

UNTYING THE WILDERNESS KNOT – TOWARDS CELEBRATING WILDERNESS AS ‘LANAI’

Haydn Washington

What on Earth do I mean? Why is wilderness ‘knotted’, and how did it get that way? What is a ‘lanai’? What has this got to do with celebrating wilderness? Well – a first question we need to ask is ‘what is it we are celebrating’? What is ‘wilderness’? I used to think that this was obvious and was clearly answered by the formal definitions, such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) definition that wilderness was:

A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition.¹

This is pretty clear isn’t it? How could one get confused? Sadly, it’s a bit more complex than that. In terms of my own background, I am an ecologist, and I have been a wilderness advocate for more than thirty years. I was a key person involved with the campaign for the Wollemi wilderness in New South Wales, and also was a lobbyist in The Wilderness Society for the NSW Wilderness Act. For the last few years I have been doing Doctoral research at the University of Western Sydney on ‘The Wilderness Knot’. As part of this, I helped to set up (and then worked with) the Blue Mountains Wilderness Network to try and gain meaningful dialogue around ‘wilderness’.

During the last thirty years, I have seen the meaning of ‘wilderness’ *change*. Wilderness now has many meanings, and some of them have very little to do with the formal definition above. Wilderness has become a *knot* - a tangle of confused meanings. To some it is ‘the original and best of planet Earth’, to others it is just a ‘Western construct’. This confusion has reached the stage where, despite the formal definitions of wilderness, some scholars can argue to protect large natural areas, yet be highly critical of the term ‘wilderness’. Clearly, we are not comparing apples with apples here, and when one person says ‘wilderness’, others are hearing various meanings.

So how did we get into such a ‘Gordian knot’ around wilderness? There are at least five strands that make up the wilderness knot. These are **philosophical, political, cultural, justice and exploitation**. Conservationists mainly speak of only the last strand, that of developers, loggers or miners seeking to exploit a wilderness. However, the confusion around wilderness is due to all five strands acting together. Given that four of the strands are rarely spoken of, it is these I will concentrate on, and take it as granted that we know there are forces out there seeking not to celebrate wilderness, but to ‘make a buck’ out of exploiting it.

You may wonder what ‘philosophy’ could possibly have to do with wilderness? ‘Wilderness’ occupies a unique position philosophically, in that it is disliked by both Modernist thought as well as some strands of Postmodernism. It is thus something of an orphan philosophically, with only Romantics, some ‘Deep Ecologists’ and environmentalists to champion its cause. Wilderness is also caught up in the debate around anthropocentrism and ecocentrism - or whether humans or the whole ecosystem are seen as being central to one’s world view. Wilderness also gets involved in the debate about ‘humans being part of nature’. Some confuse our evolutionary heritage (where we obviously *are* part of nature) with a question of ethics. Because we’re ‘natural’ doesn’t mean what we do is necessarily ethical or ‘good’, or even sensible. There is also the issue of a philosophical concern about creating a human/ nature split (= dualism) and whether this is somehow related to wilderness. Many writers (including Washington²) worry about this human/nature dualism, but many disagree with Postmodernist philosophers such as Cronon³ and Callicott⁴ who seek to link this to ‘wilderness’, thereby confusing the term.

Perhaps the most critical philosophical issue around ‘wilderness’ is *intrinsic value*. For Modernists, wilderness has no intrinsic value, it is just a resource for human use⁵. However, Postmodernism revolted against Modernism, so one might hope it would *support* intrinsic value and the right of wilderness to exist for itself? This hope was expressed in Oelschlaeger’s 1991 book *The Idea of Wilderness*⁵ – yet sadly the opposite has occurred, with a number of Postmodernists being highly critical of ‘wilderness’. Postmodernism is in fact a ‘geography’ of different ideas that developed in opposition to Modernism.

One key Postmodernist criticism of wilderness seems to lie in the importance given to *language*, (e.g. Derrida⁶). A second source appears to be a fixation with *dualisms*⁷, and that all dualisms are inherently bad³. A third source is the intense skepticism about the *real*, and the claim that we live not inside reality but inside our representations of it^{8,7}. A fourth source is the suspicion of the influence of romanticism on the conservation movement and ‘wilderness’³. A fifth source is the suspicion that wilderness was itself a ‘grand narrative’ that needs to be broken down³. A sixth source is the suggestion that wilderness ignores the history of native peoples, and is not only a Western but a *colonialist* concept^{9,10}. Postmodernist Callicott¹¹ argues that ‘the concept of wilderness ... is obsolete’.

Philosopher Arran Gare¹² however is critical of aspects of Postmodernism, stating that while it has demonstrated problems with Modernism, it has been *powerless* to oppose them. Gare¹² and Butler⁷ list the problems with Postmodernism as its opposition to *any* grand narratives, its failure to take action, its fixation on ‘dualisms’, its problems with reality, and its inability to understand science. Gare¹² concludes that Postmodernism is consumerist, actually stops opposition to mainstream Modernist culture, and has a tendency to ‘nihilistical decadence’. In the light of such criticisms, it should be noted that Postmodernism (or the related post-structuralism) is the dominant theory espoused by many university faculties (e.g. social sciences, sociology, education, philosophy). Such faculties train many of the bureaucrats who will later work in government departments and make decisions on whether large natural areas (= wilderness) are protected. Many of these presumably take away a vague idea that the term ‘wilderness’ is somehow suspect.

However, there are other strands to the knot besides philosophy. The *political strand* also tends to isolate wilderness. Politics is generally seen as a spectrum between the Left (Socialism/ Marxism) and the Right (Capitalism). However, *both* these political ideologies are based on the idea that nature is just a ‘resource’¹³. Marx himself wrote of ‘first nature’ (or unimproved nature = wilderness) and ‘second nature’, which was nature given value by humans *transforming* it¹⁴. Soule¹⁵ has pointed out that:

Extremists at both ends of the wilderness debate promulgate myths to further their political goals. Both the far right and far left hate wilderness on the grounds that it excludes human economic uses.

The Left/ Right spectrum is thus quite inadequate to understand wilderness – so wilderness has also become an orphan politically.

There is also the *cultural strand*. It has been pointed out that:

It is only a culture which has begun to register the negative consequences of its industrial achievements that will be inclined to return to the wilderness¹⁶.

This is hardly surprising, as if you didn’t clear and fragment most of the land, you would not *need* a name for those large natural areas that survive? Wilderness is a word of Anglo-Saxon/ Celtic origin¹⁷ and has no strict equivalent in other languages. There is no word for wilderness in Spanish¹⁸. In Aboriginal cultures, there were no strictly equivalent words - however there were *sanctuaries* where there was no hunting or gathering¹⁹. Wilderness (where humans visit but do not

remain permanently) has come into conflict with the Aboriginal idea of 'caring for country', where one needs to *live on country* to look after it.

Wilderness is often lumped in with other 'Western' concepts as being exclusively a European idea. Callicott⁴ states that wilderness is an ethnocentric concept, and that Europeans saw the New World as 'a pristine wilderness'. Part of the difficulty in this debate is *distinguishing* between the fact that the term 'wilderness' *does* derive from a European culture, and the reality of large natural areas (and how they should be managed). For example, Rolston¹⁸ notes:

But the trouble is that such critics have so focused on wild as a word taken up and glamorised in the term wilderness, that they can no longer see that wild and wilderness do have reference outside our culture.

Large, natural areas exist on all continents of the world, irrespective of the culture which lives there. Their existence is thus not culturally relative or a cultural creation - but their perception, and the values ascribed to them, *are*.

There is also a strand to the knot concerned with the tension between *social justice* (justice for oppressed human groups) and *environmental justice* (justice for the non-human world). Cronon³ appears to argue that we should allow development of wilderness to help the poor, or to create an economic base for dispossessed indigenous peoples. Langton⁹ states:

It is difficult for an indigenous Australian to ignore the presumption and arrogance in the arguments of many environmentalists ... It seems to us that they are usurping the Aboriginal right of stewardship of the land.

Soule¹⁵ has argued for a unity of *both* types of justice:

People must have food and shelter, yes, but a world where material welfare is the only acceptable value will be a lost world, morally, spiritually and aesthetically... We need a broader compassion – an ethic that makes room for the 'others'. We should reject the common accusation that untrammelled wild places, free of human economic exploitation, are 'misanthropic' or 'racist'.

Exploitation is the last, most familiar strand. Logging, mining and grazing interests all have lobbyists seeking to exploit wilderness economically. To what extent are the criticisms of wilderness (and the confusion surrounding it) a product of such lobbying? It is difficult to document the extent of this influence, as it is easy to slip into conspiracy theories. However, the 'Wise Use' movement in the USA is a key critic of wilderness, and has strong links to the mining lobby. Luoma²⁰ notes that the Wise Use movement has produced a book 'The Wise Use Agenda' which:

...demands, among other things, that all 'decaying' forest (meaning old growth) be logged immediately and that all public lands, including wilderness areas and national parks, be opened to mining.

So what are the key criticisms leveled at 'wilderness' that help confuse people? Of twenty criticisms I have found in the literature, there are eight key ones:

1) Wilderness as a *dualism* – being an area more valued than other natural areas^{21,22}. Cronon³ argues wilderness is a dualism that actually *stops* humans from discovering an ethical sustainable place in nature. Callicott⁴ also sees wilderness as a *myth* that separates man from nature. Neither explains just why wilderness *must* be a dualism rather than part of a 'naturalness spectrum', nor why identifying wilderness *devalues* other non-wilderness areas.

2) Wilderness as a 'human exclusion zone', even though no wilderness definition today *actually* excludes humans (just roads, settlements and mechanised transport). Rolston¹⁸ points out that:

Neither the Wilderness Act nor meaningful wilderness designation requires that no humans have ever been present, only that any such peoples have left the lands 'untrammelled'.

Soule¹⁵ explains that:

With rare exceptions, such as in the former Soviet Union ... wilderness areas do not exclude human uses. Fishing, bushwalking, and low impact recreation and camping are usually permitted in wilderness.

3) Wilderness ignores that most areas were (or are) the homelands of indigenous peoples⁹. Cronon³ says:

the myth of the wilderness as 'virgin' uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home.

This criticism in Australia also suggests wilderness is linked to the ethically bankrupt doctrine of terra nullius. Terra nullius means literally 'empty land', though legally it means land not owned by people (as they were deemed to be barbarians). Soule¹⁵ says 'the skeptic's myth' is the idea that hunter-gatherer people perceive of wilderness as *home* - for humans today now farm, log and mine using an unprecedented and powerful technology. There are almost no societies today that live in the traditional way and do not use modern technology.

4) Wilderness is a 'concept', not a place^{23,24,3}. This has strong links to the Postmodernist skepticism of reality and its arguments for cultural relativism. Lowenthal²³ states:

The wilderness is not, in fact, a type of landscape, but a congeries of feelings about man and nature.

Interestingly, Nash²⁵ has changed his position on this, and no longer makes this claim.

5) Wilderness is a '*human artifact*'. This is much discussed in the Australian context^{26,27}. A major problem here is the distinction between *influencing* a landscape (as all indigenous peoples did) and *creating* it, which is anthropocentric as it places all the emphasis on *human* creation. If wilderness is *our* artifact, then some might believe we can do what we like with it?

6) Wilderness 'locks up' resources, and instead we should have *multiple use*³. A related theme to this is that if wilderness is not being 'used' then humans won't *value* it. This ignores not only our ability to extend our compassion to areas that we don't make use of, it ignores the *ecosystem services* of such areas (that do in fact benefit humans). It also totally ignores the artistic, spiritual and recreational uses wilderness already provides. 'Multiple use' can be many things - sustainable traditional hunting and gathering (a reasonable proposition) - as well as logging, mining and grazing.

7) Wilderness is *not* in fact essential for nature conservation^{21,28}. This seems to discount the environmental impact of roads, and the biogeographic importance of large natural areas (eg. for large secure populations, gene pools, faunal territories), in favour of protecting fragments. It also highlights the fact that species loss can still occur in wilderness, largely due to invasion by exotic species. In regard to the latter, clearly active but low impact management is necessary (as recognised by conservation groups).

8) Wilderness reflects the outdated idea of a 'balance of nature' based on the idea of equilibrium ecology. Callicott⁴ argues that conservationists try to 'freeze-frame' nature and that conservation is in defiance of 'nature's inherent dynamism'. Noss²² points out:

No ecologist interprets wilderness in the static, pristine, climax sense that Callicott caricatures it ... human generated changes must be constrained because nature has functional, historical and evolutionary limits.

A way forward?

The above strands and criticisms make up much of the wilderness knot. Certainly they have confused the term 'wilderness'. So what has my research with the Wilderness Network found out? What can we say about the wilderness knot, and how do we find a way forward? The first insight is in fact just how difficult it can be to gain *meaningful dialogue* on an issue that arouses strong passions. Clark²⁹ has spoken of the need for 'profound attentiveness' and 'mutual respect' in dialogue. This may appear obvious - but faced with a nexus of social and environmental justice (where the term 'wilderness' has - wrongly I believe - been linked to the colonial doctrine of terra nullius), it is impossible to overestimate the difficulty of gaining meaningful dialogue. An important part of this dialogue is to recognise that the past history of wilderness campaigning in Australia may not have given *explicit* recognition to social justice and the rights of indigenous peoples. Conservationist Penny Figgis (2005 interview) points out that this was largely an oversight, but one that has left an unfortunate legacy of division - given that conservationists and Aboriginal communities often *do* share many aims in common. The wilderness knot is thus very much about meaning and communication.

As part of my research I did eleven in-depth interviews with selected scholars, Aboriginal people and activists, asking them about their understanding and experiences of the wilderness debate. This showed that much of the confusion is really a smoke-screen, once one gets down to what people *really mean*. Of my eleven interviewees, *all* deplored the clearing and fragmentation of native vegetation over the last 215 years in Australia, and *all* valued large natural areas. However, some did not call these areas 'wilderness', rather preferring terms such as wild country, quiet country, core conservation lands, large flourishing areas, or **large natural intact areas (= lanais)**. I use 'lanai' as a useful shorthand for 'large natural intact areas', as it is the key meaning of 'wilderness' that wilderness advocates are actually on about. 'Lanai' is also much easier to say, and in addition is a Polynesian word for an 'outdoor living area', which seems appropriate.

It is essential for us to recognise the widespread nature of an inadequate understanding of the *formal definitions* of wilderness (= a large natural area). There are many associations attached to wilderness, and it is generally some of these that are being criticised, rather than the value of large natural areas *themselves*. It became apparent that even when scholars *knew* the formal definition, they often tended to use their *own* definition of wilderness - for example mammologist Tim Flannery quotes the IUCN definition in his book *The Future Eaters*³⁰, yet in his 2005 interview defined wilderness as 'someone else's country' (which is another thing entirely).

The wilderness debate intersects centrally with larger debates around the land as a whole. One of these is whether humans are part of nature. Philosopher Val Plumwood (2004 interview) points out that while humans are a part of nature, they are not an *indistinguishable* part. We are a self-aware species with a powerful technology, and this distinguishes us from other species. One can acknowledge the *difference* of humans without subscribing to dualism³¹. Similarly, one can see wilderness as the wild end of a *spectrum* of naturalness. Wilderness also runs contrary to the idea of human possessive *ownership* of the land, in contrast to custodianship or *stewardship*. There is also the issue of the history of wilderness literature, and the perceived emphasis on the '*absence of humans*' and on '*purity*' (pristinity), which has dominated some literature in the past (Plumwood 2004). This led to a view that 'wilderness' did not acknowledge indigenous history of occupation, and was somehow linked to terra nullius.

The need for a *de-linking* of 'wilderness' from terra nullius is a key insight. In regard to the 'human artifact' debate, there are in fact at least two meanings operating here, one that humans literally did *create* the land, and the other that the *human history of the land* is created by generations of Aboriginal people, or that landscape is socially (not physically) constructed *in our minds*. The term

‘cultural landscape’ is much used in Australia, but many of those interviewed agreed that any landscape is a mixture of the cultural *and* the natural. One could call this a *geobiocultural* landscape?

Another insight is the understanding that both *wilderness* and *wild* are words that each have two key but very different meanings. For wilderness there is the older Biblical negative meaning of a ‘wasteland’, a place to be feared – versus the newer positive meaning of a ‘lanai’ that we value for itself. The ‘wasteland’ meaning *is* linked to varying extents with terra nullius, to dualism, to human exclusion, to the human artifact idea, and to resource exploitation. The newer idea of a ‘lanai’ is *not* really linked to any of these. Until we acknowledge these two key but very different meanings of wilderness, and point out what ‘we’ mean when we say ‘wilderness’ – then much of the confusion will remain. Hence my title here of ‘celebrating wilderness as lanai’.

Similarly the word ‘wild’ has two key but differing meanings. On the one hand it means ‘natural’, as in *wildlife*. However it also has the meaning of ‘savage’, and ‘lawless’. It is this meaning that has been highlighted by Rose³¹. The meaning of ‘wild’ as *lawless* has an impact on Aboriginal people who believe the land must be managed according to Aboriginal ‘law’. Calling an area ‘wild’ can thus be understood to mean it has been degraded by modern technological society, and is no longer natural or ‘flourishing’. We approach *meaning reversal* here in terms of these two meanings. This certainly adds to the confusion. Another insight is the recognition of the degree to which anthropocentrism permeates academia, which impinges on management, on the meaning of ‘responsibility’, and on belief in intrinsic value.

While much of the confusion may be apparent rather than real (when you get to what people really mean), there *are* some ‘sticking points’. One is the issue of roads and settlements. In most wilderness areas, roads are closed and permanent settlements are banned. Yet in Aboriginal communities ‘caring for country’ has traditionally meant living there. Some people seek to stretch the wilderness definition to include small sustainable indigenous settlements, while others suggest that such areas should be called by another name. Is ‘peopled wilderness’ a contradiction in terms? The Wilderness Society in Australia makes use of the term ‘Wild Country’ in part to side-step this debate. This debate remains ongoing within IUCN and other conservation bodies. Sometimes it is an underlying issue that is not actually addressed, presumably due to the passions involved (as at the 8th World Wilderness Congress 2005)?

Another issue is ‘the land needs people’ debate. This goes *beyond* arguing there is great value in a deep human/ nature connection. In its extreme form it claims that the land ‘dies’ without its human custodians. This is clearly anthropocentric - but has received emphasis from recent history, where Aboriginal people have moved out of some lands, the fire regime has changed, and some native species have then gone extinct. What this actually shows is that certain species need a particular fire regime. It does not show that the land actually *needs* people to survive. For example, Aboriginal people died out on Kangaroo Island (South Australia) some 4,000 years ago, yet the land is still very much alive. Related to this idea are different meanings about what ‘responsibility’ means in regard to the land. This can range from an ecocentric idea of ‘obligation to protect and care for’ to an anthropocentric idea of a senior looking after a junior - where the junior is the land. Another insight is in regard to Aboriginal law - that this can *change* in response to the changing world, so the ‘law’ is not always static. Perhaps the ‘law’ may need to evolve to protect wilderness – those areas of flourishing country that still remain?

Conservationist Rosemary Hill (2005 interview) argues that Aboriginal communities *primarily* see the human history rather than the ‘nature’ in the land. It would not be surprising (given their long history with the land) if the human stories attached to the land gained special significance in indigenous societies, compared to conservationists, who mainly see natural values. In this regard the

term ‘*storied wilderness*’ raised by Cronon³² may be worth developing? It is essential to recognise the importance of the stories (or ‘song-lines’) that have been attached to lanais. Another related aspect is the question of what *management* and ‘looking after’ land really mean? There is one view that if land is managed it must be *controlled* by humans, while another view sees the land as independent, and *not under human control*, even if influenced by management. Nash²⁵ points out that ‘pastoralism is a form of control’. Plumwood (2004) refers to a stream of ‘nature devaluing’ in our society that seeks to overplay the contribution by humans, and eliminate or render invisible the contribution by nature. What is so urgently needed today is the opposite – a return to acknowledging nature’s intrinsic value.

One interesting issue that emerged from the research was ‘fundamentalism’ versus evolution in regard to wilderness and Aboriginal communities. This fundamentalism may be both Christian or from Aboriginal Dreamtime religion. Taken literally, they both espouse *creation* and refute evolution as ‘just another story’. I believe ‘evolution’ acts to give humans perspective and humility, and reduces our human-centredness. To refute it tends to align one with the view that humans are *central*. The issue of Christian fundamentalism in Aboriginal communities was highlighted by Archer (2005 interview) who was told that a fossil site (which contained rocks formed many millions of years ‘before humans were a twinkle in Africa’s eye’) would contain ‘the skulls of bad humans who were drowned in the Flood’.

The above issues have been described here as ‘sticking points’. However, they are not so extreme as to actually prevent conservationists and indigenous people *working together* for the protection of lanais. Certainly, in Australia today, where Modernist resourcism is still considered the ‘Australian way’, the two groups have more in common than most other groups. In fact, given that respect for the land is *central* to both groups, it is a tragedy that the confusion around wilderness to some extent keeps them apart.

I use a ‘mind-map’ to grapple with the many issues involved in this knot. It soon became clear that many aspects related to the land in general, of which wilderness is a subset. Figure 1 shows a mind-map of eleven spectrums of thought involved in how we think about the land. This is not a diagram about ‘dualisms’, but of the middles in the spectrums of thought. Nor is there necessarily a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ side to the diagram. It is the ‘electron cloud’ of positions in the middle that make up the tangled knot of meanings around how we see the land. I believe *activism* seeks to shift thinking more towards the top part of the diagram. Thus we want to acknowledge the natural in the land as well as the cultural. We want to have an ecocentric outlook (or ecological consciousness) that is based on intrinsic value - rather than human-centred anthropocentrism. We want to see humans as part of nature - but along with a responsibility to care for it. We want to see ourselves as custodians or stewards - not ‘owners’. We want to acknowledge the independence of the land rather than seek to control it. We want to see the land as sacred rather than just a resource for humans. And we want to decolonise our view of the land.

Figure 1 – Mind-map of the land

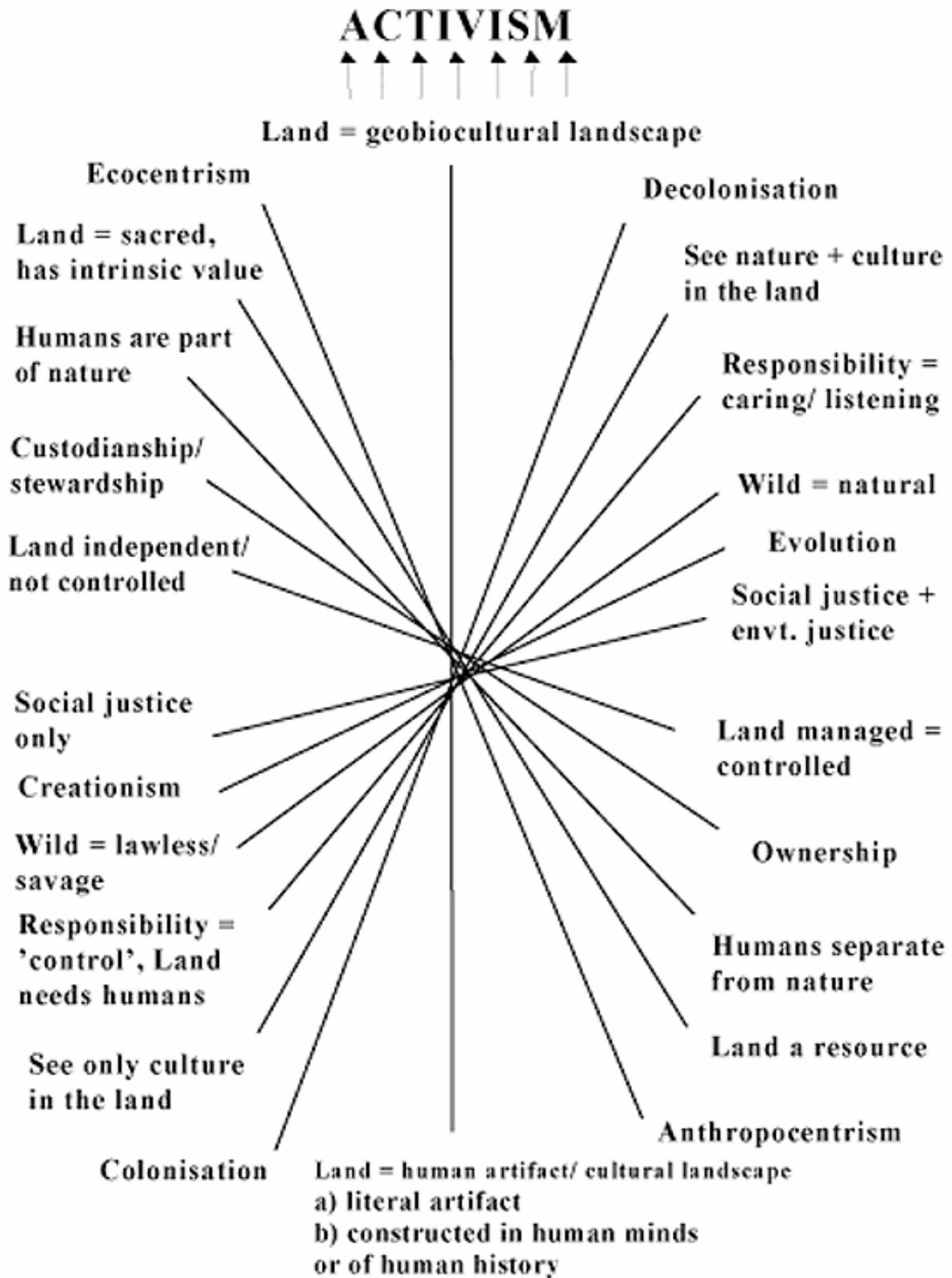


Figure 2 – Wilderness ‘mind-map’

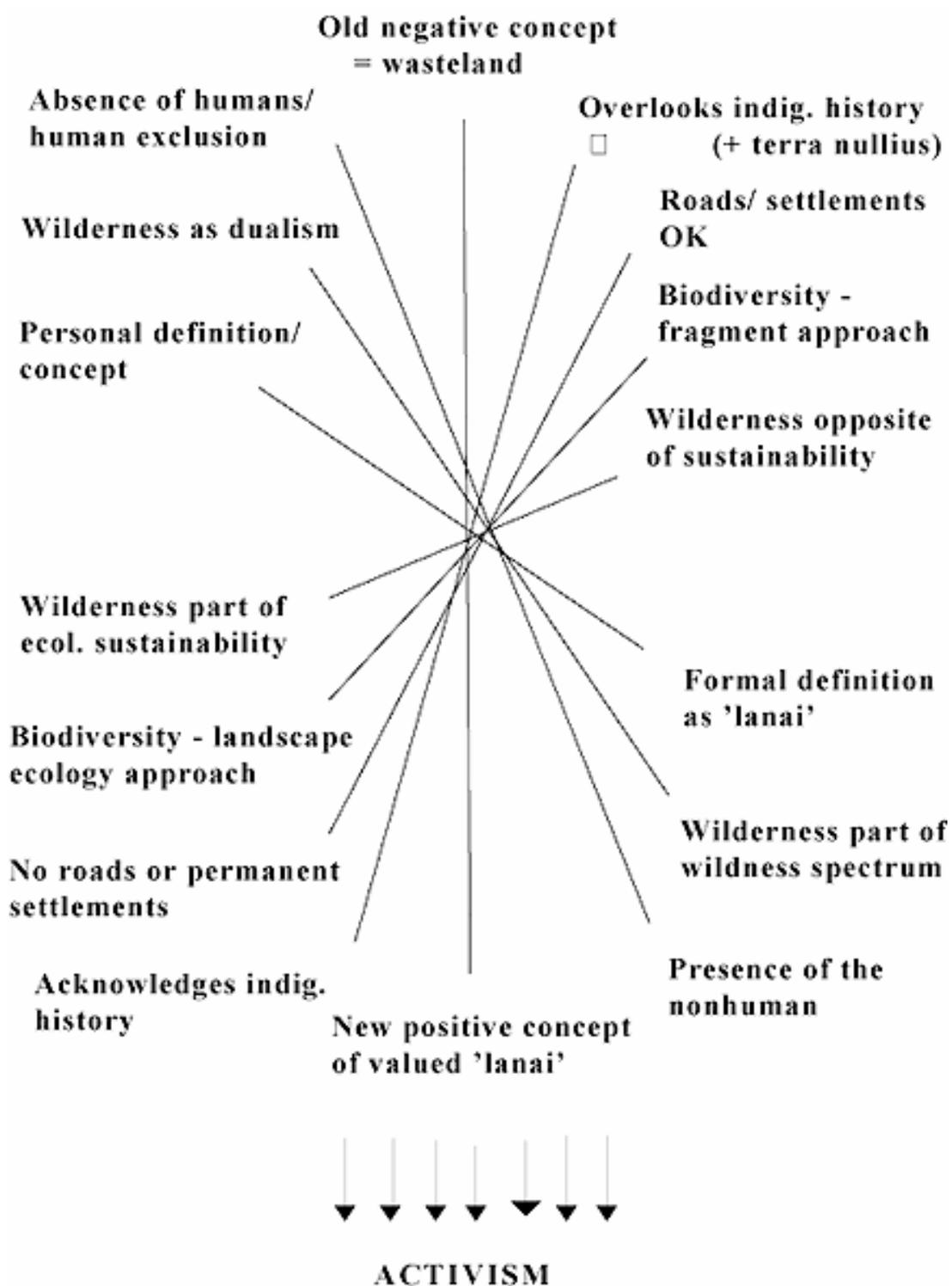
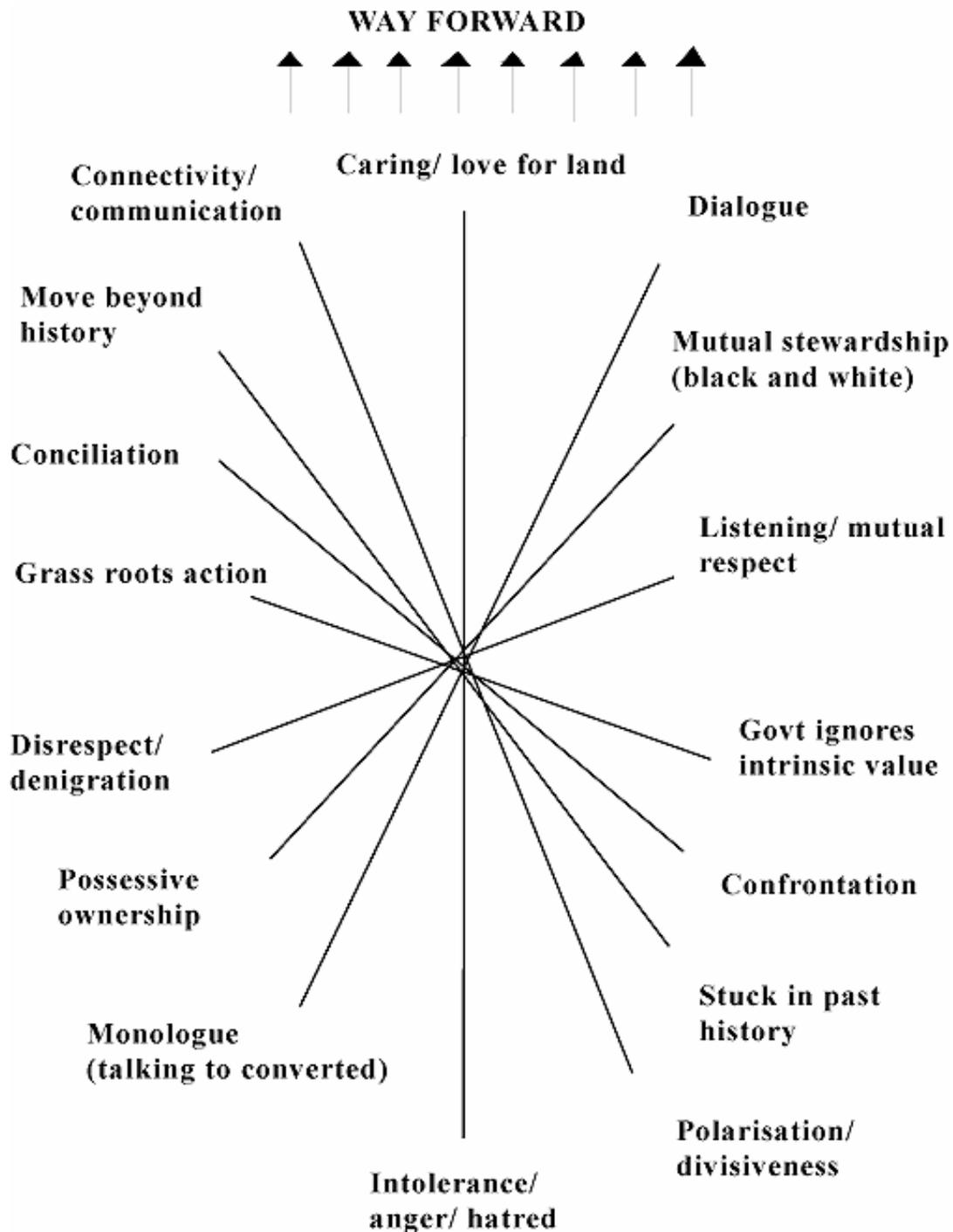


Figure 2 is a mind-map specifically for *wilderness* as a subset of the land. There are some eight spectrums of thought that relate to the wilderness knot here. In general it can be said that activism seeks to shift the mind-set towards the bottom part of the diagram, which uses the positive definition of wilderness, one that focuses on the presence of the non-human (or ‘more-than-human’ of Abram³³), sees wilderness as the end of a spectrum, sees wilderness as part of a landscape

ecology approach, does not contain roads or permanent settlements, acknowledges indigenous history and focuses on wilderness as being a lanai.

Figure 3 – The way forward for ‘wilderness’ as lanai?



So how do we unravel the wilderness knot and reduce the confusion – so we can continue to celebrate and protect wilderness into the future? Figure 3 suggests a way forward to protect wilderness as lanai. Part of it lies in recognition of the various *associations* that have been attached to the word ‘wilderness’. We need to focus on the *reality* of lanais themselves as formally defined, and steer away from popular and personal meanings. We need to avoid the politics of divisiveness

and reach meaningful dialogue that disposes of unnecessary confusion, and to elucidate the *real* areas where there are sticking points, and how these can be resolved. We can seek to make connections or we can stay polarised, we can talk to ourselves or have meaningful dialogue, we can stay stuck in past history or move beyond it to mutual stewardship, we can let the unresponsive political ideologies of government ignore nature's intrinsic value, or we can act at a grass-roots level for change. Rather than the Postmodernist idea of deconstructing all 'grand narratives', perhaps we need to espouse a grand narrative of Earth protection and restoration, related to the 'Great Work' of Berry³⁴, which in part includes protection of wilderness as lanai.

There is another issue however – that of *political naivety* in academia and in bureaucracy. Many academics are actually criticizing the associations attached to the word wilderness and *not* the formal definition and reality of lanais. This naivety is a problem, as criticisms deriving from it are having an effect in the real world in terms of the gazettal and management of wilderness. Few lanais in Australia today are being formally gazetted as 'wilderness areas'. This means they probably won't be managed as wilderness either. Given the very real power of the exploitation lobby, such naivety plays into the hands of those who are seeking *any* means to continue the exploitation of wilderness. By all means let academia criticize some of the associations (rightly or wrongly) attached to wilderness - but every time this is done there is a need to re-state the urgency to protect lanais (= wilderness). The pressures to exploit wilderness have not gone away, rather they have increased. Many academics seem to forget this in the rush to make their particular contribution.

I would like to suggest that substantial confusion can be avoided - not by retreating from the use of the word 'wilderness', but by concentrating on the definition of wilderness as *large natural areas* (lanais). In fact we cannot have any meaningful discussion about 'wilderness' until we know *what* meaning of wilderness is being referred to. As well, confusion can be decreased by promoting the recognition that 'wilderness' is in fact a *tribute* to past traditional indigenous land practices (and not a disregard of indigenous history). It was the evolved wisdom of sustainable traditional cultures that retained and sustained lanais - which today many of us call 'wilderness'. Keeping wilderness is thus about honouring that traditional 'wisdom of the elders'³⁵. The idea of shared 'custodianship' or *stewardship* of the land (rather than the possessive sense of ownership) is suggested as another way forward to disentangle the wilderness knot.

So when those of us who love 'wilderness' speak of it, we need to speak of wilderness as *lanai*. That is what we are celebrating, those large flourishing areas of natural bush that still remain in a continent where (in many states) the majority of native vegetation has been cleared or fragmented. When we celebrate 'wilderness', we are celebrating wilderness as *lanai* - we are not celebrating other meanings such as 'wasteland', 'terra nullius', 'human exclusion' or a 'purity' fixation. We are celebrating that we still live in a place that has large natural areas remaining – places that we respect and honour and love.

Let us also celebrate that we live in a country where we can still listen to and respect each other, and realise that while I might call a lanai 'wilderness', somebody else might want to call it something else – perhaps 'Wild Country' or 'quiet country'. Let us cut through the confusion to the reality of lanais and their value to us all. Through respectful dialogue we can see that while we might call it different things, it is something that we love and value, and that we must work together to protect it into the future. When we have disposed of the confusion and tangled meanings - so that we can work together to protect lanais – then we can truly celebrate!

References

1. Kelly R, Robson M, Birrell M (1993) *Establishment of a national reserve system in Australia*. ANZECC meeting 1993 (draft paper).
2. Washington, H (2002) *A sense of Wonder*. Ecosolution Consulting, Rylstone, NSW.
3. Cronon, W. (1996) The trouble with wilderness: or getting back to the wrong nature. In: Cronon, W, ed. *Uncommon ground: rethinking the human place in nature*. WW Norton and Co, New York.
4. Callicott J. B. (2003) A critique of and an alternative to the wilderness idea. In: Light, A and Rolston, H. eds. *Environmental ethics: an anthology*. Blackwell Publishing. pp. 437-443.
5. Oelschlaeger, M. (1991) *The idea of wilderness*. Yale University Press, New Haven; London, p. 320.
6. Derrida J (1966) Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences. In Adams, H (Ed), *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp. 1117-8.
7. Butler, C. (2002). *Postmodernism: a very short introduction*. Oxford University Press, London.
8. Baudrillard, J. (1987). The Evil Demon of Images. In: Docherty, T., ed. (1992) *Postmodernism: a reader*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York.
9. Langton, M. (1996) The European construction of wilderness. *Wilderness News* (The Wilderness Society, Australia), summer 95/96.
10. Adams, W. and Mulligan M. (2002) Introduction to *Decolonising nature*. Earthscan, London.
11. Callicott, J. B. (1996). Benevolent symbiosis: the philosophy of conservation reconstructed. In Callicott, J. B. and daRocha F., eds. *Earth Summit ethics: toward a reconstructive postmodern philosophy of environmental education*. State University of New York Press, Albany, pp. 139-159.
12. Gare, A. (1995) *Postmodernism and the environmental crisis*. Routledge, London/ New York.
13. Eckersley, R. (1992) *Environmentalism and Political theory: towards an ecocentric approach*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.
14. Hay, P. (2002) *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*. UNSW Press, Sydney.
15. Soule, M. (2002) Debating the myths of wilderness. In: *The Wilderness Society (Aust) calendar 2002* (introduction).
16. Soper, K. (1996) Nature/ 'nature'. In: Robertson, G. et al., eds. *FutureNatural*. Routledge, London/ New York, pp. 22-34.
17. Robertson, M.; Brown, A. J.; and Vang, K. (1992) *Wilderness in Australia: issues and options*. Australian Heritage Commission.
18. Rolston III, H. (2001) Natural and unnatural: wild and cultural. *Western North Amer. Nat.* 61(3): 267-276.
19. Rose, D. B. (1996) *Nourishing terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness*. Australian Heritage Commission.
20. Luoma, J. R. (1992) Eco-backlash. *Wildlife Conservation* 95(6):27-36.
21. Gomez-Pampa, A. and Kaus, A. (1992). *Taming the wilderness myth*. *Bioscience* 42(4):271-279.
22. Noss, R. (2003) A checklist for wildlands network designs. *Conservation Biology* 17(5):1270-1275.
23. Lowenthal, D. (1964) *Is wilderness 'paradise enow'?: images of nature in America*. *Columbian University Forum* 7:34-40.
24. Nash R. (1979) *Wilderness and the American mind*. Yale University Press.
25. Nash, R.(2001) *Wilderness and the American mind*. Yale University Press/ Nota Bene, New Haven; London, fourth edition, p. 381.
26. Flannery, T. (2003) Beautiful lies. *Quarterly Essay* 9:1-73.
27. Benson, J. (2004) Correspondence on 'Beautiful lies'. *Quarterly Essay* 13:127-134.
28. Recher H and Lunney D (2003) The problem with wilderness. *Nature Australia* 9(27):84.
29. Clark, M. (2004) Speech to University of Western Sydney 'Social Ecology Residential' by Professor Mary Clark from the University of California, Feb 2004.

30. Flannery, T. (1994) *The Future Eaters*. Reed Books, Chatswood, NSW.
 31. Rose, D. B. (2004) *Reports from a wild country: ethics for decolonisation*. UNSW Press, Sydney.
 32. Cronon, W. (2003) The riddle of the Apostle Islands: how do you manage a wilderness full of human stories? *Orion* May/June pp. 36-42.
 33. Abram, D. (1996) *The spell of the sensuous*. Vintage Books (Random House), New York.
 34. Berry, T. (1999) *The Great Work*. Bell Tower, New York.
 35. Knudtson, P. and Suzuki, D. (1992) *The wisdom of the elders*. Allen and Unwin, Sydney.
-