

**DIALOGUING IN THE DESERT FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**AMBIVALENCE, HYBRIDITY AND
REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

NATALIE McGRATH

**This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
Murdoch University 2007**

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....

Natalie McGrath

Abstract

Sustainable development is becoming institutionalised across culture and geography as a framework in which to address ecological and social crises that are increasingly apparent and manifesting in diverse ways across local spaces. It is however, dominated by binary thought which is uncomfortable with ambivalence and separates self from nature and 'the other' of Indigenous people. Indigenous people are beginning to use the discourse of sustainable development but approach this from relational and holistic perspectives. The negotiation of representational structures and responsibility for implementing strategies towards sustainable development must account for these cultural differences and will require dialogue. This thesis explores how institutional practice and discourse frames Indigenous representation and responsibility and how this either enables or disables dialogue with Indigenous people.

A case study approach informed the research, and included two consultancy participatory projects in 2001-2004. The case study was located in the Western Desert of Western Australia and involved the Martu people in addition to people working within institutional structures. The first project required extending community development strategies and strengthening Martu representation to take responsibility for a housing development. The second project, titled *Dialogue with the Pilbara: Newman Tomorrow*, involved encouraging Martu representation in a process based upon deliberative democracy. Reflections from the fieldwork form a considerable part of the analysis. The research also included analysis of a number of interviews with local institutional actors in Newman. Two major themes are outlined: power and representation; and culture. The research is reflexive and involves the use of an autoethnographic story technique which enables a better understanding of the researcher's implicit and changing perspectives. The lessons that emerged from the reflections from the case study are insightful for sustainable development.

The thesis involves two layers (and is structured accordingly): the first relates to a case study and the second to the theory and practice of sustainable

development. The concluding section combines these two layers and emphasises the need for greater attention to Indigenous participation and autonomy in order to achieve Indigenous sustainable development. This thesis argues that diverse and hybrid Indigenous voices require considerable amplification within the discourse of sustainable development in order to provide relational and holistic perspectives. Particular focus is required upon the negotiation of representative structures to allow for Indigenous voices to be heard, and thus permit for the negotiation of responsibility across culture (an important consideration of sustainable development). This requires ongoing dialogue, creativity and reflexivity in context.

Some of the work in this thesis has appeared in the following publications

Book chapters

1. McGrath, N., Marinova, D. (2006) "Initiating Indigenous-Government Partnerships through Participation: Reflections from the Field in Western Australia", in S. Paulin (2006) *Communities Doing it for Themselves: Creating Space for Sustainability*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth (in press, acceptance date 6 February 2006)
2. McGrath, N., Marinova, D., Anda, M. (2005) "Participatory Methods for Sustainable Remote Indigenous Housing in Western Australia", in D. U. Vestbro, Y. Hurol, N. Wilkinson, (eds) *Methodologies in Housing Research*, The Urban International Press, Gateshead, UK, pp. 108-123
3. Marinova, D., McGrath, N. (2005) "Transdisciplinarity in Teaching and Learning Sustainability", in G. Banse, I. Hronszky, G. Nelson (eds) *Rationality in an Uncertain World*, Edition Sigma, Berlin, pp. 275-285

Refereed Journal Articles

1. McGrath, N., Armstrong, R., Marinova, D. (2004) "Participatory Development for Regional Sustainability in Western Australia: An Enabling State?", *Local Environment*, Vol. 9, No. 6, pp. 561-574

Fully Refereed and Edited Conference Papers

1. McGrath, N., Marinova, D., Flatau, P. (2005) Institutionalising a Participatory Culture for Indigenous Sustainability in Western Australia, in Gardiner, D. and Scott, K. (eds) *Proceedings of the International Conference on Engaging Communities*, Queensland Department of Main Roads, Brisbane, Queensland, <http://www.engagingcommunities2005.org/abstracts/Marinova-Dora-final.pdf>, accessed 8 February 2006
2. McGrath, N., Hartz-Karp, J., Marinova, D., Newman, P. (2005) Deliberative Dialogue for Sustainability: A New Era of Participatory Planning in Western Australia?, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Engaging Communities*, Queensland Department of Main Roads, Brisbane, Queensland <http://www.engagingcommunities2005.org/abstracts/McGrath-Natalie-final.pdf>, accessed 8 February 2006
3. Marinova, D., McGrath, N., Newman, P. (2005) Crossing Borders through Reflective and Participatory Practice: Learning, Researching, Teaching and Facilitating Sustainability, *Proceedings of the Teaching and Learning Forum 2005*, Perth, Western Australia <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf2005/refereed/contents-refereed.html>, accessed 4 February 2005
4. Marinova, D., McGrath, N., Newman, P. (2004) Dialogue with the City: An Era of Participatory Planning for Provision of More Sustainable Infrastructure in Perth?, in P. Wilding (1994) *Proceedings of the 6th International Summer*

Academy on Technology Studies: Urban Infrastructure in Transition: What can we learn from history?, Deutschlandsberg, Austria, pp. 195-210

5. McGrath, N., Marinova, D. (2004) Enabling Regional Indigenous Sustainability and Self-Determination in Western Australia, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Nature, Science and Social Movements*, Lesvos, Greece, CD ROM
6. Marinova, D., McGrath, N. (2004) A Transdisciplinary Approach to Teaching and Learning Sustainability: A Pedagogy for Life, *Proceedings of the Teaching and Learning Forum 2004*, Perth, Western Australia, <http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf2004/contents.html>, accessed 6 August 2004
7. McGrath, N., Marinova, D. (2004) Facilitating the Participation and Representation of Indigenous Women: The Perspective of a 'White Anglo Woman', *Proceedings of the Twelfth International Women in Leadership Conference*, Perth, Western Australia, CD ROM, pp. 132-146
8. McGrath, N., Armstrong, R., Marinova, D. (2003) Good Governance, Participatory Methods and Regional Sustainability, *Proceedings of the Second Meeting of the Academic Forum of Regional Government for Sustainable Development*, CD ROM
9. McGrath, N., Marinova, D., Anda, M. (2003) Participatory Methods for Sustainable Housing Development: An Action Research Project with an Indigenous Community in Western Australia, *Proceedings of the International Conference on Methodologies in Housing Research*, Stockholm, Sweden, <http://www.infra.kth.se/bba/bbaenglish/index.html>, accessed 16 May 2004

Acknowledgements

The research and writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the love and support of a number of people. For this, I continue to feel gratitude.

Acknowledgement must first go to my supervisor, Dora Marinova, who has been my teacher, mentor and friend for many years. Her love of teaching and of learning, complemented by her gentle and patient spirit, helped me to maintain inspiration over the length of the thesis in both academia and in humanity. Gratitude to Peter Newman must also be expressed, in particular, for his ability to crystalise the most difficult of subjects. I thank Peter also, for the overflowing spring of hope that he shares. I must also thank Dave Palmer for his patience in helping me navigate difficult terrains.

I also thank my daughter, Tahlia, my mother and father, Ilonka and Brian McGrath, and my sister, Kristie McGrath, for their patience, faith and love over the years. Without their support, this thesis would not have been possible. I dedicate this thesis to them, in the hope that the future will bring new opportunities to better humanity, and in recognition of the lessons we must share across generations as well as cultures.

I sincerely thank the Martu people and also the local agency people in Newman and the Western Desert for their continual patience and kindness. I also acknowledge Indigenous people for their wisdom and care for the planet Earth, from which I have much to learn.

I would like to recognise the ISTP corridor, a unique and special place that I have thanked every day, over the length of this thesis, for the blessing of belonging,

Particular thanks must go to Simone Ruane and Peter Devereux for their humour and presence which has always brought me back to the moment. I wish to also thank Steve Kinnane for his friendship, despite the distance. I also acknowledge

Jenny Pope, Rachel Armstrong and Rebecca Schiff for their understanding and encouragement.

Special recognition must go to Allan Johnstone, John Davis and Susan Davidson for their administrative support and conversations over the years.

Space restrictions require me to close this section with a warm thank you to all my friends.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS	VII
LIST OF FIGURES	X
LIST OF TABLES	XI
CHAPTER ONE	
INDIGENOUS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AN AGE OF AMBIVALENCE	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND	4
<i>1.2.1 The Ambivalence of Sustainable Development</i>	4
<i>1.2.2 The Ambivalence of Modernity</i>	8
<i>1.2.3 Representation and Hybridity</i>	15
<i>1.2.4 Indigenous Sustainable Development</i>	18
1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS	20
<i>1.3.1 Research Questions</i>	20
<i>1.3.2 Structure of the Thesis</i>	22
1.4 MY PERSONAL HISTORICAL POSITION	24
CHAPTER TWO	
REFLECTING UPON METHODOLOGY: DIALOGUING IN THE DESERT	27
2.1 INTRODUCTION	27
2.2 PHRONETIC RESEARCH: A CASE STUDY APPROACH	28
<i>2.2.1 A Case Study Approach</i>	30
<i>2.2.2 An Overview of the Case Study</i>	34
2.3 DECOLONISING RESEARCH THROUGH PARTICIPATION AND REFLECTIVE NARRATIVE	43
<i>2.3.1 Participatory Action Research</i>	44
<i>2.3.2 Reflective Practice and Self-Reflexivity: Story Telling</i>	45
<i>2.3.3 Interviews</i>	48
<i>2.3.4 A Summary of Thesis Stages and Methods</i>	50
<i>2.3.5 Ethics</i>	51
<i>2.3.6 Validity, Reliability and Objectivity</i>	52
2.4 REFLECTING UPON STORIES: A PLURAL-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE	54
<i>2.4.1 Fieldwork Stage 1 and 2</i>	54
<i>2.4.2 Reflections upon Stage 1 and 2</i>	67
<i>2.4.3 Fieldwork Stage 3</i>	68
<i>2.4.4 Reflections upon Stage 3</i>	75
<i>2.4.5 Reflections upon Fieldwork Stage 4</i>	76
<i>2.4.6 Final Reflections</i>	77
CHAPTER THREE	
STORYLINES AND DISCOURSE: THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT	79
3.1 INTRODUCTION	79
3.2 STORYLINES AND DISCOURSE	80
3.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN POLICY	82
3.4 TWO STORYLINES OF INDIGENOUS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	87
3.5 DISCOURSE ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA	91
3.6 DISCUSSION	110

CHAPTER FOUR	
AMBIVALENT STORIES: POWER AND REPRESENTATION	119
4.1 INTRODUCTION	119
4.2 THEORIES OF POWER	119
4.3 DISCOURSE ABOUT MARTU PEOPLE	122
4.4 THEMES FOR DISCUSSION.....	153
4.4.1 <i>Discourse and the Power of Storylines.....</i>	154
4.4.2 <i>Regional Narratives: Sustaining Development?.....</i>	160
4.4.3 <i>Power and Knowledge in the Consultancy Participatory Projects.....</i>	171
4.4.4 <i>Representation in the Consultancy Participatory projects</i>	178
4.4.5 <i>Insiders and/or Outsiders</i>	180
4.5 CONCLUSION	186
CHAPTER FIVE	
HYBRID SPACES: CULTURE, REPRESENTATION AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE.....	189
5.1 INTRODUCTION	189
5.2 MARTU CULTURAL CHANGE.....	189
5.3 CULTURAL DIFFERENCE.....	195
5.4 GENDER.....	201
5.4.1 <i>Historical Representations of Indigenous Gender in Australia.....</i>	202
5.4.2 <i>Gender and Martu Participation in the Consultancy Participatory Projects.....</i>	204
5.4.3 <i>Reflections upon Representation</i>	208
5.5 COMMUNITY AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE.....	211
5.5.1 <i>Community.....</i>	212
5.5.2 <i>Individual.....</i>	216
5.5.3 <i>Family.....</i>	218
5.5.4 <i>Community Leaders.....</i>	222
5.5.5 <i>Reflections upon Representation</i>	226
5.6 DISCUSSION	228
5.6.1 <i>Difference and Hybridity</i>	228
5.6.2 <i>Politics</i>	232
5.6.3 <i>Cross-cultural Communication.....</i>	236
5.7 CONCLUSION	242
CHAPTER SIX	
AMBIVALENCE AND HYBRIDITY: LESSONS OF HOPE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	247
6.1 INTRODUCTION	247
6.2 RELATIONSHIPS AND REPRESENTATION	248
6.2.1 <i>Relationships across Culture in the Western Desert</i>	248
6.2.2 <i>Relational Holism.....</i>	255
6.3 POWER, POLITICS AND DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY	262
6.3.1 <i>Power and Politics.....</i>	263
6.3.2 <i>Cosmopolitan Deliberative Democracy.....</i>	265
6.4 CROSS-CULTURAL GOVERNANCE	268
6.4.1 <i>Cross-cultural Governance in Australia.....</i>	269
6.4.2 <i>Institutional Change</i>	281
6.5 REFRAMING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH CULTURE VALUE CHALLENGE	288
6.5.1 <i>Development and Hybrid Modernities.....</i>	289
6.5.2 <i>Autonomy, Choice and Capabilities</i>	293
6.6 CONCLUSION	298
CHAPTER SEVEN	
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH	301
7.1 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS	301
7.2 THESIS SUMMARY	301

7.2.1 <i>Research Question One</i>	302
7.2.2 <i>Research Question Two</i>	309
7.3 THESIS CONCLUSIONS	311
7.4 AREAS OF FURTHER RESEARCH	315
APPENDIX ONE TENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	317
APPENDIX TWO NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ABOUT ALCOHOL	329
APPENDIX THREE NEWMAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP ARTICLE	331
APPENDIX FOUR NEWSPAPER PAPER ARTICLE ABOUT THE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AT PARNPAJINYA	333
APPENDIX FIVE ADVERTISING FOR THE MARTU COUNCIL’S AGM	335
APPENDIX SIX TRAINING NOTES FOR THE MARTU COUNCIL ABOUT PROTOCOLS FOR MEETINGS	337
APPENDIX SEVEN NEWSPAPER ARTICLE ABOUT BASKET MAKING	339
REFERENCES	341

List of Figures

Figure 2.1:	Martu Territory and Language Groups	35
Figure 2.2:	A Street Directory of Newman	37
Figure 2.3:	The Old Watering Hole	38
Figure 2.4:	Parnpajinya Early 1990s	39
Figure 2.5:	The Wrath of Cyclone Vance	40
Figure 2.6:	The Mt Whaleback Mine Site	42
Figure 2.7:	Advertising for the Dialogue	70
Figure 2.8:	Entrance to the Parnpajinya Site 2004	71
Figure 2.9:	New Houses at the Parnpajinya Site 2004	71
Figure 2.10:	Visitors' Facilities at the Parnpajinya Site 2004	71
Figure 2.11:	Mud Map of the Western Desert	73
Figure 4.1:	Newspaper Article combating Martu Stereotypes	132
Figure 4.2:	Street Names in Newman in Martu Language	162
Figure 4.3:	Newspaper Article about NAIDOC week in Newman	163
Figure 4.4:	Spiny Spinifix	165
Figure 6.1:	Flyer for the Martu Council AGM	274
Figure 6.2:	Basket made in Newman by a Martu Woman	293

List of Tables

Table 2.1:	Three Principles of Data Collection for the Case Study	32
Table 2.2:	Coding Sequence for each Stage of Fieldwork	34
Table 2.3:	A Summary of the Thesis Stages and Methods	50
Table 2.4	Research Quality and Rigor	53
Table 2.5	Participatory Research Methodologies used in the Parnpajinya Housing Project	56
Table 2.6:	Rapid Rural Appraisal used in Stage 1	57
Table 2.7:	Demography and Housing Capacity of the Martu at Newman and Parnpajinya	60
Table 2.8:	Participatory Rural Appraisal used in Stage 2	63
Table 3.1:	Two Storylines in Australia	88
Table 5.1:	Comparison of Different Worldviews of Indigenous and Anglo People	196
Table 5.2:	Anglo and Indigenous Communication Styles	238
Table A.1:	A New and Old Paradigm: The Sustainable Development Transition	326