

**Hunting the Past, Harvesting the Present and Owning the Future.
Aboriginal Life Projects in the Dampier Peninsula Region, West
Kimberley.**

Catherine Ann Wohlan

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**A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
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DECLARATION

Except as acknowledged in the text, the work presented in this thesis is my own original research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Wohlan', is centered on a light gray rectangular background.

Catherine Wohlan.

28th October 2022

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ABSTRACT

My thesis investigates decentralised living and state policy in relation to a particular subset of remote Aboriginal communities in the west Kimberley. These leases, locally called Blocks, were granted over the former Beagle Bay mission reserve in the late 1990s.

A condition of the lease was to pursue engagement with the market economy with perceived benefits to the wider Aboriginal population. Block residents held work skills to engage with the mainstream market economy, but chose to decentralise where access to the market economy was necessarily limited due to the remote location. Previous studies of Aboriginal development have used the term ‘life project’ to reflect the agency of Aboriginal people and aspirations that differ from development projects determined by the state or market economy (Blaser 2004, Peterson and Myers 2018). The term is employed in this thesis to identify a particular form of decentralised living which shows some continuity with the earlier examples of such arrangement (‘outstations’ or ‘homelands’) but has innovations and novel attributes.

The personality and skills set of the residents of each Block differed and their ambitions varied. However, ultimately all Blocks relied on tourism to engage with the market economy. This tourism development was both embryonic and economically marginal. Consequently, Block residents depended on external funding for their business to be sustainable. Data collected during fieldwork revealed how the various enterprises managed to sustain life on the Blocks, while some activities were doomed to both social and economic failure. An alternative economy in the form of a major industrial processing plant was proposed for the central Peninsula with a promise of substantial economic returns but was regarded by Block residents as unattractive because of the perceived impact on their small scale ventures.

The central argument of the thesis is that a principal motivation for occupation of the Blocks was pursuit of ‘the good life’. Business development was not the motivation for taking up the lease but was understood as obligatory to sustain occupation. Residents of each Block held ideals and values which are identified as the ‘ideology of the Block’ that legitimized occupation. Activities and relationships were brought into play to mediate two difficulties faced by Block residents. The first was the disjunction between the pursuit of the good life and the requirement for commercial engagement. The second was tenure of a lease over country which was not ancestral country while sustaining a cultural and spiritual connection to the land.

The research demonstrates the transformational aspects of contemporary decentralised living, and the significance of understanding that the Blocks are distinct from the outstations established in the 1970s and 1980s. The ideology of the Blocks serves to articulate the cultural factors that sustain and to some extent frame decentralised living. This has implications for policy formulation and is fundamental to any attempt to engineer economies in remote Aboriginal-controlled lands.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAPA	Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority
ALT.	Aboriginal Lands Trust
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CDEP	Community Development Employment Project
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
KLC	Kimberley Land Council
KRCI	Kullari Regional Indigenous CDEP Incorporated
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
NEIS	New Enterprise Incentive Scheme
ORA	Outstation Resource Agency

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

During the 1970s Aboriginal people in remote Australia activated newly obtained rights to decentralize in what became known as the ‘homelands’ or ‘outstation’ movement. The movement is regularly associated with maintaining Aboriginal traditions (Coombs 1994) or the desire of Aboriginal people to take control of their lives (Blanchard 1987:1) while life on outstations is represented as an example of Aboriginal self-determination (Myers and Peterson 2016).

The outstation or homelands movement was assisted by government support for housing and other infrastructure provided at decentralized locations on Aboriginal controlled lands. As Peterson (1985:86) notes, at a time when Aboriginal people were gaining rights within mainstream Australian society and being incorporated into the cash economy, their response was to disengage and seek out separate living conditions. Living in larger Aboriginal settlements often meant disempowerment for some – perhaps even a majority – of families because of the cultural need to defer to those with authority to speak for the country where the community was located. This authority was gained primarily through ancestral connections to the land on which the community had been established (see Blanchard 1987:14). Moving to an outstation on ancestral land was a ready solution. Decentralisation and establishing an outstation also enabled a release from the stresses of larger communities where conditions have been described as volatile because of the closeness and intensity of personal relationships, political conflicts and competition for resources (see Coombs, Dexter and Hiatt 1982:428; Austin-Broos 2009:181-82). Decentralisation through the establishment of an outstation provided an opportunity to escape such tensions and create relatively independent small scale living areas. In short, it was the opportunity for people to become their own boss.

The word outstation is derived from the pastoral industry, where an outstation was a permanent camp, sometimes more than a day’s travel from the station homestead. The outstation was dependent on the main homestead, but as an ‘out camp’, it had a degree of separation (Peterson and Myers 2016:3). The outstations in Aboriginal Australia reflect an Aboriginal choice of purpose, of location, and patterns of occupation. Outstations in this sense are examples of what

Peterson (2005:7) describes as Indigenous 'life projects'. The term 'life projects' is derived from the international context (see Blaser, Feit and McRae 2004:2) and reflects the desire of indigenous people to establish independent development projects, aspirations separate to those directed by the state or market and based upon 'situation-based knowledge and practices in the contemporary world' (Peterson and Myers 2016:3). As such, outstations as 'life projects' become examples of Aboriginal self-determination in the contemporary world.

Being small scale and situated in remote locations, Aboriginal outstations are generally removed from the lived experience of most Australians. In the political domain outstations tend to attract an extreme response. After a tour of remote communities in 2005, Amanda Vanstone, then minister for Aboriginal Affairs, described these remote settlements as 'cultural museums' (ABC 9/12/2005). Tony Abbot, ex minister for Aboriginal Affairs and former Prime Minister, described such living arrangements as being a 'lifestyle choice' (Griffiths 2015) arguing that if Aboriginal people removed themselves from places where their labour could be sold, then the government should not be responsible for supporting such deviancy. However, not all public attention has been negative. During 2015 there were national and international protests over the proposed closure of 150 remote communities in Western Australia (ABC 1/5/2015) facilitated by social media. An estimated 5000 people attended a rally in central Melbourne on 1st May 2015 and the protests spread globally from New Zealand to Berlin. The 2015 protests illustrate the perceived connection between support for remote Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal rights. In these protests outstations were seen to symbolise an affirmation of Aboriginal specific projects in relation to home country which apparently has a broad base of popular support. Media commentary illustrates that remote Aboriginal communities inspire passionate responses, both positive and negative.

The development of outstations raised questions of funding. Few, if any, were envisaged as likely to be economically self-sufficient. Herbert Cole (Nugget) Coombs (1994) advocated for state funding support for decentralised living arrangements in the early 1970s. Coombs's vision was that infrastructural support, government service provision, and the import of some European style goods, for example, fuel, tools or building materials would enable the development of remote communities. The provision of these materials would be sustained by an economy based on Aboriginal controlled cattle stations, the sale of art, cultural tourism and contract work in conservation and land care or through receiving rent from national parks and sanctuaries (Coombs 1994:25-26). In Coombs's vision Aboriginal people living in decentralized areas would

also be able to gain subsistence from the surrounding remote landscape. The funding for infrastructure to develop and maintain outstations came via Aboriginal specific government departments. Coombs (1994) argued in support of cultural difference and against assimilation. He envisaged a future for at least some Aboriginal people to live on remote communities in control of their own land, rather than in larger centralised settlements.

... the insistence in our policies towards Aborigines [is] that their future requires that they abandon the Aboriginal way of life and actively seek to become assimilated into our industrial urbanized society, accepting its work ethic and related values, acquiring its skills and ceasing to exist in any significant sense as a distinctive people within Australian society. (Coombs 1994:5.)

Coombs argued in support of separation and special government funding to achieve this. Outstations became the responsibility of the Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) when it was created in 1990. Subsequently the Commonwealth government provided funding through ATSIC for this distinctive way of life. Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) funding allowed Aboriginal organisations to pool unemployment benefits to create specific work programs (Sanders 2016:31). Outstations flourished in the following decade. The phenomenon of outstations and the ideologies they typified were the product of much literature, some of it anthropological¹. In 2004 the Howard government introduced legislation to dismantle ATSIC and after a long delay the Bill finally passed both houses of Parliament the following year. ATSIC was formally abolished in March 2005.

Following the demise of ATSIC and cessation of its programs including funding for outstations, those who sought to sustain or commence an autonomous and separate community were required to seek resources from mainstream government services. Consequently, their viability was often assessed against the standards of the mainstream. Increasingly this has required the applicant to demonstrate a commitment to self-sufficiency, at least in the long term. Grants are not given to support life-style choices, they are provided to assist financial independence and self-reliance. For the decentralised settlements of the central Dampier Peninsula, which are the subject of this thesis, this would require engagement with the market economy through the development of some sort of business venture.

¹ See for example, Peterson and Myers 2016, Austin-Broos 2009, Altman 2006.

The opportunity for engagement with the market economy in remote Aboriginal communities has always been limited. Missionaries preferred to establish institutions at a distance from major town centres to remove their inmates from the distractions of town life and provide a measure of protection against their exploitation. Consequently, the communities that have developed out of the mission institutions continue to lack easy access to the market economy where labour can be readily sold. The availability of basic education, health and essential services is generally limited, while access and communications pose another set of challenges.

I began my PhD fieldwork at a time of significant change. Funding for outstations was being gradually reduced. Remote living areas were being progressively defunded and employment programs and other financial support was directed to centralised settlements. Funding for decentralised living was, for the most part, available only for business development. Despite this national trend at Beagle Bay in the late 1990s a process had been implemented to make available 50 acre blocks to residents for the development of some type of business venture. Blocks were granted to corporations that typically comprised a family group. These leases were provided on condition that they would be used to develop business activities characterised by an engagement with the market economy. There was an expectation from both government agencies and the broader Aboriginal community that projects on the lease holdings would be for the benefit of Aboriginal people. Government-sponsored training programs and small business enterprise began to develop. While tourism has been the most common response, other small scale industry has also been pursued. The 'Blocks' were a significant aspect of social relationships amongst Beagle Bay residents and my thesis is concerned with the social relationships of the Blocks rather than material exchange. Owning a Block (that is holding a lease) created a certain status. I was attracted to both the phenomenon of the Block and what it represented in terms of the social relationships of the Beagle Bay community, as well as the challenges posed by the limited funding opportunities and the business environments faced by the leasees. The Blocks of the central Dampier Peninsula and those who came to occupy and sought to develop them became the tangible focus of my research.

THE DAMPIER PENINSULA AND BROOME

The Dampier Peninsula is approximately 200 kilometres north to south. There are three large communities on the Peninsula, Ardyaloon (usually called by its former name, One Arm Point),

Lombadina Djarindjin², and Beagle Bay. Each community has an estimated population average of approximately 350 people. Lombadina, the site of former Catholic mission, is adjacent to Djarindjin and accommodates White staff and some tourists (See Figure 1).

Access to the Dampier Peninsula and its communities progressively improved during my fieldwork and by the end of 2020 bituminizing of the Broome to Cape Leveque road was completed. At the commencement of my fieldwork however, the entire region was devoid of any sealed roads. Tracks to the outstations merely following graded seismic lines that were created during oil exploration in region in the 1970s. In the wet season the tracks to the Blocks were often closed and this remains the case since these are not gazetted roads.

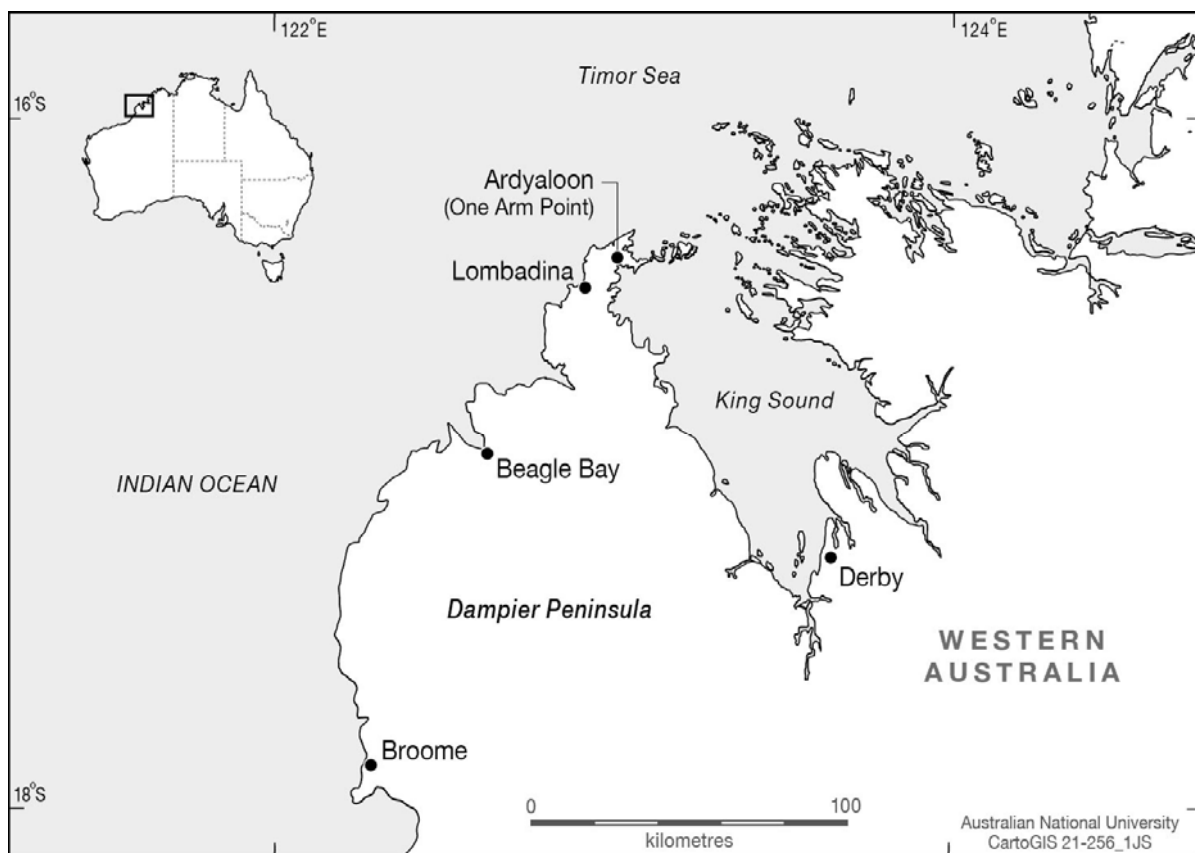


Figure 1: Dampier Peninsula.

Only one pastoral property known as Country Downs is located on the Peninsula situated 34 kilometres to the south of Beagle Bay. Pastoralism appears to have always been marginal in the area. The Beagle Bay Mission established cattle runs from the 1890s³, however certain grasses in

² Lombadina and Djarindjin are adjacent but comprise separate communities with separate councils.

³ Ganter R, <http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/mission/beagle-bay-1890-2000>. Accessed 7th July 2021.

the area are poisonous to horses⁴, and the historical photographs show stockmen on mules and goods carried on donkey carts, contrasting with the classic cowboy pictures from other places in the Kimberley like the Fitzroy Valley.

Broome has become the principal service town of the west Kimberley. Derby is located 220 kilometres east of Broome. Both towns are situated at the southern end of the Dampier Peninsula. Perth is 2,241 kilometres from Broome and Darwin is 1,871 kilometres. While Broome is remote the town is well serviced and currently there are three flights a day from Perth to Broome and one flight from Broome to Darwin via Kununurra.

Broome developed the reputation of being somewhat different to the other west Kimberley centres of Derby and Fitzroy Crossing. In part this may be due to its ethnic diversity but theatre productions such as *Bran Nue Dae* and popular music bands such as the Pigram Brothers that originated there toured nationally and internationally reflecting an arts scene, while Broome also had an exotic reputation through a history of cultural diversity. During the late 1980s into the 1990s Lord Alistair McAlpine invested in Broome, renovating and reshuffling the old master pearler buildings around the Broome townsite. He promoted the pearling industry as a feature for tourism and created Aboriginal cultural tourism ventures sponsoring the Lurujarri Heritage trail along the southern Dampier Peninsula coast. McAlpine built the Cable Beach Club (a 5 star international resort) and established a zoo. Broome locals speculate that if McAlpine had not taken an interest in the remote town Alan Bond would have influenced development and the corrugated iron and lattice buildings might have been replaced by concrete structures modelled on development patterns in Darwin or the Sunshine Coast. Airline strikes in the early 1990s are blamed for the failure of McAlpine's tourism ventures. Notwithstanding, Broome became known as a tourist town, and migration into the area increased.

In 1980 the population of Broome was approximately 2,000 people. When I arrived in 1998 the population was estimated at 8,000 with 65% identified as Aboriginal. During the mid 2000s the population underwent a radical transformation which was mostly a consequence of the resources

⁴ The grass is referred to as 'walkabout weed' and causes horses to 'go silly' and wander aimlessly. Alfred told me that donkeys and mules have a double stomach and different digestive system and therefore can tolerate the weed (Alfred pers comm August 2009). The weed is also known as rattlepods and is sweet and attractive to horses in the wet season, see <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/news/media-releases/keep-watch-rattlepod-plants-kimberley> accessed 7th July 2022.

boom (Taylor 2006:13). From 2005 interest in oil and gas supplies held in the Canning Basin (south east of Broome) and in the Browse Basin (approximately 200 kilometres offshore of the Dampier Peninsula coastline) increased. This saw a substantial increase of non-Aboriginal residents and by 2006 the total population was over 14,000 and by 2011, 16,000. As a consequence the percentage of Aboriginal people in the population fell to 35%. Broome changed from having a majority Aboriginal population to one where Aboriginal people were in the minority (Taylor, Doran and Parriman 2012).

LOCATION AND CONDUCT OF FIELDWORK

I moved to Broome in 1998 and continued to live and work in the Kimberley for 17 years. In 1998 pearling, tourism and the provision of government services supported the economy of Broome (Crough and Christopherson 1993). In the same year I gained a position at the University of Notre Dame Broome campus as a lecturer and tutor. The university at the time was a fledgling tertiary institution, established in 1996. The campus had formerly been Nulungu College, a Catholic boarding college and day school for Aboriginal students who came from communities across the Kimberley. When Nulungu College became Notre Dame University the focus was, understandably, on Aboriginal education. Many of my students were mature age Aboriginal people who held positions of responsibility in their local communities and were unwilling to pursue tertiary education at southern institutions so far from their homes. Notre Dame University in Broome provided an attractive alternative where people were willing to study. The university also encouraged off-campus enrolments through the Beagle Bay Community, with a tutoring centre established in the old mission laundry and staffed by well-educated Catholic nuns. Notre Dame engaged Aboriginal staff as lecturers, in administration positions and in Information and Technology (IT) services.

The Aboriginal people I taught and worked alongside had professional skills, while some were working to gain a tertiary degree. They were capable of pursuing employment in the major town centres. It was at this time (1998) that the extensive former reserve lands surrounding the Beagle Bay community and held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) were, in part, sub-divided into lease holdings known generally as the 'Beagle Bay Blocks', which I have noted above. During my time working at Notre Dame University some of my students and colleagues were gaining these lease holdings from the ALT.

The distribution of leases was a complex and contested process which I discuss in detail in chapter 3 below. Despite difficulties and conflicts there was plenty of attention paid on the part of Beagle Bay families to obtaining a lease and I was interested to know why the Blocks were being pursued with such keenness and how Aboriginal people would sustain living at their Block after the leases were obtained.

Through my work at the University I got to know some Beagle Bay residents who had been granted a Block. This led to invitations to visit. I did this several times, mainly staying at Sunset Beach⁵, 20 kilometres from Beagle Bay Community. Casey Swain was living part-time on the Block while working at Notre Dame during the week. Facilities were basic, the access track difficult and Casey had an 8 month old baby. I was struck by her determination to cope with the challenging conditions and with her sense of purpose. Casey believed that the Block would eventually serve as a permanent home as well as providing the means to gain a living. She planned to develop a small scale tourism venture. Whenever I stayed there I felt an obligation to contribute both financially and by offering my labour: clearing pathways; repairing beach tracks or taking care of the baby so others could work. In this way I started to become involved in the development of the Block and shared in a sense of joint purpose which I observed was a quality she promoted for all who visited and stayed at the Block. Together we were building something greater than a simple living area.

The Beagle Bay Blocks were established during a time when government support was waning and there was widespread questioning over the viability of decentralized living. The gumption showed by Casey in creating the Sunset Beach Block during a time when funding was becoming harder and harder to obtain stimulated my interest in PhD research in the region. I left Notre Dame in 2004 and took up a position as staff anthropologist at the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) in Broome, a post I held from 2005 to 2007. During native title research outstations were listed as evidence of continuing use and occupation of country. My interest in PhD research on the representation of outstations persisted.

While Government support for remote communities waned, interest in other aspects of the Dampier Peninsula grew. By 2007 there were seven companies seeking to exploit the gas reserves in the off-shore Browse Basin reserves, with plans to build an on-shore liquefied natural

⁵ I have used pseudonyms for place names and individuals in order to protect their privacy. I discuss this further on page 22 below.

gas (LNG) processing plant on the west coast of the Peninsula at James Price Point, 50 kilometres north of Broome. Woodside, one of the most prominent exploration development companies had owned ventures in Broome in the past, prior to the town being remodelled by Lord McAlpine. Woodside had been the major supplier of community infrastructure. Aboriginal people had learnt to swim in the Woodside swimming pool in Broome and portions of the Broome town site were Woodside housing. The prospect of mining or oil and gas wells in the region was greeted by at least some Aboriginal residents as an opportunity and a potential economic benefit. However, there were evident tensions between small scale local development like cultural tourism on Aboriginal controlled lands north of Broome and massive development in the form of a processing plant. Moreover opinion as to the benefits or otherwise of the proposed developments was sharply divided amongst both the Aboriginal and White population.

I continued my associations with Casey, my visits to Sunset Beach as well as my daily work with the KLC which involved direct exposure to the dilemmas and complexities of the proposed development on the Peninsula. I came to appreciate the complexity and tension from the varying development proposals, local small scale Aboriginal tourism and the rapid and considerable change associated with the resource industry.

My PhD fieldwork began in 2008 but my research was placed on hold after the KLC invited me to work on negotiations for the Browse LNG Development and then undertake research for the Nyul Nyul native title claim, that included Beagle Bay and extended up to Pender Bay. During the Nyul Nyul research I stayed with Casey, but also had the opportunity to stay at another Block that belonged to her cousin, a man who I will call Alfred. Alfred's Block I call Pindan Bay. It had been occupied longer than Sunset Beach and Alfred Swain and his wife Sandra lived there permanently. When I visited in 2008 the Block functioned as an agricultural training centre supported by CDEP funding. A grant from ATSIC had provided a house. Alfred and Sandra had been raised during the dormitory era at Beagle Bay and both were skilled. Sandra had experience in local community advocacy groups, administration and in the management of small-scale projects. Alfred had trained in carpentry and had established several buildings on the Block besides the house, including a mechanics shed, arts centre, and five chalets for accommodation. Since the Block was occupied on a permanent basis it provided a more convenient place for me to stay when I commenced fieldwork for my PhD research.

I spent the following two years doing fieldwork in the central Dampier Peninsula. During the first year I was also working for the KLC and so had other commitments most of which required

visits to the Peninsula. I stayed at Pindan Bay whenever the opportunity arose. During the second year I stayed every second week, but had to return to Broome at the end of each week because of family obligations and the need to share parenting of my school aged children. I conducted some interviews but my fieldwork was mostly participant observation. This included the use of my administrative skills to write applications and business plans. The CDEP funding for training was being phased out and Pindan Bay were hoping to change direction and develop tourism at the Block.

During this time I also visited Sunset Beach and continued my friendship with Casey. We had many discussions about her connection to the region. Casey told me of her growing up at Beagle Bay and how the area of Sunset Beach was her 'home'. I learnt about criticisms levelled at her family by others who said Block residents were 'just squatters'. I started to gain an understanding of how she worked to establish her legitimacy as a Block owner. During 2008 the LNG development targeted North Head, between Beagle Bay and Pender Bay, as a proposed processing hub site. Casey became an active and outspoken opponent of the LNG development although her right to speak for the area was often challenged. These topics were to become significant subjects of this thesis.

Casey had another cousin who also held a lease. Johnny and his partner Lauren had commenced a tourist business at Plum Point. During this time I was also able to stay at Plum Point as well as visit other Blocks across the western central Dampier Peninsula. I have described these in more detail in chapter 4 below.

The choice to take a lease and live permanently on the Block is a decision made by relatively few people from Beagle Bay Community. Beagle Bay had a population of 350 people at the time of my PhD fieldwork, while the Blocks north of the Causeway had a permanent population of around 50. However, while the permanent residents of the Blocks represented only a minority of the population of the whole of middle Dampier Peninsula region (the Beagle Bay community and the Blocks) a significantly larger number of individuals belonged to one of the many corporations set up to hold the lease to a Block. On average, the corporations established to hold the lease consisted of 35 family members who mostly lived either in Beagle Bay or the larger centres of Broome and Derby (see chapter 3). Corporation members held an interest in the Block and stayed regularly but were generally not residents.

In my research I worked with Block residents who comprise a particular subset of people. As I explore in this thesis there is a significant difference between those who live on a Block and those who are members of the corporation, visiting when they can or have the inclination. Yet without their support the Blocks would likely be unsustainable while the granting of the lease to a corporation was a condition of their allocation.

My fieldwork was with a set of collateral kin, a group of cousins who were in their 40s and 50s. Through my native title research in the area and collection of genealogies I developed a keen sense of which families traced ancestry from the various parts of the central Dampier Peninsula. The Swain family came from the east of the Dampier Peninsula, approximately 70 kilometres from their leases. However, affinal links to the region of the Blocks had been created, although the relevance of these links in matters relating to land were challenged by others who also asserted ancestry in the region. These challenges did not curb the family's local standing, and they included prominent community members. When voting rights were granted to Aboriginal people in Broome during the 1960s it was a Swain family member who stood for election to the Broome Shire Council. When Beagle Bay Mission became Beagle Bay community, Casey's father was appointed as community chairperson.

SITUATING MYSELF WITHIN THE RESEARCH

My personal and professional relationship with the Kimberley region has now spanned more than 25 years. During this time I assumed various roles, depending on my employment, personal interests and research activities. They all have a common thread: I was a trained anthropologist. 'Anthropologist' was my work-based identity. Accordingly, I have always had a keen interest in how people understood the world about them, how they made sense of it and construct relationships.

When I went to live in the Kimberley in 1998, I held a post graduate diploma of arts in Anthropology and had previously worked as an anthropologist. When I arrived in Broome Notre Dame University offered me a teaching position within their Aboriginal Studies program. Later, in 2005, I worked as staff anthropologist for KLC undertaking research for native title and cultural heritage, a position I held up until 2007. Subsequently I continued to work in the Kimberley on native title and cultural heritage matters.

During my time at the KLC I worked in the Dampier Peninsula region undertaking research for native title claims. This research overlapped with the field work sites I chose for my PhD but was focussed on Aboriginal systems of land holding prior to European occupation and

continuity to the present. The Block residents were outside the native title process (see chapter 7). When I worked on consultations and meetings for the Browse Basin Gas development in 2008 Block residents were again not included in those consultations (see chapter 6). The field research I undertook while working for the KLC is not then directly relevant to this thesis. Even though I do not rely on this experience in what follows, my work with the KLC did influence the PhD field research. It allowed me to become more familiar with the area, I met residents who I would not have otherwise and gathered informal information which these engagements and experiences produced. This all helped to frame my own field project.

I made many friends while working at both the KLC and Notre Dame but Casey in particular was important. While Casey and I come from dramatically different social and historical backgrounds, our friendship was based on what we had in common. We were work colleagues, the same age and at the time we became friends both of us had young children. As working mothers we empathised and supported each other through the demands of our professional and personal lives. We babysat for each other when one needed to work or have a night out, watched live music together at the Roebuck Hotel in Broome and I escaped to her Block some weekends. Casey was very supportive of the research. She introduced me to the reality of the Blocks on the Peninsula and it was through her that I first visited one. Her ambitions with respect to her Block, which she shared with me, provided the initial ideas for my PhD research topic. Casey 'opened doors' in terms of physical access to the Dampier Peninsula by inviting me to visit and introduced me to people providing experiences that helped shape the PhD topic.

Hinkson (2021) has written about her experiences of friendship and anthropological research. She writes of the relocation of a Walpiri woman from central Australia to Adelaide positioning herself in the research as 'friend' of 25 years and considers the impact of friendship on her analysis and field data. She writes,

... in adopting friendship as a central prism for this book, I do so not in order to assume authority, nor to enlist, nor to ventriloquize my primary interlocutor as in harmonious agreement with my analyses. This is not a project of coauthorship. It is a project alert to the considerable risks to be navigated in framing anthropological research as a shared journey between two women (2021:36).

Hinkson argues that friendship cannot be relied on to dissolve the instability, tension or miscommunication that are inevitable in research. Instead, friendship should be recognised as an 'ideal prism' through which to ruminate upon these matters (2021:36). Citing Gadamer, Hinkson

identifies friendship as an engagement that transforms both parties (2021:37). In Hinkson's (2021:36) view friendship provides a 'potent space' to glimpse what was at stake in her research.

My friendship with Casey has not protected me from disagreements both with her and with other Block residents in the middle Dampier Peninsula. She has engaged with, challenged and criticised my ideas and actions enriching my understanding and generously continuing to share life on her lease from time to time giving me an appreciation of Block life which would otherwise have been unavailable to me.

I finally left Broome in 2015 but have continued to visit the region on a regular basis to undertake anthropological research. While my time in Broome undoubtedly influenced the trajectory of my future research and undeniably facilitated it to some extent, it did not directly impact the collection of my field data. Once I had decided to undertake research for a PhD I focussed my attention and time on that activity and ventured into the field as a PhD research candidate, which was how I was understood by those with whom I worked. While this role of researcher made me the one who sought information, indulgences of time and commentary, I was not simply a mendicant, I was also seen as a resource, helping out in many small ways which provided me with an avenue for reciprocity.

In order to have adequate data I had to create networks outside Casey and Sunset Beach and so expanded my links to Pindan Bay where I paid for accommodation with Alfred and Sandra when living at their Block. My professional identity as an anthropologist was always obvious.

Noticeable activities such as carrying a large (A4 sized) black and red notebook, evenings working on the computer in the camp kitchen and other observable public acts showed my reason for being there. My research skills were regarded as a significant resource. Bruce at Pindan Bay was quick to engage my help for his own reporting and use my administrative skills when the Block was being transformed from a training centre to tourism business (see Chapter 4).

The various experiences as Notre Dame lecturer, friend, and land council anthropologist prior to becoming a PhD student gave me a much broader understanding of the Broome community than if I had just turned up fresh from the University of Western Australia unfamiliar with the region and knowing no one.

PROCESS AND MEANING

In this thesis I explore the reasons why Aboriginal people choose to decentralize and construct a lifestyle on remote Aboriginal reserve lands. My study is concerned with how decentralisation from Beagle Bay to the remote Block has created a particular culture to connect people to country. Along with the 'why' of decentralizing in this particular region, I investigate how people are managing to maintain occupancy at remote locations at a time when government funding has been dramatically reduced. In remote Aboriginal communities the prospects for engagement with the market economy are minimal, while education, health and welfare services are also limited and physical access difficult and, at times, impossible. I explore what kind of economy supports life in remote locations under these conditions and the operation of Aboriginal agency. I explore what the Blocks symbolise in terms of connection to country and how residents create home country and a sense of belonging to their lease holdings. I am interested to understand the relationships and meanings that are constructed as part of this process and what this means in terms of social change.

Others have written about the changes that characterise shifts in economic, social and ideological arrangements and beliefs which are relevant to my own area of research. For example Austin Broos (2009) describes the Arrente shift from mission to outstations and varying degrees of engagement with the market economy. Austin Broos also recognises transformations, and argues that this is, 'a world in which career narratives linked to the market have an unstable position' (2009: 266) outlining an ontological shift for the Arrente in terms of economy in a broad sense and its ideology. For the Block residents in the central Dampier Peninsula social change is evident in the economy of the Blocks which operate under a small scale domestic mode of production which is quite different from Aboriginal traditional modes of production (Keen 2004:21-129). At the time of my PhD field research various economic opportunities were available in the central Dampier Peninsula region. Engagement with the market economy included agricultural projects, wage labour opportunities through the establishment of a processing hub for natural gas at James Price Point and small scale development in the form of cultural tourism. The remote economies of the Block residents are characterised by engagement with wage labour while the business of tourism suggests residents are becoming market individuals.

The lease of a bounded Block might also be understood as a form of private property and that Block residents are creating a singular form of what might be called, 'Aboriginal real estate'. The

term Aboriginal real estate describes Blocks that are the product of a particular era of government policy which I discuss in chapter 3. The Blocks are not private property since they are in fact Aboriginal Lands Trust leases, supported by government funding and therefore dependent upon and vulnerable to change in policy. Rather than being individual lease holdings, the Blocks are held by Aboriginal corporations typically formed by small family groups averaging 35 members. Unlike a farm or cattle station where the primary purpose is an enterprise that will yield a return in cash, developing a business for profit is not the primary purpose for gaining a lease. Other interests dominate life at the Blocks, including, significantly, that of family. Creating and sustaining a place-based identity, for example 'Alfred from Pindan Bay', is part of the culture of the Block. While it is true that Block holders engage with the market they do so reluctantly to maintain government support which in turn sustains occupation – a subject I explore in chapter 7. The phrase, 'Aboriginal real estate' signifies then not merely a transformation from traditional forms of land tenure (Keen 2004:275-278). It represents a dynamic and complex set of skills learnt in the mission and contemporary economic and social aspiration. These are complexities that I explore in the following chapters of this thesis where I show that the occupants of the Blocks are more than market individuals occupying lease holdings as private property. 'Aboriginal real estate' is a particular sort of property characterised by a set of relationships which the lease-holders have with it.

Following Altman (2001), the economy of the Blocks can best be understood through the hybrid economy model, where state, market and traditional economic systems intersect in various and particular ways depending on context to support Aboriginal people living in remote parts of Australia. Altman's concern was to amplify hunting and gathering as part of the economic system. Sercombe (2008:20) following Sahlins (1972) and Peterson (1993) argued that even when hunting and gathering are not substantial parts of the means of production the customary economy can be understood as based on reciprocity and can be identified through distribution, exchange and consumption patterns specific to Aboriginal people. Identifying aspects of the customary economy within the hybrid system provides an insight into social and cultural aspects of the economic system and by extension an insight into social change and contemporary Aboriginal connections to country.

As a result of their particular history Beagle Bay people were capable of engagement with the various work opportunities, but Block residents chose to pursue small scale enterprise on the leases. There was limited focus on expanding the enterprise while abandoned neighbouring

Blocks were not seen as a means to expand the business. Statements like ‘it’s a hard life but a good life’ showed an ethos of holding onto what had been carved out already. The business enterprises were described as small family run projects to avoid being regarded as blatantly individualistic or being charged with being ‘greedy’ (see chapter 4).

I argue that such statements reflect meanings created through the development of an ideology which is directly identified with the Block and life lived upon it. I have identified a set of values that constitute this ideology that serves to justify occupation of the Blocks. It is my conclusion that a number of tensions and problems that arise for Block holders through economic and structural arrangements they have embarked upon are mediated through the application of this ideology. I describe the differing ideology of three Blocks in the region in chapter 7 and maintain that this ideology sustains connection to country. In writing of social change I draw upon Peterson (2010) to show that singular ideational systems are developed by Block residents. Peterson (2010) argues that culture and the material conditions of existence are interactively connected and that changes to one will have consequences for the other. Thus, people’s economic circumstances will modify their culture. I discuss this further in chapter 6 in the context of secular assimilation and the Browse Gas Development. In Chapter 7 I rely on Geertz (1977) to develop an understanding of symbolism and ideology to describe aspects of the culture of the middle Dampier Peninsula Block residents.

Geertz wrote that ideology has the power to,

... sustain individuals (or groups) in the face of chronic strain, either by denying it outright or by legitimising it in terms of higher values. ... Ideology bridges the emotional gap between things as they are and as one would have them be, thus insuring the performance of roles that might otherwise be abandoned in despair or apathy. (1973:205.)

Geertz further identified the need to examine ‘ideologies as systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings’ (1973:207). In this regard I describe the various symbols that the Block residents employ and what these reveal about the culture of the Block residents. In this way I investigate the ideology and symbolism of the Blocks. Ideology and the associated symbolism show that the business of the Blocks is not market engagement but rather the creation of home country which I understand as an aspect of Aboriginal real estate. The Blocks become an expression of self by reference to Beagle Bay Mission history, ideals that promote common Aboriginal benefit, environmental sustainability and family.

In examining the responses of a number of lease holders to changes in government policy and associated funding and how they have sustained their lives on their leases I demonstrate something of the meanings that are created and attributed by Block holders that underpin this process. Block residents have not merely engaged with the market economy through the development of tourist businesses. They have also created an ideology that combines aspects of Aboriginal rights of ownership of land and an associated spiritual connectedness with western mechanisms for securing rights to country and engagement with the market economy to justify and make possible occupation of their Block.

This ideology is, in part, a response to the fact that many of the lease holders are living outside their ancestral lands, or have returned to the region after living away for many years and were considered by other Peninsula residents as not possessing cultural knowledge relating to the area. This sense of alienation is exacerbated, at least in the opinion of others, by the fact that some have White partners living permanently on the lease and actively participating in the business. The ideology of the Blocks reproduces certain aspects of traditional connections to country such as knowledge of the cultural topography, the importance of kin, of caring for country, and acknowledgement of the continuing spiritual presence of those who occupied the region in times past and who are commonly referred to as the 'old people'. These traditional connections have been coupled with western legal mechanisms that secure rights to land. For example, Block residents appeal to the lease papers they hold as validation of their ownership. Hard work undertaken on the property is also cited as not only evidence of ownership but as a means to consolidate it. Claims of ownership to the land hinge upon the level of input and effort in relation to the market economy. Such claims are made on paper, in business plans and applications for funding. Ambitions to engage with the market economy is a claim made to government, not other Aboriginal people in Beagle Bay (see chapter 4).

The ideology of the Block is an amalgam of both traditional Aboriginal values, beliefs and concepts as well as aspects of the colonial values gained through long association with the Catholic mission and the later adoption of legal mechanisms to effect rights to land through the issue of leases. This ideology is brought to bear on the necessary pursuit of business strategies for engagement with the market economy. This has involved the development of a business enterprise (principally tourism) with business plans, funding, advertising and all aspects of business management. The retail product, the tourism experience, has value added through the provision of aspects of Aboriginal cultural and associated experiences. Aboriginal cultural

knowledge, spiritual references, traditional products and access for tourists to Aboriginal reserve lands are marketable commodities that contribute to the business enterprise.

THESIS OUTLINE

I present the historical background of the region in chapter 2. The chapter serves to demonstrate the significance of the establishment of the Beagle Bay Mission (1890) in the lives of both the original inhabitants of the region and of those who were brought into the institution from elsewhere. Over several generations the Beagle Bay mission regime produced a skilled population with good literacy levels and a sense of individualism and purpose. Through a mixture of Christian indoctrination of a shared humanity (see Stanton 1979) and forced expulsion from the dormitories at the mission when children became teenagers, those raised at the Beagle Bay Mission possessed a sense of entitlement to their place in the broader Australian society. The mission developed a work ethic and training for life outside the mission. Many of the people raised at Beagle Bay were the first to assume positions of authority in Aboriginal organizations in Broome and Derby (medical, educational, land councils) when they became established in the 1970s. A particular set of these people became the focus of my research interest. They included Aboriginal people who had gained status within the mainstream Australian society, held jobs in major town centres like Broome, Derby or Port Hedland, but had chosen to take their skills to remote locations and gain some independence from both the formal economy and the Beagle Bay community.

Chapter 3 provides relevant information on policy and government support of decentralisation movements. When assimilation policies were replaced by self-management and self-determination decentralisation in the form of Aboriginal living areas was supported and gained corresponding allocation of government funding. However, as a former mission site and being located on Aboriginal reserve lands, Beagle Bay was overlooked in the outstation movement that flourished with Bardi people in the northern parts of the Dampier Peninsula and in other parts of the Kimberley. In part at least this may have been a consequence of the influence of the church in keeping their flock centralised. Meanwhile the self-determining Aboriginal community remained subject to the apparatus of the colonial administration and hopes for Aboriginal control were frustrated by new and direct forms of contact with state administrators who took jobs formerly held by community members while long-term personal relationships with Mission employees were lost.

In chapter 3 I also provide background on the divestment of land by the ALT. Consistent with the then prevailing policies of sustainable economic development, the granting of these leases laid the foundations not only for the basic infrastructure of the Blocks, but mandated that engagement with the market economy was to be a feature of their future.

Chapter 4 provides information on what I have termed, ‘engineering economies’ in the region, and has as its focus the ways in which Block residents have structured their business arrangements and responded to the changes in government policy and funding over a period of years. This chapter also serves to introduce the fieldwork sites in greater detail with a focus on the three Blocks where my research was concentrated – Sunset Beach, Pindan Bay and Plum Point.

In chapters 5 and Chapter 6 I provide case studies. Chapter 5 describes small scale engagement with the market economy in the form of fishing tours. This business failed partly because it was based on a flawed business model: there was little market for the product being offered and costs were incommensurate with likely income. The failure also illustrates the importance of appreciating cultural prescriptions and the price to be paid for ignorance of them. The lack of understanding on the part of the White proponent of the business and the ideology that sustained the Block as home for its residents sealed the failure of the project.

Chapter 6 is about large scale development and a proposed LNG processing hub to be located on the central Peninsula west coast. The proposed LNG plant crystallised several issues for Block residents. For complex reasons that have to do with the application of White Australian law and which I discuss in this chapter, Block residents had little or no determining input in the consultative processes. This rather contrasted with their significant role as occupiers, users and developers of the potentially impacted land. The LNG development proposal also brought into focus the relationship between industrial economic development and the real benefits that might accrue to the Block residents as a consequence. The impact of the proposed development would also have resulted in a substantial alteration to the tenure of the Blocks in terms of what they had come to represent for their residents as Aboriginal home country.

In chapter 7 I draw on the two case studies and on the more general materials I provided in chapter 4 to demonstrate that Block residents have created a particular ideology with respect to the occupation and development of their Blocks. This ideology serves to bind them to the lease and creates a sense of belonging to country where ancestral connections are either challenged or

unrecognised. In this analysis I suggest that the ideology serves as a means to mediate structural difficulties that develop from their tenure of the Blocks and the pursuit of their business activities.

NOTE ON TERMS

In this thesis I have chosen to use certain words with specific meanings and have done so for consistency and convenience. The majority of these terms relate to categories of people.

I have used the term 'White' to refer generally to European people. In part this reflects the manner of speaking of the Aboriginal people I worked with who commonly use the term to speak of those who are of European ancestry. The term *kartiya* is widely used across the Kimberley to identify European people but the word has acquired some specialised meanings and is sometimes used as a means of signalling an insider status (on the part of Whites) and is also sometimes used pejoratively. I have mostly reserved my use of it to chapter 5 in conjunction with 'feral' (thus, 'feral kartiya') being a White who identifies closely with Aboriginal people.

I use the term 'Asiatics' of all people who are regarded as coming from beyond the socio-demographic sphere of the Kimberley and who trace ancestry to just about anywhere in south east Asia. Asiatic is used to describe members of a number of Asian countries who visited or settled in Australia, usually as a consequence of their involvement in pearling, harvesting *bêche-de-mer* (trepanng or sea cucumbers (phylum Echinodermata)) or related industries. Archival materials show Japanese, Chinese, Malays and Filipinos in various occupations during the early 1900s in Broome (Sickert 2003:182). These diverse groups were commonly referred to by use of the term 'Asiatic' describing people from Japan and China extending west to India and Afghanistan and south to Indonesia. Use of the term 'Asiatic' flattens a diverse population into a homogenous group, typical of the Orientalism of colonialism (see Said 1978). Other terms are also found in the early accounts. 'Malay' was the broad term for people from the Malay Archipelago and what is now Indonesia but those from the Philippines were identified as different. The Filipinos were known as 'Manilamen' after the capital of their country. Afghans (another label suffering Orientalism, see Jones and Kenny 2007:20 – 21) primarily worked the interior, conducting trade and transport to regions where sea transport was unavailable.

The final term I here identify is that which I use of the lease holdings which feature prominently in this account. At Beagle Bay they were called from their inception (as far as I know) simply 'the

blocks'. I have retained this term but in recognition of their status I use the word with an initial capital letter – thus 'the Block'.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In order to protect the privacy of those with whom I have worked and who feature in the accounts presented below I have employed the use of pseudonyms. I have also used fictitious names for the Blocks and have not located them on the maps except in the most general way. A consequence of this approach is that where I have drawn on social media or web pages, I have not provided the hyperlink as this would negate my purpose. In these cases I have indicated the existence of a link accessed for the data discussed, but I have not disclosed it.

CHAPTER 2

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Beagle Bay was the first permanent and eventually the largest mission in the Kimberley. The Catholic mission was established in 1890 on the western coast of the Dampier Peninsula at the head of the bay which gave the mission its name. It was the location where pastoralists had first landed sheep in the western Kimberley in 1882 (Owen 2016: 100-101) while Norman Creek, which flows into Beagle Bay, was used as a 'lay up camp' to shelter pearling boats during storms and over the wet season. As a consequence Aboriginal people in the Beagle Bay region had earlier contact with outsiders than in other parts of the Kimberley. During the first decades of the twentieth century the church and state combined to intrude into relationships that had developed between Aboriginal people and the newcomers, particularly those between Aboriginal women and Asiatics.⁶ The resulting mixed descent children of these relationships were removed from their families and accommodated in the dormitories of the Beagle Bay Mission. However, adults were also attracted to the mission environment through the provision of rations and a secure environment. While there was common ground between the church and state with respect to gaining control of the mixed descent children and their parents, each held different views on the way they wanted to assimilate Aboriginal people. Both agreed however that trading and personal relationships between Aboriginal people and Asiatic seafarers should be controlled. Through their life within the mission regime many Beagle Bay people developed a work based identity, acquisition of certain skills, an appreciation of an industrial work ethic, plus a sense of strategic planning in dealing with government and other outside bodies. By the 1920s mission trained workers became a sought after labour supply in a labour starved north west. Through engagement with the mission regime many Beagle Bay people developed an identity based on the work skills they had acquired, for example, 'Albert the Baker' or 'Joseph the Mechanic', both being a consequence of the individual's training which was designed to deliver a place in the mainstream labour market.

In this chapter I review the early contact era of the west Kimberley coast, the development of trade and personal relationships between Aboriginal people and Asiatic seafarers and the establishment of the mission at Beagle Bay. I describe the history of non-Aboriginal settlement

⁶ I discuss the composition of 'Asiatics' in the introduction under definitions, see page 21

in the Beagle Bay region and the effect of the mission regime on Beagle Bay people. This serves to contextualise the beliefs and values of the contemporary residents of the Beagle Bay Blocks.

EARLY CONTACT IN THE NORTH WEST

The first sustained contact between Aboriginal Australians and non-Aboriginal people was likely to have been with the Makassan seafarers⁷ who probably first visited the west Kimberley coast during the late 17th to early 18th century (Stephenson 2007:22). The Makassans called the Kimberley coast Kayu or Kai Jawa and travelled in large numbers, ostensibly for protection and focussed their activities on the offshore reefs. The Makassans primarily sought to harvest trepang for trade with greater Asia⁸ and made their camps on the beaches adjacent to reefs and shallow lagoons where the trepang could be harvested comparatively easily and then processed on shore for transport back to Sulawesi. The Makassans appear to have shown little attraction to any form of local barter with the Aboriginal groups. Vosmaer, a Dutch agriculturalist interested in trepang trade wrote in 1839 that,

When the number of vessels that came to Kai Jawa was insufficient to provide mutual protection against the natives, they [the Makassans] would leave this inhospitable place and travel on to Marega [Arnhem Land]. Therefore when they reached Kai Jawa, they worked with united effort at earthworks [forts] and those able assembled revolvers and light artillery on the perahus (cited in Crawford 2001:78).

Ian Crawford conducted archaeological research on Makassan visits to the Kimberley and his research at Tamarinda, Napier Broome Bay in the northern Kimberley did reveal Aboriginal occupation sites immediately adjacent to the Makassan visitation sites which suggests interaction between Aboriginal people and Makassans. (2001:71). Generally though, the relationship between the two groups in the Kimberley is described as hostile, or distant at best. Numerous historical journals show bitter relationships between Makassans and Aboriginal people on the Kimberley coast, with the theft of Makassan canoes sparking much of the conflict. In 1827 the surveyor Philip Parker King described the relationship as one of ‘perpetual warfare’.

⁷ The name Makassar is derived from the Port of Makassar in south Sulawesi, Indonesia. Macknight (1976:1-2) describes Makassan as both a noun and adjective. Rather than referring to any language or cultural group, the term refers to those travelling on the annual fleets of praus to harvest the north Australian coast line. The term has various spellings, such as Macassar or Makasar, I use Makassar and Makassan following the contemporary spelling of the Indonesian port of Makassar.

⁸ Trepang were highly regarded by the Chinese in cuisines for the jelly like texture that was thought to bring out the flavour of certain foods. It was also believed to have qualities as a stimulant and aphrodisiac. See Macknight 1976 and Stephenson 2007 for details on trepang trade and use.

[H]istorical sources for the Kimberley area describe a hostile relationship between the Indonesians and Aboriginal people. Baudin's men were told that the Aborigines were 'extremely fierce' (Baudin 1874). According to Dramah, a Macassan captain interviewed by Philip Parker King in 1818, Aboriginal people were 'treacherous and hostile' and the Macassan's small canoes were frequently stolen ... He concluded that a 'perpetual warfare exists between them' [i.e. Aboriginal people and the Makassans] (Australian Heritage Council 2011:151).

Water sources were guarded and difficult for outsiders to access and relationships were generally antagonistic. Oral histories from the Northern Territory of adoptive kin relationships and 'take home' stories, where Aboriginal people returned with the visiting fleets are not apparent in the Kimberley (see Stephenson 2007:33-34). The Makassans focused their activities on harvesting the offshore reefs with limited interaction with Aboriginal people. Crawford (2001:79) describes a broad range of natural products sought by the Makassan crews. While the primary resource taken was trepang, pearl shells, pearls, and turtle shell, as well as trochus, fish, clam shell meat and even iron ore were gathered during the Makassan voyages. Kimberley harvesting regions were similar to the extensive Arnhem Land sites, however, compared to Arnhem Land the documentation is limited. Ganter (2006:47) attributes this difference to the Northern Territory government seeking revenue from Makassan visits, while the Western Australian government did not, and as a result, the early Western Australian records are quite poor.

Early reports by European explorers of the Kimberley coast characterized the Aboriginal population as hostile people living debased lives. In 1644 Abel Tasman described, 'naked, beach roving wretches, destitute of rice ... excessively poor, and in many places, of a very malignant nature' (cited in Crawford 2001:97). William Dampier, writing in 1688 and having first sighted land off Beagle Bay, remarked of the Bardi people north of Beagle Bay that they, 'threatened us with their swords and lances by shaking them at us' (Dampier 1697 chapter 16⁹).

By the early decades of the 19th century European colonisers showed themselves eager to exploit the resource potential of the west Kimberley and reports were written by explorers who visited the north west beginning in the 1830s. Some European surveying parties delivered enthusiastic accounts of the grazing potential of the region. George Grey led a surveying expedition in the Hanover Bay region (far north west of the Kimberley coast) during late 1837 extending into

⁹ Dampier, W. 1697 (1937). *A New Voyage Round the World*. Black. London.
<http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks05/0500461h.html> accessed 6th July 2021. The Gutenberg edition does not contain original page numbers.

1838. Grey's party was attacked by Aboriginal people with Grey being wounded by a spear. The expedition had intended travelling from the Kimberley south over three thousand kilometres, to the Swan Colony (now Perth), but this plan was abandoned and eventually the survey party was evacuated not far from where they had landed. Although the expedition was short lived, Grey provided optimistic reports of grazing lands in the region. He wrote in his diary, 'indeed no country in the world is better watered than this portion of Australia' (Grey 1841:107). Grey's party travelled at the end of the wet season and reports from 1837-8 were skewed by a lack of understanding of the seasonal variations in this part of Australia.

In 1838 John Wickham surveyed the north-western coasts of Western Australia and it was he who named Beagle Bay after the ship he commanded, being the HMS *Beagle*, the same vessel that Charles Darwin had used in his voyage of 1831-36.¹⁰

Through the mid 1800s pastoralists focused development in other parts of the Western Australia and until the 1870s the region remained known as the amorphous 'North West' of Western Australia that included both the Pilbara and Kimberley. In 1879 Alexander Forrest, accompanied by his brother Matthew and six other men, journeyed through the western, central and east Kimberley region, 'sighting a vast tract of well-watered pastoral country on the Fitzroy and Ord rivers' (Bolton 1981¹¹). Forrest reported, 'a land of good grass and water, promising prospects for gold and tropical agriculture' along with an Aboriginal population 'who at first showed no hostility' (Bolton 1981).

Forrest commenced his expedition from De Grey Station in the north eastern Pilbara region and travelled north to the Dampier Peninsula coast. In 1879 Alexander Forrest wrote from his camp at Beagle Bay that,

... a native came in, who understood English, and had been to Beagle Bay. The men supplied him with damper, a pipe, and a little tobacco, which he seemed greatly to relish (Forrest 1880:9).

The natives were friendly all through our journey, and are, I imagine, unlikely to prove a source of any annoyance to future settlers. Many of them wear pearl ornaments, which leads me to infer that pearl shell banks will in all probability be found between Beagle and Collier Bays, and if so,

¹⁰ Morrison 1967; <https://www.aussietowns.com.au/town/beagle-bay-wa#> accessed 15 August 2020.

¹¹ <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/forrest-alexander-6208> accessed 18 December 2020. The article comprises a single web page.

the pioneer pearlers on that part of the coast will have no difficulty in procuring labor, the natives being there in large numbers (Forrest 1880:40).

PERMANENT OCCUPATION BY EUROPEANS: PASTORALISTS AND PEARLERS

The Kimberley region was eventually gazetted in 1880 and partitioning of east and west districts followed in 1883 (Owen 2016:85). Pastoral development in the west extended from the coast facilitated by relatively easy access through the ports of Broome and Derby to the central Kimberley. Pastoralists from the east travelled with their stock overland from Queensland and New South Wales to take up leases in areas otherwise inaccessible from the coast. The rocky country in the north Kimberley and desert regions to the south were considered marginal grazing lands and only taken under European control relatively late in the region's history. The Europeans who took leases in the east and west Kimberley came from strikingly different backgrounds and this had significant implications for the subsequent relationships with the Aboriginal population (see Owen 2016: 94). The pastoralists who trekked their cattle overland from New South Wales and Queensland were small operators who were forced out of New South Wales and Queensland as a result of drought and because wealthy monopolies had consolidated their lease holdings (Owen 2016:94). In contrast many of the leases in the west Kimberley were taken up by wealthy Western Australians from the conservative land owning classes of the Western Australian parliament (Owen 2016:94-96). Unlike their counterparts who brought cattle to the east Kimberley, leases in the west were used to raise sheep and grow wool.

Settlement of the east Kimberley was initially stimulated by a short lived gold rush at Halls Creek in 1885. The goldfield was exhausted after just three months, but the influx of a significant number of Europeans and the establishment of the town of Halls Creek (gazetted in 1887) as a telegraph and trading centre provided substantial benefit for the emerging pastoral ventures in the region. Those who settled the new cattle runs were individuals with little to lose and were willing to take great risks. For the most part they embarked on their ventures having scant knowledge about the region to which they drove their cattle, while the distances, dangers and hardships of over-landing cattle posed significant risks to the viability of the endeavour (Owen 2016:94). Early eastern cattle stations used open range pastoral methods that required only small numbers of highly skilled stockmen, infrastructure such as fencing was kept to a minimum and the overall requirement for Aboriginal labour was comparatively low. The east Kimberley colonists came from regions where pastoralists had openly killed Aboriginal people who were regarded as occupying their 'runs' and in the isolated and remote areas of both Queensland and New South Wales had done so with few repercussions. Any perceived threat to themselves or

their cattle resulted in the delivery of an immediate and violent response. This east Kimberley contact period is remembered in the oral histories as the 'Killing Times' symbolising the bloodthirsty 'dispersal' of the Aboriginal population (see Clements 1989). The townsite of Wyndham was gazetted in 1886 and had shipping yards for cattle along with a substantial prison for the Aboriginal population.

Coastal occupation of the west Kimberley began in the 1870s with the towns of Broome and Derby gazetted in 1883, slightly earlier than Wyndham. These towns supported both pastoral and pearling activities. Pastoral development interests focused on the West Kimberley, possibly because of its comparative closer proximity to Perth and the development of port facilities at both Derby and Broome. The early west Kimberley pastoralists ran sheep and required greater infrastructure, such as fencing, the flocks needed shepherding, and compared to the east Kimberley cattle runs the requirement for labour was much greater. This meant the Aboriginal population was considered as a potential labour supply. Consequently, the contact history was one of labour co-option rather than bloody 'dispersal'. However, this settlement pattern was not without cruelty and massacres. Reprisal raids and dispersals are evidenced in the oral histories at Yardoogara on the coast (120 kilometres south of Broome) and Mowla Bluff, part of the desert country of the central Kimberley (280 kilometres south east of Broome).

As I noted above the establishment of west Kimberley pastoral leases was dominated by wealthy and politically influential syndicates that included West Australian parliamentarians (Owen 2016: 94 -96). Alexander Forrest (1879) and other surveyors had given enthusiastic reports for the region, creating an unexpectedly high number of applications for leases. The secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord Kimberley, placed stocking regulations on leases as an incentive to prevent the region remaining 'unproductive'. Pastoralists were required to stock 'twenty sheep or two large head of stock' for every 1000 acres (cited in Owen 2016:95). Considering the remoteness of the region and its lack of basic infrastructure, the stocking regulations placed heavy demands on the new pastoral ventures. As many of the coastal west Kimberley pastoral leases were taken in support of pearling activities rather than pastoral development alone, the two increased the demand for Aboriginal labour.

Despite this surge in pastoral activities it was pearling rather than pastoralism that encouraged permanent occupation by Europeans of the north west. In the 1870s pearlmen began moving into the region from Cossack in the western Pilbara to exploit the pearl shell and pearls that were to be found in the warm tropical waters off the Dampier Peninsula coast. The Dampier Peninsula

soon became permanently occupied by Europeans and Asiatic seafarers. Smaller fleets of schooners and prahus travelling out of Kupang replaced the Makassan harvesters. The more successful pearlers generally held the leases for the early sheep stations established along the coast. They were taken as land bases, where the stations provided wood, water, Aboriginal labour and Aboriginal women (see Pedersen 1996). The pearlers favoured a 400 kilometre stretch of coast from the Dampier Peninsula north of Broome extending south to the Karajarri coast around the former La Grange Mission (now Bidyadanga). The creeks along this stretch of coastline afforded crews access to resources and workers. They also served as protected 'lay-up' camps during the wet season when destructive cyclonic storms were a common occurrence.

Norman Creek which flows into Beagle Bay became a substantial pearling camp (see Choo 2001:98-99). Ganter (2006:48-49) describes the fleets of the late 1800s as a mixture of pearling and fishing vessels, with many owned by Chinese, Arab and Dutch merchants, but placed under the command of British and Australian captains for better communications with Australian authorities. The pearlers sought Aboriginal labour both to crew the luggers and undertake processing tasks, while in the earlier times and prior to the introduction of diving suits in the 1880s, Aboriginal people (children as well as men and women) were used (sometimes forcibly) as free divers to retrieve pearl shell from the sea floor.

Historians have documented the use of Aboriginal labour in both the pastoral as well as the pearling economies (Owen 2016 and Yu, Pigram and Shioji 2015). These accounts support the conclusion that early labour obtained for these industries was essentially slave labour, with Aboriginal people captured for work in the pearling industry under a practice known as 'blackbirding' (Stephenson 2007:60). Pregnant Aboriginal women in particular were considered superior divers through a belief that they held greater oxygen capacity. The state sought to rectify these exploitative practices in the pearling industry by means of various pieces of legislation that were passed in the Western Australian parliament from 1871 onwards. These included a requirement for the supply of rations in return for work and attempts to separate Aboriginal women from the industry by prohibiting their use as divers and even from boarding vessels (Sickert 2003, Stephenson 2007).

Shallow water pearl stocks depleted rapidly and by the mid 1880s pearl harvesting methods changed and 'hard-hat' diving,¹² involving new technology, such as waterproof suits with compressed air feeds, was introduced to harvest deep water pearl stocks. Sickert (2003:39) states that Aboriginal people refused to wear the heavy apparatus. Perhaps the new positions were only made available to indentured labour, or the 1871 legislation made engaging Aboriginal labour too difficult. Whatever the cause, from the mid 1870s the demand for Aboriginal divers was substantially diminished, however Aboriginal people continued to engage in the pearling industry through onshore jobs and other tasks. Sickert (2003:39) lists Aboriginal people working in Broome as labourers at the foreshore camps, crewmen, boatmen, boat builders, shell openers, shell packers as well as cooks and servants.

The written record on interaction between Aboriginal people and those occupying the area also improves during this time, providing some insight into the relationships between Aboriginal people, Whites and Asiatics. After the 1870s trading and personal relationships with Asiatic seafarers were formed and enabled Aboriginal people to remain in decentralized locations and resist having their labour appropriated by European development projects. This facilitated the growth of closer relationships between the new settlers as a whole (not just the pearlers) and the Aboriginal inhabitants.

Forrest's (1880:9) description of fondness for tobacco and descriptions of encounters with 'large numbers of natives' indicate a substantial level of contact with, or accommodation of, outsiders by Aboriginal people at Beagle Bay by the late 1800s. The fresh water springs supplied much needed water, while several large creeks and the bay provided shelter for boats. This meant that Beagle Bay became an early west Kimberley contact site between Aboriginal people, Europeans and Asiatic seafarers. The trauma that was the undoubted consequence of at least some if not many of the early encounters of the Aboriginal population in the Beagle Bay region may also have influenced subsequent capacity to accommodate the various seafarers and pastoralists that followed.

Beagle Bay resident George Dann told me stories of frontier violence in the region and pointed to the substantial skeletal remains which are to be found in the sand dunes near Beagle Bay on a peninsula known as Sandy Point, approximately 22 kilometres northwest of the Community

¹² 'Hard-hat' or 'copper hat' is a type of diving suit used for underwater work that required a continuous supply of air, pumped under pressure into the suit by means of a hose. The suit and related apparatus became standard equipment for pearl shell diving.

(George Dann, pers. comm., 2002). These remains bear testament to the significant contact history of the area and speak to aspects of its impact. The shifting sands expose and cover skeletal materials at various times so the actual number is unknown, however several archaeological surveys have been undertaken and they all note the scatterings are dense (Buck 2001, Greenfeld, Kelly and Wohlan 2002). Catholic priest Father E.A. Worms considered that the site was a consequence of an epidemic (1944:292), itself a product of the advancing frontier. Worms described the area as:

Baninggad (N.N). An old burial place of the Nyol-Nyol east of Sandy Point. It has been avoided by the native since the sixties [1860s], when an epidemic of smallpox decimated their tribe. Strong winds shift the dunes, revealing human skeletons and slightly worked pieces of shell (1944:292).

Researchers have also commented on the placement of bailer shells near the Aboriginal graves (Greenfeld, Kelly and Wohlan 2002) while others still tell how it was the consequence of an intra-Aboriginal battle. The Aboriginal skeletons are distinguished by evidence of tooth evulsion in the upper jaw.

Remains from the pearling era are found in the area, where lack of refrigeration made returning bodies to formal cemeteries difficult. Pearling related burials are identifiable through the presence of heavy nails remaining at the gravesite after the coffin wood has rotted.

When Beagle Bay Mission was established in the 1890s the region had been occupied by outsiders from the 1870s representing over twenty years and nearly a generation. The local Aboriginal population was willing to accommodate permanent residency of the Catholic Trappist monks during the first wave of proselytization.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABORIGINAL AND ASIAN PERSONAL AND TRADING RELATIONSHIPS

The accounts of the nature of the relationships between the migrant labourers and Aboriginal women are mixed. Historian Christine Choo suggests that 'police and other accounts indicate Aboriginal women's openness to rather than avoidance of these encounters' (Choo 2001:110), and as these relationships developed between seafarers and Aboriginal women, members of the local population were drawn to the major coastal creek areas and the newly established towns.

The representations recovered by historians of the contact between Aboriginal women and Asiatics vary from the forcible taking of young girls at gunpoint (Choo 2001:102) to women

defying the authorities and being found on boats, actively seeking out relationships (Ganter 2006:94). Choo (2001:99) notes regular visits to coastal Aboriginal camps from pearling crews for drinking water and wood supplies when Aboriginal women were provided in exchange for rice, cloth, sugar and alcohol. Choo also mentions Europeans controlling market gardens and small holdings to supply the pearling luggers with fresh produce like vegetables, eggs, poultry and mutton (2001:99). Senior Karajarri woman Edna Hopiga whose father was Malay, described contact with the boat crews in the Bidyadanga region in pragmatic terms.

All our grandpas used to sell their wives to the Malays to get tucker. Most of my grannies had Malay kids. The Malays used to come to Whistle Creek. My people used to live there. Old people would sell 'em young wives... Luggers used to come in once a month or more. Come in for feed and water and sandalwood. All the grandpas used to cut the wood up. Have 'em ready. And the women ready [laughs]... That was for tucker. They might run out. It was a long way to walk down to the ration camp. Only get rations every two weeks. It was so they could stay out in those places. They used to stay out... I think they might like them – all the young men. It was okay by them. They might come in for water ... might be they want women... That's a good idea for people. Help one another. Blackfella never worry about it. There used to be whiskey too if they want 'em. But mainly tucker. That's not the blackfella or Malay fault. They did it for themselves. Wasn't wrong. (cited in Stephenson 2007:74.)

Aboriginal and Asiatic relationships developed through trading associations led to the formation of personalised and enduring relationships. There followed government attempts to interrupt those relationships and control Aboriginal labour. These interactions produced a mixed descent population. This led to the state targeting mixed descent children, seeking to remove them from their families (usually to a mission institution) and to prevent or at least discourage miscegenation in subsequent generations.

It was interaction between the Asiatic peoples and Aboriginal women in particular that was a cause for concern amongst both government and church officials. Some of this concern developed from a sense of moral transgression as well as a fear for the welfare of the women and the belief that a mixed race population was both undesirable and produced morally and physically degenerate off-spring. It also represented attempts on the part of both institutions to wield control over the Aboriginal population and non-European influences and individuals. Ganter (2006) and Stephenson (2007) argue that Asiatic exclusion became the flipside of Aboriginal protection.

The state developed an ambiguous relationship with the church being at times antagonistic and at others supportive, as both sought to change the lives of Aboriginal people according to their own ideals (see Choo 1996). The state sought both to control and protect Aboriginal labour for work in pastoralism and pearling. The missions sought to bring Catholicism to their charges, instil a work ethic and deliver training in job skills to provide 'job ready' Aboriginal people with a sense of entitlement to a work amongst Whites in mainstream employment positions.

Government response

Separating Asiatics from the Aboriginal population provoked the powers of the state. The Federal *Immigration Restriction Act* (1901) restricted immigration to Australia and formed the basis of the White Australia policy. Asiatics brought in to labour were provided exemption from the provisions of the Act (Stephenson 2007:61). However, the threat of deportation served to control indentured Asian labour. These conditions of entry were bolstered by restrictions on ownership of essential infrastructure such as boats and pastoral properties which served to suppress the economic advancement of both Aboriginal people and Asiatics. For example the *Land Act* of 1871 precluded Asiatic businessmen from purchasing land if they did not conform to certain strict requirements. Consequently many had to establish businesses on property held through leases only, while White businessmen were freely able to buy and sell land (see Sickert 2003:82-85).

Control was also placed over the supply of Aboriginal labour. Asiatics were rarely given permission to employ Aboriginal workers. In a labour starved north where Aboriginal labour was the mainstay, withholding employment orders prioritized European development. Trade and personal relationships persisted between Aboriginal people, the indentured workers and Asian people who had migrated before the Federal *Immigration Restriction Act* 1901. As a result of these pieces of legislation there was little chance of economic advancement for mixed Aboriginal and Asian ventures.

The police or other protectorates were also brought in to terminate the trading relationships and control Aboriginal populations to major centres. Travelling inspector for Aborigines Olivey visited Broome in 1901 where the European residents described the difficulty in engaging Aboriginal labour. Olivey described the 'scandalous state of affairs' in Broome town where it was,

Impossible to walk along the main streets any time in the day without seeing natives, men, women and children, lying and loafing about... They rarely appeared to be doing any work; at times a few might be seen carrying wood and water. The majority of the loafers were women, for the most part under thirty years of age. In no other town visited have I seen such a scandalous state of affairs. The women are all well dressed, and are to be seen at or about sundown carrying food away with them to the camps (cited in Reynolds 2000:94).

Olivey visited a number of Aboriginal women who were partnered with Asiatic indentured men and described their circumstances as 'very happy and contented', their surroundings 'neat, clean and tidy' and their condition as 'raised above their ordinary level'. Regardless, Olivey argued that mixed marriages should be stopped, suggesting that such unions 'often lead up to trouble, and are not desirable in any way' (cited in Reynolds 2000:94).

In a nation gripped in the 'White Australia' fervour that existed during federation in 1901 and the segregation associated with 'smoothing the pillow of the dying'¹³ the 'coloured' population resulting from relationships between Aboriginal people and indentured labourers was regarded as combining two elements already side-lined from what Australian national identity should ideally look like (see Connor 2013:5).

Ganter (2006: 94) cites police constable Kuhlmann at Whistlers [Whistle] Creek south of Broome in 1904 rigorously inserting himself between any direct trading relationships,

There have been about 60 of the Whistler's Creek tribe of natives carrying water for the boats, and these natives are quite willing to work for their food, so I tried the experiment ... As the boats come in I put them in four or five tubs, [presumably dinghies] and let them fill the boats with water, and in return they receive either flour or bag-rice or tinned meat or tobacco, and their food whilst carrying. I take care of what they receive, and have it taken over to my camp when they finish the boats; and when they are all gone from the creek the natives come to my camp for goods, etc, as they require it... I make the native camp two miles from the creek, and I then camp on the beach ... I have to use a great deal of bluff in dealing with these men [from the boats]. I have chained some of them up all night at times – illegally, I think, but the only way to deal with them is by main force (cited in Ganter 2006:94).

Police constable Kuhlmann, as a representative of the state, aggressively asserted himself between the Aboriginal and Asiatic trade relationships. With the passing of the 1905 *Aborigines*

¹³ 'Smooth the pillow of the dying' relates to a period of segregation after frontier violence, from the 1900s onwards, the phrase implied protectionism of a group regarded as a dying race (see Bolton 1982:59).

Act interference in the conjugal lives of Aboriginal people became sanctioned under legislation. In legislating against miscegenation the Asiatic population in the north could also be surveyed and controlled.

There was a general government concern over the growing number of mixed descent children. The following quote from Olivey captures the sentiment of the *Immigration Restriction Act* and the inhumanity of eugenics.

The worst feature of the West Kimberley, and I may say of the whole state, is the coast-line within the sphere of the pearling luggers and Asiatic crews ... nearly all the coastal half castes are half-bred Asiatics... About Broome and along the coast there are a number of full grown half-castes married to Asiatics, and most of them have children... I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half caste from its Aboriginal mother no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring (Olivey cited in Ganter 2006:108-109).

This mixed race or 'coloured' population evaded identification as strictly Asiatic or Aboriginal and legally they existed in the interstices between protectionist legislation over Aboriginals and restrictive legislation over Asiatics. The Aboriginal protection bureaucracy extended administrative categories to include quadroons and octoroons to assist intervention into Aboriginal lives (see Stephenson 2007:71).

Not all Asiatics were subject to state control. For example, the Filipino man Thomas Puertollano and his Aboriginal wife Agnes Guilwil established the Lombadina pastoral station on the Dampier Peninsula 170 kilometres north of Broome. Filipinos navigated the racial barriers slightly differently to other Asiatics as many held status as American citizens since the Philippines was an American protectorate region from 1898 to 1946 (Sickert 2003:53). Many were also Christian (and Catholic) while other South East Asians were typically Muslim (Dalton 1964). Ganter (2006:105) cites the Chief Protector of Aborigines objecting to Lombadina and the remote 20,000 acre property being owned by a Manilaman (that is a Filipino) who was 'technically employing the Aborigines in breach of regulations, as Asiatics are not allowed to employ Aborigines'. In 1910 Father Creagh from the Catholic Church took over the lease from Thomas Puertollano to create the Lombadina mission as an outstation of Beagle Bay mission where Puertollano stayed to assist as a founding member (see Ganter 2006:105).

Trade with Asiatic seafarers shows the agency of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal women in particular, in relation to contact with outsiders. These relationships allowed the various groups to

avoid major European settlement areas and illustrate a resistance to the regulation of Aboriginal labour imposed by the state and church. The exchange of women and goods meant that people could remain decentralised and avoid labouring for station bosses and escape dealings with police and Government Protectors at ration depots. Where Aboriginal people moved into or remained at major centres, for example the Djugan and Yawuru, whose traditional country lay round the present townsite of Broome, personal and trading relationships were established with the migrant workers from South East Asia. Again, close personal and trading relationships between Aboriginal people and the boat crews meant that European labour demands could be shunned and the Aboriginal population retained a measure of independence.

It was in this social setting that the Beagle Bay Mission was established. There was a growing sentiment by state and church to intervene and control the mixed descent population while there already existed an affiliation between some mixed descent people (those known as Manilamen), and the Catholic Church which provided a promising basis for missionary endeavours. There was also an evident conflict in church and state relationships that was developed from competition for the control of Aboriginal labour and direction of Aboriginal life choices.

THE BEAGLE BAY MISSION

Initially the Aboriginal population in the Beagle Bay region maintained personal and trading relationships with the Asiatic seafarers and in doing so resisted forced resettlement into the mission site and pastoral stations from the 1870s up until at least the early 1900s. The establishment of the mission positioned the Church between the Aboriginal population and Asiatic seafarers, but also between the southern based Europeans who sought economic advancement through the use of Aboriginal labour on their pastoral properties. The pastoralists, many of whom were members of the Protestant dominated Parliament (Owen 2016:94), were concerned that Aboriginal labour was being lost from the pastoral stations in favour of the mission. This was part of the objection when Bishop Gibney first requested the Beagle Bay Mission lease in 1888. The Aboriginal Protection Board wrote that, 'as the natives in the neighbourhood ... [were] for the most part in the employ of the settlers, the establishment of a mission could only result in the withdrawal of the natives from their employment and cause ill-feeling' (cited in Choo 1995:117). Government protectorates sought to confine the Aboriginal population to the pastoral stations, while the missions sought to keep them under their care so that they could protect and train the population to have the capacity to assimilate. There were also accusations that the missions encouraged and even nurtured Asiatics. Bates noted four

Manilamen living at Beagle Bay when she visited the mission in 1900 (Bates 2004:23). The involvement of Filipinos with the Catholic mission lead to protests that the Beagle Bay mission was a Manilaman refuge, being a mixed settlement of Manila-men and native women (Nailon 2001:26).

Irish priest Duncan McNab came to the Kimberley in February 1884 and established an outpost at Goodenough Bay on the eastern side of the Dampier Peninsula. McNab's mission was short lived and was abandoned by 1887 (Choo 2012: 195-213). Beagle Bay was established in 1890 and became the largest Catholic mission in the Kimberley. It is sometimes referred to as the 'cradle' of the Church in the Kimberley (Zucker 2005). Beagle Bay mission site was located on Nyul Nyul country, the area being known as Ngarlan and the mission site itself Billard, the name identifying the spring waters which characterise the area. The Aboriginal population were willing to tolerate the permanent presence of the missionaries and the lack of resistance could be attributed to the history of sustained contact with outsiders which I have described above.

The missionaries who established Beagle Bay in 1890 were French Trappist monks who built basic accommodation and a make-shift church from paperbark and tin (Ganter 2018: 56-8). They were an order of contemplatives who observed strict rituals and an austere daily timetable (Ganter 2018: 56, 156). They were vegetarians and held vows of silence at certain times, they also proselytized in French.

The deprivations, inadequate infrastructure and overall philosophy and approach of the Trappists did not favour success. The order had spent ten years at Beagle Bay and struggled to carve out the mission at the remote location. In 1900 Daisy Bates conducted her first Australian fieldwork at Beagle Bay in company with Bishop Gibney. By the time of Bates's visit the Trappists were on the verge of departure since their Order in France had withdrawn its financial support and the Catholic Church authorities in Perth sought to renew the mission lease which was in danger of forfeiture. However there were additional factors which led to the withdrawal of the Trappists including accusation of sexual misconduct both between the priests themselves and the locals and other erratic behaviour (Ganter 2018:56-7, 200).

Bates was 27 years old and she described her purpose being to travel with Bishop Gibney and report on the benefits or otherwise of the mission to the natives (Bates 2004:16). The land was held under a grazing lease and improvements to a cost of a total of five thousand pounds were required to prevent the lease being forfeited. Bates describes the poor infrastructure and

makeshift nature of the mission. The Trappists, she reported, lived in ‘a few tin buildings in a clearing’ (Bates 2004:17) and there being, ‘but a collection of tumbledown, paper-bark monastery cells, a little bark chapel and a community room of corrugated iron, which had been repeatedly destroyed in bush fires and “hurricanes”’. The ‘Trappists led a life of rigorous poverty, intensified in this barren remote land to the point of starvation’ (2004:18). Despite this apparent neglect Ganter reports that the mission was inhabited by 147 ‘Christians’ at this time (Ganter 2018:59).

Building the mission and creating routine

Bates’s visit to Beagle Bay lasted four months. In order to assess whether the mandatory minimum outlay had been expended on the lease the government surveyor was expected at the mission to make an evaluation of its worth (Ganter 2018:59), so Bates joined others doing manual labour to improve the site. She described these activities as ‘sharing the toil with the brothers and the blacks, and the Bishop in his shirt sleeves’ (2004:21). Bates indicates in her account that there were large numbers of Aboriginal people at the mission observing that 150 people came to greet their boat on arrival. Her reports show that while Aboriginal people lived at the site with the Trappists, there was very little in the way of imposed European routine or Church management of the lives of the Aboriginal people there. Bates writes of being woken by a conch shell (2004:21) indicating some form of ritual demarcation of time. The monks had also attempted to impose a ‘no wash, no breakfast’ regime which the local groups resisted and had refused the food offerings until the condition was lifted (2004:21). Bates describes that ‘shack dormitories’ had been built but most preferred ‘camps in the bush’ (2004:21). The Trappists had merely founded acceptance of their living at the site and Bates’ reports show the missionaries had little impact on the routine of the people they lived amongst.

The local conditions, tropical storms and bush fires meant that infrastructure was not only rudimentary but also often damaged, even after a decade of Trappist occupation.

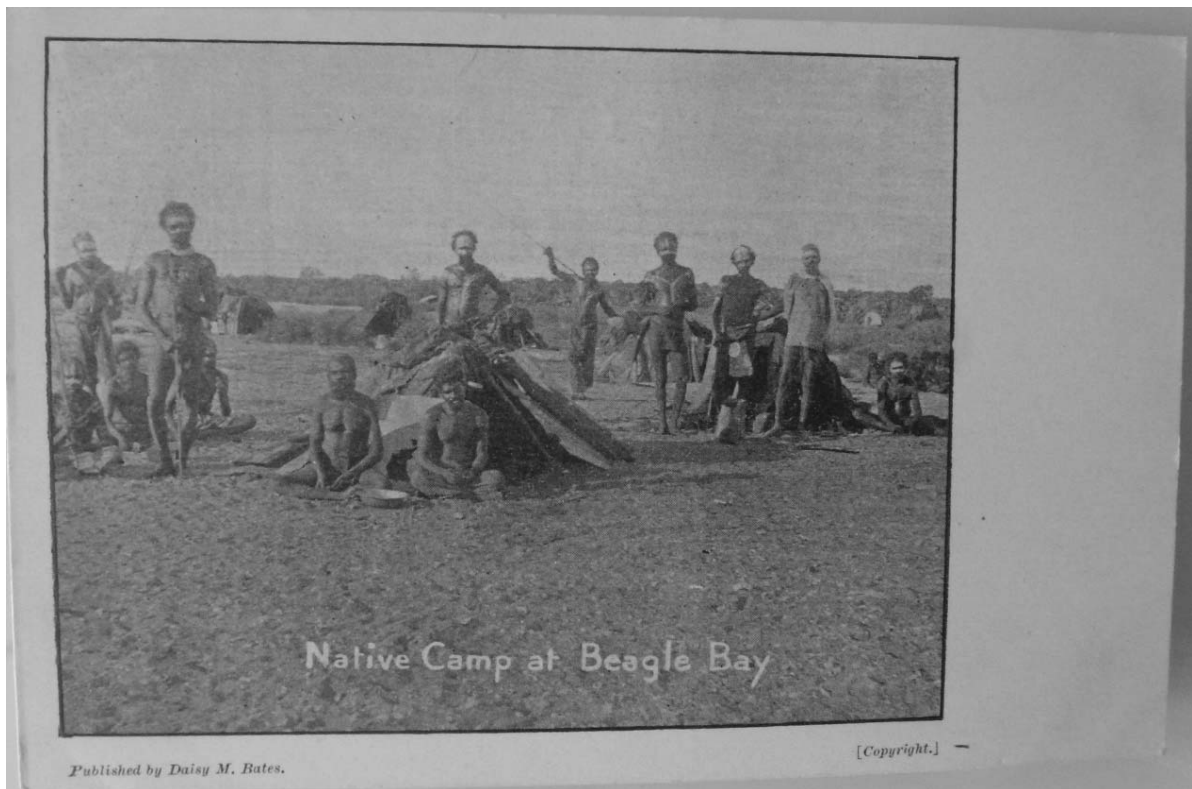


Figure 2: Postcard published by Daisy Bates in 1904.

Bates outlines the difficulty of expecting a simple overlay of European work practices on the local routine. In her account she gives a description of her attempts to make the women work alongside her in the yet to be developed mission garden.

I was sent in charge of some native women to do some ‘scrubbing’ that is, hoeing up the small shoots, or saplings, of uprooted trees, and to open up the fallen wells... I worked like a Trojan, but the force of my example failed dismally. Day after day those women played with the babies, and laughed both with and at me, full of merriment and good feeling. Now and again, a few of them took up the spade or the hoe in a stirring of conscience, but not for long, and all my efforts to make it an interesting game failed to produce results. I tried to gather the babies and children and play with them, and let their mother do a little manual labour, and I started “Ring-a-ring-a-roses”. No sooner had we got into the swing of the game than every woman ‘downed tools’ to join in. (Bates 2004:22).

Despite the apparent failure of the Trappists, their presence and influence had produced some changes in attitude. A significant incident was the prosecution of a Malay pearler in 1899 for the supply of alcohol to secure the sexual favours of a minor. Felix Nortingbor was a notable Nyul

Nyul man whose ancestral lands were Ngarlan the *buru*¹⁴ or local group name for the Beagle Bay Mission area. Choo (2001:102) provides details of the incident through the accounts of C.J. Daly, a missionary who had been appointed Protector of Aborigines at Beagle Bay. The details of the incident relate to Ah Mat, a Malay pearler (likely to be Muslim) offering Nortingbor alcohol and flour in return for sexual access to his young daughter. Choo relates that when Nortingbor refused, Ah Mat seized the child, threatening Nortingbor with a revolver. Daly lay criminal charges over the incident and Ah Mat was eventually convicted for supplying alcohol (Choo 2001:102). The same story is told in the oral histories where the young girl is Nortingbor's wife rather than daughter.

The significance of the historical and oral accounts lies in the portrayal of Nortingbor being on side with the missionaries rather than the Asiatic seafarers. Nortingbor is described in the oral histories as converting to Catholicism to satisfy the missionaries. He gave his second wife to his brother to avoid any reproach for bigamy. He also modified some aspects of men's initiation practices, such as bloodletting, to mollify the missionaries. Other writings on conversion record that the senior men were often regarded as too 'steeped in culture' to become Christians. Consequently, hopes of Christian conversion were placed in the dormitory raised children (see for example Tonkinson 1988). In contrast, having Nortingbor make a public show of conversion, give up his second wife and alter ritual practices showed his willingness to accept the presence of the missionaries.

The Trappists departed not long after Bates's visit in 1900. It was some months before Pallottine brothers from Limburg in Germany came to occupy the mission site in August 1900 (Ganter 2018:59) and attend to the distribution of rations. During the intervening period the Aboriginal people who had assembled round the mission over the ten years of its existence must have relied on their skills as hunters and gatherers, exploiting the resources of the coast and hinterland.

The Pallottines were a stark contrast to the Trappists. The Pallottines were practical and the brothers trained in manual crafts, woodworkers or bakers, they were generally tradesmen who focussed on evangelisation through working alongside the people. Pallottines were known for 'works in the world' (Choo 1997:17 FN16); they were an apostolic order dedicated to health, education and welfare. They were also outward looking and expansionist, an approach that

¹⁴ The term *buru* is polysemous that can mean 'ground', 'dirt' or 'camp'. The word can also be used to identify the country or estate of the traditional land-owning system. See Glaskin 2016:64-69.

eventually led to the establishment of mission sites in other areas of the Kimberley: at Lombadina, first as an outstation of Beagle Bay on the western Dampier Peninsula; La Grange (now Bidyadanga, 93 kilometres south west of Broome) and Balgo Hills (200 kilometres south of Halls Creek in the eastern Kimberley region). The German priest who was placed in charge of the Beagle Bay mission from 1900 to 1908 was Father Georg Walter¹⁵ who typified the order.

The Beagle Bay mission struggled in the first decade of the twentieth century with conflicting beliefs over the best pathway to pursue. This was in part due to Walter's 'abrasive personality'¹⁶ as well as differences over preferred procedures and policy. Walter forged relationships with the government to assist in separating the Aboriginal population from the Asiatic fishermen in the Norman Creek lay-up camps a short distance north west of Beagle Bay mission (Olivey 1902). This policy brought him into conflict with a Spanish priest, Nicolas Emo, who was one of the few remaining Trappists and resided in Broome.¹⁷ Emo encouraged mixed marriages between Aboriginal people, particularly those of mixed descent to Filipino Catholics (Manilamen). Emo married mixed race couples after the passing of the 1905 Act and without approval from the Chief Protector of Aborigines which was required under legislation. Under Emo's guidance the church purchased houses in the Broome townsite for mixed race Aboriginal families, improving their economic standing (see Sickert 2003:82, Nailon 2001:34). Walter was against this approach as he believed the best pathway for developing the Beagle Bay Mission was through government support and adherence to the law which required that the mission first seek approval from the Chief Protector of Aborigines for mixed-race marriages (Nailon 2001:34-36).

The arrival of nine St John of God sisters from Ireland in 1906 to work in the school and operate the children's dormitories saw a significant change in the way the mission was managed

¹⁵ www.missionaries.griffith.edu.au/biography/walter-georg-fr-1865-1939#Kimberley_mission accessed 4th June 2018.

¹⁶ www.missionaries.griffith.edu.au/biography/walter-georg-fr-1865-1939#Kimberley_mission accessed 14th August 2020.

¹⁷ www.missionaries.griffith.edu.au/biography/walter-georg-fr-1865-1939#Kimberley_mission accessed 14th August 2020. Emo was a Trappist who remained after the order was withdrawn from the region and was in charge during the hand over period from the Trappists to the Pallotines. Emo is an example of a Trappist who made every effort to learn the language, customs and practices of the local Aboriginal groups. Ganter writes of the Trappists that 'They laid the foundation for language work in the Kimberley. Fr. Marie Bernard wrote that 'One of our Fathers produced a grammar, vocabulary and a catechism in an Aboriginal language'. Fr. Nicholas Emo in Broome compiled a Yawuru/Spanish dictionary and Fr. Alphonse Tachon at Beagle Bay was working on the Nyul-Nyul language. For this work they needed to work closely with Aboriginal people. McNab's former assistant, a man referred to as 'Knife', lived at nearby Boolgin to an old age and may have helped to facilitate the success of the Trappists. Felix Gnodonbor taught Fr. Alphonse Nyul-Nyul and helped him to translate key concepts. He became instrumental in the acceptance of the Christian missionaries at Beagle Bay.<http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/mission/beagle-bay-1890-2000>, accessed 22nd October 2022.

Alroe states that after his death at Lombadina in 1915 Emo was 'at his own request buried in the sand hills without a coffin ... According to the custom of the blacks' (1988:31). The body was later exhumed and reburied by members of the Church.

(Choo 1997: 25-6, Ganter 2018: 61). Walter acquired increased funding from the state for the mission and the number of intakes rose, particularly children of mixed descent gathered by government officials from throughout the Kimberley. With the St John of God sisters school hours came to be routinised along with the daily living routine. Father Bishofs reported to the Chief Protector of Aborigines in 1910,

By day and night all these children are under supervision of special attendants. Ample time is granted for amusement and recreation between school and working hours. Roomy dormitories are provided for the children. In school and church the children (boys and girls) are though [sic] and brought up together, but when at work and in their recreation severe separation is upheld (cited in Choo 1995:278).

Beagle Bay became the preferred destination for many mixed descent children who were gathered by various protectorates from throughout the Kimberley. The 'half-caste problem' was regarded as remedied by mission training and work. Compared with other missions on the Dampier Peninsula such as One Arm Point or Lombadina there are many people who grew up at Beagle Bay now known as 'historical people' reflecting their relocation to the mission during the early to mid-decades of the twentieth century.

One of the most dramatic monuments to the mission regime is the Beagle Bay church. It was built during the First World War when the German brothers were interned at the institution.¹⁸ The building dominates the landscape, even by today's standards, with the bell tower extending 12 metres.¹⁹ The impressive structure was built using local materials only and details provided by Choo illustrate the work routine created during construction (Choo 1995:278).

Rosa Bin Amat (nee Roe) along with her siblings were taken from Thangoo Station, south of Broome to Beagle Bay in 1909. Choo provides verbatim description of the mission routine given by Rosa. The routine shows mundane duties as well as the larger task of building the church. Rosa Bin Amat's description is a remarkable contrast to the one given by Bates in 1900 and shows how much had changed in the lives of Beagle Bay Aboriginal people in less than a generation. Rosa Bin Amat's account runs as follows.

It was good. We all slept in one room, big room, one each bed. And in the morning we get up, say our morning prayer, we wash our face and hands, we go to mass. Every morning we used to go to mass. And after that

¹⁸ See Ganter 2018:66-7 for additional details. Similar measures were enforced during World War II (Ganter 2018:70-1).

¹⁹ http://wkfl.asn.au/religioused/beagle_bay_church_history.htm accessed 14 August 2020.

breakfast and then we do the job what sisters gave us, you, when I was too small. And when I was big enough to do the work at the mission, sister told me to do the churning butter. First we go to milking, milking the cows. We all four girls go and milk the cows and we get a bucketful. And we separate the milk and separate the milk in the room. And then make the butter out of cream.

... And we make the bread, get the breakfast ready for the sisters, the nuns, and then all of us girls make bricks... Bricks to build the church. We go to school. After school we put our bad clothes on and then we do the bricks.

There was mud and water. Water and mud was there and we were on the table top and we got our little mould to put the brick mud inside the moulds lie that size [shows the size of a brick] and between. So we made two bricks every day in that mould and then we put them out in the lawn... A hundred a day we must make it.²⁰

Not hard work. It was easy for us. We say that it was easy because we knew how to do it. We did it and next day when it is dry we turn them over to get more dry, and then put them in a miler, called place miler kiln, to burn them. A kiln, big kiln we put the bricks inside. We can put chips and things, put them inside the firewood and put in a row. We all standing passing one another bricks to put them inside the miler. They all inside when it's full, ...miler, and one side of it for shells.

And we used that [the lime] for the church, to paint the outside of the church, you know. And we get this, we build that church up. We get little bit of sand, little bit of cement and water and mix it up, and build the church up with that. ... And we built that all what we gathered there, [local materials] sands and everything, lime...

... We did washing and ironing and sewing, running the clothes up and gardening. With Father John we plant the vegetables, pineapples and tomatoes, cabbages, carrots, celery and everything what we get, we planted there (Rosa Bin Amat in Choo 1995:278-9.)

The grandchildren of people that worked on the church now speak of the building with a sense of pride and point to its dominating presence as a form of monument to the efforts of their ancestors.

²⁰ Footnote added: the church was made from 60,000 bricks and the tower from 15,000 double bricks (http://wkfl.asn.au/religiousused/beagle_bay_church_history.htm accessed 14 August 2020).

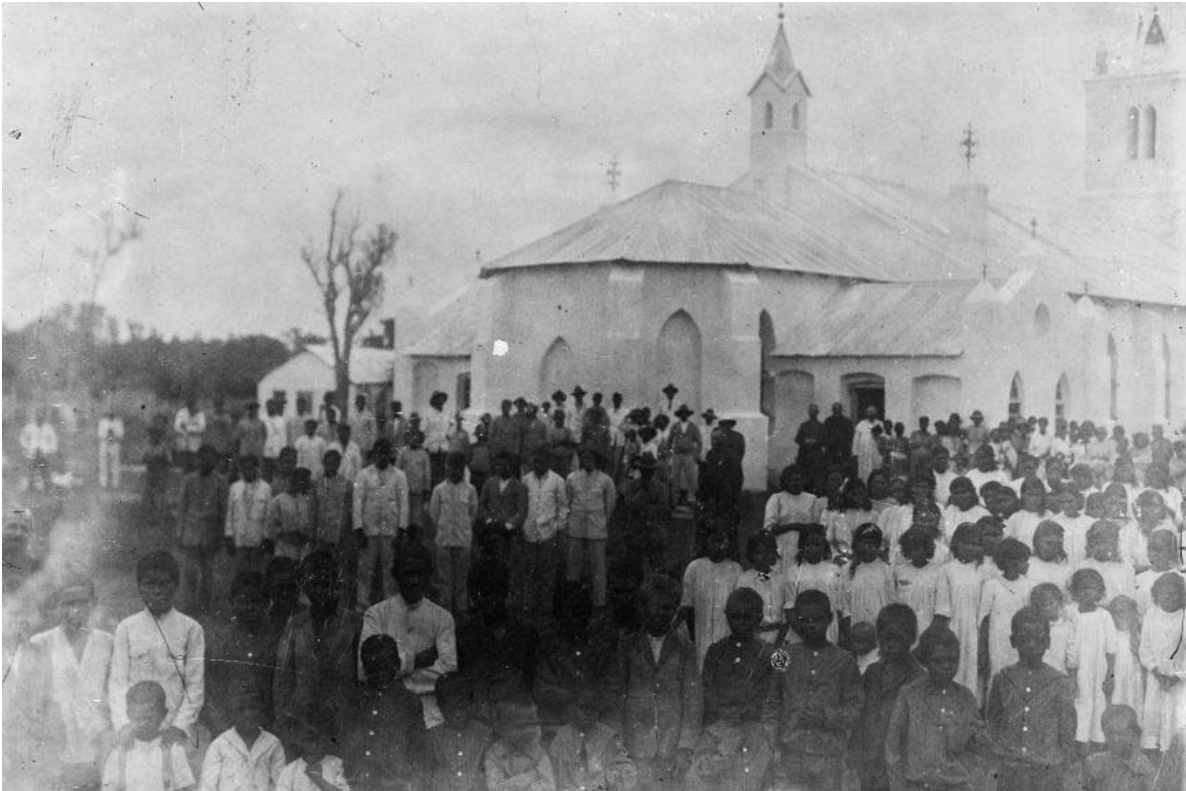


Figure 3: Beagle Bay Church c. 1918.

(Image supplied by Diocese of Broome Archive to ABC Kimberley accessed at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-08-12/mother-of-pearl-church-turns-100-kimberley/10090824>.)

The period following the First World War was one of consolidation for the mission. The state policy of removing Aboriginal children of mixed descent meant there was a continuing demand for an institution for their subsequent care and training. Choo reports figures derived from the Annual Reports of the Beagle Bay mission between 1921 and 1936 as ranging from 70 to 124 children a year (Choo 1997:23²¹). The ‘dormitory’, which is the term Beagle Bay residents still use to refer to the institution that catered for these children, was a significant feature of the mission. The Pallottines wanted to inculcate Catholic Christian values in the mission residents, as well as a sense of order, routine, personal cleanliness and pride in appearance and ability. Choo’s analysis was that the Pallottines’, ‘recommended method of evangelisation was to work with the young members of the community’ (Choo 1997:18). She cites Father Walter, who writing in 1928, described the approach he and his colleagues adopted.

²¹ Choo notes that these figures do not differentiate total numbers of children at the mission from children who were being educated at the Mission but concludes they should be regarded as ‘an indicator of the trends in the population of children at Beagle Bay’ (Choo 1997:23).

For Aborigines, correct mission method is to let them get used to a settled lifestyle and regular work without using force or restricting their freedom. Only love and a friendly approach can lead to success, not harshness or force. As soon as possible, children can be removed from the adult camp and the nomadic ways of their parents, and be housed in dormitories on mission premises to be educated at school and in trades.

...It is not the duty of a Missionary to repress a child's Aboriginal nature and for this reason the children are given as much freedom as possible to follow their customs and practices. From time to time all children are allowed to attend ordinary corrobories [*sic*] (under supervision) and to hold their own corrobories. Outings are utilised to make them sufficiently familiar with bush craft to survive, and one competes with another to catch snakes, lizards, kangaroos and other game, and to study animal trails (Walter 1982: 124, cited Choo 1997: 18.)

Overall, the Pallottines worked to teach the children skills that would equip them for life in the mainstream. Boys were taught basic stock work, fencing, carpentry, mechanics and even baking. Girls were taught domestic skills including sewing and household tasks. When the dormitory system was at its height people were generally relocated from the mission at 14 or 15 years of age and encouraged to take labour placement throughout the Kimberley. In a labour starved north, Beagle Bay people became a sought after labour supply. This was a consequence not only of the acquisition of work skills and a pride in an associated identity which has been noted as a feature of missions elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia (Austin Broos 2009: 92-93), it was also a result of an ethos, bound up in the Catholic faith, of duty, perseverance and hard work. It was a legacy that continues to inform many of those with whom I subsequently worked.

THE ENDURING LEGACY

The mission experience was responsible for the development of a particular set of values and attitudes. The orderly life, attention to punctuality and a pride in ability and self-worth were qualities that would facilitate participation in the mainstream and (perhaps unforeseen by the early Pallottines at least) equip individuals in the new world of self-determination and autonomy which came to the mission in the early 1970s. The quality of self-surveillance (Foucault 1991:201) is illustrated by the following incident I recorded from Beagle Bay residents quite early on in my field work.

It was mission practice to ring the Angelus bell at 11am each morning to mark the morning break as well as to remind mission residents of the presence of the Church and their devotional

duties.²² Mary, one of my informants, told me of a time they were fishing, just north of the Mission site, when they heard the Angelus Bell ring. She told me how they immediately all dropped to their knees as was the mission practice – but then realising that they were unsupervised and beyond the mission gaze, rolled about laughing, because, as Mary said, ‘We didn’t need to follow those rules outside the mission’. In this way Aboriginal interns were able to adopt distinct behaviours for certain settings, yet their response to the bell (the audible representation of the hegemony of the Church) was so ingrained that kneeling for prayer happened by reflex. Similarly, although girls were locked in the dormitories from 5pm each day everyone knew the wooden plank that could be used to leave the lock down and some would escape to meet up with boyfriends or family members in the colony²³. Others gave stories of midnight raids on the vegetable gardens to combat what they regarded as the meagre food supplies of the dining room. There was a response that combined both compliance as well as a sense of personal initiative and autonomy.

By the 1970s the mission regime had profoundly altered the lives of at least five generations of people from the central Peninsula region. The regime developed a work based identity for many Beagle Bay people, with the schooling and work conditions in the institution highly regarded. As a consequence of the history of the mission a distinct identity has developed for Beagle Bay people based on their lives lived together and a sense of common purpose and shared values. During the course of my field work in the Beagle Bay area I recorded how the mission trained workers, now well retired, were regarded as superior in their trade skills to the younger workers who had not had the benefit of mission teaching.

CONCLUSION

The west Kimberley coastal areas had a contact history marked by a long period of exchange, interaction and mutual benefit between Aboriginal people and Asiatics. The church and state sought to regulate and control both the Aboriginal people and Asiatics and they did so with varying degrees of success. The establishment of the mission at Beagle Bay provided an

²² A Catholic website explains the angelus as follows. ‘Designed to commemorate the mystery of the Incarnation and pay homage to Mary’s role in salvation history, it has long been part of Catholic life. Around the world, three times every day, the faithful stop whatever they are doing and with the words “The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary” begin this simple yet beautiful prayer.’ <https://simplycatholic.com/what-is-the-angelus/> accessed 15 August 2020.

²³ The ‘colony’ was the term used for the family housing at the mission.

institution for the church and state to control Aboriginal people who accepted over time the rule based regimes of the church and its work ethic.

Beagle Bay mission people developed a sense of entitlement to a place in the mainstream society through the sense of common Christian humanity and equipped with the skills of their mission training. Many of the values were those of the western economy, including acquisition of skills for work, the appreciation of work ethic and some sense of strategic planning in relation to the state or other bodies that held authority or access to resources.

When political attitudes to Aboriginal Australians changed in the 1970s with the rise of public policy favouring self-management and later self-determination, these mission-bred values and mores were of considerable worth. When Beagle Bay Mission became Beagle Bay community in 1976 many aspects of the mission life lived by parents and grandparents remained. The mission history continues to be a significant factor in the way Beagle Bay people manage their daily lives and influences the life projects they seek to pursue.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLICY OF SELF-DETERMINATION AND ESTABLISHING THE BLOCKS

In Western Australia Aboriginal people could gain citizenship rights after the passing of the *Native (Citizenship Rights) Act* of 1944²⁴ as protection policies were replaced by those of assimilation and welfare. Assimilation was conditional and Aboriginal people could only gain equal rights with other Australians if they abandoned practices that were distinctly Aboriginal. Subsequently, when integration policies were developed in the 1960s, there was some allowance for the maintenance of cultural difference but entirely within the social and economic contexts of the wider Australian society (Schapper 1970:76). The Whitlam government came into power in 1972 on the platform of multiculturalism and Aboriginal land rights and self-determination policies were introduced in Australia at this time. The introduction of self-determination symbolised a defining moment in relations between Aboriginal people and the rest of the population of Australia.

In this chapter I use the work of historian Tim Rowse as background to describe the practical effects of the self-determination policy on Aboriginal people living in remote parts of northern Australia. I explain the changes that happened at Beagle Bay during the 1970s. At this time new policies were introduced and governance altered dramatically at the settlement with state administration engaging directly with Aboriginal people.

While the implementation of the policy of self-determination at Beagle Bay delivered profound change in the community, ultimately it provided little material benefit. Special projects were assigned to the community, but in comparison with the industrious ethos which was so evident during the mission era the settlement was notable for inactivity and a profound sense of malaise. Bureaucratic administration stymied community based projects from the 1970s through to the 1990s, constantly frustrating the supposedly new-found ability of the residents to take control of their lives and the direction of their community. The majority of the working age population left the community to work in regional centres including Derby and Broome and only returned for weekends or holiday breaks to visit older family members who remained at Beagle Bay.

²⁴ This law made it possible for Aboriginal people to make an application to a magistrate for citizenship, as long as they met a range of conditions. Once citizenship was granted, the person was no longer considered a “native or aborigine”. See ‘citizenship’ at <https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/search/#/> accessed 17 August 2020. The Act was repealed in 1971.

In 1992, the Mabo decision resulted in the recognition of native title on the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait and the ensuing legislation provided the means for its recognition across Australia. In Western Australia these events inspired a review of land held by the Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT), which had been created in 1972 by legislation designed to give control of reserve lands to the Aboriginal inhabitants. Former Liberal Senator Neville Bonner was appointed by the Western Australian government in 1995 to lead the inquiry.²⁵

Recommendations from the review made with respect to the Beagle Bay leases led to the formation of a committee comprising senior Beagle Bay residents to oversee the redistribution of the ALT land to smaller Aboriginal corporations.

Details presented in this chapter provide important background to chapter four. Divestment of the Blocks through a specifically formed Aboriginal committee determined who gained a lease and to a substantial extent also prescribed the manner in which a Block was to be developed and used. This was because the Bonner review recommended that divestment of ALT lands to smaller Aboriginal corporations should give priority to economic use of the land. The Block leases would then need to provide more than an Aboriginal living area and Aboriginal business strategies would have to be enmeshed into the granting of the leases to the corporations.

DECENTRALISATION MOVEMENTS AND THE POLICY OF SELF-DETERMINATION

The protectionist policies that had supported the founding of the Beagle Bay mission were replaced by assimilation policies during the period following the passing of the State *Native (Citizenship Rights) Act* of 1944. Assimilation policies were intended to facilitate the absorption of Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society. Certificates of exemption from the control of the various Aboriginal specific welfare acts were granted under the provisions of the Act. Aboriginal people referred to the certificate as the ‘dog tag’ and they were granted on application to those who, after investigation, were deemed by government officials as capable of living in the same manner as Whites. The concept of integration replaced or perhaps augmented assimilation policies in the late 1960s as the policy came under increasing scrutiny.

... The language of ‘assimilation’, with the underlying assumption that Aboriginal equality could only be achieved by the loss of Aboriginal identity, was abandoned. The term ‘integration’ was sometimes used by the critics of the assimilation policy to denote a policy that recognised the value of Aboriginal culture and the right of Aboriginals to retain their languages

²⁵ <https://biography.senate.gov.au/bonner-neville-thomas/> accessed 17th August 2020.

and customs and maintain their own distinctive communities. (Australian Law Reform Commission 2010: paragraph 27.)

The 1967 referendum increased Commonwealth control in Aboriginal affairs. Misconceptions about delivering Aboriginal citizenship, equal wages or the right to vote illustrate the symbolic significance of the referendum. The referendum can be understood as ‘a form of historical shorthand for a decade of change which began in the early 1960s and ended in the early 1970s’²⁶.

Integration allowed for cultural pluralism and the recognition of cultural difference. Political recognition of cultural diversity meant Aboriginal people had the opportunity to be recognised as a distinct group within Australia, more than simply another ethnic minority, their position as first Australians being acknowledged at this time. Liberal Prime Minister William McMahon acknowledged Aboriginal connections to country were both exceptional and represented a significant aspect of their unique culture in a speech given on Australian Day in 1972. The speech marked the Government’s abandonment of the assimilation policy and introduced an emphasis of Aboriginal people’s right to choose the way they lived as well as the rate of change. However, it did not advocate recognition of land rights, which had been demanded by many. One consequence of this was that the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established on the lawns of Parliament House the following day (Robinson 1994).

The Whitlam government came into office late in 1972 and the following year the term ‘multi-culturalism’ was presented as the basis for migrant settlement, welfare and social-cultural policy in a 1973 speech entitled “A Multi-Cultural Society for the Future”, delivered by the Minister for Immigration under the Whitlam Government, Al Grassby²⁷. Multiculturalism accommodated ethnic diversity in Australia. The Whitlam government is also credited with the introduction of the policy of self-determination for Aboriginal Australians at this time, recognising the right of Aboriginal people to be culturally distinct and to manage their own affairs, goals and aspirations. Self-determination marked the shift from the colonial authority of native welfare departments to Aboriginal involvement in government policy and the potential for Aboriginal people to manage, or at least to inform, the formation of the policies that shaped their lives.

²⁶ Gardiner-Garden J. Background Paper 11 1996-97 The Origin of Commonwealth Involvement in Indigenous Affairs and the 1967 Referendum
https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/Publications_Archive/Background_Papers/bp9697/97bp11#IMPLICATIONS accessed 8th July 2021.

²⁷ A footnote provides a link to the text of the speech. See
https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1011/11rp06
accessed 17 August 2020.

In 1972 in Western Australia the Department of Native Welfare was dismantled symbolising the end of the State government's assimilation policy. The *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* was passed in the State parliament in the same year and the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA) was established. While the term for the new policy ('self-determination') was replaced by the term 'self-management' in 1976 when a Federal Liberal government was elected to power, the terms have been used interchangeably to describe Aboriginal involvement in government policy formulation through the 1970s and 1980s.

United States President Woodrow Wilson and Russian leader Vladimir Lenin promoted 'self-determination' during World War I and the term was given legitimacy by the League of Nations. After World War II 'self-determination' spread as a term in the United States as Europe's colonial empires disintegrated and independent nations formed. The developing autonomy of self-determination in the international context was understood as an expression of independence from colonial rule. Although anti colonial nationalism began to appeal to some Aboriginal intellectuals in the 1960s, by the time the term 'self-determination' was introduced into Australian policy in 1973, it was being used to express and promote a policy and process quite different from the way the term was used in the international context. The domestic policy of self-determination was intended as a new way to govern Aboriginal people, not as a pathway for Aboriginal people to become self-governing (Rowse 2017:269).

Rowse (2017:272-282) provides a helpful overview of self-determination in Australia and identifies 'five strands' of what he describes as the practical effects of the self-determination policy from 1967 to 1977. His account includes the changes that occurred in government policy in the period leading up to the implementation of the self-determination policy in 1972, showing that the policy developed over a period of years, rather than being the sole product of the charismatic Whitlam, as McMahon's Australia Day speech of 1972 illustrates.

Rowse's first strand of the fabric of self-determination relates to identity and self-identity. The abandonment of the 'caste' system, entrenched in both legislation and the administration of Aboriginal affairs of the assimilation era, resulted in a substantial change in the manner Aboriginality was represented. In terms of the official record Aboriginal people responded in various ways on census forms, showing little respect for the fractional categories that stereotyped caste ('half', 'quarter', 'quadroon' and so on). This reduced the integrity and value of the data collected and the effectiveness of the policy and administrative consequences which were based upon them. The imprecise and biologically determined categories were replaced with

identification through the unitary concept of 'Aboriginal' in the Federal census. This marked a shift from a restrictive biological concept to the social construction of Aboriginal identity. (Rowse 2017: 273 – 274.)

The second strand of the policy related to the centres of Aboriginal population. Aboriginal reserves and missions would continue to exist as remote communities. The settlements would continue to evolve into municipalities predominantly populated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Residents were encouraged to form Aboriginal councils and former superintendents and missionaries became 'community advisors'. Social work theory and practice at the time held that community development would empower the clients of the welfare state. (Rowse 2017:274.) Government funded programs would allow Aboriginal councils to be responsible for the delivery of essential community services.

Thirdly, under the policy of self-determination the state delivered Aboriginal specific capital in the form of finance and title in order to relieve poverty and unemployment. Rowse (2017:275) gives the example of the Commonwealth Capital Fund for Aboriginal Enterprise during the period 1968 – 69 being funded to the tune of five million dollars to distribute loans to individual or cooperative businesses to encourage economic independence. This was to complement Aboriginal welfare and employment programs and borrowers were required to contribute at least 5% of the capital requirement of the project. This initiative was continued through the Aboriginal Development Commission from 1980 – 89 and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commercial Development Corporation (1989 – 2005). Government funding assistance was linked to changes in the demand for rural labour where mechanisation was increasingly reducing the need for workers – one example being the widespread use of helicopters for mustering in the pastoral industry, which substantially reduced the number of stockmen required on the ground. These labour market changes, coupled with the delivery of award wages a year after the 1967 referendum, radically modified Aboriginal involvement in the pastoral industry. Subsequently, many Aboriginal people languished in townships and suffered unemployment and associated poverty, health and criminal justice problems. Government secured land titles encouraged the formation of Aboriginal community councils and government block funding for employment programs in the form of Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).

Fourthly, self-determination encouraged Aboriginal Australians to act collectively as corporations. The self-determination era encouraged welfare organisations that united well intentioned Whites with Aboriginal people. Rowse (2017:277) gives an extensive list of the

various organisations across Australia including the Aboriginal Legal Services and national bodies like Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). Rowse (2017:279) cites C.D. Rowley's observations on the policy formulators which encouraged the formalisation of collective action.

Instead of a disappearing liability, as in 'assimilation', the Aboriginal group is re-sited in policy as an asset, to be endowed, by its own efforts, with enduring legal personality. The fringe group is the raw material for a corporation in perpetuity. (Rowley cited in Rowse 2017:279.)

The Fraser government legislated the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* which supported the regulation of Aboriginal corporations and was later updated by the Howard government in 2006 with the *Corporation (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act*.

The fifth strand of self-determination was the formation of national political representation. In 1973 the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) was formed and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were voted into positions on the Committee. The Fraser government replaced the NACC with the National Aboriginal Congress (NAC) in 1977. The Hawke government dismantled the NAC in 1985 and it was eventually replaced with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989. Importantly, Rowse (2017:281) points out that the NACC and NAC were Aboriginal advisory bodies, while ATSIC was an elected Aboriginal representative body that was given programs previously run by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). In 2005 the Howard government abolished ATSIC.

CREATING THE SELF-DETERMINING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

Henry Schapper, an agricultural economist from the University of Western Australia, visited the Kimberley region in the late 1960s and was aghast at the living conditions of Aboriginal people on cattle stations. Schapper (1970) argued that Aboriginal people in Western Australia were deprived of a sense of identity and the opportunity to be influential in Australian society, lacking any 'frame of social orientation' (1970:74) where actions could be interpreted as rational and meaningful. Schapper concluded that Aboriginal people were being trained to be useful, but not to be self-determining. In Schapper's view expectation was so low that Australia practiced 'apartheid' (1970:107) while professing assimilation. Schapper (1970) described Western Australian Aboriginal people as suffering 'dependent poverty' which he contrasted to the more desirable 'self-determination'.

Sullivan (1996) outlines the history of the east Kimberley and concludes that while self-determining Aboriginal communities were declared by the mid 1970s, the title was misleading. Although the legislative constraints that had been placed upon the lives of Aboriginal people in the missions and pastoral stations across the Kimberley were lifted in the 1970s, the granting of equal status required a special new administration. The new provision dubbed 'self-determination' brought Aboriginal people under another kind of surveillance and control by the state. In Sullivan's view the colonial administrative apparatus remained to oversee improvement in the material conditions of the lives of Aboriginal people. The invention of the self-determining community was necessary because it was important to have Aboriginal people seen as controlling community development.

The Aboriginal communities that formed across the Kimberley during the self-determination era were incredibly diverse. Sullivan (1996) describes the zeal of the outstation movement from 1985 to 1993 where 200 remote Aboriginal communities and outstations were created in the region and 53% of the Kimberley Aboriginal population lived on the remote outstations (1996:26). Sullivan predicted that larger centres, such as Warmun in the east Kimberley, would find their purpose through acting as service centres for the outlying Aboriginal outstations. Larger Aboriginal settlements could provide schooling, health services through a clinic, communication services, a mechanical workshop and administration facilities and staff for large scale bureaucracies such as ATSIC (1996:26). Sullivan concluded that the invention of the self-determining Aboriginal community was, 'a recent creation enabling European administration to come to terms with the fluidity and diversity of contemporary Aboriginal experience' (1996:41). Sullivan further observed that,

... Aboriginal communities became the target of a highly developed Aboriginal affairs bureaucracy, the various arms of which are charged with stabilising the status of the community in terms of European land tenure and corporate structure and delivering material services to it. (1996:41.)

The self-determining Aboriginal community was barely autonomous and was bound by conditions set by state and federal bodies (including ATSIC) that funded the community and the plethora of audit and accountability requirements that are a feature of the expenditure of funds by government departments (Palmer 1990:168-172).

Sutton (2009:17) critiqued the assumptions of the self-determination era in his controversial book *Politics of Suffering*. Sutton wrote,

The new consensus was that these communities should be free of mission or state governance, self-managed through elected councils and relatively autonomous. Land rights would ensure their inhabitants security of tenure and, where possible, a source of income ... Liberation, not retraining, it was felt, would lift people's self-respect and pride, and enable them to embark on a new era in which the quality of their lives would improve. (2009:17.)

Sutton, writing over a decade after Sullivan and nearly two after Palmer asserts the naivety of assumptions involved in creating the self-determining Aboriginal community. Sutton (2009:50) cites Barry Dexter, head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1973, stating that 'progress in transferring authority to the Aboriginal residents of missions and settlements was "more apparent than real" [and there was] a vacuum in responsibility, with a resulting decay in basic services and infrastructure'. Sutton also identifies the shortcomings of operating in this authority vacuum, the problems of expecting self-determination policy would provide solutions for Aboriginal people at a time of rapid social change and that these would compensate for the void in responsibility. Sutton observed,

... perhaps the new dispensation presupposed that the people would replace their own cultural values overnight and do what the new European-derived elected local councils told them to do, if indeed the councils ventured significantly down that unfamiliar path. Or perhaps it supposed that a new and unprecedented kind of internal system of control would arise quickly to cope with all the eventualities. (2009:51.)

Memories of the 1970s from Beagle Bay residents

During the course of my fieldwork I collected oral accounts reflecting how senior Aboriginal people remember the changes at Beagle Bay settlement during the 1970s. I was interested to hear from older residents about the time when the policy of self-determination was implemented at the Beagle Bay settlement and what senior Aboriginal people had to say about social change in this era. I spoke with both Aboriginal people and former mission staff and gained an understanding of the aspirations associated with this time of tremendous change in Aboriginal affairs policy. The narratives I collected were not as I had expected them to be and they were far from positive. What was described was the everyday effects of the various aspects of the attempts at social change when the new policies of self-determination were introduced. The accounts of senior people describe the frustration of the era, where hopes for Aboriginal control were hampered by the imposed requirements of new and direct forms of contact with state administrators. At Beagle Bay the Aboriginal council that was established in the expectation that Aboriginal people would advise, influence and perhaps even execute change was all too often frustrated by the imposition of a novel and direct governance which represented a dramatic shift

in the structures of authority and control in the community. Lives regulated by the mission bell at Beagle Bay mission were confronted by the imposition of new government administrative structures while the previous authority gained through social status acquired through job roles faded. By the beginning of the 1980s the reforms implemented in the name of self-determination during the 1970s had produced a profound sense of malaise in the Beagle Bay community.

The most common theme in descriptions about the 1970s was the displacement of Aboriginal people from various employment positions. For example, Joe Nipper Roe, a Yawuru man from the Broome region, identified the 1960s and early 1970s as an era when Aboriginal people were a notable feature of the local work force. He gave the following description about Broome.

Even at the shops at that time [1960s into 1970s], you know, there was a lot of coloured people working in the shops, a lot of Aboriginal people working in the shop, everywhere sort of thing.

Today, you hardly see them [Aboriginal people] around you know, because the jobs seem to be taken away from the people. But in the early 60s and that, Aboriginal people held important positions. (ABC TV, 'Kimberley flashback Friday', broadcast 1992, accessed 26th June 2020.)

Donald McKenzie, another Aboriginal man from the Broome region, gave a similar description of Aboriginal workers in the pearling industry being replaced by Whites.

There was hardly any White people working at the time [1960s], you could say the Asians and the Aboriginal people virtually made the pearling industry.

Middle 70s, that's when the Europeans began to take over the pearling luggers. (ABC Kimberley flashback, broadcast 1992, Friday accessed 26th June 2020.)

Aboriginal people that I interviewed remember Beagle Bay settlement as experiencing a similar shift in labour practices during the 1970s. While this may, in part, have been due to equal wages for Aboriginal Australians, this reform was itself an expression of the recognition of Aboriginal people as full citizens of Australia and the resultant shift in policy relating to Aboriginal people and the labour market.

The descriptions reflect the sense of Aboriginal workers being displaced by White government agents who were considered by those with whom I spoke to have had no apparent role or practical purpose. These government agents were also unknown and had little or no social connection with the community, in contrast the mission staff who often spent many decades

working with community members and became well-known socially and integrated into the social relationships of the community. Dolly Swain, the wife of one of the early community chairmen at Beagle Bay, portrayed the depersonalised nature of the transition from mission control. Personal relationships with church members were replaced by legal rational and bureaucratic interactions with the new government administrators. While some early government representatives were mentioned by name when Dolly and I spoke, overall the new government staff were unnamed, their positions unknown or at least unspecified and people merely referred to as 'government'. Dolly's memory is that the newly formed Aboriginal community council and its Aboriginal chairperson (her husband) struggled to gain any authority over government staff. While the Church was remembered favourably, with Dolly saying her husband and the Bishop were 'good friends', the government representatives had no such personal or social standing. They were merely 'Whites' who she described as people that would 'push' her husband and did not 'show respect' for his position in the community. Dolly's accounts suggest the newly formed Aboriginal council had difficulty establishing influence with respect to the legal, rational and managerial demands of the state.

Dolly described the actions of government staff coming to Beagle Bay settlement in the 1970s as 'a take-over'. She stated, 'They took the jobs from Aboriginal people and gave them to their friends from Perth'. The transformation from mission to Aboriginal community is remembered as a time when Aboriginal people 'lost their jobs'. The accounts given by Dolly show the shift in authority, where the church still held influence, but the state directly controlled administration. The legal and rational-based nature of bureaucratic administration meant formal qualifications were required for various work duties and work skills and informal skills and training that mission inmates held, which had previously qualified them to hold important service jobs in the community, went unrecognised. As a result work identities created through the mission regime began to fade. Dolly was horrified that manual labouring tasks were given to White contractors instead of Beagle Bay residents. She told me about the following incident, by way of example.

The Bishop decided the [old mission] dining room should be converted into the shop. The government had to bring people into Beagle Bay to build it, brought Kartiyas [Whites] in from Perth.

Dolly went on to explain the time of direct government involvement at Beagle Bay as harsh and cruel, saying things like 'when the government took over [it] make us cry' and that the changes during this time were 'nasty'. Dolly left Beagle Bay in the late 1970s to live in the towns of Broome and Derby. When I asked why, she gave a long explanation. The change from mission

to community delivered entry into the cash economy. Dolly said that gambling became widespread and people were gambling their children's food money away. She said that the 'priest's shop' (the mission store) was 'so cheap', meaning that the goods it sold were priced according to the means of community members. Following the departure of the mission, prices in the store became 'too high' and she had struggled to meet the cost of daily living. Dolly also described the lack of any effective law enforcement in the settlement. Alcohol and drug abuse became common and while State police were placed at Beagle Bay for a time, Dolly said that the 'policemen in the community were scared' and did little to control the unlawful elements they were sent to contain. There was a sense of lawlessness in the settlement. She believed the negative experiences of Beagle Bay occurred throughout the Kimberley missions, saying 'Sit down, lazy money came into the community ... Kalumburu, Lombadina and Djarindjin, all the same, rape sex, lies, the most kindest people went bad at this time'.

Sister Kirstin worked at Beagle Bay in 1973 under the mission regime and then returned to Dublin where she lived for just over 20 years before returning to Beagle Bay in 1995. We spoke about the changes she observed between the early 1970s and the mid 1990s. Sister Kirsten recalled the structure of the mission and the formal ritual behaviour which characterised social action and interaction in the past. She gave by way of example the church services where priests and the brothers sat together on one side of the church and the nuns separately on the other. Both the priests and nuns were separated from the Aboriginal congregation, which she termed 'the followers'. This account of ritual separation was quickly followed with the qualifier that, of course, 'we all ate from the same pot', meaning that the church and Aboriginal people were equal in terms of access to mundane essentials like food.

In the context of this formalised ritual segregation yet commensality Sister Kirstin recalled that Aboriginal men earned positions of authority through work practices as the mission provided many employment opportunities in the soft drink factory, carpentry work, working in the gardens, bakery and mechanics' shed. All these enterprises operated under the authority of Aboriginal managers. Sister Kirsten explained that the Pallottine brothers trained Aboriginal people and when equipped and qualified Aboriginal people were left as 'bosses' (managers, supervisors) for particular works and, in turn, the training of additional employees. Sister Kirsten then described the change to government control.

When the mission was handed over as an Aboriginal community White managers were placed in charge, they took the jobs of the trained Aboriginal

people with the change of government, then government changed again and new policies [were implemented] Aboriginal people were asked to go back to these positions but they said no, their dignity was hurt. This transition changed the face of Beagle Bay forever. (Pers comm 2009.)

When Sister Kirsten returned to Beagle Bay in 1995 she worked with tertiary Aboriginal students through Notre Dame University. By this time the domestic moral economy that had characterised the subsistence patterns of the mission was no longer operational. Sister Kirsten described the people she had previously known to be workers who now had no employment and their sense of purpose was diminished to ‘just hanging around the shop’.

The lack of work identity coincided with changes in legislation that had previously restricted access to alcohol and many people at the settlement succumbed to substance abuse. Dolly Swain also blamed the state for unrestricted drinking saying, ‘when the government took over operations at Beagle Bay, they let the grog in’.

Anecdotal information provided during interviews reveals the movement of residents to regional towns or further afield to Perth. Casey from Sunset Beach Block and Johnny from Plum Point Block were children at Beagle Bay in the 1970s and left during the 1980s to attend boarding school or to take up rural trades work on pastoral stations. Sullivan describes the same, saying that ‘Missions with a large educated mixed-decent population ran down as these left for the nearby towns’ (1996:18). Most people of working age left the Beagle Bay settlement during this time and Department of Aboriginal Affairs statistics show that by 1985 half the population at Beagle Bay was either under fourteen or over sixty (Sullivan 1996:18).

Census data from the late 1990s onwards show an increase in the population of Beagle Bay and it seems that people raised in the settlement returned when new opportunities became available such as developing an enterprise through grant of an ALT lease.

In summary, when I discussed the 1970s with older Aboriginal people the accounts they gave were emotionally charged and detailed how the personal relationships held with the Church authorities shifted to a depersonalized relationship with bureaucratic administrators. The accounts given reflect the frustration of Aboriginal people during the early stages of self-determination policies and articulate the lack of participation in newly formed government administration positions. A theme common to the accounts I collected was that the era of change delivered a sense of disempowerment to Aboriginal residents rather than a realisation of the hoped-for autonomy of self-determination. Dolly Swain’s characterisation of ‘government’ as

a negative new authority in the community and that the 1970s were a time that ‘make us cry’ when the ‘government came and took our jobs away’ is the expression of the malaise identified in the analyses of both Sullivan (1996) and Sutton (2009). The church and the state vied with one another for the role of primary community advisor, while the rigid, inflexible nature of the bureaucratic control of the newly formed community meant that Aboriginal council members were reduced to managing programs designed and funded by Whites.

Nostalgia for life at the missions or on pastoral properties and reminiscences that it represented a form of ‘golden age’ reflect an imposed social stability. This was achieved through restrictive legislation with policies that sought to achieve assimilation of Australia’s Aboriginal minorities while delivering welfare and gave White people control over the lives of Aboriginal people. Expectations for Aboriginal people were low and training was focused upon creating manual workers and domestics, or at best employment at low level administrative positions. Aboriginal people were being taught to be useful but not equal, potentially able to be assimilated and so acceptable but always inferior. Theatre productions such as *Bran Nue Dae* written by Jimmy Chi, who grew up at Beagle Bay mission, portray the angst experienced by Aboriginal people through racial stigmatization in his song ‘Acceptable Coon’.

They taught me the white ways, and bugger the rest,
Cause everything white is right and the best.
So learn all the white things they teach you in school,
And you’ll all become acceptable coons. (Chi 1991.)

The responsive shift to the policy of self-determination sought to replace acceptability with equality, to hold rights enjoyed by White Australians and a measure of autonomy. However, as Sutton has it, assumptions were made about the capacity (and willingness) of Aboriginal communities to contend with the new arrangements (Sutton 2009: 51) while their implementation sharpened rather than blunted the interface with the state.

The Aboriginal Lands Trust and the Beagle Bay Blocks.

The Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) was established in 1972 by West Australian State legislation as part of the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA).²⁸ The ALT was born from the policy of self-determination at a national level but was a product of West Australian state policies and the Tonkin Labor government of the time. Politically it was a time of change where

²⁸ Created through the provisions of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* (1972). The Act repealed the *Native Welfare Act* (1963) and so abolished the Department of Native Welfare and created the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority.

recognition of the importance of preserving the distinct cultural heritage and practices of Aboriginal people and the provision of a measure of autonomy for Aboriginal peoples had broad community support. For example the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* was legislated in the same year (1972) to protect places and items of cultural significance to Aboriginal people. The ALT was given control of land that had previously been held by the State as Aboriginal reserves. Land was to be held in trust while the Aboriginal Trust members provided advice regarding the use of Trust lands. The Beagle Bay mission reserves consequently became the responsibility of the ALT as a result of the passing of the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act*.

The AAPA Act made provision for the ALT to manage land in trust with the aim to deliver Aboriginal specific benefit. The functions of the ALT are set out Section 23 of the Act and are listed as follows.

- (a) to carry out such of the functions of the Authority as may be delegated to the Trust under section 24, or as the Minister may direct;
- (b) to acquire and hold land, whether in fee simple or otherwise, and to use and manage that land for the benefit of persons of Aboriginal descent;
- (c) to ensure that the use and management of the land held by the Trust, or for which the Trust is in any manner responsible, shall accord with the wish of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area so far as that can be ascertained and is practicable;
- (d) to consult, negotiate, enter into financial arrangements, contract, and to undertake or administer projects, either directly or in association with other persons or bodies, as may be necessary or desirable for the development of the land for which the Trust is responsible;
- (e) generally, on behalf of and as the corporate entity representing the interests of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area to which the matter relates, to take, instigate or support any action that may be required to ensure the most beneficial use of the land.

The ALT legislation and the Aboriginal Trust membership epitomised the self-determination era in several ways. The Minister was listed in the first paragraph of section 23 (as cited above) and was given the authority to direct the functions of the Trust. Section 21 of the AAPA Act required that membership of the ALT Trust be restricted to people of Aboriginal descent. This rested on the assumption that the incorporation of Aboriginal people would ensure decisions made would be both for the benefit of Aboriginal people and as the result of their direction. However, the Minister determined who would serve as an ALT member. Thus the Minister had considerable influence over the composition of the Trust and by extension, of the decisions its members might make. Moreover, while Aboriginal ancestry was a requirement for membership,

the authority to make decisions relating to land held in trust remained with the State Minister.²⁹ The Trust lands also remained under the ultimate control of the state. The decisions of the ALT members were thus constrained by the limitations imposed by the legislation. For example, a vesting in the ALT could be changed by the government of the day to allow use of the land for other purposes³⁰ and the legislation provided for the Minister and in turn the Governor to make recommendations to the Houses of Parliament for change to Aboriginal reserve lands. Section 25 of the AAPA Act provided for the Governor to declare Crown lands as reserve for Aboriginal people, but also the right to revoke that reservation and 'declare that any land shall cease to be reserved for persons of Aboriginal descent' (Section 25 (1) (c)).

The AAPA and the establishment of the ALT demonstrated the political will to provide Aboriginal people with greater authority over future planning at settlements like Beagle Bay. The removal of control by the Catholic Church over the majority of the Aboriginal reserve land and transferring titles to a trust managed by Aboriginal people was designed to deliver control of land to Aboriginal people which would in turn, in some unspecified way, deliver improved living conditions.

Part of the analysis provided by Rowse of self-determination, which I outlined early in the chapter, is reflected in the AAPA Act and the operations of the ALT. Self-determination led to the establishment of Aboriginal councils which were to be the principal agency in the self-determination process. The ALT was in effect one example of such a governing council. The legislation created an all-Aboriginal body to hold land in trust for the benefit of Aboriginal people. While this gave an appearance of self-determination for Aboriginal interests, at the same time, the legislation ensured the continuation of the control of the state.

The Beagle Bay reserves were formally transferred from the Catholic Church to the ALT in 1976, four years after the Trust was created. Divestment of the lands from the Church to the ALT was not only slow but also incomplete. The Church retained a parcel of land within the settlement and the *Beagle Bay Layout Plan* shows the Roman Catholic Bishop of Broome as the primary interest holder in the freehold of Lot 403, comprising 9.63 hectares (Western Australian Planning Commission 2013:10). The Gothic style church, the primary school and accommodation for church members and school staff are within this lot. In the *Layout Plan* it is

²⁹ *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972* section 7 (2).

³⁰ *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972* section 24 and Part III sections 26-30.

stated that, ‘The majority of the community living area is located on 3 freehold land parcels held by the Aboriginal Land Trust and the Bishop of Broome’ (Western Australian Planning Commission 2013:10). Other reserves (principally reserve 1834) extended over 700,000 acres (283,280 hectares)³¹ and covered a considerable portion of the central Dampier Peninsula, extending from the west to the east coast. It is also evident that additional reserves may have not been transferred since Bonner reported in the *Lost Lands Report* in 1996 that negotiations were taking place between the Catholic Church and several Kimberley settlements including Beagle Bay regarding the transfer of mission land to the ALT (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:27). While in the same report four Beagle Bay leases are listed as being under the control of the ALT (2003:193) the Catholic Church retained freehold title to significant parts of the Beagle Bay community. Maintaining the freehold of a substantial portion of the community living area is both symbolic of the church preserving their position within the settlement as well as reflecting its continued influence and direction of the community.

Following the transfer of the Beagle Bay reserve lands to the ALT, some projects were planned for the leases. Agricultural enterprises appear to have been favoured, with products such as Australian tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) grown for its oil, and tropical timbers proposed for large scale plantations near the Beagle Bay settlement. Neither project eventuated. South west of Beagle Bay community, near Sandy Point, a lease area was proposed for a cattle run. This area had been used for cattle in the mission days and some infrastructure such as bores and wells were already established there. The proposal failed because of disagreements between Aboriginal families as to which held the traditional authority to ‘speak for’ (that is, asserts customary rights in) the country which led to legal difficulties when attempting to form a corporation to hold the lease. The cattle business was eventually abandoned. Another small area was granted by the ALT for Bobeiding community, a settlement around 8 kilometres west of Beagle Bay. Bobeiding consisted of about a dozen houses and was established to form a new living area outside the old mission site. However, the development failed to attract much support from community members and in due course most of the residents abandoned the living area and eventually termites destroyed many of the houses. A tourism venture established at Middle Lagoon (24 kilometres north west of Beagle Bay) met with greater success. One Aboriginal person used superannuation funds to start the business and some smaller outstations were created in the

³¹ Aboriginal Affairs Department 1997:30 fn. 12.

Middle Lagoon area at the same time. Unlike the other projects this venture has been successful and endured with the business now being operated by the children of the original owners.

The increase of mining activity during the 1970s was seen as a means to provide funding for Aboriginal organisations should the industry be permitted to operate on Aboriginal controlled lands. In 1973 the Western Australian Premier determined that extra funds would be distributed to Aboriginal enterprise, with the finance gained through the distribution of mining payments – lease rent or royalties – collected from mining activities on Aboriginal controlled lands. Seeking rent from mining companies on Aboriginal controlled lands appeared as a viable option where other sources of income were unavailable. The 1974 ALT annual report listed the following as options for deriving funding from mining activities.

- Normal royalties from mining on Aboriginal reserves.
- Rents for mining tenements on Aboriginal reserves.
- Additional royalties or other considerations, as negotiated by the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority or the ALT, respecting mining on Aboriginal reserves.
- Revenue derived by way of leasing or renting or dealing in any other way with Aboriginal reserves. (Aboriginal Lands Trust, *Annual Report* (1974), p. 29.)

In 1979–80, as a result of collected rents and royalties, Kimberley Aboriginal organisations received from the ALT financial assistance totalling only a little over \$16,000 to be invested in development projects across the whole region (Smith 2006:257). If Kimberley Aboriginal people were to derive any real benefits from mining, other funding and royalty arrangements would need to be implemented as they had been in the Northern Territory (Rowse 2017:297). Moreover, mining had a controversial history in the west and central Kimberley. The Kimberley Land Council (KLC) was created in 1978 in response to the Noonkanbah dispute where protestors blockaded the access of oil rigs onto an Aboriginal owned pastoral lease. Rowse was of the view that these events at Noonkanbah, ‘polarised Australian views about what Aboriginal people required and deserved’ (2017:299). There was no land rights legislation in Western Australia and the KLC was a private corporation not the product of Federal legislation. What the ALT and the KLC received as a financial benefit from mining in Western Australia was paltry so there was little incentive to share Aboriginal lands with exploration companies.

Apart from the few outstations developed in the vicinity of Middle Lagoon, there was little other development on the Beagle Bay leases and the outstation living areas that were rapidly introduced throughout the Kimberley were absent during the 1970s and 1980s. As I noted above

(see page 54) in most other parts of the Kimberley decentralisation projects flourished during this time. For example, the 1973 annual report of the AAPA states,

The economic utilization of these great areas [of land] is governed by many factors...In the Kimberleys many reserves are in remote locations . . . many mission reserves have been partially developed to allow some economic flow-on to their immediate communities. To date [1973], these have been limited largely to pastoral type enterprises. Cohesive Aboriginal groups are now forming and coming to the forefront for the purpose of developing economically a number of reserves. (Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority, *Annual Report* (1973), cited in Smith 2006.)

To the south east of the Dampier Peninsula the Fitzroy valley region experienced dramatic decentralisation and the uptake of Aboriginal owned pastoral properties (see Hawke and Gallagher 1989) and resultant outstation communities. Beyond the Beagle Bay reserves and to the north the Bardi were also able to develop decentralised living areas. However, as Glaskin points out (2017:68-69), these were often contested endeavours. Glaskin explains the difficulties surrounding development of outstations in the northern Dampier Peninsula on Bardi country where competition and conflict encouraged the intensification of outstation formation. She wrote,

The structural location of these matters [the outstations] within a non-indigenous domain, involving various government agencies, programs, bureaucratic requirements in relation to procedure and expenditure, accountability measures, spot-checks on outstation groups and more, accentuated the politics of land tenure and resource acquisition in this area. Such mechanisms pitted outstation groups within the same region against one another symbolically, and in many instances materially as well. As outstation groups competed over control of outstation resources and, sometimes, of the corporation that held them, the groups fractured and formed further outstations within the same *burru*. (Glaskin 2017:68-69.)

Competition for government funding encouraged friction and segmentation of various groups and the establishment of smaller family outstations.

Beagle Bay residents remained centralised during the 1970s and 1980s. The reasons for this lie in a combination of factors that were influential in limiting the decentralisation trends so evident elsewhere. Following the withdrawal of the mission there was a substantial shift in the population profile (see page 59 above). By 1985 the community was characterised as having a high number of residents both over the age of 65 and under 15 (Sullivan 1996:18). The remaining largely middle aged population appears to have been predominantly female, comprising those who cared for the young and old and therefore more likely to prefer living in

the larger settlement close to education and health services. While this age profile may also have been found in other communities that did engage with the decentralisation movement of the 1970s and 1980s there was another important factor at work. The Beagle Bay mission history and habits instilled through the mission regime produced an orientation towards community owned and larger land use ventures such as pastoralism and agricultural projects which did not sit comfortably with individual small-scale decentralised family communities. Finally, this lack of engagement in decentralisation was also a reflection of the nature of the advice, influence and at times direction of the Church. Despite the introduction of self-determination and a community council, the Church remained as the primary source of policy and practice direction. As such its agents were able to influence funding applications and provide advice on what ventures to pursue. Decentralisation projects which would have seen the community fracture and possibly dissipate were not in the interests of the Church which favoured a single integrated community.

In 1983 the Western Australian government appointed Commissioner Paul Seaman to conduct the Aboriginal Land Inquiry (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:25). Seaman's findings, provided in September 1984 led to the drafting of legislation, 'to facilitate the granting of land in Western Australia to meet Aboriginal expectations' (2003:26). However, the proposed legislation was defeated in the Legislative Council of the Western Australian parliament in 1985. The defeat of the land rights legislation prompted the State Government to recognise, 'the importance of granting Aboriginal people secure tenure over land in order to meet social, cultural and economic needs' (2003:26). This could be achieved through 'other legal procedures' for granting land including the *Land Act* (1933) and the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* (1972). The resultant process became known as the Aboriginal Living Area Program (2003:26). Under the program Aboriginal corporations could apply to the ALT for assistance in brokering leases with other interested parties. The *Land Act* was used to acquire lands for the 'use and benefit of Aboriginal inhabitants' and this land was then vested in the ALT with a 99 year lease offered to an Aboriginal Corporation (2003:26).

In 1986 the Western Australian government entered into an agreement with the Commonwealth government which had the following provisions:

- 99-year leases would be granted to Aboriginal communities resident on ALT lands;
- town reserves under the control of the Department of Community Services would be transferred to Aboriginal ownership;

- negotiations would be undertaken to transfer church-held mission lands to Aboriginal communities. (DIA 2003:27.)

From 1983 to 1993 the ALT brokered land packages for Aboriginal corporations with some success. Sixty three Crown Reserves and 11 Special Leases were established under the Aboriginal Living Area Program. As the title suggests, the use of the land was mostly for residential and domestic purposes. However, the Beagle Bay leases appear to have remained separated from the brokering during the period 1983 to 1993 and during this time the ALT merely administered the leases. Economic development appeared to be at a standstill and the industry that was the hallmark of Beagle Bay during the mission era was absent. Then in 1995, under the Labor Premiership of Carmen Lawrence, former Aboriginal Liberal senator Neville Bonner was commissioned to conduct a review of the lands ALT held in trust. The review resulted in the *Lost Lands Report* in 1996 which was released as a public document by the Department of Indigenous Affairs in 2003.

The review marked a significant shift in both the use and the management of the Beagle Bay reserve lands and paved the way for the development of smaller decentralised living areas some of which are the focus of this thesis. The shift that the review recommended resulted in the release of parcels of land held by the ALT to small Aboriginal corporations. Importantly, the new Aboriginal corporations were encouraged to prioritise economic use of the land, shifting the focus from the land being used as living areas only. The creation of the lease areas reflected, for the first time, an aspiration for self-determination for at least some of the Beagle Bay residents.

The *Lost Lands Report* and decentralisation at Beagle Bay

Neville Bonner's *Lost Lands* report and the inquiry that led to its writing were undertaken against the backdrop of the Federal native title legislation which the Keating Labor government enacted in 1993. Keating also provided a land fund as part of a 'Social Justice Package' and the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) was established to purchase land for Aboriginal people unable to benefit from the native title regime. Land purchased through the ILC was, 'to help Indigenous people to acquire land and manage it in a sustainable way, to provide economic, social and cultural benefits for themselves and for future generations.'³² The ILC continued to do the work of previous land fund managers (see Rowse 2017:305). However, land acquisition in the context of the new native title legislation affirmed Aboriginal pre-existing ownership (Palmer

³² <https://www.ilsc.gov.au/home/about/home-about-history> accessed 13th August 2020.

2018:16), even if it was only to those parts of the continent ‘sovereign Australia has decided it does not want’ (Rowse 2017:288). The continued acquisition of land by the newly formed ILC was to further the attempts to deliver social justice but also to encourage commercial and entrepreneurial activities (Rowse 2017:306).

The *Lost Lands* report reflected unambiguously the sense of injustice at the sovereignty assumed by the British Crown with the establishment of the Swan River Colony in 1829 and the ‘convenient assumption’ that Aboriginal people held no rights to the country (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:9). There was also a sense that land later reserved for the benefit of Aboriginal people had been lost to them as the title of the report, ‘Lost Lands’ reflects. The recommendations contained within the report attempt to redress that loss.

The Bonner led review of the ALT reflected some aspects of the intentions of the native title legislation and the social justice objectives that underlay the establishment of the ILC. The review was critical over what had been delivered to Aboriginal people through the ALT and Bonner stated that, ‘since the inception of the ALT in 1972, the management of Aboriginal land by the ALT had been ineffective and major reform is unavoidable’. (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:29.) Bonner made seven recommendations which received in-principle approval from the by then Liberal-National party coalition cabinet on 21st April 1997. The recommendations can be listed as follows.

1. Title to lands managed by the ALT will be transferred into the ownership of Aboriginal people, with all transfers to be completed in the period 1996-2002 (and with the qualification that each area of land to be transferred is to be first referred to Cabinet for approval).
2. The transferred land title will reconcile traditionally and historically-acquired rights of Aboriginal people over each property.
3. Aboriginal people are to be given a wider choice in the types of land tenure which can be adopted over ALT land, leading to a more effective balance of cultural and economic interests on Aboriginal land.
4. The ALT and the Department of Land Administration will initiate a comprehensive program to expand understanding about land title among Aboriginal people.
5. Land title must be transferred to legally durable and constitutionally fair corporate bodies which will protect the interests of Aboriginal owners and inhabitants of the land. (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003: 29-30.)

A sixth recommendation was in relation to the composition of the ALT itself and the appointment of Trust members. Bonner recommended that the members of the Trust:

- (i) be appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs from nominations made by Aboriginal organisations with a community membership, ensuring regional representation;
- (ii) must have adequate knowledge of Aboriginal land issues and the ability to contribute objectively and effectively to the transfer of land title from the ALT to Aboriginal ownership;
- (iii) be increased to nine (including the Chairperson);
- (iv) be appointed for two- and three-year periods, with half the ordinary members retiring after two years;
- (v) be compensated fairly for their involvement in ALT affairs;
- (vi) be provided with adequate resources to assist consultations and negotiations with communities in the transfer of ownership of land to Aboriginal people;
- (vii) be presided over by a full-time Chairperson who is appointed by the Minister after a formal interview process. (2003:30.)

Finally, Bonner recommended that the 'Western Australian Government establish a cross-government program to expand assistance to Aboriginal people to improve land use' (2003:30).

The recommendations reflected the sense that the ALT had merely administered the lands in its care since 1972 without providing any real sense of ownership of them by Aboriginal people. Importantly, the redress focussed on economic benefit from the land for Aboriginal people. There was a shift in what was considered important. The Aboriginal Living Area Program, as the title suggests, supported the gaining and maintenance of Aboriginal communities, but the focus was on establishing living areas. The Bonner review put economic development at the forefront of Aboriginal land use. As the recommendations above show, statements like 'effective balance of cultural and economic interests on Aboriginal land' deliver an imperative for Aboriginal corporations to use their lease holdings for some form of engagement with the market economy.

The nature of the recommendation encouraged an aggressive and confused approach to the divestment of ALT lands within the Beagle Bay reserve. The reconciling of traditional and historical rights over land within the process was difficult while the 'adequate resources' for consultations was subject to varying interpretation. The process was constrained by time (six years) and lack of resources. Members of the Beagle Bay community took matters into their own hands and formed the Gundaragin Committee in 1996 to oversee the divestment of ALT lands in the region to smaller Aboriginal corporations.

Gundaragin Committee and establishing the Blocks

Gundaragin is the Aboriginal name for a large gully comprising diverse features running eastward from the coast and south of the Beagle Bay community. Gundaragin is also remembered as a meeting place in the past for people from different areas. A man, who I will call Brett and whose family were long-term Beagle Bay residents, told me the name was chosen to reflect the varied nature of personal identity at Beagle Bay. The community is composed of individuals who identify with many different language groups and whose ancestral country lies in different areas of the Kimberley and who came to (or were brought into) the mission and who are often referred to as ‘historical people’³³. But the population also includes those having traditional connection with the Beagle Bay locale.

The ALT’s land-holding regime did not require any recognition of the ownership of country by individual family groups – nor did it take account of the traditional pattern of land ownership. The Bonner review had recommended that in the divestment of lands to Aboriginal groups through the formation of small corporations, there be a balance between the recognition of traditional and historical connections to country (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:29 (recommendation 2)). That recommendation met with substantial difficulties in practice. This can be better understood by a short examination of the traditional land tenure system at Beagle Bay.

Beagle Bay is located on what is generally regarded as Nyul Nyul land, while Jabirr Jabirr people lived immediately south and those who identified as Nimanbur had affiliations to country in the east of the Peninsula around Disaster Bay. Members of all three groups are well represented at the mission. Members of these three groups recognise traditional affiliation to land through local landed estates known as *buru* (see Glaskin 2017:64-69), which had been a feature of local organisation on the Peninsula before the mission. Members of local groups had survived several generations of colonisation and senior members retained their knowledge of ancestral country and their conviction that it was theirs to own. Common to the term used across many areas of Aboriginal Australia, these people were often referred to as ‘traditional owners’. While the term originates from the Northern Territory *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976 the advent of native title law in 1994 saw its further use as a convenient phrase to identify those who

³³ The term ‘historical people’ is used across Australia in similar contexts.

held (or claimed they held) traditional rights to certain areas of country. The use of the term 'traditional owner' attributes legal rights to those so identified and recognition of being the 'right' person for country.

But Beagle Bay residents also include many people from throughout the Kimberley and from places where other large missions were not established and who are commonly known at Beagle Bay as, 'historical people'. These are, for the most part, the mixed descent children who were brought to Beagle Bay Mission as members of the 'stolen generation' and who grew up in the dormitory system. An 'historical person' is understood with the presumption of holding slighter cultural and religious knowledge for the region and consequently limited authority over any decisions that might be made relating to the land. The phrase, 'historical person' is readily associated with the 'stolen generations' and when measured against 'traditional owner', recognition of attachment to country, becomes diminished.

When Gundaragin Committee was formed in 2001 historical people were included. Brett told me that 'historical' people were involved in the group of potential lease holders so as not to be exclusionary and to recognize what they had done for the community. Many historical people that stayed at Beagle Bay and partnered with people with ancestral connection to the area, consequently, had connection through their children. Membership of the Gundaragin Aboriginal Corporation committee reflected the current nature of the Beagle Bay community rather than privileging the views of those with traditional ancestral relationships to country.

The Gundaragin Aboriginal Corporation was based at Beagle Bay. It had responsibility for the administration of the blocks and for what amounted to a decentralization movement. Gundaragin Aboriginal Corporation was to oversee the divestment of ALT lands, some of which were divided into 50 acre parcels each offered on a 99 year lease to local Aboriginal corporations. The Bonner review recommendations were based on the implied assumption that land allocated as leases should be used to develop some sort of business enterprise that would support the residents economically (Department of Indigenous Affairs 2003:29 (recommendation 3)). Consequently, the utility value of the lease was all-important in the bureaucratic guidelines, which had to be followed when considering applications for a lease. Most of the corporations were established for the purpose of gaining secure tenure of parcels of land for both living and income generation. Membership of these corporations generally averaged 35 members, often drawn from one family. The lease areas became known generally as the 'Beagle Bay Blocks' while

those with whom I worked referred to the areas as ‘my block’, ‘our block’ or simply, ‘the block’, signalling ownership of a property.

The accounts I collected show that the allocation of the leases to the various contenders was contested and the whole process lacked independent scrutiny and was sometimes not properly formalised. The majority of the proposals identified engagement with the market economy through tourism. Understandably then leases to land on the coast were in high demand as the outstanding natural beauty of the beaches and their fishing potential would be an asset to any proposed tourist venture, while the hinterland allowed harvest of the bush resources. Coastal Blocks were quickly understood to provide a draw card for the expected tourists. This naturally led to the contested nature of the allocations and consequential disputes.

Families applying for the leases were required to enter into a competitive process, indicating their business plans and how they would develop the lease in terms of infrastructure and living facilities. This also inevitably led to disputes. During the allocation, consultation with those who considered that they held traditional rights to the country of the leases was regarded by many Beagle Bay residents, many of whom applied for a lease, as essential. Consistent with the Bonner recommendations this consultation should have been exhaustive. However, in practice, contact with traditional owners was limited. There was no engagement to negotiate access to the lands or seek some form of permission for occupation or to ensure that the traditional owners for that area were in agreement with the establishment of the leases. The native title claims over the region were at this time pending and would not be determined through a hearing in the Federal Court until over a decade later. There were also complications with the legal and formal technicalities of the leases, and some Beagle Bay residents now assert that many leases are invalid because they were not properly executed.

Brett’s family had direct experience of the operation of the Gundaragin Council and he told me about the following incident that had affected his family closely. Brett’s mother had been raised in the Beagle Bay dormitories and she left Beagle Bay during the 1970s as a young adult. Brett was born in Perth and lived variously between Perth and Broome. When he was young Brett spent school holidays with family members who remained at Beagle Bay and the family would go camping in the region. Brett maintained continuous contact with the settlement but had never lived there permanently.

Brett's family group applied for a living area when the Gundaragin committee began to distribute ALT leases to specially formed Aboriginal corporations. Applying for a living area only was unusual since most Blocks were allocated to those with plans for business enterprise attached to the application. However, Brett's family identified with the Nyul Nyul language and had ancestral connections with the area where they were applying for a Block which they claimed to be their *buru* (traditional estate or country)⁸⁴ of their ancestors. Older family members who were living at Beagle Bay and who had grown up at the mission went and lived permanently at the proposed lease area and started to build makeshift houses. 'They cut the trees by hand and built a shack there', Brett told me. However, permanent occupation was difficult to sustain. The most senior male died and there were 'run ins' between other family members. Eventually the family abandoned their attempts to live there permanently. During this time however the legal lease for the Block was never formalised.

Following these events another senior man who was member of the 'stolen generation' and consequently had no ancestral or traditional connections to the country moved to the same area with his wife and children. They began to live on the proposed Block permanently. This man had previously been community chairman and was a member of the Beagle Bay council. Consequently he had some status in the community and was influential in the political dealings that characterised the allocation of the leases. Understandably this turn of events caused considerable resentment amongst members of Brett's extended family. The family that sought to gain the lease to the Block were also unable to gain a formalised lease to the property. Part of the reason why the lease was not ratified was because of the difficulty the members of the Gundaragin committee had in attempting to mediate the interests of the permanent residents and the people with ancestral connection who had first taken up occupation of the Block. People I spoke with at Beagle Bay explained the shifting and changeable occupancy in the region and the resulting tensions in terms of the process for distribution and the operations of the Gundaragin committee. There was a mismatch of traditional authority, the authority of the committee and lack of bureaucratic accountability. Brett explained the situation to be as follows.

A lot of leases are still pending from the Gundaragin days. You could approach Gundaragin, ask the Nyul Nyul to approve a block on Nyul Nyul lands, but the Council had to approve the lease, and people like [XX 'stolen generation' occupier of the lease] knew how to work the system. There are a

³⁴ The term *buru* is defined above. See footnote on page 34. I also discuss *buru* in Chapter 4 along with a discussion of language group identities such as Nyul Nyul.

lot of people who have outstations but no lease, technically they should have had a lease.

No one is really sure, there's a back log of applications that have never been addressed.

There's a lot of buck passing now, between the ALT, DIA and DOCEP [Department of Consumer Employment Protection³⁵]. One Department thinks it's the other's job, one says they just give advice. But they're just sitting on their hands, they don't know how or why. But lives on the ground are impacted upon.

There's stuff happening, but no one knows what. What leases are available, how process will work?

During the operation of the Gundaragin committee there was no attempt at engagement with an Aboriginal regional body, such as a land council, to provide an independent assessment of the allocation process, to assist with setting up the corporations that would hold the individual leases, or manage with bureaucratic demands that accompanied the setting up of a small business enterprise. In the Beagle Bay case the local land council was the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), the peak Aboriginal body in the region. The KLC proved to be hostile to the whole process. It objected to the granting of the leases because of concern about the negative impact this might have on native title claims in the area as the leases were being provided to Aboriginal people without ancestral connection to the local area. The KLC consequently opposed the development and provided no practical assistance to the process.

The increase in native title research in the late 1990s raised awareness of the dichotomy between 'traditional owners' (prospective native title holders) and historical people. The Gundaragin Corporation's processes for granting the leases were dismissed by many. One of the women with whom I worked told me that the Block residents were, 'just squatters in my country'. Some Nyul Nyul people considered that once they had 'won' their land under the native title processes, the residents of the Blocks could be dispossessed. More generously minded people offered to let Block residents stay in the houses they had already built on their Blocks, but after Nyul Nyul had

³⁵ Former government department, which was replaced by the Department of Commerce in 2009.

won recognition of native title they would have to give the surrounding lands of their lease over to the native title holders.

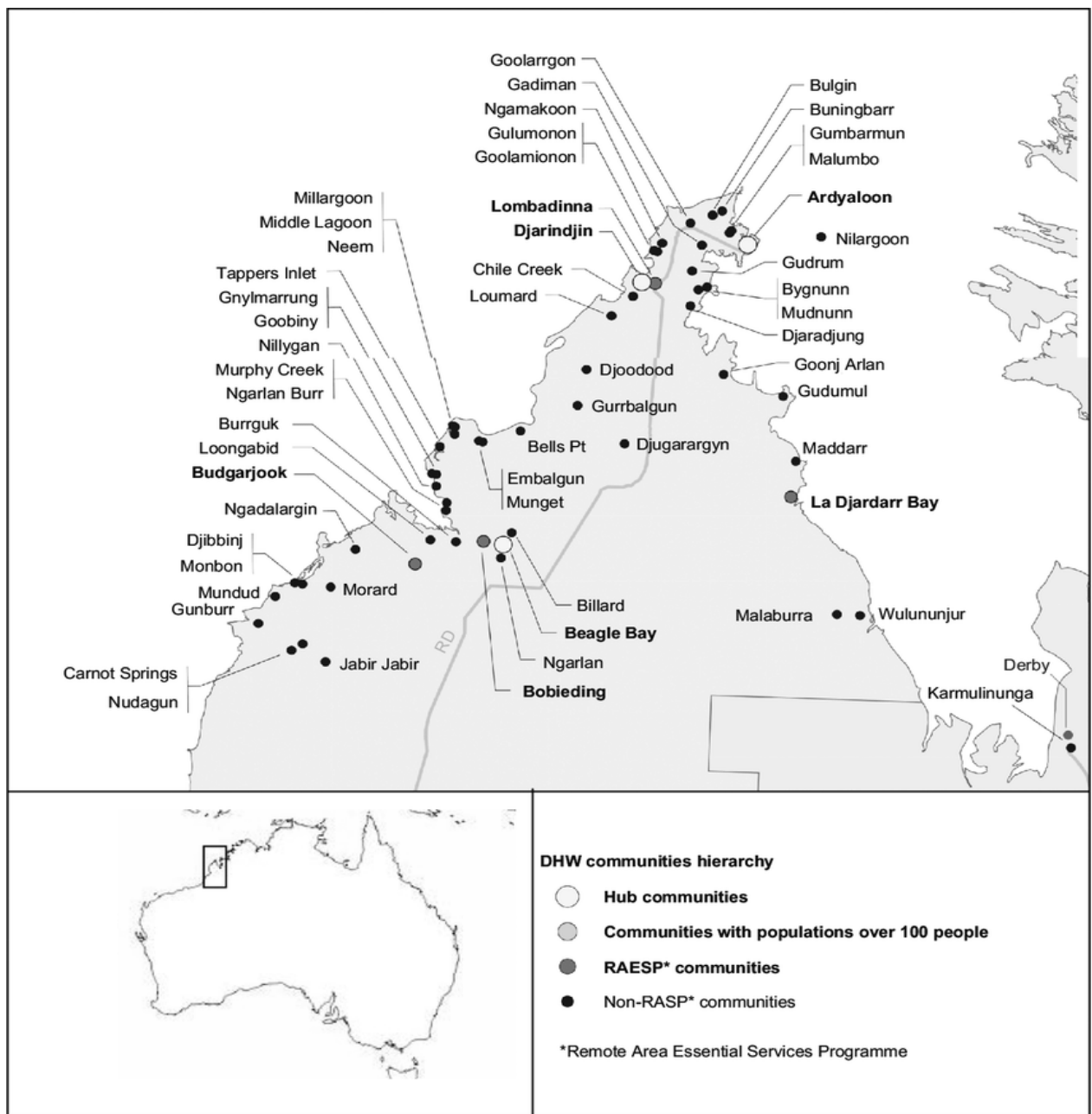


Figure 4: Department of Housing and Works Dampier Peninsula Communities

(Map copied from Western Australian Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2008 in Ciancio and Boulter 2012)

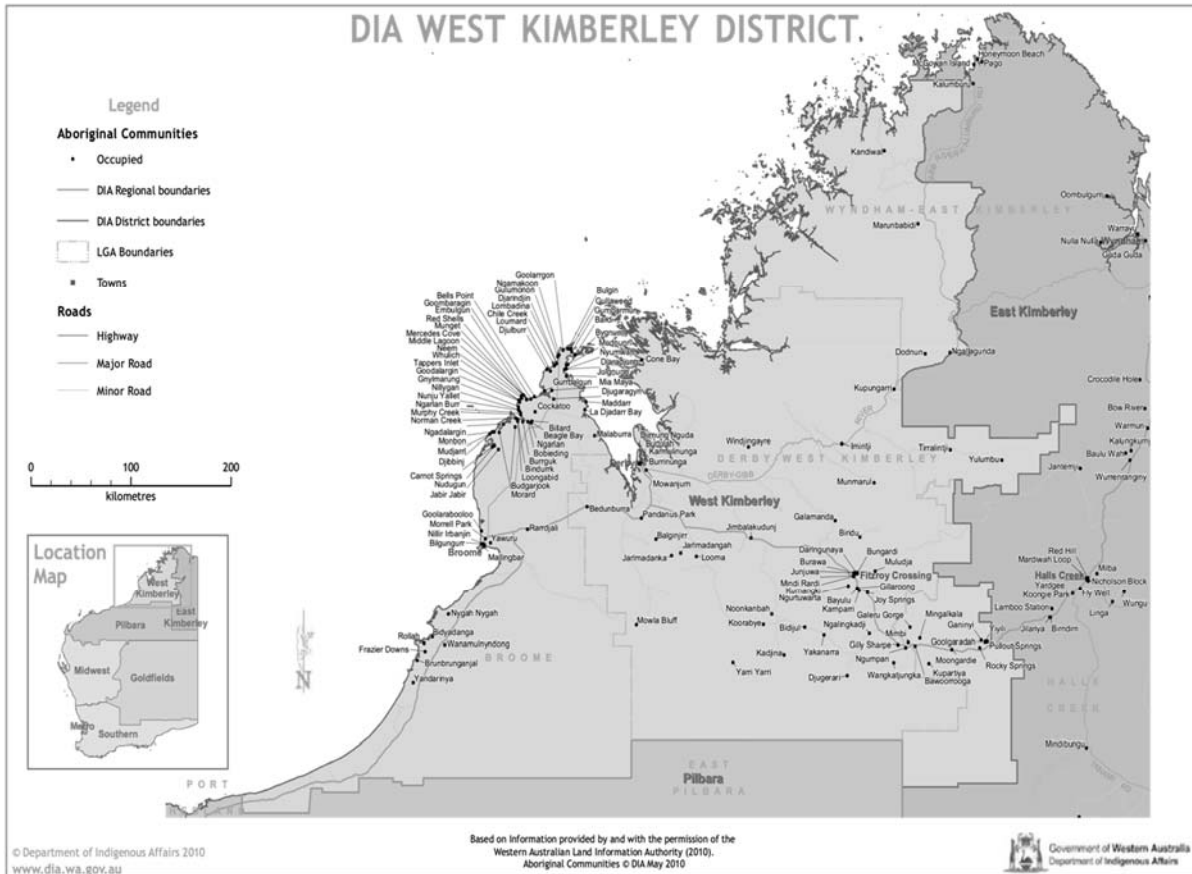


Figure 5: Department of Indigenous Affairs Aboriginal Communities in the West Kimberley

The controversial birth of the Blocks and their uncertain status is reflected in the official record. Plans, gazetting and lease holdings for the locations are inconsistent and often not formally recorded, which may account for the variation in the number of settlements recorded by different agencies. One government report described the Blocks as subject to, ‘informal occupancy’ (Department of Planning 2015). The map which is Figure 4 above based on data taken from Department of Housing and Works, shows approximately 13 ‘communities’ in my research area. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs created another map showing ‘Aboriginal Communities’ for the Dampier Peninsula with 19 listed in the same region (see Figure 5 above). During my fieldwork there were 15 leases in my research area, with nine permanently occupied. The Gundaragin Aboriginal Corporation was deregistered in 2009. The Beagle Bay council also changed at this time and a non-Aboriginal manager was brought into the community.

EXPERIMENTS IN SELF-DETERMINATION

The policy of self-determination was a watershed moment in Aboriginal and White relations within Australia. The changes in 1972 signified a quantum shift from welfare and assimilation and later integration to an acknowledgement that Aboriginal people had the right to direct and control their own future and life choices as well as maintain their own distinctive culture.

The period of the implementation of the policy was also marked by other significant changes to the cultural geography of Aboriginal Australia. This included steps to protect culturally significant places and items from destruction or exploitation, the legislating for land rights for Aboriginal people in some parts of Australia – notably in the Northern Territory – and ultimately the recognition of Aboriginal rights through the Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia. These significant changes to the ownership of large parts of especially remote Australia, facilitated the development of decentralised communities – many in response to the new-found ability of Aboriginal people to choose their own place and style of living.

As Rowse (2017:276-280) notes, self-determination policy encouraged Aboriginal people to act collectively, as corporations. The rise of ATSIC as an Aboriginal representative body with elected members that was also given responsibility for running programs helped to guarantee funding for decentralised communities.

Despite the apparent increased autonomy afforded to Aboriginal people, my analyses show that many of the achievements of the era were ‘more apparent than real’. The state retained control over many aspects of the lives of Aboriginal people and regulated the manner in which much development took place.

At Beagle Bay the process of self-determination was thwarted by a number of factors which I have noted above. It was not until several decades following the implementation of the policy of self-determination nationally that the lands of the Beagle Bay reserves were made available to the former mission residents for living and conducting a business that might hold the potential to provide them with an income and so to relieve their reliance on the state. Moreover, the process of the distribution of the leases was flawed and caused much community unrest and friction.

Despite all these difficulties, the release of the Blocks provided the opportunity for some former Beagle Bay residents to embark on enterprises that saw them living separate from the community and in a manner that promised to provide a degree of real independence and autonomy. It

remained for these families and individuals to determine how they would sustain their newly found enterprises in a regional economy that lacked opportunity, a ready market and reliable commercial advice. It is this practical aspect of the development of the life choices of the Blocks at Beagle Bay along with the conflicts and tensions it evoked, that I discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ENGINEERING ECONOMIES: ESTABLISHING THE FAMILY BUSINESS AT THE BLOCK

The central Dampier Peninsula Blocks are outstations in the sense of being small scale, decentralized and infrastructural nodes. However, the Beagle Bay decentralisation movement differed from what occurred elsewhere because the living areas were established in the late 1990s, a decade and a half after the peak of the outstation movement elsewhere in the Kimberley. The early development and maintenance of outstations was facilitated by government funding support and reflected a direct policy initiative aimed at invigorating cultural practices injured or disabled under assimilation policies (see Altman 2006:1, Coombs 1994:26-28, Peterson and Myers 2016:16-17). The establishment of homeland movements and outstations was a return to the bush, to ancestral lands, and to an engagement with traditional life and values. While government funding assisted in the formation of the Blocks at Beagle Bay, the subdivision of the former Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) land in the late 1990s represented something other than the provision of Aboriginal living areas. The would-be occupants valued the leases as a particular form of real estate and the opportunity to gain ownership of acreage. The Blocks were fenced like any other real estate development. Prospective leasees described their hoped-for Blocks in terms of size and the business enterprises they planned for the future. The Block represented an avenue for autonomy, the opportunity to live away from larger town centres like Broome or Derby and separately from the Beagle Bay community. Gaining a lease presented the chance to create an independent family business. Holding the lease was, in part, justified through engagement with the market economy. The level of input and effort Block residents put into their lease holdings, especially efforts towards engagement with the market economy, justified the granting, possession and occupation of the lease. Tourism, particularly for those Aboriginal people granted coastal Blocks, was regarded as the most obvious way to access the market economy.

There is limited anthropology written about tourism on the Dampier Peninsula. Travesi (2018) has written about the Bardi and Jawi to the north. Travesi explores differences in cultural knowledge ('knowing' and 'not knowing'; Travesi 2018) as significant aspects of self-representation within the tourist experience. Wergin (2015) has discussed the Goolarabooloo group and the Lurujarri heritage trail to the south of my research area. Wergin characterises the Lurujarri Heritage Trail, marketed as a walking tour for tourists along a Dreaming track, as a way

to bring together, 'diverse worldviews and ontological differences' which the writer asserts 'enabled the defeat of large-scale industrialisation in the region' (Wergin 2015, 488). Other accounts of Indigenous tourism have investigated corporations and the commodified persona (see, for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

Valuable though these accounts are in their own right, I did not set out to make a study of Indigenous tourism. Nor does this thesis investigate performative self-representation of self-commodification as an aspect of the tourism experience. Rather, tourism was a pathway for engagement with the market economy which the people of the Blocks understood to be a necessary activity in order to secure continuing external funding. My focus has been to develop an understanding of these and related processes and this is not a study of the Indigenous tourism experience *per se*.

The aspirations of the central Peninsula Block residents reflected a distinct and novel style of engagement with mainstream commercial dealings, noticeably different to that promoted by proponents of the outstation movement with its emphasis on return to country and traditional ways of living (see for example Coombs 1994:25-26).

The Blocks were granted through a specifically formed council at the Beagle Bay community (see chapter 3). How the council decided on the distribution of leases was not necessarily based on ancestral connection to country. What Aboriginal people would do with the lease holding influenced decisions about who should be granted a lease. At the time of my fieldwork government funding support shifted dramatically and this chapter outlines the response of Block residents in terms of how they sought to replace CDEP funding which had sustained Block life for the past decade.

In this chapter I examine the economic arrangements that made life on the Blocks possible. I show how Block residents managed the commercial, natural and social environments which constitute the way of life in the new locations and the different sets of relationships that develop from these arrangements. These activities and opportunities also created tensions and conflicts. The development of tourism led to some antagonism with Beagle Bay community members. This was a consequence of the fact that some community residents resented the intrusion of tourists and had nothing to gain from their presence, while regarding fishing and the exploitation of bush foods as depleting their own resources. The White visitors were then, to some, an unwelcome intrusion into Aboriginal reserve lands. For the Block residents tourism provided a

means to engage with the market economy while access and use of the natural resources was a significant component of their capital. Tourism presented a ready market for the sale of harvested natural resources while the natural beauty of the bays, beaches and azure waters of the Peninsula were a valuable saleable commodity. Yet I found that the Block residents were sometimes ambivalent about their engagement with tourists which led to tensions within their own families regarding the scope of their enterprise. I found that the role of a White mediator who acted as a broker or facilitator to drive the business activities developed yet another set of tensions that had at their heart the underpinning ideologies that the Block holders embraced as part of their business and lifestyle ethic. Finally, and reinforcing these tensions, was a fundamental issue regarding authority over country. This complexity was a consequence of the fact that many of the Block holders were not the native title holders of the land where they held their leases. While the lease and corporation provided legal tenure and gave security to the business of tourism, the traditional owners held moral right to the country and had become, in a sense, absentee landlords.

THE CHANGING FUNDING ENVIRONMENT

The Beagle Bay Blocks were established during a time when there was widespread questioning over the viability of outstation or homeland living. Prior to 2009 the residents of the central Dampier Peninsula Blocks had access to funding through CDEP and residents were assisted with service provisions through Kullari Regional Communities CDEP Incorporated (KRCCI), an amalgamation of the various Aboriginal corporations that oversaw service provision to remote areas, including the Blocks. Prior to 2005 these resource agencies were funded directly by ATSIC. After the abolition of ATSIC funding of outstations became problematic. By 2009 CDEP funding was substantially reduced and was available to only 9 of the 15 community Blocks north of Beagle Bay. In turn, the management of the CDEP-funded programs was put out for tender and it was to be operated within communities that had more than 150 people, meaning that all programs operating within the Blocks were inevitably defunded unless they were somehow based in Beagle Bay.

The reduction in the availability of CDEP funding coincided with a shift from programs designed for Aboriginal communities to a mainstreaming of both services and funding. The mainstreaming meant that when Kimberley Aboriginal people sought funding assistance from Aboriginal specific programs, many of which had been provided by the Federal government, they were unavailable. Consequently, mainstream Western Australian State departments had to

be approached and the chances of success were much diminished. On the Dampier Peninsula the Blocks, represented as family groups, had become a common form of remote development³⁶. However, their small size meant that attracting any funding from mainstream government agencies would be problematic as grant programs were generally designed for larger community projects.

My field research investigated how Aboriginal people were managing to cope financially following the withdrawal of regular income support. I observed that Aboriginal people in the area were being forced off a dependency on welfare and income support programs but tenaciously remained as permanent residents at remote locations where engagement with the market economy was difficult. Some external funding programs remained, but these were few and far between. Considerable time was spent chasing the various but limited public funds available. A push pull relationship developed between accessing funding through spending time at larger settlements like Beagle Bay (where CDEP wages were available) and a focus on the Block as a form of 'life project' (see Blaser 2004 and Peterson 2005). Block residents sought to find meaning in the Block that was independent of the state and market and where the Block was regarded as holding the potential to support an extended family both economically and in terms of their emotional and social wellbeing.

While government support for remote communities waned, interest in other forms of development in the Dampier Peninsula grew and gave promise to Aboriginal people for other sources of funding and income.

By 2007 there were seven companies interested in exploiting the gas reserves in the off-shore Browse Basin reserves, with plans to build an on-shore processing plant on the west coast of the Peninsula. North Head on Beagle Bay was selected as a preferred location for a time (see Figure 6 below). Woodside Petroleum (later Woodside Energy), became one of the most prominent exploration development companies in the Browse. Woodside had owned ventures in the

³⁶ Sutton (1998, 2003: 206-231) developed the term 'families of the polity' as a form of social organisation recruited through cognatic descent and identified by reference to a surname which he considered to be 'a distinctive post-colonial Aboriginal social system' (Sutton 2003:210). The surname-group system operated to assert the connection of Aboriginal people in urban and rural settings to the ancestral lands of their pre sovereignty past. Missions, small towns and pastoral stations, on account of their geographic location, could be understood as stepping stones to lands held in the pre contact era under traditional Aboriginal systems (ibid., 211). While this has relevance to native title research, the pathway to the Block is different. Leases to the Blocks were provided through the community council discussed in chapter 3 rather than through recognition of ancestral connections in the pre European contact past.

Broome area in the past and had been the major supplier of community infrastructure. During the 1980s Woodside had a substantial presence in the town and portions of the Broome town site comprised Woodside housing. Some residents in both Broome and on the Peninsula regarded the proposed processing plant as an opportunity for the region to benefit economically. An increased working population and industrial activity would stimulate the service sector and provide jobs for those with suitable skills. Specifically, for the residents of the Beagle Bay Blocks industrial or extractive development could mean an increase in the White population and a larger market for what services the new leaseholders of the Blocks might have to offer. However, not all residents in the region were supportive of the proposals since a major industrial development would almost certainly impact on the environment and the viability of cultural tourism that was dependent on offering what could be billed as a pristine environmental experience. There was, as a consequence, not only a polarising of opinion but also resultant social tensions between those who held different opinions. Industrial-scale development remained only a possibility during the initial stages of my fieldwork, but did inform debate amongst Block holders as to how they might better engage with the market economy. Eventually, the proposed developments appeared likely to become a reality – a turn of events that I consider in chapter 6.

Although government funding remained a primary source of financial support, the starvation of resources encouraged a shift in the way Block residents began to resource decentralized living. Grants to support Aboriginal living areas became even more difficult to obtain and there was an emphasis on self-sufficiency and economic sustainability. CDEP ‘work plans’, which specified the training activity to be undertaken, were progressively replaced by business and strategic plans, produced with the help of external consultants and providing a focus on commercial dealings: costs; profits and margins. When the work plans and budgets associated with CDEP were replaced with business plans, the Blocks were required to prove their viability in the language of the mainstream market economy. In order to receive funding Aboriginal people were required to do more than remain living in very remote areas. Instead, they were required to live on their land under a business model, with the Blocks being regarded as Aboriginal real estate providing the basis for economic activity. Aboriginal people were pressured to ‘do something’ with their leases rather than merely show their dedication through withstanding the challenges of sustaining permanent occupation.

FIELDWORK LOCATIONS - THE PEOPLE

During field work I lived primarily with people who often identified as Nimanbur. Nimanbur translates as ‘flying fox’ (black flying fox or black fruit bat, *Pteropus alecto*) in both Bardi and Nyikina languages. The area identified as Nimanbur is larger than a local descent group estate of the classic anthropological literature (Peterson and Long 1986, 146-7) and the term probably relates to the bounding of the region under a now not widely used totemic identifier known as *jarlng* or *barrman* (Glaskin 2017, 64-5). Flying fox was identified with areas of the eastern Peninsula, particularly round Disaster Bay, and barramundi for Goodenough Bay (16 kilometres north of Disaster Bay) and the snake at Beagle Bay. The term was no longer commonly used and it was only senior people who spoke with certainty about *jarlng* for particular areas. The name Nimanbur, however, has survived, is broadly known and serves to identify those whose ancestral country lies in the eastern portions of the Dampier Peninsula.

Disaster Bay, on the east coast of the Dampier Peninsula, was the site of an early attempt to establish a mission by the Trappist monks which was eventually abandoned in 1902. On the mission’s demise Nimanbur people from the area were eventually relocated into the Beagle Bay mission on the west coast, and were distinguished as coming from Nimanbur country. This separate identity has held for over a century and for multiple generations at the mission.

This movement into Beagle Bay and subsequent residence at the settlement over several generations in part explains how Nimanbur people came to hold leases on Nyul Nyul lands when the Beagle Bay Blocks were being allocated and decentralization began. A small enclave of families with Nimanbur ancestry now live permanently on their Blocks extending from Pender Bay to Beagle Bay – two or perhaps three surnamed family groups being identified as representatives of Nimanbur people and country. There were, of course, others who either came to Beagle Bay or were sent there, who came from other areas of the Kimberley. Some of the descendants of these people also obtained leases while the Nimanbur people married other immigrants or chose White partners. This meant that amongst the residents of the Blocks there was a substantial number of people who traced ancestry to forebears from neighbouring groups including Bardi, Nimanbur, Yawuru and Jabirr Jabirr, from groups whose country was further afield and members of the ‘stolen generation’, generally of mixed descent whose genealogies were sometimes unclear.

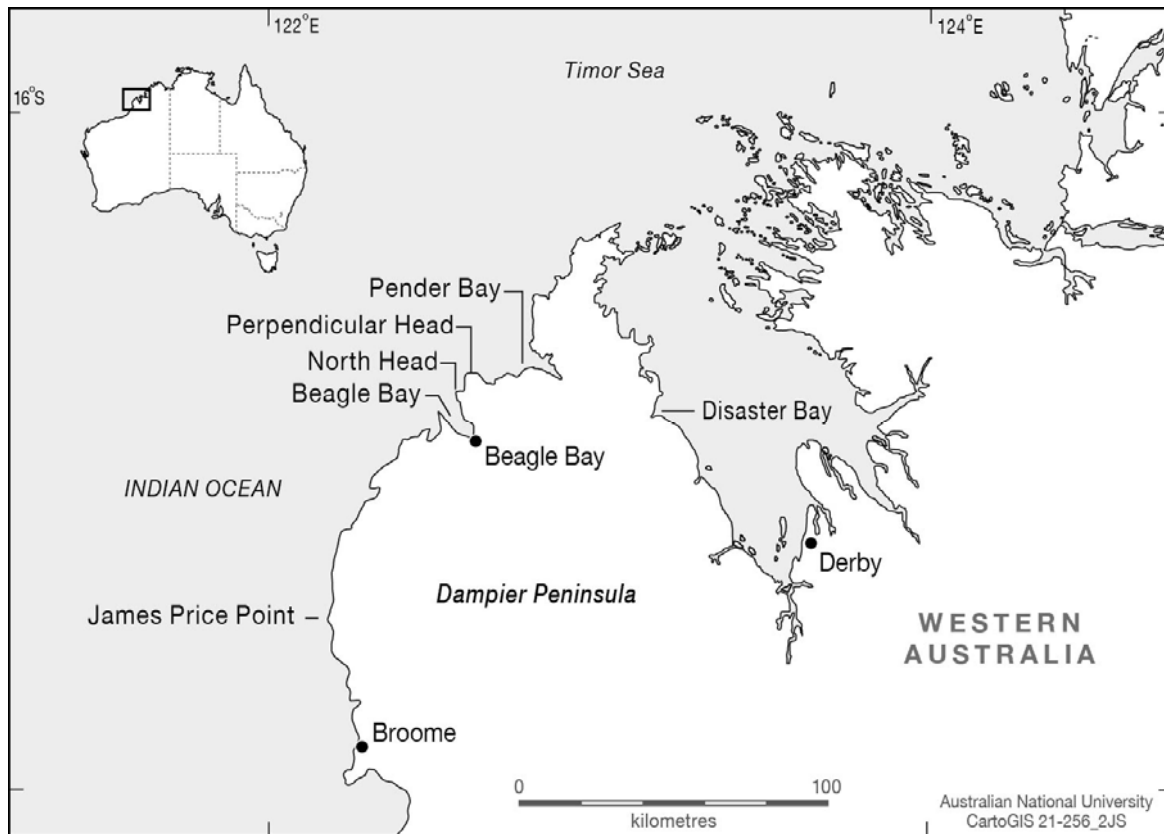


Figure 6: Middle Dampier Peninsula region

I worked with a set of cousins from a family that I will call the Swain family. The family is numerous. Daniel Swain was sent to Beagle Bay from the Fitzroy Valley region in the early 20th century, where he grew up and then married a Nimanbur woman from the east coast of the Peninsula. With the encouragement of the Catholic church they had 12 children born from the late 1920s onwards and their children had large families too, averaging 10 children.

FIELDWORK LOCATIONS – THE PLACES

During my field research I concentrated on Blocks north of Beagle Bay Community, a region loosely referred to as ‘north of the causeway’ denoting the road crossing over a tidal creek outside Beagle Bay. The road to the Blocks is ungazetted and as such is not subject to regular engineering and maintenance. Large pipes, lumps of concrete and building debris are used to make repairs to the causeway when the sand and mud upon which the road is constructed shifts and the causeway is often impassable after high tides or in wet weather. Discussing the condition of the causeway was a regular conversation starter. During the early 2000s, when the Blocks were being established, a resident advocacy body was created named ‘North of the Causeway Action Group’. This group included the full-time residents of a cluster of Blocks who mobilized to

lobby for essential services such as a school bus to Beagle Bay, rubbish dumps, road maintenance and testing of drinking water. However, there was no organisation to target for the provision of such services which are typically managed by a local municipal council, and the Beagle Bay Community Incorporated lacked the resources to extend its services beyond the community.

Like the other Beagle Bay leases, all these Blocks averaged 50 acres and most are located on the coast and operate as tourism ventures since the beaches provide a particularly attractive draw-card for tourists. One Block, which I call Springside, is located inland and at the time of my visits did not operate a tourism business but sought an income from service provision and offering facilities for teaching and training.

Springside

Springside is situated in a particular kind of bushland which is found around Beagle Bay and is notable for its numerous fresh water springs. Indeed, the springs around Beagle Bay are so numerous and the resulting vegetation so prolific that you can smell this spring country from Gundaragin Gully, being the last gully before Beagle Bay community, when you drive in from Broome. A passenger remarked to me once when we were driving to the community from Broome that she could smell the change in the country as we entered the spring country around Beagle Bay. Similar to the other Blocks, Springside was organised and operated by a family. Solomon, a senior man, his wife, their children and grandchildren lived permanently at the Block. Two of Solomon's daughters held tertiary degrees obtained through Notre Dame University in Broome. Springside Block is within walking distance of Beagle Bay settlement (albeit a long walk) and operated with steady funding to provide training programs. One structure was purpose built and dedicated to learning and research, housing an informal classroom. Jenny Macklin, then Federal minister for Aboriginal Affairs, opened the building in 2009. Professional training staff from Broome or Perth conducted a program called My Action Plan (or MAP) at the facility. The MAP program offered help from professionals to do tax returns, obtain drivers' licences, organise settlement of fines or offer legal advocacy projects and assist in sorting outstanding paperwork. Bernadette (Solomon's daughter) established links with the University of New South Wales to provide either free or low cost legal advice for Aboriginal people using the MAP Centre. Young males were especially targeted for the training centre. In 2009 Springside hosted a weeklong conference on Aboriginal suicide at which over 200 professionals, health workers, state

and Federal government officials as well as Church members gathered. Two more similar conferences followed.

A tourism venture was planned but did not eventuate and over time the training programs lost funding. Springside is now maintained as a family retreat and the study skills centre and advocacy building are now unused.

Billabong

During the mission era the area round Billabong was part of the Bell family cattle station and dormitory children would spend holidays camping there. Paul, as an Aboriginal child of mixed descent, was taken from the Fitzroy Valley in the 1950s and sent to Beagle Bay Mission under the assimilationist policies of the time. Paul grew up in the Beagle Bay dormitories and remained living at the community which he regarded as his home. As a child Paul participated in the camping trips to Billabong and this gave him an association with the area based on his own experiences at the dormitory. As a mature adult Paul gained the lease to the Block at Billabong and used superannuation funds saved during the many years he worked for the Water Board in Broome and Derby along with a redundancy payment to fund a tourism venture there³⁷. When Billabong was established in 1995 there was much criticism over both his status as an outsider or historical person, and the number of tourists Paul encouraged into the region.

The resort includes a creek system, the coastline has intricate cliff formations that show latticing and weathering that make for interesting long walks and an ideal environment for low key tourism. Accommodation at Billabong includes a camping area for up to 100 people, safari tents³⁸ as well as airconditioned units and a small shop selling ice and other goods. Boats can be launched at the tidal inlet and the creek running into the bay provides good fishing. The camp grounds are popular with Broome families (generally Whites) on return visits and during long weekends and school holidays the resort is jam packed. Paul passed away in 2010 and the next generation of his family now run the business.

Plum Point

Plum Point is located on a large Bay and Johnny, who identifies as Bardi, has ancestral connection to the region. After travelling through Queensland, the Northern Territory and other

³⁷ Paul reflected the work ethic and determination instilled during his time in the mission. He gained employment with the state water board, a job he held for several decades and that included a generous superannuation agreement.

³⁸ See figure 8 on page 87 for an example of a safari tent.

parts of Australia he returned to Broome and lived at Coconut Wells, a short distance from the town. There he met Lauren, a White woman from Sydney, who became his partner. The two took the opportunity to live in the region of Johnny's ancestral lands and eventually gained their own lease where they settled and had four children. At first they lived in a house which they built themselves until 2004 when the family received what was to be one of the last houses provided through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and the Department of Housing and Works. The house was built using recycled materials and included some experimental technologies and featured solar panels to generate electricity. It was architecturally designed with dramatic high ceilings, an open, spacious lounge room extending to a deck made of recycled plastics with an uninterrupted view of the bay. With the demise of CDEP funding the family decided to use the house as a café and develop adjacent grounds as a camping area so they could run a tourist business in the Dry Season. The family went back to live in the house they had built themselves for the duration of the tourist season. With the onset of the Wet they closed the café and moved back to live in the more substantial government supplied house.

Sunset Beach

Sunset Beach is also located on a large bay and comprises a 50 acres lease. It is now the permanent home of Casey Swain who informed my research and her aspirations for the Block were a catalyst for my choice of PhD topic. Casey and I had worked together in Broome and when possible I would take my two children to camp at Sunset Beach. Casey and her partner Shane owned a house in Broome where they lived with their eight month old child. Casey had taken advantage of a lease for the Block at Sunset Beach gained by her uncle (her mother's brother) who consented to Casey occupying the lease with her partner and son. The family based themselves at a living area created by Casey's uncle where there were basic structures such as a drop toilet and camp kitchen. The family applied for ATSIC assistance for housing but were unsuccessful. Shane was a carpenter and the couple set about building their tourist accommodation while the family lived in a caravan. Water had to be carted from a bore some seven kilometres away and a generator was purchased to provide power a little later. Access to Sunset Beach was via a sandy and rutted track from the main Dampier Peninsula road.

Casey and her family had been willing to relocate and rough it out in a caravan at the Block, at least on a temporary basis, even though they could have lived fulltime with electricity and running water in Broome.

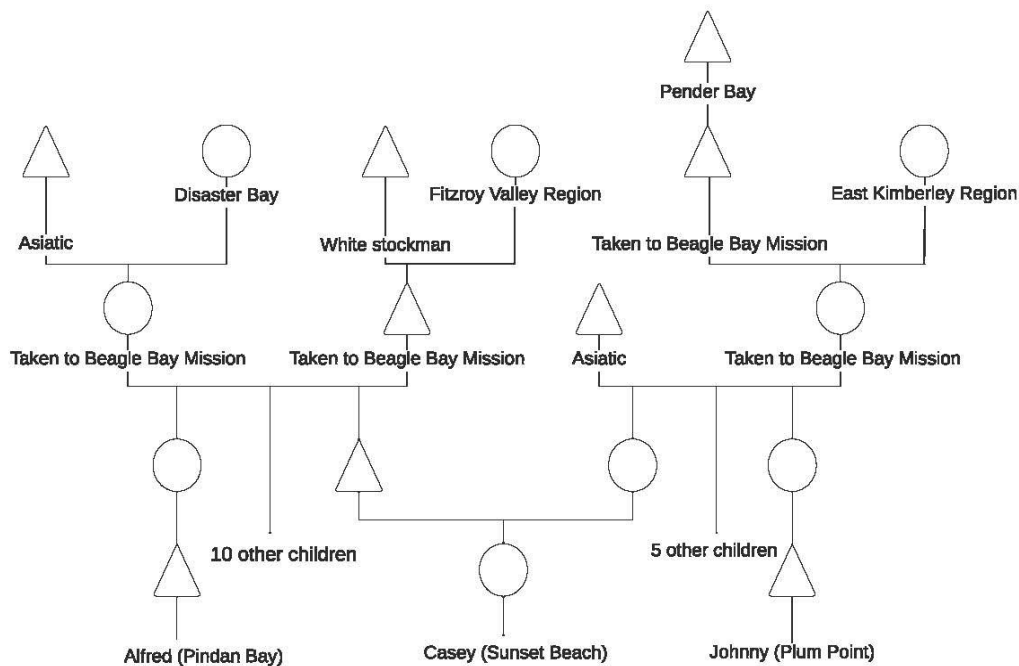


Figure 7: Genealogical ties between proprietors of Pindan Bay, Sunset Beach and Plum Point.

Pindan Bay

I first visited Pindan Bay while undertaking native title research for the KLC in 2008. I had a trip organized at the last minute to Beagle Bay. There was no accommodation available there so I asked one of the Aboriginal staff at the Land Council (a member of the Swain family) if he knew of anywhere I could stay. All I was really looking for was a safe place to roll out my swag and somebody who would be generous enough to accommodate a KLC staff member at short notice. The residents of Pindan Bay were welcoming and the accommodation represented comfortable bush living. I spent two years using Pindan Bay as a base when I worked on the Peninsula, at first doing native title research and then undertaking my PhD research and fieldwork. I paid Alfred and Sandra \$40 per night to stay, but visitors were always made to feel welcome and Alfred and Sandra had a reputation as generous people, great hosts that are always quick to offer food and beverages.

Alfred is a first cousin to Casey Swain at Sunset Beach (Alfred is Casey's FZS) so Sunset Beach and Pindan Bay are both operated by Swain family members. Casey is also first cousin to Johnny

at Plum Point (Casey's mother was sister to Johnny's mother). These relationships and other summary aspects of the family's history are shown in Figure 7.

Despite the close connections of kinship, Alfred and Casey have quite different life histories. Casey is 10 years younger, grew up in the newly formed Beagle Bay Aboriginal community, rather than under the mission regime and Casey was socialized in a very different manner to Alfred. Casey married a White person and lived in Queensland during her 20s. Casey is relatively outspoken, willing to join various committees and frequently gives interviews on Radio National concerning Aboriginal issues in her region. Alfred seldom seeks publicity and nurtures the family relationships he can enjoy on his own Block.

Alfred and his wife Sandra were both raised in the Beagle Bay Mission; Sandra in the dormitories and Alfred in a Swain family residence in the housing section of the mission formally known as 'the colony'. As a young man Alfred worked as a stockman for the Beagle Bay pastoral lease, and then as a mission trained carpenter. Alfred and Sandra married in their late teens at Beagle Bay Church and had seven children. Once they gained the Block lease they lived there permanently and their youngest children were raised there. By the time I started my fieldwork the family had lived permanently at Pindan Bay for over 10 years.

What I describe above offers background on the size, location and occupancy of the Blocks as well as briefly detailing some of the aspirations of the residents. In this thesis I focus on three of the Blocks discussed above as I had greater contact with the residents there. The three Blocks which became the focus of my field research were Pindan Bay, Plum Point and Sunset Beach.

SETTING UP AND RUNNING THE FAMILY BUSINESS

The economic activities of the Block residents include what can be termed both formal and informal activity. Tourism was an obvious choice for formal engagement with the market economy, however very low income was expected. The first business plan for Pindan Bay outlined an income from tourism of only \$15,000 per year as the predicted gross revenue to support three permanent residents. This reflected a level of remuneration that would have been well below award wages or what was considered as a viable mainstream business income. In the past Block residents had relied on the regional service provider, KRCCI, which sponsored income through CDEP. As CDEP funding diminished and eventually was no longer available, Block residents recognised that government assistance would only be provided when there was a business model that demonstrated that some income at least could be earned from the

enterprise, evidence of a step towards self-sufficiency. Each of the Blocks where I conducted my fieldwork operated businesses and all were tourist ventures, although Pindan Bay had started out operating an entirely different sort of commercial operation. While each business was different, they had much in common. In what follows I describe these commercial activities and explain something of their genesis.

Plum Point

The Plum Point residents gained funding for their development through National Employment Incentive Scheme (NEIS) after CDEP was withdrawn. This was a mainstream funding source rather than Aboriginal specific. The NEIS funding was available for one year only. I do not have data on any grant income after the one year of NEIS support but was led to understand that they had attracted occasional funding from programs aimed at small business development.

Johnny and Lauren developed Plum Point as a low-key tourist enterprise catering for a limited number of visitors. The camping area was developed to be intentionally small, allowing for five camping sites only and each campsite is separated by bush for privacy. There is a rustic out-door shower made of sculptured pindan earth with glass and handmade ornaments embedded into the pindan. The camping area also has a pit toilet and camp kitchen. The campsite was around 200 metres walk through vegetation to the main house which also functioned as a café. The seclusion and availability of ablution facilities and the camp kitchen meant that tourists could avoid the café and contact with others if they desired.

There were no facilities for caravans and no easy beach access so boats were not encouraged. Promoting the venture as low impact and connecting to nature were selling points for the tourists. The café sold cakes, coffee, and light meals. The property was well thought out, the veranda and views of the Bay, plus the quality of the food, led to a rapid spread of a good reputation for the venture and many government workers and local White families camping at the more populous Billabong resort travelled to Plum Point for lunch and a coffee.

The business was significantly influenced by Lauren. Lauren often greeted tourists when they arrived. For many tourists unfamiliar with Kimberley road conditions the corrugation and soft sandy tracks are stressful. The signs for the various Blocks are generally handmade and hammered into trees and while they are obvious to locals, tourists who are unfamiliar with informal signage often become disoriented and anxious on the numerous dirt tracks and find getting to the Blocks difficult. During one stay I watched a group of tourists arrive at Plum Point

frustrated and aggressive. Lauren listened to their various complaints without any retaliation and showed them to their campsite. Lauren held great faith in the natural surrounds of the Block and told me that tourists calm down once they stay the night and relax into the bush settings.

Lauren maintains gardens at the Block and uses some of the produce from the gardens in the café. The café is usually busy with a mixture of camping guests, tourists coming to visit from the larger Billabong resort and government workers finding time to stop at Plum Point during their Dampier Peninsula field trip.

Johnny and Lauren recognised additional business opportunities including camel tours which Johnny operated from the Block, taking tourists on beach rides similar to those offered at Cable Beach in Broome. Johnny and Lauren also introduced educational tours identifying and harvesting wild bush fruits ('bush tucker tours'), available on request for a fee. One local bush food speciality is *gubinge* (*Terminalia ferdinandiana*) famous for its extremely high vitamin C content³⁹ which is gathered in season and Beagle Bay community residents travel to the Block to assist with processing the wild harvest. The annual crop is sold and I was told may bring in as much as \$30,000 per year. Processed bush foods, including *gubinge* powder, is for sale at the café along with other local products such as wood carvings, paintings and printed fabrics.

In this way the residents of Plum Point have had some degree of success with engagement in the market economy and gain income from the camping fees, café takings and from the sale of processed *gubinge*, supplemented by some small business funding support from the state, when it is available.

Sunset Beach

Casey did not negotiate as early as some of the other Block residents with the service providers for support and this coupled with her partner Shane's hot headedness led to Sunset Beach achieving very limited assistance before the abolition of ATSIC.

When they began living at the Block there was CDEP assistance available to build some of the tourist accommodation, but Casey and Shane often preferred negotiating outside standard outstation funding sources and approached various government departments and White enterprises for additional assistance. Indigenous Community Volunteers assisted with plumbing

³⁹ Reported to provide one of the richest sources of vitamin C yielding 50 times that of oranges: Kenneally, Edinger and Willing 1996, 88.

and also volunteers from an organisation known as Willing Workers on Organic Farms Australia were welcomed and accommodated without charge in exchange for providing labour. Casey established good business relationships with another tourism resort south of Broome, run by a White long term Broome resident who had several business interests (including housing construction works in Aboriginal communities), which proved beneficial. Shane and Casey also owned a house in Broome which they used as surety to borrow money for their business venture. Both sold their labour in Broome periodically to gain various supplies.

Casey also spent considerable time and energy seeking sources of funding and was tenacious. She understood the requirement to bend to the bureaucratic demands of the funding agencies that increasingly demanded a focus on the economics of running a small business. With an increasing emphasis on economic viability and consequential changes to funding criteria, the language of budgets and work plans was augmented by management terms like 'strategic plan', 'business plan' and 'key performance indicators'. Casey sought funding from wherever she considered a potential source, understanding the requirements and demands of the new funding environment. Eventually, she was successful in securing a grant of nearly half a million dollars from the State Indigenous Regional Development Program which had as its primary objective the encouragement, promotion and support for, 'the sustainable development of Indigenous communities in regional Western Australia in a culturally appropriate way'.⁴⁰ The Program was part of the State Government's \$80 million Regional Investment Fund. Casey's success in gaining the funding was known by many and there was gossip about how she managed to gain such a generous amount.

⁴⁰ <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/Gallop/2005/09/Regional-Investment-Fund-delivers-benefits-for-WA-regions.aspx> accessed 17 December 2020. The original website from which this quotation is taken is no longer available.

One anecdotal explanation for this funding success I heard was that Casey and her partner Shane missed out on ATSI funding for housing and other infrastructure as these sources of money were no longer available by the time they began to implement their business plans. The State grant was provided in recognition of their loss and to compensate for it. Another, perhaps more plausible explanation, is that the couple owned a private house in Broome. Their house was substantial, in a 'good' part of town and worth around \$700,000 at the time. It is possible they were considered favourably in the grant assessment process because they owned private property, which was interpreted as evidence of their business sense and of having a keen understanding of what might work at the Block. With \$80 million available for regional investment the couple would have seemed like an excellent choice in support of remote Aboriginal tourism.



Figure 8: An example of Safari Hut style accommodation at a resort near Broome

Casey told me that right from the beginning she wanted to establish the infrastructure for a specific type of tourism, a style nicknamed 'glamping', an abbreviation of 'glamorous camping'. This style of accommodation offers amenities and resort style services in exclusive or isolated

locations. Construction on the Block was informed by a sound sense of what tourists would expect at such a location. The chalets known as ‘Safari huts’, prefabricated in China and assembled on site, were separated by several hundred metres, ensuring privacy and quiet, with access through the bush by means of a track. Sunset Beach markets as an exclusive resort and in 2010 charged \$170 per night to stay at a safari hut. Like Plum Point, Casey wanted to keep visitor numbers low. Five accommodation units were constructed, then lost to bush fires twice and had to be replaced.

At Sunset Beach there is a single focus – tourism. The chalets are kept in order for the tourists and visits from members of Casey’s immediate or more distant family are not as frequent as those I observed on most of the other Blocks. Although Casey blamed Shane for the lack of family visits, much of Casey’s time was spent hosting tourists and she was able to attract high profile visitors to stay, such as state bureaucrats or media celebrities who stayed during the James Price Point development process.⁴¹

Casey believed that the social demands of her Aboriginality could threaten her business and her autonomy. One evening, round the camp fire Casey told me that having a long history with Beagle Bay could ‘hold you back’. She explained that the problem with Beagle Bay was that everyone knew your business.

Even without any form of threat of blackmail or whatever, because people know so much about you, it holds you back, being talked about, something devastating could be aired about you as malicious gossip. I mean, everyone in the community knows who is staying in your house, even when you water your lawn and that can be restricting. It stops you from doing things for fear of being put down.

Casey took the view that the Block was not only an opportunity to run a business that would provide an independent income, but it was also an avenue for autonomy from the relationships and obligations that had been a part of her upbringing.

Despite her desire to establish a lifestyle outside of the Beagle Bay community, Casey actively promoted her Aboriginality in her own terms. Casey knew of some of the cultural sites in the area of the Block and was fiercely proud of her Aboriginal heritage. She tailored her presentation of culture to the tourists to suit her audience simplifying its content and employing icons to

⁴¹ A series of meetings, confrontations and negotiations focused on a proposal to develop an on-shore natural gas processing plant on the western Dampier Peninsula. I discuss this proposed project in chapter 6 below.

assist in getting her message across. This approach was evidently successful since I learnt that many people in Broome felt an emotional bond with Sunset Beach as a result of Casey spending time to sit and be with them on the beach or around the campfire. I watched Casey answer questions from tourists who had spent little or no personal time with Aboriginal people and patiently respond to what seemed to me to be intrusive or awkward questioning. Former visitors sent her poems showing how impressed they were with her energy levels and abilities in running an ecologically friendly retreat.

Pindan Bay

One of the houses at the Pindan Bay Block was provided through ATSIC and the Department of Planning and Works towards the end of Aboriginal specific funding for outstations. In 2006 and in the early years of their occupation KRCI funded a scoping report for tourism for Pindan Bay and the report found that tourism in the area was viable, accepting that it would yield only a modest income. Alfred and Sandra considered applying to various funding bodies to establish tourism. A professional consultant working for the local Aboriginal business support agency wrote a business plan. This first plan recommended that they take out a \$25,000 loan for website design, marketing, and to build an ablution block. But Alfred and Sandra were unwilling to borrow money to establish the venture. They preferred to access CDEP funding for payment to supervise trainees and the Block infrastructure was also maintained through the same funding source, assisted by Alfred's skill as a carpenter.

Alfred and Sandra, with the help of various visitors and family members, constructed four accommodation units and a camp kitchen with recycled materials, corrugated iron sheeting and wood that the Catholic Bishop of Broome donated, which were restored with silicon and paint until they were in a condition to be used. Alfred possessed skills as a bush carpenter and handyman that enabled him and his family to live comfortably at Pindan Bay and eventually the Block boasted substantial infrastructure.

The accommodation and facilities were not designed for tourism but were leased to the local training organization Nirambuk for a construction and horticultural training project growing European vegetable crops as a part of CDEP traineeship. The training consisted of construction and mechanical work supervised by Alfred, while a White staff member, Bruce, supervised horticultural training. Large gardens and a greenhouse were established for the training project, as required by the funding body. Six younger men came from Beagle Bay and stayed in chalets for the week and received CDEP payments as a wage Monday to Friday. On Thursday night

there was some end of the week drinking and on Friday morning the young men would return to Beagle Bay. Nirambuk paid Bruce as a trainer. Bruce lived permanently at the Block, unlike other trainers, he did not own or rent a house in Broome or Derby and just stayed with friends or acquaintances when he had to be in town for extended stays. Bruce had been living at Pindan Bay for a year when I first went there, but by that time considered himself as adoptive kin, Alfred was his 'brother' and he assumed personal access to things like food and regularly joined the family for meals instead of catering for himself at the staff accommodation.

Significant changes to the funding arrangements in 2009 saw an end to the CDEP projects and wages at Pindan Bay. Funding conditions forced Nirambuk to cut Bruce's training position. Those seeking wages through CDEP had to travel to Beagle Bay and take up employment there. Alfred initially expressed disgust at the loss of funding. However, on reflection, he decided that tourism would replace the horticultural training, resurrecting the 2006 tourism scoping report and business plan. The existing infrastructure was adaptable and Alfred recognised that the accommodation units could be charged out on a daily basis as chalets for tourists. Land cleared near the beach held the potential for approximately twenty campsites charged out at the rate of twenty dollars per person, per night.

Alfred also saw the change in the business arrangements as an opportunity. Pindan Bay residents were keen to build a second house for the Block, where visiting corporation members and their many children could stay. The shift to tourism provided the opportunity to gain an additional house and perhaps other tourist infrastructure too, provided funding was secured.

The changes to the business model could not be accomplished overnight. Modifications were necessary to accommodate tourists and some additional facilities had to be built. Alfred needed a source of income which was only available at Beagle Bay. Alfred expressed concerns about the security of the Block. He told me that if they moved away from the Block leaving the property vacant it would be treated 'like a supermarket'. He said, 'if we move, like shopping here, everyone will be robbing us'. Certainly, Blocks were prime targets for stealing equipment vital for occupation such as solar panels and generators. The Block had substantial infrastructure established and Alfred risked theft and damage from intruders if he left the place vacant. Alfred and Sandra decided to remain living at Pindan Bay and to travel four times a week into Beagle Bay, a journey on a poor dirt track that took forty minutes each way, to ensure that the Block was not vandalised and the assets pilfered. At Beagle Bay they were able to receive CDEP payments as the program continued there. Alfred got a job fixing the Beagle Bay cemetery,

where his sister had recently been buried, and Sandra did work at the Women's Centre. While they both spent some time socializing with extended family and friends at Beagle Bay, they spoke about needing to be at Pindan Bay to take telephone calls and set up the tourism business. In this way, they were able to access CDEP wages to support themselves while they prepared the Block for the tourism business.

Initially, Alfred was also successful in attracting a short-term allocation of CDEP wages from the Beagle Bay program, which enabled him to build an additional structure which could be used for accommodation, consisting of a concrete pad with a steel frame and shade cloth attached to keep the insects at bay. While it also had a steel roof for shade it was much less substantial than the government-funded house they used as the principal place of living. Other buildings were modified and by the time the tourist business was up and running the infrastructure on the Block consisted of a solar power system, mechanics' shed, women's centre/art room, tool room, camp kitchen, four accommodation units (renamed 'chalets'), fish scaling area, boat ramp, camping grounds, house, ablution block, and a rubbish dump. The Block was fenced.

Alfred's work history as a stockman and then as a carpenter, is reflected in the Block which was always in good order. There was a sense of industry, planning for new buildings and the older buildings were continuously repaired and maintained.

While the accommodation at Pindan Bay offered a degree of flexibility they reflected a practical approach to bush living rather than the buildings expected in a tourism venture. The Pindan Bay house, where Alfred and Sandra lived, was utilitarian, compared with the architect-designed accommodation built at Plum Point. The Pindan Bay house had practical wrap around verandas where most of the cooking and socialising occurred and could also be used as accommodation for excess visitors when necessary.

The four accommodation units had concrete floors, corrugated iron walls and power connected. There was good lighting and overhead fans and they were painted and neat. However, with shutter windows and no fly screens, no air-conditioning, bare floors and uninsulated walls, they were not what a tourist, booking from the major cities either in the south of the State or further afield, might expect or envisage when they made an online or telephone booking for what is represented as a 'beach chalet'. In addition, the huts were located adjacent to each other with only about four metres separating each hut, whereas they could have been spaced out on a block of 50 acres. They were built in a manner sensible to Aboriginal people, who, unlike the tourists,

are more aware of the risks in the bush, appreciate the protection in staying close to each other and place a greater emphasis on families and social interaction. Tourists generally favour separation from other chalets and typically are looking for peace, quiet and serenity in a bush retreat.

Despite these commercial limitations, Pindan Bay had a 'wow' factor for other Aboriginal people in the area. Compared with Blocks where buildings consisted of an old caravan and a bough shed, the infrastructure at Pindan Bay was (and remains) impressive, and even more inspiring to the people of the region who know how difficult it is to maintain buildings on the remote coast. The Block also offered excellent fishing, this also being a principal asset for attracting tourists.

With a history of adapting infrastructure to suit different funding environments Alfred and Sandra were better placed than most in terms of their appreciation of the likely demands of funding providers and the types of infrastructure that would provide for the greatest flexibility. They also ensured that the Block corporation that held the lease had a generous membership (35 people) although there were only three permanent residents on the Block. Both the nature of the facilities and the inclusive nature of corporation membership reflected government guidelines with respect to outstations or small community development and so served to facilitate the gaining of further funding.

Business as family

While tourism and running a family business was a common preoccupation across all three Blocks, I came to understand that the business was far more than a money-making enterprise. Indeed, both family and family life-style were as important if not more important than the tourist trade. But this was not the extended family of far-flung kin or those who sought inclusion through some distant or classificatory connection. Family was immediate family – grandparents, children and their affines. The physical distance from Beagle Bay settlement allowed a certain level of separation from extended kin who were not a part of the family business. At Pindan Bay Alfred attempted to maintain an ordered establishment where family could come, where tourists lived separately, and the primary focus was a place for family to gather for a break from town and for support. It was a place that always has a beer on offer, where Sandra is a great cook and where Alfred was head of the family and kept things in order. Immediate family would visit from Broome some weekends, but not every weekend. The grandchildren consistently visited on school holidays. When I visited Pindan Bay and I asked Sandra about the chalets, she told me they were built for her grandchildren to have somewhere to stay and made no mention of the

commercial purposes to which they had been and were being put. Discussion I had regarding the commercial aspects of the Blocks often stressed that the building of the business was a family duty. Similar descriptions were given by Casey for Sunset Beach, that the tourism enterprise would stay small, but would be substantial enough to provide jobs for her family. The enterprises were described as ‘family run’ businesses.

While the formal business arrangements were facilitated and made possible by tourism, the occupation of the Blocks involved informal economic activity which included bush and marine resource exploitation, principally fishing and other sea harvesting which served to supplement store-bought food. Despite the potential or assumed economic benefits of any business venture it was the quality of life, ‘living on the Block’ that was expressed as the first and loudest response when I asked people why they had chosen to live there. ‘It’s a hard life but a good life’ was the response and ‘we’re getting there’ were statements that frequently punctuated discussions. There was limited focus on the economic use of the land or expanding the enterprise. The desire to accumulate capital was notably absent. Abandoned neighbouring Blocks were not seen as a potential for expansion of the business. Rather, the ethos was one of holding on to what had been carved out already. Casey at Sunset Beach consistently started her explanations to other Aboriginal people about what she was aiming to achieve at the Block as, ‘it’s a small business, only 10 tourists at a time’, making obvious that the enterprise would not encourage large numbers of outsiders into the area, and showing that she was not ‘greedy’. The business enterprises were described as family run and this assisted in avoiding being regarded as ‘greedy’ that is, blatantly individualistic and seeking to make herself bigger or larger than others in the area.

Contributions from town based family members

The Blocks and the businesses of the Blocks were not funded solely from the profits of tourism or from government grants, when these could be obtained. There were also significant transmittals from family members who worked away from the Peninsula, in Broome, or further afield in Perth and who could afford to send some of their earnings to support the family Block and its enterprises. While these gifts were sometimes in cash they were more commonly in kind; vehicles, chainsaws, blowers and other pieces of equipment.

The Pindan Bay business plan described the contributions of family members as ‘chuck-in’. This is a term widely used in the Kimberley for money that is a gift or is a contribution made for a specific purpose and while not a loan may imply an expectation of unspecified reciprocation.

The money given to the church collection plate is 'chuck-in' as is money thrown into the centre of a rug during a large card game to create a generous float. The financial contributions made by family members of Block residents who live in town and have paid employment is also called 'chuck-in'. Money sent to the Block was sometimes in the form of direct cash transfers or specific goods were purchased and given to the corporation. For example, two important items were obtained for Pindan Bay through cash transfers from daughters living in Broome. The oldest daughter sent \$7,500 to buy a second-hand four wheel drive utility which was much needed to service the Block as well as to perform maintenance jobs round the community. A younger daughter paid for a petrol-powered blower, effective for cleaning the chalet floors and reducing the time spent raking yards. Use of the blower meant that Alfred and Sandra were able to keep the Block and its facilities, clean, neat and tidy for the tourists with far less time and labour than had been required when these tasks were undertaken manually with a broom or rake. Some chuck-in was in cash and was not evident to an observer like me, but it was clear that financial support was being provided from family members.

Chuck-in serves to maintain family members' connection to the Block and justify access during school holidays and for major gatherings like anniversaries, watching the Aussie Rules football grand final, or significant birthdays. Chuck-in is more than an additional source of funding. It helps to articulate the relationship between the older generation (who live on the Blocks) and those who live elsewhere.

The adult offspring of the Pindan Bay Block residents have mostly attended boarding schools and some have tertiary qualifications. Having grown used to life in larger population centres and enjoying well-paid employment and sometimes status as community leaders, most have little or no desire to live on a Block with limited facilities, few comforts and no or extremely limited employment. This generation, who were all born after the Beagle Bay Mission ceased operations, send chuck-in money to the Blocks where their parents or uncles and aunts now live.

Alfred and Sandra were raised in Beagle Bay and had seven children, six girls and the youngest, a boy. Their children were sent south to be educated and have subsequently acquired well-paid jobs at the Land Council, in education, or work in environmental protection and management. These daughters are non-drinkers and dedicated mothers. Their partners are employed in mining and other trade-based industries. These adult children are members of the Pindan Bay corporation and the oldest does the bookwork, keeping track of income from tourists, preparing tax returns and submitting paper work to the government departments on time to keep the

corporation registered. The grandchildren are now also being sent south for their education. During school holidays the daughters send their children to the Block and Sandra works long hours to care for them.

Payment of chuck-in by the daughters to the Block serves to stress the importance of close kinship ties and can be understood as a social glue. But it also provides the basis for asserting a sense of ownership of the Block and its business and so too of a right of access during occasional weekends and school holidays. For close kin who live some distance from the Block and are raising their families in an urban centre the Block is seen as a healthy rehabilitative place, free of the drugs, juvenile petty crime and the predominantly White culture of town life. On the Block young people can be 'straightened out' if the need arises, while those suffering some emotional crisis can be provided with the headspace to organize a return to clarity of mind. Above all else, visits to the Block are seen as an opportunity to re-engage with a traditional past, to hunt, gather, fish and live on the land and gain contact with Aboriginal cultural values and practices.

Chuck-in contributions symbolize the commitment of younger family members to a land holding corporation and represent a significant aspect of inter-generational continuity. Chuck-in characterises the practical as well as emotional connection to the Block and serves to situate the younger family members within the ideology of the Block. Chuck-in contributions also provide a real source of much needed cash and material benefit. The potential contributions made by younger family members are listed in the business plan to show commitment to the enterprise and potentially justify further funding. Assessment of chuck-in is considered a legitimate and significant aspect of the Block economy and is included in any analysis of present or projected corporation income undertaken by prospective funding agencies.

Detail on the financial returns from activities

Gaining accurate figures on income and grants was not possible given the relationships I had with the Block residents and I did not have access to annual tax returns. Block residents were sometimes guarded about funding sources and I was not told about some grants and did not pursue exhaustive information, I was interested in social relations rather than material exchange. Chuck-in was informal and perhaps other informal sources of funding were not disclosed to me during the time I spent on the Peninsula. Benefits derived from CDEP were often indirect and earning money from paid employment outside the Block was hard to quantify. I was however able to gather information from business plans about some sources of income, chuck-in, cash

and external earnings over a two year period. Funding agencies are provided with the business plan and for Pindan Bay that plan included chuck-in. The figures I have assembled in Table 4.1 illustrate the creative and varied funding sources that Block residents engage with and serve to demonstrate the wide-ranging income origins accessed rather than representing absolute amounts.

Income type	Block	Source	Amount	Item
Chuck-in.	Pindan Bay.	Daughter's work at KLC.	\$7,500.	Vehicle.
		Daughter's work at Environs Kimberley.	\$300.	Petrol blower.
		Daughter.	\$6,500.	Marketing.
		Daughter's volunteer book keeping.	Labour costs (unspecified).	Book keeping, tax returns and maintaining corporation registration.
State grant.	Sunset Beach.	Indigenous Regional Development grants program.	\$451,000.	Tourist accommodation infrastructure.
Paid employment.	Sunset Beach.	TAFE: for tourism mentoring.	\$250 per day for 10 days.	Cash income used for concrete pad for the office.
Professional service.	Pindan Bay.	Professional web site designer on extended holiday. Free accommodation at Pindan Bay in return for services.	Circa \$2,500.	Web site development.
	Sunset Beach.	Indigenous Community Volunteers.	Labour costs (unspecified).	Tourist camping infrastructure.
	Sunset Beach.	Willing Workers On Organic Farms.	Labour costs (unspecified).	Paths for beach access.
	Sunset Beach.	Plumber.	Labour costs (unspecified).	Plumbing for chalets.
Tourism.	Pindan Bay.	Business customers.	\$20 camping per night, \$40 chalets.	Cash income.

Income type	Block	Source	Amount	Item
	Sunset Beach.	Business customers.	\$170/night Safari tents.	Cash income.
	Plum Point.	Business customers.	\$20 camping per night.	Cash income.

Table 4.1: Examples of funds gained to support the Blocks

The economy of the Blocks is consistent with Altman's hybrid economy (Altman 2007), where customary, state and market forces were enmeshed. Altman also noted that with respect to Indigenous living choices, 'individuals need to be empowered to pursue a livelihood approach one that suits their particular circumstances' (Altman 2007, 7⁴²). By the time I undertook my fieldwork, some ten years after the Blocks had been allocated, only a small number were actually operating as tourism ventures, and the ones that did were small scale and residents found it challenging to cater for the tourists' needs. As I have described above, I visited a number of Blocks, driving through the back tracks and observed that many had half built houses, some with structures that had deteriorated rapidly as a result of fire damage or lack of access and subsequent termite infestations, while others left unoccupied had been vandalized and generators, pumps, or other essential items had been stolen. While this reflects a failure to thrive on the part of some Blocks, some - the focus of my research - not only survived, but also continued to operate despite substantial economic and practical hardship.

MANAGE THE BUSINESS, MANAGE THE TENSIONS

The movement to the Blocks broke the long-term mould of life at Beagle Bay. Embracing a business was also a departure. Block residents were (or aimed to be) self-employed, bosses of their own enterprises and consequently needing to balance the competing demands of their new location and occupation. In this way, the business of the Blocks was not a simple expedition into the world of commercial enterprise. It involved a complex set of relationships, antagonisms and conflicts which required good management. The first of these relates to the fundamentally exploitative nature of tourism.

⁴² Page number to paper as downloaded from <http://www.anu.edu.au/caepr/> accessed 26 June 2020.

Natural resources

A principal focus for the tourists was the active exploitation of the natural resources particularly through fishing. Access to bush foods, often promoted as a part of the tourist package, was amplified by the popular view of the health benefits of eating fresh foods which are a feature of outstations living (Rowley *et al* 2008).⁴³ However, making fishing and access to bush foods a part of the tourist experience increased demand for these natural resources. There was then pressure on the Block residents to be seen to be properly managing the natural resources of their leases in a responsible and sustainable manner. The three Blocks that were the primary focus of my research promoted their business in terms of sustainable resource use and environmental responsibility. While the business models continue to support relatively low-key developments with minimal tourist numbers, these environmental concerns will perhaps remain manageable. However, tourists are increasingly attracted to the Peninsula as road access becomes easier and the completion of an all-weather sealed road from Broome to Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) which was completed in November 2020 is likely to see a substantial increase in the numbers of tourists. Residents of the Blocks recognise that tourism is one of the few sources of generating an income available to them. In order to gain any benefit from this business they must accept both the increase in tourist numbers and the sometimes unwelcome behaviour that it brings and seek to manage the use of resources both on the land and in the sea.

The importance of ensuring a sustainable supply of natural resources also results in conflicts between Block owners, particularly those who were neighbours or near neighbours, as a result of conflicts about access to marine resources since they often could not be identified as the property of one Block rather than another. Regarded as a part of the business capital, fish and crab stock had to be preserved like any other asset – regardless of the fact that fish knew no boundaries. Those I worked with began to question who was fishing in what creek and ask how much was being taken. Aboriginal locals fishing from the beach or rocks were upset when a boat appeared off-shore, especially one carrying White people, since they regarded the fish stocks as their own and not to be taken by tourists fishing using boats from another Block. On one occasion Casey and I were fishing on the shore at Sunset Beach and a boat from the neighbouring Block with tourists aboard drifted up towards the beach to fish. Casey immediately expressed her outrage. ‘They’re fishing off my beach’, she said to me, ‘They should keep away’. She expressed her anger, showing a sense of the Block and the sea coast as contained space of

⁴³ See <https://www.abc.net.au/health/thepulse/stories/2009/10/01/2699261.htm> accessed 29 June 2020.

which she was the owner. During my stay at Pindan Bay the White staff member Bruce decimated the crab population in the local creek, since he observed no bag or size limits. Bruce's actions brought about strident criticism from Block residents and from others who lived in Beagle Bay.

Decentralised living provides ready access to bush foods that have become scarce around more densely populated areas like Broome or Beagle Bay due to over-exploitation. On average Pindan Bay residents fished five times a week and three large freezers were stocked and the catch regularly shared with others. A significant benefit which is a result of having a Block, particularly on the coast, is the marine resources that it readily yields. Having to share these with tourists is yet another point of tension which results from the aspirations of the Block residents.

The tourist footprint

The establishment of tourism business ventures necessarily attracted non-Aboriginal people to the region. Tourists' passive exploitation of the natural environment posed a challenge through an increased presence within the landscape and a knowledge that there was limited control over where visitors might go and how they might behave. The first resorts established in the area were at Billabong and further north in Bardi country at Cape Leveque.⁴⁴ The proponents of these developments suffered considerable backlash from other Peninsula communities for encouraging so many tourists into the area. Common across the Peninsula was the use of the disparaging term 'terrorist' for tourists, while White tour guides escorting them were often described as 'tourists taking tourists around country' reflecting the view that the guides were 'blow-ins' or newcomers and had no real knowledge of the country or authority to speak about it.

The impacts were not however limited to the environment and relationships with the tourists. A second and equally important aspect of the process was the management of relationships with other Aboriginal people in the region. Beagle Bay community residents did not rely on engagement with tourism and they had little to gain from the family run tourism business. Consequently, there was always potential for conflict between Block residents and community residents. Community residents at Beagle Bay and Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) experience the intrusion of tourists without the benefit of direct financial gain. When the larger Billabong resort (discussed above on page 87) was established the initial criticism from Beagle Bay residents

⁴⁴ A tourist resort comprising restaurant, chalets, safari tents and beach shelters owned by the Bardi community of One Arm Point and located 70 kilometres north north east of Beagle Bay.

related to the rights of an historical person to hold the lease and encourage tourists into the Aboriginal reserve lands. Consequently, there was a tension between those who saw in tourism a threat to their independence and way of living and those who, as Block holders, regarded tourism as a means to facilitate their continued occupation of their leases.

By the time I began fieldwork Billabong had been operating for over a decade and there was some degree of acceptance of tourist activity in the region. Tourists stopped at Beagle Bay to visit the gothic style church and generally restricted sight-seeing to the 'white' part of the settlement, the area occupied by the Church. One of the members of the Swain family established a bakery for a time with goods available to both tourists and community residents. Attempts were also made to control tourists through make-shift signs erected on the oval with 'locals only' written to dissuade tourists from using the causeway and back roads to the north-of-the-causeway Blocks. When booking accommodation Casey advised tourists to take the main road to her Block and avoid the backroads out from the Beagle Bay community in an attempt to reduce the impact of her venture on the local community.

At Pindan Bay the shift to tourism from horticultural training and reliance on CDEP funding brought with it the reality of having White tourists present in the community – something that Alfred found not altogether comfortable.

The first tourists that came to stay at Pindan Bay while I was doing fieldwork were a shock. After being used to just Bruce and I as the only Whites and hearing the dulcet tones of the Beagle Bay accent the manner and behaviour of the tourists were a stark contrast. They considered themselves Kimberley 'locals' and were quick to tell me that they lived permanently in Broome. Four couples arrived in four vehicles with two towing a boat. The group brought incredibly large blue eskis to transport the fish they caught back to Broome. Behaviour that would be considered intrusive and quite offensive to Aboriginal people could be entirely normal to Whites. The Block residents used the phrase, 'rush 'im up' to describe behaviour that lacked cultural awareness and was impetuous, disrespectful and had no regard for another's privacy. Such actions could be as simple as entering Alfred's house rather than waiting in the car and tooting three times as instructed by the sign that Alfred erected outside his veranda. When I spoke to a party of tourists over a camp fire and shared mud crabs they had caught, they had no hesitation in voicing their opinions about Aboriginal people. They told me that, 'Aboriginal people got too much'. Some pointed to the land and the buildings of the Block and assumed that these had been 'given' by 'the government' merely because the residents were Aboriginal. There was little understanding of

the history of assimilation practices or what the outstations represented in terms of hard work, Aboriginal identity and self-determination.

The Whitefella as mediator and broker

Common to all three of the Blocks I chose as case studies for my field research was the presence of a non-Aboriginal person, although their roles varied enormously. At Plum Point Johnny was married to a non-Aboriginal woman, Lauren, who played a significant role in the conduct of the business. At Sunset Beach Casey was also married to a non-Aboriginal man, although his direct involvement in the business of the Block was less obvious. At Pindan Bay Alfred and Sandra relied on the services of Bruce, who had come to the Block as a training provider and stayed on to play a significant if ephemeral role in the tourist business. Not all Blocks had their resident White person – Billabong for example, which was a long-established and successful business venture featured no non-Aboriginal player. However, for those Blocks with which I was engaged, the White person played important roles as both mediator and broker between the Block holders' ideals, aspirations, business plans and operations and the non-Aboriginal world of social, cultural and economic interaction.

Tourism requires inter-personal skills and the personal touch. Tourists in remote parts of Australia are not always the easiest of people to deal with. Their behaviour is not always gentle and polite, as I noted above. I observed that dealing with the tourists as they arrived at Pindan Bay was left to Bruce. Bruce and I had many jokes about the tourists with Bruce doing quirky imitations of their behaviour. Bruce did not hesitate to express himself directly to a tourist if he felt it necessary in a manner that would be considered outrageous to those raised in a small Church institution at Beagle Bay. Some tourists tried to overstep the agreed conditions of their stay, for example by paying camping rates at \$20 per night but wanting to use the chalet kitchen as part of the deal, justifying it on the ground that nobody was staying there and so it appeared to be a resource unused. Bruce, fuelled by his assumed status as adoptive kin, showed people where the gate was if they did not like set conditions. Left to their own devices, Alfred and Sandra would have coped through their natural tolerance and by counting down the days until the tourists would leave. Letting Bruce deal with the tourists made their life a good deal easier than it might have been otherwise.

Bruce also acted as both a gatekeeper and cultural broker for Pindan Bay and contacted agencies on Pindan Bay's behalf for establishing the tourism venture. Bruce roped in volunteer labour and favours, and I was persuaded in to do some of the administration work. I watched as he worked

as an advocate for Pindan Bay when KRCI was still able to provide funding for business development. He persuaded them to fund a second business plan which could be used as a resource for approaching funding agencies and would provide evidence that the necessary strategic planning had occurred. In this way Bruce acted as a facilitator for the planned business.

At Sunset Beach Casey's personality and her life experiences meant she coped well and enjoyed interaction with the tourists, while she lobbied for visits from local celebrities and enjoyed their stay. Like Pindan Bay the presence of a White person (Casey's partner Shane) served to mediate between the tourists and the Aboriginal world represented in the life of the Block. Shane, perhaps as the male head of the household, also offered a major influence on the direction the business took.

Authority over land

Block residents who could be labelled 'historical' under land rights or native title discourses faced an additional challenge in terms of their relationships with those Aboriginal people who asserted native title rights in the Blocks. Those with ancestral connection challenged what they regarded as their traditional land being given to Aboriginal people with shallow genealogical connections and no traditional rights to the country they would effectively own through the lease. The increase in visitors that resulted from the tourism businesses raised questions from those with native title rights about outsiders' access to the area and their exploitation of its resource as well as the benefits (financial and otherwise) which the Block holders were believed to be gaining from their tourism businesses. Some of these native title holders described the ALT lease holders as 'squatters' on their ancestral lands and threatened to reclaim what they regarded as rightfully their own – although legally this would not have been possible unless the lease could be shown to be invalid. Divestment of the various leases was then a controversial issue from the outset.

These various factors led to an increasing sense of uncertainty for those who held leases. Their authority to operate on the land was often challenged, their security of tenure was sometimes under a cloud and the manner whereby the leases were granted called into question. In short, Block residents needed to be constantly vigilant to threats or risks to their lifestyle from this social environment. It also prompted them to seek an answer to the question central to their own survival: how could they assert their sense of belonging to areas where they had taken up permanent residence and established homesteads on Blocks which are not located on their traditional or ancestral country?

Claims of ancestral connection could not be easily dismissed and all the Block holders with whom I worked acknowledged these claims while stressing their own attachment gained through hard work, community development and occupation. One method which some of the Block holders employed in an attempt to counteract these claims was to stress their own credentials as traditional owners by exploring branches of their genealogies which showed descent from forebears who originated if not from the area where they now held their Block, somewhere not too far away. When I was in the final stages of writing this thesis, Casey got in touch with me about helping with archival research for genealogical details relating to one side of her family she knew to have traditional links to the western parts of the Peninsula.

Another aspect of this affirmation was the process of identifying place with person in response to repeated challenges to authority. This was effected by the use of personal names in conjunction with the name of their lease. At times the Blocks are identified through locales such as 'north of the causeway' or Beagle Bay, Carnot Springs or other places. However, more specifically, the Blocks are identified by reference to those who lived there and the title given to the lease, for example, 'Casey at Sunset Beach' or 'Alfred at Pindan Bay'. They are then personalised as well as individualised and serve to locate a man or women along with their family in geographic space. It is a process that provides recognition that legitimates both their occupation of the Block and their business.

For the residents of the Blocks, these uncertainties and contestations also sharpened their resolve to fashion their cultural identity in terms of their acquired place of residence. They set about developing what I call an, 'ideology of the Block' that justified and sustained their presence as well as affirming their more than physical relationship with the countryside of their lease. These are topics I return to in chapter 7 of this thesis.

The tourism business – a means to an end

For the Pindan Bay residents, access to CDEP payments at Beagle Bay and the adaptation of existing infrastructure to be re-purposed for tourist accommodation were important aspects of the arrangements that would eventually make the tourist venture possible. Pindan Bay offered access to Aboriginal reserve lands, which were otherwise off-limits, for White adventurers and fishermen. The one consolation was that the tourist season was limited to the Dry Season and once the hot, humid and frequently wet weather set in, Alfred and Sandra had their Block to themselves. Tourism was a viable business in their view, but not solely from a financial point of view. It produced a modest income to add to their kitty and provide evidence of business success

when making application for additional business grants on the strength of income being generated. However, the main thrust of the tourism project was to enable Sandra and Alfred and close family members to continue living at Pindan Bay. The perpetuation of decentralised living was the reason for the business.

The same principle was evident with respect to both Sunset Beach and Plum Point. Casey regarded occupation of Sunset beach as an opportunity to re-assert her Indigenous identity and gain autonomy and remove herself from aspects of community life at Beagle Bay which she felt were holding her back – as I document above (see page 95 above). For Johnny and Lauren at Plum Point it represents an opportunity to live close to Johnny’s ancestral lands and for both to follow an independent lifestyle away from the communities and complexities of community living.

Tourism was the principal means to engage with the economy. However, it was cautiously embraced and partially pursued. Tourists impacted on the remote environment and exploited its natural resources – particularly the fish. Tourists made demands, sometimes lacked cultural awareness and encounters with them were not always attractive and some at least left that part of the business to their White residents. Servicing the demands of tourists was seldom consistent with the reasons for wanting to live on a Block. The financial rewards were slim and the nature of the service industry was unattractive to most. However, without a business, occupation of the Block would be financially difficult if not impossible. Running the business provided proof to prospective funding bodies that the enterprise met the requirements for additional or continued financial support. Without the business there would be no Block.

The economy was then one that reflected and accommodated the priority of being able to reside on the Block. The Blocks were a form of working from home, or small scale family business, while the engagement with the tourist industry was more a matter of convenience and practicality than of commitment to the practice. The living area was a place to support social and emotional well-being and in this sense the Block as a life project was much more than developing a sustainable income that witnessed engagement with the market economy. I discuss the ideology of the Block further in Chapter 7.

CONCLUSION

When the Beagle Bay reserve land was divested through the ALT to provide smaller lease holdings the government support for decentralisation projects was fading. The leases were

granted during the late 1990s at a time when there was a substantial policy shift away from government support for self-determination projects to facilitating sustainable or viable projects determined through the estimated capacity to engage with the market economy. Part of the terms under which the Blocks were made available through the granting of a lease was that they be used for economic development (see chapter 3).

The reality of the business environment for small-scale enterprises on the Peninsula was in sharp contrast to these expectations and requirements. Distance from major town centres and the consequential limitations this placed on tourist numbers meant that cash income would always be limited. The lack of expertise in tourism and business management coupled with the limited capital available for infrastructure and promotion at the Blocks also meant that engagement with the market economy would yield limited financial benefits. Yet, despite these difficulties the Block residents have remained living on their leases and they have maintained their presence there. Notwithstanding the push for tourism development and its implicit limitations, the economy of the Blocks was one that reflected Aboriginal priorities and values rather than any Western business ideal. In practical terms this was accomplished by a good deal of ingenuity and the tenacious pursuit of what limited funding could be found. In this kin-based chuck-in was not only a significant contributor to the financial survival of the Blocks, but characterised the essential family basis for the development of the Block. As such these remote living areas and businesses are examples of Aboriginal projects that exist with some state and market economic support, but they also are examples of distinct use of land where Aboriginal people are establishing new forms of connection to country. This prioritisation of connection makes the Blocks examples of life rather than economic projects.

The pursuit of funding for tourism and the limited profit that can be derived from the business are essential aspects of sustained residence on the Blocks. However, this is not a business in the sense that might be applied to the move to a commercial operation in mainstream White Australia. It is rather a business that seeks to gain independence and autonomy for family groups and promote a singular cultural environment and life-style. It is a business that seeks to create an ideological living space.

The move from community life at Beagle Bay to the Block also marked a breaking of a long-term mould. This necessarily resulted in a number of inter-personal tensions. Some were between the Block residents and other kin and friends who remained at Beagle Bay or elsewhere. Others were between the Block owners and the tourists, the White partners and workers. Some

again were between the Block holders and those with deep traditional links to the country. In this chapter I have shown how the Block residents seek to mediate and manage these tensions, which are also a feature of their business.

CHAPTER 5

SMALL SCALE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MARKET ECONOMY AT REMOTE LOCATIONS

When the Dampier Peninsula was being considered as a site to develop a substantial processing plant for natural gas - from 2007 through to 2013 - the costs and benefits for Aboriginal people were frequent and contentious topics of conversation. During conversation at dinner parties in Broome the non Aboriginal guests, some of whom had worked in remote communities and with Aboriginal people for over twenty years, voiced firm beliefs that radical economic change was impossible in Aboriginal Australia. They argued that benefit packages delivered through mining development - including a natural gas processing plant - and subsequent agreements would be without any economic advantage for Aboriginal people in the region. These kinds of conversations were often heated with differing opinions and the discussions revealed a conviction that at the very least Aboriginal development should be gradual, change should be incremental and that delivering large sums of money through actions such as mining agreements would make little impact upon conditions for Aboriginal people on the Dampier Peninsula. Rather, efforts should be directed towards small scale development. Some suggested that what was needed were agricultural programs so Aboriginal residents on the Peninsula Blocks might grow vegetable patches. But, overall, Aboriginal tourism was the most common type of development proposed by White people.

Over a number of years I listened as acquaintances in Broome proposed such enterprises as glass bottom boats in which visitors could view the extensive reef systems along the Dampier Peninsula coastline and, perhaps even more frequently, proposed fishing tours. On the Peninsula it was also common to hear Aboriginal people speak of developing tourism and gaining an income through allowing visitors access to the Blocks or other Aboriginal reserve lands.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN REMOTE AUSTRALIA

Aboriginal missions and reserves were generally established at a distance from major economic centres to separate Aboriginal people from what was regarded as the unwanted distractions of town life. The missions also served a purpose similar to reserves in keeping Aboriginal people away from towns where they were frequently regarded by the White residents as 'undesirable' on account of their manner of living (Rowley 1972: 95). As a result of this history, many Aboriginal settlements are situated in regions where the potential to engage with the market economy is

generally poor because of the lack of access to markets, resources and infrastructure. Coombs advocated decentralization in economic development in Aboriginal Australia and stressed the importance of flexibility when engaging with the market economy (Coombs 1994). However, he regarded income through the sale of labour in remote locations as unlikely to meet with much success because of the lack of opportunity and importantly, because of clashes with family values and cultural commitments.

Land care projects and tourism, plus the sale of Aboriginal art and artefacts were, and continue to be, regarded as the most viable forms of engagement with the market economy in remote regions (Altman 1988, Coombs 1989, Chambers et al 2018). Part of the reason that these types of enterprise appear viable is that they have the flexibility in their operations to accommodate family and cultural commitments which are central to the Aboriginal social domain. They are also suitable for development within a single family group that typify the residents of the Blocks on the Dampier Peninsula. Given this limited family engagement as labour, the modest capital involved and constrained profit they can be defined as ‘small-scale’ enterprises. In addition, these enterprises can be developed to incorporate strategies for engagement with the market economy, despite the obstacles posed by lack of resources and geographic distance (see Coombs 1994:84-87).

Some years after Coombs’s proposals for economic development in rural and remote Aboriginal Australia, Altman argued for recognition of a hybrid economy in Aboriginal controlled lands (Altman 2001). Altman contended that the state, market and customary economy intersect in numerous ways and in varying degrees to create a form of hybrid economy distinctive to Aboriginal people living in remote parts of Australia. Altman’s principal concern in admitting a customary aspect to an economy was to accommodate and amplify traditional economic activities such as hunting and gathering. Sercombe (2008:20) based on the work of Sahlins (1974) and later Peterson (1993) argues that even where hunting and gathering are no longer available as the means of production, the customary economy can be understood as based on reciprocity and continues to be identifiable through practices of distribution, exchange and consumption specific to Aboriginal people. In recognising the customary economy social and cultural factors become a significant part of analysis – perhaps all too easily overlooked when considering ‘viability’ in terms of capital economic worth.

Agricultural projects both large and small scale have been attempted on the Dampier Peninsula. From the earliest days of the missionaries, hopes had been high that the Dampier Peninsula

would provide a good location for a pastoral property (see chapter two). Currently there is one pastoral property (Country Downs) and three others on the southern edge of the Dampier Peninsula, but none are Aboriginal owned. A tropical timbers plantation was trialled within the Beagle Bay Aboriginal reserve lease in 2005, but did not progress into commercial planting. Consortiums have been formed with Aboriginal people to harvest *gubinge* fruit, however 'wild harvest' (that is gathering the fruit from naturally occurring plants) is currently preferred to establishing dedicated plantations (Western Australia Planning Commission 2015:65). Agricultural training projects were sponsored through Aboriginal training organizations during the late 1990s up until the mid 2000s with a view to producing fresh vegetables for local supply to Beagle Bay or Lombadina (Western Australia Planning Commission 2015:65). However, production to a level where the produce could be sold in large enough quantities to make the program economically viable seems to have only happened during the Mission era, and then only at times of great shortages such as during World War II. There are currently no agricultural enterprises and only wild harvesting on the Dampier Peninsula (Western Australia Planning Commission 2015:65).

A number of fishing and sightseeing tours have operated from Broome and Derby, some with sufficient success to remain in business. However, there are limited numbers of customers due to the small size of the local and regional population, while travel costs from southern capitals add substantially to the costs and can make the business uneconomic. These factors influence development projects on the Dampier Peninsula and contribute to difficulties with engaging with the market economy. However, as the case study I describe below illustrates, the problems of development economics were not the principal reason for the turn of events I relate.

In this and the next chapter I examine the local response to both small and large scale development projects on the Dampier Peninsula. In this chapter I discuss tourism, setting out a case study derived from my field work data. The case study is one relating to a fishing tour enterprise at Pindan Bay and very much a small-scale development. Bruce, had become a permanent resident at the Block and was responsible for the concept of the fishing tours and for planning and then initiating the business at the Block. The ultimate failure of the enterprise demonstrates the practical and economic difficulties of engaging with the market economy at a remote location. However, the story of Bruce's boat can be understood as a symbol of incompatibility and misdirected energy where one man's values failed to accommodate those of the members of the Block whose lease he sought to exploit. The failure was a consequence of

the disjunction between the ideology of the Aboriginal residents of the Block and the White proponent. Engaging with the market economy in remote regions involves recognition of the social factors that affect business. The Aboriginal family living at the Block operated it as an area that was structured and governed by the norms of social family kinship and associated expectations and obligations. While Bruce had the basic equipment and capital to establish a business, his lack of appreciation of the importance of family and family reputation within the region eventually affected his ability to operate the fishing tour business successfully. In this the power of kinship and location within the kinship network and how that is established and maintained, were significant factors that required accommodation within any business model. The case study illustrates that engagement with the market economy in remote areas requires an appreciation of social factors distinctive to the region, factors that may not require consideration in developing business in more populated centres or where cultural factors are given less prominence.

In the following chapter (chapter 6) I describe a proposal for large scale development in the central Dampier Peninsula. This was to be a government sponsored natural gas processing hub at James Price Point. My purpose in relation to both projects is to explore the relationship between the economic venture and the values and expectations of its proponent and the Aboriginal occupants of the Blocks who were either directly affected by the venture or would have been, had the development gone ahead.

DEVELOPING TOURISM AT THE BLOCK

In Chapter 4 I described Pindan Bay. Several business plans had been written for Pindan Bay as these are a requirement prior to any application for funding being considered. Business plans provide the authority to proceed, mapping the possibility of success. I saw two of these documents prepared for Pindan Bay during my field work period and they were undoubtedly a form of bureaucratic appeasement, written as evidence of the residents' aspiration to seek income outside government payments. Specific training programs were attached to the business plans and developing a plan and proposing training could be included in applications for funding and so increase the likelihood of the success of the proposal through having argued the viability of the venture.

The first business plan I saw was produced for Alfred and Sandra in about 2002⁴⁵. It identified the market for tourism at Pindan Bay. Four types of tourists were listed: short term holiday makers; those wanting to engage in cultural tourism and access an Aboriginal community; retiree long term visitors often called ‘grey nomads’; and business and government employees looking for short term accommodation while working in the region.

The plan also explored how community members would engage with the tourists, characterised in the plan as ‘the business profile’. Activities might include cultural activities – tours, fishing, crabbing, stories around a campfire and cooking damper. Artwork produced at the Block or brought in from other places could be sold as an additional source of income. According to the projections of this business model, the estimated cash flow was at a minimum \$10,000 in the first year, climbing to \$20,000 by the third. The business plan also made note of the importance of contributions from family members (noted as ‘chuck-in’ funding) which paid for items such as bar fridges, fans and bedding as gifts to the corporation.

In the second business plan the writer had suggested obtaining a loan of \$115,000 in order to build a new ablution block and upgrade facilities at the chalets. These accommodation units were comfortable bush living with concrete floors and corrugated iron walls, they had been built to a standard suitable for housing CDEP trainees but required additional work to bring them up to a standard that town dwellers would expect. The author of the business plan suggested Indigenous Business Australia be approached for loan funding, or money sought by grants through Lottery West or Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation, a resourcing agency in Broome⁴⁶.

The second business plan was written in about 2010 and was developed after the Federal government’s cuts to the operation of the CDEP in remote areas. The plan also took into account the proposed sealing of the Dampier Peninsula road, which would increase access to the Peninsula from Broome and open it to conventional vehicles. The new road was touted as enhancing the opportunity for Pindan Bay Block residents to extend their engagement with the market economy. Included in the proposed opportunities that a sealed access road might deliver were suggestions for cottage industry – for example increasing the sale of arts and crafts to

⁴⁵ Chapter 4 refers to the first business plan and the reluctance of Alfred and Sandra to go into debt.

⁴⁶ Mamabulanjin Aboriginal Corporation first established in 1985 as Broome’s first Aboriginal resource centre. From that time it has developed into a multi-functional support service to Aboriginal people in this part of the Kimberley. <http://mama.org.au/> accessed 31st March 2020.

include products created at Beagle Bay. However the second plan differed from the first in another and significant way. The second plan included direct reference to Bruce, the White resident at Pindan Bay, and his proposed fishing and boating tourist venture using a boat bought with his own money.

While Bruce hoped to gain income through providing fishing tours he would also use the boat as part of a program to train Aboriginal people in the region to qualify for their Recreational Skipper's Ticket. It was a simple model. Bruce did not need to go into substantial debt to start the business and had lived at the Block for several years and therefore had an appreciation of the local conditions – the tides, reefs, ocean currents as well as some understanding of the numbers of tourist that might make up his customer base. The boat and the provision of fishing tours would stimulate and increase the demand for camping and chalet accommodated guests, while those visiting the Block might also wish to take advantage of the fishing tours. There was then to be a symbiotic relationship between the camping and accommodation side of the business and Bruce's fishing expeditions. The business plan was based on acceptance of the arrangement that Bruce would not take a salary for the first year of the boat business, but he would receive free accommodation. During the second season however, and thereafter, Bruce could derive an income through operating the fishing tour business.

THE BUSINESS OF THE BOAT – A CASE STUDY.

Bruce first came to the Block through his employment by an Aboriginal training organization based in Broome. The organization was funded by the State and provided Aboriginal-specific training programs for communities in the west Kimberley including the Dampier Peninsula. Bruce was employed to supervise agricultural training programs at Pindan Bay. He was provided with a low but steady wage through his contract and the training organization paid for his accommodation in one of the units at the Pindan Bay Block. At first Bruce stayed at Pindan Bay from Monday to Friday, returning to Broome for the weekends. After some months he gave up his weekly trips to Broome to live permanently at the Block.

I found it difficult to get a sense of where Bruce came from or what he did prior to working at Pindan Bay. Those kinds of conversations were difficult and he was generally guarded about his history, often providing conflicting information to my questions, or muffled uncomfortable responses. Bruce told me that he had lived in the Kimberley since the 1970s, that his father was in New Zealand and he had two daughters in Perth. His presentation betrayed a general lack of

self-care. Although he had spent many years in the Kimberley, symbols of long association with the bush, such as the felt hat or history of working with stock were not a part of his personal story. He told me that he worked for a time as a cook at a hamburger shop in Broome and also for the Commonwealth Bank, although in what capacity was never clear. Bruce presented as 'local' through having lived in the Kimberley for several decades, but the Block seemed to be his first time living permanently outside the major centres of Broome or Derby.

When I visited Pindan Bay in 2008 the horticultural training program was functioning and Bruce worked as the training coordinator, a position he appeared to hold with pride and he worked diligently. Bruce was conscientious about his job and dedicated to improving the way he worked.

When I stayed at Pindan Bay Bruce noticed the amount of computer work I did. He questioned me about the different ways he might report to his employers in Broome and send them information using emails or the internet. He was quick to ask favours and utilize my computer skills wherever he saw advantage in doing so. While he appeared hard working and keen to make his training program a success, he was also opportunistic in making use of the skills of others whenever he saw a chance.

After he had been living and working at Pindan Bay for about eight months Bruce attracted the attention of his employers in Broome on account of complaints that he was seeking personal and sexual relationships with Aboriginal women in the region. These advances were reported as being unwanted, presumably by the subjects of his advances. When I spoke to older Aboriginal women about his behaviour, they made light of the complaints, attributing his actions to loneliness and believed he was 'just trying to find a wife'. In their view, the women who were the subject of Bruce's sexual advances were quite capable of 'handling' his behaviour and 'looking after themselves'.

Bruce made flirtatious comments to one of Alfred's daughters during a visit to the Beagle Bay store. This was a public space where interactions are generally reserved and self-conscious, the shop is not somewhere to make loud and obvious sexual advances, Bruce's behaviour showed his lack of awareness for the normal rules of engagement in social spaces like the Beagle Bay Store.

The administrative supervisor of the training program relocated Bruce to Broome for a time in response to the complaints and gossip. Eventually and after a period of about two months, Bruce returned to the Block and gave up pursuing relationships with local women.

While the incident appears to have been soon forgotten it signals a significant moment in Bruce's attempts to become a member of the Block community. In seeking to gain a 'wife' (in whatever terms that might have eventuated) he failed to show any understanding of the rules of sexual engagement that prevailed amongst his hosts. Mission born and raised both Alfred and Sandra were at heart proponents of Christian moral values. To gain a 'wife' required attention to cultural and moral norms of permission, licence and social acceptance. It seems that none of these considerations were admitted to Bruce's behaviour.

Despite this incident, after two years of living permanently at Pindan Bay Bruce regarded the Block as his home. He claimed Alfred and Sandra as his adoptive kin. Bruce called Alfred 'brother'. Through what could only be described as a short-term residency, he managed to derive a sense of importance from his position at the Block. He only went to Broome when necessary and spent his leisure time fishing. In time he also gained membership of the Pindan Bay Aboriginal Corporation that held the lease for the Block. He told me that was legal as long as the corporation membership retained an Aboriginal majority. Membership of the corporation further served to entrench his position in the family enterprise. He understood his listing as formal recognition of his position there, which in a sense it was.

At the time when these various events took place there were radical changes to funding arrangements for the Block. Wage funding through CDEP was under review nationally with significant cuts proposed. Pindan Bay residents applied for financial support for tourism development but were unsuccessful. While Alfred and Sandra decided to commute four days a week from the Block into Beagle Bay to access a CDEP funded wage, Bruce decided to continue living at the Block on the understanding that he would assist with modifying the accommodation units to suit the tourist market. He also answered the telephone, networked with various organizations in Broome, such as the Broome tourism centre, negotiated rates of commission for advertising and approached government funding agencies to seek support. Bruce networked aggressively and contact details placed on the Broome Tourist Bureau website were enough to bring in some tourists. Bruce was resourceful, taking advantage of any potential in visitors when he saw it. For example he persuaded a visitor from Queensland to design a web page advertising Pindan Bay in return for an extended stay at no cost. The web designer told me the free

accommodation did not match his fees, but he was willing to help as a form of gift to the fledgling Aboriginal business. Bruce rapidly found ways to use whatever administrative skills I could provide and I contributed when requested, writing letters and attending meetings and taking minutes. Bruce persuaded me to write material to be posted on the web site. Once the website was operational it led to further increases in tourist numbers. Alfred and Sandra continued at Beagle Bay for a year working while Bruce diligently pursued the business of establishing the tourism enterprise.

Alfred and Sandra's daughters were frequent visitors to the Block, driving up from Broome where they lived, for weekend stays with their families. Bruce held a narrow view about the degree to which the daughters might be involved in the business of the Block. He regarded them as having very little say in plans for the future directions of the Block because, unlike him, they did not live there. Bruce asserted his status and consequential rights to give direction to the future commercial activities on the Block by virtue of his occupancy and either failed to appreciate or perhaps ignored the status of the daughters as kin and the important financial contributions they made in the form of chuck-in. This inevitably led to tension between the daughters and Bruce.

The daughters' development plans

During this time I was a regular visitor to the Block and found the opportunity to talk with Alfred and Sandra's daughters about their aspirations for the place. As stated previously, Alfred and Sandra had seven children, six daughters and one son. It was obvious that substantial tension existed between at least three of the daughters and Bruce, particularly with respect to the economic development plans. At this stage Bruce was not a member of the corporation, a qualification he was only to gain after considerable lobbying of Alfred and Sandra. The daughters regarded the Block as their family home, regardless of the fact that they did not live there permanently and they were members of the Pindan Bay Aboriginal Corporation, which held the lease for the Block. When ideas were being floated about future directions for the Block the daughters had their own plans. These were compatible with tourism, but accommodated aspects of kin and relatedness, which for them were matters of social significance for Aboriginal people. Much of their planning was bound up in the operating principal that underpinned the development of the Block: This principal was that because the Blocks were on Aboriginal reserve lands, development must be for the advancement or benefit of Aboriginal

people. For the daughters there was a very real sense that Bruce's plans might not incorporate this ideal.

The daughters sought assistance in pursuing their own development options. I contacted the Broome TAFE and made arrangements for a meeting with the daughters and the tourism trainer. The TAFE staff member had developed a tourism training program that was tailored to suit fledgling Aboriginal tourism ventures in remote areas which she had delivered in other parts of the Kimberley. Embedded in the program were various pathways that might be followed, including one that asked prospective tourist operators to question whether tourism was actually suited to their circumstances and whether it was an appropriate choice in terms of the proponents' aspirations and desires. In short, was tourism what people really wanted? The daughters also spoke to the small business planner at the Broome Business Centre. The planner gave the proposed tourism venture qualified support but agreed that the TAFE training could be worthwhile, suggesting that at the very least it would show the good intentions of the Pindan Bay corporation members to advance development options at their Block and could be included in future funding applications.

These exchanges reinforced the daughters' views that other projects outside of tourism could be developed at the Block. The daughters believed that they were capable of hosting extended youth camps at Pindan Bay. These would cater for Aboriginal youths regarded 'at risk'; those who had become involved in the criminal justice system or perhaps came from dysfunctional family backgrounds. Youth camps were symbolic of how the daughters regarded the Block, the nurturing power of their family home and their firm belief that time spent at the Block would benefit young people. Block residents had done this in the past and the daughters thought it worthwhile to apply for further funding support to continue hosting similar camps in the future. The TAFE trainer thought the daughters' idea worthwhile and suggested further meetings with Alfred and Sandra.

I understood that the daughters considered that youth camps and the tourism enterprise were compatible: the Block would be closed to tourists when youth camps were scheduled. Bruce however had different ideas and strongly opposed the plans. He intervened and opposed the daughters while lobbying the TAFE trainer as well as Alfred and Sandra. In a unilateral act he cancelled the proposed meetings with the TAFE trainer. When I asked Bruce why he had taken this course of action he told me that he thought the idea was 'silly' and pointed out that the youth camps would involve chasing government funding relating to adolescent emotional health

that would be difficult to source. He added that in his view, the TAFE trainer was simply looking for work. Bruce also considered that because the daughters lived permanently in Broome, not at the Block, they lacked any entitlement to be involved, let alone direct, the future economic or development planning for the Block. Bruce was convinced that tourism and direct market engagement was the best way to bring funds into the Block.

I paid a price for my evident support for the daughters and their proposal to develop youth camps at the Block. The option was put aside and I was put aside with it. For about a month after I contacted the TAFE trainer and met with the daughters Bruce found reasons why I should not come to Pindan Bay. Checking my fieldnotes I read that Bruce gave all sorts of excuses to discourage me from driving up the Peninsula track to Pindan Bay: the road was closed due to heavy localised rain; the march flies were fierce; the weather was unseasonably hot; Alfred and Sandra were going camping and so on. The excuses were endless and lame. Bruce asserted his authority to operate without taking any account of the daughters and their plans. I had organised meetings to discuss development options not only without involving him but also in relation to a project he considered to be worthless. I needed to wait to be forgiven before he would allow me back on the Block.

When the boat comes in

In 2010 Bruce purchased a 22 foot aluminium fishing boat with a centre console and outboard with his own money, spending around \$50,000 for the boat, motor, safety equipment and the training required for him to obtain the licences that would permit him to carry paying passengers. He also bought a cheap second hand Toyota troop carrier in order to launch the boat. He said the funds came from money he saved during his government training contract. Pindan Bay had good boat launching facilities off the hard sandy beach, and at 175 kilometres, or two and a half hours drive, was reasonably close to Broome. Meanwhile, Sandra and Alfred made application to the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme (NEIS) for additional funding to cover essentials to begin tourism, including insurances and advertising. Their application was successful. NEIS funding was mainstream rather than Aboriginal specific and was only available for one year. With this funding they were both able to stay at Pindan Bay instead of travelling to Beagle Bay to gain part time employment through the CDEP.

Alfred and Bruce had constructed an ablution block whereby they demonstrated the commitment of the Block residents to remain living on the lease. Based on the various business plans and their own projections Bruce, Alfred and Sandra estimated that the tourist venture

would generate some \$15,000 in the first year of operation. The daughters continued to send money to the corporation which was put towards the business. The business appeared fragile but viable.

In addition to running his fishing tours, Bruce assumed the role of the public face of Pindan Bay. Bruce told me that he and Alfred had decided that although Alfred would meet the tourists as they arrived, Bruce would assist with everyday activities and chores, acting as a kind of grounds man and caretaker. The tourists could come to his house if they required anything rather than intrude on Sandra and Alfred's privacy at the main house. Bruce seemed happy enough with this role. He visited the various campers, often at dinner time, happily accepted offers from the campers that he join them in their meal. He also greeted the tourists and directed them to their camping site or chalet when Alfred was absent or perhaps disinclined to perform this function. Bruce's manner was, however, frequently direct and sometimes sharp. He was often rude to any visitor who behaved badly or strayed outside of the areas permitted for tourists. Neither Alfred nor Sandra were prepared to be so direct with visitors and Bruce considered himself as some form of shield to protect both the business and Alfred and Sandra, absorbing the social awkwardness and, occasionally, the aggression of demanding interactions and expectations.

As time passed, Bruce moved into a vacant house which had previously been Alfred and Sandra's first home. He appeared to be comfortable. When I asked him how long he thought he would stay at the Block, he told me he would be there for the next ten years. Bruce showed me the place on the Block where he planned to build his own house. In some ways he knew the Block and the family incredibly well and in other ways very little.

Despite these apparently positive initial signs of progress, the business plan for the boat was an aspiration of Bruce's that was doomed both financially and socially. Bruce's proposal was to take fishing tours, half day for \$300 and full day for \$600⁴⁷. The costs of various licences to operate the boat were higher than expected. But the greatest flaw in the project was the lack of market. Recreational fishermen that came from Broome either fished from the shore or rocks, or brought their own boat to launch at Pindan Bay. Bruce managed to gain some business through guiding people to fishing places that he had marked on his GPS in his own boat, but generally tourists coming to Pindan Bay were low budget and prices for the boat trips were unappealing. The demand for training for the Recreational Skipper's Ticket was minimal. Some Aboriginal

⁴⁷ 2010 prices.

rangers were interested in gaining various boat tickets but preferred to go to Broome or Perth for training where the facilities were better and the outcome more certain.

Over a period of months the oldest daughter in particular started to question Bruce about what kind of benefit the boat held for other Block residents. Bruce's rudeness and his personal appearance also started to take its toll. The build-up of instances of offense continued and eventually direct confrontation occurred over the boat, his presence at Pindan Bay and his involvement in the business affairs of the corporation. Things had come to a head when Bruce invited himself to stay with me one weekend in Broome after an argument with Cassie the oldest daughter. He told me that Cassie had challenged him over his fishing boat tours, asking directly, 'So what does Pindan Bay get from your boat?' She had told him directly that there was no place for him at Pindan Bay and that he should leave.

There was much misunderstanding about the relationship between the boat and its operations, the amount and distributions of profit, the Block and its residents and associated family members. Some of this developed from the lack of any contract or business agreement between Bruce and the family. The business plan, perhaps the closest document to a work contract, stated that Bruce would not receive any salary from the tourism business but would derive his income from his boat. There was no provision for Bruce to pay any of his profits to the community. As things turned out, what little income eventuated was insufficient to sustain costs for insurances, equipment and various other necessities to maintain operations. Bruce's role within the corporation and business development was not formalized as it had been when he entered the Block as an agricultural trainer. Without a written duty statement or contract and agreed payments the relationships between Bruce, the fishing venture and the other Block residents and family were ripe for misunderstanding. However, the daughters and Cassie in particular, harbouring a long-term opposition to Bruce's presence on the Block, saw only a large boat and inflated tour prices charged for operating from what they regarded as their Block. Bruce had to go.

Bruce's attitudes, assertions and assumptions only exacerbated the looming crisis. Bruce assumed his position was fixed and long term, he claimed to have become Alfred's adopted brother and believed he was entitled to access and to live at the Block because he was a member of Pindan Bay Aboriginal Corporation. He elevated his position at the Block above Alfred and Sandra's daughters on the basis that he lived there permanently while the daughters were based in Broome but visited regularly. Tourism was marketed as 'cultural' and after several months of

operations Bruce began telling the tourists that he was of Aboriginal descent. As far as I know he did not attempt to describe traditions that made him Aboriginal, or speak about cultural sites on country, however, he did attempt to present himself to tourists as having Aboriginal heritage. Knowledge of Bruce's attempt to represent himself as Aboriginal spread to other Aboriginal people in the region and many regarded his actions as offensive.

His individualism, which was perhaps unremarked on at first, increasingly was now regarded as greed that placed him outside the family corporation. But the final fatal fact was that Bruce was also no longer needed for the tourism enterprise. Alfred and Sandra were capable of working with the tourists in the camping and chalet side of the business without him, while the fishing tours had shown themselves to be economically unsustainable. In contrast, the camping and accommodation business, while limited, was making modest profits with very little additional investments required.

I was not at Pindan Bay when Bruce was finally told to hitch up his boat, collect his belongings and move out. He came to visit me in Broome to ask if he could store some of his belongings in my garage. I agreed and, as far as I know, he remained in Broome for a while before picking up his things from my garage and leaving Broome, saying he was departing for Perth where he hoped to sell the boat.

Small scale enterprises and opposing ideologies

Bruce's demise highlights two problems for Aboriginal development and attempts to engage in the market economy through small scale enterprises like the provision of camping sites, chalet accommodation and fishing tours. The first is the mis-match that may occur between the proponents of development and the ideologies that inform the Aboriginal participants. As the case study reported above illustrates, such a mis-match may be fatal to the project. The second is the manner whereby a White individual is permitted to become involved in development projects and how this may be both mutually beneficial as well as ultimately destructive.

Block residents have created 'home' and 'home country' with connection established through and for family life and permanent residence. This ethos generates a sense of entitlement to live at the Block and to regard the Block as their family home. This sense of connection also extends to a belief that development in the region should be for the benefit of Aboriginal people. This belief might be the result of the fact that the Beagle Bay lease was first gazetted at the end of the 19th century and remained dedicated Aboriginal land when it passed to the ALT in 1976. It could

also be a legacy of the mission regime and Christian advocacy for Aboriginal rights. Whatever the origin, the use of the land for the benefit of Aboriginal people influenced the desire to host various community events at Pindan Bay, such as youth camps or women's meetings, along with the aspiration to hold such events at future times as well. Block residents wished to promote their corporation as one that embodied generosity and community spirit and that sponsored activities for the benefit of Aboriginal people. While economic development in the form of some type of sustainable income was understood to be important, especially as sources for government support have dried up, the reputation of the corporation also needed to be sustained.

In the case study reported above, part of the difficulty was practical – that is the lack of a formal contract determining how any income from the boat would be distributed or whether Bruce should pay rent to operate his business from the Block. These absences held potential for misunderstandings and conflict. The original idea that the fishing venture would attract campers got lost when the business failed through lack of customers. However, the misunderstandings were nurtured by the mismatch of opposing ideologies. For Bruce the boat was iconic of individualism while for corporation members, the daughters in particular, the boat was a shared asset and it was expected that any economic benefits would be shared between Block members. For Bruce the boat was an object that was individually owned separate from the corporation as a land holding and business structure. For corporation members the fact that the boat was operating from Pindan Bay meant it was identified with their home and responsibility for their reputation extended beyond Bruce as an individual. The matter was further complicated by Bruce's own insistence that he was not only a part of the corporation – and indeed, he was a member – but that he was also a member of the family. As such it might be expected that he would share and embrace their common ideologies.

In this the boat was a central object which came to symbolise the misunderstandings and fundamentally different views of property held by Bruce on the one hand, and the Block residents – particularly the daughters – on the other. Bruce's boat, while in every sense an object, became more than an object once it was incorporated into the business enterprise of Pindan Bay and so entwined in the social relationships of its residents, including Bruce.

Understanding the role of objects and property has been discussed by others who have explored the nature of exchange transactions and social relationships in different parts of Aboriginal Australia. The nature of objects and their transformation in social exchanges in Aboriginal

Australia as valued commodities in the formation and perpetuation of social relationships is found in the early ethnography of Elkin (1932) and Kaberry (2004), who wrote in the 1930s about *wunan*, the Aboriginal exchange system which extended across the Kimberley and into the Northern Territory. Both writers show how material objects serve to create reciprocity and friendship while acting like a social glue. In this regard Kaberry wrote in 1939,

wunan is a friend, and although in the event of non-fulfilment of obligations he or she becomes a potential sorcerer, the emphasis is laid on the more positive aspect of reciprocity and friendship. (Kaberry, 2004:167.)

Austin-Broos, writing some 70 years later of the Arrente of central Australia, states that for them prestige or influence attached to objects is gained through sharing those objects to build networks. She wrote,

... commodities are multivalent in a system of relatedness. There is some acquisition of durable goods, especially vehicles and houses. At the same time, one has things like cars and houses in order to service kin. Influence and prestige lie in using them to build up networks rather than merely to signal individual prestige (Myers 1988; cf. Strathern 1985; Merlan 1991). In fact where durable goods are concerned, rapid depreciation can be a sign of a well-used thing rather than an abused thing. (Austin-Broos 2006:9.)

Myers writing about the Pintupi people from Central Australia made the same point. Myers (2016) argues that for the Pintupi property should, 'be viewed as a sign' (Myers 2016:555). In this regard how the object is used, its purpose, who is granted access and who is denied are critical factors. The uses, permissions, refusals, obligations and duties in relation to objects are constantly negotiated to establish and sustain a sense of group identity amongst those who have some sort of interface with the object. This negotiation is critical because relationships are not completely prescribed or without flexibility, instead any shared identity might be negotiated in a variety of ways. Myers wrote,

A basic issue at all levels of Pintupi social organization is transaction in shared identity. What is most impressive to me about the Pintupi conception of objects is the continual negotiation about relationships to them and a willingness to include others as what, for the want of a better heuristic term, I will call "co-owners." Such ambiguity is deeply seated in the negotiated quality of much of Pintupi social life. Relationships among people are not totally given in the rules of a defining structure, not in landownership, kinship, or residence (Myers 1986a). Instead, the relationships must be worked out in a variety of social processes. The politics of Pintupi life, however, should not be confused with an aim for domination over others. Its roots lie in the emphasis placed on shared identity with others as a basis for social interaction. (Myers 2016:555.)

Myers argues that by asserting rights to material objects the protagonist enters into a system of exchange where shared relationships are constantly negotiated (2016:556). The relationship is just as important as the object, illustrated by the object being destroyed in some instances – two vehicles were torched to end the trouble they caused in social relationships. In the case of the vehicles the loss was judged to be temporary because there was an expectation that a relative would eventually acquire another vehicle. The value of the object rested in how it formed relationships and in Myers's ethnography there is an expectation of long term reciprocity in relation to the use of material objects (2016:560).

For Bruce the boat was an item of personal property and was not an agent of either an exchange or the building of a social relationship. For the residents of the Block, however, the boat was a potential symbol of the relationships between community members. Its asserted proper function was consistently thwarted by Bruce who held to his own views as to its role and function.

Bruce's individuality and the exclusivity of his ownership of his boat was further demonstrated by his attitude to income. While the boat was to be Bruce's primary individual income earner, he also sold his labour from time to time, as needs and opportunity directed, travelling to Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) at the northern end of the Peninsula to deliver training and did the same at Noonkanbah community in the Central Kimberley. His income was focused on individual earnings. Bruce failed to appreciate the essential family identity of the Block and corporation. When gifts were given and the 'chuck-in' provided by the daughters, they were made to the corporation and meant that contributions were provided not just to the business organisation, but also to an ideology and an ideal. In this then there was no indebtedness to an individual. Rather the gifts were for Pindan Bay. The daughters gave meaningful amounts of money used to buy essential goods. They paid for items that were beyond the purchasing power of people whose principal source of income was CDEP payment. This 'chuck in' money given by the daughters was recorded in the corporation book keeping and referenced to show that there was a commitment on the part of the donor to sustain the Block. Such entries were considered to be helpful when seeking to attract other forms of funding that might become available. These transmittals were more than mere cash injections into the economy of the Block. They were also symbolic of the active role of the daughters in the corporation and their desire to maintain connection. Bruce's attempts to run his fishing tours did not include any gifts as chuck-in to the corporation and consequently he was seen as not only selfish but as a man who set himself

outside the family while deceitfully insisting that he was a family member and a participant in the life and relationships of the corporation.

Bruce enthusiastically embraced the kinship structure while failing absolutely to understand its complexities, obligations and duties or how an individual's place within kin networks is negotiated. He assumed his position as given within the network and he sought to position himself as incorporated into the group through his status as adopted brother to Alfred. Bruce considered that his status as 'brother' would mean that members of the extended family would recognise that he occupied the same social position as Alfred. In this Bruce was seemingly oblivious to the work Alfred undertook to maintain his status within kinship networks. Alfred had to gain and uphold a reputation within his family through hard work, industry and his personal skills as a builder, a leader and a man of principle. Alfred had a reputation as a responsible father of seven children and fifteen grandchildren. The Block had a reputation as a place of hospitality, where the residents were known for their generosity, somewhere that always had a beer or meal on offer to visitors. Pindan Bay, as a place within the Beagle Bay social landscape, was considered 'good'. Corporation members sought to use the Block for purposes that would yield social benefit and so contribute to the well-being of the wider peninsula Aboriginal community.

Bruce, on the other hand, had no status as a family man and was tainted by the rumours that had circulated regarding his unwanted sexual advances. While he worked hard at developing the fishing venture, he had not worked consistently to build the infrastructure of the Block as Alfred had done. Bruce regarded the youth camps and women's group meetings as a waste of time and resources and could see no benefit to the wider Aboriginal community. But perhaps his cardinal omission was a failure to comply with the kinship demands of generosity and sharing as well as the ethos of 'doing good' and appearing kind hearted. Bruce failed to see any importance in the reputation of the Block to the broader regional Aboriginal community. In this way Bruce flattened any understanding of kinship in Aboriginal Australia and did not appreciate his position as kinsperson commanding status as well as obligations that were constantly negotiated.

On one occasion Bruce left Pindan Bay to work for two months at Noonkanbah community. Before he left he told me that he believed he would be 'looked after' by the members of the Noonkanbah settlement. When I asked him why he explained that Alfred and Sandra had family members who lived there and, since he regarded himself as adopted, he too would find kinship and family connections. A couple of months later, when he got back after his stay at

Noonkanbah, he described the trip to me as unrewarding. He had not gained the same sense of belonging at the larger Aboriginal community. His expectations of being accepted as kin were not met. At Noonkanbah, where he lacked direct involvement in the goals and activities of the community, he was just another White staff member. His anticipated acceptance as a kinsman had no foundation. His presumed identity as adopted kin formed through his services for Pindan Bay was not transportable to Noonkanbah. At Pindan Bay Bruce was able to assert incorporation as family through joint action in developing the Block. Bruce's interpretation of this incorporation through shared work, goals and a resulting identity was that he was an adopted kinsman. But Bruce's interpretation of his status was both naïve and limited because it failed to accommodate the complexities and negotiated dimensions of the relationships required of a kinsperson.

When I talked to Cassie, the oldest daughter, and asked about the Block, she would mock Bruce and say that he spent his whole day walking around his boat and admiring it, describing his behaviour as a form of vanity, just as if he had spent the day gazing at himself in the mirror. The boat also affected good standing with the Beagle Bay community. At first Bruce was regarded as ignorant of how to catch fish, mocked for trawling in the wrong places and often dismissed as a fool. There were jokes about Bruce's paucity of local knowledge, that he was clueless about where to fish, and after a time these criticisms escalated. However, after Bruce had lived at the Block for a time, using global positioning equipment and other fish-finding technologies to aid in his attempts to bring back a good catch, he became more successful and caught quantities of fish. Following this apparent success, he was then subject to the criticism that he was taking the fish by means of an unfair advantage by using the boat and his equipment and so limiting the catch for those fishing from the shore. This was described to me as akin to 'jumping the queue'. Bruce and the tourists he brought were regarded by the Aboriginal residents of the region with scorn and they spoke about them with some anger while their fishing from the boat was described as theft, 'fuggin *kartiyas* [Whites] stealing all the blackfella's fish'. The criticism was not only directed at the exploitation of fish. One resident of the Peninsula commented to me regarding the exploitation of shell fish saying, 'I don't want tourists coming onto my country taking all my oysters.' (Connie, pers comm 2009.)

Tourism has always annoyed some Aboriginal people living on the Dampier Peninsula, the visitors being regarded as intrusive, potentially destructive and ignorant about the natural and supernatural environment that they so freely enter and exploit. Some of the criticism related to a

lack of awareness of the spiritual forces believed to inhabit the region, primarily the One Eyed Snake that lives in the coastal caves. Outrage is directed towards White people being oblivious to the sentient nature of the landscape. When tourists were being guided by an Aboriginal person, it was regarded as quite different and more in keeping with cultural practices. For example, a guided tour run by an Aboriginal person from Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) in the north did not receive the same degree of criticism. Aboriginal tour operators on the Dampier Peninsula have established a tourism network which acts as a means whereby the various Aboriginal operators can co-operate. However, having a White person conducting tours for individual income lay squarely outside the accepted practice followed by other Block residents on the Peninsula and was subject to much comment and criticism.

The boat was also a symbol of the ostentatious and essentially White world of individual self-indulgence. It was large and noisy and attracted negative attention from Aboriginal people fishing on shore. This was in part a consequence of the fact that it was essentially not a part of the experience of residents of the Blocks. Not many Aboriginal people on the central Peninsula Blocks owned boats. The boats in the region were generally owned and used by White people and most of these were tourists. This may have been because they were expensive to purchase and maintain – particularly one as large as Bruce’s boat. However, fishing from the beach or rocky headlands or exposed reefs was a reliable means to catch fish and residents did not need boats to achieve a good catch. When Bruce brought the new boat back to Pindan Bay it was not only visually out of place but rapidly became a symbol of Bruce’s status as a man who was outside the community of kin that made up the core residents of the Block.

Incorporating the other: feral *kartiya* on the Block

Many of the Blocks on the Dampier Peninsula have a White person who is either an affine or who has taken up permanent residence. During my association with the Peninsula and its many small communities I noted that it was sometimes the case that a White person continued a relationship with the residents of a Block that had first been established through a formal work contract. The individual might stay on after the contract ended to continue working on projects for the Block and its residents. Some, over time, had become truly incorporated into the social structure of the Block and assumed roles and responsibilities and were integrated into the kinship structure of the Block residents, generally through marrying in. However, others (like Bruce) remained socially differentiated despite sometimes making assertions to the contrary. This latter category of people were nicknamed ‘feral *kartiya*’ by observers and these may also

include short-term contractors, community workers and government employees because of their perception that they exist outside of a regulated and therefore legitimate employment role. They represent, in short, employees who were once domesticated but have subsequently run wild. Interestingly, feral *kartiya* are commonly the first point of contact an outsider may have with a Block.

At both Plum Point and Sunset Beach the White permanent resident is an affine. The status of affine provides a reference point for creating relationships and expectations within the broader central Peninsula community. The status of affine within the kinship network still requires constant negotiation, but the relationship with the Aboriginal partner is at least a reference point for placing the White person within the network of social relationships that characterises the life of the Block residents.

The case study of the boat and operations for tourism raise questions about why the Aboriginal residents at Pindan Bay incorporated Bruce into operations at the Block. On the face of it Bruce seemingly presented more disadvantages than advantages. He was unkempt and many visitors from town were put off by his personal appearance. The staff of KRCI dismissed the first application for funding a tourist program at Pindan Bay which proposed that Bruce be involved in the business. Bruce was considered by the KRCI staff to be detrimental to any development of tourism at the Block and the application was rejected. Considering the tensions produced by the boat, both in terms of relations between Bruce and other Block residents and the reputation of the Block in the broader region, why did Alfred and Sandra allow and even support Bruce to remain at the Block after his formal engagement as a trainer ended? What did Alfred and other members of Pindan Bay Block get from incorporating Bruce into the business plans?

Elkin (1951) wrote about 'intelligent parasitism' based on field observations dating from the 1930s when exploring the interaction between Aboriginal and White people on first contact or during times of tremendous social change. The choice of the word 'parasitism' is not one that would be chosen today and indeed, as Rowse points out, it was 'sufficiently ugly to obscure the author's insight into rationing' which was his contribution (Rowse 1998: 206). While I am not writing here about the provision of rations, Elkin's article continues to have relevance when seeking an understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal and White people in remote settings. In Rowse's view objects as well as skills and abilities gained and exploited from the settler's world, 'robustly preserved social solidarities and could preserve a capacity for self-determination' rather than working as a means to drive assimilation (1998:207). Among other

things Elkin observed that Aboriginal people used White people as a means to effect social change on their own terms. The White people are judged as either 'good' or 'bad' and once judged the 'good' are considered as a resource for mediating social change. Elkin wrote,

I found in parts of Central Australia in 1930, all the white men over a large area were classified by the natives according to whether they kept their word or not, fulfilled or did not fulfil their spoken or implied social and economic obligations (to the Aborigines); in the first case they were good, in the second, bad. (Elkin 1951:169.)

Elkin goes on to describe the 'good' White people as a focal point for contact and as mediators for change.

It is not only to a changed economic environment and organization in general, but also to a particular expression of the change, as mediated through the settler, station manager or employee, prospector, missionary or official who has become the focus and point of contact with the change. (Elkin 1951:169.)

Elkin continues with descriptions of various trajectories for Aboriginal populations after contact. The relevance of his article to my own analyses of the people of the Dampier Peninsula lies in the descriptions of the style of engagement between Aboriginal people and White people and the situations Elkin regards as beneficial to both parties. Applying this description of contact dynamics from the 1930s to the twenty first century and the west Kimberley provides an explanation of what Alfred and Sandra might gain through incorporating Bruce into their business lives. If Bruce could be defined as 'good' in the sense of being able to keep his word and be regarded as at least intending to fulfil his social and economic obligations, then allowing some form of incorporation into the Block would provide the potential for Bruce to become a resource for change. He might be of use in adapting the economics of the Block at a time of tremendous transformation in funding arrangements. The feral *kartiya* thus becomes a resource, a nodal point for engagement with various parties, government and private, during a time of radical change in government transfers to regions. According to Elkin's model, losing the positive classification ('he's a good man') would render Bruce of little or no value to effecting change, which is, as the narrative set out above shows, what happened.

Altman, Gillespie and Palmer (1998, chapter 4) also provide commentary on how Aboriginal communities and individuals have used the services of White people to negotiate change and gain benefit from the resources of the state. Altman in numerous publications about outstations in Arnhem Land stresses the importance of Outstation Resource Agencies (ORAs) in mediating and absorbing the cultural difference between the state and remote communities (see Altman *et*

al 1998, Altman 2001, 2006). The White people who take up permanent residence at the Blocks and assume the characteristics of a feral *kardiya* often act as personal mediators for the Blocks and this becomes one of their principal roles. In the absence of ORAs in the post-ATSIC era these men and women become brokers for what they perceive to be the best interests of the Block residents. Given their relatively better education and the self-confidence that comes with their comparatively privileged social backgrounds they are better equipped to dealing with various government agencies as well as becoming gatekeepers who can regulate access to the Block and its residents.

Battye (2005) describes Aboriginal people vesting an authority in the White people they work with to allow the person to speak for, or on behalf of, Aboriginal interests. Working in close relationships, generally one to one, the White person develops a mandate to represent Aboriginal people. Battye writes:

... the Aboriginal individual involved in such partnerships would also have to be prepared to provide his or her authorisation to their non- Aboriginal offside. This represented perhaps the most difficult area within these partnerships. I will suggest that this meant in effect, that the Aboriginal partner would have to 'lease' their Aboriginality to the non- Aboriginal partner to enable them to act with authority. Here one could say that the Aboriginal partner was obliged to invest a certain amount of 'cultural capital' in the partnership order to operationalise it. (Battye 2005:218.)

By allowing Bruce to regard himself as a 'brother' Alfred lent Bruce a portion of his own cultural capital.

In terms of my own field work ethnography, the ideas of all these writers can be better understood through an analysis of the circumstances of Bruce's involvement in the Pindan Bay community and its business ventures.

Bruce's involvement was useful to Alfred and Sandra because of the dramatic economic changes happening at the time when he showed an interest in remaining at Pindan Bay. The Block was being starved of government funding and Bruce was capable of assisting with the changes required to enable the family to remain living permanently at a decentralized location. He stayed at the Block while Alfred and Sandra worked at Beagle Bay to earn much needed income. Bruce worked as best he could to transition the income sources from CDEP training to access funds from NEIS, the mainstream small business support funding agency. Once the tourist venture became operational Bruce was allotted the task of communicating with the tourists. While his

manner was not always polite he was able to ask favours of tourists with almost missionary zeal. When people stayed who held particular skills, Bruce would negotiate varying rates for them in return for access to their skills. Bruce's purpose was clear and generally beneficial to the enterprise at least up until the time he began to gain income from his boat.

What Bruce offered then was a range of skills and abilities that worked to broker relationships between the social universe of the Block and the wider economic, bureaucratic and outside world. This also gave Bruce a degree of power over the Block, the commercial activities of its members and who could and could not visit. When I made direct contact with the TAFE trainer in relation to the development of an enterprise I operated outside of Bruce's control. He saw this as an affront to his direction of the development proposals and was able to effectively exclude me from the Block for as long as he wanted. Bruce's role as a facilitator and ultimately a would-be director of the business endeavours ultimately ended in his demise as his usefulness was outweighed by the antagonism and resentment caused by his lack of acceptance of the ideals that underpinned the very foundations of the Block. Recognition of this resulted in his being classified as ultimately a 'bad man' not a 'good man'.

CONCLUSION

The case study of Bruce's boat illustrates that economic development in small remote communities must accommodate the principles of the Aboriginal occupants, the moral imperatives and cultural precepts that contribute to the ideology of the Blocks. This requires far more than simply having some knowledge of the culture of those who make the Block their home. It requires an appreciation and embracing of the social relationships, expectations, demands, duties and rewards of being a member of a set of kin.

The Blocks as Aboriginal living areas are not simply a platform to make money, in the way a farm or cattle station might be operated in Western systems of land use. Any proposals for economic development need to be considered against the ideology of the Blocks and the ideals that sustain the living areas.

For Pindan Bay Block residents the primary purpose of the Block was as a family living area. The Block had become 'home' and 'home country' to a particular family group within the broader central Peninsula regional society. Proposals for development initiated outside the family group, such as fishing tours, lacked an awareness of the desires and expectations of that family group and ultimately risked being rejected by the Block residents. This may mean that the income for

Block residents remains modest and perhaps not sufficient to support an extended family. In the case of Pindan Bay it has been possible for the residents to sustain their style of living through sourcing external funding, including chuck-in from family members.

The case study also illustrates the dynamics of Aboriginal and White involvement in establishing small scale enterprise. Despite the multitude of problems narrated above, Bruce played a critical role at a time of radical change in obtaining funding at the Block. When CDEP was cut and Block residents were required to seek other forms of income Bruce assisted in brokering alternatives. His failure, then, was not one of lack of fund-seeking ability or any disinclination for hard work. While he was committed to advancing the business of the Block and showed some abilities to do so, his long-term survival as a member of the extended Pindan Bay family depended upon his ability to accommodate and appreciate cultural factors. These were clearly beyond his understanding. He left finally, when he was judged no longer to be a 'good man' and had therefore outlived his usefulness.

Small-scale enterprises need to be simple, require low capital and be sustainable. Bruce's boat had a metaphorical glass bottom – vulnerable to market forces and the overly optimistic predictions of professional business advisors – well-meaning perhaps but ill-informed. Commercially the venture was not viable. Bruce's business failure simply added to the litany of his social short-comings. There was no possibility that he might generate cash income that might eventually find its way to the Block residents.

Since Bruce's departure tourism has continued at Pindan Bay and the number of people staying is capped at 25. The website shows an active tourist venture, offering access to beaches, fishing and locations otherwise inaccessible⁴⁸. It is also styled as an 'eco-friendly retreat which operates on solar power and an environmentally friendly philosophy – simple, basic but comfortable'⁴⁹. TripAdvisor gives it 5 stars from 166 reviews. The daughters continue to support the Block through material contributions and grandchildren spend the school holidays as 'bushies' with their grandparents. In 2015 and after Bruce left Pindan Bay Block residents hosted a camp for the Peninsula Women's Group. In 2019 Alfred, Sandra and their daughters held a youth camp funded by a grant from Garnduwa, a youth association⁵⁰. The aspirations of the daughters for the

⁴⁸ Website reference not included for privacy of the residents.

⁴⁹ Website reference withheld for privacy.

⁵⁰ Garnduwa is an Aboriginal association focused on Aboriginal youth development, mainly through sports <https://www.garnduwa.com.au>. The camp at Pindan Bay in July 2019 focused on young Aboriginal people identified as 'at risk' from the Dampier Peninsula and Broome region.

corporation to host these events were achieved and I expect, will be repeated over the coming years. It is a small scale operation that brings in some income for the Block over the Dry season. It shows a modest if limited success that is viable and sustainable. At the time of writing (April 2020) the community was closed to all tourists as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic. But there is no reason why the tourist venture at Pindan Bay will not re-open in due course since the infrastructure is intact, the staff in residence and the demand, while currently subject to travel restrictions, remains.

CHAPTER 6

HITTING THE GAS. THE RESPONSE TO LARGE SCALE INDUSTRY PROJECTS ON THE DAMPIER PENINSULA.

In the previous chapter I discussed small scale business in the form of fishing tours and the difficulties that developed as a result of Bruce's failure to understand the ethos of the Block. This worked to diminish the degree to which he was incorporated into Pindan Bay as well as his own long term small business plans. In this chapter I investigate the response of residents of the three Blocks to the hypothetical opportunities presented through the development of large scale industry in the form of the establishment of a processing plant for liquefied natural gas (the Gas Hub or more formally as the 'LNG Precinct') on the Dampier Peninsula. In order to give the necessary context, I first outline the background to the proposed development and the factions that evolved as a consequence. I then assess how Block residents were situated within the process. In doing so I respond to two questions. In what became a prolonged and emotionally charged process, how did Block residents perceive the costs and benefits of a large scale industrial complex imposed upon their leases in the form of the Gas Hub? Secondly, where did Block residents go for support and with which factions did they align?

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE WEST KIMBERLEY

From the early 2000s the Kimberley region experienced rapid escalation in resource industry activity, fuelled by the prospect of extracting uranium, coal, bauxite, oil and gas. By 2005 the Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank declared that the Kimberley was experiencing a mining boom (Battellino 2010). The offshore liquefied natural gas (LNG) from the Browse Basin was calculated to comprise some twenty five percent of Australia's LNG reserves (O'Faircheallaigh 2011). The Western Australian government sought to encourage onshore processing of the offshore gas within the state, so as to maximise revenue from the enterprise for its own benefit. Land and infrastructure at James Price Point on the western Dampier Peninsula was offered to eight companies for a state sponsored LNG processing hub. Negotiations between the state government, the KLC and industry representatives led by Woodside, took place over an eight year period from 2005 to 2013. The proposal was controversial and encouraged local as well as national opposition from a variety of disparate groups.

The Browse Basin and the proposed LNG Precinct

The Browse Basin is located in the Indian Ocean, approximately 450 kilometres north of Broome. The oil and gas deposits there have been known about since the 1960s, however, distance from major centres and costs associated with extraction slowed interest. Liquefied natural gas is unstable and requires processing before transportation. Consequently, commercial exploitation necessitates the building of an on-shore processing plant which, along with extraction costs, amounts to a substantial investment.

By the early 2000s the price of natural gas was sufficient to warrant oil and gas companies investing large amounts on infrastructure and eight companies held tenements over the Browse Basin. Woodside led the initial process of engagement with Aboriginal groups along the Kimberley coastline and the western Dampier Peninsula was identified as the preferred location for the processing plant. Subsequently the company nominated a number of specific sites on the western Peninsula as suitable for building the processing plant.

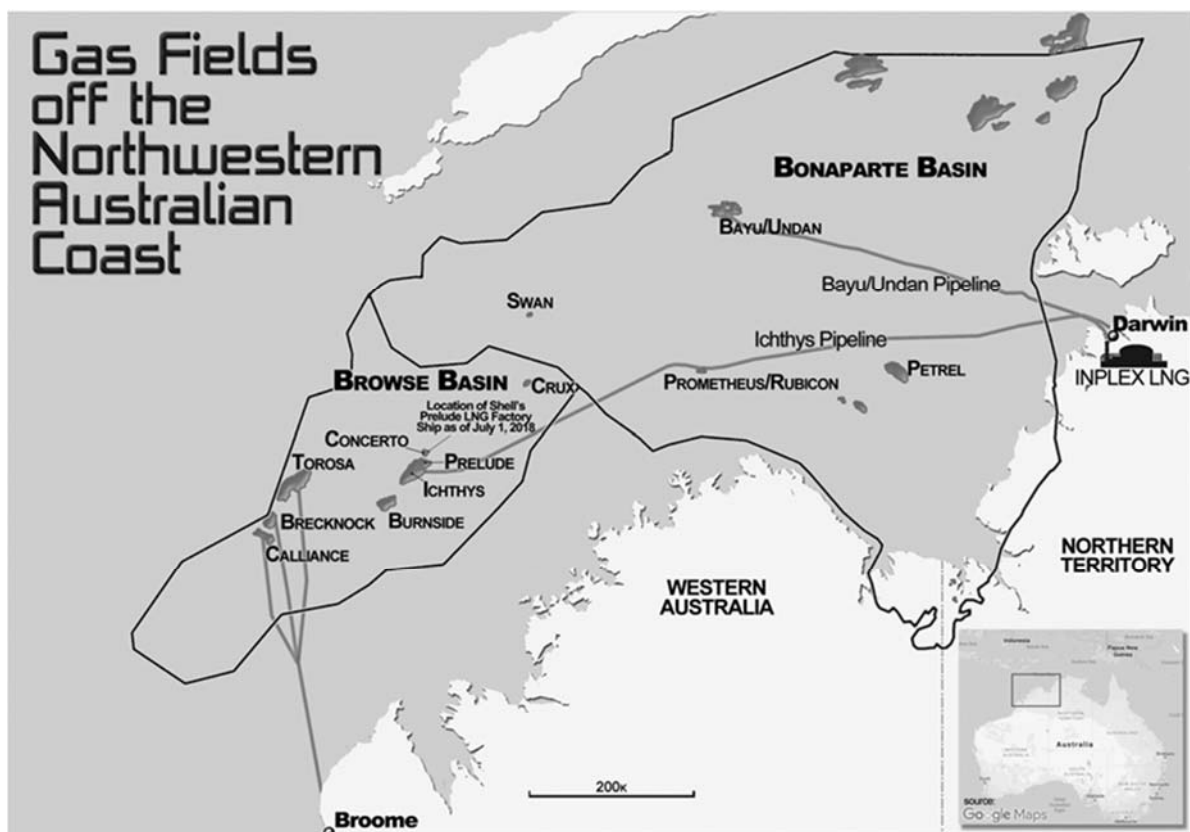


Figure 9. Gas Fields off the north western Australian Coast.

(Copied from Energy Link magazine, Summer 2018)

In response the KLC facilitated consultations during 2005 with Aboriginal residents on the Dampier Peninsula to gain feedback on how they regarded the project. In 2005 Woodside nominated Perpendicular Point as a preferred location for the processing plant as the site contained high ground for the plant and deep water for shipping. KLC consultations in 2005 led to objections to this site because the area was significant in terms of Aboriginal cultural heritage. During 2008, the area around North Head, on the edge of Pender Bay was nominated as another Gas Hub site and the State government began flora and fauna surveys in the area to keep the process moving (Welsh and Broun 2008). After the consultations the KLC formed the view that the location of a Gas Hub should be chosen by the Aboriginal people affected by the project, not identified by the developer. Consequently, the KLC indicated that it would not agree to the sites the company had nominated.

Woodside offered a substantial benefit package amounting to some 20 million dollars to the Aboriginal people who might be directly or indirectly affected by the Gas Hub. The Japanese company Inpex, offered 8 million dollars, initially proposing to build the processing plant on Maret Islands, 500 kilometres north of Broome. However, the KLC representatives responded by requesting more information regarding the terms and conditions of the payments and sought to ensure that the Aboriginal people who would be directly affected had entered into the agreement consistent with the principles of 'free prior and informed consent'⁵¹.

Western Australian state elections in 2008 led to a change of government and Colin Barnett headed the new Liberal government. Change of government led to a change of direction and derailing of the negotiation process through the KLC. The Barnett government issued a compulsory acquisition notice for land at James Price Point, south of North Head and around 60 kilometres north of Broome. The compulsory acquisition severed the right to nominate the Gas Hub location by KLC and overrode the Aboriginal decision making processes. Meanwhile, despite encouragement from the State government to build their processing plant on the Peninsula as a shared facility. Inpex announced their disinterest in a shared Gas Hub and preference for their own processing plant either in Darwin or within the Browse Basin. They

⁵¹ Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is based on the United Nations declaration of the rights of Indigenous people to Self Determination. As FPIC is not defined in the declaration the scope and content of this right 'remains unsettled' and the State and Industry are expected to act in good faith. See <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/IPeoples/EMRIP/FPIC/Australia.pdf> accessed 30 April 2021.

subsequently made agreements with the Northern Territory government with plans to pump the gas through pipelines from the Browse Basin to Darwin

Woodside, for its part, had invested over three years in establishing a relationship with the KLC and were against compulsory acquisition by the State (see O'Neill 2016 chapter 6). As a result of many meetings, trips to Woodside offices in Perth by senior Kimberley Aboriginal people and the sponsoring of Aboriginal working groups, Woodside representatives had come to appreciate the importance of personal relationships in the negotiations (see O'Neill 2016 chapter 6). The compulsory acquisition notice risked the relationship formed between Woodside and the KLC.

This is not to say that all senior Indigenous people were opposed to coming to an agreement with the company and the State. Kimberley Aboriginal leaders such as Peter Yu and Patrick Dodson who were involved in the Noonkanbah protests during the late 1970s and early 1980s understood the importance of having agreements to compensate for the lack of protection for Aboriginal people in the Western legal system. Moreover, considering the value of the gas resource at the time, there was a sense of 'not if, but when' the companies would force their way onshore (Melville, Faton and DeLay 2013). There were then elements within the KLC that considered that agreement should be reached sooner rather than later.

The resource potential in the Browse was, at least in the information distributed by the companies, unusually high. As the talks progressed, it was agreed that if the companies worked within a single processing hub, then the Western Australian state government would facilitate the development of the plant through legislating the agreement made between the parties. After various talks the companies were given the option of working within one area, being a 3 kilometre square site. The agreement was formalised in 2012 through the state enacting the *Browse (Land) Agreement Act 2012*. The money and other benefits available for distribution to the Aboriginal people of the Peninsula, and elsewhere in the Kimberley was increased until it eventually was calculated to be 1.5 billion dollars.

From 2008 to 2013 meetings continued between the State, Industry and the KLC. O'Neill (2016) describes the unfolding of events, the various negotiations and agreements signed during this time. Finally, and despite an apparently promising start, the project stalled. In 2013, after eight years of meetings and negotiations, Woodside representatives stated the company would abandon involvement in the onshore processing hub. One reason given was that onshore processing was incapable of delivering the required returns. Another was that unconventional oil

and gas extraction methods known as ‘fracking’ had been developed across the west Kimberley and the market for LNG had changed. Woodside maintained their office in Broome, but withdrew their contribution to the 1.5 billion dollar Aboriginal compensation package.

KLC – Going Through One Gate

The KLC engaged with the process on the basis that the Gas Hub would have a Kimberley wide impact described as the ‘ripple effect’. The language used by Wayne Bergmann (KLC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) 2001 – 2011) was that any benefit package should address the needs of all Kimberley Aboriginal people, rather than merely the group owning the country where the project would be situated. The social and economic impact of the Gas Hub would need to be considered as Kimberley wide.

The KLC held the dual role of Native Title Representative Body and advocate for the regional interests of Aboriginal people throughout the Kimberley. By 2008 it had established a separate office to manage the negotiations relating to the proposed Hub, known as the Gas Office. In 2011 Wayne Bergmann resigned as the CEO of the KLC and established Kimberley Regional Economic Development (KRED), a charitable organization focused on economic development in the Kimberley⁵², established in direct response to manage the economic benefits that were expected as a consequence of the development of the LNG Hub.

Senior Aboriginal people were brought into the decision making process from the beginning of consideration of proposals and subsequent negotiations with the Government and industry. It was considered an important operating principle that senior Aboriginal leaders who were identified as the ‘Kimberley Elders’ directed all discussion. Those with specialist sacred and ritual knowledge, usually referred to as the ‘Law Bosses’, were qualified to articulate matters of importance specific to Aboriginal people, such as cultural heritage places to be avoided by any development activity. The KLC established an Environmental and Cultural Heritage Team of senior Aboriginal people from the Dampier Peninsula to advise on all aspects of the physical development of the project. The support of senior Aboriginal people also provided the KLC with a degree of legitimacy and the authority to act.

The underlying motivation for setting up a comprehensive negotiating team was to guarantee Aboriginal representation, resist unacceptable demands made by either the State or industry and

⁵² see <https://www.kred.org.au>

ensure there was a single voice on the part of the native title holders and Aboriginal people in the Kimberley more generally. 'Being at the table', not being 'steam rolled' and 'going through one gate' became common phrases of Wayne Bergmann in media interviews. The resources boom in the 2000s meant that the KLC as an organisation had developed considerable expertise in negotiating mining deals by the time the James Price Point proposal arrived. Wayne Bergmann as KLC CEO was a veteran of multiple mining agreements and Indigenous land use agreements.⁵³

Despite the attempts at ensuring a unanimous voice, one group, known as Goolarabooloo frequently disagreed with the KLC agreement making and, in particular, opposed a coastal site for the Hub. Members of the Goolarabooloo group eventually sat as outsiders during the KLC process, lodging their own separate native title claim in 2011. The reluctance of the Goolarabooloo group to join the negotiation team furthered already extant divisions within the Aboriginal community and created additional complexity to the dynamics of development on the Peninsula and the community (Aboriginal as well as White) response to it.

Aboriginal people at the Blocks were outside the information stream. The authority to speak for the area of their Blocks rested with the native title claimants not with the Aboriginal lease holders. Technically, the Block residents would have been included in the Kimberley-wide benefit package that the KLC sought as a condition for the Gas Hub, as were all other Aboriginal residents of the region. However, being outside the information sessions and decision making processes, the Block residents' ideologies and aspirations were never incorporated into the position promulgated by the KLC. The difficulty for Aboriginal Block residents was their status as Aboriginal lease holders meant they were not granted a 'place at the table', yet the social impact of the project, the hope for new economies based on paid labour, the potential of 5000 White people moving into the region, was completely at odds with small scale tourism development. As a result and understandably, two of the three Block resident groups joined the protest factions.

The environmentalists

During 2007 in the early stages of negotiation about the Gas Hub the KLC and five prominent environmental lobby groups signed a Joint Position Statement. The statement expressed agreement that there was the potential for there to be 'cultural and environmental' impacts as a

⁵³ <https://www.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=417> for full list of agreements.

result of the project. The assumption made by lawyers who drafted the Agreement was that Aboriginal people and environmental groups held identical, or at least very similar beliefs about environmental protection. The joint statement implied that the parties would readily agree about environmental risks presented by the Gas Hub project. Part of the agreement was that the environmental lobby groups, led by Whites, would support decisions of Kimberley Aboriginal people, as represented through the KLC.

The in-principle agreement that there would be a single site for the Gas Hub meant that there would be less environmental impact than would have been the case had every company been given the opportunity to build LNG processing plants at different locations. The environmental groups agreed they would advocate alongside the KLC to mitigate environmental impacts of the project.

It was however, an uncomfortable alliance. Partly in response to Colin Barnett's compulsory acquisition of the favoured site for the LNG precinct, the KLC's views as to what constituted 'cultural and environmental' impacts came to differ from those of the environmental groups. Coupled with this was a change in the leadership of one of the most influential groups (Environs Kimberley) and a consequential change in direction. The organisation subsequently withdrew from the KLC agreement.

The division between the KLC and environmental groups escalated and stereotypes fuelled the separation. Aboriginal people who supported the KLC process became caricatured as people who had lost their culture through being raised at the Beagle Bay mission, or in nastier interpretations, as 'money hungry coconuts'. One environmental activist said of the Aboriginal proponents of the development,

[K]nowing nothing of their culture, coming back to their people with the pure notion of cashing in on their ignorance ... You have people like me who are Kartiya [White] who fight tooth and nail for culture, and you have Indigenous people now who are fighting tooth and nail to sell it (Louise Middleton in Dumont, August 2012).

Some Aboriginal people and groups joined with the environmental protestors. These included the Goolarabooloo (who I discuss above) and the town-based and generally mixed descent Aboriginal people from Broome – grouped together as 'the old Broome families'.

The environmental protestors generally failed to appreciate the complexities of Aboriginal land ownership in the region, and relied on stereotypes and generalisations to disparage those

Aboriginal people who did not concur with their views. While Aboriginal interests might be acknowledged, the environmentalists were generally regarded as people who found it difficult to place Aboriginal people and Aboriginal organizations, especially the KLC, at the forefront of negotiations. There was selective use of Aboriginal symbolism to protest against the Gas Hub project.



Figure 10: Environmental Protestor James Price Point 2011

(Photo by Ben Collins ABC Kimberley 2011.)

One strikingly visual example of this is the photograph I have reproduced in Figure 10. The picture was taken by ABC journalist Ben Collins in 2011. When I first saw the photo I assumed it was Johnny from Plum Point and that he had brought one of the camels from the Block to join the protest group. After web searching I found out the photo is of Luke Campbell who is not from the Kimberley, but had walked his camel from NSW via Alice Springs and lived with the Goolarabooloo people at Coconut Wells for a short time⁵⁴. From the available information online the camel protestor does not identify as Aboriginal. His camel is mentioned in a Financial

⁵⁴ See <https://theandychannel.com/a-brief-biography-of-a-bushman/> accessed 12th April 2021.

Review article (Patrick 2018), as being used to harass Woodside workers early in the morning. He was later removed from the protest camp after wilfully causing damage to Woodside equipment. The photo epitomizes the environmental protest, an ‘outsider’ coming to the Kimberley and using the Aboriginal flag to enhance the protest.

For the residents of the Blocks, however, the environmental groups represented the strongest and (despite their innate complexities) most effective means of expressing opposition to the proposed LNG precinct. They were then potential allies in a struggle to maintain all that they had fought for over so many years.

The proposed Hub and the Peninsula economy

The people of the Blocks were not blind to the realities of promised economic benefits and I think it fair to say that there was some scepticism over the promises of employment or business opportunities. However, the Blocks residents were engaged in small-scale business enterprises, so the promise of an increased clientele or access to better resources was attractive, particularly as Government funding through CDEP was being withdrawn and other sources appeared to be steadily decreasing if not drying up altogether. The project was marketed as ‘mining as progress’, and working for the mines was usually described by many Peninsula people as the ‘big money job’.

Whether mining is capable of delivering much economic benefit to Aboriginal people is arguable. Crough and Christopherson (1993), assessing the Kimberley economy during the 1990s and before the mining boom of the 2000s, conclude that major mines such as the Argyle Diamond mine had little impact on the Kimberley economy. International ownership means profits are sent offshore. Crough and Christopherson also show that, at least in the 1990s, payments from the state (in the form of various types of welfare or assisted employment programs), especially to Aboriginal people, were the principal economic support provided to the Kimberley (1993:258-262). Mining often results in substantial impact on Aboriginal social as well as cultural arrangements for those affected by its activities, while the environmental consequences are often significant and (so some would argue) irremediable. That the impacts can be mitigated and the industry afforded a degree of social licence, through promotion of the view that companies are ‘progressing’ remote and under populated hinterlands is sometimes advanced as a justification for the development. However, studies have shown that Aboriginal people realise little economic benefit from mining agreements (see Cleary 2011, O’Neil 2016 or Scambury 2007).

O’Faircheallaigh (2012:47) concluded that mining benefit packages might actually deliver little to

a region if the revenue received through agreements is cancelled out or exceeded by reduction of government funding for services, such as housing or education.

Patrick Dodson was of the opinion that the combined State and Industry benefit package for the Gas Hub was best understood as a rearrangement of public sector funding. It was, in effect, that which the government would be required to outlay to address the inequalities in existence. Dodson explained on Radio National in 2013, that Aboriginal people, ‘were being made to trade entitlements in order to get some benefit and it’s dolled up as if it’s some form of compensation’ (Melville, Fatin and LeMay, Radio National 2013).

Colin Barnett made public statements asserting that the development of the Gas Hub on the Dampier Peninsula would provide Aboriginal people with the opportunity of joining the ‘modern economy’ and that this was the means to gain ‘self-determination’ (Melville, Fatin and LeMay, Radio National 2013). One promise of the Gas Hub project was that it would give Aboriginal people the opportunity to sell their labour. This rested on the assumption that Aboriginal people would both readily and easily join the wage labour force. However, none of the Block residents indicated any desire to sell their labour to the project. Moreover, characterising the ‘modern economy’ solely in terms of the practice of selling labour and then equating this with the language of ‘self-determination’ hopelessly muddled an economic process and an ability to determine one’s future. For the people of the Blocks, not only did they have no inclination to sell their labour to the developers, but the circumstances that would enable them to do so would deny their struggle over many years to choose a way of life and living of their own choice, which for them was the reality of self-determination.

THE MANY HEADED BEAST – THE IMPERATIVE TO MINE

I worked for the KLC during this time as staff anthropologist and later as a contractor. From 2008 to 2013 I worked on three projects for the land council. The first involved consultation or what were called ‘notice meetings’ where my job was to record the decision making process in relation to the Gas Hub project. I also worked on native title applications made to land within the central Dampier Peninsula and authored two anthropological reports to register claims in the region. The KLC also contracted me to record Aboriginal sites and ‘buffer zones’ at James Price Point after the area was compulsory acquired by the State of Western Australia to construct the Gas Hub.

At this time my social circle in Broome changed dramatically. Invitations to dinner parties and gatherings on back verandas, events that sustained social life in Broome, began to fall away. The Broome intelligentsia, the White professionals who relocate to the Kimberley short term for their careers and work experience, are, broadly speaking, environmentalists who hold political views to the left of centre. As a result of the negotiations with the State and the resource industry, the KLC gained a reputation for ‘selling out’ to both the state and the resources industry. Some Broome residents expressed their disapproval and very real anger at the organisation and the KLC offices were graffitied with the slogans which included, ‘Killing Law and Culture’ and ‘Killing Law and Country’. Aboriginal staff were characterised as, ‘money hungry coconuts’. The social comments reported by journalists in Broome public media at the time reflected outrage at the KLC’s engagement with industry. Comments included, ‘it’s just down to pure greed, the [Aboriginal] people should be disgusted with themselves’ (Melville, Fatin and LeMay, Radio National 2013). As negotiations about the project continued, my reputation within the remote Broome network was reduced to some form of ‘yes’ person supporting economic gain through the industrialization of the west Kimberley.

Factions and imperatives

Factions created in response to the Gas Hub project represented those in favour, those against and many shades in between. Factions in favour of the project included the KLC, the state (both the Federal government and West Australian) and industry, led by Woodside. These three factions, each with quite different motivations, engaged from time to time in formal negotiations spurred and constrained to a large extent by the rights each asserted derived from their respective roles as state, Aboriginal representative body under the *Native Title Act* and corporate developer. A fourth faction included non-government organizations and special interest groups, and included those drawn from Aboriginal families who had been resident in Broome for many generations, along with environmental lobby groups and those who had travelled to the region from other areas of Australia. The members of this fourth faction held assorted views. However, they shared a general opposition to the project but based on a variety of reasons. They lacked any representation amongst the three principal pro-development factions and operated outside the agreement making process, which was the former’s principal business. The fifth faction, representing many who were opposed to the development, was a diverse and at times riotous collection of community protestors as ‘outsiders’, these were the ‘blow ins’ travellers that had come for the dry season. The composition of the fifth group was unstable and unpredictable. The fifth represented an informal and unsteady response to the project.

Presenting the background narrative to the Gas Hub proposal requires creating boundaries for the various factions where separation is not always complete. There was overlap between the groups and interests within groups at times were in conflict. Environmentalists who passionately waved Aboriginal flags as symbols for protecting country, also refused to accept that the KLC, the largest Aboriginal organization for the region, had the right to speak for country. Some politicians from the WA State government proclaimed that the project ‘would not be at the expense of Aboriginality’ (Gallop cited in O’Neill 2016:160). They promised that the Gas Hub would improve the economic and social position of Aboriginal people, being an ‘opportunity for self-determination’ (Barnett, in Melville, Fatin and LeMay, Radio National 2013) but the same individuals also relied on the police in military style formations to disperse Aboriginal protestors from blockades at James Price Point. Opportunities presented by proponents of the project, especially the eventual compensation offer from the State and Industry of 1.5 billion dollars for an Aboriginal specific Kimberley wide benefit package, contrast with the negative features of the proposal, such as the arrival of five thousand workers to build the infrastructure, who would live, work and recreate amongst the existing population of the Dampier Peninsula which at the time was recorded as only one thousand people⁵⁵. How the environmental damage would affect Aboriginal identity which was inextricably linked to a unique spiritual relationship with country was characterised in various ways. Some Aboriginal people argued that sites could be protected and the country was robust enough to support the project and that financial benefits were critical for the future well-being of Aboriginal people, especially the young. Others saw site destruction as inevitable and economic benefits illusory.

Despite the indefinite nature of the boundaries between the factions, they were distinguishable through their respective agendas and how each represented itself in public discourse. Each faction was driven by multiple objectives and a complex agenda reduced in the ensuing debate to a series of shorthand imperatives. Woodside touted mining as progress, holding an imperative to extract resources in an underdeveloped north. Their imperative was simply to progress the project. The state government argued the project was an opportunity for Kimberley Aboriginal people to participate in the ‘modern’ economy, Premier Barnett describing the Gas Hub as the, ‘one opportunity for self-determination for Kimberley Aboriginal people’ (Melville, Fatin, DeLay 2013). The state’s imperative was then to develop the State of Western Australia. The KLC

⁵⁵ Population estimates for remote Aboriginal settlements derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data for have been questioned by Morphy (2010), however, Ardyaloon (One Arm Point), Lombadina/Djarindjin and Beagle Bay all have population estimates of 350 people each, the figure of 1000 is likely to be close.

advocated for Aboriginal rights within a legal system that favours the mining company⁵⁶, to avoid being forced to accept an outcome that could have been socially and economically disastrous for Aboriginal people. The KLC's imperative was then to advocate and give material advantage to Aboriginal people. For the environmentalists, special interest groups and old Broome locals, whose principal concern was to protect the environment and a particular lifestyle associated with Broome and the west Kimberley, the imperative was simply stated; protect ecosystems and a 'local' way of life. For the informal community protest groups the imperative was less clear but represented the proposed development as anti-environmental and anti-Aboriginal.

This confusion of incongruent imperatives reflected the ideologies of the proponents and how they understood the proposed Gas Hub and how they represented their response to it in terms of simplified objectives and goals. But the imperatives for action all had one thing in common. All sought legitimation by reference to a universal imperative to 'do good'.

Povinelli (2002:2) captures some of the urgency involved in mining in her description of 'moral panic'. Writing of the Aboriginal community of Wadeye in the Northern Territory, Povinelli asserts senior Aboriginal people suffer through the 'various contradictory orders and levels of obligation' experienced when large scale resource development is proposed. She describes the young as eager for development and the money it may bring to remote communities, while senior people suffer 'moral panic' through wanting to support benefits for the young while protecting what Povinelli defines as a 'particularly sacred Dreaming site' (2002:2). The concept of moral panic captures to some extent what the Block residents experienced through engagement with the many and competing claims made both in favour of and in opposition to the proposed Gas Hub development. However, in my view the experience was more a moral dilemma than panic. The long term nature of the negotiations, for example eight years of deciding the physical location of the Gas Hub and quantum of the benefit package, placed incredible strain on Aboriginal political leaders such as Wayne Bergmann, Peter Yu and Pat Dodson. However, their response was something more strategic than panic. What was displayed was an obvious understanding about the position of Aboriginal people when dealing with the State and industry, coupled with the stamina to try and broker a deal that would carry the most benefit for the Aboriginal people in the region. The response of the Block residents certainly reflected the dilemmas they faced when trying to balance the asserted advantages with the disadvantages.

⁵⁶ Discussed further below in the KLC response.

The people of the Blocks and the many-headed beast

When the Gas Hub project was proposed in 2005 the Block residents had already lived permanently on their leases for several years. After ATSIC was dismantled and CDEP restructured the residents constructed new ways to remain living on their leases (see chapter 4). Block residents were acutely aware of the proposal and devoted much time to seeking information about it and discussing it amongst family and friends. The demands and expectations of the various parties had the potential to deteriorate into conflict. Together the competing parties had the characteristics of a gargantuan and powerful force that sought to accomplish outcomes seemingly with a rapidity driven by asserted imperatives. It could be likened to a many-headed beast that had a multi-directional velocity and volition of its own and had to be managed and handled with care. The Block residents did not consult with each other and caucus to form a combined response. The reaction of each Block is discussed below (see page 155 onwards).

During the period of time that the Gas Hub proposal was a part of daily interactions the Block residents in the Dampier Peninsula were forced to engage with this Hydra like beast. The factions were driven by perceived imperatives that held moral force. The imperatives were presented with power and conviction. Moreover, they were in fundamental contradiction one to another. Mining represented progress in an under-developed north but threatened a 'pristine' environment. Jobs had the potential to relieve the suffering and economic hardship of Aboriginal people through employment or cash grants, but the social and demographic changes that would be a consequence had the potential to destroy elemental attributes of Aboriginal culture.

To add to the emotional intensity of engagement and the conflicting imperatives for action, any understanding of the project required consideration of the likely end result which was something unseen and could only be understood through speculation or imagining. For Aboriginal people living at the Blocks the benefits were uncertain. The residents were not recognised as native title holders or, in the local parlance, 'traditional owners' and this meant they were generally neglected in the KLC process. This position as 'outsiders' in the native title process affected information flow from the KLC, which in turn influenced the residents' views regarding the Gas Hub. Any compensation for compulsory acquisition and social impact was generally focused upon Aboriginal people who might be native title holders under the *Native Title Act*. Consequently, the Block residents were positioned outside the negotiations between the State, industry and KLC.

The Block residents held a position at the edges of the process while if the Gas Hub had gone ahead, the development would have had a profound impact on their lives. Indeed, in immediate terms it was evident to all of those with whom I worked that the social impact of the development would affect the quiet occupation Block residents held up as ‘the good life’, would impact the environment that was harvested routinely, particularly the coast and sea reefs which were prized both for personal economic exploitation as well as for tourism. In this context, the State Premier’s comments that the proposed development afforded an opportunity for unparalleled self-determination held an obvious irony. Wayne Barker, Jabirr Jabirr native title claimant and lead member of the KLC working groups, stated, ‘[The Premier] calls it self-determination, we call it standing on our own feet with a gun to our head,’ (ABC news, 9 May 2011). For the residents of the Blocks, ‘self-determination’ appeared to mean the forfeiting of their chosen place and way of living and the adoption of another that was not only unknown but at that stage, unknowable.

These views were held in stark contrast to many others on the Dampier Peninsula who viewed the proposed development through rather different eyes. Many senior Aboriginal people on the Peninsula supported the project and the KLC established working groups in order to progress the proposals to a final settlement (see O’Neill 2016:100). For senior Aboriginal people who had held a work identity on the pastoral stations and missions, the benefits of employment and Aboriginal specific education packages were significant. Supporting the Gas Hub development came with the language of supporting jobs for young Aboriginal people regarded as being ‘at risk’. The language also included an actual or sometime implied accusation: saying ‘no’ to this development was tantamount to denying benefits and the chance of a better life to others and was selfish, self-seeking and not in accord with Aboriginal principles of social relationships.

The Block residents had to engage with these local and influential voices when outlining the reservations they felt about the proposed developments. They were also forced to engage with an assortment of people with firm beliefs who originated from places far distant from their home Block. Since the project had caught the attention of the country, ‘some days it seemed the whole nation was arguing about his remote coastline in Western Australia’s north west’ (Burnside 2013). Media entourages accompanied most events associated with any discussion or debate about the Hub.

It was in this fraught and divisive context, subject to public attention, moral imperatives and conflicting assertions as to the benefits and the disadvantages, that residents were forced to

consider the future of their lives on their Blocks and the values and aspirations they had embraced.

The context and manner whereby the residents gained their information was reflective of the metaphor of the many headed-beast. Understanding what the Block residents faced through the metaphor of the many headed beast avoids false binaries such as development versus culture, or the environment versus economic development. Factions promulgated imperatives according to their own information, so there was no easy way to determine the truth of one source over another. Information was given in different forms and at different times, so there was an uneven response from parties that had the potential to be in agreement. For example the KLC and Block residents might have been in agreement with environmental protection agencies about the development, however, information was circulated at different times making joint positions difficult to establish and maintain. This was further complicated by divisions within factions caused by conflicting interests. For example, Casey became an outspoken opponent of the Gas Hub while her brother worked for the KLC team undertaking consultations with the goal of securing an agreement to allow the LNG precinct to be built. All factions had to recommend action and make decisions based on a predicted outcome: what the project ‘might’ be, rather than any firm reality. This meant the response was often speculative, lacked a factual basis and tended to be emotional.

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE BLOCKS

In 2008 and before the WA State government issued the compulsory acquisition notice for James Price Point, one of the favoured sites for the Gas Hub was between Beagle Bay and Pender Bay at Perpendicular Point.⁵⁷ This region was relatively densely populated having 15 leases in the region of which 9 were permanently occupied. A three kilometre square processing hub would have closed the access tracks to multiple Blocks and this alone would have delivered a substantial physical impact on the ability of the residents to continue occupation. Given both the physical proximity of the development and associated infrastructure the impact on Block residents would have required a complete shift in their ideology and basis of connections formed to country (see Chapter 7).

⁵⁷ North Head lies around 5 kilometres to the west of Perpendicular Point and their proximity one to the other has resulted in the two names sometimes being used interchangeably to identify this particular area of the coastline.

These events occurred during one of my periods of fieldwork in 2008 and I was able to record the responses of the Block residents which I set out below.

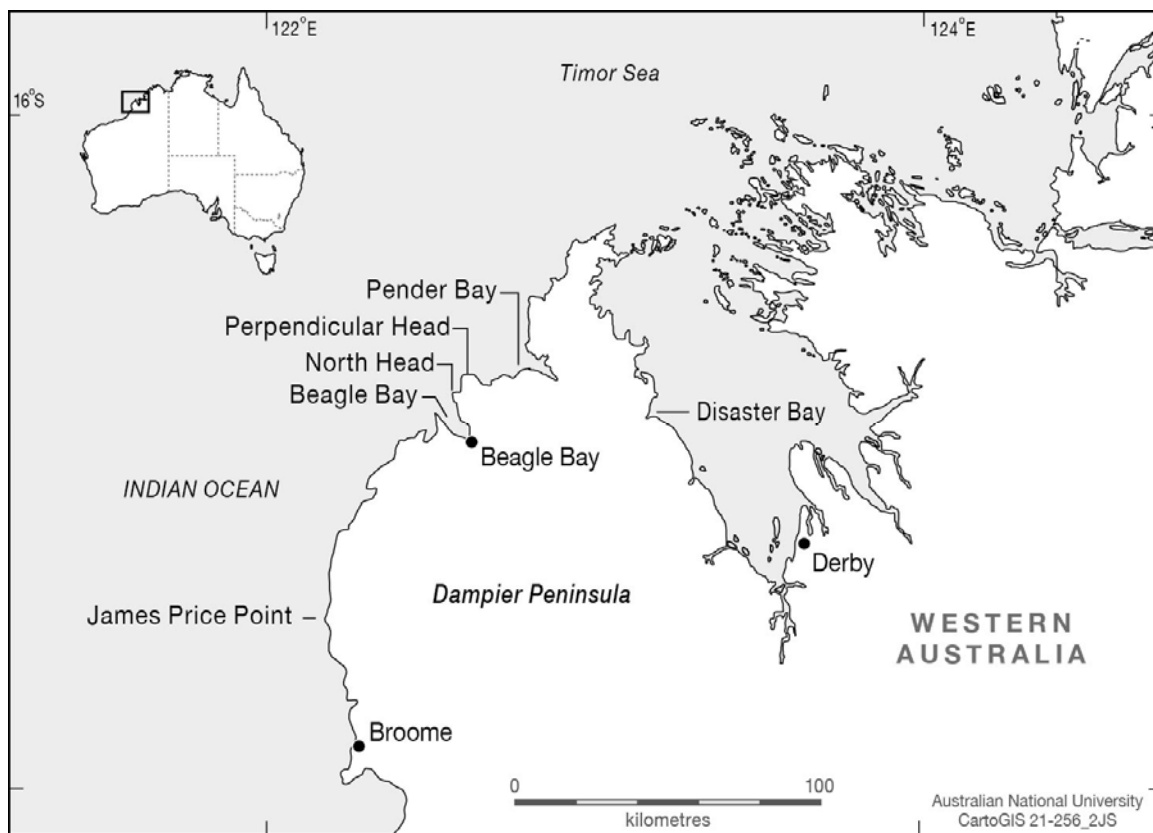


Figure 11: Map of North Head, Perpendicular Head, Beagle Bay and James Price Point.

Plum Point

Johnny was highly critical of the consultative process and regarded it as inadequate and poorly informed. He described an encounter he had with government officials who came out to visit his Block.

... out of the blue we've had a visit from one of the Premier's right hand man, came out to discuss, they just rocked up, one public holiday on Monday. Talked about Woodside, what we should do, what we want from offshore gas. We said nothing, we don't want anything. Just that you find an appropriate place, just not here.

... I asked him what he knew about Aboriginal people and he said 'I know the gaols in Australia are full of them', that was his response. (Rabbit 2006.)

Johnny was also critical of the limited extent of the consultation. He said, 'there needs to be an alternative model of development' and argued that the consultative process should be extended to include all those who would be directly affected. As it stood he challenged the process as

being inadequate, arguing that it needed to be, 'exhaustive', inferring that his status as landholder was being overlooked in the process

In day to day terms the Plum Point residents regarded the Gas Hub as incompatible with their being able to live on the Block. They said that the family would need to leave if the project went ahead. Lauren's response was, 'I don't know if we could still live here, are you allowed to live on the edge of a Gas Hub'. The couple were happy to speak with media and they offered firm opinions about what they believed was the best use for Aboriginal land in the region.

Central to their opposition was concern for the environmental impact of the project. For instance Lauren stated,

There's another issue if the plant went ahead, and we have seen some plans drawn up, they would have to do a big breakwater, a big jetty. There would be these huge tankers coming in. And also the area is sand and if they build out this huge breakwater, and one thing you just notice here, is the huge sand movement all year round. A metre gets taken away in the wet season out the front and all gets replaced again from this time now. I think it will be an ecological disaster. (Rabbit 2006.)

Concern about impact on the environment was further stated by Lauren as,

... this whole area is a migrating ground [for whales]. Pender Bay is a calving area, breeding, nursing mothers, which has all been documented thank goodness. There is quite a few studies been done. (Rabbit 2006.)

Lauren made appeal to western science, hoping that the 'documented' presence of breeding whales might help in protecting the area. This shows a degree of faith in environmental values as having the capacity to influence decision making for the Gas Hub.

Johnny and Lauren described the financial hardship faced by Block residents as a result of changes to CDEP and ever-increasing funding restrictions. They thought that small-scale enterprises provided a means to generate income, appreciating that in some respects it was possible that the Gas Hub proposal might afford financial opportunities.

Johnny: Yeah, yeah, they are finding ways to overcome it all [financial hardship].

Lauren: The only hiccup there is for those that don't [overcome the restrictions in funding], having a gas plant would be an easier way of profiting money.

Johnny: I think they are not thinking straight. I mean, it's like down the road here, we've got a chap, as far as I've known him, he's just a 'yes man' for money, don't really understand the big picture. He doesn't like to work. He's one. He'll move [i.e. vacate the Block lease for the company]. Being a non-traditional owner of the area, you have that kind of attitude towards the area. (Rabbit 2006.)

For Johnny, at least, gaining money from the development meant not only abandoning the Block, but was a characteristic of a man with no principles (a 'yes man') and one who was not culturally attached to the country ('non-traditional owner'). For Johnny, both were contrary to the ethos whereby he lived and worked at his Block.

Johnny also regarded compensation for the project as having little value, that people had become 'blinded by the dollar' and that the negotiating process with the WA State government and industry might end up delivering very little and had the potential to deteriorate into 'just an ego trip'.

Johnny also took more direct action in seeking to protect a part of his lease through provisions of the West Australian *Aboriginal Heritage Act*. He registered a stone fish trap which was an archaeological and cultural site located on the shoreline of his Block. He identified the surrounding beach as a buffer to protect the site. While such action showed his determination and resolve, it is unlikely that registration would have done much to limit the proposed project since the *Aboriginal Heritage Act* can be readily overruled by the state government.

When the Western Australian State government abandoned the consultation process for selection of the Gas Hub site and issued the compulsory acquisition notice for James Price Point, the immediate threat of being forced from their lease was eased for the Plum Point residents. When I spoke with Lauren at the Block during this time she indicated her obvious support for the Goolarabooloo faction and the environmentalists. However, in practical terms, the family appeared to be busy running their café and camping grounds and did not seek a media profile or participate in the frequent demonstrations at James Price Point.

Sunset Beach

I was staying at Sunset Beach as a paying guest while undertaking field work in relation to a native title claim, on contract to the KLC. Wishing to show my appreciation for Casey's hospitality and because over time she had become a friend I had brought a bottle of wine with me from Broome. When I had finished my work for the day Casey was more than happy to

share a glass of wine while watching the sunset. We were chatting and sipping wine, totally relaxed, when Casey suddenly cried out, 'Oh shit!' to which I responded, 'What?' She told me that she had just remembered Duncan Ord, an executive director in the Department of State Development, was booked to stay at Sunset Beach that very night. She immediately resolved that sitting drinking wine with her friend was not the image she wanted to promote. Not wanting to waste good wine, we agreed we would skull our drinks the moment we heard a vehicle. This was the nature of Casey and her response to the proposed LNG plant. It was complex, strategic and informed. It represented contact with influential bureaucrats, Aboriginal people who held local authority and her own personal relationships with family and the country of her lease. Casey networked from the position of a proponent of cultural and ecological tourism. Aboriginal culture and western ecology were aligned and considered mutually beneficial. From this nodal point of an Aboriginal eco-tourism operator Casey engaged with both industry and the state government outside of the KLC.

While Casey's response to the proposed LNG plant was sophisticated, both she and Shane were openly opposed to the Gas Hub and, like the Plum Point residents, regarded the project as jeopardizing their lifestyle at the Block and the values upon which it was based. When North Head was put forward as a location for the Gas Hub the Sunset Beach Block residents were just as challenged in terms of knowing what best to do as those living at Plum Point. Casey gave the following response,

Should that happen [the Gas Hub], we won't be able to walk on the reef anymore, we'll be stopped from going out fishing. Many of us will have to move.

... the traditions that come through country, the animals on country, we have to speak up for them. We have to put country, the plants and animals in the forefront of this whole thing too.

I myself do not support any large scale industrial development on the Kimberley coast.

These multi-million dollar companies that are coming in and promising us all sorts of jobs and employment opportunities, describing the benefits we can get from this. What they really want is our land. (Casey pers comm 2009.)

Casey's response also reflects her sympathy with the various positions that were forming at the time. This had the effect of making her response less straightforward. She stated,

We all know the appalling disadvantage that most of our people live under. The KLC is working really hard to make sure that Aboriginal people make an informed decision about the Gas. A Traditional Owner task force has been set up and members represent the local views and concerns in the Taskforce and take information back to their respective Traditional Owner groups. The Western Australia government has agreed that no development will happen without the informed consent of the Traditional Owners. Let's hope that's the case (Casey pers comm 2009)

Casey could also see the possibility for financial development. Casey was generous giving interviews to researchers and journalists, particularly ABC Kimberley. She also was confident in negotiating with government representatives in her own right as a lease holder and business developer of cultural and ecological tourism.

Casey did not provide a singular narrative in her response to the proposed LNG precinct. To the extent that it might have physically impacted on her Block and her chosen way of life, she was opposed to it. To the extent that she understood it to represent environmental destruction, she also was against it. However, she could also see the potential benefits. More than any other person with whom I worked her response characterises the complexity and innate contradictions of the proposal.

Pindan Bay

Pindan Bay residents, like Plum Point and Sunset Beach, were outside the KLC process of working groups and meetings that might have allowed them to speak up and be heard about their concerns for their lease, business and way of life. As was the case with Plum Point and Sunset Beach residents, when North Head was nominated as a location for the Gas Hub Alfred at Pindan Bay regarded this as incompatible with life at the Block. I came to stay at Pindan Bay the week the proposed site at North Head was announced. Alfred had obtained a satellite image with drawings of the boundaries needed for the project, which showed the access tracks to Pindan Bay cut. He seemed uncertain as to where he had obtained the map. Alfred was outraged. He told me in no uncertain manner that he would burn everything at the Block to the ground before he would let another person live in it. However, Alfred's indignation was short-lived. The next morning, when I spoke with him again his views had changed, literally overnight. On reflection he had calmed down and was making other plans to engage with the many headed beast.

This was the time that CDEP funding was being centralised to Beagle Bay and Pindan Bay residents were forced to work in Beagle Bay for CDEP payments (see chapter 4). Given the

limitations of such an arrangement, Alfred recognised that engagement with the Gas Hub process could result in substantial business opportunities, although it would require a change of direction in their financial plans. He told me that they would modify the tourist chalets and use them to accommodate workers for the precinct. Alfred had accommodated the CDEP trainees for several years at the Block, so the adaptation to house workers was not dramatically different from what Pindan Bay had done for the last five years. With figures floated that up to 5000 people would be needed to build the Gas Hub, accommodation shortages would be inevitable. For both Alfred and his wife, this planned response represented a way of holding onto the family home in the face of the juggernaut-like proposal.

There may have been more to his response than pure business acumen, particularly based on his initial angry outbursts. Alfred and Sandra had close family ties to the KLC. One of their daughters worked doing accounts and administration at the Land Council while another was married into the Bergmann family. Both family and institutionalised connections were likely to have been influential in Alfred's final plans. However, the information from the Gas Hub project was restricted and whether much flowed through to Alfred and Sandra from those contacts is questionable.

As it eventually turned out, the State Government compulsorily acquired James Price Point for the precinct and the immediate threat to Pindan Bay receded. Although the project would have had an environmental and social impact on their lives, Alfred and Sandra did not seek media attention or speak in protest about the project. Yet Alfred held on to his original ideal of running a small business on his own lease, independent of community or institution and looking after the environment of the sea coast. In 2015 I saw a photograph of Alfred in a Catholic Church newsletter with an article condemning the West Australian government's proposal to close 150 outstations. The article featured the couple and was strongly supportive of their lifestyle at Pindan Bay as an example of the best aspects of de-centralised living.

PROCESS, CULTURE AND SECULAR ASSIMILATION

There are two features that develop from an analyses of the various threads that make up the story of the proposed LNG precinct on the west Dampier Peninsula and the people of the Blocks. The first relates to the process and the rights of Aboriginal people when this kind of project is proposed. Without the right to veto development activities on their land, the legal system favours industry. The interests of the Block residents as Aboriginal leaseholders rather

than native title holders were easily side-lined by the KLC in its struggle to create benefits for its Aboriginal constituency, the native title claimants. The second relates to Aboriginal culture and what Peterson (2010:251) defines as ‘secular assimilation’, the false proposition that it is possible to change daily practices and material circumstances without there being consequences for culture.

Structural issues and misshapen architecture characterise the LNG negotiation process. Scholarly articles in response to the Gas Hub often comment on the failings of the *Native Title Act* and call for amendments (for example O’Fairchellaigh 2012). Aboriginal people did not have the right to veto the proposal and the KLC sought to create benefits through brokering the best possible compensation package in response to what was understood to be the inevitability of the development. In my view the stamina of the KLC staff, particularly Wayne Bergmann, in undertaking meetings, brokering deals with the State and industry, and pursuing the rights of the KLC’s constituency was remarkable. However, the Land Council maintained a focus on native title holders and other Aboriginal land holders were side-lined. The Compulsory Acquisition Notice lodged by the Barnett Government allowed environmental and special interest groups to withdraw from and then openly oppose the KLC and increased factionalism.

Each group was motivated by a singular imperative, a call to arms that would be ignored (apparently) at certain peril. The result was a complex sea of information and pseudo information. Each faction relied upon their own information, which was gained in different ways. There was no easy way to decide any truth of one source over another. Information was available in different forms and at different times, making consensus impossible. What developed was an uneven response from factions that had the potential to be in agreement. Taken together, these interest groups, the imperatives that propelled them and the chaotic products of their actions constituted a many headed beast that challenged the everyday life of the Block residents. Block residents (and others in the region) lacked the resources – or perhaps the will – to decipher these various messages and de-energise the imperatives so they could be understood with dispassion and engaged with subsequently. The abandonment of the proposed site near their leases at North Head alleviated the pressure upon them and they were able to withdraw, as it were, to a safe distance, and quietly voice their concerns only when necessary.

For reasons that develop from both the legal requirements of the *Native Title Act* and the nature of the leases themselves, coupled perhaps with some prejudices, the Block residents were neither consulted nor included in the otherwise wide-ranging process of formal consultation. This is at

odds with their central position as occupiers of potentially highly impacted country and that they ran business concerns that were likely to be severely impacted or possibly destroyed if the proposal had gone ahead.

Had the LNG precinct been built, particularly in proximity to two or more of the Blocks, it is likely that they would have simply disappeared and would have been another casualty of industry. Their loss in personal terms would have been enormous. From the point of view of the residents of the Block, the whole process could be understood as the very model of how not to attempt economic development within Aboriginal Australia.

The Gas Hub project promised 5000 jobs during the building phase. As factions took shape, the imperative of the project became based on jobs and the economic advancement of Aboriginal people in the region. To oppose the project was to oppose the potential for Aboriginal betterment. How this social change would modify Aboriginal culture on the Dampier Peninsula was never tested as the project was eventually shelved.

Peterson (2010:251) defines 'secular assimilation' as the false proposition that it is possible to change aspects of people's daily practices and material circumstances without there being consequences for their culture. This is understanding assimilation 'in its everyday intransitive sense' as the process of becoming like something else rather than the government policy (with a capital A) that sought to erase Aboriginal culture and identity (2010:251). Another way of expressing the same concept is to speak of the 'relative autonomy of culture' (2010:251). For example, the proposition would hold that Aboriginal people working full time in the mining industry might do so without implications for their values, beliefs and everyday practices. According to Peterson in his critique of this proposition, the point to consider is whether it is possible to separate ideational systems – culture – from material conditions, the everyday of earning a living (2010:251). Peterson, citing numerous social theorists, including Marx (1904), Sahlins (1976), Simmel (1907/1978) Weber (1920/1930), Banfield (1958) and Harrison (1985, 2000), concludes that culture and the material conditions of existence are interactively connected. To change material conditions will in turn alter culture (2010:251). Peterson provides the example of how the availability of kangaroo meat in the local store for purchase contributed to the decline in kangaroo increase ceremonies in the desert. Peterson extends the analysis to argue that belief in the power of material self-interest is one reason why it informs the recommendations of economically oriented policy buffs (2010:251).

People of the Blocks were faced with double bind – the promise of economic betterment carried with it the promise of the destruction of the environment and lifestyle that underpinned their ideal and was the basis for their business activities. These negative inevitabilities of the proposed development were largely absent from the rhetoric of promised benefits, the advantages of joining the mainstream economy and the better material and physical benefits. These were lauded by proponents as the natural consequences of the building of the gas precinct and Aboriginal participation in the economy that flowed from it. To achieve secular assimilation would have required that had the LNG precinct gone ahead Aboriginal cultural practices could have survived in the same form as practiced prior to development. Yet, would entering wage labour accommodate those aspects of culture held dear by the residents of the Blocks – family, fishing, wild harvesting and cultural tourism? The answer for the Block residents was clearly in the negative. This was the principal reason why the residents of the Blocks and no doubt others, opposed the project. Moreover, in terms of effecting social change and furthering Aboriginal advantage through employment, better housing, or the like, the academic studies of similar large-scale industrial development elsewhere provided little support for the opinion that the LNG precinct would be a game-changer (O’Neil 2016, Scambury 2007). The evidence was that industrial scale development would not ‘close the gap’ for the great majority of the local Aboriginal population. The people of the Block were not convinced that the economic and material benefits would flow to them.

The admittedly limited mainstream economic activity of the residents of the Block, while yielding modest returns, was however shown to be sustainable. The residents have now occupied their Blocks for 20 years, while simultaneously nourishing a culture held dear by those involved. For the Block residents the LNG precinct offered very little and threatened to destroy much more.

Peterson (2010:250) poses an important and seminal question with respect to his examination of ‘Closing the Gap issues’. He simply states, ‘how will it be achieved?’ The lessons drawn from my examination of the people of the Blocks and the chaos that ensued following years of negotiations to introduce major industrial activity to the Dampier Peninsula and almost unimaginable sums of money to go with it, is that relative autonomy of culture is unlikely to be possible in such circumstances. Rather, what is needed – if there is a choice - is more of the same: opportunities to develop cultural and economic autonomy. The residents of the Blocks have worked out how best to frame their lives by reference to their ideologies and material

needs. The only limitation is, of course, that not all Aboriginal residents of the Dampier Peninsula choose to or indeed have the opportunity, to live their lives on a Block.

CHAPTER 7

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE BLOCK

Owning and belonging: the double problem

In the previous two chapters I described how residents of the Blocks sought to secure an economic advantage by means of commercial ventures and so consolidate and make viable their place and way of living. The case study of Bruce's boat demonstrates how engagement with the market economy could be affected through the agency of a White protagonist. However, difficulties resulted from the wish to balance business goals with what the Block residents regarded as a sustainable lifestyle on the Block and adherence to values and principles the residents held dear. While the ultimate failure of the venture was due to an unrealistic business model, the proposal did not reconcile the inevitable intrusion of tourists with the residents' desire to maintain an independent, low impact and peaceful milieu, having regard to the natural environment. Nor did the proponent of the venture comprehend the social and aspirational needs and values held by members of the close family.

The case study of the LNG processing plant showed that there was a promise of substantial economic returns through participation in the development, this could have been either through the provision of labour both initially and perhaps, later, as a part of an associated service industry, or through the provision of workers' accommodation. However, Block holders readily recognised that these economic returns would only be gained at the price of the sustainability of their lives on the Blocks as the residents had come to understand it. Tourists might represent a blot on the landscape, but the development of a processing plant would destroy the very features they held most dear – the natural environmental beauty, the peace and quiet and possibly many of the natural resources.

The consultative process that heralded the proposed development brought to the fore an additional difficulty for the Block holders. The decision as to whether to support the development or oppose it was a matter for the native title holders. The Block holders, while having the right to live on their leases and conduct a business there through their lease agreement, did not command the right to be consulted and so were unable to influence the outcome directly.

The case studies show two principal difficulties faced by the Block holders. The first relates to the nature of the engagement with the market economy.

As I have shown in chapter 4 of this thesis, life on the Block is sustainable only through an engagement with the market economy – represented as tourism or (in the case of the proposed LNG processing plant) industrial development. Such engagement relies to a greater or lesser extent on Whites (either individuals or represented as corporations) and a direct engagement with the commercial or industrial world which threatens and encroaches on the lifestyle of the Blocks. Such engagement is inconsistent with the aspirations or ideology of the Block holders – a matter I have explored in greater detail above (see chapter 4 and chapter 6). The first difficulty for the Block holders is that while they own their own businesses, it is not an activity (either in fact or as proposed) with which they can comfortably feel a sense of ownership. In this they own their business but do not belong to it.

The second difficulty relates to the nature of the relationship between a Block holder and the country of their lease. Again, this is a matter I have explored in greater detail above (see chapter 4). In moving to a Block, the occupants have worked to make the lease their home. Part of making it their home is to develop a sense of belonging to the country of the Block. The Block is variously a place to live, raise a family, accommodate members of the immediate family and provide a sense of attachment, distinctiveness and identity. The leases granted by the ALT provided a right to occupy the Block and run a business there. However, the Blocks were not granted on the basis of traditional ownership. The advent of native title means that the leases sit on country for which radical title is held by native title holders. Lease holders are not granted their Blocks on the basis of traditional ownership. The Gundaragin committee regarded 'historical people' as eligible for leases only because of their forced relocation and long term association with the mission delivered a certain status and an expectation that they be granted an ALT lease. Native title processes showed there were others, either at Beagle Bay or now living further afield, who could trace ancestral links to that country. The consultations that were a consequence of the James Price Point proposals brought this disenfranchisement into sharp focus. Under the native title legislation, it was the native title holders who were consulted, not those who held ALT leases. The lease was an imposed White bureaucratic device which ignored the roots of customary title to country. The second problem for the lease holders was then how they could feel at home and belong to country where they were not recognised as traditional owners.

In seeking to sustain life on the Block residents have sought to mediate these difficulties through the development of an ideology which both shapes and sustains their relationships with others in

the pursuit of their occupation of and activities upon their Blocks. This ideology provides both the means and the justification for the manner whereby the engagement with the market economy is affected. It also necessarily imposes limits (both social and economic) on what can be accomplished. It is also an ideology that seeks to mediate the gap between a lease holder and those with customary and ancestral attachments to the same country through the creation of cultural links that legitimate occupation and use. In this way the ideology serves as an agent for succession to country.

In this chapter I describe the challenges and need for an ideology that is not a purely Aboriginal one; that is one that can accommodate the emerging ideology of private property created through labour, but complicated by the extent of the dependence on the state (for example, CDEP grants). Nor is it an ideology that might characterise a 'traditional owner' or native title holder. Rather it is an ideology which needs to encompass being Aboriginal while at the same time accommodating justification for living on land that is not, according to customary principles, their own while also being country which is both psychologically and emotionally home to them. I discuss the aspirations of occupants of the three Blocks in order to examine the ideology which residents use as the framework for their choice of their singular way of life. In this way I investigate the aspirations that sustain permanent residence at the Blocks.

Outstation stereotypes, 'homesteads' and stations

The outstation movement was very rapidly taken up in Arnhem Land. Grey (1977:115-117) gives several reasons for this rapid decentralisation. The locations of missions and reserves were originally selected on the basis of how they satisfied White needs for servicing, such as ports or roads. They took little account of Aboriginal values, including respect for the original owners of the country in question. The location sometimes resulted in friction and disputes between the immigrants and those upon whose country the settlement was built. Moving to a new decentralised location provided a solution to this friction while serving to draw the government into direct negotiation with the outstation groups. Decentralisation also provided a way to avoid alcohol. Grey (1977:115-117) also noted that increased mining activity encouraged decentralisation through a perception at least that living on country allowed some form of control of alien influences. Recognition of land rights and the availability of essential services through changes in public policy were also significant factors that enabled Aboriginal people to move to decentralised communities.

Confidence that Aboriginal people could live according to customary practices, plus belief in Aboriginal emotional and spiritual motivation to live remotely was embedded in support of the early outstation movement. Coombs concluded that distinct Aboriginal traditions would sustain decentralisation movements. He asserted that the ‘rehabilitation of Aboriginal traditional authority and decision making structures’ would be an important outcome of decentralisation (1994:26). Coombs was of the view that government financial support should be flexible and take the form of block funding rather than allocation for specific projects and services, or payments in the form of CDEP instead of unemployment benefits (1994:28). Services should also include schooling and community advice that encouraged self-management. If these conditions could be supplied by the state, then Aboriginal people could, in Coombs’ view, ‘re-establish a physical, social and spiritual environment in which traditional elements will be once more dominant and the influence of the alien culture made more marginal’ (1994:30). Coombs’ ideology for the outstations is echoed in other scholarly accounts of the outstation movement (for example Altman 2006, Peterson 2016). These works point to the variation in outstations across Australia, while also presenting a form of ‘outstation stereotype’, which involves separation from mainstream Australia both geographically and in terms of cultural practices. For example Altman writes of outstations,

These places and their residents are culturally and geographically distanced from mainstream Australia, beyond the public gaze and, in part because of cultural difference, are barely understood by the wider community. (Altman 2006:1.)

Altman (2006:6) describes Arnhem Land outstations being best understood as residential areas, established with improvised dwellings constructed from a mixture of bark and corrugated iron, with further infrastructure gained after continued occupation was recognised by the state. Altman emphasises the importance of Outstation Resource Agencies, organisations set up with Federal government funding to service the needs of outstations, as mediators between the Aboriginal residents and government funding sources. The Aboriginal population at the Arnhem Land outstations was often small and highly mobile while occupation of the outstation was usually seasonal. Altman argues that these kind of outstations are best defined as infrastructural nodes, ‘a convenient point for administrative and producer and consumer interaction between the state and the market and those Indigenous people living in the bush’ (2006:5).

Residential areas understood as ‘infrastructural nodes’ are evident in the Kimberley. For example, when I did fieldwork around Lake Gregory⁵⁸ approximately 200 kilometres south of Halls Creek, an Aboriginal woman pointed out what she called ‘my outstation’ near Balgo in the northern Great Sandy Desert. We were travelling together in the back of a troop carrier and after lengthy discussion that involved much pointing on her part and squinting on mine, I realised the outstation I was being shown was in fact simply a capped bore pipe. The availability of water was important. It meant the potential to live in that particular stretch of land and this potential was extended to define the area as ‘my outstation’.

Literature from the West Coast of South Australia on ‘homesteads’ shows some similarities with the Beagle Bay Blocks. During the 1990s, relatively late in decentralisation processes, parcels of land were acquired by Aboriginal family groups with funding gained from the Indigenous Land Corporation and ATSIC.⁵⁹ It was anticipated when the land was obtained that this would encourage and facilitate Aboriginal economic development and engagement in the market economy. While there has been little published on these enterprises (Gerritson and Phillpot 1996; Vincent 2017: 95-8) information available on the internet⁶⁰ shows that at least one offers a range of tourism, accommodation, catering and related services. Anecdotal evidence (Scott Cane, *pers. com.* January 2020) reports engagement with the market economy through either working the farm directly or leasing the farm land to others. Vincent (2017:95-98) was of the view that asserted ancestral affiliation influenced the granting of land and regarded the movement as the precursor and catalyst for disputes that arose during native title applications. Vincent does not discuss how the Blocks are being used or what sustains them as this was not the focus of her account.

A second form of contemporary Aboriginal land tenure, which has relevance to the Beagle Bay Blocks, is the development of Aboriginal pastoral properties in the Kimberley. Like the South Australian examples and the Beagle Bay Blocks, the Aboriginal owned pastoral stations in the Kimberley have provided the vehicle for the expression of a distinct Aboriginal history. Davis (2004) describes stock working skills and ‘stock worker aesthetics’, presumably style of dress and personal presentation, as part of the cultural repertoire of the Aboriginal station managers in the Fitzroy Valley region. Davis quotes Aboriginal man Eric Lawford as stating ‘[t]hat’s the only

⁵⁸ Mapping Outside the Square Project, Mulan 2004.

⁵⁹ Scott Cane, *pers. com.* January 2020

⁶⁰ <https://www.scotdesco.com.au/> accessed 27 January 2020.

thing we know, how to nurse and grow cattle' (2004:5). Connection to the area is demonstrated through physical occupation and the use of special technical work skills gained when working on cattle stations owned by White Australians.

Elsbeth Young, writing in 1987 as a part of the East Kimberley Impact Assessment Project, articulates the tensions created through differing understandings of land and land use for Aboriginal people and White people. When a pastoral property was purchased there was a level of expectation from east Kimberley Aboriginal people that the station would be used as a living area, purchased as a form of buying back Aboriginal land for Aboriginal people. Government bureaucratic technical advisors and perhaps the wider Australian public had the view that the stations would operate at a profit and provide training and employment for a number of local Aboriginal people and Young explains these expectations generally deteriorated into conflict and confusion. Young identifies three factors as the basis for conflict and confusion; the first relates to the difference in meanings attached to the land, the second relates to the pastoral station community where the buy back of a pastoral property is assumed as being able to support an Aboriginal community, while the third relates to understanding and expectations of enterprise (1987:67). Young describes the tensions as follows:

East Kimberley Aborigines, like their fellows elsewhere, see the land as providing them with a social and religious base, and the wherewithal to enhance their quality of life. This may or may not involve significant participation in the monetary economy, through exploiting some of its resources for cash. Non-Aborigines, however, place prime emphasis on such resource exploitation, and judge Aboriginal priorities which do not accord with such views as both inappropriate and irresponsible (1987:67).

Young's report also shows the Aboriginal pastoral leases starting and operating from a point of disadvantage. This disadvantage stemmed from both the limited economic resourcing available and in terms of management through Aboriginal authority systems which were compromised by bureaucratic interference (Young 1987: 68-70).

Based on Young's 1987 report, it might have appeared that the failure of the Aboriginal owned pastoral properties was inevitable. Yet these east Kimberley pastoral properties have persisted as Aboriginal owned stations up until the time of writing in 2021. One possible explanation for the stations continuing is the difference in how success is measured. Aboriginal owners regard sustaining occupancy and retaining an Aboriginal cultural presence within the landscape as a measure of success. That these pastoral properties are still Aboriginal owned proves the tenacity of Aboriginal residents in maintaining occupancy. That stated, it is also true that the properties

require funds to stay afloat and the state through the agency of the Indigenous Land Corporation provides these, presumably because the stations are regarded as providing a benefit – typically a healthy social environment and at least some training and employment opportunities.

In 2004 Richard Davis explored the manner whereby Aboriginal pastoral properties were directed, particularly with respect to Aboriginal managers (Davis 2004). Davis argues that understanding the aspirations for the property under White models of pastoral development, where production is geared towards surplus, is of little use in explaining the motivations of Aboriginal stakeholders. Recognition of the traditional land holding systems and working with Aboriginal councils means that Aboriginal managers operate according to values and goals not held by White pastoral managers. The Aboriginal managers have attracted criticism from other Aboriginal people that they are ‘too autonomous’ (2004:22) without proper regard to their obligations within the kin based social system. The Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal pastoral properties show connection to country through a unique Aboriginal history and culture while at the same time showing innovations for asserting control over parcels of land for particular family groups. In this way certain Fitzroy Valley Aboriginal station managers are creating an Aboriginal family dynasty, in some ways like the historical White station families. Davis argues these managers are ‘members of small, land and resource based business elite in Aboriginal society’ (2004:22).

Pastoralism is not the focus of my thesis. However, the fact that these stations are Aboriginal owned leases, established as a mixture of both living area and the potential for economic development indicates that they are relevant to understanding the motivations of the people holding Blocks in the central Peninsula. Pastoral leases are not just about running a business and making a profit. They provide a lifestyle and an alternative to living in larger communities or towns. This way of living is manifest through distinctive Aboriginal ideology which represents the values and aspirations of the residents.

Decentralisation and the Blocks

When the Beagle Bay mission was established in 1890 Aboriginal people were forced to live at Beagle Bay. Some were rounded up at distant locations and brought to the mission, many as children. When the missionaries surrendered their control in the 1970s the order that had structured daily life and delivered a work identity was also largely lost. New government employment positions required formal mainstream qualifications and skills gained under the mission regime were not always recognised. For many Aboriginal people membership on the community council became the primary pathway to positions of authority. This authority was

not guaranteed and the council itself unstable⁶¹. The community corporation was often under resourced and members were caught between demands from the various government departments on the one hand and expectations of Aboriginal people at the settlement on the other. Settlement life was explosive in nature because of trauma, lack of employment, drugs, drinking and noise. The provision of living areas, away from the community on assuredly secure leases provided an opportunity to move away from these pressures and difficulties. There was strong demand from many Beagle Bay residents to gain one of these leases as residents saw the potential for life away from the main settlement in a less crowded, less fraught and natural environment: a 'good life' with greater autonomy and a renewed connection with the natural environment.

While the impetus for a move away from settlement life was similar to that found in decentralisation movements elsewhere (Coombs, Dexter and Hiatt 1982: 428-9) the Beagle Bay Blocks are not examples of the outstation developments that typified areas of remote Aboriginal Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. The decentralisation movement of the neighbouring Bardi and Jawi was based on pre contact models of local organisation and ancestral connections and differed from the central peninsula (see Glaskin 2007⁶²). Outstations explained as infrastructural nodal points, understood through an ideology of the reoccupation and reclaiming of ancestral country and a return to traditional economies, values and priorities differ in key respects from the Blocks of the central Dampier Peninsula. The starkest difference is the incipient conflict over the authority to occupy. Country occupied is not always ancestral country, although traditional cultural links to country are a significant part of the language of the occupation of the Block. The lease is a licence from the Crown made through the agency of the ALT. As a lease it is bounded by means of a borderline drawn on a map. Blocks are defined in terms of size and boundary. The term 'Block' itself suggests understandings in terms of western real estate. The Beagle Bay Blocks are discussed with respect to both their acreage and the leases, which provide justification for the right to occupy, made by reference to legal principles. One of the first things Block residents are likely to emphasise is that, 'my Block is fifty acres, I have my piece of paper [lease]'. Leases are owned through corporations according to Australian law, the Blocks are permanently occupied

⁶¹ The Council was suspended in 2004 and the community was managed through a steering committee with a White advisor contracted to broker a Shared Responsibility Agreement for Beagle Bay during 2005.

⁶² Glaskin (2007:214) describes the neighbouring Bardi and Jawi outstation movement as based on pre contact models of connection to country with a contemporary twist on the way Aboriginal corporations have used ancestry and pre contact models of local organisation (2007:216).

and regarded as a home. They are not loosely and perhaps indeterminately bounded by reference to an infrastructural nodal point. Other differences are also apparent as a result of the conditions which accompanied the issue of the leases. Block residents are required to be joined with mainstream economies while referencing traditional practices. Both the authority to occupy and the requirement for commercial engagement develop difficulties which Block residents seek to mediate.

The Beagle Bay Blocks show some similarities with the ‘homesteads’ of South Australia, but they are not only smaller in size but also would appear to lack the degree of corporatisation evident in limited accounts available. One similarity shared by the South Australian homesteads and the Blocks of the central Dampier Peninsula is that small family groups permanently occupied the Blocks while the residents proffered assertions of close cultural identification with the land in question which appears however to be contested. Another similarity is the evident direct involvement in the mainstream economy as a requisite for the receipt of funds from the state and therefore necessary for the survival of the communities involved.

FROM BEAGLE BAY TO THE BLOCK

Establishing and maintaining the Blocks in the central Peninsula is hard work. Bush fires, sometimes purposely lit, frequently burn the properties. Cyclones with storm-force winds wreak havoc having the potential to destroy infrastructure. Heavy rain makes the roads impassable and access to store food and other services can be cut off for days at a time. Consequently, life for people living on the Blocks is vulnerable to extremes of weather, while financial uncertainty is a result not only of extreme weather events but also of seasonal downturns and the vicissitudes of the broader regional economy. Even at the best of times the financial returns possible from running any sort of business on a Block are quite limited. This leads to the question ‘how is the “good life” possible?’ And, in turn, ‘what aspirations sustain life at the Blocks?’ If the main motivations are not profit making or creating surplus typically the aspiration to engage in remote activities such as mining, agriculture or pastoral ventures, then what motivates and sustains residence at the central Peninsula Blocks?

Despite the vulnerabilities that are endured by Block residents, there is a constant sense of optimism and progress expressed in statements I collected from residents like ‘it’s a hard life, but a good life’ and the expression of undefined goals like ‘we have some plans’ or ‘we’re getting there’. These aspirations help to explain why people rebuild and continue to stay at the Blocks

under such volatile and uncertain conditions. By my reading such statements are tropes which wrap up a diverse range of feelings, expectations, aspirations and social relationships. Block residents have constructed artefacts to anchor themselves to the land and these artefacts establish a sense of connection to the land and express ownership of the Block. The sense of the Block as home, or home country, is constructed through an ideology that employs certain objects and their symbolism.

To locate the Beagle Bay Blocks within the spectrum of Aboriginal living experiences in the early 21st century, I turn to an examination of the ideology that underpins the enterprises.

The challenge of creating a home

As I noted above, the allocation of Blocks through the granting of leases was not based on much if any reference to families representing lineages that might reasonably be supposed to have held that country prior to the arrival of the missionaries. I explained in chapter 4 above the ancestral connections that each of the 3 lease holders have with the country where they obtained their lease. Alfred holds ancestral connection to the Disaster Bay area, approximately 100 kilometres east, so he has no traditional connection with the area. Both Casey and Johnny, who share common ancestry in their second ascending generation claim a traditional connection to Pender Bay which was, however, identified as Bardi country through in the native title processes⁶³ while neither were recognised as native title holders. The language identity of the Pender Bay area remains a highly contested issue such that neither Casey nor Johnny are readily accepted by others as having traditional rights to that country.

There was an additional difficulty regarding tenure of the Blocks. Some of the leases appear not to have been properly executed and there are questions raised from time to time about the legality of the occupancy. At Sunset Beach a younger family member has taken over a Block apparently leased to an older family member, while the legality of the original lease has been questioned. The Plum Point lease was gained outside the initial processes of committee-determined land distribution, again leading to questions as to the legitimacy of the holding. Both Sunset Beach and Plum Point are home to a White partner, both of whom are significant players in the development of the Block and the businesses set up there. This too attracts some local criticism. The Pindan Bay lease was granted in the early rounds of distribution and is subject to

⁶³ *Sampi v Western Australia* [2005] FCA 777 [1094, 1098].

less controversy. I noted above that some of the central Dampier Peninsula Blocks have been identified as subject to ‘informal occupancy’ (Western Australian Planning Commission 2015: 25, 62 and 72). The sometimes ambiguous and potentially uncertain nature of the leases has encouraged greater efforts to establish connection and so legitimate continuing occupation.

This meant that for most lease holders it was necessary to construct forms of connection to the country that did not rely on traditional arrangements. In this regard residents of the Blocks established connection to the country of their leases through the promulgation of an ideology and the presentation of a number of symbols and tropes. This connection asserted the residents’ rights to country and affirmed that the country was their ‘home’. A basic and indispensable part of this process was to frame self-representation and identity in incontrovertible Aboriginal terms. While aspects of the business of the Blocks is strongly influenced by mainstream White values (for example, bounded private property, the investment of labour as the basis for property rights) the ideology is essentially framed by reference to Aboriginal values and founded upon traditional ideals.

Some of the symbols employed are common to all three of the Blocks. For example, by building houses and other infrastructure on their Blocks lease-holders have mixed their labour with the land so the products of their industry stand as testament to their presence. Residence and physical presence is in itself symbolic since it serves to identify a Block resident in relation to place and attracts an understanding of personal identity and occupation. Being a Block resident associates person with person – consociates, kin or adopted kin – as connected to a particular named location, such as Sunset Beach, Pindan Bay or Plum Point. This understanding as ‘being from’ an occupied Block also associates Aboriginal people with a work identity affirmed with a logo (a symbol) printed on the pocket of their shirt or displayed on their web page associated with the particular development project at their Block. Most of the businesses associated with the Blocks have their own logo, featuring an animal, marine or natural species which serves to identify the business and the owners of the individual Block with the natural world and its resources.

Because the Blocks are on Aboriginal reserve land the development ethos incorporates the ideology of Aboriginal benefit. Business activity is regarded as being for the advantage of Aboriginal people. I collected statements along the lines of, ‘we’re starting a tourist business to bring in jobs for family’ (Casey, Sunset Beach) or, ‘he wanted to do something to prove to our people that we could get off our bottoms and do something’ (Tamsin, Billabong). The language

of development is then expressed in terms of being for the benefit of Aboriginal people and these constitute tropes that reflect the ideology of the Blocks.

While the use of symbolic forms of representation are common to many Blocks across the Peninsula, the three I described here were quite different in terms of the people involved, their relationships and what they sought to gain from living on their Block. I now turn to a consideration of the use of tropes and symbols as an expression of an ideology of the Block for Pindan Bay, Sunset Beach and Plum Point in turn.

Pindan Bay. 'Reaping what you sow'

At Pindan Bay the leasees have lived at the Block permanently since 1999. Alfred and Sandra are roughly ten years older than the couples at the other two Blocks. Alfred and Sandra, like many others, saw the Block as an opportunity to develop a living area for their family, creating a place to escape from the problems of larger settlement life at Beagle Bay. Pindan Bay residents have created a family living area permanently occupied and hope to hold onto it for the 99 year term of the lease, wanting the grandchildren to hold the country and believe they have a right to do so.

The challenge for Alfred and the residents of Pindan Bay has been to manage any opposition to their right to be in the area through hard work, good manners, and their assertions of belonging expressed through multiple symbols.

Alfred and Sandra were born in the 1950s and raised at Beagle Bay under the mission regime. Sandra was taken from her family in Broome to Beagle Bay and lived within the dormitory system, while Alfred grew up with family members in an area of the mission that contained family housing known as 'the colony'. The mission history looms large at Pindan Bay. During evenings sitting around the fire out in front of the house Alfred and Sandra told stories of their experiences of the mission, some discussions questioned the philosophical basis of Bible stories, while others were more humorous and told of how the Beagle Bay residents outsmarted the authority of the church and its officers. In amongst the questioning and funny stories there was also obvious affection, Sandra offering the following comments about her time in the mission system:

Those older ones were strict nuns, you would get hit on the knuckles with bamboo or oleander quick if they thought you weren't listening in class or whatever. (Pers comm 2009.)

Conversations generally indicated the influence of the church in shaping the identity of the mission inmates while the accounts contained a mixture of disdain for the cruelty and a feeling of self-worth derived from the singular history. Statements made and narratives presented reflected a sense of pride in being part of an Aboriginal heritage that had its roots within the Beagle Bay mission.

Some staff were said to be, 'like family' and 'good', others 'naughty'.

Mother [...] and Sister [...] were in the convent, Sister [...] would teach as well. ... Some were like family, some were good. But some were naughty towards the kids.

But now we thank them for what they did. (Sandra pers comm 2009.)

Christian iconography is obvious at Pindan Bay and is symbolic of the residents' status within the mission history as it relates to the region. For example, Beagle Bay Church is shown on the Pindan Bay web page while alongside the Church picture are details of support given by Pindan Bay residents in rebuilding the church after the bell tower collapsed in September 2000. Natural materials were gathered from Pindan Bay to help with reconstruction. In return corrugated iron and other materials were provided to Pindan Bay for repurposing after fire had burnt several of the old mission buildings. Exchange and gifting of resources is evidence of the enduring ties between the church and Pindan Bay Block residents. The family's connection with the church and its representatives at Beagle Bay is expressed by these various symbols and reflects both an historical and spiritual anchoring which provides authoritative legitimation for Alfred's presence at Pindan Bay and his right to live there.

Maintaining the infrastructure of the Block requires continued hard work, perseverance and ingenuity. This level of industry and determination creates and portrays a sense of ownership of the area, reflective of the Christian teaching that 'you reap what you sow'.⁶⁴ Residents gain a sense of ownership through the work undertaken while the industry that is demonstrated in the process proclaims the ideology of hard work and resolution. Alfred stays permanently, partly to protect his property from pilfering, but also as a symbol of his permanence and that he now belongs to the country. Justification to stay at the Block through hard work was obvious when proposals for the Gas Hub threatened to displace the residents. As I noted above, Alfred would rather have seen his house destroyed than let somebody else live in it. During native title

⁶⁴ 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' *Galatians* ch 6, v. 7 (*The Bible*, King James Version).

interviews some of the Beagle Bay residents commented on the amount of work Pindan Bay and other Block residents had undertaken and suggested that the native title process should respect the labour put into the living areas. The labour involved in establishing the Block and maintaining the living area was portrayed as being symbolic of the right of the Block holders to be there.

Under the mission regime Alfred worked as a stockman before later training as a carpenter. This life history has provided certain symbols that are drawn upon to create connection to the Block. The name for the Block is derived from the name of a well in the area that was constructed when cattle ran across the Aboriginal reserve. I did not get to visit the well, but Alfred knew the location and described it as having stone tanks and a stock watering trough.

For Alfred, naming the Block is significant because of his work history as a stockman. The name signifies his history, links to the land as a stockman and his working the bush with senior Aboriginal people. This work as a stockman equipped him with life skills for remote living. These skills show in the layout of the Block. The property makes for comfortable bush living, is kept clean, the buildings well maintained and everything in good working order. Alfred knows how to control wild dogs that sometimes menace the property, he can manage stock and once mentioned in passing that he was capable of neutering his own dogs if necessary. Alfred's work history means he has the capacity to undertake the more mundane but necessary duties of the Block. These include initiating controlled burns for rubbish as well as to reduce the risk of wild fire and clearing land around the buildings to act as a fire break. These actions, necessary as they are for working and maintaining the land, also serve as symbols of Alfred's ownership of the property.

During the weekends at Pindan Bay Country and Western music dominates the stereo system. When family members visit some bring out their guitars and Country music is their first choice. Some family members have taken out awards at Tamworth's Country Music Festival. Occasionally Alfred and Sandra perform country music in Broome at concerts organised through the Aboriginal broadcasting service Goolarri Media. Alfred and Sandra have included camp fire sing-a-longs as part of the promotional material for tourism. Chequered shirts, country and western music and cowboy hats underline the 'bushie' identity of Pindan Bay residents.

The aspiration that motivates Pindan Bay residents is the creation of permanence, to establish a place for the family to call home. Other activities appear to be the means to sustain occupation

for the family. When I questioned Sandra about the chalets at the Block she said they had been constructed for her family. Pointing to each chalet, she stated that there was one for every grandchild. When Sandra and I wrote applications for funding, her motivation for seeking funding was expressed as, 'I'm not chasing this money for me, I'm doing this for my grandchildren'. The Block was being constructed as an extended nuclear family living area with the expectation of the family continuing to occupy the Block into at least the grandchildren's generation. Nancy, one of Alfred and Sandra's children described the Block on the Pindan Bay Face Book page as 'home sweet home, Block is where dreams are made'.

The Block is also credited with special spiritual attributes in the form of healing properties, which serve to bolster the family's connection with the country. When Alfred's sister died during my fieldwork period her widower and small child came to stay at the Block for several months following her death. Alfred and Sandra, as well as other members of the family, regard the Block as 'home' and believe that it holds nurturing properties. The Block, like a nurturing family home, is viewed as somewhere to derive personal strength, a place of support and healing. It is home country where certain people can stay for extended periods of time to find support.

Grandchildren stay during school holidays when their mothers need to work full time in Broome. The sense of the Block as a place of healing is strongly evidenced by the attempts made by Alfred's daughters to extend this belief into the business plans, which I have described in chapter 5.

Alfred stresses the asserted healing attribute of his lease area by saying that it is 'family friendly'. Cliffs, dangerous for young children, surround other coastal Blocks, including Sunset Beach and Plum Point, while the Pindan Bay Block coastline has dunes extending to the sandy beach, which Alfred claims makes his Block safe for all. Major events are held at Pindan Bay. For example, family members come there to watch the football grand final on the satellite television, or to celebrate significant birthdays such as 50th or 60th. The Block is also used to host large wakes, which have become a traditional observance after funerals.

Sunset Beach. Developing Aboriginal enterprise

Since Sunset Beach is situated on Aboriginal land the residents readily describe the enterprise as being for the benefit of Aboriginal people. This lends credence to the requirement that the business of the Blocks is an Aboriginal one and the characterisation is a trope which residents use both to justify and motivate activities. But the ideology is also expressed through other tropes and symbols. These include assertions of historical connection to the region, ecological

knowledge and promotion of 'pristine' landscape previously occupied by the former Aboriginal owners of the country, commonly referred to by residents as the 'old people'.

Casey and Shane met when they both worked for Notre Dame Broome Campus from about 2000 onwards. With their eight month old son they went to live permanently at Sunset Beach Block in 2004. Casey was born in the late 1960s and spent her early childhood in the mission living in 'the colony' at Beagle Bay and later in houses purchased by her parents when the mission became an Aboriginal community. Casey was nine years old when the settlement ceased being a mission and became an Aboriginal community. Conversations at Sunset Beach differ to those at Pindan Bay. Casey, who is ten years younger than Alfred and Sandra, is of an age where her parents were subject to the mission rules but she attended boarding school in Perth, lived outside the Kimberley for a time and returned to Broome in her late twenties. Shane came from a tough place. He told me that he was homeless during his teenage years, had lived on the streets in Perth for a time and said that he never really knew his father who was absent for most of his life. Despite these difficult circumstances when Shane met Casey he owned a house in Broome near Cable Beach in a suburb where real estate prices were above the Broome average. Shane had trained as a carpenter and had made enough money working as a tradesman to buy this house. When he met Casey at Notre Dame he was studying environmental science and horticulture at the Broome TAFE while working at the university. When the couple resigned from the university to relocate to Sunset Beach he proudly stated at the farewell morning tea, 'I had nothing when I came here and I'm leaving with a family'. Through the proposed tourism development at Sunset Beach Shane represented himself as a leader for a small business and as instrumental in the development of an Aboriginal project. He also fast tracked his status as a Kimberley 'local' through his relationship with Casey.

The Aboriginal name for Sunset Beach is derived from the regional name rather than a specific site location and the term was widely known and identified by senior Aboriginal people as the name for the locale when I worked on cultural mapping projects for the KLC in 2014. The name was already established for the Block when Casey went to live there.

During her childhood at Beagle Bay Casey often went camping, visiting areas around Beagle Bay, North Head and northward to Pender Bay which were popular camping areas for mission residents during weekends and holidays. Casey often made reference to her early bush camping and access to the country in order to legitimate her asserted command of cultural knowledge. For example, on one occasion when talking about human burials in the region, Casey named an

area then said to me, 'Don't drive on the beach around there. See the white quartz on the beach and steer clear of that area. I know that from when I was a kid'. Casey often legitimates information by saying 'it's been that way since I was a girl' or that 'I know that from when I was a kid'. Casey presents her knowledge about cultural and historical aspects of the country gained during her childhood as evidence of a sense of belonging to that country. This is facilitated by the fact that Casey is both confident and comfortable in the bush, as she possesses an extensive knowledge about what bush resources are available. This includes knowing the Aboriginal names of bush resources – usually given in the Bardi language – knowledge of significant sites at least to the extent of areas to be avoided, along with familiarity with the various families associated with particular country.

When Casey and Shane were planning the placement of infrastructure on the Block, especially chalets to accommodate tourists and walking trails leading to lookouts on the cliffs, Casey consulted with senior Aboriginal people about places of significance along the coast line. Casey was advised that the highest point on the cliffs, where she had hoped to build a shade and establish a walking trail, should be out of bounds for tourists. Shane found this difficult to accept because he was not given cultural information about the reason for the restrictions, while Casey obeyed the requests without questioning. She chose other lower locations to establish tracks and lookouts and created a viewing area, naming it after her son. Other Aboriginal people also expressed their wish for heritage impact clearances to be undertaken before ground was cleared for the chalets and Casey complied, considering that this was a part of her duty as the proprietor of the Block.

Competition existed between the Aboriginal tour operators on the Dampier Peninsula, especially guided bush foods tours since knowledge of resources, their names and uses was regarded as a sort of cultural property, while also being mundane knowledge that could be shared with tourists. Based on her ancestral connections to the area Casey negotiated with the extended community over what kind of cultural experience she could include in the promotional materials. Casey had knowledge of the bush resources, the Aboriginal names, their uses and when they were in season. This knowledge was more than sufficient to inform guided tours through various parts of the Block. Along with tourists Casey and Shane hosted what were called, 'Science Week' gatherings, an initiative of Environs Kimberley, the regional environmental activist group, while numerous other large groups, such as the Beagle Bay primary school children, visited to participate in what was presented as a singular cultural experience at an Aboriginal location.

What interested me was the form of connection Casey developed to the country in order to both claim and sustain ownership of the Block and be able to speak, as it were, on behalf of the country to tourists and other visiting groups. As I noted above (see chapter 3) there was both controversy and uncertainties surrounding the allocation of the leases and doubts were expressed as to whether the requisite legal formalities had been completed in all cases. Moreover, the administrative details required for the creation and management of an Aboriginal corporation is complex and is frequently neglected – such being the case with Sunset Beach, or so some suggested. In response to these legal and bureaucratic uncertainties ownership is pressed in ways that lie outside of western legal framework that rely on Aboriginal traditions and cultural knowledge presented as symbols of legitimate cultural ownership to all others: Aboriginal people; tourists; government workers.

Casey recognises sentience in the country and this extends to the land having the capacity to distribute gifts or reward people. In talking about the environment ‘mother nature’ is referred to often and when accessing bush resources the belief in the sentience of the landscape is evident through the provision of fruits and vegetable food that Casey believes are ‘gifts’ from mother nature⁶⁵. An example of this is fishing, a popular and common activity at Sunset Beach, which is also offered as part of the tourist experience. Casey represents the provision of fish as a gift from the country and the sea. It is then not a result of any skills of the angler but of the generosity of the sea. But gifts must be elicited and gratitude expressed when granted. This requires verbal interchange with the environment and the spirits it is believed to hold.

Sandra from Pindan Bay told me about these traditional practices. She described holidaying at Weedong on Pender Bay and Sandy Point on Beagle Bay. During the mission regime the dormitory children regularly camped because they had the transport to do so and people who had lived at Beagle Bay often spoke of the Mercedes truck that was used for camping trips. One of the women I worked with at Beagle Bay who I call Jane told me that she knew she was connected to the Sandy Point region because when she visited from the dormitories the older Aboriginal women would tell her to ‘sing out’, that is speak loudly to the countryside and sea and tell it who she was. Jane’s forebears hailed from that country and it was believed that speaking to the land would result in better luck for all present when it came to catching fish. Mary, the woman who told me about the Angelus bell (see page 45 above) explained how those whose

⁶⁵ See also Sutton 2010 on the importation of ideas about ‘mother nature’ into Aboriginal belief systems.

ancestors came from a particular area would introduce travellers who were strangers to it, thus ensuring their safety. Another woman, Connie, would call out to Neem (the one eyed snake in the region) saying, 'we're here for holidays, we've got the dormitory girls, look out for us while we're here and give us plenty fish'. In these processes of greeting and exhortation certain people were identified on the basis of their descent with particular places on country.

Casey has adopted and adapted these traditional practices in her own relationships with the country of Sunset Beach. This personal connection with a sentient landscape serves to represent and endorse Casey's special connection to the Block. How Casey speaks about fishing is symbolic of the connections she has constructed to country based upon practices of Aboriginal people in the past but now somewhat modified. The practices are also a significant aspect of her representation of her definition of her Block as 'home'. This is the country she knows physically and spiritually. For example, Casey gave the following account of her return to Sunset Beach after a long absence on the east coast of Australia.

Got into Sunset Beach just after 4.30pm. Unpacked the car, walked around and said hello to the old people and told them how happy I was to be home.

Just love living off the land and doing the gathering of food like the old people did, and only taking enough to eat for a meal. Found myself a nice small round rock to crack the oyster shells. The oysters were absolutely delish and so full and milky.

...I'm so blessed and humbled to call this country home, true.

I had an amazing day out relaxing on country and caught my special fish. I just knew I had to go and check out this spot, the feeling felt so strong. ... and then bingo! I was so happy. Thank you old people for your gift. (Casey social media post.)

This 'home' as country has agency to provide its resources to her. The link between self and place is mediated through 'the old people' being spirits of those who lived there in past times but not specifically her own ancestors many of whom came from other areas. Casey harvests in a manner she believes the 'old people' would approve of, 'only taking enough to eat for a meal' and engages with the spiritual elements in the landscape referring to a mixture of 'old people' and the spirit of 'mother nature'. After nearly 20 years of living at the Block this communication symbolises her connection to the country of the Block, which also serves as an important indication of her sense of having the unquestioned right to live there.

Another aspect of the ideology that underpins Sunset Beach is Casey's on-going efforts to establish a family owned small business. Aboriginal enterprise based on tourism was the rationale for her initial occupation of the Block, an aspiration that motivates continued residence and rebuilding of infrastructure after cyclones and bush fires. The infrastructure placed on the block serves as a symbol of this ideal. Chalets are carefully placed, twisted walkways lead to buildings situated on cliffs that prioritise privacy and views of the beach. Pristine wilderness and enterprise based on sustainable land use are promoted in the advertising materials. Casey advertises Sunset Beach as being small scale and exclusive. Some camping is available but the preference is for guests to stay in the chalets. Engaging with nature and the opportunity to be with Aboriginal people are used in promotional material.

Casey's entry on the internet site, Trip Advisor⁶⁶ runs as follows:

Enjoy the serenity and bliss of the coastal landscape with the setting sun. This exclusive eco resort takes pride in ensuring guests are welcomed with a full orientation of the natural surrounds. Guests experience one on one sharing of information and insight about the journey of this eco retreat.

Comments from the tourists on the website include:

Took the family up to [Sunset Beach] and wow what an adventure. This is an experience I would recommend to anyone who wants to do something pretty memorable.

If you want to get away, explore, write, think ... BE! I highly recommend spending time here.

Yes the access to the beach can be an adventure but the safari hut shower and relax will ease any pain.

[Casey] and [Shane] have created a special experience that captures the heart of Aboriginal Australia... that is the country and its amazing energy. Don't think, just do!⁶⁷

Infrastructure for Casey's family living area was and remains insubstantial compared with the accommodation for tourists. ATSIIC was dismantled before they had housing approved and therefore Casey, Shane and their toddler son stayed in a caravan with an annex while the guests stayed in well-designed luxury accommodation. Over time some infrastructure has developed for

⁶⁶ The reference for the website has been withheld to hide the identity of the Block residents.

⁶⁷ Website reference has been withheld to hide the identity of the Block residents.

the family to live in, however the business buildings have consumed the majority of any funding gained, symbolic of the business providing the reason for occupation.

Casey's 'ownership' of her place at Sunset Beach has provided a sense of the right to speak for the region. Casey is willing to give interviews to local media, like ABC public radio in relation to matters affecting the central Peninsula region. When the Liquefied Natural Gas development was proposed for North Head she was an outspoken opponent and protestor, carrying a large sign with the slogan 'Tourism Precinct' written to show her opposition to the 'Gas Precinct' which was planned at the time.

Plum Point. 'Stewards of the land'

The Block residents at Plum Point have developed an ideology for living based upon the unique ecology of the region, a preoccupation with aspects of the environment, including the wild Kakadu plum or *gubinge* and the Aboriginal history of the area. Development aspirations for the Block take the form of tourism and sustainable harvesting of natural resources. Walking tours, camel rides, *gubinge* tours, and wild *gubinge* processing have become established over the years. The Block has a café with sweeping views of Pender Bay serving what the *Sydney Morning Herald* described as 'memorable meals' constructed from a mixture of produce taken from gardens at the lease or gathered in the local bushland. Of these, *gubinge* is the best known of the bush foods. The ideologies of the Block are sustainable living with a focus upon environmental protection. Consistent with other Blocks in the region the ideology for development is that it be for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

Johnny and Lauren live permanently at Plum Point with their four children. The couple met in Broome in the late 1990s and moved to Plum Point in 1999. Lauren is a White person, from an Australian capital city who is well educated. When I visited Plum Point the woman I was travelling with remarked on Lauren's elegant presentation and the careful and thoughtful layout of the property.

As I note in chapter 4 (see page 89 and following) Johnny and Casey trace descent to a common ancestor. Through this ancestor they identify as Bardi which is the language group to the immediate north of Plum Point and with an area proximate to Plum Point. Johnny's asserted Bardi identity serves to exacerbate the contested nature of his ancestral links to the country of his Block which was included as Nyul Nyul land in the native title claim but sits proximate to the

border of the Bardi determination. This lack of formal (and legal) recognition is aggravated by his own life history and absences from Beagle Bay.

Johnny's mother was raised at Beagle Bay Mission and he grew up in the post-mission Beagle Bay community, as well as in Broome and Derby. As a young man Johnny travelled widely across Australia, he worked in various remote regions, in the pastoral industry in the Kimberley, mining in Cooper Peedy and as a pearl diver. Johnny travelled through South Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland before returning to the Kimberley and meeting Lauren.

When Lauren and Johnny first moved to the Pender Bay area they camped on a Block held by members of Johnny's extended family, making do with a tent and other makeshift structures. During this time Johnny gained a place on the Beagle Bay Community Council. The couple then applied to lease their own Block. Their first attempt ended in a dispute with another family who wanted the same Block. The couple's second attempt for a lease was successful although the area was smaller than that for which they had applied. Johnny had sought a generous amount of land in the hope of sustaining several families on the Block. However, the size of the Block granted would not accommodate the additional families they hoped to include. The couple set up a corporation to hold the Block with 32 Aboriginal members.

Johnny stated that initially he and Lauren faced a general sense of exclusion by other Block residents when they first lived at Pender Bay, which they both found difficult. Johnny commented,

At the start a lot of people didn't talk to us 'cause there was all sorts of rumours floating around. ... So I kind of went up to a few people and told them straight. ... But it was good being up front. It helped us out a lot, then people knew who we were. When we came up here they thought I was a hippie 'cause I got long hair and a beard, like a couple of white hippies living out country. (In Rabbitt 2006.)

Johnny wears a stockman's felt hat which testifies to his work history in the pastoral industry. Johnny describes his time working on pastoral properties as providing the opportunity to develop important skills. He also had the opportunity to live with senior Aboriginal people in bush settings. He stated,

Well I'm quite a good horseman so when I was 11 years old my mother did the bolt from the family and left us all in Broome. She took off to Darwin and one of my old uncles old [] took me out to Mangel Creek which is called Yakkamunga and that's where I started station work and so I spent the next four

years at various Kimberley cattle stations doing all sorts of things from mustering to bull catching.

So it was good experience and taught me a lot about the bush I was even allowed to hang around with all the old Aboriginal ringers because managers had a whites and blacks rule, but if I hanged with the Aboriginals I had to go and live there and all that, so that was fine with me. (In Rabbitt 2006.)

Additionally the various types of employment Johnny has undertaken over the years have provided him with the ability to live with confidence in the bush. He is then able to represent himself as a bush person and so at home in the Block environment.

I noted above (see page 91) that tourism at Plum Point is based on small numbers of campers, there being no built accommodation, the emphasis being on simplicity, sustainability and minimal infrastructure. However, the café and visitors' centre afford a comfortable and sophisticated venue for the sale of exotic fresh foods and visitors are also attracted from elsewhere. The ideology of small scale sustainable development and low-key development is recognisable in the simplicity of the infrastructure and the emphasis on cultural products. The Plum Point website presents the location as the source of Kimberley 'wild *gubinge*', as a place for secluded camping and whale watching. Prospective visitors are invited to, 'Enjoy our spectacular sunrises and a hot shower under the stars'.

Johnny keeps seven camels on his Block that he purchased to do walking expeditions with the tourists. Camel rides are popular on Cable Beach in Broome and camels have become iconic in the popular representation of tourism in the west Kimberley, evoking the Afghan cameleers who transported goods through the interior of Western Australia. Given these associations they represent some prestige in the tourist market while their management and maintenance requires special skills. The camels at the Block symbolise the significance not only of quality tourism in the aspirations of Block residents, but also reflect Johnny's work history on pastoral stations and his ability to manage an animal of this size.

The primacy of the Block as an extended family home is reflected in the infrastructure. Johnny and Lauren had their four children after they moved to the Block. Johnny also invited his mother and two of his brothers to live there. Small structures were built for family members and the couple were successful in gaining some funding through ATSIIC but money was made available for only one house. Solar electricity and a reticulated water supply are available. Subsequently Johnny's mother died as did one of his brothers. Johnny continuously attempts to recruit other Aboriginal family members to come live at the Block. Johnny stated,

You get a lot of non-Indigenous people interested in living out here ... it's very hard to get my own mob out here. They are too used to Western society. They got to have their TVs, fast food outlets, pubs, drug dealer round the corner. But we hope to build it up when we get our business operating, we would be able to pay a wage. (In Rabbitt 2006.)

Johnny and Lauren described themselves at an international agricultural event as 'stewards of the land'. This resonates with descriptions of the classical land holding systems of Aboriginal people (see Hill et al 2013:12 or Bird Rose 1992) where the land is 'held' and looked after for the next generation rather than 'owned'. Johnny speaks of 'respecting traditional knowledge' of the Bardi people who he believes to be the original owners of the region – although this exclusive language identity is contested by others. This is in contrast to Casey's generalised references to indeterminate ancestors as the 'old people'. For Johnny then Plum Point is represented as authentic and founded on traditional principles.

Part of this authenticity is epitomised in the promotion of stone fish traps which are found along the Dampier Peninsula coastline, including at Plum Point. Johnny has registered the traps with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in order to have them protected as Aboriginal heritage sites, an act which also serves to promote their status and cultural value.

Johnny and other Plum Point residents express their connection with the country of the Block through their assertion of Bardi culture and related practices. One significant example of this is the exploitation, processing and retailing of *gubinge* fruit. Johnny links these practices to traditional processes stating, 'my people have been eating the *gubinge* for many thousands of years as a staple during the wet season'⁶⁸. Traditional harvesting of bush foods is then linked to a *gubinge* processing plant, which Johnny and Lauren have established at the Block. Johnny stated,

This knowledge is still being passed on today and our business encourages this social and cultural practice through the harvesting cycle - families going out on country, connecting to places, sharing food knowledge about plants and trees as well as health benefits of people still eating the fruit fresh during harvest time⁶⁹.

Development of small business is grafted upon an ideology of preservation of Aboriginal knowledge of the landscape and bringing Aboriginal families on to country. *Gubinge* not only represents a useful commercial opportunity but its wild harvest also signifies a part of the

⁶⁸ This quote is from promotional material and the reference has been withheld to preserve the anonymity of the informant.

⁶⁹ This quote is from promotional material and the reference has been withheld to preserve the anonymity of the informant.

traditional knowledge and values to which the Plum Point residents aspire. In itself it is a symbol of the ideology that underpins the enterprise.

CONCLUSION

The Block residents have developed an ideology expressed through the use of multiple symbols to justify their chosen way of living. In doing so they seek to resolve two problems related to possession and belonging. In Geertz's analysis ideology is best understood through identifying the supporting symbolism (1973:207) that have the capacity to make the unfamiliar become familiar (1973:215). Once formed, an ideology has the potential to motivate group action.

Clifford Geertz defines symbols as 'extrinsic sources of information in terms of which human lives can be patterned – extrapersonal mechanisms for the perception, understanding, judgement and manipulation of the world' (1973:216).

The double difficulty which is the experience of the Block holders and which I have outlined in the opening section of this chapter is chronic in the sense that it is sustained and persistent. The ideology is employed to deny the problems and so, in the minds of the Block holders, to mediate and resolve them. The ideology is also employed to legitimate possession and belonging by appeal to values which are embraced by the Block holders and asserted to be founded in truth.

Geertz argued the need to examine 'ideologies as systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings' (1973:207). Recognition of the systems of social organisation relies on interpreting the symbolism. Classifying and identifying is achieved through recognising the appropriate symbol (1973:215).

Geertz based his interpretation of ideology upon a reading of public symbolism. Symbolic forms are manifest as ritual, objects, metaphors or tropes (Geertz 1973:211). Alan Rumsey (2004) also argues for the critical roles of tropes as 'figurative and potentially realistic' symbols in any ethnographic account. Rumsey wrote,

We should accept that all representation is mediated, that ethnography is figurative in more ways than a naively realist reading would have presumed. We should focus closely upon its tropes as at once figurative and potentially realistic, and take them seriously as possible sources of insight, to be assessed critically in relation to their ethnographic objects and whatever else is said about them by the ethnographer or otherwise available as evidence. (2004:286.)

In this chapter I have used the term ideology to describe the values that residents hold to justify and bring meaning to their occupation of the Blocks. This manner of living is sustained by reference to various ideologies that can be discovered through reading the everyday symbolism used by the Block residents to represent both themselves and their enterprises. The ideology seeks to resolve the double difficulty they face through the adoption of their chosen lifestyle: owning a business to which they feel no sense of belonging and making a home in country where their traditional ownership is challenged.

The ideologies and associated symbols I have described above provide the means to represent the business of the Blocks not primarily as tourism ventures but rather as expression of self by reference to history, culture and capability, ideals that promote common Aboriginal benefit environmental sustainability and family.

At Pindan Bay symbols from the pastoral industry such as felt hats and chequered shirts plus Country and Western guitar music abound and speak to a particular history. While common to many remote and rural areas of Aboriginal Australia at Pindan Bay these symbols serve to link Alfred and his labours to the Block. The ethos of hard work and consequential just rewards underpin all aspects of this ideology. The Block is also represented as established through and for family life. Chalets were built not for tourists but for the grandchildren. The business serves to provide a home for the children and grandchildren, not a commercial enterprise. The Block provides a secure place for permanent residence which will benefit Aboriginal people.

Sunset Beach residents have established a tourist enterprise which is based on culture and presented as being for the benefit of Aboriginal people, is small-scale, personal and family owned and run. It is also presented through the language of sustainability, ecological awareness and an elegant simplicity. These attributes provide the rationale for business, frame the scope of the enterprise and deliver the impetus for Casey's continuing determination to live at Sunset Beach. Casey presents herself as having a life-long association with the area which has allowed her to gain cultural knowledge while promoting her venture as ecologically friendly and sustainable. But while the tourism business is promoted with enthusiasm Sunset Beach is first and foremost her personal place and family home.

Plum Point was founded and is perpetuated on an ideology of sustainable Aboriginal land use and environmental awareness. Camel tours, bush fruit tours and cottage industry based on *gubinge* reflect the ideology of protecting or preserving the natural environment embedded in the Plum

Point development. This ideology extends to the representation of the business of the Block as being essentially traditional – that is entrenched in its asserted Bardi culture and so too of an authenticity derived from ancestral origins. The fish traps, knowledge of the cultural attributes of the bush and its resources are all called upon to represent aspects of this aspiration. Finally, Johnny himself presents as a man who is in and of the bush, at one with his environment not just because this is, according to his claims, his ancestral country but because he has the practical and demonstrable skills to manage and direct his community.

Symbols available at each of the three Blocks are evidence of an ideology which provides a sense of belonging to the residents and serves to justify the commercial business of the Block by framing it within an ideology which matches aspirations and desires. In this way the ideology provides the stamina to weather the tough conditions that occur at such remote places. The observation that residents commonly made that, ‘it’s a hard life but a good life’ is a trope expressing both the difficulties and aspirations for the future. A sense of positive direction and optimism is evident in the trope ‘we’re getting there’, commonly announced by Block residents in response to my usual greeting when I arrived at their lease of ‘How are you?’

The Block is also represented by all three lease holders as being ‘home’ and ‘home country’. The development of the tourist business has been accommodated within the more immediate desire to make a safe, secure and comfortable home. However, the practical aspects of homemaking are fundamentally underpinned by an ideology of belonging and cultural connection. At Pindan Bay Alfred and Sandra represent themselves as both spiritually and historically anchored within the Beagle Bay locale through their close connection with the Church. The recycled tin sourced from Beagle Bay represents the residents’ strong ties to the mission and the church. Pindan Bay was historically once a part of the Beagle Bay reserve. The identification with the church helps bridge the gap between belonging to the country and owning it. Holding the lease is further emphasised through industry, hard work and self-sacrifice. The investment of labour provides the symbol of the rights of ownership. Such tireless perseverance has been acknowledged by at least some of those who hold native title rights to the area. The naming of the Block denotes its pastoral history being one with which Alfred continually identifies through his presentation of self and manifest personal skills. As a station man he now commands what was once a part of a cattle station.

Sunset Beach residents have established cultural tourism as an Aboriginal business based upon connection to their Block. By adapting their cultural behaviour to assert spiritual correspondence

with the country and through a recognition that the land is uniquely alive, aware and waiting for them, there has been an innovation in ways to assert connection and authority to speak for the cultural properties of the country. In this way Casey has constructed connection to country based on tradition but modified by her own innovations reflecting her own history. These beliefs, minor rituals and spoken words act as symbols that represent the ideology which underpins the way Casey interacts with the country she regards as 'home'.

At Plum Point Johnny recites his genealogical credentials and identifies the country of his ancestor regardless of the court cases that have determined native title holders for the region or the opposition he and Lauren first faced when they settled at Plum Point. The links with the country are also represented in the cultural knowledge that the residents display in relation to the resources of the land, which they also wild harvest as an expression of their cultural knowledge and ownership of the resource. Johnny also seeks to protect archaeological sites found on or in the vicinity of the Block as a further expression of his duties as one who had traditional right to the country he now occupies.

Symbols that appear to be mundane like felt hats, corrugated iron buildings, or logos and web page designs reflect and represent an ideology which provides the impetus to sustain individuals when faced with an emotional gap that separates the way things are and the way they would wish them to be. The power of the ideologies and the symbolism they represent becomes apparent when individuals attempt any action which runs counter to the ideologies which underpin the residents' endeavours. This explains why both the episode of Bruce's boat and the proposal to develop the Gas Hub were either failures (in the former case) or evoked strong opposition from Block residents (in the latter case). While the Blocks differ from the pastoral properties acquired for Aboriginal use and development, there are some similarities in terms of the necessary engagement with the market economies tempered by aspirational and ideological values held by the occupants. For Aboriginal people living on the lease represents something more than simply running a business.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

I commenced my research with a broad interest in both the motivations of the Block residents in gaining an ALT lease and what they were creating through their engagement with the Block as a lived experience. It was their involvement in the tourism business that first drew me to the Blocks and this has been a principal topic of my research. My thesis problem evolved to have three principle threads. The first relates to what kind of economy supports Block residents, since making at least some money from the enterprise is a significant aspect of the life and business of the Blocks. Second, I have observed how relationships and activities in which Block residents engage develop tensions and dilemmas (see, for example chapter 4, “The Blocks - resource use”). The third strand to my analyses has been to explore the way residents at the Blocks seek to mediate these tensions by establishing an ideology that serves to justify occupation of the lease and pursuit of an engagement with the market economy. The first relates to an organisational arrangement that structures daily activities. The second are the consequences of these arrangements. The third relates to the meanings, ideals and identities that Block residents have developed. These lie at the heart of the enterprises as I have observed them and described them in this thesis.

Despite a few business activities of short duration, which I have noted in chapter 4 (“Springside”, page 86), tourism was the enterprise of choice for the Peninsula Blocks. I have discussed some of the reasons for this in Chapters 3 and 4 (see page 72 and page 86). It soon became clear to me however, that while these enterprises might result in some modest income, they were not sustainable without government support particularly for initial infrastructure. During the period of my fieldwork (intensively from 2005 to 2015, see pages 12-14 above), there was a radical review of funding sources and the sorts of purposes to which they might be used. ATSIIC, the organisation that had consistently supported decentralisation and had numerous funding programs that directly targeted outstation living, came under increasing scrutiny and was eventually abolished in 2005.

I have described how residents at each Block responded to these changes in different ways. From a practical point of view sustaining life at the Block was possible only through some form of income gained through engagement with the market economy. This was required in order to generate an income and, perhaps just as importantly, so it could be used as evidence of success

and so attract additional funding from government sources. Engagement with the cash economy is then important, not only because it provides cash income, but because it is critical in gaining funding from the state without which the enterprise would be impossible to establish and sustain. I have also documented how other sources of income have been developed in different ways. This includes remittances comprising cash injections from family members (discussed in chapter 4). In addition, the traditional sector also includes the exploitation of the resources of the bush and the natural environment. I have shown how fishing and the collection of seafood provide contributions to the domestic economies of Block residents. The native bush plum *gubinge* is gathered, processed and sold as a part of a growing cottage industry. The fruit is represented as an exotic health food but also as a part of traditional Aboriginal cultural values and experiences. Through this process bush foods become a commodity to be sold as a part of the tourist package. 'Bush tucker' tours are also a form of capital sold as a part of the tourist experience and integral to the promotion of the cultural tourism which typifies the holiday ventures of the Peninsula.

There are aspects of these business arrangements that share commonalities with Altman's hybrid economy reported for decentralised communities in other parts of Aboriginal Australia, as I have explored above in chapter 4. The hybrid economy of the central Dampier Peninsula has distinctive characteristics. It was my conclusion that the economic system of the Blocks can be characterised as a modified form of the hybrid economy which I have discussed in the Conclusion to chapter 4. This form of hybrid economy provides for the basis of life at the Blocks and sustains the chosen lifestyle.

Both the form and the structure of the Blocks are evident from these accounts. This analysis also assists in providing an understanding of how these innovative settlements are sustained and organised. Most importantly they help in the development of a discrimination between the Blocks and other decentralised living arrangements – the latter being well documented in the earlier literature. While the Blocks would appear to represent a latter-day example of 'outstations' or 'homelands', they embody a somewhat different set of components and values.

What occurred in the Beagle Bay region differs from decentralisation projects in other parts of the Kimberley. Decentralisation of the 1970s and 1980s was focused upon living areas as a 'return to country' and programs were based on supporting occupation of ancestral lands. The leases for the Blocks were allocated according to a range of criteria but demonstrating ancestral connection to the land in question was not mandatory. Blocks are owned according to Western

concepts of labour and effort plus an appreciation of the contribution made to the market economy. The distribution of the leases and the nature of the projects privileged Aboriginality.

The leases were granted on the principle of economic sustainability and while this has been a cornerstone of their development and continued existence, the Block as a land holding is not simply a platform to make money in the way a farm or cattle station operates in Western economies, or how land is a necessary asset for the operation of some businesses.

I explored how these living areas might be understood, not only in terms of their economies and structures, but in terms of the relationships and meanings that underpin their creation and perpetuation over several decades.

Block residents' right to occupy their land and conduct their business rests upon their legally valid lease granted to their corporation by the ALT. They have then a lease which gives them legal right to the Block for the duration of the lease. The leasees I have discussed in this thesis have all invested their labour in the Block to add value to the lease and developed a business enterprise that adds extra value to the property. In addition, and intangibly, they have also attributed value to the lease through the imputation of moral and emotional worth. The Block has many different meanings: a representation of a cultural connection with land and sea; a 'home'; a secure and exclusive refuge; a place to carry out business and a haven for family. The leasees have worked to emphasise and in some cases construct their cultural ties to the country of the lease.

The Block and the values and relationships it encompasses constitute an Aboriginal real estate. What the Block residents represent is an innovation in Aboriginal land holding systems. They are not the people of the outstation movement of previous decades, nor are they people of the mission. Residents are then creating a form of connection to country different from what has characterised much of the literature on the development of remote living in Indigenous Australia, over the last 40 or so years. Understanding this difference is important. Former approaches to remote living and development may not be applicable to the developing phenomenon of an Aboriginal real estate. Suggested solutions that might have applicability for outstation or homeland development cannot be assumed relevant to the Blocks and those who make them home.

Understanding this concept of an Aboriginal real estate must accommodate the essence of the endeavour and the ideology of the process, which I consider in more detail below. Some Block

residents have told me that they are 'grass roots' people. They represented themselves to me as 'ordinary people' having foundations in the land. The term 'grass roots' suggests a connection to something prior or foundational. In writing about the Wiradjuri of rural and urban New South Wales Gaynor MacDonald (2011:78) defines 'grass roots' as essentially locational. It describes a person who has grown up and lives with Wiradjuri and has not moved away. Similarly, the people of the Blocks are those who live on the Peninsula where they grew up. They are rooted in that country, unpretentious with status gained through permanent occupation of the land. They do not see themselves and are not regarded by others as a privileged elite or as being upwardly socially mobile: an incipient middle class.

The issue of the leases, their occupation and development which I have documented above had consequences both for the leasees and for their near neighbours, particularly those who remained at Beagle Bay. These consequences I have represented as problems for the Block residents, which they have sought to mediate. The first problem relates to leasing land which is not ancestral land.

In chapter 6 I showed how one of the difficulties faced by Block residents in gaining representation in the LNG negotiations was that they were not recognised as holders of native title and were consequently excluded from the process. This omission reflected a longer term difficulty for Block residents. I have explained how Casey and Johnny share a common ancestry in the second ascending generation (see genealogy on page 89). Both claim that they have ancestral connection to country in the region. However, their connection was not recognised through the native title process and is contested by others. Johnny, at Plum Point, asserts ancestral country in the vicinity of his Block, but again this was not recognised in the native title process as relevant to the proposed development area (see chapter 6). Block residents have responded to the ambiguity that has developed from these conflicts by pursuing their claims of connection to the country they now lease through the attribution of spiritual and cultural relationships. In this manner they seek to legitimate continuing occupation and use of their Block.

Beagle Bay was the home of those Block residents I have described in this thesis. The move away from the community was not merely a simple matter of relocation. Block residents retained strong cultural links with Beagle Bay and the Church, they have close kin living there and they remain residents of the locale. In chapter 5 I described how the development of tourism has had repercussions for other residents of the Peninsula, particularly as a consequence of the increased

number of White tourists, exploitation of fishing grounds and the opening up of an area that until recently was little known beyond the towns of Broome and perhaps Derby. A second problem for the Block residents then has been how to manage the tensions and conflicts between themselves, their business and the Beagle Bay community members.

The third difficulty I have identified in the process of the development of the Blocks relates to the business that the leasees are required to pursue in order to secure their occupation of their lease. Block residents own businesses, but being business owners is not their principal concern. Tourist and tourism are a means to an end, an occupation that must in some cases be endured until the Wet season finally arrives and all return to their southern cities to leave the Block residents to enjoy their chosen lifestyle in peace. These are matters I have explored in detail in chapter 4.

Block residents seek to mediate these problems and associated dilemmas through the construction of an ideology which serves to legitimate both occupation of the Block and the pursuit of their chosen business enterprise. This has led me to an analysis of the meanings attributed to the relationships forged between people and the country of their Block, which I engage with in chapter 7. The construction of the identities and ideologies of the Block are a means whereby residents seek to resolve the dilemmas I summarise above.

RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR MEANINGS – CONSTRUCTION OF AN IDENTITY

The people of the Blocks have created a culture with particular attributes which I describe in chapter 7. I have discussed the differing nature of each block and the ideology formed by residents. Following Geertz (1973) I argued that reading the everyday symbolism led to an understanding of the ideology of each Block through the way residents present themselves and their enterprise. The ideology of Block residents is to create and sustain an identity based on an attachment to country manifest through fishing, wild harvesting, communing with the natural world and the spirits of the ancestors of the land. It is also an ideology that incorporates other values that relate to kin, family and core values like sharing and inclusion. For Block residents the primary purpose of their lease is to provide not simply a living area but a sense of identity expressed as cultural substance and lived as a daily experience. The business, mandated by an imposed policy of attaining self-sufficiency, was the vehicle necessary for the attainment of these ideological goals. The ideology legitimates occupation, the business is an accessory to enable occupation and the business may shift as a response to changes in government policy. I argue

that it is the ideology rather than the business of the Block that anchors residents in this shifting policy context to create the Block as home and home country. The ideology resolves a double difficulty faced by Block residents: owning a business to which they feel no sense of belonging and making a home in country in forms that are unique to Aboriginal people but do not rely on traditional land holding systems.

The created identities and the ideologies that help to represent them in social exchanges also serve to mitigate the third difficulty I have identified as relevant to the lived experiences of the Block residents – the frictions that have developed with the Beagle Bay community members. Being not only on the Block but culturally of it reflects a legitimacy of tenure and activity which is resilient to opposition. Block residents do not simply exploit their Blocks for commercial gain. Rather they represent themselves to be not only culturally attune to the land, but have a heightened awareness of its environmental and spiritual potentialities and vulnerabilities. The ideology of the Block, as I have come to understand it, serves as a means whereby the Block residents seek to mediate the problems which are the consequences of their innovative adventures.

I have come to understand that the endeavours of the Block residents which have been the subject of my field research serve an additional purpose, which locates individuals as autonomous, independent and singular. This understanding can be expanded and contextualised as follows. When I commenced my research and first visited the Blocks, as I described in chapter 4 above, the initial question I found myself asking was why some Aboriginal people chose to live in decentralised and somewhat remote locations which at least initially, lacked much basic infrastructure. It was not just that the alternative was a life lived on the Beagle Bay settlement. Casey, for example, could have remained living in Broome, and the others also had choices. Beagle Bay was the most obvious, but there were others available, including Broome or Derby. Obtaining a lease for a Block was also difficult while funding was elusive since government funding and policy favours remote Aboriginal residents who live in centralised locations because services such as health and education are more efficiently delivered at larger centres to ‘close the gap’⁷⁰. The requirement to ‘do something’ with the land was potentially onerous or even impractical. Clearly, the residents of the Blocks were attempting to establish a small family

⁷⁰ ‘Closing the gap’ is a social justice campaign that aims to achieve health equality (measured life expectancy equality) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people by 2030. The campaign began as the National Indigenous Health Equality Campaign which was formed in March 2006. <https://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/learn/health-system/closing-the-gap/history-of-closing-the-gap/> accessed 4th March 2021.

business in an extremely challenging environment. All this led me to seek a better understanding of what motivated the people of the Blocks to endure physical, social and economic hardships.

Becoming a Block leasee provided an opportunity for those who followed this path to be not only physically different, but socially and economically distinctive to others as well. It provided an opportunity for the creation of a unique identity, a singular individuality and a degree of autonomy. Casey is known as 'Casey of Sunset Beach'. The forging of that identity would not have been possible had she remained in Beagle Bay, nor would her links (both physical and spiritual) with the country of the Block have been possible. The embracing of an ideology that binds person with place and absorbs values and ideals is I think the answer to my initial question as to why those with whom I worked chose the sometimes difficult path to become the owner of a Block.

THE PROMISE OF A GOLDEN HANDSHAKE? IMPLICATIONS OF MY RESEARCH

Casey has now been living at Sunset Beach for about 18 years. We keep in touch and have been talking about genealogy research and further archival work to confirm her ancestral connection to the area. While writing this conclusion I had a telephone call from Casey who told me that she had been approached by a business consortium that wanted to sublease her Sunset Beach Block. Casey explained that the business man to whom she spoke seemed to have thought through the proposal. Legal agreements would be drawn up between Casey, the Sunset Beach Aboriginal Corporation and the proponents. The Native Title holders would be approached to enter into an Indigenous Land Use Agreement along with these other formal agreements. There was an indication of possible employment opportunities. Perhaps most significant of all was the promise of a considerable sum of money, half to be paid up front, the balance on the commencement of business. Whether the current leasee can issue a sublease was not known nor is it clear who actually owns the Sunset Beach tourist business, sale of which was evidently a part of the proposed deal. What terms the Native Title holders might demand was also not discussed.

The price Casey would pay for accepting this offer was potentially considerable. The issue of a sublease for the business proposed would require her to relinquish control of the leasehold and the direction of her business. While she and her immediate family could remain living at the Block, the proposal included the development of the accommodation from 5 chalets to 30. The decisions faced by Casey in terms of the business proposal was not so much whether she wishes to benefit from the promised payment, but whether she was prepared to abandon the lifestyle,

the ideals and the personal identity which she has forged from Sunset Beach over nearly two decades.

Yet the business offer (no doubt presented as an ‘opportunity’) is also a reflection of her success in one aspect of her enterprise. Casey has created a marketable product where the value is based on improvements to the lease. Sunset Beach now has a reputation that White investors are interested in acquiring and developing. Casey has increased the value of the lease through her labour and her expansion of cultural tourism, her engagement with the market economy is complete. The offer would permit her to expand her employment opportunities if she wishes to do so, although probably as an employee, not as the owner. However, it would also mark the effective end to her life and experiences at Sunset Beach. Moreover viewing a sub-lease as a simple legal arrangement does not accommodate the complexities of Aboriginal real estate. Any decision Casey makes about the engaging with the White entrepreneurs is constrained by distinctly Aboriginal social demands. Casey will need to consider the reaction of the family in the lease holding corporation, and in particular how the promised money would be divided between the corporation members. Sunset Beach and all it has come to represent would be lost to the family and to Casey. Important too will be the opinions of other Aboriginal people at the communities of Beagle Bay, Lombadina, Djarindjin and Ardyaloon (One Arm Point) and what they think about increasing the number of tourists in the region.

Our conversation ended with Casey voicing her ambivalence about the offer and saying she needed to talk about it further with family.

Understanding the ideology of the Blocks, the nature of Aboriginal real estate and the hybrid economy are relevant to any appreciation of similar ventures as they might be encountered on either the Peninsula, or, in future times, elsewhere. My final conclusions relate to the applicability of my research to decentralised living in Aboriginal Australia.

The very recent proposal to develop Sunset Beach along with both the case studies presented in this thesis ‘The business of the boat’, in chapter 5 and the LNG plant in chapter 6 show how deviation from that ideology or its potential denial presents the leasees with unpalatable choices. If economic development is to be successful in both an economic and social sense it must be fully accommodating of the structural arrangements as well as the ideological convictions that I have explored above. The enterprises I reviewed failed to take these factors into account.

While the case study of Bruce's boat shows the importance of the right choice of project if it is to have any chance of economic success the business model was not the only problem with Bruce's venture. The project floundered because the arrangement was not accommodating of the cultural requirements that were the necessary inclusions which characterised the hybrid economy and the ideologies that drive it. Establishing and maintaining a small business required understanding and working with the ethos of the Block and being compliant with the beliefs, expectations and mores of Pindan Bay family. These I have described. For the residents at Pindan Bay, establishing an enterprise was understood as part of and an extension of the network of social alliances, responsibilities and duties. Sensitivity to the good reputation and status of the Block within the larger central Dampier Peninsula region was as important as making money for the success of any small scale business. Bruce failed to recognise these factors that represented significant aspects of culture at the Block and the critical role kinship played for Pindan Bay residents. This lack of recognition contributed to his failure because he lost the active support of those who were best placed to provide it – the people who lived on the Block or their close kin. Even if his business model of fishing tours had been successful in economic terms, his enterprise was doomed to failure because he was out of step with those who held control of his principal business asset which was the Pindan Bay Block. It was this that provided access to the surrounding sea, its reefs and abundant resources.

Like Bruce's boat the proponents of the LNG project also promised financial gains. These were to be won through the sale of labour and expanding accommodation opportunities at the Blocks to support the projected influx of workers. The project was also promoted as potentially providing a much needed cash injection for all Aboriginal people across the remote Kimberley region of Western Australia at a time when government funding was being dramatically reduced, adding a moral imperative to proceed. However, the promised employment opportunities and benefits were not valued by the Block residents who saw only the potential for significant change in their lifestyles should they engage in some form of employment with the building and running of a LNG processing plant. Consequently and despite the prospect of significant engagement with the market economy, the price would have been the loss of the cultural ideology of the Blocks which was an aspect of the hybrid economy. These matters were brought together for the reader in chapter 6. The disjunction between what was desired by the leasees and what was on offer was then a stark one. What Block residents regarded as sufficient for their needs under their current arrangements stood in unambiguous contrast to the promise (illusory to many) of greater riches. The LNG plant, for its part, would have negated the fundamentals of the ideology

which had sustained the Block from its inception. The way of life currently being pursued on the Blocks would be altered for good – for some it would be lost altogether. The natural environment would be marred by industrialisation and the identity and individuality of the Block holders would be a thing of the past. While, in the end, the project was shelved, the disconnection between what was proposed and what was desired is evident. Had the proponents of the proposal sought to accommodate the ideology and aspirations of the Block holders, the opposition to the proposal may have been less marked.

AND LOOKING AHEAD?

Those who obtained a Block in the late 1990s possessed the stamina and the skills to enable them to create a form of Aboriginal real estate. The human spirit shown by Block residents in adjusting to and manipulating the various and ever changing government policies in order to gain funding support is awe inspiring. What I have come to understand with respect to the Blocks and the people who live on them is that they represent a new and dynamic form of Aboriginal real estate. In these endeavours the residents of the Blocks have combined the skills from their earlier times in the Mission, a desire to frame a uniquely Aboriginal identity and a singular representation of themselves as individuals, seemingly autonomous and self-sufficient. The lesson to be gleaned from the proposed LNG processing plant and the recent attempt by developers to acquire Sunset Beach are perhaps symptoms of the velocity of change evident through the Peninsula and region. The bituminising of the central Peninsula road means that conventional vehicles can motor with ease from Broome to Ardayaloon (One Arm Point) and so travel to a coastline once protected by rutted roads and sandy tracks. The Peninsula is increasingly more accessible and is no longer protected by its remoteness. Change is also evident within the families of the Block holders. Over the course of my research, which has spanned a decade and a half, some of the children of the holders of the Block leases have now reached adulthood and are living in regional towns where they have professional or semi-professional employment. For them the Block represents an opportunity to reaffirm Aboriginal practices during weekends and holidays. While regarding the land as important, the children seem unwilling to endure the same lives as their parents. Running a tourist business and permanent occupation of the Block is not, for them, an obvious choice.

That stated, my experience has been that the children of those with whom I have worked and, in some cases, their grandchildren, value the Block as presenting an opportunity to re-engage with their Aboriginal roots. While these individuals will probably utilise the Block in a somewhat

different way to their parents, I do not see the future of the Blocks as jeopardised by a lack of interest or a commitment for engagement on the part of the successors to the present residents. Rather, the unique social formation that is the people of the Block and the creation of this Aboriginal real estate is most at risk from unconditional engagement in the mainstream economy – ironically the very objective that was articulated as the principal justification for the issue of the leases in the first place.

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