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# Politics, Protest and Performativity: The Broome Community's 'No Gas on the Kimberley Coast' Campaign

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## Introduction

> There's nothing I would rather be
> Than to be an Aborigine
> and watch you take my precious land away. (Chi)

In Broome, Western Australia (WA), 5 July 2011 is now known as Black Tuesday. At dawn on that day I found myself standing on the red dust of Manari Road amongst some 250 Broome locals, singing songs from Jimmy Chi's musical *Bran Nue Dae* in the face of 100 gathering riot police. It was a pivotal moment in an extraordinary, and continuing, campaign.

***Figure 1: Police push back the community blockade, 5 July 2011. Photo: Julia Rau.***

As a white, southern academic, with research expertise in social and labour movements and community campaigns,[1] I had already spent two months in Broome in April and May 2011 researching community opposition to the proposed gas hub at James Price Point. My interest in this particular issue grew from my love of the Kimberley region, which I have visited as a tourist on camping holidays since 1998. The community blockade of the proposed development site commenced two days after my departure. Despite following events via social media, emails and conversations with community members I felt disconnected from the lived experiences. Realising it was just a matter of time before police dismantled the blockade, I returned in early July to spend a few days at the site and follow up contacts in Broome.

The ongoing research combines participant observation and interviews with community members, Traditional Owners and stakeholders, together with media analysis of social and mainstream media representations of the issue. The Broome community's opposition to the proposed 2500 hectare, $35 billion Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) processing hub and associated deep-sea port has been described by the Western Australian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), as well as commercial players such as the main stakeholder Woodside, as 'unprecedented'.[2]

Whilst cooperation between local community members, environmental groups and indigenous people is by no means unusual, there are some distinctive features of the Broome campaign. The struggle is a complex multi-layered contest between multinational mining interests and state power keen to open up the Kimberley region to industrialisation on the one hand, and the small group of Indigenous people, local community members and environmental organisations who object to the development at this particular site on the other. The pro gas hub forces also have the support of some Indigenous community members who see the development as a means of gaining substantial government compensation funds for economic and social programs, as well as some local businesses who want the project for the economic stimulus it may provide to the town of Broome.

However, while local people—including key Aboriginal groups, the community and local government—have limited leverage in this mix, winning the approval of the local community, thus achieving a genuine social license to operate, matters little when the stakes are as large as this. Furthermore, divisions in the local Indigenous community both influence the way the struggle is played out within the community and shape the way state and federal government interests and private sector development

proponents construct and respond to the nature of the conflict.

Any one paper cannot attempt to cover all the elements at play, nor to provide a comprehensive background.[3] This paper focuses specifically on the community campaign against the proposed gas hub development over the 2011 to mid-2012 period. In particular, it considers some of the means through which the various strands of opposition have woven an effective and coherent campaign with miniscule resources, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous opponents, and the repertoires of contention they have adopted. Furthermore, it explores the degree to which notions of Broome as a 'unique' place with a definable community spirit underpin campaign actions and image making. I argue that intrinsic to this strategy is a belief that the diverse multilayered cultural heritage of the town, together with its unique natural environment, provides much contemporary social capital and potential for sustainable future economic growth.

Many participants in the campaign argue that they have a responsibility to fight to preserve this heritage, to preserve the environment around James Price Point / Walmadan (the site of the proposed plant) and to stand beside the Indigenous custodians of the land. The vision of the late Goolarabooloo law boss Paddy Roe of white and black together walking the country and maintaining it, appears to have a continuing influence in the minds of those who are mobilising to stop the industrialisation[4] and inevitable destruction of country (Roe and Hoogland).

During my three visits to Broome in 2011, I attended key events and meetings, held interviews with participants and engaged in critical readings of both print and social media. This paper aims to convey a sense of the passion felt by the opponents of the gas hub and their growing sense of themselves as a distinctive community. It explores, firstly, the claims of Broome's having a unique character and spirit of place worth preserving. The paper proceeds to a more detailed background description of this development and the political contentions surrounding it. Then it examines some of the modes of campaigning adopted by the 'No Gas' group and other opponents, including online activities, and offers a preliminary assessment of the significance of the campaign.

The Broome experience may offer lessons for other small communities who are facing dramatic changes to their way of life and their values from mining and related developments, in particular those for whom strong cultural and environmental assets form the basis of an important tourism industry.

**Spirit of place: Broome's 'special' qualities**

The sense that Broome and its surroundings are characterised by a special spirit of place is deeply felt by many locals, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, harnessed in various ways by those who oppose the proposed LNG hub development, but also locals generally involved in tourism, as well as other state and national tourism operators. 'Spirit of place' is an ambiguous term meaning different things to different people in different academic fields. In the Broome context it is used by some to refer to the cultural and spiritual significance of the land it holds for Traditional Owners. The spiritual beliefs and the meaning of the land for the Goolarabooloo people—whose lands take in the site of the proposed gas plant—are well-documented and publicly available (albeit in very condensed form) through various publications, a website[5] and the annual ten-day Lurujarri Heritage Trail walk (Roe; Benterrak *et al*.). But the idea of Broome's having a unique spirit and identity is also shared by many who either have limited or no access to the traditional lore, beliefs and practices. People use the term to describe a combination of cultural heritage, affinity with the environment (including species endemic to the area) and community relationships that they value and that they believe mark their town as different, special and irreplaceable compared to other regional centres in WA, and Australia as a whole. These beliefs have been backed up by the Australian Heritage Council's statement that,

> Broome and the nearby region has outstanding (intangible) heritage value to the nation under criterion (g) as a place which has a special association with the Australian community because of the romance of Broome, its pearling history, its remote and beautiful location at the gateway to the Kimberley's outback and pearling coast, its association with pearls and the town's stories associated with the development of a unique Australian community with a distinctive cultural diversity (Australian Heritage Council, 'West Kimberley Place Report' 197).

The 'Nowhere Else But Here' team in the 2011 Shire elections summed up Broome's claims to unique status thus:

> Broome's multicultural past and beautiful natural surroundings has made it renowned the world over as a unique travel destination. And for the families of Broome a very special place to live. ('Nowhere Else But Here')

For some this refers to the layers of emotional and personal significance they and their families have built up with the land over generations. Many non-Indigenous Broome residents interviewed spoke of coming to Broome from elsewhere and making a commitment to stay, invest in the town and raise their families here because of its unique qualities: human, landscape, fauna, flora and 'something in the air'—more than the combined smells of frangipani and salt, but a 'feeling', a quality that they had not experienced elsewhere:

> There's this resurgence of pride in what Broome is. … It's only when that is threatened that you stop and you go we are *so* privileged to live in this town, to have been born in it, to have seen it change and grow and become the town that it is now. … And let's not forget, that is why people come here. Why are they first attracted to this town, you know? It's … because of the history, the cultural makeup of this town. The landscape, the environment, you know. ('Mara' interview)[6]

Many also mentioned shared community values and relationships with the environment and the cultural diversity of the town,

> the underlying deep soul factors that are here in Broome. Because it's my experience that people who live here actually are *profoundly* connected to each other and to the landscape through the heart and that's something that people like Colin Barnett don't understand and the mining companies don't understand. ('Asha' interview)

The sense of Broome as unique and special because of its hybrid identity and polyethnic history has been well-documented in oral histories undertaken with Aboriginal/Asian families (Yu). It permeates the way the town represents itself and how it has been represented in contemporary cultural productions (Stephenson; Gantner; Chi).

> Broome has got a lot of harmony, it's got a lot social energy which is hard to explain. You can live your whole life without having an Aboriginal friend or even knowing any Aboriginal people in the rest of Australia and you come to Broome and within the first week, you have Aboriginal friends. … And that doesn't happen in very many places in Australia and I think that's what makes this special. ('Max' interview)

Much environmental and community campaigning relies on expressive (and frequently visual) signifiers to stand for what should be saved and/or changed (Lester). In the 'No Gas' campaign, however, the set of images that stand for the 'spirit of Broome' are already circulating in local and national imaginary. They are familiar to people through tourism advertising campaigns and historical texts, and as local expressions of everyday life. They incorporate flora, fauna and landscape together with stories of an idealised racial harmony and interchange between Indigenous, Asian and Caucasian inhabitants that the rest of Australia (largely) lacks and in some cases envies (Australian Heritage Council, *National Heritage List, Statement of Significance*, *West Kimberley*). These stories are most evident in music theatre and film works such as the aforementioned *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road*.[7]

The terms 'Broome time', 'Broome smell', 'Broome spirit' have an everyday meaning for many who employ these notions when explaining their love of place. The colours of Walmadan and Gantheaume Point (so prominently featured in tourist advertising), the extraordinary tidal range and its impact on people's relationship with both the sea and time, the diverse local flora and fauna including whales, snub-fin dolphins and bilbies, are familiar signifiers to locals.

Some of the other elements are less well-known. These include remarkable dinosaur trackways and fossilised fern imprints that are accounted for in dreamtime mythology as the tracks of Marala, the Emu-man ancestor being, and that are central to the northern traditional songline. Whilst dinosaur footprints at Gantheaume Point are a major tourist attraction, trackways further north have been shielded from publicity due to concerns about theft (as did happen with some 100 kilogram prints in 1996).

All these elements are harnessed in the campaign to stop the gas hub from being built. They appear as visual, linguistic and aural signs in street banners, petitions, submissions and Facebook entries, on fundraising soaps, t-shirts, guitars and photographs and in performances, short films, poems and dissent events (Scalmer).[8] Far from being mere tourism hyperbole this is a dynamic, locally owned mobilisation of the spirit of place utilising some of the romanticised claims of tourism jargon in the defence of community, its beliefs and relationships, culture and lifestyle. Signifiers and values attached to place are positioned in opposition to—and portrayed as vastly superior to—the commercial values that are associated with the mining towns of the Pilbara and which locals fear will take over Broome (and destroy the community as they know it).[9]

In opposition to this, Indigenous and non-Indigenous campaigners are determined to keep the mood of the campaign playful and

positive in order to reflect that this is a thriving community, which *lives* in Broome, loves the place and is trying to protect what it cares for. As 'Lise' explained: 'there's a particular way we want to run this campaign and it is non-violent, not aggressive. It's about celebrating what we've got'. Several interviewees stressed the fact that they are not experienced political campaigners but 'naïve community members' who don't know the 'rules' of how lobbying or campaigning is supposed to be conducted. However, what campaign organisers lack in experience they make up in energy, dedication and creative skills. And it is the application of these qualities, together with Broome's particular attributes described above, that make this campaign distinctive. These aspects will be examined further below, after some contextual information.

**Contested intersections of state, mining, tourism, green and community interests**

Situated in the remote northwest of Western Australia on the edge of the magnificent Kimberley wilderness region, Broome is a tourist town of international standing. Tourism generated 64 percent of revenue for the Broome economy in 2008 (Curtin 16-17). Broome's population is around 17,000 (almost 30 percent of which are Indigenous), but between April and September it more than doubles. The average number of visitors across the three-year period 2007-2009 was 216,000 per annum, with over one and a half million visitor nights (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 'Kimberley Whale Coast Tourism Report').

Tourism is a multi-million dollar industry also to the surrounding region: 27 percent of the labour force and 20 percent of the Indigenous labour force are employed in tourism and related operations (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 'Kimberley Whale Coast Tourism: A Review'). It is a particularly important sustainable industry for the Indigenous community, enabling people to continue to live on country and practice many aspects of traditional life. Furthermore, as a Curtin University tourism study points out, 'Aboriginal tourism is seen as a way of reducing welfare dependency and strengthening cultural identity among Aboriginal people' (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, 'Kimberley Whale Coast Tourism: A Review' 35).

For many visitors, Broome fulfils its promise to be a temple of pleasure. The tourism industry promotes the idea of consuming the dramatic landscapes through (or simultaneously with) luxurious Balinese-influenced guest houses, Asian fusion cuisine, outdoor adventures, decadent tropical cocktails, sensual beauty treatments, sunset beach camel rides and the region's magnificent pearls. Few tourists choose to engage with the plans for industrialisation by the WA government which are at present absent from the general tourist experience (Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre). However, should this change, the appeal of Broome as a destination or even a gateway to the Kimberley region could be compromised.

Western Australia has become immensely prosperous though mining. It drives the economy, politics and many people's everyday lives. 600 kilometres south of Broome lies the Pilbara, one of the most intensively mined areas of the country. Here, rents have risen dramatically, with median house prices in Roebourne hitting $830,000 in September 2010 (City of Geraldton). Numerous small businesses have closed down, unable to afford the costs of wages, or to attract low-waged staff due to the cost of living in the town and the competing wages paid in the mining industry.[10]

To date, the Kimberley has avoided this fate but campaigners argue that the proposed level of industrialisation will destroy the lifestyle they cherish.[11] It is increasingly recognised that businesses that revolve around tourism or the environmental qualities of the area are likewise under threat (see Maher). The $35 billion LNG processing hub proposed by the Western Australian state Government, with Woodside Energy Ltd as the licensed operator, for James Price Point (Walmadan) on the Dampier Peninsula approximately 50 kilometres north of Broome would process the gas reserves that Woodside and their joint venture partners Chevron, Shell, BP and BHP have in the Browse Basin some 425 kilometres offshore.[12] The hub would include the LNG plant, a large port including a six-kilometre breakwater, an electricity generation plant, probably a desalination plant, accommodation for 6-8,000 workers and room for co-location of associated industries in the future.

Opposition focuses around specific objections to *this location* rather than to LNG processing in general. The local Indigenous community is split over the proposal. The strongest opposition is led by the Goolarabooloo people, custodians of the Northern Tradition Songline that encompasses around eighty kilometres of coast from Broome in the south to Coulomb Point some 30 kilometres north of the proposed gas plant. The Goolarabooloo lodged a Native Title Claim over the area in 1994, long before any proposal was put forward for gas development in the region. The area is also home to the Jabirr Jabirr people. The Goolarabooloo actively maintain the songline and their cultural traditions. They perform ceremonies, induct their children into law and walk the Lurujarri Trail every year, inviting tourists, locals and students to accompany them on a ten-day cultural learning experience (Goolarabooloo; Healy; Roe and Hoogland).

Since the 1980s, and well before the native title act had come into existence, the Goolarabooloo's work, particularly that of their

elder and law boss Paddy Roe, has been well-documented by cultural historians and anthropologists such as Stephen Muecke and Nicholas Green (Roe; Benterrak *et al*.). The area around James Price Point / Walmadan is documented as being of 'major archaeological and ethnographic significance' (Bradshaw and Fry 14). In 1989 it was recommended for declaration as a 'Protected Area in accordance with section 19 of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972-80' (Bradshaw and Fry 24). Thus, many are at a total loss to understand why such an important site can be considered suitable for such a development, which would obliterate the central section of this songline, destroying it completely.

In common with experiences in many other areas of Australia 'tensions to do with tradition and development' (Maddison 62) lie at the heart of the divisions that have developed in the local Indigenous community over the proposed gas hub. The wishes of Indigenous people to protect their land and cultural traditions for future generations are placed (by the state, mining interests and some of their own community) in opposition to those who wish (or feel they have no alternative but) to exploit their lands for the economic security they perceive it can deliver.

The complexity of Indigenous responses to the proposed gas hub can be seen in the fraught history of negotiations with both the WA state Government and Woodside itself. Following initial research investigating a suitable location for a gas hub, a 2005 meeting of all clan groups on the Dampier Peninsula, convened by the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), unequivocally rejected the development of a gas hub anywhere on the Dampier Peninsula. Woodside accepted this decision. Subsequently, however, the KLC invited Woodside to recommence negotiations, this time focussing on James Price Point in line with the WA Premier Colin Barnett's expressed wishes. This invitation was issued without consultation with the Goolarabooloo or their consent (see Perpitch).

In mid-2010 Barnett threatened to compulsorily acquire the land at James Price Point if the KLC could not negotiate consent to the relinquishing of native title rights in exchange for a $1.3 billion compensation package over 30 years. This threat, although it was subsequently withdrawn after public outcry, had a significant impact upon the negotiations. Indeed, many senior figures supportive of the development argued that they were negotiating with 'a gun to their head' (Curtis).

The negotiating process has gone through several stages since then. Every one of those has been criticised and challenged by Traditional Owners who oppose the development. A formal vote over relinquishing native title in exchange for the compensation package was held in May 2011. The result was 108 against the agreement, 164 in favour of the agreement and five abstentions. One of the most significant points of contention has been the status of some families who were prevented from voting and others who were allowed or assisted in doing so (Torres).

Subsequently, in December 2011, a Federal Court ruling on a case brought by Traditional Owners Neil McKenzie and Phillip Roe, found that the WA State Government failed to specify accurately the area of compulsory acquisition and thus people had insufficient information on which to act. In February 2012 the State Government re-issued the compulsory acquisition notice specifying the area more precisely. Opponents argue that the KLC vote is thus invalid and the consultation process needs to commence again. The KLC rejects this view. The ramifications of the court decision, and other challenges, are continuing to unfold.

These historical aspects of the proposal, together with the subsequent management of the consultation and voting processes are bitterly contested by segments of the affected communities. The KLC's position as peak body representing 26 native title claim groups is fraught with potential and real conflicts. Whilst 'getting back country' is a core objective of the organisation, increasingly its focus is spread to negotiating economic and development agreements that provide income to its membership and thus, it argues, underpin self-determination. However, many Indigenous people are sceptical about the benefits of development and mining agreements (Maddison 65-79). The KLC has set up a separate arm, Kimberley Regional Economic Development Enterprises, to pursue these projects, its CEO being former KLC Director, Wayne Bergman. This has raised questions over potential conflict of interest, given Bergman's key role in negotiations with Woodside at a time when he was still the Director of the KLC (Bergman). The KLC appears to feel pressure to demonstrate its capacity to deliver development deals and, indeed, will benefit indirectly from the compensation package, as it will receive significant resources as part of these arrangements.

Some Traditional Owners who supported the deal argue that the gas hub would deliver economic benefits that would secure the welfare of future generations. Others, including non-Indigenous advocates, argue that health, education and welfare services are a basic right for all Australians and should not be contingent upon giving up one's land and culture. The senior Goolarabooloo Traditional Owners categorically state it is a deal that cannot be done since their responsibility is to care for that country for future generations.

> [I]t's going to destroy my sacred site, my fishing and hunting grounds, my community, my family and my being.

> I'm going to feel like a man with no identity, with no land, no law, no culture and no connection to my dreaming. I am not the only one who will lose out. It would also be my children and all the other children . … I want to keep this place safe. I want to … share my dreaming with my children and the other children there. I want to share this also with you. But if they build a gas hub at Walmadan 'James Price Point' I lose this place, and the rest of Australia loses it too. (Augustine)

Charting the views of the Indigenous community is further complicated by the fact that there is a large group of Indigenous people who live in Broome but who are from different and adjacent clan groups such as Yawuru who have not had a say in the decision, despite the Yawuru lands including the town of Broome itself. These people, too, are split in their views of the value of the project but there are prominent Yawuru elders who find the way the consultation has been managed deeply problematic, because of the fact that people within Broome who will be affected by the development don't have a say (Dodson). There are also others who have always lived in the region and have strong connection to country but, due to the processes of removal to missions such as Beagle Bay under the Stolen Generation policies, cannot prove their ancestral links to the land.[13] They thus have no rights in this process. Margaret Zucker, writing about the response of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley to the *Bringing Them Home* report, notes the high proportion of Kimberley people who had been removed in childhood, usually to Beagle Bay or Moola Bulla: 'In the late 1980s one-quarter of the elderly people and one in seven of the middle-aged people, reported having been removed in childhood' (Zucker, 23).

The pressure brought to bear by the WA government on local Indigenous decision-making and the limited nature of the consultation undertaken, has presented a dilemma for many non-Indigenous locals as well as the Indigenous people who were not part of the process. They acknowledge that the KLC negotiated a deal with the Traditional Owners. For some, respect for the principle of Indigenous self-determination meant initially that they could not speak out. However, over time, as they heard more from Goolarabooloo and certain Jabirr Jabirr Traditional Owners about their opposition[14] and about the WA government and KLC consultation and voting processes, and considered in more detail the impact on Broome itself, they felt compelled to become involved.

> I also felt that there was no respect for a community that had been established 130 years ago. And I felt it was a real affront to the Broome community to have it forced upon us when I knew it would change our way of life completely. I knew that it would take on an industrial focus [and] I didn't think that could sit comfortably with tourism, I felt that they couldn't coexist. ('Sylvie' interview)

In addition to the core Goolarabooloo community and those Jabirr Jabirr Traditional Owners who are opposed to the construction of the gas hub there are various autonomous non-Indigenous groups who co-operate to a large degree whilst maintaining their own priorities. Several larger national NGOs have a strong commitment to the issue along with the WA branch of the Greens Party. There are two local environmental organisations, Save the Kimberley (StK) and Environs Kimberley, and two community groups, the 'Broome Community No Gas coalition' and the 'Broome Families' group.

The No Gas community group is a loose network of local people who provide support for demonstrations and door-knocking, run market stalls, undertake surveillance of machinery and of Woodside personnel and police movements, ferry supplies and people up to the Walmadan camp and back, set up communications technology, raise funds, lobby local, federal and state politicians, write letters and submissions, and contact the media.[15] The No Gas group found their strength when Woodside geared up to take heavy machinery onto country in early June 2011. At critical times between 50 and 250 'protectors' gathered to block Manari Road and to support community members or activists who locked-on to machinery. 25 community members were arrested in one day on Black Tuesday (5 July 2011). The group is continuing their activities in 2012 as Woodside extends its program of test drilling.

The other main community group, 'Broome Families', was started under the auspices of a group of Indigenous locals in June 2011. Traditionally, Indigenous Broome families (including Aboriginal/Asian and other mixed race families) have jealously guarded the definition of 'locals' and the status of '*old Broome*' families (Yu). However, the gas development threat has seen a strong alliance between the traditional Broome families and more recent settlers. As one organiser explained:

> Many, many people were left out and Broome had not been considered a stakeholder … [and] this was just not the protestors' voice. This was a town of really concerned citizens, upstanding citizens who had all invested … their generational history to the town, the spirit of the town and have all been part of that. And that this town is a

> shining example of multiculturalism. Before the word even became sexy, you know, we've always been practising it. ('Mara' interview)

At a public meeting of around 600 people at St Mary's College Hall the group declared their opposition to the development and their frustration that Broome families had been ignored in the consultation process. They wrote a petition and a letter to the Federal Environment Minister explaining that,

> Old Broome families' had done the hard work to build the local economy and create a unique multicultural society with 'generations of blood, sweat and love'. It said the families felt weakened by the 'formal and bureaucratic' processes which meant many people had been unable to express their views on the project. (Prior)

The group sent a delegation to Canberra to meet with key ministers and other politicians, organised a large community concert and made a video of 'typical' Broome families speaking out against the development ('Broome Families say NO'). In collaboration with others, it organised a community 'ticket' of concerned locals to run in the 2011 Broome Shire elections under the name 'Nowhere Else But Here'.

Despite the multiple groups involved in the campaign and the looseness of the organising structures, one thing everyone recognises is that any significant campaign activity has to be cleared by Traditional Owners. In particular, senior Goolarabooloo lawman Joseph Roe (grandson of Paddy Roe) is regarded as the 'boss'. His standing is unquestioned and deferred to by all the groups in planning campaign strategies and actions, most importantly anything that takes place on country. He explains that '[t]he site-specific cultural heritage has arisen directly from this coastline. It cannot be relocated or put on hold while Country is destroyed for Industry. No amount of compensation money can substitute for it' (Roe, cited in Wilcox 40).

***Figure 2: Joe Roe wearing a T-shirt commemorating his grandfather Paddy Roe, carrying both his traditional shield and his Order of Australia. Photo Talhy Stotzer.***

**Performativity and protest: 'No Gas' campaigning on the road and online**

To an outsider interested in the construction and management of campaigns two of the most striking elements are the way local features are employed for strategic purposes and the extent to which playfulness and humour characterise campaign activities. This section includes a few examples of this to provide a sense of the creativity and performative elements.

Since the early days of the campaign one of the motifs used on banners and signs along Manari Road and in Broome has been a bilby head. It is a reminder that endangered bilbies are known to live in the area, and proved prophetic in June 2011 when active bilby colonies were identified and filmed in the area designated for clearing. The footage was posted on YouTube ('Bilbies Burrows') and spread across multiple campaign, Facebook and organisational websites.

These were the first recorded bilby colonies since 1991. Since then, bilby (puppets) have featured in multiple performance events. One morning at dawn a bilby (puppet) appeared waking from sleep in the scoop of a bulldozer. To the amusement of Woodside workers it investigated the equipment and supplies in the compound before succumbing to suffocation from toxic fumes. The appearance was documented on YouTube ('Bilby Action') and multiple Facebook sites. Bilbies have been issued with move-on notices by police for dancing in Manari Road at sunrise, thus preventing convoys of Woodside workers from getting on site. Bilbies have also appeared at demonstrations outside the Woodside offices and a whole float of bilbies featured in the Shinju Matsuri festival parade 2011.[16] Since Australia swapped Easter Bunnies for Bilbies, the animals have become a widely recognised signifier of endangered species, thus a clash in values is implied: How could Woodside destroy (or be allowed to destroy) threatened bilby habitat? The bilbies also invite engagement from Woodside workers, tourists, and other Broome residents. How could people encountering bilby puppets refuse to engage, at least for a moment, with the human nature and human affect of this campaign? The bilby puppets are charming, playful, telegenic and a constant reminder of the impending devastation should the plant proceed. Finally, bilbies, like dinosaurs, are good press, and the bilby discoveries received widespread media coverage.

But perhaps the most important environmental assets threatened by the development are the extraordinary and intriguing fossilised dinosaur trackways preserved in the fringing reefs. The image of herds of huge creatures padding along what now is foreshore captures both the public and media imagination. The nature of the tracks and some of the photographs of the footprints have attracted media coverage as far away as USA and China. However, the relationship of the dinosaur footprints and plant fossils with Aboriginal creation mythology is something that has not been so easy for the media to grasp. In 2011 the Australian Heritage Council recommended National Heritage Listing for the fossilised trackways on the coastal reefs of the Dampier Peninsula in recognition of their 'outstanding scientific and natural heritage value', and in combination with the Indigenous creation stories of Marella as being of outstanding cultural value to the nation and thus of the highest priority to preserve (Australian Heritage Council, 'West Kimberley Place Report').

The dinosaur prints are promoted in Broome tourism material as one of the top local attractions, and a 'must-see' for visitors.[17] The locals have re-appropriated the prints and adopted them as one of the condensing signifiers of the campaign, also putting them to humorous and satiric use. In images and animations various politicians and business people who wish to develop the

area are depicted as dinosaurs, in others dinosaurs return from extinction to get their revenge.[18]

Another distinctive Broome signifier that has been widely used during the campaign is the music of the Pigram Brothers and the songs from the musicals *Bran Nue Dae* and *Corrugation Road.* Both musicals tell stories of colonisation, assimilation and Indigenous resistance, couched in a cheeky, ironic style which appropriates white discourses and white cultural forms to turn colonialism back on itself (Makeham); so too the No Gas campaign and the individual protectors of country have found ways to re-appropriate language and imagery and to reinvigorate them as tactical tools of resistance. *Bran Nue Dae* is loved by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike both for its unambiguous celebration of survival, resistance and country and for its demand for land rights. The campaign is likewise a celebration of relationships and obligations to country, relationships shared (albeit at differing levels) by Indigenous and non-Indigenous locals.

***Figure 3: Sign on house fence on Old Broome. Photo Kathie Muir.***

As the contest over James Price Point unfolds on country, in Broome itself, in the courts, the corridors of parliament and through the media, opponents have also established an extensive virtual campaign network. They utilise a wide range of social media to recruit supporters, to inform an interested public and the media about developments and planned actions, to document key moments and build their own community of supporters. This element is crucial, given the substantial disadvantages that campaigners face as a result of Broome's isolated location and two hour time lag from eastern state media and political centres of power.

It is widely recognised that attracting, engaging with, reflecting on and responding to media reporting is critical to successful movement and community campaigning (Bennett and Entman). Further, movements create themselves for, and through, social, independent and mainstream media almost as much as through live 'on the ground' struggles (Muir). However, the literature on movements and independent or social media most often focuses on the international spectacular and high stakes campaigns (see, for example, Meikle on the forming of IndyMedia at Seattle protests during WTO Forum in 1999 and Ghonim on social media and the Arab Spring). Less considered is the demand on small organisations and volunteer groups of maintaining a dynamic and constructive online presence. It is resource-hungry and time-consuming to administer and moderate it, despite the affordability of the technology. Groups have to work through a policy on how they will use and moderate their online presence as a defining part of their identity. Sites face external threats from opponents and trolls and internally from careless or unstrategic supporters making defamatory accusations or inflammatory claims. Endless irrelevant postings and cross listings can likewise make sites difficult to navigate or just plain boring. The No Gas campaign's experiences of communicating through social media, whilst largely positive, also make clear how its management can be a burden for small organisations.

The visual appeal of the Dampier Peninsula is one of the great assets of the region and is captured in numerous photographic albums and video channels on Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr and others. The spiritual and cultural significance of the area has been recorded in footage of Traditional Owners explaining their relationship to the land and in footage of walking the Lurujarri Trail.[19] These testimonies explain to non-Indigenous viewers why a gas hub ought not to be permitted in this location. The spirit of the protest, together with visits by musicians, politicians and other significant figures, is also captured in many videos.

Despite the value of social media in getting the message out about events both to supporters distant from the action and interested media, its greatest value seems to be its creation of a parallel community. As Diani has observed 'most interactions taking place in the virtual sphere actually expand on and reinforce face-to-face acquaintances and exchanges' (391). The No Gas campaign has a larger presence, even in its own town, due to its parallel existence online, where people (both local and distant) are able to comment or applaud actions, celebrate victories and record their favourite moments or images. These responses reinforce the on-going efforts of a small band of (frequently very tired, often stressed) community members, in this way reinvigorating them for the next round.

Polletta and Jasper question the extent to which collective identities exist independently of protest or social movement action, as opposed to being 'constructed in and through protest' (285). The No Gas campaign holds evidence that the collective identity experienced by locals as being 'uniquely Broome' has been both the central glue and one of the crucial messages of the campaign. The campaign slogan for the Shire election 'Nowhere else but here' expresses these shared values aptly. Campaigners argue that the community has been empowered by their (often very bruising) experiences of campaigning and protest. They have experienced moments of exhilaration and joy, such as at the 'We Love Broome' concert on Cable Beach. And times of deep pain and anger, such as the confrontation with 100 riot police on Black Tuesday in July 2011 and the recent Mother's Day May 2012 deployment of hundreds of Perth police to the town. Such actions were regarded by locals both as outrageously intimidating and a great waste of resources on the part of WA government and police.

The spirit of celebration and love of country and community that is carefully presented in campaign publicity is at the same time a genuine expression of local sentiment. There is no slick advertising agency running the campaign, no resources for polling or focus groups. It is a shoestring campaign run from lounge rooms, sheds and tents in sand dunes. This is both one of the greatest challenges to its success and one of its greatest resources. The collective identity that is expressed in familiar and distinctive local features: the red dust of Manari road, the dunes and cliffs of Walmadan, Cable Beach at sunset and the signage on street

fences mark Broome as a No Gas town, and a place that has a strong sense of itself and how it wants its future to be. In this way, it not only deploys the community as a key signifier but also re-inscribes the local nature of the campaign and the local landscape as itself an actor in the political struggle.

**Conclusion: walking and dancing together**

> There's nothing I would rather be
> Than to be an Aborigine
> and watch you take my precious land away. (Chi)

I began this article by locating myself as a participant observer amidst the gas hub opponents and the protectors of country. The phalanxes of police in the local top end uniform and behind them the massed Tactical Response Group forces at Manari Road presented a remarkable scene, horrible in the dread of what was to come (even for an outsider—so much worse for those whose land it was). Dawn was slowly breaking, mist was rising, lights were flashing, Traditional Owners Albert Wiggan, Joe Roe and Neil McKenzie were walking around checking details with police, rallying the crowd. Senior Traditional Owner women were sitting across the road, holding the line to stop access to country. The media pack was salivating in anticipation of the clash to follow.


***Figure 4: Janet Cox and Teresa Roe, Manari Road, 5 July 2011. Photo Kathie Muir.***

The tension was unbearable. People were singing softly the Kev Carmody/Paul Kelly anthem about the Gurindji struggle, 'From

Little Things Big Things Grow', and the *Bran Nue Dae* soundtrack. Others were crying. At one point Elsta Foy, a senior Traditional Owner and Broome Shire Councillor, stood up and danced to break the tension and the mounting aggression.[20] As she did others joined in briefly, waiting in the dust for the riot squad, celebrating Broome culture, faith in the future, faith in survival. But as the police moved in tears flowed again as women in the frontline sang 'Listen to the news, talking 'bout the blues of our people'.

'Black Tuesday' has become a landmark moment in the campaign and my (unforseen) presence was not only important to understanding relationships between locals and the extent to which the community was prepared to defend country, it was also important to the trust that has been extended to me in interviews.

Those non-Indigenous community members who stood shoulder to shoulder with the Traditional Owners—some of whom were arrested for failing to move on, for carrying disguises, for interfering with police carrying out their duties and for locking-on to machinery—were expressing solidarity and an acknowledgement of gratitude for the care Traditional Owners have taken of country over the years despite the barriers and impediments.

For many non-Indigenous community members the campaign is both a chance and duty to not only celebrate country but to stand up for it, for if reconciliation is to have any meaning, it is not a literal desire to become Aboriginal—even if that were possible—but symbolically and politically it is a pledge of solidarity. And, in acknowledgement of the community's efforts and commitment in October 2011, the Traditional Owners held a 'Walking in the Ancestors' Tracks' celebration corroboree at Walmadan to express their gratitude 'to local custodians and the many visitors and ordinary Broome families and local businesses who are doing extraordinary things to hold the land together for all' ('Walking in the Ancestors' Tracks'). Once again the community was walking and dancing together, on the land, for the land and for their shared future.

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**^top^**

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## Notes

**1** My previous work in related areas includes research into both labour and women's movements (see, for example, Muir, *Worth Fighting For*).

**2** Dr Paul Vogel, EPA Chairman quoted in Lawson: 'The level of community debate about this has been unprecedented

**2** Dr Paul Vogel, LPA Chairman quoted in Lawson. 'The level of community debate about this has been unprecedented, absolutely, it has polarised white and indigenous communities across Australia'.

**3** See Wilcox for the early case against the gas hub, Laurie for discussion of the divisive impact on the community, Wall on the challenge for Indigenous people of negotiating development agreements and maintaining cultural survival and 'Rush to Riches' for an examination of the various positions as at June 2010.

**4** Whilst it could be argued that, since colonisation, Broome has already been subject to forms of industrialisation such as the fishing, pearling and cattle industries, in this paper 'industrialisation' is used to refer to the impact of heavy industrialisation in the mining, gas processing and associated construction and transport industries, which transform landscapes and populations in very short period of time.

**5** Goolarabooloo and Lurujarri Dreaming Trail website: **http://www.goolarabooloo.org.au/**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012. Goolarabooloo on Facebook: **http://www.facebook.com/Goolarabooloo**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012.

**6** All interviewees names are pseudonyms unless full name is given.

**7** *Bran Nue Dae* was a hit musical written by Jimmy Chi and the band Kuckles in 1990 and performed nationally. It was adapted as a film directed by Rachel Perkins and released in 2010. The film was highly successful grossing over $7 million. The self-titled soundtrack CD of the film's songs reached twenty-nine on the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) chart list. All three versions celebrate the distinctive spirit and history of Broome, specifically the indigenous experience, and are regarded with a high sense of ownership by locals.

**8** Indicative examples include: the 'We Love Broome Family Concert' on Cable Beach in July 2011; the 'Power and the Passion' travelling exhibition of photographs and personal accounts of the significance of Broome and the campaign to stop the gas hub; the frequent utliisation of bilbies in protest and performance events including the Shinju Matsuri parade in 2011 and multiple protests (see discussion below); and the Nowhere Else But Here ticket run by people opposed to the development in the 2011 Broome Shire elections.

**9** For example the 'Nowhere Else But Here' team campaign video uses claims about Broome's multicultural history, images of carefree indigenous and non-indigenous families cooking prawns on the barbeque with the sun setting in the background, kids playing to a soundtrack of ukelele music. It includes a specific injunction that it is time to take care of the history and culture of Broome to stop it being devastated by development, in its plea for support. 'Our team will protect the spirit of Broome and promote the development of new economies for our community' ('Nowhere Else But Here'). The two towns, Karratha and Broome, are frequently contrasted in campaign leaflets and in graphic depictions of what Broome should avoid becoming. Karratha residents' experiences have also been used as a warning of what intensive industrialisation does to communities (see below).

**10** The impact of the mining boom and the industry's reliance on fly-in and fly-out workforces on regional economies and quality of life in regional communities has been widely discussed in Australia in recent years. A Senate Inquiry into fly-in fly-out practices is underway at the time of writing. The ABC Radio National program Saturday Extra ran a program on 6 August 2011 —'WA and the Resource Boom: Pilbara Cities'—that canvassed the impact of this on life in the Pilbara: **http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/saturdayextra/wa-and-the-resources-boom-pilbara-cities/2929288**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012.

**11** Since May 2011 concerned businesspeople in Broome and especially people reliant on tourism have organised meetings of small business people along with public information forums to raise concerns about the negative impacts of industrialisation in the Pilbara and to discuss options for Broome. One such event was the Broome Business JPP Gas Hub Information evening, 16 July 2011, at which businessman, Telstra board member and campaigner against the Gunns Pulp Mill, Geoffery Cousins spoke along with Gary Slee a former member of the Karratha Chamber of Commerce.

**12** In May 2012 the Japanese corporation MIMI, jointly owned by Mitsubishi and Mitsui, bought 14.7 percent of Woodside's share in the project.

**13** Two senior Aboriginal women involved in the campaign told the author they were unable to vote as their family ancestry could not be proven to the satisfaction of KLC anthropologists due to their removal to Beagle Bay as children. Despite this they had lived on the peninsula all their lives, identified as members of Goolarabooloo, Jabirr Jabirr and/or Bardi communities and felt intimately connected to the area.

**14** The testimony of people such as Neil McKenzie speaking at a community forum in Broome in 2001 (**http://vimeo.com/26406008**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012) and Albert Wiggan in the film *New Country Old Country* were several times cited by interviewees as moving examples.

**15** It has now employed a communications officer half-time for six months. The group's website is **http://www.broomenogas.org/Home.htm**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012

**16** The Shinju Parade Nowhere else contingent can be seen on Magic Broome's film on YouTube, **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2NdUOp7XSg**. Accessed 2 De. 2012

**17** See, for example, 'Three Great Days in Broome, WA': 'Day 1: Pearls, camels and sunsets ... Day 2: Dinosaurs, birds and moon staircases ... Day 3: Dampier Peninsula ...', **http://www.australia.com/explore/itineraries/wa-3days-broome.aspx**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012.

**18** See, for example, Magic Broome's 'Manari Road 30 Second Film Festival' video, 'Old Tracks—New Trails' **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkmgHVz4UV4**. Accessed 2 Dec. 2012

**19** See, for example, Richard Hunter on the Lurujarri Dreaming Trail, **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7GIJ36pttc**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012; Albert Wiggan in the film 'Old Country, New Country' **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gykFOvEQh8Y**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012; and Neil McKenzie talking at a Broome forum for stakeholders on why the country is important to him, **http://vimeo.com/26406008**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012.

**20** Some footage of the confrontation, with a snippet of the singing, can be seen in the Wylde Clan's video 'Broom Police fly in riot squad to break up Manari Rd blockade': **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r34uDl8EqCY**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012, and in Save the Kimberley's 'Protest edit': **http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_a7o3ES9zGM**; accessed 2 Dec. 2012.

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**^top^**

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