

Recognising cultural dimensions in psychosocial impact assessment



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Purpose of presentation

Draw attention to cultural dimensions in psycho-social impacts

Call for greater understanding of the systemic relationships involved

PSIs can arise from

- major disruptions to people's relationships with(in) their environments
- senses of responsibility for the homeland and its species

For many Indigenous peoples these add major dimensions of grief and loss to those already known for other populations.



John Banagan via Lonely Planet
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/australia/northern-territory/kakadu-national-park/images/nourlangie-rock-kakadu-national-park>

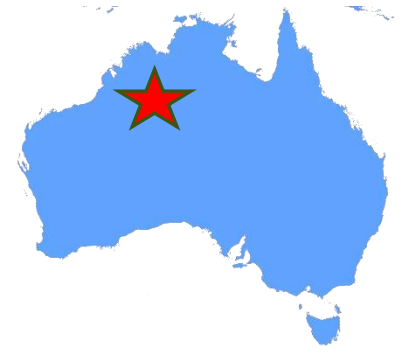
How culture and psycho-social are linked

‘Worldviews’ of particular human-environment-spirit relationships, involving strong connection and responsibility

Aboriginal Australian:

- all people derive from, belong to and are responsible for ‘Country’ and its species (complex connections)
- damage to Country, particularly a sacred site, pains the connected people deeply, represents a failure in their responsibility, creates fears for spiritual retribution

Example – Warmun community and Argyle Diamond Mine



Followed a century of cumulative impacts

Important ‘Dreaming’ site and songline for women (and everyone)



Image: Mining Technology, projects, 2 February 2021, <https://www.mining-technology.com/projects/argyle/?cf-view>

Cultural significance

Three women trying to trap Dayiwul the great barramundi with spinifex nets. This is a traditional method of fishing whereby nyiyirriny (river spinifex) is rolled and placed in the water forming a kind of net. Dayiwul was too clever for the women and jumped over the barrier they had laid. She pushed her body through the rock of what is now called Pitt Range. The women gave up and walked to a place called Gawinyji (Cattle Creek) where they turned into rocks.

The scales of Dayiwul embedded in the rock, became the diamonds that are extracted from the Argyle Diamond Mine.



Madeline Purdie, 2023 - Kilkayi Barramundi Dreaming

Initial impacts (about 1978 to 1985)

Distress, outrage

Felt powerless

But resisted and campaigned

Also empowered by their collective resistance

Community split: deep grievance against a breakaway elder and family

Felt culturally responsible

Deeply fearful of retribution by spirits, disaster, despite having no control whatsoever

But in discussion, emphasised their small gains.

Queenie McKenzie (1986-87)

They've just about flattened that hill. People are really sorry about that dreamtime. A big water might come yet and drown everybody.

If they level it right down there might be a big flood in this country.

Paddy Jumungee (1986-87)

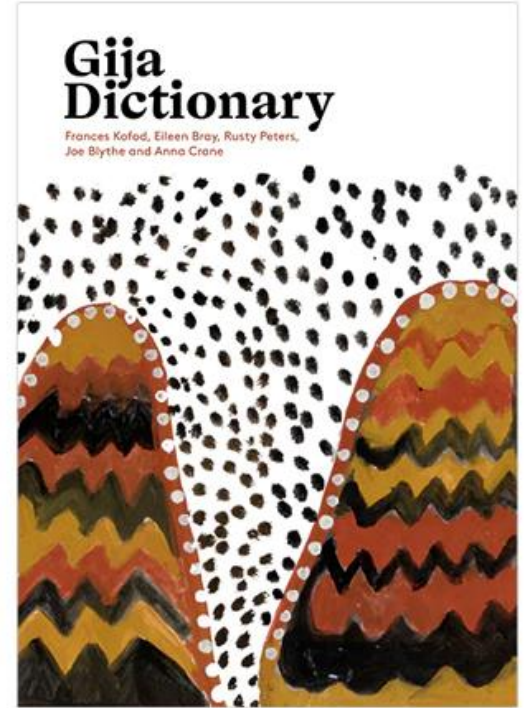
We were trying to look after that dreaming. It runs all the way to Dunham River. If they touched the main part, people would die. Some blokes were trying to cut at the sides and top. One died in his motor car - that's big punishment. Two have died now.

Warmun today

Culturally strong, suffers social 'ills' too

The older generation's dreams are happening

Strengthened by proudly facing shared challenges (e.g. flood of 2011) but new cumulative impacts (e.g. from top-down imposed housing disrupting social arrangements)



Cont.

The mine is closing.

The range of hills is being reshaped and rehabilitated, but that does not mend the sacred.

Better relationships with the company

Traditional owner groups (at Warmun, and others) will receive the land afterwards

Nevertheless the pain is still felt.

Grieving - 42 years on

This painting is about the closure of Argyle mine – the right hand side depicts the devastation caused by the site, and the left hand side depicts how we would like it to be rehabilitated for our future generations.

The current rehabilitation project started in 2020 and we can see some positive changes, however we know that our land will never be the same again.



**Madeline Purdie, 2022 - Argyle
Diamond Mine Rehab**

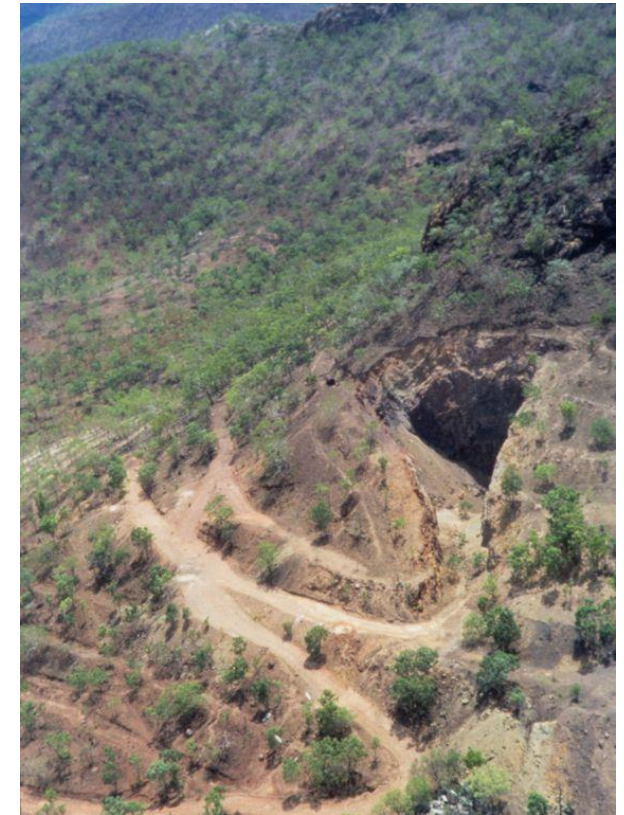
Coronation Hill mine proposal

mid 1980s - 1991

Proposal to mine on highly sacred
Jawoyn land

Although ultimately refused, the
proposal and its handling had major
psycho-social impacts

Much pressure on three male Traditional
custodians, discrediting



PSI features

Huge internal divisions between different sets of Jawoyn people,
distressing conflict

related to degrees of cultural beliefs and values, cf values towards
employment, overcoming youth troubles

Somewhat assuaged later by vindication of the elders, clever healing
processes by younger Jawoyn leaders developing unifying projects
and new routes to employment for the young.

Some conclusions

People-environment relationship can strongly cultural

- Disturbance to land and its spiritual beings generate intense, long-term, psycho-social impacts

We need to understand and support the worldview to understand the impacts

We need to consider assessment approaches, to understand:

- these impacts
- the experiences and strategies of those affected
- ways of achieving more just transformations in the interests of those with particular cultural attachments to lands and seas.

Let's continue the conversation!

Post questions and comments in the IAIA24 app.



#iaia24

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