.4 Protests by the 'Wallaby Cross' mob after 94

Plate 5.1: On the iron ore stockpile, Darwin Wharf

Plate 5.2: Stopping the loading of iron ore, Darwin Wharf

Plate 5.3: Sleep-in outside Government House in Darwin

Plate 6.1: Sit-down across Bagot Road

Plate 6.2: 'Invading' the Army Barracks

Plate 6.3: Outside Darwin's Fannie Bay prison

Plate 6.4: Major Bangun and Roy Kelly

Plate 7: A grave at Knuckeyes Lagoon town camp, 1996 (Bill Day)	after 172
Plate 8: Homeless Aborigines marching to Parliament House, 1997	after 172
Plate 9: Water is delivered to Fish Camp, 1997 (Bill Day)	after 182
Plate 10: Dulcie Malimara fishing at high tide in Ludmilla Creek	after 182
Plate 11: Senator Bob Brown at Fish Camp (Bill Day)	after 246
Plate 12: The Mormons give instruction to Fish Camp residents	after 246
Plate 13: Preparing for a ceremony at Fish Camp. July 1997	after 256
Plate 14: Raising a new flag at Fish Camp. October, 1998 (Vaughan Williams)	after 256
Plate 15: Gathering at Fish Camp after the death of a close relative	after 256
Plate 16: Bill Day gives Tommy Yalmur a shave at Fish Camp	after 256
Plate 17: Portrait of Johnny Balaiya, NT Supreme Court, 2005	after 284

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CHAPTER ONE

Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin: cultural persistence or culture of resistance?

1.1 Introduction

In 1971 I was introduced to a few Larrakia people who claimed to be the traditional Aboriginal owners of the area where Darwin, the capital of the Northern Territory of Australia, now stands. When I first met them, the Larrakia group was living as fringe dwellers under sheets of corrugated iron in unserviced camps on vacant land in the Darwin suburbs. In that year, together with other Aboriginal groups who lived in similar camps around the city, the Larrakia fringe dwellers began an eight-year campaign for land and serviced housing in the city. For thirteen years, until I left Darwin in 1985, I documented the fringe dwellers' struggle in a newsletter of Aboriginal issues called *Bunji*.¹ I have drawn upon this experience to give diachronic depth to this thesis.

Between 1996 and 2001, as this thesis describes, the presence of unserviced camps of homeless Aboriginal people in urban bushland sites around Darwin remained a contentious issue. The preparedness of unhoused fringe dwellers to protest against their marginalisation in the city was again expressed during my fieldwork in the camps from 1996-8. In seeking an explanation for the continuing militancy of Darwin fringe dwellers over a period of thirty years, my thesis asks: Do Darwin fringe dwellers order their lives in the urban bushland camps through 'cultural continuities in a world of material change' (Sansom 1988b:159), or is it in opposition that the ongoing re-creation of a distinct cultural heritage occurs (Cowlshaw 1988b:99; 1988a:243, 1993:188)? In brief, do Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin order their lives through cultural persistence or a culture of resistance? Equally as briefly, I suggest that the short answer to my thesis question is 'both and neither', as I will explain in the following chapters.

I returned to Darwin in 1996 hoping to test whether the oppositional stance of past decades remained a feature of Aboriginal fringe camps in the contested sites around Darwin. As Glendinnen (1999:333) has said of the 'Wallaby Cross' fringe camp, they were 'a group of Aboriginal mavericks, conscientious objectors to the claims of white authority, who lived, at least for a time, a resolutely independent life on the edge of a potentially hostile white community'. From 1971 I knew the 'Wallaby Cross' people well, before and after Basil Sansom's acclaimed ethnography *The camp at Wallaby Cross: Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin* (Sansom 1980a). An intention of my study was to re-examine Sansom's vividly evocative descriptions of life in the camps, in the context of the political activism of the 'Wallaby Cross' people

as I experienced it in the 1970s and 1980s.

Apart from ethnographies of Aboriginal fringe camps, theoretical approaches for a thesis representing the lives of Aboriginal people living on contested land in an Australian city are suggested by the literature on diaspora, rural immigration to towns, squatter settlements, articulation of modes of production, homelessness, urban nomads or indigenous identity in a changing world. Also the literature on 'Aboriginality' might contribute towards understanding Australian indigenous people who challenge boundaries. However, indigenous people deny that they are immigrants, squatters, nomads, or even homeless (see Dyck 1985:13). This implied unique Aboriginal connection to land can be overlooked by the broader categories mentioned above.

The social and economic interconnections between fringe dwellers and the town suggest that a study confined to an analysis of a separate Aboriginal identity would not be adequate. A critique of 'the anthropological construction of natives' by Appadurai (1988:36-40) advocates the 'polythetic' approach used in much of the literature mentioned above, because study of 'family resemblances' resists the confinement of 'the native' (Appadurai 1988:46). Appadurai (1988:36) decries 'the anthropological construction of natives' by the 'boundedness of cultural units and the confinement of the varieties of human consciousness within these boundaries'. In the case of Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin, their move from their homelands into the city, where authorities harass them, suggests that a holistic and bounded cultural study would not represent the realities facing Aboriginal fringe dwellers in the city. Instead, what Marcus (1995) calls 'a multi-sited' study offers a means of incorporating the wider issues which impact upon fringe dwellers' lives in Darwin.

In Chapter Four, my extensive critique of *The Camp at Wallaby Cross* and Sansom's other texts, and my fieldwork experience, suggest that a more 'political' approach better represents the realities of fringe dwellers' lives. Rather than concentrating on a specific site, a multi-sited study is able to examine the discourses with which fringe dwellers are engaged in a complex, interconnected environment.² By 'following the conflict', as suggested by Marcus (1995:110), a multi-sited study can trace the intersecting interests revealed by the resistance of the fringe dwellers and the opposition of the townspeople. As Ortner (1995:175) notes, resistance can be a useful category of study 'because it highlights the presence and play of power in most forms of relationship and activity'.

Before examining these issues in more detail, in the next section I place my

thesis in a theoretical, geographical, and historical context. I examine theories from Aboriginal studies that are relevant to my thesis, including the polarised 'political' and 'cultural' approaches, which are also reflected in arguments for the construction of Aboriginality-as-resistance or Aboriginality-as-persistence. Filling a perceived shortcoming in the Aboriginal studies literature, I then apply theories of peasant resistance to an analysis of fringe dwellers' open and everyday opposition, observed before and during my fieldwork.

1.2 The influence of the Darwin region on anthropological theory

Aboriginal resistance has been ongoing since Darwin was surveyed in 1869 by armed men led by G W Goyder, the Protector of Aborigines and Surveyor General of South Australia, to satisfy speculators who had paid for unseen estates, and were growing impatient for results (James 1979; Wells 1995a:9). Goyder and his men completed the survey in record time, despite violent opposition from the local Larrakia people (Kerr 1971:146). Although few of the surveyed properties had been occupied by 1882, a recent native title judgment (see Devereux 1998; Strelein 1999) found that the land sales effectively dispossessed the Aboriginal landowners. With the establishment of a townsite, Aborigines were confined in their movements, their sacred sites were renamed and their land had become a commodity.

The slowness to settle northern Australia and the unsuitability of the land for agriculture offered some protection for Aboriginal people in the north. C D Rowley (1972b:x, 1972c:xiv) termed this vast sparsely populated area 'colonial Australia', or 'remote' Australia as it is more usually referred to today (see Map 4).³ Marcia Langton (1993b:12) notes, 'remote' Australia [is] where most of the tradition-oriented Aboriginal cultures are located'.⁴ In the 'settled' southern and eastern region of Rowley's continental divisions, the temperate climate and good soils where technologies of European agriculture could be applied resulted in a more extensive dispossession of Aboriginal people (Rowley 1972b:4). In contrast, few Whites came to settle in remote or 'colonial' Australia (Rowley 1972b:14). While the boundary dividing the regions is 'an intellectual tool' (Rowley 1972b:20), I maintain that it remains useful in understanding the relationship between Aboriginal fringe dwellers and the non-Aboriginal settler population of Darwin.

In Chapter Nine I argue that as Darwin prospered prior to Northern Territory self-government in 1978, a more stable predominantly White population transformed the city into an embattled enclave of 'settled' Australia in the remote north. Contesting the status of Darwin as a securely settled region of Australia, as Rowley (1972b:16) predicted, Aboriginal people continued to move into northern towns and establish fringe camps on

vacant land, 'mak[ing] more obvious in towns the fact of a plural society'. I add that the opposition from within the towns that the campers attract suggests that the social plurality described by Rowley is unwelcome in Darwin, as an enclave of 'settled Australia'.

After Baldwin Spencer (1914:152) observed that the Larrakia tribe in Darwin had become 'too decadent to retain anything but vestiges of its old customs', the Darwin area had largely been ignored as a site for anthropological research. By 1970, forgotten by anthropologists and unrecognised by most of the general community, the Larrakia members of the local *danggalaba*, or crocodile, clan were living with people from allied language groups at an 'illegal' camp they call Kulaluk, behind the drive-in cinema in the northern suburbs (Map 3). Scattered around the town were unserviced camps of other language groups living in self-built shelters that recognised the Larrakia people as the local landowners.

The rapid spread of the Darwin suburbs in the boom years of the 1970s (ABS 1974:70) coincided with the increasing assertiveness of Darwin fringe dwellers, encouraged by the national movement for land rights which emanated from strikes and walk-offs by NT Aboriginal pastoral workers in the late 1960s (see Buchanan 1974; Duncan 1975). In 1971 the Darwin fringe campers formed a coalition, which they called 'Gwalwa Daraniki', or 'our land', and demanded ownership of their scattered urban bushland campsites.⁵ Their protests and occupation of the land continued until special purpose leases were granted in 1979 at Kulaluk (301.69 hectares), Railway Dam in the inner city (3.12 hectares) and Knuckeyes Lagoon at Berrimah (20.56 hectares). Despite government promises of more leases for Aboriginal town camps in Darwin, only one other lease has since been granted, twenty-four kilometres from the city centre.

In June 1972 the Federal Government in response to Aboriginal demands established the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission. The Commissioner heard submissions from the small number of Larrakia people at Kulaluk and their Darwin fringe dweller allies from other camps.⁶ In his findings, the Commissioner, Mr Justice Woodward, at first used a narrow definition of Aboriginal claimants:

I was told that there are some 18 members of the [Larrakia] tribe now left. Later information suggests that fewer than this number can trace paternal descent from the Larrakia, but there are more who identify themselves as Larrakia because of maternal links (Woodward 1973:26).

However, Woodward (p.26) left his findings open by welcoming further submissions on 'the question of principles involved'.

Following the release of the Woodward's first report, a violent Aboriginal protest erupted at Kulaluk.⁷ Arguing for a politically involved approach, I editorialised in the Aboriginal newsletter *Bunji* (January 1978): 'It is not justice to almost wipe out a tribe and then judge them by anthropology books - books that tell only a small part of Aboriginal history' (reprinted in Day 1978:3). Subsequently, the struggle of the Larrakia and other Darwin fringe dwellers, including my role as secretary and White broker, was incorporated into Woodward's final report. The Commissioner wrote:

I have no doubt that the Larrakia people were the traditional owners of what is now the whole Darwin area. Some of the survivors, together with a few other Aborigines have formed an organization calling itself Gwalwa Daraniki. The secretary of this organization, a white man, has achieved remarkable results in obtaining press coverage and other forms of publicity for the claims of this group. In the result, Kulaluk has become something of a symbol of the stand which Aborigines, with help and guidance from many sources, are now making against the past tendency to put their interests last in any consideration of land usage (Woodward 1974:53).⁸

Since the success of the Kulaluk claim and the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, 1976* and the *Native Title Act, 1993*, there has been a remarkable revitalisation of the Larrakia people into a language group, or 'nation' as they call themselves, which was said to have over 700 members, mostly living in the urban community (Walsh 1996:101; see also Wei 1990; Sutton 1998). Their numbers had grown to over 1500 members by 1999 (Risk 1999:1). Both Walsh (1996) and Povinelli (1993a:55-57) discuss the relationship between the Larrakia revival and extensive anthropological research that has facilitated the claims of the Larrakia and other Aboriginal people in the region. Undoubtedly, the well-publicised activism of a small group of Larrakia fringe dwellers and their allies in the 1970s also had some influence on the growing assertion of Larrakia identity.⁹

Researchers in Darwin argue for the acceptance of process and change in Aboriginal societies of the Darwin area (Sansom 1980a, 1981a, 1988a, 1988b, 1999; Brandl 1983; Brandl and Walsh 1985; Layton 1986; Povinelli 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995a), while also proposing appropriate definitions of Aboriginal social structure and connection to the land which can be recognised by Australian legal systems (see Brandl et al 1979; Sansom 1980b, 1980c, 1982b, 1985; Walsh 1989a, 1989b; Povinelli 1995b; Rose 1995; Sutton

1995a, 1995b, 1998, 1999b). As Merlan (1997:5) points out, the Larrakia Kenbi claim is amongst those Aboriginal land claims which suggest: 'broad socio-territorial identities [have] involved people whose concepts of attachment to country [is] at less socially inclusive levels and finer geographic scale [as a result of] historical contingency and change'. From another approach, Kerin Coulehan (1995a) documents Aboriginal systems of governance that extend to Yolngu women and children who live in Darwin.

In 1978 the NT Government increased the size of the Darwin urban area to about three times the size of Greater London (Parsons 1998:15). All the Aboriginal claim to vacant Crown land on the Cox Peninsula, across the harbour from the city, was included within the new boundaries and therefore could not be claimed under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, 1976*, which excludes claims to land in towns (see Olney 1991:12; Blowes 1992). Subsequently, the Larrakia people won a High Court appeal against the government action. During my fieldwork, as I will later describe, the Larrakia people also registered a native title claim over the city (see Carey and Collinge 1997). However, the tribe had received no more than token recognition as traditional owners of the Darwin area prior to the December 2000 findings by the Aboriginal Land Commissioner on the Kenbi Land Claim to the Cox Peninsula and nearby islands.

Although most of the above studies incorporate into Aboriginal social systems some of the vast changes that have occurred in the Darwin region, I suggest that the writers continue to construct what Appadurai (1988:40) terms 'metonymic prisons for particular places (such that the natives of that place are inextricably confined by them)'. The construction of 'the survivor native' is understandable, in response to land rights legislation and past stereotypes of urban Aboriginal people; however, I suggest that the above brief 'genealogy' of descriptions of Aboriginal cultural continuity, or persistence, in the Darwin region reveals the exclusion, or marginalisation, of the prolonged resistance made by many Aboriginal occupants of the region.

A rare, though stifled, voice of opposition appears in a brief excerpt from the transcripts of the Kenbi land claim hearing that is cited by Povinelli (1993a:247):

June Mills: ...the majority of people here would know that we are Larrakia. The only ones that would not know would be the white people, and actually it is quite offensive that us black Larrakia people who have lived in - in the Darwin area, I find it - I find it extremely offensive - that we have to get up here now, in front of all you people, and to try to justify who we are and how we got to be here and do we

know this and do we know that...

His Honour: Mr Parsons, I think the - if you could pursue - the witness has made a point and it is not going to be a political meeting, and there is no...

June Mills: No, but I want this down as evidence, because this is why I...

His Honour: Well, just - just - just take it easy. You have made your point, and we better get on to something relevant.

Compounding the silencing of Aboriginal oppositional voices, fringe dwellers have been excluded from the land claim process. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, 1976* excludes claims based on needs and the *Native Title Act, 1993* does not appear to support the claims of fringe dwellers in Darwin. In spite of their omission from these laws, in my experience most fringe dwellers resist containment and claim that they assert Aboriginal rights in their 'illegal' camps on vacant Darwin bushland.

Edmunds (1995:9) views town camps as 'the fundamental point of Aboriginal resistance to European-Australian dominance'. As sites of 'action and change', the camps stand for the recognition of '[Aboriginal] needs, their definitions of community and of the ways in which these definitions are derived from their particular relationship to country' (Edmunds 1995:9). These are issues I examine in this thesis. More usually, the seemingly displaced location of the camps, their reputation as a 'war zone' (see Merlan 1995:165; Glendinnen 1999:92) and the apparent acculturation of the residents has deterred anthropological fieldworkers. Where fringe camps have been the subjects of ethnographies (Sansom 1980a; Collmann 1988), their political context has been seen as secondary to a holistic study.

1.3 A multi-sited study

Bolton (2000:2) defines a single-sited study as 'concentrated participatory research among a defined group of people who are co-residents'. According to Bolton (2000:2), a multi-sited study requires a 'methodological shift ... dependent on ... the identification of a field of sociality as a subject, rather than the place where those relationships are worked out'. In my assessment, a multi-sited study as proposed by Marcus (1995:110) tends to include the campers in town *space*, rather than being complicit in the confinement of fringe dwellers to a bounded *place*, which Appadurai (1988) suggests may occur figuratively and literally in a single-sited study. Although Sansom's

analysis is an example of a potentially multi-sited study of people who are 'no longer exclusively located' (Sansom 1980a:5), in his ethnography the fringe dwellers are selectively bounded within a 'segregated social field' (Sansom 1981a:275) and a region (Sansom 1980a:iii) from which 'countrymen' are recruited into a 'hinterland Aboriginal community' (see Sansom 1985:84-87).

I claim that in the 1990s the Darwin fringe dwellers struggle for *space* where they can live, knowing that their location in a specific *place* is usually decided by city power structures that are inaccessible to the campers. However, the physical space contested by fringe dwellers differs from the type of Aboriginal domain that Trigger (1986:114) argues can 'never be permanently fixed by the location itself'. In Darwin, a shifting spatial domain is created by Aboriginal card players or drinkers in a public park. In contrast, the fringe dwellers I describe struggle for space with security of tenure. Rather than the passive resistance expressed within an Aboriginal domain, as described by Trigger (1992), the fringe dwellers openly challenge Darwin authorities, as my fieldwork illustrates.

Marcus (1995:100) points out that fieldwork, which is always potentially multi-sited, bounds the object of study to a single site by the selection of what to include. Even in a multi-sited study, through 'constructivism' (see Marcus 1995:105), it is the ethnographer 'who provides the only site of wholeness and continuity in the face of a fragmented, disjointed array of sites of incommensurable scales' (Weiner 2000:77). As the field widens, it tests the limits of ethnography and produces the 'anxiety' of losing the perspective of the subaltern (Marcus 1995:95). In addition, 'something of the mystique and reality of conventional fieldwork is lost' (Marcus 1995:100), including claims of being a holistic representation (see Marcus 1995:99). However, the evidence I present suggests that a multi-sited study better represents the priorities of the Darwin fringe dwellers.

According to my thesis, a failure to engage with the nature of power relations between fringe dwellers, the practice of anthropology, the public, other Aboriginal groups, legal institutions, the media and Local and Territory Government would be a failure to represent the 'perspective of the subaltern'. Marcus (1995:100) notes: 'what is not lost but remains essential to multi-sited research is the function of translation from one cultural idiom or language to another'. If the conflict in this case is a result of the intersection of powerful discourses with the aspirations of the fringe dwellers, the value of multi-sited research remains in the anthropologist's role of translation across cultures. This is made more complex in a multi-sited study because 'innocent "identity" politics' is less likely to be convincing (Marcus 1995:101)

as the connections between sites are revealed. In the world of today, 'the very status of "cultural difference" as anthropological subject matter is rendered problematic' (Weiner 1997:87).

1.4 Cultural continuities or a culture of opposition?

In this section, I examine the literature that pertains to the dichotomies implied by my thesis question. The debates which I cite reveal the weaknesses and strengths of two differing approaches to ethnography which Marcus (1986:178) describes as, 'staging culture as an integral spatio-temporal isolate' and viewing 'culture as a product of struggle'. For example, in defending his descriptions of uniquely Aboriginal cultural continuities, Sansom (1984a:40) asks if apparent cultural accommodation, or 'adaptations', in Australia's indigenous minority must always be viewed as reactive? His view contrasts with the emphatic claim by Cowlshaw (1993:187-188): 'Cultural reproduction amongst Aborigines in Australia today *always* occurs in a context of opposition, official and unofficial, in Arnhem Land as well as Bourke'.

Although these two ethnographers foreground cultural forms in an Aboriginal domain, Cowlshaw (1986:10) includes within contemporary Aboriginal culture all Aboriginal resistance, 'as creative response to the conditions of existence experienced by a group'. She is critical of anthropology that interprets culture as 'exotic practices' (p.10). Similarly, Merlan (1998:169) claims Sansom (1980a) privileges an 'alternative reality' in the fringe camps. In Chapter Four, I present evidence that suggests that the uniqueness of 'Wallaby Cross' owes much to the fringe dwellers' cattle station backgrounds and their history of struggle for space in Darwin.

Sansom's (1980a) description of Darwin fringe dwellers, as though they are a 'self-managing entity in classic field work style' (Cowlshaw 1986:9), contrasts with Cowlshaw's (1993:184) view that 'one cannot represent Aborigines without representing the dialectical relations of domination'. Where culture is identified in an inclusive sense, as Cowlshaw proposes: 'The analysis of culture groups then depends more on the nature of the boundaries and relations between culture groups than on their defining characteristics' (Cowlshaw 1988b:89).

Cowlshaw (1988a:232, 1993:186, 1994:80) uses the term 'oppositional culture' to describe the 'active creation and protection of [an Aboriginal] arena of meaning in an embattled situation' (Cowlshaw 1988b:97). An oppositional culture subverts and challenges dominant systems of meaning (Cowlshaw 1993:185) through everyday acts of resistance, like drinking and socially disruptive behaviour. According to Cowlshaw (1993:187): 'The political

aspect of mundane Aboriginal culture need not be due to any intention to be "political". Cultural expression can develop a sharp political edge because of the white response'. Indeed, Jack Davis the Aboriginal author has commented that, 'To be Aboriginal in Australia is to be political' (Shoemaker 1994:32). However, I will argue that fringe camps in Darwin exhibit a more active resistance to authority than Cowlshaw noted at Brindleton, where Aboriginal people are reluctant to directly challenge the Whites who rule the town (Cowlshaw 1988a:226).

In later chapters I suggest that the Darwin fringe dwellers' domain is generally marked more by a distinctive 'lived in' traditional culture and language than a reactive culture of opposition. Neither does the maintenance of Aboriginal language and beliefs amongst the Burarra fringe dwellers appear to have been the crucial element of defence against missionary intrusion observed by Tonkinson (1974:67) and Trigger (1992:126) at Jigalong and Doomadgee Missions. Darwin fringe dwellers from central Arnhem Land, to the east (Map 2), have not experienced the history of dispossession experienced by both the Aboriginal residents of Brindleton in 'settled' Australia and the cattle station workers at 'Wallaby Cross' or the indoctrination of fundamentalist missions like Doomadgee and Jigalong.¹⁰

Contributing to the debate, Trigger (1997a:86) suggests: "'continuity" is a problematic notion unless it is understood in the context of an ongoing process of reconstruction of culture and identity through an intensive history of relations with the broader Australian society'. In Aboriginal communities like Doomadgee in Queensland: 'A researcher ... would have to be particularly romantic to conclude that everyday life reproduces, in any direct fashion, the pre-colonial culture of the region' (Trigger 1997a:101). Although some readers of Trigger's (1992) ethnography come to a different conclusion (see Turner 1993:146),¹¹ Trigger's description contrasts with my experience of the maintenance of traditions and language amongst the Aboriginal people in the Darwin fringe camps, where many groups have been spared the 'wild times' of the pastoral regions (see Trigger 1992:17-37).

Despite Trigger's (1986, 1988a, 1992) and Cowlshaw's (1988b:97) shared concept of a closed Aboriginal domain as a site of resistance against intrusion by the dominant society, Trigger differs with Cowlshaw's 'avowedly materialist analysis' (Trigger 1990:237). He emphasises the 'enmeshing' of Aboriginal culture with the historical experiences and commodities of colonialism (Trigger 1992:223, 1994:33, 1997a:101). That is, Trigger places more importance on Aboriginal accommodation within the intruding system (see Trigger 1988a). His statement, that there are major 'discontinuities' in Aboriginal tradition since precolonial times (Trigger 1997:88; see also Merlan

1998:168), implies a dichotomy between 'traditional' and 'introduced' cultural forms (see also Trigger 1992:102), which is less evident in either Cowlshaw's or Sansom's analyses.

In everyday affairs, Cowlshaw (1993:187) stresses that: 'Cultural expression can often develop a sharp political edge because of the white response'. Cowlshaw (1993:188) adds:

The fact that these remote communities are regularly being taught to fit in with alien practices means that ceremonial life, painting, language use, as well as everyday practices are marked as distinctively Aboriginal rather than as normal.

For example, fringe dwellers value their closeness to the soil, on which most of them sleep, as confirmation of their Aboriginality. Their lifestyle demonstrates that they belong to the land. As one man told me, 'My mother put me on the ground. My mattress [was] paperbark - not bed like Whiteman'. In response to authorities that claim that the campers do not belong in the city, the campers assert their identity as indigenous people. However, being harassed from place to place 'like dingo, like wallaby', as they told me, suggests to fringe dwellers that they are not regarded as human.

The elements of Aboriginality-as-persistence listed by Keeffe (1988:68, 1992:46) are: 'a belief in the persistence of an inherently unique identity; the continuity of cultural practices that originate in traditional Aboriginal culture; the common sharing of these by all Aboriginal people in Australia'. These are ingredients of the politicised public ethnicity also referred to as 'the politics of culture' that Hollinsworth (1992b:169) distinguishes from the 'private ethnicity', which is more typical of the Darwin camps. In this thesis I give examples suggesting that Aboriginal persistence is more likely to be exploited in the public realm by non-Aboriginal tourism and festival organisations, which otherwise oppose or do not appear to support fringe dwellers' complaints. More often, the lifestyle of 'bush people', as fringe dwellers sometimes call themselves, is used by opponents as a reason for excluding them from the town.

Where persistence of Aboriginal culture and social structure are required in claims under Australian land rights laws, the fringe dwellers are excluded. Because of this exclusion, the 'mimetic' or imitative representation of Aboriginality that Merlan (1998:150) believes is a result of land claims around Katherine, is not as applicable to Darwin fringe dwellers.¹² The following observation by Keeffe (1988:79) is therefore less likely to apply to

fringe dwellers than it does to other Aboriginal people:

Aboriginality-as-persistence becomes equated with 'primordial ties', and the relationship between Aborigines and the larger social system within which they are encapsulated and by which they are dominated is eliminated from analysis.

1.5 The 'political' and the 'cultural'

Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982:223) label 'the two major competing ethnic ideologies as the "cultural" and the "political" ideology'. They continue:

These polar positions, we claim, are the basic symbols competing to form the basis of group-wide identity. Indeed, it seems that the history of the relationship between Aboriginal political demands and the government's response had been an attempt to reduce the full scope of these demands ... to the more limited demand of the rights of Aboriginals to retain their racial and cultural heritage.¹³

The analysis by Jones and Hill-Burnett appears to be applicable to the two anthropological approaches typified in my thesis question. That is, a bounded study of a culture portrayed as complete in itself is less likely to examine the issues which daily confront Aboriginal people, particularly fringe dwellers. These issues, which are often the material priorities of the fringe dwellers, are more likely to be examined in a study emphasising the interface of Aboriginal people and the dominant socio-economic system.

Because fringe dwellers' demands include recognition of their cultural rights to live as a community, their fight for space in the towns appears to represent an intersection of discourses of equal rights with discourses of identity politics. Prior to 1967, Aboriginal activists claimed an equal humanity as citizens of Australia (Stokes 1997:162; see also McGinness 1991:25). Stokes (p.162) adds: 'If there was any general Aboriginal identity, it was located within a shared history of oppression'. In that period, activists, unionists, and others identified with elements of Aboriginality-as-resistance - as again occurred in the fringe dweller protests during my fieldwork.

After 1967 in Australia, there was a shift towards emphasising the uniqueness of Aboriginality (Stokes 1997:164). Frank Hardy (1968) witnessed the changing paradigm as the Gurindji strikers widened their demands for equal pay to include claims for sacred land. As Langton (1981:19) writes:

[W]hen paternalistic restrictions and the stigma of Aboriginality began to lift in the mid-sixties, many Aboriginal groups, both in and

out of the cities gained the freedom to express their own terms and idioms... By the later sixties, a series of successes brought Aborigines to the point of demanding equal but different access to material wealth and social, legal and political status.

My research suggests that the dichotomy between equal rights (expressed as resistance) and cultural rights (expressed as persistence) cannot be sustained in an analysis of the struggle by fringe dwellers for space in Darwin.

1.6 Transitive and intransitive resistance

Scott (1989:4) argues that studies of resistance have concentrated on formal protest such as 'petitions, rallies, peaceful marches, protest voting, strikes, and boycotts'. Scott (21-2) argues that everyday forms of resistance have not been seen as political. He states, 'if class domination is a process of systematic appropriation, then the measures devised to thwart that appropriation constitute a form of resistance' (p.22). These issues are reflected in debates on Aboriginal resistance.

According to Rowse (1993b), there are two dimensions of Aboriginal resistance. The Dhan-Gadi people, as described by Morris (1988, 1989), use intransitive resistance 'in the sense ... of actions focused primarily among those doing the resisting' (Rowse 1993b:273). Similarly, the preference of fringe dwellers to live as a group in the town, barefooted, speaking their own languages and using open fires for cooking, are examples of this form of resistance. In contrast, transitive resistance is directed outwards and challenges the encroaching actions of others. Examples from my fieldwork are the refusal to pay fines for sleeping in a public place and continuing to camp illegally on vacant Crown land. Elsewhere, Rowse (1990:189) questions the effectiveness of the intransitive Aboriginal opposition described by Cowlshaw by asking, 'In what sense is the "oppositional culture" articulated as **political** interest?'

In response to Rowse's privileging of organised resistance over everyday intransitive resistance, Lattas (1993:244) states: 'Rowse de-politicises the oppositional culture of Aborigines by equating politics with formal institutionalised political processes'. Lattas (1993:243) adds that the high arrest rate for Aboriginal people points to 'a sense of moral panic in the white community'. For example, in Darwin Aboriginal 'antisocial behaviour' is a regular Local Government and Territory election issue (Schulz 1996; *NT News* April 30, 1996, April 6, 2000; see also Collmann 1988:51; Ween 1997:26).

Cowlshaw (1993:193) states that an oppositional culture is often the only alternative for Aboriginal people: 'To be heard by the white institutions

[politically active Aboriginal people] must employ the language, metaphors and moral stance that are often not known, rarely accepted and certainly not the *lingua franca* of the black community'. However, Dyck (1985:14) notes changes that have occurred:

The traditional means of opposition undertaken by indigenous communities that have been dominated by colonial powers were indirect, symbolic and commonly expressed in terms which did not provoke a punitive response from governments ... In contrast the opposition tactics of today are open and, and often as not, decidedly provocative. The development of political organizations, the issuing of legal challenges, and the use of the mass media are all means by which indigenous spokesmen can appeal directly to governments and the public.

In this thesis I give examples that indicate that intransitive, hidden or everyday oppositional culture may quickly transform into open, formal or transitive resistance. My research also suggests that there is a political awareness behind fringe dwellers' everyday actions that blurs the distinction between transitive and intransitive opposition.

Although Keffe (1988:72) includes elements of an oppositional culture, including school truancy, inattention and 'cheeky behaviour', Hollinsworth (1992b:169) and Keffe (1988, 1992) generally refer to Aboriginal resistance as explicit public forms of 'transitive' action. Keffe (1988:73, 1992:102) claims that Aboriginality-as-resistance has the advantages of being: interactive; conscious; dynamic; modern and political, in contrast to the limiting effect of a reliance on a unique cultural identity, as in Aboriginality-as-persistence. Resistance is also claimed by Keffe (1988:73) as being: forward looking; does not reify culture; uses a universalistic language; and is inclusive in recognising non-Aboriginal support. However, the claim by Hollinsworth (1992a:149) that young, urban and Westernised Aborigines can identify more easily with Aboriginality-as-resistance does not appear to be as applicable today, as Chapter Seven indicates. Otherwise my research suggests that the features of resistance, listed above, characterise fringe dweller resistance.

Although Sansom (1995:276) has more recently given one vignette of fringe dweller protest, in *The camp at Wallaby Cross* (Sansom 1980a) there is no example of open resistance and little indication of who or what the 'mob' would be opposing. Instead, at 'Wallaby Cross,' Sansom (1980a) describes a persistence of Aboriginal ways that can be interpreted as a form of everyday resistance (see Glendinnen 1999). Elsewhere, Sansom (1982b:137) analyses the 'limited and constricted vision' within an Aboriginal commonality based

on the cultural continuities of 'bordered communities' (Sansom 1982b:136). His argument is for cultural interpretations of Aboriginal oppositional behaviour, rather than interpretations rendered over 'to a Western world of discourse' (see Sansom 1985:40, 1988a:148). In contrast, in Chapter Four I give many examples of more open, consciously political resistance by the 'Wallaby Cross' mob.

1.7 The politics of culture

Sansom (1984a:41) interprets the 'politics of culture' as Aboriginal demands 'that value be allocated to their values', which he claims are maintained by Aboriginal people in a changing world. More commonly, the expression 'politics of culture' refers to a dialectic with the wider society that Trigger (1997b:118) describes as 'the politics of indigenism'. Trigger (1998a:155) demonstrates how 'identity politics has disrupted established [Australian] ideologies of civic unity and moral solidarity'. In contrast, Tonkinson (1999:137) argues that Aboriginal 'tradition' (his quotes) has intellectual and emotional appeal as a political and economic resource to a growing Aboriginal middle class, and as a component of an Australian national identity.

Tonkinson (p.137) distinguishes the persistence of the 'lived in reality' of Aboriginal tradition in remote Australian communities from the use of Aboriginal 'tradition' in identity construction, which requires 'a very much higher level of self-consciousness and objectification of the past and of culture than in remote Aboriginal Australia' (Tonkinson p.139).¹⁴ During my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001, the fringe dwellers often defended their right to camp in Darwin as a valued element of Aboriginal identity (see Illustration 5 and Section 5.11 of this thesis). My observations suggest that their argument was based on the 'lived in reality' of the fringe dwellers, rather than a construction of Aboriginality.

According to Tonkinson (1998:302), 'the dominant representations in Aboriginal rhetoric appear to be moving from a defensive or reactive tone to one that is more culture-centred, emphasising commonalities, continuity and survival'. In this 'more positive' and 'less confronting' self-representation, '[discourses of resistance] are couched less in direct opposition to white hegemony and historical abuses and more in terms of survival and the strength of Aboriginal culture as proof of successful resistance' (Tonkinson 1998:302; see also Tonkinson and Tonkinson 1998:13; Tonkinson 1999:137). Expressions of fringe dweller resistance appear to encompass both discourses.

1.8 Essentialism

Essentialism, which is described as 'imputing essences, fixed and necessary characteristics, to a category of people' (Cowlshaw 1993:187), is a debated topic in the anthropology of Aboriginality.¹⁵ Ironically the concept of an essential Aboriginal identity has its origins in the invasion of the continent in 1788. Langton (1993b:32) states: 'Before Cook and Phillip, there was no "Aboriginality" in the sense that is meant today' (see also Tonkinson 1990:191; Attwood 1992b, 1996a:3; Tonkinson and Tonkinson 1998:12; Tonkinson 1998:294). According to Stokes (1997:158) and Tonkinson and Tonkinson (1998:12), by categorising Aborigines as the 'primitive other', non-Aboriginal people asserted their superiority while rationalising dispossession. After 1972, the state began to 'rehabilitate' Aboriginality through special structures formed to stabilise and integrate Aboriginal political activity (see Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982:224; Beckett 1988:17).

Morris (1985:87) defines essentialism as 'the assertion that certain social relations are governed by some inevitable natural causality, independent of historical contextualisation'. Similarly, Hollinsworth (1992a:147) comments:

[T]he discourse of cultural continuity (or persistence) as an essentialist and universal commonality is typically predicated on some genetic or biological mechanism operating despite the vagaries of history and diverse backgrounds evident in contemporary Aboriginal communities.

According to Hollinsworth (1992b:169), his critique of Aboriginality-as-persistence questions 'the effectiveness of particular essentialised and universalistic discursive strategies in Australian cultural politics'. Hollinsworth (1992a:147) suggests that an assumption of an Aboriginal essence tends to isolate or ignore outside influences. In this way, I suggest that studies based on essentialist theories differ from those studies that examine the infrastructure influencing cultural superstructures.

If Morton (1998:375) is correct in claiming that to identify the key characteristics of something is to essentialise it, then it is not surprising that accusations of essentialism have often been made in the anthropological literature. Although Cowlshaw (1988a:279) directs her criticism against concepts that view Aboriginal culture as 'unchanging and exotic', others (Rowse 1990:190; Hollinsworth 1992a:148; Morton 1998:360) accuse Cowlshaw of 'political essentialism' for her discounting of 'interstitial' Aboriginal people who are not oppositional (see Cowlshaw 1988a:233, 253).¹⁶ Similarly, Morton (1998:361) states:

Surely, if an older anthropology contributed to the idea that

Aborigines in 'settled' Australia had lost their culture simply by overwhelmingly emphasising (and therefore authorising) the idea of the traditional black, a newer anthropology overwhelmingly emphasising opposition contributes equally to the idea that those persons whom Aboriginal people sometimes refer to as [assimilated] have lost their history.

As I argue in a later chapter, the 'newer anthropology', to which Morton (1998:361) refers has been overtaken by a return to 'older', or 'neo-classic' forms in native title claims, under laws which may judge that fringe dwellers have no claims or that people like June Mills, who defended her right to identify as Larrakia, have 'lost their culture'. Or, as Wolfe (1994:122) claims:

The fundamental political consequence of the specifications attaching to traditional connection [in the *Native Title Act*], like its predecessor, traditional ownership, is that they shift the burden of history from the fact of expropriation to the character of the expropriated.

Lattas (1992:162, 1993:249) believes that Aboriginal people, in claims of 'persistence', legitimately adopt an essentialist view of themselves as a form of resistance. This point is also conceded by Keeffe (1988:77, 1992:90) and Hollinsworth (1992a:149, 1992b:170) in their essays expounding the advantages of Aboriginality-as-resistance over persistence. Perhaps more appropriately, Tonkinson (1999:134) suggests that resistance and persistence are 'analytically separable yet closely intertwined'.

With the notable exception perhaps of Sansom, outside observers do not usually view fringe dwellers as models of the persistence of Aboriginal traditions. Aboriginal town residents who have achieved a degree of acceptance in the dominant society (see Fink 1957:103) mostly view the fringe dwellers' drinking behaviour as an embarrassment. As letters to the Darwin press suggest, the lifestyle in the camps is more usually equated with a failure to adapt to the standards of White-dominated towns, rather than as opposition. An observation by Keeffe (1988:78), on education but applicable to this study, suggests an explanation for the failure to recognise fringe dweller resistance:

Aboriginality is being condensed into a form that can be incorporated into the dominant cultural tradition. The elements of Aboriginality that are resistant or oppositional are sanctioned and constrained, edited from the formal curriculum and denied the support of state resources.

In a study of a Central Australian Aboriginal employment program, Rowse (1993b:283) suggests an alternative to giving an 'ethnic personality' to resistance:

Now that Aboriginal people occupy positions of power at all levels of the administration of 'Aboriginal affairs', the structural 'frontier' that divides the central apparatus of the state from its local capillaries may be a more significant topic for our study than the (increasingly abstract) 'frontier' which is said to divide Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal people.

Attwood (1992a:159) suggests that an alternative model for the construction of Aboriginality is 'Aboriginality as history'. Keeffe (1992:142) stresses the importance of Aboriginal oral history in constructing a 'community of memory', in resistance to what Stanner (1969:18) termed 'the great Australian silence'. By using history to construct space for a people otherwise marginalised, there is also the potential for Aboriginal people and other Australians to perceive that their pasts and presents are not necessarily opposed, but often shared (see Attwood 1992a:159, 1992b:xvi).

The fringe dwellers use their historical memory to defend their right to be in Darwin. Older campers often told me of their experiences walking to Darwin from Arnhem Land in the 1950s. An example of history conveniently 'forgotten' in Darwin public memory, but remembered by Darwin Aboriginal people in the camps, is the Aboriginal burial site at Mindil Beach that was exposed by earthworks (see *Bunji* May 1981). A Larrakia elder told Sean Heffernan (1996): 'That's where they dug all the people who were buried there. They dug [my sister] out too'.

I find that C D Rowley's arguments are relevant to the dichotomies of persistence and resistance. Attwood (1992a:159) also acknowledges the importance Rowley (1972c:8) places on history in understanding the Aboriginal predicament. According to Rowse (1993a:30), Rowley found anthropology to be 'redundant in its ahistorical concern with "cultural predispositions", and potentially apologist in its analytical promotion of "race" and "culture" over the historical structures of colonialism itself'. Rowse (1993a:30) cites Rowley (1972a:173):

If from their many origins there are indeed some cultural predispositions, as there may well be, it is not necessary to postulate these as the *cause* of Aboriginal actions and attitudes; these may be adequately accounted for by historical and economic factors and by social factors arising from the relationship of the group with

government and with non-Aboriginal society.

Despite Sansom's (1988a:150) critical assessment of Rowley's texts for being 'determinedly culture free' (discussed in a Chapter Four), according to Cowlshaw (1992:26) it was the 'encyclopaedic study of Aborigines in Australian society' by Charles Rowley (1972a, 1972b, 1972c, 1978) which heralded major changes in Aboriginal studies (see also Hamilton 1995). Inglis (1994:74) describes Rowley's focus on contacts between Aborigines and non-Aborigines as a break with anthropological studies that Inglis (1994:77) says suffer from 'theoretical myopia' by 'de-emphasizing both the role of the state and the resistance of Aborigines to colonial (and post-colonial) oppression'.

The separation of studies of 'traditional Aborigines' from racial, political or policy considerations is traced by Cowlshaw (1992:22) to the 1940s and 1950s when 'the anger and energy of students who were concerned about the position of Aborigines was deflected into other disciplines, or away from the academic arena altogether'. Today there is a wealth of historical texts on the Aboriginal protest movement (see Hardy 1968; Palmer and McKenna 1978; Lippmann 1981; Bandler 1989; Hawke and Gallagher 1989), including reinterpretations of early Aboriginal resistance (Reynolds 1982, 1995; Broome 1982). Other studies examine Aboriginal resistance to institutionalisation (Tonkinson 1974; Morris 1989; Trigger 1992; Rowse 1993a, 1998). However, only passing reference is made in earlier anthropological literature to the formal, organised protests that have influenced public and political opinion (Maddock 1972:15; Berndt and Berndt 1992:525).

More recently, anthropological debates on Aboriginal resistance centre on everyday, informal forms of opposition to assimilation (Toussaint 1987, 1992; Cowlshaw 1990, 1988a, 1988b, 1993, 1994; Rowse 1990, 1993b; Hollinsworth 1992a, 1992b; Attwood 1992a; Lattas 1992, 1993). Otherwise, when Aboriginal protest is mentioned in the anthropological literature (Trigger 1997:84; Beckett 1988:16; Keeffe 1988:71, 1992:140; Tonkinson 1998:301), it is included to illustrate the functional role of protest in identity formation, or ethnogenesis (see Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982; Tonkinson 1990; Stokes 1997). A rare exception is an early analysis of Aboriginal protest by Ronald Berndt in a paper to the Adelaide ANZAAS Congress (Berndt 1969).¹⁷

1.9 Why do fringe dwellers resist?

Abu-Lughod (1990:41) notes that studies of resistance widen the definition of the political. She paraphrases Foucault (1978:95), to state: 'Where there is resistance, there is power'. Abu-Lughod (1990:53) concludes:

[I]t seems to me that we respect everyday resistance not just by

arguing for the dignity or heroism of the resisters but by letting their practices teach us about the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power.

In this thesis I examine fringe dweller resistance in the framework of Rowley's division of Australia into 'settled' and 'colonial' regions and the tension where these regions intersect. In this section, I more specifically examine why Aboriginal groups living without land tenure in fringe camps around 'settled' Darwin are often more prepared than other Aboriginal groups to participate in open resistance. Later chapters of this thesis give examples from my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001 and of fringe dweller protest in the 1970s and 1980s that suggest a political dimension to fringe camps not shared by other urban Aboriginal groups.¹⁸

During fourteen years involvement as a political activist and personal friend of fringe dwellers in Darwin I observed that fringe dwellers like those at 'Wallaby Cross' and Kulaluk were notably prepared to take part in open protest despite outside pressure from police and more conservative Aboriginal people against their activities. Their living conditions were inadequate and they had no security of tenure, which resulted in a vulnerability to prosecution; however, there appeared to be other factors that motivated their opposition.

It was often suggested by the public and in the media that I was instigating this unrest (see Gilbert 1977:221; *Sydney Morning Herald* February 11, 1973; *The Age* February 13, 1973), and my involvement is a factor that is considered in this thesis.¹⁹ However, formal, organised, fringe dweller resistance has been recorded by Eames (1983), Perkins (1998), Rubuntja (1998) and Shaw (1998) in their brief accounts of the Alice Springs campaigns in the 1970s.²⁰ Similar protests were held in Katherine and outside the NT Parliament House by the Katherine Combined Aboriginal Organisation of town camps (see 'Rally for more Aboriginal housing', *Green Left Weekly* October 12, 1995; *Land Rights News* October 1995, February 1996). As I will describe in Chapter Six, fringe dweller protest resulted in tragic consequences while I was absent from the NT in December 1996 and January 1997. In addition, the struggle for recognition by the group I describe in this thesis intensified after the completion of my fieldwork.²¹

Trigger (1997:116) examines 'Factors relevant to taking an oppositional or accommodationist position' and theories of power relations (Trigger 1992:8-16). He places an emphasis on the 'consciousness' of powerless groups (Trigger 1988b:236) and the hegemony of the powerful (Trigger 1992:9-11). However, there appears to be little analysis in the Aboriginal studies

literature of the reasons a marginalised group are prepared at various times to move from informal, hidden everyday opposition to formal open activism.

I suggest that the paucity of analysis in Aboriginal studies literature reflects the predominance of 'cultural' interpretations. Therefore, to explain why some Aboriginal groups are prepared to openly resist, I have followed Trigger (1992:13) in applying theories of peasant resistance to Aboriginal studies. In particular, I have adapted ideas from Wolf (1971), Migdal (1974), Paige (1975), Scott (1985, 1986, 1987, 1989, 1990), Gutmann (1993), Ortner (1995), Korovkin (2000) and the comprehensive overview of the theories of peasant resistance given by Skocpol (1982).

As I have discussed, central to my analysis is Rowley's division of Australia into 'colonial' (more usually referred to as 'remote') and 'settled' regions. Rowley (1972b:12) emphasises that organised resistance can only come from 'colonial Australia' where 'small Aboriginal groups' have 'maintained some power to act, to make crucial decisions, and to adhere to them'. In 'colonial', or remote, Australia, 'two systems of legitimacy [Aboriginal and White] remain in juxtaposition' (p.12). The following chapters appear to illustrate this point. Rowley (p.12) argued that: 'What remains of Aboriginal culture [in] "settled Australia" can provide neither means of decision-making nor legitimacy for leadership'. As Tonkinson (1998:299) notes, claims of legitimacy for Aboriginal leaders are complex, but based largely on the possession of certain kinds of knowledge. He adds that the subtleties of who has the right to speak become more complex in the national political arena than in territorially defined actions, which are more typical in the remote north.

Rowley's earlier theory of Aboriginal leadership was later questioned by the actions of the Aboriginal Embassy on the lawn outside Parliament House in Canberra in 1972 which began claims for recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty in capitals of 'settled' Australia. The Embassy activists did not claim authority through traditional structures, but gained legitimacy as leaders of Aboriginal resistance. By making the Embassy an impoverished, self-built structure on disputed land, the Black activists also projected the fringe camp into a symbol of national Aboriginal resistance to dispossession. As Rowley later comments:

When they looked at the Embassy, some of our legislators were stirred with that same indignation that has moved generations of country town councillors, contemplating Aboriginal shanties unlawfully built from materials acquired from the town tip, and unlawfully placed on the town common (Rowley 1978:1).²²

The Aboriginal Embassy is an example of how 'hidden' or 'everyday' resistance can become the basis of political action. The Embassy projected the fringe camp into the national and international arena by making the self-built Aboriginal humpy a symbol of sovereignty and land rights. The construction of self-made huts in the fringe camps, and at the Embassy, also draws attention to the lack of adequate shelter comparable to the rest of the community. In addition, the shelters contrast with the popular image of nomadic itinerant Aboriginal people. Korovkin (2000:6) examines this relationship between hidden and open forms of resistance in rural Ecuador, where 'small acts of defiance can prepare the ground for organised [actions]' (see also Esman 1989:222). The testimony of Bob Bunba and Johnny Balaiya in Section 5.11 of this thesis and their subsequent participation in the protest described in Section 6.16 are perhaps evidence of this.

Rowley (1972b:12) assessed that organised resistance could only come from Aboriginal societies with a traditional structure in remote Australia, as in the Pilbara (p.12) and Gurindji strikes (p.338). However, traditional Aboriginal organisation may be linked to colonising structures through ascribed or elected leadership, bureaucratic structures, or 'false consciousness' (see Trigger 1988b:236). Trigger (1988a, 1992:215) gives examples of Aboriginal accommodation to mission hegemony at Doomadgee and also describes how traditional decision-making authority has been used against Aboriginal activism by government and industry (Trigger 1997a:95, 1997b:119; see also Dixon 1990:67).

I maintain that fringe dwellers benefit from a lack of formal organisation, because their leadership is less vulnerable to being expropriated.²³ For example, Stewart Harris (1994) contrasted the bureaucratic restrictions he experienced on Darwin's Bagot Aboriginal Reserve with his relationship to fringe dwellers, and an Aboriginal social worker and activist, Vai Stanton, described confrontations inside Bagot when the reserve was dominated by a conservative Aboriginal council and employees (Kamener 1992).²⁴ In my experience, fringe dwellers consistently contrasted the relative autonomy of their camps with the problems of living at Bagot.

Evidence in Chapter Seven suggests that land-owning, institutionalised or wage-earning groups are inhibited by governing structures and may be dependent on unreliable government grants. Governments generally prefer the more manageable Aboriginal advisory bodies or the more co-operative and predictable institutionalised pressure groups (Weaver 1983:106; see also Weaver 1985). Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982:224) note that, since 1972, the emerging Aboriginal elite have become a part of the governmental structure.

Their position limits their freedom to criticise continuing injustices without fear of reprisal (Tonkinson 1998:298). As Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982:224) suggest, the leadership became 'integrated into the very structure of oppression that they are attempting to combat' as positions in these organisations became salaried.²⁵ They contrast this with the Embassy protest where 'selection of leaders was not controlled by whites' (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982:225).

Other Aboriginal commentators claim that government-sponsored Aboriginal organisations are an advancement towards self-determination (Cadd 1998). In the final report, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, states that Aboriginal organisations raise 'the status of Aboriginal people in their own eyes and the eyes of non-Aboriginal society' (Johnston 1991:23). Commissioner Johnston (1991:22) stresses, 'the existence of strong Aboriginal organizations does not lead to an exacerbation of community relations but to improvement in those relations'. If so, it appears to be at the expense of fringe dwellers' interests, as I later discuss.

Although few observers in Darwin recognise the actions of Aboriginal drinkers as resistance, I have cited anthropologists who view drinking as a culture of opposition. The freedom to consume alcohol in the camps contrasts with alternative Aboriginal places of residence in towns and at communities where alcohol is banned or restricted (see Sansom 1980a:51). Drinking also becomes politicised when it is the cause of confrontation between fringe dwellers and the administration in the towns. I discuss the relationship between alcohol and resistance at greater length in Chapter Nine.

The experiences of earlier struggles, and the links made with supporters during these struggles, are important in the formation of political awareness. Rangiarri (1997) describes the ties that existed between NT unions and Aboriginal groups in the late 1960s. In the 1970s there were many Aboriginal veterans of the struggle for citizenship who lived in the camps and referred to White supporters as 'union' people. Those who had experienced the long campaign for Aboriginal equal rights knew that their victories had not come easily (see Sansom 1977:59, 1980a:49).

Although the Burarra people in fringe camps in the 1990s have worked with White supporters in the continuing actions for self-determination at Maningrida since the early seventies (see Gillespie 1982), by 2001 few Aboriginal residents in the fringe camps survive who have experienced the citizenship struggles of the 1960s.²⁶ The ending of this connection is compensated for by a greater awareness of Aboriginal land rights today, and

the resultant development of political consciousness discussed by Trigger (1997a:95).

My experience indicates that organised Aboriginal resistance amongst Darwin fringe dwellers could not be facilitated without the leadership, channels of communication and solidarity of the traditional Aboriginal social organisation that was evident in most camps, including Wallaby Cross. However, the examples in Chapters Six and Eight of this thesis suggest that powerlessness, lack of resources and cultural divisions between groups in Aboriginal fringe campers in Darwin ensure that an oppositional culture will not advance to organised resistance without outside help.²⁷ However, my study focuses on the willingness of fringe dwellers to resist and the political awareness of their actions, not whether they will openly resist the state unaided.²⁸

Despite Rowley's theories of Aboriginal leadership in remote Australia, Berndt (1969:8) appears to acknowledge a need for brokers in a reference to five examples from the region:²⁹

The stimulus to protest came from outside agents concerned in varying ways with Aboriginal welfare. Indications of discontent were already present; they awaited the necessary lines of communication, resources, and ability to organize, which the Aborigines themselves lacked but which the outside agents possessed.

A reliance on outsider activism in fringe dweller protest in Darwin may be because there is no overarching activist organisation like the Tangentyere Association, which serves Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs. Coombs (1994:182) claims that the Tangentyere Association is a good model of 'bottom-up' federalism that 'does not compromise the identity or culture of individual groups, but give[s] common purpose and considerable effectiveness to Aboriginal aspirations and political action'. Unlike the Tangentyere Association, the Aboriginal Development Foundation, as the NT Government-appointed 'umbrella' organisation for most Darwin camps, did not originate from the fringe camps and is accused of being unrepresentative of them, as I later describe.

Glendhill (1994:190) discusses 'alternative visions of modernity', noting that social movements may contest 'normative models' of social practice (p.181), including interpretations of the past and future directions. Darwin fringe dwellers were influenced by the arrival of the counterculture in Darwin in 1969 and the change that was occurring within Australia and elsewhere before there was any real prospect of land rights. Many were familiar with

the rise of black consciousness in North America (see *NT News* February 4, 1972) and anti-colonial struggles overseas.³⁰ The shared interests of fringe dwellers, alternative political parties and White activists continued between 1996 and 2001, as Chapter Eight of this thesis describes.

According to Migdal (1974:87), peasants remained 'inwardly orientated' unless an extraordinary crisis pushes them into an 'outward' engagement with capitalist expansion. Berndt (1969:6) also gives examples of Aboriginal 'movements' which have been 'inward looking and have drawn heavily on traditional elements' (see also Kolig 1987a). In contrast with Aboriginal people on Aboriginal land, such as Arnhem Land, who may remain inwardly orientated, fringe dwellers have experienced a dramatic shift of location into the heart of the city, associated with an 'outward' re-orientation of their lifestyle, as I will later argue. In contrast with 'inward' religious movements, Berndt (1969:9) suggests that:

[Aboriginal protest is] outward-oriented, toward the wider Australian scene, in an attempt to achieve an equal allocation of various resources - economic viability, socio-political representation, access to sources of wealth, status and the right to be heard.

Away from the restrictions of the permit system which remains in operation for the more remote communities, and free of 'gatekeepers', the campers are able to choose diverse company, including many with political views which would not be welcomed by those in authority in the remote communities. Sometimes with difficulty, campers attempt to exclude unwelcome company, as is illustrated in a conflict with Mormon missionaries, recounted in following chapters. Also described is the formation of allegiances in times of threats from outside the camps that occurred between 1996 and 2001 (see also Sansom 1980a:185).

According to Berndt (1969:8), 'for protest to be effective ... publicity is essential'. Aborigines who may speak English as a second language have had their 'protesting voice ... heard indirectly through external agents' (Berndt 1969:9). In Darwin, the examples I give suggest that the introduction of local television news in 1971 empowered Aboriginal groups and continues to do so. However, my research suggests that Aboriginal groups now have to struggle against increasing public cynicism of their cause rather than 'jump[ing] on the bandwagon' to gain popular and political support as Berndt (p.9) claims Aboriginal protesters were able to do in the late sixties.

Not all homeless Aboriginal people formally resist. It appears that the construction of shelters on the land is a good indication of feelings of

proprietorship and willingness to defy authorities. This is a common factor with the camps at Kulaluk, Knuckeyes Lagoon and Railway Dam in the 1970s, and Lee Point, Fish Camp and Palmerston in the 1990s (see Map 2).³¹ In particular, resistance to eviction at Johnny Balaiya's Palmerston camp in 2001 focused on bough shades, old vans and a caravan (see Illustration 5).³² In contrast, Yolngu groups near Mindil Beach in the 1980s at a site they called 'Low Down' and the Burarra people living in parks and on the streets in the 1990s, with no fixed shelters, lacked stability and a focus for their protests.

Groups in Darwin with a long association to the land that they claim, or strong links to the traditional landowners of the area, also appear more likely to openly make a stand. This may explain why, according to Coulehan (1990:10), 'the [diverse accommodation] needs of comparatively recent Aboriginal migrants and transients in urban centres like Darwin have been largely neglected'. In the 1970s, successful fringe dweller protests were endorsed by the traditional owners - the Arrernte in Alice Springs (see Eames 1983; Layton 1986; Rubuntja 1998), and the Larrakia in Darwin. Although there are historical links between many Aboriginal campers and the traditional owners of the land, I explain in a later chapter that the 'Larrakia Nation' in Darwin is reluctant to support fringe dwellers' claims.³³

As I have noted, 'status conscious' Aboriginal town residents and the 'interstitial' group which Cowlshaw (1988a:253) describes as living within the wider community usually disassociate themselves from assertive 'antisocial' behaviour in public places which heightens racial tension (see also Fink 1957:101). In my recent experience, people from these more acculturated groups visit the camps to ask for favours, but usually are reluctant to be associated with the behaviour of fringe dwellers or to publicly defend them. The camp residents are polite to their visitors, but privately scorn their aloof and sometimes exploitative attitudes.

Sansom (1977:61, 1980a:65) describes 'Masterful Men' who ensure drinking in the camps is conducted without incident. I refer to the dominant personality in each camp as the 'doyen' (Day 1994:106), who, in my experience, is not always a man and does not necessarily drink moderately. The 'doyen's' authority, often strongly self-asserted, appears to come from the length of their connection with the site and their strength of personality. While they usually also have some form of traditional authority, their position is not recognised by the state. In every case in my experience, having a recognised and strong doyen is a prerequisite for organising formal fringe camp resistance. In contrast, in larger Aboriginal communities on Aboriginal land, processes controlled by others often select leaders, and open resistance is rare (see Day 1997b). On the other extreme, there does not

appear to be any leadership or organised resistance amongst the solitary homeless.

In Darwin, confrontation with authorities appears to be generated by competition for land usage, brought to a crisis either in times of rapid suburban growth, as in the early 1970s in Darwin,³⁴ or through the persecution of campers, as occurred from 1996 to 2001. If people are relatively secure on Aboriginal-owned land, live on land where illegal camping is tolerated, or have the authority of the landowner to camp, they are less likely to join in open protests.

Recognition of indigenous rights gives courage to fringe dwellers' resistance. Heppell and Wigley (1981:184) note that the 'passive attitudes' of fringe dwellers in Alice Springs changed in 1976 after land rights became a possibility:

From the process of politicization and subsequent success of some of the leasehold applications, the town campers came to realise they were no longer impotent and that, through political action, they could obtain other desirable goals (Heppell and Wigley 1981:185).

As I will discuss, the results of open resistance are often in contrast to the original aims. Scott (1985:29) comes to similar conclusions in his analysis of peasant resistance. I give the example of the 'Wallaby Cross' mob whose success in gaining housing and land tenure facilitated deeper penetration by the state and resultant loss of their autonomy. In most cases, those who fight for long-term aims do not survive to see the fruition, or a new generation of stable residents supercedes the activists on the town camps leases. This is the background of many of my interlocutors who achieved an official camping place in the 1980s. When other groups moved into the houses provided, the original claimants returned to the relative autonomy of fringe camp life (see Appendix II).

As I will discuss, one of the strengths of fringe dweller resistance is the nature of its secretive, 'underground' society, into which few Whites have access. Scott (1990:151) notes that subordinates have a tactical advantage in 'informal networks' that are 'opaque to outside surveillance and control' (Scott 1989:23). In secluded settings (Scott 1990:91), subordinate classes have an 'extensive social existence outside the immediate control of the dominant society' where 'dissent to the official transcript of power is voiced' (p.xi). Scott (1990) refers to the collective view formed in these locations as the 'hidden transcript', fostered in these locations by 'slights to human dignity' (p.7).

Gutmann (1993:86) asks, 'Why must everyday resistance always be hidden?' My thesis recounts many acts of open protest. However, I question whether there will be benefits those who take part. Scott (1986:21, 1987:422, 1989:6) notes that peasant groups avoid calling attention to themselves through everyday resistance. In one case, I describe how the negative effects of public, open resistance by Fish Camp people in 1997 eventually culminated in their eviction in 1999, where beforehand they were tolerated. The emphasis on individuals in open resistance also led to dissension, rivalry and possibilities for other interests to influence leaders and groups. In my fieldwork experience, and previously, the recognition of individuals in a fringe camp community by an authority figure, or the media, led to constant arguments in the camp. However, the disputes had a levelling effect and were confined within the group.

Fringe dwellers in the Northern Territory are perhaps uniquely placed to exploit the sometimes contradictory, overlapping administration by tiers of government, statutory authorities and the law. The liminal status of a site often delays eviction. On the other hand, the separation of powers between Federal, Territory and Local Government can result in long delays in the negotiation for town camp leases and make targeting opponents difficult for Aboriginal groups. One camp claimed 'the city council' evicted them from Lee Point, near Darwin (Channel 8 News, October 18, 1996), although the area in question is outside the city council boundaries. Issues were further confused when the Darwin City Council refused to take responsibility for inflammatory statements against homeless Aboriginal people made by the Mayor of Darwin.

Apocalyptic visions or harnessing of supernatural forces are not as influential in the recent protests by fringe dwellers as they sometimes are in peasant resistance. However, Buchanan claims that a prominent Larrakia leader, Bobby Secretary, told 'quite a few people' in Melbourne in September 1974 that 'the spirit who watched over their land, had said that a very big cyclone was to come [to Darwin]' (Marginson 1975:8). A Larrakia woman, who was the elder at the Kulaluk camp during my fieldwork, also told Heffernan (1996) that 'one important reason for Cyclone Tracy coming to Darwin in 1974 was because her brother [Bobby Secretary] asked [Old Man Rock, a sacred site off Casuarina Beach,] to bring a big wind because the Government would not give the *Larrikiya* the *Kulaluk* land'.³⁵ Threats of sorcery are also sometimes made in anger against government figures. Fringe dwellers also threatened to use supernatural powers to revenge acts of discrimination by police and others (Day 1994:38).

Although a southern Aboriginal supporter of the fringe dwellers in the 1970s named his newsletter *Son of Namarluk* after an Aboriginal resistance leader of the 1930s, and later held a public servant hostage at gun point in Canberra (Day 1994:52),³⁶ 'primitive rebels', or outlawed individuals, do not appear to inspire visions of a just society, as they do in the cases of peasant resistance given by Hobsbawm (1959). According to Hobsbawm (1959:15) the social bandit 'does something which is not regarded as criminal by his local conventions, but is so regarded by the State or the local rulers'. Occasionally, people from central Arnhem Land would tell me of their ancestors who used weapons against early attempts to begin cattle stations on their land (see Dewar 1992:9). More recently, I was told that the struggle of the fringe dwellers in Darwin inspired opposition to government policies at Maningrida. Another example is the popular song 'Tiwi Warriors', sung and composed by the Letterstick Band from Maningrida, which praises a self-titled group of Burarra-speaking 'warriors' who drink in the parks around the suburb of Tiwi, in Darwin (Letterstick 1999).

Ortner (1995:179) emphasises that 'individual acts of resistance, as well as large-scale resistance movements, are often themselves conflicted, internally contradictory, and affectively ambivalent' (see also Robinson 1994). In particular, she believes internal gender politics are not analysed in studies of resistance. Hiatt (1986:16) agrees with Cowlshaw (1978, 1979) that in Aboriginal societies, women 'are not in the business of domination but of resistance'. Hiatt (1986:16) sees Aboriginal women 'contributing more to the egalitarian and anarchistic tendencies in Aboriginal society than to its authoritarian components'. In the liminal and somewhat anarchic space of the fringe camps, women appear to have greater opportunity for a leadership role. During my fieldwork, the camps at Fish Camp, Knuckeyes Lagoon and Kulaluk all had female 'doyens' and an elderly woman who died had been the 'doyen' of the Railway Dam town camp for many years.³⁷ As Coulehan (1995a:12) suggests, women may move to the city to 'access the better standards of living there and to exercise greater autonomy'. Collmann (1979b:210, 1988:118) also notes that women are advantaged by the move to the town because of their greater access to financial resources than the men. However, unlike the Yolngu women in rented housing who claim to be 'going their own way now' (Coulehan 1995a:128), women in the fringe camps do not appear to be advantaged more than the men with whom they share their lifestyle.

1.10 Resistance in 'colonial Australia'

Finally, I briefly place my discussion of fringe dweller resistance in the context of debates on the articulation of Aboriginal society with the wider Australian economic system. Although I have used Rowley's division of

Australia into 'colonial' and 'settled' regions as a useful concept for an understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal settlers in Darwin, Trigger (1988b:235) is critical of Rowley (1986) for 'inadequate discussion in support this analytical continuum'. Similarly, Hartwig (1978:123) wonders, '*when* relations between Whites and Aborigines in any part of "settled" Australia cease to be "colonial"?' Despite this query, Hartwig suggests that Rowley's concept of 'colonialism' is essentially similar to the concept employed in the general literature on 'internal colonialism', which he claims best reveals how bourgeois ideology masks the expropriation of the Aboriginal means of subsistence (p.132; see also Edmunds 1994:19). In addition, Hartwig (p.122) asks, 'What is the relationship between the system of class exploitation and domination and the relations of racial and ethnic exploitation characteristic of internal colonialism?'

More specifically, Bagshaw (1977) analyses Black-White relations at Maningrida, in central Arnhem Land, where many of the Darwin fringe dwellers have ties. He argues:

[In bourgeois society] economic processes generate cultural meaning both in themselves and through the goods created by them. However, in 'primitive' society, with its lack of specialised economic subsystems, symbolic production is necessarily located in the overarching set of kinship relations through which all activity is articulated (Bagshaw 1977:61).

At Maningrida, Bagshaw (1977) examines the way 'European political forms' are imposed on Aboriginal social life, and claims: 'The political interests of the Australian bourgeois polity were clearly served by the creation of European-style Councils in Aboriginal communities' (p.74). The 'cultural incongruity' of the bourgeois mode of material production and Aboriginal kinship relations prevents successful articulation of the two systems (p.67). Furthermore, the movement away from Maningrida 'is indicative of a firmly held collective desire on the part of Aborigines to return to an environment in which the normative genealogical proscriptions regulating traditional social relations can again become effective' (p.71).

Cowlishaw (1997b:108) discusses the 'cultural resistance of Aboriginal communities to insistent modernising processes'. And Benn (1994:178) cites a man who now lives in the Darwin fringe camps. The man was interviewed on film when he was a teenager at Maningrida in 1970:

Finity expressed his dislike for the school, the settlement staff and 'all'

white man's things ... He wants to go 'bush' never to return. All 'white man's things' will be discarded. For food he intends 'singing' buffaloes and crocodiles - 'an old man told me how'. He said he has no need for Maningrida, its people or its material things (*Maningrida Mirage*, May 15, 1970).

In a discussion of economic development and dependency theories, and other theories of the articulation of modes of production, Altman (1987:9) claims: 'The obvious fact that social beings are not merely the products, but are also the producers of their social and economic environments is recognised but largely ignored'. In his text, Altman examines the possibility that indigenous minorities may regard themselves as exploiters of the capitalist system (p.9). However, Beckett (1988:14) believes a system of 'welfare colonialism' through special government structures has now incorporated the indigenous minority.

Peterson (1998:106) criticises theories of welfare colonialism for focusing on the undifferentiated delivery of entitlements rather than on their reception and use, which varies. For example, Aboriginal people on outstations (and fringe camps) use social security benefits to support their chosen life style (see Bernardi 1997:40). They avoid the 'bureaucratisation of the Aboriginal domain', which is integral to 'welfare colonialism', by opting out of the special Aboriginal structures and institutions (Bernardi 1997:42).

Pearson (2000c:21) argues strongly that welfare is a 'method of governance [which] is increasingly becoming a method of managing marginalised groups at minimal cost without even maintaining the fiction that a lasting solution to their problems is sought'. While the latter part of Pearson's statement appears to apply in Darwin, the lifestyle of the fringe dwellers suggests that they take advantage of government entitlements, while attempting not to compromise Aboriginal sovereignty. As Collmann (1988:84-102) notes, the campers 'restrict their material demands' and structural involvement with the town to maintain their independence while retaining access to white-dominated resources. In later chapters, I apply these arguments more specifically to fringe camps and suggest that their aspirations for land tenure may have unforeseen consequences for fringe dwellers. In the next chapter, I discuss the confusing array of categories and terms for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment and examine these terms in the context of the arguments expressed in this chapter.

Endnotes for Chapter 1:

¹ See Day (1993). The period is recounted in *Bunji: a story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement* (Day 1994; see also Buchanan 1974; Henderson 1984; Macinolty 1994; Walsh 1994; Povinelli 1995c; Ralph 1995; Wells 1995a).

² I include Sansom's textual representations of fringe camps as a 'site' in my multi-sited study. Similarly, although relatively uncritically, Toussaint (1996, 1999) has included a re-examination of Phyllis Kaberry's 1939 text to effectively enrich the ethnography of Aboriginal people of the Kimberley region of Western Australia common to both studies.

³ Drakakis-Smith (1981:35) redraws Rowley's boundary to encompass an area where the Aboriginal population is approximately 20 per cent of the total, according to the 1976 census. Drakakis-Smith (1981:37) calls the northern section "'Aboriginal" australia' (his quotes and lower case) (see Map 4).

⁴ The division has been further blurred by the recognition of native title across Australia. However, the majority of successful claims are likely to be on unalienated land in 'remote' Australia. Map 4, showing Australia's freehold land in 1992 (see Trigger 1994:38), suggests that the alienated areas are mostly within the region of settled Australia in Rowley's map.

⁵ The Larrakia founders translated *gwalwa daraniki* to me as the more inclusive 'country belonga we'. Heffernan (1996:16) spells the Larrakia words as *gwoyalwa darrinigi*.

⁶ A compilation of ABC television news reports and other film on a thirty-minute videotape includes a historic segment showing Darwin fringe dwellers meeting the Commissioner at the Kulaluk camp (see Day 1997e).

⁷ The fringe dweller protests were reported in the *NT News* July 7, 1973; *Bulletin* July 21, 1973; *Nation Review* July 19, 1973; *National Times* August 6, 1973; *Australian* August 1, 1973; *Financial Review* August 7, 1973).

⁸ According to *Land Rights News* September 27, 1979, p.5: 'If it weren't for the courage of the Larrakia, particularly their leader, Mr Bobby Secretary, and his able supporters, such as Bill Day, Fred Fogarty and Cheryl Buchanan, there might not be an NT Land Rights Act today'.

⁹ For example, the long-running Kenbi claim had its origins in this period (see McNally 1974:53-6; Willey 1980).

¹⁰ Despite these different histories, Cowlshaw (1990:246) claims that *all* Australia is 'settled'. Tonkinson (1999:135) emphasises the different cultural bases, histories and socio-political conditions of Aboriginal people in settled and colonial Australia.

¹¹ Turner (1993:146) comments: 'there are hints in the text of another world hidden beneath the agenda the author has set for his inquiry', suggesting that Aboriginal traditions have been sustained at Doomadgee.

¹² In a review of the book which Merlan (1998:vii) describes as an 'avowedly intercultural ethnography', Trigger (2000:371) notes Merlan's aim 'to dissolve what she regards as the conventional dichotomy between cultural persistence and change'. Trigger (2000:372) then claims that Merlan does not adequately address indigenous agency in her discussion of the mimetic 'mirroring relationship' in the context of land rights legislation - a relationship which Merlan (1998:150) states, 'often requires from Aborigines demonstrations of the autonomy and long-standing nature of what is seen as cultural production'.

¹³ Merlan (1998:164) finds Jones and Hill-Burnett's view to be debatable in the context of the demand for land rights 'which is not just a "cultural" claim', but has considerable 'materiality'.

¹⁴ Sansom (1984) shares with Tonkinson (1999) the differentiation of a 'lived in' persistence from other less authentic forms. However, Sansom (1984a:37) criticises the 'retrievalism' formerly practised by anthropologists to preserve a reified Aboriginal culture. While Sansom (1984) criticises anthropologists' failure to interpret change in Aboriginal societies as cultural continuity, the dialectical view by Cowlshaw (1993:187) advocates 'exposing the forms of colonial power that saturate Aboriginal social life' to save Australian anthropology from becoming an anachronism.

¹⁵ See Morris 1985:87; Morton 1989:12, 1998; Keeffe 1988:76, 1992:86; Cowlshaw 1990:246, 1993:187; Trigger 1990:237; Rowse 1990:190, 1993:283; Hollinsworth 1992a:147, 1992b:169 and Lattas 1992:160, 1993:248.

¹⁶ In a spirited defence, Cowlshaw (1993:192-3) claims that her comments were misread.

¹⁷ Useful analyses of 'inter-ethnic politics' have been written or edited by Howard (1978, 1981, 1982). Hawke and Gallagher's (1989:331) detailed account of the Noonkanbah dispute is critical of Kolig's (1987b, 1990) cultural analysis of the same events.

¹⁸ For accounts of the activism of the 1980s, see *NT News* (October 2, 3, 31, 1978, February 12, 1982); Hayward-Ryan (1980:14); *Darwin Star* (April 23, 1981) and *Bunji* (March 1982).

¹⁹ In a chapter titled 'Darwin pub talk' (Gilbert 1977:221), a man called 'Kenny' says: 'Fred Fogarty went about it the wrong way. Should've used the media. Voice your opinion to the

public. Get a petition. Bill Day made a mistake when he said he was fighting for the Aboriginal people. He went out and wrote a bloomin' whatsername on how to make a Molotov cocktail. Now that's not right.'

²⁰ Wenton Rubuntja (1997) describes a later campaign to protect Aboriginal sacred sites in Alice Springs.

²¹ Stella Simmering, a friend of the campers since 1997, has continued to document the struggle for space by Darwin fringe dweller groups and individuals until the time of writing. A newsletter called *Kujuk*, published and edited by non-Aboriginal activists, was printed in July and September, 2001, and further editions were planned. The title is a popularly used Kriol word for sexual intercourse. See <http://www.geocities.Kujuk2001/>

²² In 1973, Fred Fogarty from the Darwin fringe dwellers staffed the second Canberra Aboriginal Embassy for several months (see Harris 1994:vii).

²³ In 1975, I emphasised this point in an article in *Aboriginal and Islander Forum* that suggested tactics for Aboriginal groups making land claims (Day 1975:1).

²⁴ Vai Stanton, describes a protest by Aboriginal women at Bagot Reserve after she advised them that office staff had no right to open private mail. She claims 'it was the very beginning where people took a stand against that administration office' (Kamener 1992:24). Vai's description is an example of the minor acts of Aboriginal resistance that are often not recorded in contact history.

²⁵ See the interview with Cheryl Buchanan by Marginson (1975:8) for her analysis of the split between 'welfare orientated blacks and the militant ones'.

²⁶ The very high mortality rate amongst Aboriginal fringe dwellers has left myself and several other Whites as some of the few living participants in the actions of the 1970s.

²⁷ See footnote 24. In the 1980s a coalition of Yolngu fringe dwellers was assisted by social workers inquiring into the needs of fringe campers. Hayward-Ryan (1980:14) mentions the formation of an organisation to represent northeastern Arnhem Land campers, noting that: 'These meetings were tape-recorded and transcripts are available for perusal'. In Katherine, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs fostered the formation of a combined Aboriginal town organisation (Merlan 1995b:70, 1998:8).

²⁸ Povinelli (1995:327) comments on 'the complex alliances and singular strivings of a large number of Aboriginal communities' in the Darwin protests of the 1970s. I replied: 'why does Povinelli exclude non-Aborigines? ... I do not remember any racist ordering of the alliances formed' (Day 1996:501). In my examples, it is mainly White brokers who have been responsible for open, organised fringe dweller protest.

²⁹ The Pilbara strikes, the Warburton Range controversy, the Wave Hill strike, the Gove land rights dispute and the Weebo affair.

³⁰ Two Darwin Aboriginal leaders had earlier visited newly-independent Kenya (see Hardy 1968:47).

³¹ All these locations are indicated in Map 2. See also Appendix II and Appendix III.

³² In 2001, Johnny Balaiya told me the story printed in *Kujuk*, July 2001. One afternoon as Johnny was walking back from the shops he saw his bushland was on fire. Subcontractors had lit the dry long grass without notifying Johnny or helping him protect his camp. Johnny spent all night with a metal rake defending his camp from the bushfire. Following the fire the bulldozers started work near Johnny's camp. Nobody came to talk to Johnny about what was going to happen... Family and friends helped to move the caravan, water tank, two old vans used for sleeping, cooking gear and mattresses.

³³ According to Layton (1986:30), the absence of traditional owners in Darwin contributes to the 'spontaneity and anarchy' of the Darwin camps described by Sansom (1980a).

³⁴ There was an 80 per cent increase in dwellings constructed in the greater Darwin area between 1966 and 1971 (ABS 1974:44).

³⁵ See 'The revenge of Old Man Rock', *NT News* April 30, 1994. Also *NT News* July 11, 1975; Cole 1977:183 and *Bunji* March 1982).

³⁶ Mounted police pursued Namarluk and his band for months before Namarluk's capture in the Daly River region. He escaped from the Darwin prison and returned to his country before being recaptured and eventually dying in gaol (see Idriess 1947).

³⁷ The women leaders at the camps were Dulcie Malimara, Louise Bangun, Topsy Secretary and Ruby One. After a failed traditional marriage, Dulcie moved to Darwin and married a White man. Burbank (1988:111) notes similar cases of women moving to Darwin.

CHAPTER TWO

'Itinerants' or at home in their land? Defining the fringe

2.1 Introduction

In 1982, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs Inquiry into Fringe Dwelling Aboriginal Communities (HRSCAA 1982) decided that 'fringe dweller' was not an appropriate category for Aboriginal groups living in self-made shelters on vacant Crown land around Australian towns. Following submissions that claimed that 'fringe dwellers' should be viewed as part of the town, the inquiry decided to use the term, 'Aboriginal town camps' in preference to 'Aboriginal fringe dwelling communities'. However, in Darwin, since 1979 town camps have had a different legal status to fringe camps, as I will explain. The use of other terms such as 'itinerants', 'transients' and 'long grass people' in the report and later investigations, articles and reports, suggests a confusing array of terminologies.

Examining the way fringe dwellers are represented is pertinent to my thesis, as I explain in this chapter. For example, the debate over the use of the category, 'fringe dweller', which I discuss in a later section of this chapter, illustrates the perceived negative or positive inferences that this term can signify. I will discuss the appropriateness of various terms that are used in investigations into the needs of urban Aboriginal communities and individuals, in media reports and in general use. I also demonstrate the influence anthropology has had in the selection of those definitions. I will argue that the nature of 'the problem', and the definitions of it, are contested by my interlocutors, who believe that they have yet to experience the benefits of the recommendations of the many reports and investigations into their needs - from the Woodward Report to the present.

2.2 Clarifying definitions

Special purpose leases with services and designed housing for incorporated Aboriginal communities are usually referred to as 'town camps'. This terminology began in an era of transition recorded by Heppell and Wrigley (1981), Eames (1983), Rubuntja (1998), Coombs (1994:177-182) and others. Before the establishment of 'town camps' in the 1970s, ethnographers and others referred to Aboriginal communities who camped on identifiable urban sites without services as 'fringe dwellers' (Rowley 1972a, 1972b, 1972c; Sansom 1977; Collmann 1988, 1979a).

Robert Bropho, who has described a lifetime in the Aboriginal camps around Perth, Western Australia (Bropho 1980), submitted to an inquiry: 'All Aboriginal people became fringedwellers the day the white man set foot

upon this continent. All Aboriginal people are fringedwellers until land is given back' (HRSCAA 1982:3). In an alternative interpretation, Collmann (1979a:47) describes the first Whites as living on the fringes of Aboriginal society. More recently, Coulehan (1995a:338) describes Aboriginal groups who live 'on the fringe of both Yolngu and [non-Aboriginal] systems of care and control when they become "lost to grog" in Darwin'.

Gale (1972:3) describes the 'fringe dwellers' as the fourth group of six 'widely differing [Aboriginal] adaptations to [urban] European society'; however, I suggest that regional differences blur Gale's categories. For example, 'Aborigines who live and think as members of a traditionally orientated group' (Gale 1972:2) are also the majority of those who inhabit the fringe camps of Darwin. Young (1981:14) suggests one reason why traditional Aboriginal people may be marginalised:

[M]ost Aborigines in urban and metropolitan communities aspire closely to equality of living standards and employment opportunities with non-Aborigines while those in rural areas, particularly where the tribal background remains strong, do not necessarily value these material needs as highly.

Spradley (1970:106) observed in his ethnography of 'urban nomads' in the United States:

In one sense those who live in cities share many facets of urban life, including climate, scenery, streets, parks, law enforcement agencies and other institutions. In another sense, members of the same city do not share these things since their function and meaning is different.

People in the same town can be 'cultural worlds apart' because physical space and objects are socially constructed and mean different things to different groups. For example, an Aboriginal woman who circulated between the urban camps drew me a diagram on the sand illustrating how homeless Aboriginal people divide the city between various groups (Figure 1). These urban regions tend to be spatially orientated to the homelands of the linguistic groups who claim them, as Heppell and Wigley (1981:55) noted in Alice Springs and Merlan (1991:269, 1998:1-2) observed in Katherine. For example, the region my informant marked for 'Daly River mob' straddles the highway leading south to the hinterland of cattle stations where the Daly River people and other allied groups work (Sansom 1980a:5). The Wagaitj area at Railway Dam is located near the wharf where the ferry plies to the Cox Peninsula, on the far side of the harbour. People from the Catholic Mission at Wadeye (Port Keats) gravitated around the old Stuart Park

mission headquarters that operated the radio communication to their homeland. Along Darwin's northern beaches the coastal people of northeast Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt have their camps, in addition to the airport area where charter flights provide a quick service to their distant coastal communities. The inner city is an area for 'mixed' groups.³⁸

Many of the Aboriginal homeless remain hidden from view and seldom have conflict with the law. Some belong to large groups, others live as loners. Some sleep out, some build shelters, some return to hostels and houses at night. Some have a commitment to certain places while others move from place to place. Some groups share common languages while others are linguistically mixed. As Coulehan (1990:10) claims, 'urban-dwelling Aborigines are not a homogeneous group'. For example, Wells (1995a:6) cites Sansom's view that, because they are traditional owners, the Larrakia people camped at Kulaluk in the suburb of Nightcliff, 'had a very different and extra super duper special status in terms of their camping site'. Sansom submitted to the HRSCAA (1982:13) that there are two types of campers: those who have a long association with a particular area which he called the 'local community' and the 'hinterland Aboriginal community' who belong to a wider region and are absent for extended periods.

2.3 Long grass people

Homeless Aboriginal people who sleep in hidden locations around Darwin often refer to themselves as 'long grass' people (see Langton et al 1998; Day 1999a). Like the word 'parkies', describing the homeless drinkers in eastern towns (see Hale 1996), it is a supposedly racially non-specific term, although Aborigines are the more visible majority in both cases. 'Long grass' is a regional term, describing the speargrass that grows more than two metres tall on vacant land around Darwin in the monsoon months from October to April. The long grass then dries and is flattened by 'knock 'em down' storms and is usually incinerated in dry season burn-offs. Cleared areas in the grass could be used for illegal drinking sessions or hidden places to sleep for people threatened by vagrancy laws. Since drinking rights were granted to NT Aboriginal people, drunkenness decriminalised and vagrancy laws abolished, the 'long grassers' have moved into the parks and beaches or amongst the rocks, 'coffee bush' and neglected buildings of the town.³⁹ They prefer not to camp in the speargrass where the breezes are stifled and insects thrive.

Rather than signifying a particular site, when the Parliamentary Standing Committee reported that 'there were about 500 transients living in the long grass area around Darwin' (HRSCATSIA 1992:156) the committee was using the term as a metaphor for homelessness. I suggest that the description also

historically locates the homeless as hidden and 'wild', although their drinking and their lifestyle is more open than the citizens who drink inside homes and hotels.⁴⁰ Langton et al (1998:24) suggest another level of meaning: 'The so-called "long grass" people, resident along the beaches and on the edges of the town in Darwin [are] a reminder of Australia's hidden "black" history' (see also Langton 1993a; Day 1997a).

In the past, Aborigines regularly burnt the long grass in the north for hunting and sometimes as a tactic of resistance. Kerr (1971:144) notes a case that occurred during the surveying of Port Darwin. With the establishment of colonial administration, Aborigines lost the power to burn the grass in all but remote areas. According to Langton (1998:9), Aboriginal people and their land management traditions have been 'rendered invisible' in Australian landscapes, in particular their use of fire. Without the power to burn the grass in the towns, the Aborigines are symbolically concealed in their long grass camps. Power resides with the 'short grass' people, surrounded by their mown lawns. Even at the remote Maningrida Aboriginal community, Annette Hamilton (1975:169) observed 'a neatly mown white Anglo-Saxon suburb dropped by a twist of fate at the very edge of the last of wild Australia'.

At a time when authorities were tightening controls on sleeping in public places, the cartoonist Wicking drew a wall of flame threatening two oblivious long grass drinkers to illustrate the start of the dry season (*NT News* May 3, 1997; Illustration 1.1). It appears that an environment they used to manage now threatens homeless Aboriginal 'long grassers'. Another Wicking *NT News* cartoon has a worried householder peering out a window complaining, 'I don't feel safe in my own home'. A ragged man looking up from long grass answers, 'You should try it out here' (Illustration 1.2). For the short grasser, the 'wilderness' with its untamed savages remains as a threat, while for the long grasser what was once a managed 'wilderness' has become an unpredictable place with the dangers of eviction or arrest.

Identity is removed from 'long grass' people, who are seen as beyond the structures of Black and White societies. For example, when 'long grass' Aborigines protested in Darwin for rights to shelter and services in 1997, they also carried banners referring to conditions at the settlement of Maningrida (*NT News* March 18, 1997). A Gunavidji couple, who were traditional owners of the Maningrida area, complained to me that the televised banners had made them 'shamed'. Although most of the protesters originated from Maningrida, the couple reflected the liminal status of the fringe camp when they said, 'Don't say Maningrida people - they are long grass people' (Later the couple joined other protests and lived in the fringe

camp for long periods). In confirming the liminal position of the camps, Brandl (1981:99) states: 'We know very little about the problems of the town camps. Undoubtedly this is a result of their Orwellian state of "non-exist"'.

2.4 The itinerants and transients

In the 1980s, 'the transient problem' was debated by politicians and the media (Cooper 1985; Day 1994:121; Wells 1995a:72). At the time, I contributed to this debate in a Darwin newspaper:

So we are told the need is 'transient camps' without a clear explanation of what a transient is - an all-encompassing word that has become meaningless, overused by an insecure population desperately trying to earn the envied label of 'Territorian' (Day 1983:2).

The mayor had campaigned on a promise 'to relocate illegal Aboriginal camps' to Bagot Reserve or Kulaluk (Wells 1995a:72) and plans were made for two government-sponsored camps to accommodate up to forty 'transient' Aborigines on the Kulaluk lease under the airport flight path (*NT News* October 14, 1981; *Darwin Star* October 14, 1981; *Bunji* October 1981), and later on the old Ludmilla dump, now occupied by the Minmarama Aboriginal village (*NT News* March 19, March 30, 1983; *Advertiser* April 7, 1983).

In the same period, the influential report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs inquiry into fringe dwelling Aboriginal communities (HRSCAA 1982) categorised homeless Aborigines in towns as 'permanents', 'transients' and 'homeless drifters'. By 1992, another parliamentary report, *Mainly Urban* (HRSCATSIA 1992:152), used Beckett's (1965) and Sansom's (1982b) descriptions of Aboriginal mobility patterns to stress a 'complex and purposeful' itinerancy that fulfils obligations and maintains links between people along a 'beat'.

All the above categories fit the definition of homelessness by the Australian Council of Social Services, cited by the latter report (HRSCATSIA 1992:157):

The absence of safe, secure affordable and adequate shelter, as perceived by the individual. This can be defined by a person being in any of the following situations, or combinations of them:

- having no shelter
- being threatened with loss of shelter
- having to move constantly between residences
- having limited choices of alternative housing
- having inadequate accommodation because of
 - * overcrowding

- * insecure occupancy
- * lack of emotional support or stability
- * threat of physical, sexual or emotional abuse
- * eviction or threat of such
- * payment of high proportion of income in rent

Drew and Coleman (1999:17) emphasise that homeless people are not rootless: 'They are people who are connected, and who value those connections as much as we more settled community members do'. Langton et al (1998:24) believe describing indigenous people who live in urban bush communities as 'homeless' or 'camping' implies their failure to live in 'acceptable' ways. Reser (1977) also draws attention to a European preoccupation with houses as 'home'. However, although some Aboriginal people have consciously rejected the costs of housing, I suggest that it cannot be assumed the residents of camps in towns are at home where they reside. In many cases the people are living in unsanitary sites not of their choosing, are constantly threatened with eviction and have not been free to select better sites with access to water and services since the establishment of the town.

Both 'unhoused' and 'homeless' are terms that suggest a link between my interlocutors and the wider society that can be developed in a multi-sited study. The terms draw attention to the needs of the fringe dwellers in comparison to others. In contrast, the parliamentary report, referring to Sansom (1982b), discusses Aboriginal itinerancy as a natural condition, a cultural continuity of people who were 'itinerant in this country prior to British colonisation' (HRSCATSIA 1992:151).⁴¹ An account by Heppell and Wigley (1981:11) is applicable to many campers:

Many of the older people in the camps have watched the town grow and found themselves inexorably pushed from campsite to campsite, each time further away from the centre. Moreover, there have been many occasions when camps have been dismantled by the authorities and their members forcibly evicted. These movements might have given the camps an air of impermanence, but it needs emphasising that the core populations of town camps do not consist of itinerants; only, until very recently, of landless and dispossessed people.

An anthropological text (Sansom 1982b) is used by the parliamentary inquiry to argue that Aboriginal itinerancy is an *individual* choice of movement within a cultural pattern of behaviour that is purposeful and not 'aimless wandering' (HRSCATSIA 1992:153). Discussing homelessness, Mackie (1998:17) believes an emphasis on individuals typically deflects attention from the public domain to the inadequacies of the person in the private

domain. According to Mackie (p.17), homelessness is thus seen to be a pathological condition of individuals rather than a result of a structural problem within society.⁴²

2.5 Media representations of 'itinerants' from 1996

In keeping with the 1992 parliamentary report, the Darwin media now refers to the anonymous and voiceless group of 'transients' as 'itinerants'. The description includes a diverse group, including some who have been born in Darwin (see Appendix II). Cowlshaw (1988a:106) believes: 'The politics and economics of a small town enmeshes the people in a particular historical process which each tries to shape in their own way'. With the coming of land rights in the north, race becomes a signifier of the special rights of Aborigines that are carefully avoided by using the non-racially-specific category 'itinerants'. The term 'itinerant' avoids an association with dispossession or the specific needs of homeless Aboriginal people and is justified by a supposed desire not to appear racist.

In 1996, Wicking's cartoon headed 'clean up day tomorrow' (*NT News* March 1, 1997; Illustration 1.4) showed ragged men being carried from the long grass and loaded onto a truck. 'Drunks' were blamed for Darwin's litter problem and 'itinerants, both black and white' were named as a major cause (*NT News* February 9, 10, 1996). Itinerants were said to be spitting, urinating, defecating, fornicating and masturbating in public (*NT News* February 10 and 16; April 5, 1996). The mayor claimed council workers often had to clean excreta off barbecue plates (*NT News* February 10, 1996). In 1999, he claimed a man had 'pulled down his daks and had a crap' on a pathway in his view (*Australian* April 29, 1999). Ween (1997:46) comments: 'The European Australian inhabitants of Darwin had something close to an obsession with Aboriginal bodily functions'. In a later chapter, I suggest that the annual Darwin Beer Can Regatta serves to contrast uncontrolled Aboriginal drunkenness with controlled and purposeful White drinking.

It is no coincidence that the campaign against the itinerants began with the Clean Up Australia launch in 1996. I suggest that culturally-specific attitudes to litter are markers of the racial divide in the Northern Territory. Bourgeois ideology can be used to justify expropriation of land (Hartwig 1978:133) and groups who are different are made deviant in 'the search for the true essence of Australianness' (Cowlshaw 1997b:179). The 'itinerants' are to be swept from the parks with the litter that has branded them as unAustralian, without civic pride and environmentally unaware (see also Trigger 1998a). As Edmunds (1994:106) notes, civic tidiness becomes another basis for defining Aboriginal behaviour as non-conformist. Commenting on the litter associated with groups using the parks, the Mayor of Darwin stated: 'I think

one of the myths that we are told is that Aboriginal people are the world's most concerned environmentalists - in fact we never see that at all' (*NT News* February 10, 1996).

2.6 Transients', 'itinerants' and 'homeless drifters'

The HRSCAA further divided town campers into 'permanents', 'transients' and 'homeless drifters' with different strategies for each, although the committee admitted there is overlap and movement between these groups (HRSCAA 1982:6). Transient visitors have been identified as a problem for more permanent Aboriginal residents in towns (Woodward 1973:25; Young 1982:1754; Coulehan 1990:9; Memmott 1990:35). Typically, the Tangentyere Council that represents Alice Springs town camps asked in their submission to the HRSCATSIA (1992:155) for 'visitors camps' to provide for transients to 'decrease the disruption caused by visitors to town camps'. The disruptive effect of visitors results from the changed nature of camps that have achieved land tenure, housing and services. The NT Department of Lands and Housing noted: 'many of the town camps, originally established to cater for transients, have become preferred places for permanent residence' (NT Government 1982:50).

Most transients can be accommodated in the self-managed fringe camps that have shelters that can be expanded to accommodate visitors who are attracted to the site by a common language and kin. An NT Government report (NTG 1981b:3) states:

The elusive presence of these shelters is normally indicative of the lack of tenure over [temporary camps]. However, many Aboriginals prefer accommodation of these types as they may be laid out to reflect social organisation, kin relationships, and do not compromise serious avoidance relationships. A sudden increase in population does not pose a problem as these structures are lived 'around' rather than 'in'.⁴³

Outside the fringe camps, housed Aboriginal urban dwellers are pressured to accommodate the homeless (Coulehan 1990:9, 1995a:255, 1995b:217). For the more stable residents with increasingly fewer links to hinterland people, transients are perceived as a problem, as they are for Darwin residents who compete for the public spaces contested by homeless people.

The parliamentary report defined the 'homeless drifter' as 'frequently destitute and frequently alcoholic people who live in parks, under bridges or in deserted buildings' (HRSCAA 1982:11). Although homeless Aboriginal people are not as likely to be social isolates as other groups (Eggleston 1974:59), it appears that 'the drifters' are likely to have weak ties to kinship

structures and cultural heritage. Their networks of soup kitchens and welfare agencies are concentrated in the inner city where their lifestyle is likely to be closer to that of the urban nomad described by Spradley (1970).

2.7 'Sit down' and 'lie down' camps

Two important reports, one by an anonymous researcher for the NT Government (1981b:2) and another prepared by Hayward-Ryan (1980:8), view 'sit down' camps in Darwin as camps of convenience. As Hayward-Ryan (1980:7) points out, the sit down camps 'are often the targets of criticism by the wider community, ostensibly because of the amount of accumulated litter which characterises such sites'.⁴⁴ The term is commonly used by Aboriginal people for favoured locations that are known to be safe, close to conveniences, and with shelter from sun, wind and rain. The location may therefore shift throughout the day. In Darwin in 1996 and 1997, large numbers of Aboriginal people gathered at 'sit down' camps on the foreshore and near the hospital to play cards, in what police described as a 'positive social gathering' (*NT News* April 12, 1997 and May 27, 1997). Card playing continued into the night under street lighting but people did not sleep in these very public, open locations. It is the well known 'sit down' drinking sites which are regularly raided by police patrols (see 'Hundreds held in Darwin grog blitz', *NT News* April 18, 1997).

The HRSCAA (1982:13) defines the 'sit down' camps as temporary and the 'lie down' camps as 'more or less permanent'. Overnight 'lie down' camps are divided by Hayward-Ryan (1980:6) into those with facilities and those without facilities. The NT Government report (1981b:3) prefers categories of permanent, or 'major camps', and temporary camps with lack of tenure. However, under present policies, to be illegal, or without tenure, equates to temporary occupancy. As John Tomlinson (1982:104) comments, camping is criminalised other than on a few sites approved by Local and Territory Government. In Tomlinson's (p.104) view, the criminalisation of Aboriginal campers is enacted by Darwin authorities who are 'totally lacking a sense of history, an understanding of Aboriginal culture, and who are totally devoid of humanity'.

Young (1982:1756) believes that the leasing of land to the 'illegal' campers is essential: to provide amenities, preserve the identity of groups who wish to live in town and to allow the option of living a life-style which may differ significantly from that of non-Aboriginal town residents (Young 1982:1755). Brandl (1981:101) also stresses the need to recognise fringe camp communities as autonomous bodies. She claims that, although Aboriginal groups have always camped near settlements, the townsfolk have 'consistently seen [Aboriginal camps] as temporary phenomena' (p.94).

Tomlinson (1982:104) claims there are 'over thirty places where Aboriginal people coming to Darwin sit down', while Sansom (1980a:8) describes eighteen 'on-and-off' sites, used on an irregular basis, which are 'owned' by a similar number of out-of-town Aboriginal groupings. Sansom (p.8) states that although the land is not legally owned by the campers, permission is needed from the Aboriginal 'owners' to camp at these sites. In more recent years, it appears that police action has resulted in smaller groups in more locations. Gradual takeovers, in minor 'turf wars', do occur between groups. In 1997, Daly River people were moving into the area around the shops in the suburb of Tiwi, long-dominated by a Burarra group of homeless men and women, self-titled the 'Tiwi Warriors.'

2.8 Reserves

Until the 1960s, Aboriginal people in some northern towns were still confined to Aboriginal reserves by a curfew (Jackson 1996:9). Prior to World War II, in Darwin, the Aboriginal population on the reserve also supplied domestic labour to the town (Wells 1995a:27, 2000:64). As I have discussed, until the mid-seventies, the town reserves were tightly controlled by a government superintendent and compliant councils, with entry permits issued by government officers. Before being converted into Aboriginal land under Aboriginal control in the late 1970s, reserves were sites to train Aboriginal people for assimilation, with 'transitional housing' preparing residents to move into the wider community.

During the assimilation period, according to Wells (1995b:220): 'The bus did not leave each morning to take Aboriginal workers to town - there was no longer a place for gangs of Aboriginal workers in Darwin and most Aboriginal wards worked in training schemes at Bagot ... Opportunities for personal relationships to develop were, therefore, few'. By 1959, when Darwin was declared a town with its own municipal council, 'The gap between the increasingly affluent settler community and the impoverished [Aborigines] living at Bagot [Reserve] had widened so much that the two communities almost never came together' (Wells 1995b:119). Both the unserviced fringe camps built by Aboriginal people who refuse to live at Bagot and the bounded domain of the Bagot Community were indicators of the state of race relations in Darwin in the late 1990s.⁴⁵

At Bagot Reserve in Darwin, and the Amoonguna Reserve near Alice Springs, Aboriginal people in towns were compelled to live in an 'undifferentiated area in which it was impossible to maintain traditional boundaries' (Heppell and Wigley 1981:24). This remains true for the Aboriginal people in Darwin at the Bagot Community, as the old reserve is

now known, who have been unable to find suburban housing, or who do not belong to the few groups with town camp leases. In 1964, promises were made by a Federal Minister that one house in three in the new suburb of Ludmilla would be set aside for Aboriginal people; however, the promise was not kept (Woodward 1974:62). Wells (1995b:229) suggests that the failure was partly because 'Aborigines at Bagot repeatedly made clear by their actions that they were not particularly interested in moving into Darwin away from kin and friends'.

'Wallaby Cross' is described by Sansom (1980a:51) as a 'free grogging' community, unlike the missions and government reserves which were organised as 'total institutions' (Sansom 1980a:45, citing Long 1970:6). In an interview, Vai Stanton, an Aboriginal social worker and activist, claims that 'there were basic rights violations [at Bagot]. She attributed the lack of resistance to the fact that 'people were so institutionalised that they didn't know ... they just accepted it as the norm' (Kamener 1992:20). Similarly, Rowley (1972a:278) describes the Aboriginal residents of institutions as 'inmates' (see Rowse 1993a:27). With the granting of a lease, the incorporated Bagot Community council has permitted the drinking of alcohol on the old reserve land, resulting in a common complaint of fringe dwellers that there is 'too much trouble' at Bagot, where Aboriginal people of many language affiliations are housed side-by-side in overcrowded homes, without the night patrols of the past.

2.9 Town camps

The House of Representatives Standing Committee assigned to investigate the needs of 'fringe-dwelling Aboriginal communities' preferred the title 'town camps' in their final report. The committee defined town campers as:

any group of Aboriginals living at identified camp sites near or within towns or cities which form part of the socio-cultural structure of the towns and cities, but which have a lifestyle that does not conform to that of the majority of non-Aboriginal residents and are not provided with essential services and housing on a basis comparable to the rest of the community (HRSCCAA 1982:xii).

The report usefully divided Aboriginal living areas in towns into 'tenured' and 'non-tenured'. Non-tenured campsites were unlikely to receive essential services (HRSCCAA 1982:26). They are also more prone to harassment. Both were included under the terms of reference, despite the NT Government claim that tenured communities on special purpose leases should be described as 'developed urban leases' (HRSCCAA 1982:57), or 'group housing projects' (HRSCCAA 1982:41), rather than town camps. The NT

Government claimed that Aboriginal town camps on a lease, 'because of their development' were best seen as 'part of the town' (HRSCCAA 1982:16) and therefore excluded from the terms of reference of the inquiry.

The Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC) argued that the camps with land and services should be included as 'fringe dwellers' because they are a 'positive model' of what could be achieved by similar Aboriginal groups (HRSCCAA 1982:16). The parliamentary committee agreed that all types of camps might benefit from the strategies to be recommended, although the needs may be different. They decided to exclude from their inquiry only those few Aboriginal groups in towns 'which have been provided with essential services and housing on a basis comparable to the rest of the community' (HRSCCAA 1982:5).

Heppell and Wigley (1981:14) reject the term 'fringe-dweller' as one of 'opprobrium'. They suggest a more positive definition of 'town campers':

[G]roups of people who have largely rejected the European suburban way of life, desire to live in small closely knit homogeneous groups which exalt certain human values above those held and expected by white society (such as kinship obligations) and, above all, want to pursue their chosen lifestyle away from any possible interference by outsiders who little understand the values and aspirations of the town campers.

Heppell and Wigley (1981), Drakakis-Smith (1980, 1981), Rowse (1988) and Collmann (1988) describe some of the changes taking place in the late 1970s and early 1980s as 'town camper' groups became incorporated associations to manage land and make improvements to previously unserviced camps in Alice Springs. As a result of these changes, 'town camps' are now more specifically seen as incorporated communities on leases with housing designed for the perceived requirements of the Aboriginal residents. Despite the good intentions of the HRSCCAA to find an all-inclusive term, the official town camps now have different needs to the illegal camps and a distinction is therefore made in this thesis.

2.10 Fringe or town camp?

Comments by fringe dwellers suggest that the persistence of cultural values in the 'illegal' Darwin camps is a focus of resistance. For example, Johnny Balaiya says:

This is not for a White man country, because this is the country for the Blackfella country. They born here and I born here, true story. My son,

my brother, my cousin, they born here ... I don't like that Balanda way, no. I want to look after myself Blackfella way, that's the really one.⁴⁶

Wallace (1979:144) notes: 'An essential prerequisite to any investigation into Aboriginal housing schemes is a knowledge of the religion, culture and philosophy which the Aborigines concerned are striving to maintain'. These points are considered in the objectives of the 'Fish Camp Community Housing Project' (Appendix III). A recurring theme is the preference for outdoor living, where 'sleeping inside occurs only when absolutely necessary' (Larbalistier 1979:193; see also Appendix III, p.6). The isolating nature of a 'more conventional European residential environment' is also noted by Reser (1977:52).

With good intentions, while perhaps underestimating the resistance role of fringe camps, contemporary social scientists have sought to incorporate fringe dwelling Aboriginal communities into the urban society. Reser (1977:58) gives an example of 'benign statements' advocating housing for all which can be 'used to justify the wanton destruction of existing and psychologically meaningful traditional living environments'. Reser (p.52) notes that: 'A physical environment which departs from the European model is too readily seen as squalid, dirty, unhealthy'. He suggests that there is a correspondence between 'a culture's dwellings and its values, lifestyles and institutions'. He argues that 'Aboriginal communities are inevitably expected to adapt to European dwelling environments, rather than adapting environments to people' (p.52).

Similarly, Cowlshaw (1988a:221) is critical of 'do gooders', who she describes as, 'The purveyors of the new enlightenment theories ... struggling in the pool of their own middle class mores'. However, in another chapter I describe the developing relationship between two Darwin Aboriginal fringe camps and White alternative lifestyle and activists who share with fringe dwellers a rejection of many of these mores, in preference for a more communal, less materialistic style of living.

Rowley (1972a:231) believed: 'The fringe area has to be established in the minds of townsmen as *part of the town*'. Langton et al (1998:24) state: 'Understanding the distinct camp culture which has emerged is one important step in devising necessary policy measures to benefit camp residents and meet the objections of non-indigenous Darwin residents to their lifestyle'. These are worthy replies to the popular concepts of detribalised, demoralised people clinging to the edges of towns. Similarly, Diane Bell told a parliamentary inquiry:

The term 'fringe' gives the idea they are peripheral, transient and somewhat haphazard... It makes people look as if they have no rights, where they are, as if they are on the fringe. It suggests that in some sense they have different sorts of claims whereas the term town campers locates people within the town. It indicates that they are camping there and camping in Aboriginal terms means living (HRSCAA 1982:5).

I suggest that by not recognising the long and unaided resistance role of fringe camps, the above researchers may unintentionally assist the incorporation of fringe dwellers into a social and economic system that the campers have resisted without assistance in the past. That is not to deny that the campers want better housing. As Tonkinson and Tonkinson (1979:198) point out, the basic problem is making improvements to living conditions without seriously disrupting the positive aspects of life in Aboriginal camps. According to Tonkinson and Tonkinson (p.204): 'Aborigines can no more appreciate the eventual ramifications of a move into new housing than they could their move into contact with Europeans'. Reser (1977:57) states that building codes 'are one of the most crippling sources of community deterioration in Aboriginal Australia'. My fieldwork suggests that these are topics for further investigation.

2.11 Fringe dwellers

Homeless Aborigines in Darwin today resemble the people of Bourke who 'lived on the fringe of the town, on the fringe of the economic system, on the fringe of the education system, and ... on the fringe of adequate health' (Kamien 1978:45). Despite the view by Heppell and Wigley (1981:14), that 'fringe dweller' has little currency amongst those to whom the term refers, Collmann (1988:13) and Bropho (1980) claim that either the term 'fringe-dwellers' or 'fringedweller' reflect the people's view of their existence. An attribute defining the fringe dweller is the 'rudimentary shacks' they build for themselves (Collmann 1988:6). During Sansom's and Collmann's fieldwork these structures were on vacant Crown land.

The camps could maintain the degree of autonomy described by Collmann and Sansom in various urban bushland locations before NT self-government in 1978 ended the more tolerant and distant Federal administration of vacant Crown land. However, despite the changed regime, some fringe camps that resemble those described by Collmann and Sansom in the 1970s remain on vacant land within and around most northern towns. They are often tolerated until the land is required for development.⁴⁷

Darwin Aboriginal 'long grassers' do not describe themselves as 'fringe dwellers' and are unfamiliar with the description. However, as I have outlined, the term is useful in distinguishing from other groups the people whom I describe in camps around Darwin. Gare (1961) and other writers have popularised the Aboriginal fringe dweller as an Australian icon. In keeping with anthropological tradition, my research suggests that the term remains appropriate for Aboriginal communities living without tenure on vacant urban land in self-made unserviced shelters. These camps are therefore distinct from temporary 'sit down' camps. Fringe dwellers are also distinguished from 'town campers' that have tenure to the land where they live in architecturally-designed serviced huts.

In the next chapter I describe how a particular fringe camp in the northern suburbs of Darwin became the base for my fieldwork in 1996. Complicating my definitions of fringe dwellers, the group had been evicted from Crown land earlier that year and were living under tarpaulins on land held by an Aboriginal Association (see Map 3). I discuss their relationship with the landowners in Chapter Seven. In Chapter Five, I discuss at length the origins and affiliations of the campers. In the following chapter I examine the 'finding' of a field site and the earlier forced relocation of the fringe dwellers in a historical and political context. The role of the anthropologist as a committed witness is also defended.

Endnotes for Chapter 2:

³⁸ The informal division of the town into Aboriginal areas of interest possibly helps control conflict and competition for resources amongst people from the many language groups living in the 'long grass'.

³⁹ The Mayor of Darwin said that fining 'long grassers' was like cutting down coffee bush: 'It just comes up again' (*Australian*, 'A new kind of sleeping sickness in the Top End', April 29, 1999)

⁴⁰ A photograph illustrating a newspaper article on the Northern Territory Chief Minister Shane Stone's zero tolerance laws pictured two Aboriginal men sitting around an open beer carton on the lawn of a public park, under the heading: 'Long grassers feel the hand of Stone' (*Weekend Australian* May 30-31, p.6).

⁴¹ Sansom (1985:78) discusses how his submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry (HRSCAA 1982) uses 'processural modelling' (p.72) to craft 'special and novel purpose-built models for use in court' (p.75). In a more politically engaged essay, Sansom (p.70) cites Hobbes' discussion on making 'Systemes that are Private and Irregular' into 'Systemes Political and Regular'. Sansom (1982) is also quoted in Volume 2 of the National Report, Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1989:83) as a reference confirming a systematic Aboriginal itinerant lifestyle.

⁴² An article in the *Bulletin* (February 26, 1996) titled 'Down and out in Darwin' and headed, 'Itinerants', has an accompanying photograph of a black woman asleep in a city park. It could be said that the heading 'down and out' suggests the problem lies with unsuccessful individuals.

⁴³ Researchers describe similar advantages of the self-designed, self-built 'humpy' (Smith 2000:180, 198; White 1977:104; Tonkinson and Tonkinson 1979:199; Wallace 1979:148; Sansom 1980a:111; Doohan 1992:79) and their layout in a camp (White 1977; Larbalistier 1979; Wallace 1979; Memmott 1983, 1991; Ross 1987). Stanton (1981:32) points out that 'humpies' are 'difficult to keep clean, were damp in winter, lacked secure cupboards ... and lacked any supply of water'. Also see Memmott 1988, 1990, 2000; Reser 1977.

⁴⁴ Tomlinson (1982:102) reproduces a newspaper story picturing one of these camps at East Point under the heading, 'Darwin's dirty problem baffles chiefs'.

⁴⁵ In 1998, at the single vehicular entrance to the Bagot Community (the old reserve), a sign forbade 'Unauthorised entry'. During my fieldwork, I rented a room in a street of predominantly White residents in the suburb of Ludmilla that surrounds the Bagot Community. In a scene that was visually reminiscent of Belfast or Jerusalem, the street, which continues into the Aboriginal housing area, is barricaded at the boundary.

⁴⁶ From 'Freedom to sleep' (Media release, Darwin Longgrass Association, September 5, 2001).

⁴⁷ At the time of writing, a camp of old car bodies and tarpaulins in bush near Palmerston, on the outskirts of Darwin, is threatened with eviction to make way for the continuing expansion of the satellite town.

CHAPTER THREE

Locating the fringe.

3.1 Introduction

In the first chapter I discussed differences between 'cultural' and 'political' approaches to Aboriginal studies. One approach emphasises a social domain which functions parallel to the wider socio-economic world, while the other emphasises the dialectic engendered when an indigenous society is encapsulated within the dominant Australian socio-economic system. While Tonkinson (1999:134) suggests that the two theoretical frameworks are 'closely intertwined', the differences are typified in the contrasting analyses of Aboriginal society in an urban environment by Basil Sansom (1980a) and Gillian Cowlishaw (1988).

In this chapter I include the role of the anthropologist, the selection of a study topic and the 'finding' of a field site as evidence of interconnections between fringe dwellers and the wider community. I suggest that the anthropologist is required to be a 'committed witness', rather than an 'invisible observer', whose 'writing up' of fieldwork cannot be separated from the struggle of fringe dwellers for space. Drawing upon my past experience in the Darwin fringe dwellers' struggle, I trace the connections between my primary fieldwork site at Fish Camp and the continuing struggle for space by homeless Aboriginal campers. I examine how media representations ended any illusion of a bounded field and confirmed the preparedness of fringe dwellers to resist against public and political opposition. Finally I give the example of a fringe camp where a process of 'legitimation' as an Aboriginal community has led to public support in the face of NT Government threats to 'relocate' the town camp.

3.2 Fieldwork and the 'itinerant problem'

Aboriginal urban bush camps and the related issues associated with Aboriginal drinking in public places are recommended as topics requiring research in numerous reports and the findings of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston 1991:45). A parliamentary inquiry found 'insufficient information about the numbers and needs of [itinerant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders]' (HRSCATSIA 1992:169). In an earlier inquiry, Brandl (1981:102) submitted: 'Very little research on the town camp exists... Before government and other agencies can plan effectively for the needs of town camps, more studies are undoubtedly needed'. An *NT News* editorial (March 11, 1996) stated: 'Pulling down of makeshift camps and moving people on certainly doesn't work. The itinerants just shift to another spot in town. Disliking them and their lifestyle won't make them go away. Positive ideas are needed'.⁴⁸

These comments, combined with my previous experience of conditions for homeless Aboriginal people in Darwin, confirmed the relevance of my research topic. During my brief pre-fieldwork visit to Darwin in February 1996, a newspaper interview situated me in an earlier role as defender of Aboriginal rights under the heading 'Bill is back to tell of battle' (*NT News* March 7, 1996):

A rebellious school teacher left Perth in 1969 to become a hippy in Darwin. But on arrival Bill Day became immersed in the lives of Aborigines and a champion for land rights...

Mr Day, 56, who lived on Lameroo Beach for six months in 1969, returned to Darwin this week after more than 10 years in Perth to meet old friends and reminisce about a grand struggle.⁴⁹

By the time of my return, the renewed campaign by the Northern Territory Government and Darwin City Council (DCC) against 'the itinerants' had driven the Aboriginal camps from the beaches and parks into hidden sites in bushland around the town which often received early morning visits from police or council inspectors. A petition of over 4000 signatures (Schulz 1996) had called for firmer action against unsociable behaviour in public places. 'Aboriginal people are quite free to come into white communities, white people are not allowed into black communities, that's a very distinct form of racism', proclaimed the mayor, in one of his many contributions to the lively media debate (see Ween 1997:32).

On my return to The University of Western Australia I mailed a standard letter to all interest groups in Darwin. My letter ended:

Perhaps your interaction with the itinerants will provide a valuable information resource. Therefore I would like to work with your staff who have the most knowledge of the problems, sharing any statistics you have gathered, respecting your experience and taking heed of any difficulties you may anticipate.

Over twenty-two replies were received, including a helpful discussion on the telephone with the manager of a Darwin taxi company. The NT Tourist Commission expressed interest 'in supporting any possible solution to a problem which can have a negative image to visitors to the Northern Territory'. An alcohol awareness organisation wrote of 'an abundance of opinion but little factual data in this specific area'. The Darwin City Council replied in detail:

Together with the public places program Council operates in co-operation with a similar NT Police program, Council supports the recent initiative to establish a Social Issues Reference Group comprising representatives from Aboriginal organisations and NT and Local Governments. The initial meetings of those keen to establish such a group saw issues underlying much of the anti-social behaviour apparent in public places as a high priority for discussion aimed at generating long term solutions. The organisation of this reference group is auspiced by the NT Office of Aboriginal Development.⁵⁰

One organisation admitted to a failing of many other social welfare agencies in Darwin. The NT Region of the Salvation Army (22 April, 1996) stated: 'We do have a work with itinerants, however we have very little to do with the indigenous population'. I decided that I would not feel comfortable being accepted into a fringe camp while working closely with institutions or organisations seeking a solution to 'the itinerant problem'. I share the doubts of Gupta and Ferguson (1996:9) about an anthropology where: 'the importance of particular topics as research priorities have mostly been thinly disguised (if that) projections of the state's strategic and geopolitical priorities'. In the Northern Territory, research on 'the itinerant problem' could come under that category, as my replies indicated. Because of the heightened conflict between fringe camps and authorities from early in 1996 and my own contacts which developed as my fieldwork progressed, I did not pursue the possibilities suggested in the replies to my letters and in discussions during my pre-fieldwork visit to Darwin in March.

As the campaign of harassment intensified during 1996, I anticipated that getting to know people who are being constantly moved could be difficult. A police blitz was announced (*NT News* February 20, 1996) and DCC by-law 103 making it an offence to sleep in a public place between sunset and sunrise was enforced (*NT News* April 4, 1996). In the month of August 1996, when I began fieldwork, the media later reported that 398 people were warned for sleeping in a public place and 156 infringements for the same offence were issued (*Suburban* October 9, 1996). As a sole researcher using a bicycle as transport, I suspected that finding the shifting camps and retaining contact long enough to build a relationship of trust in a sprawling city like Darwin would be impossible.

Urban anthropologists recognise that the size and complexity of urban groups and localities often limits what can be accomplished by one fieldworker (Foster and Van Kemper 1988:96). In my preparation for participant observation, I had internalised much of what Gupta and

Ferguson (1996:25) call 'the hegemonic "Malinowskian" practice of "the field"'. In this tradition, I sought a manageable field site where I could work with a particular group of, as yet unknown, fringe dwellers. However, as I argue in this thesis, not only is the methodological convenience of a bounded field destabilised by the tactical refusal of Aboriginal fringe dwellers to remain within defined borders, but the artificial drawing of boundaries to make fieldwork manageable potentially renders invisible many influences on fringe dwellers' lives.

Early in his fieldwork, Sansom (1980a:9) found that: 'given inter-mob competition, it was not possible to run with a variety of mobs'. I also found that without ties of kinship the fieldworker must show a degree of commitment to a particular group before being accepted as part of a fringe mob, although the rivalry does not necessarily prevent some Aboriginal campers moving between groups. In a response similar to that noted in Arnhem Land communities by Benn (1994:7), fringe campers appeared to take a possessive and jealous view of 'their balanda' (White person) as a useful resource.

3.3 The role of the anthropologist

In this section, I defend my personal involvement in fringe dweller resistance during my fieldwork between 1996 and 1998 and suggest that my research and my thesis cannot be viewed as separate from the embattled position of fringe dwellers in Darwin. I was aware that research in an embattled environment might involve personal commitment to their cause, possible conflict with authorities and difficulties in satisfying the requirements for objectivity in research. Indeed, as I describe in this and later chapters I soon became an active participant in the fringe dwellers' struggle for space in Darwin. However, the point of my thesis is not whether fringe dwellers will openly resist without outside help, which I have already suggested is unlikely. My point is, that fringe dwellers in the Northern Territory over a period of almost thirty years have consistently shown a political awareness and preparedness to openly protest which suggests that their oppositional role has not been adequately examined in other studies. Towards this end, I maintain that my methodology satisfies the definition of scientific and objective methodology cited by D'Andrade (1995b:433) and Harris (1995:423) as, 'public, replicable, and testable'.

Gupta and Ferguson (1996:18) criticise research proposals that use 'the vocabulary of justification' to academically select a field solely to test 'theoretical problems.' In their critique of fieldwork practices, they claim that neutrality privileges a study directed by 'intellectual interest' under the guise of 'universal, meritocratic norms [which support] a particular structural and

ideological location' (p.18). According to Gupta and Ferguson (p.18), the authority of 'academic interest' continues to privilege the White middle-class male over others who may have alternative reasons for working with the subaltern group. Gupta and Ferguson (p.18) continue: 'leaving their commitments and responsibilities for the sake of untethered "research interests" is for many anthropologists a Faustian bargain, a betrayal of those people whose lives are inextricably linked to their own'.

On the other hand, Bourgois (1996:256), who worked amongst cocaine dealers in East Harlem, suggests that the majority of anthropologists avoid venturing into unpleasant neighborhoods 'where they must face the underside of their class privilege'. In defence of his own subjective approach, Bourgois (1995:13) notes that ethnographers using methods of participant observation, 'establish long-term, organic relationships with the people they write about. In other words, in order to collect "accurate data", ethnographers violate the canons of positivist research' (p.13). Bourgois (p.18) cites Scheper-Hughes (1992:25) and Wolf (1990) in his conviction that 'anthropological writing can be a site of resistance' (see also Scheper-Hughes 1995:420), and that social scientists should 'face power'.⁵¹

The inequalities I witnessed in the field in 1996 caused me to agree with Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995:410) that the anthropologist who witnesses injustice should be critical of the position of an 'objective' and 'neutral' observer. However, I maintain that international treaties recognised in Australia can be accepted as objective facts.⁵² As I will explain, the conditions in the camps breach those treaties. Therefore I suggest that my study of homeless Aborigines in Darwin is not only ethically committed, but also constitutes an objective view supported by internationally accepted standards which are increasingly being applied in criticisms of Australia's treatment of indigenous people.

In a criticism of Scheper-Hughes (1995), Ong (1995:429) sides with D'Andrade (1995a) in warning against ethnocentrism in applying 'Western notions of morality', so that cultural others become 'bit players in yet another Western debate' (Ong 1995:429). Ong (p.430) defends 'a mobile sensitivity to cultural difference', in contrast to Scheper-Hughes's argument centred on 'human universalism', but agrees that an ethical anthropology should defend 'minimal modern human rights (freedom from hunger and torture and the right to survive as people)' (p.230). In the Australian context, I agree with Rose (1986:28), who argues: 'If we who are frequently identified as experts on Aboriginal society and culture have little to say about the power relationships in which they are embedded, we contribute to the process of masking these relationships'. According to Scheper-Hughes (1995:417), in the

so-called 'objective' approach to anthropology, 'the suffering is aestheticized, (turned into theatre, viewed as "performance") and thereby minimized and denied'.

In his defence of 'an advocacy approach' to anthropological research, Harries-Jones (1996:166) notes: 'If researchers form part of the situation which they have to interpret, this conflict between participant activism and objectivity is supposed to endanger the value of their conclusions'. In response to this argument, he cites opinions that 'all science is a process of engagement between scientists and that which they study' (p.166). Harries-Jones adds that, in this view, it is a doubtful proposition that the researcher is independent of the world and that the world is external to the observer.

Scheper-Hughes (1995:419) claims that 'noninvolvement was, in itself, an "ethical" and moral decision'. She advocates instead the position of a committed 'witness' who, unlike the passive spectator, is 'accountable for what they see and what they fail to see'. Consistent with my critique of *The camp at Wallaby Cross* in Chapter Four, I take the position Scheper-Hughes (p.419) describes as a witness 'accountable to history', rather than the spectator 'accountable to "science"'. Scheper-Hughes (p.411) asks: 'What makes anthropology and anthropologists exempt from the human responsibility to take an ethical (and even political) stand on the working out of historical events as we are privileged to witness them?'⁵³ Accepting this view, I suggest that my presence in the field and my thesis become inseparable from the object of my study.

Contrary to Marcus's prediction that multi-sited fieldwork could lead to 'cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments' (Marcus 1995:113), a collection of short papers on multi-sited research in a special edition of *Canberra Anthropology* shows 'the researcher will usually have a primary emotional and political affiliation to one particular group within the wider field' (Bolton 2000:4). In his Afterword to a collection of essays on multi-sited ethnography, Weiner (2000:75) states:

Certainly it was Foucault who reminded us that power is effective to the degree that it disguises itself, and part of how it accomplishes this is by denying the systematicity to regimes from which power emanates. And although Marcus admits that mobile positioning attenuates the subaltern as a locus of resistance, when through our ethnographic work, we bring this locus into relationship with other nodes and points of agency, I think the opposite reading is also possible: in shedding light on power's systematicity, one has to necessarily bring oneself into opposition to it and hence assume an

advocacy position with respect to those who are affected by these regimes. Bill Day's project I think rests on this reading of the siting of power in the contemporary indigenous world.⁵⁴

Arguments for objectivity in the field (D'Andrade 1995a, 1995b), often fail to critique the role of the anthropologist in the 'writing up' process, on return from the field. For example, D'Andrade (1995b:433) states: 'What makes an observation objective is that it describes a phenomenon that exists independent of the observer's feelings or thoughts about it'. However, Marcus (1995:112) observes that in the writing up stage of a multi-sited study, 'the privilege and authority of the anthropologist [is] unambiguously reassumed'. At this point, according to Appadurai (1988:37) the mobile and all-seeing ethnographer may create what he or she calls the 'spatially incarcerated native' who is restricted in what they 'know, feel, and believe'.

In my experience, the researcher's commitment to their interlocutors is tested by his or her academic commitments. The conversion of the fieldwork experience into ethnography is described by Pratt (1986:32) as requiring 'a tremendously difficult shift' from the subjective experience to 'the scientific position' of an observer 'looking in and/or down upon what is other'. Similarly, Gupta and Ferguson (1996:42) believe: 'One "writes up" in a space that is superior', where the roughly made notes are given order. However, I seek to respond to these criticisms by suggesting that my thesis is not separate from, but is integral to, the struggle by the fringe dwellers for space in Darwin. I further suggest that the anthropologist in the field is another connection between fringe dwellers and the wider world which should be critically examined in a multi-sited study.

Bourgois (1995:11) discusses the problems of 'the politics of representation'. He questions whether his ethnography will confirm negative stereotypes and worries about 'the political implications of exposing minute details of the poor and powerless' (p.18). He refers to advice from Nader (1972) not to study the poor and powerless 'because everything you say will be used against them'. Despite these arguments, Bourgois reasons that his graphic descriptions of the lives and conversations of crack dealers emphasises 'the interface between structural opposition and individual action' (p.12). To avoid providing material that may compromise the campers in the hostile environment that existed in Darwin in the 1990s, and due to other factors discussed in Chapter Five, I have kept my accounts of life in the camps to a minimum.

3.4 'Finding' a field site

Marcus (1986:172) asks: 'Why precisely are you in this locale rather than another?' Marcus (p.172) comments:

One is obliged to be self-consciously justifying (or strategic) in the placement of ethnography precisely because of sensitivity to the broader system representation that is at stake, foreshortened by the practical advantage of ethnography fixed in a single locale.

The 'rhetorical self-consciousness about the selection and bounding of the ethnographic subject' discussed by Marcus (p.172) was emphasised for me by the harassment of fringe dwellers which was occurring as I moved about Darwin looking for a fieldwork site.

Gupta and Ferguson (1996:13) claim descriptions of arrival into the field as 'another world' often minimise, if not make invisible, 'the multiple ways in which colonialism, imperialism, missionization, multinational capital, global cultural flows, and travel bind these spaces together'. In the arrival narrative, the distinction between 'home' and 'away' is often dramatically illustrated. The narrative of discovery emphasises the field as a place apart, distant from home, while the 'arrival tropes' used in ethnography 'mediate this contradiction between the engagement called for in fieldwork and the self-effacement called for in formal ethnographic description' (Pratt 1986:33). I will presently apply these observations to my own arrival into the field.

Trigger (1992:3) introduces Doomadgee with the tropes of a detective novel, with the lone outsider arriving by road to discover if descriptions given by outsiders of a closed and divided community were correct. Burbank (1994:7) is accepted by her Aboriginal interlocutors as 'a different kind of Westerner ... not there to judge or change but to accept and learn' (see also Trigger 1992:86). In my activist text (Day 1994), the arrival scene authorises the liberator of the exploited victim. Coming from 'the free world' into the land of the oppressed, and returning to the freedom of writing in isolation is a version of the entry and exit trope perhaps most applicable to my thesis.

The entry and exit narrative emphasises the connections between the site and the wider world, through the person of the anthropologist. For this reason, I suggest that critically examining the entry of the anthropologist to the field becomes an aspect of a multi-sited ethnography. For example, the 'discovery' of the site for my fieldwork in 1996 introduces issues of media representation, power relations and the history of the Aboriginal struggle for recognition and land in Darwin, including my earlier involvement. These are some of the connections I now examine.

3.5 The establishment of Fish Camp

An Aboriginal fringe camp was established on vacant Crown land at Fish Camp by an Aboriginal activist from Queensland, Fred Fogarty, and his Malak Malak wife, Violet Adams in 1973 (see Maps 2 and 3; Plates 17 and 18)).⁵⁵ The area is amongst burnt-out monsoon forest beside the tidal and mangrove-fringed Ludmilla Creek, under the flight path of the Darwin International Airport, in Darwin's northern suburbs.⁵⁶ It is situated between the lease held by the incorporated Bagot Community, and the sea to the east. Fish Camp is near the banks of the tidal Ludmilla Creek which now serves as the southern border of the 301 hectare Kulaluk Aboriginal lease (Map3).

Prior to 1965, the extensive eucalyptus and monsoon forest, grassland and swamp surrounding the site had been a sizeable part of the Bagot Aboriginal Reserve (see Woodward 1974:55-63; Wells 1995b:221-232, 2000:73). More land was required for subdivisions as Darwin spread and the Aboriginal reserve was a prime site. In 1959 the mayor stated: 'The way Darwin is growing, leaving Bagot where it is would be like putting it in Smith Street. What a furore that would cause. It is high time Bagot was moved' (quoted in *Bunji* October 1972). The politician and activist lawyer, Dick Ward, stated in the NT Legislative Council: 'The town of Darwin is extending and we do require places within easy access where people can live. (Hansard of NT Legislative Council, January 13, 1959). An August 28, 1964 memorandum suggests the 'scrubland and swamps [on the reserve] provide the seclusion ideal for drinking and gambling orgies and other forms of anti-social behaviour. The very nature of the land prevents adequate supervision by authority' (quoted in Wells 1995b:225). Perhaps referring to the initiation area, *Gunabibi* site and burial grounds, which were pointed out to me by various of my Aboriginal interlocutors during my fieldwork, Wells (1995b:226) notes: 'The activities which the Branch describes as "anti-social" and for which Aborigines used the bushlands would have been portrayed quite differently by the Aboriginal protagonists'.⁵⁷

Woodward (1974:55) believed 'it is worth setting out the history [of Bagot] in some detail, since it illustrates the way in which Aboriginal interests can be lost sight of when other requirements become pressing. It also shows that the general Darwin community owes some land to Aborigines on the basis of past understandings'. Woodward (1974:62) noted that the alienation of the Bagot land 'highlights the strength of the Aboriginal case for more land in the township of Darwin'.

Without any legal process to claim the land in within the pre-1964 Bagot Reserve boundaries, myself, Fogarty and others in the Gwalwa Daraniki coalition of fringe dwellers had nailed signs to trees along Bagot Road and

Coconut Grove Drive stating: 'Aboriginal land claim - Under negotiation with the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission'.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, the Bagot Aboriginal Council had failed to lodge an interest in the Ludmilla land. According to Woodward (1973:25), the only concern of 'the regular residents of Bagot Reserve' was to 'obtain title to the Reserve so that they can develop it as an attractive and useful community area'. Despite the lack of interest by the Bagot Council, the Aboriginal residents continue to use the nearby creek, mangroves and vacant land for food gathering and recreation, as they had done when the area was part of the reserve.⁵⁹

In July 1973, three of the Aboriginal residents of the Kulaluk camp were charged after a truck was firebombed in a confrontation with surveyors. Fred Fogarty, who was charged with malicious damage, then moved from the Kulaluk camp, with his wife, to the site that they named Fish Camp.⁶⁰ While his court case was pending, he began constructing houses with building material from the Darwin City Council dump, which was located at the end of Fitzer Drive where Minmarama Village is today (see Map 3). As the DCC filled low-lying land on the fringes of the Ludmilla Creek mangrove system, Fogarty was able to salvage useful building materials, tools and utensils for his house.

After the Kulaluk incident, the legal adviser to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Gareth Evans, spent four days in Darwin researching a report to the minister (Henderson 1984:20-21). Evans recognised that Fish Camp and the fringe dwellers' claim to the original Bagot area was becoming 'another Kulaluk situation'. Evans believed that Aborigines had a strong claim to the Ludmilla Creek area around Fish Camp because it was a traditional fishing ground, had been part of the reserve and 'there are a large number of grave sites (perhaps as many as two hundred) in the area' (p.22). In contrast, Evans cited cynics who suggest the Kulaluk camp claim was established 'less because it was of traditional significance than because it was a convenient staging post for both the Seabreeze Hotel in Nightcliff and the Dolphin [Hotel] in Bagot Road' (p.21).

During the ten years Fogarty lived at Fish Camp, many people were invited to share the area and use the buildings he had made, including myself for a short time in 1978. Fred attached 800 metres of piping to a water main at his own expense. The piping extended from the end of Fitzer Drive to his house (see Map 3). The shower, flushing toilets, sinks and taps that he installed all provided water and facilities for Aboriginal people going fishing and for others camping nearby. Deep hand-dug wells provided extra water for the Fish Camp gardens and reforestation project (*Bunji* March 1978).

Fred died suddenly at his camp in 1985 (see *NT News* April 1, 1985). Before his burial in Queensland a work gang from the Kulaluk community demolished his house and the wreckage was left in a twisted pile (see Day 1994:132). As no move had ever been made to evict Fogarty, the motivation behind this act appeared to be to prevent other Aboriginal people using the area.⁶¹ By the destruction of Fogarty's house his contribution to the struggle by fringe dwellers for space in Darwin was figuratively erased and piped water supply was effectively confined to the community on the northern end of the lease. Since then, apart from my own version of events, the failure to acknowledge his contribution is a notable silence in the history of the struggle for alternative accommodation for Aboriginal people in Darwin.⁶²

During a quick visit in 1990 (Day 1994:135), I photographed the scattered timber and iron of Fred's buildings that had been burnt by the annual uncontrolled grassfires. The ruins otherwise lay as they had been left in 1985. Fogarty's neatly painted sign, 'Fish Camp. Legally owned by Aborigines' was still standing at the site in 1996. Several open wells and rows of trees also remained. Although Burarra people from the Maningrida area in Arnhem Land had shared the area with Fred in the 1980s, I saw no recent evidence of any campers in the area.⁶³

Coulehan (1995a:81) mentions the Kulaluk lease as 'a significant referent for Yolngu in Darwin'. She adds that 'during the years of my fieldwork Yolngu sometimes called the place "fish camp"'. This observation suggests a continuing connection by Arnhem Land Aborigines to the Ludmilla Creek area. The situation had changed since Hayward-Ryan (1980:5) reported: 'For spiritual and a variety of other reasons Eastern Central Arnhem Land people will not, and cannot, camp overnight in that area triangulated by East Point, North Kulaluk and Ludmilla [i.e. Fish Camp and environs]'.⁶⁴

In 1989 an Aboriginal village of ten one-bedroom houses with communal ablution blocks and ten two-bedroom houses with showers and toilets was built on the old city council dump site across the mangroves from the ruins of Fogarty's camp (Map 3). The development was named Minmarama after a Gwalwa Daraniki Association president who died in 1986.⁶⁵ Minmarama was an attempted resolution to an ongoing controversy over the government policy to move 'transients' from the parks and beaches onto the Kulaluk lease (*NT News* October 13, 14, 1981; *Bunji* April 1982; Day 1994:111; Wells 1995a:75; Jackson 1996:100). In 1983, the Aboriginal manager of the Kulaluk lease joined the media debate on the housing of 'transients':

'A transient area with adequate facilities is an absolute must for many reasons,' Mr Baugh [the Kulaluk manager] told *The Advertiser*. The

lack of such a facility was largely responsible for complaints from the general public of small temporary, some not all that temporary, camps springing up in areas around the outskirts of Darwin. Some temporary camps are actually set up not a great distance from the city centre. 'These people must have somewhere to go that is properly organised,' said Mr Baugh (*Advertiser* April 7, 1983; see also *NT News* March 19, 1983, p.1).

The project was funded by the Aboriginal Development Corporation and the Town Camp Housing and Infrastructure Program (Wells 1995a:75). The residents pay rent to the Kulaluk management. According to Wells (1995a:76) 'although the houses were specifically designed as transient accommodation they quickly became used as permanent accommodation'.

3.6 Fish Camp and Lee Point 1996

I arrived in Darwin on August 2, 1996, looking for a base to begin fieldwork with the homeless people. While following the 'itinerant debate' in back issues of the newspapers, I found an article describing the eviction of Aboriginal fringe dwellers from central Arnhem Land who had been camping in bushland on vacant Crown land at Lee Point to the east of Lee Point Road, to the north of Darwin's northern suburbs (see Map 2).

Darwin residents and tourists use the parkland overlooking the beach at Lee Point infrequently during weekdays until 5pm, when people arrive to walk their dogs or enjoy the sunset. However, there had been complaints about the behaviour of Aborigines from the camps that were hidden in the bush opposite the park's facilities. The *NT News* published an account of the eviction on July 8, 1996 under the heading 'Govt moves to clear Point Camps'. Photographs showed the bags of aluminium cans at the camps, one of the tin huts, and a disabled man being carried from the area. The man was Bob Bunduwabi, whose history is told in Chapter Six of this thesis.

One of 'the itinerant residents' told the newspaper they had cared for the area and kept it clean. 'We were told we had to go,' he said (*NT News* July 8, 1996). A Department spokesman said there had been complaints about the rubbish from the campers. 'The decision was made to ask them to leave,' he said. The newspaper article ended, 'The camps are near the popular Casuarina Coastal Reserve which includes Lee Point'. The incident was reported only because the Keep Australia Beautiful representative had been in the vicinity with a photographer from the *NT News* at the time of the forced move (personal communication).

I had known Bob Bunduwabi in 1982 when he was living on the narrow

beach between the mangroves and the remnants of a dense coastal monsoon forest on the Kulaluk lease. An expatiant of the East Arm Leprosarium who had lost his fingers and feet to leprosy, as I will later recount, Bob had set up his camp beside a sewerage pumping station, where there was a tap and private access road (Map 3). I regularly passed that way and provided his camp with fresh fish from the fish trap, which I had built in 1981, by constructing two-metre high fences extending in a twenty-five-metre vee shape on the nearby mud flats that were exposed at low tide. A brief description of the Bob's beach camp appears in my book:

'Old Bob', as I knew him, lived in pitiful conditions under shades of plastic and cardboard. His artificial legs were seldom used, while his stumps of fingerless hands served him well enough. Fortunately he was never short of helpers.

Old Bob had no intention of returning to his birthplace near Maningrida. Instead he made Central Arnhem Landers welcome with the conveniences of a tap, seafood, firewood and seclusion. At night, he shared a blanket with his dog, Fifty Cents, while his visiting countrymen hurled their [fishing] spears into the mangroves. They preferred searching for weapons in the morning to risking an impulsive drunken murder (Day 1994:106).⁶⁶

The *NT News* (July 8, 1996) reported that the evicted Lee Point campers had moved to the Kulaluk community. Surprisingly, there had been no public indignation at the photograph of a man with no feet or fingers being carried from his makeshift home to an unknown future. However, the photograph and article gave me hope that Bob could be a personal contact that might be helpful in my search for a field site.

Few people had survived in the conditions of the Darwin camps for as long as Bob Bunduwabi. After fourteen years, I was amazed to read he was still alive and looking so well.⁶⁷ After moving camp at least six times over the years, he was forcibly on the move again. A telephone call to the Kulaluk management informed me that the Lee Point group was now at Fish Camp, although there is no water there.

Having a fringe camp on Aboriginal land presented several issues that complicated the position for them and for me. Firstly, to visit the camp I needed the permission of the Kulaluk leaseholders, the Gwalwa Daraniki Association (GDA). Secondly, the government claimed no further responsibility for the conditions in the camp because it was on Aboriginal-owned land. Thirdly, the landlords refused the fringe dwellers permission to

build any permanent structures or to lay water pipes, which could have easily been done, as Fred Fogarty had shown at the old Fish Camp twenty years earlier. The threat of eviction also remained ever present for the campers.

Gaining authority to visit Fish Camp could have been a problem for me because from 1982 to 1984 I had successfully contested an eviction order against me by the GDA (Day 1994) and my relationship with the management remained tense. Fortunately I received verbal permission to work on the lease from a surviving Larrakia elder who then lived at Kulaluk and knew me from the 1970s.⁶⁸

Gupta and Ferguson (1996:3) describe the 'lack of fit' between a research method of participant observation that has been developed to study small-scale societies and the realities of 'a mobile changing world'. However, the little community at Fish Camp hidden from the busy city gave the appearance of a bounded and manageable field site suited to the 'dominant Malinowskian orthodoxy' (Gupta and Ferguson 1996:23). Despite appearances, the media report, which had led me to Fish Camp, was evidence that a bounded field would not adequately explain the fringe camp's location and purpose. Later newspaper and television reports also ended any hopes of 'the practical advantages of ethnography fixed in a single locale' (see Marcus 1986:172).

Appadurai (1991:191, cited in Gupta and Ferguson 1996:3) asks, 'What is the nature of locality, as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world?' In this thesis I have already recounted some of the events that set the scene for Fish Camp as my research location and as a refuge for a displaced group. They are: the establishment of a town on Larrakia land; the revoking of a large part of Bagot Reserve, which alienated the area set aside for Aboriginal use; the activism of fringe dwellers and Larrakia people which reclaimed the area; the work of Fred Fogarty and his partner who established a recognised camp site; the 1996 campaign to drive 'itinerants' out of the city which forced the Lee Point people to relocate; my past involvement and the contacts I had made; media representations which led me to the site; the complexities of living as fringe dwellers on Aboriginal land; the determination of one severely disabled man; contested land in a developing city and the lack of alternative housing for Aboriginal groups.

3.7 Making contact

The single track into Fish Camp in the dry season of 1996 wound through pandanus and paperbark from the junction of Dick Ward Drive and Totem Road, in the suburb of Coconut Grove (see Map 3). The rough gravel track

turned sharply left before the Aboriginal burial ground which had given Totem Road its name. Totem Road also marked the northern boundary of the old Bagot Aboriginal Reserve. Running parallel with Dick Ward Drive, the track now ran in a straight line for 800 metres across a raised bund of earth on the edge of a freshwater swamp known as the old rice field (Map3). After heavy rain this section of the track was covered by a sheet of knee-deep water. In the dry season many taxi drivers refused to negotiate the corrugations. The track crossed a culvert that was excavated to drain the freshwater wetlands and now allows high tides to inundate the reeds with seawater. The track then rose onto higher ground, winding through the remnants of coastal monsoon forest choked by tall dry grasses. Wheels spun in the dry sandy soil or sunk to the axles if the driver slowed.

Gupta and Ferguson (1996:13) criticise anthropologists who suggest by their descriptions that their entry into the field is a journey back in time, amongst cultures apart from the world the anthropologist has left behind. In my case, the conditions in the camp and the access track were more reminiscent of a past frontier era than a modern city. In my eyes, this view derived from material conditions, rather than cultural difference. The noise of glinting international airliners descending to land on the nearby runway, or screaming jets circling in war games, contrasted with the privations of the residents of the camp. Rather than exemplifying cultural distance and establishing the anthropologist as outsider (see Bolton 2000:3), entry to the field accentuated for me the relationship between the dominant social and economic system and the marginalisation of the fringe dwellers.

The track had been opened to provide access to fishing spots on Ludmilla Creek that marked the southern boundary of the Kulaluk lease. Two hundred metres before the track terminates at the creek bank it passes a shady tamarind tree that forms a canopy with a weeping fig and several black wattles amongst rain trees struggling to rise above the annual grass fires. Gusts of wind whipped up the fine brown dust around sawn bush saplings resting on upright forked poles supporting four tarpaulin shades. A muddy path through the mangroves led across to Minmarama Village. In the distance, visible above the mangroves, were the golden arches of the McDonalds restaurant which had been given an 'anchor lease' on the Kulaluk land by the Aboriginal leaseholders in 1993 (GDA 1995).⁶⁹

Bob welcomed me to his camp as an old friend while his middle-aged niece, Dulcie, prepared food for him, her two invalid pensioner brothers and her partner. Her daughter lived in another low tent with her young White husband, who did most of the heavy carrying. In a later interview Dulcie described the camp:

That's my uncle over there. He can't do anything. Also my brother. He's blind. We've got to go and get the water and carry it back. I can't do anything because I'm stuck with the old people - mainly old Bob and old Tommy. My son-in-law has a car. He shifted all the things here. It's very hard. We need water. We need some place to wash. We rang up city council. We asked them to come and collect the dogs. They didn't come. We've got too many here - nine or ten. It floods when it rains here. Big mob water runs under the tarp but we got our beds up higher. It worries me all the time - old people. Bob, he's all right. He goes to Danila Dilba [Aboriginal Medical Service]. He has a shower there but the rest of us, nothing. Our Darwin government, they welcome tourist people from overseas but they don't welcome us because we full-blood Aboriginals. We all belong to this land, our country, and we are full citizens.⁷⁰

The campers' dogs usually lay resting in the red dust. Their barking was a warning that someone was approaching. Always close to Bob was his pet black hen that intimidated the dogs or picked parasites from their skin as they rested. I was soon feeling at home sitting in the shade of the tamarind which I remembered planting in 1978, (although several Aboriginal people I later met, claimed to have done so).

Bob Bunduwabi, who was about sixty-five years old, told me he came from the Gamal clan at Yilan, to the east of Blyth River (Map 1), with close ties to the Yolgnu people from northeastern Arnhem Land and the Burarra people to the west (see Bagshaw 1994, cited in Sutton 1995c:122-4; Carew and Handelsmann 1996c). He claimed to be a sorcerer, and was an exceptionally determined man. His younger brother, who also lived in Darwin, later became involved in the struggle of the campers, but I did not meet him until the following year.

Prior to the eviction, Lee Point camp had been a well-established and comfortable one, as I was to later see in a music video filmed there by a band in which Dulcie's son is the lead singer (NLC 1996b). Without representation and unaware of any legal rights, the campers had hired minibus taxis to shift their tarpaulins, bedding and utensils. They had left behind many items they could not carry from Lee Point and all their self-made structures supported by sawn saplings had been destroyed. The other Lee Point residents had scattered to other sites around Darwin. Before they had time to establish their camp on the beach beside the Kulaluk village, the GDA had asked them to move to the old Fish Camp site and the group shifted their tarpaulins for the second time in weeks. They were left with few options.

Thirst compelled me to cut short my first visit. After that, I carried water for the pensioners and myself from my accommodation at the North Australian Research Unit guest house in Casuarina known as 'the Manor'. After a day at the camp, with clothing and skin stained by the fine red soil and soaked with perspiration after cycling the five kilometres home each evening, I relished soaking myself in the clear water of the swimming pool. The daily transition of my access to abundant water, to the desperate need for a single tap at Fish Camp produced a daily 'culture shock', while the persistent complaints of the Aboriginal campers assured me that my reaction was more than an ethnocentric view of the contrasting conditions.

Watching Bob crawl about in the dust with nowhere to wash the clinging red dust from his clothes and body gave a surreal effect to an already scarcely believable scene. The pair of artificial legs he had used in the past were seldom used and remained jammed in a tree fork beside his tent. He had no wheelchair. Despite these deprivations, Bob and his relatives at the camp made me feel very welcome.

Bob had told the *NT News* (July 8, 1996), 'he believed he had been living at his camp [at Lee Point] through wet and dry seasons for seven years'. Another spokesman had said: 'We would like to be left here. We have been here a long time and we are a bit worried'. When I met him two months later, Bob still had a strong wish to return to the campsite at Lee Point where there was water, bitumen access and a historical connection. The anger expressed at Fish Camp over their eviction was reminiscent of the mood in similar camps on vacant Darwin bushland in the 1970s.

3.8 Fish Camp and the media, 1996

With permission from the people at Fish Camp, in September 1996 I contacted the Darwin media to publicise the needs of homeless people. I noted my fears that filming the camp could be seen as voyeurism, especially if the story highlighted Bob's disabilities. I wondered how publicity would affect the group and my fieldwork. And I suspected that the Kulaluk landowners would resent the negative publicity. However, I was concerned that authorities were using Aboriginal land as a 'dumping ground' for unwanted homeless Aboriginal people. Once away from public view it appeared to be a case of 'out of sight out of mind'. At Lee Point, where there are taps and showers, the camps had caused concern to the government, but once they were hidden in the Kulaluk lease, they were of no further interest, as later statements by politicians indicated.

A very sympathetic journalist visited the camp and interviewed the people.

She quoted two men by name in her report, although I was given as the major spokesperson under a heading, 'People dumped in Darwin, says Bill' (*NT News*, September 10, 1996). I was placed in the centre foreground of a photograph illustrating the article. Situating a tent and anonymous Aboriginal people behind me appeared to signify the mediating role of the anthropologist. Presumably, the involvement of an anthropologist gave the story an added authority. Rebecca Whitfield wrote:

Anthropologist Bill Day said the [city] council was creating South African homeland-like areas in the city - set up for blacks only to live. One member of the group is blind and another cannot walk after losing his arms and legs through leprosy.⁷¹

Mr Day said: 'The conditions at the camp are shocking - there is no running water and cooking and washing is difficult. They have their own tents but the area is a dust bowl and the fine dust is already causing eye problems. The Kululuk lease was never meant to be used as a dumping ground for homeless people'.

And George Banbuma, about 50, said: 'We are thankful to the Kaluluk [sic] people for letting us live here, but want our own land where we can speak our own language'.

He said the group did not want to move to one of Darwin's three established Aboriginal communities. 'There are too many fights there,' he said. Mr Banbuma pleaded with ATSIC and Northern Land Council to help'.

The subsequent local radio interview and debate between myself and the Community Services Manager for the Darwin City Council on ABC 'Drivetime' (September 10, 1996) and a local television news item on Bob's complaint of discrimination, described by Alison Morrow of Channel 8 'as a case which will test the rights of itinerant people' (October 18, 1996), produced no noticeable remedial action. Later, when early storms turned the dust to mud and wet the mattresses, I commented in a letter to the editor, 'I cannot believe there has been no response - no donations of beds or tents, no offers of emergency water supply' (*NT News*, October 26, 1996).

On November 13, 1996 the *NT News* published my open letter to Pauline Hanson,⁷² which was later published in the *West Australian* (November 16, 1996), the *Koori Mail* (November 20, 1996) and *Green Left Weekly* (November 20, 1996). The letter gave an alternative description of an Australian icon known as 'the battler', which was championed by Hanson:⁷³

If you had to cart your daily water supply in a jerry can through mud and mangroves, would you call that disadvantaged? If you had no sewerage, electricity, mail delivery, telephone or garbage collection, would that be disadvantaged? If your local government harassed you instead of representing you, labelling you 'itinerants' by the colour of your skin although you had lived in the city for more than 15 years, would that be fair?

Now imagine you have no feet, or are blind, yet have never claimed taxi subsidy vouchers, meals on wheels, Medicare or most of the entitlements due to a disabled pensioner. Instead you sleep in dust or mud huddled under a leaking tarpaulin. Nearby an ailing middle-aged niece toils as a full-time carer, cooking on an open fire, worried that her unemployment benefit demands she be 'looking for work'. Please explain to her the meaning of 'respite leave'. Try negotiating the bureaucratic maze in a language that is foreign to you, because this family speaks a tongue that has grown with the continent, and that is a lot longer than 200 years. Wouldn't you agree, Pauline, that this family group, friends of mine in the city of Darwin, are the real Aussie battlers?

Meanwhile, the Aboriginal flag I had tied to a tree in the centre of the camp had become a landmark for taxi drivers who distinguished Fish Camp from similar locations as 'the camp with the flag' (Plate 3). For northeastern Arnhem Land people, reflecting their contact with Macassan traders, flags flying on a mast have localised ceremonial and spiritual significance that has been integrated into the pan-Aboriginal resistance symbolised by the Aboriginal flag. When the flag became worn, another in a succession of Aboriginal flags was raised over the camp in emotional ceremonies organised by the residents (see Plate 14; Simmering 1998).

In November 1996, the issue of town camps and homelessness returned to the media. A front-page story on Fish Camp appeared in the *Suburban* (November 13), a free newspaper delivered to every home in Darwin. 'Family's home an "atrocious squalor"' was the headline above a sympathetic article:

And a Darwin anthropologist has blamed Darwin City Council's public place patrols for the crisis, saying homeless people were being forced to move to unhygienic camps to avoid fines... Seven people have been living at the site, behind Minmarama Village housing estate off Dick Ward Drive for four months, without any water supply or

sewerage.

Mr Day said: 'They're having to go back and forth with jerry cans to get water, and you can't do much with a jerry can of water in terms of keeping clean... It's discriminatory to say they have to move to Kulaluk, because Kulaluk belongs to the Larrakia people - just because they're Aboriginal, they shouldn't have to live in one designated area. These are people from the Maningrida region, who have lived in Darwin for more than 15 years. To them this is an urgent state, a life and death issue, not something that can just wait'.

A reader wrote to the *NT News* (November 18):

Some of these people [from Lee Point] have leprosy and as such are entitled to a disability pension and disabled housing... If on the other hand they have rejected these benefits, I can only say they have made their own bed so let them lie in it.

If the attitude of the letter writer was representative of a wide section of the Darwin public, it was evidence that 'the politics of embarrassment' (see Dyck 1985:15; Kapferer 1995:78) was no longer an effective tactic in Darwin. Local and Territory Government wanted to appear tough on Aboriginal 'itinerants' and the Federal Government appeared to have little influence on local issues. Another letter, condemning the 'poor bugger me' syndrome, drew attention to the 'four storey ATSIC palace built ... on the dearest real estate in Darwin. Just look through the sealed windows at all the sleek and well-paid ATSIC staff'. The writer continued:

But Bill, in this day and age why are your friends living like this? Do they not get pensions, or social security, or CDEP like everyone else? Do they not have relatives other than the one niece mentioned who have money and who could help care for them? In all the vastness of the Northern Territory surely there are camping places more convenient? (*NT News* November 21, 1996)

Another letter on the same page suggested 'Aussie battlers' have access to services because they work and pay taxes. 'Many people in Aboriginal communities don't work, don't pay taxes and therefore don't have and should not expect those services'.

Jim Saint has been a Top End resident for 30 years. He attacked 'do-gooders' like myself who: 'appear to live in a dream world where because you may be an anthropologist, what you write people may believe. Wake up mate, the

bludgers have lived without you for the past 11 years, they will live without you for the next 100' (*NT News* November 27, 1996). In my reply, I wondered if there would be a place for old 'bushies' like Jim when Darwin became a little Singapore, as politicians had recently proposed (*NT News* December 3, 1996). Jim fired back (*NT News* December 6, 1996):

Is it not great Bill that Darwin is soon to become a 'little Singapore'? Your friends will have to pay for their camping and their littering ... their places of abode are still their own choice, they can walk out, catch a plane, go to their own country, speak with their own people in their own language tomorrow.

As I will describe, it became evident that the negative media attention angered the Kulaluk leaseholders. Comments by members of the public and some Aborigines emphasised the gap between fringe dwellers and recognised Aboriginal organisations. The campers themselves were pleased by the publicity, without any apparent sense of it being an intrusion into a private Aboriginal domain. Indeed, they appeared to be encouraged by the media interest and the positive public response they received in face-to-face contacts. Neither did the sometimes aggressively negative remarks in letters to the editor deter them. In Chapter Eight, I discuss the building of allegiances between fringe campers and sympathetic non-Aboriginal groups that began during the media attention in 1996.

3.9 Legitimation: the case of the Railway Dam camp

The lack of sympathy for homeless Aborigines in letters to the NT media and on talkback radio reflected the general view that fringe camps are little more than hideouts for alcoholics. In the following paragraphs I contrast such views with the public support for the Aboriginal community at Railway Dam (see Map 2) in the face of threats by the NT Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment to 'relocate' the town camp (*NT News* November 15, 16, 1996; ABC 7.30 Report, September 28, 1997). The case is an example of the process of 'legitimation' of fringe camps, which Brandl (1981:98) rather hopefully saw beginning with the Woodward Commission reports (1973, 1974). That is, 'the process of educating outsiders to sharing [the campers] views of themselves as autonomous, legitimate communities'.

Brandl (1981:98) claims 'legitimation' is the necessary first step towards 'reasonable and acceptable living facilities for their lifestyle', adding that: 'Long and difficult as the process has been, most fringe-dwelling communities are still engaged upon it'. By 1996, Railway Dam has gained a degree of public acceptance as one of the first camps 'legitimised' by being granted a lease almost twenty years earlier.

Like Fish Camp, Railway Dam struggled to achieve the initial stage of 'legitimation'. In 1972 the *NT News* (July 13) reported:

Aboriginals camped behind Dinah Beach ... are wondering why the community has waited so long to establish showers and facilities in the area ... No one has ever expressed concerns whether they have facilities or not. The camp has no shelter, no toilet facilities and no water supply.⁷⁴

When the 3.12-hectare lease was finally granted to the Aboriginal Development Foundation on behalf of the community, the Minister for Lands and Housing stated:

It will provide a permanent place for Aboriginal people to stay when they come to Darwin. It is best for all concerned if land is allocated and used to meet the needs of Aborigines who wish to live as a community in the urban environs. The people can now move to make improvements to their surroundings confident they have secure title to the area (*NT News* March 26, 1979; ADF 1997).

Railway Dam is now home to thirty people and more who are visitors to Darwin (ADF 1997). After the threat to transform the lease into a public park, one of several support letters stated: 'The people of Railway Dam belong there. They "fit in"' (*NT News* December 3, 1996). Radio talkback was strongly in favour of keeping the town camp (*NT News* November 16, 1996). The daily newspaper was also supportive:

The Railway Dam camp site houses up to 12 Aboriginal families and also hosts remote community visitors. It will be removed as part of plans to relocate the Frances Bay [oil] tank farm. The picturesque and well-hidden campsite is located off Dinah Beach Road, between Tiger Brennan Drive and Duke Street, less than a kilometre from the city centre.

Mr Karadara, 44, who has lived at the camp since the 1960s, said the move would uproot a community that had never contemplated having to leave. He said: 'We've never had any trouble here and no one bothered us. This is our land. We don't have anywhere else to go... Why can't they make a park somewhere else? This is our home' (*NT News* November 15, 1996).⁷⁵

Another letter reflected a growing class-based opposition to the

development of the land for the benefit of elites:

We want to live in a society where commercial development is the top priority ... don't we? The preposterous proposal to move the camp at One Mile Dam is in the interests of only a minority of people. To let the camp remain would benefit the families who live there, and serve as a valuable lesson in tolerance (*NT News* November 23, 1996).

In this chapter, my introduction to the field illustrates the inadequacies of a single-sited study of a fringe camp. Instead, I have justified the need for a morally engaged, multi-sited study. My 'finding' of my primary field site, the history of Fish Camp and my examples of public reaction to fringe camps demonstrate that Darwin fringe camps exist in a politically charged environment. The reaction of the fringe dwellers confirms their political consciousness, preparedness to resist and suggests that theories of a closed Aboriginal domain do not apply. In the next chapter, I give evidence to support my politically engaged, multi-sited approach in a revisiting of *The camp at Wallaby Cross*. My extensive critique of the work of Basil Sansom that follows is additional evidence suggesting that a bounded study does not adequately represent Darwin fringe dwellers.

Endnotes for Chapter 3:

⁴⁸An illustrated feature article in *Aussie Post* (March 31, 2001, pp.10-11), headed 'Riverbed refugees', reports that an 'NT exodus' has resulted in 'destitute and homeless' Aborigines setting up camps in Mount Isa, the closest town to the NT border.

⁴⁹ See also Sydney Morning Herald, 'The man who wants martyrs', February 11, 1974; *Sunday Times*, 'Flower-power teacher leads Darwin's protest causes', October 21, 1984; *Sunday Territorian*, 'A trek into paradise', October 7, 1984; *The Australian* (NT Special Report), 'An old beatnik mixes politics and palm trees', July 15, 1985, p.11.

⁵⁰ Letter from Community Services Manager, DCC to Bill Day, 24 April 1996.

⁵¹ Bourgois (1995:11) also notes his concerned with the 'politics of representation' whereby his graphic portrayals of the lives of drug dealers will be 'misread as negative stereotypes'.

⁵² See for example, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 25:1 (United Nations 1948).

⁵³ Tonkinson (1974), Stanton (1985) and Trigger (1992) are other examples of witnesses' accounts of Aboriginal resistance - in their cases, to fundamentalist missionary indoctrination.

⁵⁴ Weiner is referring to my article, 'Forgive us our trespasses: finding space for Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin' (Day 2000:62-69).

⁵⁵ Violet is listed in the Malak Malak Aboriginal land claim book as 'Violet Fogarty' (Sutton and Palmer 1980:51).

⁵⁶ See 'A walk through Kulaluk' in *Bunji* (March 1978), for a detailed description of the area.

⁵⁷ On March 26, 1982 the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Authority wrote:

a Gunabibi ground is located on Kulaluk Community land, south of Fitzner drive and just east of Dick Ward Drive. Guwaykuway, a North East Arnhem Lander from Naymil/Datiway clan group, now living at Bagot, says that the site was used during the 1950s and although no longer active is still out of bounds to all women and children (AS.81/147, reproduced in Cooper 1985).

⁵⁸ Fogarty had built himself a hut at the Kulaluk camp by early 1973, and became the founding public officer of the Gwalwa Daraniki Association Inc in June the same year (see Buchanan 1974; Cooper 1985).

⁵⁹ 'It is hard for non-Aborigines to see the mangroves and tidal flats as useful areas', wrote Maria Brandl, of ANU (*Bunji* October 1981). She continued: 'More than this, Aborigines find a lot of food in these areas. This is still true today. Often the only fresh food available to them is what they can hunt or gather'.

⁶⁰ See *NT News* July 7, 1973; *Nation Review* July 19, 1973; *Bulletin* July 21, 1973; *Bunji* July 1973; Buchanan 1974:17; Henderson 1984:17; Wells 1995a:71).

⁶¹ A notice in the *NT News* warned that 'all permits to enter the reserve [Kulaluk lease] have been revoked' (Day 1994:128).

⁶² See *Koori Mail*, 'Academic remembers "Fighter" Fogarty', April 5, 1995, p.6.

⁶³ After Violet's death, Fred lived with a Burarra woman. Another Burarra woman and her white partner lived in one of Fred's old houses. Both these women visited Fish Camp during my fieldwork.

⁶⁴ The restriction was probably because of deaths in the area.

⁶⁵ See 'Last of the Larrakias', *Midweek Territorian*, March 16, 1986.

⁶⁶ The spears are popular amongst Arnhem Land campers to catch stingrays, but they can be dangerous weapons if a dispute occurs when people are drinking together.

⁶⁷ One of Bob's kin suggested to me that his survival was due to regular visits by health services and his more sedentary, and safer, lifestyle.

⁶⁸ Heffernan (1996) refers to an unpublished text he has co-authored with the senior elder, Topsy Secretary, called (in English) 'I burnt my feet for this country, this is my country' (Secretary and Heffernan 1996). I was told that the title describes walking on hot bitumen in bare feet in the protest actions of the 1970s.

⁶⁹ Section 4.2 of this report, prepared by the Kulaluk leaseholders, states: 'a successful lease agreement with the McDonalds restaurant on Bagot Road in the eastern part of the lease (part lot 5182) ... forms the anchor tenancy for future planned developments'. I was informed by an Aboriginal woman, who was involved in making the report, that an anchor lease is given on generous terms to a prestigious developer to attract other developments to the area.

⁷⁰ From 'Bill Day and Sally Mitchell, *Green Left Weekly* November 20, 1996, p.7.

<www.greenleft.org.au/backissu.htm>

⁷¹ *NT News* reports often incorrectly stated that Bob had lost his 'arms and legs' to leprosy (January 24, 1997; February 11, 1997). This rather grotesque image appeared to gain no extra sympathy from the public.

⁷² Pauline Hanson, the founder of the One Nation Party, had complained that Aborigines received special privileges.

⁷³ Just as I argue in Chapter Nine that Aboriginal drinking owes much to an earlier frontier lifestyle, my observations suggest that the lives of the fringe dwellers retain many aspects of a frontier life now unknown to many residents of settled Darwin.

⁷⁴ See also *NT News* (February 28, July 4, 1973); Woodward (1974:54-55); *Bunji* (April 1978, March 1982); Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority 5368/1994: Railway Dam land claim.

⁷⁵ The minister told the *NT News* (November 16, 1996): 'the camp did not fit plans for the relocation of the Frances Bay tank farm and the development of an inner-city residential area'. In the same article I was quoted: 'For me it's total *deja vu*'.

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.⁷⁶ 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).⁷⁷ 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'.⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes Lagoon.

In October 1971 the Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 1974.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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.⁸²

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

Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes Lagoon in January 1976 and four more in 1977.

In April 1974 the Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 1975.⁸³ 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.⁸⁴

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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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.⁸⁵

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).⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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):

Knuckeyes 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 Knowles⁸⁸ from Finnis and Ronnie Yates from Annaburroo.

On this day, Major Bangun⁸⁹ 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 Neil⁹⁰ a haircut under the shade of the gum trees. Roy Kelly⁹¹ 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,⁹² little Tania and a boy, Neville Morton,⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ They have slashers to keep down the high grass, and a quiet place for ceremonies . . .

The Muddi Community⁹⁵ ute comes back in a cloud of dust. Young Raymond Bangun,⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ Without the lease papers for the land, they are told they cannot build better facilities.

One thing is for sure, whatever happens, the Knuckeyes 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, 1979,⁹⁸ 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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'.⁹⁹ 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, 1996.¹⁰⁰ 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.¹⁰¹ 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).¹⁰² I suggest that Sansom's description of re-entry to the field through a form of 'Tardis' time-warp¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴ 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 Knuckeyes 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'.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckey's Lagoon amongst his interlocutors (see also *Bunji* August 1975). The *NT News* (July 21 1975) reported:

Two elderly Aborigines 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.¹⁰⁷

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 Finnis 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'.¹⁰⁸ 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'.¹⁰⁹

While elsewhere in 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 Knuckeyes 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.¹¹⁰

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 Knuckeyes 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, Saggars 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' (Saggars and Gray 1998:79).

4.13 Did the mob at Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes Lagoon.¹¹¹ 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 Knuckeyes 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.¹¹²

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'.¹¹³

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.

Knuckeyes 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).¹¹⁴ 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,¹¹⁵ 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'.¹¹⁶ 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Saggars 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).¹¹⁷ 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'.¹¹⁸ 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; 1982b:129; 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.¹¹⁹

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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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).¹²⁰

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.¹²¹ 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 Knuckeyes 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.¹²² 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.¹²³ 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).¹²⁴

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.¹²⁵

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' Knuckeyes 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.¹²⁶

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/Knuckeyes 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'.¹²⁷ 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).¹²⁸ 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, idelect, 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 Cowlshaw (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 Knuckeyes 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 Knuckeyes 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' Knuckkeys 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.¹²⁹

Endnotes for Chapter 4:

⁷⁶ 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).

⁷⁷ See also Sansom 1982b:118.

⁷⁸ Clendinnen (1999:88-93) gives a very positive interpretation of Sansom's text.

⁷⁹ 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.

⁸⁰ 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.

⁸¹ 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).

⁸² 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 Knuckkeys 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).

⁸³ 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).

⁸⁴ 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).

⁸⁵ I was involved in preparing three of these claims (Day 1994). Toohey was appointed in August 1976 (Eames 1983:270).

⁸⁶ 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'.

⁸⁷ 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).

⁸⁸ I met Gilbert Knowles again at Knuckeys Lagoon in 1997.

⁸⁹ Major Bangun is buried on the Knuckeys Lagoon lease.

⁹⁰ Margaret and Neil Dargie's daughter, Marlene, still lived at the camp during my fieldwork in 1997.

⁹¹ Roy Kelly is buried on the Knuckeys Lagoon lease.

⁹² Helen Stevens and May Stevens were still living at Knuckeys Lagoon in 1997.

⁹³ Neville Morton still visited kin at Knuckeys Lagoon and Bagot in 1998.

⁹⁴ 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).

⁹⁵ 'Muddi Community' was the name chosen by the Knuckeys Lagoon residents for their group.

⁹⁶ Raymond Bangun was still living at the camp in 1997.

⁹⁷ 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).

⁹⁸ NT Archives photograph 06204.

⁹⁹ The burial of the third 'masterful man' in the Darwin general cemetery is described by Sansom (1995:274).

¹⁰⁰ The ceremony was videotaped for the Aboriginal Areas Protection Authority (1996).

¹⁰¹ 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...'

¹⁰² 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.

¹⁰³ The television time traveller, Dr Who, enters the 'Tardis', which looks like a London police telephone box, to re-emerge in another era.

¹⁰⁴ See the account by Trigger (1992:86) of a 'whitefella' crossing into the Aboriginal domain at Doomadgee.

¹⁰⁵ 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.

¹⁰⁶ According to Sansom (1998), Povinelli said it is presumptuous to think that her presence would change the senior women's world at Belyuen.

¹⁰⁷ The Knowles family still use Knuckeys Lagoon town camp.

¹⁰⁸ The detailed obituary to Rowley by Young (1986) shows that his involvement in Aboriginal affairs far exceeded that expected of 'a scholar'.

¹⁰⁹ 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.

¹¹⁰ 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 Knuckkeys Lagoon lease in 1992. By 1994, 'CAAPS realised that it could not co-exist with the "wet community" on Knuckkeys Lagoon and the break-ins, vandalism and violence to staff and clients' (p.12). During my fieldwork, the Knuckkeys Lagoon community did not appear to have any direct involvement in CAAPS, which finally moved from the lease in 1998.

¹¹¹ 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 consociate 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.

¹¹² I have no recollection of being placed in a skin system at Knuckkeys 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.

¹¹³ In this chapter, I suggest that Sansom uses this same device in his writing.

¹¹⁴ Sansom (1995:260) describes his relationship to the singing man as a *ngirriwat* partner.

¹¹⁵ *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'.

¹¹⁶ 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.

¹¹⁷ 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 Knuckkeys Lagoon camp. C V Hee claimed: 'Knuckkeys 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"'.
¹¹⁸ In Chapter Seven I discuss the relationship between fringe dwellers and Larrakia people.

¹¹⁹ 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).

¹²⁰ 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.

¹²¹ 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)

¹²² 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'.

¹²³ 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)

¹²⁴ As I note in Chapter Five, most fringe dwellers now receive a reliable income from social security payments.

¹²⁵ 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.

¹²⁶ 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.

¹²⁷ 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.

¹²⁸ 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).

¹²⁹ 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.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reaching across difference: the Burarra people of central Arnhem Land

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I introduce my mostly Burarra-speaking interlocutors of Fish Camp and Lee Point who have moved from their homelands near the Blyth River in central Arnhem Land (see Map 2). I examine the past and present relationship between Aboriginal language groups of the Liverpool and Blyth River regions of Arnhem Land and the settlement at Maningrida, established by the Federal Government in 1957. I suggest that the Aboriginal homelands, or outstation movement, which began in Arnhem Land parallels the resistance of the Burarra fringe camps in Darwin as a reaction against state control of Aboriginal lives. I give examples which suggest that resistance by the Burarra people in Darwin fringe camps is an attempt at engagement, or 'reaching across difference', which belongs to a tradition demonstrated since White settlement at Port Darwin. Finally, I construct a model of this process by adapting the Yolngu concept of *ganma* to an urban metaphor of merging traffic.

The town of Maningrida, on the west bank of the mouth of the Liverpool River, derives its name from a local place-name meaning 'the place where the Dreaming changes shape' (Carew et al 1996a). In per capita terms, Maningrida is perhaps the most multilingual community in the world (Carew et al 1996b), with most people speaking or understanding four or more of the fifteen languages from the region: Ndjebbana, Eastern Kunwinjku, Kune, Rembarrnga, Dangbon/Dalabon, Nakkara, Gurrioni, Djinang, Wurlaki, Ganalpingu, Gupapuyngu, Kunbarlang, Gun-nartpa, Burarra and English (Carew et al 1996b). Burarra is the common language of Maningrida (Glasgow 1985:7). The Burarra language group is also described by Benn (1994:iii) as 'a federation of Aboriginal people, concentrated on the Blyth River, living mainly along the coast between Maningrida and Cape Stewart'.

While referring to the language used for most internal communications as 'Burarra', the people at Fish Camp acknowledge the differences between Anbarra speakers (a sub-community of Gidjingali [Meehan 1982:12; Hamilton 1981:3; Corn 2001]), other close dialects of the Blyth River region and the Gun-nartpa dialect of the Cadell River region (see Glasgow 1985:7; Hamilton 1981:3; Green 1987:1).¹³⁰ According to Glasgow (1985:7): 'The Burarra and Gun-nartpa people ... number approximately 600, making up the predominant part of the Burarra Language Family'.¹³¹ Hiatt and Hiatt (1966:1) note that: "'Burara" is a term originally used in eastern Arnhem Land for two groups who knew themselves as "Gidjingali" and "Gunadba"'.¹³¹

Hamilton (1981:3) observed that by 1981 Burarra was the inclusive name for all the groups of the Blyth River region and the term Gidjingali was 'never used'. This coincides with my observations in Darwin.

Many of the Fish Camp people claim Djunawunya as their clan estate, four kilometres west of the Blyth River mouth, which has been described in detail by Hiatt (1982; see also Meehan 1982:14), celebrated in the popular song 'Sunset Bay' (Wild Water 1996)¹³² and shown in the film *Waiting for Harry* (McKenzie 1980).¹³³ Kopanga, on the coast, was the nearest outstation (see Meehan and Jones 1980) until the shift inland to Je-bena in about 1985, forty-four kilometres from Maningrida, where water is reliable and the road to Maningrida is open all year (Carew and Handelsmann 1996b).

In 1958 the Djunawunya landowners identified themselves as An-barra speakers (Hiatt 1982:21) who comprised almost half of the total Gidjingali population of 600. However, Hiatt (p.21) recounts how groups circulated for rituals and to exploit resources. Hiatt (p.15) claims, 'access and benefit [of resources] are normally accorded to a wide network of tribesmen over and above the actual owners' in the interests of 'an over-riding ethic of hospitality and open-handedness'. Hiatt's (p.15) observation, that 'degrees of open-handedness bear a rough correspondence to degrees of relatedness', differs from Sansom's descriptions of 'performative kinship' and a service economy, but corresponds with the ethic of sharing in the fringe camps where the membership is drawn from related, though wide-ranging groups.

Carew et al (1996b) describe linkages and overlapping between Burarra-speakers, the Yolngu dialects to the east, 'the Nakkara' ('sometimes included with the Gijingarliya [Gidjingali] group') between Maningrida and the Blyth River, and the 'Ndjebbana-speaking Kunibidji' [Gunavidji] people who are the traditional owners of the Maningrida town area. These connections are often reflected in the mixed gatherings at Fish Camp with residents comfortably switching in and out of the above languages.

In the fringe camps where I did my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001 the members of the groups converse amongst themselves mostly in their native languages, with English as a second, third or fourth language.¹³⁴ In contrast, Sansom (1980a:11) likens the fringe camp to 'Babel' where people 'ethnically unlike, will speak in different ways and so have different words for things. They therefore cannot share properly in understandings'. He then asks: 'If ethnicity does not serve as a basis for association, what else can?' (Sansom 1980a:12). One response to the mixed nature of the 'Wallaby Cross' mob is the adoption of 'Aboriginal English', or Kriol, as the 'prime camp language' (Sansom 1980a:29). However, unlike 'Wallaby Cross', where 'the

distinctiveness of rough camp English is that its very roughness makes it English that is unwhite' (Sansom 1980a:31),¹³⁵ Kriol was rarely used at Fish Camp and Lee Point and there was never a demand that 'Aboriginal English' be used as a common language.

Almost all of the Aboriginal people who were associated with the Fish Camp community at some time during my fieldwork originate from the central coastal region of Arnhem Land, which was declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1948 (see Map 2). In comparison, the people of 'Wallaby Cross' came from a hinterland of fragmented Aboriginal Reserves, alienated land and cattle stations, which has a long history of contact (see Sutton and Palmer 1980:17; Sansom 1980a:iii). In Arnhem Land, Aboriginal land ownership is comparatively secure and social organisation is relatively intact. My interlocutors always explain their relationship to each other in kinship terms, such as 'I call Dulcie grannie', or use more specific Burarra titles such as *mununa* (mother's mother - see Hiatt 1965:48), *galikali* (spouse) as well as the sixteen subsection names recorded by Hiatt (1965:49) and Glasgow (1985:925).

The majority of the regular Aboriginal users of the camps at Fish Camp and Lee Point are members of the Gidjingali clans of the Blyth River region discussed by Hiatt (1965, 1982, 1986b), Meehan (1982:16), Hamilton (1981), Bagshaw (1982:50, 1994) and Meehan and Jones (1986). The Gidjingali people, who generally refer to themselves as An-barra or Burarra, are also predominant in camps at Palmerston and around the Darwin suburb of Tiwi. I suspect that the movement of people from the Blyth River region to Darwin has been partly because their homelands are located between the Aboriginal towns of Maningrida and Milingimbi. With no regular direct road service, access to services and goods is mostly through the traditional lands of rival clans.

Bob Bunduwabi came from Yilan, to the east of Blyth River, and had close ties to the Yolgnu people from northeastern Arnhem Land. His niece, Dulcie, had a Nakara father and An-barra mother with close family extending into the Maung, and as far west as the Gundjeihmi dialect groups. Her partner was a Djinang speaker from the Ramingining area and a renowned singerman who often returned for funerals and other ceremonies in the region. His family connections extended to Barunga, south of Katherine, where Kriol is more widely used. When groups from this region came to visit, the tensions at Fish Camp were noticeably increased. Although some men from the extended family group had lived with women from Central Australia, these languages are not as well understood and visitors with affinal connections through these relationships seldom stayed long in the

camp. Fish Camp therefore accommodated a group who were closely related, spoke closely related dialects and came from adjoining estates, predominantly the areas described by Hiatt (1965,1982), Meehan (1982) and Meehan and Jones (1980).

The two main exceptions were the husbands of two women in the core group. Apart from the Djinang man, there was a 71-year-old man married to an elderly Burarra woman who had been a patient at the leprosarium. The man was of mixed descent but identified as a Larrakia. He looked after his wife by shopping and fishing with his cast net. He drowned while on a night fishing excursion near the camp in 1998 (see *NT News*, November 21). While these men were accepted, tension was created during one week when a single urban Aboriginal woman evicted from her home sought refuge in the camp. With no kinship ties, and unaware of the expected behaviour towards kin, this woman offended a male relative of the camp doyen and had to seek my protection. She moved out soon afterwards.

Heppell and Wigley (1981:52) note that 'residents of the [town] camps maintain traditional ties with traditional country', giving the camp life a familiarity for its residents despite the geographical separation from country. Although many of the campers have a long association with the Darwin area and claim rights to space in Darwin, as I discuss in Chapter Seven,¹³⁶ my fieldwork also suggests that they maintain many traditional connections to specific sites and land-tenure systems in Arnhem Land described by Hiatt (1965, 1982, 1984), Bagshaw (1994:122) and Sutton (1995c:13-17). These ethnographic descriptions of Burarra social systems, values and beliefs appear apposite, even in the fringe camps where I did most of my fieldwork. As Merlan (1991:271) notes, 'the town camp and rural settlement situations exhibit commonalties which are not as strongly associated or fully shared with house-in-town living'.

The Fish Camp group is typical of the mixed 'residential aggregates' model that Sutton (1999a:26) derives from his thorough analysis of Hiatt's (1965:24) descriptions of Gidjingali social groups, called 'communities' in Hiatt's text.¹³⁷ In another Northern Territory Aboriginal town camp, Doohan (1992:79) noted: 'I have not experienced a situation where Aboriginal people without some immediate kin ties at Aputula would take up residence there'. Similarly, those who camped at Fish Camp from August 1996 to January 1998 for periods of between two weeks and six months, with numbers peaking at twenty-five between September and October 1997, were almost all from central Arnhem Land.

My experience confirms the observation by Heppell and Wigley (1981:64):

The town camp provides a recognised order and ready community to which visitors can attach themselves. They can be sure of obtaining shelter among kin with whom they have an established set of reciprocal obligations, and can be reasonably certain that everyone else living in the camp, if not immediate kin, are members of the same tribal group and therefore, linked by historical ties of amity.

My record of residence over time (Figure 3) indicates a shifting population of more than 150 'countrymen' (and women) who associated with Fish Camp for varied lengths of time. However, in a submission for housing assistance, Simmering (1999; see Appendix II) states that Fish Camp had a core group of twelve who identified twenty-seven others who the group wished to accommodate on visits 'of weeks, months or longer' (see also Appendix III).¹³⁸ Ages ranged from three to older than eighty, although children were rarely present. As Doohan (1992:75) found at an Aboriginal camp near Finke, it is possible for an individual to identify with more than one location.

In Chapter Three I gave some first impressions of the camp. Although I lived in the camp from May 1997 to January 1998 and visited regularly in other months, the language barrier I describe above precludes a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of life in a fringe camp. In addition, I maintain that the 'classifying practices' of the hegemonic power noted by Asad (1993:17), Abu-Lughod (1990:47), Kapferer (1995:88) and other analysts of resistance are a reasonable cause for 'ethnographic refusal' in studies of resistance amongst subaltern groups like the fringe dwellers.¹³⁹ As I have cited, authorities know little about the campers. Scott (1990:xi, 1985:321) notes that 'sequestered settings', 'offstage' and 'removed from institutional circuits' are sites where resistance may be fostered. I suggest that anonymity remains the fringe dwellers' strongest defence. However, for the benefit of the reader unfamiliar with Darwin Aboriginal fringe camps, the following section gives descriptions of everyday life in one such 'sequestered setting' during my fieldwork before the camp was closed in 1999.

5.2 Some observations of life at Fish Camp: 1996-8

During the dry season, the shelters at Fish Camp were used only for storage. People shifted their 'sit-down' camp into the shade of the surrounding trees as the sun warmed, and continued dragging tarpaulins and mattresses around with the shade as it shifted throughout the day. The tents were used as a windbreak during the colder nights when heavier logs were gathered in the evening for the night fires. Sleepers laid their bedding close to, and around the two or three hearths, depending on the numbers and family groupings in the camp. If there was no alcohol to be consumed and no

visitors to entertain everyone settled down when darkness set in. Apart from the half dozen dogs, who barked fiercely if anything or anyone approached, there was usually little apparent concern for physical barriers or other protection for the exposed sleepers.

When there was alcohol being shared, the group would stay up by the fires until very late at night, singing and dancing to the clap-sticks and *ngorla* (didgeridoo) kept at the camp, or sharing stories in a relaxed mixed-gender circle sitting on the earth (I discuss drinking at Fish Camp in Chapter Eight).¹⁴⁰ At times of less abundance, the camp was often kept awake by domestic arguments, fuelled by alcohol, which were highly repetitive night after night. These arguments were usually over failure to reciprocate, accusations of sexual unfaithfulness, allegations of talk behind the back of the accuser or disputes over who was the most important representative of the camp. These internal tensions are fuelled by alcohol and controlled within boundaries of kinship and do not motivate the forms of resistance described in this thesis.¹⁴¹ In a 'miler' week or on a Sunday when people have no cash or the convenient liquor outlets are closed, silence reigns and people rest, go fishing or gathering bush foods and recuperate.¹⁴²

Temperatures during the dry season nights fall to as low as 16 degrees Celsius. Foam mattresses were dragged closer to the fires for warmth, and it was not uncommon for bedding to smoulder or for sleepers to suffer bad burns. Couples and single women slept around their own fire apart from the single men and women. Occasionally, if too many single men were drinking and the spouses were not present, the single women, mostly middle-aged, brought their blankets to my hearth for protection or removed themselves altogether for the night. Early in the morning the fires were stoked to boil tea and cook whatever food was available for a light breakfast. If there was a major drinking session continuing, people would be woken at first light to continue the celebrating and to share what alcohol had been saved as a 'reviver' until the liquor outlets opened for business.

Sometimes a man, but more usually women, gathered firewood in the late afternoon for themselves and the pensioners. The fittest, younger men were often slow to help. At Fish Camp, the firewood was mostly dry mangrove timber that was plentiful in the tidal regions of the Kulaluk lease. In the wet season, there was no attempt to keep wood dry, but fires could be started even on all but the wettest days. In the dry season, mangrove wood burns relatively quickly, leaving a fine ash that built up after a few nights until it was eventually shovelled to the side of the cleared sleeping and activity area. When a larger log of black wattle or similar better-quality wood was burnt, it was allowed to smoulder continuously until it was consumed. Occasionally a

vehicle might help bring wood from more distant areas for the fires that are a distinctive feature of the fringe camps. Pieces of arc mesh or similar metal scraps were used as grills for cooking, or pots were perilously balanced on the burning logs (see Plate 4). Sparks flying, these burning branches were sometimes wielded as weapons, more in spectacular threat at night than in blows, although the scattered coals did create havoc with clothing and bedding.

Arguing at night, noted by Tonkinson (1992:150), or shouting across the camp from where people lay could be vitriolic but cleared the air of pent up grievances. Sometimes, in the darkness, 'wires were crossed' with humorous results. One old man who was also rather deaf, while arguing with his partner in English shouted racist remarks at her that were understood by others to be insulting responses to a shouted complaint from across the camp from another couple, which the old man had not heard. As I lay listening, the man continued insulting his wife, which was interpreted as further insulting replies to the complaints from the other side of the camp, inflaming an already noisy dispute. Usually no mention was made of these night arguments the next day although they could ignite again on another night. One night I recorded on tape a particularly loud and insulting tirade in Burarra, and the responses from across the camp which caused great amusement when it was replayed the next morning, and many times thereafter.

With no vehicle, and several disabled pensioners, Fish Camp was reliant on taxis and 'minibuses' for trips to the bank and shops. Fares are negotiable on the minibuses, which can take up to thirteen people at a reasonable charge, making this form of transport indispensable to fringe dwellers, particularly for ceremonial gatherings and for protests. Unfortunately, at thirty dollars for the round journey to the shops, the fares took a sizeable proportion of the pensioner income on pension day. There were also friends who came to take pensioners shopping, or to the bank to collect debts. None at the camp had a drivers licence, so I sometimes drove a hired a vehicle which was paid for by contributions from the camp. In later months, the White activist friends began helping with shopping and excursions.

Fish Camp was rich in utensils, cooking pots and fishing gear compared to other camps and even to many Aboriginal homes. However, this was not always immediately evident because cups, spoons, saucepans and plates lay scattered about on the ground or hidden until they were needed. Occasionally there would be a clean up and washed utensils would be stacked together but mostly they were retrieved and washed when needed. Old cardboard made useful plates for meat or shellfish or as a firelighter or

fan. Empty plastic bottles of all shapes and sizes were used to share out the wine that arrived in four litre casks called 'suitcases' or 'yellow boxes'. Once used, the 'plastic', as the wine containers were called, was cast aside without the top and not used again. There was little attempt to put aside the bottles for the next drinking session or to wash and keep them for later use. At Fish Camp the used drinking bottles were raked into the piles of litter and put in bins that were removed weekly by the Keep Australia Beautiful utility, one of the few services provided to the camp.

When money is short, groups went crabbing, fishing with lines in the nearby creek or gathering food in the mangrove swamps, including worms from dead trees, shellfish called 'longbums' (*telescopium telescopium*) from the mud flats, periwinkles (*nerita lineata*) clinging to mangrove trees and small oysters from the rocks (see Plate 10). Wild honey, yams and berries were also collected from the surrounding monsoon forest. The camp usually had at least one cast-net that was used to catch smaller fish in shallow water. Friends and family might bring a wallaby, geese in season, long neck turtle or seafood from a hunting trip out of town. An urban Aboriginal entrepreneur usually drove into camp on pay weeks with saltwater turtle meat, offering the campers the cheaper, less saleable parts that made a popular soup. However, most 'bush tucker' came from shops that specialised in this type of food, including kangaroo tails, fish, shellfish and live crabs. It was also quite common for groups from the camp to spend a day out of town hunting or fishing when transport was available.

Multi-pronged spears were made in camp for hunting stingray during the dry season. A wading hunter hurls the spear at the stingrays that fed on the seabed and remained plentiful in the tidal shallows around Darwin. After removing the liver, the stingray meat was cooked on the open fire or in pots, then rinsed and mashed with the liver into stringy but tasty 'fish cakes'. Spears might be hidden in various locations but rarely remained for long in the possession of the maker - they were always in demand and often broken, not returned, or to prevent their use in fights they were so well-hidden that their whereabouts was sometimes forgotten (see also Day 1994:106). Knives and axes were also hidden or given to me to keep when tensions were high.

Although large card schools for gambling were held at other Darwin outdoors locations, card games were not popular at Fish Camp. Occasionally there would be a short round of cards with small stakes but generally money tied up in a card game was seen as money that could be redistributed amongst kin in more immediate ways. The silent concentration of a card game also contrasted with the more usual rowdy sociability of the camp. However, in quiet moments cards were popular for a solitary game of

patience.

Numbers peaked at Fish Camp from August to September in 1997, but this was not statistically significant, because over the year the camp became more established as the campaign for a permanent living area became more widely known. For example, there were only five people living at the camp in January 1997 during the wettest period while in January 1998 up to eighteen people were using the camp regularly and more visiting after the death in the hospital of Dulcie's sister from Maningrida (see Plate 15).

Some people, most notably couples, would stay for months while others used the camp as convenient overnight accommodation or a place for recreation. Only Dulcie stayed on through the entire time of my fieldwork with her partner and two brothers being almost continuous companions. Most others returned to Arnhem Land centres after moving from the camp, although a large number of 'drifters' shifted back and forwards between Fish Camp, other 'long grass' camps, and alternative accommodation in the city.

Significant ceremonies were organised at Fish Camp (see Plates 13-15). The largest was on July 15, 1997, to jointly cleanse the relatives and friends of two kin who had died in Darwin. After consultations with relatives who did not live at Fish Camp, a truckload of beach sand was delivered and spread over the red dust to construct a dance area around a sand sculpture formed to represent the fish totem of one of the deceased (Plate 13). Two circles, about a metre in circumference in the central oblong area, were formed to hold water and fire. All those close to the deceased later gathered around the former to be washed with water tipped from a bucket. In the latter circle a smoky fire was made, from which men wafted smoke with green leafy branches over and around all participants, including many non-Aboriginal friends. After the ceremony, attended by almost fifty people, the hosts paid dancers and singers and everybody was fed and joined in the drinking without incident. To minimise expense, the ceremony was shortened to a single afternoon.

It appears to be significant that these totemic rituals can be relocated from Arnhem Land to Darwin. It is not a new phenomenon, and has been witnessed by observers since earliest settlement, as the historical evidence suggests later in this chapter. Sansom also observed the ceremonial importance of Knuckeyes Lagoon, including the post-burial 'rag burning' rituals (see Sansom 1995; Plate 2) in which I have been a participant at Kulaluk and Railway Dam. In addition, Coulehan (1995a:273-4) noted the smoking of houses and other rituals amongst Yolngu residents of Darwin. At the camps, people can gather to perform similar rites that, I suggest, are important for the religious life and mental health of Aboriginal people in

towns. In my experience, these rites are also commonly open to non-Aboriginal people.¹⁴³ Participants can still locate earlier sites used for rites of passage, such as initiation, around suburban Darwin, which adds significance to otherwise vacant areas.

While there were many drinkers not living in the fringe camp who could be called 'humbugs', as Coulehan (1995a:277) describes those living in the 'long grass' who do not reciprocate with kin, most of the residents and associates of Fish Camp attempted to fulfil ceremonial obligations in their homelands or in town. A more common example was gathering for the ceremonial departure of a 'coffin plane' when a body was flown back to Arnhem Land for burial (see Coulehan 1995a:276). On one occasion I drove nine people from Fish Camp on an eight hour journey overland to Maningrida where Blyth River people were preparing for a *mamurrng* exchange ceremony (see Corn 2001:25-6), during which they would sing the much-in-demand *diyama*, or stripy cockle (*tapes hiantina*) song which I also recorded at Fish Camp.¹⁴⁴ Considering that Maningrida is only a fifty-minute flight from Darwin and people are in almost daily telephone communication, such occasions suggested that location is no longer fixed. The drive from Fish Camp to the Arnhem Land homelands juxtaposed town and homeland sites in a way not possible when people walked overland to Darwin in the 1950s.

5.3 Early contact

Trading between Aborigines along the north coast and visitors from islands further north has been documented by researchers (Berndt and Berndt 1954; Hiatt 1965:5; Macknight 1976; Meehan 1982:17; Poignant 1996:30). Reports of the regular visits to the north coast by Macassan trepanger fleets were incentives for British attempts to establish outposts and settlements at Fort Dundas in 1824, Raffles Bay in 1827 and Port Essington from 1839 to 1849 (Poignant 1996:30-31). With the successful establishment of Port Darwin from 1869, Macassan traders were regulated, while Japanese and Australian pearlers and trepangers continued to operate along the Arnhem Land coast (Poignant 1996:34).

By 1885, Arnhem Land was divided into eleven pastoral leases (Trudgen 2000:18; Cole 1979:80). Using oral history and other references, Trudgen (pp.12-42) recounts a 'first pastoral war' of attacks and reprisals between cattlemen and Aboriginal people of the area which is now northeastern Arnhem Land (pp.18-20). This conflict was followed by a 'second war' against the Eastern and African Cold Storage Company leaseholders (pp.20-28) which led to closure of the last pastoral leases, but left a number of Djinan clans either scattered or at 'the point of extinction' (p.25).

Trudgen (2000:28-38) describes a 'third war' and a 'fourth war' against crocodile hunters, buffalo shooters and Japanese crews occurring in the post-pastoral period in northeast Arnhem Land, as the loss of trading networks which existed in Maccassan times forced Aborigines to move off their estates into missions to survive (p.38). Although Hiatt (1986b:6) claims that there was no recorded violence in the central Arnhem Land area, conflict between Aboriginal groups and Japanese crews escalated in the 1930s. The publicised deaths of Japanese trepangers, two White adventurers and a White police officer and the subsequent trial of Aboriginal men in 1933 raised public awareness of these incidents (Dewar 1992). Sympathetic media coverage prevented the type of punitive expeditions conducted elsewhere, particularly in earlier decades. Dewar (1992:6) suggests: 'Perhaps it was [the] long experience of dealing with Macassan people which made the interaction of the Europeans and Yolngu less on the outsiders' terms in Arnhem Land than it was in other places in Australia'. The greater national public scrutiny of settler activity by the 1930s was also a likely factor that prevented reprisals.

5.4 The Reserves

Baldwin Spencer had recommended in 1911 that reserves be set-aside for Aborigines (Dewar 1992:23). By 1929, J W Bleakley's report for the Commonwealth, *The Aborigines and half castes of Central Australia and North Australia*, recommended the formation of a reserve with assimilationist aims of protection and supervision of Aborigines under the care of missions (Dewar 1992:23). The sometimes-violent attempts to operate cattle stations in Arnhem Land had been abandoned in the 1890s and in 1908 (Dewar 1992:9), leaving the area free for the 79,900 square kilometre Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve to be proclaimed in April 1931 (Dewar 1992:3). Mission leases had already been established at Oenpelli in 1925, South Goulburn Island in 1916, Milingimbi in 1918 and Elcho Island in 1921. Yirrkala mission followed in 1935 (Hiatt 1965:7; Poignant 1996:27).

In 1939, the anthropologist Donald Thomson (cited in Dewar 1992:81) recommended that:

Rigid segregation in Arnhem Land Reserve and protection from all outside contact with its destructive and disintegrating results, alone would preserve this population as a stable, self-respecting [sic], self-supporting, primitive community.

The Northern Territory Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1937, Cecil Cook, and the general community believed that the missions had failed as administrators of Aboriginal communities (Dewar 1992:23). Dewar (1992:24) quotes Cook:

the finished product of the Mission School taught to appreciate and need the legitimate amenities of white civilization is left without the opportunity of enjoying them except by migrating from the Reserve to centres of settlement.

Baldwin Spencer had earlier stressed the need for reserves to keep Aborigines out of major urban centres. His argument was an important factor leading to the creation of the first reserves in the 1890s (Dewar 1992:24), in conjunction with laws restricting Aboriginal movement in towns. As Protector of Aborigines, Baldwin Spencer also established the Darwin Kahlin Compound in 1911, primarily for the local Larrakia people and associated hinterland groups (Wells 1995a:22; 2000). According to Read (1995:276):

In the regulation of the lives of Aboriginal town dwellers ... Spencer's recommendations illustrated a long-standing tension between laws to protect Aborigines from Whites and laws to protect Whites from Aborigines ... Spencer believed that in Darwin and Alice Springs it was the rights of the Whites which must be protected ... Spencer's concern for the welfare of traditional Aborigines in remote areas, but for the welfare of Whites in the towns, set a precedent which arguably still remains entrenched in Northern Territory legislation.

Jackson (1996a:8) believes town reserves were commonly built on land of little economic value. She indicates that the confining of Aborigines met some resistance from campers in Broome. The WA Commissioner of Native Affairs reported in 1955: 'The adult natives are most reluctant to leave their "homes" by the sea or mangroves which are very convenient to them' (Jackson 1996a:8).

Although by 1913 in Darwin it was reported to the Protector that, 'most of the camps in town have been broken up, and the Aborigines removed to the Compound at Kahlin' (Wells 1995a:22), years later Harney (1957:70-75) recounts an early morning 'muster' of the camps to remove the 'down and outs' to a waiting ship where '[t]heir names were recorded so that the Director of Native Affairs could commit them to an aboriginal reserve'. Presumably these were the unemployed Aboriginal campers. Harney (1957:17) writes: 'I often met a native I had known in his tribal lands under some name that linked him to his country, to discover that he had dropped the old name and now called himself after the store or White people he worked for'. Wells (1995a:27) notes that in 1941, after many Aboriginal town campers had been repatriated, the demand for Aboriginal domestic labour

greatly exceeded supply. This shortage, which had also occurred in the past (Wells 1995a:23), continued to subvert the policy of discouraging Aboriginal movement into Darwin (Wells 2000:64).

5.5 The 'drift' to Darwin.

Numerous reports cited in Brandl et al (1979), Povinelli (1993a) and Wells (1995a; 1995b; 2000) express the official concern over the movement of Aboriginal people into Darwin and their interaction with the town population. Wells (2000:74) describes early attempts to 'keep Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal lifestyles well outside the Darwin town boundaries'. In her conclusion, Wells (p.74) suggests that:

Aboriginal resistance to such authoritarianism is evident in the persistence of town camps and the need for authorities to continually rework legislation in an effort to affect greater control over a seemingly recalcitrant Aboriginal population.

An official head-count in 1955 claimed there were twenty-five Aborigines from the Liverpool River region and ninety from the Blyth River living around Darwin (Poignant 1996:40), amongst a total of 155 from the two regions living in Territory centres of White settlement (Hiatt 1965:10). According to Hiatt (p.10), 'The Native Affairs Branch on several occasions sent boatloads back to the Liverpool River, but many of the passengers set out on the 200-mile [320 kilometre] return journey as soon as they had visited their aged relatives'.

Poignant (1996:40) refers to the government records known as 'repatriation files' which reveal personal histories of repeated visits to Darwin, including Frank Gurrmanamana, a Gidjingali elder who regularly visited the fringe camps during my fieldwork.¹⁴⁵ Harney (1957:17-20) describes a population of 400 'homogeneous people from all tribes' living in the Darwin camps in 1940. Further migration occurred when World War II increased opportunities and expectations. Cole (1980:53) says that in 1947 about 100 people from the Liverpool River (Maningrida) began 'drifting into Darwin with the idea of settling permanently close to the source of Western goods and services'. According to Hiatt (1965:10), at a time when drinking alcohol was illegal for Aborigines, 'the Darwin crime registers record a steady increase in the number of Liverpool-Blyth River men charged with offences of this kind from 1948 to 1955'. Hiatt says forty-eight from this region appeared in court in 1955.

In 1951, at the Berrimah camp, important exchange ceremonies were held, with senior Arnhem Land ceremonial leaders present (Poignant 1996:40-1). Harney (1957:17) describes 'a complete [new] tribal life, with its laws and

rituals' which he claims included trafficking in drugs and alcohol and acting as 'employment agencies' (p.17). He notes: 'Their tribal life had been transferred from the trees and lagoons to the streets and houses of this northern town', where '[c]ertain localities in Darwin were the domain of distinct groups of natives' (p.17). Hiatt (1965:148-154) records the emergence of Aboriginal leaders who had lived in Darwin and drew upon their experience as brokers to gain authority in their home communities. One man, Harry, who had worked in Darwin for many years and made the journey from central Arnhem Land several times, returned to announce 'that he represented the government and that his job was to look after everyone in the area' (Hiatt 1965:149). In 1946 a government patrol officer, Kyle-Little, was surprised how many Aborigines around the Liverpool River had visited Darwin and the Air Force stations during the war. He claims 'a trip there was almost equivalent to a Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca' (Kyle-Little 1993:90). During his expedition, Kyle-Little (p.90) believes his acceptance amongst the Liverpool River people was aided by the coincidence of meeting one man who had worked for his father and knew his mother in Darwin.

Kyle-Little (1993:156) reported to the Native Affairs Branch that:

The [Second World] war has brought about big changes in the native economic life and has tended to accelerate contact with our culture. Natives throughout the Arnhem Land reserve - many of whom worked with the Services during the war - now desire to participate in our economic and social life, and unless the latter activities are advanced and some attractions made in the reserve, the Native Affairs Branch will be unable to cope with the already ever-increasing drift of natives from the reserve to Darwin and other settlements along the north-south highway.

5.6 Maningrida 1957-1999

As a result of Kyle-Little's patrol and report, in 1949 he and a junior patrol officer, Jack Doolan, were assigned to begin a trading post at the Liverpool River 'to encourage the inhabitants of the area to hunt crocodiles and barter the skins for goods' (Kyle-Little 1993:159). Doolan (1989:1) says a site was chosen which 'was not covered by the influence of the existing Missions'. He notes that the idea of a trading station resulted from 'the considerable problem of Aboriginal people drifting into Darwin and other towns following the 1939-45 War' (p.1):

Government departments, and in particular, the Native Affairs Branch, were at their wits' end trying to cope with the problem of totally unsophisticated Arnhem Land people suddenly descending in

fairly large numbers on Darwin, where the existing facilities for housing and feeding them were totally inadequate (Doolan 1989:1).

A trading post may have appealed to the government as an economic option. Native Affairs after the war was 'a quite poverty-stricken little Branch' (Doolan 1989:2). Also, the Aborigines outside of the influence of the missions could trade for goods 'which were now enticing them into the "fleshpots" of Darwin' (p.2). Doolan adds that Kyle-Little's suggested remedy would not have been considered seriously by the administration 'if the problems caused by the drift of Aborigines from Arnhem Land had not been so immediate and fairly desperate'.

Doolan and Kyle-Little's attempt to create a trading station was abandoned despite fears expressed in the patrol officer's 1949 report that: 'If [the Native Affairs] Branch abandons the project, I visualise the natives again drifting to Darwin' (Kyle-Little 1993:231). Doolan (1989:16) says a change in administration and 'an unsympathetic director' were the causes of the failure, and 'nothing was done' until 1957 when the idea of a trading station was replaced by a government Welfare Branch settlement at Maningrida. In contrast to the original plans, Benn (1994:125) claims that government settlements tended to increase state control and diminish Aboriginal self-reliance.

In an interview with a senior NT welfare officer, Benn (1994:115) was told that a primary concern of the post-war period was the number of Aboriginal people coming into Darwin with leprosy. Ingrid Drysdale established a hospital at Maningrida settlement where her husband was the first superintendent from 1957 to 1961. Drysdale (1974:78) writes:

Arnhemlanders were best left alone to make up their own minds whether they wanted to continue leading their tribal lives or come in to civilisation. However, the situation was not as simple as that, for it became increasingly difficult to ignore the fact that leprosy and many other diseases were spreading unchecked in the reserve area.

Hiatt (1965:9) blames the 'shortage in staff and funds' for the failure to reopen the trading station after Doolan and Kyle-Little had been recalled to Darwin for the 1949-50 wet season. In 1955 the government sent Sweeney 'to carry out a census in the Liverpool and report on the causes of migration [to Darwin]' (Hiatt 1965:10). A second attempt to begin a settlement in 1957 aimed to leave Aborigines 'in their tribal areas with a minimum disruption, initially, of their tribal patterns. The function of the settlement at this early stage was primarily to provide trading and medical services for the area as a

whole' (cited in Hiatt 1965:10). However, the trading post quickly became secondary to the growing settlement's function as a service centre (Altman 1987:4). In Hiatt's opinion the concept of encouraging people to remain self-reliant was never realized. When he travelled on foot from Maningrida to the Blyth River in 1958 he met only a few people still living in the bush (Hiatt 1965:11).¹⁴⁶ Despite its failings, the settlement initially reduced the migration to Darwin.

5.7 Maningrida and assimilation

Bagshaw (1977:9) notes that Maningrida was established at the height of the assimilation policy aimed at including Aborigines in a single Australian community. In 1951 an all-states conference on Aboriginal Affairs agreed that the policy should be extended to include all Aborigines, 'irrespective of individual degrees of acculturation'. Large government settlements operated both as an 'anti-urbanisation measure' and as 'a "transitional" situation, part of the "assimilation" process', claims Rowley (1972b:121, 122) in his extended criticism of the politics of institutions.¹⁴⁷ Altman (1987:4) agrees that: 'Maningrida was now viewed as a potential instrument for government policy, particularly as it was the only government settlement in Arnhem Land'. By 1971, over 1,100 Aborigines and 200 Whites lived at Maningrida (Altman 1987:4). According to Bagshaw (1977:11):

Different perhaps to the 'out of sight, out of mind' segregation policy, assimilation was designed to achieve essentially the same purpose: the removal of a problematic minority from the collective Australian conscience in the shortest possible time.

However, Drysdale (1993) portrays a happier scene where urgent medical services and a hospital were begun amongst a grateful people. A school was begun by Betty Meehan (Drysdale 1993:159-161), which Meehan (1982:19) later concedes was one of the factors inevitably contributing towards the development of a township. Coulehan (1994:70) points out a fundamental contradiction in this shift (see also Rowley 1972b:32; Beckett 1988:10):

Whilst the assimilation policy shifted the rationale of the Aboriginal Reserves from places of protection to places of tutelage, where Aboriginal people might be prepared to take their place within the wider community at some unspecified time in the future, it was recognised that isolation from and disparity between settlement and wider society contexts was in large measure inimical to the goal of assimilation.

As the town grew, Meehan (1982:19) states:

Anyone visiting Maningrida at the end of the 1960s would have been overwhelmed by the feeling that all the Aborigines were there to stay - that their past, their traditional life, was slowly but surely disappearing, and that it would eventually be replaced by a 'poor white' culture.¹⁴⁸

5.8 The outstation movement

Meehan also witnessed the return to traditional lands in the outstation movement. She attributes this move in part to the 1972 government legislative support for land rights, the tensions caused by the concentration of language groups in one place, the problems of the Maningrida beer club since 1969, deaths blamed on sorcery, the inadequate diet of shop food, and the tensions of a large sedentary population where 'old grievances were aired instead of being diffused by naturally occurring barriers such as beaches and large stands of forest' (Meehan 1982:20).¹⁴⁹ On the outstations, Aborigines 'for the first time in many decades, are making important decisions about the way they wish to live' (Meehan 1982:21). Rowley (1986:27) describes the movement as a form of de-colonisation, with Aborigines 'voting with their feet' (Rowley 1986:151).

According to Gillespie (1982:4) 'there had always been a few small groups of Aboriginal people who remained most of the time on their country away from Maningrida'. Meehan (Meehan and Jones 1980:133; Meehan 1982:19) says those who remained on their estates 'were few in number' in the late 1960s and also when she visited the area in reconnaissance for later fieldwork with Rhys Jones (Hiatt 1970). Other commentators have described the social tensions, problems with alcohol and petrol sniffing and disillusionment with self-determination at Maningrida that contributed to the movement to homelands (Bagshaw 1977; Gillespie 1982; McLeod 1982; Benn 1994; Burns 1995, 1996; Burns et al 1995).

By the time Meehan returned to the Blyth River in 1972, about one third of the Aboriginal population of Maningrida had returned to their own estates (Meehan and Jones 1980:133; Meehan 1982:19). Gillespie (1982:5) attributes the formal recognition of this movement to a meeting held during a large ceremonial gathering of An-barra people at Kopanga at the mouth of the Blyth River that was witnessed by Rhys Jones (*Maningrida Mirage* October 6, 1972). According to Gillespie (1982:5), who was working at Maningrida at the time, the presence of Meehan and Rhys Jones for a year in the field (see Meehan 1982) was 'crucial' in focusing Aboriginal aspirations:

The Blyth River example was also an inspiration to many other

Aboriginal groups who wanted to leave the tension of Maningrida and re-occupy their lands but were worried about the amount of support they could expect. The minute some support was offered the Aboriginal people voted with their feet.

Coombs (1994:160) found the NT Administration in Darwin in 1968 strongly opposed Aborigines returning to homelands because it was contrary to the assimilation policy, weakened administration control and was 'likely to make health and education programs ineffective'. However, the Maningrida Superintendent John Hunter 'cajoled' financial support for the 'outstations', as they were known. Meehan and Jones (1980:133) also acknowledge the sympathetic attitude of John Hunter towards Aboriginal aspirations in the first years of the movement back to homelands. Superintendent Hunter's belief that Maningrida must 'decentralise or perish' by growing its own produce in suitable watered locations such as Cadell Gardens, begun in 1966, motivated his support for the establishment of outstations (Benn 1994:161).¹⁵⁰ Until 1972, 'Officially, support was discouraged' (Gillespie 1982:5). In late 1972 the election of a Labor government in Canberra and its 'willingness to support Aboriginal decisions gave added impetus to decentralisation' (Altman 1987:5).

The increased funding by the new government led to an increase in the European population (Gillespie 1982:5), which has been an ongoing cause of conflict at Maningrida (Bagshaw 1977:52; Gillespie 1982:6; Benn 1994:212; Day 1997b).¹⁵¹ When Hunter tried to reduce the number of White staff in the community in 1974 he was transferred, despite an Aboriginal sit-in at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Darwin to demand his return (*NT News* July 2, 1974). Coupled with a sixfold increase in government spending from 1963 to 1973, the White staff had grown until Aboriginal leaders complained, 'Too many Balandas' (*NT News* July 11, 1974). According to the newspaper, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs replied, 'Well you're the boss, you can sack 'em'. The *NT News* also reported the superintendent's comments (July 11, 1974):

'Too many Europeans, too many European concepts ... a big line of brick houses all in a row. Mow down the bush ... the same story'. The superintendent said of many white workers at Maningrida, '[H]e's going to have traditional Australian attitudes to Aborigines, which means they're way down there somewhere and he's just not going to relate to them at all'.

Glen Bagshaw, the manager of the Progress Association at the time, claimed in the same article that the Aboriginal people believed they were being

overwhelmed. According to Benn (1994:212), Glen Bagshaw believed: 'Maningrida has always suffered the burden of a surfeit of Europeans, prohibiting a climate of Aboriginal participation at a meaningful level'. Another member of the family, Geoffrey Bagshaw (1977:71), claims that the outstation movement is indicative of:

a fundamental dissatisfaction with the institutional nature of life in the Maningrida community' [and] a firmly held collective desire on the part of Aborigines to return to an environment in which the normative genealogical proscriptions regulating traditional social relations can again become effective.

Coombs (1994:29) believed that Aboriginal people wished to moderate the rate of change caused by these increased pressures and to 're-establish a physical, social and spiritual environment in which traditional elements will be once more dominant'. Dissatisfaction with living conditions, employment relations, and intergroup hostilities coupled with the threat of mining in Arnhem Land and increasing awareness of land rights are other factors listed by Altman (1987:5). Meehan and Jones (1980:135) also note the effect of the Woodward Land Rights Commission which 'added grit to the determination' of those talking about returning to their estates and sacred sites (see Moon 1992:27). Holmes (1999:295-308) gives a first-hand account of the raised expectations of Aborigines who gave submissions to the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission at Maningrida in June 1973.

Gray (1977:116) mentions the tension between language groups caused by the increased authority of the local land-owning group as land rights was enacted (see also Trudgen [2000:40, 46]). Hiatt (1965:151-154) discusses the rivalry between the Gunavidji landowners in the settlement and the Nkara and Burarra people from further east.¹⁵² Before land rights became a reality a Burarra man told him in Darwin, 'The [Burarra] own that country now' (Hiatt 1965:153). However, the Land Rights Act in 1976 emboldened the traditional owners, who asserted their prior rights to the town site. Although the town council, which began in 1975, allocated positions in proportion to the size of the nine main groups (Bagshaw 1977:26), a Gunavidji clan leader stated:

We Gunavidji don't like the Council. We should decide what happens to Maningrida, not the Councillors or the men from Canberra. This is our country not theirs ... it's ours, we belong here (Bagshaw 1977:39).

Altman (1987:11) describes assimilation as 'the state's least benevolent and most destructive intervention' because of its 'Eurocentric bias'. However,

Benn (1994:207) claims that the new policy of self-determination, after a change in government, was a 'very traumatic' transition for Maningrida people. Giving examples of the effects, Peterson (1998:109) claims: 'The radical change in the nature of life in remote communities that took place between 1968 and 1977 has not been adequately registered or examined'. More recently, Trudgen (2000:43-65), in a chapter headed 'A crisis in living: into the self-determination era', describes the effects of the changes he observed at an Arnhem Land mission during this period. Unlike the missions at Milingimbi and Elcho Island, Maningrida did not have the advantage of the continuity fostered by the relationship between the church and the community social structure (Benn 1994:207). In Trudgen's view (Trudgen 2000), the changes delivered little more than a continuing 'nightmare' (p.59) and 'confusion and disillusionment' (p.44). However, Meehan observed positive outcomes that she attributes to the outstation movement:

[I]n terms of purpose, of self-confidence, of dignity and even of that elusive quality happiness, the Aborigines of central Arnhem Land are today different people to those dependent, institutionalised inmates of 15 years ago (Meehan and Jones 1980:146).

Bagshaw (1977:41) saw the outstation movement at Maningrida as 'a wholly Aboriginal inspired programme of community decentralization, created as a largely unforeseen initiative to the Commonwealth Government's self-determination policy'. Benn (1994:19) stresses that the people did not wish to return to the past, and the homelands movement should not be interpreted as purely reactive.

Meehan and Jones (1980:135) describe the outstations as experiments in a new lifestyle 'with a largely traditional structure into which some elements of European technology and culture have been incorporated where they are seen to be useful and desirable'. Their study of diet in an An-barra camp confirms that the gathering of fresh bush foods produced a much higher standard of living than at Maningrida. On their income, by comparison, 'They would not survive outside the ranks of the destitute in places such as Darwin' (Meehan and Jones 1980:139). However, despite their deprivations, my observations suggest that the fringe camps share many of the advantages of the outstations.

Coulehan (1995a:77) stresses that although urban migration is in apparent opposition to the movement to clan lands, the movement shares the desire for self-determination. She states: 'At much the same time as the "walk off" from pastoral properties and the "homelands movement" was underway, Aborigines were also moving into urban fringe camps'. Although the fringe

camp residents share a desire for self-determination, I suggest that the homelands movement could be described as an act of 'desistance', to distinguish it from the resistance engendered by the move to fringe camps.

Orlove (1991:30, cited by Korovkin 2000:20) introduces a concept of 'desistance', whereby indigenous peasants achieve relative cultural and political autonomy by closure, or limiting their interaction with imposing systems. Korovkin (p.20) gives examples where hidden acts of 'desistance', or resistance through the creation of an insulating distance, become the basis of subsequent organised political action. I find that Korovkin's term is useful to distinguish the movement to the homelands from the more passive closed Aboriginal domain described by Trigger (1992). In the fringe camps, as I will argue in Chapter Eight, a closed domain is not so evident. Instead, I suggest, outstation 'desistance' is transformed in the urban camps by their relocation onto contested land and into the forefront of Aboriginal resistance to dispossession. This process occurs in spite of the campers' embracing some of the attractions of Australian society in the towns.

Homelands 'desistance' is compromised by a dependence on links to the outside world. Gerritsen (1982:68) claims: 'To fully understand the outstation movement, we have also to analyse the outstations within the totality of the politics of Aboriginal villages'. As Altman (1987:5) notes, there are 'important linkages and interdependencies' between the movement and the towns. Examples of the need for cash, supplies, mechanics, funding, vehicles, medical services and communications on Maningrida-associated outstations are given by Gray (1977:118), Bagshaw (1982), Bond (1982), Gerritsen (1982), Meehan and Jones (1980:144; 1986), Burns (1995:21) and Danaja and Carew (1995). Where the connection to country is expressed in art forms, a network of traders and the Arts and Culture Centre exist to market the works (see Moon 1992:27; Carew et al 1996a). The needs of the homelands provide jobs in Maningrida, where institutions like the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation organise supplies and services. People from the homelands also move to and fro, with most spending longer periods in Maningrida during the rainy months. In contrast to most outstations on the homelands, the fringe camps have no electricity, vehicles, water supply or even buildings. Unlike Maningrida homes, the campers have no television, lighting, showers or stoves. I argue that this is a price they are willing to pay in their aggressive resistance to state controls, while making contact with the settler society on their own terms.

5.9 Unrest amongst Darwin Aborigines in the 1950s

It is significant that in the early 1950s Darwin Aborigines were resisting Welfare Department controls and wage exploitation (see Rowley 1972b:292-3;

Wells 1995b). Resistance included strikes and protests, leading to arrests of Aboriginal leaders from the Berrimah Reserve (Rowley 1972b:293; McGinness 1991:59). The protests continued into the 1960s when 'several hundred Aborigines marched for equal wages through the streets of Darwin' (Bandler 1989:18). Frank Hardy (1968:50) describes a gathering of more than two hundred Aborigines under trees beside the Rapid Creek Beach in suburban Darwin in 1966 to re-form the NT Council for Aboriginal Rights that had begun campaigning for citizenship in 1961.¹⁵³

Media reports of the Aboriginal strikes did not distinguish a group known today as 'itinerants'. Although Aborigines came from many parts of the Territory, those living in Darwin were referred to simply as 'town natives'. In the first of four reports from Darwin, headed 'Darwin's dark harvest', Gordon Williams writes in the *Argus* (March 13, 1951) that despite 'the irreclaimable, the illiterate, and the hopeless' amongst 'Darwin's lost generation of aborigines':

[Employers] would resent any suggestion that all Darwin's town natives should be sent to bush settlements away from the doubtful benefits of white civilization.

'I can imagine the shriek that would go up from senior public servants and business men if that became policy,' one Territorian said.

Williams described the town Aborigines as 'hewers and drawers', paid two pounds a week, who were striking for citizenship rights and a trebling of their wages (*Argus* March 9, 1951). He visited camps a few miles from Darwin with 'natives living in conditions of such squalor, filth and abasement as defy open description'. Writing of the strikes under the heading, 'Darwin: town of discontent' (*Argus* March 9, 1951), Williams claims: 'Until a few months ago many aborigines were living in virtual squalor and in relative deprivation in the Berrimah compound [where the strikes began], a few miles from Darwin'. Williams hoped the move back to Bagot Reserve after the strikes was an indication of better things in a town where Aborigines were confined to the compounds after sundown.

Screened by a strictly enforced entry permit requirement for non-Aboriginal visitors, Aboriginal people on the reserves were protected from the leftist influence blamed for the strikes. Symbolically, the desert Aboriginal settlement of Haast Bluff was used by the government to banish a leader of the strike named Nadpur, or Fred Waters (*Sydney Morning Herald* February 15, 1951; Rowley 1972b:293; McGinness 1991:59). In Darwin, the involvement of a mixed group of Aboriginal workers in organised urban protests was an indicator of a growing participation in Darwin affairs by Aboriginal people

from all parts of the Northern Territory. However, as Hamilton (1995:193) states in defence of Rowley's trilogy (1972a, 1972b, 1972c), the anthropological literature prior to 1972 seldom considered such issues.

Stanner (1979:48) believed the 'search for stimulants', including tea, tobacco and alcohol, motivated Aboriginal people to migrate to centres of European settlement. 'They went because they wanted to, and stay because they want to' (Stanner 1979:49; see also Sansom 1980b:11). The move was costly in lives, but Stanner (1979:49) did not meet any who wanted to return to the bush amongst the Aborigines who survived this voluntary movement. According to Stanner, unlike epidemic, genocide and dispossession, the Aboriginal 'zest for life' is seldom understood as a motivation for migration towards centres of population:

[The arrival of Europeans] was sufficient to unsettle Aborigines still long distances away. The repercussions spread, evidently with great rapidity, along the network of structural interconnexions. Eventually, for every Aborigine who had Europeans thrust upon him, at least one other had sought them out. More would have gone to European centres sooner had it not been that their way was often barred by hostile Aborigines (Stanner 1979:48).

Stanner (1969:56) interprets further implications in the voluntary movement of Aborigines into towns and cattle stations:

an offer, and an appeal; an implicit offer of some sort of union of lives with us, and an implicit appeal for a new identity within the union. Usually they ended in a fringe-camp or an institution, but just being there was a continued appeal. The trouble was that they made their offer on a hard market and their appeal at times when no one saw or heard very clearly.¹⁵⁴

5.10 The An-barra *rom* exchange ceremony

In contrast to the 'hard market' of the towns, Poignant (1996) documents her photographer husband's contact with people from the Liverpool and Blyth River region in 1952. Axel Poignant took about 2500 photographs during six-weeks at Nagalarramba opposite the present site of Maningrida at the mouth of the Liverpool River, with three Christian Aboriginal companions from Goulburn Island Mission (Poignant 1996:4). Their camp attracted at least seventy Aborigines, including groups from eighty kilometres east (Poignant 1996:20). Two well-known residents of Darwin fringe camps in 1997 are pictured as young boys in the book (see Poignant 1996:150). During my fieldwork, Burarra, Nakara and Gunavidji residents of Fish Camp also

recognised many of their kin in Axel Poignant's photographs.

According to Poignant (1996:21), such a gathering was not unusual. The *rom* exchange ceremony that followed is often performed to make and consolidate friendly relations (Hiatt 1986:13; Meehan and Jones 1986:25; Poignant 1996:21). For a number of generations, noted performers of the popular *Jambich*, or wild honey songs, have come from the An-barra people, one of whom sang at Nagalarramba in 1952 (Poignant 1996:66). Poignant (1996:60) discusses the significance of the ceremony performed for the photographer:

I believe that the Burarra's explicit statement that they were making a presentation of the Rom because Axel had come to photograph the people was based on an understanding of the narrative potential of photography. They and their neighbours recognised that the photographs and films they saw conveyed messages about the balanda world, and perhaps they saw Axel as a potential messenger.

This interpretation coincides with the sentiments expressed by Frank Gurrmanamana in the final scenes of Hiatt's film of a ceremony at Djunawunya (McKenzie 1980).¹⁵⁵ Poignant notes that 'going to the pictures' was one of the attractions of Darwin for Arnhem Landers, although some Aborigines at Nagalarramba expressed fear of the cameras. She cites Peter Sutton's finding that Aboriginal people at Aurukun believe that being on film is a positive assertion of identity (Poignant 1996:60). Certainly, most of the fringe dwellers during my research experience viewed the media, particularly video, as a means to project their message and assert their position in relation to the town and other Aboriginal groups (see also Simmering 1997, 1998, 2000b).

A *rom* ceremony binds givers and receivers, like the *mamurrung* exchange rituals between Aboriginal groups, which I witnessed people from Fish Camp preparing at Maningrida in 1998. Altmann (1987:202) says, because trade goods used in exchange ceremonies are not the scarce items which skilfully-crafted artefacts once were, the goods which are exchanged now symbolise 'social invisibles' more than trade. Similarly, performances of the An-barra *jambich rom* in Canberra in 1982 and 1995 were transformed into 'a ritual of diplomacy' (Hiatt 1986:10; Wild 1986:xi; Poignant 1996:68; Meehan 1997:25).¹⁵⁶ Wild (1986:xiii) claims the Gidjingali extended the ritual to the whole nation:

After two hundred years of colonisation Australia as a nation has not yet reached a satisfactory accord with its indigenous people. It has

been a history in which diplomacy has been rare. 'Rom in Canberra' was a diplomatic initiative by one Aboriginal group to the people of Australia through the mediation of the Institute of Aboriginal Studies.

A computer, which was a gift from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in exchange for the *rom* ceremony performed in Canberra in January 1995, enabled Maningrida organisations to prepare comprehensive internet home pages (Carew et al 1996b).¹⁵⁷ On the Maningrida home pages, Peter Danaja and Margaret Carew (1995) compare the internet with Aboriginal methods of communicating by fire, sign language, letterstick and by interpreting nature's signs.¹⁵⁸ In a later chapter, I describe how the fringe dwellers similarly used ceremonies at the Darwin camp as a diplomatic initiative to involve non-Aboriginal townspeople (see Plates 13 and 14). If finances were available, people from the camp were eager to travel to southern capitals to seek support. They also helped Stella Simmering construct a Fish Camp home page and an experimental site on 'bush tucker' on the internet.¹⁵⁹ However, these attempts at articulation with the wider society have yet to bring material change for the fringe dwellers. Interviews in the following section suggest some reasons for the failure of the fringe dwellers to find space in Darwin.

5.11 The Burarra in Darwin

In 1973 Aboriginal men and women who were walking overland to Darwin in increasing numbers were praised in the local newsletter, the *Maningrida Mirage*, as demonstrating their 'courage and integrity' (Benn 1994:181). A non-Aboriginal activist, Stella Simmering, who has assisted the Fish Camp people compile their case for housing in Darwin, records the stories of several who came overland to Darwin (Simmering 2000a). One elderly woman told Stella:

Me and my husband, five days to Darwin, we were walking all the way on the beach and King River, we couldn't swim across, we came through... where that creek?... South Alligator, and we swam across, and we came Shady Camp, they used to live there, all the Burarra people.

Another man, aged fifty-six, told Stella how he walked from his Blyth River homeland to Pine Creek with his brother:

[N]o road, no motorcar, no nothing... we didn't have any clothes, only ngarndam (loin cloth), no shirt all the way... At Pine Creek we got the transport half way to Darwin... There at a camp close to Coomalie Creek but further up to Batchelor way my people were camping there,

relation mob, three grandfathers... We were there a long time, Berrimah [compound], big billabong, two billabong, still there.

Other stories Stella has recorded come from the pensioner who was institutionalised at the East Arm Leprosarium and Johnny Balaiya, a sixty-four-year-old Burarra man who had been the doyen of the old 'Pipeline Camp' at Palmerston, near Darwin, since being evicted from Lee Point in 1996 (see also Simmering 2000b). He told Stella that he worked as a ticket collector in the Star Cinema in his first years after walking to Darwin as a young man.

In late July, 2001, I visited Johnny Balaiya's camp near Palmerston with Bob, Stella Simmering and a White lawyer from the Darwin Community Legal Service. Johnny was concerned that he had been give one month's notice to move from his camp. On this day another Burarra man, Bob Bunba, joined him. Bob had been camping on vacant land around Darwin's northern suburbs for about three years after he and his wife were evicted from their unit in Palmerston. He is Dulcie Malimara's brother. In July 2001 he was living with a group of about ten men and women, mostly from central Arnhem Land, at a camp known as 'Leanyer Lake'. The camp, which was hidden amongst eucalypt trees and cycad palms, had no facilities.

Shortly after we arrived with Bob to visit Johnny Balaiya, an ABC film unit drove into the camp to film a segment showing a census collector gathering information for the national census. As the filming was finishing, Bob spontaneously stood up and began a speech on issues that affected him. There was no alcohol in the camp that afternoon. The television crew listened as Bob began his tirade, but did not film or take notes. However, after they had gone Stella used her video camera to record some of Bob's views.¹⁶⁰ In the following chapters I describe how the actions that Bob Bunba and his wife found intolerable led to an open expression of anger by homeless Burarra people a few weeks later. The following transcript, which is taken from that video recording, suggests some answers to Esman's (1989:223) question, 'What is the threshold beyond which [tactics of everyday resistance] become confrontational...':

Bob (standing): Long as we born in the fire and this ground. I'm telling you, my mother been put me this one (picks up handful of soil). My mother, she was put me in the dirt. I was born in the bushes. We can sleep any way we like. Before Captain Cook, he was around the world.

Johnny (sitting on a tarpaulin): Long time, before the White man come. I was eight years old and I see Captain Cook. I say, 'Who this

one?' and we run. This is a big boat ... [Johnny gives his account of the first contact with White people]

Bob (sitting in front of Johnny): How come the City Council they push us - that's wrong. When they see your fire they tip it up water, when we cook something...

Stella (behind camera): And what else they doing?

Bob: They take it out that saucepan. Everyday they come there, everywhere.

Johnny: One day they come here. I said, 'Hey don't do that again. You not from this country here. You're from long way. We're the Black people this country'.

Lawyer: They give you a paper?

Bob: They put my name. And they think I'm going to pay fifty dollars. But no. I can't give fifty dollars from me, no!

Lawyer: How many paper you get?

Bob: I start from Daisy Yarmirr back way [illegal camp]. They gave it to me a lot of paper [infringement notices]. I said this your paper, you watch, I cut 'im off [tearing motion]. I put in fire. They used to come early in the morning. Six o'clock they wake us up, 'Wakey, wakey!' What's that mean, 'Wakey, wakey?' Try tell me...

Lawyer: They come last week?

Bob: Always. How come I carry me gear? Look at that. I was camped at my sister's place in the top and they came and tell me, 'Get your gear and go'. I was carrying all my gear, mattress everything, me and my wife. Why that? All the White people. I try find out that kind.

Lawyer: And they take you to court?

Bob: No I can't go to court. I might put in court. What they doing, to [to] us mob, all Black people. Not you [referring to visitors] but you know? [stands] How come they come and see us they say, 'What you doing here? Get your gear and go'. And we pack up and take another place. And after that they see us and they say, 'Ah, you're here Bob' [points down].

[I say] 'Yeah, but I'm staying here - I might see Legal Aid'.

'No, just go right now.'

Well I carry all the gear, myself and my wife [mimes carrying swag on his back]. Well, I carry, carry all the gear. Come back and get another one [acts out returning for another load]. Come back get another, get 'im, hide it, you know ... Well I carry to another place and they come and see me. Why is that? So I want to make sure what they doing, all the [Darwin] City Council. They want money, or what? I want to try ask you.

Lawyer: Government they make this law. Bad law.

Bob: Bad law? But this our country [stamps on the ground]. Nobody

tell us [what to do] like Black people. No! Old man, my old man, he know, he's working for me too [points to me]. Even you, mum [Stella]. No matter where I go, I'm still there. I can sleep in the bushes, my mother in the bush and my father. But White people they get smart. You too smart you mob. every people, my people too and they say, 'Ah, we'll get that mob. How come they get all the bag, all the gear and they take in Berrimah [points towards the police station]? And we come and look, 'Hey where that my gear?' Nothing. And I make fire and sleep with my trousers, no blanket.

Bob then described how he and his wife contacted a White friend he calls his 'boss' who had worked at Maningrida and who helped them get their gear back from the police station. He continued:

Bob: Long as we can stay in the bushes -we a Blackfella, you are white, you are different. But us mob, how they doing like that? And they say, 'Get out! Go somewhere else'. That not right, long as we born in this ground ... All the city council mob, you know, they working, that not their business. We can camp anytime, long as we bush...

Johnny [interrupts]: I'm a black man, I can sleep anywhere. On the grass, that's all right. I don't swearing. I don't kill a man. No, I'm not a killer, no! I'm not a dog. I can sit down - quietly. That's not funny [to Stella]. That's true story what I'm talking. I tell a policeman too when he come here too. I say, 'Hey, that not your fuckin' country' [describes incident with police]. Four times they kick out.¹⁶¹

Bob: Like, we like stop in the bushes, we don't like to stop in the town. Like when we get a house, all the young boys and young girls, they break everything. I was get three times house in Palmerston, and they [Housing Commission] kick me out, me and my wife, and I said, 'No more'.

In the newsletter *Kujuk* (September 2001:3), published by a small group of Aboriginal and White supporters of fringe dwellers, another camper expresses opposition that appears to be more than simply a reaction to the treatment that the campers receive. Mark Winter Norris is quoted:

This land is for black people. My family was here, [world war one, world war two], my dad, my mum, they was here before too, long time ago. Those are our people, that is, white people they come here, must be gold or something, you know what I mean. This black people area in Darwin before that, not white people, no, no way in the world. This world will be coming, black and white, where they share one another, and the Larrakia people ... Night patrol, they tell us stand up

with one leg. We not long bird, Jabiru... They talk, like 'stand up, one leg up', they hate us. They shouldn't be, they shouldn't do like that to black people, this black people area, Darwin.¹⁶²

5.12 Resistance as engagement

The preceding sections of this chapter suggest some reasons for the Burarra movement to Darwin. These include problems associated with the town Maningrida and a wish to engage with the society, services and goods in Darwin. The strong language of the above lengthy quotes suggests that the move often leads to resistance in a reaction to the lack of recognition of the campers' perceived rights. My research suggests that these examples, and other examples of Burarra resistance in Darwin which I give in later chapters, are an attempt to engage with the invading society rather than retreat solely into a closed Aboriginal domain, which they can more easily do inside Arnhem Land. This process appears to have features in common with Penan resistance, as interpreted by Brosius (1999:2).

Examples of the Penan struggle against logging of their forests, discussed by Brosius (1999), include the use of letters, maps, videotapes and blockades. In what he describes as 'a minor intervention into how we think about the phenomenon of resistance', Brosius (p.2) states:

The arguments that Penan are putting forth should be viewed not exclusively as acts of resistance, but simultaneously as efforts of *engagement*. In making their arguments to loggers, civil servants, environmentalists, or others, Penan are attempting to speak across difference, to *familiarize* themselves, to frame their arguments in ways that they hope will be recognizable to outsiders.

The Penan protest 'because they believe this is their only recourse: they declare that they do it as a last resort, and then only to the extent necessary to be heard' (Brosius1999:34). Similarly, the anger that Bob Bunba, Johnny Balaiya and others express their to their White friends, sometimes on camera, suggests that their resistance results from unreciprocated forms of 'engagement' with forces that refuse to acknowledge the Aboriginal campers' rights to space in town, in contrast to their visitors, who they apologetically exclude from their invective. In the next section, I suggest a metaphor for this process.

5.13 *Ganma* and merging

The Yolngu people, accustomed to centuries of trade with northern seafarers, describe the meeting of cultures in the metaphor of *ganma* (see Marika 1999:7; Yunupingu 1994a, 1994b:118), which describes the turbulence and foam

where the fresh water meets the sea in a tidal river mouth (McConvell 1991:17).

In the same ways, balance of Yolngu life is achieved through ebb and flow of competing interests, through [the] elaborate kinship system ... in the same ways, balance between black and white in Australia can be achieved (Yunupingu 1994b:118).

Like the sea and the river, the two cultures remain distinct identities, 'where each remains distinct and neither overwhelms the other' (Coulehan 1995a:27-8). Coulehan adds that more commonly, the Yolngu express this aspiration as 'two ways, both ways'. In the field of education, the metaphor arose from Aboriginal people combining ideas from the two cultures in a two-way flow that benefits the interacting systems (McConvell 1991:21). Both sides learn from each other instead of knowledge coming only from the *balanda* (White) side (Wunungmurra cited in McConvell 1991:23). However, in the interpretation by Harris (1991:24) of the two-ways concept, 'Aborigines restrict outside access to their own domain to allow for a cohesive group cultural base, but they have unrestricted access to the Western domain'.

Harris asserts, in response to McConvell (1991), that Aboriginal and Western culture are 'fundamentally opposed and antithetical'. He believes the two societies 'articulate very poorly' (Harris 1991:21) because they have different worldviews. However, the cultural separation of the Aboriginal domain is not isolation from the world, but an 'offensive/aggressive/progressive strategy' for cultural survival (Harris 1991:23). In a criticism of 'two ways, two laws', Robinson (1994:124-5) claims that the formulae 'reflects increasingly complex interdependence', rather than 'unproblematic, realistic delineations of obvious social boundaries'.

Coulehan (1995a:27) contrasts 'two-ways, both-ways' with the 'more divisive, dichotomous perspective' of relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people argued by Trigger (1986, 1988a, 1992), Morris (1985, 1988, 1989) and Cowlshaw (1988a, 1988b, 1993). Williams (1987) also describes how Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land balance clan and government laws to settle disputes. Although Coulehan (1995a:21) gives many examples of the articulation of systems of governance, she admits:

The two systems of nurturant powers, namely Yolngu governance by kinship and ceremony and welfare government by monies and services, seek to care for and to realign Yolngu in terms of their respective solidarities and norms and values. The difficulty is that the one does not fully recognise or acknowledge the legitimacy of the

other system and so the Yolngu familial form of governance and state agencies of government are all too often acting at cross purposes (Coulehan 1995a:19).

In the next chapter, I discuss what Kapferer (1995:80) has called a state discourse of 'egalitarian individualism' which disadvantages Aborigines, in which 'the bureaucratic process [is] a disembodiment and fragmentation (and reduction) of human beings who otherwise live their worlds as larger and more fluid embodied totalities' (p.84). In his observations made at a town meeting between Aborigines and Whites, Kapferer (p.76) claims that 'Whites, in their expressions of opposition to the State, confirm their thorough membership of it'. In contrast, the silence of Aborigines may confirm 'the subordinating violence of old regimes' (p.77) and the validity of non-Aboriginal values (p.78). Kapferer's analysis of 'discourses over identity' (p.69) suggests a racial hierarchy in Australian towns.

In similar circumstances in Darwin, I give examples from my fieldwork in the following chapters which suggest that, although Coulehan (1995a) attests that forms of the 'two-ways, both-ways' concept also apply to Yolngu families in Darwin, the metaphor of *ganma* is generally not appropriate in the urban situation where cultures meet in a field of asymmetrical power, unlike in areas of northeast Arnhem Land where Aborigines are the majority and have some control over the imposing socio-economic system. In Darwin, the attempts made to find space by Aboriginal fringe dwellers are rejected by the public and government authorities, as later chapters show. In contrast to the natural forces of river meeting sea in the metaphor of *gamna*, where there is a turbulent but reciprocal meeting, I suggest that a metaphor of merging traffic is more appropriate to the attempted articulation of Aboriginal fringe dwellers with the asymmetric power of the dominant urban society.

Aboriginal people in Darwin fringe camps seek to engage with the urban environment. According to their interpretation of 'the road rules', they move from their domain on Aboriginal land, in a process that I compare with the merging of traffic where two parallel lanes meet. As in the metaphor of *gamna*, the merging entities retain their separate identities. However, unless vehicles in separate lanes have a common understanding of the speed, direction and give-way rules of the traffic code, they cannot merge easily.

If the lanes do not merge, controls such as traffic lights can avoid a collision course. Another possibility is through the confusion of a traffic jam, where the rules are suspended and merging takes place in disorder.¹⁶³ More usually, there is a collision course, where the less familiar, more hesitant user is forced off the road by the more assertive or dominant traffic stream. I argue

that this metaphor of merging city traffic better captures the asymmetrical conflict that occurs between fringe dwellers and the town than does the more harmonious environmental Yolngu metaphor of *ganma*.¹⁶⁴

In Chapter Eight I discuss forms of merging in the alliances made between the fringe dwellers and Darwin activists and alternative lifestylers. I suggest these processes belong to a long history of independent Burarra moves to articulate with the invading society. In the next chapter I give an example of a 'collision course', with tragic results, when the state failed to 'give way' to attempts by people from Fish Camp to 'merge', as they claimed what they perceived to be their rights to an area of vacant bush in the urban scene.

Endnotes for Chapter 5:

¹³⁰ A resurgence of a distinct identity for the people to the west of the Blyth River mouth is suggested by a recently released CD titled, 'An-barra clan', sung by the Letterstick Band (1999; see Corn forthcoming). The CD includes original compositions and adaptations of clan songs, in particular *Diyama* (see Hiatt and Hiatt 1966; Corn 1999a:2). Meehan (1982:13) notes: 'The Gidjingali are divided into four loosely knit communities called Anbarra, Matai, Marawuraba and Gula' (Glasgow [1985:7] uses the spelling, 'An-barra').

¹³¹ Glasgow (1985:7) adds that the two other dialects belonging to the Burarra Language Family are Gurrgoni, to the west, and Yanyangu, to the east. People from both these language areas lived at Fish Camp and Lee Point during my fieldwork.

¹³² The song is written and sung by Dulcie Malimara's son, Paul McKenzie. The CD cover notes describe Sunset Bay as 'Dulcie's home - Djuna-winya on the north coast of Arnhem Land' (Wild Water 1996; see also Corn forthcoming).

¹³³ See also the forthcoming CD-Rom 'People of the Rivermouth'. Kim McKenzie (2001) states that the disk:

centres on a remarkable body of work created by Frank Gurrmanamana of the Anbarra people of north-central Arnhem Land. In 1960 Gurrmanamana dictated to anthropologist Les Hiatt a sequence of imagined scenarios as a way of explaining Anbarra kinship and the responsibilities that accompany relationships... The project has been able to draw on some forty years of scholarship undertaken in a range of disciplines with Gurrmanamana and his family.

¹³⁴ I do not speak any Aboriginal languages.

¹³⁵ As I have described, Sansom (1980-82:6) elsewhere draws a distinction between 'that pidgin' for 'organizin for business' and traditional language, or 'lingo', reserved for 'High Culture'.

¹³⁶ In her study of a town camp community in Pine Creek, south of Darwin, Jacqueline Wolfe (1987:57) stresses that many Aborigines camping in the town have a long association with the area. She continues: 'They are not newcomers nor transients'.

¹³⁷ Sutton (1999a:24) notes that, as an assemblage of people from different descent groups, the 'community' is not a generalised model for land ownership. He adds (p.24) that this does not mean that the members of the community have no rights to the land where they live.

¹³⁸ In noting the 'substantial residential stability' at Aputula camp, near Finke in Central Australia, Doohan (1992:73) states: 'A number of researchers have also noted the existence of a "residential core" at other Central Australian Aboriginal communities'.

¹³⁹ Arguing for 'thick' ethnography examining the 'ambiguity of resistance' amongst 'internally divided' subaltern groups, Ortner (1995:175) believes that the 'ethnographic thinness' of many studies of resistance is caused by 'a failure of nerve' to examine internal politics of subaltern groups and the 'crisis of representation' in anthropology (p.190).

¹⁴⁰ Chairs were also popular when they were available. When I purchased four steel-legged plastic chairs, they were constantly being 'borrowed' from my area (see Plate 15).

¹⁴¹ In his analysis, Robinson (1994:142) states unequivocally: 'the "oppositional culture" apparently directed outwards in destructive or self-destructive acts, offending or overt protest, is to be explained in terms of the resolution and externalization, through an often complex series of displacements, of group-internal tensions and oppositions'.

¹⁴² Sansom (1980a:232) also observed the alternating of 'miler' weeks and weeks of plenty at Knuckeys Lagoon. Sansom (1980a:241) was told the term comes from a losing phase in a game of cards. In the 1990s, only hotels sold takeaway liquor on Sundays, at higher prices than the stores.

¹⁴³ An exception occurred in February 1996, when I was asked to leave the Kulaluk village while visiting because a 'young girl' ritual was about to begin, which men should not see.

¹⁴⁴ Harry Mulumbuk, the husband of Dulcie's sister and father of her nephew at Fish Camp, claimed to have received the song in a dream (see Corn 2001:17). Harry, of the film 'Waiting for Harry' (McKenzie 1980), was the traditional owner of the Gopanga, or Kopanga area near the Blyth River mouth (see Hiatt 1965:19).

¹⁴⁵ Frank became a close friend and 'main collaborator' of the anthropologist, Les Hiatt (see Hiatt 1982:16; McKenzie 1980; Meehan 1997:25).

¹⁴⁶ During Hiatt's twenty months fieldwork in 1958-60, the Gidjingali were the largest group at Maningrida, comprising 46 percent of the 480 Aboriginal population (Hiatt 1965:13)..

¹⁴⁷ Rowse (1993:27-53) argues that the criticism by Rowley and others of the oppressive and soul-destroying nature of institutions is based on ideals 'complicit with the deeper assumptions of assimilationist liberalism: their underlying belief that Aboriginal people would evolve towards bourgeois modernity'.

¹⁴⁸ It is noticeable in large Aboriginal communities today that many of the young appear to have adopted the 'home boy' fashions originating from a poor Black urban culture in the United States.

¹⁴⁹ Meehan and Jones (1980:134) were told there was 'too much trouble' in Maningrida and people were vulnerable to sorcery that they believed had caused many deaths. These explanations were also commonly expressed to me in 1997 as the main reason for moving to Darwin.

¹⁵⁰ According to Carew et al (1996c), 'after several years of no maintenance', the market gardens at the Cadell River outstation, also known as Gochan Jiny-jirra, were reverting to bush in 1996.

¹⁵¹ Altman (1987:6), who analyses an outstation economy, stated that: 'White Australians still hold most of the managerial and skilled technical positions [at Maningrida] and they are the key brokers in external economic relations'.

¹⁵² See also Coombs (1994:160) for an account of the tensions at Yirrkala between the landowners and other residents of that northeast Arnhem Land community in the late 1960s.

¹⁵³ See 'The Abo vote', *Bulletin* (September 15, 1962, p. 8).

¹⁵⁴ My argument is that a 'hard market' exists for Aboriginal fringe dwellers in the Northern Territory to the present day.

¹⁵⁵ Frank told Poignant (1996:13) that he missed the *rom* ceremony for Axel in 1952 because he was in Darwin. Poignant (p.13) notes that the film *Waiting for Harry* shows the memorial rites for the principal An-barra owner of the *jambich rom* performed at Nagalarramba.

¹⁵⁶ Another Rom ceremony was performed by An-barra people of the Burarra language group at AIATSIS on September 17, 2001. An information pamphlet accompanying the invitations to members stated: 'This is the third Rom performed in Canberra that continues and reaffirms the relationship between AIATSIS and the Anbarra people' (AIATSIS 2001).

¹⁵⁷ 'Maningrida on the internet' was a theme of the Fulbright Symposium, 'Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world', held in Darwin in July 1997 (see Jordan 2000). In an article contrasting computer technology with the lack of services at Maningrida, Danija says few Maningrida people have used the internet service (*Weekend Australian* August 2-3, 1997, p.1). The Maningrida home page prepared for the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation in 1995 was redesigned in 1999 (Jordan 2000:85). Jordan (2000:86) states:

The original Web site contained details about out-stations serviced by the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, including their phone numbers, potentially facilitating direct access to the community by people who would fail to pass the scrutiny that is part of the process of getting a permit to visit Arnhem Land... The new site contains much less personal detail, offering only the kind of information that is already publicly available.

¹⁵⁸In November/December 2000, sons of Harry, in *Waiting for Harry*, toured Southwestern WA with their An-Barra Letterstick Band. They told the *Australian* (November 23, 2000, p.5): 'We come to share our culture' (see Corn forthcoming).

¹⁵⁹ <www.geocities.com/rainforest/canopy/6905> and <www.nxtnt.net/jichicha> In August 2001, Stella and others created a 'Long grass' website with a photograph gallery, sections on the separate camps and individuals in them and articles on fringe dwellers in Darwin. See <<http://longgrass.tripod.com>>

<<http://dustyjackets.ozbyte.com.au/longgrass/default.htm>>

¹⁶⁰ On August 15, 2001, Stella won awards for both the best documentary and the most popular film in the 'Fist full of films' Darwin fringe festival short film competition. Titled 'I'm a Black man', the video (entry #22) included sections of the above video, a protest held on August 3 that year and scenes of Johnny's camp moving to make way for construction works.

¹⁶¹ See Illustration 5; *NT News* June 5, 2001, p.4; *Delirra* August 2001, p.12.

¹⁶² The practice of Night Patrol officers demanding that fringe dwellers stand on one leg to test their sobriety was also reported as a complaint by Aboriginal people in the February *Analysis of interviews with itinerants in Darwin* (AERC 2001). The report quotes one man: 'Night Patrol have got an attitude, cheeky feller. They make you stand on one leg, if lose balance, you go in. But I got a gammy knee. I'm not a brolga'. For many of the campers, being forced to stand on one leg offends religious beliefs. Bob is reported in *Kujuk* (September 2001:4):

Eric, he always just comes and wakes us up. And how come he says, 'one leg up', why's that? That's my dreaming. Brolga. I'm saying myself, that's brolga, that's mine. And all the night patrol tell me, 'Hey get up, come on get up,' like that. And I come. That's my brolga, fucking idiots, they can get fucked. That's my dreaming...

¹⁶³ In addition to the dichotomy of two domains, Harris (1991:25) suggests there is a third domain, which is a space of compromise, not truly representative of either group, where interaction can take place.

¹⁶⁴ Another Yolngu metaphor, *garma*, represents an open forum where people can share ideas and work at reaching agreement. *Garma* is the ceremony area, an open place for participation and enjoyment, where connections are negotiated (Marika 1999:7).

CHAPTER SIX

Fringe dwellers and representatives of the state.

6.1 Introduction

In Chapters Six and Seven I discuss the relevance of my work to the recent anthropological debate between Peter Sutton (1998, 1999b) and Basil Sansom (1998, 1999). Sutton is the anthropologist representing the Larrakia language group in the Kenbi claim to land near Darwin under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act, 1976* (Sutton 1995a). In his monograph, *Native title and the descent of rights*, Sutton (1998:103-113) claims that the Larrakia group is an example of a 'post-classical Aboriginal society'. As I have already discussed, Sansom is noted for his processual, or 'fluidist', analysis of Darwin fringe dweller society. I discuss the Sutton-Sansom debate more fully in Chapter Seven. In this chapter and the next I apply events during my fieldwork in Darwin fringe camps to the theories of the two anthropologists.

Both Sutton (1998) and Sansom (1982b:120) describe Aboriginal cultural continuities which are an 'expression of a recreated culture' and an 'emergent culture' (see Sutton 1998:59). Sutton (p.59) describes a 'distinctive form of Aboriginal social organisation ... combining features of both classical Aboriginal and modern European societies, as well as a number of innovations...' Sutton (p.59) states that he does not dispute Sansom's descriptions of an 'Aboriginal commonality' (Sansom 1982b); however, Sutton describes an overarching system 'dominated by classical forms of thought, language, religion and social organisation'. The continuities that Sutton (1998, 1999b) describes are those more traditionally associated with Aboriginal social structure than the socially negotiated processes Sansom (1980a) describes in the Darwin fringe camps.

In this chapter, an account of the fringe dwellers' actions in the 1990s, in addition to my earlier discussion of resistance at Knuckeyes Lagoon in the 1970s, acts as a corrective to Sansom's thesis that Aboriginal resistance is 'rooted not in rebellion but in the resilience of cultural practice' (Sansom 1988a:152). That is, I expand my argument that a study of fringe dwellers' cultural continuities in a 'segregated social field' is incomplete without examining the political context of their lives. In the next chapter I give examples of how the long-standing understanding between fringe dwellers and the Larrakia owners is now being tested by the resurgent Larrakia, as one of Australia's 'new tribes' as defined by Sutton (1998:105).

In keeping with my multi-sited study, I 'follow the conflict' (see Marcus 1995:110) as the determination of the fringe dwellers at Fish Camp and their allies to find space in Darwin brings them into conflict with the state and

with formally incorporated Aboriginal organisations such as land councils. Firstly, I detail the case of three complaints to the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC) by fringe dwellers against Local and Territory Governments. I describe how media interest gave the fringe dwellers access to government, which had otherwise been refused. The government response then gave impetus to fringe dwellers' claims of discrimination. These complaints eventually led to government consideration of the fringe dwellers' claims, in a process that continues into 2001. The ideology supporting the government insistence that all Territorians are treated equally is also examined.

6.2 Previous contact with government and its agencies

The Tangentyere Council (1984/5:1) reported: 'Historically, Australian towns have been European institutions to which Aborigines were expected to adjust by abandoning their own values'. Although the NT Government (1990:44) claimed it 'adopts a non-discriminatory approach to the allocation of its houses', typically Aboriginal tenants are said to have a 'lack of urban living skills' (NTG 1990:45). Alternatively, Coulehan (1995a:339) notes: 'Lacking a territorial or property base in Darwin, the Yolngu have had to pursue much of their wider group sociality in public places'. Homes get overcrowded and residents evicted (Coulehan 1995a:255). In this regard, the family of the Fish Camp doyen was evicted from her state house years before my fieldwork. 'Dulcie Malimara's story' on the Fish Camp home page on the world wide web emphasises the ways in which Aboriginal people find life in a town camp community more meaningful and familiar than in suburban housing (see Scougall and Osborne 1998:57):

Anyway, we had a Housing Commission house and we was in a house for nearly 19 years. and my people come along making a lot of noise so I get kicked out. But I was in the hospital when my kids got kicked out. My kids was staying in the house. I had injury neck. I had injury leg. My kids was in the house but no one didn't look after them. Somebody came along - I mean my people, eh - came along, and making a lot of noise. My kids got kicked out and I was in the hospital, and when I came out it wasn't there. And that's my big problem.

I didn't want to go back in the Housing Commission. I'm happy staying outside so I can sing, dance, cry - whatever I like. So I'm free enough to stay here. The Housing Commission, it's really hard. You can't even take your family. It's really hard for us to go back in a Housing Commission, cause I've tried that a lot of times. I told my people not to make noise 'cause that house, it wasn't mine.

Neighbours complaining, it was really hard for me and my kids. But I had all my kids in Darwin, and I've been in Darwin when I was 17. Even my brother... and my other brother - he's blind, he can't see - they was walking from Maningrida to Darwin, and we've been staying in Darwin all our lives. And we're still here.

The home page explains how Dulcie was born in Arnhem Land and came to Darwin with her two children after leaving her promised husband. This move is typical of many Arnhem Land women who seek to improve their 'life chances' (Coulehan 1995a:305, 1995b:220). In Darwin with her daughter and son, Dulcie married a White man and bore two more children. While Dulcie was in hospital after her second marriage failed, she was evicted from her state house. Since then she has moved between fulfilling her ceremonial responsibilities at Maningrida and living in various Darwin fringe camps. In the late 1990s, three of her grown children either lived with or regularly visited the campers, while the youngest son uses his musical talents to promote Aboriginal rights and reconciliation (Wild Water 1996).

For Dulcie, the 'lack of urban living skills' translates into prohibitions on traditional activities of dancing, singing, cooking and mourning, which all involve extended family. As Sansom (1982c:8) states, 'the model of the stable household simply does not fit the way in which Aboriginal people in urban settings manage their affairs'. By restricting her guests and asking her people to be quiet because the neighbours might complain, she recognises the cultural restrictions of living on a suburban housing block. Only by compromising her Aboriginal values can Dulcie experience the autonomy which Coulehan (1995a), Collmann (1979b, 1988) and Burbank (1988) suggest Aboriginal women attempt to achieve by moving to the towns. Coulehan (1995a:33) notes that in the city: 'The State's policies and agencies particularly offer [Yolngu] women and children more autonomy from "patriarchal authority", but largely in exchange for dependence on the State'.¹⁶⁵

6.3 NT Government, Local Government and fringe dwellers

The Northern Territory Chief Minister was criticised for his public statements threatening harsher measures in response to Aboriginal public drinking in Darwin:

I go for a walk every night and I am totally disgusted with what I see and I'm sure other Territorians are too. These people have usually come to Darwin from remote areas. They should go back to their own communities and their own land. They have every right to visit Darwin, but if they do, they have got to behave properly. If they don't they deserve to be monstered and stomped on by the community. This

is not a question of racism - it also refers to white itinerants with drinking problems. Enough is enough. They have no right to hijack our lifestyle (*NT News* April 13, 1997; see Illustrations 2.2, 2.3).

In his defence of 'our lifestyle', the Chief Minister appears to privilege the residents of an enclave of settled Australia and confirm the fringe dwellers' perception of their exclusion. The dispossession of Aboriginal people also appears to be defended by calls for them to be 'monstered and stomped on by the community'. The *NT News* (April 15, 1997) editorialised: 'Mr Stone's choice of words was unfortunate. Such comments will do nothing to improve the worsening problem of drunken itinerants'.

Andrew Coward (1997), who was the director of Special Projects in the Chief Minister's Office from 1988 to 1995, claims the Territory is socially divided between 'the non-Aboriginal New Territorians who are the haves and Aboriginal True Territorians who are the have-nots'. In a document he circulated widely in 1997 he wrote:

For New Territorians, urban Territorians, the non-Aboriginal Territorians, self-government has been a dream run. They belong to a group that has among the highest incomes in Australia, the most extensive subsidised housing program in the country, multi-car families, many with boats, paid holiday air fares for some, superannuation and more than adequate services and facilities...

They will in the main deny any overt racist sentiment, and yet they have been defined by shared attitudes that often begin with the shock of the new - the observation of drunken, destitute Aboriginal people, dressed poorly and unwashed who sometimes confront and beg for a dollar, producing natural recoil among New Territorians... The dark side of the mind of many New Territorians; attitudes that help some win elections and some lose. The True Territorians could be excused for thinking themselves victims of the 'external enemy theory'. They are often said to hamper the development ethic, drain resources through their intractable social problems and moreover are likened as rapacious in their continuing demands for Land Rights and Sea Rights (Coward 1997:18-19).

In his conclusion, Coward (1997:27) states emphatically: 'There is a racial divide that is a political divide that divides the Territory into haves-and-have-nots that 20 years of self rule has not bridged'. The unequal contest between settler and Aborigines in towns is also maintained by what Cowlshaw (1988a:193) refers to as 'institutional racism' that 'in informal

ways reflects particular cultural practices and values and disallows others'. The Chief Minister's objections to the behaviour of homeless Aboriginal people excuse the government refusal to recognise the need for culturally appropriate accommodation. According to Edmunds (1995:25), in Tennant Creek the subordination of Aboriginal interests is legitimised by a discourse that excludes Aboriginal people except where they create 'problems' for 'the [White] public':

Underlying the discourse was a system of classifications and oppositions - normal and deviant, acceptable and unacceptable, residential zones and camps, development and backwardness, European and Aboriginal - which acted to reproduce the objective relations of economic and symbolic power (p.25).

Settled Darwin now resembles the urban environment described by Cowlshaw in rural NSW (1988a:104), where 'oppressors and oppressed may never meet each other'. Although the Chief Minister claims he is confronted by drunken Aboriginal 'itinerants' which disgust him when he goes for a walk each evening, they are an anonymous group who appear to be unwelcome intruders into the settler domain of the racially-divided community which he represents.

I argue that, in areas where Aboriginal resistance has been defeated or expropriated in settled Australia, Aborigines who confront walkers in the park are the last line of opposition. They are a persistent irritation to the settlers and a reminder of Aboriginal claims to the land, in a city where there is only marginal Aboriginal political representation.¹⁶⁶ Public comments by politicians in Darwin show little recognition of the 'new language, drawing authority now not from just a European-Australian but from a publicly recognised Aboriginal symbolic system', noted by Edmunds (1995:8) in Tennant Creek. Illustrating this conflict with the state, I recount the following case of Bob Bunduwabi, who lived at Fish Camp and Lee Point in 1996.

6.4 Bob Bunduwabi at Lee Point

Bob Bunduwabi began his long involvement with agencies of the state in 1958. It was then that Ingrid Drysdale (1974:120) describes meeting him in Arnhem Land during the early years of the Maningrida government-sponsored Aboriginal settlement:

One day I was stopped ... by a young man who had been hiding behind a clump of pandanus palms. I noticed that he had just enough flesh below one ankle to hold a bandage where one foot had been, and enough on the other to maintain his balance on the blood-covered

stumps. Only part of his hands remained, with one or two little inch-long claws in place of the fingers he had lost.

‘Sorry, Missus,’ he said in apology for having startled me. ‘I wanna medicine’.

I told him he could go to our hospital [at Maningrida] if he promised to remain, and to this he readily agreed. We learned that his name was Bundawabui, and until he went to East Arm fourteen months later he was the life and soul of the camp, always singing, playing his didgeridoo or sticks, and generally making everyone feel that it was good to be alive.

After spending the next twenty-four years as a patient in the East Arm Leprosarium, like many other ex-patients, Bob opted to stay in Darwin when the institution closed after medical advances made isolation unnecessary (see Hargrave 1977). As I have mentioned in Chapter Three, I first met him at his hidden beach camp in suburban Coconut Grove. At that time, I contacted a local newspaper in the hope that they might help him in his wish for better facilities. In reply to criticism of the NT Health Department in the article which was published in the *Darwin Star* (November 26, 1982), a spokesperson for the Department replied: ‘There is a good chance your health might deteriorate if you were not housed properly, but if you chose to live on the beach, then I do not see why or how the Health Department can be blamed for that’ (*Darwin Star* December 3, 1982).

Bob had camped in many Darwin and hinterland locations since 1982. The people at Fish Camp claimed that he had fought for a camping place beside the Stuart Highway at ‘the 15 Mile’ in the late 1980s. When this area eventually became an official town camp, the land was granted to the Aboriginal Development Foundation (ADF) that built houses on the lease. Eventually, other language groups moved onto the land and, except for one household, the Burarra residents moved out. In 1997, at Fish Camp, Finity told me:

We started off living in bush eh, like this one here [folds in fingers to indicate Bob Bunduwabi]. At Mitchell Creek, where 15 Mile is now, his young brother and old man, that one we lost at Lee Point [Bob Bunduwabi], they fought for that land and they got it. And that’s supposed to be for Maningrida mob. Bernie [from ADF] come along and he started building houses, toilet, shower, everything. That place out there was a quiet place away from stupid people. Actually, this one [repeats gesture to indicate Bob Bunduwabi] was fighting for this

land, this one [repeats gesture] and Jimmy North [man still at 15 Mile] ... they [the NT Government] handed it to ADF.

In the early 1990s, until 1996, Bob had lived in various bush and beach camps at Lee Point. The campers lived in corrugated iron structures, tents and under tarpaulins concealed in the bush, close to the road. By crossing the road, they could use the public toilets and showers in the grassed public recreational reserve managed by the NT Conservation Commission. Bob's relatives later told me that the Keep Australia Beautiful Council regularly emptied rubbish bins at the camps and NT Conservation Commission rangers occasionally helped mow the long grass around the shelters in the wet season. Public telephones are two hundred metres from Lee Point, inside a caravan park beside the single bitumen road leading to the Darwin suburb of Casuarina. The nearest shops are four kilometres along this road (see Map 2).

The camps were spread through the bush along Lee Point Road, down to 'Beach Camp', which was variously located on old army concrete slabs beside the beach, shaded by native hibiscus bushes and casuarina trees, or further into the dense coastal monsoon forest thickets. 'Bottom Camp', as the fringe dwellers called it, was directly opposite the new public conveniences and car park. The shacks at Bottom Camp were built on concrete slabs laid on special purpose lease 127 granted in 1967 to the Aborigines Inland Mission for a children's holiday camp and surrendered in 1979. 'Top Camp', as it was known, was fifty metres further up the road on higher gravely soil amongst thick eucalyptus and pandanus forest. The camps were outside the boundaries of the Darwin City Council.

At a public meeting in May 1997 during a protest at the Lee Point reserve, which I describe in a later chapter, a Gunavidji man and a Nakara woman told of their long association with the area. They remembered hunting and camping at Lee Point with Aboriginal Christian and sporting groups before competing in running, spear throwing and team events. During the more recent occupation of the area, songs were written and dances created to commemorate events that occurred there. Bush foods and seafood were gathered from the area to supplement the diet and when money was scarce. Bush timber for structures and firewood is plentiful and nearby a source of white clay is still mined for ceremonial body-paint by Aboriginal residents of Darwin.

As I have briefly mentioned in Chapter Three, on June 17, 1996, Bob and his Burarra relatives were verbally advised that they were 'unlawfully camping on Crown land' at Lee Point and requested to move.¹⁶⁷ The next day they

were again advised by department officers to move. On 2 July signs stating 'CROWN LAND - NO LITTERING, NO MOTORBIKES, NO FIRES, NO CAMPING. OFFENDERS LIABLE TO PROSECUTION' were erected at the site and the campers were again requested to move.¹⁶⁸ On July 4, 'Department officers accompanied by police again visited the area and requested the campers to move by 3.00 pm on 5 July'. The Aboriginal Development Foundation, with responsibility for town camps, was notified and asked to assist find 'appropriate accommodation in Darwin for the evicted campers'. When officers returned on 5 July the campers had moved 'leaving behind an amount of rubbish and mess'.¹⁶⁹ An officer from the Department of Lands Planning and Environment said there had been complaints about the campers' rubbish (*NT News* July 8, 1996).

Once the Lee Point camp had been closed down, the area cleared and a new camp established on Aboriginal-held land at Fish Camp, the state denied all responsibility for Bob Bunduwabi and the other Burarra campers. The Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment later said: 'Fish Point [sic] isn't on public land... They accepted an offer to go and camp at Fish Point knowing there were no facilities there. I'm sorry, I can't be held responsible for that' (ABCTV Stateline 23 May 1997). The only representatives of government agencies to visit the camp regularly were the Keep Australia Beautiful utility and the Aboriginal health services van.¹⁷⁰ In my fieldwork experience, on the very rare occasions when police or ambulance were called to Fish Camp, they were unaware of its location.

As I have recounted, I re-established my friendship with Bob at the Fish Camp location, close to where we first met. After some persistence I was able to help him get a wheelchair from a community agency. On pension day, he would order a minibus taxi to take him, and others from the camp, to the Kulaluk office to pick up his cheque. From there the minibus would be told to drive to a service station where an employee friend would cash Bob's cheque without him having to get out of the vehicle. Clutching more than three hundred dollars in cash, Bob would direct the minibus to the supermarket and liquor outlet for a few food items, cigarettes and alcohol, then return to the camp. On the first pension day after this wild trip with about five others in the minibus, I was surprised when Bob handed \$150 to me for safekeeping. The rest of his cash he stuffed into the lining of a cushion that he kept close to his side or under his head.

Over the coming two weeks, until the next pension day, Bob would order his basic needs to be delivered on my next visit, until his money was spent. I kept a record of his 'withdrawals' but he never disputed my tally. As a sign of trust, he increased the amounts in later weeks. His last 'banker' to hold his

cash had been an Aboriginal man who lived in the suburbs and provided transport for fringe campers, as well as acting as marijuana dealer. Bob remained very firm with his cash, apart from giving some to his niece, Dulcie, who did the cooking and bought supplies. Like the other invalid pensioners in the camp he paid his 'board' to Dulcie. I thought perhaps the younger men and women who came to the camp as drinking companions for Bob on pension weeks may have been resentful of me for holding Bob's cash. On one occasion he angrily told two young men to leave the camp, but when I remarked to Bob that he was being too hard on his young relatives, the two men retorted to me that their grandfather had the right to reprimand them and I should not interfere. Otherwise they showed no outward disagreement with my role.

6.5 Bob Bunduwabi's complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Commission

At my suggestion, Bob Bunduwabi lodged a complaint to the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission in September 1996. The complaint was based on statements by the Mayor of Darwin who was quoted saying of Aboriginal 'itinerants': 'I reckon if you keep shifting them around, constantly harass them so they can't settle, they will get sick and tired of it and maybe some will go back to their communities' (*NT News* September 10, 1996). In another media report the mayor said: 'The only real answer is to get the Aboriginals back to their own communities' (*Bulletin* February 27, 1996, p.28). Bob's complaint, written by me on his behalf, claimed that the mayor's statements created 'a climate of persecution against alleged "itinerants" including people like [Bob] who have lived in Darwin for many years'.¹⁷¹

To have the complaint accepted was quite an achievement in itself and this aroused media interest (*Channel 8 News*, October 10, 1996), some of which has been discussed in an earlier chapter. The publicity then incurred the displeasure of the ADC. They objected on the grounds that 'it is very difficult to get Respondents to move positions if there is the glare of publicity and there may be a public perception that a Respondent is acting illegally and/or they have been pressured into changing policy'.¹⁷² The comment acknowledged that representative bodies like the government and city council are vulnerable to public pressure from the media, which provided a weapon to an otherwise powerless group. In addition, through the media coverage, the workings of the ADC gained some credibility amongst the fringe dwellers. The statutory body remained distant to the campers, other than the impersonal pamphlets explaining the role and processes of the ADC that had been mailed to the complainant, which the campers could not read. However, I recorded a long interview by Nikki Harrison with myself and an officer of the Darwin City Council debating the anti-discrimination case on

the local ABC radio ('Drivetime', October 11, 1996). After hearing the interview, the Fish Camp residents asked me for a copy of the tape and played it repeatedly in the camp for weeks.

With the collaboration of the fringe dwellers, the media reports placed the private realm - the living conditions of the fringe dwellers - into the public domain to 'shame' the government. This was more clearly spelt out in later protests. The media also acted as an intermediary between the Aboriginal campers and the government by gaining direct access to government ministers. In gathering their stories, journalists were able to ask government ministers the questions Aborigines wanted to have answered. Previously, fringe dwellers had no opportunity for face-to-face contact with government representatives or politicians. In 1997 positive media images and interviews began to categorise the 'itinerants' as 'homeless', giving interlocutors names, voices and histories.

My role in the process is an important issue. As I have implied in my analysis of fringe dweller resistance, probably no formal action would have been made by the fringe dwellers alone without outside assistance. In the original complaint, I tried to express the grievances Bob and others often related to me against the Darwin City Council (DCC) and the NT Government. Once the complaint had been accepted by the ADC, the moral decision I had made early in my fieldwork to be an active witness of the conditions in the camps began to direct the nature of my thesis research. My role as a letter writer and intermediary was particularly time-consuming, but these records became my data. The point is that, as in the 1970s, the fringe dwellers were noticeably willing to participate in acts opposing their marginalisation by government departments and others.

The ADC delegate authorised me to act for the complainant, Bob Bunduwabi, in 'recognition of his impairment and non-English speaking background'.¹⁷³ In that role, I was asked by the ADC delegate to check with Bob the draft letter to the Darwin City Council that the delegate had composed, based on Bob's complaint. I was then to submit a written response 'with any amendments that Mr Bunduwabi wishes to make'.¹⁷⁴ This request formalised my role as an activist working in collaboration with my interlocutors.

On receiving Bob Bunduwabi's approval, the ADC formulated the final version of his complaint of discrimination on the basis of race, impairment and failure to accommodate a special need. The ADC alleged:

1. He is a person of Aboriginal descent, originally from Maningrida

but for at least 17 years has been resident in Darwin and feels entitled to have his needs represented by the Darwin City Council regardless of his race.

2. He has suffered from Hansen's Disease and as a result is severely impaired. He was formerly a patient at the East Arm leprosarium until it closed and then camped at Ludmilla Creek, Coconut Grove, Buffalo Creek and Marrara. For the past four years he, with the approval of a person he considers the owner, Mr-----, camped at Lee Point until he and others were evicted by officers of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment (press cutting attached).
3. He is now a resident of 'Fish Camp' at Kulaluk. The move to Kulaluk has caused him anxiety and humiliation. The enforced move resulted in expense to him and loss and damage to his property. The dust and facilities have caused discomfort and infections. He is dependent on two artificial legs and his relations are either pensioners or unemployed.
4. There are social tensions with the other residents at Kulaluk as those in his group have to cart water through the mangroves from houses at Minmarama village. There is also tension with the other residents of the Kulaluk lease on the basis that they have plans for development which have been affected by the establishment of 'Fish Camp'.
5. The land at Kulaluk is Larrakia land, and he feels uncomfortable being on it. Aborigines have been visiting Darwin since white settlement commenced, and have a traditional right to camp, which has not been respected by the Council.
6. He considers the enforced move to Kulaluk to be discriminatory, and failed to accommodate his special need. The Council has refused to make land available for other town camps until the land at existing Aboriginal leases is fully utilised. This policy has been a consistent one of the Council's as evidenced by the attached letter from the Town Clerk to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, dated 25 June 1981.¹⁷⁵ It is understood that this is still the Council policy, as evidenced by the statements to the media by Council representatives in February 1996.

6.6 The Lee Point protest, 1996

When Bob Bunduwabi decided, after four and a half months, to return to his old camp at Lee Point in late 1996, he was aware of the probable response by the authorities. He told me he was prepared to die at Lee Point, rather than be shifted again. At the request of the residents of Fish Camp, on November 24, I hired a twin-cab utility that transported Bob, his faithful pet hen, four men, one woman and a child to Lee Point. Once unloaded, the campers strung up a tarpaulin besides the sawn-off stumps of the old shelter at 'Bottom Camp'. The others at Fish Camp, who had been talking about returning to the old camp for months, were eventually deterred by the prospect of a repetition of their July eviction.

Bob was photographed with an expression of grim determination, being pushed on his wheelchair as he led his followers in the return to his old camp at Lee Point (Plate 1; *NT News* November 26, 1996). The campers joked about the large 'No Camping' signs that had been erected at the entrance to their campsite before they were evicted in July. On one sign someone had written with a felt pen, 'except for blacks'. Contradicting that scrawled comment, two non-Aboriginal travellers and their Maori companion were camped in the bush nearby. When the travellers heard the explanation for the protest camp, they accepted Bob as the owner of the land and offered to pay rent to him. For the next month, Bob kept the neighbouring campers to their promise of \$100 per week rental payments.

Bob considered returning to Fish Camp after the first night when we were attacked by swarms of mosquitoes. However, a television crew came to interview him during the day and the Aboriginal journalist asked him the leading question, 'You're not going to move are you?' (*ABC TV News*, November 25, 1996). In what is perhaps an example of the way the media makes its own news, Bob then publicly committed himself to making a stand that he maintained until his death. The next day one of the more aggressive protesters returned to Fish Camp and attempted to force those who stayed behind to move to Lee Point. To make his point, the man had ripped down tents and harassed the remaining people with unfounded assertions that I was coming with a vehicle to take everything to Lee Point.

Meanwhile, the response from the DCC to the ADC letter stated that the mayor's statements were not necessarily Council policy. The reply added: 'Local government is apolitical and allows all elected members the opportunity to express the views of constituents'. The Council reply quoted minutes and decisions including the creation of a network of agencies to work with itinerants to coordinate the provision of services and facilities for 'the long grass population group' and to facilitate the development of

appropriate housing needs of people disadvantaged in the rental housing sector.¹⁷⁶

If the complaint was to proceed, a reply to the DCC's defence was urgent because Bob was under threat of eviction from Lee Point. I had to leave Bob at Lee Point and return to Perth on the sixth of December. My ticket could not be changed. In a tearful farewell, Bob and the few kin remaining with him vowed they would still be at Lee Point on my return. They did not appear to fear any action the authorities might take. On the same day, the Delegate of the ADC, who was handling the complaint, videotaped scenes at Lee Point and Fish Camp before driving me to the airport. By then, government representatives had asked Bob to move several times, so I felt guilty in leaving him. On 13 December, as requested by the ADC Delegate, from Perth I faxed a reply to the DCC's response that read:

On 8 November Ms Leeder wrote that 'the Council is not involved in the provision of land nor does it presume to comment on how Aboriginal organisations determine the utilisation of land managed by them...' However, [the Community Services Manager] also wrote: 'since the early 1990s Council has encouraged the pursuit of appropriate land in the northern suburbs which could be used for camping by the "long grass" community and visiting Aboriginal people'.

The fact that Mr Bunduwabi lived without the most basic of facilities at Fish Camp should be a concern of the City Council (DCC). It is discriminatory to maintain that the living conditions in Fish Camp are the responsibility of an Aboriginal organisation. That is, matters of hygiene (infectious diseases, mangy dogs, water supply, sewerage etc) are the concern of the City Council, regardless of race.

Further, decision No 16\5318(13/03/95) states that: 'Council delivers the same municipal services to Town Camp residents on the same basis it does to the rest of the community'. This has not been Mr Bunduwabi's experience (for example the DCC ranger refused to remove mangy dogs from the camp). What other people are expected to live without sufficient available water for washing, within the city boundaries?

If the DCC has encouraged the setting up of more camps in the northern suburbs since the early 1990s, as [the Community Services Manager] says (8 November), there is nothing to show for it. This point seems contradictory to the statement that the DCC is not

involved in the provision of land. Decision No 16\5318(13/03/95) states that Council acts as 'an advocate to the NT and Commonwealth Governments in relation to local housing issues', so at the very least the DCC *influences* planning and policy. The Lee Point Camp was established for many years and there appears to have been very little in the way of advocacy on their behalf. There has been even less support at Fish Camp, despite the appalling conditions and dangerous health situation there.

In her response dated 10 December, [the Community Services Manager] denies 'Council's supposed involvement in conditions of camping at both Kululuk [sic] and Lee Point'. I believe it is necessary to look beyond the legalistic reasoning of [the Community Services Manager], that Council policy is all in the minute book. What is *not* done is just as important as what is *recorded* as done. This surely is the point of a complaint of 'failure to supply a special need'. When Aborigines camp on land controlled by the DCC they are moved on. The camp at Kululuk is the direct result of these DCC Public Places Program. When they camp in the most shocking conditions without water or any amenities out of the public eye, nobody cares. This shifting of responsibility is a form of discrimination that is little different to the old DCC policy, as listed in the complaint, that Aborigines must 'utilise existing leases'.

In one year the number of infringements issued has almost trebled... The camps exist because of a failure to provide a special need; the pressures on the more established camps comes from the enforcement of DCC programs; the increase in homeless Aborigines living on the Kululuk lease is because DCC policies and programs are not in force there. From the granting of the lease in 1979 until the beginning of the present Public Places Programs, there was no similar problem with camps on Kululuk land. In short it is incorrect to say DCC has no involvement in present conditions at Kululuk and Lee Point.

Whatever the official policy recorded in the minute book, and the informal nature of 'a network of agencies working with itinerants', the DCC policy has clearly been to harass homeless people. The Lord Mayor has taken a prominent role in promoting these policies including a well-publicised election campaign on the issue. There has been no recognition that people like Mr Bunduwabi are not 'itinerants' but identify as citizens of Darwin, entitled to be represented by the DCC, not harassed by them. To attempt to force people like him back to their place of origin as is suggested by the Mayor is grossly

discriminatory.

The usual response to this complaint is to point out that other accommodation is available. However, Mr Bunduwabi needs the support of an extended family and indeed it is his culturally appropriate life-style to live in a communal group. He was institutionalised by the Department of Health for many years and does not want to go back to an institution. He regards Darwin as his home. He says the 15 Mile Camp was built for his people; however, the houses were gradually occupied by other culture/language groups (from Humpty Doo).

Mr Justice Woodward, the Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner, recognised the special needs of Aborigines camped in Darwin in his 1974 final report. Various Parliamentary inquiries confirm this special need. Both the DCC and NT Government have failed to accommodate this need, with dire continuing consequences for Mr Bunduwabi. This reply attempts to trace the interconnectedness of actions that make it impossible to confine DCC responsibilities to 'Council resolution which is recorded in the minute book and in the Policies and Procedures guide'. The DCC as a responsible body is the sum of the whole: public statements, the Mayor as head, employees like [the Community Services Manager], informal networks and actual on-the-ground actions.¹⁷⁷

Two days after I left Darwin, NT Government officers again approached Bob and the other campers at Lee Point. According to a later letter:

[An officer of the Department of Lands Planning and Environment], accompanied by an Aboriginal liaison officer and an Aboriginal health worker from the Territory Health Services visited the camp and spoke to Mr Bunduwabi to encourage him to take up an offer of appropriate alternative accommodation in Darwin'.¹⁷⁸

Despite the government opinion expressed in the above letter, that it is unnecessary for notices or other written advice to be served before eviction action occurs, Bob received another visit on 19 December 1996:

a Department officer, accompanied by police visited the camp and delivered a letter to Mr Bunduwabi advising that if he continued to stay at the camp then the Department would ask the Northern Territory Police to ask him to leave the area pursuant to the *Trespass Act*.¹⁷⁹

The letter delivered to Lee Point by hand, dated 19 December 1996 and signed by the Assistant Director of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, stated in full:

Dear Mr Bunduwabi

I refer to your conversation of 6 December 1996 with Mr Greg Lambert of this Department and officers from the Territory Health Services regarding your camping at Lee Point.

I am sorry to hear that you did not accept the offer from the Territory Health Services to look at alternative possibilities for accommodation that were not on Crown land. I understand that this was as a result of advice from Mr Bill Day that the Northern Territory Government has no legal power to ask you to leave the land.

If you persist in this view, this Department will have no alternative but to approach the Northern Territory Police to ask you to leave the area in accordance with their powers under the *Trespass Act* should you continue to remain on the Crown land at Lee Point.

I would therefore hope that you could reconsider the offer made by the Territory Health Services to help you to find suitable accommodation. In order to progress the matter would you please arrange for further contact to be made with Mr [D] of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, who has delivered and explained this letter, on telephone [number], and who will assist you in every possible way to resolve the matter.

6.7 Fighting the threat of eviction

A few days before Christmas, Bob and his small group of kin received eighteen days notice to leave Lee Point (*NT News* December 22, 1996). The *NT News* republished the poignant photograph of Bob being carried helplessly from his camp in July 1996 with his stumps of hands and legs exposed, beside a heading, 'Camper plea: Please don't kick me out'. Meanwhile I kept in distant contact with the situation at the camp through faxes and telephone calls between myself in Perth, the ADC in Darwin, the NT media and activist supporters who were in regular contact with Bob at Lee Point. The Minister had been quoted on ABC radio as saying that the campers had been given notice to remove themselves before January 8, 1997.¹⁸⁰ On advice from Bob's supporters, in my role as authorised representative, I urgently faxed an application for an interim order by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to prevent eviction proceeding on the

grounds that it would be difficult for the campers to get legal aid or other assistance over the holiday period. In a letter from Perth published in the *NT News* (December 25, 1996), I satirised the single-mindedness of the government minister in pursuing the eviction on Christmas Eve:

‘With the poor and weak and lowly,’ goes the old carol. At Christmas-time even Ebenezer Scrooge might hesitate to evict a severely disabled pensioner like Bob Bunduwabi at Lee Point. Not the hard-hearted Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. In the season of goodwill the minister has issued an eviction notice to Bob and his followers.

Two of the White activists in Darwin, who were working closely with the campers at Lee Point, also sent a fax to the Commissioner on December 24, which said, in part:

Under section 101 of the Anti-Discrimination Act, we wish to seek interim orders to preserve the status quo pending resolution of the complaint by Bob Bundawabi [sic] before the Commission. We wish to notify your office that in Bill Day’s absence we have been authorised by Bob Bundawabi to make representations on his behalf.

The representations of Bob and his supporters were successful in gaining an interim order from the ADC Commissioner for a stay of eviction until a hearing on January 6 while another complaint, this time against the NT Government, was considered by the Delegate of the ADC. At the January 6 hearing by the ADC Commissioner, an extension of the stay of eviction was ordered until January 17 for the processing of the second complaint from Bob Bundawabi, which was eventually delivered to the NT Government by the ADC on January 14.¹⁸¹ Theoretically, this delay also gave Bob time to seek legal advice. Until then it was the interconnected actions of the ADC, the media, the Aboriginal protesters, myself and the activists in Darwin that had prevented the government enforcing their eviction notice.

Despite Bob’s failing health after record January rains in Darwin and monsoon gales, the application for an extension to the interim order for maintenance of the status quo was heard at the ADC offices on Friday January 17 (see *NT News* January 17 and 18, 1997). Bob’s health had continued to deteriorate and he had been admitted to the Darwin hospital, a multistorey air-conditioned building with the same design as a Canberra hospital. He told his friend and supporter, Caroline, that he felt uncomfortable in the enclosed wards, as many Aboriginal patients do. With Caroline’s help he had discharged himself and returned to the camp where

he was pictured on television being tended under his tarpaulin by an Aboriginal health worker. The young man said: 'The main contribution to his sickness is basically living conditions. No basic necessities such as water, power, toilets, not even a roof over his head' (ABCTV news, January 17, 1997).

The reasoning behind the determination to evict was presented to the NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, Dawn Lawrie, at the hearing on January 17. Firstly, the representative of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment requested that the department be allowed legal representation. The departmental official claimed to have a solicitor standing by to attend immediately, if allowed.¹⁸² He also noted that the details broadcast on the morning's ABC radio news had indicated a breach of confidentiality in the proceedings. The Commissioner also said she had had phone calls from the press all morning indicating they were aware the hearing was to be held. She clarified that the reason for closing the hearing was 'to preserve the confidentiality of the complaint process which is still on foot'.¹⁸³ However, it could be suggested that the ADC's suppression of media scrutiny was beneficial only to the government.

Caroline, who was now Bob's authorised representative, asked for more time to get legal advice, which she said was not available until January 22. Her appeal to the Commissioner for an extension of the order is an example of how the media mediates between government, Aborigines, activists and others:

On the last hearing, which was 7 January, the Minister ... was on TV news that night. At that stage I believe [the Minister] had not had a copy of the complaint at hand with the ADC. However, in the news items he said that he would be enforcing the Trespass Act at the close of business today. Which to me states that he's not interested in the merits of the case at all, or any of those things. He just wants those [Aboriginal] people out of there. So I imagine that at close of business today the Trespass Act will be enforced as the Minister has said, and that as I've stated at the opening of this hearing, Mr Bunduwabi has just gotten out of hospital this morning. He's only got his brother Jackie looking after him at Lee Point at the moment. Most of the other family has returned to Maningrida for funeral ceremonies, and even though he's left hospital, he's still not in good condition at all. And he refuses to go to Fish Camp and so he's ... what will happen at 5.00 or 4.21 today I don't know. Once again we haven't had advice on the Trespass Act, what that will mean at the end of today. Whether Mr Bunduwabi - he will be refusing to leave - and what will happen to Mr

Bunduwabi at that point I don't know, I haven't got legal advice.¹⁸⁴

In response, the departmental officer pointed out that Bob Bunduwabi 'refuses to go to alternative accommodation' and that from the first notice of eviction in December there had been 'adequate time to seek legal advice'. He continued:

Our contention is that we have responsibility to control both access and the management of this land. We have in the past removed this particular person, his family and many others. We wish to continue to be able to manage the land and continue to remove campers including many others. A continuation of this order would authorise a continuing breach of the law rather than maintaining any rights. It would be seen, we believe, by the public as discrimination in favour of a particular person on the grounds of race, and that would present us wider problems within the community with which we would then have to deal. Thank you.¹⁸⁵

Caroline pleaded: 'I don't think the usual accommodation applied to people with impairment would be appropriate because Bob is not usual, he is Aboriginal and he has lived more or less traditionally all his life'. The Commissioner was also concerned. She asked:

The matter of suitable accommodation which is a very good phrase and something we all believe in but there's nothing been put to me to say that suitable accommodation is immediately available and suitable to whom - is it suitable in Mr Bunduwabi's eyes?

In a further example of institutional racism that enforces a racially particular view on others, the government went on to object to the order of a stay of proceedings against 'Mr Bunduwabi and family'. They claimed, because the complaint was only in the name of an individual, the clause, 'and family', should be struck out of the order.¹⁸⁶ The commissioner then asked for a definition of family, to which Caroline replied, 'a lot of them have gone back to Maningrida over the wet. There's usually about, well in the dry season there can be anything from twenty to forty'. The department objected to the order '*in toto*'; however, they accepted five people as a reasonable family size.

After hearing both sides, the Commissioner extended the order until February 11, 1997 to give the department time to reply to Bob's outstanding complaint of discrimination against the NT Government, which was almost the same as that laid against the DCC. Also within that time, Bob was expected to reply to the government response (see Appendix I). Finally, the

Delegate would need to make his finding after these designated processes were complete. Making available to the media her judgment for an extension of the interim order for maintenance of the status quo (*NT News* January 18, 1997), the Commissioner commented 'it may serve the best interests of truth, honesty and justice if the order itself without any other embellishment [as above] is made known'.¹⁸⁷

6.8 The reply from Lands, Planning and Environment

Although I am not able in this thesis to discuss fully all the points made in the government reply, the basis of their argument was that: 'The Northern Territory Government provides services to Mr Bunduwabi in the same manner as it would any other person with similar needs'.¹⁸⁸ The reply maintained a narrow legalistic view in claiming Section 24 of the Anti-Discrimination Act, 'Failure to accommodate a special need', was irrelevant because: 'the matter is not one of providing services. Rather it is one of the right of the Northern Territory Government to evict trespasses on Crown Land'.¹⁸⁹

As the department argued in the hearing, alternative accommodation was available and 'it was Mr Bunduwabi's personal cultural values that caused him to reject it'. The respondent asked, 'how can he have been denied the single service of camping at Lee Point when such a facility is not available to anyone else?' Furthermore, 'with regard to Lee Point, the NT Government has not conceded that any person has a "right" to camp there and regularly moves on campers, including in the past Mr Bunduwabi'. The department asserted, 'All people, no matter what their background are regularly moved on from Lee Point. Mr Bunduwabi has not been treated singularly in this instance'.¹⁹⁰ The letter ended:

Overall, I submit that Mr Bunduwabi has been treated in the same manner as all other itinerant campers at Lee Point. He has not been discriminated against either on the basis of race or disability. There has been no distinction made in his case, nor have there been any restrictions in the area of goods, services and facilities. Indeed, the contrary is true'.¹⁹¹

According to the government spokesperson at the hearing before the ADC commissioner, to allow the Lee Point campers to stay would be seen 'by the public as discrimination in favour of a particular person on the grounds of race'. In this interpretation, the demands of Aboriginal campers are against the interests of a homogeneous group, or at least a majority, described as 'the public' or 'the community'. Presumably 'the public' also includes the tourists who are the other group most affected by camping bans. Yet the protest

indicated that some Aboriginal people who have particular cultural needs and indigenous rights are disadvantaged by the treatment of all people in a supposedly similar fashion.

In an analysis of a similar case, Cowlshaw (1997a:178) states:

These notions of equality, meaning sameness, operate to block any consideration of how difference can be accommodated in a liberal democratic society. That is, both establishment and popular egalitarian discourse silence the kind of dissent that is embedded in cultural differences.¹⁹²

6.9 How notions of equality discriminate against fringe dwellers

Morris (1997:168) argues that the removal of discriminatory legislation to give Aboriginal Australians citizenship rights has not abolished racism (see also Kapferer 1995). When everyone is theoretically born equal in the secular state, 'the individual is made "the measure of all things"' and birth, class, race, religion or other grouping has no currency (p.168). As the NT Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment was later to say: 'Lee Point is publicly owned land. If you were to go there, dare I say it, as a white person, and camp on public land, you'd be asked to move. Why can't the same laws be applied to Aboriginal people?' (ABCTV News, April 24, 1997). Ironically, unable to achieve the land rights which have caused popular sentiment to claim that Aborigines receive 'special treatment', at Lee Point in 1996/7 the fringe dwellers appealed to recognised universal rights to shelter and water to make their demands, albeit as a group with particular cultural needs.

Merlan (1994:17) discusses 'entitlement' and 'needs', while warning against 'the predictable poles of a policy opposition'. The current concept of 'needs' is associated with deficiency, whereas 'entitlements', or 'rights', has a stronger association with justice (p.17). Merlan (p.17) concludes:

If present needs derive from abridged rights, that is from previous injustice and dispossession, then any rights-linked conception of justice which formally concedes that abridgement will eventually be bound to do something about it.

However, the above reply from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment suggests that any move towards a wider interpretation of needs by the government is unlikely in Darwin.

Cowlshaw (1997a:178) shows how racism flourishes as a 'hidden discourse' behind the assertion of equality within institutions that are based on the

assumption of 'a cultural homogeneity in the nation'. As Cowlshaw (1997a:180) points out, claims of equal rights can disguise the legitimisation of privilege. In the Lee Point case, the 'commonsense' natural right of 'everybody' as equals in matters of access to land in Darwin disguises the dispossession of Aboriginal people. The overlaying liberal anti-racist discourse that normalises the privileges of the White settlers ensures 'a double victimisation' of the already socially and economically disadvantaged Aboriginal residents of 'settled Australia' (Cowlshaw 1997a:180). That is, Aboriginal communal living and homelessness become signs of 'deviance' that cause 'the Aboriginal problem' in settled Australia (see Morris 1997:172). The government refusal to consider the claims of fringe dwellers, under the guise of equal treatment for all, denies the racial nature of these policies.

My fieldwork suggests that the Lee Point fringe dwellers had been unable to achieve culturally appropriate accommodation through institutions founded after 1972 to recognise Aboriginal difference, as I discuss in Chapter Seven. In Darwin, these organisations claim a conflict of interest when asked to represent fringe dwellers' claims, or cannot support groups who have no land title. However, Chapter Eight discusses how the fringe dwellers are able to connect with oppositional groups of non-Aborigines in their struggle for the right to live within the town as a group. These allied groups also contest the ideology behind the 'commonsense' definition of equality in citizenship.¹⁹³

6.10 The death of Bob Bunduwabi

On January 22, five days after the extension of the stay of eviction, and before the ADC could make a decision on his complaint, Bob died after being returned to the Darwin hospital from his camp. He had endured two months of arduous monsoon weather under his inadequate tarpaulin, under the stress of government determination to have him moved from Lee Point over the Christmas-New Year holiday period, which had made coordination of his defence difficult. By this time I was visiting friends in Singapore and Malaysia, but a journalist from the *NT News* notified my contact in Singapore, who passed the sad news on to my Kuala Lumpur hosts. That night, when I visited the annual Hindu festival of Thaipusam at the sacred Batu Caves, I stood amongst worshippers, pilgrims and chanting priests in the huge and crowded Temple Cave as clouds of incense rose to a gap in the high roof above. Through the swirling smoke the moon was visible in the dark sky overhead. Although I was in a distant land, in this intensely spiritual atmosphere, reminiscent of Aboriginal ceremony, my sorrow was eased by a sense of the presence of my friend's indomitable spirit.

In an example of fringe dweller resistance, Bob's family approved the use of

his name in the continuing campaign for fringe dwellers' rights. However, after his death, amongst themselves, they use only his subsection category of 'Gojok'. Family amongst the 100 who attended the mortuary rites spoke of Gojok as a 'fighter [who] fought for the rights of Aboriginal people (*NT News* January 24, 1997). In the same article, another of Gojok's family was quoted: 'He was a kind man and fought to have Lee Point available for Aboriginal people, but no one understood what he wanted'. I later commented: 'If ever there was a martyr, it's got to be him' (*NT New* February 11, 1997).

Darwin fringe dwellers from Arnhem Land organised a ceremony at Gojok's camp attended mostly by homeless Aboriginal campers, where his possessions were burnt the day after his death (Plate 2).¹⁹⁴ The same *NT News* journalist who notified me of the death later told me that he had received a telephone call from Gojok's relatives, asking the media to hurry out to Lee Point as the ceremony was about to begin. In an interview following the ceremony that was shown on ABCTV News (January 23, 1997), Gojok's nephew said:

He find us a safe place to use the grog away from the town, away from the accident... This man died because he suffered. He suffered by government pushing him away. He's so scared but he's so brave to hold this place, he's so brave.

The ABC's Aboriginal journalist ended the news item with the comment: 'Gojok's brothers say they will continue the fight' (January 23, 1997). In Chapter Eight, I give an account of the later return to Lee Point, and Gojok's brother's involvement. The Aboriginal flag that flew over Fish Camp, where the evicted Lee Point campers had settled, displayed additional evidence of the continuing resistance. When the flag was replaced in mid-1997, a new Aboriginal flag on a bamboo pole became a symbol of the deceased. The people at Fish Camp expressed their grief as the new flag was raised and again when the flag was replaced in October 1998. In the latter emotional flag-raising ceremony, singers and dancers from several Darwin camps, wailing and painted as mourners, were led by Yolngu men singing Macassan chants as the bamboo pole was fixed in the ground with the flag attached to the top (Plate 14). White supporters were invited to participate and encouraged to make video recordings and take photographs (see *Simmering* 1998).

On my return to Perth, presuming the case would proceed, on February 5, before the deadline, I faxed the ADC a six-page reply to the letter from the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment. In my reply (Appendix 1), I questioned who was advantaged by the department's statement: 'How can

[Bob Bunduwabi] have been denied the single service of camping at Lee Point when such a facility is not available to anyone else? Did the categories 'anyone else', 'any person' and 'all people', referred to in the government response, discriminate against Aborigines? The Anti-Discrimination Act was created to ensure the rights of people who are disadvantaged in comparison to 'anyone else'. If all are treated alike there would be no need for wheelchair access to buildings or interpreter services in courts. And if the group was treated as 'anyone else', how was it that they had been left to live without water or services in the city?

The legalistic defence submitted by the government was a classical example of institutional racism under the guise of equality before the law. Cowlshaw (1988a:193) defines this as 'the informal ways that institutions reflect particular cultural practices and values, and disallow the expression of others'. Confining the case to one of trespass avoided the interconnectedness of government actions. In my reply and in this thesis, by tracing the connections between fringe dwellers and past and present actions I attempt to place Bob's situation into a wider perspective. However, the ADC did not consider my final replies to the NT Government and the DCC on behalf of the complainant. Following Gojok's death, the delegate for the ADC had decided to end my right to represent the complaint. 'As a matter of courtesy', in letter to me dated 12 February the ADC delegate also explained why he had decided to dismiss the complaint:

On 14 January 1997, I authorised you to act for the deceased complainant (a person who, for reasons of Aboriginal custom, cannot be named) in this matter, under Section 62 of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*.¹⁹⁵ I authorised you to act for him in view of his non-English speaking background and his impairment. As you are no longer able to receive instructions from him, your authority under Section 62 is hereby revoked.

Given your past involvement and assistance in this matter, as a matter of courtesy I write to you to advise that I have decided to dismiss the complaint of discrimination on the basis of race and impairment.

The complainant was a person suffering from Hansen's disease and had been a camper in the Darwin area for many years. He alleged that he had been granted permission to camp at Lee Point. He claimed that the actions of the NT Government and Darwin City Council, in evicting him and failing to supply essential services, amounted to discrimination on the basis of race and impairment.

The complainant sought permanent access to the land at Lee Point.

The complaint was not brought in a representative capacity, as the Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 does not allow for representative actions. The complainant was therefore, in a legal sense, only acting for himself.

The complainant has now died, and the issue for decision is whether the complaint survives the death of the complainant.

The ADC delegate referred to Stephenson's Case, a decision of the Full Court of the Federal Court that found that a hearing could continue where the correction of discrimination is 'independent of the identity of the particular complainant or her continued life at the time of the determination'. I considered Gojok's case might create a precedent for all Aboriginal homeless people. However, that was not to be so, because the delegate ended his letter by dismissing the complaint under Section 102(a) of the Act as 'frivolous in the sense that it is "manifestly futile"'. The delegate wrote:

I accept that there may be cases where a complaint will survive the death of the complainant. The difficulty that I have is that the complainant's situation in this case was a very unusual one. He had been resident in and around Darwin for many years. He suffered from a serious disease. The remedy he was seeking was access to land.

In all the circumstances, a further consideration of the complaint appears to be futile, as, even if the complaint were to be successful (and there would be considerable practical difficulties, given the absence of any documentation proving, for example, the complainant's occupation of the Lee Point land and the conversations surrounding his being allowed to stay there) I cannot see what practical order the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner could now make at the conclusion of any Hearing. The objects of the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* are not advanced by continuing with proceedings which have their own particular and unusual facts (unlike those in *Stephenson's Case*) and which can only have one outcome.

I am therefore dismissing the complaint under Section 102 (a) of the Act, namely that it is frivolous. It is frivolous in the sense that it is 'manifestly futile'.¹⁹⁶

Bob's campaign was doubly muted by becoming nameless, as is the usual

custom amongst Burarra people after death, and by the summary withdrawal of my authority to represent his case. However, when a sincere White female student from the NT University guild reprimanded me for using Bob's name in an article I submitted to the student paper discussing the ADC decision, Dulcie, his niece at Fish Camp, told me emphatically, 'Tell her to speak to me'.¹⁹⁷

By dismissing the complaint, the ADC required the fringe dwellers to begin the lengthy process of a new complaint, with a new complainant. As I stated, 'There is a continuing succession of people willing to come forward as complainants in Mr Bunduwabi's place but to do so would be like presenting them as targets at a shooting gallery to be shot down one by one' (Day 1997c, 1997d). Meanwhile, the health of the fringe dwellers continued to be at risk in the same conditions, under the same regime contested by the deceased.

By his qualification, 'in a legal sense', the Delegate of the ADC appeared to recognise the representative nature of Gojok's complaint. In my final defence of Gojok's case, I argued that the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* is itself discriminatory because it favours a Western individualism. In Aboriginal society centred on kinship, complaints are more likely to be of 'the failure to supply a particular need *as a group*' (Day 1997c). The ADC further disadvantaged Aborigines by giving more value to documented evidence than the oral record. My media release (Day 1997c) also criticised the requirement for documentation for a people already written out of the landscape in settled Darwin. This requirement disadvantaged people whose land use in Darwin has previously largely been orally recorded.¹⁹⁸

Within five months, a follow-up complaint to the ADC, on similar grounds to the one I have described, was lodged by Gojok's niece at Fish Camp and accepted by the ADC.¹⁹⁹ Activated once more, but again on behalf of an individual, the process continued for almost a year, as related below. Meanwhile there were a series of protests by homeless fringe dwellers in Darwin.

6.11 The combined fringe camp protest at Parliament House

Early in my fieldwork, in 1996, George and Gojok at Fish Camp wanted to introduce me to others who had lived at Lee Point before the July evictions. We hired a vehicle and drove to camping places known as Waratah Oval, Spot On Marine, Nightcliff shops, Seabreeze, Marrara, Free Beach, 'Daisy Yarmirr back way',²⁰⁰ Tiwi shops, Palmerston, Pipeline and the deserted Lee Point. Most of these sites were dominated by Burarra-speakers. Only the Palmerston and Spot On Marine camps with roughly constructed shelters and cooking fires had an appearance of permanency. The people sleeping at

the other sites complained of their mattresses and gear being confiscated by council inspectors and regular infringement notices being served, which they ignored.

In late February and early March 1997 we returned to the main camps to gather signatures on a letter I had written to the NT Government and copied, asking for an officially recognised town camp for people from central Arnhem Land to replace the Lee Point site. Very few of the Aboriginal fringe dwellers refused to sign and most were keen for further action. The letters were signed by twelve people from Waratah Oval, seventeen from Fish Camp, ten from 'Daisy Yarmirr back way', twenty from Palmerston and two pensioners living at Knuckeyes Lagoon who had also been evicted from Lee Point. Meanwhile, the people at the Knuckeyes Lagoon town camp also gathered signatures on a separate petition calling for ownership of the town camp lease that had been set-aside for them in 1979. The Arnhem Land campers' letters stated:

We are people from central Arnhem Land who have lived in Darwin for a long time. For eight months we have been camping under tarpaulins in the bush at [FishCamp/Palmerston/Minmarama/DaisyYarmirrHostel/Palmerston/Waratah Oval]. There is no water supply or sewerage where we are. Men from the NT Government told us to move from our camp in the bush near the Lee Point park last July. Some of us had lived there for at least four years without any trouble.

At Lee Point there were many people from central Arnhem Land who are relations of ours. Those people are now camped all around Darwin [as above]. None of them have houses, toilets or showers. They live under tarpaulins like us.

We are asking your government to make a good place where we can camp where there are toilets, showers and laundry. There is a lot of bushland between Casuarina, Lee Point and Buffalo Creek where we could make a town camp for our people. We would like to have a meeting between the government and our people about this idea.

Having gathered over sixty signatures of 'itinerants', mostly from one language group, and with the support of at least one town camp community, preparations were made for a joint presentation of the letters at Parliament House. This idea also received overwhelming support during my further visits to the camps. Leaders at each site vowed to ensure a strong attendance.

Five Aboriginal members of the Maningrida Progress Association (MPA) were in town to protest at the dismissal of the elected committee at a special general meeting in the township (see Day 1997b). The five men were anxious to direct the fringe campers' protest towards alleged interference in Maningrida affairs by a powerful group of entrenched White employees. However, the fringe dwellers appeared to show little interest in the grievances of their MPA countrymen. Despite carrying a few signs drawing attention to Maningrida politics, the Burarra fringe dwellers made it clear by their chants that they were determined to make a point about specifically Darwin issues.

On March 17, 'minibuses' (taxi-buses) left from the camps, collecting others from Aboriginal-rented homes in the suburbs for the meeting point in Civic Square, Darwin. A White supporter of the five Maningrida council members paid the fares and booked the vehicles, but the leaders at each camp organised the passengers. As I have stated in my discussion on fringe dweller resistance, organised protest needed outside support - my point is that the fringe dwellers were prepared to confront the authorities in open protest. As we drove into the city centre, the taxi radios assured the Fish Camp group that a respectable crowd was heading into town. Once at the assembly point, a tarpaulin was stretched over a rope strung between two trees to represent the housing of most of the protesters. Television cameras moved amongst the crowd of over sixty Aboriginal protesters as they began a public meeting. Speeches were made in Burarra and in English by Dulcie Malimara, Johnny Balaiya and two other campers before a decision was made to march across to the imposing Parliament House building in Mitchell Street nearby (Plate 8).

While the television report of an 'angry mob' may have been an exaggeration (Channel 8 News, March 17, 1997), when the people found the glass doors locked and guarded they hotly demanded entry to present their signed letters and the Knuckeys Lagoon petition. In a humorous and spontaneous gesture, protesters pressed the end of their didgeridoo, accompanied by clap sticks and singing, to the intercom beside the locked door. They thus ensured an Aboriginal message penetrated the building. I interpret this action, which was highlighted on all television news bulletins, firstly as symbolic of the failed articulation between homeless Aborigines and the government, secondly of the role of music in articulation between societies and thirdly as confirmation that fringe dweller resistance is also an attempt at engagement, 'reaching across difference', or 'merging'.

After continued shouted demands for entry by the protesters on the steps, the police permitted three Aboriginal representatives to enter Parliament

House to deliver the letters and petitions. Although it was said that the relevant minister was in Katherine, all the Aboriginal protesters were convinced that he was hiding in his office behind the locked doors. After the noisy gathering at the top of the steps of Parliament House, several of the Aboriginal demonstrators were interviewed by Kath McKenzie, the ABC radio journalist for the 'Drivetime' program. Susan asked where the people slept. An anonymous man replied:

Everywhere. In the grass, at the shops, Tiwi shops. When it rains we go and stay at the shops or at the school or in the toilets, public toilets, that's where we stay during the rain. We need a really good, decent house with shower and toilet facilities.

Kath: Some people say only Larrakia people should be staying in Darwin.

Protester: [pause] Ah well, I can't agree with that. I reckon all Aboriginal people we been living in Australia all our lives - we should have a place to live for ourselves like Lee Point or Fish Camp there.

Kath: Lots of white people say why don't you buy a house?

Protester: Housing Commission wouldn't let [us], that's why we stay in the bush, in the scrub.

Despite wide coverage in radio, television and newspaper both in the NT and interstate, there was no noticeable reaction by the government.²⁰¹

On 21 April 1997 the NT Minister for Aboriginal Development sent an identical reply to each group that had signed the letters. He claimed that people who 'camp illegally' around Darwin already have 'substantial areas in their traditional country'. He also claimed that the Larrakia Native Title Claim restricts the NT Government; however, he offered some hope to applicants for land by 'the established process'. The responses stated in full:

I refer to your recent letter signed by yourself and others regarding provision of additional land and services in the Casuarina Coastal Reserve area for people currently camping illegally in various locales around Darwin and Palmerston.

There are a range of Government assisted, private and commercial accommodation options already available that can be accessed by all people resident in the Darwin area. These include housing managed by the Northern Territory Housing Commission, private rental accommodation, existing caravan and camping parks and hostels including those managed by Aboriginal Hostels Limited. Support, including access to land, has over the years been provided to various

organisations in the Darwin area to assist with accommodation for short and medium term visitors to Darwin who have come from outlying areas.

These facilities were also intended to be used as temporary, transitional accommodation for people who intend to stay longer. They were largely intended to provide a stopgap until more permanent housing could be arranged.

Community groups like the Aboriginal Development Foundation have been very successful in providing a basic level of amenity to the residents of their facilities [town camps] and Government has provided land, funding and other support for these services. Unfortunately much of this type of accommodation has become fully utilised by people choosing to remain for the long term.

It is not Government's role to freely provide further land for people who choose to camp illegally around Darwin, particularly given the rights and access most have to substantial areas in their traditional country.

Administration of requests to Government for land for any purpose is the responsibility of the Department of Lands Planning and Environment, and there is an established process in place for consideration of applications. I have forwarded your letter to my colleague the Minister for Lands Planning and Environment for his information.

You should be aware that the area which your letter suggests as being suitable for the establishment of a serviced camping ground is currently the subject of a Native Title Claim lodged by the Larrakia people and, as a consequence, the Northern Territory Government's ability to deal with that land is now somewhat inhibited.

6.12 The return to Parliament House

On 24 April, 1997 two barefooted and shirtless pensioners from Fish Camp with red dust rubbed over their hair and skin, shakily climbed the steps of Parliament House before a cluster of waiting television cameras. Without any apparent fear, the two elderly Burarra men then tipped bags of the rust-coloured Fish Camp soil over the steps and sat cross-legged in the dust holding signs: 'Are we just rubbish?' They explained into the microphones thrust at them that they lived in this same dust at Fish Camp, without water for washing. While parliament continued inside, the two men sat

determinedly until the Leader of the Opposition and two Aboriginal members of her shadow cabinet emerged to speak to them. The Labor leader was seen on television that night saying: 'It's quite a shocking contrast isn't it, these two old gentlemen, obviously in ill health, sitting in front of the splendour of Parliament House' (ABCTV News, April 24, 1997). Showing how the media acts to elicit a response from government, although an unsympathetic one, ABCTV also showed the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment saying: 'The fact is they've gone to Fish Camp knowing that there were no services available and they were happy with that at the time'.

It was my suggestion that the two men express themselves in this way. I warned them that their protest might result in police action, but this did not deter them. It was not clear if the men were aware of the 'symbolic power' which Kapferer (1995:77) claims was held by a drunken Aboriginal woman at a town meeting in Queensland. At the meeting, her drunkenness was the 'embodiment of the Aboriginal as victim' and confronted Whites with the 'full force of their guilt' (p.77). Although the signs, using a sentiment often expressed in the camp, appeared to conform to this image, there was little indication of it as Tommy spoke enthusiastically into the tape recorder as we made plans at the camp the night before:²⁰²

Tommy: I will, I will - I'm coming tomorrow - dirty clothes, no shirt, just like an animal, buffalo or whatever, I just coming tomorrow.

Bill: Because you got no water to wash...

Tommy: I haven't got no water, I haven't got no anything. No toilet, no whatever. But I just coming meeting. I'm gonna say about something.

Bill: What do you reckon about throwing that dust?

Tommy: Yes, I can do. But I gonna throw dust to maybe [inaudible], maybe nothing. That's my problem what I'm gonna say and what I'm gonna say me... that dust I'm gonna take that dust tomorrow. I'm gonna throw there. And they're gonna tell me, my brother and me - I'm not interested to my brother [the other man] and you [Bill] - only by me I can say that's because I live in the grass and I live, no blanket whatever, and just sleep in the bushes and dust. Dust my friend.

I would not have been surprised if the men had reconsidered the plan as we travelled to the city together by public bus, carrying the bags of red soil. I wondered at their courage as the two men rubbed some of the dusty soil onto their bare upper bodies and grey hair in a park near Parliament House. There was little for me to do but to inform the unsuspecting media of the event. The fact that assistance from outside enabled this protest to take place

is not an issue in my argument. The point is, the two fringe dwellers displayed a high degree of political awareness and an unusual lack of 'shame' in their willingness to confront the media, police and politicians at Parliament House. However, I do not believe that their lack of fear could be attributed to the licence that may be promoted in larger gatherings (see Scott 1990:65) like the August 3 protest described below.

In the media stories on two channels and on ABC radio that day the two men were given names, rather than being anonymous 'itinerants'. Brief interviews with Tommy accompanied the three reports. The *NT News* did not cover the event, as the editor told me on the telephone that he was not interested in 'a two-man' protest. Another journalist who wrote for a national newspaper told me the action by the Fish Camp men was a 'parochial' story only. These journalists' attitudes were interesting, in that meaningful Aboriginal protest is seen to come from either large organisations or large groups of demonstrators. Individual or minor acts of resistance by the powerless can easily be missed, which is a point I have attempted to make in this thesis. That is, everyday acts of resistance, and sometimes more 'transitive' actions may be viewed as 'anti-social' or 'criminal' by the public or the media, but are rarely recognised as resistance.

6.13 Another Anti-Discrimination Commission complaint

When no changes were forthcoming, Dulcie Malimara, Gojok's niece living at Fish Camp, lodged a complaint against the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. Dulcie lodged the complaint as an individual, to satisfy the legislation. As in Gojok's case, the complaint would presumably lapse if Dulcie could not complete the process. The requirement to act as an individual also caused friction in the camp, which Dulcie attributed to 'jealousy'. Dulcie's husband was suspicious of my consultations with her to check drafts and send and deliver mail to and from the ADC. Ongoing domestic arguments worsened when he was photographed in his role as a renown Aboriginal 'singer man', beside the Darwin Chief Magistrate at a Darwin Festival dinner (*NT News* September 9, 1997). He claimed that his familiarity with the Chief Magistrate was evidence of his greater importance. It appeared that the requirement for individual complaints under the Anti-Discrimination Act had contributed to the increased tension in the fringe camp community, at least between Dulcie and her husband.

On September 3, Dulcie was informed by mail that the complaint of discrimination on the grounds of race, which I had helped her draft, had been accepted. In the letter she was asked 'to read the [draft copy of the complaint] carefully to make sure that it is an accurate account of your allegations', before the ADC delivered the final version to the Minister for

Lands, Planning and Environment. Although, unlike Gojok's complaint, I had no appointed status in the procedure, the letter was addressed to my post box and would not have been fully understood by Dulcie without an explanation. In the first six points of her complaint Dulcie alleged:

1. She is a traditional Aboriginal person from Maningrida.
2. She came to Darwin from Maningrida to live at the age of seventeen. Although she returns to Maningrida for family business and traditional ceremonies she regards Darwin as her home;
3. She has four children who were born and reside in Darwin. her grandchildren also live in Darwin;
4. Herself, her family and others had been living at Lee Point for approximately four years until they were evicted from the area in July 1996;
5. They moved to the Kulaluk community until they were asked by members of the community to move to the area known as Fish Camp. As there were no basic amenities such as water or sewage at Fish Camp herself and other campers requested that a town camp be established at Lee Point.
6. As Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment you have refused to consider her needs and those of others because of their race. She believes statements made by you on Northern Territory television reflect your position on this matter. You stated on Channel Eight news on April 24 1997,²⁰³ in response to complaints about Fish Camp: 'Their home is in fact at Maningrida as I understand and that is their traditional land'.
7. You also stated on the ABC program 'Stateline' on 23 May 1997:²⁰⁴

Well could you tell me what we should do? I mean, these people have their own homelands. Ah, we've heard so much over the last two decades that if people are given their land back and they've got full control over their land then they will have self-esteem and be able to accept ah, on behalf of themselves their responsibility. These people have their own homelands. They have never been taken off them in fact, being Arnhemlanders, yet we still have this circumstance where the taxpayer is expected to run after people the moment that they

have some demand on the community.

On 19 November 1997 the Minister mailed a ten-point response to the ADC. He stated:

1. I have never met Ms Malimara.
2. I have no knowledge of the matters stated in paragraphs 1 - 5 of your letter of 19 September.
3. Prior to 15 September 1997 I was Minister responsible for the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment and ceased to be responsible for that Department thereafter.
4. I categorically deny that I 'refused to consider [Ms Malimara's] needs and those of others because of their race' as alleged, or at all.
5. I note that you have me as having made certain statements to the media on 24 April 1997 and 23 May 1997. I cannot recall all that was asked, or said by me in reply, on those occasions and would be grateful if you would provide me with the full tapes of those interviews, which I assume you have, so that I may see the full context in which the statements are alleged to have been made.
6. In any event, I deny that my statements evidence any intention to discriminate, and state that at no time did I intend to discriminate against any person by reason of race.
7. As you know, there are a number of political issues associated with campers at Lee Point, and to my recollection my comments were of a political nature and in response to questions by the media.
8. I know of no application by Ms Malimara or any other person to the Department for permission to camp at Lee Point, and am quite certain that there was no application on foot at the time I was interviewed. Had an application been made, the Department would have processed it in the normal way and I do not expect that I would have had any involvement. I would not have interfered with that process, or given any directions as to an outcome, and certainly would not have sought to have the Department discriminate against any person on the basis of race. I did not have any discussions with any person in the Department about how to respond to an application (if filed), and at no time did I intend to do so.
9. As at 15 September 1997, when I ceased to be Minister responsible for the Department, I do not believe an application had been made by Ms Malimara or anyone else for permission to camp at Lee Point.
10. I cannot comment upon the alleged beliefs of Ms Malimara as to my intentions, or upon her alleged stress, mental anguish,

emotional abuse or hardship, except to say that my comments were not intended to cause distress to Ms Malimara.

I trust that the foregoing clarifies the matter and will enable you to determine the complaint.

If this matter is to be taken further, I would be grateful if you would allow me to be represented by the Solicitor for the Northern Territory as I am no longer responsible for the relevant Department, am often interstate on government business and unfamiliar with the details of this matter and the legal issues which may arise under your legislation.²⁰⁵

Consulting with the people involved, then drafting and typing replies had become a large part of my fieldwork. This attention to Dulcie may have aroused the jealousy of her Djinang husband who often disputed with her as to who was the leader at Fish Camp. The residents advised me to ignore him when he drunkenly demanded I leave the camp in his almost nightly outbursts against me. He usually apologised to me the next day and claimed he had no memory of what was said. However, for a period it made living at Fish Camp unpleasant. My fear was that the aggravation could escalate if the husband's kin from outside the camp took his side. However, despite the verbal abuse from this man, I remained welcome in the camp and the complaint procedure continued. Four years later, Dulcie's husband and I remain on friendly terms.

In a reply to the Minister that I wrote and Dulcie signed, it was pointed out that the Minister had inferred a knowledge of her situation in his public statements and in a letter that stated, 'you have chosen to live at this location' (Fish Camp). Dulcie's reply continued:

Mike Reed replied to an application by Ms Malimara and others: 'There are a number of areas specifically set aside for town camps in the Darwin and Palmerston region and there are large vacant areas within these sites' (23/7/97). This reply infers that because Ms Malimara is an Aboriginal person she should move to areas set aside for **Aborigines**. However, she considers these are areas set-aside for other **language groups** and she would not feel comfortable living there.

Ms Malimara has never received a written response from the department of Lands Planning and Environment or any visit from representatives of the department or Minister despite the written

requests for a resolution signed by herself and others. The Minister's public statements suggest that Ms Malimara as an Aboriginal person has a home elsewhere and for that reason her requests would not be considered.²⁰⁶

The ADC called for copies of correspondence between the Minister and Fish Camp that fortunately I had retained. No legal representation had been forthcoming for the fringe dwellers in their negotiations with the ADC. After satisfying every requirement of the complaint process, by January 1998 the offer was made to settle in a mutually acceptable outcome as is done in the majority of cases, or wait for a *prima facie* decision by the ADC on the evidence before it.²⁰⁷

Ranged against the resources of the state, it would be difficult for an unrepresented Aboriginal camper to gain the provision of communal living facilities, using an Act that made no allowance for group complaints. As Dulcie's complaint had now spanned six months and I was about to leave Darwin, I advised her to opt for settlement terms that we sent to the Minister via the ADC. The Minister then agreed, in part, to:

facilitate talks between Ms Malimara and others and relevant Government officials with the aim of resolving the application for a town camp or appropriate living facilities for Ms Malimara and her group. As you know, I am no longer the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment. However, I am happy to report the circumstances to the current Minister and urge him to meet with Ms Malimara to explore all possible avenues to resolve the problem of accommodation in Darwin for Ms Malimara and her group.²⁰⁸

As I describe below, with the continuing help of their White friends, the Fish Camp group, in allegiance with other Burarra fringe dwellers around Darwin, remains hopeful that an area of land will be set aside for community housing for people from central Arnhem Land (see Appendix II).

6.14 The NT Health Department, a TB outbreak and fringe dwellers

There were no more formal protests by the homeless during my fieldwork in Darwin; however, interaction with the Territory Health Services provided both an example of everyday resistance and a demonstration of the practical application of my work. In January 1998, activity between fieldworkers from the Health Services and members of Fish Camp attracted my attention. I learnt from my interlocutors that a man who had lived in the camp for several months had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. At least two other regular Fish Camp visitors amongst the homeless Burarra people of Darwin

were being treated for the disease at the Darwin hospital.

Despite the *NT News* (January 14, 1998) front-page headline, 'Deadly disease tests in Darwin' followed by the paragraph, 'Health officials are rounding up hundreds of Darwin itinerants to test them for the killer disease tuberculosis', there did not seem to be any knowledge of the previous movements of the TB patients or a concerted effort to trace their contacts. My record of residents and visitors to Fish Camp (see Figure 3) was not requested. I was never officially warned that three TB cases were found in the camps, although I had been living at or visiting Fish Camp for over a year.

I joined a bus that came to Fish Camp with a few people from Spot On Marine camp, named after the commercial business nearby (see Map 3). Other buses that were to take all homeless Aboriginal people to the hospital for blood tests and x-rays drove away empty when the campers hid. The campers did not want to spend hours waiting at the hospital. Tuberculosis patients also have to spend months in the air-conditioned hospital's infectious diseases wards. The disappearance of most people when the buses arrived in the camps can be interpreted as an act of everyday resistance to the procedures within the Health Services.

The TB outbreak caused a belated though temporary public concern for conditions in the fringe camps. However, due to the constant movement between camps, Aboriginal land and institutions such as the prison, there was no effective way to trace contacts. According to the Director of AIMSS, many people brought into the sobering-up shelter 'had symptoms consistent with TB infection' (*NT News* January 14, 1998). Because of the nature of the centre's work, the staff at the shelter said that knew 'where to look for long-grassers'.

The Health Services Disease Control Unit claimed that the mass screening was a precaution after a single recent case of TB amongst the homeless, although they admitted that there were thirty-six cases in the past year, making the Territory rate four times the national rate (*NT News* January 14, 1998). Judging by the prevalence of TB amongst the Burarra, the rate in central Arnhem Land is higher again (see Burns 1995).²⁰⁹ The mobility of the people from central Arnhem Land and the conditions in which they live around Darwin could also be a factor in the spread of the disease.²¹⁰

6.15 The struggle continues

In the *NT News* on February 12, 1999, the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner

criticised the Mayor of Darwin after he again urged that homeless Aborigines and 'white trash' be driven from the city streets (*NT News* February 11, 1999). The commissioner urged that the mayor use his influence to help set up appropriate accommodation, including serviced camping areas for remote area Aborigines in Darwin (*NT News* February 12, 1999). However, in reply to my letter supporting the statement by the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner (*NT News* April 20, 1999), the mayor claimed that he had received 'no contact from the Anti-Discrimination Commission relating to providing camping areas for remote area Aboriginal Territorians' (*NT News* April 29, 1999). Meanwhile, the Darwin City Council continued to fine homeless 'long grass' people for sleeping in a public place. In a report on the jailing of homeless Aborigines in Darwin for not paying these fines, the journalist Paul Toohey claimed: 'But after five years of by-law 103, it is clear the fines neither raise revenue nor deter people from returning to their camps' (*Australian* April 29, 1999).

The North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (NAALAS) wrote a letter of support to the commissioner:

I would like to commend you on your swift response to [the mayor's] recent comments concerning itinerant people in Darwin. Stable and decent housing is a cornerstone of public welfare. Many social problems might be met at minimal public cost if serviced and secure camping areas were available in Darwin.

Your office would be familiar with the case of Ms Dulcie Malimara, who in late 1997 or early 1998 lodged a complaint under the Anti-Discrimination Act, regarding comments [the] Deputy Chief Minister had made regarding itinerant Aboriginal people in Darwin.

Ms Malimara and her fellow residents of 'Fish Camp' have just applied for project funding under the Commonwealth Community Housing Scheme ... Ms Malimara's experiences suggest a case can be made for the proposition that NT housing policy has the practical effect of discriminating against Aboriginal people from remote communities, by failing to provide 'culturally appropriate housing'...²¹¹

The government reply to the application for funding offered some hope in future budgets.²¹² Meanwhile World Vision had prepared a detailed four-page report on the situation at Fish Camp (Darby and Wenitong 1998; see Appendix III). A covering letter commented: 'Our involvement with the Fish Camp Community has shown us the determination of this group of people,

as well as the crucial need for adequate housing'.²¹³ In April the introduction to an 'update' on the 'Fish Camp Housing Project', issued by the Darwin Area Housing Association (DAHA 1999) stated:

It's been nearly a year since the people at Fish Camp became members of [DAHA]. In this time we have achieved a submission of an application to the NT Department of Housing and Local Government for the construction of three houses consisting of four bedrooms each. Much work has been done by DAHA members in the form of background information of members housing history and appropriate housing needs for this particular group of people. We have received many support letters, also kind support from NAALAS, Council for the Aging and World Vision Indigenous Programs'.²¹⁴

The same month a NAALAS solicitor wrote to the government, listing twelve possible areas of vacant Crown land in Darwin suitable for the housing project. He explained: 'The project calls for an area of land with a minimum size equivalent to four suburban house blocks, to house a minimum of about 20 people. On 5 April the Project Coordinator and I went with Fish Camp residents to look at possible sites, after identifying them from maps we viewed at Land Information Office'.²¹⁵

Later that year it was announced that the DAHA 'Fish Camp Project', was the national winner of the National Bank's Community Service Award section of the 'National CommunityLink Awards' for non-profit groups (*NT News* October 16, 1999; *Community Link* December 1999, p.31). Although the project no longer had 'Fish Camp' in the title, until August 2001 the corporate community which used to be known as Fish Camp continued to pursue Gojok's dream of home from their other hidden camps and the state house which had been obtained for the pensioners from Fish Camp.

6.16 Another Parliament House protest, August 3rd, 2001

By the year 2000, after continued representations, Dulcie and George and several pensioners from Fish Camp had moved into an NT Housing Commission home in the northern suburbs, while others prefer to camp on vacant land near the airport and visit the house. Although there had been no direct result from Dulcie's complaint to the ADC, her extended family group had used a more reconciliatory approach to gain access to state resources. However, when I returned to Darwin in July 2001, they were under threat of eviction after persistent complaints from neighbours and in September 2001 the group was evicted.

Others I knew at Fish Camp and at Lee Point were camping in thick bush

and mangroves between the suburb of Tiwi and the Casuarina Beach Conservation Reserve, in an area known amongst the campers as 'Daisy Yarmirr back way', after the Aboriginal Hostel nearby. Burarra people were also living on the edge of mangroves behind Alawa sports fields near the NT University. Other predominantly Burarra camps I visited were located near Leanyer Lake, in bush near the suburb of Karama and near Palmerston. I also observed that campers had built shelters in hidden locations near Railway Dam and at Lee Point.

Since my fieldwork between 1996 and 1998, an Aboriginal Night Patrol had been established which had largely substituted for the police in the task of removing intoxicated 'itinerants' to the Coconut Grove sobering up centre. For the campers, the yellow canopies of the night patrol vans distinguished the 'yellow tops' from the police 'blue tops'. Complaints were loud and frequent against the actions of the night patrol uniformed officers when I visited the above camps in July. Homeless Aborigines claimed that the night patrol officers, who were urban and Islander people unrelated to the majority of the campers, were chasing people into the bush, making them stand on one leg to test their sobriety and coercing people into the van 'for no reason'.²¹⁶ Particularly the elderly, the lame and women complained that, after being kept for six hours in the sobering up facility, they had to walk back to their camps, where they may find their possessions removed by Darwin City Council or Conservation Commission employees. I observed where city council officers had stapled a notice to a tree informing the owners that their swags, bedding, bags or other gear had been impounded under By Law 100 which prohibits 'stacking and storing goods in a public place'. A survey amongst homeless Aboriginal people in February (AERC 2001) found similar concerns, confirmed in a media release later in 2001:

Jinang mob from Lee Point have also been harassed for

living in the longgrass:

We moved here, Lee Point, and the Conservation mob they told us, 'You people not allowed to camp here. Pack your bags and go, it's against the law, go somewhere else.'

They told us, 'we might burn all the tents and clothes for you if you don't go', they said, 'if you mob stay here, you have to pay

\$25 each for the fine.'

If we leave this stuff and nobody here, they will come and burn it. When we come back - all ashes. So three or four of us stay here and look after camp.

Night Patrol and police grab people, City Council giving us the fine every minute and stealing our bags and ranger Conservation mob they think they're policeman now. Every time they say go somewhere else they don't give up the reason. They say there's not enough room here at Lee Point, but there's a big mob of room here. They should be shame of themselves when they hear this story, treating us like a dog, making us sleep everywhere...

Longgrass people are going to prison for unpaid fines. If the NT Government is serious about addressing the high rate of imprisonment of Aboriginal people in the NT, longgrass people must be allowed to camp and live in peace. 'The government are only interested in using the homeless people as a political football, and they will continue to do so,' June Mills, spokesperson for the Darwin Longgrass Association said. 'They are not interested in solving the problems.'²¹⁷

On several occasions in mid 2001, Darwin activists had organised protests against the new Public Order and Anti-Social Conduct Act targeting, 'by and large, Aboriginal itinerants' (Howse 2001:15).²¹⁸ When these activists called for a protest to coincide with the visit of a Senate committee to Darwin, I printed fliers to be distributed in the camps advising that 'Homeless people have rights' and should gather at Parliament House on August 3rd to express their grievances. I received an interested reception everywhere except inside the Bagot Community. As I have suggested, the 'illegal' camps are notable for their politicisation which contrasts with the relative conservatism of housed Aboriginal groups in Darwin. After visiting the camps I was asked by the organisers if any Aboriginal campers would be prepared to address the rally on the day. I replied that almost everyone appeared to want to speak.

The NT University Guild supplied a free bus and driver to collect Aboriginal campers around the northern suburbs. A fund was provided by a community organisation to hire minibus taxis to go Bagot and to suburban camps at 'Spot On Marine', Palmerston, Knuckeyes Lagoon and Leanyer Lake.

I joined the university bus as it drove from camp to camp. Small Aboriginal flags hand-painted by a university activist were handed out and whenever the bus stopped the Aboriginal passengers improvised by attaching the flags to straight sticks which they gathered. No one on the bus, except myself, showed any nervousness at what might happen that morning. Scott (1990:65) notes the license that is promoted by 'autonomous gatherings' of 'normally disaggregated inferiors', in contrast with the tactical prudence of anonymity in everyday resistance (p.15. See also Scott 1985:xv, 1986:29, 1987:422, 1989:6). The 'exhilaration of declaring in face of power' (Scott 1990:66) was perceptible amongst the crowd on the bus and at the rally.

By 11.30 am the buses had arrived with a representative gathering. About sixty mostly Burarra Aboriginal campers and relatives had gathered in Civic Park ready to march to Parliament House where the protest organisers had assembled with others. No one came on the bus from the Bagot Community and very few housed Aboriginal people attended. Before the campers moved off from the park, I handed out placards which I had painted the day before and explained the plans for the protest, which included street theatre and speakers followed by a march to the Darwin City Council Building. Being a Friday of a pension week, many of the protesters had been drinking, but in my estimation none seemed overly affected. Later ABC radio and *NT News* reports commented that the protesters were rowdy and that some appeared to be drunk (*NT News* August 4, 2001, p.2; ABC Drivetime, August 3, 2001).²¹⁹

As we moved towards Parliament House, angry chanting began amongst the 100 people that the media estimated that joined the protest. As the White MC announced the prearranged speeches, emotional Aboriginal participants surged forward and grasped the microphone. The gathering of 'long grassers' that day had been planned by the MC, myself and others who were not homeless, but it was the Aboriginal participants who seized the moment and took possession of the protest from the activists. The invited speakers stood back watching as one after another of the homeless expressed their anger into the microphone. Despite the loss of control by the organisers, many who were there declared it to be 'the best protest in Darwin for years'.²²⁰ The singing of traditional songs by George, in the Djinang language, incited spontaneous Aboriginal dancing by protesters, surrounded by a thin ring of media representatives. The protesters then moved from outside Parliament House across the park to the Darwin City Council chambers where they noisily occupied the reception area of the council building for another twenty minutes and caused consternation amongst the council staff.

The Aboriginal speakers at the rally were accompanied by loud shouting, chanting and cheering that caused most White media representatives present

to later comment that they could not distinguish coherent statements. An Aboriginal community worker who was also present later commented:

I think it was great to give the itinerant people a voice, but I was aware that a number of them were intoxicated. I question the effectiveness of the rally and the methodology behind the itinerant involvement when some of the people were picked up intoxicated by buses sponsored by community agencies. Following are some of my concerns presented primarily in the form of questions:

1. It was very hard to hear what any of the speakers were saying while I was there because of the noise coming from the crowd. It appeared very chaotic and disorganised. Was it meant to be like this?
2. Does not the way the itinerant people were encourage [sic] to participate reinforce the very stereotype that the government is using to justify their draconian measures?
3. Has anyone been working with the itinerant people so they could understand and present their voice clearly and rationally in the debate?
4. Does the way they were encouraged to present themselves help them to present their true feelings and thoughts on government measures and policies?
5. Has there been any ongoing work and support with these people to debrief them from the action they took, build them up as community and keep them strong in the movement? I do not know who was directly responsible for the itinerants' involvement, but maybe you could pass on my concerns. Thank you.²²¹

The apparent uncoordinated nature of the protesters may have been because they had been left without representation, as I claim in Chapter Seven. Instead, Aboriginal homeless people in Darwin have been 'objectified as disordered', like the 'townies' described by Kapferer (1995:70) in his analysis of a town meeting. In contrast to the concerns above, for many observers on August 3 the protesters attempted to transform a negative 'erased identity' into a positive one (see Kapferer 1995:79). Kapferer describes noisy disruption by an Aboriginal woman that 'disconfirm[ed] the validity of those non-Aboriginal values that lay beneath the surface civility' (p.78). In another example of a community 'making their own experiences relevant' by acts of resistance (Vike 1997:213), Vike describes vulgar language, interruptions and

the rejection of hegemonic speech styles as 'counter strategies' to institutionalised political discourse (p.210). Similarly, Scott (1985:41) writes of the 'demystifying language of peasants' as a form of resistance.

Always in my experience, similar protests by an apparently disorganised section of the community cause surprise and accusations of outside manipulation. Fringe camps are not obviously 'political' sites. As Scott (1985:297, 1986:28, 1987:423) notes, there has been a 'Leninist' privileging of formal organised protest, typically the preserve of 'middle class intelligentsia' (Scott 1985:xv). Although the camps were without a formal representative organisation, actions like the August 3 protest were facilitated by informal networks similar to those noted by Scott (1989:23, 1990:151) in peasant societies. Amongst fringe dwellers, I have observed the efficiency which kinship and other traditional networks are used to organise for ceremony in the urban situation, sometimes at very short notice (see Section 5.2 and Section 6.10 of this thesis).

As I have discussed, and Scott (1989:6, 1990:151) notes, the lack of a formal organisation may be a tactical advantage in thwarting appropriation of subordinate groups (see also Duncan 1975:59). A Larrakia dissident, June Mills, had founded a 'Longgrass Association' whose banners first appeared at the 2001 National Aborigines Day rally (see Chapter Seven) and had issued media releases. However, as I discuss in Chapter Eight, most support for the Aboriginal campers between 1996 and 2001 came from White activists.

The above actions appear to be further evidence of how the everyday resistance of fringe camps can be politicised as open protest with intervention by outside activists. Scott (1987:419, 1989:4) suggests that because everyday resistance is not declared openly as 'politics' and is not seen as group action, as this is normally understood, it has not been considered as significant. However, 'insults and slights to human dignity [by practices of the dominant group] in turn foster a hidden transcript of indignation' (Scott 1990:7). This discourse is elaborated amongst a restricted public and hidden from others (p.14). In some circumstances, as I have related, 'the entire transcript may be spoken' (p.30).

Unlike the observer quoted above, others present were able to distinguish some of what was shouted openly at police and officials and into microphones during the protest, as is illustrated in the following anonymous fragments, transcribed from a video soundtrack in the newsletter *Kujuk* (September 2001). In further response to the above questioner, I suggest that the homeless Aborigines appropriated the August 3rd protest *despite*

attempts by outsider organisers to direct proceedings in a more controlled manner. Referring to incidents of open resistance, Scott (1989:30) notes that it is 'unlikely that we can account for the *content* of this action by reference to outside agitators'.²²² I maintain that the words and actions of the fringe dwellers on August 3, 2001 express the 'hidden transcripts' fostered in the camps:

'Doesn't matter what colour you are, black or white, we are all one family. Why government is treating us like we are animals? ... We are not animals, we are family. We not animals, not dogs, we not kangaroo, but we are family. See yourself outside, yeah, you are different colour, but we are all the same, you got to see yourself inside, what you got inside for your own self. We all the same, we all one blood. Why you treating us wrong way?'

'I was going to make a complaint about this mob here, the 'yellow tops' [Night Patrol]. Even when you looking around for bumpers, you know, cigarette butts, they'll just chuck you in the back of the bloody cab and you're gone now... Why can't they show some respect and come up and say good evening or good day? Instead they just pick you up, and I wasn't even bloody drunk. A couple of times they picked me up walking back from the spin dry.'

'That's what we are, we are long grass. That's what I stand for, and it's our land. We were the first people, not you people over there. It was only Black people that was here first. And nobody is gonna kick us out from our long grass. It's our land and it's what we are doing for our futures, to stand up for ourselves and fight for our rights.'

'We had freedom before Cyclone Tracy, We used to have Lameroo Beach, you know we had everything down at Lameroo Beach, the hippy days... freedom. And it's a new century now, and you get this so-called 'wedding cake' [Parliament House] that they've got up here. You call it the wedding cake, there's nobody in there, there's just nothing but disappointment, they can't even understand themselves.'

Police stood by and took no action while the angry protesters occupied buildings and verbally abused them. As the above complaints suggest, the homeless had been taken into custody for much less. The grievances expressed by campers and their preparedness to openly confront the symbols of power, in contrast with other Aboriginal groups, had again suggested the political nature of fringe camps. Their participation with non-Aboriginal activists also suggests that this opposition is not solely within an Aboriginal

domain. I discuss these issues in the following chapters.

After I returned to Perth on August 16, 2001, in the more sympathetic environment of a new government, activists organised a successful follow-up action in conjunction with the Longgrass Association, in the form of a 'sleep-out' outside Parliament House. Headed, 'Freedom to Sleep' (Darwin Longgrass Association 2001) their media release stated:

Longgrass people have the right to live in peace

Come along and hear their stories

A camp will be set up at Parliament House, on Sunday October 7 [2001] from 3pm, by longgrass people and their friends, to highlight increasing police and council harassment. Longgrass people are tired of being pushed from camp to camp, being locked up, fined for sleeping, having their belongings confiscated and burnt by Darwin City Council and going to prison for unpaid fines. The camp has been established to give politicians and the community the chance to talk with people who live in the longgrass, and hear their stories.

Longgrass people demand an end to the harassment. Chief Minister Clare Martin and Darwin Lord Mayor George Brown have been invited to come to the camp and talk to people at 9am, Monday October 8.

In the above protests outside Parliament House, the Aboriginal protesters, objectified 'itinerants', reclaimed both their rights to resist as citizens and their Aboriginality that was denied to them. As such, their actions blurred the boundaries of identity politics and equal rights, of persistence and resistance, and of 'settled' and 'remote' Australia. In the following chapter, I examine the relationship between the fringe dwellers and other Aboriginal groups in Darwin that blur the distinctions between 'historical' and 'traditional' people. In particular, I examine the relationship between fringe dwellers and the Larrakia traditional owners in the context of Sutton's (1995a, 1998) descriptions of the Larrakia as one of Australia's 'new tribes'

Endnotes for Chapter 6:

¹⁶⁵ Collmann (1988:125) claims women 'are structurally placed to construct a more perfect fringe-dweller identity and existence than men'.

¹⁶⁶ The Northern Land Council (NLC) remains the most powerful representative of Aboriginal interests in the NT. However, the same Chief Minister described the chairman of the NLC as a 'whingeing, whining, carping black' (see Trigger 1998b). The *NT News* (April 15, 1997) commented: 'It could be argued that Mr Stone should be trying to resolve this difficult issue and ignore the vote-catching rhetoric'. Drastic changes to the role and structure of the NLC have been recommended by the Reeves Inquiry set up by the NT Government (see Altman et al 1999).

¹⁶⁷ This point was made in a letter from the Department of Lands Planning and Environment to the Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC), 17 January 1997. See also *NT News* July 8, 1996.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from the Department of Lands Planning and Environment to ADC, 17 January 1997.

¹⁶⁹ Letter from the Department of Lands Planning and Environment to ADC, 17 January 1997.

¹⁷⁰ The Aboriginal Medical Service in Darwin, known as Danila Dilba, provided an invaluable outreach service to the camps during my fieldwork; however, their efforts were the exception.

¹⁷¹ Letter from W B Day to Delegate of ADC, 21 November 1996.

¹⁷² Letter to Bill Day from the Delegate, NT Anti-Discrimination Commission, 10 October 1996.

¹⁷³ Draft letter to Darwin City Council from delegate of the ADC, 3 October 1996 (copy to Bill Day).

¹⁷⁴ Letter from Delegate of ADC to Bill Day, 3 October 1996.

¹⁷⁵ The letter stated the Darwin City Council's opposition to more town camps until existing Aboriginal special purpose leases are fully utilised. I argue that it appears discriminatory to presume that all Aboriginal people should be accommodated on leases granted for the use of particular groups.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from the Community Services Manager, DCC to ADC, 8 November, 1996.

¹⁷⁷ W B Day, reply to the Delegate, 13 December 1996.

¹⁷⁸ Letter from A/Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment to ADC, 17 January, 1997.

¹⁷⁹ Letter from A/Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment to ADC, 17 January, 1997.

¹⁸⁰ Letter from Bill Day to Dawn Lawrie, NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, 23 December, 1996.

¹⁸¹ Letter from the Delegate, ADC (re: 'Complaint of discrimination on the basis of race, impairment and failure to accommodate a special need') to Acting Secretary, Department of Lands Planning and Environment, 14 January 1997.

¹⁸² Transcript of hearing for extension of interim order. ADC 17 January 1997.

¹⁸³ as above

¹⁸⁴ as above.

¹⁸⁵ as above.

¹⁸⁶ as above.

¹⁸⁶ as above.

¹⁸⁷ as above.

¹⁸⁸ Reply to the Delegate of the ADC from A/Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 17 January 1997.

¹⁸⁹ Section 24 states in part:

2(a) a failure or refusal to accommodate a special need of another person includes making inadequate or inappropriate provision to accommodate the special need; and

(b) a failure to accommodate a special need takes place when a person acts in a way which unreasonably fails to provide for the special need of another person if that other person has the special need because of an attribute.

¹⁹⁰ Reply to the Delegate of the ADC from A/Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 17 January 1997.

¹⁹¹ Reply to the Delegate of the ADC from A/Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 17 January 1997.

¹⁹² For an account of the 'Rights for whites' or 'Equal rights for Territorians' campaign in Katherine based on the belief that there should be 'one law for all', see Merlan (1995b:70-76, 1998:177-8).

¹⁹³ Trigger (1998a:164) questions whether difference is to be nurtured or subordinated by the ideological construction of 'a good citizen'. He notes that in the Gulf country, Aborigines contest the view of natural resource development as a civic duty. Importantly for this thesis, Trigger (1998a) fails to adequately consider that the benefits of economic development are also questioned by many non-Aboriginal Australians.

¹⁹⁴ When relatives in the camps had been visited to be ritually informed of the death, bearers of the news approached in a crocodile dance, representing the deceased's totem. The next morning, minibus taxis were ordered relatives of the deceased, to bring mourners from camps around Darwin to Lee Point. As well as an expression of grief and respect, the ritual burning of the deceased's sweat-impregnated possessions protects the living from any sorcery associated with the death (see also Hiatt and Hiatt 1966:3; Berndt and Berndt 1992:458; Sansom 1995:290). In this case, the ritual at Lee Point was followed by a cleansing of Gajok's close associates with water and smoke, to the accompaniment of the deceased's totemic songs, in an elaborate ceremony at Fish Camp six months later (see Plate 13).

¹⁹⁵ The Delegate of the ADC first authorised me to act for the deceased in the complaint against the DCC on 3 October 1996.

¹⁹⁶ Letter from the Delegate, Anti-Discrimination Commission to Bill Day, 12 February 1997.

¹⁹⁷ 'You can't use his name. I shouldn't even be seeing this,' the student told me indignantly.

¹⁹⁸ For example, very few Larrakia place names in Darwin are recorded on maps.

¹⁹⁹ Letter from Conciliator for the Delegate of the ADC to Dulcie Malimara. 3 September 1997.

²⁰⁰ Park land behind the Daisy Yarmirr Aboriginal hostel in the northern suburbs.

²⁰¹ ABC 8DDD Drivetime, March 17, 1997; *NT News* March 18, 1997; *Land Rights News* June 1997; Radio National Breakfast, March 18, 1997. A video compiled by me, of television news coverage of all the protests (Day 1997f) was widely circulated at Maningrida and elsewhere. I was told that at a public meeting in Maningrida in November 1999, a speaker announced: 'We have to fight for our independence like the Fish Camp people did in Darwin [in 1997]'.
²⁰² The two older men may have had memories of an older moral economy that Vike (1997:196) believes motivated resistance in a Norwegian town. Scott (1985:318) claims that subordinates' everyday resistance is backward looking in defending their interpretation of an earlier dominant ideology. This may be as in 'colonial' Darwin, when Aborigines and administrators had a more personal relationship, or before settlement when Aboriginal people were in sole possession of their land.

²⁰³ After the two pensioners had scattered red dust on the steps of Parliament House.
²⁰⁴ During the second Lee Point protest.
²⁰⁵ Letter from Deputy Chief Minister to Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, 19 November 1997.
²⁰⁶ Letter from Dulcie Malimara to Delegate of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, 24 November 1997.

²⁰⁷ Letter to Dulcie Malimara from Delegate of the ADC, 8 January 1998.

²⁰⁸ Settlement agreement between Dulcie Malimara and Mike Reed, January 1998. The agreement is a further example of how institutional racism disadvantages Aborigines thorough terms like 'all people', 'equally to all' and 'any person'.

²⁰⁹ This appears to be confirmed by reports that claim that Maningrida has a TB infection rate of 532 in 100,000, five times the national average (*Land Rights News* March 2001, p.9; *West Australian* March 14, 2001). The reports blame overcrowding and an inadequate treatment program for the high incidence of tuberculosis. By September 2001, ATSIC had promised 2.45 million dollars for housing at Maningrida and the local newsletter claimed: 'Some of the Council Members believe that the TB issue given wide coverage by local and national media was influential in getting the ATSIC money' ('Housing improvements make a difference', *Manayingkarirra Djurrang* August-September 2001).

²¹⁰ During my fieldwork there were regular warnings from the Disease Control Unit in the media of the dangers of Ross River Virus in Darwin. Residents were warned to stay inside at

night, use insect repellent and avoid mosquito bites. I am not aware of warnings directed to fringe dwellers who sleep under the stars every night with no protection from mosquitoes.

²¹¹ Letter from Director/Principal Solicitor, NAALAS to Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, 3 March 1999.

²¹² Letter from Housing Client Services - Special Housing Programs, Department of Housing and Local Government to DAHA-Fish Camp Coordinator, February 1999.

²¹³ Letter from Manager, World Vision Indigenous Programs to Coordinator, Fish Camp Project, DAHA, 3 December 1998.

²¹⁴ Available at <www.geocities.com/rainforest/canopy/6905>

²¹⁵ Letter from Solicitor, NAALAS to Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 16 April 1999.

²¹⁶ Two Burarra men who had lived 'in the longgrass' in Darwin were working for the Aboriginal night patrol in Katherine. In Darwin one of these men accused the night patrol of entering his mother's house and dragging him outside. It appeared that the Darwin night patrol was acting as a defacto police force. In August 2001, the Darwin Community Legal Service expressed concern at the role of the night patrol officers (see supplement to *Kujuk* September 2001).

²¹⁷ Darwin Longgrass Association, September 5, 2001. In a leaflet titled 'Us mob Jinang', Stella Simmering (2001) describes a scene at the Lee Point camp:

Tammy and Jedda, twin sisters, are sitting with their Aunty Agnes at a picnic table at Lee Point. Rosemary their other sister is scrubbing clothes under the outside shower at the public toilet block. On the table is a billycan with cold tea, a stereo is playing songs from their peoples' language. Agnes is talking about buying a throw net next pay day, how much it will cost and where she can get it?

On the ground at Tammy's feet are littered the bright orange seed stems from the black acacia seed, some seed, some shell, and bones from a fish collected from the Lee Point area. She is making necklaces. Tammy is using green fishing line to string a bunch of ten shell and ten seed necklaces together which she hopes to sell for about \$8 each.

Rosemary has finished the washing and lays out a couple of bright coloured skirts and tops on the green grass in the hot sun to dry. Rosemary joins us at the table.

²¹⁸ Protests were held before and after the Act became law on July 4, 2001 (*Green Left Weekly* July 11), including from the public gallery of the NT Legislative Assembly (see Howse 2001:15; Hansard 4 July 2001). According to Howse (2001:16), in defence of the legislation the NT Chief Minister stated on June 5th in the Legislative Assembly:

We are not being paranoid when we say that Territorians are beginning to feel unsafe on their streets. We are not being commercial when we say that tourists - visitors to out [sic] Territory should not be confronted with this behaviour. And are we being racist when we suggest that many of our urban problems might not be there if some of the people went home?

²¹⁹ The evening news on both local TV stations and ABC online did not mention drunkenness (<http://www.abc.net.au/news/state/nt/metnt-3aug2001-15.htm>).

²²⁰ On August 9, 2001, a community showing of videos made of the protest was held at Railway Dam town camp. The videos were projected onto a screen to an appreciative audience of representatives from camps around Darwin and their supporters. A thirty-minute video of the August 3rd protest, called 'We live in the long grass', was later produced for general release.

²²¹ Email forwarded to the Democratic Socialist Party, Darwin by the Social Justice and Human Rights Sub-Committee Coordinator, AASW NT, 12 August, 2001.

²²² Scott (1989:29) suggests that resistance may become a direct and open political challenge if 'the perceived relationship of power shifts in favour of subordinate groups' (see also Colburn 1989:x). Perhaps not coincidentally, in the election held in the Northern Territory two weeks later, a mood for change produced a Labor government for the first time in over twenty years.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'A conflict of interest': fringe dweller resistance and Aboriginality

7.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I presented case material illustrating fringe dwellers' engagement with the state that suggests that Sansom's (1980a) 'segregated social field' analysis does not adequately represent the priorities of fringe dwellers. In this chapter I argue that claims to town land made by the resurgent Larrakia 'new tribe', which are defended by Sutton's (1995a) 'neo-classic' model of land ownership, have increased a widening gap between the traditional land owners and other Aboriginal residents of the land in the Darwin region and the nearby Cox Peninsula.

My research suggest that the struggle by fringe dwellers for space in Darwin has been weakened by the lack of support from the Larrakia and other Aboriginal representative groups, while the substandard conditions in the camps has added to public perceptions of mispending by Aboriginal organisations. My fieldwork also suggests that, in relation to fringe dweller resistance, the lack of involvement of Aboriginal representative bodies in the protests and complaints of the campers in the 1990s served to insulate those actions from control and encapsulation by institutions of the state.

This thesis argues that, despite Sansom's 'balancing of anthropological books that is long overdue' (Sansom 1982b:118), the marginalisation of fringe dwellers is partly due to legal definitions of Aboriginal land owners since 1976 (see Wolfe 1994), which now have more influence than the spoken agreements made between familiar Aboriginal parties in the past. Although change is promised in the Native Title Act, so far native title claims in Darwin appear to have further marginalised the fringe dwellers. A further factor in the marginalisation of fringe dwellers is the orientation of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act 1976* towards entitlement, rather than including claims based on need, as was originally intended (see Rowley 1978:77; Merlan 1994:15).

According to Sutton (1999a:8):

The Land Rights Act alone, as it stands, is clearly inadequate to the task of dealing with the security concerns of long-term residents whose ancestral countries lie somewhere other than where they are currently living. Anxieties about being 'kicked off' or 'sent back' by those who have ancient connections to the land are real. The native title system, with its explicit capacity to cover such concerns by formal agreements made at the point of the determination of native titles,

offers a much better regime in this regard.

Gaynor Macdonald (1997:74) describes 'an increasing polarisation between traditional and historical people'.²²³ She claims that traditional owners' land claims are disadvantaged because they confront mainstream Australia with its history of colonialism (Macdonald 1997:77), whereas the 'historical people', who have moved onto the land from elsewhere, make claims for rights based on 'non-Indigenous values of a liberal democratic society' (Macdonald 1997:76). She adds that: 'Traditional rights do not lend themselves to absorption into generalised democratic values' (Macdonald 1997:79).

Trigger (1983) also writes of 'historical' and 'traditional' claims to land. He claims that historical associations to land lack the genealogical connection to specific areas. In historical connections to land, 'the systematic formulation' of traditional claims is not present (p.193). Trigger (p.193) lists historical connections to a region as: habitual associations (such as camping and hunting), specific event associations (where a ceremony or other memorable occasion occurred), and biographical associations (a birth, death, accident or similar memorable event). There may be historical associations to the current place of residence or to traditional lands elsewhere (p.197). Trigger (p.192) claims that: 'People at both end of this continuum [of historical and traditional associations with land] need to be able to legitimately claim land under any just legislation'.

With concern for this 'differential quality to being Aboriginal', Macdonald (1997:80) asks: 'How are the concerns of historical people to be heard and accommodated?' Macdonald (1997:78) looks to the host/guest model where 'traditional people as hosts have certain powers and rights, so too do guests, and the onus is on the hosts to look after the guests adequately'. Obviously, the application of this rule varies under modern conditions where 'guests' may be permanent and even outnumber 'hosts'. In this chapter, I argue that native title changes the dynamics of the above conflicting agendas of recognition and equality, while the revitalisation of the Larrakia group blurs the distinction between 'traditional' and 'historical' people in Darwin.

Wolfe (1994:129) maintains the Native Title Act, most particularly in 'settled Australia', 'recruits a minority of Aboriginal people to the continuing invasion of the rest'. He maintains that government legislation 'constitutes a state strategy for containing Aboriginal resistance' (Wolfe 1994:130). Povinelli (1997:20) refers to the Act as a 'double gesture' where 'the state has relied on a representation of Aboriginal social organization to consolidate and legitimate its power'. In a more positive view, Tonkinson (1998:303)

suggests that Mabo provides a nexus between the 'political' and the 'cultural' by reinforcing 'laws and customs' as key determinants of title.²²⁴

As I will illustrate, the Burarra fringe dwellers believe that they are asserting rights to urban land under an indigenous customary system that continues regardless of Australian law. The fringe dwellers live on the land, recognising the Larrakia as owners but believing they are allowed access to the resources on understandings also applying in their homelands where, 'notions of trespass are, in [Hiatt's] estimation poorly-developed or non-existent, being submerged or nullified by an over-riding ethic of hospitality and open-handedness' (Hiatt 1982:15). However, the Larrakia are arguing within the Australian legal system, using Sutton's model of classical Aboriginal social structure. To the time of writing, for reasons I will discuss, the Larrakia incorporated organisation has done little to support fringe dwellers' rights to space in Darwin.²²⁵

7.2 Fringe dwellers in the context of the Sutton vs Sansom debate

Sutton (1998:54, 1999b) and Sansom (1999) have outlined an increasing dichotomy between the 'fluidity' and 'neo-classic' analyses of Aboriginal social structure and relationships to land. Sutton (1999b) makes a strong case for the historical stability of Aboriginal genealogies, totems, laws, customs and social structure in his plea for 'systems thinking' in contrast to the uncertainties of process in 'culture production' analyses.²²⁶ In a satirical defence of assertions of traditional Aboriginal social structure, Sutton (1999b:13) comments: '[S]tructuralism and functionalism have long since become devil worship. The very use of the notion of "systems" sometimes looks like it also might follow them down the same drain'. Sutton (p.13) adds convincing and well-researched historical evidence of 'classical land tenure to which so many Aboriginal people remain committed'.

Sansom's work amongst Darwin fringe dwellers is described by Sutton (1999b:21) as the 'most extreme example of fluidist ethnography in Australia'. Generalisations drawn from life in a Darwin fringe camp by Sansom (1981a:278, 1985:83, 1987:7), discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis, are dismissed by Sutton (1999b:23) as only 'one aspect of one particular kind of residential aggregate in one aspect of its members' lives' (see also Layton 1986:30). In his critique of Sansom, Sutton (1999b:38) discusses over 150 years of serial patrification that, according to Sutton's research, has been predominantly stable in the Daly River region. This area is the homeland of many who lived in the Knuckeyes Lagoon fringe camp, which Sansom (1980a) claims is ordered by performative relationships, emergent states and indeterminate futures.²²⁷

Sansom (1999) criticises Sutton's argument as a 'charter for monopoly rights' for 'neo-classical' anthropological interpretations of Aboriginal social structure over 'postmodernist theories' of Keen, Sansom, Myers, Povinelli and 'the new arch-fluidist [Francesca Merlan]'.²²⁸ In his 1999 seminar, Sansom said that Sutton had 'taken what he wanted', or had been selective to defend his argument - for example he fails to mention the status of the 'five different language groups' which have moved onto Larrakia lands on the Cox Peninsula (see Povinelli 1993a, 1995b; Sutton 1998).²²⁹ Sansom (1999) claims Sutton was a 'fluidist' in his earlier descriptions of succession to land through the evolving 'structural amnesia' of the Maranunggu people, which the Finnis River Land Claim interrupted (see Sutton 1980:8; Sansom 1980b, 1985:82; Toohey 1981b).

The description by Sutton (1998:59) of Aboriginal 'post-classical social organisation', in defence of 'the neglected domain of kinship', is evidence of changes emerging in Aboriginal social structure since colonialism. However, Sutton (1998:55) asks if these post-colonial Aboriginal social systems are 'transformations' or 'new creations'. He appears to answer by appealing for field work to 'throw more light on the mechanisms by which classical land tenure systems have been transformed into post-colonial ones' (Sutton 1998:53). According to Sansom's (1999) critique, Sutton's ultimate reference is to structures 'as they are meant to be', and his 1998 monograph, *Native title and the descent of rights* should more aptly be titled, 'Descent by right'.

In my research experience, the Aboriginal residents at Fish Camp and Lee Point are committed to traditional social structure and land tenure systems, even while living far from their ancestral lands in an urban environment. They move easily between formalism and flexibility in their social organisation, in a dialectic which Hiatt (1984:11) emphasises is 'adaptive and dynamic' (see also Shapiro 1997). In the Lee Point and Fish Camp cases, Sansom's perceived dichotomy between fluidist and structural theoretical models does not apply. Similarly, in the case of 'Wallaby Cross' my analysis suggests that Sansom recognises but chooses to downplay the importance of 'classic' Aboriginal social structure. That is, the dichotomy made by Sutton and Sansom is not evident in Sansom's texts, or in this thesis. I argue that poststructural models of process and change as an alternative to classical structural models of Aboriginal society do not reflect the continuity of the social structures of the Burarra, Nkara, Gunavidji and allied groups which are demonstrated daily at Fish Camp, and also, as Sutton (1999b:22) suggests, were evident at Knuckeyes Lagoon.

The fringe dwellers amongst whom I did my fieldwork, have a very different history of contact to the labile groups in Sansom's (1980a) analysis of fringe

dwellers.²³⁰ Coulehan (1995a:9) also notes that Aboriginal people in Arnhem Land have been largely insulated from 'labour related mobility' described by Sansom (1980a) and Collmann (1988). Contact came much later, and the land was not alienated in Arnhem Land. As a result, although a fringe camp community resembles the flexible residential communities described elsewhere, the members' ultimate reference is to an inherited structure and Law, centred on land ownership systems.

Like most long-term campers on Larrakia land, including at Belyuen (on the Cox Peninsula) and Knuckeyes Lagoon, Burarra people made arrangements to use the land through friendships and associations with local landowners. Povinelli (1993:30) argues that the 1976 Land Rights Act subordinates foraging to other Aboriginal social and cultural expressions of land attachment. Povinelli (p.30) adds that 'the imbalance to how the two "sides" of Aboriginal life are weighed in land claim hearings has historical roots in popular and anthropological models of Aboriginal social life'.²³¹ Povinelli (1995b) uses the above argument in defence of the Belyuen people against the land claim of the Larrakia 'new tribe', as argued by Sutton (1995a). The hunting and gathering activities by fringe dwellers in Darwin and their continued marginalisation suggests that Povinelli's concerns about the priorities in land claims also apply to the rights of fringe dwellers who use and care for Larrakia land.

The Larrakia people seek to have their claims recognised by the Australian legal system. However, according to Mantziaris and Martin (2000:22), the Native Title Act fails to distinguish between the subject of recognition, which is indigenous relations to land ordered by traditional law, and, and the product of recognition, which is native title rights and interests as recognised by Australian law. As Pearson (1997:154) states: 'Native title is, for want of a better formulation, the recognition space between the common law and the Aboriginal law which now afforded recognition in particular circumstances'.

Mantziaris and Martin (2000:9) use a diagram of two intersecting circles, one representing indigenous relations to land and the other Australian law (Figure 2). The overlapping area is the 'recognition space' in which Aboriginal traditional law and custom is translated into Australian common law. According to Mantziaris and Martin's interpretation, the bulk of 'indigenous relations and practices concerning "country"' remain unrecognised and outside Australian property laws. (Mantziaris and Martin 2000:22). As Pearson (1997:155) states: 'It is fictitious to assume that Aboriginal law is extinguished where the common law is unable to recognise that law'. During my fieldwork, while the fringe dwellers' relationship to the land remained beyond the recognition of Australian law, the Larrakia people

sought to have their interpretation of the 'classic' land tenure system, as described by Sutton (1995a), recognised by Australian law.

Sutton (1995b:10) signals a move away from 'the relative indeterminacy of indigenous people's land relationships, as compared with the tenure systems of nation states'. Sutton (1999c) mused at a recent conference that codification of Aboriginal practice might be beneficial for all in the articulations of systems.²³² He states (Sutton 1995b:10) that it would be unjust to 'deny people the right to move away from an inherently conflict-prone system towards the greater certainty and stability they might hope to achieve from engagement with the western legal system'. However, Mantziaris and Martin (2000:3) suggest that 'incommensurability' makes the translation from one system to another difficult.

The above were not issues in Darwin in the 1970s, when there were still groups of Larrakia people living in fringe camps. They mixed freely with fringe dwellers at Knuckeyes Lagoon, Belyuen and other locations around Darwin, who joined the Larrakia-led campaign for land rights. By the 1990s, many of the older Larrakia people had died, leaving a small group living in the Kulaluk community, a family at Belyuen and a community on the old Larrakia Reserve at Acacia Gap, south of Darwin. Most of the other 1,600 members of the Larrakia Nation now live in urban housing and are members of incorporated associations under Western law. They are also increasingly influential in Aboriginal representative bodies supported by the state. Fringe dwellers remain marginalised by a process discussed by Merlan (1995b:81):

There is a need for clear conceptualisation by anthropologists, with all the complications this may bring, of how different cultural selves are being produced through different forms of experience. A difficulty ... remains how such difference may be rendered intelligible in often adversarial contexts in which codification and regimentation of difference has been a political guarantee of the genuineness ... of the claim process.

7.3 Fish Camp and the Kulaluk landowners

During the early years of the fight for a camping place at Kulaluk, the Larrakia people who claimed the area 'stood together' with people from other Aboriginal language groups with which they had traditional and historical association (see Povinelli 1995c:327). In the camps and on reserves, the Larrakia shared ceremonies and life in the 'illegal' camps with groups who had moved onto vacant land on the Cox Peninsula and in Darwin (see Brandl et al:187). Larrakia people have also recruited men and women from other language groups to ensure continuity as their own elders passed away

(Brandl et al 1979:194). Similarly, Walsh (1989b:3) documents instances where 'the transfer of knowledge across generations is going from non-Larrakia to Larrakia'. These processes are aided by the socio-cultural links which facilitate 'mixing' amongst Aboriginal campers in Darwin (see Brandl et al 1979:32; Brandl 1983; Brandl and Walsh 1983:154). According to Brandl (1983:17) it is the non-Aboriginal presence which has brought local Aboriginal groups in the Darwin area into close contact with one another.²³³ The bonds between Aboriginal residents of the area have also been strengthened by sharing life's experiences as consociates (Sansom 1980a:137, 1980c:4, 1982b).

Until 1999, the group from Lee Point who sought refuge on Aboriginal land at Kulaluk received a verbal agreement to live on Kulaluk land from a Larrakia elder who was known to them from her years living in the old Bagot Reserve. While she lived, she exercised a powerful influence in community decisions by right of her position as one of the last Larrakia-speaking women and a keeper of Larrakia knowledge (see Olney 1991:52; Heffernan 1996). With the passing of the generation who had known each other in the cattle and army camps, workplaces, ceremony grounds and institutions of the assimilation era, there has been a lessening of personal contacts between previously close Aboriginal groups. This section describes how those who moved freely over the Kulaluk land on the basis of their friendship with the traditional owners prior to the 1980s were being increasingly excluded by decisions made by the younger generation controlling the incorporated association which holds the lease. Unlike past generations, the Larrakia and Kulaluk groups have few ties to Burarra campers and have less need of their support. My examples also suggest that the commercial interests of the two former groups are seen to conflict with the needs of those who still camp on vacant land around the city.

As I have mentioned in Chapter Three, in the 1980s there was considerable pressure on the Kulaluk leaseholders to accept 'transient camps' on the lease (see Wells 1995a:75; *NT News* October 13, 14, 1981). Government policy had been to reject applications for land by homeless Aboriginal groups 'until adequate and rational use is made by Aboriginals of existing land grants' (NT Government 1981a: 2168). In addition, the policy stated:

The residents of Kulaluk will be encouraged to identify areas within their leases for the establishment of additional separate camping areas (to this end, discussions have been held with the Kulaluk people and areas have been so identified) (p.2168).

Several of these sites were opposed by the Gwalwa Daraniki group (*Bunji*

June 1982); however, illegal campers are still told by government and city council officials to go to Bagot, Kulaluk or other areas set aside for Aboriginal use. This is what occurred after the eviction of Burarra people from Lee Point. However, the two complaints to the Anti-Discrimination Commission make clear that the campers were not always comfortable on Kulaluk land. Dulcie later told a White friend, Sally Mitchell:²³⁴ 'No one support us. When we moved from Lee Point, the first place we moved to the Kulaluk. Now they told us to come here [to Fish Camp]. They said we can't stay down the beach because they going to build houses there'.

When I arrived at Fish Camp, members of the group were filling jerry cans and asking to use showers at the private dwellings in the Minmarama village. According to the Fish Camp World Wide Web site:

[T]he Kululuk [sic] have permitted [the campers] to live temporarily at Fish Camp, on condition they build no permanent structures. While grateful to the Kululuk, Fish Camp residents have no assurance they can remain where they are, no proper shelter, water source or ablutions. The Fish Camp people have been evicted and moved on from other sites around Darwin over the past few years, and have no security of tenure beyond Kululuk goodwill (Simmering 1999).

The Gwalwa Daraniki Association, which manages Kulaluk, refused permission to lay pipes for taps or to build solid structures at Fish Camp. The Association feared that signs of permanency might precede claims to rights of occupancy. Unfortunately, the restriction on improvements caused extreme discomfort for the pensioners of Fish Camp for over three years of a 'temporary' existence. Complaints to the media about the conditions at the camp also annoyed the Kulaluk management. After one publicised protest, a delegation from the Kulaluk village threatened to evict the campers because their complaints were giving the lease a bad name and 'shaming' the leaseholders. Representatives from the Kulaluk community aggressively questioned camera crews if they were observed filming at the camp.²³⁵

Before and during my fieldwork, the landowners caused further inconvenience for the Fish Camp residents by advising taxi companies not to drive into the camp. Often when 'minibuses' or taxis were ordered, the switchboard operator refused to send a vehicle to Fish Camp because the company had been informed that the area was sacred. Presumably, the instructions to the taxi company from the Kulaluk management referred to the burial ground hidden by coffee bush to one side of the access track (see Map 3). However, other taxi operators and drivers, who had not heard of the ban, accepted bookings from Fish Camp without complaint. For several

months in 1997, from dusk to dawn, the Kulaluk management also began padlocking the double gates at the entrance to the track into Fish Camp, leaving the camp without emergency access at night.²³⁶

An announcement in the media (*NT News* October 16, 1999) of a \$2000 grant for the 'Fish Camp Housing Project' failed to mention that the camp wanted the houses built elsewhere than the Kulaluk lease. I am informed that the publicity resulted in an immediate threat of eviction by the Gwalwa Daraniki Association. Although the order lapsed, by late 1999 the leaseholders finally ordered the Fish Camp people to leave the site. The Fish Camp area was then cleared of structures and is no longer in use as a campsite.

Although the Kulaluk community has always been mixed, it has grown in size since the first claim in 1971. Most of the original claimants have died and the membership of the Gwalwa Daraniki Association is now based on other criteria and alliances than those formed for a different purpose in the past. Relationships between couples, and children born to them, have created ties with urban Aboriginal families, Maoris, Torres Strait Islanders, Tiwi people and interstate Aboriginal people. Leadership is passed on through an extended family with Larrakia ancestry that protect their interests against competing factions. The family has negotiated the exclusion of their lease from the Larrakia native title claim over Darwin and allied themselves with the Larrakia *danggalaba* clan, who are one of at least three contesting claimant groups in the Cox Peninsula Kenbi claim (see Povinelli 1995b; Rose 1995; Sutton 1995a).

Plans to develop the Kulaluk land in cooperation with Darwin and international businesses have made the organisation more inward looking and exclusive than in the earlier days of campaigning for recognition and land rights. In 1995, the Gwalwa Daraniki Association Incorporated, as leaseholders of the Kulaluk land, entered into an agreement with a local business to develop a range of tourist and accommodation facilities on the Aboriginal lease, including a motel, tourist village, water theme park, a par three nine-hole golf course and golf driving range. A McDonald's restaurant has been built but rezoning problems have stalled the other proposals (see GDA 1995, 1997; *NT News* August 22, 1993). To facilitate the rezoning, 'The GDA Inc, representing the Kulaluk and Minmarama Park communities, is seeking the assistance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the Darwin community to lobby for the relocation of the Darwin Airport' (the land is under the flight path) (GDA 1997; see also *NT News* March 27, 1996).

The interests of Aboriginal residents in Darwin who depend on hunting and gathering to supplement their diet have been challenged by Kulaluk

management since the lease was handed to them in 1979 (the area was granted to the leaseholder group on the basis of the land's past association with the Bagot Reserve which was set aside for all Darwin Aborigines [see Ward 1975; Wells 1995a; Wells 1995b]). Productive mangrove areas were threatened by planned development in 1981 (Wells 1995a:64; Day 1994:107) and by the digging of deep mosquito drains in 1983 and 1984 (Wells 1995a:67; Day 1994:123). These deep drains changed tidal flows and limit pedestrian access to fishing areas.²³⁷ During my fieldwork, excavations began on a three-hectare aquaculture development that threatened the ecology of an area of tidal flats (see Map 3). When the bulldozer began work, I cycled from Fish Camp to complain to the Kulaluk community elder who I had known since 1971. She told me brusquely, 'We need the money'.

According to the Association (GDA 1997), plans reflect the 'GDA aspirations for self-determination and socio-economic growth that will ensure the well being, independence and stability of their community'. Before a bulldozer began excavating the tidal flats for the prawn ponds on the day the Fish Camp group were preparing to return to Lee Point in May 1997, I had joined women in crab hunting, honey gathering, shell fish collecting and yam digging expeditions in the surrounding area. Regarding the effect on Aboriginal users of the land, the brief environmental assessment only states that:

The Ludmilla Bay and Creek system serves as an aquatic habitat and food source for a wide variety of fishes. Ludmilla Creek and Bay are also used for recreational fishing and boating. Assessment has been made of the likely impact of the prawn farm on the local habitat, and the potential impact of other land users in the immediate area on the Aquaculture operation ... the farm will not be in view of the general public' (North Australian Aquaculture Company 1997).

I wrote: 'Gradually the lease is being alienated from its intended purpose of community use. Aborigines who fish, crab and live in the area will be affected by the large ponds and access roads' (*NT News* July 19, 1997). The contractor, who is an Islander associate of the Kulaluk Community, replied:

I would suggest [Mr Day] spend less time condemning Aboriginal and Islander people trying to pursue sustainable economic and social progress and more time doing something useful himself. Now if Mr Day had a problem with Aboriginal development for community benefit he should say so and leave out all the nonsense' (*NT News* July 26, 1997).

The letter is interesting in its concept of the common aspirations of 'Aboriginal and Islander people'. The 'community benefit' appears to be for the interests of a small exclusive group of landowners who live in the village on the northern end of the Kulaluk land (see Map 3), while the development appears to be to the detriment of most other Aborigines who use the area. Quite apart from the doubtful sustainability of the aquaculture ponds in their Kulaluk location, the alleged 'economic and social progress' disrupts both a prolific hunting and gathering environment and a popular Aboriginal recreational area. Fish Camp people and the sizeable Aboriginal community at nearby Bagot Community are excluded from a landscape that is ironically seen, in the Aboriginal landholders' eyes, as an empty landscape available for development.²³⁸

The plans of the Gwalwa Daraniki Association for golf courses, motels and the aquaculture development, on Aboriginal land at Kulaluk in Darwin, which will exclude Aboriginal cultural and recreational uses as well as dramatically change the environment of the area, appears to contradict Sue Jackson's view that recognition of Aboriginal relationships to town country will result in 'land use outcomes which place a higher value on the protection of the environment, and respect for the richness of different cultural relationships to landscapes and places' (Jackson 1996b:101).

While the letter in defence of aquaculture at Kulaluk relies on values of ownership under Western economic principles, Povinelli (1993a:12) calls for 'a counter voice to the hegemonic frame of Western economic policy' that has not valued Aboriginal notions of land and labour. The relationship between the nation-state and indigenous people 'continues to be underwritten by the notion that the action of the intentional subjects has the power to transform mere objects and landscapes into things of value' (Povinelli 1993a:8). In contrast, it is the everyday action of Aborigines hunting, fishing and 'just sitting' on Larrakia lands that develops a discursive relationship with the countryside (Povinelli 1993a:26, 53).

7.4 The Larrakia.

Burarra people have been present in the Darwin fringe camps since the Second World War, as previous chapters have described. Despite the paucity of personal contacts between Larrakia people and Fish Camp during my fieldwork and lack of support from Larrakia organisations, my research suggests that the fringe dwellers believe that they have common interest with the Larrakia. A camper is reported saying in the *Kujuk* (September 2001) newsletter:

Like blackfella we are staying in the long grass, we born from the

bush, they should leave us alone. If [Night Patrol] keep coming in the bush, we'll spear them. This is Larrakia land, [Night Patrol] should go back to their homeland, where they come from, they stay there. Larrakia, they let us stay as long as we in the long grass. This is our land. That's it.²³⁹

Songs composed in Burarra, telling of the contact experience, act as a living oral history record of life in the socio-cultural exchange with Larrakia and other people of the Darwin region. Visitors and residents in Fish Camp often sing many of these songs, like 'the motorcar song'. Some of these people from Arnhem Land also claim to be able to sing Larrakia songs in Larrakia language. Learnt by repeated use in shared camps, the songs document and confirm the ties between different people and different country. Without places like the fringe camps to gather to sing and dance together informally, the process will undoubtedly end. As Dulcie says:

Doesn't matter we come from different country, we been all support one another. We all culture people, Larrakia people and from Arnhem Land. Why the government always kicking us out? Even [at] Kulaluk, my big sister she died there.

Fringe dwellers do not dispute the distinction between residence and traditional affiliation to country as described by Sutton (1999c:41) and Morphy (1999b). The people of Knuckeyes Lagoon and Fish Camp have always respected the Larrakia as traditional owners, as do the people at Belyuen, across the harbour (see Povinelli 1993:73), despite the traditional owners being a minority presence in Darwin in past decades, until urban Larrakia people began to reclaim their heritage in the 1980s.²⁴⁰ Layton (1986:30) states: 'In contrast to Alice Springs, Darwin [fringe camps have] almost no resident Aborigines with traditional rights to the land'.

Perhaps because of the absence of traditional owners, Dulcie and others from Arnhem Land who had committed themselves to the Darwin region for much of their lives often claim that they are Larrakia. Although most of the Burarra fringe dwellers do not know the Larrakia dreaming stories or use the Larrakia language to the same extent as the people of the Cox Peninsula, described by Povinelli (1991, 1993a, 1993b), they often call themselves 'Larrakia' to emphasise their claim to close historical ties to Darwin and knowledge of the land. In this case, claiming to be a Larrakia person signifies familiarity with the land on which they live. Several of the older people at Fish Camp told me that they could speak some Larrakia, including expressions they translated as, 'We all one family' and 'You mob all welcome'.

One man from Arnhem Land told me:

My ancestors they were here, there were a lot of tribes ... all this area of Darwin was roamed, including my tribe was here too. Now we [are] in Fish Camp. This used to be a sacred ceremony area before, but I don't know, maybe the Larrakia don't use it this time. And we had songs, also concerns for Darwin. This has been going on for ages and ages, from ancestor to ancestor. This is Darwin, we can sing every coastal areas, every beaches. It's part of our nature.

Aboriginal visitors to Darwin continue to compose songs in their own languages that tell of their experiences and their place in the society and landscape. Dulcie sings to the accompaniment of a guitar, of a frightening night with her sister at Fish Camp as a cyclone passed near Darwin. Her nephew sings a more traditional song about gathering shellfish at Lee Point, while dancers enact the scene, in memory of his wife who died at the Lee Point camp. It is true, as Layton (1986:30) suggests, that the fringe dwellers do not have the same attachment to Darwin places as the 'localised, enduring clans' of the homelands, but the ties which they have constructed serve to make them feel at home on Larrakia land.

In Chapter Four I gave evidence of the fringe dwellers' attachment to land at Knuckeyes Lagoon and the burials at the camp of two of Sansom's interlocutors he calls the 'Masterful Men'. In a discussion at Fish Camp, several of the campers told me they wanted to be buried in Darwin. Dulcie and her husband said they would request this in their wills. She said on television, 'I grew up here and I will die here' (ABC 'Stateline' 24 May 1997). Gojok also told me he wanted to be buried in Darwin. After he died there was a prolonged dispute over where he should be buried. Eventually, to the resentment of most of the people at Fish Camp, a decision was made to return his body to Milingimbi, near his homeland at the Yilan outstation. It appeared to me that the desire to be buried in Darwin was a considered statement of commitment to a new place. However, due to the influence of relatives in the homelands, the lack of land tenure in Darwin and the regulations for burials in towns, the wishes of the deceased are rarely enacted.²⁴¹

While the Larrakia native title claim has problematised the claims for space by the fringe dwellers, fringe camps remain a valuable repository of Aboriginal cultural values and centres of Aboriginal resistance. During my fieldwork, this exchange of personnel and rituals continued as the Fish Camp group conducted smoking ceremonies by request after the death of people

from other groups in Darwin. These requests became so frequent that the Fish Camp people complained they were 'like a ping pong ball', moving across the city by demand. I describe below how the campers were asked to perform as the 'Larrakeyah Dancers', on stage at a multicultural dance festival. More recently, the newspaper reported that 'elders of the Larrakia people danced in NT Parliament House for the first time as a welcome gesture for a group of federal politicians' (*NT News* March 3, 1999). The accompanying photograph suggests that the dancers were recruited from another language group for the event.

7.5 The Larrakia native title claim

In November 1971, when two representatives of the Larrakia people raised their flag outside the Northern Territory Supreme Court to claim the Darwin area, they were assisted by other Aboriginal men who were similarly homeless and camping on vacant land around Darwin (see *NT News* November 8, 1971; *West Australian* November 8, 1971; Day 1994:25). Twenty-five years later, on November 7, 1996, a Larrakia woman, Mary Lee, sewed a replica of the original flag. At her invitation I joined a ceremony at the site of the 1971 Kulaluk camp to again raise the flag (ABCTV News, November 7, 1996; *NT News* November 8, 1996; *Koori Mail* December 4, 1996). Three of the original residents of the camp were present, along with representatives of the Larrakia Nation.

The past struggle of the Larrakia and their fringe dweller allies intersected with the present native title claims under the powerful symbol of a flag.²⁴² Television reports that night used black and white footage of the 1970s protests in Darwin by fringe dwellers together with that morning's commemoration ceremony. The *NT News* reported (November 8, 1996):

The Larrakia Aboriginal flag was raised in Darwin again yesterday - for the first time in 25 years. The first flag was raised outside the Supreme Court in 1971 as part of a symbolic claim to Larrakia land in Darwin... At yesterday's ceremony anthropologist Bill Day said the flag was the result of a realisation that Darwin was growing and Larrakia people needed to fight for their land.

The wide reporting of the 1996 ceremony may have encouraged the announcement of a Larrakia native title claim over Darwin three weeks later, the repercussions of which affected fringe dwellers' claims for living areas in town, as I will later describe.²⁴³ Meanwhile, the reference in the media to 'the Larrakia flag' annoyed some members of the Larrakia Nation who claimed the flag had never been accepted as representing their tribe. The dispute confirms that a flag can be a powerful symbol of regionalism as well as a

banner for ethnogenesis (see Tonkinson 1990:197; Keeffe 1988:71, 1992:55; Stokes 1997:166). The dissension drew attention to the fact that the original flag raising was for another purpose, for another time, when Larrakia claims were not supported by legislation and included other homeless Aboriginal people living on vacant land in Darwin. In 1996, the descent group incorporated as the Larrakia Nation required a more exclusive symbol of their identity than the old 'Larrakia' flag (Illustration 3).

On December 1, 1996, three weeks after the flag-raising, at a dramatic media conference the Larrakia announced a native title claim over Darwin, including the foreshores and reserves which they regard as traditional hunting and living areas (*Australian* December 2, 1996; Carey and Collinge 1997:22). The claim was far more extensive than earlier Larrakia native title claims to scattered parcels of urban land (*Koori Mail* August 10, 1994; *Land Rights News* November, 1994) and earlier Larrakia *danggalaba* clan native title claims to selected vacant land around Darwin (*NT News* October 24, 1996).²⁴⁴ 'A cynical and unseemly money grab', editorialised the *NT News* (December 2, 1996). 'We'll pay to use the beaches', complained Chief Minister Shane Stone (*NT News* December 9, 1996). The Chief Minister described the claim as 'a greedy money grab' and complained: 'You're talking about a whole city, complete suburbs, all of the vacant Crown land and that in itself will determine the way developers think about Darwin in the future' (*NT News* December 2, 1996).

In response to this criticism by the media and politicians (*NT News* December 2,3,4, 1996) a spokesperson for the Larrakia said, 'The Larrakia want the same rights to negotiate over developments that all other landowners enjoy in Australia' (*NT News* December 4, 1996). He also confirmed that the Larrakia had retained a strong traditional connection to their lands, including hunting, fishing and responsibility for sacred sites in the city area (*NT News* December 2, 1996; see also *ATSIC NT News* March 1997; *Land Rights News* March 1997; Carey and Collinge 1997:23).

On the internet, a statement issued by the NLC, under the heading 'Living together in Darwin', suggested that recognition of Larrakia native title would benefit 'all people' in the Darwin area:

The Larrakia people are the traditional owners of the land in and around Darwin.

Native Title is a way of recognising that the Larrakia people are the original owners of the land.

Accordingly, Larrakia people have instructed the Northern Land

Council to lodge a native title claim under the Native Title Act over the Darwin region.

Native title is an opportunity for Larrakia and non-Larrakia people to come together to build the kind of society Territorians can be proud of: a society built on mutual respect and finding a path forward for the benefit of all people in the Darwin area (NLC 1995).

Similarly, a pamphlet headed, 'How will a native title over Darwin affect me?' was distributed to every home in Darwin. The pamphlet reassured citizens that: 'Larrakia want the public to continue to use and enjoy public areas and beaches as they always have' (NLC 1996a).

The claim was announced during the return to Lee Point by Bob Bunduwabi's group, discussed in Chapter Six, but did not involve Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin. Under the legislation, the claim was specific to a defined language group, which has been even more narrowly self-defined by the *danggalaba* dissident claimants of the Larrakia people. Using the resources of the Northern Land Council, the Larrakia language group, 'new tribe',²⁴⁵ or 'nation',²⁴⁶ defends its existence within the legal processes of the Native Title Act. Under that Act, Aboriginal representative bodies assist the Larrakia people to claim unalienated land in Darwin that has also been occupied and used by fringe dwellers.

As an indication of past relationships between Aboriginal groups in Darwin, the Interim Aboriginal Land Commissioner, Mr Justice Ward had recommended in 1975 that the Kulaluk land be granted to Aborigines:

for the purpose of establishing, developing and maintaining a communal settlement for the use of Larrakia and other associated Aboriginal people and ancillary purposes. The Larrakia themselves have indicated their agreement with other compatible people having use of the land, which, in area (some 847 acres) would appear to require a use more extensive than that of the Larrakia alone (Ward 1975:15)

Although Local and Territory Governments have refused to consider the further needs of fringe dwellers in town planning, they now refer to the Larrakia native title claim as a further difficulty in meeting fringe dwellers' requests for land. The complaint of discrimination by Lee Point evictee, Bob Bunduwabi, stated: 'The land at Kulaluk is Larrakia land, and he felt uncomfortable being on it'. In reply, the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment confused the special purpose lease held by the community at

Kulaluk with the recent Larrakia claim. The department wrote: 'The land at Lee Point, too, has been nominated as alleged Larrakia land (refer to the current claim before the Native Title Tribunal). His apparent lack of discomfort at Lee Point has not been explained and, in any event, is irrelevant'.²⁴⁷

Similarly, a Northern Territory Government submission in 1982 said of applications for town camps:

much of the land has been allocated to groups who have no traditional rights in the area and this had been of concern to those Aboriginals who consider it to be their area of traditional influence. They had complained that the land has been granted to tribal groups from elsewhere without any reference to them and often against their wishes (NTG 1981a:2167).

In the first weeks of the occupation of vacant Crown land at Lee Point by Bob and his group, an appeal was made to the Larrakia for support. Alongside an article quoting the NT Chief Minister, warning that Darwin residents 'may have to pay to visit their favourite beach or picnic spot', was a photograph of George from Fish Camp over a heading, 'Campers: help us Larrakia' (*NT News* December 9, 1996). The article continued:

He said the Larrakia, who have claimed native title to huge tracts of crown land in Darwin and Palmerston, could help the Lee Point Camp residents by demanding camp rights on their behalf. Mr Banbuma said: 'We support the Larrakia. They should support us'.

Despite the commitment of individual Larrakia friends of the Burarra fringe dwellers, during my fieldwork no official comment was made by the Larrakia Nation on the plight of other Aboriginal people camped in the native title claim areas. Meanwhile the government used native title claims over Darwin vacant Crown land to avoid considering the land needs of the homeless. Although exchanges continued, to a limited extent, between Larrakia people and fringe dwellers, in land matters there appeared to be little consideration from Aboriginal representative bodies that the interests of the two Aboriginal groups may be complimentary.

Amongst the fringe dwellers in the Darwin area, I regularly observed line, set net and cast net fishing, crabbing, spearing stingrays, gathering many varieties of shellfish, digging yams, harvesting grubs, mangrove worms and wild honey, picking bush berries, killing and eating various reptiles and on one occasion, digging turtle eggs from the beach.²⁴⁸ Other bush foods, like

kangaroo tails, geese, and fresh and saltwater turtles were purchased from shops or traders who visited the camp. All were cooked on open fires at the camp or on hunting and gathering excursions. Coulehan (1995a:193) also notes how Yolngu groups regularly gather to hunt and fish in the Darwin environs. Coulehan (1990:7) suggests: 'Traditional Aboriginal usage ought to be a major consideration in foreshore and parkland management and in Darwin urban and immediate rural-area planning'. She claims that the urban Yolngu, 'have cultural-specific needs in relation to economic and recreational use of foreshore and parkland and of mangroves and bushland in Darwin's environs' (p.7).

Fringe dwellers believe they maintain an Aboriginal presence on vacant urban land by agreement with Larrakia elders and daily assert the Aboriginal entitlement to forage and move across the land. The continued practice of this right is also a consideration in native title claims. Although they do not claim ownership in Aboriginal law, fringe dwellers and others explicitly connect their use of the landscape and closeness to the soil to their special relationship with the land as indigenous people. Similarly, Povinelli (1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995a, 1995b) illustrates how Aborigines on the Cox Peninsula 'use hunting, fishing, collecting, and just plain sitting in the countryside as methods to position their rights vis-a-vis sites' (Povinelli 1993a:31). To my knowledge, the hunting and gathering activities by Aboriginal fringe dwellers across the Darwin landscape have not been contested by the Larrakia Nation or government authorities, apart from isolated prosecutions for killing protected species on public reserves.²⁴⁹

7.6 Supporting the Larrakia

Unofficially, there were occasions where the Larrakia people confirmed the continuing relationship between the landowners and the campers. An elderly Larrakia man also lived at Fish Camp and had camped with the Burarra at Lee Point in 1995-6. Two women who claimed to be Larrakia made a purposeful visit to the Lee Point camp in May 1997 to offer their approval of the protesters' aspirations. Also the spokesperson for the Larrakia Nation brought overseas visitors to Fish Camp to 'meet Aborigines' and to see how they live in Darwin. As I have recounted, this man also offered support for Johnny Balaiya at his Palmerston camp when he was under threat of eviction in August 2001 (see *NT News* June 5, 2001). Because Johnny was well-known by the older Larrakia people, they promised him conditional support. In *Kujuk* (September 2001), Johnny Balaiya was quoted:

Larrakia people they say we love you, we got to visit you there ... because we remember you and you know our old people and [when] we [were] little boy time and we seen you there. Our father and

grandfather tell us, we seen you Northern Territory.

June Mills²⁵⁰ and her family, who are members of the Larrakia group, often visited the camp and slept there to protect the people when they were under threat at night from unknown youths shouting threats from passing cars. When the Kulaluk management threatened to close Fish Camp, the camp was temporarily renamed and signposted as 'Mills Camp'. Members of the Mills family, pointing to the prominent sign they had erected, told the campers, 'If the Kulaluk mob try to kick you out, tell them to see us'. June Mills also founded the Darwin Longgrass Association in 2001, contributed to the first two editions of the newsletter *Kujuk* and aided its distribution amongst the fringe camps. She was pictured addressing the fringe dweller protest outside Parliament House on August 3, 2001 (see *NT News* August 4, 2001).

The only Aboriginal member of the Darwin City Council, who identifies as Larrakia, has spoken out for Aboriginal people living in the scrub around Darwin. Picturing her with a homeless group in a park, the *NT News* (April 6, 2000) reported: '[Dorothy Fox] believed shelters, for short-term accommodation, and bathroom facilities should be considered. She said: "This is something the Commonwealth and the NT Government, Local Government and Aboriginal organisations should address"'. This remained Ms Fox's policy in the Darwin City Council election campaign (*NT News* April 29, 2000), which she lost.

In response to criticisms of 'itinerants' by a spokesperson for the Larrakia Nation, an Aboriginal woman who described herself as a 'Larrakia supporter of cultural differences' wrote in the *NT News* (June 13, 2001):

Those at ATSIC and Larrakia Nation, in their rush to clean up the Johnny Balaiyas of the Darwin community, just remember the moral and legal rights they have to the same extent as those suited by the dominant culture dictates, that condemn the rest of us to living in boxes.

In a further demonstration of solidarity, during my fieldwork in 1997 the May Day parade in Darwin was led by six homeless Aborigines in a line across the road, carrying a six-metre-long banner proclaiming the Larrakia nation, assisted by a sole representative of the Larrakia people. This banner was painted by Larrakia people who, on the day, were reliant on the contingent of fringe dwellers to carry it. Many others from the camps walked behind them. According to the *NT News* (May 6, 1997):

Racism was the target of more than 500 marchers who celebrated May Day yesterday. Marchers carried placards with 'Larrakia: we are citizens too' and 'Racial division is the tool: oust the CLP' as they marched through the city centre.²⁵¹

Another expression of Larrakia-Fish Camp solidarity was the performance by the 'Larrakeyah Dancers' in the government-sponsored 'Ausdance: "your culture, your dance" spectacular' on May 3, 1997. Under the direction of an enterprising Larrakia woman, who was a friend and supporter of Fish Camp, hasty rehearsals of well-known Arnhem Land dances were held at the camp by a mixed group of Gunavidji, Burarra and Yolngu men and women. The group then travelled in a minibus to a suburban open-air amphitheatre for a night performance before a large crowd picnicking on the lawns. 'The Larrakeyah Dancers', daubed with white clay, were the last item listed on a long program of costumed ethnic dancing. After a few quick dances, the Fish Camp troupe received their share of the payment and returned to camp to celebrate. Although the motivation was largely monetary, the ties between traditional owners and fringe dwellers appeared to be strengthened by the evening's events.

7.7 Native title extinguished

Despite arguing that the Larrakia native title claim prevented consideration of a new town camp at Lee Point, the NT Government approved development on other vacant Crown leases covered by an earlier Larrakia claim. In *Fejo and Mills (on behalf of the Larrakia people) v the Northern Territory and Oilnet (NT) Pty Ltd*, the Larrakia appealed to the High Court, claiming that although the land had been held under a freehold title before the Commonwealth acquired it in 1927, native title rights had not been extinguished.²⁵² On September 10, 1998 the High Court of Australia unanimously dismissed the Larrakia appeal. The court ruled that native title had been extinguished when freehold title had been granted to the land in 1882, although it had later reverted to the Crown (Devereux 1998; Strelein 1999:18; *Australian* September 11, 1998; *Land Rights News* February, 1998, p.20).²⁵³

The finding suggests 'native title is seen to occupy a subaltern status in relation to other forms of title and is inserted at the bottom of the hierarchy of recognised tenures' (Strelein 1999:19). According to Strelein (p.19), the judgments give support to native title as a bundle of rights and interests under Australian law rather than the recognition of indigenous systems of law and culture. As the findings show in this case, the form of native title sought by the Larrakia and others is one defined by the court, and not ultimately by Aboriginal use of the land. Or as Merlan (1995:65) points out:

'[Native title legislation] assimilates [native title rights] to the existing class of property rights at common law' (see also Wolfe 1994:134).

Concerning the vacant Crown land claimed by the Larrakia Nation, Justice Kirby stated:

Doubtless the bundle of interests we now call 'native title' would continue, for a time at least, within the world of Aboriginal custom. It may still do so. But the conferral of legal interest in land classified as fee simple had the effect, in law, of extinguishing the native title rights (Strelein 1999:20).

Across the harbour the connections between landowners and occupiers is even more complex, as documented by Povinelli (1993a:53):²⁵⁴

At Belyuen Aborigines perform their rights and duties over the Cox Peninsula region without claiming the title 'traditional Aboriginal owner' - an outright claim, on one hand, with which Belyuen Aborigines are generally uncomfortable and, on the other hand, which would create a serious if not irrevocable social and political rift between the Wagait-Beringgen and Darwin Laragiya.

The rift has now widened, and the Wagait-Beriggen have contested the Larrakia claim to the Cox Peninsula, to safeguard their future (see Povinelli 1995b). In earlier times Brandl et al (1979:169) reported in the Larrakia claim book: 'The traditional owners too, have always been at pains not to exclude others who have been exercising rights and responsibilities in the area and always referred us to them' (see also *Bunji* June 1980). Nowadays the revitalised urban-based Larrakia tribe does not have such a close consociate relationship with language groups from elsewhere camped on their land. This chapter suggests that Larrakia group also appear to have greater access than the fringe dwellers to Aboriginal representative groups.

Although elements of succession to land, variously described by Peterson (1983), Sansom (1980b:3) and Povinelli (1993a:134), are evident amongst fringe dweller groups in Darwin, the process has been negated by the remarkable revival of the Larrakia Nation.²⁵⁵ Also the process of 'mixing' (Brandl et al 1979:) and cultural sharing noted by Walsh (1989b:3), which I also noted in the fringe camps of the 1970s and 1980s, has been severely limited by the differing life styles and aspirations of urban Larrakia people and 'long grass' Aboriginal groups.

Unlike earlier generations, unhoused fringe dwellers and the urbanised

Larrakia people are 'on different sides of the fence'. As Merlan (1998:140) documents in Katherine, Aboriginal identity has been shaped by 'the nature of differentiated relationship to the town'. Merlan (1998:147) also notes how, 'Reified understandings of Aboriginal organization also now enter into the way socio-territorial designations are used among Aboriginal people'. Although no Aborigines dispute the Larrakia as traditional owners, the interpretation of customary law amongst fringe dwellers now conflicts sharply with the claims of the 'neo-classic' Darwin new tribe.

Sutton (1999a:27) emphasises that residence gives privileges, not rights, according to indigenous tradition. According to Sutton, the privileges of foraging and participating in ceremonies (which Aborigines living on Larrakia lands enjoy) do not equate with the right to make decisions about:

excavating deep holes, mass clearing of vegetation, and the introduction of outsider work forces. To conflate all these with berry-picking and skink-roasting under the heading of 'economic rights' is to ignore the distinction between important business involving economic and social change, on the one hand, and business as usual on the other.

In contrast, arguing for the rights of Aboriginal people living on and 'looking after' Larrakia land, Povinelli (1991, 1997, 1993a, 1993b) seeks to 'increase the worth of hunter-gatherer productivity', particularly women's labour. According to Rose (1996:300), Povinelli (1993a) aims 'to encompass and theorise that which conventional political economy marginalises or excludes: the work of producing social relations and knowledge'.²⁵⁶ Sutton (1999a:28) comments that Povinelli's (1993a:3) challenge to 'the subordination of foraging to social and cultural expressions of land attachment as it exists in the Land Rights Act', does not justify 'a collapsing of the categories of ancestral affiliation and long-term resident'. To strengthen the case of ancestral affiliation to land, Sutton (1995b:10) believes in moving away from 'an inherently conflict-prone system [of the relative indeterminacy of indigenous people's land relationships] towards the greater certainty and stability [Aborigines] might hope to achieve from engagement with the western legal system'. As I have argued, it is this legislative system which further marginalises the 'berry-picking and skink roasting' of Darwin fringe dwellers in the cause of an agenda determined by Australian economic and legal systems, which have yet to offer any concessions to fringe dwellers.

7.8 Fish Camp and Aboriginal representative groups

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss the relationship between the Burarra fringe dwellers and groups that have been established to

represent Aboriginal people in their dealings between each other and with the dominant society. I suggest that these groups have not responded to fringe dwellers' needs, leaving fringe dwellers to express resistance outside organisations that have otherwise acted to mediate Aboriginal opposition.

7.8.1 The Northern Land Council

The Australian December 2, 1996 reported on the Larrakia native title claim under the heading, 'Capital backlash as blacks claim city land'. The article continued: 'The powerful Northern Land Council yesterday backed a landmark native title claim over beaches, reserves and parks in Darwin ... The head of the NLC, Mr Galarrwuy Yunupingu, defended the claim, saying the Larrakia were only asking for what was rightfully theirs under native title law'. According to the NLC chief executive officer: 'The NLC supports the Larrakia's call for the NT Government to negotiate to ensure that developments proceed swiftly and efficiently for the benefit of all Territorians' (*NT News* December 7, 1996).

Prior to the Larrakia native title claim, a letter was sent from Fish Camp to the NLC signed by Dulcie's husband, George Banbuma who is an acclaimed songman of the Djinang people from the Ramingining area of northeast Arnhem Land. His letter ended: 'We are not fighting to drink in a public place. We only ask that more land be made available for Aboriginal needs in Darwin. If you can help, please come and talk with me at Fish Camp or I can come to your meetings'. Although he was confident the NLC would listen to him, George was not asked to speak and no NLC representative came to Fish Camp. However, the NLC chief executive officer did write to the Anti-Discrimination Commission (ADC) in support of Bob Bunduwabi's complaint against the city council. The CEO added:

Our statutory functions under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 do not allow us to intervene in this matter to any extent, however we are concerned that there has been a breach of human rights and are anxious for the complaint to be resolved satisfactorily and speedily.²⁵⁷

Although the NLC regularly makes statements on issues of importance to Aboriginal people in the NT, they remained notably muted after the publicised attacks by the mayor on fringe dwellers and other homeless Aboriginal fringe dwellers. After the Larrakia claim, the NLC became even more unwilling to support the fringe dwellers. They replied to a request for legal advice:

We had conducted a preliminary investigation into this matter and, as

a part of that process, obtained the advice of [a lawyer] on some of the legal issue involved. We also carried out some consultations with the Larrakia about the matter.

In the course of carrying out those consultations, it became apparent that, were the NLC to formally act in the matter, there was the potential for a conflict of interest to arise in us also acting for the Larrakia in their native title claims. I also note that, strictly speaking, the NLC has no formal statutory role in the Lee Point matter.

In light of these circumstances, the NLC has declined to formally act in the matter and we have referred the matter back to [a lawyer] of NAALAS. The NLC does however have a continuing informal interest in the matter in the wider context of addressing a variety of town camp issues vis-a-vis the Larrakia's native title claims. This issue will take some time to work through.²⁵⁸

Thereafter, the problem of 'conflict of interest' was always introduced when people from Fish Camp or Lee Point approached the NLC, including at a meeting between Bob Bunduwabi's brother (the longest serving NLC delegate), myself and a NLC lawyer after our eviction from Lee Point in May 1997.

One statutory role that the NLC was accused of failing to carry out during my stay at Fish Camp was consultation of traditional owners. Although Sutton (1995b:3) suggests budgetary restraints may prevent 'the diaspora people' being consulted during research by anthropologists, the experience of people of the Gurrgoni dialect at Fish Camp, from an area to the southwest of the Blyth River mouth, suggest it is more likely that fringe dwellers become non-persons in consultations by landowner representative groups. However, people camped around Darwin are interested in decisions about their country and an urban residence does not exclude them from ceremonial duties, apart from the logistical difficulty of returning to their homelands (see Coulehan 1995a).

In October 1997, two Gurrgoni-speaking men at Fish Camp were shocked to read in the media of the proposed shooting of limited numbers of crocodiles in their traditional estates near Maningrida (*NT News* October 2, 7, 1997; Schulz 1997).²⁵⁹ I helped the senior traditional owner lodge a complaint to the NLC and arranged for him to speak on talkback radio. As a result of his actions, he and his brother were driven by the NLC to a meeting at the Nangak outstation, on the Gurrgoni homelands, to discuss the issues. At the same time, the man claimed that he had not received royalty entitlements,

which is a common complaint of Aboriginal traditional owners living in Darwin.²⁶⁰ Later, the harvesting was temporarily discontinued after complaints by the 'Baru [crocodile] people' who have the crocodile as their totem (*NT News* March 9, 1999).

7.8.2 North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service

Fringe dwellers were supported by the executive officer of the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (NAALAS) when a woman was held in custody for 15 hours after complaining of being raped. A detective told the NT Ombudsman that, comparing the facilities, care and attention provided by the watch house with the living conditions of her Darwin camp, 'it is reasonable to conclude that custody did provide [the complainant] with a number of benefits that outweighed any detriment' (*Land Rights News* July 1996). At the same press conference, the NAALAS executive officer claimed that the NT is now the only place where it is an offence to be homeless. She stated that: 'They must know that these people can't pay these fines and will end up spending time in custody when the fines aren't paid' (*Land Rights News* July 1996).

In response to requests for legal aid in a complaint against their threatened eviction from Lee Point in December 1996, a group from Fish Camp were given an appointment with a legal aid lawyer. NAALAS then wrote to the NLC asking if they would consider acting for the Lee Point campers. The NLC engaged a lawyer to carry out a preliminary analysis. They wrote to NAALAS:

This matter is one that probably does not come within the role of the NLC under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. It may have some relevance to our role under the *Native Title Act 1993*. I consider that the matter would come within the scope of the work of your organisation but I understand your preference that we have primary carriage of the matter. In these circumstances, I would be grateful to know if NAALAS would be prepared to meet 50% of the costs of obtaining such preliminary advice on the understanding the NLC would fund the other 50%.²⁶¹

Again the fringe dwellers find themselves in a liminal space where representative groups argue over their responsibilities. At the hearing for the extension of the interim order for stay of eviction from Lee Point in January 1997, the NT Government sought leave to be represented by a solicitor 'ready to attend immediately'. A conscientious but untrained young supporter named Caroline, opposing well-informed senior public servants, represented Bob Bunduwabi at the ADC. The only concession to her by the

Commissioner was the right to an adjournment at any time to seek legal advice. When the Commissioner asked the government representative for a response to Bob's complaint, he answered: 'Apart from having the matter legally checked, I'll have that complete this evening. I could probably have it to you this evening. I think I could get our legal practitioners to attend to it in that time'.

In contrast, the Commissioner said to Bob's supporter, Caroline: 'I know how hard it is to push lawyers. I've carefully read these letters from the NLC [concerning legal representation] which are careful not to say much'. She gave a five-minute adjournment to enable Caroline to contact the lawyer or the NLC before making a final extension of the interim order of stay of eviction. When the hearing resumed, Caroline reported:

I just spoke to [the lawyer]. He has a brief from the NLC or rather, yes a brief which they are seeking advice. He said, he says it won't be available to the NLC for two weeks - his advice. His advice... is that he doesn't act on behalf of Bob Bunduwabi and family, but acts on behalf of NLC. So I then rung the NLC and spoke to [a lawyer] out there and he says they do not act on behalf of Bob Bunduwabi and his family until they receive the advice from [the briefed lawyer]. And just as an extra additional thing, it was more my query like why's this taking so long, and part of it is because they need to consult Larrakia people which is a time-consuming process. In short we don't have legal representation until the advice is given by [the lawyer] on the merits of the case, and the NLC will only take it up pending the merits of the case.²⁶²

The Commissioner answered wryly, 'That must be very helpful to you', before ordering a stay of eviction for another three weeks.

7.8.3 ATSIC

I wrote to ATSIC on behalf of the camp in October 1996, beginning: 'On behalf of the people camped in the scrub on Kulaluk land ... I beg for some emergency water supply'. I detailed the complaint to the ADC and concluded: 'While their complaint is being heard, which may take time, their need is absolutely urgent. Something temporary like a water tank that could be delivered immediately and topped up regularly'.²⁶³ The reply advised: 'Please be advised that ATSIC funds the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service to represent the legal needs of indigenous residents of the area. This funding allows the pursuit of legal cases of significance for the rights of indigenous people'.²⁶⁴

Candidates in the ATSIC elections visited the camp prior to the complaint, but there was no remedial action. However, on October 8 an Aboriginal team from the electoral office arrived in the camp to erect a mobile ATSIC polling booth. The fringe dwellers were then given their democratic right to vote for an ATSIC delegate. Dulcie later complained: 'They was talking a lot about water, they going to put a tap here, but they only wanted us to go through the election. They make promises but nothing happens'.

Later, ATSIC explained that they were unable to help because it is necessary to have land title before a town camp can be established. The state manager wrote:

I understand your concern for the plight of the people at 'Fish Camp' and the environmental health problems that these living arrangements have created. However at this stage no application for funding has been received by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission to provide assistance for these people. As you are aware it is necessary to have land title before a town camp can be established and given the response you have received from the Northern Territory Government, ATSIC would not wish to breach government regulations by providing any assistance which contravenes these.²⁶⁵

Two months later, the state manager replied to my reply:

I can only reiterate that advice which concerns the necessity to have land title before a town camp can be established and that the area you identify [Lee Point] is the subject of a Native Title claim lodged by the Larrakia people. Within these constraints there is little more that can be done to formalise this area as a town camp.

I continue to recognise the difficult plight of these people but until some security of tenure to the land is resolved there is little physical or financial aid that can be offered either on a permanent or temporary basis as the problem is basically one for the Northern Territory Government to resolve.²⁶⁶

In contrast to this hesitancy to act, in late-1997 an international charity supplied tarpaulins to Fish Camp, to shelter the group in the wet season (see Appendix III). Earlier in the year, generous anonymous donors in Darwin had supplied a transportable water tank to Fish Camp (see *Green Left Weekly* September 24, 1997); however, the \$100 fee for a water carrier to refill the tank (see Plate 9) made the cost of an essential service excessive. Residents paid this extra cost until 1999, when the Aboriginal Development Foundation

began a regular water delivery, as it had in past years to other Darwin camps. In the previous three years no Aboriginal representative body or Local and Territory Government agency had been able to respond to Fish Camp's urgent need for water.

7.9 Conclusion

Although Macdonald (1997) argues that claims for rights by 'historical people' can be more easily accommodated by Australian social justice systems, this does not appear to be the case in Darwin. Without recognition of their special needs fringe dwellers have been unable to have their claims acted upon by Darwin authorities, as Chapter Six illustrates. The reasoning of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment is that no distinction should be made between races in considering the fringe dwellers' demands for a camp at Lee Point. This resembles the reasoning that Merlan (1994:15) suggests caused the Fraser government to re-draft the proposed Land Rights Act. That is: 'no "needs" criterion could apply because it would create an invidious distinction, allowing Aborigines to claim on this basis, while others could not'. In this case, 'historical' people are disadvantaged in comparison with 'traditional' people, who have made their demands through land rights legislation.

In the above sections I gave data from my fieldwork that indicates that the lack of recognition for needs claims by 'historical' people in the legislation, and the growing recognition of the Darwin traditional owners, supported by anthropological literature, has contributed to the marginalisation of fringe dwellers in Darwin. As Rowley (1978:77) stated: 'There is urgent need for support of Aboriginal movement into towns. This [Land Rights] Act leaves them on the fringe where their attempts at urbanisation have been frustrated for generations'.

Hale (1996:18) notes that Aboriginal people in Townsville, North Queensland, were divided on the demands of Aboriginal 'park dwellers' who camp in public places. However, at least the Townsville groups agreed on the need for 'sensitivity and compassion', for Aboriginal people to work with Aboriginal people and to involve park dwellers in developing strategies to address their needs (Hale 1996:18). In Darwin, the above data gathered during my fieldwork illustrates that, to the time of writing, Aboriginal representative groups have had little to offer fringe dwellers.

In discussions with urban Aboriginal people in 1997, I was told that more positive role models are needed to replace the 'poor bugger me' image. They and many Aboriginal organisations reflect a shift in attitude from 'a defensive, reactive or confrontational tone' in Aboriginal resistance towards

a 'more positive form of self-representation', noted by Tonkinson (1998:302, 1999:141). Furthermore, other Aboriginal residents in Darwin complained to me that the homeless people from Arnhem Land already have land rights and 'now they want our land... We can't go and camp in their land'.

As discussed in Chapter One, Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982:224) claim that, since 1972, Aboriginal organisations have become integrated into the structures they originally attempted to combat. Scott (1985:298) points out that having 'no centre to be co-opted' is an advantage of the hidden resistance that I maintain is a tactic used by unincorporated fringe dweller groups in the hostile environment of the towns. My fieldwork suggests that organisations like ATSIC, NAALAS, ADF, the Northern Land Council and the Larrakia Nation have been constrained in their support for the Burarra fringe dwellers due to 'conflict of interest', the campers' lack of legal land tenure, insufficient funding and other differences I have mentioned in this thesis.²⁶⁷Dulcie expressed the lack of support fringe dwellers get from Aboriginal organisations in Darwin in her interview with Sally Mitchell:²⁶⁸

ATSIC mob came for elections and Bill and my husband they went to see [Aboriginal] Legal Aid. They never come around to see us.
 Sally: Do you get support from any of the Government mob?
 Dulcie: No, not really. Only Bill Day, he's the only one supporting us - he's trying his best. Danila Dilba [Aboriginal Health Service], they can't do nothing.

Without outside help, the need for fringe dwellers to negotiate through the bureaucracy surrounding most Aboriginal and government organisations makes access to these bodies unlikely. In the case of the Lee Point evictions, which required urgent action, I have shown that the only defenders able to respond in time to assist the campers were informal activist groups who, in most cases, also acted without access to the resources of government-funded bodies. In conjunction with the negative government response to fringe dwellers' claims, the examples in this chapter can be interpreted as further illustrations of unsuccessful attempts by fringe dwellers to reach across difference, in acts of 'merging'. In the next chapter, I give more successful examples of allegiances formed between fringe dwellers and other groups who appear to maintain resistance to the values of the dominant society.

Endnotes for Chapter 7:

²²³ For example, in Tennant Creek, Walpiri fringe dwellers are in dispute with the Warumungu traditional owners of the town area (*Weekend Australian* June 24-25, 2000, p.1).

²²⁴ Tonkinson (1999:137) adds that only 10-30% of Australian Aboriginal people are potential beneficiaries of the native title claim process.

²²⁵ The Larrakia Nation were one of several Aboriginal organisations sponsoring a study of 'itinerants' in Darwin. However, a workshop at Nungalinga College in Darwin on 17 July, 2001, to consider the preliminary findings by Memmott and Associates (AERC 2001) was told that an option which was not available was the setting aside of land for itinerants.

²²⁶ Sutton (1999b:15) defines 'a system' as: 'an assemblage of things which are somehow correlated or coordinated among themselves, and in which there is an ordered complexity of some degree'.

²²⁷ The man Sutton (1999b:53) mentions as a senior patri-descendant was the brother of Fred Fogarty's wife at Kulaluk during the struggle of fringe dwellers in the 1970s. The man's brother was one of those who raised the flag to claim Darwin in 1971.

²²⁸ The quotes used come from extensive notes I made during Sansom's seminar at the National Native Title Tribunal in 1999. As an example of the fluidist analysis, Sansom (1999) cited Merlan's (1998:216-223) recounting of the 'discovery' of a catfish dreaming near the Rockhole Camp in Katherine, as residents began to develop ties to the location.

²²⁹ Sutton (1998:103) notes that his text is adapted from the Larrakia claim book (Sutton 1995). Elsewhere, he (1999a:29) points out that he is involved in the 'contentious and long-running Kenbi Land Claim, Povinelli for the Belyuen group and myself for the Larrakia group...'

²³⁰ As my evidence suggests, Sansom (1980a:190-1) does not adequately describe the fringe dwellers' struggle for space, their involvement with the state, allegiance to 'predetermined hierarchies of status and rank' and their corporate commitment to place.

²³¹ Although, as Trigger (1997) demonstrates, there is also a self-conscious Aboriginal use of the 'politics of culture' in land claims, this arguably originates from anthropological discourse.

²³²References to Sutton's 1999 paper are from my notes made at the time.

²³³ Sansom (1980a:11) also noted how Wallaby Cross was 'mixed', with fourteen different language groups, claiming to be all 'the same', united in 'that Darwin style' (see Sansom 1980c:3).

²³⁴ Sally Mitchell and I wrote a report on Fish Camp for *Green Left Weekly* (November 20, 1996, p.7). Also available at <www.greenleft.org.au/backissu.htm>

²³⁵ While the ABC 7.30 Report was filming at Fish Camp, the journalist Geoff Thomson was challenged over his right to film on Kulaluk land.

²³⁶ By 2001, the gate across the track into the lease was permanently locked, with a sign on it stating: 'BURIAL GROUND ON THIS LAND. PRIVATE PROPERTY. NO ENTRY'.

²³⁷ See also *NT News* May 19, 1981; *Darwin Star* October 28, 1981; *NT News* 24 and 25 September, 1984).

²³⁸By 2001, the aquaculture ponds were abandoned and the entire infrastructure removed, except for a line of steel power poles. According to the planning permit, the area must be restored after the cessation of the scheme.

²³⁹ *Kujuk* can also be viewed on the internet at <http://geocities.com/kujuk2001/>

²⁴⁰ Layton (1986:24) contrasts Sansom's descriptions of the social fluidity at Wallaby Cross with 'the stability built around the Aranda [traditional owners] core of camp residents [in Alice Springs]'.

²⁴¹ The Larrakia elder who began the Kulaluk land claim was buried on the lease in 1984 (see Day 1994:130). Since his death, the landowners have allowed at least eight burials in the area that was once a part of the Bagot Reserve assigned for Aboriginal burials. Prior to the

reopening of the burial ground, the only visible evidence of graves was a few Tiwi burial poles and a wooden cross inscribed to a man from Elcho Island, to the east of Maningrida.

²⁴² The ABC television report associated the flag rising with the slow progress of the long-running Kenbi Larrakia land claim.

²⁴³ For internal political reasons the Kulaluk lease was excluded from the native title claim to appease the Larrakia elders living there.

²⁴⁴ In earlier claims, the Larrakia *danggalaba* (crocodile) clan, which includes 'all people who have a filiative link to some members of the *danggalaba* clan' (Walsh 1989b:1) was said to be the local descent group for the Darwin area. A dissident, more narrowly defined group, led by Tibby Quall (see Olney 1991:28-30) has made native title claims to various blocks around the city prior to the Larrakia native title claim made in December 1996.

²⁴⁵ Sutton (1998:104) defines the new tribes as emergent groups now quite widely found in Australia as a consequence of the gradual collapse of earlier systems. New tribe members trace descent from antecedent landowners, are 'accepted relatively uncontroversially' as members and self-identify with the group and the land. The new tribes are also termed 'language groups', in the sense that the members own the language and the right to use it in their title, but it is not required that they speak the language (p.104).

²⁴⁶ *Larrakia News* (2) February 1997, a newsletter 'published by the Northern Land Council for Larrakia people', announced that 'ATSIC has approved funding for the establishment of the Larrakia nation office'. Advertisements for the position of coordinator (*NT News* June 20, 1998) state: 'It is envisaged that the Nation will be a major contributor to the cultural, social and economic life of the Darwin region'.

²⁴⁷ Letter from Assistant Secretary, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment to the Delegate of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, 17 January 1997.

²⁴⁸ An elderly Darwin Aboriginal man, who claimed to be Larrakia, lived at Lee Point, Knuckeyes Lagoon and then at Fish Camp with his Burarra partner until he died while fishing alone in the mangroves near the camp (see Simmering 1997; *NT News* November 21, 1998).

²⁴⁹ The Larrakia people also hunt, fish and gather bush foods from the landscape of the region (Carey and Collinge 1997:23). One fringe dweller told me he had been fined for killing an ibis at a popular picnic reserve. At the Berry Springs zoo I had to advise friends against catching the long-necked turtles.

²⁵⁰ June Mills is a musician, songwriter, poet, actor, graphic artist, aspiring politician and a past president of the Larrakia Association (Mills 1995:45).

²⁵¹ In contrast, apart from Larrakia banners, no placards were planned for the National Aboriginal and Islander Day march in July, 2001. Although the national slogan was 'Treaty - let's get it right', in Darwin the official slogan was 'Larrakia land - treat it with respect'. None of the Burarra campers participated in the march. June Mills for the 'Longgrass Association' was the only dissenter against the placard ban.

²⁵² *Fejo and Mills v The Northern Territory Government and Oilnet Pty Ltd.*

²⁵³ See also *Australian Indigenous Law Reporter* 1999, 4(1):36-58.

²⁵⁴ See the collection of stories from the Belyuen area by Marjorie Bil Bil (1993:3) and the poem, 'They used to dance all night', which begins:

Once upon a time there were six language groups.
One was Larrakiya.

The poem ends:

The older people used to sit around the campfire
and tell the stories to younger children.
Even the older women
go out with the younger ladies
to hunt for bushtucker.

²⁵⁵ Sansom (1980b: 4) notes that Sutton (1980:8) observed the same effect of the Finnish River land claim, although Sansom adds that: 'the "normal process" to which Dr Sutton refers has not so much been interrupted as wholly subverted by [the land claim]'.

²⁵⁶ Povinelli (1991:240) writes: 'At community meetings, the male president often chastised Belyuen men for not helping the women "keep the culture going" by hunting and camping in the surrounding bush'. Besides 'cueing issues of power, group inclusion and exclusion', she notes that 'stories that frame activity in the environment create group consciousness and orient people to action, in this case to fight for the land claim case' (p.240).

²⁵⁷ Letter from NLC to ADC, 16 October 1996.

²⁵⁸ Letter from NLC solicitor to Bill Day, 3 March 1997.

²⁵⁹ The Gurrgoni elder usually read the local newspaper when I had finished with it in the camp. If he had access to the internet he could have read that: 'Nangak is the site for BAC's new ranger research station. The aim of establishing the research facility is to have the research data to put in place management plans for future wildlife harvesting' (Carew et al 1996c). According to the dissident newsletter *Gun-Burrul* (Volume 1, no.1, 1999): 'Gurrgoni Boretta [people] from Narngark' claim that the area should be called 'Djinkarr'. They are quoted in the newsletter as stating: 'Any balandas that go to Djinkarr are trespassing and we do not want them to go there'.

²⁶⁰ In my experience, little effort is made to contact landowners entitled to royalties who live in Darwin fringe camps.

²⁶¹ Letter from NLC CEO to Acting Director, NAALAS, 13 January, 1997.

²⁶² NT ADC Transcript of extension of an interim order application by Mr Bob Bunduwabi and Department of Lands, Housing and Environment held at Darwin Friday, 17 January 1997.

²⁶³ Letter from Bill Day to ATSIC, 6 October 1996.

²⁶⁴ Letter to Bill Day from Senior Admin Officer, Darwin Regional Office, ATSIC, 15/10/96.

²⁶⁵ Letter to Bill Day from State Manger, ATSIC, 23 September 1997.

²⁶⁶ Letter to Bill Day from State Manager, ATSIC, 19 November 1997.

²⁶⁷ Newspaper reports at the time of writing suggest that a funded study of 'itinerants' in Darwin will begin in 2001: 'It is a project between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Territory Government, Territory Housing, North Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, Aboriginal Medical Service Association of the NT, Larrakia Nation and the Northern Land Council' (*NT News* February 6, 2001).

²⁶⁸ See *Green Left Weekly* 20 November 1996. Also available at <www.greenleft.org.au/backissu.htm>

CHAPTER EIGHT

Blurring the boundaries: Fish Camp gives a barbecue.

8.1 Introduction

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

In the fifties and sixties, within the bounds of assimilationist values, there have been sympathetic Whites in Darwin who worked alongside Aboriginal people to defend their rights as citizens within Australian society (see Rowley 1972b:292; Markus 1978:152-3). From the late 1960s, as part of a wider social movement for change, alternative lifestylers and activists from the south began to challenge, in a different way, the structures of a racially stratified Darwin society. In a continuity of the movement of the late sixties, as the examples in this chapter demonstrate, alternative lifestylers and activists in the 1990s continued to find commonalities with fringe dwellers in their resistance to the values of settler society.

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

8.2 An Aboriginal domain?

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

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

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

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

more enthusiastically than I was, and as a non-drinking anthropologist living in a fringe camp I became the 'exotic other' (see Day 2000:66).

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

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

8.3 'The white Aborigines of Darwin'

In 1969 a new type of homelessness appeared on Lameroo Beach, at the base of jungle-clad cliffs fringing the Darwin inner city. While Aboriginal people in the north were still being indoctrinated by assimilationist policies, non-Aboriginal people from other parts of Australia and overseas began to experiment with alternative lifestyles that challenged the hegemony of the dominant White society in Darwin. The Darwin newspaper called these longhaired newcomers the 'hippies'. They slept on Lameroo Beach, where the indigenous Larrakia people had camped before the coming of the colonisers.²⁶⁹ Although the Larrakia people had been harassed from their

camps at Lameroo by 1911 (Wells 1995a:21), in 1969 'the hippies' began to resist attempts by the Darwin City Council and police to remove them from the beach.²⁷⁰

The tropical north was the beginning and the end of the backpackers' overland trail through Asia and a refuge from the southern winter for dissatisfied youth. In the streets of Darwin the travellers who the media later called 'Darwin's white Aborigines' (*Advertiser* September 17, 1981), contrasted with the Territory 'redneck' frontiersmen and women and the city's neatly dressed bureaucrats. In a year of full employment, each weekday morning almost all of the Lameroo campers who reported to the crowded Commonwealth Employment Services (CES) office were assigned casual labour in the town. At night the Lameroo campers mingled with Aboriginal people from remote hinterland communities, to spend their pay in the sprawling beer gardens of Darwin hotels, where they danced to the music of local mixed-race rock and roll bands. It was in these bars with their Aboriginal patrons that I first heard of the surviving Larrakia elders in their fringe camp behind the drive-in cinema.²⁷¹

Before its destruction by Cyclone Tracy in December 1974, the Star Cinema in Smith Street, Darwin, was popular with Aboriginal people. By 1969, mixed-race or 'coloured' patrons, as they were known, could sit on the canvas seats in the covered stalls or upstairs in the dress circle while 'full bloods' sat in the low-priced front rows close to the open-air screen, separated from the stalls by a flat concrete area where families could sit on blankets to watch the films. Little children scampered about as cowboys galloped over the dusty plains on the screen above them. The Star Cinema was a survivor of the stratified colonial Darwin lifestyle, while vast changes were taking place around the world. However, change came to the Star in 1969, as 'the hippies' demanded the right to sit in the cheap front rows with the Aboriginal customers.²⁷²

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

A 1972 press report described the unsanitary tin humpies of Daly River Aborigines camped at Knuckeyes Lagoon, near the Berrimah crossroads on

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

A southern journalist described the 'liberated area' of Lameroo Beach, 'the only legal nudist beach in Australia ... population 700 heads and 200 yards from the main shopping centre' where '[t]enuous structures grip the trees and rocks, delicate fabrications of driftwood and plastic held together with good intentions' (Stocks 1973:6).²⁷³ The article, titled 'Adventures in paradise', inferred there were parallels between the lives of the hippies and the fringe dwellers with a photograph showing 'the white squatters at Lameroo' above a photograph of the Knuckeyes Lagoon self-made iron shacks captioned, 'black squatters at shanty town'. 'Only the heads and the blacks have that existential sense of place', the report enthused (Stocks 1973:6).

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

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

Alternative lifestylers in Darwin claimed: 'Aborigines especially like us because they feel we treat them like people' (*NT News* July 30, 1975). This mutual support had been demonstrated when a group from Lameroo joined Aboriginal protesters on National Aborigines Day 1972, in a march through the city streets (*NT News* July 15, 1972). In return, the Lameroo dwellers received support from the Larrakia people of the Darwin area. Visiting Lameroo Beach from the Aboriginal camp at Kulaluk behind the drive-in cinema at Nightcliff, Johnny Fejo for the Larrakia traditional owners

confidently assured the hippies that the city council could not evict them because Lameroo belonged to the Larrakia tribe (*NT News* August 7, 1972). The campers were reported as responding: 'to us this land belongs to God, who is not a white man, but if we the present dwellers are to recognise proprietorship then it is the black people to whom we look'.

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

Newton (1988:61) describes the 'naive and romantic' notions of 'tribal living' amongst alternative lifestylers at Nimbin, in New South Wales, seeking a sense of belonging, or *communitas*, outside their perception of the oppressive structure of the dominant society. According to Newton, alternative lifestylers have looked to non-industrial societies for new models of living. At Lameroo in 1969, the predecessors of Nimbin danced to the song 'Age of Aquarius', from the anti-establishment American 'tribal rock musical', *Hair*, as they improvised new rituals beside their campfires on the beach (Day 1994:1). However, the naive and romantic notions of Aboriginal culture described by Newton (1988) in southern communes were difficult to sustain in the north, where there was daily and unmediated contact between races. A journalist wrote of my first encounters with Aboriginal people: '[H]e did not know that much about Aborigines when he first arrived. [He said,] "I was amazed when I found out they didn't speak English and that they had their own languages"' (*Sunday Territorian* October 7, 1984). In the north, my examples suggest that the finding of common ground by fringe dwellers and other groups in an oppositional culture ensures a respect for Aboriginal culture, rather than the appropriation of it.²⁷⁴

Although Newton (1988:58) argues that 'the countercultural movement' in Australia is 'strongly derivative of the movement overseas', my experience on Lameroo Beach suggests that from 1969 to 1975 the bush worker tradition described by Ward (1958) and Rowley (1972a:234) was a homegrown oppositional lifestyle as influential amongst the beach dwellers of Lameroo as the idealistic movements of the 1960s. That is, by their dress, binge drinking, values of mateship, suspicion of authority, insubordination and hatred of police, many of the young southerners were emulating the

Australian traditions of their bush worker forebears that Ward (1958:84, 100, 127, 258) describes. Also, as Ward (p.76-7) notes, labour shortages enabled the bush workers to value an independent lifestyle, 'albeit, at what was, from a middle-class point of view, a relatively low level'. Since European settlement, liminal locations that were similar to the fringe camps and the Lameroo camp have been meeting spaces for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal bush workers (see Cowlishaw 1988a:97). In my view, these traditions became integrated with the ideology of the North American hippies in Darwin in from 1969 to the mid-1970s.

During my fieldwork between 1996 and 2001, , references to Australian bush traditions were frequently used by activists who became involved with the struggle of fringe dwelling Aborigines. I will suggest that many of these activists were the present-day successors of the hippy movement of the 1960s. In 1996, an artist/protester sat a plaster, wire and fabric life-sized dummy on a bench in the Smith Street Mall. In the dummy's mouth was a cigarette and on its chest was printed: 'There was once a jolly swagman but he was arrested in Darwin for anti-social behaviour' (*NT News* May 18, 1996, p.3). In the mall in August 2001, a young traveller named Truce and his friends from their shared house laid a be hatted dummy of a swagman inside a swag between two printed signs which connected the 'long grassers' with 'Australian icons' and traditions of anti-authoritarianism. The idiosyncratic wording on the placards is reproduced below without changes or additions:

A Waltzy long-grass SONG

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

here Larakia Land, you'll Not move
 us away so easily you see", and
 the Larakia are still there as you
 pass by the Darwin foreshores
 you'll COME A WALTZY MATILDA WITH US!

The second sign stated in part:

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

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

... a part of cultural diversity [which] is continually recognized in the wrong way [is] of course the long-grassers. To think that this nation once wanted Waltzing Matilda as our/their anthem is amazing. In art and prose the life of the vagrant/itinerant has always been conveyed as *joie de vivre* with Shakespeare, Banjo [Patterson], H Lawson and etc all have their seminal works steeped in the mystery of the streetsleeper/longgrasser.²⁷⁵

Darwin remains a popular location for activists and alternative lifestyles who live in shared and communal housing in the city and rural areas. These groups resist the policies of unrestrained economic development and opposition to Aboriginal claims propounded by the Northern Territory Government.²⁷⁶ Homeless Aboriginal people have been particularly vilified, and have been left with few options but to resist state policies. Their resistance has brought the fringe dwellers into contact with a widening group of non-Aboriginal people in a process that continues today. For the remainder of this chapter I describe some of the contacts that occurred during my fieldwork and their continuation to the time of writing.

8.4 Fish Camp holds a barbecue

The publicised actions of the Fish Camp and Lee Point people had aroused the interest of activists who were to act as brokers with the government, media and the NT Anti-Discrimination Commission. A few, like Caroline and her friends from the Resistance group in Darwin had been deeply involved in Gojok's conflict with the Department of Lands, Planning and

Environment, as I have described in Chapter Six. However, in general the public reputation of fringe camps as 'violent and drunken hangouts for demoralised Aboriginal people who have 'lost their culture', ensures that the camps attract few casual visitors. Politicians do not usually 'door knock' these potential voters, doctors rarely check for the contagious diseases rampant there, and the young American missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) were the only regular representatives of the Christian churches to visit the drinking camps during my fieldwork. Like the Mormons, those who visit with good intentions are received cordially and seem to enjoy the experience.

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

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

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

invited their activist friends to attend ceremonies in Arnhem Land in 1998, 1999 and 2000.

8.5 May Day

A week later, ten people from Fish Camp caught the minibus taxi together into the city for the annual May Day march. They had nowhere to wash and had had no breakfast; however, clean clothes appeared from their kits for the occasion. Another bus brought Burarra people from the scattered camps in the northern suburbs, assembled by an able Burarra leader. Wearing red headbands, the fringe dwellers were photographed in the forefront of the Aboriginal section of the union-organised march through the city streets carrying the wide Larrakia banner and the signs they had used in their Parliament House protest (*NT News* May 6, 1997; *Land Rights News* June 1997). They remained sober, and desperate for cigarettes, to hear a program of speakers followed by the Wild Water Band performing songs in Burarra language and English. From the stage, with some emotion, Djulpa dedicated the song 'Sunset Bay' to his mother and her community at Fish Camp.²⁷⁷

8.6 The Arafura Games

A common complaint of homeless Aboriginal people is that the NT Government spends money on tourism to 'make people welcome from overseas but not Aboriginal people'. The fringe dwellers talked about banning government workers travelling to Arnhem Land, where often public servants lived in accommodation that is superior to Aboriginal housing. I suggested that they might protest to highlight their poor living conditions during the biannual Arafura Games in Darwin from May 10 to 17, 1997. Following a media release expressing the campers' views, television and newspaper journalists visited Fish Camp to interview Gojok's niece and the camp's leader, Dulcie Malimara. Dulcie was pictured in front of her shelter at Fish Camp to illustrate an article stating that: 'Protesters will target next month's Arafura Games opening ceremony to show millions of TV viewers the poverty of Darwin's indigenous people' (*NT News* April 11, 1997).²⁷⁸ Channel 8 news also suggested the small group of homeless Aborigines could disrupt the games (April 4, 1997). Besides a common reaction condemning the mixing of politics and sport (*NT News* letters, April 17 and 18, 1997), offers of support came from activists and other Aboriginal people in Darwin.

Demonstrating the power of fringe dwellers to use the 'politics of embarrassment' (see Dyck 1985:15) to 'shame' governments on the international scene at least, all the media reports emphasised the possible effects the protests could have on the Arafura Games. This response empowered the homeless beyond their already substantially debated

everyday resistance. A letter to the editor (*NT News* April 18, 1997) expressed the public fear of the potential of protest while demonstrating the reasoning that excludes people like Dulcie from the general Darwin populace:

The article in the *Northern Territory News* (April 11, 1997) with the photo of an Aboriginal lady sitting in her environment stating it is her intention to be part of a protest group targeting the Arafura Games because of poverty is straight-out blackmail to all Australians.

Many [sporting groups] will be using their hard-earned money to get to Darwin to compete, only to be confronted by people who choose to sit on their backsides, doing nothing and getting paid to do it and we are going to be made feel sorry for them.

8.7 The second return to Lee Point, May 1997

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

Day 1: On May 11, the day after the opening of the Arafura Games, seven Aboriginal campers from Fish Camp and I return by minibus to Lee Point and are photographed setting up a protest camp on the lawns of the grassed area beside the public amenities (*NT News* May 12, 1997). Len and his partner, Peppi, had been with their close countryman, Gojok, at Lee Point from November 1996 until his death in January, 1997.

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

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

You are illegally camping on vacant Crown land.
Notice is hereby given to vacate this land immediately.
If you are found to be present on this property within 24 hours, the Northern Territory Police will be authorised pursuant to the *Trespass Act* to do all things necessary for your removal as prescribed under *Act* [sic].²⁷⁹

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

Day 4: Some of the protest signs were stolen from the roadside during the night. Tommy, the almost blind invalid pensioner, says we should move out of the park to the bush across the road. During the afternoon, the protest campers discuss what they will do if the police come. More White supporters and all of the remaining Fish Camp residents come to Lee Point for a meeting at the 5pm deadline which was given in the 24-hour eviction notice yesterday. 'I can feel the people getting strong', says Dulcie's eldest daughter excitedly. Aboriginal speakers questioned the government's right to evict them when Aborigines had been using the area through living memory and beyond. Referring to a politician's statements claiming that the Lee Point campers have a home at Maningrida, protesters asked, 'Why doesn't the Minister go back to where he comes from?' Fish and meat are grilled on the public barbecues while others listen to Djulpa, sing 'Yanguna', which was composed by Duncan Dennis of Fish Camp.²⁸⁰ There is no appearance by police. ABCTV film and interview the protesters for the Stateline program (May 23, 1997) while two of the activists make videorecordings. 'We sleep in the scrub like pig and like dog. We are treated like dogs taken to the RSPCA', says one of the campers to the ABC cameras (Stateline May 23, 1997). The short statements recorded by the media reflect the intense political debate amongst the campers, their supporters and visitors that continues, much of it in Aboriginal languages, throughout nights and days of the protest. A White social worker who organised a previous protest against fines for the homeless sleeping in a public place (*NT News* April 3 and 4, 1996), says in support: 'I'm worried that these people don't have a place to live. It makes me feel ashamed that I've got a decent place to go home to each day and other people haven't' (Stateline May 23, 1997). Ten protesters, all Aboriginal

except for me, stay overnight.

Day 5: The ABCTV crew visit and interview the Aboriginal protesters who burn copies of the eviction letter in front of the cameras with defiant shouts directed to the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment (*Green Left Weekly* May 28, 1997). The ABC reporter, Natasha Belling, asks me to telephone 'anytime' if the eviction is beginning. Later, government and police officers return to the camp that has moved into the bush on the site of Gojok's old camp and has become more established. They ask if we are refusing to leave. I telephone Natasha and she rushes out with a film crew but the police have gone. Natasha suggests that I borrow a video camera. A minibus taxi brings several family groups who dance and sing happily until arguments begin. Len's sister screams that the protesters are drunken long grass people. She lives in a house in the suburbs, and it is her drunken behaviour that disrupts the celebrations. At night six men and one woman sing in Burarra language to the accompaniment of a guitar by the campfire.

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

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

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

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

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

Day 10: Andrew, who spoke on ABCTV News at the ceremony for Gojok last January, has joined the camp. He insists on coming in the taxi to my university lecture. 'I want to hear what you say about us', he says. Together with two others from the camp, we make a presentation in the lecture theatre, illustrated by a twenty-minute video of television new items. Andrew answers most of the students' questions very confidently from the lectern. Back at camp, Denis is making a didgeridoo out of piping for the schoolgirls' return tomorrow. The Mormons are back in camp having a lesson on Aboriginal culture from Len. Tommy, the invalid pensioner, is drunk and says he has come to Lee Point to die like his uncle, Gojok. 'I'm the boss now. I take over this place for my uncle. Nobody kick me out', he says emotionally.

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

Day 12: Early in the morning Len returns from the beach carrying two buckets filled with turtle eggs, which are eaten before I get up. He found the nest by following fresh tracks on the sand. While I cycle to Fish Camp, the

ABC television crew return and interview the men again. The ABC wants more film for the Stateline program. With the people from Fish Camp, I arrange for a meeting with Department of Lands, Planning and Environment at 8.30 am tomorrow. Gojok's brother arrives to join the protest, bringing his brother's black hen that had been the 'mascot' of the last protest. Tommy cries to see the hen back on its favourite roosting place - the seat of Gojok's wheelchair, which Tommy is now using.

Day 13: More than ten Aboriginal campers from Lee Point and Fish Camp arrive, accompanied by a television crew, at the Department's conference room in the city. The bureaucrats insist that only three people can be admitted for the talks. The Aboriginal protesters heatedly insisted that they should all hear what is to be said. Due to their determination and refusal to accept restrictions on their number, the campers are all admitted into the conference room, on the provision there are no cameras. They are joined by myself and another White supporter. After lengthy debate with the Assistant Secretary, the campers are promised that all their grievances will be considered. Apart from the previous Anti-Discrimination process, the talks are the first opportunity by the Lee Point and Fish Camp people to meet with government representatives and have their case heard.

Day 14: Sally Ann, an activist who had attended the meeting, composed a follow-up letter to the Assistant Secretary, on behalf of the people at the meeting.²⁸¹ Three of the Fish Camp residents signed it. The letter stated:

You said that you have no authority to make any decision about whether or not our people can stay living at Lee Point. So you said you would pass what we have said to you today, on to your people, and that what we have been talking about would go through a 'process'. You explained that this process would involve meetings.

One person said that it might be a good idea if two representatives from the Lee Point community were present at any meeting about whether or not we would be allowed to stay at Lee Point, and you said 'Yes, that sounds like a good idea'.

It was a good meeting. But it needs to be followed up by your people and ours. We want to know the names of the people who will be involved in any decisions about us staying at Lee Point. We would like to know when the first meeting of the process is. We expect that we will be invited to send someone to speak on behalf of the people of Lee Point.²⁸²

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

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

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

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

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

Day 19: On May 29, at 7.30am, a long procession of vehicles is seen coming down the bitumen towards Lee Point. Police and government officials

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

While police said the group left peacefully, Darwin anthropologist Bill Day - who was among those camping in the area - was arrested. He was later charged with trespass and for failing to leave at the direction of police.

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

It is not the first time this group, which has been as large as 30, has been evicted from the Lee Point camp.

They were told to leave last year and moved to Fish Camp at Kulaluk, near Nightcliff, but had to endure atrocious living conditions without power, toilets or running water.

No one should be forced to live in these conditions.

Importantly, the Lee Point campers have not been forced to live anywhere.

They are from Arnhem Land which is inalienable freehold Aboriginal

land - the strongest form of land tenure in the country.

If these people want to leave their homelands and live in the city and want public housing then they join the queue like everyone else.

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

Two weeks later, the Lee Point protesters, residents from Fish Camp and several of the activists sat in the court gallery as the charges against me were read. Three of the men wore tee shirts with a message, 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us', printed on the front with felt pens.²⁸³ After pleading guilty to the charges, I defended myself by explaining my fieldwork methodology of 'participant observation' to the magistrate:

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

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

8.8 The Mormons

Mormon missionaries visited regularly and continuously during my fieldwork. They were usually young North American men in pairs dressed in dark trousers and long-sleeved white shirt with a tie. They would park their car away from the camp and walk in, then sit down on the beds or mattresses and talk and pray with the people or offer Christian instruction if there was interest (Plate 12). When I first arrived, there were many copies of the Book of Mormon lying about the camp in the dust. On my first day at Fish Camp I was shown a note written by a friend of Dulcie's family, to be given to the Mormons. It stated in part:

I have been told by the people at this camp that you have been coming and annoying them almost daily, searching for them in the bush and

giving them a hard time. They want you to stop coming here. This is their home - you are invading their privacy. They have their own beliefs.

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

The Mormon missionaries were transferred elsewhere every three months. Each team claimed to enjoy their time with the fringe dwellers. When welcomed into the camps, as they usually were, the young missionaries sat down with the campers without any displays of superiority. However, they did not actively support fringe dweller resistance as the Mormons believe 'in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates in obeying, honouring, and sustaining the law'.²⁸⁴ That they also sometimes overstayed their welcome is shown in the following argument that I hastily transcribed in January 1998:

Tommy, who had been drinking, to Mormons: 'You coming sitting down like this is your home - this is my home. You coming, you fucking missionaries like you looking for women. Fish Camp is my home, government give it to me. You didn't fight over land. You can't help me. Just go. Always you two coming. You sitting down like this is your home. Why don't you move away and go back home. Just loaf around from here'.

Tommy's 28 year-old nephew, apologising to Mormons: 'He's mad!' Mormons to Tommy: 'You've been drinking'.

Tommy: What you reckon you're wonderful? Just fuck off from here. Move away early part. I mean it. I don't give a fuck'.

Niece who is talking to Mormons: 'Shutup'.

Mormon makes a joking remark.

Tommy: 'I'm not your father. I'm not your son. Only my God I love. Just my God. I love God, not any man. You just coming looking for

women. Just pray and go back. We don't like no more, we don't like that business. You can go back to your place where you living. I'm a Christian man too. I love my God and he loves me. We different people, you Mormons. Why don't you move away from Fish Camp? Dulcie and me and Bill, we fighting over law. You Mormons don't fighting over law'.

Niece to Mormons: 'See you tomorrow. Bye bye'.

Mormons, cheerfully: 'See you Tommy'.

Tommy: 'Why you coming? It's not your camp. This is my home, I'm fighting for law. Not you. You don't asking me. You stupid. Fuck you cunts. Just fuck off'.

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

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

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

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

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

After the threats, a rough fence had been erected to protect the people

sleeping on the ground at Fish Camp. For the campaign launch on August 3, 1997, the fence was decked with colourful flags, while anti-uranium activists from Jabiru set up a surreal display of mock yellow-cake drums topped by a man in gas mask and protective suit. Cars began parking along the track as an audience gathered to sit on tarpaulins on the ground. As the senator arrived, George fell from his chair, his body clenched in a fit. Senator Brown, who is also a medical doctor, rushed to help. Another White friend of the campers, who is a high-ranking federal public servant, used his mobile telephone to call an ambulance.²⁸⁵ As the senator was treating George, another of the Fish Camp residents collapsed in a similar fit and needed attention before being taken to hospital in the ambulance.²⁸⁶

Eventually, the serious business began, with introductions and speeches by the Greens sitting on the ground amongst the shelters of the camp. Although no media attended, several activists recorded the campaign launch on their video cameras (Plate 11). During the formalities, speakers revealed conflicting interpretations of Fish Camp. Sitting cross-legged on the ground next to the senator, the Green candidate for the district of Millner, which includes Fish Camp, described the site of the campaign launch as 'a beautiful little camp in the middle of suburbia, a nice remote little area away from the hustle and bustle of the city'. She advocated that town camps be seen as 'an integral part of Darwin life' and spoke of the need for an Aboriginal cultural centre in Darwin (Tapp 1997).²⁸⁷ In his speech in support of the candidates, Senator Bob Brown expressed two views of the camp. Firstly, he spoke of the connection to the land that the camp seemed to signify:²⁸⁸

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

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

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

Essentialist references by the speakers to the evidence of Aboriginal spirituality and life in harmony with the natural surroundings at Fish Camp

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

Ironically, although no one may have intended it, [the recognition of Aborigines as a culturally distinct people] provided a charter for Aborigines to live at a lower material level than other Australians: Their poverty had been rendered exotic and so no longer comparable to other forms of poverty.²⁸⁹

In the camps out of public view it was the invited media that brought the private realm into the public view, with the intention of making the public aware of the lack of services in the camps. In oral and written reports, some control could be retained over the message, but in pictorial representations the squalor of the camp easily became an exotic 'otherness' that contrasted with the 'ordinariness' of neighbouring suburbs.²⁹⁰ Sympathetic activists, and sometimes journalists, appeared impressed by the cultural expressions of Aboriginality displayed in the bushland setting. They also had good intentions in accepting uncritically what appeared to be a particularly Aboriginal way of life. In this way, it appeared to me that Fish Camp was being transformed into a public 'theme park' for reconciliation. On several occasions, visitors were brought to the camp 'to meet Aboriginal people' and take photographs, if permitted.

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

Against the growing emphasis of Aboriginality-as-persistence at Fish Camp there were four entries in the annual Human Rights Week Darwin Community Legal Service arts awards on December 8, 1997 that had universal rights as their inspiration.²⁹¹ To make the installation titled 'Please explain', the artist used blackened cooking utensils borrowed from the camp, placed beside a reconstructed open hearth of ashes and charcoal. Stained plastic water containers, an empty wine cask and other items given by the camp were placed around a soiled foam mattress and bedding on red dirt to create a reflective view of homelessness in Darwin. The artwork was intended as an answer to a comment by a national right-wing politician who had spoken out against Aborigines receiving special privileges. The title of the work referred to that comment.

A minimalist painting of a tap, titled 'A denial of justice', by an activist art student who was very close to the fringe dwellers, symbolised the

conversion of natural resources into a controlled commodity that was denied to Aboriginal fringe dwellers at Fish Camp. Access to natural water sources is now restricted for Aboriginal campers in Darwin and water comes through a metered pipe. The same artist also entered a clay sculpture of a tap with one sculptured drop falling on dry sand. He called this work 'No water, no life'. Lastly, the winning entry was an edited video of scenes and interviews at Fish Camp filmed by Stella (Simmering 1997), whose involvement in Fish Camp affairs began at the Parliament House protest. She has continued to make videos of life in the camps (see Simmering 1998, 2000a, 2000b).

Marcia Langton (1993b:33) writes:

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

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

8.11 Waak Waak Jungi at the Festival of Darwin

When an innovative Aboriginal performance group arrived from their Ramingining homelands in northeast Arnhem Land for the annual Festival of Darwin in August 1997, the Fish Camp people and their friends provided dancers and a leading male ceremonial singer for several of the shows. The dancing and singing at five various performances to enact the sometimes amusing, sometimes sacred stories sung in Gunmalbingu language by the group illustrated the versatility of the campers and their unrecognised contribution towards Darwin cultural life.²⁹² The group is a unique experiment in collaboration with white musicians and poets who effectively reconstruct songs in the Woiwurrung language from Victoria and Yolngu people who perform traditional songs and dances of northeastern Arnhem Land to a mixture of Aboriginal and European instruments (see Waak Waak Jungi 1997; *Age* August 29, 1997; *Sydney Morning Herald* August 29, 1997; *NT News* September 9, 1997). The media reported on the concert:

Meanwhile, black women from deprived Fish Camp danced barefoot on the marble floor of the Supreme Court foyer, while one of their number with a wooden leg clapped.

With [George] Banbuma, [two Europeans in the group] are campaigning for water for Fish Camp. They point out that when Banbuma and the dancing women went back to their camp, they had no water to wash the [clay] paint off (*Sydney Morning Herald* August 29, 1997).²⁹³

At night members of the group celebrated their successes with dancing and singing in the dust at Fish Camp and for months later their cassette tape was played repetitively at high volume in camp (Waak Waak Jungi 1997). Songs like 'Jumbucco'²⁹⁴ and 'Kava song' invariably stirred listeners to get up and dance to the music from the cassette player.

8.12 The role of music

It is notable how often it is that music features in the above interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. In the camp, the didgeridoo, tapes or guitar accompany most gatherings. Fringe dwellers otherwise mix with townspeople at musical events, particularly if either of the popular Burarra bands, or groups like Waak Waak Jungi with Arnhem Land musicians and singers, are playing. Although these bands mostly sing in their own language, I suggest that music and dance creates a space where merging can occur. As Breen (1989:143) cites, 'Music in any society helps us to communicate on a different plane with each other'.

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

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

Corn (1999a:3), who conducted some of his research with the Burarra residents of the Darwin fringe camps during my stay amongst them, concluded that popular Western music forms in the 1990s, 'through their recontextualised local uses, have been acculturated to accommodate local Aboriginal concepts, values and beliefs concerning family, country and spirituality'. Corn (1999a:18) notes that 'Aboriginal musicians imbue their own musical creativity within the simultaneous contexts of the contemporary world and the ever-present Dreaming'.

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

Although singing to the accompaniment of didgeridoo and clap stick was the preferred style at Fish Camp, the campers followed the three bands of countrymen and women that gave many performances during my fieldwork. Drinking and dancing to Aboriginal rock music provides a space where the intermingling of fringe dwellers and their non-Aboriginal sympathisers can occur. By temporarily subverting structural and linguistic authority during the 'heteroglossia' of these occasions, Aboriginal bands allow a form of 'merging' to occur between fringe dwellers and others.²⁹⁵

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

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

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

As much as they enjoy the events where their kin are playing, by their lack of material possessions the fringe dwellers are insulated from the disruptive effect the intrusion of the rock music culture might have on the camps. On one occasion at Fish Camp, a dispute occurred over the playing of loud music on a large portable radio/tape cassette player. The young man was considered mentally damaged by petrol sniffing which was rife at Maningrida before being eliminated in 1993 (see Burns et al 1995:84). He became more unpredictable after smoking 'gunja' (marihuana) or drinking alcohol. He could not understand why he should not play his favourite tapes at top volume late at night. Radios and tapes are not popular in the camp at night. The control of music that can be turned to high volume by any unskilled person is a problem not easily resolved by traditional sanctions. In addition, unlike the didgeridoos lying about the camp, the radio is accepted as a private possession. Although he eventually took his player further away until only a distant booming could be heard, the incident showed how intolerable life could be in the camp if such possessions became commonplace. Instead, radios or tape decks are often smashed by the owner in anger, which has a levelling effect by removing the object of dissension.

Unlike the examples of institutionally encapsulated Aboriginal societies given by Tonkinson (1974), Morris (1985, 1988, 1989) and Trigger (1986,

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

Endnotes for Chapter 8:

²⁶⁹ Wells (1995a:21) states that the park in front of the new NT Parliament House, above Lameroo Beach, has been named 'Demeora Park' in recognition of the Larrakia name for the area.

²⁷⁰ My connections with the Aboriginal fringe dwellers of Darwin began with friendships formed while camping in the open on Lameroo Beach from June to October in 1969. At that time, prior to Sansom's (1980a) groundbreaking ethnography on fringe dwellers in Darwin, most anthropologists had little interest in Aboriginal fringe dwellers (see Sansom 1982b:118).

²⁷¹ In 1973, Woodward (1973:26) was told that there were 'eighteen members of the [Larrakia tribe] now left'. He says that many more could trace maternal links. A 1973 Welfare Branch report, cited by Cooper (1985), claims that only seven Larrakia people of paternal descent survived.

²⁷² As a result, the cheap seats were discontinued, and all tickets in the stalls were the same price.

²⁷³ 'Heads' was a synonym for 'hippies', referring to their reputed liking of marihuana.

²⁷⁴ The 'hippies' who lived at Lameroo Beach in 1969 had successors in the 1998 Jabiluka anti-uranium activists' protest camp, which supported the Aboriginal traditional owners.

²⁷⁵ Email sent to Caroline Tapp, forwarded to Bill Day October 25, 2001. Re: The Diversity Conference November 2001: redefining the mainstream - Local Government, inclusive communities.

²⁷⁶ These policies also place most anthropologists who represent Aboriginal people in the NT in an oppositional role (for example, see Trigger 1998b). However, Sansom told the 1998 Ethnographic Forum that he was about to leave for Darwin to represent the Northern Territory Government in the Kenbi land claim hearing.

²⁷⁷ Many of Wild Water's songs, like 'Diff'rent Colours' and 'Blak History' are defiantly political. The videorecording for the song 'Diff'rent Colours' on *Land Rights Views* (Northern Land Council 1996b) shows the group singing with the Lee Point camp behind them, before the July eviction, as though to illustrate the lyrics:

We are black, we are white, we are many races living together now,
 We live in this world of misery where there are wars that really can hurt.
 There is racism and prejudice but we must go on,
 Life was never easy, life is so tough.

Chorus:

We are diff'rent colours but we are one people
 We are diff'rent colours but we are the world.

In our society we have random violence and stressful drinking.
 There are drug dealers and alcoholics - this must be stopped.
 Why must life be so rough? Let's all stop and come together now.

²⁷⁸ See also the NTU student newspaper *Deli*rra* May 1997, p.17.

²⁷⁹ Letter from Assistant Secretary, Land Administration, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment 'To Whom It May Concern', 13 May 1997.

²⁸⁰ The song celebrates kava drinking and is performed on cassette and CD by Wild Water (1996). Duncan Dennis (Manalpuy), whose homeland is near Maningrida, was a founder of the popular Letterstick Band and co-starred with Nicole Kidman in the 1983 Australian film, *Bush Christmas* (Baron Films, 1983). He was based at Fish Camp and stayed at Lee Point throughout the protest.

²⁸¹ In a review of *Bunji: the story of the Gwalwa Daraniki Movement*, Sally-Ann wrote: 'It's only since last year that I've become good friends with some of the Aboriginal people living at Fish Camp, in the Kulaluk Reserve, and begun to see some of the problems facing Aboriginal people living in official and unofficial town camps in Darwin' (Watson 1997:18).

²⁸² Letter from George Banbuma, Dulcie Malimara and Billy Cooper 'on behalf of the people of Lee Point' to A/Secretary of Land Administration, Department of Lands, Planning and Environment, 23 May 1997.

²⁸³ Although I made the shirts, the campers proudly wore them in court and on other occasions as a conscious gesture of resistance, as can be seen in the film, *A dying shame*, in the opening scenes which were filmed at Fish Camp (Roy 1997).

²⁸⁴ Article 12 of 'The articles of faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints'.

²⁸⁵ At first the ambulance refused to attend, claiming they had just come from the camp. Over the mobile phone they asked if a doctor was present and were told 'Yes, and he is also a senator!'

²⁸⁶ Sometimes these fits may be caused by withdrawal from alcohol, particularly on Sundays when licensed stores do not sell alcohol.

²⁸⁷ June's election campaign publicity included a photograph of 'June Mills and Senator Bob Brown at Fish Camp, August 1997', but the policies did not specifically refer to the fringe dwellers (Mills 1997).

²⁸⁸ In the video of the meeting (Tapp 1997), most of the residents of Fish Camp are sitting on beds, while the visitors sit on the ground. I purchased three strong plastic-backed chairs for my side of the camp during my fieldwork. I was continually retrieving them from around the camp as they were in great demand. The point is, sitting on the ground is not always the preferred style, although the people are accustomed to it.

²⁸⁹ I suggest that Sansom's ethnography *The camp at Wallaby Cross* also treats Aboriginal poverty in this way.

²⁹⁰ See 'In the heart of Darwin', (*AustralAsian* 1(2):11) for examples of controlled images like, 'George and Dulcie cart water to drink, cook and wash' and, 'Humpies and the flag, but no water'.

²⁹¹ The exhibition is held in conjunction with the 'Living with Alcohol' program. The entries listed in the 1997 catalogue of *Rights on show 97: an exhibition of art from the community with a focus on human rights issues in the Territory* are: 28 'A denial of justice' by Darren Kane; 34 'No water, no life' by Darren Kane; 43 'Fish Camp' by Stella Simmering; 44 'Please explain' by Penny Campton and Caroline Tapp.

²⁹² In August and September 1997, Fish Camp was involved in music and dance performances at the Supreme Court, the festival concert on the Esplanade, a Myilli Point restaurant, a high school and the album launch (Waak Waak Jungi 1997. See *NT News* September 9, 1997).

²⁹³ At another concert, Banbuma politicised 'a song about rain' when he announced, 'We all need rain. Water comes from rain but we do not have water at Fish Camp'. As a result of the Waak Waak Jungi concerts, an anonymous Darwin lawyer donated a small water tank to Fish Camp (see *Green Left Weekly* September 24, 1997).

²⁹⁴ The title of the song refers to tobacco. The song tells of sharing, exchanging and asking for something from another (Waak Waak Jungi 1997). At Fish Camp, and at public performances, dancers move from person to person with hands outstretched for gifts of cigarettes.

²⁹⁵ In the Bakhtin School of literary criticism, the interplay of alternative voices is termed 'heteroglossia' (Selden 1989:17-18). In my metaphor of merging traffic, in the case of music, the rules are suspended and space for merging is made in the resultant confusion.

CHAPTER NINE

Alcohol, resistance and race in Darwin: fringe dwellers and the Beer Can Regatta.

9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I suggest that alcohol becomes a marker of racial difference in the annual Darwin Beer Can Regatta which, at the time of its beginning, signified changes occurring in Darwin as a frontier society became an enclave of settled Australia in the remote north. In the 1990s, my analysis suggests that the festival remains a marker of attitudes to alcohol in the north as members of the settler society in Darwin demonstrate and confirm their ingenuity and their ability to drink in a socially constructive manner by constructing boats from beer cans and having fun racing them while raising money for charity. In contrast, Aboriginal drinking is commonly viewed as uncontrolled, purposeless and associated with antisocial behaviour, untidiness and litter.

I argue that in the Beer Can Regatta the Darwin non-Aboriginal settler society conceals its cultural dislocation and dispossession of Aboriginal people, while constructing settler myths on the urban landscape. In my analysis, I suggest that the festival mediates the disjunction between culture and place typical of immigrant people.²⁹⁶ In contrast, I suggest that Darwin fringe dwellers believe that they are at home on their own land, while their drinking is associated with Aboriginal resistance to dispossession. I argue that Aborigines in the heavy-drinking fringe camps of Darwin order their lives in traditional ways rather than through a 'culture of opposition' but are more inclined to actively protest than are non-drinking or housed Aboriginal groups in towns.

I firstly give an account of changes in drinking behaviour of Aboriginal people in Darwin and the previously undisciplined drinking style of White frontier males, leading up to the first Beer Can Regatta. I relate these changes to the present conflict between Aboriginal drinking in public places and the Darwin settler society and suggest the regatta assists to resolve the conflict between condemnation of Aboriginal drinking and the image of the beer-loving Territorian.

In my analysis I dispute Mewett's (1988) insightful interpretation that the regatta signifies class divisions, and suggest the regatta has a racial metamessage. I then give an account of the recent regattas, before discussing moves to regulate Aboriginal drinking in public places. After a brief description of fringe dweller drinking in the 1990s, a summary of the

explanations for Aboriginal drinking is followed by evidence suggesting that there is a relationship between alcohol and fringe dweller resistance.

Sargent (1984:186) asks: 'Who benefits from the problem and certain ways of defining it?' Sargent (1994:212) claims: 'In Australia, where problems with alcohol are prevalent in *all* parts of society, for whites to label blacks as alcoholics is an obvious projection of blame by the powerful on the powerless'.²⁹⁷ With these questions in mind, I have avoided taking advantage of the open lifestyle and hospitality of the fringe dwellers to create an intrusive ethnography of Aboriginal drinking. As I have argued in my critique of Sansom's texts, such descriptions can be offensive and harmful to fringe dwellers in Darwin.

My analysis of asymmetric power relations is similar to that of Saggars and Gray (1997:221), who advocate a 'political economy approach' that 'directs attention away from Aboriginal people to the wider network of relationships in which their lives are lived'.²⁹⁸ Arguing against particularistic studies that focus on demand rather than supply of alcohol, Saggars and Gray (1998:85-6) point out that Aboriginal groups 'do not exist in a vacuum'. Similarly, Wright (1996:4), in his study of Aborigines using emergency services in a major city hospital, believes that to focus on alcohol is 'oversimplifying in the face of complexity'.

Sansom's (1980a:44) observation that grog 'deserves prime emphasis because it gives the fringe camp its character and *raison d'être*' is a view not accepted by this study. Certainly, regular and excessive drinking is the norm in most fringe camps (see O'Connor 1984:181). However, Eggleston (1974:60) suggests that the 'pathology of the white community which rejects Aborigines' is a more pertinent topic of study. Alternatively, the comment by Sansom (1980a:44) that 'the meaning of grog and grogging is rooted in history' suggests a line of research to explain the different drinking styles of the powerful and the powerless in Darwin.

9.2 Alcohol and citizenship

Most Northern Territory Aborigines had been prohibited from consuming alcohol until 'part Aborigines' had been given full rights in the Welfare Ordinance 1953. Under the new legislation, 'full blood' Aborigines became 'wards' of the Director of Welfare (see Chesterman and Galligan 1997:174). Wards were those who:

had been declared by the Administrator to need assistance, by reason of their manner of living, or their inability, without assistance, to adequately manage their own affairs, or whose social habits and

behaviour was undesirable, or who associated with undesirables.²⁹⁹

After many of the NT public objected that the Ordinance would give the Administrator too much power, regulations stated that no one could be declared a ward if they had a certificate of exemption or already had the right to vote (Franklin 1976:143). According to Franklin (p.143), 'this additional criteria made it certain that the only people who could be declared wards were full blood Aborigines'. In 1961, out of a population of 17,000 'full blood' Aboriginal people, only 89 had drinking rights (Chesterman and Galligan 1997:175). After a long campaign in Darwin for Aboriginal equal rights, the passing of the Social Welfare Ordinance in 1964 abolished the wardship system and thus removed restrictions on consuming alcohol (see Franklin 1976:152; Wright 1985:16; Wells 1995b). Bans remained for Aboriginal residents on reserves and cattle stations (Rowley 1972a:406). Remembering the era of prohibition and the campaigns for change, Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory and elsewhere equate achieving the right to drink with 'citizenship rights' (Albrecht 1974:5; Bain 1974:43; Sansom 1977:59, 1980a:49; Siggers and Gray 1998:50; Cowlshaw 1999:22).³⁰⁰ With Aboriginal citizenship, non-Aboriginal Northern Territory drinkers were faced with the contradiction of deploring uncontrolled Aboriginal drinking while praising the frontier tradition of drinking to excess.

In the 1970s Aboriginal fringe dwellers in towns viewed themselves as 'the true inheritors of the new era' (Sansom 1980a:50). When I first arrived in Darwin in 1969, the town still had the atmosphere of a frontier city. Hotels catered for the Aboriginal patrons of spacious bars and beer gardens like the barn-like Bamboo Lounge of the Don Hotel or under the stars at the suburban Seabreeze Hotel. Single men bought drinks for Aboriginal women and fights were a regular event amongst the heavy-drinking crowds. At the courthouse each week, barefooted Aboriginal men and women were called forward to receive nominal fines for public drunkenness (see *Bunji* November 1972; Sansom 1980a:46; Day 1994:22). Down 'the track', the Stuart Highway was lined with beer cans that glinted in the headlights. To the east, on the edge of the dry Arnhem Land Reserve, the notorious 'beer can mountain' continued to rise beside the thirsty Aboriginal customers of the licensed Border Store.

The Australian bush worker and Aborigines have long had a symbiotic and at times exploitative relationship at outback drinking locales where 'work and bust' was the rule (see Sansom 1980a:180). While the frontier population was predominantly European and Asian single men and the racially-mixed populace who called the Territory home, the Ted Egan song praising the 'bloody good drinkers in the Northern Territory, from Darwin down to Alice

Springs they're always on a spree' remained popular. During the rebuilding of the cyclone-ravaged city in 1975, the casual 'thongs bars' frequented by single White men and Aboriginal drinkers experienced a revival (Sansom 1980a:179). However, as Darwin became more settled, the informal bars were gradually converted to a more stylish air-conditioned and controlled environment with strict dress codes.

As dress regulations, rising prices and a shift from frontier drinking in Darwin bars increasingly made Aboriginal men and women feel unwelcome in hotels, they moved out into the parks and found drinking partners amongst visiting kin. In addition, 'many indigenous Australians prefer open, public drinking environments' (Saggers and Gray 1998:63). Drinking styles became increasingly different and drinkers became increasingly segregated because the more racially exclusive gatherings are less secure than supervised bars for Whites.³⁰¹ Wild frontier drinking was also increasingly seen in settled Darwin as 'antisocial'; however, drinking beer remains an integral part of the image of a particularly North Australian way of life, as I suggest in the following case study of the Beer Can Regatta festival.

9.3 The decriminalisation of drunkenness

In 1974, the year of the first Darwin Beer Can Regatta, drunkenness was decriminalised in the NT, shortening the weekly parade of Aborigines before the courts. The repeal of Section 56 of the *Police and Police Offences Ordinance 1923* and the subsequent amendment allowed NT police to take drunks into custody for up to six hours without laying charges. However, the removal of drunken or homeless Aborigines from parks and contested spaces around Darwin continued apace. The 106 per cent increase in persons taken into custody for being drunk between 1974 and 1982 suggest the changes were 'decriminalisation in name only' (Donald 1984:25).

According to Warren Donald (1984:24): 'The increase [in numbers of those taken into custody for drunkenness] immediately after decriminalisation [from 8606 in 1974, to 17,766 in 1979] could be explained by the peculiar social conditions present in the Northern Territory in the reconstruction period following cyclone "Tracy"'. However, Donald gives no figures for 1975-7, the years of Sansom's fieldwork. Figures dropped and then rose in later years from 12,736 in 1980, 13,969 in 1981 to 16,217 in 1982 (Donald 1984:23).

Although they were not charged, the numbers of intoxicated Aboriginal people who were taken into custody under the amended ordinance by police in the years following decriminalisation suggest a much higher level of state intervention into fringe camp drinking than is indicated in the table

reproduced by Sansom (1980a:47), showing that 179 Aborigines were charged in the Darwin magistrate's court in 1976, with 79.4 per cent of the charges alcohol-related.³⁰² Sansom has cited only the more serious offences, while the figures given by Donald reflect a greater police surveillance of Aboriginal lives. Donald's statistics raise doubts about the reality of a 'free grogging community' on the Darwin fringe described by Sansom (1977:60, 1980a:51) which 'established an independence from direct white interventions' (Sansom 1980a:51) and an 'absence of alien and externally imposed ideologies and instruments of social control' (Sansom 1977:59).

The police discretionary powers to take drunks into custody could easily be misused without the protection against wrongful arrest that the courts offered to Aborigines and others (Donald 1984:25). Donald (p.40) believes the NT increase was a result of the failure to allocate specific resources until 1983 and the allocation of an unrewarded and unpleasant duty to police officers.³⁰³ In contrast, in the USA decriminalisation produces a decline in drunks processed by the law (p.37). Although Donald (p.50) argues against accusations that a racial bias accounts for Aboriginal people comprising over sixty per cent of those taken into custody in Darwin in 1982, it is possible that the police reflect the desire in 'settled' Australia to 'clean up' the city by removing Aboriginal drinkers from public places.

By 1974, in Alice Springs public drunkenness was seen as 'uncontained and dangerous' in contrast to the 'contained' private drinking of most Whites (Collmann 1988:47). To avoid reports of racial tensions, the problem was expressed as a parochial concern over maintenance of social order and not as strife between Aborigines and other town residents (p.47). Reports of racial disputes aroused the national media and threatened federal intervention into Territory affairs at a time when aspirations for self-government were growing (Collmann 1988:51).³⁰⁴

At the same time, the Territory sought a new image by removing the kilometres and mountains of cans and labelling the excluded Aboriginal drinkers as 'transients'. Marcia Langton (1993a:197) writes of the colonial necessity of transforming the dangerous native into the 'pathetic mendicant "Abo"'. In addition, Langton (1993a:205) believes anthropological notions of social pathology and cultural degeneration amongst Aborigines in towns have supported White society's view of the Aboriginal drinker 'living a fantasy of wanting to become like a white man, but unable to do so' (see also Langton 1981:18; Cowlishaw 1988a:103). For non-Aboriginal drinkers in settled Darwin, acceptance of these concepts avoids an analysis of the process of dispossession taking place in the north, in a pattern resembling that that occurred earlier in the southern cities of settled Australia.

In Darwin, it would seem that homeless Aboriginal people become less threatening as 'transients' or 'itinerants'. These categories are often used as the equivalent of the iconic 'drunken "Abo"', as described by Langton (1993a). However, as Cowlshaw (1994:80) claims, the refusal of Aborigines in towns to be passive and silent 'stimulates the fears and feeds the paranoia' which many town residents feel towards the significant minority. The behaviour of public drinkers warrants increased local surveillance and intervention, without threatening the economy built around the sale of alcohol (see Drakakis-Smith 1981:41) or asking the question posed by Langton (1993a:199): 'Who benefits from the sale of alcohol?'³⁰⁵

Aboriginal people who did not conform to the lifestyle of the majority in Darwin were increasingly excluded in the 1970s as the city became an enclave of settled Australia in the remote north. Families began to 'put down their roots' and plan for a future in Darwin as the Territory population stabilised and the distant federal administration was being replaced by a settler-dominated legislature in preparation for self-government in 1978. Beyond the larger towns, the Territory remained typical of 'remote Australia' as described by Rowley (1972b:13), where Aboriginal people are a predominant percentage of the population. It was in these years of transition, in the early to mid-1970s, that the Beer Can Regatta began as a unique Darwin event that I interpret as a marker of the changing attitudes towards Aborigines and alcohol in the NT.

9.4 The Beer Can Regatta

The Beer Can Regatta was an instant success, gaining publicity for Darwin around the world and attracting large crowds. Team or individual entrants were required to construct various categories of vessels with used beer cans that were in abundance. In a good-natured spectacle, the finished boats and rafts competed in various classes and sizes on the calm dry-season waters of a popular Darwin ocean beach.

According to Mewett (1988:11), beer cans removed from their usual setting as alcohol containers become symbols. He suggests that: 'The beer can as the dominant symbol of the Beer can Regatta does not imply that the Regatta is about beer or drinking. Rather the beer can is symbolic of certain axioms about the social order' (p.11). A festival's 'metamessage' is about affirmation of social values and social control (p.6). In Mewett's insightful analysis, the values are those of the working man's frontier masculinity. These values are supported by the Darwin elites because the frontier is the image that draws high rates of federal funding (p.3). However, perhaps because he did not do extended ethnographic fieldwork and lacked local knowledge, the

conclusions drawn by Mewett overlook the racial divide that I suggest is symbolised by the beer can boats.

Mewett misses the significance of the regatta's origins in the Keep Australia Beautiful campaign to clear the NT landscape of beer cans. The construction of beer can vessels publicised the need to collect used cans, which in remote Australia were otherwise left to be hidden by the long grass or be swept away in monsoonal floods. As the 1996 program for the festival stated: 'In 1973 [a Darwin business man] came up with the ideal solution for the Keep Australia Beautiful Council who were looking for ways to dispose of the drink cans that littered the city'.³⁰⁶

Comments which I will cite by entrants, suggest that instead of producing litter to disfigure an increasingly settled environment, emptying the cans becomes a useful occupation when the empty cans are subsequently bound together as boats for competition in the regatta (Illustration 4). Similarly, I suggest that drinking becomes purposeful, constructive and family-orientated rather than an antisocial activity of the single frontier male who was often in the company of Aborigines, more particularly Aboriginal women (see Cowlshaw 1988a:95; Rose 1991:179-188)

The cans are glued, bound and contained into imaginative and colourful floating shapes. The vessels made from cans compete in organised races around a set course and at set times, guided and propelled by crew. In the speedboat section the aqua-dynamic craft use outboard motors to skim around the course at high speeds. In my view, the symbolism is predominantly one of the controlled uses of beer cans, in contrast to discarded cans that are evidence of uncontrolled frontier drinking.

The association between clearing litter and controlling Aboriginal drinkers is still made in Darwin. In 1996, under a heading, 'The dirty drunks of Darwin', the founder of Clean up Australia Day, Ian Kiernan, was reported as saying that drunks are often to blame for litter in Darwin (*NT News* February 9, 1996).³⁰⁷ The launch of the clean up also signalled the beginning of a campaign against 'itinerants' by the mayor who said: 'I'm saying that there is a problem, we have to admit there is a problem, and if that makes me a racist or a red-necked bigot, that's exactly what I am' (*NT News* February 10, 1996).

In his class analysis, Mewett (1988:4) describes the demography of Darwin in the 1980s, where public servants accounted for 46 per cent of all employed people. Mewett claims that the regatta is a 'festival of the working man' and that many of the middle-class shun the vulgarity of the events (p.5). However, 'elaboration of the ideology of frontier' in the festival is supported

by Darwin elites because it presents the Territory as unique within Australia, which helps attract the federal grants on which the Territory depends. Mewett adds: 'For the boom to continue and for all that this means for the ruling party and the Territory elites, the subsidies must keep rolling in' (p.4). Mewett (p.18) notes that 'Territorians, with the highest average incomes in Australia, are better off as ordinary people than those in any other part of the nation'. He concludes that 'the Beer Can Regatta facilitates the ready cooperation between working people and the Darwin elite' (p.4). At the regatta the two classes 'focus their consciousness together ... to generate a commonality of understanding' (p.12).

I suggest that, rather than signifying the class conflict that Mewett suggests, the regatta has a racial metamessage. Class differences are less significant in the Northern Territory, where the Chief Minister said, 'you could really be anything you wanted to be' (*Suburban* May 29, 1997). In this environment, racial divisions tend to replace class divisions. In the NT, the conservatives have held political power since the granting of self-government in 1978, largely by playing on racial issues that appear to draw many voters to their policies. Labor candidates are elected only in predominantly Aboriginal electorates while many Whites who settle in Darwin find a commonality in their opposition to Aboriginal claims to prior ownership of the land. According to Cowlshaw (1988a:6), 'Racist beliefs become culturally sanctioned responses that, perhaps unintentionally, defend the advantages that whites enjoy'.

Mewett (1988:14) noted that the festival had little ethnic participation:

A final comment about the audience is that it was overwhelmingly composed of people who appeared to be of Anglo-Celtic origins (or at least of Western and Northern European extraction). Non-whites, both Aboriginal and migrant 'ethnic minorities' were noticeably absent...

For Mewett (1988:15), the racial composition of the crowd is significant only because it emphasises the common cultural understandings that are symbolically endorsed by the festival. Judging by my own observations during attendance at the regatta many times since its inception, and during my fieldwork, the absence of Aboriginal participation is a striking feature of the regatta, in comparison to other events that are supported by Aboriginal people.³⁰⁸ In overlooking the significance of Aboriginal non-participation, Mewett has missed the racial metamessage of the Darwin Beer Can Regatta.

By failing to mention the significance to Aboriginal people of Mindil Beach (see Map 2), where the events are held, Mewett also reinforces the

dispossession of Aboriginal people by viewing the landscape as an empty canvas on which meanings are inscribed by the settler society.³⁰⁹ This is a role of the regatta which was implied by the *NT News* (June 15, 1974) when it reported that: 'Darwin has, of course, been on the map since the late 1800s when white men first settled here ... but it should be in little danger of slipping off the map after tomorrow's beer can regatta'.

Mindil Beach was a fringe camp at the turn of the century when Aboriginal people lived on the seafront in humpies very similar to the shelters in many fringe camps today (see *Bunji* May 1981).³¹⁰ In a belated recognition of prior use, a memorial was erected at the northern end of the beach in 1992. A plaque states:

The memorial acknowledges that the Larrakia and in more recent times other Aboriginal people living in Darwin, have traditionally used the area for the burial of their ancestors.

Designed by Koolpinya (Richard Barnes) one of the Larrakia custodians for the area, the memorial was completed in November 1992 with a traditional mourning ceremony putting to rest a skull returned from Edinburgh by an Aboriginal delegation in 1991...

Darwin City Council funded the memorial to mark the site for Larrakia and other Aboriginal people to ensure that people are respectful and remain aware of the history and sacredness of the area.

For Mewett (1988:19) the association of dangerous sea and racing craft represents the conquering of the unknown frontier by 'real men' while the spectators in the safety of the dry beach are representative of effete men and females of settled and civilised Australia. However, in the dry season in Darwin the sea is calm and inviting. It is unlikely that spectators considered the ocean dangerous at the time of the regatta, as Mewett (1988:17) insists. Despite this criticism, I agree that the building of racing craft out of empty beer cans is a symbol of the ability of real men to 'overcome adversity' (p.17). However, I believe 'real *white* men' is the dominant signifier rather than 'real *working class* men' (as Mewett suggests).

Mewett stresses the gender message of the festival where 'boats were crewed almost exclusively by men' (p.12). Mewett (p.22) claims that the ironman event, where contestants drink beer between amusing tasks, is a demonstration of the competitors' mastery of beer:

Men who are unable to 'handle' their beer in this way are

distinguished and separated from real men and marked as part of that mass of effete men, barely different from women and children (p.23).

Rather than a marker of gender, my observations suggest that the ability to drink is seen as a marker of the racial superiority displayed at the Beer Can Regatta. It is not women and men who are contrasted by the predominantly White spectators but Whites and Aborigines. The display of purposeful, enjoyable and controlled drinking by the participants in the races can be interpreted as a demonstration of the successful assimilation of alcohol into the culture of settled Australia, in contrast to Aboriginal drinking, which is viewed by many as childlike and without culture.

The displays of masculinity observed by Mewett (1988) appear to typify the role of men on the frontier as protectors of White women. However, in settled Darwin, functional and controlled white drinking is shared by white women and displaces the secret liaisons between frontier white men and Aboriginal women that were an integral part of riotous drinking in remote Australia. By 1997, the Beer Can Regatta ironman had become the 'ironperson', 'Mr and Mrs Beer Can Regatta' replaced Miss Mindil Beach and many women competed in the races. One Defence Force crew titled their entry, 'The vicious bitches' (*NT News* August 11, 1997).

Mewett (1988:18) believes the 'real [working] men' who have tamed the frontier mock the yachting regattas of the effete and wealthy in the south. I suggest that the regatta can be seen as a wet imitation of the 'Henley on Todd' races in Alice Springs where contestants run inside boat-shaped constructions in the dry riverbed. The connection became explicit when the Beer Can Regatta began including 'Henley on Mindil' races for crews carrying yacht-shaped structures in a dash along the dry beach. The borrowing of names can be read as ironic comments on the cultural displacement of the transient non-Aboriginal population, while inscribing a mythology onto an empty landscape. In addition, the signifiers of regatta and Henley-on-Thames suggest the British origins of 'civilised' society that distinguishes white drinking behaviour from the uncontrolled and purposeless drinking of Aborigines.

9.5 The Beer Can Regatta in 1996 and 1997

In 1997 the Living with Alcohol Program proposal to have breath-testing equipment at the festival caused a controversy (*NT News* August 9, 1997). According to the newspaper report, organisers believed people would be intimidated by breath-testing. They added that 'the "boozy" image of the regatta had been dispelled years ago'. After moves to change the name of the regatta to something less associated with beer drinking, the festival publicity

chairman reflected the concern of an *NT News* (August 10, 1996) editorial that Darwin was losing 'its last frontier-type of image' (*Suburban* August 7, 1996). He accepted that responsible drinking must be promoted but also believed Darwin's beer drinking image should stay intact. The chairman said: 'Once they try and convert [Darwin] to a churchy, teetotalling sort of an area I think the image of Darwin will go down'. However, despite concern in 1996 that entries were well below the sixty the Lions Club event attracted in the peak years of the festival (*NT News* August 12, 1996), over 8,000 people, still predominantly Anglo-Celtic Australian, enjoyed the family events on the beach.

During my 1996 fieldwork at the regatta, a Christian group shouted testimonies from a distance, in opposition to the regatta's celebration of alcohol. In response, the crowd on the beach interrupted the Christians' singing of 'Amazing Grace' by throwing missiles at them. Smoke drifted from a campfire of four seemingly disinterested Aboriginal campers sitting under the grove of casuarina pines which fringe the northern end of the beach. The only other Aborigines from remote Australia apparent at the festival were small groups of high school boarders whose neat weekend wear contrasted with the half naked white skin around them. As the *NT News* (August 11, 1997) stated the next year: 'An hour after the event began Mindil Beach had transformed into a carpet of Eskies, resting red bodies and frolicking families'.

Heavy drinking was excused as preparation for the beer can races. One team said they had drunk 3,000 cans of beer in a week. 'If we win we'll get rid of a few more cans of beer - to use in next year's race, of course' (*NT News* August 6, 1997). Illustrating that beer drinking for the festival was a constructive 'occupation', distinguished from wasteful drunkenness, the *NT News* (August 11, 1997) noted: 'After months of arduous work (a moderate boat takes about 6,000 beer cans), eleven feats of engineering brilliance finally made it into the water for the Battle of Mindil'. The *NT News* (August 1999) reported that drinkers at the Berrimah Hotel had 'worked hard lifting 375ml weights' (beer cans) to build their entry: 'In fact they drank so hard they have built two boats for the regatta this year'. The burly crew was pictured consuming cans for their craft.

The declining interest in the Beer Can Regatta follows the successful transformation from wild frontier drinking in Darwin to a pattern more typical of settled Australia.³¹¹ In the new environment, 'itinerants' do not belong or contribute to (civilised) society. I suggest the display of purposeful drinking, confirmed year by year at the festival, overcomes the contradiction of Whites enjoying their drinking while criticising Aborigines for their

excesses. Cowlshaw (1994:80) observed in a similar situation 'a pervasive hypocrisy' associated with White morality which reserves 'disapproval and contempt' for Aboriginal drunkenness while being 'secretive and ashamed' of their own drinking to excess.

In postcolonial Darwin where public expressions of racial superiority are illegal, the festival makes a powerful unspoken statement authorising task-directed white drinking in public places. Aborigines, who are noticeably absent from the Mindil Beach festival, are further displaced by the appropriation of the supposedly empty landscape for the predominantly White festival. Finally, the festival is a measure of social change in settled Darwin where Aboriginal drinking as a remnant of remote Australian lifestyle is disowned by the settler-residents of Darwin and banished to city parks and vacant land. In these 'public' spaces the newly won citizenship of the Aboriginal drinkers, who are now objectified as 'itinerants', is nullified.

9.6 The 2-kilometre law

Attempts to move Aboriginal drinkers from public space by amending the NT *Summary Offences Act* in 1983, making it an offence to consume alcohol in a public place within two kilometres of a licensed outlet, were viewed by many Aborigines as discriminatory (Brady 1998:117). Saggars and Gray (1998:100) claim 'most commentators see the 'Two Kilometre Law' as a transparent attempt to clear the streets of indigenous drinkers while doing nothing to address the underlying problems' (see also Brady 1988:59). The restrictions continue to entangle Aborigines in the criminal justice net, as has occurred since of the decriminalisation of drunkenness in 1974. Local Government by-laws have also had this effect (James 1993:13; *Australian* April 29, 1999). I reported in *Bunji* (March 1982):

The men from east Arnhem Land said: 'This new law tries to make us hide in the bush and drink like fifteen years ago. We don't want this. We don't want your new law and if you gave us a place you would not need this new law' (see also 'Aborigines petition council for camps', *NT News* December 12, 1982).

The men liken the two-kilometre law to a loss of citizenship. They refer to the pre-1964 situation when concealed drinking was a tactic of resistance against discriminatory laws. Like many affected by the restrictions on public drinking, the Yolngu men complain they have nowhere else to go and demand provision for Aboriginal-controlled open-air spaces in Darwin. D'Abbs (cited in Saggars and Gray 1998:101) agrees that restrictions on alcohol consumption do not work unless they assist Aborigines themselves to control the use of alcohol.

The two-kilometre law also caused conflict amongst the non-Aboriginal people of Darwin who feared their rights were being restricted. While giving the police authority to remove alcohol from Aborigines drinking in public places the law also theoretically threatened the Darwin custom of serving alcohol at most outdoors occasions. For this reason, many areas and events like the Casuarina coastal reserve, the Mindil Markets and the Beer Can Regatta, popular with non-Aboriginal settlers and tourists, are exempt from the liquor restrictions. The Liquor Commission can also grant exemptions for social functions or family barbecues.

During my time in the field, the Chief Minister called for the two-kilometre law to be enforced 'vigorously, rigorously and without compromise' (*NT News* 15 April, 1997).³¹² Two regular residents of Fish Camp were pictured in the *NT News* (April 18, 1997) being escorted into the police van in a blitz on Aboriginal drinking in the city parks that directed 393 drunks to the sobering-up centre in five days. However, senior police believed it was a 'short-term strategy that would not fix the problem'. The Deputy Commissioner said: 'We have to get together and provide long-term solutions, and Aboriginal people are the most important factor in that equation' (*NT News* April 23, 1997).

The police action and the language of the Chief Minister confused non-Aboriginal drinkers who were unsure which areas were exempt. One said: 'The 2km law is a joke because no one has any idea where or when you can drink around the place. Innocent people are going to be caught out' (*Sunday Territorian* April 20, 1997). Another white drinker claimed the Chief Minister's directive was 'an election ploy': 'It's aimed at a minority group and the rest of us have to suffer' (*Sunday Territorian* April 20, 1997).

9.7 An Aboriginal Club

James (1993:13) notes the need for legitimatised public space for Aboriginal drinkers:

If one accepts that the lack of other available space is a primary explanation for the congregation of groups on the street and in shopping centres, then strategies geared toward the providing of alternative public space are essential.

An Aboriginal social club in Darwin is an alternative space often proposed (see *Bunji* February 1980). The concept of an Aboriginal social club 'combined with the responsible serving of alcohol and transport for anyone

who needs it' was also proposed by the NT Police (*NT News* February 22, 1996). Although the Tyeweretye Club has fulfilled this role in Alice Springs since 1993, with mixed success, there is no Aboriginal club in Darwin. Brady (1998:100) quotes from the Tyeweretye Club rules:

Tyeweretye Club is a place for Aboriginal people. Especially town camp people. It is also for people from bush when they are in town. The club aims to provide services that meet the social and other needs of Aboriginal people. The Executives of the club are Aboriginal people. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are equally welcome as members of the club.

Opposition to an Aboriginal-controlled liquor outlet is likely to come from the take-away market of licensed stores that cater for Aborigines by selling packaged alcohol with a minimum of service. Suggesting that opposition to their application for a take-away liquor licence might come from competing liquor outlets, the Tyeweretye Club commented:

Aboriginal people like other members of the community have finite funds. There is only so much money they can spend on alcohol out of these finite funds. So the impact of the Tyeweretye Club getting a takeaway liquor licence is highly likely to divert money from other takeaway outlets rather than increase the consumption of alcohol (*Koori Mail* March 10, 1999).

In her study of drinking in the Northern Territory town of Tennant Creek, Brady (1988:22) notes the 'double standard' towards Aboriginal alcohol consumption by White residents who maintain a 'high tolerance for heavy drinking'. Attempts by a Tennant Creek Aboriginal organisation to have the sale of alcohol restricted were strongly opposed by licensees and others who claimed their rights were being infringed and their livelihoods threatened (see Roche 1995; Wright 1997; Siggers and Gray 1998a:330; Clausen 1999). Similarly, Aboriginal communities that enforce alcohol bans, or are completely alcohol-free 'dry areas', have experienced opposition from White residents, including police, who demand the right to consume alcohol (*Bunji* January 1982). Reggie Wuridjal, a traditional owner of the Maningrida area wrote in part:

We will never agree to different liquor permit rules for white or black in Maningrida.

If some white people want to drink as much as they want, when they want - they had better move somewhere else where they can do that.

If there is to be any ban on grog permits in Maningrida then bans must apply equally to white and black (*NT News* December 25, 2000)..

A report by the NT Liquor Commission (1982:2935) suggests that the majority of Aboriginal drinkers in the north are 'opportunity drinkers' who drink liquor if it is readily accessible 'but will not worry too much if it is not available...' The report adds that these drinkers 'are often prepared to live quite happily in dry areas, where non-Aboriginals would not' (p.2935). A correspondent to the *NT News* (March 7, 1996) wrote:

Darwin has a lot of problems to solve in relation to drinking. The Living with Alcohol program in Tennant Creek may be a good starting point. But somehow I can't see the people of Darwin going without the ability to buy grog for one day a week.³¹³

9.8 Profiting from Aboriginal drinking

After trial 'grog free days' and restrictions on the sale of wine casks, permanent restrictions were enforced in Tennant Creek by a decision of the NT Liquor Commission (*NT News* April 9, 1996; Wright 1997:250; Brady 1998:160; Siggers and Gray 1998a:330, 1998b:165). Commenting on the opposition from liquor traders to the Julalikari Council initiative for shorter hours, the Commissioner said: 'You can't separate yourself from the community for several hours a day while your bank balance swells. And go to church on Sunday morning and say I am part of this community: it is just too bad about the drinking problem' (cited in Wright 1997:257).

In a comprehensive summary of the literature on Aborigines and alcohol, Hunter (1993:100) uses an 'intercultural approach' to stress the importance of alcohol to the non-Aboriginal economy. Langton et al (1991:319) also found Aboriginal people believed that the Liquor Commission is 'acting on behalf of businessmen selling grog, and to be deliberately extending the availability of alcohol'. One submission to the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody (Langton et al 1991:319) stated: 'everyone is just trying to make more and more money from these outlets, and take money from the people'. For some Aboriginal people 'alcohol is seen as a deliberate component of the invasion of traditional lands and the destruction of traditional culture and law' (p.308).

I agree with Hunter (1993:100), that sales of alcohol become the most direct route for federal money to Aborigines returning to the non-Aboriginal economy. Hunter (p.100) adds that the government is a beneficiary of Aboriginal spending on alcohol. The rapid spending of federal pensions and

allowances boosts the general Territory economy with a regular, predictable injection of cash from Aboriginal drinkers who are condemned for their drinking while licensed suburban supermarkets stock their shelves with piles of cask wines popular amongst Aboriginal drinkers.

In a letter to the editor, a respected researcher, Peter d'Abbs criticises appeals from the Darwin Regional Tourism Association to 'banish' Aboriginal drinkers from public areas (*NT News* March 7, 1998). The plan is echoed in the editorial, 'Get rid of city drunks' (*NT News* March 9, 1998). D'Abbs wrote:

I am sure that this is a genuine problem, though whether it has as significant an impact on the industry as you suggest is questionable. For if you are serious about the health of the tourist industry in the NT, I suggest that we have a rather more intractable problem on our hands.

This is the way in which the tourist industry exploits indigenous culture for every cent that can be milked from it, while members of the society of which that industry is an important part continually display anger and contempt towards the carriers of that culture.

Tourists are not blind; many of them, I suggest, recognise that this is a symptom of a somewhat sick society, and say so to their friends back home. Petulant racist outbursts by senior politicians, for example, help to maintain the NT's reputation as a land of rednecks, and probably do more to lessen our attractiveness in the eyes of other Australians than the irritation of being badgered for a dollar by a drunk on the Esplanade.

9.9 Drinking on the fringe in the 1990s

Like 'Wallaby Cross', Fish Camp and Lee Point are 'free grogging' communities that contrast with the restricted drinking in other Aboriginal communities. A large proportion of income is spent on alcohol, with surprisingly few incidents that require outside intervention. Police or ambulance were rarely called during my fieldwork. At most times the drinking in the camps is celebratory and accompanied by singing or dancing. Although Bolger (1991:46) and Burbank (1994:61) note that Aboriginal women associate alcohol with anger and aggression, and are the chief opponents of drinking, Bolger (1991:33) also notes that the proportion of women who drink in town camps is greater than in other Aboriginal groups. In addition, it appears that the women in the fringe camps enjoy drinking and on most occasions drink as equals and in safety with the men.³¹⁴ Protection comes from the openness of the fringe camp (see Burbank

1994:156) amongst familiar kin. The security is often compared to the danger of sorcery alleged to exist at Maningrida and the problems of drinking amongst rival groups in centralised Aboriginal townships.

At Fish Camp, there was no obvious attempt to attract the pension dollar, which Sansom maintains motivated Wallaby Cross leaders who worked 'to gain cash from fellow countrymen' (Sansom 1980a:7). In contradiction to Sansom's (p. 230) assertion that 'a mob member is not a free economic man', pensioners at Fish Camp and Lee Point appeared to be free to spend their money wherever they wished. Although they usually chose to be with kin, even pensioners sometimes spent days or weeks away at other camps. However, it appeared that 'performative kinship', on which Sansom (1988b:170) bases his argument for 'structural indeterminacy ... in the Australian north', is less important in the Burarra drinking camps than obligations to kin determined by a 'classical' system applying to the homelands.³¹⁵

I did not detect a 'service economy' amongst the fringe dwellers as noted by Sansom (1982b:129, 1988b) at 'Wallaby Cross'. Many kin of the campers are aware of the day and institution of payment and wait around banks and post offices on 'pay days', hoping to get a share of the cash. To avoid being ambushed, the payee uses back entrances or other subterfuges. One man who was unable to refuse his family waiting each fortnight outside his bank asked me to escort him out of the bank to a waiting car. The next hazard he faced was at the supermarket where others waited for their cut, or I was sometimes asked to drive to more distant liquor outlets. Another man carefully avoided his sister who regularly waited outside the post office on his payday to receive some assistance for her rent. In one case known to me, a man assumed a kinsman's identity to collect a cheque from the post office and cash it at a store.

Aboriginal kin who lived on the streets were usually welcome at the camp for the day, for respite or to stay for longer periods. They would leave early every morning for the banks, hoping to join a drinking party around someone with funds. They were under no obligation to perform duties in the camp, but if they regularly returned drunk and hungry they were eventually driven out by the tongue-lashing of the camp boss. Neither was I permitted to give them refuge in my side of the camping ground. Many who lived at the camp also spent time at other camps, in particular in various shifting locations around the huge northern suburbs shopping centre. These were also Burarra-speaking people who included Fish Camp on their urban beat of places to stay.

The large air-conditioned shopping mall at Casuarina, in the northern suburbs, acted like a stock exchange as Aboriginal campers moved through the arcades in the morning checking on the activity inside and at the various entrances. While those in the camps waited for visitors, the people around the shops actively sought the company of those who had received their payments. To the east of the shopping centre is a long taxi rank, ATM machines and a liquor outlet. To the west were banks, the post office mail-collection counter and post boxes. Spotters moved back and forth picking up word of who and what was making a move that day. Many were familiar with the particular days that relatives and others received their unemployment benefit (pensions came on a regular day once a fortnight). There was competition to join a select group around someone who was collecting money that morning. Later, up to 13 people could share a minibus to an agreed location to spend the rest of the morning drinking and eating. Money changed hands around the outlets as loans were repaid or kinship obligations met.

Since the 1980s the preferred wine in the fringe camps has changed from port in glass flagons to moselle in four-litre casks. The most popular brand, which is also very economically priced, is the ubiquitous Buronga Ridge moselle, packaged in yellow cardboard containers commonly called 'suitcases' or 'yellow boxes'. The bladder of wine, with its press-down plastic tap, is ripped from the cardboard wine casks when the drinking is about to begin, but is not passed around a drinking circle, as was done with the glass flagons of the 1970s. In Darwin fringe camps, drinkers no longer use a wine filled mug as a 'communal chalice', as described by Sansom (1980a:61). Clear empty plastic soft drink bottles of all shapes and sizes are now used to share out wine. The 'plastic' was usually cast aside without the top after the drinking session. Once their 'plastic' is filled with an agreed fair share, drinkers appear to be free to sit where they will and drink as they wish.

9.10 The 'spin dry'

Several of the men and some of the women who were my interlocutors were regulars at the sobering up centre in Coconut Grove, where police took drunks they found on the streets. After showering and changing into clean pyjamas, the intoxicated person sleeps on a clean bed to 'dry out'. During their stay, their street clothes are washed and dried by duty staff. Before leaving they are given a light breakfast. Appropriately, the regulars know the facility as the 'spin dry'.

After leaving the 'spin dry' early in the morning, some walk down the track to Fish Camp that is less than a kilometre away, in the bush behind the centre. At other times, men escaped from the 'spin dry' in their pyjamas and

changed into spare clothing at the camp. More usually, my interlocutors appreciated a night in a bed. One group of Burarra men occasionally telephoned the police to make a complaint about 'Aborigines making trouble' outside a particular suburban shop. After telephoning the police, they would lie down and wait to be taken to the 'spin dry' for the night. The owner of the same shop knew this group well and encouraged them to use his liquor licence by opening the public toilets behind the shop if it was raining at night. This public drinking including opportunistic theft and the resultant frequent contacts with the police, city council inspectors and sobering up centre, is uncharacteristic of those who prefer the relative privacy provided by the hidden bushland camps.

9.11 The ethnography of Aboriginal drinking

One interpretation of Aboriginal drinking, and the popular view, is that of 'a traumatised people caught in a poverty cycle' (HRSCATSIA 1992:156) or of a dispossessed people affected by a loss of self-esteem (Lippmann 1973:145; Albrecht 1974:39; Kamien 1978:44; Sargent 1994:213; Hazelhurst 1994:5; Hale 1996:15). Similarly, Dagmar (1975, 1978:144) uses the 'culture of poverty' thesis outlined by Lewis (1966) to explain why Aborigines in Carnarvon did not participate in the political system. Alternatively, Tomlinson (1974) found that empowerment of Aboriginal drinkers, on their own terms, motivated community action in Brisbane.

Sackett (1988:67) believes that the 'well meant sentiments' of the symptomatic approach overlook more functional explanations of alcohol use. Collmann (1979b:208) and Sansom (1982b:119) are others who criticise 'social problems', or 'cultural disintegration' analyses of Aboriginal drinking. They argue that Aboriginal drinking is rule-governed and assimilated into Aboriginal society. Brady and Palmer (1984:14) argue that 'patterns of drinking, far from being imitative, are aggressively Aboriginal in form'. Mandelbaum (1965) and Heath (1987) also defend cultural interpretations of alcohol and stress that meanings of alcohol consumption are culturally defined.

Heath (1987:109) notes case studies that indicate that drinking can be a defiant gesture by indigenous people rather than a retreat. Others claim that viewing drinking as deviant or as a sickness needing punishment or rehabilitation depoliticises the actions of drinkers (Tomlinson 1974:144. See also Edmunds 1994:100). Cowlshaw (1988a:236) claims that the 'social pathology' view is a misinterpretation that seeks 'cures' rather than recognising an oppositional culture amongst Aboriginal drinkers.

Like Cowlshaw (1988a, 1988b 1993, 1994), many researchers interpret

Aboriginal drinking as a form of everyday resistance (see Reay 1945; Fink 1957:108; Beckett 1964:46; Eggleston 1974:55; Kamien 1978:151; Morris 1988:52, 1989; Sackett 1988:76), or as giving a sense of power or equality (Bain 1974:43; Sansom 1977:60, 1980a:49; Collmann 1979b:217; Brady and Palmer 1984:71; Brady 1991:180; Brady 1992b:702; Edmunds 1994:33).³¹⁶ Toussaint (1987, 1992) describes Aboriginal people in Perth maintaining a separate identity through sharing, which could include communal drinking, as resistance against the coercive demands of the state. Tomlinson (1974) observes that hotels in Brisbane were centres of Aboriginal solidarity in the absence of other meeting places.

Collmann (1979b:209) states: 'The understanding of drinking among contemporary Aborigines will not advance until moral judgments about its effects on traditional society and about the irresponsibility of people who drink are suspended'. However, socio-cultural explanations of Aboriginal drinking are criticised by others, like Room (1984), who accuse anthropologists of the 'wet generation', for whom drinking is normative, of 'problem deflation' (see Saggars and Gray 1998:65). For example, ethnography concentrates on the public, collective behaviour of men rather than the 'private agonies' of women and children (Room 1984:172). Room (1984:171) states: 'In my view, the de-emphasis of the problematic side of drinking is not a matter of oversight, but rather tends to be inherent in a functionalist perspective'. Room adds that problems are then attributed to outside causes (p.171). In response, Beckett (1984:179) admits he took no account of the long-term physical consequences of heavy drinking he has since witnessed amongst the people he described in 1964.

Many commentators do emphasise the destructive effects of excessive drinking on Aboriginal society (Gilbert 1974:156; Weller 1981; Pettman 1991:191; Hollinsworth 1992:148; Rowse 1990:187; Gibson 1991; Brady and Palmer 1984:71; Morton 1996:7; Hazlehurst 1994), or question the effectiveness of alcohol as resistance by doubting the possibility of lasting transformations of Aboriginal society solely through 'inversions of bourgeois values' (Morris 1988:53; see also Fink 1957:104). While agreeing that alcohol heightens the sense of opposition amongst Aboriginal drinkers, Merlan (1998:207) claims characterisations of alcohol abuse as 'manifestations of resistance' are 'incomplete and simplistic'.

Economic or social change is often seen as a necessary precursor for reducing alcohol abuse (see Lickis 1974:32; Kamien 1978:159; HRSCATSIA 1992; Sargent 1994:209; Hale 1996:16). However, three writers, including two Aboriginal leaders, are particularly critical of anthropological explanations for Aboriginal drinking. Gibson (1991:187) emphasises that the alcoholic 'has

actively created his own problems'. Hazelhurst (1994:9) is also a strong critic of 'the culture of opposition' that, in its worst manifestation 'takes shape in wanton irresponsibility, excessive use of alcohol, and other forms of belligerent self-destructiveness [which] hurts Aboriginal people more than the systems they are trying to punish'.

More recently, the Queensland Aboriginal leader, Noel Pearson (2000a), has stated: 'The symptomatic theory of substance abuse is wrong'. He adds that 'Our outrageous social problems and our current widespread unemployability followed passive welfare'. Placing the emphasis on 'reciprocity and responsibility' (Pearson 2000b:153), he claims that a first step is to 'ensure that the government stops interacting directly with individuals in our society by sending cheques in the mail' (Pearson 2000b:153). Pearson believes that 'passive welfare' leads to the 'direct corruption of individuals' (see also Pearson 2000c:22).

Whereas Cowlshaw and others suggest alcohol consumption is an aggressive assertion of identity in the face of White interventions, Pearson (2000c:19) argues that 'rather than drinking being a true expression of Aboriginal social and cultural values and relationships, it is a blatant corruption of them'. Hazelhurst (1994:148) believes: 'Denial that certain problems exist has allowed outside authorities and others to intervene and impose solutions'. Sackett (1988:76) notes that Whites are more likely to view Aboriginal drinking as mindless rather than as resistance, which therefore justifies more legal and social intervention into Aboriginal lives. Hazelhurst (1994:11) adds: 'In a large number of areas, Aboriginal councils are responsible for, and derive considerable profit from, the import and sale of liquor to their own people'

Resistance always has its costs, often the loss of human life, to produce outcomes. Cowlshaw (1993:187) suggests, for example, the tragic suicides of Aboriginal prisoners is a form of protest that produced the Royal Commission Into Deaths In Custody. However, in a review of Cowlshaw's book, Rowse (1990:190) questions the viability of an Aboriginal oppositional culture:

But to be a pitied and despised public embarrassment because one violates value consensus is only in a very weak sense to be a threat. One could argue to the contrary, that such 'opposition' maintains a cultural separateness which arises from and reinforces one's powerlessness ... perhaps the oppositional culture of Brindleton is a culture without interests, eschewing the political process to celebrate an Otherness without future, sustained economically by welfare

cheques without end.

Lattas (1993) claims Rowse (1990) has devalued the challenge to White hegemony made by everyday Aboriginal resistance by emphasising political and economic forms of opposition.³¹⁷ Lattas (1993:242) writes, 'the rendering of Aboriginal defiance and disorder as the non-political moral crimes of individuals, is itself a political act carried out by state agencies'. He adds that the high arrest rates of Aborigines for petty crimes 'points not to a weak threat but to a sense of moral panic in the white community' (p.243). Sackett (1988:76) notes: 'Through drink Aborigines express their antipathy to the idea and practice of others administering their lives'.

Drinkers in the fringe camps notably resist assimilation through the communal nature of their lives as described by Gare (1961), Sansom (1980a), Collmann (1988), Bropho (1980), Merlan (1998) and others. For example, the open-air living arrangements and the sharing at Fish Camp appear to be more compatible with the hunter-gatherer lives in Arnhem Land described by Hiatt (1965, 1982) and others than the rows of government-designed houses at Maningrida satirised by Hamilton (1975). Although the drinkers in the fringe camps are often stigmatised as 'antisocial' for their 'failure' to assimilate with urban life, attempts to regulate Aboriginal lives further marks Aboriginal customary ways as distinct and oppositional (see Cowlshaw 1993:188).

Hunter (1993:95) describes the pleasure from alcohol consumption as a factor that must be recognised. Other commentators note that social drinking of alcohol is an activity with real social value for Aboriginal people (Bain 1974; Eggleston 1974:59; Tomlinson 1974:172; Kamien 1978:160; O'Connor 1984:179; Collmann 1979b:208, 1988:151; Sansom 1977:61, 1980a:53; Brady 1991:206; Brady and Palmer 1994:11; Merlan 1998:183). O'Connor (1984) claims that this group activity is 'contingent drinking':

[A]lthough a high degree of drink-centredness exists, its locus is in the fringe camp drinking group and not in the individual. Away from this group the individual typically does not display such alcohol-orientation' (O'Connor 1984:179).

Contingent drinking occurs in particular social and physical environments (O'Connor 1984:182), so a community solution is needed for Aboriginal alcohol problems, rather than concentrating on the individual (O'Connor 1984:182). Saggars and Gray (1998a:323) suggest one reason why action is slow to be taken at the level of community:

Liberal ideology attributes the misuse of alcohol and other drugs to the weakness or susceptibility of individuals - whether biological, psychological or moral - and denies the role of political and economic factors in misuse.

9.12 Alcohol and resistance: another view

In the first chapter of this thesis, I asked, 'What makes some groups more ready to resist than others?' In other chapters, I refer to examples of the preparedness to defy government authority by residents of more than six heavy-drinking Aboriginal camps in Darwin from 1971 to 1998. They are: Kulaluk, Railway Dam, Knuckeys Lagoon, 'Low Down', Lee Point and Fish Camp - with Palmerston and other camps also involved. This preparedness goes far beyond the hidden, informal or everyday resistance of 'an oppositional culture'. By way of contrast, with notable exceptions there was minimal involvement, and sometimes-hostile opposition, from urban-dwelling Aborigines living outside the fringe camps. To explain this notable feature of the Darwin drinking camps, in this section I discuss the relationship between alcohol and resistance, and alcohol and 'merging', or 'reaching across distance', in the fringe camps.

In 'settled' Australia, where Aborigines are a discriminated against minority, the solidarity derived by Aboriginal people drinking together described by Reay (1945), Fink (1957), Beckett (1964, 1965) and Cowlshaw (1988a). Sansom (1977, 1980a) has ably demonstrated that the social function of drinking is no less significant in the Darwin fringe camps where indigenous language, kinship systems and ceremonial life are regularly in use. However, because Darwin fringe dwellers in the more traditional camps are confident in their own culture, social structure and language, I argue that the oppositional role of alcohol stressed by the above authors is different in Darwin.

Earlier chapters describe how the hidden grog camps usually provide a site for freedom of association between Aboriginal drinkers and friends of their choosing, despite harassment from authorities. Despite the harassment campaign by town authorities, one incidental result of the lack of tenure over land where fringe dwellers camp is a greater autonomy for residents than exists on some leases and at Bagot Community in Darwin. In my visits to Aboriginal town camps, Bagot Community, hostels and homes in Darwin during my fieldwork, I found the fringe camps to be the most welcoming, without any overarching authority or 'gatekeeper' deterring or screening my visit as anthropologist, activist or friend. The freedom of association in the camps appears to have a direct correlation with the freedom to consume alcohol. That is, people who wish to drink without interference also wish to

be free to choose their associates. As I noted earlier (Day 1975:1), and confirmed during my fieldwork, alcohol also insulates the drinkers from the possibilities of infiltration by the State, its agencies or Aboriginal representative groups. The heavy drinking and associated 'antisocial' behaviour, dress style and financial priorities 'outlaws' the fringe camp community from any attempt to incorporate them by any means other than on their own terms.

Most of the fringe camp residents have moved from regulated Aboriginal communities. Others have been evicted from rent-paying houses in Darwin because of their preference to drink freely with associates of their choice. Their drinking and behaviour that prevents their assimilation also isolates them from organisations and councils established by the State to incorporate Aboriginal resistance. As I have described, this has also disadvantages the fringe dwellers in their attempts to find space in Darwin. On the margins, as I have described in Chapters Six and Eight, the fringe dwellers find their allies amongst alternative groups who also feel marginalised.

In the 1970s, 1980s and again in 1997 and 2001, it was the drinkers in the camps who were prepared to take direct action against government neglect. In all cases the actions were highly confrontational with the possibility of arrest. In my experience, the preparedness to risk conflict with authorities, with maximum publicity, was almost unique to fringe camp residents. Unlike the residents in other Aboriginal accommodation, the fringe campers protested enthusiastically, not once but on many occasions in the 1970s, 1980s and again in 1996, 1997 and 2001 (see Day 1994; 1998), much to the surprise of the Darwin populace and activists who told me they had viewed the drinkers as stereotypically 'drunken and demoralised' Aboriginal fringe dwellers.

Some of the political activism of the drinkers has been described throughout this thesis. In each case the drinkers welcomed a chance to articulate their grievances. The resistance by the fringe dwellers in the 1970s lasted over three years, with another five years until their leases were granted. The Yolngu group at the 'Low Down' camp were active from 1978 to 1982. Few of these people survived in the late 1990s when the Burarra people similarly openly protested, and remained steadfast in their aims to the time of writing. These examples are undoubtedly in addition to earlier unrecognised Aboriginal activism that may have occurred in Darwin, and belongs to a pattern of resistance that has been recorded since initial invasion.

Many other cases could be given which would demonstrate an unusual lack of the internalised 'shame', which is a means of social control in traditional

Aboriginal culture (see Tonkinson 1991:150). I do not believe the absence of shame can be attributed to alcohol. Instead, being noticeably under the influence of alcohol during the public protests is a cause of shame amongst the fringe dwellers of my study. In 1997, people from Fish Camp expressed shame at the crude language of some protesters who had been drinking before the March 1997 protest outside Parliament House. Otherwise there was no expression of embarrassment in participating in the very public actions. The participants planned their actions in the weeks beforehand and viewed themselves on television and in video replays. They loudly contrast their militancy with the hesitancy of other Aboriginal people and continue to show pride in their actions, despite condemnation and ridicule from some Aboriginal kin and associates.

For a people continually harassed by police, the unusual lack of deference and fearfulness of the possible reaction by authorities is exceptional. Their protests do not appear to be actions of a demoralised people. Drinkers show a sustained willingness to place themselves in 'the firing lines' of the Aboriginal struggle for recognition of prior land ownership. I use the military analogy deliberately, because the price the drinkers pay is often their own lives, either through the effects of alcohol, the lack of services, or through other problems associated with their living conditions, as I have illustrated in Gajok's story (see also Bropho 1980:2; Day 1994:82). As in war, it is often others who are the beneficiaries of the conflict, evidenced by the family groups living in the relatively secure town camps of Darwin today.

In a study of an Aboriginal community, Brady and Palmer (1984:2) believe that Aborigines at the 'Diamond Well' camp, by drinking alcohol, 'seek to redress their powerlessness and subordinate status in a world dominated by European Australians'. Although this empowerment is real for those who consume alcohol, it is 'a contrived independence' (Brady and Palmer 1984:71). As I have illustrated, the Burarra campers often deal with European Australians in Darwin. During my fieldwork, they asserted themselves in many ways other than drinking. Drinking was something that was predominantly done amongst kin, and it was recognised that people should appear sober on public occasions. As my thesis suggests, they sought to redress their powerlessness in more direct ways than by drinking alcohol.

Brady and Palmer (1984:72) claim that Christianity offers alternative feelings of empowerment, so that the Aboriginal Christians do not need to drink at Diamond Well. In contrast to Diamond Well, most of the drinkers in the Darwin camps profess to be Christians but continue to consume alcohol. Unlike the Christians at Diamond Well, they remain aware of their marginalisation and are prepared to redress it through active opposition.³¹⁸

The difference may be because Burarra Christians mostly belong to the Uniting Church that preaches an Aboriginal theology that swept through Arnhem Land in a series of revivals from the 1970s (see Blackett 1997; Gondara 1988; Magowan 1999; Bos 1985; Thompson 1982).³¹⁹ Unlike the Doomadgee Mission, where drunkenness posed an inevitable fall from Christianity (Trigger 1988a:224) and Christians were expected to reject 'Blackfella law' (Trigger 1992:196), the Arnhem Land revival movement preaches the 'blessings and insight offered through Aboriginal culture and spirituality' (Gondara 1988:6). My point is, the acceptance of Christianity amongst the fringe dwellers from Arnhem Land does not appear to result in the political accommodation noted amongst Doomadgee Christians (see Trigger 1988a:234, 1990:236, 1992:224).

In this chapter, in keeping with my multi-sited and political approach, I have largely avoided the ethnographic approach to an analysis of Aboriginal drinking, which Sansom (1980a, 1977) has used so graphically. I have chosen an alternative approach, partly because concerns about Aboriginal drinking in Darwin have often distracted attention from the wider context in which the drinking occurs. I have also attempted to respect the privacy of my hosts. Instead, I have used the Beer Can Regatta as a means to interpret differing attitudes to alcohol in Darwin. I have also given historical explanations for Aboriginal drinking as a focus of tension between White and Black society in Darwin. I have suggested that behind this tension, and the many expressions of it, lies the dispossession of Aboriginal people from their land in the city, their unfulfilled expectations of citizenship, the unresolved problem of Aboriginal homelessness and financial profiteering from Aboriginal drinking. In this racial, economic and political context, it is perhaps not surprising that there appears to be a correlation between the drinking camps and Aboriginal resistance.

Endnotes for Chapter 9:

²⁹⁶ For further discussion of cultural dislocation, see Gupta and Ferguson 1992:7; Hodge and Mishra 1990; Lattas 1991 and Morton 1996.

²⁹⁷ As Heath (1984:181) notes, few anthropologists use the term 'alcoholism'. O'Connor (1984) argues that Aborigines in the fringe camps are 'contingent drinkers' and not alcoholics under WHO definitions (see also Merlan 1998:200). Similarly, Larsen (1979:147) found Aborigines in Perth are 'environmental drinkers' which he distinguishes from 'chronic drinkers', or alcoholics. However, regardless of these studies, Hunter (1993:127) states that the majority of Aboriginal drinkers in the Kimberleys consume amounts of alcohol at levels harmful to health (see also Saggars and Gray 1997:218; Saggars and Gray 1998:56).

²⁹⁸ See also Brady 2001. It is insightful to follow the development of a political analysis of the problems in Wiluna in articles by Sackett (1977, 1978, 1988, 1990)

²⁹⁹ NT Welfare Ordinance, 1953, cited in Franklin (1976:142).

³⁰⁰ Rowley (1972b:263) comments that in the early sixties more attention had been paid to the right to drink than to the right to an equal wage. Voting rights were granted in 1962 (see Wright 1985:16; Chesterman and Galligan 1997:162). The 1967 referendum removed special

provisions from the Australian Constitution that excluded Aboriginal people from the census and prohibited the Commonwealth Government from making laws for Aboriginal people. However, the vote was more generally seen as being for full citizenship rights for Australian Aborigines (see Bandler 1989; Attwood and Markus 1998).

³⁰¹ Sansom (1980a:58) claims outside drinking is more dangerous for fringe dwellers. However, Saggars and Gray (1998:62) maintain that research shows licensed premises to be the most 'risky' in terms of alcohol-related harm. Mandelbaum (1965:284), comments that in complex societies taverns perform the role of kinship networks, although, as places where anonymous people gather, they can be dangerous.

³⁰² Statistics submitted by Australian Legal Aid Services to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs (see NT Hansard, 3 July 1976, pp. 871-2).

³⁰³ Donald (1984) notes that in 1983 a sobering-up centre opened in Darwin to complement an amendment passed that year making intoxication sufficient reason to be taken into custody. However, police retained the duty of picking up and transporting drunks in Darwin.

³⁰⁴ As I have illustrated, racial outbursts by public figures in the 1990s sometimes projected the issue of Aboriginal drinking in towns into the national media.

³⁰⁵ During my fieldwork the police began charging liquor outlets that served alcohol to drunks (*NT News* June 13, 1997). A drive-in bottle shop raised the price of casks and explained the increase to me as 'High profit for high risk' (see letters page, *NT News* September 19, 1997; Brady 1998:103, citing *NT News* June 13, 1996).

³⁰⁶ Aluminium cans became a greater litter problem because they do not corrode as quickly as steel cans. However, it was more practicable to recycle aluminium cans in the north.

³⁰⁷ Under a heading: 'Darwin's dirty problem baffles chiefs', the *Darwin Star* (July 25, 1981, reproduced in Tomlinson 1982:102) reported that: 'Litter is choking Darwin's beaches and parks - but it appears nothing can be done. The problem is worst around the city's illegal campsites where there are no bins and little motivation to dispose of rubbish'.

³⁰⁸ I instigated an Aboriginal entry in the first Beer Can Regatta ('Beer can boomer', *NT News* May 24, 1974, p.1). The 'boat' was actually a stack of 2000 beer cans wired together into layers for an experimental building materials project supported by a local architect and the Railway Dam Aboriginal community. The federally funded experimental building, using empty beer cans inside concrete slabs, coincided with the move to clean up Darwin and had the support of the fringe dwellers. The beer can boat did not make it to the starting line.

³⁰⁹ In her interpretation of the Mindil Beach Sunset Markets, Helms (1998) also fails to consider Aboriginal readings of the landscape.

³¹⁰ *Bunji* shows a photograph of 'Woolna camp at Mindil Beach about 1904' from the Gillstrom Collection, National Library of Australia.

³¹¹ A National Drug and Alcohol Research Institute report claims that alcohol consumption among non-Aboriginal people in the NT remains 43 per cent higher than amongst other Australians (*NT News* February 2, 2000). The report found there was significantly higher alcohol consumption in the Katherine and Alice Springs areas. Alcohol consumption in the Katherine region 1993-1997 was earlier reported as 18.7 per cent higher than the NT rate (Clausen 1999:36).

³¹² The Chief Minister's comments that Aboriginal drunks deserved to be 'monstered and stomped on by the community' (*Sunday Territorian* April 13, 1997) were described as 'perhaps the most venomous public attack on Aborigines by a Territory politician' (*NT News* April 15, 1997). The editorial continued: 'Such comments will do nothing to improve the worsening problem of drunken itinerants'.

³¹³ For reports on alcohol restrictions in northern towns, see d'Abbs et al 1996, 1997.

³¹⁴ Outside the relative safety of the fringe camps, in isolated drinking locations around Darwin, several Aboriginal women were murdered during my fieldwork.

³¹⁵ Merlan (1991:262) notes that by 1988, Sansom had 'developed' his model of a unique Aboriginal economy (see Sansom 1980a:232) into that of 'service exchange' (see Sansom 1988b). She comments: 'This concept is one which I find more useful than the opposition of symbolic and material "economies" in his earlier work'.

³¹⁶ See also Brady (1992:192) and Folds (1987:85) on petrol sniffing as resistance in Aboriginal communities.

³¹⁷ Lattas (1993:242) refers to Langton's (1988) analysis of Aboriginal 'antisocial' behaviour in a metropolitan park as an example of how Aborigines 'defiantly map out the lack of total European control over Aboriginal existence'. However, Cowlshaw (1990:246) has accused Langton of 'anthropologising', or 'essentialising' Aboriginal behaviour, in contrast to Cowlshaw's (1994:81) politically engaged view of Aboriginal swearing and defiance in the face of attempts at suppression by authorities.

³¹⁸ Although some of the Burarra fringe dwellers have been baptised by Mormon missionaries, they continue to drink and rarely attend services of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

³¹⁹ The Arnhem Land Christian revivals since 1979 have resulted in temporary decreases in drinking, card playing and drug taking (see Brady 1989:62, 1992:116). Bos (1988:432) claims the revival was partly a response to increased alcohol abuse in Arnhem Land.

CHAPTER TEN

Persistence or resistance?

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter I firstly briefly summarise the preceding nine chapters. In the light of the evidence presented in these chapters, I then conclude by re-examine the relative values of a 'political' or a 'cultural' approach to research amongst Aboriginal fringe dwellers, or whether this dichotomy is applicable to my findings.

10.2 Summary of chapters

In the first chapter, I discussed the anthropology of the Darwin area, a body of academic work which I argue still creates what Appadurai (1988:37) calls the 'spatially incarcerated native', restricted in what they 'know, feel, and believe' (p.37) by the mobile and all-seeing anthropologist who alone is not confined to the observed location. I argued that Aboriginal protest is often written out of the literature or is only mentioned for its functional role in Aboriginal ethnogenesis. I then located my thesis in the context of the parallel 'cultural' and 'political' approaches to ethnography, typified by Basil Sansom and Gillian Cowlshaw in their studies of Aboriginal societies in urban areas. I compared these approaches to the debates on the construction of Aboriginality through persistence or resistance, which in recent years has been blurred by the use of a 'politics of culture' by Aboriginal people and others to emphasise an essential Aboriginality that has survived invasion. After a discussion of 'intransitive', or everyday hidden informal resistance and 'transitive', or organised open formal resistance, I drew upon the literature of peasant studies, to suggest that the 'political' approach offers an understanding of the position of fringe camps in Darwin which cannot be gained through a bounded single-sited study.

I drew upon the literature of peasant studies to suggest that Aboriginal fringe campers in Darwin are more politically conscious than a bounded single-sited study might suggest.

In the second chapter I discussed definitions of homeless Aboriginal people and the relationship between signifier (the word), signified (the subject) and referent (the actual topic of reference). I have suggested that these contested definitions are themselves sites of struggle that reflect the place of fringe dwellers in Darwin. After describing the use of various categories in reports and elsewhere, I distinguished 'town camps' from the 'illegal' camps where I conducted my fieldwork. Finally, I explained my decision to follow Sansom (1980a) and Collmann (1988) in using the term 'fringe dweller' to describe my interlocutors, who are also 'homeless' people in Darwin, according to the criteria.

In Chapter Three, I discussed my role as an activist anthropologist. I included my entry into the field and the historical background of the Fish Camp site in my multi-sited study. My previous experience as an activist for the rights of Darwin fringe dwellers gives my research a diachronic depth not usually possible within the limitations of postgraduate fieldwork. Any remaining illusions of a neatly bounded field were ended by a complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Commission and the resultant media interest. In contrast to the public hostility towards fringe camp communities, which are harassed by Local and Territory Governments, I then gave the example of public sympathy for the Railway Dam town camp community, which had been 'legitimised' almost twenty years earlier.

In Chapter Four, I revisited Basil Sansom's definitive ethnography, *The camp at Wallaby Cross: Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin* (1980a), and his other texts. Drawing upon my past experience, I located 'Wallaby Cross' in the wider events before, during and after Sansom's fieldwork. My analysis suggested that in the 1970s the mob at 'Wallaby Cross' belonged to a tradition of fringe dweller resistance shared by the Burarra people of Fish Camp and Lee Point in the late 1990s to 2001. In my reinterpretation of Sansom's texts in Chapter Four, I suggested that the texts cannot be separated, figuratively and literally, from the ongoing struggle for space by fringe dwellers in Darwin.

The Burarra people who predominate at Fish Camp and Lee Point have a long history of movement into Darwin from central Arnhem Land, where they were early participants in the homelands movement in the 1970s. As I related, there have been past and recent attempts by Burarra people to build links with the wider community. A section of this chapter describes life at Fish Camp between 1996 and 1998. I examined some of the Burarra people's attempts to engage with the invading society and suggested that resistance can be a form of engagement, or reaching across difference, in response to government or public hostility. As a substitute for the Yolngu ideal of 'two-ways, both-ways', which depends on a reciprocal relationship between invader and indigenous people not displayed by Darwin authorities, I developed what I believe is a more appropriate urban metaphor of merging traffic for the mostly unreciprocated attempts at articulation between fringe dwellers and the town.

In the next two chapters I placed fringe dwellers in the context of the debate between Basil Sansom and Peter Sutton. I included this discussion because the theories of both these anthropologists have been influential in the relationship between Darwin fringe dwellers and other Aboriginal groups,

and the understanding of fringe dwellers by anthropologists. My examples of fringe dweller resistance to the state in 1996 to 2001 parallel the earlier and continuing struggle of the 'Wallaby Cross' people for their land at Knuckeys Lagoon. In reply to refutations by the media and Northern Territory politicians that all people in Darwin are treated equally, I argued that these assertions ignore the special circumstances of Aboriginal people and thus further disadvantage them as my examples indicate.

In Chapter Seven, anthropological evidence that supports the 'traditional' Larrakia people with a 'neo-classical' interpretation of Aboriginal society is contrasted with descriptions of the 'fluidity' of the 'historical' fringe dwellers. I suggested that this theoretical dichotomy has widened the growing gap between Aboriginal people who have moved onto Larrakia lands and previously shared the fringe camps with the traditional owners, and the Larrakia 'new tribe' who made a native title claim to Darwin during my fieldwork. On the ground, despite the notable exceptions I have given, the fringe dwellers now have limited contact with the mostly urban Larrakia people. My evidence further suggests that in the late 1990s, Aboriginal representative groups have failed to assist the fringe dwellers, who appear to have no recognised rights to support their wish to live as a community in the city of their choice.

The eighth chapter looked at more successful examples of 'merging', when fringe dwellers found allies amongst White and Black activists, alternative lifestyleers and others in Darwin. I suggested that the possibilities for these relationships began in 1969 in Darwin, as young Australians and travellers, influenced by social changes taking place in North America looked to 'new' models of social organisation. This was also the period when my involvement with Aboriginal fringe dwellers began. My examples suggested that while Aboriginal fringe dwellers claimed a uniquely Aboriginal connection to the land, they did not necessarily seek a closed domain. Instead, during my fieldwork there was a perceived commonality of purpose between Aboriginal fringe dwellers and activists in resistance to the NT Government and Darwin City Council. Finally, because music appeared to be central to shared understandings during my fieldwork, I discussed its role in the creation of spaces where 'merging' can occur.

In Chapter Nine, while recognising the centrality of alcohol in the fringe camps, I also examined its importance to the settler society in Darwin. I suggested that an analysis of the Beer Can Regatta provided insights into changes in the Darwin scene which help explain the creation, and continuation, of Aboriginal drinking camps. My analysis belongs to a 'political economy' approach advocated by Saggars and Gray (1998) that

suggests that Aboriginal binge drinking is important to the Darwin economy. After describing elements of the 'grogging style' of fringe dwellers today, I reviewed the ethnography of Aboriginal drinking. Based on my fieldwork and past experience, I attempted to account for the correlation between Aboriginal alcohol drinkers and a preparedness to actively resist Darwin authorities.

10.3 Persistence or resistance?

As Lattas (1993) stresses, there is not necessarily a dichotomy between Aboriginal cultural continuity, or persistence, and resistance. For example Morris (1988, 1989) links Aboriginal resistance to the maintenance of a distinct domain. Clendinnen (1999:89-93) interprets Sansom's ethnography of cultural persistence, *The camp at Wallaby Cross*, as an example of Aboriginal resistance, while Trigger (1992:101) writes: 'Social life within the Aboriginal domain can be regarded as at least in part an arena of resistance to the colonial imperative of assimilating the colonised to the beliefs and practices of the colonising society'.

For Darwin fringe dwellers, cultural persistence is a form of resistance in an embattled arena which is expressed through connection to the land, religious practices, languages, songs and traditional social roles. Largely because of later contact times, the above behaviour enacted in an enclave of settled Australia is an everyday 'oppositional culture' which is not as reactive as the behaviour described by Cowlshaw (1988a) in rural towns of 'settled' Australia. However, the statement by Cowlshaw (1993:187-8) that 'cultural reproduction amongst Aborigines is *always* in a context of opposition' can be said to apply to the harassment I have described confronting 'illegal' fringe dwellers in Darwin.

My data suggests that everyday actions like sitting on the ground in groups, gathering 'bush tucker' or cooking on a fire are politicised by Aboriginal relocation onto contested land and the hostility of city authorities. Alternatively, the interest of other residents in the town draws attention to everyday practices which are seen as unusual in the city environment, like spearing fish or weaving a pandanus-leaf basket. Inviting the media or activists to urban ceremonies like the burning of Gojok's possessions at Lee Point after his death (Plate 2) and the raising of an Aboriginal flag at Fish Camp (Plate 14) added a public and political dimension to these rituals. Other more private, and larger, cultural gatherings of fringe dwellers for mortuary ceremonies in Darwin (Plate 13; AAPA 1996; Day 1997a) do not usually make an explicit political statement. However, in my experience, non-Aboriginal people who are privileged to attend the combined rituals held in urban bush clearings or town camps to smoke and wash associates of

the deceased are impressed with the strength and continuity of Aboriginal rituals in the face of public and government hostility to the Aboriginal presence.

When Sansom (1988a:152) criticises Rowley (1972a, 1972b, 1972c) and states that '[Aboriginal intransigence] is rooted not in rebellion but in the resilience of cultural practice', he suggests that the fringe dwellers maintain their domain on the outskirts of Darwin by conducting all their affairs in a uniquely, though changed, Aboriginal way. I have suggested that the cultural continuities which Sansom describes owe much to the cattle station backgrounds of most of his informants. I have also maintained that fringe dwellers order their society by selective Aboriginal customary ways, including traditional language, beliefs and social roles. Although I suggest that these practices are more influential in the camps where I conducted my fieldwork, these forms are not necessarily dichotomous to the 'fluidity' of Aboriginal social organisation which Sansom's processual analysis suggests is typical in northern Australia. For this reason, I have argued that Sutton's model of classic Aboriginal social structure has been disadvantageous to the fringe dwellers.

My analysis of Sansom's texts presents evidence that the people at 'Wallaby Cross' were more politically engaged than is apparent in his accounts. The open protests which I have described being made by people from 'Wallaby Cross', Fish Camp and Lee Point and other fringe dwellers indicate that these groups have a level of political awareness which satisfies Sansom's use of the term 'rebellion', cited in the previous paragraph.³²⁰ My work also demonstrates that in particular circumstances, with outside assistance in addition to the existing political awareness of fringe dwellers, everyday resistance can escalate into formal or active resistance, in the sense discussed by Berndt (1969:11):

[P]ublic protest is one way through which much can be achieved - if negotiations break down, or overriding injustices are ignored or sidetracked by those who could do something about them. Public protest, in such circumstances, represents the only forum for the expression of free speech, for the presentation of a case.

My past activism suggests my choice for a thesis topic would present a difficulty in maintaining 'scientific disinterest'. With reference to Rose (1987), Scheper-Hughes (1991, 1995) and Bourgois (1995, 1996), I have argued that the position of the Lee Point and Fish Camp fringe dwellers in the 1990s and others in 2001, and my friendship with some of them over many years before my fieldwork, obliged me to become an active witness rather than a

supposedly neutral observer. This role led to the involvement which I discussed in Chapters Three, Six and Seven, and my eventual arrest at Lee Point in May 1997.

Cowlishaw (1997b:101) argues that a technique of Australian anthropology (which this thesis attempts to avoid) has been to 'bracket off the domain of actual lived relations between white and black people'. Taking the 'political' view, Cowlishaw (1997b:111) states:

At best the classical ethnographic accounts of specific Aboriginal societies were peripheral to the exercise of colonial power. At worst, they purveyed a traditionalism which could be seen as reinforcing primitivist evolutionary ideas while exploring the fascinating intricacies of certain aspects of Aboriginal social existence ... Only by turning our attention to the cultural borderlands of racial interaction can this failure be understood and overcome.³²¹

In a seminal article from the 'cultural' side of the dichotomy, Langton (1981:20) criticises materialist analyses which 'can only explain the structural position of Aboriginal societies within the larger Australian sovereign state'. She (p.19) states: 'Culture is not a matter of this interface, of class relations or race relations'. Instead, she argues that urban Aboriginal 'society' and 'culture' (her quotes) must be seen as complete systems (p.19). I have given evidence of several fringe dweller groups' integrity as 'complete systems', while engaging in acts of 'merging' with an encompassing wider system. My analysis also suggests that any study proposing to represent the priorities of Aboriginal fringe dweller society is incomplete without an analysis of their political and structural position in relation to the wider society, and that the dichotomy suggested by Langton (1981) can therefore not be maintained.

In summary, fringe dwellers in Darwin do not appear to maintain the closed Aboriginal domain which Cowlishaw (1988a) and Sansom (1980a) describe respectively in Brindleton and Wallaby Cross. Darwin fringe dwellers are also more prepared to openly oppose policies which affect them than were the Aboriginal people at Brindleton who Cowlishaw says ordered their lives through an 'oppositional culture'. Traditional Aboriginal beliefs and social structures continue to order the lives of fringe dwellers in the camps where I conducted my research. That is, in my research suggests that the identifiable Aboriginal cultural continuities in the camps are not predominantly those described by Sansom (1980a).

My examples also suggest that resistance by the campers is expressed in more open, confident and engaged forms than the reactive everyday

opposition which Cowlshaw describes amongst Aboriginal people in rural New South Wales.

In this thesis, I have asked: Do Darwin fringe dwellers order their lives in urban bushland camps through 'cultural continuities in a world of material change' (Sansom 1988b:159), or is it in opposition that the ongoing recreation of a distinct cultural heritage occurs (Cowlshaw 1988b:99; 1988a:243, 1993:188)? I have concluded that the most appropriate answer is, 'both and neither'. As they negotiate their lives in the City of Darwin, the campers blur the dichotomy between cultural continuities and an oppositional culture, between a 'cultural' and a 'political' analysis, between transitive and intransitive resistance, between 'historical' and 'traditional' people and between 'fluid' and 'classic' Aboriginal social structure.

Basil Sansom's influential ethnography vividly described the lives of Aboriginal people living in poverty on the outskirts of Darwin in the 1970s. My fieldwork from 1996 to 2001 indicates that many Aboriginal people still live in small communities on sufferance on Crown land in Darwin where they are threatened with eviction as the city spreads.³²² As Aboriginal fringe dwellers in Darwin, these small groups live within an enclave of 'settled' Australia, maintaining their 'illegal' camps as the successors of the camp at 'Wallaby Cross'.

Endnotes for Chapter 10:

³²⁰ Sansom (1988a) was responding to Rowley's (1972a) reduction of Aboriginal people to 'class actors', whereby historical and economic factors are considered more important than cultural difference.

³²¹ See also Merlan (1998:4) and Cowlshaw (1999:4).

³²² In a section headed 'City and town dwellers', the final Woodward report states:

284. The necessity to set aside urban land for Aborigines will have two results. In the first place it will compel the specific inclusion of planning for Aborigines amongst other town planning requirements. Secondly, the bare Aboriginal lands will draw attention to housing needs whereas makeshift camps on Crown lands could be and have been ignored.

285. I would hope that by 1976 there will be no Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory, except those actually travelling, living on sufferance on Crown lands. By that time they should all be living on places they have chosen, where they have a recognised right to be, and plans should be well advanced for permanent camping facilities or community housing projects as required (Woodward 1974:52).

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