

Western University
Scholarship@Western


Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi)

2003

Pastoralism, local knowledge and Australian aboriginal development in Northern Queensland

Benjamin R. Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/aprci>

 Part of the [Other Anthropology Commons](#), and the [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Smith, Benjamin R., "Pastoralism, local knowledge and Australian aboriginal development in Northern Queensland" (2003).
Aboriginal Policy Research Consortium International (APRCi). 358.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/aprci/358>

This article was downloaded by: [University of Western Ontario]

On: 07 December 2012, At: 10:40

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtap20>

Pastoralism, local knowledge and Australian aboriginal development in Northern Queensland

Benjamin R. Smith

^a Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University

Version of record first published: 19 Aug 2006.

To cite this article: Benjamin R. Smith (2003): Pastoralism, local knowledge and Australian aboriginal development in Northern Queensland, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 4:1-2, 88-104

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442210310001706397>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

PASTORALISM, LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN QUEENSLAND

Benjamin R. Smith

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three years, Indigenous policy in Australia has taken an interventionist turn. The work of Noel Pearson (see Pearson 2000), a prominent Indigenous intellectual from Cape York Peninsula in northern Queensland, has provided much of the impetus for this push. As a result, the chronic social problems of the Peninsula's Aboriginal communities have become a focus of state and federal government action, driven by the recommendations of the 2001 Cape York Justice Study (Fitzgerald 2001), commissioned by the Queensland government and developed in partnership with regional Aboriginal organisations. Pearson, along with other commentators, politicians and bureaucrats, has asserted that the policies of self-determination of the past three decades have failed Indigenous people and have contributed to the chronic social problems faced by many Indigenous Australians. This paper examines the current push for intervention in the context of Aboriginal pastoral enterprises in central Cape York Peninsula. In particular, the paper considers the failure of Indigenous policy discourse to engage with the complex interrelationship between the state and the Aboriginal people of the region. It also indicates how the current 'turn' in Indigenous affairs may reproduce the entrenchment of the state in Aboriginal life-worlds such that Aboriginal people are neither truly autonomous in their relationship to wider Australian society, nor successfully refashioned as participants in the wider economy.

The central Cape York region was one of Australia's last colonial frontiers. Coen, the region's administrative centre, was founded as a mining township in 1878 following the discovery of gold nearby two years previously. The township grew rapidly from 1892 after the establishment of a reefing field near Coen. From the 1880s, pastoral runs were taken up across the region to supply the miners with meat. The gold rush dwindled in the early 1900s but the stations remained, selling their cattle at sale yards hundreds of kilometres to the south of the Peninsula. The cattle industry remains socially important for the region but economically marginal, despite the recent development of live export sales to Southeast Asia.

Local Aboriginal labour was brought into the industry from around the early twentieth century to meet a shortfall in skilled white labour and Aboriginal labour from more settled regions (May 1983:33-50, 1994; Rowse 1987:84). The local Aboriginal population was only gradually incorporated into the pastoral workforce, but by 1936 Aboriginal workers carried out nearly all work on the region's stations (Kidd 1996:16). Incorporation into the station workforce began with the occasional and informal use of Aboriginal labour drawn from the remnants of the region's Indigenous population, who had suffered greatly from the direct and indirect violence of the occupation of their homelands. This work, typically compensated by food, tobacco and blankets, enabled the fringe-dwelling Aboriginal population to survive in conjunction with continuing, but significantly less productive, use of the surrounding areas for hunting and gathering. Stations continued to depend on Aboriginal subsistence production, even when the Indigenous workforce was more established (May 1983:62). Thus, from the late nineteenth century onwards, Aboriginal people depended on what Altman (2001) calls a 'hybrid economy', involving a shifting mix of market (or 'private productive sector'), state and welfare, and 'customary' (including hunting and gathering and fishing) components (Altman 2001:4-5).

The Aboriginal people who lived around the region's townships, cattle stations and mining camps had not been involved in a 'purely' customary economy since the 1890s, when the Aboriginal population were 'allowed in' to Coen (Parry-Okeden 1897:9). From the 1930s, most Aboriginal people were born and raised 'in the cattle' (McGrath 1987). Most of this workforce were also 'under the Act'; subject to the provisions of the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* (Qld) and subsequent legislation. This legislation placed Aboriginal people under the paternalistic control of local whites, including Coen's police sergeant who managed Aboriginal wages, employment and a range of wider decisions, including marriage and the education, residence and employment of children (Smith 2003a; Kidd 2003). State control and a local hybrid economy remained the normative basis of Aboriginal existence for subsequent generations.

The colonial pastoral milieu did not simply mark an economic shift for Aboriginal people; pastoral employment and state control transformed Aboriginal life-worlds and the forms of sociocultural production inherent in them. Even so, the uptake of pastoral work appears, in retrospect at least, to have proceeded without major disruption to local Aboriginal subjectivity, which continued to be founded on ideational and practical ties between people and particular tracts of country.¹ This maintenance of Aboriginal subjectivity was enabled by a particular

'fit' between an existing ontological and technical orientation to landscape and the needs and practices of the pastoral industry. As Sutton notes:

The geographically decentralised pattern of pastoral development, combined with the need to muster large areas of land on the stations by horseback each year ... meant that opportunities for station-based Aboriginal people to learn and remain in touch with the cultural traditions of even remote parts of their countries were ... plentiful (Sutton 2004:33; see also Brady 1992:185; Beckett 1978:4, 6, 17-19, 27-8; Elkin 1954:324; May 1983:54-5, 1994).

Cattle work did not simply facilitate the maintenance of Aboriginal sociocultural production; it formed the basis for a powerful syncretic tradition to emerge across the region which extended to the reproduction of sociality, territoriality, values and relationships among Aboriginal people (Smith 2002a, 2003b).

PASTORAL TECHNIQUE

For the region's settler population, the power of pastoralism lay in its adaptability as a technique or technology for inhabiting and making money from the newly settled central Peninsula. Here I follow Ingold's use of the term 'technique' to signify skills related to particular life-worlds (Ingold 2000:349). I reserve the term 'technology' to denote the particular 'concrete, substantive form of instrumentally rational action' linked to capitalist production and Western modernity (Collier and Ong 2003:423; see also Ingold 2000, Wagner 1981[1975]). Pastoral technique proved suitable both for the settlers and for Aboriginal adaptation to the pastoral milieu, given its compatibility with existing local knowledge, skill and practice. Nonetheless, there were — and remain — a range of differences between Aboriginal use of pastoral techniques and their use by non-Aboriginal pastoralists.

Wagner suggests that those whose subjectivities are embedded in an Anglo-European cultural matrix employ technology primarily 'in terms of objectification, and *only incidentally* in terms of energy and efficiency' (Wagner 1981[1975]:72, emphasis in original). Ingold (2000:216-7, 310-1) similarly uses the term 'technology' to mark objectifying and externalising orientations within production which differ from more intersubjective orientations apparent amongst many hunter-gatherers. Wagner defines technology as 'the subtle art of putting together complex mechanisms upon which "natural event" impinges in such a way as to sustain their workings'. As 'technology', the Anglo-European deployment of pastoral technique treats its objects — which include stock, landscape and the events that occur within it — as 'Culturalised nature'. Simultaneously, the refined techniques honed in this landscape through trial and error and increasing skill and

knowledge become 'naturalised Culture'. Failure of technology is experienced as 'the realization of nature as an opposing entity' (Wagner 1981[1975]:72).

Wagner's analysis is provocative for an ethnographic analysis of northern Queensland's pastoral milieu, not least in its potential to explain the ways in which settlers found themselves able to draw upon the local population as a labour force, treating the Indigenous population as another natural resource (see also Rose 1998; Cowlshaw 1999). Settlers similarly drew on Indigenous knowledge of the country on which pastoral runs were located, as well as Aboriginal labour, as resources to increase productivity. Costs were minimised by forcing Aboriginal workers to supplement their rations through hunting and gathering, and laying them off completely during off-seasons (May 1983:54). Wagner's analysis also clarifies similarities and differences between Aboriginal and settler life-worlds which illuminate the contemporary articulation of Aboriginal pastoralism and the state, not least in cases of perceived failure in Aboriginal enterprise development.

Elsewhere (Smith 2003b:41-3) I have outlined the importance of indeterminacy among the Indigenous people of the region, and illustrated its continuing importance for intersubjective relationships with both people and land (which is also believed to possess agency). Such indeterminacy is related to customary economic practice (cf. Povinelli 1993). It is particularly apparent in the articulation between local Aboriginal groups and state structures, where it manifests itself as a broad cultural principle which 'at least from a non-Indigenous, Anglo-European or Anglo-Australian perspective, refuses the creation of decontextualised or abstract knowledge, structure and authority' (Smith 2003b:41).

The techniques of pastoralism and hunting and gathering share a common orientation towards unpredictability. Nonetheless, Aboriginal employment of pastoral technique appears to have become syncretised with aspects of Indigenous sociocultural production — including its orientation towards indeterminacy — at variance with the employment of pastoral technique by settlers. As Wagner notes, the differential emphasis among 'tribal' peoples in the mediation of relationships 'metaphorizes ... sterile orders of technique and self-fulfilling production as life and human relation' (Wagner 1981[1975]:32; see also Bird-David 1993). This metaphorisation, better understood as *remetaphorisation* — settler relations to land being no less 'cultural' — recasts the technological deployment of pastoral technique towards deployment within an intersubjective relationship with country. These cultural differences between settler and Indigenous pastoralism are masked not only by the use of what appear to be similar techniques, but also by the ways in which technique is symbolically related to subjective attachments to the region's landscape. These include oppositional claims by settlers and Aboriginal

people of 'love for country', or of station properties as 'home', during native title claims. The shared language of these assertions renders opaque their differing ontological bases (Smith 2003b:38).

While white pastoralists tend to deal with their enterprise as one in which grass is turned into cattle, which are subsequently transformed into cash,² Aboriginal pastoralists have 'remetaphorised' pastoralism as a vehicle for the reproduction of relationships with kin and country. The subsistence use of cattle as 'killers', for example, involves the reproduction of kin relationships through the distribution of meat at the station and in Coen.³ Experiential encounters with stock and the pastoral landscape similarly demonstrate an intersubjective orientation to land and resource management where indeterminacy involves the negotiation of relationships with country rather than triumph over natural barriers.

The principles underlying these differences between Aboriginal and settler pastoralism are articulated by Ingold in his differentiation of cosmological and technological orientations to life-world. Ingold asserts that Indigenous cosmologies place the person within an ordered universe of meaningful relations, enjoining 'an understanding of these relations as a foundation for proper conduct towards the environment'. Ingold contrasts this cosmological orientation to a Western, technological orientation, which he characterises as placing human society outside of what is 'residually construed' as the physical world, furnishing the means for control over this world. Cosmology thus 'provides the guiding principles for human action *within* the world', whilst 'technology provides the principles for human action *upon* it' (Ingold 2000:216, emphasis in original).

Ingold's insistence that 'as cosmology gives way to technology, the relation between people and the world is turned inside out' (Ingold 2000:216) does not account for the ways that particular techniques, including those employed in pastoralism, can produce different modernities. In central Cape York it is possible to recognise a modernity that has not resulted in disenchantment, and the continuing existence of a life-world which grants agency to '[g]ods, spirits, and other "supernatural" forces' (Chakrabarty 2000:73). The ontologically and socioculturally distinct modernity of Aboriginal pastoralism can be recognised in the continuing stress on what local Aboriginal people call 'signs'; these are understood as the communication of country with those who hold a substantial relationship with it, often indicating the death of a kinsman. Accounts of such signs given to me (see Smith 2002a:24, for example) involve introduced species, including pigs and cattle, demonstrating the incorporation of these species (and pastoralism more generally) within the customary management of homelands.

It has not been the techniques of pastoral modernity per se that have 'turned the world inside out' for Aboriginal people in the central Peninsula region, either

in the sense of the transition from intersubjectivity to objectification intended by Ingold, or through an associated crisis of subjectivity. However, the ability of Aboriginal people to engage in pastoral work on their country has been increasingly undermined by the insistence that Indigenous pastoralism should be market-oriented. The notion that pastoralism provides a potential basis for remote Aboriginal economic development is apparent both among state agencies and local and regional Aboriginal organisations.

ECONOMY AND ENCAPSULATION

Articulating the differing ways in which pastoral techniques are interwoven with sociocultural production is not sufficient to explain the relationship between the Indigenous population of central Cape York Peninsula and post-contact socioeconomic developments. The region's economy has remained dependent on the encapsulation, control and management of the Aboriginal population by the state. The development of the pastoral industry in the early years of the twentieth century depended on a state-controlled Aboriginal workforce, paid at rates far lower than those paid to non-Aboriginal employees (Kidd 2003; May 1983, 1994). The pastoral industry also relied on the ability to lay off workers in off-seasons. It is not only Indigenous economic activity, but also the region's general economy, which has remained a hybrid mix of state, market and 'customary' subsistence components.

The socioeconomic forms which emerged during the colonial milieu have themselves become customary among the region's Aboriginal population. As outlined above, the historical trajectory of this hybrid economy began with occasional work by fringe-dwelling Aboriginal families in the late nineteenth century. Its development continued with the incorporation of an indentured Aboriginal labour force in the early 1900s, dependent on the control of rations, funds and supplies by local businesses and state agents. This situation continued with the advent of Aboriginal citizenship in 1967 and the introduction of award wages and freedom of movement to Aboriginal workers in 1972. At this time, the state Department of Aboriginal Affairs manager in Coen wrote that '[f]or the first time ... men did not have to go to a station if they did not want to' (Kidd 2003). However, what Coen people still refer to as the 'freedom' resulted in the mass lay-off of Aboriginal workers, whose labour was no longer affordable for station owners (May 1994:160-73).

In recent work on 'fourth world' contexts, Peterson has stressed the need to make the relationship between economic and ideational structures 'a central issue' (Peterson 2002:2; see also Lee and LiPuma 2002:192). Peterson's approach draws on Barnard's concept of the 'domestic moral economy' to explain the

interrelationship of Aboriginal people and state encapsulation. E.P. Thompson's ironic suggestion of the term 'dialectical asymmetrical reciprocity', cited by Peterson (2002:4), perfectly describes the historical development of the relationship between Aboriginal people and the state. The inflow of capital to the region depended on a state-controlled workforce, but simultaneously produced a situation in which Aboriginal people were insulated from involvement with the cash economy. Aboriginal workers were instead made dependent on the state and their employers in return for the provision of labour and local knowledge to settler pastoralists, 'helping them build up their stations' as Aboriginal people often put it. This dependence was accompanied by forms of spatial and social separation between Aboriginal people and white settlers and the reproduction of separate sociocultural 'domains' in which many day-to-day interactions — Peterson's 'domestic moral economy' — were enacted. The 'Aboriginal domain'⁴ was, nonetheless, closely tied to an economic domain alienated from Aboriginal control and dominated by local whites.

The collapse of pastoral employment in the late 1970s led to a radical socioeconomic shift. Newly identified Aboriginal citizens, left discarded by the outflow of pastoral capital, became increasingly dependent on the state's provision of welfare payments. Although this marked a shift in the form of articulation with the state and cash economy, it continued a now-customary pattern of dependence, reshaping the role long played by white 'bosses' across the region through the liberal-democratic tradition of welfare provision. In the 1970s and 1980s many Aboriginal people also experienced the loss of meaningful articulation with their homelands and increased access to alcohol, with disastrous results. During this period, Coen — along with other townships with large Aboriginal populations — became subject to the emergent political and bureaucratic discourse of Aboriginal 'self-determination' which dominated the following three decades. This discourse arose in response to the situation of Aboriginal people across rural and remote Australia, partly motivated by the national and international development of a post-colonial rights agenda.

Despite considerable resistance from the Queensland government (Eriksen 1996; Kidd 1997), the 1980s saw Aboriginal people attempting to take up the opportunities afforded by federal policy. In Coen, the establishment of a series of local Aboriginal corporations (the first of which was registered in 1984) provided new opportunities for local Aboriginal people. The local style of 'leadership', in which 'focal' men and women acted as brokers in relationships with state agencies (see Smith 2000), was provided with new sites of articulation, including newly developed Aboriginal organisations. Many focal individuals sought support for the

federal purchase of pastoral leases on behalf of their ‘tribal’ groups. One focal man described his successful push for a station purchase in this manner:

when we fighting for land ... like myself, I fight for land, had to go ‘round, visit all the people [families with traditional connections to the area, to gain their support for his actions] ... that’s what I done ... I was fighting for Fairfield [station] ... [contacting family in] Cooktown, Pormpuraaw, Southwell, B_ [his older brother], ... ring Weipa, old uncle W_ there ... let them know why I getting this information.

S_ and H_ [at that time the local Department of Family Services & Aboriginal Island Affairs officers in Coen] ... I used to go down every day, with the papers.

S_ and H_ ... they know *murri* [Aboriginal] way ... well S_ is *murri* himself ... they knew what I’m after ... ‘well mate, we’ll give it a go, see what we can do’ ... [they] got ATSIC [the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission]⁵ money to buy station.

I told ‘em, ‘I want everything that’s there’ [stock, equipment], not start from nothing.

These fellas now [seeking a further purchase of land for the same ‘tribal’ group] ... gotta do a lot of work on that thing [application for a purchase] ... well, he’ll be good [that is, it would be good to put in a potentially successful application for a land purchase], but you gotta put a lot of time into it.

Another thing too, ILC [the Indigenous Land Corporation]⁶ might just buy the place [the station alone, with no equipment] — they’re those sort of people ... getting cattle, horses, machine ... gotta start over again from scratch.

This account illustrates how an Aboriginal ‘moral economy’ of relatedness and egalitarianism is maintained in conjunction with relationships of brokerage and dependency on state agencies and their representatives. The continuation of the customary role of provision by the state, mediated by local or regional representatives at a remove from the Aboriginal domain, is inherent in such relationships.⁷ This account also demonstrates a common emphasis on the need for the hand-over of land which can be worked. This emphasis on (typically pastoral) work as the ‘proper’ basis for the return of traditional land occurs despite the problems faced by focal men and women (as well as non-Aboriginal administrators) in persuading younger members of their families to return to their homelands, or to work when visiting homeland camps (Smith 2002b).

In the central Cape York region, the liberal nation-state’s encapsulation of Aboriginal people has consistently produced ‘graduated sovereignties’ through

which 'regimes of economic coordination and social citizenship are differentially applied to sectors of national populations' (Collier and Ong 2003:425). The original form of graduated sovereignty involved state-controlled Aboriginal labour during the protection era which resulted from the 1897 Act. The region's Aboriginal population developed its extractive relationship with the state and mainstream economy, from which they remained alienated despite their continuing economic dependency, following their 'freedom' from the Act. This complex relationship with state and capital has produced a life-world in which a 'domestic moral economy' has been alienated from any significant productive component, save for the production of local sociality, a weak basis for any meaningful form of Aboriginal autonomy (cf. Martin 2003).

Aboriginal people have developed new forms of local knowledge concerned with the extraction of resources from this 'new environment', alongside older forms of local knowledge relating to traditional environments and cosmology (Smith 2003c; see also von Sturmer 1982; Eriksen 1996). Focal men and women are usually adept in these new extractive techniques and have gained their status partly as a result. Yet the same alienated economy which has provided for the reproduction of the Aboriginal domain increasingly demands more productive Aboriginal participation in the mainstream economy. As Peterson notes, as capitalist economies 'the encapsulating societies are responsible for the forces that threaten the dissolution of the domestic moral economy', while as liberal democratic welfare states 'they inadvertently contribute to its reproduction' (Peterson 2002:8-9). Current shifts in the relationship between the state, capital and Aboriginal people are likely to present difficulties for the reproduction of this extractive relationship and for the reproduction of the Aboriginal domain in its current form.

INTERVENTION AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Government and media continue to voice demands for increased intervention in Aboriginal affairs despite a continuing — if not intensifying — ideal of Aboriginal autonomy. Rather than a simple paradox, it seems likely that this situation is a manifestation of a global trend in which autochthonous identities are becoming intensified in a manner which recasts Indigeneity as a form of state-orientation (Smith 2003a, 2003c; Kuper 2003).⁸ The emergent relationship between the Aboriginal domain and the state, in which intervention is seen as an overwhelming necessity, is reminiscent of Hardt and Negri's (2000:16) identification of 'crisis' as an increasingly common justification for intervention. Such crises and the 'exception' operative in the 'moment of their production' suggest that intervention is due to exceptional circumstances, while deeming this

intervention inevitable. Despite a social imaginary of Indigeneity which presents 'Aboriginal society' as autonomous, the current interventions demanded by various organisations are not incursions into distinct social realms, 'but rather actions within a unified world by the ruling structure of production and communication'. This 'moral intervention' (Hardt and Negri 2000:35) involves a variety of bodies including the news media, Aboriginal organisations and the conservative federal government.

The need for development intervention is often justified in terms of 'local knowledge' limiting or being insufficient for socioeconomic development (see Fergusson 1994). Parallels are increasingly drawn between the situation of Aboriginal people in northern Australia and international development contexts to underpin interventionist strategies while maintaining the rubric of Indigenous autonomy. One recent newspaper article, which reproduces the rhetoric of autonomy while simultaneously arguing the need for state engagement, argued that the current moment:

is a time the unthinkable is being thought aloud by the visionaries and veterans whose lives have been given to the indigenous cause. Everything is on the table, as extensive interviews with ... key officials revealed.

One of the central figures in Aboriginal affairs even used last week's meeting to call for a new strategy of long-term nation-building aid, along the lines of the Marshall Plan assistance the US poured into the states of western Europe to rebuild their shattered societies after World War II (*Weekend Australian* 2003a:23).

The identification of shortcomings in local knowledge by agencies concerned with development typically defines the extent to which 'external scientific and other knowledge (and information) need to be introduced and integrated as a constructive contribution to local adaptation to changing natural and socio-economic environments' (Bicker and Sillitoe 2003). Current discussion of the crisis in Indigenous Australia often casts local knowledge as absent or as an impediment. The failure of self-determination — itself a form of state intervention — is often linked with the Indigenous 'domestic moral economy', for example in incidents of corruption and nepotism in local Aboriginal corporations.⁹ In other instances, this domestic moral economy is obscured through accounts of the degeneration of social fabric. This is common in recent accounts of the shift to 'welfare dependency' and the direct and indirect traumas associated with alcohol and substance abuse which remain widespread among Aboriginal populations across remote northern Queensland (cf. Neill 2002).

For Aboriginal-controlled pastoral leases such as Fairfield, the ascribed failures of self-determination include the irregular presence of Aboriginal people

on the property, the poor economic management of station finances and the use of the herds for subsistence rather than planned herd development (cf. *Weekend Australian* 2003b). Currently, the proposed solution to the problems of the three Aboriginal-run pastoral leases in the Coen region — all of which remain under some degree of control by ATSIC and other agencies — is for further outside control to be brought in by regional Aboriginal organisations to manage the station's activities.

The discourse of intervention demonstrates remarkably limited engagement with the interweaving of state agencies and Aboriginal people which has long characterised attempts to produce Aboriginal development, and through which 'Aboriginal autonomy' has remained a 'state-effect' (see Trouillot 2001; Smith 2003a). This may provide an example of what Weiner (2001:133) notes as 'the concealments, the gaps in knowledge, and the turnings-away that make nescience a positive component of social knowledge'. The management of Aboriginal pastoral activities has always been undertaken under non-Aboriginal control, reproducing the dialectical asymmetrical reciprocity that characterises the state's engagement with Indigenous people. However, the fact of non-Aboriginal control is often elided in criticism of the lack of financial productivity of Aboriginal-run properties and claims that Aboriginal people need to achieve improved governance and asset management.

Aboriginal practices relating to stations like Fairfield reproduce a contemporary body of Indigenous knowledge. These practices include visiting and living on one's 'home' or 'country' and using its resources to sustain a resident population and widespread kin relationships. Group identities are also reproduced through possession of the station, either in the process of joint management, or through conflicts over station control. Equally, these stations — and their associated corpus of local knowledge and technique — are embedded in the matrix of relationships of material dependency on the state, with the property itself acting as the basis for extraction of further resources.

This body of local knowledge and its relationship to the state have emerged from the particular relationship of the Aboriginal domain to the regional history of capital. As Peterson (2002:4) notes, this relationship, which privileges the 'reproduction of social relationships at the cost of obvious immediate personal benefit and profit maximisation', is 'anti-market'. This is true of the activities undertaken within the 'Aboriginal domain', but this domain has been reproduced through the hybrid interplay of market, state and Aboriginal life-worlds (see Martin 1995, 2003). The increasing global convergence between state and capital has reinforced pressures towards Aboriginal assimilation as a solution to Indigenous socioeconomic disadvantage. Those — including anthropologists —

who have supposedly perpetuated Aboriginal social exclusion through their own exoticising imaginaries have been blamed by many commentators for ensuring Aboriginal exclusion from the mainstream economy (cf. Neill 2002: 235-82).

Many Aboriginal people in the Coen region regard their current situation as near-disastrous, a verdict which I share, although the manner in which such opinions are phrased may itself mark the circulation of interventionist discourse and its mimesis in relationships with the state. Questions remain, however, about the current promotion of intervention in Indigenous Australia. A number of local Aboriginal people fear that intervention of the kind proposed may simply compound long-running relationships of disempowerment, dependency and dispossession. This last piece of local knowledge presents an uncomfortable, but incisive analysis of the 'asymmetrical reciprocity' which continues to characterise the Indigenous relationship with the state. Moreover, this analysis may prove more accurate than many of those currently offered within the field of 'Aboriginal development'.

NOTES

This paper was originally presented in the panel *Beyond science: approaches to local knowledge in development* at the Fifth Decennial Conference of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth ('Anthropology and Science'), 14-18 July 2003. I am grateful to Paul Sillitoe and Alan Bicker for their invitation to participate in the panel. The paper is part of my continuing work on an Australian Research Council post-doctoral fellowship on 'Aboriginal outcomes from land claims, transfers and purchases in central Cape York Peninsula' held at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. It also draws on earlier research, supported by the Leverhulme Trust, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, the Emslie Hornimann Fund of the Royal Anthropological Institute and the University of London Research Fund. I am grateful, as ever, for the ongoing support of the families of the central Peninsula region for my research, and the insights which innumerable conversations with people in the region have provided me with. I am particularly indebted to David Claudie, David Martin, Deirdre McKay, Phillip Port, Bruce Rigsby and CS, a recently deceased Olkola man, for the development of the ideas in this paper. I am also grateful to TAPJA's two anonymous referees for their comments. Any errors are mine.

¹ In this region, as elsewhere across Australia, Aboriginal life continues to be organised around what are held to be substantive links between groups of people and areas of country, often spoken of as 'homelands' (see Smith 2000, 2002b, 2003c).

² I am indebted to Richard Davis (pers. comm., August 2002) for this formulation of settler pastoral production.

³ Making money is also often an aim of Aboriginal pastoral enterprises, however, and the difference between Aboriginal pastoral endeavours and settler endeavours is typically one of degree or emphasis, rather than absolute difference. This complex relationship of similarity and difference between Aboriginal and settler pastoralism also speaks to the

complex nature of Aboriginal subjectivities, which are typically oriented both to acephalous and state forms of sociocultural organisation (see Smith 2003a).

⁴ von Sturmer (1984:219) defines the 'Aboriginal domain' as the space 'in which the dominant social life and culture are Aboriginal, where the major language or languages are Aboriginal, where the system of knowledge is Aboriginal; in short, where the resident Aboriginal population constitutes the public'.

⁵ The federal government agency with responsibility for Indigenous affairs. In July 2003, ATSIC's roles were split between ATSIC and the newly established agency for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS).

⁶ A federal agency established with the passing of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth), which purchases land (and provides assistance with equipping and managing business ventures) for Indigenous groups unable to establish land claims over their traditional country. The creation of the ILC has added another organisation to those from which prominent Aboriginal men and women and local and regional organisations seek funding to support Aboriginal aspirations for regaining control of their homelands.

⁷ Elsewhere I have discussed the domain of these relationships as 'interethnic' (see Smith 2003a). Sutton (2000:14-16) describes the sociocultural matrix underpinning 'boss-ship' in western Cape York Peninsula, and in particular, the cultural misfit of the notion of 'self-management' for Cape Keerweer people, who sought Sutton's incorporation into their life-world as their 'boss-help-us'. Aboriginal people with whom I work have often represented me as someone whose 'job' it is to 'help Aboriginal people'. This 'job' encompasses a range of tasks, from work on land claims to asserting requests to local and regional agencies on behalf of particular local groups, families and individuals.

⁸ Hardt and Negri (2000:44-5) also note the common and problematic assumption that localised identities are in some sense natural or beyond question, or that such identities remain 'in some sense *outside* and protected against the global flows of capital', noting that 'in many cases what appear as local identities are not autonomous or self-determining but actually feed into and support' the development of globalised capitalism.

⁹ Martin (2003) discusses the relationship between Aboriginal corporations and 'indigenous values and practices [which] may actually inhibit the kinds of social and economic changes which are arguably required to address disadvantage — or at least, those forms of it as measured by standard socioeconomic indicators' (Martin 2003:7).

REFERENCES

Altman, Jon

- 2001 *Sustainable development options on Aboriginal land: the hybrid economy in the twenty-first century*. Discussion paper No. 226. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.

Beckett, Jeremy

- 1978 George Dutton's country: portrait of an Aboriginal drover. *Aboriginal History* 2(1-2):2-31.

Bicker, Alan and Paul Sillitoe

- 2003 *Panel description. Beyond science: approaches to local knowledge in development.* Source: <http://www.octagon-pictures.demon.co.uk/nomadit/asa/panels/bicker.htm> (accessed 10 June 2003). [Website no longer available.]

Bird-David, Nurit

- 1993 Tribal metaphorization of human-nature relatedness: a comparative analysis. In K. Milton (ed.), *Environmentalism: the view from anthropology*. London: Routledge, pp. 112-25.

Brady, Maggie

- 1992 *Heavy metal: the social meaning of petrol sniffing in Australia*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh

- 2000 *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Collier, Stephen J. and Aihwa Ong

- 2003 *Oikos/anthropos: rationality, technology, infrastructure.* *Current Anthropology* 44(3):421-426.

Cowlshaw, Gillian

- 1999 *Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas: a study of racial power and intimacy in Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Elkin, Adolphus Peter

- 1954 *The Australian Aborigines: how to understand them*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.

Eriksen, Judith P.

- 1996 Aboriginal outstation development in Cape York Peninsula: moving back to traditional country. Honours thesis. Division of Environmental Sciences, Griffith University.

Fergusson, James

- 1994 *The anti-politics machine: 'development', depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fitzgerald, Tony

- 2001 *Cape York justice study*. Brisbane: Department of Premier and Cabinet (Qld).

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri

- 2000 *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Ingold, Tim

- 2000 *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood dwelling and skill*. London: Routledge.

Kidd, Ros

- 1996 *Occupation history: Archer Bend and Rokeby*. Cairns: Cape York Land Council.
- 1997 *The way we civilize: Aboriginal affairs — the untold story*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.
- 2003 The biggest broker of them all: the state of Queensland and Aboriginal labour. Paper presented to the conference Transforming Labour: Work, Workers, Struggle and Change, 8th Labour History Conference, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Brisbane, 3-5 October.

Kuper, Adam

- 2003 The return of the native. *Current Anthropology* 44(3):389-402.

Lee, Benjamin and Edward LiPuma

- 2002 Cultures of circulation: the imaginations of modernity. *Public Culture* 14(1):191-213.

Martin, David Fernandes

- 1995 *Money, business and culture: issues for Aboriginal economic policy*. Discussion Paper No. 101. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.
- 2003 *Rethinking the design of Indigenous organisations: the need for strategic engagement*. Discussion Paper No. 248. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.

May, Dawn

- 1983 *From bush to station: Aboriginal labour in the North Queensland pastoral industry, 1861-1897*. Townsville: History Department, James Cook University.
- 1994 *Aboriginal labour and the cattle industry: Queensland from white settlement to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McGrath, Ann

- 1987 *'Born in the cattle': Aborigines in cattle country*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Neill, Rosemary

- 2002 *White out: how politics is killing black Australia*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Parry-Okeden, W.E.

- 1897 Report on the North Queensland Aboriginals and the native police. *Queensland Votes and Proceedings* 2:23-42.

Pearson, Noel

- 2000 *Our right to take responsibility*. Cairns: Noel Pearson and Associates.

Peterson, Nicolas

- 2002 From mode of production to moral economy: sharing and kinship in Fourth World social orders. Unpublished manuscript, presented at Ninth International

Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies, Edinburgh University, 9-13 September.

Povinelli, Elizabeth

1993 'Might be something': the language of indeterminacy in Australian Aboriginal land use. *Man* (n.s.) 28(4):679-704.

Rose, Deborah

1998 The year zero and the North Australian frontier. In D. Rose and A. Clarke (eds), *Tracking knowledge in North Australian landscapes: studies in Indigenous and settler ecological knowledge systems*. Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, pp. 19-36.

Rowse, Tim

1987 Were you ever savages? Aboriginal insiders and pastoralists' patronage. *Oceania* 58(1):81-99.

Smith, Benjamin Richard

2000 Between places: Aboriginal decentralisation, mobility and territoriality in the region of Coen, Cape York Peninsula (Australia). Unpublished PhD thesis. Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

2002a Pastoralism, land and Aboriginal existence in central Cape York Peninsula. *Anthropology in Action* 9(1):21-30.

2002b *Decentralisation, population mobility and the CDEP scheme in central Cape York Peninsula*. Discussion Paper No. 238. Canberra: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University.

2003a Still under the Act? Legislation, articulation and subjectivity in northern Queensland. Paper presented at CAEPR Seminar Series 1, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, 23 April.

2003b Whither 'certainty'? Coexistence, change and some repercussions of native title in northern Queensland. *Anthropological Forum* 13(1):27-48.

2003c Circulation, locality and Indigeneity in central Cape York Peninsula. Paper presented to the session Anthropology in Cape York: cultural particularities, flows and regional connections, Australian Anthropology Society Conference 2003, University of Sydney, 2 October.

Sutton, Peter

2000 Conflict, representation and negotiation: some cultural issues in the context of native title. Unpublished manuscript.

2004 *Native title in Australia: an ethnographic perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph

2001 The anthropology of the state in the age of globalization: close encounters of the deceptive kind. *Current Anthropology* 42(1):125-38.

von Sturmer, John

- 1982 Aborigines in the uranium industry: towards self-management in the Alligator River region? In R.M. Berndt (ed.), *Aboriginal sites, rights and resource development*. Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, pp. 69-116.
- 1984 The different domains. In Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Uranium Impact Project Steering Committee, *Aborigines and uranium: consolidated report to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs on the social impact of uranium mining on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, pp.218-37.

Wagner, Roy

- 1981[1975] *The invention of culture: revised and expanded edition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Weekend Australian

- 2003a After ATSIC. *The Weekend Australian*, 5-6 July, p. 23.
- 2003b Native land grab a fistful of trouble. *The Weekend Australian*, 5-6 July, pp. 1, 6.

Weiner, James F.

- 2001 *Tree leaf talk: a Heideggerian anthropology*. Oxford: Berg.