

Introduction to the discussion

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Introduction to the discussion

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- 1 **BARBARA:** Because I didn't introduce the session today, before I give the microphone to Bob Tonkinson, I would just like to make a few comments. I think it's very important the way everybody has insisted on the importance of history, and also on the issue of cognitive kinship in Native Title because it's not just an issue for Noongar people, for people who live where there are cities, but also everywhere in Australia where people in one way or another have been displaced, or were moving before the settlements were organised. The issue of Noongar land that was presented by Virginie Bernard, was already discussed in the 1990's in Broome, for instance, when the Rubibi Corporation was created, with Yawuru around Broome, the importance of history then.
- 2 I would just like to tell a personal story because the reason why I was involved there at the time, in an oral history project that I was asked to work with my ex-mother-in-law who was a Yawuru woman. She had been recording since the early 1980's the history of displacement in the Broome region. There were about 12 big families involved who were later in the Rubibi Corporation. This project led to a book that was going to be published by Magabala Books but the day before going to print, it was already announced to come out, it was seized by the State. And what was in this book? There were many, many testimonies, I mean transcribed, that was my job, and criss-crossed with any literature I could find in French, in English or in German that I organised to be translated in English for the Kimberley Land Council, for that project. It was all the conflicting interests that groups had because they had been displaced, in missions and so on. The old people were having their testimony in that book. It was seized but then it circulated between the 12 families who were in conflict, and they all used it, including Dodson, Peter Yu and I will not name any other names but they are very big figures in the Broome region who are famous artists, film makers and so on, or people who have nothing.
- 3 So history is a real tool, and I really feel that we have a responsibility, but I often feel powerless, so that this paradigm can be changed, so this history that we heard today for the Noongar. Why is it that it is the lawyers in court who decide what is the right to live for the people who were colonised in Australia? I just don't understand! Now, a

second point. Lise Garond was proposing to say that the issue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is not just a question of the State. It's not a question of the State because it's a question for all of us, everywhere in the world, how we relate. I don't believe in otherness, how do we relate to any other human being, and this is a constant fight, I find, against the normative State. And again, in anthropology, what I believe to be able to address the questions that you propose to address, that you say were underestimated Sylvie Poirier, in terms of objectivity, there is transversality in every person today and we all have to obey the State, but we also try to resist. In the interactions that we have with the Aboriginal people, they also have that transversality, the State is in them, some wide values are in them. If we work with Aboriginal people, or people here who have never been in Australia but who read some of our works, who buy the art, they also have some values they pick up from Aboriginal people. Yesterday Françoise Dussart was asking, why is it that we are so committed and we keep going back? Because personally, and this could be put to discussion, I believe that Aboriginal people do present precisely something for post-modernity in terms of the way they have conceptualised this network of relations which are transversal. It's a subjectivity that has been constructed that we desperately need to have as an alternative to what the State is imposing on us, and especially today when there is a recognition of failure of all the multicultural policies. And I noticed that nobody, since yesterday, has used the word intercultural, while in the catalogue of Papunya it comes back very often, and it has been coming back very often in some of the Aboriginal literature produced in the last ten years. I don't believe in interculturality, I don't believe that there's something like the White and the Aboriginal people with a space in between where exchanges are made. Of course Bhabha talked about a third space, but we all live in a third space, which is the only space which is reconstructed in different places.

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