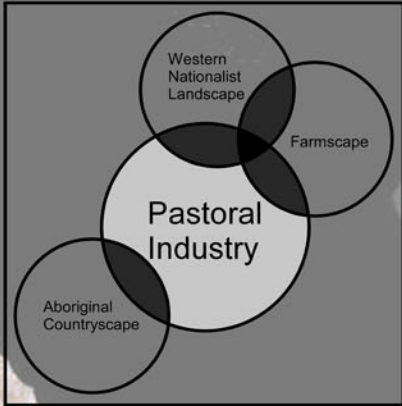


Shared Histories Shared Landscapes

Point of Resistance: social preservation through trade and exchange in northwest Australia

Camille Kirby
University of Queensland

This study aims to explain the increase in stone tool production, associated with the manufacture of Kimberley points at the Marralam Boab site. The Marralam Boab contact archaeological site, excavated by Head and Fullagar in 1997 is situated in the eastern Kimberley region of the Northern Territory, Australia. The site is recorded to display an increase in stone tool production during the contact era which I argue, following Head and Fullagar, is due to the continued manufacture to uphold trade and exchange networks. It is from this hypothesis that I base my research and explore reasons and explanations of continuity within the pastoral industry of the Kimberley region. I apply a shared histories approach, incorporating interdisciplinary material and focus on aesthetics to explain the atypical increase in stone tool production at the site in the contact era.



Shared Landscapes

This research presents a model that demonstrates the cross-cultural relationships occurring in the pastoral industry as connected but not over-lapped. The pastoral industry is presented as the central link between Aboriginal traditions and land (countryscapes); Western Nationalist Landscapes, being the government and state agendas; and what I have termed 'farmscapes', the pastoral and/or other horticultural groups, communities and workers.

In presenting this model I believe that the relationships between the interacting cultures involved in notions of shared histories and their associated landscapes can be easily assessed and that the interactions that occurred in this setting can be seen as non-dominant. From this position of viewing people and land as interrelated, contested, co-dependent and continually negotiated, I follow Harrison in viewing pastoralism as a 'contact zone' of the processes of shared histories and shared landscape.

Aesthetics

To apply aesthetics from ethnographic data to Kimberley point production and usage enabled me to draw on the cosmogonic attributes associated with the tools and study their physical and aesthetic qualities in light of this. Given that shininess and opalescence is so valued across such a broad, culturally diverse part of northern and central Australia as an aesthetic quality, I argue it is highly likely that the large Kimberley points from Marralam Boab were also perceived to have the potency of Ancestral Beings embedded in the appearance of the materials from which they were made. It would make sense that glass with its capacity to refract light and glisten as with quartzite and other crystalline and opalescent materials, would have been easily adopted into the manufacturing cycle and valued in the same way as shiny tin lids were obviously valued in place of pearl shell.

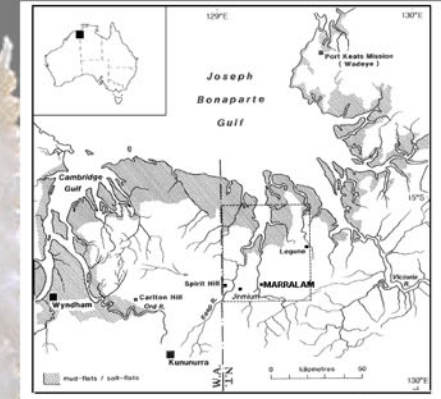


Akerman repeatedly argues that trade of material culture has continued throughout the Kimberley region since pastoral and pearling industry contact. Further, he argues that trade has even expanded beyond the Kimberley region because of pastoral contact. The pastoral industry facilitated the maintenance of much ceremonial life and the continuation of relationship to country. Therefore, with the emergence and expansion of colonial infrastructure such as town centers, rail networks, major roads, and transport such as horses, cars and aircraft, the speed and intensity of much of the trade has actually increased since, and as a result of, pastoral contact.

Research Conclusions

Following the shared histories approach to understanding the contact period, the Marralam Boab site can be understood in the context of:

- With Kununurra acting as a trade hub to the south and to the west, understandable how the debitage at the Marralam Boab site would increase once the pastoral station of Legune was established as a part of the Gajerrong, Miriuwong, Jamandjung and Murinpatha peoples' lives due to higher populations and sedentism
- Aesthetics may provide a valuable means to understand the multi-dimensional layering of meaning associated with Kimberley points and their place in the landscape
- In light of all of the above, a shared histories/shared landscapes approach was able to challenge the idea of Marralam Boabs' atypical nature
- Another valuable archaeological research project would be to expand analysis beyond Marralam Boab and to focus on other pastoral contact sites within the Kimberley region. Following Akerman, particular attention could then be directed towards those important trading sites within the wunan.



Case Study

An excavation at Marralam by Head and Fullagar (1997) in the East Kimberley is a perfect example of research into cross-cultural relations in the contact period. The main case study of this thesis is the Marralam Boab site, situated in the Keep River Catchment in northwest Northern Territory, in the area of the east Kimberley. The site is situated in the location of the original homestead of Legune Station where the Marralam Outstation is now located. Gajerrong, Miriuwong, Jamandjung and Murinpatha people are now, and during the pastoral era, associated with the site. The excavated materials show a prominent increase in stone tool production following the introduction of European materials.

