



2012 PUBLIC SEMINAR SERIES

The common discourse: Blackfellas and Whitefellas in it together.

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I begin this seminar with a summary of my PhD project in Kakadu National Park, a place where the tourism abounds, injecting several hundred million dollars into the NT economy and where, at first blush, all seems to be going well. Yet more than the most cursory observation will reveal that most actors in this World Heritage listed and jointly managed national park are unhappy with how joint management works for their interests.

Joint management is supposed to be about sharing of power and decision making by the Australian state and the traditional Aboriginal owners and my project revealed both that the park is productive, doing much of what a national park should, and that power is actually shared. Yet the perceptions of actors within both groups, the Blackfellas and the Whitefellas, are quite different. All the real power, they say, is with the other group. My argument is that Kakadu is a very difficult place for all the actors within it, required as they are to manage contradictions at a number of levels. The park's history reveals good reasons for these contradictions, some of which I explain.

The second part of the seminar is about how the apparent inequalities and resulting social stress can be relieved and that goes to my interest in what I call the common discourse, produced out of doing work together. I draw on examples from Arnhem Land and Kakadu itself to demonstrate how this form of discourse comes about and distinguishes itself from the inevitable, yet corrosive, discourses of each group that threaten joint management and, I suggest, other forms of enterprise in which the state seeks to involve Aboriginal people.

Thursday, 22 March 3.30pm

The Seminar Room, NARU, 23 Ellengowan Drive, Brinkin
This seminar is free and open to the public.

The views expressed in this lecture are those of the presenter and do not necessarily represent the view of ANU.

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