

SUMMARY

The Historical Transformation of Environmental Management by an Aboriginal People in South-East Australia: A Case Study of a Movement by the Yorta Yorta People at the Middle Basin of the Murray River

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This paper considers the Yorta Yorta people's actions to secure a role in the management of river and forest resources located at the middle basin of the Murray River on the Victoria - New South Wales border. First, the paper briefly reviews political action by the Yorta Yorta in relation to the history of their land rights struggle. Following this, it examines a recent Yorta Yorta movement focusing on the Co-operative Management Agreement between the Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation and the State of Victoria, which was reached in 2004. In so doing, it analyzes the concept of environmental management and the relationship among each stakeholder from the perspective of accounts by Yorta Yorta people, local non-Aboriginal people, and the staff of environmental NGOs, in addition to government reports and opinions from each stakeholder. By means of this examination, the paper shows that the Yorta Yorta people's struggle for environmental management has not been taking place within the conventional binary opposition between White and Black, but in a situation of interaction with individuals and groups from diverse backgrounds. It also shows that the Yorta Yorta movement is becoming more broadly accepted in the wider society, but that this universalization of the Yorta Yorta people's struggle as an environmental movement is a threat to the way outsiders view the Yorta Yortas' authenticity as indigenous people. The Yorta Yorta people have therefore been forced to attempt to enhance their authenticity as 'real' indigenous people in order to persuade non-indigenous people to recognize their struggle for control of their environment and their social situation.