

JOHN VON STURMER: FRIDAY 26 March 2010

2.00 – 2.30 PM

ABSTRACT: TITLE AND ABSTRACT

### **‘AND THE MEEK SHALL ...’: DISABLING THE LIFEWORLD**

Not with a bang, a whimper. Eliot’s prediction.

No, the thunder does not roll or roar.

It is doubtful that there has ever been a ‘wild anthropology’ – not that one wishes to fetishize ‘the wild’. However, the alignment of anthropology with strategies of containment, ‘taming’, domestication, administration, remediation, forms of ‘reasonableness’, involves a commitment to a culture of ‘wanness’.

It is far from reasonable.

The Wik admired their own capacity to ‘fire up’. Pama kulinydya (from kuli, angry), the mobilisation of anger in social challenge and interpersonal confrontation, had what we might call a total value, as opposed to the mistrust accorded the pama ngangk waya (the weak-spirited).

Since the state takeover in the mid-1970s, Aurukun has been characterised in the media as a site of riot and mayhem. Yet it is precisely through the public performance of ‘rage’ that Wik identity continues to assert itself.

Aurukun under MacKenzie (the famous missionary) was characterised as a site of violence and servitude by, among others, the anthropologists McConnel and Thomson, but it was a culture that contained and structured what others might too willingly label as the ‘predilection to violence’. McKenzie himself was admired for his willingness to return the violence of the frontier with direct counter action, and to make himself available to local challenge.

The cataclysmic need not be conceptualised as ‘the traumatic event’; it may just as easily be thought of under the head of attenuation.

The importance of performance resides in its capacity to focus and to enliven: to engage. Whether successfully or not my own performance hopes to exploit these attributes – to provide an echo of what is lost to or resists the ‘academic’.

Dr John von Sturmer

15 January 2010