



Research Letters

Rock art and mining violence on the Australian Burrup Peninsula: language wars, economy and culture



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ABSTRACT

Humans have lived on the Australian continent for around 50,000 years. During that time, the indigenous people developed complex cultural, economic and social systems. These systems were sustained and expressed through the myths and songlines which comprise the indigenous people's Dreaming. It was through the Dreaming that the natural, symbolic and material worlds converge, enabling humans to orient themselves spiritually, cosmologically and geographically. This cultural and natural contingency was shattered by the British invasion and settlement of Australia from 1788. In one particular region of the country, the Burrup Peninsula, this violation has been perpetuated through the destructive practices of mining. The Burrup Peninsula is located in the remote Western Australia Pilbara region on the Dampier Archipelago. This area hosts one of the world's most extensive and significant indigenous Palaeolithic art galleries—petroglyphs that may be as old as 30,000 years Before Present. The Pilbara also contains one of the world's most extensive and richest iron ore deposits, as well as a vast array of other minerals and fuels. This paper examines the ways in which the cultural and natural heritage of the Burrup has been excoriated by the mining industries. The paper examines recent attempts to protect the heritage of the area from further destruction. It focuses on the World Heritage nomination of the Burrup, indigenous activism and the complex politics of conservation in the area.

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Introduction

The Burrup Peninsula is located in the remote Western Australia Pilbara region on the Dampier Archipelago. This area hosts one of the world's most extensive and significant indigenous Palaeolithic art galleries—petroglyphs that may be as old as 30,000 years Before Present. The Pilbara also contains one of the world's most extensive and richest iron ore deposits, as well as a vast array of other minerals and fuels. The extraction and transportation of these minerals has had an enormous impact on the region's natural and cultural heritage, contributing to a regional history that is mired in social conflict and violence.

This paper will examine these conditions of violence as they are being currently exercised within the cultural landscape of the Dampier Archipelago, and in particular the Burrup Peninsula. This cultural landscape represents a 'Thirdspace', in the Lefebvre-Soja

coinage, whereby natural and humanly created systems converge within the language wars of modernity, economy and culture (Lewis, 2005, 2016). Mining and development associated with resource extraction are at the centre of these language wars and the ways in which space and culture are imagined and rendered meaningful.

Flying Foam

This was an attempt at ethnic and cultural cleansing. While one police troop crossed onto Burrup Island from the western mainland, another troop entered from the northern waters of the Flying Foam Passage. It was a well-planned pincer movement, designed to trap and exorcise the remaining members of the indigenous Jaburara people from the region. By this time in early 1868, the Jaburara had already been decimated by the British invasion and settlement. The last of the tribal group had retreated to the island when the attack took place. The two police groups converged, slaughtering adults and children and throwing their bodies into the sea (DEC, 2013; Monuments Australia, 2016).

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Burrup Island (aka Murujuga) was an integral part of the Jaburara's economy, spiritual life (Dreaming) and sacred songlines. It is through these songlines that the natural, material and symbolic life-worlds coalesce, forming a complex cultural matrix by which the indigenous peoples orient themselves geographically and spiritually (Molyneux and Vitebsky, 2001; Kerwin, 2010; Gammage, 2011; Norris and Hamacher, 2011). While they may seem to be invisible, these songlines are continually expressed in the economic, artistic, ritual and social practices, which define everyday life for Australian Aboriginal people.

There are various speculations about the Burrup attacks, which subsequently became known as the Flying Foam Massacre (DEC, 2013). However, it appears that the British settlers had organized a death squad, which was determined to rid the region of troublesome Aborigines who were constantly breaching colonial property law. According to some reports, the squad pursued the small band of Jaburara from their camps and onto the iron-stone hills which define the spine of the island. When they could go no further, the Jaburara were forced over the cliff-tops where they plunged to their deaths (Gara, 1983).

While the actual detail of the Flying Foam Massacre may be uncertain, the events were highly significant for other, surviving indigenous groups of the region (Mulvaney, 2015; MA, 2016). These groups have memorialized the genocide in various ways, inscribing it within the songlines of the Burrup. Ken Mulvaney notes, for example, that many local indigenous people identify the massacre with a series of 'standing stones' which give voice to the slain Jaburara spirits. While standing stones are a feature of the extensive rock art and symbolic landscape of the archipelago, a particular series of stones have been linked to the site of the Flying Foam genocide:

These stones may act as signal stones, either as prohibition or direction marker, ceremonial structure or feature with ascribed Dreaming narrative. . . In one case, low-rise comprises some 96 standing stones along with petroglyphs. This site is probably the largest concentration of this type of stone arrangement present on Burrup Peninsula. Current mythology holds that these are erected as markers of the slain Jaburara during the Flying Foam Massacre of 1868. (Mulvaney, 2015, p. 764)

Thus, while the massacre was largely overlooked by colonial authorities, the event remained starkly visible for the local indigenous groups who continually revived its significance across generations. This cultural memory was borne through the expression of the Dreaming in songs, songlines, stone arrangements and artworks. In this way, the natural landscape—specifically the distinctive iron stones of the Dampier Archipelago—has represented a 'cultural canvass' for the articulation, dissemination and storage of meaning (Bird and Hallam, 2006; AHC, 2012; Mulvaney, 2015; MA, 2016). Throughout the iron stone hills of the Dampier Archipelago (see Fig. 1), standing stones and rock engravings have marked particular geographical and sacred sites for indigenous people over tens of millennia.

Thus, the standing stones which represent the Flying Foam Massacre have become embedded within the broader cultural landscape of the Archipelago—in particular, the vast stone etchings (petroglyphs) that distinguish the area as one of the most significant Palaeolithic art sites in the world (Bird and Hallam, 2006; AHC, 2012; Mulvaney, 2015). As various archaeologists have confirmed, many of the Burrup rock arrangements and engravings were created as early as 20–30,000 years Before Present, paralleling the Palaeolithic artworks of Lascaux in France (17,300 BP) and Altamira in Spain (18,500 BP).

The Flying Foam standing stones are distinctive within these vast and enduring galleries, however, because they signal the emergence of warfare within the cultural landscape of the region and the



Fig. 1. The iron stone hills of the Dampier Archipelago.

Photograph: Belinda Lewis.

Australian Palaeolithic more broadly. Colonialism, that is, brought the phenomenon of warfare—organized intergroup violence—into a Palaeolithic cultural landscape that had well developed systems of conflict avoidance and peace-building (Ferguson, 2006, 2013; Flood, 2007; Fry, 2013; Malešević, 2015; Lewis, 2016). Indeed, events like the Flying Foam Massacre are largely an effect of the European invasion and abiding conditions of colonial military and militia warfare. This violence was not haphazard or an unintended consequence of the European annexations: it was clearly an exercise of war, which involved systematic cultural cleansing. The impact and social resonance of this systematic violence continue through variously formed cultural politics into the present (Connor, 2008).

As in many parts of the New World, therefore, events like the Flying Foam Massacre were not exceptional, but rather prescient (Elder, 1998; Moses, 2005). As the violence of this attack was inscribed into the indigenous songlines, it also became a harbinger for the ongoing exclusions, brutality and oppression that have marked the cultural and natural landscape of Australia. Thus, the songlines, and specifically their expression in the Flying Foam stones, became inscribed within a national consciousness which normalized violence as the fundamental imperative of progress and development.

Burrup songlines

The Flying Foam murders symbolized, in many respects, the complex disaggregation of the Jaburara (Yaburara) people and their cultural integrity. The violence that was inflicted upon this group not only gratified the early colonial beef and maritime industries, it paved pathways for later territorial expropriation by large multinational extraction industries. Within a century of the murders, in fact, these large corporations began surveying the Pilbara, supported by state and federal governments who regarded the region as a template of *terra nullius*, an empty land which had little obvious ecological, economic or cultural value. It was only mining companies' miraculous technologies which exposed the sub-surface value of the land and its abundance of extractables such as gas, oil, lithium and most notably iron ore. This 'miracle' was amplified with Messianic force, as the extraction companies began their major assault on the region, transforming its fragile ecosystems (see Box 1) into a major, global industrial landscape (Mulvaney, 2015; Zarandona, 2015).

Box 1: Fragile ecosystems of Burrup.

Burrup Peninsula was originally a small island of 118 km² surrounded by the 42 islands of the Dampier Archipelago.

Landscape dominated by massive basalt rock rises of fractured blocks containing over a million petroglyph rock engravings. Geologically one of the oldest regions in Australia. Some rocks were formed 3600 million years ago and are amongst the oldest in the world.

Hot, arid climate with a shallow soil profile, few permanent water sources, seasonal watercourses follow the wet season and tropical cyclones.

Diversity of habitats: Natural grandeur, red rocky outcrops, deep gorges, narrow valleys and gullies, pockets of tall dense vegetation and eucalypts, coastal grasslands, saline and supratidal flats, coastal fringe rock-shelf communities. Vegetation very distinctive due to unusual geomorphology.

Rich and diverse fauna, numerous species of high conservation significance, including endangered Pilbara olive python, 10 species of migratory birds, mammals and bats, rock wallabies, reptiles frogs and marine life (DEC, 2013).

Surrounding coastal environment: 105 km² of tidal mudflats and mangrove forests have been destroyed by industrial development.

The Burrup microenvironment has become more acidic than before industrialization.

The impact of industrial development, and the causeway linking the island to the mainland, is irrevocably changing the landscape and ecology of Burrup (Mulvaney, 2015)

During this early phase of transformation, there was very little account of the region's conservation value, and hence there was little organized resistance (Bird and Hallam, 2006). As much as the extraction companies were subsuming the region's lands and ecosystems, they were also inveigling public and policy conversations regarding mining and development. Environmentalists were virtually absent from the region. The local indigenous groups who continued to live there were scattered and struggling for social, cultural and political coherence within those policy debates (Vinnicombe, 1987). Non-indigenous people were largely unaware of the deep spiritual significance of this environment—and in particular the rock art galleries—for the sense of identity and 'connection to country' that is essential for the wellbeing of contemporary indigenous people (DEC, 2013). Academics and archaeologists, who were aware of the heritage significance of the indigenous petroglyphs and the cultural landscape more generally, were located thousands of kilometres from the Pilbara in Perth and other Australian cities (Vinnicombe, 1987; Bird and Hallam, 2006; Mulvaney, 2015).

The Burrup petroglyphs map the economic, cultural and spiritual life of the indigenous peoples of the Dampier Archipelago spanning a 30,000 year time period. They were created by people whose deep knowledge of the ecosystems was etched into rocks across the landscape as an unparalleled record of Dreaming stories, customary law and natural resources. Palaeolithic cultures regarded the spiritual and material worlds as entirely overlapping and often indistinguishable. Animals and humans shared a common spiritual and natural existence. The petroglyph in Fig. 2 represents an animal and animistic spirit. Rock engravings such as those in Fig. 3 convey complex symbolic and sacred meanings.

In 1964, specifically, the maritime areas around the Burrup Island (King's Bay) were marked for a major industrial and port development, which would service the emerging mining and petrochemical extraction activities as they expanded across the Pilbara and its off-shore waters. Development of the port and industrial area involved the transformation of Burrup Island into a peninsula connected by a road-rail causeway to the mainland. The works



Fig. 2. Example of engraved rock art within landscape of Burrup—an animal and animistic spirit.

Photograph: Belinda Lewis.

necessitated the bull-dozing of vast areas of mangrove forest along with the filling and drainage of surrounding wetlands (Vinnicombe, 1987). While the development was clearly devastating for the natural ecology, it also inflicted irreparable damage on the cultural landscape and indigenous heritage of the area. Most significantly, it is estimated that around 10,000 individual petroglyph artworks were destroyed by the development (Mulvaney, 2015). Many of the artworks were bull-dozed into land-fill, others were smashed or clustered into preservation yards well away from their original locations.

Nevertheless, Woodside Energy which operates the A\$34 billion, North West Shelf Project gas processing plant, promotes itself as a proponent and supporter of the region's cultural indigenous heritage (Woodside, 2015). Not only does Woodside have a range of synthetic imitations of iron-stone boulders with petroglyph images in the foyer of its tourist Visitors Centre at Burrup, it also claims to be a defender of heritage by removing, preserving and re-locating vulnerable rock-art affected by the development (Mulvaney, 2015; Burrell, 2014). According to respected Burrup archaeologist, Ken Mulvaney, the vast majority of these engraved boulders were left ignored in an obscure, fenced compound for 30 years before public pressure forced the company to commence attempts at repatriation



Fig. 3. Example of petroglyphs with complex symbolic and sacred meanings (Murujuja/Burrup).

Photograph: Belinda Lewis.

(Mulvaney, 2015, p. 12). For Mulvaney and others (see Zarandona, 2015), this obfuscation seems little consolation for the nearly 10,000 individual petroglyphs which the industrial development at Burrup has been implicated in destroying.

The violence of landscape destruction

Recent commentary has struggled to explain how such systematic vandalism could have been inflicted on a cultural landscape which is so profoundly significant, not only for local indigenous peoples and their songlines, but for national and global cultural heritage. As we have noted, these artworks extend to a period that pre-dates most of the world's Palaeolithic art sites, representing perhaps the most enduring and continuous of all human cultures. Indeed, as numerous archaeologists have recognized, few other of the world's Palaeolithic art sites have the breadth, longevity, integrity and astonishing diversity that defines the Burrup cultural landscape (Vinnicombe, 1987; Bird and Hallam, 2006; Donaldson, 2009; Mulvaney, 2011, 2015; Zarandona, 2015).

Beyond the Palaeolithic, of course, history becomes replete with violence, particularly through the rise of militarized urban hubs and civilizations (Lewis, 2016). Human civilization, in fact, was formed around a process of economic development and expansionism which necessitated the control, vandalism and excoriation of other populations and cultures. This process was constituted around powerful military élites who sought to impose themselves and their own social, political and cosmological knowledge systems over all human and non-human life-forms in order to re-create and re-define them as economic resources (Lewis, 2011, 2013, 2016).

Mining has been absolutely critical to this process, particularly as small and dispersed agricultural societies became increasingly absorbed and transformed by the ever-expanding ambit of urban, military, trading civilizations (Lewis, 2013). Many of the great cities of the Old World were constructed in volatile tectonic zones where minerals and ores were close to the Earth's surface. While perpetually risking volcanic and other forms of tectonic annihilation, these civilizations accessed the minerals in a Faustian pact, forging and deploying them for various kinds of technological and economic advantage. Often using enslaved labour, these civilizations exploited the mineral resources for agriculture and other industries, construction, decorative trade and most importantly weaponry (Stewart, 2005; Lewis, 2013). As the contiguous resources were depleted, these civilizations violently expropriated the territories of other people, including the indigenous peoples of Australia.

In this context, it is not unreasonable to explain the destruction of extraordinary cultural landscapes, like the Burrup Peninsula, in terms of this violent and accelerating civilizational volition. In what many scholars are calling the 'Anthropocene' (Proctor, 2013), this most recent permutation of the volition of violence inevitably replaces diverse ecological and cultural systems with an homogenizing industrial and consumer capitalism.

Thus, the indigenous songlines, which are represented in the artworks of the Burrup Peninsula, were not simply caught in the historical crossfire of modernism and industrial development: they were sacrifices to the greater purpose of liberal capitalism, progress and hierarchies of affluence. These unique, ancient petroglyphs have been targeted as enemies of this volition of violence. The mere existence of the petroglyphs, along with the mystery of their knowledge and meaning systems, represented a deep offence to the industrialists and miners who pre-figured them against the imaginary of *terra nullius*, a world of absences which was simply awaiting the glorious miracle of pre-destination and mining development.

Among the élites who sponsored the assault were the state and federal governments who have jurisdiction over lands and

Box 2: Examples of visitor comments about preservation of Burrup rock art.

'We saw the displays at the Woodside Visitor Information Centre. They had a couple of pieces of rock art near the entrance. Not the real thing—but a model of how they look. It's the first thing you see as you go inside. You can tell the company cares about local indigenous people. They would do the right thing'. (*International tourist visitor*)

'Well, I've walked around looking for rock art. I couldn't find anything. So I think it's true. . . the company has it all safely in a museum somewhere'. (*Visitor from southern Australia*)

'To be honest I'm not really interested in the rock art. This complex is incredible—just amazing technology'. (*Local building worker*)

'I'm a shareholder and so I read the company reports. It does sound as though they are doing a good job. But who would know? Really. . .who would know?' (*Retiree from Australia*)

their development. The state and federal governments of Australia have been loathe to disrupt the economic trajectory which was established by the industrial infrastructure and Dampier port at Burrup. These economic benefits are clear enough. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2016), minerals comprise around 54% of the nation's export wealth at around AUD 118.3 billion per annum. In a nation of only 26 million people, these figures are enormous, contributing significantly to a per capita GDP of around USD 68,000 per annum. This figure has increased substantially from the 3500 USD per capita/per annum in 1970, when the Burrup infrastructure was just beginning to function.

Cultural and natural landscapes

The Pilbara is a central jewel in Australia's escalating affluence, accounting for nearly 60% of the nation's iron ore production and around 75% of oil and gas. Even as the Australian mining boom subsided through 2015–2016, due in large part to economic softening in China, the Burrup port area continued to thrive. Industrial leases comprise around 47 km² of mostly Burrup land with an additional 33 km² marked for further industrial expansion.

The economic arguments that have been mounted in support of these expansions and their 'collateral' destruction of the cultural (and natural) landscapes are also endorsed by various sections of the public, most particularly the individuals, families and communities whose livelihoods benefit from the mining economy. In conducting our own interview-based research in 2015, we found significant support in the local area for the mining economy and companies. Interviewing both tourists and the many working residents in the townships of Dampier and Karatha, we also found very little awareness of the petroglyphs and their significant cultural value. Moreover, many visitors to the region expressed much greater interest in the high-technology Visitor Information Centre at Burrup Peninsula, than the nearby indigenous artefacts and art sites. Most interviewees also believed that the operators Woodside Energy, along with the iron-ore mining corporation Rio Tinto, were doing a 'good job' of preserving local indigenous art sites and artefacts (see examples in Box 2).

This ignorance or indifference to the Burrup petroglyphs seems simply to extend the silences and violence of the Flying Foam genocide and the development vandalism inflicted nearly a century later.

In fact, the first real signs of development restraint did not emerge until 1993 with the proclamation of the Australian federal government's *Native Title Act*. The Native Title legislation sought to restore title to those indigenous groups who could prove continuous occupation and cultural connection to given tracts of land.

Inspired by this legislation, a number of the Aboriginal communities who continue to live in and around the Dampier Archipelago lodged a Native Title claim over the Burrup Peninsula. The Federal Court granted title rights to only one claimant group deemed to have sufficient cultural connection with Burrup, the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi people. As the legal owners of Burrup Peninsula, therefore, the Ngarluma Yindjibarndi were able to bring the Western Australian government and its collusion of private corporations into negotiations over land use, heritage and conservation. The result of these negotiations was the Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates Agreement (BMIEA) in 2003, which effectively traded native title for various forms of economic, land use, cultural and educational concessions (Department of Environment and Conservation, 2013).

Within the terms of the Agreement, freehold title was transferred to an approved Body Corporate, the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation (MAC), comprising members of the original three indigenous claimant groups—including those that were unsuccessful. The Ngarluma Yindjibarndi, the Yaburara Mardudhunera and the Wong-goo-ttoo groups were recognized in law as the Traditional Custodians of the non-industrial lands occupying 44% of Burrup Peninsula. Contemporary descendants of these three traditional groups refer to themselves generally as Ngarda-ngarli (Department of Environment and Conservation, 2013).

Under the agreement, this aboriginal land was leased back to the Western Australian government. Responsibility for managing these areas, now the Murujuga National Park, remains largely a matter for MAC and the government agencies, including the WA Department of Environment and Conservation.

Much of the remaining peninsula has, in fact, been allocated for future industrial development and the associated infrastructure corridors that are required to service these industries (DEC, 2013). In effect, this has meant that the Western Australian government has the capacity to accept applications for the continued industrial development of the southern end of the Peninsula that will impact on the conservation of the non-industrialized areas further north and east.

These arrangements have not been enthusiastically welcomed by a range of conservationists, not least because they expose the underlying weakness of the Native Title Legislation. As numerous legal scholars and conservationists have subsequently recognized, the granting of native title rights does not guarantee autonomous authority over the a given tract of land nor does it endow the right of title holders to veto existing or even proposed development (Bednarik, 2007; Langton and Longbottom, 2012).

The outstanding value of the extensive rock art and associated archaeological materials has recently been recognized by the National Heritage listing of the park, as well as adjacent lands and islands (DEC, 2013). But experts express grave concerns around the persistent threat of ongoing industrial expansion. Recent additions to the industrial development on Burrup include a fertilizer plant and an ammonia production plant to supply explosives used in the mining industry. Concerns are about further damage to local ecosystems, along with atmospheric and water pollution degrading the Burrup artworks are well documented (Mulvaney, 2015). The negative impacts on cultural and spiritual practices of Indigenous people resulting from activities on the adjoining lands are likely to further increase as a result of the construction and operation of industrial projects, service traffic, quarry blasting, and rifle range shooting. Increased access by visitors and recreational users on adjacent industry zoned lands also has significant impacts, including incidental damage and graffiti to rock art sites (DEC, 2013; Mulvaney, 2015).

Over the past decade, there have been further attempts to protect the integrity of the Burrup cultural landscape through its

nomination for World Heritage listing, an issue we will discuss in greater detail below.

Signals of erasure

During the course of our primary research in 2015, we examined the question of indigenous 'invisibility'. We wanted to understand, in particular, the disappearance of cohesive and identifiable indigenous groups along the maritime zones of the nearby Exmouth region, and how this relates to the attempted obliteration of indigenous groups in the Dampier Archipelago. Exmouth is another remote coastal township, situated around 550 kilometres south of Dampier. While Exmouth was originally developed as an agricultural port facility and military base, it has more recently become a centre for servicing a small-scale tourism industry associated with the World Heritage listed Ningaloo Reef (Bright, 2005).

Unlike the Dampier region, however, Exmouth has no formally recognized Aboriginal communities and very few individual residents of Aboriginal descent. Innumerable local explanations have been offered by both residents and visitors for this 'invisibility', many of which border on the mythical. In a range of interviews conducted in 2015, some of these everyday theories included, for example, that—Aboriginal people never settled in the area because of dust mites; the few indigenous groups that had visited the area were wiped out by a giant tsunami; Aboriginal people believed the area was haunted by an evil spirit who forced the local indigenous groups move away from their songlines; aboriginal people do not like to live on peninsulas; and this hot, arid desert area was too harsh for habitation.

None of these explanations has any credibility, and in fact there is significant evidence of Aboriginal habitation in this area up until at least the colonial period. There are a number of kitchen middens around the dunes and inlets of Exmouth and North West Cape. Moreover, Morse excavated two caves in the area, both of which have considerable evidence of long-term occupation by indigenous Australians (Przywolnik, 2005).

The most plausible explanation for the current absence of indigenous communities in the Exmouth area relates simply to the violence of colonial territorialization. In a common pattern, the establishment of large cattle stations deprived local Aboriginal people of unrestricted access to traditional lands and sustenance. While some were employed on pastoral 'stations' as a cheap labour source, the nature of the landscape and the climate meant that many pastoral operations were marginal. In the mid-1960s the granting of equal wages to Aboriginal workers, along with the mining boom to the north, contributed to the decline of the local pastoral industry. As a consequence, most Aboriginal people were forced off the stations. During this era of colonial invasion and occupation, there were no towns in the Exmouth area, and hence the surviving members of local indigenous clans drifted and dispersed, along with the songlines which had for millennia sustained them.

In some respects, this gradual cultural devolution represents a co-extension of the more dramatic violence which was inflicted on the Jaburara on Burrup Island. In the case of the Jaburara, invisibility was inflicted in a direct and genocidal attack, whereas the indigenous communities of the Exmouth region were slowly starved out of cultural and ultimately physical existence.

The net effect, however, is precisely the same. The colonists, and all of us who now thrive on the economic legacy of this violence, were committing a crime that reached well beyond the murder of miscreants who had no comprehension of European property law. And indeed, while in 1868 these murderers might have resisted the greater depth of their sins, there can be no doubt in hindsight that this was as pernicious a crime against humanity, as any in our species' history. Not only were the colonists attacking a group

of living humans and their cultural grid of meanings, they were also mounting a brutal and unrelenting assault on history itself. In seeking to re-direct the temporal sequence of the whole natural and cultural world of the Jaburara, the colonists were aiming ultimately to re-create history in the image of their own violence.

This is not a form of logo- or Euro-centricism, as many postcolonial and cultural theorists have argued (Zarandona, 2015). As we have argued above, it is rather a pan-cultural volition of violence which extends across, as it legitimizes, the whole conception of civilization and its economic, social and political discourses. To bring this argument back into scale, it is precisely this volition of civilizational violence which lies within the ideology of development, an ideology which is deeply inscribed in the destruction of the Burrup petroglyphs and cultural landscape.

It is this violence which underwrites the attempted erasure of indigenous communities within this region and other parts of the world. Certainly, the Western Australian government and its affiliated modern mining corporations have continued to sponsor and support this violence, even as it has itself been obfuscated and disguised within the discourse of development. It is clear that the killing and erasure of the Jaburara was not an end in itself, but continues in the resonance of denial and degradation which is inscribed into the 'management' processes of the indigenous people and cultural landscape of Burrup.

Heresies of heritage

Part of the problem for indigenous Australians and the preservation of their songlines is vested in the whole idea of title and culture. For Zarandona (2015) this problem can be isolated in terms of the concept of 'heritage' itself. Invoking Homi Bhabha's (Lacanian) conceptions of hybridity, Zarandona concludes that the extensive destruction of the Burrup cultural landscape has been enabled through the whole notion of heritage which implies ownership and a European conception of historical and cultural value (see also Collins, 2005). Zarandona argues that the discipline of cultural studies opens the question of who owns the past, a question that is particularly apposite for postcolonial societies and their regard for indigenous cultural heritage:

In sum, the destruction of Indigenous rock art on the Burrup is caused by the out-of-date but nevertheless current practices of conservation, which often neglect the core of Indigenous heritage in Australia. (Zarandona, 2015, p. 464)

In this context, it appears that even the good intentions of archaeologists, along with the majority of heritage scholars and practitioners, fail to adequately appreciate their own ontological Eurocentricism. Heritage scholars and practitioners fail to acknowledge that heritage—or at least the past—means very different things to the modern western-based state apparatuses and agencies, as it does to indigenous people. This is the only way we can explain the extent of damage that has been inflicted upon the Burrup cultural landscape.

This analysis of the politics of heritage should be understood in terms of broader theoretical conceptions of history itself. Our argument in this paper is that all knowledge—including knowledge of natural and cultural heritage—is formed through cultural systems. That is, our understanding of the past and what the past means is subject to variously formed and contending knowledge systems. The telling of the past as *history*—or who owns the past—is simply the outcome of these contentions. And while it is obvious enough that powerful economic and military élites are most likely to have their histories produced, distributed and amplified through time, numerous alternative and minority stories continue to challenge historical homology and the resolution of these 'language wars' (Lewis, 2005).

This is to say, therefore, that history is an amalgam of voices and knowledge systems, even through the formation of powerful civilizations. In fact, civilization itself represents a complex historical layering of human social groups and their equally diffuse knowledge systems. Thus, even as the European colonists sought to impose invisibility on all contending discourses and knowledge system through the domination of their own homogenizing sovereign ideology—alternative knowledge systems continued through various channels and voices. In the Burrup, specifically, these alternative knowledge systems were continually re-emergent and vocalized through the indigenous communities and their songlines. These challenges have contributed to disrupting the homology of Europe and the sovereign colonies, creating spaces for alternative knowledge and ways of considering and imagining the past—and by corollary, the present.

The ideals of natural and cultural heritage, in this sense, cannot be considered a concession to the volition of capitalism and violence. Heritage, rather, represents a pathway, a vocalization, for those innumerable beings, voices and knowledge systems which the homology has sought to destroy, repress or render invisible. For all its limitations, the concept of 'heritage' is not simply another pitch within the vocal range of the conquerors, as Jose Zarandona seems to be suggesting. Rather, heritage is part of a broader chorus of desire by which modern societies seek to understand themselves, their own fallibilities, contentions and violence. Heritage, that is, becomes a rallying point or totem around which the language wars of history clash and seek absolution if not resolution. Heritage, that is, represents another zone in which the knowledge systems of modernity and modern civilizations will clash in their pursuit of pleasure and moral purpose.

UNESCO

One of the key contentions around which the concept of heritage has evolved as a modern paradox relates directly to the volition of economics and violence: heritage is often offered, therefore, as a means of resolving the paradox between the need for social stability, belonging and moral purpose within a system that is promoted and is reliant upon perpetual agitation, desire and rapacious economic expansionism. However, as we suggested above, heritage struggles against the irrevocability of these contentions, and in particular the ways in which the past can be imagined and mobilized in the service of any knowledge system generated by any given social group. As we have also argued, these social groups and their respective knowledge systems are formed around complex civilizational layerings and their social hierarchies. Different social groups have more and less access to the resources of culture and the capacity for telling their version of the life-world and particular history.

This is demonstrably evident in the contentions over the Burrup Peninsula's cultural landscape. While colonists, governments and mining corporations have sought to render the indigenous peoples of the area invisible, if not annulled, the songlines represented through the extensive petroglyphs of the region have continued to reassert themselves and the indigenous history of the region. And indeed, even through the Western Australian government's reclamation of Native Title and its limpid promise of cultural restitution, the indigenous communities, their cultures and songlines are again proving remarkably resilient. In this instance, the songlines are reasserting themselves within another modernist discourse and knowledge system—the ambit of the United Nations World Heritage. It is clear that these modernized discourses cannot claim to be 'authentic' within the origins of the pre-invasion cultural context. However, as 'revivified' discourses (traceable to these origins) they can provide cultural resources for the mobilization of claims, which must battle for breath within the vast and unrelenting language wars that mark the modern era.

And indeed, even though some cultural commentators may find the prospect of World Heritage listing for the Burrup to be a mere concession to Eurocentricism, inclusion on the UNESCO list would bear significant conservation benefits for the region. It would, for example, compel substantial protection and investment from responsible Australian governments, reinforcing opportunities for employment, educational and caretaking roles for local indigenous groups. Equally, World Heritage listing would raise the Burrup artworks and cultural landscape out of obscurity and the persistent threat of invisibility, bringing the region into new zones of regional, national and global consciousness. As with other World Heritage sites, the profound cultural significance of the area, and of the petroglyphs themselves, would be promoted for international scholarship, education and tourism. The cultural and moral value of the region and its indigenous songlines, that is, would be rendered available for the consciousness and pleasures of the whole of our species and cultural history.

This exposure, however, returns us to the other side of the paradox—and the other dimensions of the language wars of history. As we found in our empirical research, many members of the local indigenous communities are deeply anxious about potential World Heritage listing. Indeed, many local Aboriginal people, including Elders, are concerned about opening the Burrup and its rock art sites to any form of development and public attention. For these individuals, the Burrup—its art and songlines—are deeply sacred. Exposing them to public attention and tourism would necessarily transgress the spiritual and physical integrity of the art sites.

Unlike Ningaloo Reef at Exmouth, which has been listed for its unspoiled natural heritage value, the Burrup area has already been savaged by industrial development. Not only has a significant portion of the Peninsula been destroyed, the industrial development dominates the whole vista of the area. The huge mining industry, port facility can be seen from most parts of the Burrup rock escarpment and maritime zones including those that are only accessible by four-wheel drive or foot. Moreover, the aural environment is cluttered by industrial, port and traffic noise. The undeveloped part of the Peninsula, in fact, is itself marked by four-wheel drive tracks, a large picnic and recreational area, and various camping and fishing sites. Prolific as they are, some of the artworks are already being damaged or compromised by non-indigenous graffiti.

There is no doubt the risk of this sort of incidental damage will intensify commensurate with increased tourist numbers. Infrastructure investment and a range of management strategies are urgently required if such risks are to be minimized (Mulvaney, 2015; DEC, 2013). Equally, however, these forms of infrastructure will significantly alter the vista and sacred context in which the petroglyphs currently exist. It would radically transform the current contemplative experience of viewing the petroglyphs, creating a clamour of tourist activity such as now exists in the World Heritage, Kakadu, area of Australia's Northern Territory. An immersive cultural experience is virtually impossible in the major Kakadu rock-art galleries as viewers are constantly trampled by bus-loads of tour groups whose schedules, noise and camera illuminations seem incongruent with the sacred nature of the sites.

And this is precisely the issue of concern for various members of the Dampier Aboriginal communities. That is, the conscription of the Burrup artworks and songlines into a heritage discourse and cultural framework which exposes the area to various claims and imaginings that simply do not accord with the indigenous people's own moral purpose and imagining of the sacred. Tourism, even World Heritage tourism, can be exercised by individuals and groups whose desires and pleasures conform more directly with the capitalist project of desire which has threatened the survival and long lineage of their indigenous custodians. Among the many hordes of tourists who may be attracted to a World Heritage Burrup site,

there will undoubtedly be many who have little or no sympathy with these custodians and their moral, political and cultural objectives. If not the tourists themselves, then particular dominions of a global tourism ideology may simply exercise the same economic privileges that were expressed through the murder of the Jaburara.

The major risk of World Heritage listing, therefore, is a further imbalance in the language wars of history, and in particular the further obfuscation of the violence which now defines the Burrup cultural landscape. It is this violence which needs to be exposed, preventing its re-ascription and re-location within a monadic public, preservation or tourism discourse that is predicated simply as historical entertainment for the apolitical pleasure of the viewers. The horrors and political iniquities of the past must be vocalized, arousing the same deep emotions and offence with which our societies confront the terrorist destruction of ancient relics. There can be no excuses. No niceties. The genocide and historical cover-ups need to be unveiled. Even in the mystery and splendour of the indigenous songlines and their expressive petroglyphs, the story of these horrors must be told.

Conclusion

We have learned over recent years that World Heritage listing does not preserve sites in perpetuity. A number of governments, including those in Australia, have not always respected or fulfilled their responsibilities. Sites like the Australian Great Barrier Reef have been damaged by various forms of neglect or industrial development, including mining and mining port infrastructure. The decision in 2015 of Australia's Environment Minister, Greg Hunt, to approve the proposed construction of the largest coal mine in Australia's history and the world's largest coal shipping port on the fringes of the Great Barrier Reef, exposed the vulnerability of Heritage sites to rapacious mining interests and collusive, inept government ministers (Robertson, 2016).

In many respects, this vulnerability highlights the wider issues about cultural landscapes and the ways in which all parts of the world are subject to the same forces of human history. In fact, we would repeat the broader anthropological point that all natural landscapes are ultimately subject to the organizational processes, knowledge systems and language wars which define human culture. Nature and natural forms are not distinct from culture and human meaning making, but are simply its co-extension. This is certainly the primary lesson of the Anthropocene where human activity—culture—is largely responsible for the extinctions of an estimated 32,000 individual species each year (Proctor, 2013; Lewis, 2016).

In this context, it is reasonable to associate the murders inflicted on these non-human life forms with those committed against other humans. The murder of the Jaburara in 1868, therefore, represents an attempt by the colonists to impose their volition of violence on humans who were 'not human' and who barely existed within the *terra nullius*, a vacant land devoid of meaning. What has become clear, however, is that the world of the indigenous Australians was abundant with symbols and meanings. In the Thirdspace of the Australian continent, all the land and its rich ecosystems were inscribed by an immanent and sacred culture in which all lives—human and non-human—were entirely contingent and embedded within one another (Flood, 2007). It was simply that the colonists, like the governments and miners who have followed, were captive to their own volition of economy and violence. Thus, the colonists, miners and governments who inflicted this violence were culturally illiterate and incapable of reading alternative versions of history, nature and the life-world. While they have been the perpetrators of terrible violence, it is important to expose the systems and cultural volition which supported this violence, locating these crimes within the broader processes of history and cultural politics.

Our aim in this paper has been to expose these systems and the cultural politics of genocide which continues to haunt the Burrup Peninsula.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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