

## Of place and Alice Springs: Two contested sites in an Australian outback community

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### Abstract

This paper considers the notion of place in Alice Springs, Australia, and traverses the importance of memory as well as the concepts and construction of place and community. People's daily, lived socio-cultural experiences in this Northern Territory town are defined by numerous factors, including the importance of texts, which give meaning to place, social memories as well as narratives and symbols, all of which are instrumental in creating identity and a sense of place. Furthermore, a legacy of the colonial past is still informing the post-colonial present in Alice Springs. Memories of the settler state, both local and national, as well as individual and collective social and cultural relations continue to inform and define the community and the place today. In particular, two adjacent places within the town – the Todd Mall and the Todd River – reflect continuing, fluid and shifting senses of place. Privilege and consumerism; spatial suppression and submersion co-exist in a state of hegemonic dualism. Amid such contestation, paradoxes emerge which impact on the understanding and creation of negotiating a sense of place in this community.

**Key words:** Alice Springs, Aborigines, land, place, community, colonisation

### 1. Introduction

This first part of the article considers the theoretical concept and construction of the sense of place and community through the ideological and the phenomenological turn, that is, people's lived experience of place and that the sense of place involves the sense of being. Furthermore, the importance of 'texts', which give meaning to place, and the importance of (social) memories in people's everyday under-

standing of their world and their lives and the construction of memories of place – how people construct their own images of the world – are also traversed. The article will then reflect on the creation of the rural in Australia and this will be followed by a consideration of two places within the rural ‘out-back’ community of Alice Springs – the Todd Mall and the Todd River. Observations contained in this article were informed by eight months spent living and working in Alice Springs. Time was spent in remote outback communities to the north-west (Tanami) of Alice, as well as considerable time in the Alice Springs community and in close proximity of both the Todd River and the Todd Mall. Data collected was recorded in a logbook, a repository for recorded information both from within Alice Springs as well as from the outback.

## **2. Concepts and construction of place and community**

As human beings our social and cultural lives define, and are defined by, concepts and notions of class, age, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and the environments within which we live, work and play. The organisation, coordination, perception and understanding of such associated and complex environmental interaction affects groups of people and individuals in different ways.

Embedded in these interactions are currencies of signs, symbols and narratives all of which inform and contribute to the establishment of memories, identities, a sense of community and, importantly in the context of this article, a sense of place. At the centre of these socio-cultural notions, concepts, lived behaviours and experiences are people’s being-in-the-world, their relationships with world and the day-to-day world. According to the geographer Edward Relph places ‘are constructed in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations. Place experiences are necessarily time-deepened and memory qualified. In geographical experience, a place is an origin; it is where one knows others and is known to others; it is where one comes from and it is one’s own’ (1985: 26-27).

From E. Relph’s cogent articulation, place must be considered and interpreted as a source and site of identity for people within their socio-cultural constructs and the wider world within which they live. Place thus reflects the synthesis of nature

and culture; place reflects such integrations that have developed and that are still developing in particular locations. It is, as E. Relph posits: 'A place is not just the 'where' of something; it is the location plus everything that occupies that location seen as an integrated and meaningful phenomenon' (1976: 3). Places and people are inseparable: place 'is where the foundations of our earthly existence and human condition establishes itself. [...] We can change locations, move, but this is still to look for a place; we need a place to set down our Being and to realize our possibilities, a *here* from which the world discloses itself, a *there* to which we can go' (Dardel 1952: 56; Relph 1976: 41; emphasis original).

Therefore one may rightly conclude that place, while loosely aligned to geography and landscape is also a referential locus within wider societies and communities. Indeed, as D. Butz, and J. Eyles (1997: 4) state 'the grounding of human beings may be explored in the context of studies of 'community' in which sense of place often resides'. And, note the authors, community might be considered as 'groups of individuals and their relationships with one another' (1997: 4). Furthermore, community incorporates 'place or area, people and their institutions, and sense of belonging, which helps enrich our notion of place' (Eyles 1985: 63). Community thus embraces the cultural components of the social, the ideological and the ecological.

Yet community is far from being tranquil, harmonious and a site of symmetrical relations. Max Gluckman (1958: 35) considers it as 'a lot of people operating and disputing within the limits of an established system of relations and cultures.' It is important to acknowledge that, as M. Gluckman does, social tensions, unequal power relationships and social exclusions continually emerge as sites of negotiation and contestation within community. While social and cultural ties are strongly articulated, so are conflicts and disputes.

The dimensions that combine to form 'community' are, as E. Hague, and J. Mercer (1998: 106) note, "'texts' which give meanings to places' and "'texts' become part of 'social memories' used by residents to link their personal lives to the collective experience of living in a place'. Texts can assume many forms be they visual, written or oral. The artworks by Alice Springs artist Rod Moss, for example, illustrate this notion of texts. These social memories provide form, focus and direction - they

make meaning – for people to understand their lives and the social groups within which they live.

Memory reflects both the individual and the social at the same time. Write J. Fentress and C. Wickham (1992: ix): ‘memory is structured by group identities: that one remembers one’s childhood as part of a family, one’s neighbourhood as part of a local community, one’s working life as part of a factory or office community and/or political party or trade union, and so on – that these memories are essentially group memories and that the memory of the individual exists only in so far as she or he is the probably unique product of a particular intersection of groups’.

Given that memory is both individual and social at the same time, the individual memory becomes the social memory ‘essentially by talking about it’ (Fentress, Wickham, 1992: ix-x). And, furthermore, as memory is both social and individual at the same time then ‘one’s memories are repeatedly discussed, shared with others, told in stories and so on – they are thus social memories’ (Hague, Mercer, 1998: 106). Social groups form their own impressions, views and understandings of the world by ‘establishing an agreed version of the past [...] these versions are established by communication, not by private remembrance’ (Fentress, Wickham, 1992: x). E. Hague and J. Mercer (1998) note that social memories embrace all spatial scales and the authors cite, for example, the role of memories in the creation of cities (Boyer 1994) and landscapes (Schama 1995). Such studies exemplify the ever-moving relationship of memory as an identifier with place or places. As such, ‘place, therefore, is a *fundamental structure of memory and remembering* (Hague, Mercer, 1998: 107; emphasis original).

Given the fluid relationship between memory and place, not all constructions of place are positive even though they may reflect affections, even loyalty. Place can also include discrimination, marginalisation, conflict, suppression and subversion – as promulgated by M. Gluckman (1958). Place, and community, can be at the same time both inclusionary and exclusionary. As such, place and community therefore reflect the everyday tensions and power imbalances that emerge within and around them.

If memory – both individual and social simultaneously – and community are critical referents in the construction of place, then symbolic boundaries are also as critical in the defining of place. Put simply, these boundaries are nothing more than symbolic devices used to demarcate communities from start to finish (Tonts, Atherley, 2010: 383). They demarcate those people who ‘fit in’ and so belong and those who do not, those who are outsiders.

While such boundaries can be physical, for example, the MacDonnell Ranges that surround and embrace Alice Springs, they are also more likely to be subjective instruments created and enforced by sections of particular groups or communities. Such constructs reflect the ‘collective memories of the spatial dimensions of social or economic activities, political relations and socio-cultural difference’ (Tonts, Atherley, 2010: 383). The authors state that cultural events, public art, architecture are examples of the signs and symbols that can stand for such boundaries. Importantly, these symbolic boundaries and the sites they represent are infused with local social and geographical memories. They are anchored in local consciousness and symbolism; they accentuate boundary and place. These boundaries reflect worldviews and world as lived and experienced by both the inhabitants and outsiders.

### **3. Of place and the rural, the country**

In Alice Springs, as in the rest of countryside Australia, the notions and understandings of the rural place, that which reflects values and spaces that answer basic human psychological and spiritual needs (connections with the land, the open outdoors, community and even a nostalgic thread interconnecting these concepts) and its accompanying narratives are embedded in a variety of texts through which landscapes are portrayed (Bunce 2003; Gibson, Davidson, 2004).

The accompanying narratives have been formulated and constructed over generations with their dominant meanings representing the masculine, the white, the working class and the nationalist voice and worldview. What is apparent in Alice Springs is the hegemonic ethnicity reflecting British colonialism and settler-state histories, practices and mentalities. The hallmarks of identity conflict – otherness, dispossession of land, racism and marginalisation – lurk. Distorted and uneven power

relations reflect not only racialisation of place (see, for example, Cloke 2006) but also the still-prevailing white networks, which, in turn, focus a lens on the postcolonial present and the residue of colonials and colonialism whose forebears have never left.

R. Panelli, D. Allen, B. Ellison, A. Kelly, A. John, G. Tipa make an interesting point concerning the racialisation of place (landscapes and locations) albeit in a New Zealand context: while it specifies 'white' privilege it also endows a legacy which 'continues to affect many rural areas, privileging selective oral and aural dimensions of proclaiming place and marginalizing others' (Panelli et al., 2008: 44).

The rural in the Australian context reflects successive generational construction; one in which dispossession of Aboriginal land and its resultant new usages prevailed. The first settlers knew very little of Australia and the environmental conditions within. The 'squattocracy' (land-claiming settlers) 'also sought to impose on the landscape imported European production systems, populating country with hooved animals that carved up soil and damaged habitat. They enacted, through the development of an Australian pastoral industry and in cartographic practices, notions of Australian rurality that ignored and/or erased meanings of place and landscape (Gibson, Davidson, 2004: 389; Gibson 1999)'.

Concomitant with, and expanding on, the above perspectives is the opinion advocated by A. Moran (2002): 'The discourse of 'newness', the staple of nineteenth-century and earlier twentieth-century settler nationalists, proclaimed settler colonies or nations were new societies free of the problems, the traditions and the class distinctions that bedevilled the 'old world.' The 'absence' of history and tradition meant that settlers could build their own utopias without hindrances (2002: 1016)'.

The stark inference is that Aboriginal customs, lore, traditions and relations with land were worthless in the eyes of the settlers and thus there were no obstacles standing in their (the settlers') way. They could realise their new utopian dreams at their whim. The Europeans' dispossession of land together with the systematic destruction of Indigenous populations is a hallmark of Australian settler society. Writes S. Razack: 'As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythology of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are

presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus *become* the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship (2002: 1-2. Emphasis in original)'.

Indigenous American scholar Luana Ross (1998), in citing Robert Blauner (1972), qualifies this further and notes that critical features of colonisation (and of the ensuing settler society) include the regulation of Indigenous (and hence colonised) peoples' movements and the erosion, alteration and modification of their culture, including the loss of sovereignty. The coloniser 'attempts to destroy the culture of the colonised' and thus culture becomes a method of control (1998: 4).

However, Indigenous peoples, Australian Aborigines included, have begun to fight for the right to address histories of dispossession and to seek to "repatriate" land, resources, knowledge and cultural artefacts' (Castree 2004: 136). These sites of resistance and resilience are informed by astute awareness and knowledge of place: 'they are struggling for differential geographies: that is, the right to make their own places, rather than have them made for them' (Castree 2004: 136).

The new methods of land appropriation and land use conferred a new sovereignty and an unchanging durability of ownership on the burgeoning settler society, out of which emerged a particular national Australian identity and spirit, which might appear mythic. This is predicated on, for example, the art of Pro Hart, the poetry of Banjo Paterson, the folksy music and lyrics of *Waltzing Matilda*, the notions of 'going bush', mates, 'hard yakka' and beating all the odds stacked against you, including drought, fire and flood.

New symbols, texts and meanings were being constructed in and by ordinary, yet hardy, men (and women) who could do extraordinary things to overcome their foe, the land.

The narratives have become popularised and have established an Australian identity steeped in the rural. Historical representations inform the present rural place identity and the associated discourses and texts, in their communications, continue to also inform a national identity. Within this the rural setting were, and are, the world-views and 'consciousness of place as it is lived and experienced by residents' (Tonts, Atherley, 2010: 394).

The pioneer folkloric myth became an instrument that justified the dispossession of Indigenous populations from the land because the process settling the wild, untamed frontier provided new meanings for these spaces. Indigenous people were submerged and erased from their lands and the landscape. Frantz Fanon (1967) made a critical point with his comment that is still so pertinent today: the Aborigine was considered part of the natural landscape and thus the ethos of mastering and ruling nature meant mastering and ruling the Indigenous. To remove the Aborigines from the land and to eradicate their ties and relationships with it were central to the settler takeover.

As opposed to Western discourse and social and cultural process in relation to land ownership, Aborigine populations, as hunter-gatherers, do not have any institutions of land tenure, particular rules of land ownership and concepts of strictly enforced territorial boundaries. As noted, their attachments to land were viewed as transient and unproductive by the incoming settlers (Moran 2002).

The myth of *terra nullius*, that is, the land of Australia had belonged to no one when the British arrived in 1788 must be acknowledged as the cornerstone of the process of legitimising land dispossession in the Australian settler state. The early settlers held the blinkered view that the social lives of Aborigines were deficient to the point that they did not rightly hold land ownership.

However, essential and fundamental Aboriginal elements in relation to land were in place and underpinned Aborigine society. Y-F. Tuan (1977) writes about the holistic notions of 'estate' and 'range' as being essential core components of Aborigine socio-cultural relations and reflects this initial point made above. In short, 'estate' is the traditional dreamtime home of patrilineal descent groups and their ancestors while 'range' extends to land over which people hunt. Range is important in day-to-day survival, while estate is at the centre of socio-cultural ceremonies and relations. It is in the fixed and unchanging nature of estate – the trees, rocks, hills, sand dunes, creek beds, water holes and stone formations – where the dreamtime ancestors reside and estate is the repository for Indigenous identities and cultural and social expression. 'The whole countryside is his family tree', wrote Y-F. Tuan (1977: 158).

The holistic concepts of Aboriginal, hunter-gatherer links to land, in which institutions of land tenure do not exist, are fundamentally opposed to the commodification and production values sought, implemented and enforced by the settler state.

This author shall expand on this and provide some further insight by drawing on my personal experience when I undertook work area clearance work at Kintore in the Western Desert. This settlement is home to the Pintupi-speaking Aborigines, as well as some Warlpiri and Luritja-speaking Aborigines, all of whose members also visit and occasionally reside in Alice Springs.

For the Pintupi, as with other tribes, contact with the settler state introduced change in relation to the knowledge of 'country' (a particular Australian descriptor used specifically in relation to the rural and its accompanying lifestyles) being passed down or onto following generations.

Such knowledge permeates Pintupi social life and organisation. Concepts of land – camp, country and place – as well as family and social ties – kin and relatives – are completely and inextricably linked to a symbolic cosmological order known as *tjukurrpa* or The Dreaming. *Tjukurrpa* is the fundamental all-embracing principle upon which Pintupi reality, society, culture, place and place-in-the-world is founded. It is a single and totalising ontology.

L. Hiatt illustrates Pintupi relationships between people and the land as follows: 'The expression "my country" means an expanse with which an individual is associated through genealogical ties, residence, mythological links, but which contains numerous sites of which he is not an owner. Within this range, movement for hunting and foraging purposes is unrestricted though visits to sacred sites need the permission of owners' (1983: 16).

It is through *tjukurrpa* that concepts of land acquire their value. An individual may consider his 'ownership' of a place as 'that's his story' (Myers, 1986, 59), a phrase which denotes not only ritual links with place but also memories, narratives, symbols, meanings and texts relating to beings passing to, from and through it. Pintupi transform the landscape into narrative by invoking *tjukurrpa* in their interaction with

it and using each place as a mnemonic for telling and re-enacting the story of their whole country (Rodman 2003).

‘The metaphor of country as story is particularly appropriate,’ writes F. Myers (1986: 59). The author also notes that underpinning this is ‘Esoteric knowledge...the value on which the development of Pintupi social reproduction is built’ (Myers 1986: 240). F. Myers’ work is considered the benchmark upon which to frame research Pintupi land tenure and ownership, for example, and his scholarship highlights, among other things, the shift from the group to the individual. Conception place, birth place, initiation place (for males), residence place, links to *tjukurrpa* and descent and connection to place along various pathways clearly illustrate this and establish a framework in which an individual’s autonomy is recognised in relation not only to sites and a strong identification with them but also to other individuals. E. Relph’s (1985: 26) words have a particular resonance and prescience: places ‘are constituted in our memories and affections through repeated encounters and complex associations’.

The phenomenological approach of lived experience or consciousness from the first-person perspective underscores the Pintupi relation to land and place perfectly: concomitant with experience is intentionality, that is, being steered towards something as it is an experience of/about/in relation to something else. This gives meaning to things that people have in the events that emerge and become experiences and memories: notably, the flow of time, the self, others, the relevance and importance of things (be they objects, ritual, land, duties) and so on. The settings of cultural and social context in the life world experiences of the Pintupi and the importance of social organisation and the relation to land is, as F. Myers reminds us: ‘They (Pintupi) focus on what individuals do and the experiences to which their concepts are relevant’ (1986a: 443).

## **4. Of place and Alice Springs**

### **4.1. Memories of the past**

This article will now focus on the contemporary place that is Alice Springs – informed by past acts of colonisation and the settler state – and the conditions of the present.

The Aborigine populations in and around Alice Springs and their day-to-day life pathways, social interactions and cultural practices, while demonstrating collective notions of community, also illustrate the on-going and contemporary reality of racialisation and racial oppression levelled against such specific populations.

The community that makes up the town is tied to discourses, local and national memories of the settler state, social relations and the narratives that underscore them all of which are critical components in the construction of place, the building of a sense of place identity and place attachment (Tuan 1977). In particular, physical spaces are used to bolster and support local memories.

The Todd and Charles Rivers that dissect Alice Springs, which has a population of 27,000, are an integral part of the town's identity and can be rightly considered as core features and landmarks. Five access ways and a bridge span the two rivers, which are mainly dry for much of the year. Traffic, be it by foot, by car or by bicycle, traverse these river access points every day and on a regular basis. The Todd and the Charles and their arid, riverine ecologies are home to many River Red gum trees (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), many of which are 400 years old, as well as local species of birds, bats, insects and lizards (Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory 1994). The locals often refer to the gum trees as 'the ships of the Todd.'

Both rivers and Mparntwe (Alice Springs) itself are the traditional homelands of the Arrernte people and the river corridors are rich with sacred sites and points of huge symbolic importance. Dreamtime ancestors are embodied in place and in landscape. B. Spencer and F. Gillen (1969) noted that the landscape was imbued with totemic significance with much of the rivers, surrounding hills and the peaks of the ranges around the town having an important and essential association with the ancestral beings who originally travelled through the land creating many of the features (see also Strehlow 1947). The sandy river beds and the trees embody creative dreamtime ancestors including three species of caterpillar – Yeperenye, Ntyarlke and Utnerrengatye (Brooks 1991). In the dreamtime stories, the caterpillars, together with other beings such as wild dogs and kangaroos as well as the uninitiated Kwekatye boys, who travelled north in pursuit of two sisters, shaped the landscape that exists

today. Spatio-cultural meanings and the close ties to the land and inherent place-based cultural practices abound.

Settler state incursions into the area began with an exploration party to the centre of Australia, led by John McDouall Stuart in 1862. But it was the construction of the Overland telegraph from Adelaide to Port Darwin in 1872 that led to the naming of Alice Springs. The government surveyor William Mills named a water spring after Alice, the wife of Charles Todd, who helped oversee the telegraph construction. Probably the most important factor that confirmed the establishment of the settlement of Stuart (forerunner to the present day Alice Springs) on the banks of the Todd River, was the 'rush' that followed the discovery of gold in the eastern MacDonnell Ranges in 1887. (Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory 1994: 30).

#### **4.2. Alice Springs' identity today**

Both the Todd River and the Todd Mall can be seen from the high points around Alice Springs. As such, they are part of the social and cultural fabric of the community. However, given that both places are central to the town's identity, tensions surround the access to and sharing of both places will be explained shortly. The river and the mall are collectively recognised in local socio-cultural relations and the everyday lives of European and Aboriginal residents and visitors alike.

Today, the appeal – cultural, social and visual – of the riverine landscape is being undermined by rubbish, fire and generally unkempt environs. Entry to the river beds is haphazard and, in the eyes of many, unsafe and possessing the potential for violence, not at least for the night-time drinking parties hosted there. This author arrived in Alice Springs in the wake of the sentencing of five young white men who were jailed for between 12 months and six years for the killing of a young Aboriginal trainee park ranger while he slept in the riverbed.

The ranger's death and subsequent trial and sentencing's for manslaughter made national and international headlines. Much was made in the popular press of

the death being labelled a 'racist' killing and an incident of 'white supremacist violence'<sup>1</sup>.

Much has been written both in the academy and in the popular press about the Aboriginal 'failure' to subscribe to the basic standards of law and order in a place like Alice Springs and equally as much has been written about the 'crisis' posed by alcohol, in particular, when in the hands of Aborigines; and equally as much has been written about police discrimination and institutional racism. (See, for example, Cunneen 2001; Hogg, Carrington, 2006; Barclay 2007; Goldflam 2011).

Indeed, C. Cunneen (2001), for example, ties the issues of Indigenous imprisonment and incidences of police cell deaths with the historical and on-going legacy posed by the settler or colonial process, his approach being grounded in the dispossession of land and cultural suppression.

The early dispossession of people from the land has also been well recorded and is being maintained by both local and federal governments, to a large degree, in a continued and persuasive attempt to get people to move into centralised community places like Alice Springs and the chance to access a range of public services.

The town has a history of control and access of the right to be in the place that is Alice Springs. This has been manifest in the 18 town camps, which are located in and around the town. The populations who live *in* the camps are based on kinship and language groups (This author's emphasis). Many are home to Arrernte residents, who are the traditional owners, or the descendents of the traditional owners of Alice Springs (Tilmouth 2007). W. Tilmouth notes that the town camps emerged as an answer to a 1928 prohibition, which forbade Aboriginal people to be in the town after sunset (2007: 235). From the 1970s, the town camps pushed to be recognised as legitimate communities with legal tenure over the land they were occupying so as to be able to qualify for essential services. The fight for recognition was tough but tenacity won. Pastor E. Rubuntja, the first president of the Tangentyere Council, set up in 1974 to help coordinate the campaign for recognition, said that the white population did not like the camps: 'They tried to push us away. But this was our country. Ar-

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<sup>1</sup> For example, 'Five jailed for racist Alice Springs killing' (Gibson 2010); 'Alice Springs thugs acting like the KKK' (Bolton 2010).

rernte country. Aboriginal country. The other people living in the camps – Warlpiri, Luritja, Pintupi, Pitjanjatjara, Anmatjere – had been pushed off their land too. We wanted our own land so we could sit down and not worry about the whitefellas pushing us off (Tilmouth 2007: 236)‘.

Underpinning the most recent coercive push has been the initiative known as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), popularly known as the Intervention. This was introduced in 2007 and aimed to stamp out child abuse, access to pornography, control alcohol abuse, stem domestic violence and stop truancy. The federal government’s rationale was that crime had reached epidemic proportions in remote Aboriginal communities. The Intervention was justified on the grounds that legislation was required to resolve Aboriginal ‘dysfunction’ (Anthony, Blagg, 2013: 52).

The issues of place as land, access to it and use of it are also at the heart of Intervention policy. Together with the implementation of the Intervention’s measures, came a revamping of local government processes including the abolition of more than 60 small, local councils and the creation of 11 centralised shires based in regional centres, like Alice Springs, note T. Anthony and H. Blagg (2013). They wrote: ‘At a stroke, Indigenous community councils lost funding. Coupled with the draconian regulations of the Intervention, this constituted a new phase in the dispossession of Indigenous Australia by a colonial power’ (2013: 53). The Intervention, as D. Howard-Wagner states, ‘validated the setting aside of the normal state of affairs in “prescribed areas” and allowed for a legalised reforming of Indigenous spaces and practices within those “prescribed areas”’ (2012: 222).

The migration of people from the remote ruralities of the Northern Territory to urban places like Alice Springs accelerated as a consequence of the Intervention. As T. Lea, M. Young, F. Markham, C. Holmes and B. Doran (2012) state, many of the new arrivals into ‘growth towns’ like Alice Springs had left the bush in order to flee growing family problems, ‘problems which invariably involved violence arising from the NTER’ (2012: 143). Such reorganisation of Indigenous place (and space) has created a redefined sense of place within the concentrations and boundaries of the urban environment of Alice Springs, a community that exhibits the social, cultural po-

litical and economic characteristics of a colonised place. It is also a service centre for numerous remote Aboriginal 'out stations'.

#### **4.3. A reconsideration of space**

Non-governmental resources in Alice Springs were not adequately resourced to cope with the population influx and the numbers of Indigenous people living and sleeping 'rough' increased markedly. Urban places like Alice Springs' CBD experienced a spatial reorganisation, one in which Aborigines were explicitly marginalised, an on-going concerted process which was expedited by increased police patrols, the installation of CCTV, and the passing of restrictive local (and state) government by-laws targeting offending in public places. This is made manifest, for example, in the Management of Public Spaces By-laws (2009), whereby begging becomes a criminal offence and the police are given the explicit powers to disperse and move on Indigenous people, relegated to a class of urban nomad, from gathering in any council-controlled public space.

From a state-implemented perspective, the Northern Territory's Summary Offences Act criminalises public place 'anti-social' behaviours: loitering, drinking in a public place; undue noise at a social gathering after midnight; offensive behaviour, for example. This Act was introduced in 1924 and has been through 95 re-enactments. A more recent piece of legislation, the Northern Territory Mandatory Alcohol Treatment Act (2013), is directly aimed and focused at Aborigines who misuse alcohol. The legislation's ability to detain people without entering the court process or being represented by a lawyer is unprecedented in Australian law. Every person who has been detained under the Act's powers has been Aboriginal (Cordell, Watson, 2014). A person will be given an AMT (Alcohol Mandatory Treatment) Order if he or she has been detained by police for being very drunk three times within a two-month period. A person is then assessed before a panel comprised of health professionals and at least one community member before being served the Order. The individual is then taken to a secure facility and locked up for three months.

Such control and management of the visibility of Aborigines in public urban areas puts them at the whimsical mercy of the authorities and at the interpretation of

draconian legislation, now part of the Territory's white-dominated, official narrative and infrastructure. Their presence creates contested places. A case can be made that the particular spatial politics of enforcement legislation and wider macro-policy explicitly impel the Aboriginal presence of place and presence towards the outskirts of Alice Springs: this underscores wandering and displaced populations who appear dispossessed, who do not seem to have a 'fixed abode' and who do not appear to own anything, land included.

#### **4.4. Whitefellas and the Todd Mall**

This article will now focus specifically on Alice's Central Business District (CBD), a white-dominated place of concentrated dispossession and marginalisation and the Todd River, a peripheral but Indigenous place offering some respite and solace and a gathering place for Aborigines.

From the outset, racialised access into, control and policing of such a public place such as the CBD is to be seen and understood in the context of on-going spatial suppression and submersion – Aborigines' presence in such a place of consumption is strictly controlled.

Alice Springs' CBD is centred in and on the Todd Mall, a pedestrian precinct which runs parallel to the Todd River. Places like CBDs invite, create and support their own particular types of cultures and subcultures and will accommodate their own types of disciplinary power. As R. Guha (1998) argues: colonial power veers towards coercion not hegemony and exclusion not inclusion (Guha 1998, cited in Anthony, Blagg, 2013: 45).

Public place and public space engender a hegemonic dualism, one that affords certain people (citizens) access and usage while curbing such 'rights' or 'privileges' in respect of others: such accepted public status is not so forthcoming to the colonised in that unfettered access is denied and is replaced by restrictions and conditions.

From a material (and a capitalist) perspective CBDs can be considered 'centres of capital accumulation, where commerce, tourists, government agencies and local

residents intersect' (Lea et al., 2012: 144). Alice Springs positions itself as, *inter alia*, a service hub, business centre and as a gateway for international tourists.

My overall impression of the Todd Mall and its periphery, which extends to the Todd River, is that it is a place that is predominantly peopled by white pedestrians with the areas at each end of the Mall – Gregory Terrace (south end) and Wills Terrace (north end) – the only sites of Aboriginal inclusion. Wills Terrace is the locus of the (in)famous Todd Tavern, the front bar of which is known as the Animal Bar and home to numerous and mainly Aborigine-only drinkers. The bar is open from 10 am to 2 pm and then patrons can go next door to the bottle store, which opens when the front bar closes, and buy liquor before heading into the Todd River.

Within the Mall proper, there is only one place where Aborigines can sit and gather – a grassed area under trees in front of the Uniting Church. The church's website states: 'Together with the Alice Springs Town Council, the church has made it possible for Indigenous artists to use the lawns as a place from which to sell their own art, what T. Lea, M. Young, F. Markham, C. Holmes and B. Doran (2012, 149) refer to as "a commodified Aboriginality". Many people enjoy the opportunity for 'cross-cultural conversation' (Uniting Church 2015). And that is what they do, sitting in small subdued groups either working on their pointillist (dot) paintings or offering them for sale, all under the gaze of white café patrons and passing police patrols. One feels that they know their place. Otherwise they walk with purpose, direction and pace navigating their way towards the Todd River or towards Hartley and Bath Streets, the site of the Yeperenye Shopping Centre, home of Woolworths supermarket, and the nearby Coles supermarket. The Aborigine pedestrians purposely avoid the white shoppers and there is minimal eye contact between them. The foot traffic reflects a cultural contestation between 'the blackfellas' and 'the whitefellas'. The Todd Mall might be considered a zonal place or an 'interstitial' place' which are the sites of 'ambivalence, hybridity, compromise, resistance and contestation' (Anthony, Blagg, 2013: 46). Such place, and space, creates the opportunity for the emergence of new narratives, symbols, meanings and texts.

These narratives are, as such, both epistemological and ontological simultaneously as they are parts of people's experiences, meanings and lifeworlds, that is,

place as it is lived, experienced and informed by the symbols and signs used to define place. They will reflect overt, as well as subtle, inclusion and exclusion and will represent perspectives from both insiders and outsiders. They are always open to cultural contestation and cultural negotiation and cultural recontestation and cultural renegotiation. The fluid inclusion/exclusion binary will continue to inform local communal identity – the ‘voice’ of the inclusionary will thwart the ‘voice’ of those excluded, however, in their resilience, they are able to absorb and accommodate these dynamics at varying levels.

Numerous galleries selling Aboriginal art (paintings, sculptures and jewellery) line the Todd Mall and its approaches. Interestingly, the space *within* (this author’s emphasis) the shops is staffed by white people. Only occasionally (the opening of an Aboriginal artist’s exhibition, for example) will one see Indigenous artists *inside*. Is it because the artists do not fit white preconceptions of how artists ought to look? The art is generally expensive as is the surrounding atmosphere within which it is displayed. The target market is the out-of-towner, the international/national tourist. To see Aboriginal artists ‘at work and *in situ*’ one may have to travel to outlying communities like Papunya, home of the Papunya Tula cooperative, or Yuendumu, home of the Warlukurlangu Artists. At both places, artists, many of whom are quite elderly, sit in the shade of the verandah and paint.

Inside the Todd Mall galleries, the discourse quickly turns to the collectability of the artist, the price his/her work will fetch at a gallery in Sydney, Paris or Berlin (the French and Germans are great collectors of Aboriginal art), what collections the artist’s work resides in, what the reviewers say, the accolades received and so on. Outside in the Mall’s pedestrian walkways, the Aborigines can be considered as misfits in the CBD in that they do not subscribe to the kind of consumer expected to be present and displaying the accompanying commercial imperatives. They represent a highly mobile and impermanent presence – apart from the Uniting Church locus – always on the move to somewhere else and not stopping. Todd Mall reflects the silencing of an Indigenous population within a given context.

An interesting paradox emerges from within the Todd Mall: Aborigines are seen as romanticised agents of contrast and dissimilarity, sought after by tourists for

their artistic endeavours, yet they are reduced to a shadow presence in the white, urban frontier place of Todd Mall. Such a shadow presence is important from a commercial perspective. T. Lea, M. Young, F. Markham, C. Holmes and B. Doran (2012: 152) write that they, the Aborigines, are tolerated only when 'entrepreneurial values can be met, such as when the Aboriginal Other conforms to the white construction of a tourist place with its heavy dependency on commoditised Aboriginal culture'.

Such a paradox – the wish to have a commoditised Aboriginal culture accepted and displayed – is resisted by Aborigines 'skilled in evading unwanted harassment through forms of urban nomadism' (Lea et al., 2012: 157). The authors continue: 'such coproduced mobility assists a romantic mainstream view that Aboriginal people are naturally mobile, which further helps disguise the spatial disfigurements in play. Indigenous practice and response takes distinct forms depending on place. Without essentialising, we might say that Indigenous people deploy multiple cultural resources to maintain fragile spatial domination within the resource-rich urban frontier. In the CBD the tactic is to remain camouflaged through a calm and permanent pedestrianism'.

#### **4.5. Blackfellas and the Todd River**

A decent cricket ball throw away from the Todd Mall is the wide and dusty Todd River, which snakes its way through the town. It is a meeting place for Aborigines. While closely proximate to the concrete and paved paths that run adjacent to the river, the river, as a place, represents another social and cultural zone. Access to the river is screened by shrubbery and tall grasses, masking what T. Lea, M. Young, F. Markham, C. Holmes, B. Doran call 'a precarious sanctuary where the intermittent drive-by gaze of patrol cars and welfare personnel replaces the omnipresent monitoring of police, shop-keepers, CCTV and security guards' (2012: 153).

The concrete and paved paths that border the river bed are utilised by white runners, walkers and bike riders, who often encounter Aboriginal people 'sleeping rough', drinking and socializing. The walkways converge on and intersect each other's spaces. Both groups cannot avoid each other's proximity at these intersec-

tions. As mentioned, white people fear the Todd River, particularly at night, where it is considered a 'no-go' area. Living nearby (Chewings Street), I could hear the singing, the shouting and smell the smoke from the fires lit in the river bed. Early mornings (circa 3 a.m.) were often punctuated by swearing, the sounds of fighting, bottles being thrown, the sounds of breaking glass as people left the river bed and made their way to the Eastside town camp walking past my flat. Mornings in Chewings Street and around Anzac Hill revealed puddles of vomit and broken glass, with Monkey Bay sauvignon blanc bottle remains featuring prominently. Blood frequently spattered the road and walkways.

The Todd River affords Aborigines with the strategy to stop moving, sit down, relax, socialise and to be shielded from the gaze of the CBD. The riverbed, as an uncommodified and unregulated place, provides temporary relief from the mall and its regulated gaze (Lea et al., 2012: 157).

The rigid construction of place and approved patterns of presence and movement as reflected in the Todd Mall is replaced by a more relaxed – and more threatening – environment in the Todd River bed. Yet, for its more casual atmosphere as a place for Aboriginal socialising, the Todd River is still subject to the random attention of the police and of the enforcement of regulations. As a resting place, the litter and detritus serve as boundary markers demarcating this as a place to be avoided by white passers-by, except by police and security guards. However, the continued littering in itself can be seen as anti-social and therefore liable to attract attention. The behaviours that accompany boisterous socializing – excessive alcohol use, shouting, swearing, fighting – will, of course, also attract attention. Night time, in particular, makes the Todd River a place of heightened fear for white people, both tourists and locals: for example, those going to and from Lasseters Casino on the far side of the river and who choose to walk from the town centre, are brought into an intensified contact with the river dwellers' presence, whose fires they can see and smell and whose singing and drinking they can hear. Another paradox emerges: Aborigines, as consumers, are welcome in the casino's gaming rooms and while it becomes a place of inclusion, something that eludes Aborigines in other public places, it is governed by an economic exploitation of these consumers (Young *et al.*, 2013).

The riverbed might also be considered as a 'muted' locale – the reference to 'muted' implies being partly, even totally, submerged within or by the dominant mainstream through a communication hiatus. Groups such as the river dwellers are rendered mute because they are not involved the articulation of a society's dominant communications process (Hardman 1973). S. Ardener expands on this – there are 'dominant modes of expression in any society who have been generated by the dominant structures within it. In any situation, only the dominant mode of the relevant group will be 'heard' or 'listened to.' The 'muted groups' in any context, if they wish to communicate, must express themselves in terms of this mode, rather than the ones which they might have generated independently' (1978: 20).

## 5. Conclusion

The Todd River and the Todd Mall embrace two distinct zones. They are two separate places: the white consumer presence that defines the urban place of the Todd Mall/CBD and its accompanying people management, including the having of acceptable Indigeneity on show; while, in the peripheral area of the Todd River, an uncommodified place which is a locus for Aborigines and not for consumers and/or tourists and a place which attracts a degree of tolerance of Aboriginal presence. However, this 'right of place' is tempered by the fact that raucous behaviour will attract police attention and intervention if deemed warranted. Such racial management reinforces some embedded features of the colonial past still informing the post-colonial present.

The high visibility of people and things in the Mall makes it easier to police and invites a greater police presence while in the periphery, white presence declines as does the police/security intervention. And while the peripheral tolerance is allowed, it is wafer-thin and illusory – it may convey a sense of order but will always be subject to the whimsy and capriciousness of security management and surveillance regimes. The hunter-gatherer and the post-colonial intersect and ensuing processes fluctuate under an over-arching paradox: the lure and attraction of social and cultural 'otherness' as an object of commodification against which Aborigines, the first and original inhabitants of Australia – including Alice Springs – and whose

existence is barely acknowledged and tolerated. At the heart of the on-going contestation is the notion of place, which is governed and still informed by the post-colonial present. Time and memory, both individual and social, are essential components in the construction of place. They create an awareness of and a sense of connection with place. Such a consciousness of place is immersed in the thinking that one's own community is distinctive.

Socio-cultural interactions, in which signs, symbols and narratives are embedded, enlighten, represent and assist in the formation of memories, identities, a sense of community and a sense of place. Lived behaviours and experiences reflect people's being-in-the-world and their relationship with world, albeit being contested and exclusionary: this is a basic part of humankind's 'being alive' and existing and acknowledges that everything that exists has an environment and a place. Concomitant with the establishment of place identity and community is the development of difference, both social and cultural, and which will vary from neighbouring place to neighbouring place. Difference is defined by socio-cultural boundaries, that is, those who belong (insiders) and those who do not (outsiders). Place and such attached boundaries are informed by memories and narratives, originally steeped and anchored in the colonial past. In the case of white Alice Springs residents, there is an on-going reaffirmation of having tamed an inhospitable land and so have formed a sense of belonging and developed socio-cultural bonds; in the case of the Aborigines there is the ever-present and continued reaffirmation of society, culture and lives intimately connected with the land. Colonial incursions led to Aborigines being dispossessed of their lands, senses of identity and place and massive socio-cultural changes.

The insider-outsider dichotomy of Alice Springs is made manifest in the socio-cultural differences and a reframed sense of place between the new and dominant insiders, who were once outsiders, and those once insiders, now marginalised outsiders.

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