

# **DISPUTED TERRITORIES**

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**Land, Culture and Identity in Settler Societies**

**Edited by David Trigger and Gareth Griffiths**



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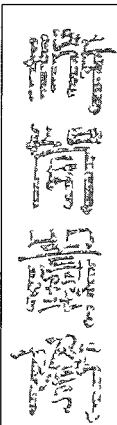
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Hong Kong University Press is honoured that Xu Bing, whose art explores the complex themes of language across cultures, has written the Press's name in his Square Word Calligraphy. This signals our commitment to cross-cultural thinking and the distinctive nature of our English-language books published in China.

"At first glance, Square Word Calligraphy appears to be nothing more unusual than Chinese characters, but in fact it is a new way of rendering English words in the format of a square so they resemble Chinese characters. Chinese viewers expect to be able to read Square Word Calligraphy but cannot. Western viewers, however are surprised to find they can read it. Delight erupts when meaning is unexpectedly revealed."

— Britta Erickson, *The Art of Xu Bing*

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## List of contributors

**Valda Blundell** is Professor of Anthropology at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She is a co-editor of *Relocating cultural studies: Developments in theory and research* (1993), and the author of *Changing perspectives in the anthropology of art* (2000), as well as numerous articles on Indigenous culture and art in Canada and Australia.

**Jane Carruthers** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of History, University of South Africa, Pretoria. With her doctoral thesis, 'Game protection in the Transvaal, 1846-1926', she pioneered environmental history in South Africa. She is the author of *Wildlife and warfare: The life of James Stevenson-Hamilton* (2001), *The Kruger National Park: A social and political history* (1995) and co-author of *The life and work of Thomas Baines* (1995). Her research has encompassed Indigenous land claims and the history of science, with a recent focus on historical comparisons between South Africa and Australia.

**Paul Carter** is a writer, artist and cultural theorist, and a Professor at The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne. His more recent books include *Repressed spaces: The poetics of agoraphobia* (2002), *Lost subjects* (1999) and *The lie of the land* (1996). His book, *Material thinking: Local invention and creative culture*, discussing

the nexus between his collaborative art practice and the emerging field of creative research, is due to be published in 2003. Recent and current public art commissions include *Neararnnew* (Federation Square, Melbourne, 2002) and *Tracks* (North Terrace, Adelaide, 2003).

**Michèle Dominy** is Professor of Anthropology and Dean of the College at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. She received degrees from Bryn Mawr College (AB Honors) and from Cornell University (Ph.D.). Her research interests include the anthropology of place and British settler descendant identity in New Zealand and Australia. Author of *Calling the station home: Place and identity in New Zealand's high country* (2001), she has published articles in a wide range of journals and edited volumes and proceedings. Dr Dominy serves on the editorial board of the *American Anthropologist*, and is Monograph Series Editor for the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania.

**Norman Etherington** was born in 1941 and educated at Yale University. He was appointed to the Chair of History at The University of Western Australia in 1989. He is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, a past President of the Australian Historical Association, a Member of ICOMOS and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain. He is the author of six books, the most recent of which is *The Great Treks: The transformation of southern Africa, 1815-1854* (2002).

**Gareth Griffiths** is Chair of the English Department at the University at Albany (SUNY) in New York State. He is also Adjunct Professor at The University of Western Australia. He has written extensively on post-colonial literatures and literary theory, especially on African, South-east Asian and Australian topics, as well as on modern theatre. His most recent book is *African literatures in English — East and West* (2000). Co-author of *The Empire writes back: Post-colonial literatures and literary theory* (1989) and *Key concepts in post-colonial theory* (1998), he has also co-edited *The post-colonial studies reader* (1995), and written many articles and book chapters. His current interests include comparative work on mission texts in African and other settings.

**Roslynn Haynes** is Adjunct Associate Professor of English at the University of New South Wales, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Having studied both Science and Literature she is particularly interested in interdisciplinary interfaces, as is reflected in her published books: *H. G Wells, discoverer of the future: The influence of science on his thought* (1980); *High tech, high cost: Technology, society and the environment* (1991); *From Faust to Strangelove: Representations of the scientist in Western literature* (1994); *Explorers of the southern sky: A history of Australian astronomy* (1996); *Seeking the Centre: the Australian desert in literature, art and film* (1998). She is currently writing a book on Tasmania, with particular emphasis on its wilderness areas.

**Isabel Hofmeyr** is Professor of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa. She has published widely in the field of southern African literary and cultural history. Her previous work includes the award-winning book *'We spend our years as a tale that is told': Oral historical narrative in a South African chiefdom* (1994). Another book, *The portable Bunyan: A transnational history of The Pilgrim's Progress*, will appear with Princeton University Press in 2004.

**Ian McLean** is Senior Lecturer in Art History at The University of Western Australia. He has published widely on Australian art, including colonial art and contemporary practices, and has a special interest in the representation of Indigenous cultures and issues in art. His two books are *The art of Gordon Bennett* (1996) and *White Aborigines* (1998).

**Catherine Nash** is Reader in Cultural Geography, Royal Holloway, University of London and her research interests are in cultural geographies of relatedness. Much of her research has focused on understandings of national identity and senses of cultural location in relation to ideas of gender, place, nature and the body. This work has appeared in leading geography and feminist journals. She is currently exploring ideas of origins, ethnicity, inheritance and descent within popular genealogy and population genetics. Her research entitled 'Genealogy and Genetics: Cultural Geographies of

Relatedness' is being funded by an Economic and Social Research Council Research Fellowship (2004–2007).

**David Trigger** is Professor of Anthropology at The University of Western Australia. His current research includes an investigation of contesting assumptions in Australian society concerning land and nature, focusing especially on a comparison of rural and urban settings, and on connections between notions of indigeneity, ferality and belonging in both nature and society. He has researched Aboriginal relations with land for more than 20 years, and is the author of *Whitefella comin': Aboriginal responses to colonialism in northern Australia* (1992).

**Neville White** is a biological anthropologist who is Senior Lecturer in the School of Genetics and Human Variation at La Trobe University, Australia. His research has investigated social and cultural influences on population genetic diversity in Aboriginal Australia. Situated in north-east Arnhem Land, this work has encompassed articles on Yolngu medical beliefs and practices, subsistence behaviour and natural history, and the description and management of the Yolngu cultural landscape.

# **Introduction**

## **Disputed territories: Land, culture and identity**

*David S. Trigger*

**W**hat has been the significance of land and place for the construction of cultural identity in settler societies? The contributors to this volume address this question in the context of European migration to the southern hemisphere regions of Australasia and southern Africa. As suggested in the title of the book, these may be regarded as 'disputed territories', albeit among identity groups that have become culturally blended in significant respects through the historical processes of colonialism.

The chapters focus on the making of identity in two settler regions with similar yet distinctive colonial histories. In each region, European visions of landscape and nature have engaged historically with southern hemisphere environments and Indigenous peoples. The authors variously explore the history of negotiations over the meanings of land and place in settings where settler-descendants have historically continued to trace elements of their ancestry back to Western Europe. Furthermore, these are regions where the descendants of European colonisers look towards each other across 'the south', in recognition of parallel histories, identities and cultures. The exchange of personnel on both short-term and lengthy

visits between Australia and New Zealand is well documented (Carmichael 2001), and what we might term new migration movements from South Africa and Zimbabwe to Australia and New Zealand in recent decades have gained momentum since at least some Whites have felt threatened by the emergent assertions of African cultures and political rights (Kennedy 2001; Lucas 2001).

During the past decade, issues surrounding notions of contested 'landscapes' have undergone 'a remarkable revival' in academic debates, as the editors of a recent volume, *Landscape in Africa*, have commented (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 8; see also Stiebel et al. 2000). Our aim in this collection is to focus particularly on what might be termed 'hidden dialogues' (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 37) between European perceptions of land and those of the peoples encountered in Australia, New Zealand and southern Africa. If it is indeed the case that the bulk of studies continue to focus on the nature of colonial discourses (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 38), in this collection we seek to complement such work with a number of chapters paying serious attention to the meanings of land for Aboriginal, Maori and African peoples. We seek to build on Darian-Smith et al.'s (1996) innovative comparative collection on 'land, literature and history' in South Africa and Australia, where contributors reveal much in the way of shared settler perspectives across these 'southern spaces'. Thus, we have assembled a collection of chapters that, when read together, make explicit both the sharp differences and the overlaps between settler and autochthonous visions of land and its implications for cultural identities.

In the countries of both regions, the challenge of building an identity in relation to land, its topography and species has loomed large for immigrants who have become settlers, and ultimately citizens, of relatively young multicultural nations. One of the few attempts at direct comparison provides an apt illustration. Terence Ranger's discussion of the Matopos mountains in Zimbabwe, and Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Central Australia, finds each of these extraordinary rock formations to be 'an icon of national identity, a major tourist attraction, and the site of struggle between black and white over possession, representation and control' (1996: 157). Both areas have been made national parks, and are acknowledged as encompassing striking natural landscape qualities, rock art and

spiritual values of great significance. In both cases, long histories of cultural connection with the landscape prior to European arrival vie with current desires for access from tourists both within the nation and from overseas. Just as Whites fleeing Zimbabwe after 1980 (when the long-established Rhodesian government was toppled) 'often took paintings of the Matopos with them to remind themselves of their lost heritage' (Ranger 1996: 170), at the same time there was uproar in Australia because the process of 'handing back' ownership of Uluru to traditional Aboriginal groups ignored the fact that 'the Rock' is a deeply valued 'part of ... [the Australian] psyche' (English 1986: 140). As pointed out by one of the contributors to this volume (Jane Carruthers), who also compares the Central Australian national park to one located in southern Africa, disputes over areas like Uluru illustrate clearly the contested nature of highly significant landscapes in societies with settler colonial histories.

Ranger's comparative work draws our attention to struggles over what may be termed the 'imaginative possession' (1997: 69) of land, and it is this issue that lies at the heart of the chapters presented in this volume. In both Australasia and southern Africa, Europeans have sought to engage intellectually with land by bringing it within a culturally meaningful aesthetic. However, if that has involved similar transcontinental colonial 'dreams of possession' and historical acts of 'symbolic appropriation' (Luig and Von Oppen 1997: 30–31) — issues dealt with by several authors in this collection — parallels are also provided by consideration of African, Aboriginal and Maori intellectual investments in the landscapes so central to the reproduction of these non-European cultures. The chapters in this volume seek to investigate these matters with an acute appreciation of the subtleties of intellectual contest between the various 'mental maps' operating from the earliest historical periods of European arrival.

Thus, these are chapters about disputed territories of the mind, as well as of the land itself. If this is so, how might researchers best investigate such complex issues? This brings us to the second sense in which this book concerns 'disputed territories', for the chapters broach different theoretical and methodological orientations among scholars from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Anthropology, geography, history and literary studies are represented among the

authors; while there is an evident overlap of approach, one of the aims of the collection is to juxtapose ethnographic, historical and textual research perspectives held by an eminent group of accomplished writers. Given that there is a current 'conjuncture for broadening the debate on landscape which is able to overcome ... disciplinary divisions' (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 16), and that the subject of culture and the environment is one especially capable of 'break[ing] down conventional disciplinary boundaries' (Flint and Morphy 2000: 3), this volume seeks to illustrate the value of cross-disciplinary interaction: the chapters were selected, revised and took their final shape following an invited workshop involving a week of debate and exchange of ideas among an interdisciplinary group including all the authors.

More generally, the collection has its origin in a year-long programme of seminars and workshops that Gareth Griffiths, a literary scholar committed to textual analysis, and I, an anthropologist practised in the use of ethnography as a method, arranged together. The tension between these methodological traditions has engaged the energies of us both over recent years and, before dealing in some detail with the specific subject matter of each of the chapters, I should present my own perspective on this debate, which gave rise to an ambitious collaboration between two editors who share a research interest in the subject of land, culture and identity, but whose disciplinary approaches are sharply divergent.

### *Interpreting texts, witnessing social action*

As an ethnographer, my research perspective on land, culture and identity leaves me uncomfortable with the neglect of the importance of social action in many textual studies. I have asked previously (Trigger 1993) how adequately significant elements of Australian culture can be 'read' from literary (and other) 'texts' alone. In my view, despite the impressiveness of textual analysis, it is likely that a key issue will remain the matter of what is lost when the researcher cannot 'be there', observing what people actually do and say, via interviews and recordings of informal discussions, unelicited comments, asides, jokes and a broad range of behaviours.



However, apart from the impossibility of 'being there' among research subjects when it is an understanding of the past that is sought, the response from those committed to textualist approaches finds ethnographic writing to be no more or less reflective of what people think and do in relation to contesting landscapes than are written biographies, archival documents, fiction novels, visual images or internet sites. By this view (evinced in Gareth Griffiths's Afterword), ethnographers have no privileged position from which to 'discover' knowledge of the world through observations and interviews (or 'conversations', as some researchers would term their inquiries), because all knowledge is constructed in terms of the assumptions and prescriptions of the researcher's background and culture. The strongest version of this critique is that ethnographers (like everybody else) are in a sense 'prisoners' within their own language, and so what they write is as much a product of their particular worldview as it is a description of events, practices and ways of thinking among research subjects. As my co-editor, Gareth Griffiths, has put it previously in collaboration with his colleagues in postcolonial studies (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998: 85–86), such criticism of ethnography argues that participant observation activities like watching, listening or asking questions, cannot operate apart from the assumptions and constraints of the discourse of the participant's own culture. *What* is known, they say, depends upon *how* it is known, such that knowledge of culture is 'constructed' rather than 'discovered', by ethnography.

Despite my misgivings about the adequacy of textual approaches, it has seemed increasingly appropriate to acknowledge this point in my own research concerning a highly contested postcolonial landscape. My ethnography, focused on social action among Aboriginal and White residents of a northern Australian town (Trigger 1992), can be viewed with hindsight as a 'partial' depiction (Clifford 1986) of the lives of research subjects. The strong focus in that work on spatial and social distance based on race, culture and identity grew out of my personal success as a 'Whitefella' in becoming accepted within a distinctive Aboriginal domain of space, thought and behaviour. A researcher from a different background, perhaps with a different personality, may well have 'constructed' a quite different study.

Nevertheless, I remain convinced that my results would have been broadly replicable by others interested in ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of everyday life. Thus, it would be hard for any participant observer to have missed how the town was residentially divided into Aboriginal and White spaces, and how the distinction between two cultural worlds was sustained in everyday language and behaviour. Indeed, the landscape itself was transparently considered among Aboriginal residents to be understandable in terms of cultural distinctions between Blackfella and Whitefella domains; while the expanse of surrounding bush was known as ‘Blackfella country’, exotic species of trees were signifiers of the introduced Whitefella presence. Thus, both deliberately planted semi-domesticated frangipani, poinciana and mango trees on town streets and in house yards, and feral plant species scattered through the bush, such as ‘bean tree’ or ‘mimosa’, were linked to the domain of Euro-Australians. In contrast to the wide range of flora with names and properties known in the local Aboriginal languages, the introduced species were known in Aboriginal English as ‘*Mandagi* [‘Whitefella’] trees’.

Having come, via lengthy ethnographic research, to understand such matters connected to the significance of place and landscape in the pattern of inter-cultural social relations, what value might there be in examining a variety of available texts about my study region in northern Australia? Several works written by missionaries, about their relations with Aboriginal people, indicate that social distance based on race and cultural identity had been a feature of life for some five decades before my first arrival as an ethnographer in the late 1970s. From one such text we learn how the very bodily appearances of Aboriginal people and Euro-Australians were understood as incompatible — at the first somewhat make-shift mission site in 1931, Aboriginal women would, in the words of a missionary author, only come ‘up the ridge to greet us’ one at a time, for ‘each had to wait their turn for a loan of the one and only dress’ (Cantle 1980: 61). Moreover, the land itself evoked a sense of place incompatible with the missionaries’ own cultural history (McNaught 1994) — it was seen as ‘unforgiving’ (p. 1), productive of ‘incredible hardships’ (p. 3), ‘fearsome’ (p. 4), and ultimately destructive of the health of Euro-Australian bodies (p. 155).

Similarly, autobiographical texts produced by a long-resident White pastoralist (McGinnis 2001) reveal aspects of the settler-descendant perspective on relations with both Aboriginal people and the regional landscape. This woman worked with cattle herds from the time she was 12 years of age; her contact with Aboriginal men was mainly in their capacity as stockmen who, during the 1960s, 'shared the camp life [with White people] but were apart from it, having their own fire to sleep about at night and their own shade on the dinner-camp' (p. 130). Reflecting upon this social distance, she comments frankly that Aboriginal stockmen were referred to as 'boys', 'a habit of speech that had grown out of the Aboriginals' childlike dependence upon the white man, imposed by the State' (p. 130). This woman's family seemingly lived closely with Aboriginal workers in remote bush locations, yet shared little of the latter's knowledge of land and its native species. Even when musing on what Aboriginal people might find aesthetically beautiful, there is a strong sense of the author transposing her own Euro-Australian sensibility on to Aboriginal consciousness — new growth of plants and insects after rain may suggest to White Australians an 'evanescent beauty' lying behind 'the harsh face' of the land (p. 198) but, contrary to the author's suggestion, it can hardly be assumed that this particular notion of a hard country only reluctantly revealing a pleasurable aesthetic also arises from Aboriginal cultural perspectives on northern Australian environments.

For the cattle station author, it is the domesticated species introduced in the course of European colonisation — horses, cattle and dogs — that are positioned throughout her book as being in a relationship of familiarity and at times intimacy with the pastoralist family. Without these animals, the landscape remains, for her, undomesticated. As she puts it in one particularly revealing passage (pp. 34–35), 'country without cattle ... [is] like an untenanted house'. In this perspective, it is the introduced herds of cattle and horses, together with the planting of certain flora, such as mango trees and other 'cuttings' (p. 203), that 'turn wilderness into a property', making a 'home' amid the bush. While these sentiments are commensurate with Aboriginal views about introduced fauna and flora signifying a Whitefella presence in the country, they do not engage with Indigenous knowledge of land and nature. Where the

two perspectives doubtless also diverge is over whether it is Whites or Aborigines who should maintain control and custodianship of the land.

For their part, few Aboriginal people from the core community setting of my ethnographic research have produced available written texts. However, a novel (Wright 1997) authored by an Aboriginal woman from a nearby town arises from her kinship and broader social connections with the community. Quite strikingly, the novel speaks again to the issue of discrete cultural identities as reflected in conflicting understandings of land and nature. Within the first few pages (pp. 3–4), the product of seeds brought by the first missionary ('God's celebratory poinciana tree') is presented as something resented among Aboriginal residents: they 'thought the tree should not have been allowed to grow there on their ancestral country'. As the missionary's pleasure increases along with the development of the seed into a large and graceful plant, so, too, do the spiritual ancestors of the novel's Aboriginal community grow more and more disturbed by 'the thirsty, greedy foreign tree intruding into the bowels of their world'.

The uprising fluid carried away precious nutrients; in the middle of the night they [spirit ancestors in the ground] woke up gasping for air, thought they were dying, raced up through the trunk into the limbs and branches, through the tiny veins of the minute leaves and into the flowers themselves. There, they invited Cousin Crow to sit along the branches and draw the cards of death. (p. 4)

While crows are ignored by the novel's White missionary characters, the Aboriginal girls living in a dormitory adjacent to the tree know the Crow as a spiritual harbinger of death, and they lie frightened at night, wary of news about someone's demise.

Such fiction prose reflects the particular Aboriginal sensibility of this author; however, as with the texts written by missionary and pastoralist women, analysis of it contributes to understanding the complexities of the broad pattern of inter-cultural relations in northern Australia. From my perspective as a long-time ethnographer of the region, such texts have the capacity to both complement and challenge my findings based on 'being there' and participating first-hand in social action with research subjects. Indeed, as I have been

led to supplement my own ethnographic inquiries with close readings of these texts, I have correspondingly become aware of the importance of cross-disciplinary exchanges between different approaches to the study of land, culture and identity.

This collection represents the product of a mutual recognition of, and engagement with, each other's research orientation by my co-editor, Gareth Griffiths, and me. The contributors use the methods of ethnography, textual analysis or some combination of these to study both historical and contemporary issues of land, culture and identity in particular settler societies. In some cases, their conclusions derive from recording living people's behaviour and knowledge, and in others from examining fiction and non-fiction prose, archival documents, maps, ground plans, photographs and works of art. When conceiving the book, and the programme of discussions preceding it, Gareth Griffiths and I felt that this range of methodological and disciplinary approaches remains disparate and often disconnected among researchers. Partly, this follows from the circumstances of institutional arrangements in the universities, whereby anthropologists, geographers, historians and literary scholars operate within administrative units that do not encourage collaboration. The mutual lack of familiarity with other disciplinary bodies of literature, and the influence of peer consensus about what is intellectually fashionable, can also challenge commitment among researchers to engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue. By presenting chapters from eminent scholars who variously draw upon (and in some cases combine) the methods of ethnography, historical analysis and textual studies, we seek to illustrate the value of forging exchanges across borders that will hopefully become less opaque in academic life.

### *Disputed territories, contesting disciplines*

As author of the first chapter in the volume, Catherine Nash establishes the global context for discussions of identity and belonging in settler societies, by 'setting roots in motion': the 'genealogical tourists' of the 1990s, visiting Ireland from the countries that have become their families' homes following

migration (Australia and New Zealand among them), seek confirmation of their ancestry through documentary evidence of their genealogies. The 'diasporic identities' being sought do not displace the firm material attachments of these persons to the land and place to which their ancestors travelled; however, Nash shows how, in settler societies, genealogy (looking for your 'roots') can be an appealing tool for people endeavouring to navigate through tangled questions of culture and belonging. Despite much fixedness in cultural theory on ideas of diaspora and cultural hybridity, Nash considers the way the desire for a sense of belonging derived from ancestry remains strong at the turn of the twenty-first century. At least for some citizens in settler societies, there is no simple opposition between rootedness in the land of one's birth, and a sense of finding ancestral identity in the place from which one's forebears migrated up to several generations ago.<sup>1</sup>

A cultural geographer, Catherine Nash has examined published texts, observed first-hand those who travel to do Irish genealogies, and conducted pre-arranged and impromptu interviews with both tourists from settler societies and professional genealogists they may consult in Ireland. She describes her work as 'uneasy ethnography'; the research process was a sometimes 'edgy and emotional business', partly because, while she 'took the journey, too', in the tradition of participant observation, her own family tree remained more of an unexplored 'troublesome presence' than the sort of thoroughly studied artefact sought by her research subjects. Such distance between the personal inclinations of the researcher and her interlocutors is hardly unusual; in any case, Nash is not a citizen of a settler society, and does not pretend to emulate the genealogical concerns of those visiting Ireland from distant homes outside Europe. What is notable is that her work on diasporic identities is not confined within the setting of postcolonial politics in countries like Australia, New Zealand and South Africa; the great value of this chapter is its focus upon those aspects of identity and culture that derive from outside settler societies, yet operate within them amid contesting claims about belonging to the land to which one's ancestors came as migrants.

It is the cultural dimensions of such contesting claims that are the concern of Michèle Dominy's chapter. As a visiting North

American anthropologist, this author has carried out research with high-country New Zealand farmers over a period of 15 years. Her work investigates the forms that 'Anglo-Celtic settler-descendant indigeneity' take, in a setting where the physical space of New Zealand's South Island sheep stations is a site of 'intense cultural activity and imagination' (Dominy 2001: 3). While Dominy's reportage of farmers' connections with the land has provoked some controversy among certain of her colleagues who write more conventionally as anthropologists in support of Maori land claims,<sup>2</sup> her point is that to argue for high-country pakeha (those of European descent) indigeneity is not to argue for the same indigeneity as do Maori (Dominy 2001: 227). What is abundantly clear is that her research has involved long-term and localised ethnographic fieldwork, such that key interlocutors within the farming community came to be 'like siblings', and she became 'a part of their lives' (Dominy 2001: 9). Michèle Dominy has chosen to supplement the rich ethnographic data resulting from this fieldwork with close analytical readings of significant texts; her chapter in this volume thereby fuses the signature methods of anthropology and literary analysis.

The chapter probes a set of textual data to ask what it means for pakeha to be of a place where Maori have been displaced, and of particular significance are the ecological dimensions of the relation between these identities. During the 100 years following 1840, New Zealand changed, for the most part, from rainforest to grass; the collision between Maori forest and settler grass is interrogated in this chapter for what it can tell us about the cultural dimensions of colonialism. In both a remarkable historical novel set in the mid-nineteenth century, and a renowned ecological history authored in the 1920s by a settler who was also a naturalist, Dominy finds sources that richly depict the way the growth of introduced grass created, not only the 'material telltale patchwork quilt of European settlement', but also a key ecological signifier for an emplaced pakeha identity. The cognitive, as well as physical, colonisation of the New Zealand landscape progressed via the cultivation of land, especially via the introduction of grass; the spread of grass, to enable the subsequent production of fibre from sheep, was a 'silent weapon' implicit in the establishment of pakeha society.

Furthermore, making maps and imposing a cartographic sensibility on to the land emerges as highly significant in an intellectual struggle between pakeha and Maori peoples. In the novel, *Monday's warriors*, a magistrate points out to a key Maori character a splendidly straight line drawn on a map in 1868. The line cuts through the curves of a river and, like the fence lines and many surveyors' pegs being installed, establishes in the pakeha mind fixed territorial boundaries. For his part, the Maori character asks if the surveyors are blind, that is, unseeing of the land in its fluid reality of species and topography; later, one of his men refers to each surveyor's peg as a 'bayonet in our belly'. However, the settler perspective of improving the land was hardly to be dissuaded, and Dominy goes on to describe eloquently the joy pakeha found in establishing 'the straightest of fence lines, the woolliest of sheep, the shadiest of willow groves; beautified with tall crops, smoothed in green grass, lawned like Arcadia'. Thus, her chapter brings alive for the reader the importance of understanding the intimately entwined environmental and cultural dimensions of colonialism.

However, it has not been solely the imperative to domesticate and make physically familiar newly encountered landscapes that has produced settler cultures. Roslynn Haynes's contribution considers the highly significant concept of 'wilderness' in the thinking of the British and their descendants who have colonised Tasmania, the southernmost island State of Australia, located directly to the west of New Zealand across the Tasman Sea. Like Dominy, Haynes examines literary and other texts for what they may reveal about settler views of nature; a scholar of literature, her achievement in this chapter is to distil a number of core meanings implicit in the history of Australian artistic and photographic representations of the Tasmanian landscape. As with her previous influential work on the meanings Australians attribute to desert environments (Haynes 1998), this chapter foregrounds the intellectuality of artists and photographers, as well as writers, as deserving our attention just as much as do the assumptions and practices of those engaged in physically working the land.

In Tasmania, there has been a succession of 'constructed' assumptions about nature and the bush over a period of more than 200 years. Haynes points out initially that Aboriginal people in



Tasmania would appear unlikely to have been enamoured with any notion of 'wilderness'; their use of fire prior to colonial disruption was designed to reduce forests to open grassy plains, thereby attracting grazing animals and producing optimal hunting conditions. Then, in the late eighteenth century, Europeans brought an intellectual perspective to the Tasmanian landscape, which drew on the Judaeo-Christian tradition of 'the wilderness' as a place of danger and spiritual testing. The early colonists also arrived with cultural baggage that included both romantic ideas about sublime qualities evident in the grandeur of nature, and the view that 'taming' land beyond the frontier gave purpose to their colonial enterprise. Roslynn Haynes illustrates a tension between these latter views: while some admired the wilderness, others regarded it as useless and unprofitable.

In the 1870s and 1880s, the first Australian-born landscape artist, William Piguenit (whose work was both extremely popular during his lifetime and later to become so influential in framing Australians' appreciation of 'wilderness'), presented the sublime qualities of the rugged areas of the south-west of the island. While he paid close attention to geological and botanical details, Haynes points out how much this artist 'constructed his landscapes to fit the conventions of the sublime'; for example, he exaggerated the impact of cliffs and mountains, and emphasised the horizontal sweep of lakes, plains and valleys.

Haynes goes on to consider the idea of 'saving the wilderness' that developed in Tasmania from early in the twentieth century. Amid the commitment to farming, mining, forestry and other resource development, artists, photographers and writers sought to ensure preservation of 'wilderness', a sentiment that was later to become central to the environmental movement. By the 1970s, saving Tasmania's wild rivers from dams built to produce hydro-electricity had become a major issue in Australian society. Haynes discusses how such recently expressed environmentalist visions have been no less 'constructed' than those of earlier writers and artists.

In her view, the iconography of Green activism has centred on circulated images of Tasmania's landscape as a place without people and animals. Such images as 'Rock Island Bend', promoted as an iconic representation of the wilderness settings to be flooded by a

proposed dam in the early 1980s, are carefully managed political advertisements; every household in every marginal electorate in Australia received a two-page colour reproduction of the image in the lead up to a federal election in 1983. Haynes discusses the romanticism of the image, the milky water, trees seeming to grow out of solid rock, and the suggestion of a unique and wonderful island world, which (though in reality inaccessible to anybody other than very fit and daring individuals) is made to symbolise the mystical landscape Australians should strive to preserve. Thus, the meanings of pristine and unchanging land should be understood less as reflecting a material reality than as indicating constructed images that are carefully edited to permit nothing that might disturb the wilderness-focused expectations popular in public life.

British aesthetic responses to what was a new and strange set of topography, flora and fauna is also the focus of Ian McLean's chapter, which brings the method of art history to a consideration of representations of Sydney Cove, the place of first European settlement in Australia. Here, it is selected visual images from colonial art, supplemented by an investigation of associated archival texts, that form the empirical basis for McLean's interpretations.

This author has written previously of a pervasive Antipodean desire to engage with, if not embrace, the aesthetics of the Australian continent — a subliminal desire, as he has put it, to be 'white Aborigines' (McLean 1998). His chapter in this volume traces the way English artists, during the very earliest years of the new colony, nevertheless assembled a sense of place by using a distinctively European 'picturesque' aesthetic trope. As with nineteenth-century European artistic representations of landscape in southern Africa (Ranger 1997: 61; Luig and von Oppen 1997: 32), this was part of a settler need to make the new world their own by discovering (or, more accurately, constructing) something familiar in land and spaces that appeared strange. While the convict artist, Thomas Watling, brought from Europe a 'picturesque sensibility', which sought to transfigure 'the wild' into art, his paintings failed to 'simulate home at Sydney Cove'. It was ultimately an established London artist's copies of the convict's paintings that turned them into a picturesque landscape 'as bountiful and romantic as England itself'. As McLean suggests, these were representations made for consumption in the

home country and constituted, much more so than the convict's paintings, what he terms an 'aesthetic justification' of the colony. Thus, the paintings done in London might be regarded as visual 'texts of colonialism'. As much as representing the land, they imagined it, according to a set of European perceptions and assumptions that were in dialogue with the experiences of those, like Watling, who were actually living in the colony.

Visual images of imaginative landscapes are the subject of Isabel Hofmeyr's southern African case study; however, against the tide of recent scholarship focused on European 'colonial' perspectives (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 20), her chapter considers African responses to European cultural forms. Isabel Hofmeyr is a literary scholar for whom fiction texts reveal significant aspects of the ways cultural identities are formed. In her previous work (1993), she adopted oral history interview methods, which involved paying detailed attention to the inter-generational reproduction of African oral narratives. In her contribution to this volume, Hofmeyr brings this interest in both historical and anthropological research perspectives to bear on consideration of significant texts that circulated in southern Africa from early in the colonial period.

The chapter is concerned with several powerful evangelical images that spread from Europe through Christian missions. These were 'Protestant landscapes' insofar as they relied upon spatial metaphors to portray proselytising messages. The chapter considers how the evangelical iconography of the 'Broad and Narrow Way' (the former path leading to hell and destruction, the latter to heaven and salvation), and influential images contained in John Bunyan's allegorical novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, subsequently informed both an emergent Christian consciousness among Africans and certain key texts of fiction authored by them. Hofmeyr calls this 'visual evangelism' in the context of her case study of Lesotho in the early nineteenth century. A text by the famous novelist, Thomas Mofolo, is used to illustrate the 'travelling' nature of imagined landscapes: not only did the seventeenth-century southern English vistas of *The Pilgrim's Progress* become Africanised in many translations, but also the seminal allegorical and evangelical theme of traversing the paths of life was incorporated into Mofolo's text. The author created 'a Sothoised Protestant narrative of heroic endeavour', and thereby

spliced together a series of images, panoramas and landscapes drawn both from European and African cultural traditions.

Such tensions in settler societies among those colonised, and among their descendants, between incorporation of and resistance to cultural forms brought via European intrusion, have been commonplace. In Australia, the Christian image of the broad and narrow ways through life also circulated among Aboriginal people influenced by evangelical missionaries. Stanton (1988: 303), for example, presents a poster depicting the 'two ways' of Christianity versus Aboriginal 'Law', at an Australian mission established during the 1920s in the Western Desert area, with the visual imagery of 'the broad and narrow way' identical to that described for southern Africa by Hofmeyr. Similarly, Magowan (2001: 276) depicts, for a northern Australian coastal area, the past 60 years of Yolngu Aboriginal groups' intellectual engagement with Christianity, whereby 'ancestral places' are 're-territorialised' as 'Christian topography' mixed synchronically with traditional spiritual visions of the significance of the land. If Hofmeyr's chapter addresses African engagement with, and appropriation of, various European spiritual images of landscape — something, it would seem, as yet inadequately explored by researchers (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 36; Ranger 2000: 53–62) — Magowan and Gordon (2001) similarly seek to prompt such research on the 'synchronisation of indigenous and exogenous elements' in the region of Australasia.

Two contributions in this volume deal explicitly and in detail with Australian Aboriginal understandings of the landscapes in which regional communities assert traditional rights and interests. While cognisant of syncretic processes of cultural mixing, these authors stress the resilience and persistence of distinctively Indigenous cultural traditions in the face of powerful pressures for intellectual assimilation. Valda Blundell draws upon long-term anthropological research to consider the famous *Wandjina* art of the Kimberley region of north-western Australia, exploring its role in Aboriginal understandings of nature. The *Wandjina* paintings are anthropomorphic figures, at times up to nearly two metres in length, which for Aboriginal people encode meanings associated with superhuman ancestral agents in the land. These mythic figures are believed to have acted during the 'Dreaming' epoch to mould the

once 'soft' features of the world into their present form. *Wandjina* paintings on rock faces are regarded as the 'imprint' of powerful spiritual forces, in that the images reveal or make visible these key non-human figures embedded within the land. Moreover, this autochthonous spirituality is identical to that which is understood to lie within the Aboriginal people of the region, so that when the designs are made 'fresh', through re-painting, those who carry out this action refresh and invigorate their own identities. Simultaneously, they are believed to ensure the reproduction of animals, plants and other natural phenomena.

Blundell points out how, during recent decades, the *Wandjina* rock art has become a 'contested site of cultural politics', with debates occurring about the extent to which the images should be focal sites for cultural tourism. As with innovations produced by San artists of southern Africa in transposing images from an extraordinary corpus of rock art (Williams 1996: 489), during the 1990s there has been a prolific output of *Wandjina* Aboriginal art on boards and canvass. The use of a giant *Wandjina* image, featured in the opening ceremony of Sydney's 2000 Olympic Games, is indicative of this mobilisation of Indigenous Australian art as part of what Valda Blundell terms 'innovative traditionalism'. The explicit parallel here with the San culture is the use of a modified rock painting in 1993 on the new South African Olympic flag. Like representations of the *Wandjina*, San images have also appeared on popular tourist items such as post-cards, coffee mugs and place-mats (G. Blundell 1998: 153) — a tendency, in the view of some commentators in southern Africa and Australia alike (G. Blundell 1998; Johnson 1996), that risks trivialising Indigenous art in the interests of labelling commodities with a facade of cultural authenticity.<sup>3</sup>

However, despite such possible appropriation of images, San artists may be understood as producing work that is, for their purposes, 'counter-hegemonic' in the sense of revitalising elements of their own 'traditional culture' (Geunther 1998: 121). In the Australian context, Valda Blundell similarly depicts Kimberley Aboriginal people as 'painting against' the idea that they are assimilated into the broader Australian society; in this way, the art of *Wandjina* enables them to express their continuing distinctive

intellectual vision about the meanings embedded within nature and their ancestral lands.

The chapter authored by Neville White also concerns a distinctive cultural region of Aboriginal Australia. Derived from a human ecology approach arising out of the author's training in biological anthropology, this contribution is based on ethnographic and biological research carried out with the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land over a period of 30 years. As in the Kimberley area, Indigenous communities in Arnhem Land seek both to reproduce local cultural traditions and to engage with the wider Australian society. Just as the *Wandjina* image was drawn from Aboriginal concepts of the significance of land, and projected recently on to the world stage of an Olympic Games opening ceremony, it is from Arnhem Land that the internationally known popular music band, *Yothu Yindi*, originates. The chosen name translates to mean the quality of a connection between mother and child, and is generally understood to refer to relationships between Yolngu people and their lands. Since forming in the early 1990s, the band has taken traditional song and dance sequences, many based on species of native fauna or other natural phenomena, and worked them into contemporary rock music performances. Popularised versions of Australian Aboriginal conceptions of the landscape thereby reach large audiences across the world and are typically received with considerable enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup>

White's chapter in this volume considers complex aspects of Yolngu understandings of land and place; his comprehension of the songs and dances from which *Yothu Yindi* draws its materials is based on lengthy studies of both culture and ecology. We learn that metaphors for conceiving features of nature derive from the human body; thus, a person's clan estate is his or her 'bone country', important water sources are known by the same term that means 'stomach' or 'womb', open plains are associated with the human back, and so on. Given the intimate quality of connections between such features of landscape, related as they are to implied links among parts of the human body, it is hardly surprising that such major developments as large-scale mining are often not embraced with enthusiasm by Indigenous Australians.

Yet Yolngu conceptions of the land cannot be regarded as equivalent to 'environmentalist' perspectives. Consistent with

Roslynn Haynes's speculation about traditional Aboriginal understandings of land in Tasmania, Neville White finds no Yolngu term for a general concept of 'nature', nor one for 'wilderness'.<sup>5</sup> If, as he suggests, Western environmentalism values places highly when they can be regarded as pure nature by virtue of being 'untouched' by people, among Yolngu it is the places recognised as bearing the mark of culture that are most significant across the landscape. Moreover, it is not panoramic vistas visible from high vantage points, spectacular waterfalls, or serene lagoons that Yolngu regard as aesthetically impressive; the idea of 'beauty' is more commonly connected with such things as the 'brilliance' seen in white clay used as paint on rock or human bodies, the spiritual power considered to lie within sought-after shiny grey-pink pieces of quartz, or even the 'fat' of animals, which is connected in Yolngu thought with both these latter items.

Here, then, is compelling evidence of the significance of culture and language in the production of the meanings of nature. According to findings in the Yolngu case, the very material geography of the land is understood differently among European and Aboriginal Australians. When senior Yolngu clan members drew representations for Neville White of the relationships between physical locations (often having place names), these were in the form of a central-core totemic site connected in the fashion of a 'cobweb' structure to many other places. The relationships thereby depicted show connections that are meaningful in terms of the local cosmology; the drawings are not 'maps' in the sense of a diagram representing actual topographic features in relation to one another. Yet, for Yolngu, they depict what are regarded as the most significant aspects of the relationships among those sites.

If Australian Aboriginal groups such as the Yolngu produce images that privilege perceived spiritual qualities of nature, as Michèle Dominy's discussion of colonial New Zealand also suggests, it has been explicitly cartographic representations of land that have been pivotal in the establishment of settler cultures. In the Australian context, we might note that maps often 'conceal the histories' of Indigenous peoples — '[s]uch is the power of cartography' (Birch 1996: 180). Norman Etherington's chapter in this volume considers such issues in southern Africa, finding that during the early

colonial period a number of maps constructed a myth of an empty land ripe for European intrusion, indeed, Etherington suggests that the maps can be understood as achieving 'genocide by cartography', in relation to the extant African populations of the early 1800s

Maps produced between 1830 and 1850 are revealed as distorting the landscape of southern Africa in a fashion that both reduces the real geographic expanse to be colonised and inaccurately depicts the location of African tribal groups. The latter are shown as being at war with one another, and/or already reduced in number prior to the Great Trek of the Boers, which began the transformation of this region's political geography. Given that nineteenth-century maps in southern Africa combined presentation of information with what has been described as a 'latent sense of desire or wish fulfilment' (Stiebel 1998: 64), Norman Etherington reads the maps he has examined as texts, which reproduce 'the dreams of [European] colonisation' in the way they represent the land emptied of African peoples. Shrinking certain geographic distances made groups such as the Pedi, Swazi and Venda disappear in the imaginations of the colonisers, reinforcing the justificatory colonial perspective that these populations had been obliterated by Zulu and other aggressors. The maps helped codify in textual form, and thereby added great weight to, the proposition that 'pandemonium' raged across the southern African landscape prior to the arrival of Europeans. Drawing on his knowledge of South African history, Etherington suggests that certain maps exaggerated the presence and importance of the particular groups that were known to missionaries and colonial officials.

While later maps corrected such misrepresentations, it would seem that historians continued to rely on the cartography produced during this critical 20-year period of South African history. To the extent that the maps constitute 'mental pictures' that 'still dominate our imaginations', to use Etherington's wording, they are texts that distort understanding of the geopolitical and cultural struggles central to the historical production of South African society. This applies as much to the spatial representation of Voortrekker routes of intrusion as to the location or absence of African groups, Etherington's concluding point is that when a map represents the geographic spread of the Great Trek, using a network of thick lines



to cover the image of the land, the importance of maps as texts that signify colonial desires and priorities is further demonstrated.

The 'pointedly political function' (Stiebel 1998: 64) of mapping land in settler societies of the 1800s was rarely challenged, based as it was on European colonial ideology of the time, which was unambiguously dominant. However, by the second half of the twentieth century, in both southern Africa and Australasia, what Terence Ranger (1997: 64) terms the 'casual triumph' of White inscriptions of settler landscapes had become subject to challenge and dispute. Following on from Ranger's (1996) innovative comparative work, Jane Carruthers's chapter in this volume considers the case of national parks, showing these to have become highly contested 'symbolic landscapes' in both South Africa and Australia. Late in the twentieth century, the Kalahari Gemsbok and Uluru – Kata Tjuta desert areas have proved to be sites for vigorous contests: over practical land use and associated symbolic meanings. While settler-descendants with environmentalist aspirations have envisioned 'parks' as refuges for threatened natural landscapes, descendants of those colonised have sought to reclaim these spaces as part of their cultural heritage.

Carruthers has interrogated historical texts to reveal how national parks can thus be 'divisive institutions'.<sup>6</sup> Both San Bushmen and Aboriginal people have been displaced over time from such lands. Small groups of San were able to live within the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park after its formal establishment in 1931; however, during the 1940s, they would be evicted to a nearby reserve if park wardens determined they were not living 'traditional' lives. While this criterion was no doubt capable of a broad range of definitions, Carruthers provides a telling example from the 1950s: one warden became incensed that the San groups refused to wear 'traditional dress', and evicted them because they were not a tourist attraction. Similarly, following the creation in 1958 of a national park in Central Australia at Ayers Rock (as Uluru was then named), Aboriginal people retained few rights to live on what they regarded as their traditional lands, and the area became increasingly valued as a destination for tourists.<sup>7</sup>

However, by 1985 there had been a controversial decision to return ownership of the Central Australian park to the 'traditional

owners'. In 1999, a community of some 300 San people similarly won a land claim over approximately 25,000 hectares of the Kalahari Gemsbok Park. In both cases, the lands have been leased back to the government, though, more so than in the South African case, Aboriginal groups have placed conditions on tourist access and activities. Jane Carruthers speculates on whether the descendants of hunter-gatherer San groups will come to forcefully assert similar cultural rights over the Kalahari landscape, given the more complex history of African farmer-settlers' intrusions, as well as the legacies of European colonialism. Yet, despite such differences, this excellent comparative chapter demonstrates how the desert lands in both countries are attributed quite another significance by settler citizens. While the wider society's notion of 'parks' rests on the importance of preserving nature and attracting tourists, for subaltern groups descended from those colonised the lands clearly constitute traditional loci of spiritual meanings as well as instruments for the assertion of postcolonial cultural rights. These are cases of intense intellectual struggle over the cultural and symbolic meanings of landscapes in two settler societies with parallel though diverse histories.

In the light of the discussions in this volume about contesting visions, representations and understandings of land and nature, the final essay from Paul Carter seeks a way of theorising such fundamental cultural differences in the perception of socially meaningful spaces. Well known for developing what he terms 'spatial history' (Carter 1987, 1996), Carter interrogates aspects of Western intellectuality to establish its approach to this matter. In the chapter presented here, he comments on how cartography as a 'graphic language' shapes a particular understanding of land and space. Maps, he says, construct spaces in advance of their empirical exploration; they represent space as points, without telling us about what lies between. In the context of settler societies, maps also territorialise geographic space, such that cartography is connected with the mythopoeic foundations of imperialism.

The examples in Paul Carter's chapter are drawn from Australia. He describes the historical map of New South Wales by First Fleet surveyor, William Dawes, as a graphic and literary device, which foreshadows the joining together of discontinuous lines. The region

intended for exploration in the winter of 1791 was drawn in such a way that it would ultimately consist of continuous lines and clearly defined, encompassed territories. However, Carter also links the nature of such early colonial ground plans with issues arising more than 200 years later in the task of urban design for contemporary Australian cities. Against what he sees as the continuous culture of cartography in settler societies, he suggests possibilities for a 'new ichnography'. Derived from *ichnos*, a Greek word meaning 'track', this manner of intellectually mapping space would embody 'a different conception of migration, placing and residence'. This is a conceptually ambitious chapter, which seeks ways of marking *movement* into ground plans and refining a graphic method capable of indicating places in a non-territorial way. Typical of Paul Carter's innovative writings, the chapter encourages readers to break free of habitual and familiar ways of understanding how the meanings of places are constructed: after reading it, I was inclined to re-read the other chapters in this volume, bearing its propositions in mind.

The contributions to this book thus illustrate a set of theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of land, culture and identity that both diverge and intersect. In presenting the collection, we seek to provide further impetus for what has been described (Darian-Smith et al. 1996: 18) as potentially a 'rich new body of comparative work', investigating particular settler societies with overlapping colonial histories. In a range of 'southern landscapes' across Australia, New Zealand and southern Africa, the disciplines of anthropology, geography, history and literary studies collectively produce an engaging perspective on the cultural significance of land and place. As Gareth Griffiths elaborates in the Afterword, if there are tensions evident between the approaches of these chapters, there is also the promise of cross-disciplinary exchanges that are mutually enriching and intellectually refreshing. Furthermore, this is research with both academic and practical import: it helps us to understand land and nature as disputed territories of the mind, as well as a material resource subject to pragmatic negotiations. In our view, more so than is presently the case, this is clearly subject matter worthy of collaborative attention across the humanities and social sciences.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Whether those who constitute the Irish Diaspora in South Africa (Akenson 1993; Coogan 2001) are similarly interested in their European 'roots' is an interesting question. A Durban-based historian who has for some years convened the 'Ireland and Southern Africa Project' suggests (D. P. McCracken, personal communication, 8 August 2002) that, while there have in recent decades been substantial numbers of citizens seeking to trace their Irish genealogical connections, this has less to do with an interest in discovering an intriguing aspect of identity than with potentially getting an Irish passport for use should Whites have to leave the country. If this analysis is correct, it reflects different dynamics of identity between southern Africa and other settler societies considered in Catherine Nash's chapter.
- <sup>2</sup> See the contributions from a number of commentators (NZASA 1990) to 'Cultural politics in New Zealand', *Anthropology Today* 6(3), 1990.
- <sup>3</sup> Valda Blundell (1994) has also written on this issue in the context of Canadian Native cultures.
- <sup>4</sup> See the following comprehensive internet site for information regarding Yothu Yindi: <http://www.yothuyindi.com/culture.html>
- <sup>5</sup> While a similar point has been made for many African languages, which are said to 'have no proper terms for "landscape" or "nature" in the abstract sense of the European equivalents' (Luig and von Oppen 1997: 21), it is also evident that the concept of wilderness might be regarded as central to both traditional and Christian religious discourses in southern Africa (Mukunyora 2000).
- <sup>6</sup> Jane Carruthers (1995) has previously developed this type of analysis in her work on Kruger National Park in South Africa.
- <sup>7</sup> In his comparison of Uluru with Matopos National Park in Zimbabwe, Terence Ranger (1996: 158) similarly describes frustration among 'indigenous hunters and gatherers' and African farmers in regard to park regulations and exclusions; it would appear that during the 1950s and 1960s, 'hundreds of African families' were evicted from the Matopos (Ranger n.d.: 5, fn7).

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