

PANEL 9: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE

Settler Imperialism, Ecocide and Social Ecological Systems

Norbert Finzsch

My contribution attempts to discuss neglectful or willful manipulations of the Australian Social Ecological Systems by commercial stock farmers in NSW and Victoria as part of an attempt to drive Aboriginal people from their lands into the hinterland thereby accepting or condoning their annihilation or demographic reduction. By displaying the different ways in which commercial stock farmers have engineered changes in the ecological system, I will show that traditional definitions of the term genocide fall short of applied techniques of decimation that consist of a combination of micro-practices and quotidian low-level violence. It is doubtful that given the complexity and the resilience of Social Ecological Systems (SES), however, a group of commercial stock farmers can operate the system (of which, after all, they are an element) in a controlled way. Thus, it is doubtful, whether the term ecocide should be applied to the way, stock farmers changed the habitat of the indigenous population, because the term supposes agency. SES as coupled complex systems is dependent on the existence of bio-diversity, the intensity of grazing⁵, defoliation, habitat fragmentation and changes of the soil as a consequence of densification.⁶

Bio

⁵ Andrew J. Ash and John G. McIvor, 'How Season of Grazing and Herbivore Selectivity Influence Monsoon Tall-Grass Communities of Northern Australia', *Journal of Vegetation Science* 9, no. 1 (February 1, 1998): 123-32.

⁶ Kimberly A. With and Thomas O. Crist, 'Critical Thresholds in Species' Responses to Landscape Structure', *Ecology* 76, no. 8 (December 1, 1995): 2446-59. Richard J. Hobbs, 'Synergisms among Habitat Fragmentation, Livestock Grazing, and Biotic Invasions in Southwestern Australia', *Conservation Biology* 15, no. 6 (December 1, 2001): 1522-8.