**Michaela Spencer**

**Research Assistant (RIEL, CRN, NI; CDU)**

**How does the work you are doing relate to governance?**

Currently I’m employed as a research assistant on a project called ‘Using Social Network Analysis to untangle connections in Natural Resource Management governance’ (RIEL). We are working with a survey to be able to learn about the way in which different groups carry our natural resource management in the Daly River catchment and how they collaborate with each other.

I am also beginning to help out on the Indigenous Governance and Leadership Development Project working with people and communities around the strengthening and articulating indigenous governance practices as they connect with forms of western governance in the current context of a focus on self-governance being promoted by tiers of government in Northern Australia.

Finally, transitions in forms of governance has been a focus within my PhD project looking at environmental and conservation work in Tasmania. In particular, the way in which standard and familiar means for valuing and making decisions about the protection native forests have recently been deprioritised as governments have sought different ways to generate working means to manage forests as a contentious and ongoing problem (most notably in the form of the Tasmanian Forests Agreement, 2013).

**What interesting or different insight have you gained about governance in your recent research?**

With my project in Tasmania, I worked with a number of community conservation groups as they managed, protected and cared for native forests and bushland. These groups were exceptionally good at reporting on the native ecology of the area, and presenting robust scientific evidence to tiers of government about why particular areas of bushland are legislatively required to be protected and conserved. However, at the same time (and in particular around the 2013 Tasmanian Forests Agreement) there seemed to be a general shift towards other means for managing environments which did not separate out native and non-native bushland, or knowledge of nature and the making of decisions about its welfare. Rather these and other things were all juggled together as part of general processes if shaping and managing places. I found it quite difficult to keep this shift in focus and to be able to discern what might be going on within it. But for me it opened up questions about the types of natures able to be enacted and cared for as forms of governmentality in which government presides as a decision maker and arbiter seem to be breaking down, and other sets of practices emerge in relation to and as an alternative to those already around.

**What theoretical or practical problem to do with governance are you engaging with at the moment?**

How to tell stories about transitions in governance which take account of sets of practices which have previously clotted as effective and appropriate, at the same time as being sensitive to new shifts promoting and calling up new sets of practices. And, how to tell stories which might support my own, and others’, sense of competency and confidence as we try to act in careful and controlled ways within the ongoing emergence of a (strange) domain where all these practices and possibilities are swirling around and at stake.