

Narratives of Change – Structures of Standstill

A study of the Carmichael Coal Mine-dispute in Mackay

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Master's Thesis

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Abstract

In 2010, a proposal to build the ‘Carmichael Coal Mine and Rail Project’ in the Galilee Basin in Queensland Australia, was submitted by the Indian mining company Adani Mining Pty Ltd. This thesis is a study of how this proposal has affected the city of Mackay. Between 2003 and 2011, Australia was in their fifth and largest coal boom to date, and Mackay was affected greatly in terms of migration to the city and economic growth. Subsequently, when the bust came, Mackay was also one of the cities that were hit the hardest. The Carmichael coalmine brings hope for many in Mackay, for the unemployed and those who see economic growth as a predicament for the city’s survival. However, seven years after the proposal was submitted, no construction has yet been made. The resistance towards the mine has been great, and due to litigation put forward by several environmental groups, the mine has been stuck in court. Environmental groups from all over the nation are afraid that if the mine opens, the Great Barrier Reef will suffer. Mackay is in a cooled down state, and stands between two proposed futures: One promises a return of the state the city was in during the boom, the other is a more uncertain future, a future without coal. With two of the most avid proponents and opponents of the mine located in Mackay, the city can be seen as the epicentre of what has become a dispute over the Carmichael coalmine. I study how the people of Mackay see their own situation, how Mackay’s past is facilitated to fit how they see the present, and whatever future they want for Mackay. Furthermore, I study the two opposing actors’ discursive strategies to propagate their view of the Carmichael coalmine, as well as people’s reactions to these. Lastly, I connect the dispute with Australia’s nation narrative, of how the concept of egalitarianism and different views of the past can shed light on what has become a polarised dispute.

Acknowledgements

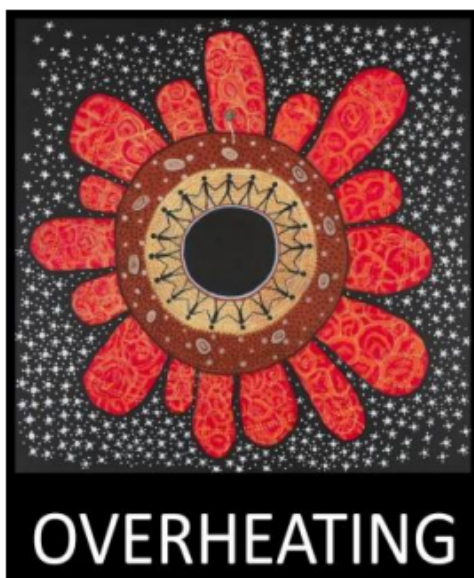
First, my deepest gratitude goes out to the people of Mackay—to each and one of you who included me into your group, and allowed me to learn about your lives. You will always have a special place in my heart, and hopefully, one day we will meet again.

I want to thank my supervisor Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who bestowed me the idea to study overheating processes on the Great Barrier Reef, and concurrently fulfilling one of my childhood dreams. I have always been fascinated with the ocean, and you, Thomas, provided me the tools to study it—without becoming a marine biologist! Thank you for the indispensable encouragement and feedback during fieldwork. I am also deeply grateful for being a part of the Overheating-project, which has given me endless inspiration, and to the Department of Social Anthropology in Oslo (SAI) and the European Research Council for funding.

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Trevor Nickolls: Warmun Mandala (c) Trevor Nickolls/BONO

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Prologue

'I'd rather die than see you return to your parents as a greenie¹,' John exclaimed to me on my first day in Mackay. Simultaneously I was thinking in my head, 'well, mate, I already am'. However, as I did not want to give the wrong impression on my first day in his home, where I would spend the entirety of my stay in Mackay, I just nodded, smiled and kept quiet. John had picked me up at the airport some two hours prior. The conversation took place after I had been given a small introductory impression of the city; after I had been served my first plate of Australian seafood, and he had had the chance to drink the first of his daily cans of beer, we sat down in his rickety car and ventured out into the city where I would spend nearly six months. The 'sightseeing tour' included sights such as the Mackay Harbour, where watching all the large vessels in the horizon waiting to be filled with coal from Hay Point was the biggest attraction, the empty city centre, which, as I was told, used to be filled with drunk coal miners just four years ago, and Caneland, the city mall, which, he informed me, would serve me all the amenities I needed.

During our tour, which lasted around an hour, we had the chance to talk about a diverse range of topics, including immigration, the unemployment rate, gender roles, the resources industries, and greenies. As a newcomer, and as a researcher, I was trying hard to not express any of my personal opinions, but rather letting the man speak his mind. I realised that we were both working hard to 'be the same'. For every new topic I would make assumptions regarding his opinions, only to find out that he did not fulfil my immediate suppositions. By default I misinterpreted him, thinking that because he was so open and earnest that we had to be alike. I had the impression that he did the same, and that he found it obvious, if not necessary, that we agreed. If I, due to the nature of my questions, might have revealed any opinions I held, he would patch things over—eliminating the possibility that we disagreed.

When our tour ended, we placed ourselves in the backyard, which was plush in terms of environmental diversity. There were kookaburras diving into the swimming pool, lorikeets singing and making a big ruckus high up in the palm trees, skinks running back and forth between the house and the backyard, and the geckos were soaking up the sun on the concrete.

¹ A brief explanation on the term will be had later on in this chapter, and elaborated further in chapter four

John was a retiree, who used most of his days in the same chair in the backyard, day in and day out, together with his books, cigarettes and beers, whilst his wife worked at the Mackay hospital. Our first conversation was the beginning of a ritual between us: Two cans of beers, sharing a couple of cigarettes, and talking for hours. These conversations turned mostly into long monologues where he gave me life advice and revealed the ‘truth’ about the world.

He must have sensed my reluctance towards being critical to greenies despite, or rather because of, my muteness towards the matter. I had also asked him about the Carmichael coalmine: Did he think it should go ahead or not? Instead of answering yes or no, he became exasperated and lectured me on the state of the matters; who the greenies really were, and that they had contributed to the nation’s demise. John explained to me that greenies were the cause of many troubles in Australia, including the standstill of the Carmichael coalmine, the economic downturn, the loss of jobs in the coal industry, multiculturalism, the Ice-epidemic², and the influx of immigrants to Australia.

Through our conversation on my first day in Mackay I came to understand that a greenie could be a derogatory term, which held a much deeper meaning than I had assumed prior to my fieldwork. However, it had not always been a derogatory term; according to John, the greenies had destroyed their own image. Despite the poor image John had painted of greenies, he confided smilingly to me, saying ‘I was the first greenie, you know! I was a real hippie in the seventies, living naked in a tree’. He said it in an enthusiastic way. Being a greenie used to be a lifestyle; living in symbiosis with nature. The greenies today, however, did not have this relation to nature, according to John. Their mission was accumulating money and destroying people’s jobs—their declared mission to protect the environment was a smokescreen. Simply put; they were corrupt.

Though he had stopped living in trees, John was still ‘one with nature’, and he had continued this relationship with nature through his backyard, he told me. Compared to the other properties in the street his backyard looked like a jungle, and as animals continually accompanied him he did not have the urge to go beyond his fences. He was not particularly keen about people, and only went out when he absolutely needed to—for food and cigarettes. Though he did not care to meet people, he still cared about the nation as a whole, and that was why he voted for the Liberals, he said, ‘you know... if I was selfish I would be voting for Labor. As a retiree I would

² A highly purified form of methamphetamine

have benefited more from Labor's politics, but I am altruistic, and vote for the Liberals—for the good of the community. Liberals are the answer for Australia.' In comparison greenies were selfish, therefore John no longer mirrored himself in them. Greenies should know better than to interfere with people's jobs; they were 'job-destroyers', and intellectuals in the big cities with no real grip on the world and unable to understand the direness people in Mackay were living in. I was not going to become one of them—not on his watch.

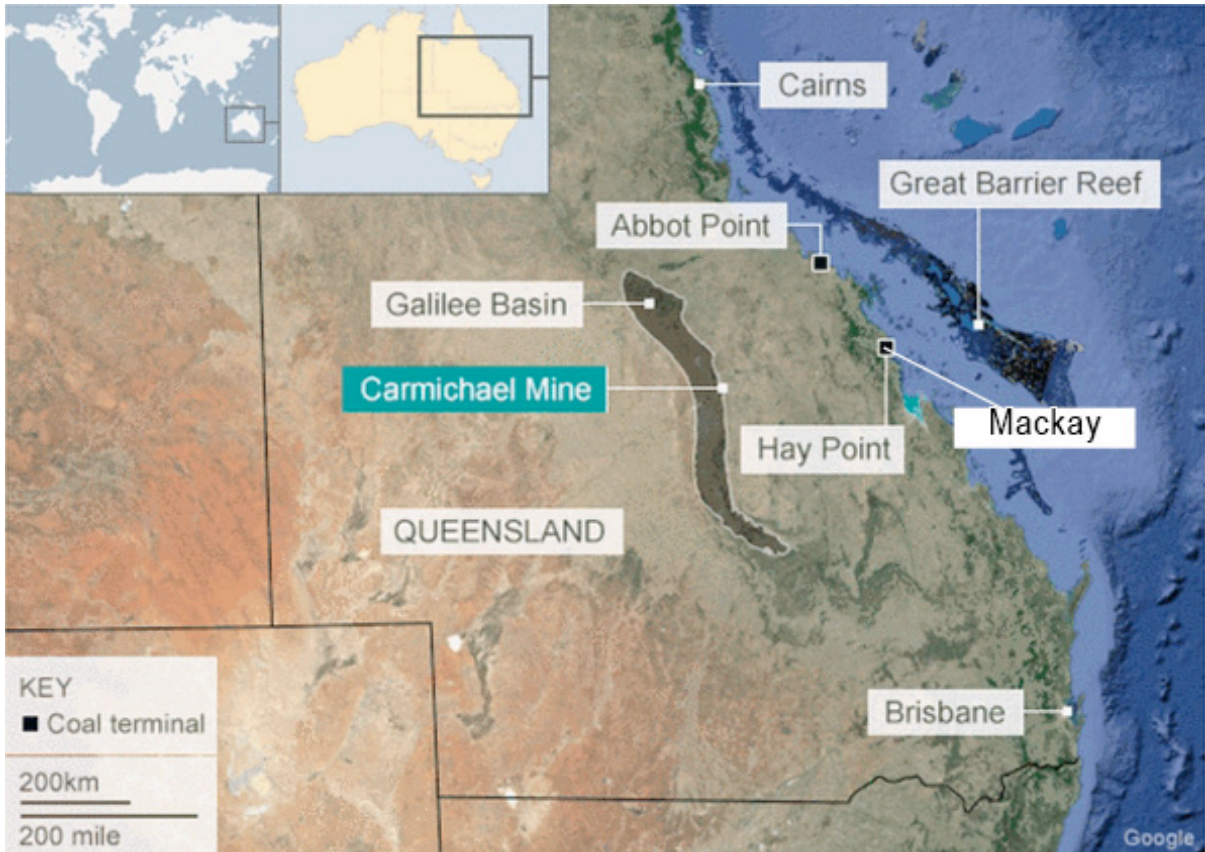


Figure 1 Map of Mackay, the Carmichael Coal Mine, and the Great Barrier Reef

1 Introduction

This thesis is the result of nearly six months of fieldwork in Mackay, Queensland, Australia (see Figure 1), conducted between January and July in the spring of 2016. It is a study of a cooled down city; a city that was overheated for nearly a decade, being at the epicentre of the biggest coal boom Australia has ever experienced, with the period between 2003 and 2011 considered the most overheated. Mackay is a city which is now at a crossroad, provided with at least two distinctively different proposals of a future. The first alternative promises a return to the state of how Mackay was during the coal boom, a familiar and known future. The second alternative proposes a more uncertain future, something new that people do not quite know what is. It is the proposed Carmichael coalmine, planned to be built in the Galilee Basin in the hinterlands of Mackay (see Figure 1), which stands as a symbol of hope for the former alternative future. The latter proposes a future without coal. As coal is the basis of Australia's 'narrative of modernisation' (Eriksen, 2014), and is arguably also a significant ingredient in the workings to maintain a common national identity (Eriksen, 2014), it may be difficult to fathom what an Australia without coal would be.

Two of the most avid and well-known proponents and opponents of the Carmichael coalmine are located in Mackay, which has made Mackay not only the epicentre of the Carmichael-conflict, but also the stage where the major clashes overall in Australia surrounding the mine plays out. As it stands now, the situation looks increasingly polarised, and the proposals of the futures are conceived as ultimate, and mutually contradictory. I will examine the two discourses at play in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute, in order to provide an understanding of the situation that Mackay is in today—in-between two proposed futures. I will investigate the narratives that surround the mine and people's reaction to them. Furthermore, I will explore how Australia's past can be a structure that affects the development of the Carmichael coalmine-dispute.

My main focus will be on Mackay, but I have found it necessary to link the whole dispute with larger social structures common in Australia. Therefore I will fluctuate between large and small scale; what happens in Canberra has consequences for Mackay, and vice versa.

Further on in this chapter I shall provide context of the dispute, starting with the Carmichael coalmine, before moving on to present the interests of key actors in Mackay. First I will present an overview of literature that has guided my thesis' focus.

Conceptual framework

Being a ‘new nation in an old continent’ (Robin, 2007, p. 1) has called for much introspection, as Bill Bryson (2001, p. 232) jokingly points out by referring to the ‘obligatory’ large section on ‘Australiana’³ in bookshops. Though Bryson dedicates the fact to how ‘self-absorbed’ Australians are (‘if the rest of the world is going to pay them no attention, then they must do it themselves surely’), it is rather telling of what being a young nation implies. Much of the literature that I base this thesis on is indeed by Australian authors. According to Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 201), ‘Australia has a history which appears, quite blatantly, to be always in the process of creation’. She does not suggest that any other country is *not* in a process of creation and recreation of past events, but particularly ‘ex-colonies of European imperialist adventures’ are engaged in a very self-conscious process of ‘nation-building’ (J. Kapferer, 1996, p. 201). If the Australian history is in a constant constructional phase, I see it fruitful to bring this recognition into the Carmichael coalmine-dispute in order to gain an understanding of how and why the dispute has developed the way that it has.

My thesis takes great inspiration from the sociologist Judith Kapferer (1996) and the environmental historian Libby Robin’s (2007) work on Australian identity. In Robin’s book, *How a Continent created a Nation*, she investigates the links between nature and nation, how the settlers struggled with accepting their new land and the ‘strange nature’, and how this heritage still affects Australians relationship to their land in times of global change. Robin argues that a key to unlock the Australia national identity lies in how they treat and have treated their natural environment. Robin has provided me with great historical context to look at how past traditions can be constitutive of the present, as well as future aspirations. Kapferer looks at rituals and practices of everyday life, and argues that the nation as a whole is struggling with shaping a common national identity, which according to her is becoming increasingly urgent in a globalised world. Kapferer investigates how the Australian national identity is moulded through practices, symbols, and narratives of which are based on diverse understandings of pasts, presents, and futures. With the title *Being all Equal* (1996), her study concerns itself with the inherent egalitarianism of Australian culture; the supposition that all are the same, on how it is maintained and in what ways the interpretations of egalitarianism might be changing. Since the release of Kapferer’s book in 1996,

³ Anything pertaining to Australian culture, society, geography and ecology, particularly if it is endemic to Australia

the globalisation processes has arguably intensified, and with that I will further look at how the idea of egalitarianism persists despite profound changes in the Australian society, using Mackay as a case of study.

Don Garden's (2005) book *Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific : An Environmental History*, as well as Stephen Dovers' (1994) *Australian environmental history : essays and cases*, with contributions including George Frawley and James Bowen, have provided me with in-depth information on key tendencies within Australian environmental history, political developments, and relationship to land, and will be cited throughout the thesis. They compliment each other regarding the historical record of the establishment of the conservationist movement in response to plans of mining on the Great Barrier Reef, as well as the political developments that followed—from the 1960s to today. As it was then, the Great Barrier Reef is also a component in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute. There are similarities between the dispute in the 1960s and today, and these will be explored in chapter four. Paul Cleary stands also as a complimentary voice, but who has provided me with more insight into recent developments within the coalmining industry as well as Australian politics. His books, *Too much luck: the mining boom and Australia's future* (2011) and *Mine-Field : The Dark Side of Australia's Resources Rush* (2012) are a critical examination into the last coal boom between 2003 and 2011.

In 2003, Chris Ballard and Glenn Banks released a paper called 'Resource Wars: The Anthropology of Mining', which was a critical examination of recent developments within the anthropological field of mining, and proposed areas that deserved further exploration. Looking at the discourse of mining, the rhetoric of multinational mining companies, as well as the role of the state in mining projects was advised as fruitful points of departure for anthropological study (Ballard & Banks, 2003, pp. 292, 294). According to Garden (2005, p. 306), most Australian literature on environmental disputes have focused on conservation and environmental movements, and of specific campaigns and issues. However not much attention has been granted the voices of 'developmentalists'. This is reflected in Terre Satterfield (2007, p. 161) and Erin Tuckwell's (2012, p. 20) call for more attention to the 'knowledge, beliefs, values and objectives of those who work for the corporations'. They argue that studies of environmental disputes are often 'one-sided', as especially the voices of 'developmentalists' are studied from afar. Therefore, as a response to Ballard and Banks encouragement to explore the discourse of mining and the role of the state, as well as Garden, Satterfield, and Tuckwell's insight on how studies of environmental disputes commonly have been focused on conservationists, I will

investigate both the rhetoric of those who fall under the pro-coal discourse and the opponents arguing against coal development, as well as the public's understanding and reactions to these. I pay also close attention to the political landscape and the role of the government, and how this affects the development of the dispute.

When it comes to studying large-scale developments in Australia, there are particularly two studies that I have drawn inspiration from. Abovementioned Erin Tuckwell studied the proposal of building a solar salt field in proximity to the Exmouth Gulf in her doctorate thesis (Tuckwell, 2012, p. 3), whilst Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2015, 2016b) studied local reactions to coal related developments in Gladstone. Tuckwell studied two groups who maintained they were irrevocably in opposition, based on how their understandings of science and nature were based on different environmental knowledge. The two groups were local conservationists and the company behind the solar salt field-proposal, and by using Gregory Bateson's concept of *schismogenesis*, she compared their strategies on how they worked to 'win' the battle. Their strategies appeared to be the same, but they were working for different outcomes. I chose to do fieldwork in Mackay because I found that the city holds representatives from both of the opposing discourses in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute, and furthermore two of the most avid and renowned contenders. Tuckwell called for more study on developmentalists, because with only attention to conservationist, she argued the consequence may be an overemphasis on 'incommensurable, morally-based differences of worldview' (Tuckwell, 2012, p. 4). When difference between two oppositional groups is taken as a given, it conceals any possible significant similarities, as well as the diverse creative forces that makes up the dispute. As in Tuckwell's study, the dispute between the two different discourses in Mackay have also polarised; the two proposed futures are presented as ultimate, communication seems impossible between the voices that represent the discourses, and no compromise is initiated. Though I will not use schismogenesis actively, I will still see if there are similarities in the strategies that the oppositional actors use in the dispute.

In his study on Gladstone, Eriksen utilises another concept from Gregory Bateson, the *double bind*. According to Eriksen, Gladstone 'epitomises, in a striking way, the double bind of growth and sustainability' (Eriksen, 2016b, p. 1). Bateson (1972) introduced double bind as a concept in his studies of schizophrenia to explain what it means to say two mutually exclusive things at once. It is a double bind when whichever of the incompatible actions you do, you would not be able to do it right, as each action would be unsatisfactory (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 23). Gladstone relies directly on the fossil industry, 'the city embodies the high point of industrialism' (Eriksen,

2016b, p. 14), but has also an expanding environmental engagement amongst the public—albeit highly suppressed. Alas, for Gladstone, they are in a double bind between fossil fuels and environmental sustainability; if they choose the latter they cannot have growth in the economy, and vice versa. During his fieldwork in 2013-2014 the Gladstone coal port was undergoing expansion, and Eriksen studied the local community's different reactions to the development. The Gladstone coal port expansion took place concurrently with the plans to expand the Abbot Point coal port, which would accommodate the Carmichael coal mine and the other coalmines in the Galilee Basin. Therefore, there are links between Eriksen's project and my own.

The Carmichael coalmine

18th November 2010 the Indian mining company Adani Mining Pty Ltd submitted a referral of proposed action to the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, with the project title of 'Carmichael Coal Mine and Rail Project' (The State of Queensland Department of State Development, 2017). Adani Mining Pty Ltd is a subsidiary of the Indian company Adani Group operating as Adani Australia for its Australian projects. With a proposed production of 60 million tonnes per annum (Mtpa) of coal (Adani Mining Pty Ltd, 2010, p. 1), and spanning a workable length of 45 km (Adani Mining Pty Ltd, 2010, p. 5), it will become Australia's largest coalmine (Cleary, 2012, p. 14). The mine will be a thermal coal mine situated in the north of the Galilee Basin, and the mining will be conducted by both open-cut and underground methods. At the time of proposition of the coalmine, Australia was still in their biggest coal boom to date, which lasted between 2003 and 2011 (Megalogenis, 2016, p. 11). A key difference between the last boom and past mining booms was not the number of projects, but their scale (Cleary, 2012, p. 10). The Carmichael coalmine would be the first of numerous large-scale mines proposed for the Galilee Basin, and though they would all become 'mega-mines' (Cleary, 2012, p. 14), the Adani-mine took the prize for the single largest mine. Together with its proposed corresponding railway project, as well as plans to build drivable roads, the mine would facilitate the other coalmines' later constructions.

Although the coalmining industry is not foreign to the boom and bust-cycle, this last coal boom was considered to be permanent (Cleary, 2011, p. 59), and the Australian government had felt no obligation to save their resource wealth, as future generations were assumed to be richer than them (Cleary, 2011, p. 56). As a consequence of the coal bust, but also heavy resistance from

oppositional actors, several of the proposed coalmines in the Galilee Basin were put on hold—but not Carmichael. The Carmichael coalmine is seen as a necessity to get the Australian and Mackay economy up and running again, and potentially rise to the same level as during the former coal boom. However, since the proposal in 2010, no construction has yet been made on the Carmichael coalmine. In order for a coalmine to be ready for development, and its subsequent exploitation, there are several formal procedures that must be completed. These include an approval of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), Federal and State approval, and a financial loan from a bank. Though these are formal procedures any coalmine must undergo, it is argued that the Carmichael coalmine's process has been particularly lengthy. Due to doubts about its claimed economic benefits and financial viability, as well as accusations of its detrimental effects on the environment and the climate, earning the required approvals and financial backing has taken time, and all required approvals are still not granted. The coalmine has faced several legal challenges as well, delaying the process even further. The traditional owners of the land on which the mine was proposed, the Wangan and Jagalingou People, have challenged the mine in court over native title issues (Milman, 2015a; Robertson, 2016), and different environmentalist and conservationist groups have done the same on grounds stretching from specific environmental potential effects, such as on groundwater, endangered species, and the Great Barrier Reef, as well as the mine's potential contribution to an increase of global warming, and subsequent global climate change.

The oppositional voices in Mackay

The coalmine's most devoted proponent is arguably George Christensen. He is a federal politician, and member of the House of Representatives, representing the Liberal Party for Dawson⁴, and has his office in Mackay. MP Christensen has done a great deal to open the mine; arguably the Carmichael coalmine is the pinnacle of his political slogan 'working for jobs'. For example, Christensen travelled to India to meet with Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani, to deliver in person the signatures of several 'Mackayans', to prove and promise that the citizens of Mackay want the Carmichael coalmine to open—as a response to the bad press the mine and company had received. A contributor to this bad press was the Mackay Conservation Group

⁴ Dawson is an Electoral Division in Queensland, and includes the regions of Mackay, Ayr, Bowen, and Proserpine.

(MCG), whose office is just a few blocks away from MP Christensen's. The MCG is an integral part of what may be conceived as an anti-Carmichael movement, with several active environmental groups. However, due to the litigation put forward by them against federal environment minister Greg Hunt's approval of the Carmichael coalmine's Environmental Impact Statement, they have been singled out as one of the main contenders in the battle over the Carmichael coalmine. Therefore, MP Christensen stands as the main representative of the proponents of Carmichael in Mackay, and the MCG as the opponents.

Though MP Christensen often targeted MCG in the media, in his blog, or on Facebook, he would often refuse to state the full name of the MCG, but rather just call them 'greenies' or 'green group'. In a speech to the Parliament in 2014, MP Christensen also referred to the groups opposing Carmichael as 'terrorists': 'The greatest terrorism threat in North Queensland, I'm sad to say, comes from the extreme green movement' (Bourke, 2014). Not referring to them by name gives the impression that he does not acknowledge them as a legitimate group of people worthy of full recognition, nor to be taken seriously. However, he always answered any 'attack' from the MCG with one of his own; any opportunity to criticise them and put them in a bad light was seized. This indicates that MP Christensen on some level perceives them as a threat, and sees it imperative to provide answers or arguments to his followers, so that they would never be in doubt about the 'real' truth. Any concerns about the mine, be it environmental concerns or regarding the number of jobs the mine will create, he would respond by saying it was false stories planted by 'greenies'.

Greenies

'Greenie' is a widely used colloquial term in Australia, and according to Hilary Whitehouse and Neus Evans (2010, p. 22), the term has a particularly 'persistent cultural traction in regional Queensland', which is where Mackay is located. Because of the ubiquity of the term in the everyday discourse in Mackay, I will briefly elaborate on its meaning and the usage of the term in the Carmichael-dispute; a further discussion will be held in chapter four. Greenie is defined in the Heinemann Australian Dictionary fourth edition from 1992, as '(informal) a conservationist'. It would be appealing to write this group off as 'environmentalists' or 'conservationists', as greenies likewise are 'person(s) concerned with the problems of the environment, especially the effects of pollution', as well as, 'advocate(s) or promoter of conservation of natural resources', which are the definitions of environmentalists and conservationists in the Heinemann

Dictionary, but this would not capture the gist of how the term has been used in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute. Moreover, a further explanation on what a greenie is can be found in the relation to the political party The Greens. Identifying oneself as a greenie does not necessarily mean you vote for The Greens. However, the stereotypical image of The Greens, as shall be exemplified by a statement from Peter Sandery, from Rasmussen, Queensland, is commonly attributed to greenies. Sandery wrote to the Townsville Bulletin in April 2016 (p. 40):

I am a 70-year old who has spent years fighting against the exploitation of the ignorant by the arrogant. (...) The Greens, it seems, are intent on obstructionism. They are anti-farming, anti-forestry, anti-mining (although taking donations from the CFMEU⁵) and against any policy which helps strengthen border security

These characteristics that Sandery attributes to The Greens, are also attributed to greenies. Greenies are ‘anti’ a lot of things. The main discourse around greenies in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute is that they are ‘anti-jobs’. MP Christensen, with his media-coverage and political ethos, has in recent times had the power to define what a greenie is. The Carmichael coalmine to him signifies first and foremost jobs—it is *the* job-creating project of the hour. Thus by stopping the Carmichael coalmine effectively makes greenies ‘anti-jobs’, as will be explored further in chapter four.

Structure of thesis

Chapter two is dedicated to present the methodology of my fieldwork. Including is how I entered the field and to which groups of people I was able to gain entry. From day to day I would interchangeably engage with people representing different interests, it being coalminers, greenies, or politicians, and respectively a reflection on my position in the field will be provided. I will present the challenges I had in the field, and its consequences on my data collection.

In chapter three a closer view on Mackay will be provided. We move from ‘official’ presentations of the city, as presented on a wall mural as well as a promotional video facilitated by the Mackay council, to the narratives of Mackay’s past and present as provided by residents. Particular

⁵ The Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Australia’s main trade union in building and construction, forestry and furnishing products and mining and energy production.

emphasis will be put on three different groups of people that I engaged with on a regular basis, where each group has been given a particular focus based on repeating themes in our engagements.

In chapter four I will look at the strategies the opposing actors in the dispute use to argue their future for Mackay and Australia. This includes an investigation of the narratives that surround the Carmichael coalmine, and people's reactions to them. I will compare their strategies to see if they hold similarities, and present how they fight to take the definitional power of what coal is. I will see if these discourses can shed light on the situation in Mackay.

In chapter five I suggest 'un-Australian' as an analytical concept to view the dispute through. I look at it as a possible structure that sets the premises for how the dispute evolves. I will discuss the ambiguities and the significance of the concept, relating it both to Australia's history as a nation, and today.

2 Methodology

In this chapter I shall provide insight into which methods I used during fieldwork, which includes participant observation, conducting interviews, and gathering data through different news media. First I will elaborate on how I gained entry, and thereafter on my position and role in the field.

Entry

My prologue invites you to share my first meeting with the field. I introduce you to Mackay's industries, scenery, and animal life, in the way that my host John introduced it to me. I also showcase how the nature of our relationship came to be during my time in the field. I rented a bedroom in John and his wife's home for the entirety of my stay. I had found them through Airbnb (an online marketplace and hospitality service), and prior to my arrival in Mackay I had already paid the rent for three weeks. However, on my first day John suggested that I could live with them the whole time I would be staying in Mackay. He did this just after a couple of hours of knowing me, as he told me he had an immediate sensation of me being a 'good person'. I did not accept the offer immediately, as I had initially planned to use Airbnb to rent different rooms and move around, in order to meet a variety of people. After the first three weeks, however, I continued to stay there and paying rent on a weekly basis, which gave me the opportunity to move if I found it necessary.

I had a two-week long field break in April, where I travelled to New Zealand, as well as Sydney, Melbourne, and Uluru, to gather my thoughts and prepare a mid-fieldwork report on my progression so far. Relative to my findings I found staying with John and his wife was still beneficial. So far in the fieldwork I had not gained enough entry into any particular group of people where I found it natural to ask for accommodation in their homes; we met in specific contexts, such as at meetings or in the pub, and only a couple of times did I visit anyone at their homes. There were also no community of environmentalists living together; if the Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) could be called a community as such, it was rather individuals, with their own personal lives, who came together whenever they felt like it, to feel a connection with like-minded in the context of the MCG-office. Moreover, the alternatives on Airbnb were not

favourable to John's home, as they were mostly located a long distance from the city centre. John provided me with a bike, which I was dependent on to get around in the region when I was not catching a ride with someone else. Actually not having a driver's license turned out to be beneficial to me, as I was dependent on other people's willingness to show me the area, and thus I could kill two birds with one stone: Both get around, as well as getting insight on people's perspectives of the region. John's home was a great home base: I had an easy access to the city, and as the home was easy to find, people had easy access to me, and with a lock on my door I could keep my belongings safely there when I travelled, for camping or road trips.

John had numerous ideas and opinions on how I should proceed my fieldwork, who I should meet and where I should travel. In the beginning this was immensely helpful: He arranged for me to be Mackay's Mayor's date on the eve of Australia Day; he lent me his country club card where I met coalminers who I remained in contact with throughout my fieldwork; he arranged an interview with MP George Christensen; he facilitated a fishing trip with two coal miners; and he organised a one-week trip to Airlie Beach for me, a tourist town a couple of hours north of Mackay. John was the first gatekeeper to provide me entry into the field, and through the Mayor of Mackay, Deidre Comerford, whom he introduced me to, my fieldwork and presence in Mackay was officially acknowledged through a notice in the council meeting minutes.

As I lived with John, and because of his eagerness to talk with me, he became one of my most important informants. However, as I will elaborate further on, our relationship became difficult over time, as it sometimes felt like he invaded my personal space, and tried to control or change my personal opinions. When I started finding informants and groups of people to engage with on my own he gave me 'advice' on who I should and should not engage with. Although I had been provided with a bicycle that I borrowed from him, he was very willing to drive me if the distances were too great. Once when he drove me to Black Beach for a turtle egg excavation with the Mackay & District Turtle Watch Association he asked me to be wary; these people were greenies, and I should be careful not to be influenced by them. Because of his 'warning' I had a strong urge to ask the participants whether they identified themselves as greenies—they did not. The fact that John had felt obliged to warn me about potential greenies was indicative of the graveness that he put in engaging with them, and the fact that he was mistaken in his assumptions told a story of what the content of the category 'greenie' was. When he picked me up after the excavation, he curiously asked me what they had told me in order to convert me into a greenie.

Position and role

Since I first visited the Great Barrier Reef as a ten-year old I have been deeply fascinated by the ocean, and this laid the foundation of my interest and engagement in activist environmental practices that I have had since. I initially started this project with an interest to study people's relationship to the Great Barrier Reef. As I will elaborate in chapter four, the Great Barrier Reef has been one of the greatest arguments proposed by greenies against the opening of the Carmichael coalmine, thus I had sympathy to the greenies' cause. The contempt for greenies that my host showcased on my first day was, however, a warning that I ought not to show any sympathy for their actions towards him. I already mentioned in the prologue that my host and I on our first day together were assuming *sameness*, and any obvious differences were misinterpreted. This is what Marianne Gullestad (2001, p. 35) calls 'imagined sameness': The assumption that one *must* be alike in order to get along, and any differences are ignored and suppressed. I am not a smoker, but I smoked cigarettes with John at first as an icebreaker, and then as a routine to preserve the relationship we had. Though I cannot be sure, it seemed to me that John was able to contain a feeling of sameness throughout my fieldwork. John treated me as a 'mate', where we were 'the same'; someone he could share a couple of beers with and have a 'yarn'⁶. But also as a teenager who he could give 'life-advice' to. At first I aspired to not express my own attitudes on different issues, but quickly I understood that worrying was superfluous, as he seldom showed interest in what I had to say. I was rather a deposit for him to pour out his attitudes, and someone who he could reflect himself in. It became apparent after a while, at least for me, that we were not the same, but then we rather focused on maintaining sameness through other things, such as the simple act of smoking, or singing together in the grocery store. Though we started out assuming sameness in attitudes, we eventually maintained sameness through behaviour.

John became one of my closest, and thus what felt like the most extreme, informants. Extreme in the sense that considering how much time I spent with him I was able to gain much insight into what he was concerned about, his position and reasoning, and compared to the other informants that I engaged with—with not the same frequency—the urgency and lucidity of their

⁶ An Australian expression for a casual conversation

attitudes were not as palpable or intrusive as John's. I found our routine of sharing cigarettes a nice way of also providing me with context to other people's views. He could either stand as a contrasting or complimentary voice to others. However, John's pervasiveness eventually made our relationship ambivalent. He had an urge to convince me that he was right, and anyone who did not share his beliefs, were wrong. This eventually made me physically ill during our conversations, because when he spoke about 'the Others' in highly negative terms, which he took for granted excluded both of us, he was often speaking about me or people who I sympathise with. If I ever gave an indication that I in fact was 'the Other' he spoke so negative about, he would shrug me off, pretend he did not hear me and continue talking, or use age and wisdom as an argument—being young, I did not know better. Often I pinched my arms and scratched my legs to the point of actually hurting myself in order to maintain my calm demeanour. Moreover, it was not easy to avoid these conversations. I lived on the second floor, and sometimes John called me on my cell phone telling me to grab a couple of beers and join him in the backyard, other times when I went down to the kitchen to get a snack he would also call for me to go outside. Towards the end I stopped asking questions, trying to keep the conversations to only one cigarette, but the conversations easily lasted two hours. At least it motivated me to stay out of the house as much as possible, and be social with others.

However, John was not the only 'extreme' actor I engaged with. There were many who assumed sameness with me, and were eager for me to share their frustrations. It was as if because I was Norwegian, and thus an outsider, if they were able to resonate with me their attitudes were somehow legitimised. The different groups had, however, differing ways of maintaining sameness, but a common link was alcohol—particularly with the group from the country club. I met them in my first weekend in Mackay, when John lent me his country club card, and where I eventually earned (read: paid to get) my own membership. The group consisted of a core of three men: Hugh and Brad, who were middle-aged, and Patrick, who was in his thirties. They all worked in the same company, which services the coal industry by delivering parts to the mining sites in the Bowen Basin. There was always alcohol involved when we met, and as Bruce Kapferer (1998, p. 158) notes is common in Australia, alcohol played the role of manifesting the 'mateship' in the group. The working for sameness was made easy through alcohol, as the 'aim' for these get-togethers were to get drunk, and difference in attitudes were downplayed. My questions were never as controversial as the rejection of a schooner⁷. They invited me every time they planned to meet in the country club, for birthdays and sports events, and for every time we

⁷ A particular glass size, most commonly half a litre of beer

met there were new people there, which meant that I could also speak with their other friends, who mostly worked as coalminers.

It was a goal for me to engage with people who were related to the coal mining industry, but I had imagined it more difficult than it turned out to be. I gained quick entry to the group at the country club, which gave me a non-stop access to life-stories from the coal industry. The Mackay Conservation Group, which I engaged with on a regular basis, had several members who had worked or was working in the coal mines, and at the Environment Centre where I volunteered every Tuesday, several of the men were retired coalminers. This is a testament to how many in the city are actually related to the industry. Mackay's second biggest industry is sugar cane, but except for the interview I had with the Development Manager of Mackay Sugar, I never met anyone who worked in the sugar cane industry.

I mainly engaged with men between the ages of 30 and 70. Though I have encountered unwanted sexual approaches from men, and thus chose to alienate myself from those persons for shorter periods, overall I see that I have benefited from being a woman. Katrine Fangen (2010, p. 156) affirms this, by noting that men typically have an urge to teach women, and by holding a naïve role and being an interested listener, women may have an easy access to male dominated environments. Holding a role as a naïve and interested listener was something I had aspired to, as I was well aware that if I started arguing about issues where I disagreed with anyone I might lose access. However, as exemplified with John, it could be difficult at times not to speak up if anyone said something that I perceived as discriminating or racist. Sometimes I chose to take a 'time-out', and go to the toilet, or out to get fresh air, but then at other times a discussion would play out in the group. Patrick, who at thirty-two was the youngest in the group at the country club, would commonly challenge Brad, who was in his fifties, when he said anything about 'a woman's role' or how women should look. At those times, Patrick would 'team up' with me and represent 'the younger generation'. Whenever Patrick and I played as a 'team' I could challenge the others on a variety of topics, holding a role as the amusing inquisitive youngster, instead of as a mere researcher asking questions they were uninterested in in the context of hanging out and drinking beer with their mates.

On the surface they seemed to treat me as 'one of their own', however, they never allowed me to buy a round of beers—or what Kapferer (1998, p. 159) calls the 'shout'. Kapferer argues that the 'shout' is a mirror of the inherent egalitarianism in the Australian culture; every member in the

group is the same, and everyone is expected to buy a shout. If anyone ever gave an indication that they needed to get back home, they were treated as ‘henpecked husbands’ and a bad mate, to which I was often given the privilege as being the judge of whether they were henpecked or not. Mateship is not exclusive to men (B. Kapferer, 1998, p. 158), and they worked to give me the impression that we were equal, expecting me to drink as much as they did, and when I did not I was given loud complaints. However, they were also preoccupied with my gender. As with John, I seemed to shift between being a ‘mate’, and a ‘young female’ that needed guidance. On our first meeting they were astounded that I was in Mackay all alone, but more so of the fact that my fiancé had ‘let’ me travel alone. With this they saw it as their responsibility to take care of me, as ‘there are many people you need to stay away from’ they often told me. They wanted to give me the ‘real’ image of Mackay, tell me secrets only they knew, and wanted me to avoid the ‘wrong crowd’. Every time I met them they warned me that for a young woman as myself I was an easy target for men—‘men only wants one thing’ they said. Thus, when the invitations to meet them alone started coming, with their own warning in mind, I declined and declined, and after a while I ignored them. I thought maybe it would have been expedient to learn more about them outside the context of the country club, but outside the country club I would not have been in control of the situation. However, when I did meet them in the country club, they never mentioned the fact that I had ignored the invitations, and acted as if we were back to just being mates drinking beer.

A sense of men having to ‘take care of me’ played out in many of my relations, and as Fangen (2010, p. 146) notes, the fact that I gained entry in to male dominated environments may, due to the power hierarchy between the men, be because I was considered a harmless figure. On the flipside, this might be the reason why I had difficulties in gaining entry to female dominated environments; not necessarily because they saw me as a threat, but the sense of curiosity that I benefited from the men, seemed to be non-existent with the women. In the beginning this applied to the group at the Environment Centre in North Mackay as well. Every Tuesday I volunteered with a group of retirees where our activities mostly entailed planting grass into small pots. I became particularly close with three of the men, Thomas, Michael, and Finn, who all had worked in the coal industry, either as blue- or white-collar workers, and they always invited me in their conversations, and asked me how I was doing. Though towards the end of my fieldwork the women from the Environment Centre warmed towards me, when I first started volunteering with them they rarely greeted me or invited me to engage in their conversations. Commonly we were situated on two different tables, often divided based on gender, and the men were always

very eager to speak with me, therefore I predominantly engaged with them. Hence, my immediate entry to the field was provided through men, but eventually I accessed the female perspectives as well.

My access to people under the age of thirty was limited to one meeting when I volunteered with the Green Army at the Environment Centre; an environmental program where youth between the ages of 18-24 have the opportunity to get temporary work and gain certificates. It was by chance that I was able to hang out with them that day, or rather because of the bad weather, as they usually worked outside the Environment Centre, at beaches or inland where these activities were off-limit to me as I did not have the necessary certificates. Thus, in my thesis the youth perspective is limited.

Participation, interviews, and reading of newspapers

By elaborating on my role in the field I have already presented some of the groups that I engaged with. These include my host, the group of men in the country club, the Mackay Conservation Group (MCG), and the volunteers at the Environment Centre. The latter was my only fixed appointment; I met with them every Tuesday. Other somewhat fixed appointments I had were attending the Mackay Council meetings as an observer, every second week, and participating at every debate or meeting that the MCG arranged. Other than that, I was dependent on people's invitations. Interchangeably my telephone was silent for days, or it was 'run down' by text messages and calls from people who wanted to meet. I could be wandering aimlessly at the beach or in the city centre, or I was bird watching with BirdLife Mackay, camping at Urannah (a river close to the Eungella National Park), dining at one of the mining camps in Moranbah (a mining town in the hinterlands of Mackay), or letterboxing in Clermont (another mining town), to name a few of the activities I did. Particularly the MCG members were great at keeping me in mind, and contacted me whenever there was a meeting at their office, any excursion or protest I could join.

My initial entry to the field was provided to me through my host, but I had also arranged for three interviews prior to my arrival in Mackay. This included an interview with a representative from Mackay Tourism, the Acting Coordinator of the MCG Peter McCallum, and The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Regional Liaison Manager Carolyn Thompson. The

interview with McCallum from the MCG was a door opener to engage in several of the activities and events that the MCG arranged. I also later came to know McCallum better when I volunteered with the MCG, where we had several informal conversations. This was also true with The Greens' Dawson Candidate Jonathon Dykyj, whom I knew before our interview took place in May, through the events and social get-togethers that the MCG arranged. The interview with Dykyj took place at a bar, we had a couple of glasses of wine, and the interview subsequently turned into a long conversation. In this way interviews could be door openers, as well as a way to strengthen ties further.

Interviews can be a fruitful method in order to gain individual's accounts of specific events, and mirror the subjective experiences—accounts that relative to the interviewee I would not been able to gain without an interview (Fangen, 2010, p. 15). Mainly I have interviewed persons who had some sort of 'leader'-position, and like with Powdermaker (1966, p. 213-217 in Fangen, 2010, p. 15), these were actors who were inaccessible without suggesting a formal interview. These include Mackay's two mayors Deidre Comerford and Greg Williamson (there was a council election during the spring of 2016); MP George Christensen; and Mackay Sugar Limited Business Development Manager John Hodgson. The interviews started out in a formal manner. I contacted the interviewees by e-mail beforehand, and I presented my objective with the interview, and asked them if they would allow to be recorded. Everyone I asked accepted, and all in all I did eleven interviews. They were conducted as semi-structural interviews where I had written questions down beforehand, but where I allowed the questions to be adjusted accordingly to the information provided by the interviewee. All of these interviews are transcribed.

There were few actual meetings where the two opposing groups in Mackay met face to face. Most confrontations happened through written discussion contributions in the newspaper, through news segments where both parties were individually interviewed, and also on social media. There were two occasions that there could have been a face-to-face confrontation, on a demonstration outside MP Christensen's office and on an election debate facilitated by the MCG; but MP Christensen refused to attend. The confrontations rather played out in the media, which meant that I spent much of my time reading newspapers, watching the news broadcast on the television, as well as following the conflict online, through social media and online newspapers. My host subscribed to The Courier Mail, which, according to him was the only reliable source of news, and he laid the newspaper on my steps each day after he had read

it—sometimes circling around specific articles he thought it imperative for me to read. I found the local newspaper, *The Daily Mercury* (which I was told by my host was ‘absolute crap’ and former Mayor Comerford as ‘untruthful’), particularly helpful in gaining an understanding of the interests in the city. Each Thursday, McCallum from the MCG would have a column about something relating to one of their campaigns, such as proposing a re-introduction of deposits on bottles and cans, and commenting on the coral bleaching event in the Great Barrier Reef. MP Christensen was also a frequent voice in *The Daily Mercury*, he would often have written something in the comment section, as a response to earlier articles or comments directed at him. I read *The Daily Mercury* for free either at a café, or at the library, which held subscriptions on nearly all national newspapers. I kept myself particularly updated on *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Guardian*, which often provided contrasting views on the same stories. On Facebook I followed George Christensen’s official page, which he often updated, and to which I would read the comments. I was friends with some of the members from the MCG, and read whatever they posted, which were often activist content. I also subscribed to the MCG’s newsletter on mail, as well as *The Shift Miner*, a ‘Premium Queensland business and industrial news’-letter, where I could read news about the coal industry.

Making errors

By virtue of being Norwegian and travelling to Australia, thinking that you will study a culture not too different from your own is a pitfall I realised I was a victim of already on my first day, during the conversation with my host—and continuously so throughout my fieldwork. Getting rid of my own categories was one of the most important but difficult tasks I had to undertake. However, according to James F. Hamill (1990), making errors can reveal knowledge systems that make up culture, and thus be a methodological tool (Hamill, 1990, p. 45). Acknowledging that I am ‘wrong’ made me aware and attentive to people’s production of categories, and articulations of their content. What I found was that the categories presented by my informants entailed ambivalence. For some group membership was important, but for others it was more important to *not* be labelled as a part of a particular group. To some a suggestion that they were greenies was an insult, as I came to experience by making that ‘error’ when suggesting it to an informant who volunteered at the Environment Centre. Though he refused in a friendly, and by no means hostile manner, it was clear that it was imperative to him to not be related to greenies. Making such errors became an important way of discerning group boundaries, but also

to recognize how there were discrepancies between what members of a particular group 'saw themselves as' and what outsiders thought of them.

Anonymity

I have anonymised all individuals that are not public actors. These have been given new names, and some of them I have chosen to mix in order to make their attitudes more indistinguishable as single characters. Public actors are individuals who are widely recognisable, to the degree that it would be inexpedient to anonymise them, this includes politicians, as well as representatives of organisations that are well profiled in the media. As a rule, if a person is referred to by their surname they are not anonymised.

3 Mackay

Mackay holds several different understandings of the city's narratives of the past, present, and the future, and I shall investigate these through looking at the interests that the city holds. In which ways are the past mobilised, which elements of the past are selected, and how does that affect one's image of the present and future? I start by giving an overall look of the city, before moving onto the 'official' narrative of the city as represented by the council and Mayors' visions. I compare these with individual accounts from some of the residents, before focusing on particularly three groups that I engaged with during fieldwork: Coalminers, a group of retired volunteers, and an activist green group.

A melange of the past

One of Captain James Cook's famous voyages through the coral maze of Great Barrier Reef (McCalman, 2013, p. 10) led him to the Mackay coast in 1770. He named several local landmarks, including Slade Point and Cape Hillsborough (Mackay Historical Society and Museum Incorporated, 2009). However, the area was not settled by colonialists until the second half of the nineteenth century after John Mackay led an expedition in 1860 to seek pastoral opportunities. At this time, approximately two thousand Indigenous people lived in the area around the Pioneer Valley (Mackay Regional Council, 2008, p. 2), and the area which is now the city centre of Mackay was originally inhabited by the Yuwibara people (also known as Juipera) (Mackay Historical Society and Museum Incorporated, 2006).

Mackay is a region and a city on the eastern coast of Queensland. Per 2015 the Mackay region had an estimated population of 123,724 spread throughout its 77 suburbs (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011 Census of Population and Housing, 2015), where 85 455 were estimated to live in the urban area (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016a)—this excludes the fly-in-fly-out coalminers (FIFO), who fly in every second week from all over Australia; but it includes those who drive-in-drive-out (DIDO) from Mackay. The region's population and economy is quite diverse, with a gross regional product of AU\$5.1 billion in 2013 (D. King, Apan, Keogh, & Thomas, 2013, p. 102). As Mackay produces one third of Australia's cane sugar the city is nicknamed 'the sugar capital of Australia', however today the city is very much more acknowledged as a hub for coal after the last coal boom.

Mackay's overall design is a reflection of its history: The settlers, the cyclones and floods, and their industries. According to Whitlock and Carter (1992, in Boni, 2009, p. 206), Australia is one of the most suburban nations on earth—it is 'quintessentially Australian' (J. Kapferer, 1996, p. 124)—and this suburban lifestyle may in fact be 'a key element in the construction of an "Australian way of life"' (Boni, 2009, p. 206). According to Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 116), the suburbs work as a microcosm of the Australian society, and the suburban home enshrine egalitarianism and freedom of choice, which is believed 'to lie at the very heart of a liberal capitalist democracy'. If so, then Mackay is by design a representative of the Australian suburbia. A Google-search on 'suburbia' gives you images of identical—often white—houses in straight or circular-curved lines, presenting you the impression that these areas were made for the sake of confusion alone. These areas are called *suburbs* because they are *outside* the urban area, but the city of Mackay is virtually just a big suburb if you eliminate the city mall Caneland, and the buildings surrounding the main streets Victoria and Gordon. Except for the apartment building 'Quest Mackay on Gordon', which was built in 2013 and stretches 43 metres up in the sky, there are no high rise-buildings.

The city of Mackay is made of straight crisscrossing lines, but the houses are not nearly as identical as the images on Google. The overall design of the city is a testament to the two industrial booms that the city has experienced. Some areas are filled with bungalows, a consequence of the sugar boom between 1920 and 1940s, where due to the increase of newcomers many turned to 'kit-homes', usually prefabricated at another location (Mackay Regional Council, 2011, p. 2). The houses are built on stumps with varying height, and some of the houses are 'embellished' with verandas; a common feature in the early colonies, but once they arrived in Mackay they had evolved into quite decorative constructions. As time has passed the conservation of the initial design of the houses vary, despite the council's many encouragements for 'conserving the character and heritage significance of your house' (Mackay Regional Council, 2010), thus some of the houses are a hybrid between modern and old designs.

During the last coal boom between 2003 and late 2011, the council built 1500 new houses a year, according to the former Mayor of Mackay, Deidre Comerford. These are predominantly found in North Mackay, around Mount Pleasant and the Northern Beaches, where the existent residents had to see the hills and fields be filled with non-distinctive, beige and white, one-storey buildings. The new houses spread along Illawong, Quota and Iluka parks in East Mackay appear

to be more elaborately built; these are either two-storey houses with black tiles (a subtle version of the American ‘McMansion’), or a modern interpretation of functionalism, with three storeys, large windows, and clear surfaces. ‘For sale’ signs are in general common in Mackay, and some of the signs never disappeared over the six-month period I lived in Mackay. ‘For sale’-signs were particularly common in East Mackay, and many houses seemed to never have been inhabited.

Progression from past to present

One morning I walked along the beach, I walked through Sandfly Creek, and further on to the Bluewater Trail. Between the fish market and the Forgan Smith Bridge, and facing the Pioneer River I found a 306-meter long wall mural; set against a white background there were illustrations of colourful lorikeets and kookaburras, mudcrabs resting underneath trees, floods and cyclones, sugar cane plantations, the two coal ports at Hay Point and Dalrympe Bay, naked people, dead people, and people with various types of hats. This wall mural was unveiled in the winter of 2015, a few years after the coal boom, and painted by four artists commissioned by the Mackay Council. According to one of the artists, the project’s mission was to ‘share Mackay’s history spanning across 165 years’ (Kleidon & Kesteven, 2015), as well as, ‘promote Mackay’s multicultural history and progression from past to present’ (Laval, 2016).

The first illustration on the mural is of a ship, with the words ‘Captain John Mackay’, ‘supplies’, and ‘hope’ in turquoise and blue, signaling that with the arrival of this ship the history of Mackay started—with hope. Following is an illustration of an Indigenous woman breastfeeding a child, as well as other Indigenous characters catching fish with spears made out of tree branches. As the historical mural does not include the Indigenous peoples’ history before the arrival of John Mackay, it appears that catching fish and sitting on the ground is the gist of what they did in the centuries prior to the British settlement. Further on, the year 1863 marks the end of their centuries-long practice of catching fish in seemingly tranquility. Under the words ‘embryo’, ‘sugar’, and ‘regulations’, black stick figures are seen running away from a character on a horse shooting a rifle (see figure 2). Some of the stick figures are lying on the ground, bleeding from their heads and backs. There are only a few of the black stick figures that have eyes and mouths painted on, and one of the faces is particularly in distress—the face resembles Edvard Munch’s painting ‘The Scream’. This character is holding a bleeding child over its head.



Figure 2 Black stick figures on the wall mural



Figure 3 Illustration of the Roylen Cruises on wall mural

From 1875 and into the twentieth century there are illustrations of brown people working in sugar cane fields with a white man surveying them; trains transporting sugar cane in-between palm trees; people milking cows; various small houses; and characters with yellow faces and triangular hats working in mines accompanied by several dogs and horses. This is the depiction of progression from the slavery of South Sea-Islanders, to when sugar cane became an industry in Mackay, further on to when the Chinese came to Australia during the gold rush to work in the mines. Over the year 1924 people are painted sitting on top of the city's buildings, there is water everywhere, utility poles are lying on the ground, and ships are wrecked; this marks the biggest cyclone and subsequent flood Mackay has had. Over the year 1947 there is a large red fish swimming around a yellow poster with a boat in the middle, and the text 'Roylen Cruises to the Great Barrier Reef' (see figure 3). Most of the following decades are illustrated with animals, as well as, predominantly English words, but also in Maltese, Italian, and Yuwibera language, which states historical events. These include cyclones, opening of schools, establishment of football teams, and other events considered significant to Mackay's history.

In 2014, the year before the unveiling of the wall mural, Mayor Deidre Comerford launched a campaign called #MackayPride. Concurrently with the launch she stated that it was important to shape a feeling of pride in their city, despite that everyone is 'feeling the impacts of the change in the economy' (Mackay Regional Council, 2014). This change she refers to, is the downturn in the coal industry. The campaign consisted of a nearly three-minutes long video, which was distributed on a USB-stick to the tourism centre, but also available at the council headquarters. According to Mayor Comerford the video is 'very different to other promotional videos as it encapsulates some of the real treasures and statistics about our region and helps foster a positive city image for residents and visitors alike' (Mackay Regional Council, 2014). When I interviewed Mayor Comerford I was provided with this USB-stick, in which she said it would provide me with the most essential things there is to know about Mackay.

The video starts with a birds-eye view, moving over the Pioneer River, towards the Forgan Smith Bridge, before it focuses on a couple of palm trees on a beach in sunset, with the title #MackayPride moving by, accompanied by upbeat electronic tunes. Following comes the text 'The beauty of nature' over shots of kangaroos on the beach and smiling faces, then after, 'We don't just grow rainforests, we produce some of the world's best sugarcane', which runs over a close shot of a drop of water running down a moss-filled tree, before it switches to a plain of sugar cane. The video shifts between shots of the rock band KISS, to coal being lifted on to a

ship, further on to the airport, the city mall Caneland, and people bicycling, accompanied by this text rolling over the screen:

Home to Australia's 2nd largest Sugar milling company, and our very own miniature sugar mill. Have one of the largest coal terminals in the world, and serve the best seafood fresh to the plate. About 120,000 call here [sic.] home, our annual growth rate is among the highest in Queensland. Birthplace of 17 Olympians [...] We have produced one Australian Prime Minister [...] And hosted rock legends on their world tour.

The Indigenous population in Mackay receive less attention in the video than they do on the mural. Under the sentence 'Celebrate our diversity', preceded by shots of a couple doing capoeira, and a woman dancing what appears to be a salsa, is a two seconds sequence of an Indigenous boy and a man, attired in green leaves and black paint, clapping their hands. After comes the text, 'We are proud. Enjoy our lifestyle. Love 31 pristine beaches. Vibrant Mackay. Sustainable Mackay. We have pride in Mackay', rolling over shots of people of North-European descent eating, drinking and running, before a couple of kangaroos sunbathing on a lawn. On the mural, the Indigenous people are granted some ten metres of Mackay's history, as well as a few words of the Yuwibaran language painted in blue together with words from other languages—albeit predominantly English words. The next non-white people on the mural are South Sea Islanders working as slaves, and then the Chinese, with yellow faces and triangular hats, working in mines. After this there is only people of North-European descent on the mural.

As reflected on the wall mural, in Mackay's official depiction of the city the Indigenous population are acknowledged as the first owners of the land. Furthermore, in every council meeting the Mayor commences the meeting with reciting this statement, 'I wish to acknowledge the custodians of this land, the Yuwibaran people and their Elders past and present', which is an 'Acknowledgment of Country', common to most official and public meetings or gatherings. Nevertheless, in the video they distribute to the citizens of Mackay, as well as visiting tourists, the role that the Indigenous people play is only as a short passage of diversity in the cityscape. 4.1 percent of the population in Mackay is registered as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, and a total of 19.9 percent born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Throughout the year the council holds Citizenship ceremonies, the one on Australia's national day, Australia Day, the 26th of January being the largest one. In 2016, before she was elected out

of the council, Mayor Comerford, welcomed 150 new citizens to Mackay ‘from all over the world’, she stated. In an interview with the local newspaper, *The Daily Mercury*, she said she was very proud that so many wanted to live in Mackay. As an initiation gift all are given a small plant to symbolise that they are now Australian citizens; these plants are provided by the Environment Centre and the volunteering retirees I engaged with every Tuesday.

Narratives on before and now

When talking about what Mackay is today, people commonly linked it to a comparison to ‘before’. ‘Before’ could imply before the downturn, i.e. during the coal boom, or it could mean before the coal boom. However, people emphasised ‘during the coal boom’—perhaps because the contrasts to today were so great. It sometimes seemed like before the boom, Mackay had been a great ‘nothing’; being a great nothing was to some, not something they wanted to go back to. Today was dreadful, because yesterday had been so great—before yesterday was not that sensational. The writer Paul Cleary (2012, p. 153) describes Mackay’s transition as a ‘conservative rural centre servicing the sugarcane industry’, turning into a city of ‘fast cash and fast cars’ during the boom. One of the older residents, Thomas from the Environment Centre, had experienced the fluctuating nature of the coal industry, and worked through the up and downturns both up at the mines and at the coal terminal at Hay Point; he compared contemporary Mackay with before the coal boom. The last boom he had seen ‘was too big, it was too big to be sustained’. Michael and Finn agreed, they were similar to Thomas retired miners and volunteers at the Environment Centre, and they disagreed when I asked if Mackay today was in a recession, ‘No, this is normal. The last boom was too big, and now we’re back to normal,’ Thomas said, and the other two nodded and gave their agreeing remarks. Thomas, Michael, and Finn gauged Mackay relative to how it was before the coal boom, and relative to before the boom contemporary Mackay was back to ‘normal’. There were not many whom I met that agreed with them. Of those who would disagree, though they might depict Mackay as a ‘crazy’ town during the coal boom, wanted it to be the new normal—they wished the ‘coal boom-times’ to come back.

Considering that the government had in fact exclaimed that the coal boom would last for decades, this is understandable. The last resources boom was the fifth in Australian (Cleary, 2012, p. 8), and it would be easy to criticise those who didn’t see the bust coming; because history tells us that after a boom, there is a bust (Cleary, 2011, p. viii). However, both the

Treasury and the Reserve Bank declared that this boom would stand in contrast to the former ones, and *not* bust (Cleary, 2012, p. 8). This *would* be the new normal, they had predicted, and the Mackay council had facilitated for it, building 1500 new houses a year. Just a few days after I arrived in Mackay the local newspaper, The Daily Mercury, stated that there were 3000 houses out for sale and 1500 for rent in the Mackay area. It was a common misconception that the same amount of people that had moved to Mackay during the boom had moved away in accordance with the bust, and the ones that remained were ‘dying’ to get out, but could not due to the financial loss of selling their house now that the prices had dropped—and no-one was willing to buy. However, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics the region’s population has risen steadily since 2011 (2015; 2016a). But, furthermore the Bureau of Statistics also state that in 2012 there were 772 more people coming than leaving Mackay, 11 959 to 11 187, whilst in 2015 there was a negative difference of 2592; whereas 8618 moved to Mackay, 11 210 left (2017).

The statistics of vacant homes was commonly referred to me throughout my fieldwork as proof that there was nothing left for people in Mackay. However, this was due to overinvestment on the Mackay council’s behalf, and the same sense of emergency that the residents felt was similarly reflected in the former council. On the first council meeting I attended in January the then Mayor Deidre Comerford presented Mackay as being in dire economic straits. 19th of March in 2016, there was held a local council election, and Greg Williamson was elected in as the new Mayor. When I interviewed him after his win, he told me that he saw the situation with the empty houses rather as a short-term situation. The last coal boom had,

a massive demand on the public purse, to supply all the services to enable those houses to exist. The roads, the water, the sewage, the electricity, huge demand, for that sort of infrastructure, and now of course we have a lot of that infrastructure begging now, there is now no one living in a few of those houses, a lot of those houses actually. That’s a short term, in all I think the city has had a positive outcome from the infrastructure growth.

Though the city might be standing ‘fallow’, so to speak, at this moment, the past massive development of the city would not be in vain facing a possible new coal boom with the Carmichael coalmine opening, according to the new Mayor. Thus, the suburbs in Mackay are not only a melange and a reflection of two industries that are still prevalent in the region today, but also a reflection of the temporary state Mackay is in. The empty houses are therefore not necessarily a reflection of the coal bust, and the dire situation Mackay is in now, but can rather

be seen as a signal of what is to come—with all these empty houses, Mackay is prepared for a new rush of migrating coalminers. Mayor Williamson continues:

Because the boom was so big, so that changed the face of the city through infrastructure, it brought a lot of different people to town and therefore we have great restaurants now, we have a seaside community at the harbour, so those sorts of things of metropolitisation of our city, or the urbanisation of our city has, that's affected us. And there's good and bad in that. The bad I suppose lies in what the boom brought to the region in terms of people who were here not necessarily because of the right reasons, so you know, we've had a lot of problems with drugs, in the community with young-ish people [...] that played out in our streets for a long time, that seems to have disappeared now, all the testosterone has left town and that's not a bad thing, so the community has benefited from all that infrastructure and growth [...] we have a lovely region to live and work in and I think that the people who are here now are going to enjoy the benefits from all that.

All in all, negative aspects aside; the coal boom was positive for Mackay, in Mayor Williamson's eyes. They got new restaurants and residents moved to the Mackay harbour. Though the last coal boom brought with it some negative aspects, such as drug and alcohol-abuse, particularly in the younger community, Mayor Williamson saw this as something that belonged to the past. The drug and alcohol-abuse, however, is still a problem in Mackay today. It seemed like nearly every person I met knew someone with, or had themselves in the past, a substance abuse problem. Simon was a miner who enjoyed fishing in his off-time, and as I experienced on a fishing trip together, drank heavily, and smoked pot before he went off to a shift in the mines. Simon had both a daughter and son that were addicted to methamphetamine-based drug Ice, and his wife were left to take care of their grandchildren, whilst he himself was either working in the mines or out fishing. With his statement, Mayor Williamson left me wondering, therefore, if he thought that the negative aspects from the past, would not accompany the Carmichael mine.

Not only had the coal boom brought with it substance abuse, but also a lack of community engagement. On the Australian of the Year award January 25th, held the day before Australia Day, I had the honour of being the then Mayor Deidre Comerford's cavalier. The Australian of the Year award ceremony is for recognising individuals' contributions to the community, commonly through their volunteer work. In her speech, Mayor Comerford mentioned the statistics of volunteer work in Mackay, and that they had the lowest participation in Queensland,

emphasizing that ‘We’re even lower than Townsville!’ This was also documented in a study done by Finn King, Armando Apan, Diane Keogh and Melanie Thomas (2013, p. 99), through data collected in conjunction with a flood in 2008, that there were not ‘many strong social bonds and networks through community organisations’ in Mackay. During an interview I had with Carolyn Thompson from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, a couple of days prior to the Australian of the Year event, she made a similar statement as well, but directly attributing it to the coal boom, explaining:

The volunteer organisations are struggling to have numbers and keep people, because especially if you work out at the mines you’ve got ridiculous shifts, but the family come and go and well I’m not gonna make a commitment to once a week, a month or whatever, because I don’t know if I’ll be there, and I don’t want to start something that I can’t complete, or I work really hard and on those days off I want to be looking after me not looking after the environment or whatever.

With the coal boom, an immense migration of people who wanted to work in the coalmines had settled in Mackay. Together with the lifestyle that followed coalmining (as will be further discussed later on), the volume of people was also suggested as a contributor to the low attendance in volunteer activities. Going from a rather small town to a coal ‘mecca’, people told me the social ties had become weaker. However, I was still often reminded on that ‘in Mackay it’s all about who you know’, for jobs, for services, and so forth, meaning that social ties were still important for people. As already mentioned in chapter two, with just a phone call my host had been able to arrange for me to meet the Mayor and the MP.

Though the council had been building 1500 new houses every year during the boom, they had not been able to keep up with the increase of newcomers. The rent on apartments skyrocketed, there were no motel-vacancies, and people slept in tents. Being a tourist was nearly impossible as all plane seats were occupied by commuting fly-in-fly-out (FIFO) miners. According to MP George Christensen, Mackay had never been much of a tourist town before anyway:

Well I’ve lived here nearly all my life, except four years to go to university and came back. We used to have when I was a child, Royleen cruises that did cruises out to Brampton Island, we used to be able to do day trips to Brampton, but that would have been the pinnacle of tourism in Mackay. And it wasn’t really a big part of the local economy. It was

there, it was solid, they did the job, but did it bring hundreds of thousands of tourists here? No. It was more so something to do for locals on the weekend to go over to the island to enjoy it, there probably was some tourist activity generated beyond that, but Mackay has never been a big tourism town.

The Roylen cruises, as illustrated on the wall mural, was also something Thomas, Finn, and Michael from the Environment Centre, talked about. However, they gave a contrasting account about the tourism industry in Mackay. They remembered the tourism industry as once being quite big in Mackay, using the Roylen cruises as an example—once Mackay had been an even bigger tourist attraction than the Whitsundays⁸! It was the local council that eventually had ended the cruises, and made a stop to tourism, as they wanted to prioritise other industries, such as coal, they said. Now, however, after the downturn in coal, the council and MP Christensen want to invest more into tourism, with MP Christensen proposing charter trips from China, as the industrial revolution has left the general Chinese family more wealthy. Thomas, Finn, and Michael saw this as ironic, ‘oh, so *now* they want tourism! The Mackay council can’t make up their mind.’

Both former Mayor Comerford and current Mayor Williamson saw potential in several sectors, including tourism, but also in the sectors facilitating the coalmining industry. They saw the same knowledge could be used in other sectors, where Mayor Williamson mentioned ‘defence and air space manufacturing’. Mayor Comerford was particularly interested in investing in more green solutions, using the knowledge there instead. It seemed like a sore spot when I asked Mayor Williamson about the fact that Mackay was now nationally acknowledged as a coal-town, and he refused, ‘we were a sugar town for a long time, and a very rich sugar town, for a long time, and we still are a sugar town’. However, he quickly jumped to say that Mackay is not ‘a one-trick pony town’, contrary to the towns in Mackay’s hinterlands, such as Moranbah and Isaac which solely rely on coal—and would disappear without it. Still, if the Carmichael coalmine was not to be opened in the near future, Mackay would surely die he said, almost contradicting himself: ‘If you don’t grow you’re basically dead.’

However, though Mayor Williamson stressed that Mackay was a sugar town today, he used the past to argue this fact. For decades, and arguably still today, the sugar cane industry has been

⁸ The Whitsunday islands are a popular tourist destination for travelers to Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef

blamed for being the biggest contributor to polluting the water, due to the chemicals they use. The sugar cane industry, together with grazing and agriculture, would often be the first examples of threats to the Great Barrier Reef that people mentioned to me. The sugarcane industry has, however, undergone a green revolution the last 20 years. As a response to heavy competition in the global sugar industry, Mackay Sugar has seen it necessary to use sugar in new ways. The Development Manager at Mackay Sugar, John Hodgson, told me they now have a ‘nothing is wasted’ policy, which entails using all the by-products of sugar cane production. They produce ethanol and bio-diesel, and are now providing 33% of Mackay’s electricity—unbeknownst to most of the population in Mackay, he told me. Just a year ago they had had Community Transitions, a community group connected to the Mackay Conservation Group, on a visit to teach them more about the ‘greening’ of their industry, and many had shown surprise when they learnt about the sugar cane’s contribution to the city’s electricity. When speaking of Mackay pride, most seemed to emphasise the coal industry, and the supposition that Mackay has the ‘greenest’ coal in the world. Most people seemed to think that Mackay is solely run on coal, and no one ever mentioned sugar cane as a part of why they were proud to live in Mackay. Other than coal it was the warm climate, despite the yearly floods and cyclones. Particularly the coal miners in the country club used to state that ‘Australia is the best country in the world!’, and that Mackay was the best place to live in Australia—subsequently making Mackay the best place to live in the world.

During the boom, Carolyn Thompson from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority noted that schools were cramped, and you were lucky to get a dentist or doctor’s appointment before six months time. Furthermore, if you were not connected to the mining industry, you were most likely to suffer from your new rich neighbours. Though the prices on housing have dropped since the end of the boom, food prices have not, and were actually a common topic of conversation in Mackay. The retirees at the Environment centre considered themselves fortunate as they were growing their own vegetables and fruit in their gardens, whilst my host daily ‘excused’ himself for not buying certain types of food, as he thought it too expensive. When I joined him on his trips to the grocery store, he always gave me advice on which brands were the cheapest, and what foodstuff was not worth buying.

The increase of newcomers had also brought with it environmental changes. A woman who worked in the art museum in the city centre, Artspace, had accompanied her husband when he came to Mackay for work in the mines. Contrary to in Brisbane, where they had moved from,

people in Mackay seemed not to care for the environment, she said. She regularly made trips on the beach to pick up garbage, as no one seemed to care about all the plastic bags lying around. Artspace had actually made an art installation (see figure 4) with all the plastic they had found on the Mackay beaches. Also, she saw how everyone had started cutting down trees in their gardens as a negative development. She, however, lived in a ‘jungle’, where she could pick fruits in the morning. The woman was afraid, however, to speak loudly in the museum, when I talked to her—she was afraid to say anything negative in front of ‘native’ Mackayans.



Figure 4 Art installation of plastic waste at Artspace Mackay

However, several of the ‘old-timers’ had noticed changes as well. Fay Griffin, the treasurer and spokeswoman of the Mackay and District Turtle Watch, is a resident in Blacks Beach, and she told me that the rapid expansion in the Northern Beaches, as well as along Eastern Mackay, had resulted in depletion of the environment near the Mackay’s beaches. Sanctuaries for the animals were destroyed; the migrating birds had become fewer and turtle nests were destroyed. Though it was illegal, the residents whose property bordered the beach had cut down trees, and ‘tidied up’ the thickets outside their property boundaries. Also illegal, was the use of all-terrain vehicles

(ATV) in the evenings, which pulled up the sand where turtle hatchlings were nesting. The increase of people taking their afternoon strolls had also disturbed the needed rest for the migratory shorebirds who come to the Mackay beaches to fatten. Daryl Barnes, one of the bird watchers from BirdLife Mackay, told me they were very concerned that the migratory birds would not have enough fat reserves to make the flight back to Siberia or Alaska now that the birds had to lift off the beach more frequently with more passersby.

The lifestyle of a coalminer

Early one morning in March, I accompanied Anthony, a guy I had met at the Mackay Conservation Group, on his trip to Moranbah to meet George, a friend of his who worked in one of the coalmines in the Bowen Basin. After Sam's shift we joined him and his colleagues for dinner. Sam lived in Mackay, but his colleagues came from all over Australia. One had flown from Brisbane, another from Perth, and a third had driven ten hours straight from Cairns. They worked in the mines for one week, and then they went home for a week—on and off. Most had worked in the mines all their working life; some had only worked in the Bowen Basin, whilst others had been in mines all over Australia—Hunter Valley, Collies etc. The majority of them also had families; one man was a single-father and had to have his mother baby-sit his daughter, another was divorced, so he did not have to stress too much about his children he told me, whilst another said he was lucky to only have a girlfriend; being away for so long was beneficial for their relationship—it kept it 'fresh'.

This was in stark contrast to the account Peter McCallum from the Mackay Conservation Group had given me during an interview. He used to work in the coal industry as well, but as a truck driver who delivered parts—often back and forth between the coalfields and Mackay throughout the night. He had a brother-in-law who had quit his job up at the mines due to the strain it took on his family relationship. Once you got home from the mines you were too exhausted to engage in any family activities—not to mention any community engagement. Also, due to the long commutes between the mine and your home the time you actually spent home could be as little as five days: If you flew, it easily took a whole day, and if you for example drove back and forth to Cairns, you lost forty hours a month to driving. McCallum told me,

by the time they get home, they probably haven't slept for about 24 hours, so they're tired, and they're not happy, everyone has got to be quiet, the house is in a state of stress when this person arrives home, and then they recover, and then they're expected to do things, you know the other partner in the relationship, has been looking after the kids, doing all the washing, and they want a break, so this person is then kind of thinking I want to relax, been spending twelve hours at night shift, every day for the past week, and I want to recover, so there's relationship issues starting to occur, and kids don't respect their parents or whatever it is, so there is issues occurring in the family, there is a very high rate of family break down in the mining industry. So people get into it thinking yeah I need that job, but some are really happy when they're offered an opportunity to leave.

After our dinner at the mining camp, Sam gave us a tour around the 1700-bed large mining camp. Just outside the dining halls there were two fire tanks embellished with paintings of humpback whales, dolphins, turtles, and hammerhead sharks, swimming around a coral reef, as well as penguins and a polar bear on a landscape of ice (see front page photo). They were beautiful, but I found it curious that the unknown painter had chosen these specific environments. It was clearly the Great Barrier Reef, as well as the South and North Pole (the artist clearly has taken artistic liberties in joining together a polar bear with penguins). I wondered if the miners who stayed in the camp ever contemplated this.

While we had waited for Sam to get off his shift, Anthony and I had had a couple of beers at the bar in the camp. Sam told us that besides sleeping, the only pastime activity for the miners used to be drinking and playing pokies (gambling). Now however, a few fitness rooms had been installed. The miners could now wake up at three a.m. and do a round of boxing before their 12-hour long shift at the mine. Sam spoke at length at how the facilities in the mining camp, as well as the conditions in the mines, had improved. The comradeship between the miners had become better as well. For a long period of time Sam had been so depressed that he had been suicidal, but luckily this had receded, and he owed it to the atmosphere between the miners.

Sam's account was, however, quite unique regarding how positive he was towards the milieu between the coalminers. Frank and Simon, who I met at a fishing trip, spoke at length about the backstabbing workers in the mine, 'you can trust no-one', and, 'you always have to watch your back'. They enjoyed the money though, so much so that it was worth not being friendly with anyone you worked with. On my bus ride back from Airlie Beach I spoke with the bus driver the

entire trip, he used to be a coalminer but had quit due to the conditions. ‘There was always someone who were trying to sabotage you, because they wanted your position, or they thought you earned more than them’. Henry, whom I met at the mining camp, together with Anthony and Sam, said he felt extremely lonely at the camp. He could never speak about the things he was interested in, as people would scoff him off or ignore him. Mostly he kept to himself. When I met him I had found him a bit terrifying as he mumbled and seemed angry, still he continued to talk to me—and eventually he invited him to his home to see his aquarium and his corals. His pastime activity was doing aquaculture and fishing. No-one at the mining camp were interested in his corals, therefore, he told me, he had been very excited to meet me who seemed interested in learning more about aquaculture. When I met Henry in his home he seemed like a completely different person, smiling, laughing, and eager to talk—relaxed.

Cleary (2012, p. 151) has written extensively about the coal mining industry in Australia, and argues that coal brought an unhealthy lifestyle for many, and that the long shifts and commutes were linked to general ill-health, depression and suicide. Not only are there long shifts, but also the job in itself is dangerous. One coalminer I met at the country club asked me rhetorically, ‘what is the price for a human life? Is the money you earn from the mines worth the risk? The corporations think so. They don’t care if you die. So you have to make your own choice—if it’s worth it’. He was happy with his own life-choices, but he would never allow his children to work in the mines—the risk of dying was too great. The use of caffeine, cans on cans of Coca Cola, was common in order to cope during the long hours at the mine. However, for some, a can of Coke was not enough, and the crystal meth drug called ‘Ice’ had spread within the mining community. The combination of drugs and energy-deficiency thus makes the likelihood for accidents on the mining site high. Many also brought their coping mechanisms from the mining camp back home, which spread the Ice-abuse into the wider community.

The very route Anthony and I had driven to Moranbah used to be known as the ‘highway from hell’ (Cleary, 2012, p. 147), and the signs which read ‘Stop revive survive’, ‘Fatigue is fatal’, ‘Rest and stay alive’, ‘Take a rest and refresh’ along the roads were all testaments to the carnage that had taken place along this route. As we were driving, Anthony told me that when the coalminers’ last twelve hours-shift of the week is done, many of the miners are eager to get back home as soon as possible, but with an energy-deficit combined with dark and curvy roads this is the critical stage of road accident-probability. He had himself lost a friend along the Nebo junction, which was the spot where there had been the most accidents. However, no improvement on the

junction had been made since then. Though there are almost weekly reports of car accidents in Mackay in the local newspaper *The Daily Mercury* or at the local *Seven News*, fortunately accidents have gotten fewer. It is a consequence of some improved road safety measures, but mostly due to less activity on the roads. With the heavy redundancies in the coal industry there are fewer miners driving back and forth.

The coal boom and bust had especially affected the younger population in Mackay. In the mines you did not need any higher education, and after a short period of training they were earning more than their peers with university degrees—seemingly without any sense of what they should spend their money on. Greg Williamson, Mackay's Mayor, told me that during the boom, 'people in mid-twenties could earn 140 000 (AUSD) driving a truck, and had nothing to spend that money on other than a lot of alcohol and drugs.' With the bust many of these lost their jobs due to the heavy redundancies, and Mackay has today both one of the highest youth unemployment rates, as well as a huge drug problem.

Those who were related to the coal industry, whom I met at the country club, went quickly from telling me how amazing the times had been during the coal boom, before telling me about the about the odd jobs they had had before they were hired at a company servicing the coal industry. They had been dependent on the 'contacts' they had in Mackay, as they kept telling me that in Mackay, as I had heard before, it is all about 'who you know'. Brad used to lay carpets with his dad and brother; Hugh had worked as a painter—painting houses—and worked with cars; and Patrick, who was the youngest one at 32, had just started working. Before the boom, they told me, there had not been many job opportunities for people. Anthony had worked as a bouncer, and when the coal boom was at its highest peak, he had tried to get a job up at the mines in the Bowen Basin. However, he ended up not getting the job, and whilst on a shift as a bouncer he met a woman who offered a job at the same company that Brad, Hugh, and Patrick worked at. Now, with the downturn in the coal industry, they were all, excluding Anthony, afraid of losing their jobs, as the company had announced they would make several redundancies. Anthony was hoping to be made redundant, but the others said they were dependent on the Carmichael coalmine opening. Facing possible redundancies, the mine's opening could not come soon enough.

Through following different individual accounts from people connected to the coal industry, I found that the narratives of how Mackay was during the boom and how they perceive the

situation today, varied significantly. As exemplified by the discrepancy between Sam and Simon's accounts: Sam thought that the milieu in the mining camp had improved the last years, whilst Simon maintained that it had become increasingly worse, where people were backstabbing each other. There were accounts about the riches the coal boom had given them, and the potential riches that may come with the Carmichael mine, as well as different negative health issues related to the coal industry. I continue with an account from a group of retirees working at the Environment Centre. Many of these had used to work in the mining sector as well.

The Retirees at the Environment Centre: Potting plants, talking politics

Winter was slowly approaching—so was the end of my fieldwork. Interchangeably I woke up full of sweat from the heat, and unable to sleep because I was freezing. Getting out of bed had been particularly difficult this morning, it was cold and seemed to rain. Still I got up, drank my usual three cups of coffee, and cycled the twenty minutes ride to the Environment Centre in North Mackay. The air was now heavily humid, and the trousers and jumper I had put on was by now too warm. The retirees at the Environment Centre wore the same exact clothing as they always did; shorts, long-sleeved jumpers, and a sun-hat—come rain, come sun. I greeted everyone—the response was so-so. They seemed pre-occupied by their tasks; Finn and Sue were trying to find out which species a handful of seeds were, consulting a book; Thomas was shuffling soil into a barrel; Kate spread the small plastic pots over the tables; and Michael and Harriet carried today's lumps of grass that we would distribute into the pots. Everything was normal—but not quite.

Nearly every Tuesday since the beginning of March I had been planting grass into pots. The work in itself was highly tedious. Take some dirt into a pot, divide a straw of grass from a huge lump of grass, be wary of not tearing it apart from its root, put the straw's root into the pot, and shuffle more dirt into the pot; then, put the pot away with the rest and sprinkle some water over it. Do this over and over from half past eight till eleven; at about that time someone will ask, 'anyone up for smoko?' The social part of it, chatting whilst potting grass, and then the smoko (lunch), was what made the work bearable. At smoko we had tea and coffee, home-baked bread, cakes, and focaccia. The retirees also proudly brought with them home-grown bananas, coconuts, limes, and dragon fruit, and there were discussions on which species of banana or

dragon fruit was the best one. After smoko it was back to the lumps of grass, which we continued to pot from twelve to one o'clock.

The weekend prior to this particular Tuesday, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull had announced the date for what would be a double-dissolution election⁹, and this news had weighed down the mood in the group. When we had started potting the grass I asked them all in plenum their thoughts about the upcoming election. Kate answered, 'It doesn't matter who we vote for—they're all the same', she continued, 'they're all corrupted, so it doesn't matter any way'. 'I'm sick of their election campaigns already—before it's even started', Michael exclaimed. Then everyone continued with their business in silence. On our table we continued talking, Michael asked me about politics in Norway, 'are they corrupted there as well? Do you trust them? I sure as hell don't trust ours.' I had been asked a similar question earlier, by Brad from the country club, 'Do the Norwegian politicians have to do all what they promise to do? Are they allowed to lie?' I was left dumbfounded by that question. It appeared that both Michael and Brad were assertive that their politicians were outright lying, and when I met such attitudes I commonly asked why they believed so. 'They only care for themselves', was the answer, 'they only care about getting elected, that's their only agenda'.

Hugh Mackay wrote in 1993 (p. 169) that 'Australians have never been famous for the esteem in which they have held their politicians'. Contemporary distrust in politicians was demonstrated when the referendum of implementing fixed four-year parliamentary terms for the House of Representatives in Queensland was proposed. Per spring of 2016 Queensland and Tasmania were the only states in Australia that did not have fixed four-year terms, but rather three years. Particularly the fear of voting in someone 'dumb', and being stuck with them for four years, was the argument the retirees gave me against the referendum. The proponents, however, argued that with three years the politicians did not have enough time to do any effective politics; all their time is devoted to the next election campaign. Ultimately 53% of Queenslanders voted in favour of the fixed-year term (Fellows, 2016). According to Nico Stehr (2001, p. 159) the average citizen has never 'been able to exert as much influence when grouped together with others as he currently can'. Australia is based on a compulsory voting system, where the public is obliged to vote in elections. However, the feeling that they would have any influence at all was not present. It was not just a feeling that their vote would not have any impact; it was more that even if they

⁹ A double dissolution is a procedure to resolve deadlocks in the bicameral Parliament of Australia between the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house), this is the only circumstance in which the entire Senate can be dissolved

voted for someone they believed in, they would eventually be left disappointed, as the politicians did not fulfil their promises.

Mackay (1993, p. 169) writes that the cynicism towards politicians is simply an ‘extension of what has gone before’, and the retirees seemed to justify their attitudes by their age. They had seen the ‘the good, the bad, and the ugly’ times and people, as Thomas put it. The retirees came from different backgrounds, but the men had predominantly been connected to the mining industry—except for Mike, who had been an electrician. Some had lived in Mackay their whole life, and others came from Dawson. Brisbane, and the inland. Mike had volunteered for the Environment Centre for the last thirteen years, he was eighty-something, and some of the others had just started before Christmas. Thomas, Michael, and Finn had worked together in the coal industry. Finn had been an engineer, Thomas and Michael had been blue-collar workers; they had worked up in the mines; they had worked at the coal ports at Hay Point. Their experiences were a common conversation topic as they enjoyed telling tall tales to me. Thomas had quit school at sixteen to pursue ‘easy-earned money’ in the mines—which he did, and to which he was glad. However, the fact that a sixteen year old, without a higher education could earn more than a trained doctor, he thought disgraceful. Looking back, he was embarrassed, ‘I earned way too much relative to my education. I made too many bad choices’. And, this had been typical for every coal boom Mackay had experienced. With the last boom, which Thomas, Michael, and Finn saw as too big to be sustained, relative to the other booms, they knew it could not last—contrary to the official narrative argued by the government.

The volunteers at the Environment Centre would go under Vincent and Neale’s (2016, p. 5) definition of older ‘environmentalist’ or ‘conservationist’ practices, such as bushwalking and species protection. A few times we had excursions, where we planted some of the grass we had potted as ‘ecological restoration’ on the beaches’ shoreline, or we travelled inland following the Pioneer River to survey how well earlier restoration projects had gone. Early one morning we met up at Illawong Park from where we had the view of Hay Point and Dalrymple Bay, the coal terminals, in the horizon—as well as a tenfold ships standing in line to get coal. Thomas and Michael, who had worked at Hay Point, told me about how they had seen with their own eyes how the coal was detrimental to the environment. Not just how the development of the mines and the excavation of coal destroyed the land and subsequently left it barren, but the tankers at the coal ports were also a significant concern. In order for the tankers to stabilise through their long journeys, from Japan, from India, from China, to Australia, they had to fill their tankers

with large quantities of seawater, and when they arrived at Hay Point this water was released in Australian waters; foreign species of microorganisms that did not belong, and which damaged the local ecosystem. More than anything else, this was the most detrimental effect of the coal industry in their opinion—and people seemed to be ignorant of this. The greenies talked about CO2 emissions, which were probably bad as well, however people *know* about that, but they do not know about the polluted seawater, they told me. It seemed like they thought of it as some sort of secret knowledge, inside information, that they had not worked actively to communicate to others, but still were disappointed that people were not aware of. Another fact they thought people oblivious of, another ‘secret’, was that the coal ports were shipping out more coal now than during the boom. Yes, the coal was worth less, and yes, the companies had made several of their workers redundant, but still they were able to excavate and ship more coal. Thomas believed it was because the companies realised that the end of coal was near, and they were clever enough to get as much as possible out of the ground before it was too late. It was better to make profit out of something, instead of nothing.

The retirees showed great distrust in the Australian politicians, but also the greenies. The politicians did not care for anyone but themselves, whilst greenies seemed to be more preoccupied with large-scale issues, such as climate change, rather than visiting Hay Point to see the immediate consequences of the shipping of coal. The retirees were exasperated over the situation Mackay and Australia was in, but due to experience they were certain they had no power of the situation. Thomas told me that he would not like to see the Carmichael coalmine opening, but he was sure that it would—come what may. The politicians had enough power to do whatever they liked. Due to Thomas’s attitudes, I once asked him if he considered himself a greenie, and he refused, quite brusque, because he would not be associated with them. I tried to dig further, and the only answer I received why he was hostile towards them was, ‘because they are job-destroyers. They destroy people’s livelihoods, and I won’t be a part of that’. I will now continue with an investigation into one of the Carmichael coalmine-dispute’s most active contenders, which would go under the term ‘greenies’.



Figure 5 Peter McCallum and I, underneath a paper maché dugong



Figure 6 Art installation at the Mackay Conservation Group office

Mackay Conservation Group

The Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) was just a four-minute bike ride from where I lived, and it was the kind of place where you could just meet up, have a cup of coffee and have a yarn, read literature on their projects, and wonder at their big paper-maché dugong (see figure 5) hanging from the ceiling. The first time I visited the MCG office was for an interview with the acting coordinator of the MCG, Peter McCallum, in January. It happened to be a relatively small office, at least relative to my pre-suppositions before I arrived in the field. I had envisioned an office in a high-rise building, an open space with windows on all the walls, and busy minions tapping on their computer screens or making calls—a modern version of the office in ‘All the President’s Men’. What I met at Wood Street, however, was more a modern version of a ‘Western saloon’. It was situated along a row of interlinked one-storey buildings, with a red and blue ‘WorkWear4U’ store to its right and a yellow ink and toner cartridge store to its left. I was told that the MCG office used to be painted in bright colours, with a huge green frog and other animals on the outside walls. Now, the building was purely white, and the frog was no longer green, but white in a deep green square in their logo. When I arrived, the office was still closed, so I had time to look at the art installation (see figure 6) they had just inside the window. A deep blue velour carpet was draped over a few boxes, and on top were pieces of corals, seashells, and starfish, some were genuine, some in ceramics, and some were knitted, and on this decoration was a sign that read, ‘Hey George, We are still waiting!’ This installation was directly aimed at MP Christensen who arguably has been the Carmichael coalmine’s biggest advocate. In the manner it was set up, it was as if the Reef was calling for George; the Reef is still waiting to be protected.

The MCG was established in 1984 when members of the Mackay community came together in response to several development projects that were happening at the time, such as the proposals to subdivide Lindeman Island for development, as well as proposal to build a road through the Daintree rainforest, to which their resistance eventually ended in a World Heritage listing of the Cape Tribulation National Park. According to McCallum, who took over Ellen Roberts’ position as acting coordinator in 2015, the MCG’s focus for the last five years has intensified on the coal industry. Amongst several demonstrations and protests they have held against the Carmichael coalmine, the ‘Carmichael Coal Mine’-campaign consists also of their legal action against federal environment minister Greg Hunt’s decision of approving the Carmichael coalmine’s Environmental Impact Statement, which they won in 2015. After they won, McCallum said:

It was unbelievable the number of people who gave donations to this organisation, after that. It was sort of like a thank you, like a donation saying thanks, like we didn't get money to fund the appeal, but after winning, people like a winner, so we got lots and lots of donations from people, so they felt that we were achieving something for them. And recently we received another large donation from readers of a magazine [...] and they had an appeal over Christmas to raise money to us to protect the habitat for a species called the snubfin dolphin which is impacted by the Abbot Point development, so the readers there gave a large amount of money as well, so it's interesting. So there is support for action that will protect species but also to stop climate change.

However, according to McCallum, the government reacted 'badly' to this, as they have done every time the MCG has challenged coalmines in court. In the 2000s they had a similar case, and when they won that case,

within an hour they had the Queensland premier on the radio saying that we are going to introduce some emergency legislation to change this, to stop this from proceeding, so within that day the win in court was overturned by Queensland government legislation.

Legislations to stop environmental groups from going to court were also proposed after they won the Carmichael coalmine. Also, all environmental groups receive tax-dollar cuts, but this was also proposed to be revoked, on the fact that environmental groups should not use their manpower to challenge the government, but rather 'plant flowers', as McCallum said. The MCG is reliant on monetary support from members as well as donations, which they today get a tax dollar cut on. Without it, they would not be able to do the work they do today. The members, who are employed and receive a salary, amount to only a handful.

Though the statistics on volunteer engagement might be low in Mackay, there are several volunteer organisations working on specific environmental causes—many using the MCG's headquarters as a gathering place. Amongst others, the Community Transitions Mackay group and Mackay's Turtle Watch Association held their monthly meetings there. The MCG was also an 'all-round' gathering place; for movie screenings, demonstration preparations, a place to stop whilst you were in town to meet old friends, social get-togethers with beer and food, and for education (they had a small library with books you could borrow, and several leaflets you could take with you). The political party The Greens used manpower from the MCG when they did

their election campaign; I had been asked to go door knocking and making phone calls for them, but I settled with ‘only’ handing out voting pamphlets on Election day. However, though there were many volunteer groups, the same people seemed to engage in several of them—basically making the people related to the MCG a tightly knit group. It was only on the monthly get-together ‘Sustainability Social’, which they held in the backyard, that I saw a diversity of people. It was a community space for people who were concerned about environmental issues to meet, but who were not necessarily able or had the time to engage in any groups, to have a beer, and socialise.

The people connected to MCG were from different background and ages ranging from twenty to eighty. The younger ones in particular were active in protests, such as the one outside MP George Christensen’s office, where they held signs reading ‘Save the Reef’ and ‘Vote for the Reef’, and some had dressed up in diving gear and mermaid suits. The older ones were more active when The Greens were holding events, such as the door knocking and telephone rounds they did as a part of their election campaign. This reflects Bruce Tranter’s (2010) research on the examination of the social backgrounds of Australian environmental groups’ members, where he finds that contrary to the older members, younger members tend to not play active roles on a day to day basis, and far more likely to join protests than the older members. Many of the active members had been, or were, working in the coal industry, including McCallum.

It’s surprising the types of people, you know they might be working in the mining industry and they come to say that they are concerned about, yeah we have a lot of members who are miners, ex-miners. I think people have a bit cognitive dissonance. Like they are in the mining industry, but they really don’t want to be in the mining industry. I count myself as amongst those people because I was doing that myself [...] and then I’m looking around and thinking I can get work here but it always feel a bit shameful

The value that McCallum attributed to some of the coalminers he knew was ‘cognitive dissonance’. He was not the only one I met who used this term; Thomas from the Environment Centre had used it to describe the his own situation as well. Cognitive dissonance is the feeling that you struggle with contradictory beliefs. According to Eriksen (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 23), this can also be called a double bind; the feeling that, whatever you do, you would not be able to do it right—each action would be unsatisfactory. But then there are also ‘some people [who] just don’t like greenies’, McCallum noted in our interview, directly speaking about MP Christensen’s

followers. ‘He gathers around him with people that feel that way, they don’t tend to come to us, [but] we haven’t had a brick through our window’. Though he was aware that many people are ‘hooked on coal’, and deeply against greenies, in Mackay, McCallum was not sure how many really were against the MCG. As McCallum had once worked in the mining industry, he knew that many of the coalminers were afraid to utter any concerns about the environment.

People would come up to me, ‘do you know about this, because the mining company is doing this’, so when you get people on the side, walk into the toilet, people would talk to you there, they didn’t want to be seen with me in public.

According to McCallum, there are people in the mining industry who are concerned about the relationship they have with the MCG, because they would be looked upon as a threat, and ‘you would be seen as “not part of the team”’. Moreover, McCallum knew that predominantly coalminers are against greenies, and said they were in denial, as in either ‘they do not think about it, or they actively deny it, as in “I’ll oppose it”’. Meaning that, McCallum was certain that most coalminers are in denial of the coal industry’s effect on the climate and the environment.

Concluding remarks

Over the past century, Mackay has gone from being a sugar-town, to being in the centre of one of Australia’s largest mining-disputes. As I have shown, there are different understandings of how it was living in Mackay during the former coal boom, likewise people have varying accounts of what Mackay is today. Some of the retirees maintained that Mackay was back to normal, whilst others saw that Mackay was in a major downturn—a downturn that Mackay needs to get out of. In a way, the people are living in the relics of the past boom, with empty houses and for sale-signs, constantly being reminded upon what was before. But Mayor Williamson presented this fact in a different view, that the ‘relics’ are rather a vision of what is to come.

The account from Mayor Williamson tells a great deal about the ambivalence in the city. On the one hand, he argues that Mackay is not a one-trick pony. On the other hand, he still sees Carmichael as a prerequisite for the survival of Mackay; without it, the city will die. Mayor Williamson says two contradictory things at once; that Mackay is flexible with many industries to rely on, but with their reliance on Carmichael, they are also inflexible. There is no common

understanding of the situation of Mackay, but there is a somewhat common feeling of waiting. There is a Norwegian saying, '*den som venter på noe godt, venter ikke forgjeves*', which literally translates to, 'Whoever waits for something good, waits not in vain'. A friend of mine has made his own alternative version of this common expression, '*den som har ventet på noe godt, har ventet lenge nok*', and it is this latter expression that seem to apply to the general feeling in the city of Mackay, both for the residents, and the opposing groups in the dispute: 'Whomever that has waited for something good, has waited long enough'. That is, regardless of where you stand in the dispute in question, you have a transcendent feeling that the arrival of 'the good' you are waiting for is way overdue. The former saying, however, is dependent on the 'receiver'; whether or not they are waiting in vain is still unclear, as the waiting game is not over yet. This has resulted in much frustration and pointing of fingers trying to find someone to blame. As I will investigate in the next chapter, greenies are often provided the role as the scapegoat.

In chapter four and five I will continue looking at how the past can colour the view of the present, and how it affects people's outlook on the two proposed futures Mackay is standing in-between. I examine the narratives that the opposing discourses present, and represent, and how the communication seems to become increasingly dysfunctional. Overall I am interested in how and why the Carmichael coalmine-dispute becomes polarised, and the consequences it has on its development.

4 Working for change

I presented various accounts of the situation in Mackay in chapter three; as provided by ‘official’ narratives from the Mackay council, and further through individual accounts, where I found discrepancies in their understandings of the former coal boom and their visions of what the future with Carmichael coalmine would bring. In this chapter we shall focus on the discursive strategies the oppositional actors in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute use to argue their case—for either opening or stopping the mine—and see how people react to these. This includes how they use stories of coal and the Great Barrier Reef to argue for change. Herein lies also an investigation into the term ‘greenie’, which has already been employed a great deal in the thesis, and a further investigation will shed light on the development of the dispute.

Taking control over the narratives

The camera moves over a wondrous, mountainous black landscape that sparkles like diamonds. First a close up where you can see all the small details, the rugged surface thick with grooves and spikes, and in between the black it sparkles in blue, lilac, green, and yellow. Then the camera zooms out, and moves further around the landscape which holds caves and plateaus. ‘Is it an ad for NASA? Are we looking at a new planet? Is it lava? Maybe it is Armageddon?’ are the first thoughts that come to my mind. Then the camera moves even further out, and that is when I realise that the images are computer generated: What I have looked at is a lump of coal. I watch the thirty seconds long video again on YouTube, this time with sound. My immediate reaction is that the background music reminds me of a xylophone played in a quick pace, before it wanders into a more classical tune of piano music. The song is soft but with a quick beat—‘hopeful’ is the word that comes to my mind. A female voice speaks over the music, she too is soft, but more so than anything, pleasant. It sounds like she is telling me a good night story. What she speaks of is coal, ‘a little black rock’ with ‘endless possibilities’. In a seductive voice, over images of coal that sparkles, she tells me about how much money that little black rock generates in ‘wages for Australians’, and that it ‘powers our economy’. It produces steel and powers homes; it can create light and jobs. ‘Isn’t it amazing what this little black rock can do?’ she asks before the video ends over an image of a white surface with a shining lump of coal.

This video was released in September of 2015 by the Minerals Council of Australia, as a part of a campaign ‘to fight for the hearts and minds of Australians’ (FERNYHOUGH, 2015). Managing Director Paul Flynn had stated earlier that year ‘the coal industry needed to “find its voice”’ (FERNYHOUGH, 2015), or as another spokesperson of the Minerals Council stated, ‘It’s fair to say there are a few misconceptions out there the industry wants to tackle [with this video]’ (MILMAN, 2015b). The campaign included this video, newspaper and radio ads, as well as a webpage with facts, called littleblackrock.com.au, which ‘highlights the “indispensable role” played by Australia’s coal industry in providing cheap electricity, steel and jobs’ (MILMAN, 2015b). The video was highly ridiculed in the media, and commentators were asking why they felt the necessity of doing this. The Minerals Council stated that there were misconceptions about the coal industry, but would not tell who had brought forward these misconceptions—who had seized the power to change its narrative?

Four years prior to the release of The Minerals Council’s video, a strategy to *change the story of coal*, was initiated by a group of anti-coal activists. John Hepburn from Greenpeace Australia Pacific, Bob Brown from Coalswamp (founder of The Greens, and former leader 2005-2012), and Sam Hardy from the Graeme Wood Foundation produced a plan in 2011 on how to avoid a potential new coal boom: ‘*Stopping the Australian Coal Export Boom: Funding proposal for the Australian anti-coal movement*’. In 2011 Australia had a total coal export of 300 million tonnes, making Australia the world’s largest coal exporter. Moreover, at this time there were 120 new coal mines or mine expansions proposed to be built, and if built, Australia’s export would triple (Hepburn, Burton, & Hardy, 2011, p. 4). Including were countless small projects, but also the ‘mega-mines’ in the Galilee Basin, the largest being the Carmichael coalmine. With its expected production of 60 million tonnes of coal per year it would produce three times more than the biggest mines operating in 2011. These prospects made the government promise that the coal boom would not just last for decades to come but intensify. As a reaction to what they saw as a potential new coal boom, ‘unprecedented in both scale and speed’ (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 3), Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy saw the necessity to act fast and with force to stop the coal industry from expanding. In their view, the potential of tripling Australia’s coal export would be catastrophic for the global climate, and if they were unsuccessful in stopping the mines over a two-year period it would ‘be too late to have any chance of stopping almost all of the key infrastructure projects and most of the mega-mines’ (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 4).

Both the Minerals Council and the environmental movement have seen that taking control over the narrative of coal as important. The environmentalists created a plan in response to what was seen as a possible new coal boom, and saw gathering forces within the environmentalist community as a predicament to be successful. Four years after the anti-coal campaign was initiated, the Minerals Council felt that the coal narrative indeed had been changed, and performed some sort of ‘change of identity’ for coal. However, as I will show, this ‘change’ can be seen as a continuation of the already existing story of coal, which argues the positive sides, such as bringing power to the people. I shall investigate further how the anti-coal movement are working to change the story of coal, as well as the coal proponents and people’s reaction to it.

Canaries in a coalmine

Queensland miners used to take canaries down the shafts to test for dangerous cases. When the canaries died, the miners got out. Now it’s coral reefs. When they start dying, we’re in serious trouble.¹⁰

In the spring of 2016, the Great Barrier Reef suffered the biggest coral bleaching it has ever experienced since the first recorded coral bleaching in the 1960s. 93% of its reefs were bleached (Slezak, 2016d), with the ones in the North, who have been considered the most ‘pristine’, or with the least human interference (from tourism), were hit the hardest. Between Port Douglas and Mackay a third of the reefs were severely bleached, and 57% had moderate or minor bleaching (Slezak, 2016d). Coral bleaching occurs when sea-surface temperatures rise, and is a common occurrence during the summer months. It is argued that we have not yet fully experienced the consequences of climate change, because the ocean takes most of the beating—or heating. Corals are thermally sensitive, which means they can only tolerate small temperature ranges. The corals can tolerate bleaching, as long as the water temperatures drop and stabilize, but with global warming the temperature rise has been so high, and lasted over longer periods of time, that they die—and can never reinvigorate. In Daniel D. Chiras book from 1994, ‘Environmental Science’, he notes that several scientists were predicting that the Great Barrier Reef would die by the year 2000. The fact that it is not yet dead is commonly used as an argument that scientists cannot be trusted.

¹⁰ Statement made by Michael Caton, in a documentary by the Mackay Conservation Group on the Carmichael coalmine

19th of April 2017, 2016, in the midst of the coral bleaching, Professor Terry Hughes tweeted ‘I showed the results of aerial surveys of #bleaching on the #GreatBarrierReef to my students, And then we wept.’ Professor Hughes is Director of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, which is headquartered at James Cook University, Australia. He played a key role in surveying the Reef, and presented his findings to the media. Professor Hughes’ tweet re-surfaced in the media a year later, after The Greens’ Peter Whish-Wilson read it to the Senate. Sparrow (2017) reported that,

the chamber responded with loud derision, as if the grief of a climate scientist constituted some tremendous joke got up for their especial amusement. Amid the jeers and hoots, Liberal frontbencher minister Simon Birmingham mockingly suggested that Whish-Wilson needed a hanky.

This happened some months after treasurer Scott Morrison brought a lump of coal to the Parliament, as a response to Labor’s call to phase out coal power, and urging for more renewable energy (Butler, 2017). Morrison roared out, ‘This is coal, don't be afraid, don't be scared,’ continuing with, ‘It's coal, it was dug up by men and women who work and live in the electorates of those who sit opposite.’ Reflected in the reaction to Whish-Wilson’s reading Professor Hughes heartfelt tweet about the state of the Reef, a large percentage of the Senate does not believe that the Reef is threatened. Morrison’s comment about his lump of coal, ‘don’t be scared’, reflects that it is rather the coal industry that is perceived in danger, or proposes that there are voices in the Parliament who are negative to coal.

Together with polar bears, glaziers, and the Arctic, the Great Barrier Reef has often been called a ‘canary in the coalmine’ (Sale, 2011, p. 296). The frequent usage of the allegory is indicative to the state of which our environments are in, facing climate change and environmental hazards these are seen as ‘useful indicators’ or forewarnings of what is to come. Similarly to the Great Barrier Reef, the Carmichael coalmine is also considered as some sort of a canary bird. People were afraid that, if the mine is not opened, then the coal industry will surely die. Whatever happens to Carmichael will be indicative for the future of coal in Australia. Thus, Adani, the company behind the Carmichael coalmine, is seen as the last hope, or on the opposite side, as an aboriginal spokesperson put it: ‘The snake’s head’. If you are able to cut off Adani, the remaining body (the coal industry as a whole) will die. Arguably, greenies perceive the Carmichael mine the

same way, as reflected in the anti-coal plan where stopping the ‘mega-mines’ is seen as key to stop the other 120 coalmines planned to be built.

Simultaneously, the pro-coal campaigners see that the Great Barrier Reef is the last obstacle in order to open the mine: If they can prove that the Reef is not threatened, then it delegitimizes the green groups’ arguments, and there is nothing left to stop the mine. There are, nevertheless, several hurdles Adani needs to overcome before the Carmichael coalmine can proceed, such as legal battles over native title-issues and lack of financial backing, but it is commonly understood that the real issue, the only true obstacle, that is keeping the Carmichael coalmine from opening, is the Great Barrier Reef—or more accurately, the narratives of the Reef. As the Great Barrier Reef is seen as some sort of Australian symbol, either as something that evokes strong feelings in Australians, or as a commodity they can sell to tourists, any change of its meaning or content has consequences. Either side of the dispute insists that their narrative is the correct one, and I shall investigate in which ways they maintain their narrative.

Fragility and adaptability

There are particularly two different discourses at play concerning the state of the Great Barrier Reef. One is about the fragility of the Reef; the other is the belief in the Reef’s adaptability and resilience. The latter can be understood as the belief in the *treadmill syndrome*: ‘when the environment changes, you have to improve and adapt merely to keep your place in ecosystem’ (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 23), which the Great Barrier Reef is argued capable of doing; either by its inherent resilience, or by migrating southwards along the Queensland coast.

Henry, a coalminer I met in a mining camp in Moranbah, was a strong believer in the Reef’s resilience, and was certain that it would survive the coral bleaching event—as it had before. Henry’s hobby was *aquaculture*—diving for corals in the ocean, and farming them in his aquarium at home. He argued, ‘I’ve read so much of the science behind this, so I probably know more than marine biologists’. Therefore, with declared weight, he told me:

Corals are very adaptive, and they’ve adapted, maybe not over a hundred years, a hundred years is probably a little bit short time, I would say 1000 years. I think corals will adapt to a lower PH, but there’s a lot of other things that goes into that as well. Yes, I think

acidification is bad, but how long is it going to take, probably long after we're gone. My view is that people will kill themselves long before that.

Henry believed in anthropogenic change, that humans affect the climate, however, he questioned the extent to which humans had 'power' over the change. He thought greenies and scientists 'too extreme' in their view of the Reef, and their predictions that the Reef could die due to the recent coral bleaching. More than anything, the Reef was much more resilient than scientists were saying—as he had experienced countless times himself with his aquarium. Asking about pollution, Henry answered, 'no, I do think that pollution has something to do with that'. But then he continued, 'absolutely, there's no doubt about it, you can't go around blindly and say it's not causing any problems, but it's to what degree that's the thing. Is it causing the majority of the problems? I don't know, that's hard to answer'. For any proposed human made contribution to coral bleaching he said 'that's hard to answer', however, what Henry was sure of, was that the Reef would outlive us.

Henry was in some sort of middle-position between the two discourses, he believed in the Reef's resilience, but argued the Reef was facing human made stress—but to what extent, he did not now. In the Carmichael coalmine-dispute, there is no room for a middle-ground. The battle between whether the Reef is resilient or fragile has arguably been ongoing since the 1960s, and had its naissance in the 'Coral Battleground'. Like today, conservationist voices came together as a reaction to what they saw as a threat to the Great Barrier Reef, and the way politicians have handled people's concerns over the Reef are also likened to the 1960s. Following is a brief overlook over of the developments in the 1960s and 70s, and thereafter I will provide an investigation into how these practices unfolded in 2016.

The Coral Battleground

The 1960s and 1970s Australia saw the first real battle between development and environmentalism, in the face of potential mining on the Great Barrier Reef. As a political issue, this was when environmental matters became capable of influencing voter preference (Garden, 2005, p. 124); a consequence of a combination of series of events. In the mid-sixties the first major outbreak of the coral-eating Crown of Thorns starfish was reported, and in 1967-68 there were plans to drill for limestone on Ellison Reef in Queensland (Bowen, 1994, p. 244).

Unbeknownst to the public, the government had also leased a considerable part of the Reef waters, about 215 500 km², to five oil prospecting companies in 1967 (Bowen, 1994, p. 240). Soon after, in 1969 the Queensland Department of Mines received lease-applications from forty oil companies to prospect for oil on the Reef, the same month as the Santa Barbara blow-out outside southern California (Bowen, 1994, p. 244). Anxieties around oil spills had already been mounting after the 1967 Torrey Canyon oil tanker disaster in Britain, and when crude oil started spewing out from a rig in Santa Barbara anxieties of what would happen to the Reef if they started mining mounted (Wright, 1977, p. 53-54 in McCalman, 2013, p. 297).

Public concern quickly took the form of activist conservationist voices. *The Coral Battleground* (1977) is the title of Judith Wright's book, an Australian author and founder of The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland; an account of the events that took place around the proposal of drilling oil on the Great Barrier Reef in the late 1960s. Together with conservationists such as John Busst, Len Webb, Billie Gill, from the Wildlife Preservation Society, the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Littoral Society of Queensland, she fought a lengthy and determined effort against the Queensland Government's several proposals of development projects on the Reef (Bowen, 1994, p. 246). Ultimately their work laid the foundation for the further work for founding a Marine Park, and subsequently a Marine Park Authority in 1975 (Bowen, 1994, p. 234), covering 344,400 km² of the Great Barrier Reef.

In the 1970s the conservationist voices were often drowned and suppressed by the National Party government in Queensland, and the government was not unknown to be using the police to overcome any protests or resistance to its decisions and policies (Garden, 2005, p. 237). In 1968, member of the National Party, Joh Bjelke-Petersen became Premier for Queensland (Bowen, 1994, p. 242). He had pledged he would 'protect the Reef from both starfish and oil pollution' (Bowen, 1994, p. 245), but in 1969 he decided that the Crown of Thorns-issue was not a problem serious enough to take action. His reaction to the news of the Santa Barbara-oil spill was 'Don't you worry about it; it won't happen in Queensland' (McCalman, 2013, p. 297), and he promised he would "honour existing [oil-leasing] contracts" on the reef (Queensland Parliamentary Debates, 1970; v. 253, 2393 f.; Whitton, 1989, p. 14 in Bowen, 1994, p. 244). As a backbencher, Bjelke-Petersen had held well earning oil leases (Bowen, 1994, p. 241), and not three weeks after becoming Premier the two companies that he held shares were granted six-year leases to prospect for oil on the Great Barrier Reef (Whitton, 1989, p. 14 in Bowen, 1994, p. 242). Bjelke-Petersen's way to circumvent any conflict of interest was to transfer his

directorships to his wife (Bowen, 1994, p. 242). This meant that there was evidence of corruption mounting, but Bjelke-Petersen's government was repeatedly elected in Queensland from 1968 to 1987 (Garden, 2005, p. 237). Don Garden (2005, p. 237) attributes Bjelke-Petersen's re-election to the older generation in Queensland, that had moved there for retirement. One year later after the Santa-Barbara spill, facing further resistance from the conservationists, Bjelke-Petersen was quoted saying 'I think before long, you and you and every one of us will be saying: "Please get on with the job because I'm sick and tired of waiting, and things are coming to a halt"' (Whitton, 1989, p. 58 in Bowen, 1994).

Like in the 1960s, several green groups have for the last years joined forces and created a movement against what they perceive as a threat to the Great Barrier Reef. Furthermore, the reaction patterns of the coal-proponents today can be seen as similar to Queensland's former Premiers, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, both in terms of rhetoric and action.

The Coral Battleground anno 2016

Changing the story of coal

We will build a powerful narrative about the global importance of the Galilee Basin and use this to build a high profile public campaign to put the issue in the national and international spotlight (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 7).

The anti-coal movement initiators, Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy, saw 'changing the story of coal' as a predicament in order to stop the potential new coal boom. Acutely aware that one of their most significant hurdles in attaining their goal to stop the coal industry is people's views and relationship to coal, and as change in the national consciousness is imperative in order to make this possible, their strategy included building a powerful 'anti-coal-narrative' and having public campaigns where they 'expose the impacts, increase costs, [and] investor uncertainty' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 6). However, they acknowledged that the Australian community tolerates the 'massive negative environmental, social and health impacts of the coal industry because these impacts are largely invisible' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 9). Furthermore, the coal industry is also

seen as providing jobs and prosperity, and being the backbone of Australia's economy (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 5). 'Changing the story of coal' entails undermining such key myths 'upon which the social license of the coal industry depends' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 9), and convincing the public that the coal industry is a disruptive force 'that destroys the landscape and communities, corrupts our democracy, and threatens the global climate' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 5).

Inspired by the 'Lock the Gate'-alliance¹¹, Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy saw how joining forces within communities could have real impact on policies. Their strategy would essentially be to 'attack' from all sides, with multiple voices and points of intervention. If successful in gathering enough forces they would function as 'an orchestra', or, as a 'a deafening cacophony' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 5). Their first priority would be to 'disrupt and delay', meaning slowing down 'critical projects' in their approval process, and their main tool being litigation. Though there were 120 proposed mines and mine expansions, they chose to focus on the 'mega-mines' for 'strategic campaign purposes' (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 6), and one of them was the Carmichael coalmine. Through litigation, they argued they would be able to make at least some of the mines unviable, as well as if they were able to delay some projects it would have a domino effect and help them delay others. Arguably the anti-coal voices have been successful in 'disrupting and delaying' key coal projects, albeit with the good help of the coal bust. The Mackay Conservation Group (MCG) was able to delay the Carmichael coalmine by challenging Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt's approval of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2015. They challenged his decision on three grounds: Adani's terrible environmental record¹², Carmichael's potential impact on the climate, as well as impacts on the endangered species, the yakka skink and the ornamental snake. The MCG won their case, though only on the latter ground. The acting coordinator of MCG, Peter McCallum, stated soberly that 'it wasn't going to stop the mine'.

¹¹ A grassroots organisation started by farmers who saw their land increasingly being 'stolen' by coal seam gas development, and reacted with 'locking their gates'. By law, however, 'the crown has ownership of all materials beneath people's properties and NSW legislation grants rights to companies to explore for and extract minerals and petroleum products on behalf of the crown.' (Joyce, 2011)

¹² There are particularly two cases worth mentioning: 1. Adani's power plant (built in 2007) and coal port in Mundra, India. Adani has destroyed the environment and working conditions for the local fishers and farmers. Emissions has left black residue on the salt pans, the mangroves have died, and pastoral land has been declared barren and thus wasteland, as constructed boundary walls prevent sea water from reaching the mangroves, and the sea water is polluted, reducing the fish stock (GetUp! Australia, 2015). 2. The Adani-owned Chingola Copper Mine in Zambia polluted the local farmland over a 10-year period from 2004, and in 2010 a serious pollution spill saw a toxic brew of highly acidic, metal-laden discharge released into the Kafue River. Adani Australia's chief executive officer, Jeyakumar Janakaraj, was in charge during the latter incident—and is now in charge of the Carmichael coalmine (Willacy, 2015).

During the coral bleaching event in 2016 the oppositional actors in the Carmichael-dispute saw taking control over the narrative of the Reef as paramount. Already in 2011 had Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy (2011, p. 9) seen that teaming up with scientists could be a strategy to expose how coal mining is having negative effects on the Great Barrier Reef; extensive research were undertaken, and multiple reports published. Some of these reports were later used against the Carmichael coalmine in court. Groups such as Greenpeace, GetUp!, World Wild Life, and Generation Alpha published reports specifically on the Carmichael coalmine, as well as nationwide protest campaigns, such as the 'Fight for the Reef' and 'Save the Reef' campaigns, ongoing since 2013. The Mackay Conservation Group have been active in distributing these reports, as well as arranging 'Fight for the Reef' and 'Save the Reef'-campaigns in Mackay. This meant that, when the coral bleaching happened in 2016, they could form the argument that this was the result of the coal industry, and a motive for not opening the Carmichael coalmine. Their strategy was to call for urgency, and the last Federal Election in July 2016 was called the 'Reef Election' as they argued that this election was the 'last chance to save the [Great Barrier] reef' (Slezak, 2016c).

However, using 'urgency' as a strategy backfired somewhat. Just after the news about the bleaching broke loose, Greenpeace was one of the first to react. One morning my host called me down to read The Courier Mail, and particularly one story, which he had circled around. The headline stated 'Greenpeace uses Samoa photos to tarnish heritage gem' (Passmore, 2016). The news story read that Greenpeace had used a picture from a Samoan reef when they advertised the news on Twitter about the coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef. I tried to argue that the usage of a wrong picture did not mean that the Reef was not bleached, but my host refused. Laughingly he told me that 'the Reef was all good, it has always been good, and always will be'. He told me that the greenies were always using pictures, or 'propaganda', to try to evoke emotions, but people had grown tired. Some of the retirees at the Environment Centre complained about the greenies' 'propaganda' as well. They called the media coverage of the coral bleaching 'doom and gloom'-news, and they were sick of the greenies trying to make them feel bad. Arguably, greenies had cried wolf too many times before. According to MP Christensen, the 'Green movement' present the Reef as 'either dead, dying, or it's gone', continuing with,

you know, uhm, and nothing could be further from the truth. In fact the constant barrage of bad publicity and advertising on those lines, that they do particularly overseas has

detracted people from coming here, because they believe that there is a problem. There might be isolated problems which can be managed and sorted out, but the Reef isn't dead, the reef is still here, the reef will be here for a long time to come.

Not only did Greenpeace's picture shed suspicion to the 'theory' of the coral bleaching, the post was also 'job-damaging false advertising' about the conditions of the Reef. The coral bleaching did not hurt the tourism industry, but the greenies pointing it out to the public did. It was also argued that Greenpeace and other anti-coal activists were jeopardising investment in the resources industry (Passmore, 2016). The Reef was not really the issue; the greenies had used the coral bleaching to their own advantage, to give the coal industry a bad reputation, and simultaneously they had damaged the tourism industry.

Don't you worry about it'

The government maintained, for a long time, that greenies were destroying the image of the Reef, and they felt they needed to do some 'damage-control' in order to save the Reef as a tourism commodity. The length of political power was exemplified in how the Liberal-National government was able to remove 'all mentions of Australia' in the final version of Unesco's report on climate change and world heritage sites, including the Great Barrier Reef (Slezak, 2016a). The report, 'World Heritage and Tourism in a Changing Climate', was a joint-publication between Unesco, the United Nations environment program, and the Union of Concerned Scientists. The Australian government's argument for intervening in the publication of this report was that it could negatively affect the tourism industry that is based on the Great Barrier Reef. A spokesperson for the governmental environment department had stated that, 'Recent experience in Australia had shown that negative commentary about the status of world heritage properties impacted on tourism,' (Slezak, 2016a).

However, facing an election in July 2016, Prime Minister Turnbull reacted to the public rise in concern for the Great Barrier Reef, by promising to invest more in research on the Reef. Calling for more research has been a common reaction to any concerns about the Great Barrier Reef in Australian politics, particularly from the Liberal party. During his predecessor's, Paul Keating (1991-1996), prime ministership, polls showed that concern for green issues had started to rise (Burgmann & Baer, 2012, p. 62), but John Howard (1996-2007) as prime minister provided

rather ‘considerable comfort to climate change deniers in both his policies and pronouncements’ (Burgmann & Baer, 2012, p. 64). Former prime minister Howard refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, following in the footsteps of the United States’ former president George W. Bush (Garden, 2005, pp. 187-188), ‘declaring it was “not in Australia’s interests” to ratify it, though climate change was becoming ever more a serious concern amongst Australians (Burgmann & Baer, 2012, p. 64). According to a survey, even working class people, contrary to ‘mythology’, were just as concerned with green issues as middle-class people, predominantly about pollution and greenhouse emissions (Burgmann & Baer, 2012, p. 62). Thus, facing an election in 2004, former prime minister Howard ‘proposed’ to the people who were unsatisfied by his anti-green policies, by promising to inject half a billion dollars of environmental research money into the Reef (Garden, 2005, p. 188).

What evolved during the election campaign in 2016, was some sort of *potlatch*-ritual between Australia’s two largest political parties, the Liberals and Labor, where each party would mirror the other, in the race of the title ‘the best protector of the Great Barrier Reef’. The Turnbull government promised to devote \$171.0 million in their budget for research (Slezak, 2016e). Shortly after, Bill Shorten pledged that, if elected, Labor would ‘create a \$500 million fund to help protect the Great Barrier Reef through better research’ (Woodley, 2016). As a response, Prime Minister Turnbull said they would invest 1 billion dollars in the Great Barrier Reef over a 10 year-period (Norman & Smail, 2016), and then Labor promised to devote a further 352 million dollars ‘to help one of the world’s natural wonders’ (Willacy, 2016). However, instead of a productive outcome, where the Reef could have benefited from such a race, the result was mere symbolism. None of these investments in the Reef would focus on climate change, but water quality. Particularly the Liberals have been firm in arguing that it is possible to protect the Reef without tackling global warming. Moreover, according to a report obtained by ABC News, the needed investment for reaching the 2025 water quality targets on the Great Barrier Reef would be 16 billion dollars, not 1 billion (Willacy, 2016). Furthermore, it was revealed that the money they promised was recycled funding; the money would have reached the Reef nonetheless. Both the Liberals and Labor framed their announcements of funding to the Reef as an economic one. Possibly, they realised that if the Great Barrier Reef disappeared, they would lose substantially amounts of revenue from the tourism industry. The tourism industry is one of Australia’s biggest contributors to the treasury (Pham, Bailey, Marshall, Spurr, & Dwyer, 2013), and whilst the tourism industry based on the Reef employs some 77 000 people, the mining industry in Queensland employs 20 000.

Like the National Party government in Queensland in the 1960s-70s, the current Australian government argues that they have the Great Barrier Reef-situation under control. Furthermore, they maintain that the situation on the Great Barrier Reef is not an issue that should put the Carmichael coalmine on hold; rather the Reef's health is only an issue when it affects the economy. First, the greens were blamed as a threat to the tourism industry, before the government gave in to public concern, facing an election, and promised to provide (recycled) money to research in order to make sure there would not be any economic loss in tourism.

*We are not saying we will be patient forever*¹³

It's time to let Adani get on with the job. Adani has waited patiently, spending \$3 billion in Queensland, including \$120 million for court battles and approval. [...] it is in the best interest of all to ensure that Adani can now seek to raise the funds required to start construction next year. (Heywood, 2016, p.22)

The statements made by Bjelke-Petersens in the 1960-70s sounds distinctively familiar to the coal proponents of today. It is argued that Adani and the Australian people are, similar to a half century ago, sick and tired of waiting, 'and things are coming to a halt'" (Whitton, 1989, p. 58 in Bowen, 1994). Adani submitted a referral of proposed action to build the Carmichael coalmine in 2010, and now, at nearly seven years at the time of writing, it is argued that it is mainly the greens' fault that any construction on the coalmine is yet to be made. If the coalmine is not opened soon, it is argued by proponents of the mines that not only might Adani choose to leave and build the mine somewhere else, it will also send a bad signal to other foreign investors looking into building coalmines in Australia. Coal-proponents are afraid to get a bad reputation on the global market. They argue therefore that it is particularly important for the Carmichael coalmine to open; it is pertinent to send a signal that Australia greet new investments with open arms. Moreover, not only has the 'waiting' been unfortunate in terms of gaining a bad reputation, it is also argued that the postponement is destroying lives—in Australia and in India.

¹³ Jeyakumar Janakaraj, Adani Australia's chief executive officer

The Carmichael coalmine was first estimated to give up to 2,500 construction and 3,900 operational jobs (Seeney, 2014). However, MP Christensen has argued since that it will be 10 000 jobs, before the number was again reduced, after investigations by journalists and green groups. MP Christensen responded to the allegations in a Facebook post, 22nd of August 2015:

The vast extreme green network, helped by a biased and/or lazy media, have perpetuated the lie that the Carmichael coal project will generate ‘only’ 1,464 jobs (as if that’s a bad thing!) instead of 10,000 jobs. While it’s true that the mine alone will directly employ approximately 1,464 workers during its first phase, this figure doesn’t include workers needed for the construction phase [...] Adani have modelled what all of it adds up to and have come to the figure of 10,000 jobs. It’s a number they’re sticking with despite the extreme green lies.

To MP Christensen then, stopping the Carmichael coalmine means destroying 10 000 jobs, effectively making greenies ‘anti-jobs’. This is a common rhetoric by coal mining proponents, to refer to the ‘indirect jobs’ that any mine will generate. However, if one were to count every indirect jobs related to any industry in Australia, the total number of jobs in the economy would be 30 million—around three times larger than the Australian labour market (Richardson & Denniss, 2011, p. 3). It is argued that the Carmichael coalmine will not only provide jobs to the unemployed in Queensland, but also bring prosperity to the poor in India. Which means that greenies are not only destroying jobs in Mackay, but also the lives of millions in India. Adani is effectively portrayed as the victim, as they came to Australia with the hope of bringing electricity to their people, but the greenies are destroying their shot at a ‘well-deserved’ industrialisation. According to the report, ‘The life saving potential of coal’ (Hogan, 2015), at least 300 million people have no access to electricity, and the coal from the Carmichael coalmine can help 82 million Indians access electricity and improve their living standards. Also, as it is argued India will need coal regardless, a common argument is that it is better for them to get it from Australia, as they have the ‘cleanest coal in the world’, instead from Indonesia or India, which have coal with higher impurities. As Adani Australia’s chief executive officer, Jeyakumar Janakaraj, stated, ‘If we do not send clean coal... from Australia, India will continue to burn dirty coal’ (Heywood, 2016). In a local election debate, facing the federal election, The Green’s Dawson candidate, Jonathon Dykyj, called this latter claim ‘the drug-dealers fallacy’—‘Should drug dealers continue to sell drugs just because there is a market for it?’

Arguably, there are similarities between the development that surrounded the coral battleground in the 1960s and today. It seems like history repeats itself, or rather, the dispute is never ending; it is a continuation of a power play that has been ongoing, in fluctuation, ever since environmental matters became a political issue. One of them claims the higher moral ground, whilst the other takes the role as the victim. The greenies claim the higher moral ground by insisting the coal industry is destroying the Reef, and that they are a viable alliance of as anti-coal individuals facing a possible environmental catastrophe, whilst the coal industry argue they are the victims of the greenies' warfare. Furthermore, the coal industry claims the higher moral ground as well, by invoking that they are working for the Australians who need jobs and the Indians who need electricity; whilst the greenies paint themselves as a fragmented and under-resourced movement (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 11), effectively taking the role as the *underdog*.

Greenies

Claiming the higher moral ground, becoming the victim

According to William Cronon (1996, p. 20), environmentalism has often asserted its moral authority. In Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy's campaign they recruited scientists to do extensive research, and to publish multiple reports about why coal mining is having negative effects on tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing. With these reports they have distributed a steady stream of local and national news stories undermining the social license of the coal industry (Hepburn et al., 2011, p. 9). Arguably, the greenies have the support of many in the scientific community, and the contention, that if we do not act *now*, it will be too late, is consistent with a 'growing recognition' within the scientific community that the window for humans to halt or reverse an environmental crisis is narrowing (Palsson et al., 2013). The Anthropocene is proposed (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007), and now widely recognised, as the name of the geological time period when humanity's impact on the Earth became so significant that its impacts will never be reversed—humans have changed the Earth forever. Scientists as well as environmental activist groups from around the globe have called for action to halt the high-speed 'train' towards environmental crisis for decades. However, as presented, the greenies' call for urgency during the coral bleaching event 'backfired' as a result of calling wolf too many times before. Painting the Great Barrier Reef as a canary in a coalmine is arguably a contributor to the apathy which was common in Mackay, as reflected in the reaction to the coral bleaching in 2016 where people

either labeled it as ‘doom and gloom’-news, refused to believe it, or focused on the greenies’ trying to hurt the tourism industry. Arguably, the fact that the Reef is not dead yet is proof that the greenies—and the scientists—are wrong.

Including in Hepburn, Brown, and Hardy’s plan to change the story of coal was also articulating an inspiring vision of a future beyond coal. This goal, however, is commonly one of the biggest criticisms towards greenies; allegedly they never propose an alternative to what they protest, a critique exemplified by The Courier Mail’s Editor Lachlan Heywood directly commenting green groups resistance towards the Carmichael coalmine, in an Editorial from April 2016:

The vociferous environmental groups who peddle complaints but never a solution [...]
For all the hashtag activism of environmental groups who blindly jump on board, there is nothing yet proposed that would come close to replacing the state’s mining and agricultural industries.

Greenies are critiqued for not proposing any viable options to fossil fuels; also they are just as dependent on the fruits that coal grow as anyone else. Towards the federal election in July 2016, and during the election campaigns, discussion could get tense at the Environment Centre, and a common complaint by a few of the retirees was that the greenies were hypocrites: They had cell phones, they flew from city to city to hold their demonstrations, they had cars, not realising they were dependent on coal to have those technologies. Not only were they oblivious of their own actions, but also, they were critiqued for not being sympathetic to other people’s *real* problems. Michael, from the country club, thought that the greenies were putting Australia in reverse. All the development that coal brought with it, greenies wanted to take away from them.

Michael focuses on the purely positive sides with coal; the same rhetoric the Minerals Council used to promote in their ‘Isn’t it amazing what this little black rock can do?’-video from 2015, albeit trying to focus on what coal will continue to do in the future, but still based on what history has shown us: Coal is what has enabled the reality the Western countries live in today, and since the commencement of the industrial revolution, we have been able to ‘master nature, and to change the nature of the planet’ (Garden, 2005, p. 184). The foundation of the lives we live in today, mostly derives from the transformation that has happened within the last 250 years (Garden, 2005, p. 184), but now the greenies want to put this transformation in reverse if they manage to end the era of coal.

My host explained to me the first day in Mackay, that the reason greenies were out of touch with reality was because ‘they were intellectuals in the big cities’, cities such as Sydney and Brisbane; according to him they had no jobs, and were reliant on welfare. According to Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 102), this is a common view of people from the ‘big cities’: ‘Australian cities are seen to breed venality and corruption, physical and mental disease and illness, violence, greed and sloth’. Although the Mackay Conservation Group (MCG), as mirrored in their contribution to ‘disrupt and delay’ the Carmichael coalmine, is a part of the anti-coal movement—they are still a local group, which also focuses on local environmental issues. The MCG is challenging the mine both on their contribution to global warming, and its subsequent effects on the Great Barrier Reef, as well as the environmental effects, such as the dredging of the harbour around the Abbot Point coal terminal, impact on water quality, and the endangering of species endemic to the area on which the Carmichael mine will be built. Also, as reflected in how MP Christensen often refuse to state the name of the MCG, but rather refers to them only as greenies or ‘the green movement’, the MCG is not acknowledged as a group that work with small scale issues, but only on the larger scale. The MCG is painted as alienated from the Mackay community, someone who does not care for the lives of the people in Mackay who are reliant on the Carmichael to open. Eriksen (2016b, p. 2) provides a similar understanding of the situation in Gladstone where the community felt that environmental groups, such as Greenpeace, were not concerned with the lives of the locals, they were only concerned with ‘saving the planet’. Though arguably this is not the case with the MCG in practice, this is how several locals in Mackay, as well as MP Christensen portray them.

‘We’re all greenies now’¹⁴

The quote ‘We’re all greenies now’, came from former Prime Minister John Howard in 1996, who as I noted earlier in this chapter, gave ‘considerable comfort to climate change deniers in both his policies and pronouncements’ (Burgmann & Baer, 2012, p. 64). However, according to Vincent and Neale (2016, p. 4), this might very well be true, as there is no group who ‘holds a monopoly on “green politics”’, which is particularly evident when it comes to spheres where there is ‘no explicit attachment to environmentalism’. It should be added that there is no common agreement on what an ‘environmental problem’ includes, and can include a wide variety

¹⁴ Vincent & Neale, 2016, p. 4

of issues, such as pollution, global warming, health, and overpopulation (Doyle & Kellow, 1995, p. 32). The ‘sustainability discourse’, which arguably is the legacy of the ‘Brundtland Commission’, where the former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland introduced the concept ‘sustainable development’ in 1987, has been adopted by corporations in any type of industry, which at face value one would perhaps not associate with environmentalism. Even the coal industry boasts ‘green options’. Abreast with their coal mining projects, Adani are planning on building large solar cell plants, and in March 2017 they joined the Global Energy Interconnection Development and Cooperation Organisation (GEIDCO), which is ‘a non-governmental body dedicated to promoting sustainable development of energy worldwide’ (Team EnergyInfraPost, 2017).

However, as I have shown throughout this chapter, there is some sort of negative stereotype around the term ‘greenie’ that hinders green groups from any real change. According to Jeff Sparrow (2016), there is a significant difference between the coral battleground and the Carmichael coalmine-dispute. When environmental concern rose in the 1960s, the conservationists had a larger base of supporters than today. Sparrow suggests that the issue of climate change may be a contributor to the lack of support for the contemporary greenies. Sparrow writes (2016), ‘over the past years, many people have hoped that when global warming manifested itself as a concrete threat, rather than a scientific abstraction, politicians would be forced into action.’ For that reason, it was impertinent to debunk the theory that climate change had a contribution to the coral bleaching on the Great Barrier Reef in 2016. Politicians were arguing it was not a concrete threat. Furthermore, the Carmichael coalmine-dispute has in large part been concerned with arguing that the mine will have less contribution to global warming if they use Australian coal, than any other country’s, therefore decreasing the chance of any possible effect on the Great Barrier Reef. A large part of Australian politicians, MP Christensen included, does not believe in climate change, thus the argument of the Carmichael coalmine’s contribution to it is delegitimized.

However, a Lowy institute poll from 2014 showed that, ‘Forty-five per cent [of Australians] want [climate] action now “whatever the cost”’ (Davidson, 2014). The Climate Institute (2015) had a similar study in 2015, which showed that the majority of Australians agree that climate change is happening, but they are not in agreement on what causes the changes. This mirrors my experience from Mackay, where most of the retirees at the Environment Centre agreed that there was something happening with the global climate, but there were disagreements on what was the

cause. Not all believed it was human made; one suggested that volcanoes could be the cause, whilst Thomas for example was sure that coal was bad for the climate. However, as noted in chapter three, though I observed that Thomas had many similar beliefs to greenies, he would never allow for an association with them. ‘They are job-destroyers’—nothing more, nothing less. Though there are innumerable environmental and conservationist groups in Australia, which ‘accommodates numerous conflicting and often ambiguous goals and practices’ (Doyle & Kellow, 1995, p. 55), the understanding of greenies are based on an accumulation of all these groups’ past actions. Such actions have indeed included stopping ‘job-creating’ projects before, within the mining sector or any other extractive industry, e.g. forestry. It seems that although many Australian people are concerned with climate change, the issue’s ties with greenies make people hesitant, and unsure, as to what to believe.

According to Whitehouse and Evans’ (2010, p. 22), greenie is both ‘a discursive category of (human) social identity’ as well as ‘a divisive social fiction’ and used ‘irreconcilably between pejorative and non-pejorative attributions’. As I have shown, greenie can be used to categorise an individual, a movement, an organisation, a group, or a discourse; it could be used in explicit or general terms. Furthermore, MP Christensen used it as a negative, and would use it on anyone opposing the Carmichael coalmine, the MCG, however, would claim themselves as greenies in a positive manner. The actors who were in favour of the mine opening did not have any specific nickname, but would rather be called by their respective name, such as any politician, coal-lobbyist, coalmining organisation, or mining company. Calling someone, or claiming themselves as, a greenie constitutes the formation of social boundaries, as defined by Fredrik Barth (2000 p. 34) as ‘a separation that surrounds a social group and divides it from other groups and from its surrounding environment’. Employing ‘greenie’ has been a critical political tool within the dispute, both in order to create boundaries towards others, as well as identification within the boundary. However, not only can the boundary be perceived different by the people on opposite sides of it, ‘but also by people on the same side’ (Cohen, 1985, p. 12). There is a difference between a given group membership, and ones own recognition of being in a group. Sometimes, as in the case of Thomas, who had similar views as greenies, could also defy any relation implied, as the term has come to encapsulate so many different phenomena. As Peter McCallum noted in chapter three, there were also people who considered themselves as greenies, but who would not state it publicly, because of the scrutiny they might possibly be a victim of. In the prologue, my host said that it was the greenies who had destroyed their own reputation, and redefined it to something else than its initial definition; a definition that he used to identify himself with. But on

the other hand, it is also powerful pro-coal voices that have been able to use the term for political purposes, and thus shaped it for whatever purpose they need an enemy to blame. In a way 'greenie' is a metonymy, representative for a whole which is disputed, subjective, frozen, and alas, difficult to change and contest. It is both a term which people identify themselves with in pride, but it can also be a proxy for any issue people condone, or look at as a threat to the local community or the nation.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has focused on the discursive strategies the coal proponents and opponents used in the Carmichael coalmine-dispute, and people's reactions to these. There was a particular focus on the narratives that the oppositional discourses represent and presented to the public, and how a dispute evolved as a result. A power play has been ongoing—each group fighting their contrasting stories of coal—and it is a continuation of a power play that has been ongoing, in fluctuation, ever since environmental matters became a political issue. In 2016 it was seen as paramount to seize the definitional power of the Great Barrier Reef, as it was understood as the key to either opening or stopping the Carmichael coalmine. Green groups tried to frame the coral-bleaching event in 2016 as a consequence of global warming, and shed light on the coal industry's contribution to warming the climate. Politicians were trying to argue that the greenies' act of shedding light on the coral bleaching was detrimental to the Reef, not the bleaching in itself. The situation between the oppositional actors evolved in a similar manner as it did in the 1960s, when conservationist voices, despite profound resistance from the Queensland government, was able to stop planned development on the Reef and create a Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) to protect it. Today, the GBRMPA is oftentimes used as an argument that the Reef is sufficiently controlled, and that the GBRMPA's work to ensure the Reef's resilience is enough to protect it from any threats it may suffer.

The anti-coal campaigners, or greenies, tried to change the story of coal by focusing on the negative sides coal has on the environment and on people's lives. They teamed up with researchers to provide a solid case, but there is a difference between winning a debate by 'presenting sound and rhetorically powerful arguments' and having an actual influence on political decisions (Binde & Boholm, 2004, p. 174). The Minerals Council reacted to what they saw was a change in the public's conception on coal, and chose to do a promotional video to

change people's attitudes. Arguably greens have history against them on two points. First, history has shown how positive coal has been for the lives of people in Western countries, and second, greens have called for urgency too many times before, and people in Mackay are sick of hearing the 'doom and gloom'-news.

By focusing on the oppositional discourses in the dispute, I intended to investigate the overall situation Mackay is in. As a centre stage of the Carmichael coalmine-dispute, the oppositional discourses are a large part of the Mackay community. The situation in Mackay is affected by how the Carmichael coalmine-dispute is increasingly polarised, and how the communication between the oppositional actors is growing more and more dysfunctional, to the point where there is no communication at all. There seems to be no real development, and as people are growing impatient they work to find someone to blame—the greens are mostly granted the role as the scapegoat. By stopping the Carmichael coalmine greens are destroying people's lives in Mackay, as they are hindering a job-creating project. Because of this, there is no compromise initiated, as the greens case is not regarded as viable. It is striking how little direct communication between the fronts in the dispute, as they rather talk about each other. The narratives meet continuously, both in the political conversation, but also amongst people. However, still there is no real communication between the oppositional actors; they rather work within echo-chambers, which intensifies the differences.

Furthermore, there is a fight on claiming the title of the 'underdog', being the victim of the other's demonization. After all, they both want what is best for Mackay, for the nation, and for the world, whereas the other is seen as a threat to achieve this. I will explore how each party is seen as a threat further on in chapter five.

5 UnAustralia—the place where unAustralian people do unAustralian things¹⁵

When cleaning up his espresso bar, in the evening of January 25th 2016, Matt Chun put a blackboard sign outside his bar that read ‘yes, we’re open on National Dickhead Day’, to signal that they would be open the next day, on the official National Day of Australia. A friend of his took a picture of the sign and posted it online. When Chun went to open his bar the next morning he reported in a Facebook-post that the ‘door locks had been drilled out and the windows glued shut’. Already in the wee hours of Australia Day, the picture of the blackboard sign had received 7000 likes, 2000 comments, and 4000 shares on Facebook. According to Chun the Facebook activity ‘was primarily fueled by the pages of several hard-right political organisations,’ and several hate pages had been made to target his business. Soon after, national news agencies had picked up the story—viralling the story further. Throughout the day, Chun received threats of ‘vandalism, arson, murder, [and] mass violence’. According to Chun, ‘the blackboard was possibly the most Australian thing that one could write about “Australia Day”, in a country that claims to be proud of its “larrikin” irreverence and self-effacing humour.’ The blackboard was directed at no one in particular, but reflected in the reactions many took the sign highly personal. Chun argued that the sign had been used as a convenient repository for anyone who had anything negative to state, and a ‘proxy for Indigenous Australians, Islam, refugees, homosexuality, class, Asia, immigration and much more’.

I arrived in Mackay four days prior to Australia Day, and though I had been promised fireworks, community celebrations, and barbequing, none of those came through, and I celebrated Australia Day mostly through television. On the news, the story about Chun and his ‘yes, we’re open on National Dickhead Day’-sign received much airtime: There were heated discussions about whether or not Chun’s sign was *un-Australian*. People wanted him deported out of the country, and he should get his citizenship revoked if he did not like the country he was living in. Perhaps the reactions to Chun’s blackboard sign captured the zeitgeist of 2016, or perhaps not. Perhaps it was a continuum of attitudes that have been common in Australia for decades, and the sign was taken as an opportunity to pour out these sentiments. Apparently, Australia Day is a day to

¹⁵ Neumann, 2007, p. 481

celebrate the positive things about Australia, and not the appropriate time for any introspection. Thus, the blackboard was taken as resentment towards *Australianness*, and the values ascribed to the blackboard sign—that it was an expression of sympathy to Islam, refugees, homosexuality, and so on—indicates that whatever is un-Australian is multi-faceted.

In this chapter I shall explore the power of the concept un-Australian. Similar to the term *greenie*, it is a potent vehicle of meaning, with real consequences, but which content is disputed. The concept is related to maintaining boundaries, showing distance to a people or a concept, and can possibly be looked upon as a consequence of a *crises of reproduction*, that being: ‘Ruptures in the system or life-world resulting from accelerated, imposed change’ (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 27). Reproduction ‘refers to the ability of a person, a system or a social field to continue on its path without constantly having to adjust to exogenous changes’ (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 27), and when there indeed are ruptures and changes, such as with booms and busts in the economy, it makes it difficult to reproduce whatever has been before. When feelings of uncertainty for the future becomes predominant, trying to find ‘who – or what – they can trust, and who – or what – they can blame’ (Eriksen, 2016a, p. 27) becomes significant, but ever more difficult. In the former chapter I investigated the different narratives that the opposing groups in the Carmichael coalmine use to argue their cause, in this chapter I shall investigate the discursive structures they act within.

Uncharted territory of study

In 2001, Philip Smith and Tim Phillips (pp. 323-324) called for more study on the term ‘Un-Australian’; studies of nationhood and national identity, they argued, have chiefly been focused on exploring the ‘positive carriers of national meanings’. In an Australian context they mention Uluru as an inspiring symbol, or heroic myths of Gallipoli, or as elaborated in the former chapter, Great Barrier Reef as a symbol, or the mythology of the ‘hard working coalminer’. On the flipside then, Smith and Phillips, suggests there must be ‘a shadowing discourse of the un-national, non-national or anti-national’ (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 324). Smith and Phillips saw ‘un-Australian’ as a somewhat uncharted territory of study, and that it could fruitfully be explored in order to ‘further our knowledge of how symbolic processes are involved in

reproducing relations of inclusion and exclusion in Australian society' (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 324).

Smith and Phillips (2001, p. 324) argued that 'un-Australian' was a label often used in order to condemn 'the other', and any attempt to make a classification of the term could at worst be a 'continuation of pejorative discourses that reinforce social boundaries'. Instead of making a classification themselves, they used data from a study they did in 1997, where they had conversations with six focus groups involving 49 participants from Queensland, and all participants were asked to identify concrete exemplars of the 'Un-Australian'. What they found was there were no obvious similarities between the different figures suggested to be un-Australian, which ranged from the politician Pauline Hanson to the Gay Mardi Gras, but also the KKK and the historian Geoffrey Blainey, who were perceived as racist. However, they found that the diversity found in their answers were substantiated by a common set of logical rules: 'Put simply, things which are "Un-Australian" represent either (1) a violation of norms of civility and natural justice and/or (2) are a "foreign" influence on Australian culture.' (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 335) Within normative were concepts such as violence, intolerance, racism, waste, divisiveness, extremism, selfishness, separatism, and immodesty. Within the second there were only two concepts: 'Americanization' and 'The ethnic' (Smith & Phillips, 2001, pp. 335-336).

Since their call for more attention to the term, variously efforts have been done to do so. The Cultural Studies Association of Australasia' Annual Conference in Canberra in December 2006 had as their theme 'UnAustralia', where different academics were invited to give their own discussion on this term. In his lecture, Klaus Neumann (2007, p. 476) asked 'What or who is unAustralian?'. To answer this he consulted politicians' use of the term—'what or whom do politicians deem to be unAustralian?' (Neumann, 2007, p. 479), and found:

Members of the opposition often label individual pieces of legislation unAustralian. Sometimes politicians call each other, or each other's conduct, unAustralian. But other than that, the range of practices and things that have been labelled unAustralian in the past 20 years is very broad. They include, amongst others:

- The banning of Christmas carols in Western Australia (Donald Randall MP, Liberal Party, 16 February 2004);

- Criticism levelled at Australia by Australians abroad (Sen. Julian McGauran, National Party, 6 June 2000);
- Tax fraud (Warren Truss MP, National Party, 24 September 1997);
- The use of gender-neutral language (John Howard MP, Liberal Party, 14 December 1993);
- The failure to answer mail (Steve Gibbons MP, ALP, 23 May 2001);
- Socialism (Maxwell Burr MP, Liberal Party, 1 December 1988)' (My selection) (Neumann, 2007, p. 479).

Un-Australian can thus be used as an insult to fellow politicians, and it can be used to deem everyday conducts, such as not answering mail, as unfortunate. What Neumann rarely found, however, was as to *why* these were un-Australian. He found that there was no clear pattern in these politicians usage, rather, “unAustralian” seems to go with just about any term that has unequivocally negative connotations’ (Neumann, 2007, p. 480). Neumann (2007, p. 481) concluded that his ’research suggests that, at best, “unAustralian” is used as a synonym for “bloody awful”’. Moreover, he noted that, the Australian politicians are no worse than the community in general (Neumann, 2007, p. 481). People use it just as much as politicians to emphasize that something is negative—without explanation.

The satirical TV-show ‘Chaser’s’, presented by Chas Licciardello and Andrew Hanson, can be used as an example to back up Neumann’s latter claim: Through a compilation of clips from various news stories they show that un-Australian can be ‘expensive food’, ‘private parking inspectors’, ‘two sets of rules’, ‘evicting caravans’, and ‘being fined for cars you don’t own’. Also, if, for the sake of the argument, Twitter can be representative of the ‘community’ (as Neumann mentioned could be just as incoherent as politicians in their use of un-Australian), then there are at least 27 things that are ‘completely un-Australian’ (Whitehead, 2015). Included are hating the Australian spread Vegemite—or loving it too much—not having enough beer, or not being served ‘sausage sizzles’ in the voting queues for election. This list of 27 things ‘completely unAustralian’ was compiled by BuzzFeed, a digital news and entertainment media company which mainly produces clickbait-friendly articles based on popular culture, hence the mentioned list is a tongue-in-cheek article. Arguably, ‘un-Australian’ has been overused to the point of now being a much-loved satirist term. However, when the term is used as serious, it can still be powerful and hurtful, and have concrete consequences.

Neumann (2007, p. 481) suggests an explanation as to why vegemite is such a relevant item in the discussion of un-Australianess:

Vegemite is supposedly Australian because it was produced by an Australian-owned company and has been consumed by generations of Australians. [...] The reference point of the term 'Australian' is the Australian past. [...] The term 'unAustralian' has barely any historical reference points: whereas the past is supposedly replete with instances of Australian behaviour, there are evidently no precedents for unAustralian conduct. In a way, there can't be—unless one were to question the Australianness of Australia's past.

Neumann argues that what is Australian, and what is not, is inextricably linked to Australia's past. Australia's past is a patchwork of different strategies to control or limit the immigration of people who seemingly do not fit their preferred mould of people, as will be further explored below. Rapid social change and feelings of insecurity are factors Zygmunt Bauman (1990, p. 48 in Smith & Phillips, 2001) relates to boundary-maintaining behaviour, as is common within the nationalist orientation. Labelling something as 'un-Australian' would be a core aspect of such a boundary maintaining process. Arguably, *not* fighting for exclusion is un-Australian.

From the unAustralian landscape to the unAustralian people

According to various sources on the Internet (Dubecki, 2008; Ireland, 2005; Zwankhuizen, 2016), the 2001 Federation edition of the Macquarie Dictionary was the first time 'un-Australian' was added, and by 2005 it had been further updated, where it stated that the term was first ever used in 1855 to describe the character of a landscape or art. However, my own investigation of the online version of the Macquarie Dictionary found no records of the term. Nevertheless, the mentioned Internet sources saw the Macquarie's addition of 'un-Australian' in its Dictionary as a sign that the term's wide usage had 'finally' been officially acknowledged. At the time Smith and Phillips wrote their paper, they noted that 'despite the growing symbolic potency of the "UnAustralian" in the vocabulary of public life in contemporary Australia, the meaning and usage of the label have yet to be clarified.' (2001, p. 325). They found no dictionary definitions,

neither in the *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* from 1998, nor *The Macquarie Dictionary* from 1991. The closest link they could find was the term *un-American*, which is defined in the Webster's dictionary from 1986 as:

Not having characteristics of persons or things native to the United States; lacking in patriotism and national feeling toward the United States; not consistent with American ideals, objectives, spirit, etc.

Smith and Phillips' critique on this definition was that it neglected the fact that the term *un-American* entered the public discourse with a particular political inflection; in the 1950s with Senator Joseph McCarthy's Committee on Un-American Activities (Bell, 1979; Hanson, 1996 in Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 324). *Un-American* came to stand as a term for any person, group, or activity that were understood to threaten American national security (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 324). Though 'sorely neglected as a subject for research and analysis' (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 325), and lacking a lexical or dictionary definition, Smith and Phillips were able to dig up some historical records on 'un-Australian', and thus able to provide an understanding of it which does not stand without context, in contrast to the definition of *un-American*. What they found was that 'un-Australian' has mainly been connected to 'a broader set of terms used to label non-whites and communists, such as aliens, fifth columnists, foreigners or the Yellow Peril' (Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 325). The term dates back mainly from the aftermath of the First World War and the 1917 Russian Revolution, as well as throughout the 'White Australia Policy', which lasted between 1901 until 1973. One of the explicit mentions of the term *unAustralian*, was uttered by the Minister for Trades and Customs, Thomas White, who served under Joseph Lyon's anti-communist government from 1932 to 1938. He wished for a stronger immigration policy in order to keep out "UnAustralian" groups as "the non-British, the disloyal, the subversive and seditious (communists), and the criminal" (Brett, 1992, p. 91 in Smith & Phillips, 2001, p. 325). Smith and Phillips found that, in sum, 'Un-Australian' has mainly served as 'a boundary-maintaining discursive player' that were successfully able to cause suspicion of 'sedition, subversion and disloyalty' onto certain groups of people (2001, p. 326). Since the 1960s, however, Smith and Phillips were unable to find any historical records of 'un-Australian'—that is, until the 1990s when former Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007) made it popular again.

Despite the many attempts to avoid it, Australia, with 28 per cent of its 24 million population born overseas (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016b), is indeed today a melting pot of different,

social, religious, and cultural backgrounds. However, there still reigns a sentiment that there exists, or needs to be, a common Australian identity. Explicitly reflected in former Prime Minister John Howard's use of 'un-Australian' in the 1990s. According to James Arvanitakis (2006, p.10, in Instone, 2010, p. 360), Howard's political aspirations behind using the term 'un-Australian' were both exclusion and displacement; excluding outsiders who did not 'reflect Australian values' as well as displacing 'citizens who no longer met the benchmark of Australian values' (Instone, 2010, p. 360). Howard first used the term in relation to his immigration and refugee-politics: Anyone opposing Howard's 'Pacific Solution', which involved moving asylum seekers to detention centres in the Pacific Island states of Nauru and Papua New Guinea (Instone, 2010, p. 360), were called un-Australian. With Howard un-Australian was meant as a marker for those who both outside and within Australia were 'seen to threaten the purity of the nation, morally and geographically' (Instone, 2010, p. 360).

Founder of the political party One Nation, Pauline Hanson, has carried Howard's legacy on long into the 20th century. After a 20 year long hiatus, Hanson is back in government, after the federal election in 2016. In her maiden speech in 1996 Hanson famously stated that 'I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians,' (Martino, 2016) and in her book *The Truth* from 1997, Hanson forecasted that by 2050 Australia would be run by a Asian lesbian cyborg called Poona Li Hung (Crabb, 2016). Twenty years later Hanson used her first speech to Parliament as a Senator to proclaim that 'we are in danger of being swamped by Muslims who bear a culture and ideology that is incompatible with our own,' (Butler, 2016). In 1996 Asians were un-Australian, today Muslims are un-Australian; they should not only not be allowed into the country, and similar to Howard's statement in the 1990s, also those who are already living in Australia are a threat to Australianness.

As The Sydney Morning Herald commentator Annabel Crabb notes (2016), Australia has a long history of exclusion. There have been several control mechanisms trying to limit the immigration from other parts of the world, such as the 'White Australia policy' (1901-1973), which came about as a reaction to what was experienced as an invasion of Chinese immigrants. They immigrated to Australia so they could work in the gold mines, but eventually they were considered to be 'stealing people's jobs'. However, since the British settlement, the Chinese has not been the only people victim of restrictions and discrimination:

The first ethnic immigrant group to attract a concerted public and media campaign was the

4000-odd Irish orphan girls who were brought to Australia in the late 1840s fleeing the Great Famine. The Sydney Morning Herald led a campaign against the girls, who were feared to be stubborn, lazy and of bad character. But the settlers quickly assimilated them and turned their hatred on the Chinese, only to turn on the Irish Catholics, and then on the Italians (whom we threw into prison camps during World War II), and then on the Jews. Then the Vietnamese. Then the Chinese again. And now Muslims. Often, the fear is of lawlessness (Irish insurrection, Italian Mafia crime syndicates, the Triads, Lebanese crime gangs, Islamic State). Always, it's of otherness, of cultural incompatibility (Crabb, 2016).

It is not only immigrants that have received the label of 'un-Australian', the first people of Australia, the Aboriginals, have also. They were not officially recognised as Australian citizens before 1967, thus treated 'outside society' (Robin, 2007, p. 7). Once acknowledged as Australians, they were open to be deemed as un-Australian. Particularly this is in relation to when they riot, refuse, or demonstrate against something. Be it tourists climbing Uluru during their mourning period (Dubecki, 2008, p. 2), when they call upon their ownership of a land, such as where the Carmichael coalmine is to be opened, or when they refuse to celebrate Australia Day, which marks the arrival of the First Fleet of British ships in 1788, and rather calls for a change of the day's name and content, into being called 'Invasion Day' and a day of mourning. They are called out as being un-Australian because they are too focused on the past, 'pushing their history', and should move forward—the complainers not acknowledging that the arguably bigger national celebration day, ANZAC day, is all about remembering the past: The lives of soldiers lost in the First and Second World Wars, and the wars since.

Un-Australian greenies and un-Australian politicians

Following Smith and Phillips' (2001) study, greenies can be seen to go under both of the two types of 'un-Australian': a violation of norms of civility and natural justice and (2) a "foreign" influence on Australian culture.' Within 'violation of norms' greenies have been called out as being selfish, and 'not sympathetic to other people's *real* problems', as I presented in chapter four. By trying to stop the era of coal, greenies are depriving people in Mackay of jobs, and India

of their industrialisation. Furthermore, greenies are also seen as un-Australian due to their foreign ties.

Green groups, such as the Mackay Conservation Group (MCG), are suspected of being linked to a larger network of anti-coal groups on a global scale. Greenies are associated with foreign influences, and mostly specifically American influences. In an interview with Mackay's mayor Greg Williamson, he explained to me that greenies are, 'holding up the Adani project by continuous legal action in the Queensland courts', continuing with '[it] has got nothing to do with sustainability in terms of the environment, it's all to do with money, and American money'. The latter allegation is a reference to the mining magnate and former member of the Australian Parliament for Fairfax Clive Palmer's statement from 2012, that 'all [The Greens'] candidates [...] are being funded by an offshore political power,' (Wordsworth, 2012) The suspected offshore political power was the American Rockefeller Foundation as well as the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), with the intent to sabotage and end Australia's coal industry, in order to make American oil more lucrative. In 2016, further proof of this theory was proposed when Presidential Candidate Hillary Clinton's emails were released through Wikileaks. Two emails forwarded to Clinton's campaign chairman, John Podesta, suggested that the funders behind 'The Sunrise project', headed by the former Greenpeace activist and initiator of the anti-coal campaign presented in chapter three, John Hepburn, was a large charitable trust based in the United States (Slezak, 2016b). The newspaper *The Australian* then released a report that stated, 'Australia is a key target in a global, no-holds-barred war against coal which has set a priority of shutting Adani out of Queensland' (Slezak, 2016b). Hence, green groups are foreign-funded, and behind them stand a tightly orchestrated conspiracy which systematically is working to destroy the Australian coal industry.

Such conspiracy theories were widespread when I was in Mackay; I saw them both being distributed online as well as in conversations. Thomas, Michael, and Finn from the Environment Centre told me they thought there was 'too much information' today, and it was difficult to know what to believe. Information is arguably easier attainable than ever; the 'truth' is made accessible through just a few keystrokes. But, Jennifer Nagel (2014, p. 1), argues, 'these new advantages don't always protect us from an old problem: if knowledge is easy to get, so is mere opinion, and it can be hard to spot the difference'. Moreover, news articles can be biased accordingly to the media house they belong to, and on social media sites such as Facebook, the algorithms customise your newsfeed which means you will only be exposed to attitudes you

already agree with. Instead of an informed debate, social media sites can nurture ‘groupthink, polarization and extremism’ (Enjolras, 2013, p. 112). One time, when I arrived at the Environment Centre, Michael told me that Norway was the first to insert chips under the skin of all their citizens. Being a Norwegian myself, I told him that this was not true, but he remained certain that it was.

Foreign involvement was something that generally tickled people’s temper in Mackay; it could be directed at greenies as well as politicians. With the latter, there was one issue in particular that enraged people: How politicians let foreign forces ravage their land, take their jobs, and how foreign workers did not know the Australian waters, and therefore crashed the big tankers with the corals on the Reef ‘all the time’. Therefore, the politicians who are sympathetic to the coal are also called out as being un-Australian; they are letting foreign forces influence Australia. According to Cleary (2011, p. vii), Australia has been called a third world country, as well as a developing country, because of loose regulations and the amount of influence mining companies have. More than 80% percent of Australia’s mineral and energy production is owned by foreign corporations, and contrary to countries such as Norway and Qatar, who profit from the entire production chain, Australia’s economic return is only gathered through a modest amount of tax revenue (2011, p. 45). Thomas argued that the way Australian politicians allowed for so much foreign ownership of their land was a prolongation of the century-long suppression and lack of recognition of the Indigenous people in Australia: First, the Brits took their land, and now they sold it overseas. He teasingly told me about an idea he had for a comic that the late Bill Leak could have drawn: First an indigenous man, a Brit stealing his land, and then a ‘yellow-faced’ Asian man drooling and holding out his hands to receive the and the Brit would bestow him. The indigenous people in Australia have lost their land twice, and both the taker and the end receiver were greedy and unintelligent in Thomas’s view. Thomas argued that it is only the foreign companies that reap the benefits, whilst the Australian environment, as well as the Great Barrier Reef, is left to pay the cost in the form of environmental degradation. Thomas had, however, an answer to why Australia let other countries take their land, ‘it’s because of our “she’ll be right”-attitude’. Meaning that Australians are too relaxed to care.

Foreign landscape turns people into recognized Australians

Australia is an irretrievably *hybrid* of what Tim Low calls a *new* nature. In which case, what is the purpose of the ubiquitous vilification of one category if not to preserve the notion or theoretical possibility of a pure Australianness? Second, what makes these animals pests in scientific terms is not their country of origin but their being “out of ecosystem” or in the wrong ecosystem or ecology, one that has evolved in their absence. Pollution has been described by anthropologists as ‘matter out of place’, and this biological construction of ‘organisms out of place’ is essentially similar. (Franklin, 2006, p. 146)

Australia has a strained and ambiguous relationship to their environment—like most of the Anglophone settler nations have (Lien & Davison, 2010, p. 3). According to Lien and Davison (2010, p. 3) it is in these regions, such as North America, South Africa, and Australia, that ‘ecological narratives of native inhabitants versus non-native invaders find full expression’, as well as the ‘notion of endemism permeates [...] public discourse and everyday environmental practice.’ Nature conservation in Australia has concerned itself with questions of what belongs and does not belong in the Australian landscape, thus creating boundaries, and defining what is ‘matter out of place’. Franklin (2006, p. 146) notes that, ‘in scientific terms’ it is not the species’ country of origin that makes them ‘invasive’, but rather whether or not they fit in the current ecosystem. The ‘semi-native’¹⁶ dingo for example is treated as both a pest and a part of the ‘natural wilderness’ (Trigger et al., 2008, pp. 1279-1281), whilst cattle, an introduced species, is understood as a necessity in the Australian fauna; like the ‘populations of pigs, goats, [...] horses, donkeys, camels, buffalo and deer’ (Bowman, 2012, p. 30) it fills a gap in the Australian food web. Cattle are favoured relative to dingoes, as I experienced on a camping trip to the Urannah River, where dingoes got shot because they were threatening the cow stock in the area. Therefore, even Indigenous species can be ‘matter out of place’, if, for example, they are re-introduced into the ‘wrong’ ecosystem or one that has evolved in their absence. Franklin’s question on the ‘possibility of a pure Australianness’ is asked specifically in the context of species in Australia, but what if we prolong this question to regard human-societal relationships?

¹⁶ The Dingo (*Canis lupus dingo*) is known to have arrived from Asia around 3500 years ago (Trigger, Mulcock, Gaynor, & Toussaint, 2008, p. 1279)

Australians' relationship to land is worked and reworked through the initiation process that takes place on Australia Day, when people obtain their Australian citizenship. All new citizenship holders are given a native plant, and with this are immigrants given the opportunity to be integrated into the society through acknowledging and creating a relationship to the Australian environment. Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 258) writes that, 'when immigrants become Australian citizens, they are said to have been naturalized'. In terms of equality, the expression 'similarity *in nature*' reflects the view on those immigrants that have managed to adapt to the Australian society. They are like exotic plant species that have adapted to the local environment to the extent that they are barely distinguishable from the native species (J. Kapferer, 1996, p. 258): They are made the *same*, or in Pauline Hanson's words, 'our own'. By doing 'mundane activities, such as weeding and planting' immigrants can 'root' themselves in the environment (Cerwonka, 2004, p. 2), and when they are assimilated into the Australian society, or the Australian environment, it is 'the new nature' they have to adapt to and 'root' themselves in. And following Franklin's reasoning, the indigenous (species, as well as people) is only considered 'matter *in place*' if they can adapt to the new nature, or society, that has evolved. But what is the new nature? What is the current ecosystem they need to adapt to? The two discourses in the Carmichael coalmine represent two different understandings of what the environment has been, and how it should be today.

When the British settlers came to Australia, they had difficulties in relating to its landscape and species. Commonly, the uniqueness of the Australian landscape was understood as *un-British*. The newcomers brought with them British practices, and introduced animal and plant species to make the landscape more familiar. Those who settled from Britain in 1788 had a vision of Australia as a *terra nullius*, 'a land belonging to no-one' (Frawley, 1994, p. 58), and the land was defined as 'empty' (Robin, 2007, p. 7) where there were no apparent signs of a human past; open to be civilised. The newcomers' worldviews was a product of the Enlightenment, and stood in great contrast to the worldviews of the Indigenous populations. Where the newcomers viewed 'nature and human society based on "scientific principles"' (Frawley, 1994, p. 58), the Indigenous Australians saw nature and culture as 'inextricably bound together' (Frawley, 1994, p. 58). The differences in relationship to land brought great tensions; the knowledge of the land that the Indigenous population had accumulated for millennia, was ignored, and is arguably still to be fully recognised as legitimate knowledge (Robin, 2007, p. 7).

It was a long struggle to shape a common Australian identity for the British newcomers as

images and recollections of ‘elsewhere’ shaped their relationship to the present land (Lien, 2009, p. 91). Not only did Australia hold species that were not to be found on any other continent—a nightmare for any taxonomist—the landscape did not behave as it did in Great Britain. Long into the twentieth century, the dictionary makers have had trouble with defining the word *river*, as they do not behave like British rivers do. Compared to British rivers, the Australian ones seems to not know ‘how to be rivers, but are “lost”, “wandering aimlessly”, “degenerated”, and flow to “a dead end”’ (Arthur, 2003, p. 18). Sometimes the word ‘river’ is even put in quotation marks in order to distinguish Australian rivers from the common conception of what a river is (Arthur, 2003, p. 19), where the British river is the ‘default’ understanding, and Australian rivers do not fit in to that description. Nonetheless, eventually, the newcomers managed to make the Australian environment into a positive space. Instead of comparing the environment to their motherland, they saw the foreign landscape, with seemingly infinite outback and desert areas, as something that brought them ‘vast repositories of invisible wealth in the form of gold, uranium, oil, (and) coal’ (Eriksen, 2015, p. 304); the unique environment was something that ‘harboured countless opportunities for those who worked hard enough’ (C. K. King, 2009, p. 108). Stories of hardships and crises was important for the formation of an Australian national identity, and this forged a ‘sense of shared colonial experience in the unfamiliar landscapes of Australia’ (C. K. King, 2009, p. 107). Today, the landscape ‘tickles the collective imagination’ (Eriksen, 2015, p. 304), and calls to mind the rags-to-riches stories that have followed every boom.

Australia has had difficulties in forming a shared understanding of the environment and where its value lies; as a resource that should be exploited for economic gain, or for its ecology and inherent value as an aesthetic place. For those who situate their national identity in the ‘hardships’ that past generations have endured, the resource sector is seen as the foundation of Australia. Past gold, and other mineral, miners are seen as those who ‘tamed’ the Australian landscape, who managed to drive out the full potential of the land. The fact that the green movement have put extra pressure on the coal industry upsets a lot of people, and because coal has been a key contributor to the wealth of Australia, they feel as though their modern wealth is at risk. By stopping coal, they would end the relationship countless Australians have to the land, but more importantly, erasing Australia’s past. Australia Day is a celebration of how they overcame, and continuously overcome, the difficult landscape of the new land.

In 1987, Donald Jessop, Liberal Senator for South Australia, when speaking against the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Amendment Bill, said: ‘I regard that prohibitionist activity as

un-Australian because it is hindering the development and productivity of our country'. By hindering developments such as the Carmichael coalmine, greenies are un-Australian. As referenced by Peter McCallum's comment earlier in chapter three, it would be better if the Mackay Conservation Group planted flowers instead of protesting and 'hindering the development' of Australia. By hindering 'productivity, greenies are a threat to the national narrative, and effectively destroying the opportunities for people today, and in the future, to experience prosperity and success, like the former generations have. In 2015, Christensen went as far as calling greenies actions 'treachery', as he argued, 'Although they spruik concepts such as conservation, they are really about destruction, because they want to destroy our way of life and our biggest industry' (Medhora, 2015). MP Christensen says that by hindering the Carmichael coalmine, greenies are a threat to the Australian way of life.

Geoffrey Blainey's (1968) concept of the 'tyranny of distance' tells a story of how Australia's geographical remoteness has shaped the nation's identity and history, and will continue to do so in the future. 'Australia is a place away from the mainstream of world events' (Johnson, 1994, p. 41), but with coal they can be a recognised actor on the global market. According to Paul Cleary (2011, p. 7), the self-image Australia likes to present themselves with outward is as 'a reliable supplier of energy products,' and being a major exporter of coal. By hindering Carmichael from opening, greenies effectively muddies this image, and according to coal-lobbyists, scares potential coal companies from investing in Australia. Greenies are hindering coal projects that would help the world, and Australia's role as an actor on the world stage.

Structures of standstill

In the prologue I showed how my host felt that greenies had taken monopoly on environmentalism; he used to be a greenie before, but now they had changed its meaning of content. He maintained that greenies were guilt-trippers, and making people feel bad about their own relationship to the environment. Instead of being encouraging to the people to make change, the negative stereotypes reduced social change and increased resistance. The actions of greenies are ingrained in people as notions of extremism and aggressiveness; something few want to identify themselves with. The negative stereotypes, I argue, is a contributor to the standstill of

the Carmichael coalmine—and the negative stereotypes is a product of the *need* for sameness, that seem to prevail in the Australian concept of egalitarianism.

According to Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 96), in Australia there ‘is an aspect of egalitarian thought which finds expression and comfort in belonging to a clearly designated cultural group, in having a common culture and taking for granted shared understandings of being in the world’. Inherent in the logic of community logic lies an exclusion of ‘otherness’, both exclusion of individuals and groups of people. If the aim is to achieve ‘community harmony’ and ‘social cohesion’ (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2009, p. 323) then greenies are ‘unmakers’ of the community. On the other hand, greenies are also makers of their own community, and they are also claiming the honour of being the keepers of the ‘true’ Australian identity. Seemingly based on the love for the unique Australian environment they have successfully placed their identity in the land. However, the same goes for the supporters of the resource sector, but their understanding of ‘love for the environment’ is expressed in a different manner—to use the unique environment’s full potential. Libby Robin (2007, p. 195) quotes a book by William Lines, *Patriots*, where his dictionary definition of a patriot has gone from “one who loves his country and zealously guards its welfare” to include ‘the activists who over the years took on the defence of “natural” heritage’. Who would be defined as the more patriotic in the Carmichael-coalmine dispute has no a clear-cut answer, as in a way they are both arguing they love their country and works to defend the natural heritage, but they are working based on different premises.

In the introduction of this chapter I proposed if maybe the situation in Mackay can be seen as a crises of reproduction, where feelings of abrupt and imposed change can make people uncertain, and in turn make people point fingers as to who is to blame. Being in a transitional phase, but not knowing what they are waiting for, means there is a lot of ambivalence in Mackay. However, the possible crises of reproduction that I postulated, is rather a typical trait with the Australian society overall, instead of a consequence of the recent boom and bust. Australia is in a constant crises of reproduction, constantly reworking what they are, and constantly trying to search for who they can trust or who to blame. As I showed in chapter five, inherent in the logic of Australianness lies the need for pointing fingers—not fighting for exclusion is un-Australian.

Those who are reviled and officially condemned in one era may be celebrated and officially incorporated in another. That this is so tells us much of changing understandings of the

worth of individuals and the comparative social standing of groups in egalitarianism (J. Kapferer, 1996, p. 49)

As quoted in the introduction, according to Judith Kapferer (1996, p. 201), 'Australia has a history which appears, quite blatantly, to be always in the process of creation'. In that process lays a constant search for creating boundaries, in the search for a common national identity, and as history changes, those boundaries moves. The heroes might have been the conservationists in the 1960s, but today the same voices are condemned. This practice of creating boundaries is not so much nostalgia for the past, but rather an uncertainty over what is Australian. Thus a continuous hunt for what is un-Australian is conducted. The supposition that all are the same, or rather the *need* for everyone to be the same, polarises the debate. People are frustrated because it appears that those with contrary beliefs are working against a common identity—a common Australia everyone can relate to. However, the basis for what they see is Australian is based on different understandings of Australia's past, which makes the project of sameness unattainable. I mentioned in the introduction that I would see how egalitarianism persist despite profound changes in the Australian society, and arguably the need for sameness has intensified, making the boundaries between the oppositional actors wider and wider for each day the Carmichael coalmine is at a standstill. There is no real communication between the opposing actors, as sameness is seen as prerequisite for communication. Rather the dispute has turned into a long monologue between the two parties, particularly on the coal proponents' side, as they refuse to answer any attempt at conversation from the greenies. The necessity for sameness, may therefore, ironically, create distance rather than community. Therefore, sameness is a structure of standstill.

6 Conclusion

I commenced this thesis with a prologue that gave a peak into the ‘world’ of Mackay, as well as a view into the relationship I had with my host. We assumed sameness; although it became evident we were not the same. I was a greenie, and my host despised greenies more than anything else; they were the root to Australia’s evils. Still, despite great difficulty, at least on my behalf, we *had* to be the same. In chapter five I argued that what makes the Carmichael coalmine-dispute polarised is that in the Australian society there is an inherent egalitarianism which prerequisite is that everybody needs to be the same, and as they are both working for differentiation they end up in a zero-sum game where both lose. In a sense I have gone full circle, starting with a description of how working for sameness unfolds in an individual to individual-relationship, and in chapter five studying the difficulties of such a process on a larger national scale.

I have tried, to the best of my ability, to present a variety of narratives that I encountered during my fieldwork, from the people I met in Mackay, and the two opposing discourses that surrounds the Carmichael coalmine-dispute as they were performed through different media. Overall the Carmichael-situation have been precarious and complex; not only taking into account my own experience, with all the hours I spent prior to, during, and after trying to keep updated on the development of the dispute, but also in consideration of how people chose to deal with the quick pace of events, and the information distributed as a result. Many felt there was an overload of contrary information, and was despaired because they found it difficult to know what was ‘true’, whilst others *knew*, and chose to be exposed solely to that particular truth. As a result, the Carmichael coalmine-dispute is polarised, and so is Mackay—and arguably becomes increasingly so each day, for every development or delay in the process of either opening or stopping the mine. For many they are in a process of waiting. Urgency is called upon by both sides of the dispute, but the situation remains at a standstill.

What I exposed in chapter four was that the opposing actors, be it politicians or greenies, had similar strategies to reach their goal. Their goals were not only directed at getting the mine stopped or opened, but also to convince people with narratives of what was the right development for Mackay, and for Australia. This included calling upon narratives of the Great Barrier Reef, which has been in a continuous battle between development and conservation since the 1960s. However, they all maintain they are doing what is best for the Reef, and for the

environment in general. That is, there is no one who deliberately wants to destroy the environment; it is just a definition of what it implies. There is no one who does not want to protect the environment; they just disagree on the threats and the means. Furthermore, their strategies include setting the other side in a bad light, by playing the victim of the others warfare, or claiming the other is taking the higher moral ground—which is in all regards a bad thing, as I explored in chapter five. Furthermore, though the narratives meet continuously, both in the public debate, as well as amongst people, it is striking how little direct communication there is between the oppositional actors—as they rather talk about each other. This means that, similar to the communication between my host and I, the ‘conversations’ are almost like monologues.

In chapter five I explored the concept of ‘un-Australian’ instead of focusing on ‘Australianness’, which arguably is a well-studied issue. Studies on Australianness have typically been focused on the positive sides, the symbols and events that evoke positive feelings and makes people proud, of being Australian. The other side of the coin is that inherently in the logic of working for sameness, is that someone necessarily needs to be un-Australian. Particularly in a time when uncertainty reigns, and one needs someone to blame for whatever situation Australia is in. Interchangeably different kinds of immigrants have been labelled un-Australian, which arguably they are by definition—until they are made legal citizens. Once they are Australians, they need to assimilate as quickly as possible, but the problem of what exactly is the culture they need to assimilate into. The two discourses in the Carmichael coalmine represent two different answers, and they can never agree as they have different understandings of what Australia has been, and what it needs to be. Each opposing groups see the other as a disruptive force, which makes the Australian notion of required sameness impossible. The past is a patchwork of different strategies to control people who seemingly do not fit their preferred. In the process they claim the other as un-Australian, and as I argued, not fighting for exclusion is un-Australian. This means that Mackay’s situation remain precarious in-between the two proposed futures.

Post scriptum

Recent developments

In May 2017, the last possible bank Adani could get a financial loan from officially stated that they would not finance the mine; consequently meaning that Adani has no options left for financial backing. However, Prime minister Turnbull has sworn that no matter what, the Carmichael coalmine shall go ahead, and assured the chairman and founder of the Adani Group, Gautam Adani, that the recent native title issue in the federal court will not be an obstacle. The Queensland government has since promised they will give Adani a 320 million dollar tax cut on the Carmichael coalmine, to prove that the government is dedicated to opening the mine. However, in May 2017, Adani postponed the mine indefinitely. Thus, the situation remains at a standstill.

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