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**Title: Hunting magic, maintenance ceremonies and increase sites exploring traditional management systems for marine resources along the tropical north Queensland coastline.**

*[This paper is 'as presented' and has not been edited].*

Often when we hear of Indigenous environmental management techniques the focus is on management 'practices' e.g mosaic burning, rather than 'systems'. While not denying that some practices may be useful alternatives to other scientific or cost effective land management practices the question needs to be asked: how effective can these be in ecosystem management if adopted in isolation of the other components of Indigenous management systems?

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Lines (2006), has challenged the efficacy of Indigenous management systems and questioned their sustainability but provides no evidence that he understands the complexity of such systems. What happens to them when key elements are discontinued, lost or destroyed? Perhaps if we, in partnership with Aboriginal communities, explore the changes to such systems over time we can begin to understand the consequences of these changes and the implications for long term species and ecosystem management.

This paper outlines a current project, a work in progress, which seeks to explore one such indigenous system through the investigation of key archaeological sites.

At the time when European's were first recording observations along the Cape York Peninsula coastline, Aboriginal people and their Torres Strait Islander neighbours were hunting and consuming turtle and dugong in numbers great enough to be remarked on. Sites comprising heaped turtle and dugong bones were noted and in some cases sketched. Populations of both animals were however extremely healthy, the size of herds of dugong and the proliferation of turtle were also remarked on. Was this just some kind of coincidence as some environmentalists and scientists suggest? Or was there a system in place that actively contributed to the sustainability of the harvest of this resource?

**The arguments for and against Traditional Environmental Knowledge as a useful contribution to sustainable natural resource management and nature conservation.**

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Lines (2006) challenges the contribution of Aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge with an attack on what he refers to as the 'myth of the ecological aborigine'. He claims that idea of Aboriginal people living in harmony was a '...racial fantasy' in which 'white men not black ...(were) barbarous and ignorant' he claims that 'Aborigines were a trope, a figure of speech used to illustrate and condemn the destructiveness of the modern world' (Lines 2006:49).

Lines claims that rather than living in harmony with nature ...

*“...Australian Aborigines were flexible and opportunistic. They took advantage of the world as they encountered it. They did not recognise resources as finite or scarce. Rather, they considered scarcity merely as a temporal and spatial inconvenience remedied simply by moving to another area where that scarcity did not exist. Instead of practicing conscious conservation- which requires deliberate and self conscious sacrifice of immediate self interest to long term preservation of endangered species and habitats- Aborigines limited their impact by limiting their population, employing a limited technology and living within a limited understanding of need. (2006:50)*

In this rendition of hunter –gatherer practice Lines clearly portrays Aboriginal people as unthinking consumers of environmental resources somewhat akin to a locust plague moving across the landscape consuming one area and moving on to the next. This scenario completely disregards the complex net of tabus and ceremony attached to the use of many key resources such as turtle and dugong in the current study area. Clearly **ceremony** and **magic** cannot be integrated into Lines conservation paradigm even though they often involve ‘self conscious sacrifice of immediate self interests’.

Nevertheless, protected area managers continue to introduce elements of Indigenous traditional management into their routine land management practices. It has been noted however (Cruikshank 2000; Rose 2005), that where Aboriginal traditional environmental knowledge is considered by researchers and land management agencies there is tendency to collect it as data (e.g species use) and isolated practices (e.g seasonal burn patterns/times) and to then incorporate it into Western paradigms, ignoring as irrelevant any cosmological framework in which these practices had been embedded.

Rose outlines an Indigenous philosophical ecology for discussion where there are four general principles:

- ❑ Subjectivity in the form of sentience and agency is not solely a human prerogative but is located throughout other species and perhaps throughout the country itself.
- ❑ Life processes although they rely on humans do not prioritise human needs and desires;
- ❑ Kinship with nature- where non-humans and human are part of the same moral domain;
- ❑ The ecological system is not activated solely by human agency but rather calls humans into relationship and into activity. i.e... rather than humans deciding autonomously to act in the world, humans are called into action by the world. (Rose 2005:302-302).

### **System versus Practice:**

Archaeologists often describe individual sites or collections of sites in a broad landscape context. To this end and to imply the interrelatedness of these sites we have previously described the range and collection of these sites as an Indigenous ‘culturescape’. Similarly one can describe elements of culture as ‘practices’ and an interrelated collection of these that work to effect certain outcomes or control and mitigate processes as a ‘system’ To describe a system we must first recognise and describe the various elements and understand how they work together.

The almost total disconnect between economic practice and politics; and ceremonial practice and cosmology in our society obscures the relevance of ceremony and cosmological beliefs to the management of marine resources and to their crucial role in indigenous ‘systems’.

On the other hand some cursory acknowledgement is made to Indigenous contributions to ecological management but these ‘contributions’ are often

treated superficially. In some instances attributed to political correctness rather than any innate value in a backlash against the stereotype of the 'ecological aborigine'. Lines (2006:16) refers to this as 'myth making about Aboriginal Australia'.

He says: 'The net result [of the influence of anthropology and cultural relativism on the environment movement and public thinking about the environment] ..was that one stereotype- Aborigines as hyperactive managers and ecological geniuses possessed of a wisdom unattainable by other human beings- replaced another'. (Lines 2006: 169)

Although put in a particular scathing and objectionable manner- at one level his accusations have some validity. Part of the problem I believe is the way that these ideas have been embraced- so that land managers, governments and even Aboriginal people themselves in some instances, selectively take 'practices' e.g mosaic burning etc....and patch them together and call them 'systems'. Practices may be an important way of reinforcing Aboriginal ownership and control and they may be useful ecological tools but in isolation they tell us very little about Aboriginal relationships with the environment. In some cases the extraction and isolation of these practises reflects the discomfort of western science with the religious and spiritual realm.

In looking at the turtle and dugong 'magic' and ceremonial sites I am exploring the fundamental connection between the practices related to these places in order to see if they functioned in part, as an ecological management system. Whether or not the ecological impacts of this system were positive or negative is not assumed.

Applied sciences assume the separation of all things magical from those technical. In contrast Alfred Gell provides a way of exploring the role of magic in technology that may be useful in this current study.

Gell maintains that the '*opposition between the technical and the magical is without foundation. Technology is inadequately understood if it is simply identified with tool –use and tool –use is inadequately understood if it is identified with subsistence activity.*(Gell1988:6).

In his exploration of what 'technical means ' Gell points out that *What distinguishes technique from non -technique is a certain degree of circuitousness in the achievement of any given objective. It is not so much that technique has to be learned, as that technique has to be ingenious. Techniques form a bridge, sometimes only a simple one sometimes a very complicated one between a set of given elements (the body, some raw materials, some environmental features) and a goal–state which is to be realized making use of these givens. The given elements are rearranged in an intelligent way so that their causal properties are exploited to bring about a result which is improbable except in the light of this particular intervention* (1988:6)

Magic provides '*the orienting framework within which technical activity takes place. Technical innovations occur, not as a result of attempts to supply wants, but in the course of attempts to realize technical feats heretofore considered 'magical'.*p8

Magic is "an ideal" technology which orients practical technology and codifies technical procedures at the cognitive-symbolic level...Production 'by magic' is production minus the disadvantageous side-effects, such as struggle, effort etc."-

This by the way is exactly how Aboriginal people describe hunting magic.

'When you do it – you don't have to sweat the dugong go meet you half way'

### The Evidence

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The mid 19th Century was a time of exploration in North Queensland and a lot of valuable information comes from the journals and sketches of the naturalist/observers on the hydrographic survey ships such as *HMS Rattlesnake*. From them we get some of the earliest recording of turtle and dugong ceremonial and magic sites.

We are fortunate enough to have some early ethnographic descriptions of such sites. Jukes (1847: 136ff) provides a description and two illustrations of a 'native grave' on Cape York Island. Some of this information I have previously published in a paper relating to these specific Gudang sites (McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004 )

*On its northern side, about fifty feet from the sea, we found a native grave, on the brow of a small precipice. It consisted of a pile of skulls and bones, chiefly of turtle, but with a few that had belonged to a dugong. Most of the bones were very old, but some of the turtle were almost fresh, the shell still adhering to them. The pile was six feet long, four feet wide, and three feet high. It was surrounded by slabs of stone, and from the centre of it protruded a piece of bamboo about five feet long. Similar graves were found at one or two other points on the island, and one on a little bush islet some miles to the eastward. This one, however, was in a peculiarly picturesque and appropriate situation, a bleak and desolate spot, overhanging the sea, and well adapted for solemn and mournful reflections (1847: 137).*

Jukes also reports that Macgillivray later excavated the mound and found 'human bones belonging to more than one individual, but no individual, not even a complete skull' (1847: 138) inside.

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#### Slide 6:

Several years later Macgillivray and the crew of the H.M.S. *Rattlesnake* had a chance to discuss the function of this and similar stone cairns with Aboriginal and Islander people during their one month stay in the vicinity of Evans Bay, Cape York in 1848, and a two month stay in 1849. He noted,

*There are some favourite look-out stations for turtle where the tide runs strongly off a high rocky point. At many such places, distinguished by large cairns of stones, bones of turtle, dugong &c., watch is kept during the season, and, when a turtle is perceived drifting past with the tide, the canoe is manned and sent into chase...One of these on Albany Rock is a pile of stones, five feet high and seven wide, mixed up with turtle's and human bones, and, when I last saw it, it was covered with long trailing shoots of *Flagellarea Indica* placed there by a turtling party to ensure success, as I was told, but how was not explained. The human bones were the remains of a man killed there many years ago by a party of Kowraregas who took his head away with them. The mounds described and Figured in Jukes' *Voyage of the Fly* and considered by us at the time to be graves are merely the usual cairns at a look-out place for turtle (1852: 22).*

Brierly's diary and sketchbook (see Moore 1979; Brierly 1848-50a) from this same journey record in much greater detail a number of significant observations from key Gudang and Kaurareg informants about these turtle increase cairns and associated turtle hunting magic.

On October 25<sup>th</sup> 1849, Brierly was shown an actively used turtle increase cairn on the top of a hill on *Moebunum* [Tree Island] near Albany Island. Brierly measured the cairn and produced a field sketch (Figure 7). He describes it as:

*...composed of big stones below with the heads and other bones of turtles piled on top. Its height was about 4 feet [1.2 metres], the diameter of the base being about 2 yards [1.83 metres] diameter. Round the sides and near the top of the heap several (six) green branches were stuck...the long leaflets fluttering in the wind (Moore 1979: 87)*

He goes on to describe the careful placement and ornamentation of old turtle skulls with red ochre, along with the presence of seven freshly placed turtle heads in the centre, painted with 'red squares with a single bar crossing it and in some the square had a cross in the centre' (Moore 1979: 88). The cairn also contained the bones of other parts of the turtle, similarly smeared with red ochre, and a long bone belonging to a Gudang man who his informant told him had been killed by Islanders and had his head taken. In addition to the turtle bones and heads,

*Near the top of the heap were...six green branches stuck. They appeared to be the head of a kind of palm, the long leaflets fluttering out in the wind. At about a third of the height of the pile, measuring from the tip, were six leaves from some description of palm, the shaft of the leaf being about 3 feet [91.5cm] in length, round with long leaflets standing out at right angles to the main stem. They were all fluttering in the strong breeze like a number of ribbons on a stick...above these and springing out from the heads on top of the heap were five long pieces of some kind of plant which runs along the ground...which...radiated out...only in such a direction as the natives would be likely to approach the point from the water. These creepers they call bodja (Moore 1979: 88-9).*

Brierly's sketch also accurately reproduces several small subsidiary stones around the main cairn on which were placed various items in different combinations including (fresh) turtle flesh, (old) turtle bone, shells, grass and a round stone, which he later describes using the generic word for magical objects, *uperi* (Moore 1979: 226).

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Reviewing the sites related to turtle and dugong magic and ceremony reveals at least 3 levels of sites and practices.

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**Higher level ceremonies and securing the health and proliferation of the species**

The large number of stone cairns at Evans Point suggests that it functioned as an important turtle increase centre, which possibly involved large groups of Aborigines and Islanders in joint ritual activities.

The *Rattlesnake* expedition's main shore based landings at Evans Bay were at Ida Point to the south where they dug a well, the crew sleeping aboard the ship and coming ashore for supplies and scientific investigations only. Brierly's notes on his only visit to the Evans Point end of the bay are instructive. He was aware of a group of Kaurareg who had arrived at Evans Bay for a meeting with local Gudang people who were camped behind Evans Point at the base of Mt Bremer, and was keen to go ashore and see this camp.

*Pulled down and into a beach that lies between some rocks at the NW end of the beach, a very pretty place which I had not seen before [Evans Point]. About a dozen natives came down to meet us on the rocks as we landed...as I got out of the boat one of the natives seized my hand, guiding me with great care over the*

*rocks which in this place are all tumbled together, calling out quickly and holding me tightly by the hand when I appeared to be stepping in the wrong direction, pointing to the proper path* (Moore 1979: 72).

As I have previously noted (McIntyre-Tamwoy & Harrison 2004), it is quite likely that the apparently undecorated cairns on what was a generally rocky headland would have been invisible to him as Aboriginal monuments prior to the single decorated cairn near Albany Island being pointed out to him. Brierly was discouraged from visiting the camp on this occasion, and there were reports of 'corroborees' held over the preceding and following days which involved both Gudang and Kaurareg people. While Brierly was onshore, another of the sailors obtained a Kaurareg mask which had presumably been brought across for the ceremonies. The apparent anxiousness of the Aboriginal men who met Brierly at Evans Point and led him around the stones so that he did not disturb them, coupled with the presence of stone circles, suggests the site may have had a dual initiation/bora and increase function. The large number of cairns at this site and its dual function might be further accounted for by the fact that this was an important inter-group meeting place

#### **Species Maintenance during the season and from one season to the next.**

A number of single stone cairns (*agu*) occupy prominent headlands in the region. These appear to have functioned on a clan group or sub-clan group scale and did not require large inter-group gatherings. Brierly notes the use of *uperi* (magic objects) carefully placed around the stone cairn

Practices at these sites focused on balancing what is taken from the system by 'giving back', a practice that is a familiar part of traditional Aboriginal hunting practice in this part of northern Cape York as well as other parts of Australia. The placement of turtle heads on the cairn was 'thought to bring more turtle about' (Moore 1979: 168).

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#### **Hunting Magic**

Some men had magic paperbark bundles (*marki mabarr*) containing the tongues of head-hunted enemies and other magical objects, which would be anointed with turtle fat and tied to the bow of the canoe to give good luck during the hunt (Moore 1979: 184).

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Injino people today use certain sites and natural stone formations to bring them luck in hunting turtle. The sites such as the one at Peak Point may be well known but access to the magic is restricted to traditional owners through controlling information on the practices carried out.

#### **Similarities and differences with Torres Strait Sites and practices.**

McNiven (2003) has cited much of the ethnographic evidence of turtle magic from the Torres Strait and also in McNiven and Feldman (2003) with reference to their excavation of a dugong hunting magic site composed of dugong bone on Pulu Islet near Mabuia Island.

Haddon (1904: 334-5) also records a large granite boulder on Mabuia called a *wiwai* stone which was used in turtle increase and hunting magic rituals. This sound similar to the site at Peak Point near Cape York.

Haddon describes the way in which the skulls of successful hunters could be incorporated into the materials which were ritually deposited at turtle magic places to harness the skill of the spirit of the dead hunter (1935: 69). This is the practice described by MacGillivray at Albany Rock and consistent with the occurrence of human bone in the Cape York Island *agu*.

What is not found in the Torres Strait however are the large increase sites such

as that at Evans Bay. The stone cairns recorded at Evans Point appear to be similar in appearance to the *agu* described by Brierly, which prior to the turn of the nineteenth century were still being actively constructed and used by Aborigines at Cape York. However the *agu* generally appear as individual stone cairns. In addition it is clear that the stone Cairns at Evans Bay were not usually decorated with turtle skulls as were the individual *agu* or Brierly would have noted this when he visited the area.....Slide with quote re being guided.

### **Conclusion;**

There is evidence in Cape York Peninsula for a network of ceremonial sites was associated with dugong and turtle which was in use at the time of initial European contact. It is not known how long this system had been in place and it is clear that key elements of the system were dismantled or abandoned due to the impact of European invasion quite early on in the contact period.

In this paper I pose the possibility that the magic and ceremonial system that developed around the use of turtle and dugong prior to European occupation of the northern Cape York region functioned in part as a species management system. Ensuring the proliferation of the species through ceremony and controlling catch volumes through control of access to the hunting resource. The practices that together comprised this 'system' fostered an awareness of the importance of the resource and its connection to the broader ecosystem and the welfare of the community. It did this through the adoption of rituals which 'invested' in the environment and encouraged contemplation of the role hunting 'practice' in the environment. In other words the ritual practices associated with hunting ensure that hunting is carried out 'mindfully', meaning people are aware of the act of taking an animal from the environment rather than as Lines would have us believe consuming resources opportunistically.

Of course the other side of this view suggests that when such practices are discontinued through a breakdown in traditional knowledge systems as happened in many instances under the pressures of European colonisation, then the efficacy of the system is threatened. Clearly the large inter group ceremonies are highly vulnerable to restrictions in the freedom of groups to travel and meet at appropriate times and places. The smaller sites used by individuals and clan groups were less vulnerable as they were able to be used and maintained without the need to involve other groups. Such sites are still dependent on access to specific types of locations by 'owner' groups and so in the region would have been somewhat vulnerable to restriction of access to specific sites (e.g Jardine /Albany Island), although it is likely that new sites could have been created in similar locations. Many hunting magic sites may be accessed by individual hunters and so the knowledge and use of such sites is not reliant on the ability to gather with other groups.

Understanding how cultural systems changed over time and what elements have been lost or replaced is essential to understanding traditional resource management and traditional hunting systems and assessing whether or not these constituted sustainable resource use. Clearly, the loss or abandonment of ritual and ceremony can threaten the very relationship that Aboriginal people have with the environment and/or specific species. At the very least, individuals may lose the quality of 'mindfulness' that previously governed the use of the resource. For resource managers and scientists it is important to understand that ceremony and magic are important components to acknowledge and understand and cannot be excluded from a 'scientific' assessment for as Gell (1998:6) says *...the opposition between technical and magical is without foundation.*

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The people of Injinoo facilitate my research in many ways, particularly the Gudang people who encourage me to work on these sites and maintain an ongoing interest in this research. This paper is a 'work in progress' – the first archaeological excavations in relation to this site will be undertaken later this year. Some of the descriptions of the stone cairn sites have been previously published (see McIntyre & Harrison 2004).

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