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# We are not a Christian mob, we want that UAM land back

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# We are not a Christian mob, we want that UAM land back

Bernard Moizo

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- 1 Hello everybody. I am pretty happy that yesterday Jon Altman said we would be hearing from the next generation today. So I believe Sylvie and I are part of the new generation. Secondly, that's probably the first time in 25 years or so that I am attending a symposium or a seminar where I have colleagues who were enrolled in the PhD at the same time as I was, my supervisor, one of my examiners and very close friends as well, so it is a bit embarrassing. Not only for that, but embarrassing too because I am facing a panel of experts on Aboriginal studies and I only see myself now as a part-time "Aboriginalist". Because since I left Australia in 1989, I think, returning briefly in 1991, I got a position with IRD which stands for the Institute for Research and Development. I have had several positions overseas for up to 5 years all together. We are very lucky at IRD to get posted overseas for such long periods of time. And I did work in Thailand, Madagascar and Laos, so even though I was not dealing with Australian Aborigines any longer I was confronted with many similar issues, like ethnic minority groups, and people that don't get the status of indigenous people, although they are, but not recognised as such, struggling with land issues and recognition of rights to name only a few.
- 2 So, I had to dig for my old fieldnotes from the late 1980's to remember what I would be talking about, and I also relied on work from the new generation, like Martin (Préaud) here and Catherine Thornburn, to share with you some ideas, maybe not as well articulated as the previous presentations we had yesterday and today, but some ideas about those land issues and how I was confronted with that in the mid 1980's.
- 3 So, in Fitzroy Crossing, which is becoming very popular now, a kind of the flavour of the month as far as research is concerned. It was in the middle of nowhere at the time and the first time I went to Fitzroy I was invited by the former chairman of the Kimberley Land Council, just after the Nookanbah crisis in 1980, and I ended up in Junjuwa which was a town-based community, the only one at the time, and worked with the Bunaba people. And amazingly, when I first arrived, the people came to me

and wanted to teach me Walmajarri because most of the anthropologists working at the time were learning Walmajarri language, which is a group from the desert but not so much of the local language... except for Alan Rumsey who did some work previously in Junjuwa as well.

- 4 So, I found myself confronted with those land issues in a very peculiar situation. Like Junjuwa was community, was not only a town-based, but a mixed community of people coming from different places, at different periods of time, with very different backgrounds as far as history and contact with the non-Aboriginal people are concerned. Also the Junjuwa community was not involved at all, in fact they took a lot of distance with the Nookanbah event, for those of you who heard about this. Nookanbah was a pretty big story at the time. It was also a period of quite strong confrontation I would say, between the Bunaba people and some other people who labelled themselves as River People, and Desert People. There was also a lot of internal conflict as I tried to explain in my PhD at the time. Also there was a very strong influence in the Junjuwa community of the United Aborigines Missions that was established in the early 1950's and it's the place where people settled when they moved in towards the Fitzroy Crossing town, after they were kicked out or left with their own will, the stations because the station owners had to pay the Aborigines and they were not prepared to do so and some other different stories that were pretty well recorded in the files of the Department of Community Welfare (DCW) which at the time became the Department Community Services (DCS). And consequently all these DCW files were destroyed in 1985-86 which is a pity I think because there was a lot of history to be kept and recorded for Aboriginal people, and that could be used for land claim and other things I guess.
- 5 There was a lot of frustration for the Bunaba people because first they felt there was very little recognition of their status as the boss, or the owner of the place, so-called. And the main thing, they didn't have any outstations, they were all living in Junjuwa community whereas most of the Walmajarri people had outstations, as well as some Wangkajunga, a language from the desert area. And these people, in the Bunaba view, as some anthropologist colleagues and later on Thornburn recorded, most of the Walmajarri were involved in the community business like the Adult Centre, Language Ressource Centre, Art and Craft centre and the Bunaba were very rarely involved. It is not very clear whether they didn't want to be involved or if they kept themselves away from that involvement.
- 6 So, definitely the local dynamics were in favour of the Walmajarri and moreover the access to the land, just to go fishing, or to go in the bush, or to collect bush tucker was very difficult for the Bunaba because they had to deal and try to get the permission from the station manager or station owner at the time. They had to go across most of the stations around Fitzroy Crossing, so it was very difficult for them to go to places of significance or just places to go out in the bush. Here, are some of the statements telling of how the people, what was the feeling of the Bunaba people to be isolated or trapped, if you want, in the Junjuwa community. Joe Ross, who was previously, not so long ago manager or chairman of Junjuwa if my information is correct, described the situation as being in a "fishtank, trapped in that fishtank."
- 7 There was some celebrity too, if you want, at the same time. Not only because I was there, but Steven Hawk was there, it was Bob Hawk's son, so he could attract a lot of attention to the situation in Fitzroy Crossing as well. Here you have map, done by the

Housing Department I think in the early 2000. The black and white picture is one I took, and you see in the background, a very small house at the back which is where the first camp of where Aboriginal people settled in Fitzroy Crossing was positioned. And the small group of houses on the back was where the mission, so-called mission land, was at the time. The main houses on the front are of course the Junjuwa community with division between language group, was initially established didn't work at all. So, in the early 90's I had gone there by then, there was definitely a revival of the Bunaba language and the Bunaba culture as well. First, you had a lot of excitement about the Jandamarra story, Pigeon story as it's called. There was even a project to make a film. I don't know if they really made it or not, I had some contact for a long time and interest of many people, but my involvement in other things meant that I couldn't keep contact as much as I would have liked to. And also several books came out on the lives of the Aboriginal stockmen of the area, so there was a lot of renewing, putting forward the Bunaba again and all the things seem to come back to a more logical order, in the understanding of the Bunaba speakers.

- 8 In my understanding, it really started in the late 1980's, more 1986-87, just before the bicentennial. I think the initiative came from the United Aborigines Mission, who was really keen to hand over that lease just before the bicentennial. I had some other information saying that they are really short of money and they couldn't afford any more to take care of the building and all the materials at the time, and I remember that there were very lengthy discussions between the Aboriginal leaders and the representative of the UAM to decide if they would buy back from them the material, and of course the Aboriginals said "look, we worked for nothing for many years so I think we should get the land and all the materials as well". So, I couldn't get much of the details because those United Aboriginal Mission people are not very talkative, especially not to anthropologists and maybe moreover to French anthropologists.
- 9 So, at the beginning, the UAM started to contact local agencies like Marra Worra Worra and the Kimberley Land Council. But since the Junjuwa people were not very involved and not very open to go through those agencies, gradually they directed, they shift the discussions with the Junjuwa leaders and then with the Bunaba leaders. It was quite interesting to see how the Bunaba suddenly came very aware of the power they could have in that negotiation of getting the land back. So the handover of the lease, so called by the people the Land Mission, happened in early 1987, I think February, and for most of the people, even the Walmajarri people, it was a recognition of the role and the importance of the Bunaba people, leaders in the area. So, that handing over ceremony was organized, and those of you who know these people there may recognise some of them who had an important position at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs at the time. Unfortunately that was a very difficult timing because a couple of weeks before the handing over, a very important Bunaba leader passed away, and of course there was a suspicion about the responsibility of death to some community, probably more on the Balgo side, it's more convenient when you live in Fitzroy Crossing when it is the community not next door. But still, there was a lot of tension between River People and Desert People. And interestingly, and Marcia outlined yesterday that we anthropologists love initiation ceremonies, so just before there was an initiation ceremony and I attended several of them over the years, and for the very first time that initiation ceremony was not controlled by the Walmajarri speakers but by the Bunaba leaders who re-enacted some Dreamtime stories related to the river, the Fitzroy River and the Margaret River, the two main rivers of the area. And that ceremony became

prominent in the year after. Some of the dancing that was performed at the end of the ceremonies was part of the public part of the dancing associated with the River People.

- 10 It was a very strong delegation coming from the United Aborigines Mission (the ones wearing ties, you can pick them out), a lot of Department of Aboriginal Affairs staff, a lot of the former residents of Junjuwa, a lot of old leaders, and some Aboriginal agencies representatives as well, and many, many people from nearby communities. Interestingly the role of Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal agencies came afterwards. It was more negotiation directly between UAM and Junjuwa community, which I think is completely different from most of the native land claim and that sort of thing, especially in a situation where, to my understanding, it's sometimes very difficult and almost impossible for Aboriginal people or Aboriginal groups to prove that they were able to maintain the link with the land when the local history and the local situation forced them to be away from that land, and they needed to be engaged in other types of activities than the hunting and the gathering and doing ceremonies. So to me it's a very strange situation and it's not the only place where Aboriginal people had to prove that they were, they are still indigenous, to get access to the land they grew up on. And of course because it was a very strange event to have these United Aborigines Mission people coming to the land, there was suddenly a very big dust storm and heavy rain, and all the United Aboriginal Mission people disappeared, and only the Bunaba people dancing remained there. To me they didn't care about the storm and the rain but they wanted to show how happy they were. Even though, on that piece of land they got back, there was not really any site of significance as far as maybe secret site or things were concerned, but to them that was very, very much in heart, as far as their arrival and settlement in Fitzroy Crossing is concerned, that was part of the history and of course it has a lot of meaning to them. So, Junjuwa and Bunaba leaders got back in front became very popular, and I had, not so much from the people talking themselves because most of the time Bunaba people were very proud of themselves and very proud of the link they maintained with their own country. But for the outsiders, like the non-Aborigines and people from other communities, there was definitely a sentiment of justice had been done to the Bunaba people and pride, and their position as leaders has been sort of recognised by that getting back their land. Also, it was very important for the Junjuwa people to be able to show that they were not church mob, as they were labelled most of the time, because they were not involved in the Nookanbah event, because they were under the influence of the so-called, two or three of the previous non-Aboriginal community managers were former missionaries from the UAM, so that could explain the way that sometimes they were labelled as church people. But, the Bunaba people were very much against that label and wanted to show that they were prepared to fight and to get the land back, even though the initiative came from the UAM and not from the Bunaba people themselves. And suddenly also, the community, the Junjuwa community found itself in a strong position towards local agencies because most of the buildings, the buildings of Kimberley Land Council, Adult Centre, Marra Worra Worra was actually on the land, the former mission land, so now the lease was in the hands of the community and these agencies had to sub-lease it, to get sub-leased to the community. So it inverted the power relationship, the Bunaba were not any longer in a dependent position towards these agencies, but if they wouldn't renew the lease these people had to move somewhere else, so that was interesting to see also the shift of power.

- 11 There was also recognition of Walmajarri and other non-Bunaba speakers, and the strong support of the Bunaba leaders, suddenly, and they felt a new start in their relationship between different communities. So, many changes happened afterwards and I listed some of them, as we all know, it's a very complex and rapidly changing situation in many of those remote places. But first a Bunaba sub-group got Leopold Down Station and then Fairfield Station which is nearby, in 1991 and 1995, and you will see after I have some quotes from a non-Aboriginal person involved in the cattle industry in the area and they did a very good job in restoring the herds of cattle and then making profit gradually although it was quite difficult in the first years. Also, many places in the Bunaba country got the status of National Park, like Tunnel Creek, Brooking Spring, Wandjina Gorge and I know that now there's a land claim still going on for the Native Title for the Bunaba people to get access, or to get the recognition of that status on these lands, on these places. And several camps of the Bunaba sub-groups were established after 1991 and 1992. So, there was definitely new opportunities like in the cattle industry for example, in tourism as well, and also in art and craft because up to the late 1980's most of the paintings were from the Walmajarri, and suddenly with that recognition, because maybe the people did feel better about it, some people didn't want to be involved in that painting business, as they call it, there was more painting done by the River People group and the business started. They lodged a land claim, actually they lodged several land claims in 1999 and they were grouped together so there was also that dynamic that instead of being competing between the sub-groups of the Bunaba speaking language, they regrouped together. I think the initiative has a lot to do with the personality of June Oscar, for example, the Junga Inc., Bunaba Aboriginal Corporation which has been created for the Pigeon movie merge into the Bunaba incorporated in 1999, so a lot of dynamic going on. And as you can see here, some of the quotes of the recent PhD submitted by Catherine Thorburn who has a very inside knowledge of what was going on, and she has pointed out a few times in her PhD that I got my prediction, or my description of the situation, how it could change in the future, was wrong. But also, she acknowledged that some of the things Eric Kolig and some other anthropologists that worked at the time, were still going on, so it's a kind of changing situation and also some things are maintained in place.
- 12 I think that the cohesiveness of the Bunaba is mainly due to some strong individuality, and also the success of the Bunaba cattle company and running Leopold Down and Fairfield stations. As you all know, when the first claim to get the cattle station back and being run by Aborigines were mentioned in the 1980s, you could hear all sorts of negative comments, and maybe negative is not the proper word, it was even worse sometimes. "They would spend their day shooting bullock and eating meat, bla, bla, bla... we know what it's like". And they really did a very successful business at the time and again, restoring and being very proud of what they have been doing, and many of the Bunaba people just worked for nothing for many, many months to restore the community, the buildings, and to have all the equipment running again, and also to gather and herd all the herds of cattle that had been running wild for several years. And you have here the Bunaba cattle company visions as is put forward in their way of dealing with business, and I think they've been doing it pretty successfully so far. That Mcaw is a non-Aboriginal person involved in the cattle industry himself and he's very respectful of the work that has been done in the area.

- 13 I returned to Fitzroy in 1991 to do a small evaluation of the CDEP program, we also propped up a lot of solidarity within the linguistic group but also across, between different linguistic groups. And people starting really to do some projects at the community level. It was not that successful at the beginning but it was really coming, bringing some new initiatives and people were becoming aware, for the first time they really had the feeling they were doing things how they wanted them to be done, not done from the outside or because some government or some state decisions or even some white fellow being involved. The time I was in the field it was self-determination policy, and amazingly there were three times as many non-Aboriginal people working in the community, and being involved in the community than five or six years before. So, the thing is the pressure put on the people and all the paperwork they were supposed to give to the government and to the agencies outside, they had no training whatsoever to be able to do it, so they had to rely on non-Aboriginal to do the work for themselves which reproduced a situation, a post-colonial or interior-post-colonialism, as Jeremy Beckett used to call it. It was a very, very complex situation as well and as Sylvie said yesterday, when we are working in the field there is no way we can do research on one hand and not be involved in the community we're working with. So I did my best at the time to record for the community, they had a computer that I know was from the beginning of Macintosh, so I organized some training with the local people and we also did a lot of surveys in the community for the census, the 1986 census. We also registered all the health problems, all the papers people had from driving license and all that sort of thing. And this was very much needed; they didn't have the data at the time, so every time they wanted to apply for something they had to get the information to be recorded from the outside. So with the help of some other non-Aboriginal people involved in education and health issues as well, we recorded many of things that I believe was useful for the communities afterwards.
- 14 So, amongst the creations, there was also a Bungoolee tour agency created in 1997, which has been very successful I believe, it's one of the guy I used to work with, he's also at Leopold Downs Station and he received, I think, a prize for his agency business in 2005 or 2006. And then we are coming up with very recent news of December 2012, so after lodging a claim in 1999, so 13 years after, Bunaba people were at last recognised as the rightful owners of that traditional country, and I believe, as it's stated underneath, in the mouth of June Oscar, it's not the end of the fight but at least it's a recognition of all the things they had to go through for generations. And listening to some speeches on the ABC radio from June, and also from the cattle stations which are located within that lease, the situation shouldn't be as bad as it used to be as far as access to the land is concerned and involvement of the people with the cattle station. So out of this there's some new dynamics as well. I could find in Catherine Thorburn's work a dynamic going on for example with the newly created Bunaba cattle Inc. They pay for a full-time young person to work there, but he's also following a part-time ranger project to have more people involved in the emerging or newly created industry. And there was a lot of complaint too; I came across a report on the Fitzroy River, of complaints from Aboriginal people, complaining of tourists touring the place, littering and not being respectful of different places. So, it is really important, and when I was involved in Laos and Madagascar in so-called "local tourism development", it is crucial to have small leaflets in the local language explaining the things because it's sort of restoring people's self-esteem, to give pride to the people to be really respected. Whereas in most local tourism ventures that you see in places, they have

guides, they may be indigenous people but most of the time they're not from the area, they are from somewhere else. They know by heart all the Latin names of all the animals, plants and bla, bla, bla, but they don't they don't know the local history. And the local people are usually recruited as parking guards, like you park the car in the community and they get paid for that, and that's about it. So, that's dreadful and there's a lot of movement going on at the moment within Indigenous groups to incorporate some change in that relationship as far as tourism is concerned, to have a real involvement of the local people and not only just on the surface and not to say where they get nothing from it whereas money is concerned. There is a strong program initiated to overcome the drinking problem with the young generation, once again June Oscar is behind that. And the venture between Bunaba Inc. and the Western Australian Conservation and Land Management to have land interest in protecting area in the West Kimberley, with all the places I mentioned before. And with this protected area it's not only input on site as far as Australian landscape is concerned, but I hope that the cultural values and the sites will be put forward and really should stand out. And that's about it.

15 Thank you very much.

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