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The Cinematic Northern Territory of Australia

Jonathan Rayner, University of Sheffield

Introduction

> Here is a passionate and prolific earth never tamed and trimmed to small designs of man; …. A sixth of Australia…. a State, and one of the greatest in its own geographical right - 523,620 square miles from under Capricorn to the Timor Sea …. Someone is always discovering the Territory, its colour and beauty, infinite resources, boundless wealth, 'forever piping songs forever new' […] What is the truth of this changeling child of ours? Is it a paradise or hell, milk and honey or Dead Sea fruit? Has it a transcendent future or only a pitiful past? Is it true, as the American serviceman said, that in colonising Australia we 'began at the wrong end' or, to use the cynical old phrase you hear so often up there, shall we 'hand it back to the blacks with apologies'?[1]

This paper examines the filmic representation of the Northern Territory of Australia, through a consideration of the narratives, settings and locations used to depict this distinctive region within Australian cinema. The Northern Territory (frequently referred to simply as 'The Territory') is arguably the most remote and underpopulated region of Australia, not just in the opinion of outsiders but from the perspective of Australians themselves. The Territory's capital Darwin, for example, is over 1900 miles from Sydney. Where Melbourne and Sydney both boast populations of over 4 million, Darwin's is barely more than 130,000, and the entire Northern Territory accounts for just over 1 per cent of the total population of the country.[2] The Northern areas of Australia are also differentiated demographically from the rest of the country. The Northern Territory and Western Australia are the only states where males still outnumber females, and in the Territory the Aborigines and Torres Straits

[1] Graham Wilson, *Children of Arnhem's Kaleidoscope* (BeyondBeyond Books, 2012), 8-9.
[2] Anonymous, Australian Bureau of Statistics: Northern Territory: <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/3218.0~2010-11~Main+Features~Northern+Territory?OpenDocument#PARALINK2> accessed 8 January 2015

Islanders constitute approximately 30 per cent of the population, the highest proportion of any Australian state.[3] Consequently, the Territory's place in the popular imagination (as a remote, inhospitable, unique, frontier-like and male-dominated terrain) conforms to pervasive perceptions of the country, character and landscape of the country as a whole. The perception of the Territory as a distant and unspoilt area, even by comparison with the expanses of Western and Central Australia, is also reflected in the preservation of extensive Aboriginal cave art in the region and the establishment of the iconic Kakadu National Park within the region. While Australian cinema since the 1970s has explored the country's culture and character through historical narratives, polarised depictions of the rural and urban environments, and more recently has striven to represent the modern and multicultural society, the Territory has occupied a special place within documentary, touristic and horror discourses crucial to the image, and self-image, of the country.[4] The films examined here - the documentary feature *The Overlanders* (Harry Watt, 1946), the first Australian colour feature film *Jedda* (Charles Chauvel, 1955), the horror film *Rogue* (Greg McLean, 2007) and the self-conscious epic *Australia* (Baz Luhrmann, 2008) – reflect the range of aesthetic, narrative, affective and ideological responses to and representations of this iconic region. The narratives of these films are set in the Territory, but notably their shooting locations are not limited to it. The disjuncture of setting and location points to paradoxes of depiction, in which the image of the territory propagated by mise-en-scene and narrative impacts on the ways in which these films' images feed, reinforce or alter an Australian imaginary, influence a national image or identity linked to perceptions of landscape and environment, and affect the local and global audiences addressed by these representations.

The Overlanders (1946)

The Overlanders was an Ealing production, conceived during the Second World War but completed after the war's end, as part of the production of documentary-inspired feature films representing and supporting the war effort. It was written and directed by Harry Watt and starred Chips Rafferty, a local actor who came to embody the laconic Australian male in the

[3] Ibid.
[4] In examining some specific examples, Stephen Carleton has proposed that films portraying the Northern Territory constitute a distinct group or genre within the national cinema. Stephen Carleton, 'Cinema and the Australian Northern: Tracking and Troping Regionally Distinct Landscapes via Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*', *Metro* 163 (2009), 50-55.

cinema of the 1940s and '50s. The British-ness of the production should not distract from the initiation of the project by the Australian authorities, who desired a propaganda documentary production to be made by the Ministry of Information to represent the Australian contribution to the global conflict.[5] After lengthy research the story Watt chose to depict was of the epic cattle drives, which moved massive herds from the Northern coasts of Australia across the country away from an anticipated Japanese invasion. The film's opening voice-over describes the Territory in stark terms, reflecting both the rhetoric of wartime and Australia's contemporary racial realities:

> In 1942 the Japanese were driving invincibly southward from Singapore. It seemed inevitable that next into their hands would fall the Northern Territory of Australia, largest undeveloped region in the world, with a million head of cattle and a population of only 5000 whites. Space, scorched earth and space, was Australia's final weapon. But first, the vast herds of the Northern must be saved.

At this point, the importance, and even the quantification, of whites and cattle, rate above the Territory's non-white, Aboriginal population. Amid scenes of the evacuation of families and farms, the film's exhortation for Australia to follow the example of Soviet Russia in using the scale and inhospitableness of its landscape – 'scorched earth and space' - to confound an invader, is perhaps an indication of the Left-wing tendencies of its makers.[6]

The emphasis upon the Territory's isolation works to heighten the apparent vulnerability of its population and assets, but also ennobles the teams of volunteer drovers who move the cattle thousands of miles across arid country rather than simply destroy them. Rafferty's character Dan McAlpine gathers a scratch crew or 'plant' together from work colleagues, the Parsons family fleeing the expected invasion, a pair of Aboriginal drovers, and a Scottish sailor who leaves his ship to join the drive. The quiet determination with which this extraordinary operation is undertaken rhymes the portrayal of British reticence and innate

[5] Adrian Danks, '"Scorched earth and space": *The Overlanders* (Harry Watt, 1946)' *Senses of Cinema* 64 (2012): <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/64/scorched-earth-and-space-the-overlanders-harry-watt-1946/> accessed 30 April 2014.
[6] Ibid.

Australian nonchalance together in the format of the wartime documentary feature. Although the 'mass migrations' of cattle are described by the voice-over as 'unique in history', a crucial national precedent is invoked as Dan proposes his journey. When Bert the boss tries to dissuade Dan from overlanding his cattle from the Kimberley to either Queensland or Adelaide, he cites the Durack family's three-year journey to the region (in the opposite direction, from Queensland to Northern Territory) in the nineteenth century. Equally, Australian nationalism and socialist sympathies emerge in the call to preserve the Territory as an ideal and epitome of the nation and its values. When one of his helpers proposes the creation of a company to exploit the natural and mineral wealth of the Northern Territory, Rafferty's Dan responds with an instinctive reproof, throwing the company's draft prospectus into the campfire:

> We've exploited our south for a hundred years and torn the heart out of it. The Territory's too valuable to be messed about by get-rich-quick schemes like yours. I say let's save the Northern from what we've done to the south […] Leave it to Australians. Ordinary Australians. It's a national job.

Dan's example and the experience of the drive chasten and temper its Australian participants and naturalise the sailor (nicknamed 'Sinbad'). The Territory clearly breeds or creates the best sort of Australians for both peace and war work, and encompasses a national wealth worth both defending during the war, and developing after it as a source of communal pride and prosperity, rather than capitalist corruption. Ironically, however, directly after the scene in which Dan asserts national ownership and responsibility for the Territory, Sinbad and the Parsons' eldest daughter observe Jacky, one of the Aboriginal drovers, singing as he rides around the resting herd. When Sinbad wonders aloud what he is singing about, Mary replies carelessly: 'About when his people owned this land, probably. When they were happy.' During their journey, Dan has pointed out the 'wild blacks' observing them to the Parsons' younger daughter Helen. Not counted among the region's official inhabitants and no longer considered its owners, the presence of Aborigines within the film is limited visually to picturesque detail and narratively to subordinated labour within a (white) national project. Despite its overt themes of contemporary nationality, unity and sacrifice, *The Overlanders*

overlooks or discounts precedents of ethnicity, difference and loss within the Territory which stands symbolically for the entire country.

Jedda (1955)

The implicit valuations and sites of Aboriginality within the landscape of the Territory become explicit in the story and imagery of *Jedda*. Chauvel's final feature production opens with a series of aerial shots of remote, spectacular and unpopulated outback landscapes accompanied by otherworldly choral singing, and a voice-over which locates its narrative and its protagonists within a simultaneously natural, mystical and ideological environment:

> This is part of the oldest land in the world: the Northern Territory of Australia. It is my land, and the land of Jedda, the girl I loved. My name is Joe. I'm the half-caste son of an Afghan teamster and an Australian Aborigine woman [….] This is a land of half-a-million square miles, a land of buffalo and wild pig, of great cattle herds and lonely homesteads. Mountains of mystery, red tombs in Australia's dead heart, which hold the secrets of the Aborigines' dreamtime, the burial place of the old totem-men, a native race so old that their laws and religion stretch to a past beyond our thinking.

The shifting tone of Joe's statements, overlaying the remarkable colour views of deserts, mountains and rivers, reflects the paradoxes of the attitudes to race and landscape which the film encompasses. The pride expressed in the unique national landscape, evident not least in its being committed to colour film, is tempered or reversed by the landscape's investiture with uncanny Aboriginal spirituality, which represents a culture alien to and substantially predating white colonisation. Where *The Overlanders* negated or peripheralised Aboriginality, in *Jedda* the admission of its presence and influence within the environment produces a parallel to the landscape's natural danger and difference in the perceived secrecy and inscrutability of indigenous culture. Notably, Joe describes Aboriginal history and culture

with an outsider's disquiet despite his own Aboriginal heritage, which gives an indication of the film's complicated racial and ethnic agenda. Aboriginality exists in *Jedda* as an allegorical version of the Northern Territory itself: as a set of innate qualities suited to strictly limited applications and potentials, beyond which it represents only danger and chaos.

Joe's is one of several controlling and competing voices which map expressions of gendered, sexual and racial power onto the landscape of the Territory. The conclusion of the voice-over introduces the 'voice of the pedal radio', the 'lonely homestead's' only link to the outside world. Sarah McMann, grieving alone at Mongala buffalo station in her husband's absence, is seen asking the distant medical authorities for a certificate so that she can bury her infant child. At the same time, on the cattle trail an Aboriginal mother dies in childbirth, and her baby is brought to Mongala, in the hope that an Aboriginal woman will foster the female child. Sarah McMann at first resents the presence of the living baby ('it survived -- they always do'), but slowly changes from simply caring for the child to seeking to nurture and raise 'Jedda' to be white in a 'maternal assimilation project.'[7] Eliding his wife's replacement of her own dead child with the Aboriginal girl, Doug McMann declares her desire to 'make something' of Jedda to be a dangerous folly:

> Still trying to turn that wild little magpie into a tame canary? … She's a member of one of the oldest races in the world... Her roots are deep in a religion and way of living that we can never understand, or wipe away. They don't tame, only on the surface … You won't wipe out the tribal instinct and desires of a thousand years in one small life.

By contrast, Joe is shown to be happy in his place allotted by the 'white boss and missus', as a trusted worker whom Doug will one day promote to head stockman. Unconsciously Sarah has articulated the ambiguity of Jedda's position in the household, telling her to get ready for the return of 'Boss-dad'. Joe's voice-over describes Jedda growing up under the 'restraining voice' of Mrs McMann, and he echoes Doug's opinion that Sarah's 'denial of the freedom of her tribal life' is harmful, and cruel. Here the film's casting (Joe is played by an Aboriginal

[7] Catherine Kevin, 'History and Memory in Ngunnawal country, and the making of *Jedda*', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 7 / 2 & 3, (2013), 165-178 (169).

boy in childhood, but by a white British actor as an adult[8]) accentuates the ideological importance of the apportionment of race to place within its narrative.[9]

The conflict between Jedda's nature and nurture is concretised in two scenes which create a powerful juxtaposition between the homestead and the landscape, whiteness and Aboriginality. When Jedda mentions her desire to go on 'walkabout' like the rest of the Aboriginal population on the station, Sarah McMann punishes her with an enforced piano practise. While she plays, intercutting between her anguished face, her fingers on the piano keys, and Aboriginal artefacts decorating the wall above the piano visualise the internal struggle between her upbringing and her origins. Aboriginal singing voices and music (perhaps diegetically justified by Aboriginal workers off-screen outside the homestead, or perhaps sounding only subjectively in Jedda's mind) are audible on the soundtrack as her playing breaks down in frustrated discord. Pointedly, it is the magical singing of the sexually predatory 'wild' Aborigine Marbuk which enthrals Jedda. Leaving the homestead at night and following his voice to his camp fire, Jedda lays down on the ground and gazes up at the sky, as a pure white full moon is covered by black cloud. This graphic rendering of whiteness subsumed by blackness precedes Marbuk's abduction and seduction of Jedda. He carries her further away into the 'taboo' lands of the mountainous desert, where his own tribe castigate him and shun Jedda because of the incompatibility of their 'skins.' Joe pursues Marbuk through the wilderness but is unable to rescue Jedda before she and Marbuk (driven mad by the death songs of his own tribe) fall from a cliff edge to their deaths. Joe's final voice-over (accompanied by the mystical choir of the opening) avers that in the afterlife Jedda has been transformed into the wild bird which is her namesake, and now flies over the wilderness in peace in an atavistic assertion of the film's 'compounding of race and landscape.'[10] Therefore, while the wildness and sorcery of Marbuk are expulsed as uncanny and menacing, Jedda's Aboriginal spirit re-attains harmony, with the landscape acting as stage for both punishment and redemption. The overthrowing of Jedda's white influences, symbolised by the shrouding of the moon by black clouds, returns her to her proper, natural state. Significantly, Sarah McMann never re-enters the narrative after Jedda's abduction,

[8] The dubious nature of Joe's actual or cultural whiteness within *Jedda*'s narrative of assimilation stands as one example of the Australian cinema's problematic history of racial representation. See Benjamin Miller, 'The Mirror of Whiteness: Blackface in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*', *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* Special Issue (2007), 140-156.
[9] Kevin, 'History and Memory in Ngunnawal country, and the making of *Jedda*', 172.
[10] Miller, 'The Mirror of Whiteness: Blackface in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*', 149.

suggesting that her aspirations to raise Jedda as white are irrelevant to the working out of her inexorable racial fate. Poignantly, it is the voice-over of the 'half-caste' Joe which, eschewing his own grief, acknowledges the appropriateness of this conclusion.

Rogue (2007)

The perception of the natural landscape as site of punishment and retribution is relevant to conceptions of the outback in the wider Australian cinema, chiefly within films of the horror genre. Two cognate films which position the environment and fauna of the Northern Territory in horrific and punitive modes are *Black Water* (Andrew Traucki and David Nerlich, 2007) and *Rogue* (Greg McLean, 2007). These closely contemporary productions depict the predations of outsize saltwater crocodiles, the 'salties' which inhabit the Territory's river systems in their thousands. In these films an iconic Australian and Territory inhabitant becomes the star and selling point of formulaic horror, which also re-invokes the guilt and fear of colonial culture towards the acquired but empty landscape. In *Black Water*, the young Australian suburbanites who fall victim to these monster crocodiles have first witnessed the incarceration and display of crocodiles in wildlife parks and shows, have eaten barbecued crocs or purchased crocodile skin boots and handbags. Their heedless intrusion into the wild environment is punished with their own entrapment in trees or on sandbanks, their terrorisation by an unseen menace, and their evisceration by an animal characterised as an avenging natural slasher villain, whose foregrounded victims are female. Where *Black Water* explores this predictable nature-horror paradigm with low-budget realist aesthetics, *Rogue* displays big-budget studio sets and digital effects driven by the support for the production from the Weinstein Brothers.[11] *Rogue* also plays the same national hand as *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986) in foregrounding Territory locations and the Kakadu National Park, while also consciously seeking a large international horror audience by including an American tourist who becomes the unlikely hero.

[11] Jim Schembri, 'Putting the bite back into Horror', *The Age* 12 November 2007: <http://www.theage.com.au/news/film/putting-the-bite-back-into-horror/2007/11/11/1194749391593.html?page=fullpage#contentSwap1> accessed 26 February 2015.

Recognition of the Territory as a resource is forcefully asserted in the images of *Crocodile Dundee*. The ironic adventures of Paul Hogan's Australian outback hero take place within the setting of the Kakadu National Park. The film was produced as an adept commercial exploitation of Hogan's television persona, already familiar to both Australian and American audiences through his comedy shows and advertising appearances.[12] Yet this opportunity was also capitalised upon by the Australian tourism industry (adverts for which Hogan had also appeared in before the film was made), with the attraction of the Kakadu national park's landscape and fauna being foregrounded in the film's imagery. Certainly Hogan himself saw the film and his character as self-consciously crafted for overseas audiences, in purveying a tamed Australian male stereotype in a (relatively) inoffensive generic narrative vehicle aimed winningly as much or more at American audiences than local ones. If *The Overlanders* stands as a British film, we might legitimately argue *Crocodile Dundee* is an American one, produced and distributed by Hollywood majors. Yet this merely reaffirms the film's picturesque deployment of its Territory locations as a highly successful national and international strategy for its Australian director and star.

A perverse pride is evinced in *Rogue* in the dangerousness of the Territory's largest carnivorous inhabitants. Advertising posters for the film echoing *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) carried the tagline 'Welcome to the *Terror*-tory.' Given that both *Rogue* and *Black Water* draw inspiration from a real fatal crocodile attack from 2003, a mixture of proprietorial pride, fascination, horror and repulsion accrues around the crocodile as personification of the Territory's uniqueness, wildness and hostility. The contradictory love affair with the crocodile (which predates the international profile of Queensland's Steve Irwin), can be seen in the story of Sweetheart, a 5-metre male salty responsible for numerous non-fatal attacks in the 1970s. Sweetheart drowned accidentally during an attempt to capture and move him from his home in the Finniss River. Penitently he was preserved, and can be seen on display as one of the most popular exhibits in The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin.[13] In effect, in *Rogue* the crocodile assumes a similar status to that of the

[12] Tom O'Regan, '"Fair Dinkum Fillums": The *Crocodile Dundee* Phenomenon', in Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka, eds, *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Cinema in the late '80s* (Sydney: AFTRS, 1988), 156-175, (161).

[13] Neal Woolrich, 'Memories of Sweetheart the Crocodile', *ABC Stateline News* <http://www.abc.net.au/stateline/nt/content/2003/s1150733.htm> accessed 24 February 2015.

lovable/lethal Australian male (played by John Jarrett) at home in the outback landscape of McLean's previous feature *Wolf Creek* (2005).

Rogue's relationship with and representation of the Territory begins with an opening sequence resembling that of *Jedda*, with aerial shots of valleys, plains, gorges and waterfalls. These images also evoke comparison with the aesthetic use of Territory landmarks, such as the Gunlom Falls, in *Crocodile Dundee*.[14] After the unrelenting viciousness of *Wolf Creek*, the softened, more deliberately commercially orientated (but actually commercially disastrous) *Rogue* was seen by its director as not a 'brutalising' but a 'fun experience' which suggests a sympathy for a generic film format and its indigenous, murderous antihero as much as a lack of sympathy for the expendable human cast.[15] The Territory's crocs are therefore positioned as internationally recognisable and marketable in the mould of Mick Dundee. Within the aestheticized environment, the crocodile exists as much as authentic cultural marker as a narrative threat for both local and international viewers, defining and being defined by the land in the same way as Aboriginality exists in *Jedda*. Narratively, Aboriginal precedence and the natural menace are linked deliberately when a river tour party trespasses on 'sacred' land and is attacked by a crocodile defending its 'territory.' This connection of the crocodile and the indigenous human population to perceptions of the land produces a paradoxical pride in and alienation from both, which can be seen to affect the production and publicising of *Rogue*. In interview McLean acknowledged that the decision to include an Aboriginal singer on the film's soundtrack in some ways reciprocated the filmmakers receiving permission to film on location from the traditional owners of the land.[16] Recalling the location shooting, actress Radha Mitchell observed that: 'you have a connection to the place as an Australian like you feel somehow part of it, but somehow as if you have nothing to do with it and you'll never understand it.'[17] The proprietorial and pictorializing gaze of the camera on the Territory locations (Fig.1) is, then, an outsider's view even from the perspective of the local (non-Aboriginal) population.

[14] Key locations used in the filming were Yellow Water in Kakadu National Park and Katherine Gorge in Nitmiluk National Park: 'The Making of *Rogue*: Northern Territory' (Dimension Films/Village Roadshow Pictures/Emu Creek Pictures, Big Croc Pty. Ltd 2006).
[15] Schembri, 'Putting the bite back into Horror.'
[16] 'The Making of *Rogue*' (Dimension Films/Village Roadshow Pictures/Emu Creek Pictures, Big Croc Pty. Ltd 2006).
[17] Ibid.

Rogue's use of the landscape as a national marker and international selling point also inflects the film's casting and narrative. Pete McKell (played by Michael Vartan), is an American travel writer and unenthusiastic visitor, who is transformed by his experience of



Fig.1 *Rogue*'s Northern Territory landscape

the Territory. On arrival in the outback his foreignness and arrogance arouse the animosity of the locals. Since he prefers urban travel he resents the heat and the insects, and he is appalled at the newspaper cuttings and photos recording crocodile attacks which adorn the walls of the local shop. However, when the river tour boat operated by Kate Ryan (Radha Mitchell) is attacked by a monster crocodile, and the obvious local hero figure Neil Kelly (played by Sam Worthington) becomes an early victim, Pete assumes the leading male role in saving the survivors, confronting the crocodile and rescuing Kate. An ironic postscript under the closing titles shows that newspaper reports of Pete's heroism have been added to the collection. Starting as the unwilling tourist, Pete has become a local, having been naturalised and validated as a hero in an Australian landscape redolent of both beauty and menace. The film's pictorial, touristic gaze and horror genre narrative are amalgamated in an attraction/repulsion relationship to the landscape and the fauna crucial to both national and international viewership and identification.

***Australia* (2008)**

Similarly competing or incompatible agendas are pursued conspicuously in Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*. Originally entitled *Great Southern Land*, Luhrmann's film assumed the status of a national document and definition, in its self-conscious union of a droving narrative which evokes *The Overlanders* with the re-enactment of a traumatic, historical watershed: the Japanese attack on the Australian mainland in World War II with the bombing of Darwin.[18] As with the precedent of *Crocodile Dundee*, *Australia* leveraged the local landscape in the service of a narrative dismissed by some critics as a collage of clichés, ignoring the fact that the director avowedly aimed for an end product which consciously echoed Watt's and Chauvel's films and resembled *Casablanca* meets *Gone With the Wind*.[19] Also after the model of the *Crocodile Dundee* films, a close integration of *Australia*'s marketing and Australian Tourism advertising, to which Luhrmann and his film were recruited, were again indicative of the Territory's perception and propagation as the icon and epitome of Australian-ness.[20] However, this mobilisation of the film's imagery belies the alternative national 'history' – that of Aboriginal children and the 'Stolen Generations' – which *Australia* brings uncomfortably to the foreground. In addressing this unpalatable historical truth explicitly, Luhrmann makes the Territory stand for the country in an entirely different, universal and culpable role. Jim Schembri identified and applauded this unexpected strand in the texture of *Australia*:

> Luhrmann seems so eager to trowel on the Aussie clichés — obviously to appeal to the tourist markets! […] The word 'crikey' is spouted so often the film often sounds like a tribute to Steve Irwin […] More importantly, local films with black themes or major indigenous characters tend to do poorly, so if *Australia* succeeds

[18] Garry Maddox, 'Luhrmann to parade Australia's epic scale', *The Age* 26 November 2006 <http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/luhrmann-to-parade-australias-epic-scale/2006/11/22/1163871482154.html> accessed 12 May 2015.
[19] Killian Fox, 'How we made the epic of Oz', *The Guardian* 2 November 2008 <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/nov/02/baz-luhrmann-nicole-kidman-australia> accessed 12 May 2015.
[20] Elizabeth Gosch, 'See the film, then come visit', *The Australian* 16 June 2008 <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/archive/news/see-the-film-then-come-visit/story-e6frgcs6-1111116642284> accessed 12 May 2015.

> here it could represent a breakthrough. We've always had trouble dealing with racial issues on film, so, in that regard, the film could be a landmark.[21]

For all their invocation of familiar, imagistic precedents, *Australia*'s landscapes represent a 'breakthrough' in mobilising the pictorialized land for an uNorthernodox purpose (the probing of racial history and territorial dispossession) even as they are exploited for conventional, commercial ends. This is mirrored in the film's narrative, as Lady Sarah Ashley's (Nicole Kidman) business objective of saving her husband's cattle station with an epic drove is paralleled and superseded by her adoption and protection of an orphaned Aboriginal child.

Like *Rogue*'s reluctant hero, Sarah Ashley is at first repelled by her encounters with the environment and inhabitants of the Territory. She has been metaphorically and literally widowed by her husband's residence in Australia rather than England and by his murder at the hands of another cattle baron. Two male characters, the murderer Neil Fletcher (David Wenham) and the Drover (Hugh Jackman), come to personify the challenge and opportunity of the alien environment for Sarah. Both are empowered and sexualised figures, associated with the landscape and with controversial mixed-race relationships, but their moral and behavioural differences represent the narrative and symbolic conflicts (and resolutions) articulated by Luhrmann's film, and manifested in the transformation of Sarah. Her adoption and embracing of forms of indigenous Australian-ness – the stereotyped Drover and the orphaned Aboriginal child – constitute her naturalisation and the completion of her symbolic national family, assembled redemptively from tragically damaged individuals (an orphan, a widower, and an infertile widow). The restorative nature of this conclusion might appear to mark the working out of the characters' fates in idyllic fashion, but just as Sarah's adoption of Nullah must incorporate his departure with King George (David Gulpili), so this ending acknowledges the contradictions played out on the landscape:

> Sarah Ashley's privileged English approach to raising Nullah is mediated by the Drover, who is, in his own words, 'as good as black.' Although he is an employer of Aboriginal drovers, his subject position is landless but of the land, so he is

[21] Jim Schembri, 'Good, but no classic, and way, way too long', *The Age* 18 November 2008 <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/11/18/1226770367495.html> accessed 2 May 2014.

> more akin to the Indigenous people than the land-owning squattocracy represented by the cattle barons, the Carneys and to some extent Sarah. The Drover is no colonizer in this story. Sarah Ashley, on the other hand, is emphatically of the land-owning class […] Yet Nullah's commitment to the drove, and to his belief in the healing of Faraway Downs by Sarah Ashley, elides the history of Indigenous dispossession of the land through which they drove.[22]

Movement through the landscape is crucial in order for its recuperative powers to be felt. This is ironically akin to the tourist experience of the Territory advertised through and by association with Luhrmann's film. The non-Aboriginal drove and the Aboriginal walkabout become purposed as transformative, simultaneous engagements with the land, and with personal and cultural identity. That the landscape and Sarah's relationship with Nullah are associated with the fairy-tale land of 'Oz' (via the invocation of the cinematically contemporary *Wizard of Oz* [1939]) underlines the positioning of the film's landscape as a site of child-like desires for magical restitutions and simple solutions to recalcitrant, controversial, adult dilemmas:

> Journeys through the mythical terrain of the Never-Never in *Australia* construct a space that is symbolic and ideological, communicating myths of nationhood, history and identity in a manner at once grounded in the Australian landscape yet liberated from physical geography. *Australia* is yet another example of landscape films post-*Crocodile Dundee* that present an "indigenized" way of seeing the landscape tied to commercial tourism […] The cinematic representation of the landscape as challenging, empty, mythic and yet a space of belonging is thus a form of selective ideological work in which the nation comes to terms with Indigenous-settler relations.[23]

The recovery of the country's tourist industry via *Australia*'s landscape cinematography may seem as cynical as the rehabilitation of its racial history appears simplistic, but as with all the

[22] Catherine Kevin, 'Solving the problem of the motherless indigenous child in *Jedda* and *Australia*: white maternal desire in the Australian epic before and after *Bringing Them Home*', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 4 / 2 (2010), 145-157 (154).
[23] Jane Stadler and Peta Mitchell, 'Never-Never Land: affective landscapes, the touristic gaze and heterotopic space in *Australia*', *Studies in Australasian Cinema* 4 / 2 (2010), 173-187 (184-5).

director's films, irony and self-reflexivity coexist with and demand the reappraisal of naivety and cliché. Luhrmann's Territory landscapes, therefore, are not so much postmodern palimpsests as sites of popular mythologies, social archaeologies, and cultural, forensic archaeologies.

Conclusion

> The orientalized Northern does not simply function as a heart of darkness, a foil for an otherwise 'civilized' Australia. Rather, the Northern represents the nation as a whole.[24]

Filmic versions of the Northern Territory have adopted clear and coercive generic and narrative models (the Western, the horror film, the romantic historical adventure) to define Australia and Australian-ness. The familiarity of the generic formats which these films assume contrasts with the self-consciously emphasized remoteness and exoticism of the Territory's 'orientalisation' to local as much as global film audiences. 'Northern-ness' in Australian cinema appears to stand for quintessential and transparent Antipodean qualities of remoteness, ruggedness, austerity and purity. Within the films examined here, several consistent conceptualisations of the natural landscape as national stage can be seen to coalesce. The conflicts depicted in and with the landscape naturalise and vindicate those who survive them and succeed by exhibiting laudable national traits, even if they are newcomers or tourists. The tourist's view is deliberately courted and satisfied in Luhrmann's *Australia*, and in *Rogue*, while the tourist gaze also consciously embraces the non-Territory population of Australia itself, the tourist experience is both heightened and ironised in the 'naturalisation' of the visiting American hero. If the Northern Territory on film comes to stand in as a cultural construction for all Australia, then it is appropriate to consider in parallel the Territory's cinematic construction, as the sum of disparate parts of Australia have actually stood in for the Territory on film. *The Overlanders*, *Jedda*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *Rogue* all make use of authentic Northern Territory locations in the depiction of

[24] Peta Mitchell and Jane Stadler, 'Imaginative Cinematic Geographies of Australia: The Mapped View in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* and Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*', *Historical Geography* 38 (2010), 26-51 (31).

representative Australians (human and non-human, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and indigenous landscapes, indicative rural endeavours and national characters.[25] In the case of *Rogue*, shooting in the Northern Territory was followed by use of a location at Warburton in Victoria, where the survivors' island was 'built' in a lake (with backgrounds from the Territory locations added digitally), and filming of the scenes in the crocodile's lair on a soundstage in Melbourne.[26] Luhrmann's *Australia*, though filmed partly in Darwin, also used locations in Western Australia and Queensland (with the incentive of financial support for the production) to represent the Northern Territory.[27] The typing of all these locations as the Territory does not necessary imply a misleading artifice, any more than any other form of location vice studio footage in any other film, of any other nationality. Rather these films achieve a localisation of national commonalities of landscape, flora and fauna, natural and national type and narrative in one cinematically-sutured and reiterated, indicative Australia, for national and international audiences:

> Chauvel's and Luhrmann's imaginative geographies of Australia—their ideologically redolent maps and their substitutions of location for reasons of exigence and aesthetics—are not simply erroneous or, worse, deceitful. Rather, the films use landscape and geography to make particular appeals to nationality, and […] to create a sense of 'Australian-ness' that doesn't fit neatly into the categories of truth or lie.[28]

Films of, about and from the Territory are plainly intended and perceived to embody and epitomise inherent, unarguable (and marketable) characteristics of Australian-ness, as often with authenticity and candour as with self-consciousness and irony. Identifying the diversity of historical commentary in Luhrmann's *Australia* finds its parallel in Tom O'Regan's recognition of the comparable articulation of uncomfortable, contemporary issues in *Crocodile Dundee*:

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[25] Location shooting for *Jedda* took place at Alice Springs and Mataranka. Anon., 'Chauvel to Make Film In N.T.', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (19 June 1951), 5.
[26] 'The Making of *Rogue*' (2006).
[27] Gosch,'See the film, then come visit.'
[28] Mitchell and Stadler, 'Imaginative Cinematic Geographies of Australia: The Mapped View in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* and Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*', 29.

> The [*Crocodile Dundee*] films sought to engage with the general public arena of talk - arguably the "social imaginary" of their period and society. If the filmmakers wanted to inscribe the films into public discourse so too did they want to register public discourse in the films themselves. Thus we find *Crocodile Dundee* referencing uranium mining, Aboriginal land rights, the current tourist industry Hogan himself was advertising, nuclear weapons, TV; and *Crocodile Dundee II* drug-running, Hogan's own popularity, Aboriginality etc.[29]

In mimicking Paul Hogan's own use of an idiomatic Australian term – Fair Dinkum (that is true, honest, and authentic) – to describe the international *Crocodile Dundee* phenomenon, O'Regan neatly ironises the contrivance, and summarises the emblematisation and problematisation, of Australian-ness which all these films about the Territory evince.

Filmography

Australia (Baz Luhrmann, 2008)
Black Water (Andrew Traucki and David Nerlich, 2007)
Crocodile Dundee (Peter Faiman, 1986)
Jaws (Steven Spielberg, 1975)
Jedda (Charles Chauvel, 1955)
The Overlanders (Harry Watt, 1946)
Rogue (Greg McLean, 2007)
Wolf Creek (Greg McLean, 2005)

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[29] O'Regan 'Fair Dinkum Fillums', 160.

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