

## **Tiwi Islands, Australia**

Wurrumiyanga is the capital of the Tiwi Islands off the coast of Australia's Northern Territory. With a population of almost 3000, the Tiwi People are the traditional owners of the Tiwi Islands where they continue to speak their own language .

In an effort to grow it's economy, the Tiwi Land Council and local government is turning to tourism, a lucrative Aboriginal art market, farming and what can essentially be labeled as a commodity economy - the selling of natural resources.

I met farm manager Richard Portamini while cycling through town early in the morning. He invited me to come along to this modest farm a few kilometers from town.

We drive through the fields of bananas trees, sweet potato and Bougainville seedlings. Richard explains that he and his team are working while getting their certificate in forestry or agriculture. Up-skilling is important he says. But keeping the farm going is tough, "who runs a farm with just five men?" he says rhetorically.

It's a small farm, producing goods on a small scale. Eventually, he says, they should supply produce for local consumption. During the time of my visit, Richard and his team are working towards regularly supplying produce to the supermarket in town.

Imported from the mainland, goods sold in Wurrumiyanga's supermarkets are more expensive than in Darwin - the state's largest city. As I buy lunch to meet with a group of sisters, or transgender women, I see Tiwi People pay with what looks like bank cards. I later realize that these are cashless welfare cards.

To fully appreciate the significance of the cashless welfare card, it's imperative to discuss the 2007 Northern Territory intervention - a state intervention aimed exclusively at Aboriginal People in the Northern Territory. This intervention led to military presence in the state's Aboriginal Communities.

The NT Intervention introduced policies such as a cashless welfare card, a state-wide alcohol ban while also taking away traditional land and removing children from their homes. In the eyes of many Aboriginal People, it took away what was left of their sovereignty.

We didn't explicitly discuss the intervention, but Crystal Love, a transgender Tiwi Woman known in Australia as a Sistergirl, was vocal about discussing religion, their changing culture and what Crystal described as Tiwi Law versus Australian Law. When asked about life on the Tiwi Islands, Crystal Love says "We need to start realizing that we need to start getting involved in politics, getting involved in law changing".

Ownership is key, she continued, "...we need to encourage our Tiwi People that we can make a change. And the change that our people need to do is to start lobbying and to start being activists and start talking about it. Not let other people tell us how we can govern our own people."

## **Minjerrabah (Stradbroke Island), Australia**

The videos of Minjerrabah document the island's coast. The videos show little to no human impact or presence in a place in a place with a complex history and present.

Since the 1940's, sand mining has been a significant part of Stradbroke Island in South East Queensland. Decades onwards, Stradbroke Island, or Minjerrabah in the local Aboriginal language, is considered a case study in the destructive nature of sand mining, with harm caused to wildlife, water sources, fisheries and erosion.

With mining operations ending in 2019, Minjerrabah' economy is in transition with government plans to strengthen tourism.

With an economy dependent on mining, Australia's fragile ecosystem is susceptible to mining activities. Throughout the country, communities are affected and speak out against existing and planned mining activities.

Jenny Ellis is a Garamaroi woman from Mungindi in northwestern New South Wales. A concerned mother and grandmother, she spoke at a rally at Sydney's parliament house in 2016.

"These mines are bad. They're very very bad. Fracking is very bad. We need to stop fracking. We need to stop all these mining companies that are doing this. It's like a shock. Send it down the middle of the earth and blow up a part of the earth. How are they gonna repair that? How are they gonna bring healing to the earth? They can't. The only way that they can is if they stop the mining."

On Google Maps, the mining sites leave a visible imprint in contrast to my documentation. During this period, I started research on mining and covered the issue for radio.

### **Turakirae Head Scientific Reserve, Aotearoa**

This came at a time that I was thinking a lot about a controversy involving a world champion boxer and politician from the Philippines - Manny Pacquiao. In a video, he had said that same-sex couples were "mas masahol pa sa hayop (worse than animals)".

While the scrutiny is justified, I felt that the entire discussion was missing a key point. Humans are animals.

It is a common to think that humans are separate from animals, mostly that humans are above animals. But we are part of a greater ecosystem.

To rephrase Pacquiao's statement, humans equal animals.

The video documents the Turakirae Head Scientific Reserve - a geological site near Wellington in Aotearoa New Zealand.. When I looked back at the footage of the seals at the beach, it made me think of a group of people, just hanging out.

This triggered further thinking about human relationships with the environment. How do we compare to other animals then? The geological reserve became a key reference.

Utilizing a scientific approach to environmental protection, the reserve reflects the value attributed to scientific and non-scientific systems of knowledge - in this case Maori and western knowledge. This tug of war between credible and discredited systems of knowledge, places humans at different points in relation to nature. Sometimes at the centre, sometimes at the periphery.

Since this period in 2016, I've furthered this work by focusing on human intervention and human impact on the environment.