

The Thin Black Line: Living Apartheid on Groote Eylandt

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The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples charts and formalises international concern for the plight of Indigenous communities. It is well known that the majority of Aboriginal communities are socially disadvantaged in comparison with white Australians. A case study of the confined communities on Groote Eylandt demonstrates graphically the extent of social dislocation and disadvantage of Aboriginal people. An effective apartheid system has prevailed there since the arrival of white missionaries, who sought to isolate 'stolen' children from contaminating influences of white and black communities. Tensions have been exacerbated since the arrival of large-scale manganese mining and the spreading influence of the individualism of the capitalist system, with whites enjoying luxurious surroundings in isolation from dilapidated black communities badly affected by alcohol abuse. Despite generous royalty compensation for the disruptions caused by mining, mismanagement and traditional tribal rivalries have kept most Aborigines in dire poverty.



Introduction and Personal Positioning

Race and associated disadvantage is not simply a black and white issue on Groote Eylandt in East Arnhem Land, Australia. The intersections of racism on Groote are far more complex and cross colour lines, border lines and blood lines. This paper will look at the dialectics of power in the communities on the island and subvert common assumptions about their origins. Whilst it is an undeniable fact that the Anindilyakwa people of Groote, as with Indigenous Australia at large, are dramatically and inexcusably socially disadvantaged, this paper will investigate how white imposition has merely exacerbated a pre-existing social hierarchy which pitched black against black, and how the segregation of communities has intensified cross-cultural antagonism.

(Source: Brasche 2006 Rowel Highway, road between black and white communities)

The cosmopolitan ideal envisages a world of human equality irrespective of race, nationality, caste, class, education, wealth or social standing, yet the complex social terrain of Groote Eylandt both before and after European contact has meant that the realisation of the ideal is made more complex by the intersections of race, power, culture, and capital.

I lived and worked as a Remote Area Lecturer on Groote Eylandt and traversed these racial intersections daily, both professionally and socially. Having lived in a recently democratised and post-apartheid Namibia for a number of years prior to moving to Groote, I was struck by the

geographical separation of black and white on the island, however developed a nuanced understanding of the complex and historical dimensions to this separation. The Rowel Highway, or the 16km of sealed road between the white mining town of Alyangula, and the nearest Aboriginal community of Angurugu always struck me as a powerful metaphor of the physical separation of largely white and black communities. The manganese dust coming from the trucks travelling between the mine and the port had rendered one half of the road a deep black. This one lane represented the one-way exit of the island's main resource or the one-way passage to the global economy. Yet it also represented the limited route of access of the Anindilyakwa to the spoils of Alyangula. This paper will draw from empirical material through the lived experience as well as historical and theoretical material. Whilst some aspects of life on Groote Eylandt have changed since my extended time on the island with the fluctuations of mining activity, the experiences of black and white on Groote Eylandt continue to be very different, and the internal Anindilyakwa social unrest continues.



Source: Angurugu Community Government Council 2006

History and Segregation

apartheid

noun: any system or practice that separates people according to race, caste, etc [Afrikaans, from apart APART = -heid -HOOD] (Oxford Dictionary 2014).

Groote Eylandt, Dutch for 'Big Island', lies on the western side of the Gulf of Carpentaria, in north east Arnhem Land and is about 630km east of Darwin. Abel Tasman named the island in 1644, perhaps unaware there was a much bigger island 50km to the west. The Anindilyakwa

people of Groote Eylandt had been in contact with the Macassans of southern Sulawesi (Indonesia) long before Europeans took an interest in the island, and a largely harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship based on trade endured for more than two centuries (Cole 1973). Macassan visits to the region ended in 1907 when the Australian Government, in a policy familiar to contemporary times, declared the northern coast off limits to the Indonesian fleets (Clark et al. 2008). As visits were only ever seasonal and transitory, Macassan encounters had left social organisation and practices largely unchanged.

In 1921 The Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), who had been active in Arnhem Land for some time, set up a mission station on the Emerald River of Groote Eylandt (Cole 1973). This was the beginning of a dramatic change to the social and cultural landscape of Groote Eylandt, and the beginning of organised and institutionalised racial segregation down colour rather than clan lines. The mission was originally established with 'half-caste' children who had been taken from the Roper River region, around present day Ngukurr. In keeping with the protectionist policy of the day, the Anglican bishop Newton of Carpentaria stated:

There must be a separate establishment for half-caste children ... [as] the tendency of the half-caste is to sink to the level of aborigines (Newton in McMillan 2001:102).

It was believed that by separating the children from the destructive influences of white culture, and by removing them from primitive, pagan Indigenous influences, these children could be educated and civilised in a place so remote that former ties would not hinder their progress. These children were used as manual labour to further establish the mission:

[Half-caste children] ... were held in a state of exile and isolation, living under harsh conditions and somehow dealing with the loneliness that removal from their families entailed ... Barbaric punishments were introduced to counter minor breaches of discipline. For answering back, children were chained up to posts or clamped into stocks in the church or in the grounds (McMillan 2001:107).

The mistreatment of the half-caste children and their indentured labour continued with accusations levelled against the missionaries, government authorities and the police. On 24 October 1933, Constable Vic Hall wrote to the Chief Protector of Aboriginals in Darwin stating:

Accusations against the Police and Aboriginal Department involving charges of ill-treatment,

brutality, and every black offence against humanity, decency and law, even down to accusations of wholesale murder, are continually brought by the Missionaries (Hall in McMillan 2001:135).

And on November 4 1933, Constable Ted Morey wrote to the Chief Protector of Aborigines stating:

It is evident that this seclusion of half-castes of both sexes cannot possibly be of any noteworthy benefit to them. They are virtually the drudges of the Mission and appear to be no more than the missionaries' unpaid servants (Morey in McMillan 2001:135).

The cruelty of the practice of forced separation from one's family is now understood, but on Groote there was an added cruelty. Children were forbidden from social interaction with the world outside the mission and placed on an isolated island. This island already had a reputation in the region of being a harsh place with fierce warrior tribes who were feared amongst surrounding East Arnhem communities and intensely protective of their women (Thomson 2006:110). The descendants of these children still live on the island and continue to face discrimination and exclusion from the Anindilyakwa people as they struggle to negotiate their own identity, as will be further examined later in this paper.

Inevitably, traditional hunting practices and movement around one's country on the island were altered as the local Anindilyakwa people began to settle around the mission. This social, geographical and cultural shift was an intentional aspect of mission establishment and colonial practices and gives a clear illustration of physical and psychological enclosure, a people 'under surveillance' and a 'tribal system shaken to its foundations' (Smith 1926: 256).

Segregation and the disruption of social and cultural identity also meant the departure from traditional collectivism, a nomadic lifestyle and habitation in demarcated country owned by specific families. For the Anindilyakwa, the traditional owners of the land, this change was indicative of the evolving ideology of mercantile capitalism in the area, where collective responsibility and provision for one's family was being replaced by responsibility for oneself and one's soul, and increased dependency on external industry. By 1950 almost all of the Anindilyakwa clans living on the west of the island, together with some from Bickerton Island, had settled at the Angurugu mission (Cole 1988: 12). This was an almost incomprehensibly rapid social, cultural, geographical and physical change in less than thirty years.

Of course, the background to missionary and colonialist activities on Groote Eylandt were the Government policies of the day and reflected shifting ideologies as to the most appropriate strategies regarding Aboriginal welfare. These ranged from protectionism and assimilationism through to the current policy of self-determinism and entrepreneurialism. The move from communitarianism to individualism has been forced upon colonised Indigenous peoples across the globe and whilst tempting to idealise the past, Indigenous people themselves acknowledge that intra-community envy and jealousy have always existed in hunter-gatherer communities (Pearson 2011). Problems are exacerbated when market capitalism, supposedly the great social leveller, is thrown into the mix. The greatest social, economic and cultural shift for the Anindilyakwa on Groote Eylandt took place with the establishment of mining operations.

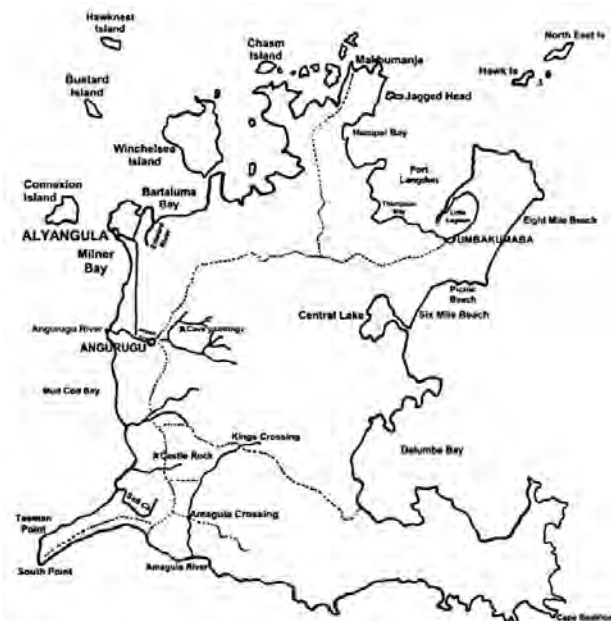
In 1963, Broken Hill Proprietary Company Limited (BHP) commenced prospecting for manganese on Groote Eylandt before establishing their subsidiary, Groote Eylandt Mining Company Pty Ltd (GEMCO). Manganese is a metal ore used in making steel, and GEMCO is one of the largest producers in the world. Negotiations between Keith Rowell for BHP and George Pearson for the CMS (Church Missionary Society) were completed with both parties satisfied that royalty payments and conditions of operation were in the best interest of both the company and the Anindilyakwa people of Groote Eylandt. It is important to note that the multi-million dollar per annum royalties were and are considered to be extremely generous by comparative mining corporation standards.

It is also telling that the white missionaries were the key negotiators acting for the Anindilyakwa people as this plays into the evolving ideological shift from communitarianism to individualism and its inherent dependency on capital. The royalty negotiation and mining lease arrangement, 'was made to help compensate Aborigines for the loss of exclusive use of reserve lands and the disturbance to their way of life' (Cole 1988: 20). In 2013, 4.8 million tonnes of manganese were mined on Groote Eylandt (Mining Link 2014).

Contemporary Geographical Impacts and Personal Insights

Groote Eylandt comprises 14 clans or family groups on Groote and the land is divided along these clan lines. There are three communities on the island – Alyangula, the 'white' mining town, Angurugu, the Aboriginal community and former mission station on the western side of the island, and Umbakumba, another Aboriginal community on the eastern side of the island. Keith Cole wrote of Alyangula in 1988:

Gemco's delightful mining town ... the gardens of the houses and public areas are covered with masses of beautiful Indigenous and exotic tropical trees and shrubs ... the whole township has become a place of great beauty, unequalled by any other town in the Territory (1988: 38).



Source: Anindilyakwa Land Council, 2006

Living in Alyangula was somewhat like living in a country club. In our time on the island, Government employees were not allowed to live in Angurugu or Umbakumba due to the volatility of the communities, hence essential service staff such as teachers and nurses commuted from Alyangula to the two Aboriginal communities. The 'white' mining town of Alyangula has a golf course, Olympic swimming pool, recreation club, supermarket, café, outdoor cinema, tennis and squash courts, gift shop, gym, a television and white goods shop, post office and even a beautician. GEMCO have invested a lot of money into the community to maintain mining staff levels and minimise the reliance on fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) personnel. Due to its self-sufficiency in terms of service provisions and lifestyle options, the residents of Alyangula were almost completely disengaged from the Aboriginal communities on the island. Like many mining towns, it was also quite a transitory population. Small classes at the predominantly white Alyangula Area School, great facilities and exceptionally beautiful surrounds, combined with a 'great sense of community' made it the most desirable mining town destination on offer¹, particularly for GEMCO employees with families.

Alyangula is like a gated community, without the actual gates. Bryan Massey, OAM, a former missionary who worked with the Anindilyakwa for 40 years, recounted that an active campaign to fence off Alyangula from the

rest of the island, including the Aboriginal residents of Angurugu and Umbakumba, was undertaken during the 1990s (Massey 2014). The Anindilyakwa Land Council intervened, pointing out that the all-important manganese lay in the ground outside the boundaries of Alyangula.

The contrast between Alyangula and the Aboriginal communities (Angurugu is only 16km away) is somewhat reminiscent of apartheid town planning practices of southern Africa, where the *natives* and their squalid townships were kept out of sight, beyond the borders of white suburbia, or the separation of Aboriginal reserves and former Mission Stations in many regional towns in Australia. In South Africa and Namibia, for example, demarcated land for housing is still largely compliant with the apartheid stratification of black, white and coloured areas, despite the disintegration of discriminatory town planning policies with the end of apartheid.

In Angurugu, despite the physical beauty of the surrounding tropical landscape, the social despair is unavoidably part of the landscape. Instead of carefully manicured lawns, horticulturally-designed established gardens and large identical pastel-coloured houses, Angurugu is identified by skinny camp dogs, unsealed roads, rubbish, shells of smashed up 4WDs and damaged houses, patches of dirt and, increasingly, young petrol sniffers roaming the streets. Vandalism and the attempts to thwart it are an aesthetic feature of most buildings in Angurugu, with grills, grates and mesh a part of all public buildings and houses, including windows, lights and door handles. The school in Angurugu had a number of signs up around the grounds featuring various weapons from machetes to star pickets, knives and guns with the words Weapons Free Zone – an initiative from the principal during our time on the island after a number of particularly violent incidents resulting in regular lock downs and school closures.

The towns rarely intersected. People from the mining community would pass through Angurugu to reach certain camping and fishing spots on the island, and Angurugu residents would come in to Alyangula to shop. However the Anindilyakwa were not allowed to freely use the other facilities of the town such as the pool, or recreation club. Alyangula exists on a 'Special Purpose Lease'. As such, except in specific circumstances, only employees of GEMCO can reside there, and only residents of Alyangula are entitled to use the town's facilities, such as the recreation club, gym and pool. This seemingly racist policy is, in fact, endorsed by the Anindilyakwa Land Council, which ultimately has power over the lease and can expel people from the community. Further, the Anindilyakwa Land Council has endorsed the decision to largely control the distribution and consumption of alcohol via the recreation club. On a practical level, however,

the reality of Anindilyakwa not being allowed to use the extraordinary facilities on offer further exacerbated racial difference and inequality. Until recently the Anindilyakwa were unable to even shop at the much more extensively stocked supermarket in Alyangula. Article 21 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which Australia became a signatory to in 2009, states:

Indigenous peoples have the right, without discrimination, to the improvement of their economic and social conditions, including, inter alia, in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security (2008: United Nations Article 21).

It should be noted that our time on Groote Eylandt coincided with a marked rise in violent incidents in the two Aboriginal communities on the island including assaults, aggravated assaults, arrests of armed persons, and suspicious death (Conigrave et al. 2007: 31) which was largely attributed to the failure of management of, and access to, alcohol.

The issue of alcohol management on the island is complex. In 1964, when mining operations commenced, one of the conditions imposed on GEMCO by the traditional owners was that the company must minimise the social impact of the mine on the Aboriginal communities and in particular must minimise the impact of alcohol (NT Licensing Commission 2005). However in the years that followed, alcohol exerted a rapidly increasing adverse effect, causing major community disruption, including increased violence:

... the 1980s are described by community members and other witnesses as years of great violence. By 1986, Groote Eylandt had one of the highest imprisonment rates reported in the world, and it was assessed that the majority of crime was alcohol related. As a result of meetings and discussions, all the Aboriginal communities decided that their residents should no longer be allowed to become members of the licensed club (Conigrave et al. 2007: 13).

Despite this, alcohol continued to be either purchased or otherwise illegally obtained via a thriving black market. Crime rates increased and there was reported to be regular violence related to alcohol, with the resulting community tensions involving weapons continuing often for days and occasionally resulting in deaths (N.T. Police Report 2004: 19).

As mentioned, the establishment of the mission stations drew clans away from their traditional lands and had them

living alongside each other in close proximity. Though traditional lands are no longer inhabited, traditional enmities remain. Combined with housing shortages and often fuelled by alcohol, these enmities erupt on a regular basis in both Angurugu and Umbakumba. It is not uncommon for an argument between individuals to escalate rapidly into a clan-based and even on occasion moiety-based war.² On such occasions, the community, including school, council, shop, and clinic would be shut down, hundreds would gather with weapons such as spears, machetes and star pickets in hand, usually at the oval, with the group proceeding to meter out the age-old tradition of pay-back. Policing policies varied on this form of confrontation – with the superintendent during my time on the island allowing for supervised 'payback', but without weapons and with police and ambulance on hand to deal with the consequences. Such events were a surreal and frightening thing to witness.

Due to the massive royalty payments, combined with fortnightly welfare payments, the Anindilyakwa are wealthier than many Aboriginal people in Australia. However the social and living conditions in the Aboriginal communities are extremely confronting and anomalous to the relative wealth of the communities. Alyangula is the wealthiest postcode in the Northern Territory, and yet Aboriginal people, including the Anindilyakwa, remain the most socially disadvantaged group in Australia with unemployment and infant mortality rates significantly higher and life expectancy 18 years less than their non-Indigenous counterparts.³ To have such disparate conditions in such close proximity on a small land mass undeniably contributes to the general antagonism that exists between the black and white communities on the island. The physical or geographical separation of the communities is no accident, and serves as a fitting example of contemporary social, economic and cultural enclosure that is antithetical to the cosmopolitan ideal. Such separation can have devastating consequences, such as described by an Anindilyakwa woman from Angurugu, cited in Conigrave et al:

When a man was hurting a woman, the police were not here. They were in Alyangula. By the time they arrive, the woman might be dead (2007:31).

Royalty payments are distributed to six associations that are clan-based organisations and administered through the Anindilyakwa Land Council. Unsurprisingly, the twice annual distribution of royalty payments, termed 'black Christmas' by the Anindilyakwa, often brought with it much community tension and unrest due to their traditionally rigid social hierarchy. Combined with this, the Anindilyakwa people are negotiating a divisive system of commerce at odds with their communitarian history. The arrival of GEMCO did not herald the end of nomadic

practices, including movement around the island and a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, as the Anindilyakwa had been living at the missions of Angurugu or Umbakumba since the 1920s, and economically had largely become dependent on rations, pensions, child endowment or training allowances for sustenance (Cole 1988). However the arrival of GEMCO and the establishment of a white mining town further polarised the people of Groote Eylandt in entrenched clan-based social hierarchies, and brought extraordinary wealth and privilege to this small island which largely benefit only a few.

The profound socio-cultural consequences of economic change and the flow of capital on Groote have been neither carefully investigated nor adequately acknowledged. These have occurred on the back of political contests and social policies, which have undermined community organisation producing deculturation (Pearson 2004; Latouche 1996). Money alone through royalty payment does not comply with modern corporate ethics in regards to Corporate Social Responsibility. GEMCO have in recent years attempted to invest in other aspects of community development such as through their Indigenous Ranger programs, environmental rehabilitation and even recently recognising the need for a social anthropologist to record the cultural traditions of the Anindilyakwa before they are lost with the passing of elders. However a precedent has been set and since 1964 cash compensation for social, geographical and cultural dislocation has become the expectation of the Anindilyakwa.

Socio-Cultural Impacts

The greatest threat to Aboriginal culture has not been the activity of the missions. Rather it is the impact of an aggressive, acquisitive, exploitative white society, on a people whose way of life for thousands of years has been the most dissimilar as possibly can be (Cole 1983: 46).

Inevitably, the identity and socio-cultural landscape of all Aboriginal people in Australia – regardless of their geographical isolation, urban or remote, salt-water or desert people – have been irrevocably changed through European contact. Of course this seems obvious. However in looking at the impact this contact has had on contemporary Anindilyakwa, we are given some clues as to why they have been more culturally affected than neighbouring Arnhem communities. Identity formation is always a dynamic and fluid process, but in the case of Groote Eylandt, the Anindilyakwa identity has mainly been affected by the two historical agents of change mentioned previously – the missionaries and the mine. The missionary impact could be seen to represent the European sensibilities of the day, with an emphasis on personal salvation. However as mentioned, this paved

the way for a more dramatic paradigm shift in local and personal identity – the creation of the individualist consumer. Forever altered were the traditional hierarchies of clan, with power and authority now vested with those whose associations received the greatest royalty payments, or those on whose land the most manganese was mined.

Other than the harmonious contact with the Macassans, the Anindilyakwa had very little contact with the outside world until the arrival of missionaries. 'Otherness' on Groote Eylandt is exacerbated by the geographical separation of the white mining community from the Aboriginal communities. Similarly, other Aboriginal communities in East Arnhem in which I worked, such as the Yolngu or Nungubuyu people, seemed far more interlinked (socially and culturally, through marriage, clan and language) with neighbouring communities. The Anindilyakwa, however, are very much viewed as outsiders to this East Arnhem connectedness. The Anindilyakwa language is completely distinct from those of surrounding mainland communities leading to geographical linguistic isolation.

One of the most tragic aspects of contemporary life on Groote Eylandt that could be seen as a result of European settlement and policies of enclosure and displacement has been the discontinuation of ceremony. It has been around twenty years since the last group of boys went through ceremony; which is almost a generation missed. At a meeting I attended in March 2005, the issue of ceremony weighed heavily on the two elders present. I asked why boys were no longer taken through ceremony and was told that not only was there nobody to take the boys through ceremony (one elder was on dialysis and another was too old), but they did not know of a single boy in the community who demonstrated the appropriate qualities to be initiated. Recent changes to the Liquor Management Act on Groote Eylandt have meant that there has been a reduction in criminal activity. However, there still remains substance misuse and associated social dysfunction on the island. As ceremony indicates future leadership, so a lack of ceremony speaks of a lack of future cultural custodians and leaders.

This is a profound tragedy and means, for example, that whenever there is a funeral on Groote, people are flown across from Numbulwar, on the mainland, in order to carry out the funeral ceremony largely in another language, using Nungubuyu⁴ not Anindilyakwa songs. Funeral services are Christian and largely conducted in English, with a brief, Nungubuyu-led ceremony afterwards at the burial.

Besides the black/white antagonism and the social estrangement that largely persists between races on

Groote, there are significant hostilities amongst the Anindilyakwa people themselves, which have their foundations in thousands of years of enmity, yet have been exacerbated by European social re-ordering and enclosure. With the establishment and growing dependence on missions or reserves, traditionally warring families were forced to live next door to each other, or in otherwise much closer proximity than had traditionally occurred. Groote is geographically a big place, and prior to European engagement, there had been enough space for each clan to hunt and survive on their own 'country' or land. Again, referring to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 10 states:

Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without the free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return (2008: Article 10).

Of course, a return to life on pre-European traditionally demarcated land is neither practical nor desirable for the Anindilyakwa. Yet geography notwithstanding, throughout history the Anindilyakwa have maintained a rigid and categorical, tribally determined class system. This hierarchy is deeply obvious in all aspects of life. It affects the dynamics whenever a group of Anindilyakwa are gathered. As discussed earlier, the most powerful family group on the island own the land where manganese is currently being mined, and those families at the bottom of the ladder have no way of altering their social position. Those of mixed descent, whose lineage was more closely linked with the communities of Ngukurr and Borroloola but whose whole lives had been lived on Groote, existed in an even lower social standing. As the descendants of 'stolen' children who were brought across to the mission, these *yella fellas*, as the Anindilyakwa referred to them, had to negotiate complex roles and responsibilities whilst being dramatically discriminated against. Such discrimination was acutely obvious in the classes I taught on Groote.

This class system was often at the heart of much of the tension and violence of Groote Eylandt. This classist orientation is antithetical to generally accepted Australian egalitarianism and the principles of the cosmopolitan ideal. As Cox writes, 'Civic virtues come from building on what we have in common rather than by using our differences to create in-groups and out-groups and fear driven competition' (Cox 1995: 10). However, on Groote Eylandt this orientation also pre-dates European contact.

Many Anindilyakwa struggle with substance misuse and the social despair that comes from a culturally dislocated

people with conflicted identities. All of this has contributed to Groote Eylandt's reputation as one of the most violent communities in Australia. More individuals have been incarcerated per head of population on Groote than in any other community in the world (Johnston 2006). Groote also has the highest policing rate per capita in the Northern Territory.

Conclusion

On 21 November 2006, an article was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* entitled 'Girl left to the mercy of rapist, court told':

Northern Territory health workers and police ignored the plight of an 11 year old indigenous girl who a man raped in public and then took as his so-called 'promised wife' for nine years under the guise of traditional Aboriginal law ... In the Northern Territory Supreme Court, **Justice Mildren said nobody on Groote Eylandt, including white people, stepped in to help the girl**, identified as LM. She was only 12 when she was forced to live as the wife of the man, Owen Bara, [who] fathered her three children, one of whom he brutally assaulted when she was five ... **Justice Mildren said the 'police who know everything on Groote [Eylandt]', relatives and teachers also failed to intervene** [bold added by author] (Murdoch 2006).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to engage with issues of traditional Aboriginal law. What struck me about this article, however, was that Justice Mildren asserted that the white community, and authorities had turned a collective blind eye to the plight of a young, vulnerable Aboriginal girl. Groote Eylandt is socially a small place, with a total population of just over two thousand. How could something so horrific have endured for so long without intervention?

The geographic and socio-economic disjunction between communities, combined with a stratified and socially dislocated Aboriginal community, transitory social services personnel, largely disengaged white population and numerous other factors mean that cases like this sadly do slip beneath the radar. When communities are estranged and fractured from within, the dialectics of race, class, power and social responsibility become blurred.

Sixteen kilometres of sealed road separates black from white on Groote. The socio-cultural and the economic are not so easily separated. The circulation of capital, the re-ordering of traditional social organisation, the payment of mining royalties and the forced social and physical segregation of communities has intensified the stratification of the Anindilyakwa on Groote Eylandt, complicating the question of where power lies and who

has agency over the lives and futures of the Anindilyakwa. This question speaks to Article 26 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which states that:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.
2. Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired (2008: Article 26).

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End Notes

1. It should be stated that the social service personnel on the island such as the community development workers, teachers, nurses etc were also quite a transitory population. Staff turnover was high and recruitment often difficult as the volatility of the island made it a challenging place to work.
2. The Aboriginal social and natural world is divided into two moieties: in East Arnhem Land these are called Dhuwa and Yirritja. This organisation determines everything from people's lands, songs, animals, totems, marriage partners etc.
3. Source: Anglicare Inequality in Australia Report 2006.
4. Nungubuyu are the largest group from Numbulwar – the mainland community closest to Groote.