

CHAPTER IXTHE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CONFERENCE ELECTIONS
AND LAND RIGHTS ACTION : A FOOTNOTE

The phase of land rights politics documented in this thesis cannot be disassociated from the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) elections which were held in October of 1981. Both the Kokatha and Adnjamathanha groups had candidates in the elections who were involved with land rights. Their participation in the election and the election itself acted as a catalyst for much of the land rights activity noted. Most of the climaxes of land rights politics both in the inter-and intra-ethnic spheres coincided with the final weeks of the NAC campaign.

Seven candidates were nominated for the region incorporating Port Augusta. The candidates included four nominees from Port Augusta, one from Whyalla, one from Port Lincoln and one from Ceduna. The Port Augusta contingent was made up of the KPC Chairman, an ALRC member, an 'outsider' from New South Wales, and a local man involved in sport, welfare services and the church. The Whyalla woman was an important spokesperson for the Whyalla Aboriginal community, participated on a number of committees, and had run for the two previous elections. Similarly, the Port Lincoln contender was a local spokesperson, and had nominated for the preceding election. The Ceduna candidate also participated in numerous local committees. Most of these candidates had established brokerage roles within their own

communities. As in Howard's observations of the Perth NACC election of 1973, those who nominated as candidates were those already involved in and familiar with the inter-ethnic field (1981; 126). However, although all nominees were, or saw themselves as, spokespersons for the Aboriginal people, few were in paid brokerage roles and essentially assumed these roles by participating on voluntary advisory committees. In this sense, most sought to secure not only validation of their spokesperson role by winning the election but also monetary payment for this 'service' to their people.

Most candidates had a fairly secure source of support arising from kin and close friends. Two of the candidates, however, were not local (the Port Augusta 'outsider' and the Whyalla nominee) and their success relied upon their gaining support from community or organisational links. For example, the Whyalla candidate relied essentially upon capturing the support of the Whyalla Aboriginal community. In this respect her brokerage role within the Whyalla community was particularly valuable and throughout her campaign she stressed her association with the Labor Party and her ability to operate in politics of this calibre. The outsider from Port Augusta had a less easy task in securing community support for he competed against the three other Port Augusta candidates. He relied essentially on his recent and purposeful association with the ALRC but even within this pool of potential supporters he competed against another ALRC participant.

The community affiliations of candidates were particularly important in the case of the contenders associated with Whyalla,

Port Lincoln and Ceduna. None of these candidates had to face opposition from within their own community and were essentially guaranteed the support of the community group. Of course, some individuals may have preferred to support a close kin member operating from another community. In securing community support all three candidates, when within their own community, stressed their intent to place the needs of their own community above those of other groups. For example, an important part of the campaign message of the Whyalla candidate was her intention to make sure the Whyalla group had just compensation for the use of Stony Point by Santos. Moreover, she claimed that she would request mitigation in terms of Santos sponsorship for an Aboriginal community centre in Whyalla. Similarly, the Port Lincoln and Ceduna candidates, because they shared the same kin links, found that emphasising their community ambitions was important in securing support. In the low resource field of Aboriginal affairs in which funding is allocated along community lines many electors felt it was an astute vote to follow the community candidate.

The two local candidates affiliated with the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha land rights groups relied upon, and were in fact guaranteed, the support of the other participants in the land rights groups. Not only did these men advocate their intention to further the land rights cause but they were able to rely upon their close kin links with the rest of the land rights groups. The candidate affiliated with the ALRC as the only Adnjamathanha candidate, also relied upon the support

of the rest of his community however, in discussing the elections with Nepabunna people, it was obvious that their support actually went to one of the other candidates who they felt was a 'good-living Christian'. No doubt the existing tensions between the Nepabunna and Port Augusta groups, and the heightened level of this tension in the land rights issue, meant that this candidate's association with the ALRC became more a liability than an asset.

In contrast, the KPC chairman was better able to turn his commitment to land rights into a positive asset. Instrumental in this was his advocacy of a regional lands council and his organisation of the regional meeting in Port Augusta which preceded the NAC elections and helped to prove, in action, his election promises. To the electors his apparent ability to secure the support and resources of the Pitjantjatjara worked to prove his suitability as a candidate to further the land rights cause. Significantly, this candidate came a close second. A good record of producing benefits or acting on behalf of Aboriginal people was readily turned into an election asset by framing such efforts in a reciprocal logic; 'I look after you, now you can help me get paid for my work' (cf. Myers, 1982).

The winning candidate, logically, had the winning formula of support sources. This candidate was one of the four contenders from Port Augusta and in this sense had to compete with the other local candidates for support in Port Augusta. However, he had a wide range of complementary support sources which assisted in his dominance of the Port Augusta scene and final victory in the election. Firstly, he was able to rely

upon support from an extensive kin network. Complementing this source were supporters gained from his strong involvement in the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, the Aboriginal Sports Association, and in alcohol and offender rehabilitation. His campaign message included only minimal reference to land rights, focusing essentially on issues such as improved services for Aboriginal communities and 'real' Aboriginal self-determination. His campaign was the best organised, his effort in gaining support began much earlier than the other candidates and he made an extensive trip through the region 'door knocking' (cf. Howard, 1981; 127 citing Mayer, 1963; 120-2). In the cases of both this winning candidate and the KPC candidate who came second, the ability to secure support outside of the immediate kin group was greatly influenced by their proven record of action.

The lead up to the NAC elections was a time of avid and overt politicking on the part of the various candidates as they sought to revive dormant associations, to secure support and advertise their policies (Howard, 1981; 129). Securing the support of close friends and kin was done essentially through informal conversations. In reaching those outside this secure group of supporters, ^{his} campaign techniques became more formalised. All candidates produced posters or broadsheets of varying quality which gave personal and policy details. Two of the candidates arranged interview sessions on the local radio station, and one appeared on a local television 'chat' show. All candidates spent some time travelling to other towns 'door knocking'. Some relied more heavily on this tactic than others. For example, the candidate from the

West Coast area put considerable energy into door knocking in Port Augusta and through the relatively densely populated Flinders Ranges. The relative isolation of the West Coast meant that it was important for this candidate to create and rejuvenate links with the rest of the electorate by a 'face to face' procedure if he was to transcend kin-community support. Others who were better known in Port Augusta and the Flinders area relied less on this procedure.

The emergence of the SLC cannot be viewed in isolation from the NAC election. At a general level, the NAC campaigning resulted in heightened political awareness among the electorate. The campaign isolated the 'common plight' of Aborigines and, more than other times, distinct communities and groups were aware of their regional oneness. The NAC politicking created channels of communication and association not normally a part of the political structure of this area. The NAC campaign, by way of its regional electorate, transformed (on the surface at least) local issues into regional issues. The existence of this regional notion complemented and enhanced the regional-based, collective concepts underlying the formation of the SLC. In fact, the area encompassed by the NAC electorate coincided with those communities which made the greatest showing at the first and subsequent SLC meetings. Of particular significance to the SLC formation were the electioneering efforts of the KPC Chairman and his reliance upon the regional land council as a prime campaign point.

Significantly, and in contradiction to the apparent 'regionalism' that assisted in the SLC formation, it was the

individual politicking accompanying the election which assisted in the Council's demise. The first SLC meeting was attended by four of the seven candidates. Absent were the winning candidate, the Port Lincoln candidate and the Ceduna candidate. Either they did not know about the meeting or declined to attend because they felt it would damage their campaigns (the land rights issue was seen as controversial and radical by many Aboriginal people in the area). Logically, the three candidates who participated in the land rights groups were present, along with the Whyalla woman whose campaign placed considerable emphasis on land rights. The first SLC meeting became not only a forum for land issues but a vehicle for NAC politicking.

Each of the candidates present spoke at length (the longest speeches for the meeting all came from the candidates) about their concern for, and past involvement in, land rights and the need for realistic alternatives to the current options available. Interestingly, most speeches were made without direct reference to the NAC elections, or to any of the Government departments they suggested were currently offering unsuitable options. They spoke in support of each other projecting an approach which suggested they had laid aside their individual differences and interests for the sake of the higher ideal of the SLC. Their behaviour in the meeting was in keeping with the tone of the SLC concept of unification and co-operation. In fact, in supporting the SLC each candidate was seeking to secure additional supporters. By this stage not only had the KPC Chairman taken on the SLC as an important policy point but so too had the other three

candidates.

In the week between the first SLC meeting and the NAC elections both the Adnjamathanha and the Kokatha land rights groups had important meetings in which the SLC/NAC combination created internal difficulties. In the case of the Adnjamathanha it was the previously mentioned meeting with the Heritage Unit. As noted, the SLC commitment was matched against the Heritage Unit commitment. In this situation of conflict the NAC candidate from this group stated vociferously that he stood by the SLC strategy. As the meeting proceeded and it became obvious that the community was against this commitment it was clear to the NAC candidate that this strategic affiliation with the SLC had worked against his campaign rather than for it. Enraged by his lack of support among his own people he walked out of the meeting.

In the Kokatha case the situation was somewhat different in that two NAC candidates were present at the exclusively Kokatha meeting which was held between the SLC formation and the NAC elections. The meeting was held to discuss who should go on the first independent field trip to Roxby Downs. A large number of Port Augusta Kokatha attended, including the KPC Chairman/NAC candidate and, for the first time since the Stony Point controversy, the Whyalla contingent appeared in full force. The Whyalla contingent was accompanied by their NAC candidate who, in an unprecedented move towards participation in land rights action, had attended both the first SLC meeting and this KPC meeting.

The appearance of the Whyalla contingent at the meeting was enough in itself to create some tension as the Stony Point fiasco had not been forgotten. However, the appearance of the Whyalla candidate, who had revived the Stony Point issue in her election policy, and was a competitor of the Chairman of the KPC acted as a catalyst for underlying tensions. Both candidates gave speeches which again did not refer directly to the NAC election but which were designed to solicit support. The KPC Chairman emphasised his previous unpaid efforts to secure land rights for the Kokatha: his many trips to Yalata and Coober Pedy, his role in creating the SLC and securing the services of the Pitjantjatjara Council's anthropologist, and his discussions with outside groups. His logic was essentially one based on the KPC owing him their vote in return for his efforts. Again the Whyalla candidate took a conciliatory line by supporting the speech made by the KPC Chairman and the move to form the SLC. Moreover, and this was the problematic move, she guaranteed the support and assistance of the Whyalla community.

In promising the support of the Whyalla group she was acting mainly on behalf of the Pangkala woman with whom the KPC had been in conflict in relation to Stony Point. The Pangkala woman also had an interest in Roxby Downs and the NAC candidate, by offering Whyalla support to the KPC, was fulfilling her obligations to her supporters. In so doing, the Whyalla candidate had tried to secure the involvement of a group the KPC had already rejected. Later in the meeting,

when the KPC did not select any of the Whyalla group to go on the first field trip to Roxby Downs, arguing broke out between the two groups. A Whyalla man, who had worked on the Roxby Downs lease for most of his life, was angry at being excluded from the party of informants and claimed they would not find any sites and that Roxby Downs was not Kokatha country. He walked out of the meeting. Thus, NAC politicking had worked to bring the Whyalla group and the KPC together against the wishes of the latter and the inevitable result was tension.

In summary, it can be seen that the NAC worked as a catalyst in both the creation and dissipation of the collective, co-operative notions embodied in the SLC concept. The fact that the climatic points of land rights politics during the observed period coincided with the NAC elections attests to its influence. While the NAC engendered a concept of regionalism and shared difficulties it also, by its very nature, exacerbated factionalism as the Aboriginal voters moved into smaller groups in support of their chosen candidate who, they felt, would be able to assist in having their discrete needs and interests met.

CHAPTER XSUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The preceding documentation and analysis of Aboriginal land rights in a regional setting has touched upon a number of inter-related issues. The focus of the analysis has been the politics of land rights in the Aboriginal realm and the impact of Government penetration and often control of land rights moves. Within the analysis I have recognised the 'we (Aboriginal)/they (outsiders) dichotomy' but illustrated that the local manifestation of this dichotomy is far more diverse and multifaceted than is normally portrayed. Within this basic structure of land rights politics there are a variety of groups and individuals holding a variety of interests both in relation to the common factor of land and in relation to each other. Land rights is a process of interaction between these diverse interest groups and is characterised by a variety of in-built contradictions, leader-client and patron-client gaps, factionalism, competition and conflict.

The analysis has been divided into two levels of political action: that of ideology and that of reality (the participants and the climaxes of land rights action). The ideological level of Aboriginal land rights is shaped by both the internal ambitions of participating Aboriginals, and particularly more influential participants or leaders, as well as a number of external factors such as Government expectations and successful precedents. The development of an ideology is a necessary measure in the move towards

political action, particularly in inter-ethnic situations where intrinsic symbols may prove to be inadequate (Geertz, 1973; 218-219). The inter-ethnic sphere of land rights is such a situation; it is astute and necessary political manoeuvring by Aboriginal leaders to develop and disseminate an ideology based on relevant and proven symbols such as sacred sites, collective identity and action, and traditionality. This is not to demean the intrinsic reality of these symbols but to suggest that, when transformed into a land rights ideology, they take on a purposeful inter-ethnic meaning. The ideology, therefore, draws upon symbols significant in the internal realm but also known and acceptable to the external realm and which will validate and legitimate land rights claims. In so doing the ideological level of land rights works to establish an authoritative concept which makes sense of the insensitive and ever-changing legislative realm within which Aboriginal groups seek control of the land. Within the land rights groups the ideology is generally adhered to by participants and works to unify them under a common goal. However, it is not uncommon for participants to abandon their commitment to the ideology when and if it conflicts with the norms and expectations of other internal commitments or inter-ethnic commitments.

Logically, the most persistent feature of the ideological level of land rights is the emphasis on Aboriginal tradition and 'traditional' association with the land. Balandier (1970; 133) noted that the manipulation of tradition is a way of giving meaning to new realities or expressing a demand by highlighting disagreement with new power structures.

Such is the case in land rights and many symbols have emerged in the land rights moves which give credence to and stress the uniqueness of the Aboriginal relationship with the land.

An important example of this process is the role initiated men play in land rights. Both the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha land rights groups have men with initiated status as Chairmen and have instigated other political manoeuvres centred around deliberate and overt inclusion of the initiated sector. This pattern validates land rights action by both internal values associated with the land as well as standards set by existing legislation and successful precedents. Initiated status has become as much a political tool as it is a crucial factor in the Aboriginal relationship with the land. Again, this inter-ethnic application does not place into question the internal relevance of initiated status but it does suggest that the external emphasis given to this facet is such that it has new significance in the inter-ethnic realm of land rights politics. Furthermore, the inter-ethnic relevance of initiated status has meant that those men who assume leadership status within the land rights groups are not only those with knowledge of the Dreaming but those men who can responsibly handle this knowledge in the inter-ethnic context. In the Port Augusta environment, where there are dwindling numbers of initiated men or the initiated are not always close at hand, initiated status bestows important internal power by placing such men in control of a crucial but not always immediately

accessible resource.

The emphasis upon initiated men as custodians of knowledge about the land has a serious impact on the status of women in the land rights movement. In both the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha populations women have important power and significant interests in the land which are rarely acknowledged by the male leaders who establish the ideological level of land rights (unless these views are representative of a much stronger community interest). This is again not simply an internal matter. The ideologies of the land rights groups are shaped by the axioms of the current land rights model which, in legislation and an anthropological interpretation, relegates the female role in relation to land and power to the sidelines. In this sense the Government, and indeed many of the Aboriginal men involved in land rights politics, are addressing only half of the land rights issue. At the internal level of Aboriginal politics it is doubtful that the male status quo will jeopardise their positions and their potential land rights success by accommodating the female perspective until the external sphere has also accepted the validity of female interests in the land.

Sacred sites are another intrinsic element of the Aboriginal relationship with the land which are gaining new status in the inter-ethnic realm of land rights. The 'sacred site' terminology is more commonly used than ever before and is rapidly assuming a role as a political symbol of the Aboriginal right to control land. As sites come under threat

they are placed into the political arena and undergo a redefinition which is sensitive to their controversial status. The credence given to sacred sites by the dominant order which controls land means that the term is gaining new meaning and wider application by Aboriginal groups wishing to legitimate their claim to the land. Among the 'uneducated' young, sites which become the centre of inter-ethnic controversies are often given greater status than they would normally accrue. Indeed, in a political context, sites at the centre of a controversy do undergo a general increase in internal status and emphasis.

Finally, the ideological dimension of land rights presents another important symbol, that of collective tribal identity. Both the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha land rights groups stress a tribal identity concept which is tied to a specific tract of land. The development of this concept is an important political tool for it assists in distinguishing the area of interest of one group from that of another. In a situation where land is a scarce resource and competition for access to and control of the land is avid (both at the intra- and inter-ethnic level) this process is an important part of ensuring a group's potential right to an area is not challenged. In establishing the collective identity/territory concept the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha have relied on internally based principles such as shared experience as well as externally derived evidence from anthropological documentation. The application of interpretive evidence from external sources indicates the political nature of this type of

identity concept (cf. Geertz, 1973). This reliance on external definitions of country and, as with the KPC, their incorporation into a policy statement, produces a static concept of country which is contradictory to the noted internal variability of individual territory concepts and the kin/community distinctions within the Aboriginal population.

It has been shown clearly within the analysis that there is a considerable gap between the ideological level of land rights, the product of a powerful élite (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), and the level of reality which is based on smaller, often conflicting, kin/community groups. The propensity of the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha populations to aggregate along kin and community lines when dealing with land issues suggests that new social units are becoming significant to the land relationship. These aggregations have developed historically and are tied to new concepts of country which are individual expressions of the collective ideal. The current context of land rights works to exacerbate kin/community factionalism. The scarcity of the land resource, the limited and conditional opportunities for gaining control of the land, and the preference of the Government to implement funding by way of discrete community groups has resulted in internal competition among groups claiming primary and exclusive rights to land over other groups (cf. Jones and Hill-Burnett, 1982; 234).

The gap between the land rights ideal and the nature of land rights action is of considerable significance to the

ultimate success of land rights moves. As Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982) point out in their discussion of ethnicity, the Government can choose to ignore such gaps or manipulate them to their own end by questioning the representativeness of the politically active élite responsible for the ideology. Certainly the ADC's dealings with the ALRC were a local example of this type of manipulation. This gap remains a vulnerable characteristic of land rights action. In the case of Port Augusta, the leaders of the land rights groups find it difficult to recruit and maintain large numbers of supporters outside of their immediate kin because their ideology conflicts with established norms which are often enforced via patron-client associations.

The creation and later demise of the SLC is a prime example of this process. The SLC emerged from an Aboriginal élite in association with non-Aboriginal people familiar with European law and the Pitjantjatjara precedent. Its initial success was closely linked to the NAC election which was a period in which an ideology of common dispossession and shared inequalities was spread (cf. Jones and Hill-Burnett, 1982). Its subsequent demise was a result of its failure to spread and maintain its ideology outside of the conducive environment of NAC electioneering. The SLC ideology was in conflict with the established factions and competitive nature of land rights politics and demanded a commitment to a wider loyalty which was incompatible with this structure.

The nature of the ideology being developed in association with land rights and the important role that kin/community

groupings are playing in Aboriginal conceptualisation of and dealings with land suggest that the land rights process is itself influencing the Aboriginal relationship with the land. The current model of land rights (as established in law and anthropology) acknowledges the Aboriginal association with the land in a static and unidirectional fashion. That is, the Aboriginal relationship to the land is seen only as the starting point for land rights action and the possibility (or validity) of changes resulting from this action are denied. Moreover, not only is the Aboriginal relationship to the land fluid, the non-Aboriginal attitude to the land is altering. One of the most significant of these changes is the increase in environmental consciousness and the development of conservation and preservation moves which incorporate the Aboriginal interest in the land. This change is creating new struggles for Aboriginal groups in which the different aims of the two interest groups are less clearly distinguishable.

Germinal to this thesis is Government domination of land rights by way of the co-opting of Aboriginal participants. As has been demonstrated, both the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha groups are affected by this process. Indeed their location in the township of Port Augusta, an environment fully entrenched in Government instituted departments and programmes servicing the Aboriginal population, is conducive to this. Thus, while the land rights groups are unaffiliated and not formally under the auspices or directives of the Government they are not immune to its influence. The case

of the Heritage Unit and its impact on the ALRC is the clearest example of this process of Government penetration and domination. The almost total acceptance of the Heritage Unit's procedures as a means of achieving land rights has institutionalised land rights action among the Adnjamathanha. The incorporation of formal brokers (Rangers) and informal brokers (informants, potential employees) has resulted in the ALRC being set apart from the rest of the community by placing its ideology and action in conflict with the normative procedures of land rights action. The impact of this conflict is immense in that it often manifests itself through, and exploits, established kin/community distinctions. In its position of isolation and conflict, the Government could question the ALRC's credibility and right to speak on land issues and thereby render it ineffectual. Furthermore, the ALRC was vulnerable to internal factionalism based on this same long-standing commitment to the Heritage Unit, again thwarting its political power.

The KPC suffered similar problems but the process was less clear-cut largely because of the lack of a commitment to one permanent patron. The non-Aboriginal married into the group, the CAP, and the Pitjantjatjara Council anthropologist were all valuable patrons/brokers but were not indispensable. The relationships between the KPC and these patrons were either not founded in a long-standing association or not institutionalised and therefore could be broken. In this sense the KPC found it easier to break with a current patron if the relationship began to conflict with its ultimate land

rights ambitions. Changes such as this were usually the result of the association having unacceptable internal ramifications such as a conflict between existing factions. Like the ALRC, the KPC also had its internal solidarity eroded by individuals finding their association with the Committee conflicting with their positions as Government employees. Many such participants eventually left the KPC in order to maintain their positions with the Government and in so doing deprived the KPC of internally located administrative and secretarial skills. The voluntary status of the land rights groups and the lack of funding and autonomy mean that land rights groups will always be vulnerable to this process for they are unable to offer realistic alternatives to individuals seeking or used to financial rewards for their services.

There are significant distinctions between the Adnjamathanha and Kokatha situations which elaborate upon the ramifications of the interaction between the expectations and norms of the Government and Aboriginal ambitions in relation to land. In terms of property acquired, sites protected and control over the land, the Adnjamathanha have been far more successful than the Kokatha. Currently the Adnjamathanha have ownership of two pastoral leases, joint-control over the Gammon Ranges National Park and many sites recorded and offered protection under the Heritage legislation. The Kokatha have no pastoral leases, relatively few sites recorded under the Heritage Unit programme and only recently (since I left the field) have had the finances to undertake their own site recording

programme. The relative success of the Adnjamathanha group is partly due to their acceptance of and cooperation with Government-instigated procedures. And their opportunity to become involved in such programmes, especially that of the Heritage Unit, was a result of the physical nature of their environment, its appeal to the European aesthetic and conservation logic, and the distinctiveness of the Adnjamathanha identity as associated with Nepabunna reserve and the Flinders Ranges. The Government has co-operated only with those land rights ambitions which are compatible with its own ambitions. When the Adnjamathanha ambition conflicted with that of the Government it acted, by way of its local agents (often co-opted Aboriginals), to pressure the land rights groups into inaction.

The Kokatha situation is similar. However, while the Adnjamathanha have ultimately acquiesced and moved closer to strategies acceptable to the Government, the KPC has moved further away from the norms preferred by the Government. The KPC has features of indecisiveness, haphazardness and opportunism to external agents attempting to deal with it. But internally its changes in strategy and affiliation are examples of the KPC exercising choice by shifting to resource options which its members feel will better suit their ambitions; that is, those not affiliated with the Government and which give the KPC the desired degree of autonomy. This general shift away from accepted Government procedures has not been without some consideration of preceding success stories and the Kokatha have modelled their action on

procedures established by Northern Territory groups and the Pitjantjatjara people. Moreover, they are still tied to non-Aboriginal resource people who, although not affiliated with the Government and act with the best interest of their clients in mind, may exploit and exacerbate conflicts concomitant of the land rights phenomenon in order to preserve and enhance their own role. The ultimate result of the KPC's move for autonomy and refusal to compromise has been, at this stage markedly limited success in terms of realising its ambitions to control land and mining operations on land.

It is obvious from the analysis that external penetration is manifested locally by internal shifts in alliance and the consolidation of kin/community distinctions. It is doubtful that this internal procedure of decision-making will alter, however it would be hoped that in the future external bodies dealing with Aboriginal groups would seek to accommodate these processes rather than exploit them to their own advantage.

In conclusion, this study has revealed that the land rights move is far less than the vanguard of new rights for Aboriginals, (cf. Howard, 1982). While the sentiments of the Aboriginal participants remain genuine, the process by which they might realise their ambitions is vulnerable to penetration and manipulation by external agents seeking to control land rights in order to maintain their own individual niche and ultimately (but often inadvertently) the dominance of the values and ambitions of the Government

and strong interest groups such as pastoralists and miners. Success comes rarely and only within the limits dictated and accepted by the standards of the dominant order controlling the resource of land. In essence, land rights action is being used to perpetrate the limited and inaccurate model of land rights preferred by the Government rather than the raw land rights ambitions of the Aboriginal participants. Land rights ambitions are eroded, reshaped and diminished and the minimal victories rarely work to alter dramatically the disadvantaged position of Aboriginal people in Australian society today.