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**The Return of the Noble Savage By Popular Demand: A Study of  
Aboriginal Television Documentary in Australia**

**BY FRANCES PETERS-LITTLE**

**Submitted for the degree of Master of Philosophy of the Australian National University  
April 2002**

I hereby state that all of the contents are my own work and that all sources used in the thesis has been acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Peters-Little', written over a horizontal line.

Frances Peters-Little

## Abstract

This thesis, entitled *The Return of the Noble Savage: By Popular Demand*, is written after several years of being an avid Aboriginal television watcher, filmmaker, and activist. It is based on research on a neglected topic and in response to the consistent attack from well-meaning critics, in an attempt to argue for the complexity of the meanings generated on television, and for the rights of the individual filmmaker in representation.

In myth-making about Australian Aborigines there has been a consistent paradigm of opposing poles – noble and savage, good blacks and bad blacks, primitive and civilised, real and unreal. Oscillating between these two poles are all kinds of imaginings of Aboriginal identity, politics and desires for truthful representation.

When early documentary filmmakers began to film Aborigines they disregarded the Aboriginal audience, and spoke rather to themselves and to white audiences whom, for all kinds of reasons, they wanted to inform about Aborigines. In contrast, there are in the Australian television industry today many more Aboriginal people making films than there have ever been, and a greater recognition of the existence of Aboriginal television audiences. Aboriginal filmmakers have been backed by a history of radical politics and by the efforts of non-Aboriginal filmmakers.

The recent marriage between Aboriginal filmmakers and mainstream television has been neglected by most commentators and scholars. Critics ignore the efforts and progress made by mainstream television and documentary filmmakers. They have written about television without making references to Aborigines; and they have written about Aborigines without making reference to television. This is startling when one considers the invisibility of Aborigines before television, and the difference television has made.

The thesis also addresses the problem that in the current climate, new pressures being brought to bear on filmmakers making documentary films on Aboriginal topics. Because they do not take into account the nature of filmmaking, or the rights of individual filmmakers, these pressures are infringing upon the rights not only of white but also Aboriginal filmmakers. This pressure has swung the pendulum from *savage* to *noble* imagery, the latter of which is just as unrealistic and untrue as the former. It also requires Aboriginal audiences and filmmakers to protect and uphold a particular vision of Aboriginality, and denies them the right to critique and defend themselves.

# **The Return of the Noble Savage by Popular Demand: A study of Aboriginal Television Documentary in Australia**

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I also thank the Australian National University for providing me with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander postgraduate scholarship, research assistance from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and then a Visiting Fellowship in the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, which enabled me to complete the thesis.

## *Abbreviations*

Aboriginal Programs Unit	APU
Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission	ATSIC
Australian Broadcasting Authority	ABA
Australian Broadcasting Corporation	ABC
Australian Film Commission	AFC
Australian Film Television and Radio School	AFTRS
Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies	AIATSIS
Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme	BRACS
Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association	CAAMA
Department of Employment and Industrial Relations	DEIR
Department of Employment Education and Training	DEET
Direct To Home	DTH
Indigenous Programs Initiative	IPI
Indigenous Programs Unit	IPU
National Australian Indigenous Broadcasting Association	NAIBA
National Indigenous Documentary Fund	NIDF
National Indigenous Media Association of Australia	NIMAA
National Interest Program	NIP
Remote Commercial Television Service	RCTS
Special Broadcasting Services	SBS

## THE RETURN OF THE NOBLE SAVAGE: BY POPULAR DEMAND

### *Introduction*

To anyone who confesses to being influenced by television, and particularly to those who deny it, I would like to say that I too was briefly a non-believer of television especially when I was going through my 'artistic' period through the 1980s, which felt a bit haughty after a while. Yet television had always fascinated me, and like the militant black teenager that I became during the 1970s, I knew the value of invading white peoples homes via television. I knew its value lay in its potential to send messages to those who were racist. So I thought it was important that we would have our time on television too. Fortunately, I had grown up during the 1960s with a family who watched television, whose members all became critics by default, though I cannot recall feeling offended by it. I had grown up watching documentaries perhaps not too differently from the way one watches documentaries today. The Aboriginal people in early documentaries appeared semi-naked, would hunt crocodiles and kangaroos, and spoke their own language, and I felt I had absolutely nothing in common with any of them. My family had an urban and rural black culture and they had been singers, musicians, postmen, telephonists, nurses, stockmen and fruit-pickers.

I had not been aware of having my culture being invaded by our black and white television set (that we covered with blue cellophane), and the term *racism* had not even been used in our home until the early 1970s. Before then the way our family described people who did not like Aborigines were called *ignorant*. But ignorance is something one hears rather than sees, which may explain why so many descriptions of racism in the media use examples from radio broadcasters. Violence on the other hand *is* visible. Watching violence on television, no matter how gratuitous, did not make me want to be violent, and perhaps in the same way



someone who watches or hears racism does not necessarily therefore want to be racist. In our home television had only communicated a violence and ignorance that already existed. Although I heard the term *coloured* on television, I do not recall hearing the words *boong* or *blackie*, *nigger* only rarely, as in the Sidney Poitier film *A Patch of Blue*, and I heard *Abo* used by a villain in *Homicide*. But I had been called *boong*, *blackie*, *nigger* and *Abo* as a child in the school playground and on the street. I knew that socially, politically and economically Aborigines were placed in an inferior position to whites. Yet television did not offend me, and I did not perceive Aboriginal people on television being portrayed as inferior. Whether they were artists, activists or stockmen, members of my family appeared on television in all contexts and appearances during the 1960s and 1970s. I missed the subliminal messages of racial hatred that others seemed to have detected in television. Television to my mother and me was entertaining as well as educational. We delighted in our regular viewing of old *Hitchcock* movies, *Bandstand* and Vincent Serventy's *Nature Walkabout*. My mother, who had been an ardent fan of documentaries, is an avid watcher of the Discovery Channel today. In hindsight I have often wondered why my mother and I never felt as offended as others say they were. We certainly thought some people on television were silly and unreal, but we did not feel the racial hatred that perhaps whites who worked in television supposedly endorsed, but perhaps we were not meant to, or they only spoke to white audiences. Insult and shame were not our experience. Whenever my family saw Aborigines on television we were really proud of them. Probably because I was a blackfella I loved seeing them 'having a go' on television, and perhaps there were many others like my family and me.

The purpose of this thesis is to raise discussion about the more positive aspects of the relationship between Aborigines and television. I wanted to investigate why so little has been written about it and why so little attention had been given to those documentary programs

that reflected a sympathy, interest and passion for Aboriginal people and cultures. I wanted the thesis to develop a more balanced account about the achievements of television documentary has made. Although much has been written about Aboriginal films and Aboriginal history, little has been written on Aboriginal documentary films in mainstream public and commercial television. Research has overly focused upon Aboriginal involvement in cinema and grossly under-estimated Aboriginal involvement in television. Furthermore, what little has been written about Aboriginal involvement in television by and large highlights television's racist distortions and pays little attention to the achievements of mainstream Aboriginal television making. Critics have dismissed (whether intentionally or not) the efforts of the relatively high numbers of documentary filmmaker who have made films about Aborigines for white audiences since television's earliest days. They have been dismissive of the Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU) in the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Indigenous Programs Unit (IPU) in Special Broadcasting Services (SBS), and urban and rural Aboriginal involvement, and one of the aims of this thesis is to explore why this is so.

Filmmakers, scholars, and other people in the industry continue to argue strongly that mainstream television is an inappropriate form for cross-cultural documentary. Part of the problem is the low status of television itself amongst radical artists and critics. Ann Curthoys shows that it was conventional to critique television even before it arrived in Australia in 1956, and hostility to television as an important cultural form has continued ever since.<sup>1</sup> Television itself is under constant criticism from media academics and political radicals. While French filmmaker Bruno de Villenoisy, who for a time produced Aboriginal

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<sup>1</sup> A. Curthoys, 'Television Before Television', *Continuum: The Australian Journal Of Media And Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1991, p.1.

documentaries for the ABC, argues the Aboriginal documentary in mainstream television reduces the invisibility of Aborigines to the rest of Australian society, many others argue that there is no hope that mainstream television can produce anything original, innovative, or politically challenging.<sup>2</sup> Marcia Langton and Gary Foley have been especially dismissive of the commercial networks and mainstream public television. In her book, *Well, I Heard It On The Radio And I Saw It On The Television*, Langton has little to say about public television, the ABC and SBS. Foley wrote in 1999 that: ‘When Kooris were referred to in television it was only on *Four Corners* or some other news or current affairs program, where they were invariably presented as “victims”, or people with problems’. Television depictions of Aborigines, he argues, invariably involved variations on a racist construction of Aboriginality as being lazy blacks, drunken blacks.<sup>3</sup> Also in his recent book *Australian Television; A Genealogy of Great Moments*, Alan McKee dismisses the overwhelming impact of Aboriginal involvement in mainstream television.<sup>4</sup>

While some scholars have addressed the effects of racist stereotyping of Aborigines in television, what is still glaringly missing is a balanced discussion of the impact of television in breaking down old stereotypes, while conversely creating new ones. One exception to this general picture is anthropologist Megan McCullough, who has been critical of Langton’s failure to recognise the importance of Aborigines on mainstream television. She writes:

It is possible to see how Langton’s dismissal of mainstream television in Australia was perhaps hasty. The Aboriginal programs unit at the ABC demonstrates that Aboriginal mainstream television can effectively and interestingly juggle identity politics with the nuts and bolts of production, reception and distribution without compromising the complexity of the Aboriginal political positions and cultural positionalities.... she [Langton] appears to judge independent cinema and remote

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<sup>2</sup> B. De Villenoisy, *Topics of interest in Aboriginal documentaries*, unpublished essay, University of Technology, Sydney, 1990, pp. 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> G. Foley, *Koori Engagement With Television*, Gary Foley’s Koori history website, Melbourne, 1999. [http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/essay\\_17.html](http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/essay_17.html)

<sup>4</sup> A. McKee, *Australian Television: A genealogy of great moments*, Melbourne, 2001.

Aboriginal media associations more valuable, more worthy of both the title and state funding.<sup>5</sup>

While there are valid criticisms about the way Aborigines have been represented on television, I argue that there have been significant changes in television images of Aborigines as a result both of the actions of increasing numbers of non-Aboriginal people sympathetic to their cause and to a slow but increasing access by Aboriginal people to mainstream television via documentary films. While Australian television makers may have a long way to go in terms of reaching the 'ideal' state of representing Aboriginal issues, what has been achieved to date has been remarkable when compared to other indigenous involvement in mainstream public broadcasting and commercial networks throughout the Western and colonised world. In her article Faye Ginsburg expresses her concern for the disregard of Australian achievement in this field when she writes:

Perhaps due to television's distinctly national profile, ephemeral character, and middle-brow status amongst intellectuals and artists, the APU [Aboriginal Programs Unit within the Australian Broadcasting Corporation] has had virtually no recognition outside of Australia, despite the quality of the work it produces. Its programs bear consideration in terms of form, substance and reception; and the unit itself is of interest as a precedent-setting model for indigenous people as their concerns in the televisual imaginary of the nation state and beyond.<sup>6</sup>

Ginsburg expressed these ideas in 1993, yet the productions made by the APU and the IPU [Indigenous Programs Unit within the Special Broadcasting Service] remains virtually unrecognised even by Australian scholars, except where central Australian Aboriginal content is involved. Most academic work to date has focussed on Aboriginal representation issues in remote and central Australia, and this thesis also challenges the emphasis on certain regions (usually the 'remote north') to the neglect of others (the south-east).

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<sup>5</sup> M. McCullough, *Re-positioning Aboriginality: The Films of Frances Peters and Tracey Moffatt*, Master of Arts thesis (unpublished), Department of Anthropology, New York University 1995, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> F. Ginsburg, 'Station Identification: The Aboriginal Programs Unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation', *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 9 no. 2, 1993, p. 92.

I have been not only a long time television viewer, but also, from 1989 to 1996, a maker of Aboriginal television documentary, an experience I discuss in detail in Chapter Three. I will be referring mostly to those Aboriginal television programs produced between 1958 and 1998, with fewer references to programs and series produced after that time. In the thesis as a whole, I have wanted to use my own experience to develop insights into the Aboriginal television industry, and the political, aesthetic, and ethical issues which confront Aboriginal television filmmakers. I acknowledge those Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal documentary filmmakers who persist in breaking through the barriers within mainstream television and who remain largely ignored by scholars and archivists. There are serious consequences when media experts and supporters of the Aboriginal cause do not present a balanced view of Aboriginal representation in television. Highlighting what is offensive and racist rather than giving a balanced view denies opportunity for Aboriginal people to make their own decisions about television, to harness it for their own benefit, and to enter into an honest dialogue with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences. Without such opportunities, both are unable to defend and debate the issues that most concern them against those who are less sympathetic and aggressive.

One of the most fundamental criticisms put forward in this thesis is that Aboriginal television documentary, whether made by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people, still adheres very often to the idea of the *noble savage*. The very phrase *noble savage* is itself a contradiction, and the terms *noble* and *savage*, when separated, indicate a paradox that has existed throughout television's history in Australia. There has been an oscillation between the two, the idea of Aborigines as *noble* or alternatively as *savages*. Throughout Australia's colonial history, Aborigines may once have been thought of as *noble*, then as *savages*, only to return to their

being *noble* once again.<sup>7</sup> I argue that television documentary has not been able to escape these enduring stereotypes of Aboriginal people, and that while academic commentators have criticised the use of the savage stereotype, they have not seriously criticised the idea of Aborigines as noble, which in my view is just as futile and destructive.

It is also part of my argument that within the Australian film and television industry as a whole there are some areas thought to be more *noble* than others, i.e., fiction being more cultural than non-fiction; independent filmmakers are regarded as more ethical than their in-house television peers; cinema is seen to be more highbrow intellectual than television. Within documentary itself, there are constructed opposite poles rather like the division between noble and savage, good and bad, real and unreal, community and mainstream.

Key words used in this thesis in addition to *noble* and *savage* are *Aboriginal* and *non-Aboriginal*. This is to distinguish between people of Aboriginal descent and those who are not. Some people choose not to use the word *Aborigines* because they think it is offensive. However the differences between the term *Aborigines* and *Aboriginal* is just that one is a noun and the latter is an adjective. These terms are preferable to indigenous and non-indigenous as there will be no other indigenous people that I will be referring to in my analysis of the *noble savage* and indigenous is mostly a generic adjective, whereas Aborigine/Aboriginal is noticeably Australian except for Canada. Occasionally I will refer to Aborigines as 'blacks' and non-Aborigines as 'whites' especially where the thesis makes specific references to 'skin-colour' as part of its analysis of the *noble savage*. The term *mainstream broadcasting* generally refers to public television broadcasting such as the ABC and SBS. *Network* generally refers to the commercial channels that are privately owned and

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<sup>7</sup> J. Woolmington, *Aborigines in Colonial Society, 1788-1850: Noble Savages to Rural Pests*, Armidale, 1988.

controlled. An *Aboriginal documentary* is a film that can be made by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal filmmakers, however the content and subject must be Aboriginal. A *television documentary* is a documentary film that has been aired on television. This includes films that have been made by independent filmmakers as well as in-house producers. The term *film* can refer variously to fiction films, videos, programs, documentaries and items. If they are non-fiction or drama features and short dramas they will be specified as such, but on the whole 'film' will refer to documentaries that have screened on television unless specified otherwise. Because the a large number of the Aboriginal documentaries that the thesis refers to have been shot and edited on 16 mm film they will be called films and not videos. Aboriginal documentaries can be shot and edited on 16 mm film and transferred to one-inch videotape for broadcasting.

Once they have screened on television they can also be called *programs*. All dates for documentaries mentioned in the thesis are provided in the appendices and most dates refer to the year it aired on television rather than its completion date. A program only refers to a particular timeslot on television. For example a one-off documentary that has been shot and edited on film and made by an independent filmmaker can also be referred to as a television program once it has a timeslot on television. The documentary entitled *Lousy Little Sixpence* was made by an independent documentary filmmaker but was also screened on television. Although it can be referred to as a film it can also be referred to as a television program because it has been given a television timeslot. But when aired during a specific television series the film can be referred to as an episode of the television series called *Aboriginal Australia*. This example is common in the television industry as a whole.

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Woolmington says Aborigines were initially perceived as noble savages until such time that Aborigines began to obstruct the new settlers in their efforts to graze and cultivate land.

In-house productions (that is films that are made by employees of the broadcasters) can be both a film and a program. The one-off documentary film entitled *Tent Embassy*, which I made while at the ABC and the production and reception of which I will discuss in Chapter 3, was shot and edited on film but aired in the *True Stories* series, and will be referred to as a film and a program. Aboriginal Studies on the *Open Learning* series on the ABC were shot and edited on videotape, but each episode will be called a program. However for the purposes of this thesis there are episodes that feature Aboriginal people, and they are therefore referred to as a component within Aboriginal documentary. In terms of non-fiction films I will be discussing a range of documentary genres: ethnographic films, nature and wildlife programs and historical documentaries. In addition to the Aboriginal produced documentary series on the ABC and SBS other documentary films I have researched for the thesis are marked in Appendix H.

Because so little has been written on this topic the research methods used for the thesis include extensive oral historical accounts and interviews. Oral histories have been collected from David MacDougall, Vaughan Hinton, Jenny Brockie, Greg and Cathy Eatock, Susan Coombs, Sylvia Lawson, Trevor Graham, Bob Connolly, Andrew Lawrence, David Bradbury, Ian Dunlop, Catherine Serventy, Darlene Johnson, Nicky Tyndale-Biscoe, Barry Minchin, Gary Bryson, and Dasha Ross. I have also compiled a comprehensive appendix listing archival sources of Aboriginal documentary films that are held by the ABC, SBS TV and *Film Australia*. In comparison to the numbers of scholars who have written about drama or feature films, a much lesser number of scholars have specifically written about Aboriginal documentaries. Most of what has been written about Aboriginal documentary films has been written by other filmmakers, or by journalists who have interviewed the filmmakers.



Chapter One explores the development of Aboriginal television documentary by non-Aboriginal filmmakers, and asks whether the coloniser can play a meaningful role in Aboriginal television and documentary filmmaking. Chapter Two explores the entry of Aboriginal people into mainstream television documentary filmmaking, in the ABC, SBS, and elsewhere. The following chapter, Chapter Three, is a description and reflection on my own experience as a filmmaker in the ABC, first in the Aboriginal Programs Unit, and later as a series producer. Chapter Four examines the various ways in which the idea of the *noble savage* has emerged in television documentary films. Non-Aboriginal filmmakers have developed these ideas, but some Aboriginal-made films perpetuate them too. Finally, in Chapter Five I explore the relationship between the Aboriginal filmmaker, the politics of self-representation and the notion of the Aboriginal community.

The short-term aim of the thesis is to provide a unique and extensive coverage on the topic of Aboriginal representation in television documentary films for academics, filmmakers and the general Aboriginal community who have particular interests in Aboriginal Studies, Australian History, and Film Studies. The long-term aim is to provoke discussion amongst the broader Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community and to challenge current attitudes about the way we perceive Aborigines in the film and television industry. What I most hope for is for black and white filmmakers to become more thorough in their representations of Aboriginal people, as human beings deserving of justice and constructive criticism, and fearlessly challenge the binary framework of nobles and savages which have bedevilled Aboriginal documentary films for so long.

## Chapter One

### *'A legitimate part to play?' Non-Aboriginal documentary filmmaking.*

Marcia Langton has written that 'the easiest and most "natural" form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible'.<sup>8</sup> Yet this statement ignores that fact that there have been significant numbers of documentaries and current affairs about Aborigines on television from its earliest days. Over ninety percent of the 6000 items<sup>9</sup> assessed by film archivist Michael Lee are not dramatic films, but non-fiction films according to archivist for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, (AIATSIS).<sup>10</sup> Documentaries made about Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal people have screened on television since 1958, and here I examine them from the earliest examples through to the late 1990s. I ask why Aboriginal subjects have been so popular in television documentary and current affairs, consider the criticisms levelled at white control over Aboriginal images on television, and look at some examples of black-white cooperation in documentary filmmaking.

Documentaries were being made about Aborigines even before television came to Australia. Mostly produced by scientists, artists, and even government departments, they had varying purposes and audiences. Films like Tom Haddon's *Torres Strait Islands* (1898, possibly the world's first ethnographic film), and later films like *Derniers Indigenes Australiens* (1912), *Northwest Scientific and Exploration syndicate in the Kimberleys* (1917), *Astronomers and Aborigines* (1922), *The Tree of Knowledge* (1926), and *Australian Aviator* (1927), and others such as Francis Birtles' docu-drama film *Coorab in the island of Ghosts* (1929), *The Real*

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<sup>8</sup> M. Langton, *Well I Heard It On The Radio, And I Saw It On The Television*, Sydney, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> M. Leigh, 'Curiouser And Curiouser', in S. Murray (ed.), *Back Of Beyond: Discovering Australian Film and Television*, Sydney, 1988, p. 78-89.

*Australia Kinegrams* (1929) are just a few of those that were made before television arrived and eventually used on television (even if just as footage). We can still view these films on *Dreaming Reels*, an initiative by the Aboriginal members of *Screensound Australia*.

Governments spent time demonstrating goodwill in their assimilation policies in documentary film format. The Government Film Unit, which was set up in the 1930s, made documentaries about Aborigines; from as early as the 1937 docu-drama entitled *The Native Problem in Queensland* to Ian Dunlop's very different 1964 documentary entitled *The Aborigines in Australia*. The *Movietone* newsreels between the 1930s and the 1970s that were screening in cinemas all across Australia also highlighted many non-fiction stories on Aborigines. In brief, Aborigines were not all that invisible, even before television. A list of *Movietone* news items on Aborigines, held at *Screensound Australia*, is given in Appendix A. Most well known of these newsreels today is *Native Girl In Fairy Land*, a short story about two Aboriginal girls from Melville Island who were fostered out to a white family in Toorak in Melbourne.

While Aboriginal people had little or no control over their images in the early days of television in Australia, many Aborigines however were to become the subjects of numerous television programs in the first three decades. Documentary films on Aboriginal subjects began screening on Australian television in 1958, its second year of operation. The first documentary series *Walkabout*, by Charles and Elsa Chauvel, ran for thirteen weeks on the ABC that year, followed by Vincent Serventy's *Nature Walkabout* which ran for twenty six weeks the same year on the Nine network, airing on Sunday mornings at 10am. This series

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<sup>10</sup> F. Peters-Little interview with Andrew Lawrence, November 2000.

followed Vincent Serventy and his young family travelling across the continent.<sup>11</sup> Continuing in the same format about families on their personal expeditions of the Australian outback the *Leyland Brothers World* series went into production as early as 1961 for the Seven Network, producing over forty episodes for the network throughout the 1970s. As recent as 2001 Mal Leyland returned to television producing one off episodes without his brother Mike, but now with his wife, grown daughter and son-in-law. In 1976 the ABC screened Harry Butler *In The Wild*, a 26 episode series, followed by the Malcolm Douglas' *Adventure* series that aired on the Seven Network. Butler who was a Tasmanian naturalist and conservation expert became famous for his fanatical interests in plants and animals, but would nevertheless regularly feature Aborigines in his program also. Both Butler and crocodile farmer and filmmaker Douglas dropped the family expedition format earlier set by Chauvel, Serventy and the Leyland brothers, and made personality-driven protagonists a popular style. Douglas's raw commentary of his outback journeys have appeared on the Seven Network for over thirty years.

Following Douglas in the same format was 'new aged sensitive but rugged' Aibly Mangles in the late 1970s, and in the nineties high-camp cowboy archetype Troy Dann. Douglas, Dann, and Mal Leyland have all continued to have their documentary films shown on *The World Around Us* series, which usually goes to air on Saturday afternoons at 5pm on the Seven Network and Prime TV. Appearing on television much later in the 1980s, the ABC nature and wildlife series *Bush Tucker Man* filled the gap that the successful *Harry Butler in the Wild* series had left behind. Airing over twenty six episodes, Les Hiddens, who is the bush tucker man is also a highly specialised protagonist like Butler but was nevertheless a more

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<sup>11</sup> F. Peters-Little interviews with Catherine Serventy, November 2001.

robust personality and connoisseur of edible native plant and animal life, noted for wearing his army fatigues and a strangely modified Aussie slouch hat.

Following these documentary series television through the sixties and seventies presented most of their short documentary stories in current affairs programs and in the occasional sixty-minute documentary like the ABC's *A Changing Race*. Programs like *Countrywide*, *Monday Conference*, *This Day Tonight*, *A Big Country*, *Weekend Magazine*, *Four Corners* and *Chequerboard* all carried Aboriginal stories. A list of ABC programs is given in Appendix B. This testifies that invisibility was not the problem in television. Although not listed here, Aboriginal political issues were frequently featured on nightly news and current affair programs on all the commercial channels as well. In view of these extensive lists of programs with Aboriginal content, it is clear that white Australians have been taught by television about Aborigines more than by any other form of communication, long before Aboriginal studies was taught in schools. Surely it is more correct to say that television in fact *broke* the invisibility of Aborigines to mainstream white Australia.

Eleanor Bourke who played a significant part in the production of the Aboriginal Studies *Open Learning* educational series on the ABC argues that television plays an important role in setting the record straight. Although I would agree with Bourke that television must take a moral and social responsibility in revoking racist stereotyping of Aborigines as childlike and simplistic primitive *savages*,<sup>12</sup> I argue that television news and current affairs and documentaries *have* on occasion attempted to tackle the *savage* stereotype, but now it needs to address the *noble* stereotype. By sweepingly blaming television news and current affairs and documentary programs we may be shooting the messenger and neglecting to attack the

biggest bearers of racist distortion and/or invisibility - the Australian press, radio, Australian cinema and television drama.

In my interviews with Aboriginal filmmakers I asked how they saw racist stereotypes of Aborigines emerge on television. They generally answered in reference to the invisibility of Aborigines in television dramas, or they talked about a stereotype in news and current affairs. However it was unclear if they objected to news and current affairs programs that were *about* racism, or only to programs that seemed intended to incite racial hatred against blacks. In the case of Aboriginal alcoholism, what are we to make of the story covered by Aboriginal reporter Stan Grant who travelled to Wilcannia to do a story about alcoholism amongst Aborigines? Are we to say that Grant was aiming to incite racial hatred against Aborigines? Even when discussing commercial television, Lester Bostock's report for the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) never clearly states *how* television documentaries incite racial hatred towards Aborigines. He says:

The media still persists in presenting stereotypical images of Aborigines. There are many examples ranging from well-known cases of John Laws...and Alan Jones. There are also letters of complaint that are often sent to the television and radio stations expressing concerns about the discriminatory attitudes being presented by some media commentators.<sup>13</sup>

But could Bostock be thinking more of radio broadcasters than documentary filmmakers? It is a very difficult thing indeed to prove racism, there is a danger that if Aborigines do not clearly define who and what is being racist on television, they are left without recourse and opportunity to sufficiently strike back.

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<sup>12</sup> Colin Bourke, Eleanor Bourke and Bill Edwards (eds), *Aboriginal Australia : an introductory reader in Aboriginal studies*, Brisbane, 1998, p. 11

<sup>13</sup> L. Bostock, *From The Dark Side: Survey Of The Portrayal Of Aborigines And Torres Strait Islanders On Commercial Television*, North Sydney, 1993, p. 3.

Nevertheless there are times when programs tend to sensationalise Aborigines and resort to old fashioned stereotyping such as alcoholism, laziness, and so on. Such stereotypes fitted in with the basic assumptions of white Australians in the 1950s and early 1960s, as a researcher, Malcolm Calley, found in 1957. He found that many white Australians thought Aborigines to be dirty and foul smelling with no concept of hygiene, riddled with diseases and sexually promiscuous. Calley's research also revealed that whites believed Aborigines drank more alcohol than they did, and that they handled it badly. They also believed that Aborigines' lazy, unpunctual, thriftless and unreliable characteristics were compounded by an incessant gambling addiction all of which proved them to be mentally inferior to whites. These were the background assumptions that operated in the early years of television.<sup>14</sup> Even so, anti-Aboriginal sentiments such as these did not represent the majority of stories on current affairs. Most television current affairs items on Aboriginal topics in these decades were made by producers and journalists whose stories attempted to arouse white sympathy for Aboriginal rights and injustices. This was partly to do with the nature of these programs, as television journalism sought to expose poverty and suffering generally, and partly to do with the influence on white journalists of political activism led by Aboriginal radicals during the 1960s and 1970s that aimed to prick comfortable Australian consciousness.

#### *A brief history - 1960s to 1970s*

Early television journalism was shot on black and white film, and used techniques such as panning and zooming, poor framing, scenes that begin in mid-sentence and in close-up, the suppressed voice of the interviewer, and dirty sound to offer the look of being on the 'cutting-edge' of society. *Chequerboard* for example, did not uphold a view of Australia as the lucky country, but found poverty, loneliness, neurosis, corruption, mental and physical suffering and

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<sup>14</sup> M. Calley, 'Race Relations on the North Coast of New South Wales', *Oceania*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1957, pp. 190-

other social problems just below the surface of everyday life. Ending before colour television began, it seems as though part of the program's realism was tied up with its grainy black and white images.<sup>15</sup> There was also the new style of *Four Corners* which began in 1961 with one of the stories in the very first episode being called '*The Boomerang Shop*', shot in Brisbane. *Four Corners* replaced the traditional 'voice of God' narration with an on-screen personalised face and body; holding a microphone, interrogating people and situations; a living visible guarantee of the reality being recorded. The studio host's role was minimal, asking questions of the audience. They as innocent bystanders lent a kind of subjective involvement and individual consciousness. The journalists became as much a feature of the stories as the topic itself, stirring and shocking audiences by their probing and interrogative journalistic styles, and many media personalities like Kerry O'Brien and Bill Peach emerged from out of this time. Some of the ABC's leading journalists, like Ray Martin, George Negus, Mike Willesee, and Richard Carlton, moved on to commercial networks, where they continued to broadcast Aboriginal stories.

Political themes that were of the utmost importance to Aboriginal people did not, then, sail by un-noticed by television journalists particularly during the sixties and seventies and early eighties. Political Aboriginal personalities began appearing on television frequently and were seen by Australians as the next generation of activists. This era enjoyed a public face that previous Aboriginal generations had been denied and they had taken full opportunity to use it to their own advantage with designs upon gaining more access and control in the television industry. It is important to recognise that not every Aboriginal person who appeared on television during that period felt exploited, and it is highly arguable that not every Aboriginal person who watched television in NSW felt that television offended them or robbed them of



their Aboriginality. Contrary to the possibility that television possessed an enormous capacity to exploit them or contaminate their cultural identity, Aboriginal people in the south-eastern states of Australia became the willing subjects of television documentaries and news and current affairs programs decades before Aboriginal broadcasting began in central Australia. Although there were times when they would object to inaccuracies and 'white' slants on their stories, Aboriginal protesters, artists or 'ordinary people from the community' took the opportunity to expose their anger, hurts and horrors nationwide. Strongly influenced by a desire to counteract *savage* portrayals, there were several programs produced for television giving Aboriginal people a voice. Yet they still had no control over production.

Very different from those programs that depicted them only as hunter/gatherers in the natural environment without a voice the first documentary to present Aboriginal people having a political voice was a one-hour documentary that was aired on the ABC in August 1964. Called *A Changing Race*, a title which was to reflect the tide of assimilation, it was presented by Aboriginal pop singer Jimmy Little who had previously had a contract with ATN Channel Seven. The documentary interviewed over eighteen relatively unknown Aboriginal people who were able to express their vigorous and personal views on racism, justice and equality. Regardless of whether their black faces and voices were welcomed by white television audiences, journalists who were themselves on a steep learning curve in Aboriginal affairs could not ignore the tensions and political climate stirring between black and white Australians.

In addition to the Vietnam War, Women's Liberation, and the Springbok demonstrations, black and white activists were influenced by international developments such as the Freedom

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<sup>15</sup> A. Moran, 'Constructing The Nation', in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds), *The Australian Screen*, Ringwood,

rides in the early 1960s and the Black power movement in the late 1960s in America. Activists identified with the Afro-American Civil rights and later Black power movements and like them aspired to get their messages across to white Australia through the media. Getting on television was perhaps one of the main reasons why the Australian 1965 Freedom rides took place. In 1964, after discussions between Peter Westerway and Kumantja Perkins, they agreed that 'getting pictures' would be the most effective way they could get their message to the Australian public.<sup>16</sup> The Freedom rides were covered in part by both 'Four Corners' on ABC television and the *Seven Days* program on Channel 7 (produced by Peter Westerway), perhaps making Aboriginal activist Kumantja Perkins the most notable Aboriginal public figure in the history of Australian politics. The 1967 Referendum brought Australia's attention to activists and writers Faith Bandler and Kath Walker who would be seen to be more composed and responsive than Perkins. Both women expressed a strong need for fairness and reason and the media presented them as such.

The Gurindji strikes on Wave Hill station were covered by the ABC as early as 1968, followed by a spate of stories covering the Yirrkala test land rights case against Nabalco first airing on the ABC in 1971. The following year, the Aboriginal Embassy protesters in 1972 successfully captured the media's imagination by setting up a tent on the lawns of parliament house and calling it their embassy. They were equipped with their own Aboriginal press secretary. Personalities such as Gary Foley, Paul Coe, Bobbi Sykes, Bob Maza and Bob McLeod would now be referred to by the media as 'spokespersons' and leaders for the Aboriginal community. Embassy leader Gary Foley remembers:

Back in 1972 Koori political activists demonstrated that they had mastered one of the possibilities that television offered when they extremely successfully manipulated national and international TV news crews, and projected their 'Aboriginal Embassy'

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1989, pp. 149 – 170.

<sup>16</sup> Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: an Australian Journey*, Allen and Unwin, forthcoming.

protest action to a vast international audience. The television coverage of the Embassy demonstrations put the indigenous Land Rights struggle on the international political agenda, and the symbol specifically created to show up dramatically on a television screen, the red, black and yellow Aboriginal flag, has since become the most recognised image of Aboriginal people today. Such was the power of television tapped by those Koori political activists of that era, and the result was the globalisation of the Australian Koori struggle.<sup>17</sup>

Aboriginal people also appeared as actors and as subjects for nature and wildlife programs. In cooperating with these programs, these people were not as naive and offended by television as some many imagine. The *Alcheringa* series ran for twelve weeks with episodes of boomerang making, trading, stone axe-making, cane making, fishing, women gathering food, kangaroo hunting, emu hunting, turtle hunting, shellfish gathering and mutton bird gathering. The descendants of the original actors who acted in them are willing to have images of their deceased relatives and their traditional culture remembered and aired on television.<sup>18</sup>

The ABC 1973 docu-drama program *Basically Black* evolved from the Redfern-based National Black Theatre (NBT). Gary Foley suggests that in adapting the play for television, the 'ABC had compromised many of the most effective satirical barbs thus forcing them to make far less powerful political statements in the program'. In my view, however, the program that went to air did not suppress powerful political messages but instead, in the time frame of a thirty-minute program, included some political satire. There were satirical characters such as 'Super-boong', was based on a character that rescued Aborigines from racist situations. In the opening titles of another skit, the footage shows two white men pissing on the head of an Aboriginal man in the bushes who then says, 'It doesn't matter how many times it happens, you never get used to it'. In another skit an actor confronts the white

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<sup>17</sup> Foley, *Koori Engagement With Television*, p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> W. Borchers, 'The Visual Record - An ABC Treasure Trove', paper presented to *Alternative Australias*, symposium organised by the Australian Academy of the Humanities, Canberra, 12 November 2001. In her presentation Borchers emphasised the value of cultural maintenance in the ABC series *Alcheringa*.

parents of his girlfriend and confesses that he is not going to marry their daughter but instead race her off to become a revolutionary activist in Mozambique. Some of the program's political message, meant to offend white people, had even offended blacks.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to know why Foley thinks the ABC had quashed the political messages of the program.

The 'resistance' paradigm is a particularly complex one in terms of representation. Depending on the viewer, the activist can be construed as either *noble* or *savage*. Journalists know this to be the cases; they know that while some sympathise others condemn, and they know that arousing strong polemical views in your audience is what makes one a good television journalist. In the 1960s and 1970s, many journalists expressed views that they knew to be unpopular with the white Australian public. As in the case of the land rights issue, there are many instances where journalists were sympathetic to the Aboriginal cause and somewhat anti-government.

Alongside this fascination with Aboriginal politics in the sixties and seventies, were stories about those Aboriginal people who in the face of adversity became successful. Stories about Aboriginal individuals who set up their own enterprises were recognised in programs about their boomerang shops, farms, and ministries. Celebrated Aboriginal personalities to appear on television during the fifties, sixties, and seventies included artist Albert Namatjira, actors Rosie Kunoth-Monks and Tudawali, singer Harold Blair, Wimbledon tennis champion Yvonne Goolagong, international boxer Lionel Rose, and pop-idol Jimmy Little. Some of these Aboriginal personalities, people like Namatjira, Tudawali, Gulpilil, and Rose, were seen as 'torn between two worlds' (an idea discussed at greater length in Chapter Four), and as representing the inevitable tragedies in Aboriginal life. The activists, however, were

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Coe, in interview in the film, *Tent Embassy*, explains that previous generations of Aborigines were

dissatisfied that prominent Aboriginal people did not use their popular status to be more vocal and political, and feared that their examples of 'success' would become the milestones by which white Australians would judge the potential of more disadvantaged Aborigines. They saw Goolagong, Blair, and Little 'jacky-jackies' because they had not failed in white society, and would for many years to come accuse them of 'selling their people out' to white society. Yvonne Goolagong was rejected by members of the tent embassy contending that at the height of her career she had insulted other Aborigines by accepting the honorary white status by an apartheid South African government<sup>20</sup> Goolagong remained overseas for a couple of decades, only to return to reconnect with the Aboriginal sporting community and to meet with a whole new generation of young Aboriginal people who had not heard of her.

To this day footage of opera singer Harold Blair singing to white audiences continues to be used in documentary films as a visually classic example of assimilation. Although Blair is no longer with us, a documentary has been made about his life. Directed by filmmaker Steve Thomas, who directed *Black Man's Houses*, the filmmakers interview Blair's daughter. In the film one is able to share a poignant moment with Nerida Blair, whom we see needlessly apologising for her father's so-called 'weakness' to assimilation, when she says she wished he had been more political. This is by no means the only example where black virtuosity dominates the 'reality' of another Aboriginal generation's values. The 1970s had been a time when Aborigines challenged each other on the basis of who was more 'blacker or political etc. than others'. Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little, although the board member of several Aboriginal arts and education bodies, is another. Aboriginal presenter Kelrick Martin asked him in an interview in 1999 if he thought it was unfair of whites to judge other Aborigines by his own success. Little, who was bewildered as to why people would even want to judge

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threatened by the direct political action taken by the activists at the Embassy, including some of the more confronting language they used. *Tent Embassy*, ABC TV, August, 1992.

anyone by his own choice of career and success, answered that he thought it would be a particularly useless thing indeed if anyone, black or white, should judge anyone else by the successes or failures of another human being. His response was not the one the presenter hoped for, and the original question - which queried Little's naivety about the white domination over him - was quashed before the interview was screened. The irony is however that Little, who grew up on CummerooGUNja Mission during the thirties, grew up under a more oppressive regime than Martin did. However Martin's generation, although it purports itself to be a generation of resistance and self-determination (like the generation before it), has nonetheless become more integrated into the white educational, legal and social systems than people of Little's generation. After the interview Little could sense he did not satisfy Martin's curiosity but later admitted that he had heard the question a few decades before and thought it to be just as loaded now as it was then.

*A brief history - late 1970s and early 1980s*

By the late seventies and early eighties images of Aboriginal people in television became slightly more multi-dimensional. Older activists were not so popular as they were in earlier decades, and stories about the 'quiet achievers' had all but disappeared because they were thought to be patronising and repetitious. These older-style stories were replaced by stories that took a more sophisticated view of Aborigines. People like Pat Dodson, Bill Needjie (the Kakadu Man), Burnum Burnum, Robert Bropho and Essie Coffee were cultural icons while Michael Mansell, Marcia Langton, Linda Burney, and Pat O'Shane were political intellectuals now noted for their regular appearances on television. A new generation of Aboriginal artists became the focus of media attention, now seen to be making the connection between tradition and culture. Black art was more popular than black politics. There were frequent television

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<sup>20</sup> C. Tatz, *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport*, Sydney, 1995, p. 276.

stories about visual artists (and photographers) from Tracey Moffatt to Emily Kngwarreye from the central desert, or writers like Jack Davis and Sally Riley. Performing artists ranged from the dancers from the Torres Strait Islands to Stephen Page's Bangarra Dance Theatre, from singers like Archie Roach and the Tiddas, and actors such as David Gulpilil and Justine Saunders.

For urbanised Aborigines the eighties was a period when the political had to be cultural, when it became necessary to link the authenticity of their political views to a tradition and culture that for many of them no longer existed except genetically and spiritually. Often judged or even rejected by critics for not being black enough (Michael Mansell) or authentic enough (Sally Morgan) urban Aboriginal identity came under the scrutiny of those who wanted to maintain a purity of experience, knowledge and sometimes even blood. Blacks and whites could now judge whether one was Aboriginal enough, political enough, or 'community' enough. They could be judged for their behaviour, choice of clothes, accents, and careers. Urban Aborigines who stepped outside Aboriginal cultural boundaries on television in the eighties were reporter Stan Grant, who was the anchor man for Seven's *Today Tonight* current affairs program, and Ernie Dingo, who hosted the *World Around Us* series and the *Great Outdoors*. Both were criticised as well as praised by the white and black communities.

What was all this supposed to mean? Hadn't the early protesters been fighting for the freedom to choose? Why couldn't they accept Aboriginal people in television to be any character or personality they wanted to be? The answer surprisingly enough is in many cases 'no'; anyone choosing to work in the mainstream is seen to automatically compromise their

Aboriginality.<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal activist Gary Foley has argued that Aboriginal people were being robbed of their identity and values because of television:

Aborigines fought a battle for cultural survival that was in direct contradiction to the prevailing modern notions of individuality, capitalism and mass consumerism that were ever present on television.<sup>22</sup>

What is often criticised as a lack of Aboriginal representation on television is perhaps not about the number of Aboriginal programs on television but what is perceived as lack of Aboriginal control *over* television, and lack of Aboriginal perspectives represented on television. There were grave concerns that Aborigines were not in control of their own images. This was a matter of major concern in the early 1970s. In interview, film reviewer and scholar Sylvia Lawson described the time she and a few other whites attended the first meeting with the new Aboriginal Arts Board. The board was first established as an arm of the Australia Council in 1971 to handle the submissions dealing with artist projects that contained Aboriginal content and reference in the performing, literary and visual arts. Lawson remembers meeting with the first board, who asked them to take into consideration that this was now the time in which blacks should make their own demands on their own behalf without white domination or interference. Lawson said that she felt that this was a reasonable request and had agreed to keep silent, on the principle that she had much to learn from them, especially about her own desires to interfere with the new Aboriginal body. While there had been times when she knew that she had some ideas that would be productive, she kept silent. She went further to explain that while there had been times when she wanted to 'treat people as equals' by offering her advice or even criticism, she kept herself in check so as to not be seen to take away the rights of those who were more oppressed than she was.

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<sup>21</sup> In the *Tent Embassy* interviews, Paul Coe and Lois O'Donohue debate the purpose of Aboriginal people working in the mainstream or for the community, with Coe arguing that Aborigines working in the public service robs them of their Aboriginality and O'Donohue arguing that Aborigines must choose for themselves what they want to do for a career in their lives. *Tent Embassy*, ABC TV, August, 1992.



### *Early collaborations*

From the 1980s to the early 1990s an important source of documentary on Aboriginal subjects were those films made independently, and then usually sold subsequently to the ABC, who screened them on a series called *The First Australians* which went for eight weeks. The series had been a timeslot where Aboriginal presenters Bryan Syron and Justine Saunders would introduce the films then discuss them briefly with a panel after their screening. The mid 1980s was a honeymoon period for white independent documentary filmmakers, with the total of documentary films on any subject financed by the Australian Film Commission (AFC) peaking at over sixty between 1983 and 1987 (there were less than twenty financed in the years immediately before and after this peak period). Appendix C lists the independent documentaries funded between 1980 and 1991.

Although white filmmakers were still involved, these independent films stirred up new directions in their accessibility to Aboriginal participation. From the mid seventies to the mid eighties white independent filmmakers were keen to see revolutionary new styles in documentary filmmaking and wanted to explore Aboriginal issues in more depth. Encouraged by personal relationships with Aboriginal actors and writers, white filmmakers aspired to give artistic and cultural control to Aborigines as co-producers, consultants or presenters of their films. They wanted to co-produce with Aboriginal people so that their films would have greater depth and truth, and also to demonstrate their support for Aboriginal self-determination. Aboriginal people developed associations with directors affiliated to the Sydney Filmmakers Cooperative (SFC), who adhered to the principle that self-determination

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<sup>22</sup> Foley, *Koori Engagement With Television*, p. 1.

for women equalled self-representation, and who discussed some of the basic principles of documentary filmmaking.<sup>23</sup>

One example of these new documentaries was Martha Ansara's film *My Survival as an Aborigine*, which screened on the ABC in 1978. Revealing the failure of the government's housing and relocation schemes in Brewarrina in the far north-west of New South Wales, it was developed in consultation with Essie Coffey. The film showed Essie Coffey's large family, forced to live in a 'white nuclear family' style commission home on Dodge City Reserve. Although it continued the earlier ABC documentary style that revelled in the poverty, loneliness, and physical suffering of others, *My Survival as an Aborigine* was different in that it expressed a humanity and strength that existed amidst the poverty. Through meeting Essie and her young and large family it personalised her story. This was a crucial element that perhaps sensational journalism had missed in earlier days.

Following that example was Alec Morgan's documentary film *Lousy Little Sixpence* that also personalised Aborigines in the story. Written with Aboriginal writer Gerry Bostock, Aboriginal characters testified to what was then an unspoken history, of the stolen generations of Aboriginal children. It wouldn't be until *Lousy Little Sixpence* went to air on television before audiences were even able to review government archival footage from a different perspective particularly from the *MacRobertson expeditions* and the *Native Problem in Queensland*. Now one could see the footage in another context, of the thousands of Aboriginal children who tragically were forcibly removed and placed into white foster care as a part of a duplicitous assimilation policy that not only disconnected them from their own families but also from their Aboriginal heritage. Morgan's film, shown on television in 1982,

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<sup>23</sup> F. Peters-Little interview with David Bradbury, August 2001.

screened to audiences that were now more informed and aware of the complexities that government policies well intended or not, posed for Aboriginal people. Morgan's film drew on footage from films originally made by the government film unit and ethnographers which had been used in the 1950s and 1960s to dupe Australian audiences into believing that assimilation policies for fostering out Aboriginal children was beneficial and done for humanitarian reasons. The original purposes of these films took a 180-degree turn when *Lousy Little Sixpence* exposed the hidden stories behind the early footage. In Morgan's film we watch the images in a different context with Aboriginal voices adding crucial details to the story behind the pictures.

Morgan's film was groundbreaking in its analysis and use of archival footage. Archival film footage is perhaps the most powerful and convincing format available for Australian audiences to grasp the history of government policy and how it has impacted upon Aborigines. Yet it remains to be seen how 'dated' Morgan's film will become in its treatment of the 'stolen generations'. Historian Peter Read, who appeared as a founding member of Link Up in David MacDougall's 1985 documentary *Link-Up Diary*, has since argued that in the mid 1980s people were not as politically motivated in wanting to connect with their Aboriginal roots as they are now.<sup>24</sup>

Other films in this period practising cooperation between black and white filmmakers included *Munda Nyuringu*, produced by Jan Roberts and Robert Bropho, a Nyoongah activist from Western Australia. This was a documentary about the Kalgoorlie Gold Fields, the pitiful compensation, and the relationship between the local Aboriginal tribes and the Western Mining Corporation. *Couldn't Be Fairer*, made by Denis O'Rourke and Aboriginal activist

Mick Miller, exposed the overt racism and hypocrisy of whites living in northern Queensland.

Other films to screen on television bringing new messages to Australian audiences included Tom Haydon's *The Last Tasmanian*, even if it did present a controversial point of view that resulted in having the Aboriginal Tasmanian descendants challenge its accuracy in a televised discussion. There was also Alessandro Cavadini and Carolyn Strachan's *Two Laws*, a film about the conflict Aboriginal people have with honouring their own traditional laws while being under the governance of white law. Graeme Isaac and Ned Lander's *Wrong Side of the Road* showed the journey beset by racism and hardship of Aboriginal bands *Us Mob* and *No Fixed Address* across South Australia. David Bradbury's controversial film *State of Shock* courageously exposes the domestic violence that led to the killing of an Aboriginal woman by her husband in the abandoned northern Queensland Aboriginal community of Weipa. Other films made by independent white filmmakers in collaboration with Aboriginal communities included *On Sacred Ground*, about the Noonkanbah Demonstrations, *Radio Redfern 88.9FM*, or *Dirt Cheap*. These are just a few of the more groundbreaking films that were to screen on television during the 1980s.

During the 1990s films made about Aboriginal issues by white and black filmmakers working together were just as compelling. One example is the 1999 documentary *Bush Mechanics*, produced and directed by white filmmaker David Batty sharing a co-directorial role with Francis Kelly who regularly appears in the film. The film's success has inspired the *Bush Mechanics* series. Other films include Graham Chase's *Kimberley Mob* and Trevor Graham's *Land Bilong Islanders*, as well as *Aeroplane Dance* and *Mabo, the Life of an Island Man*.

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<sup>24</sup> P. Read, 'Film and the Stolen Generations', paper presented to the AIATSIS film discussion night at the

Further films made by independent white filmmakers in collaboration with Aboriginal organisations and individuals included Tom Zubrycki's *Bran nue day* and *Whiteys Like Us*, Ivo Burum's *Satellite Dreaming*, and Frank Ravjic's *Exile and the Kingdom*. John Pilger's *Secret Country*, made for the ABC, was heavily criticised for being heavily biased in favour of Aborigines. ABC in-house documentary producer Jenny Brockie made the award-winning documentary *Cop It Sweet*, which impacted upon the relationships between Redfern Police's double standard treatment of Aborigines in Redfern. There was even Bruce Belsham's *Frontier* series, which was based upon the Henry Reynolds book.

### *Conclusion*

With such a long and extensive list of Aboriginal programming that has been on television since 1958 it is hard to understand why one would argue that Aborigines have been invisible. Nor can one say that racist stereotyping has been the only mode of white documentary filmmaking. As this chapter has shown, the picture is far more complex.

## Chapter Two

### *The Aboriginal Film and Television Industry*

Though Aboriginal people had become involved in filmmaking for television to an unprecedented extent during the 1980s, even greater change was on the way. Aboriginal people were being trained and employed as filmmakers in unprecedented numbers, and Aboriginal film units were formed within both the ABC and SBS. At the same time, the late eighties and early nineties brought with them a devastating blow to white filmmakers who wanted to make documentaries about Aborigines. It was now harder for independent filmmakers to get funding from the Australian Film Commission, and to get pre-sales, to make Aboriginal documentaries. White producers began making fewer programs about Aborigines, and Aboriginal filmmakers now had increased access and responsibility within mainstream television broadcasters, for Aboriginal control in television programming. This chapter traces these changes in detail, and investigates the impact of Aboriginal filmmakers on Aboriginal television documentary.

#### *The Aboriginal Units in the ABC and SBS*

After twenty-three years of a Liberal government a newly elected Labour Whitlam government was keen to implement Aboriginal radio broadcasting in remote regions. It was anyone's guess to see how this would come about. Initially there was an intention to have Aboriginal broadcasting presented in Aboriginal languages in central Australia on the ABC, but through a combination of events Aboriginal television production units were installed in the urban centres of Sydney.<sup>25</sup>

The first national Aboriginal media conference was held, with Lester Bostock in the chair, in Alice Springs in 1983. Participants established a group called the National Australian Indigenous Broadcasting Association (NAIBA) which set out a list of objectives, which it wanted heard by SBS and the ABC.<sup>26</sup> The newly formed group demanded that public broadcasting must ensure that:

- Programs be produced and presented by Aborigines
- Cater for individual need of urban, rural and tribal Aborigines
- Encourage and facilitate Aboriginal communities to maintain their cultures and traditions and pass them on to their descendants
- Be sensitive to the diverse and changing nature of the needs and aspirations of Aborigines
- Provide a medium for presenting entertainment, news and information
- Provide information and advice on the rights and obligations of Aborigines as well as on legal and other community services available to them
- Encourage the use of Aboriginal languages and provide a forum for cultural creativity
- Facilitate an understanding of Aboriginal cultures and values among all Australians

When Lester Bostock made the transition from 2EA in SBS radio broadcasting to SBS television, the stage was set for the development of the Indigenous Programs Unit within SBS.

The Aboriginal programs unit at the ABC came about as a result of the efforts and determination of some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals and organisations. Non-Aboriginal support for an Aboriginal programs unit came after much discussion. The story goes that in 1986, Nick Colless-George, a policy officer in the ABC and the mildly radical federal secretary of the ABC union, together with the Managing Director of the ABC, David

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<sup>25</sup> P. Batty, 'Enlisting the Aboriginal Subject: The State Invention of Aboriginal Broadcasting', paper presented at the AIATSIS conference entitled 'The Power of Knowledge, the Resonance of Tradition', Australian National University, 18-20 September 2001.

Hill, went through the ABC charter looking for policies the ABC had not yet implemented. They came across some the glorious ABC policies about Aboriginal programming that had never been carried out. Sometime later David Hill received an invitation to address an audience in Canberra at the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Colless-George sent a paper over to David Hill's office that outlined a new policy on Aboriginal programming. Much to his astonishment, the day before he was to announce the new policy in his speech in Canberra, David Hill read in the Sydney newspapers that the ABC would commit to Aboriginal employment up to two per cent within the ABC, and that there would be an immediate allocation of one quarter of a million dollars to be sent to the television division for an Aboriginal programs unit to commence producing programs immediately.<sup>27</sup>

It is unlikely that without white support and interest anything would have come of it. The unit was set up in 1988 and is now enjoying its fourteenth year. In my interview with the then executive producer of the APU Vaughan Hinton, he recalled how the APU became very quickly the most sought-after unit in the ABC. White producers, producer assistants, first assistant directors, production managers and secretaries, archivist, post-production sound crews, editing crews, camera crews all who would put their proposals forward several months ahead to ask if they could do a season with the Aboriginal programs unit. The attraction was that they would have the opportunity to work with Aboriginal producers and communities. The arrangement was productive and beneficial for black producers as it was for white producers. The input from non-Aboriginal producers and crews was a constant resource of great value to the Aboriginal team. The unit quickly developed a reputation for producing quality programs that went to air in prime time, and this was a huge incentive for any producer.

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<sup>26</sup> L. Bostock 'Aboriginal Broadcasting and Training', in *Media Information Australia*, no. 27, 1983, p. 37.



The ABC indigenous board member was Dr. Roberta Sykes, and the first series producer and team for the Aboriginal Program's unit were Aboriginal people such as Bryon Syron, Bobby McLeod and Jimmy Everett. Aborigines quickly occupied more than two per cent of the staff at the ABC with a full figure of one hundred and sixteen Aboriginal staff members in 1992.<sup>28</sup> The most popular reasons for Aborigines entering into television in the ABC were because they; (1) wanted to change white Australian attitudes about Aborigines and (2) felt that by their presence they could make Aboriginal people in the community feel comfortable about having the media approach them and vice versa.<sup>29</sup>

Hinton however, was white, and the ABC received considerable criticism for appointing a white person to this position. This opinion can be clearly seen in Ivo Burum's film *Satellite Dreaming*. Interestingly the Aboriginal producers in the unit were satisfied to have a non-Aboriginal executive producer, because it mattered more to them that they could have someone to take care of the boring business of dealing with ABC management, than they should have an Aboriginal executive producer to discuss Aboriginal matters with them. The early days of the APU displayed how Aboriginal producers meshed with non-Aboriginal producers with one purpose on their minds and that was to make good documentaries. What the team of Aboriginal producers needed was someone to leave them alone to make the programs that they wanted to make. They had to be someone who knew how to pull the purse strings and had credibility and a long and secure position in the ABC.<sup>30</sup> It was irrelevant whether they were black or white.

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<sup>27</sup> F. Peters-Little interview with Vaughan Hinton, November 2001.

<sup>28</sup> McCullough, *Re-positioning Aboriginality*, p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> F. Peters-Little interview for *Oceans Apart* with ABC Aboriginal journalist Britta Lyster. Lyster talked about the main reasons why Aborigines became journalist at the ABC. *Oceans Apart*, ABC TV, January, 1991.

<sup>30</sup> F. Peters-Little interview with Susan Moylan-Coombs, Sydney, November 2001.

Some of those who worked in the APU were Lorraine Mafi Williams, Bryan Syron, Michael Riley and Jim Everett had not been ABC trainees. The APU produced the *Blackout* series, *Kam Yarn* series, *Songlines* programs, *Storytellers of the Pacific* series, and *Messagestick* series. These are listed in Appendix D. At the height of its term the *Blackout* documentaries on the ABC rated very highly in an 8pm timeslot following the *7.30 Report* often clipping the flagship program of its ratings.

The SBS Indigenous programs unit (IPU) received less criticism from Aboriginal and media activists than the ABC because their executive producer was Lester Bostock an Aboriginal man, and their Aboriginal Board Member was Kumanjta Perkins. The indigenous unit at SBS produced the *First In Line* series in 1989, and some years later the *ICAM* series from 1996 to 2002. It had a staff of sixteen indigenous and non-indigenous people. Fronted by Rhoda Roberts and Michael Johnson, viewers complained they looked too much like a black Jana Wendt clones.<sup>31</sup> But the team also received overwhelming positive responses to the program. Executive producer Cyndia Roberts noted that ‘right from the premier episodes we received hundreds of calls congratulating us. In the remote outback areas where people have told us how good it was to see Aboriginal faces on television, but we are happy to hear their criticisms, because that keeps us on our toes; so we’re always open to suggestions’.<sup>32</sup> Programs made by SBS’s IPU are listed in appendix E.

Evolving from the NAIBA, the National Indigenous Media Association of Australia (NIMAA), representing a collective of indigenous radio and television broadcasters, was formally established on 23 March 1993. Its aims were to develop and promote the free flow

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<sup>31</sup> C. Roberts, *First In Line*, published by SBS TV publicity, Sydney, 1989.

of news, views, information and entertainment with an appropriate cultural perspective on behalf of all Aboriginal people at the local, regional and national levels. However its definition of indigenous television broadcasting was narrow. According to Greg Eatock in interview, NIMAA strongly discouraged Aboriginal people who worked in the ABC and SBS from applying for membership.<sup>33</sup> The NIMAA group argued that Aborigines working within the mainstream did not fit under the category of Aboriginal broadcasting. According to Eatock, Rhoda Roberts, a presenter from SBS TV's *First In Line* program, protested, arguing that all blackfellas were under the control of government dollars in one way or another, and so asking 'what was the big deal?'<sup>34</sup> Although its constitutional aim was to achieve Aboriginal autonomy and self-determination, it is peculiar that NIMAA had arrived at the conclusion that Aboriginal people working for *Imparja* TV (the central Australian television station) could be members, while Aboriginal people working for ABC and SBS could not.

#### *The Australian Film Commission Indigenous Branch*

In addition to the units in the ABC and SBS, the Australian Film Commission (AFC), which provides funding for independent filmmakers, established its own separate indigenous unit. This had major consequences for white filmmakers, and indeed for Aboriginal filmmakers as well. After Marcia Langton's essay, which had been commissioned by the AFC in 1992, the AFC contracted Aboriginal consultant Shirley McPherson from South Australia to carry out interviews and surveys with the Aboriginal community. McPherson's report drew the attention of the AFC to the views of Aboriginal producers, which were noticeably and consistently different from those of Aboriginal people outside the industry. They did not support a separate indigenous unit because they felt they should compete with non-Aboriginal

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<sup>32</sup> Roberts, *First In Line*, p. 6

<sup>33</sup> F. Peters-Little interview with Greg Eatock, November 2001.

<sup>34</sup> Eatock interview.

filmmakers in the industry and be assessed on their merit rather than their Aboriginality. The report states:

The attention of the AFC is especially drawn to the responses provided by Aboriginal producers. These exhibit much greater knowledge of the industry and are noticeably and consistently different from the views expressed by others. In particular their views are significantly different with respect to a separate Aboriginal unit in the AFC.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these objections, the AFC established a separate indigenous unit in January 1993.

The establishment of the AFC's Indigenous Branch had consequences for white documentary makers. The first Aboriginal director of the unit, Wally Saunders, announced at the Third National Documentary Conference in 1993 that the Indigenous Branch would be placing a moratorium on white producers making Aboriginal documentaries.<sup>36</sup> Strangely enough some white documentary filmmakers themselves supported the moratorium against white documentary filmmakers. Martha Ansara, who was at the same conference, supported the principle that Aborigines should have more control over films about Aborigines and that whites should take a back seat for a while.

Saunders went further. He sponsored a moratorium not only against white documentary filmmakers, but also against documentary filmmaking about Aboriginal people in general. He announced that he felt that Aborigines were being documented to death, and that it was now time for Aboriginal people to be telling their own stories by making short drama and feature films. As a result very few independent Aboriginal documentaries were produced during the early 1990s, while short drama flourished. He initiated the *Sand to Celluloid* project which he launched on December 1994, which was a collection of short Aboriginal dramas, which

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<sup>35</sup> McPherson and Pope, *Promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Involvement in the film and video industry*, p. viii.

toured nationally and internationally. The assessment process now meant that if any proposal for film development contained any material of Aboriginal content Aboriginal people must assess it. Many of those who were assessors in the early years were not necessarily writers or filmmakers, but if they shared the views of the director of the branch this would have affected their responses to proposals from those white documentary filmmakers who sought funds at that time.

Aboriginal filmmakers were not necessarily advantaged by the policy of assessments being conducted by Aboriginal people. Later criticisms of the AFC indigenous unit have included the argument that because the Aboriginal film community is so enmeshed, conflicts of interest have been heightened, and that the right to privacy of Aboriginal filmmakers have been lessened. Having a separate AFC unit means they have been forced to compete with their Aboriginal peers, since those who assess their proposals are generally people who are either competing against them for funding or who potentially oppose their individual artistic, cultural and political views. Perhaps for some Aboriginal filmmakers being assessed by non-Aboriginal filmmakers may have some advantages.

### *Training*

A key issue for the employment of Aboriginal people in the media was training. Between 1986 and 1989 *Film Australia* became perhaps the first government body to train Aboriginal people in film production (at the same time other organisations had Aboriginal trainees in radio and journalism). Their first and only Aboriginal graduates were Michael Riley, Michael Brogan, Madeline McGrady and Darrell Sibisado. A Commonwealth-owned production and distribution company, *Film Australia* was, and remains, an incorporated business that saw

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<sup>36</sup> W. Saunders, untitled paper to the Third National Documentary Conference, Haymarket, Sydney, November

itself as performing a necessary community service. It receives finance from the Commonwealth Government under a contract requiring the company to devise, produce and distribute National Interest Program (NIP) productions. It has continued to support the Australian documentary sector not only by the commissioning of NIP production, but also through the provision of services and facilities it operates without Government funding. *Film Australia* remains the nation's largest producer of television documentaries and educational programs. By 1998 its library held over ninety-four documentaries catalogued under 'Aboriginal'. They are listed in Appendix F.

Other film and broadcasting bodies soon followed *Film Australia* in training Aboriginal filmmakers. Initially funded by the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations (DEIR) after the Whitlam government firmly lodged Aboriginal self-determination policies throughout government organisations and departments, a training scheme was conducted by the Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) from the late 1980s to the early 1990s with the aim of raising the level of Aboriginal employment within organisations to two per cent. With little or no cost to the employer, government subsidies covering the traineeships of Aborigines in the public service meant that departments would at the end of their training be provided with highly skilled labour.

The ABC and SBS began their television trainee programs after completing their training in ABC radio, but many of them were to transfer over to television. Trainees like: Cheryl Rose, David Sandy, Tina Fong, Imelda Davis, Barbara McCarthy, Xavier Minnecon, Michelle White, Daniel Bobongie, Vicki Ngangala, were followed by Johnny Harding, Sue Coombs, Lorraine Wallace, Llew Cleaver, Stan Grant, David Wilson, Tracey Caligiari, Julie Wilson, Michelle Tuahine and Aaron Pedersen who had all began their traineeships in television. The

SBS training course was run by Lester Bostock who aimed to provide course participants how to realise their full potential in not only technical fundamentals but he hoped that they would take their skills back to their own communities and initiate more informal education programs in communications. SBS trainees were: Lola Forrester, Constance Saveka, Lindsay Watson, Vanessa Duncan, Michael Johnson, Rhoda Roberts, Lydia Miller and Cyndia Roberts. Assisted by DEET in much the same way the APU at the ABC had.

Doubtful that mainstream organisations like the ABC, SBS, *Film Australia* and the Australian Film Television and Radio School in Sydney (AFTRS), would attract Aborigines, it was recommended that educational institutions more amenable for their needs would be The Aboriginal Task Force at the South Australian Institute of Technology, James Cook University, Darwin Community College, Batchelor College and Murdoch University.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless trainee positions in the urban centres for Aboriginal people to learn producing, directing, editing, camera operating, sound recording and journalism, attracted Aboriginal people living in rural and urban centres. AFTRS provided Aboriginal placements under its Indigenous Program Initiatives (IPI). Through education and training, AFTRS seeks to provide an avenue for Aboriginal people to express themselves, in their own way, through control from behind the camera. IPI is a national program was designed to upgrade the creative and technical skills of indigenous Australians already working in the film, broadcast and related industries, and to assist them to progress into key creative positions. Their specific objective is to increase the number, and thus the voice, of Aboriginal producers, directors and scriptwriters in the industry.<sup>38</sup> Graduates of the film school are Rachel Perkins, Jeremy Geia, Alan Collins, Ivan Sen, Sam Conway Erica Glynn, Priscilla Collins, Steve

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<sup>37</sup> G. Leahy, *An Interim Report On The Research Into The Needs Of Aboriginal People For The Training Techniques Of Film And Television*, 1983, p. 51.

<sup>38</sup> AFTRS special programs and guidelines, AFTRS website, 2001. <http://www.aftrs.edu.au>

MacGregor, John South, Louise Glover, Anne Pratten, Darlene Johnson, Warwick Thornton and Romaine Moreton, Gillian Moody, Rima Tamou and Pauline Clague.

Many of those trained by *Film Australia* and AFTRS later found themselves unemployed once their traineeships expired. Even Aboriginal community-based organisations failed to offer permanent positions once training had finished. Rachel Perkins often joked that she worked as a trainee for over ten years in Alice Springs for the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA), as the only way it could provide her salary was to continue subsidising her government training funds. The ABC, however, was different, as it was bound by policy and contract to offer each trainee permanency after the completion of his or her course.

#### *New funding arrangements for Aboriginal Documentary*

By 1996 the new National Indigenous Documentary Fund (NIDF) began to turn the tide for Aboriginal documentaries. The fund is supported by a number of stakeholders, including ATSIC as the major contributor of grant funds, while ABC TV contributed pre-sale finance for each film in order to gain broadcast rights. The ABC's Aboriginal Programs Unit (which had a name change to Indigenous Programs Unit from 1995) offered five pre-sales on the series. The AFC contributed development funds, state film agencies in Queensland, South Australia, and Western Australia each agreed to contribute, and several Northern Territory government Departments invested funds, as there was no film support agency in the Northern Territory. NIMAA became the manager of the project and set about a process of extensive consultation with indigenous Media groups and individuals via nationwide phone conferences. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement and control were the fundamental objective. CAAMA was appointed series producer to supervise production, and



Rachel Perkins became the executive producer of the series.<sup>39</sup> Altogether over eighteen documentaries were produced and aired on the ABC through this system. The documentaries produced between 1997 and 1999 were: *Shifting Shelter*, *Tent Boxers*, *Willigans Fitzroy*, *A Walk With Words*, *Back To Yamba*, *Small Island Big Fight*, *Bush Mechanics*, *Wrap Me Up In Paperbark*, *Healing Sounds of Bugarun Orchestra*, *In Search of Archie*, *Silent Legacy*, *Defining Black*, *Vanish*, *Bunjie*, *A Life In Photographs*, *Blacktracker*, *Straight From the Yarraman's Mouth*, *Shifting Sands*, *Night Patrol*, *Milerum*, *Look Listen Speak and Apatheka*, and Rachel Perkins' *Crim TV*.

#### *Remote versus urban*

For a short period in the late 1980s and early 1990s the community channel, *Metro Television*, offered traineeships for Aboriginal people who, under a scholarship with Abstudy, could undertake short courses in production. Broadcast on the UHF 31 band *Metro Television* had a frequency expanding from the studios to the outer suburbs of Campbelltown to Hornsby in the north and across as far as the outskirts of Katoomba in the Blue Mountains. Sydney's first community television channel, it broadcast from the town hall rooftop in Oxford Street Paddington in 1988. By 1992 Metro's licence was due for renewal. However the new Aboriginal group called *Perleeka* did not really get off the ground let alone run training programs for Aboriginal people. Instead *Perleeka* shared a particularly uncomfortable relationship with some of the other licensees because board member Greg Eatock insisted that *Perleeka* be granted one third of the channel's total air time, arguing that the group had sufficient archival and program sources to draw on, from bodies such as the

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<sup>39</sup> Guidelines to the National Indigenous Documentary Funds are accessible via the AFC, website:

eighty one BRACS communities, CAAMA, *Imparja* TV, ABC and SBS. The other licensees were totally unsympathetic to *Perleeka's* demands, and the licence was not renewed. Eatock told me his despair was in part due to the lack of support from government bodies such as ATSIC and NIMAA. He believed that they had been rejected because the government bodies they applied to were incapable of grasping the significance of an urban Aboriginal community television broadcasting unit and how potentially powerful it could have been.

Community television broadcasting was far more successful in Central Australia. Being seen to have a culture to maintain, the new central Australian commercial broadcaster *Imparja* Television celebrated its first fourteen years of broadcasting on 15th January 2002. With sixty percent of *Imparja's* viewers live in mining, pastoral, rural and Aboriginal communities, who receive satellite signal direct-to-home (DTH), they broadcast through the Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) and receive infrastructure. The Broadcasting in Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) system aimed to intercept national broadcasters such as the ABC, SBS and commercial channels enabling remote Aboriginal communities to minimise 'white' or unrelated programs in order to safeguard against an intrusion upon their cultural values. A significant feature of the BRACS model was to encourage television programs to be locally produced using languages chosen by the local community. In 1988 special class licenses were developed and eighty-one Aboriginal communities were gazetted as eligible to operate licensed BRACS transmission facilities. These were converted to full community broadcast licenses in 1997, which meant they could choose (or not) to broadcast mainstream material. Their television programming comes from *Imparja* TV broadcasted locally, where they are also capable of intercepting the outside world to provide a wide range of services, such as government information on indigenous languages and other cultural programs.

Today *Imparja* Television employs over fifty people at Alice Springs studios, and provides training and career opportunities for indigenous people in the commercial television industry. *Imparja* has implemented an Aboriginalisation policy and has achieved Aboriginal staffing levels of fifty percent. Programming on *Imparja* is similar to programming on the commercial networks, though there are a few special programs dealing with Aboriginal cultures and languages, particularly in remote communities where traditional cultural orientation remains strong. There is an effective Aboriginal presence with Aboriginal newsreaders and journalists on screen. (See Appendix G on *Imparja* programming.)

An important question remains, however, and that is how has Aboriginal control impacted upon the programming in *Imparja* Television? It is paradoxical that *Imparja* is accepted as being a model of Aboriginal control in programming in television by the same people who were critical of Aboriginal production at the ABC and SBS, as one would see in the CAAMA documentary about Aboriginal television, called *Satellite Dreaming*.

Most recognised scholars who discuss Aboriginal media have an anthropological or historical background. Scholars of media and communication studies do not specifically research Aboriginal media. So that the majority of work written on the topic of Aboriginal media focuses a great deal on the development of Aboriginal television in Central Australia. Most noted for his work in Yuendumu, anthropologist Eric Michaels's research has a clear bias towards the 'cultural maintenance' model but is unable to produce a model that is valid for more than one language area.<sup>40</sup> But this did not stop a whole new industry of writing about

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<sup>40</sup> R. Hodge, 'Aboriginal Truth and White Media: Eric Michaels Meets the Spirit of Aboriginalism', in *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1990, p. 3.

Aboriginal broadcasting focusing only on remote Aboriginal broadcasting.<sup>41</sup> The absolute fascination for Aboriginal media in central Australia compared to the scholarly attention given to Aboriginal film and television production compares excessively in strange proportion to the masses of programs done by Aboriginal broadcasting in the urban centres (this is of course with the exception of Moffatt's work). Even other parts of Australia like Broome, Moree, Townsville or Port Augusta are just a few places where Aboriginal broadcasting has been operating and have been overlooked before Michaels's time and more than ten years after his death. But anthropologists who take a special interest in Aboriginal broadcasting continue to be 'trapped' in central Australia. Only filmmakers (who make films for reasons other than art or anthropological) seem to want to go to places like Redfern, Alice Springs or Brisbane for example. But the central Australian magnet seems to feed and attract the most fundamental of anthropological desires for the exotic or the 'exceptional'. This is best described by Robert Hodge who points out the consumerist relationship between anthropology and Aborigines when he says:

The foundation premise of Aboriginalism is the construction of Aboriginals as 'primitive' in a binary opposition to 'civilised'. As primitives they become an endlessly fascination object of the white gaze, able to generate unlimited discourse but never able to participate in it on any terms. Because the terms of the opposition are absolute, Aborigines remain forever encapsulated in a self-contained universe, unable to speak or even understand their own meanings...Only the privileged class of interpreters can understand and mediate these meanings between the two incommensurable universes of discourse.<sup>42</sup>

Archivist Michael Leigh argues that the ever-increasing involvement of Aboriginal people in media production from the mid 1980s was a legacy of the Labor government's 1972 policy towards 'self-determination'.<sup>43</sup> Phillip Batty suggests the reasons are more complex. He notes

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<sup>41</sup> M. Hinkson, *New Media Projects At Yuendumu: Towards A History And Analysis Of Inter-Cultural Engagement*, paper presented at the AIATSIS conference 2001: 'The Power of Knowledge, the Resonance of Tradition', the ANU, 18-20 September 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Hodge, *Aboriginal Truth and White Media*, p. 2.

<sup>43</sup> Leigh, *Curiouser And Curiouser*, p. 78-89.

that the first and only Aboriginal controlled television broadcasts began in central Australia in 1985 with the Remote Commercial Television Service (RTCS), shortly after the arrival of AUSSAT. Critical of the use of the 'resistance model' to explain developments in central Australia, Batty disagrees with scholars like Helen Molar, Tony Downmunt and Michael Meadows who he says see the development of Aboriginal broadcasting in central Australia as the culmination of government policy and Aboriginal resistance. Batty suggests the idealised resistance model is not a unified one, not even in central Australia and argues, that federal governments and various departments created Aboriginal broadcasting for their own governmental ends.<sup>44</sup>

This emphasis on remote at the expense of urban television is reflected disturbingly in archives. At *Screensound Australia*, the largest archive of Australian film and television, they do not hold items produced by the APU from the ABC, but they do a few copies from the IPU at SBS. Similarly the film and video archives at the AIATSIS do not include documentaries that were produced by Aboriginal crews working for the APU at the ABC and IPU at SBS. What they do have on in their *Mura* catalogue system are 1427 items of which the majority of items is ethnographic footage produced by academics. What documentaries they do hold are mostly made by white independent producers or they have an agreement with the ABC to access news and current affair programs made by white journalists. There is nothing on their catalogue that suggests that the programs they can access are films made by Aboriginal filmmakers with the ABC or SBS. So that the largest archives of Aboriginal films not only not hold films produced by Aborigines but also they are very unlikely to know how many Aboriginal people there are out there making films, outside of those broadcasters in central Australia.

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<sup>44</sup> P. Batty, *Enlisting the Aboriginal Subject*, p. 1.

*Conclusion:*

The adage that Aboriginal control began in central Australia for central Australian Aborigines is only true for those who base their research upon government policy and not Aboriginal participation. It is an argument that can only come from those who have not properly investigated the impact of television and Aboriginal responses throughout the eastern states of Australia, which has the highest population of Aboriginal people. The claim that Aboriginal people in central Australia have more broadcasting control and power over programming than their city and rural 'cousins' derives a view of 'Aboriginal control' in the narrowest sense of the word. Insofar as many of these scholars are anthropologists who deal specifically with Aboriginal issues, they may have disciplinary reasons for appreciating television to be a useful format only for the purposes of communal and cultural maintenance. Is it too much to ask that they recognise that many Aboriginal people want to get into television for their personal and artistic reasons?

Furthermore, these scholars all fail to acknowledge the history of Aboriginal involvement in television in urban Australia. But by failing to explore the history of Aboriginal involvement in television outside central Australia they fail to understand Aboriginal broadcasting in its broad historical context. In their exclusive focus on remote broadcasting, such scholarship demonstrates the exoticism and romanticisation involved in the opposing the poles of 'authentic' versus 'contaminated'. Contemporary notions of 'good blacks and bad blacks' or 'the real and unreal Aborigine', mainstream or community, remote or urban are as futile and inapt as the scientific views of the *noble savage* of previous centuries. The ignorance of the history of urban Aboriginal television production is a result also of the emphasis of researchers on Aboriginal representation in feature length films, cinema, and short dramas, to

the neglect of the non-fiction film. Drama is 'good', non-fiction is 'bad', and so the dichotomy between *noble* and *savage* continues.

### Chapter Three

#### *“Yet another Aboriginal filmmakers journey”. A personal account of Aboriginal documentary filmmaking in the ABC*

When I was thirty years old I landed a job in 1989 as a television documentary researcher, which was quite by accident. I was an undergraduate media student sharing a big house under the flight path near Mascot international airport, and a huge phone bill with six other music and communication students. Just hours before the phone was disconnected the series producer Martin Rooke from the ABC called to offer me a fortnight researching for *Blackout*. Seven years later I left the ABC as a producer. In that time I had worked on over sixteen documentary films, researching, writing, directing and producing, as well as co-ordinating a four one-hour international co-production series. The first film I worked on had been a 30-minute documentary film for the second series of *Blackout* entitled *Civil rights* that aired in 1989, which was about the Freedom Ride protesters who travelled to Walgett and Moree in 1965. In this episode I conducted *vox populi* interviews with Aboriginal people in my own community of Walgett at the annual Aboriginal football knockout, and also in Moree. We aimed to take the same trek the *Freedom rides* took back in 1965. The director David Sandy was from Moree and I from Walgett. It was the first time a documentary had been made about the *Freedom rides* since the news and current affairs items in the mid 1960s, though the Freedom Ride documentary by Rachel Perkins followed three years later. For both Sandy and I it was the first time in many years since we returned to our home towns to interview those family and elders who we had grown up knowing were involved with the *Civil rights* protests in the sixties. It had already been agreed that this series was going to be distinct from the first series, a magazine format program that had Aboriginal presenters in a studio type situation reading cue cards and casting over to roving Aboriginal reporters.



The other program I directed in my first year on *Blackout* was the *Education* episode, again with a *vox populi* format, using as many black faces as possible, cross-referencing nationally. This episode focused upon racism in schools. The reason for cross-referencing nationally was to indicate that the issues that affected Aborigines in central Australia were similar to the issues experienced by Aborigines living in Redfern and so forth. The national cross-referencing on topics meant that at any given time a director and researcher in Perth would be asking the same questions as the director and researcher in Walgett, Kempsey or Wagga Wagga for example. On their return to Sydney each team would log out segments for the other team. The Walgett/Moree team headed the *Civil rights* episode, but the Wagga Wagga or Perth teams for example would give their answers to the questions about *Civil rights* to the Walgett/Moree team. Likewise with the Wagga Wagga team, they headed the *Education* episode, and while they gave the other team the *Civil rights* questions the *Civil rights* team gave them their education questions. The aim was to get a national perspective on all the episodes in the series. All teams were given instructions on how the visual style would work so there would be a visual style that would be easy to edit in the fine cut. (See photograph of *Blackout Two* team).

Each episode had a music clip breaker of unknown Aboriginal bands. We did a deal with them to produce music clips for us that they could also use for promotional purposes, as well as getting extra airplay on *Rage*. This series launched many bands and singers; Paul Kelly first noticed Archie Roach from a *Blackout* episode and rang the ABC to find out how to contact him. Other emerging Aboriginal bands and artists at the time of *Blackout* were Mixed Relations, Scrap Metal, and dancers who are now with the Bangarra Dance Theatre. Other artists like Yothu Yindi, Kev Carmody, Jimmy Little, Maroochy and Leah Purcell were also screened nationally on *Blackout*. In years to follow the APU's interest in Aboriginal music

continued with the *Songlines* programs which covered many bands that would otherwise not be seen on television, concerts in Broome from 1992 to 1994, the *Building Bridges* and *Survival Day* concerts from 1988 to 2000, and the *Yepperenya* concert in Alice Springs in 2001.

The mood and style of the program was heavily influenced by the *Beatbox* series where the series producer had worked. (Later it was to reappear in the *Front-up* series that was to follow *Blackout* on SBS.) The general feeling from the Aboriginal team was that this approach suited the purpose of getting as many 'faces' as possible from the community on screen. One could produce each episode with limited directorial skills, and it came as a relief to those we interviewed that we could follow them around with less equipment, no lighting, and could interview them on the hop. We enjoyed the spontaneity of the interviews. Nevertheless, we had to plan our questions in considerable detail and plan where to take our camera crews. We chose public events and other locations where we believed there would be more than a handful of Aborigines at any given time. It is unlikely that a white producer would have known where to find such a huge number of Aborigines hanging-out together, as many of these events were not publicised in the cities. We were able to go to highly populated Aboriginal communities such as Hopevale, Perth, Cummeroogunja Mission, Brisbane, Redfern, Manly, La Perouse, Kempsey, Wagga Wagga, Mt. Druitt to name a few.

Pre-production and research played a significant role. The APU began reserving a relatively high proportion of their pre-production budget towards sending researchers out in the field for sometimes weeks on end to introduce themselves and represent the ABC to the communities they wished to film. Sending Aboriginal researchers out in the field to Aboriginal communities weeks before the film crew's arrival was a strategic plan the ABC

found to be as much as a benefit for the *Blackout* team as it was for other ABC crews and programs such as *Four Corners*, *7.30 Report*, *Quantum* etc. Reporters did not have to do this. A reporter on the other hand could visit the community after a researcher spent time communicating with them, although in our case some of the Aboriginal reporters like Aaron Pedersen, Vicki Ngangala, Barbara McCarthy and Michelle White did exactly that. When *Blackout One* went to air it was the first of its kind to cover Aboriginal issues in the way it did. Aboriginal youth had a large part to play in the series. Notwithstanding strong and angry political messages the answers Aboriginal people gave to our questions were personal and direct. With high ratings this series format was novel, slick, and entertaining. On occasions it rated higher than its neighbouring timeslot the *7.30 Report*. It was thought that the personal approach to the issues was interesting according to Margaret Pomerantz who interviewed me at the time *Blackout Two* went to air.

Sometimes the Aboriginal producers were reluctant to be too political or too different. With the *Health* episode in the *Blackout Two* series, Aboriginal director Susan Coombs edited together a program that we had shot in the Aboriginal communities in Wagga Wagga and CummerooGUNja Mission. During the interviews with Aboriginal people Coombs was particularly interested in statements made by a young Aboriginal woman who worked for the Wiradjuri Lands Council who asked why couldn't Aborigines get off their backsides and get jobs like other hardworking Australians. Although I conducted the interviews for Coombs at the time I then took the opportunity to query the interviewee further about her particularly harsh criticism of unemployed Aborigines. Coombs (who was directing at the time) completed the interview because she thought I was too tough on the interviewee. A few weeks later when Coombs presented a rough cut of the program to the executive and series producers who were both white, they were unhappy that the program seemed to gloss over

the important issues and didn't present Aborigines in a more forceful position. At that point the program was scrapped and I was called in to complete the other program we worked on which was the *Education* episode as the co-director. So early in my assignment with the APU I was curious why I found some of the other Aboriginal producers to be more conservative in their political and cultural attitudes about the issues and people we filmed. Even more disturbing I wanted to know why I found what I thought were my highly politicised ideas to be supported and appreciated by the white executives of the ABC. There was obviously something wrong.

The format for *Blackout* Three changed radically. In one episode, *Oceans Apart*, I wanted to make a personality-driven documentary about some Aboriginal women. The main visual style was to set them in public spheres they were not usually represented as inhabiting. That is, the women were not 'earth mothers', 'on the land' or painting, protesting or drinking or even living in 'humpies', but instead were women who lived ordinary lives with and amongst white Australians, living every bit the same life they did but feeling different about it. The idea for this film came about after viewers of the last series of *Blackout* complained that we did not use 'real' Aborigines in our films. Another contributing factor was my feeling that whites seemed to think that Aborigines were not present in 'their' environments. So we filmed scenes of the women catching a train at Central Railway Station, or attending a play or hanging out with friends in an inner-city coffee shop. I felt that it was important for audiences to see that perhaps it wasn't that there were no Aborigines around but rather that they were unable to recognise Aboriginal people in the public sphere. An extreme example where I wanted people to see 'different images' of Aboriginal women was a scene where a mother is bathing her children in the shower. This was to counterbalance the numerous images of Aboriginal children with snotty noses and flies in their eyes. The music was written and

performed by the *Preferred Models* especially for the film. I wanted to use a commercial sound for a conventional visual style.

I was happy to keep within the ABC documentary style because I made it for the ABC and wanted a widespread audience to see the film. In the film, although it looks very non-confronting in its style and images, the statements of the women were somewhat outrageous to say the least. It was not a message film, but a personality driven film. In one beautiful picturesque shot where Margaret is sitting nursing her two-year-old son in the park she is telling us about how South Africa's apartheid was based on Australia's reserves and Aboriginal Protection Board policies. In another where Rosalie has been sipping a cup of herbal tea with her sister in the garden she nonchalantly talks about her white skin colour and miscegenation etc. Although not particularly cutting edge television by today's standard at the time in 1991 these topics and others discussed in the film were not seen to be said by such 'acceptable' and pleasant women. The point of the film was to have audiences 'introduced' to the women. As all scriptwriters are aware if audiences don't 'like' the person they see then they won't care about what they have to say. *Oceans Apart* was about inviting people to get to know them personally, before they spoke about political issues. Then perhaps non-Aborigines could 'care' about what they were saying also. The film's inoffensiveness was intentional; the visual style was not to be intrusive. It had to look and sound conventional while building to a stronger and stronger message. After its screening I received comments and phone calls from viewers, mostly women, who said they had learned something new about Aborigines from the film.

The most interesting were those comments which came from those who said that normally they didn't like watching programs about Aborigines because it usually tried making them

feel too guilty and so they would turn off. But the most rewarding comments were those from people who said that they didn't realise that it was offensive to call someone a 'real' Aborigine as opposed to calling someone else an unreal Aborigine. *Oceans Apart* was made specifically for that kind of audience and it had achieved what I had set out to do. No one was offended and even some of my more militant friends enjoyed the film to the degree that they had been relieved to see 'positive images of black women' in the film. Presently I wonder if that wasn't the key to working in television. The medium was about conforming to expectations while having a strong message that could be deciphered and appreciated by the most ignorant of racists. Or should television not give a toss about offending audiences and aim to shock and incite? Perhaps television should do both, and we as audiences allow for producers to have the right to reach their perceived audiences, and not expect that all television programs be made to our own liking.

Television has changed and adapted according to its perceived audiences at different times in its history, and perhaps this is precisely what makes it popular. From my own perspective I strongly believe that one should spend less time worrying about offending audiences and simply say what you want to say, but my earlier films for the ABC did not yet reflect this attitude. I made those programs hoping to understand why television had become the most powerful tool of education for and about Aborigines, and I just believed that as an Aboriginal person one must learn that skill as soon as possible. Yet, as filmmaker David MacDougall points out, one makes films and television for different personal reasons. Therefore is it fair to say that Aboriginal filmmakers should make films for different reasons? I would question whether their ideas about making stories about Aborigines are any different from those of a white filmmaker.

From the *Blackout* series to *Oceans Apart*, I tried my hand at making my next documentary film *Tent Embassy* hoping to make a radical change from the format I had worked on previously. I thought in the spirit of the tent embassy itself that this film should not adhere to the rules or give a tinker's toss about offending anyone, and I thought the film should address white oppression, and black control. 1990 was my second year in the Aboriginal programs unit (APU). I had completed research for other directors in the second and third series of *Blackout*. I had researched for David Sandy's *Civil rights* and *Debutante's Ball*, Mafi William's *Spirituality* program, Susan Coombs' *Health* and *Education* programs, Martin Rooke's *Building Bridges* episode and Michael Riley's *Malangi* documentary film. In that time I had completed *Oceans Apart* and a few other bits and pieces like voice-overs for the ABC.

*Blackout* Two and Three did not use presenters and reporters. They had instead used Aboriginal researchers to carry out the research and to conduct the interviews, so the Aboriginal researchers were used to the maximum, in effect they doubled as off-camera reporters in addition to carrying out the research. In hindsight I believe that in the items made by the Aboriginal researchers, Danny Bobongie, Lorraine Wallace, and myself, we were off-camera reporters as much as we were researchers. I felt that our interviews and background knowledge of the stories and personalities were more thorough and covered more depth than was evident in the items by the reporters who worked on *Blackout* One, Four, Five and Six. The on-screen reporters for these series of *Blackout* had other concerns to contend with such as make-up, hair, costume, script writing and their on-screen personalities. But we as researcher/interviewers had more time to develop stronger relationships with and increase our knowledge of the subject.

It was fairly evident that the APU placed strong emphasis on research in Aboriginal programming. Also the practice of extensive field research before shooting Aboriginal communities grew and intensified, carrying over to other program areas of the ABC. Tensions between Aboriginal communities and television camera crews in the past seemed to have eased somewhat due to the increasing numbers of Aboriginal directors, producers, researchers and reporters who now fronted camera crews. This point was clearly demonstrated by ABC journalist Britta Lyster who said of her experience in the ABC that she thought that Aboriginal people expressed to her that communities could finally trust the ABC because they felt safe knowing that they had a 'brother or a sister' who would understand them and their issues better, and they could approach the Aboriginal crews with ease.

February to June was the time when the unit went into pre-production for the next series. The series usually aired between December and January, with production taking place between July and November. We held regular production meetings and discussed the production styles and topics for the fourth series of *Blackout*. *Blackout Four* looked to be developing into a totally different format. This time the Aboriginal trainees were nearing the completion of their producer/director traineeships. Two of the trainees Susan Coombs and Llew Cleaver had been involved with the production of *Blackout One*, Susan Coombs as a production assistant and Llew Cleaver as a presenter.

### *Tent Embassy*

I wasn't looking forward to *Blackout Four*, and though it wasn't my idea I was grateful that the then Head of Documentaries, Mark Hamlyn, approached the APU's executive producer Vaughan Hinton and suggested that the unit produce a one-off documentary special for the *True Stories* series. *True Stories* was a program timeslot on Sunday nights at 8.30pm, which



is the prime time television second to the Wednesday night 8.30pm timeslot. These times outside of weekdays 6pm to 8pm are the highest rating periods for both commercial and public television. The fact that the ABC documentary department in those days offered the APU to produce their own special in television prime time demonstrated that the ABC held the APU's standard of production in high regard. Another reason the documentary department may have wanted the APU to produce an Aboriginal documentary for the series was because *Blackout Two* had successfully rated on Thursday nights at 8pm.

Although all of the *Blackout* team came forward with their own ideas for the *True Stories* series, I was fortunate to have my proposal about the 1972 Aboriginal Embassy in Canberra approved for production. I argued that there had never been a comprehensive study or documentation (film, book or dramatic account) of this particularly highly volatile period of Aboriginal politics in Australia, and that the story would be groundbreaking and appropriately newsworthy. Secondly I felt the strength was in the film's timing since we were approaching the 20th anniversary of when the tent was first established. What also attracted them to the project was that the ABC held extensive archival news footage that could now be put to good use. We aimed to air the film in the *True Stories* series during Aborigines Week July 7<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 1991. However, it eventually didn't air until August 2 1992.

It served the ABC's purpose to pull a production team from the APU rather than an independent team because it was cost effective and that the ABC could be assured that the producers were reliable and familiar with the operations and broadcasting practices and standards of the ABC. Initially I asked for independent documentary filmmaker Graham Chase to direct *Tent Embassy*, but the ABC suggested that I might want to use Aboriginal director David Sandy. I agreed to Sandy because I had worked with him on three films

previously, liked his work and because he was Aboriginal. Although I am happy with the film today I do wonder how much different it would have been had Chase directed it.

The ABC gave overwhelming support and encouragement to the Aboriginal team to make the programs we wanted and on the topics we liked. For example one of our first time directors Danny Bobongie had the opportunity to make a film entitled *Gammin Paradise* about his Islander roots in the Solomon Islands. In his first directorial role Bobongie asked to shoot a dramatic scene re-enacting the blackbirder traders on a schooner boat, with actors decked out in pirate costumes and black slaves chained to the vessel. The film worked quite well, the interviews and historical re-enactment was well produced and appropriate for the film's style and presentation. The series producer Martin Rooke who took a co-director's credit assisted Bobongie. The film received positive responses and has been repeated on the ABC a few times since. The amount of support Aboriginal producers and directors were given to make their documentaries was perhaps enviable to any independent documentary filmmaker or Aboriginal community broadcasting unit in the country at that time. Perhaps these producers were quite right to accuse us of being spoilt, but they were not right when they assumed that the collaborative productions between white and black producers at the ABC was about white people telling black people how to think.

In terms of political and cultural content in our programs, it was the white executive and series producers who were enthusiastic for the Aboriginal producers to make highly political and controversial programs for the ABC. Where one would expect to be supported by an Aboriginal person when taking a strong Aboriginal political position, the unexpected had occurred and the ABC's white executive producer supported the film's strong political message.

The opportunity to make *Tent Embassy* came along at the right moment. I had just completed and aired *Oceans Apart* and the new team of *Blackout Four* was in the early stages of pre-production. I had little interest in the new styles and format that was being expressed by the Aboriginal trainees so I was glad to leave the APU. For example the new team of Aboriginal trainees wanted to go back to the magazine format that they had in *Blackout One* (remembering that two of the trainees had worked on that series). Another reason was that the new *Blackout* team wanted to shoot on SP Beta cam Tape, whereas I was used to shooting and editing on 16 mm film. Finally this new team wanted to use more reporters and studio performances and segments. I had no experience in studio directing. The decision for *Blackout* to return to magazine format shot on videotape was a highly cost effective alternative compared to documentary film.

Although it had a very distinct Aboriginal political story to tell, the initial idea for *Tent Embassy* had not been about the rise and fall of Australia's national Land Rights movement. The first proposal had been considerably different, asking the more general question 'do protest demonstrations make a difference any more?' During my initial research I approached Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth and asked what did they think made them angry and what do they think they could have done about it. Most of the youth I canvassed in Redfern, Glebe and Kings Cross and asked them about their opinions on protest demonstrations. I wanted to know what made them angry and how did they go about changing things. Many of the people I spoke to stated personal opinions that appeared to reflect the position from which they saw themselves currently in. One media student candidly stated, 'Of course we get angry about things like racism and sexism and that, but why waste your energy yelling in the streets

at people who don't listen when alternatively you could be home watching MTV, sucking a few cones, drinking and enjoying yourself with a few of your mates?'

Gradually I turned my attention to the tent embassy as a particular example of protest. I had been given support by the ABC to seek advice from independent filmmakers outside of the ABC and took opportunity to discuss the script with University of Technology, Sydney's (UTS) lecturer Gillian Leahy. Leahy had also been a graduate of the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) and advised that I might like to think of an event that I could focus upon. The film was either going to be about the Aboriginal tent embassy protests or the *Freedom rides*. Since David Sandy and I had already made a 30-minute documentary called *Civil rights* in Walgett and Moree in 1989 the tent embassy had been an obvious choice for us.

I encountered some early difficulties. In my initial approach to one of the tent embassy's media representatives, however he insisted that I should tape his voice only. We met in his flat in Brisbane where a camera crew including Aboriginal journalist Vicki Ngangala and myself had instructed the camera-man Michael Klein that we could record the interview sound only. Some months later I contacted him if I could re-interview him for the film but this time with pictures. He declined. Then later during an Aboriginal Legal Services (ALS) conference in Sydney in 1991, I informed him that the film was coming along and asked if I could credit his name in the acknowledgments. He however, asked not to have any reference to his name in the film, accusing me of having the film dominated by Kevin Gilbert. However at the time I met with him and interviewed him, I had yet to meet with Kevin Gilbert, so his fears were unfounded and it had been unfortunate that I could not add his knowledge and perspective with everyone else who involved themselves with the film.

The second person I wanted the film to be done in consultation with was someone I thought perhaps had the highest profile Aboriginal activist at that time. We had met for a couple of champagne breakfasts in Ravesi's Café on Bondi Beach where it would become the first in a long line of interviewees to warn me that I would need to get the story 'right'. On our second meeting it became apparent that there had been some tension between he and my executive producer Vaughan Hinton. He then asked if we could request another executive producer for the project because he did not want to work with Hinton. Hinton was in fact my boss who sanctioned the project. My association with the tent activist had come to a stalemate until I decided that perhaps I should make the film without him. I also felt that because he had such strong convictions and experience of filming himself perhaps he would be better off making a film about the tent embassy himself leaving me to make my own. From my perspective it seemed logical that he would make a film about the tent embassy and that there could never be enough films and perspectives made about the topic. My decision to make my own film was also supported by Aboriginal activists who had also been at the tent embassy at the time such as; Isabel Coe, Bob McLeod, Alana Doolan, Jenny and Lyall Munro, Denis Walker, Bobbi Sykes, Paul Coe, Michael Anderson, Kevin Gilbert, Billy Craigie, Charles Perkins, Mum Shirl and many others. It was clearly pointed out to me by those who supported me in making the film that it was more important that someone independent make the film rather than halting the project because certain parties may have opposing opinions.

Oral histories and memories are often problematic for many reasons. Therefore the script I had to write for the film about the tent embassy was always going to be a difficult one to produce. It seemed that what was developing from my many interviews during my research was that the topic of 'how' was the tent embassy set up and 'what did it stand for?' varied

greatly from person to person. There were great inconsistencies everywhere. Much to my surprise I found that there were some who very blasé about the impact and history of the tent embassy while others were almost threatening. I had been warned that if I had interviewed this person or if I had omitted that person, that I would have consequences to bear. Some accused me of wanting to promote the political views of some Aboriginal leaders over the views of other leaders; some told me that I was guilelessly being led by others. I was warned that there would be boycotts of the film while others said they would not appear in the film unless they were paid a substantial fee. Needless to say the notion to make this film 'right' was of the utmost concern for me at the time.

In the long run what made the film right for me was decided with advice from my father who told me that I am not obliged to anyone to repress what I feel or think is the right thing for me. He insisted that I could make the film from my own perspective and to know that this was about my truth and my understanding of the tent embassy. Gratefully his message to me was made even clearer when Dr Roberta Sykes stressed to me that the tent embassy was a time and a place that belonged to those who were there and to those whose lives had been changed by it. Her statement gave me the conviction to make the film from my perspective first. That my personal connection to the tent was significant to me as it was to whoever may have been of a higher profile at the tent. Her advice to me was one that allowed me to feel that I did have a connection to the tent that was worth owning and expressing. What little connection I had was my brief visit as a young woman who sat with her cousin Bob McLeod in the tent who told me about the land rights movement and challenged me to be more politically aware and responsible. For while it would be my father who would influence me all through my life, so would my cousin Bob McLeod who would eventually shape that in some fantastic way. And then many years later Dr. Sykes who would tell me that I could

make a film about something that while I had not played an important role I had been a part of it and that making the film about the tent embassy was the right thing to do.

After much counselling on the production of the film it had been decided that this film would now be a film whereby Aboriginal director David Sandy and myself would then take the bull by the horns and present various points of view. We had agreed that the film would now be one interested in every inconsistent story, every cautionary tale and dim memory regardless of whether the Aboriginal characters in the film agreed with each other or not. This film was committed to letting every interviewee put his or her 'best' foot forward. This meant that for everyone we interviewed or researched they would be given the opportunity to have their strongest statements heard. But since this was a 60-minute film there would have to be limitations.

What made this film so special is that it thrives on the strength and determination of such a dedicated, articulate and highly dynamic group of Aboriginal people in a most exciting period of Australia's history. This film was to reflect how Sandy and I saw Aboriginal people; as articulate, determined and individual in their opinions about land rights, welfare or whatever Aboriginal issues we endlessly seem to deal with. This film's uniqueness is in the fact that it specifically aimed to express how diverse our political actions and thoughts are amongst the community. It exposes internal conflict and highly intellectual differences between Aborigines. We deliberately aimed to show how Aboriginal people can be victims but with determination and justifiable anger moving away from past injustices without being morbid victims who are incapable of dealing with the past. The Aboriginal people in the film appeared as personal, intelligent and humorous. In fact all this film ever tried to do was try to capture the vigour of the time of the protests movement and ask why that sort of energy was

not seen on television any more. And just in keeping with the attitudes of the time, the film did not aspire to protect white sensitivities.

It is interesting that on *Tent Embassy*, as in *Blackout*, some of the Aboriginal producers themselves were very careful not to offend. Aboriginal director Sandy while editing *Tent Embassy* was reluctant to include scenes of white children dancing around a maypole inter-cut with scenes of Aboriginal tent protesters. This aim of this juxtaposition was to emphasise the difference between how whites and blacks celebrate Australia Day. However cautious Sandy was about offending white audiences, I nevertheless felt the scene worked very well for the segment and was encouraged by the white executive producer to include it. For the remainder of the editing of *Tent Embassy* I felt that his constant over-sensitivity was weakening the film's message and eventually I had to ask Sandy to abandon the project, which he did.

*Tent Embassy* went to air not without its problems. These were not only the results of the inconsistencies of oral history and memories, but often by more mundane matters like lack of archival footage, money, time constraints. There were instances where the black and white footage was limited to what interviewees were saying and therefore sometimes the wrong footage was used. For example, I wanted footage to accompany what one person was saying in the film about how terrified she was. There was no footage from that specific time, so I used another piece that gave the atmosphere of what she was saying. In the re-enactment the wrong car was used, but this is an example of what happens most of the time.

I was not prepared for the reaction amongst some Aboriginal leaders after the film went to air. One Aboriginal leader, for example, complained to the Managing Director of the ABC,



David Hill, in a telephone conversation that I should be fired from my job because the film omitted their part in the erection of the tent embassy. However the irony was that the three remaining people who set up the tent embassy specifically told me this person tried to 'talk them out of it'.

### *Storytellers of the Pacific*

Following *Tent Embassy* the next project I was commissioned to do was the international co-production between the Pacific Rim public television group entitled *Storytellers of the Pacific*. Leading up to the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, the Public Television Broadcasting Consortium of the Pacific Rim had agreed that the ABC would host the first international indigenous co-production documentary series entitled *Storytellers of the Pacific*. I was a television producer at the ABC at the time and had just completed a research trip to Canada, the United States and London to meet with other indigenous and black documentary filmmakers. At the same time discussions were taking place between executive producers from TVNZ in Auckland, TVO Canada, KCET in Los Angeles, who agreed that the APU at ABC TV Sydney offered a more commanding position to host the series. It was to follow that I would be asked to undertake the position as the series coordinator as well as the producer for the Australian segments. The process in the years to follow would begin to demonstrate to me a most revealing account of how 'different' our 'indigenous-ness' was and how our individual filming styles would prove to me that indigenous filmmakers were not all looking for the same thing. It also demonstrated to me how not to presume that indigenous peoples of the Pacific Rim were very similar in some respects but then were almost diametrically opposed in cultural matters as well. In fact it was rather chilling that one would find they had more in common with white producers from their own countries than they would have with other indigenous producers.

The end product nonetheless was quite successful. The four-part, one-hour documentary series premiered in 1995 and continues to be screened internationally. Composing of five ten minute segments each from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Hawaii, Guam, West Samoa and the west coast of the United States of America, each one hour episode was entitled, *Identity, Land Rights, Self-determination* and *Healing*. Each episode was to have a visual link in their segments that would bring consistency to the visual presentation of the series. Yet the themes of each segment were not easily arrived at, and there was also the problem of how these programs were going to be edited together, narrated, visually stylised and distributed. These were all issues the five indigenous Producers were going to have to resolve.

Episode topics were arrived at after two and a half years of telephone conference calls and much jet-set meetings from Sydney to Hollywood, Montreal and back. It had been agreed from the outset that each segment in each program would have to be a contemporary 'personal' account of one's own experience. The topic for the first episode - *Identity* - it seemed was arrived at without hesitation. It clearly established to us that we had many similar personal stories, whether it was from a Residential School in southern California to the children's homes along the south coast of NSW. Both had stolen children from their families for the purposes of assimilating them into white society. Almost everything from the personal accounts down to the government legislation of 'reserves and reservations' rang a familiar tune amongst the producers, who were astounded with how remarkably alike our government policies and our life experiences were. The second episode was called *Land Rights*, a term that I felt particularly comfortable with, which was eventually shared and understood by all. Although the second episode was originally going to be called '*Treaties*', Australia of course

had nothing to contribute. So it was thought that perhaps the topic Sovereignty might be the second best title for the series, but again, this was something that the Hawaiian people were keen on, but not others, eventually it had been dropped in place of *Land Rights*. The third episode topic - *Self-determination* - was easier, even though many of us were critical of what we saw as the failure of Self-determination in our communities.

A title for the fourth episode was much more difficult for me in particular. Although it had been raised for several weeks that the last episode would be called Religious Freedom, I felt that this was a topic not true to Aboriginal experiences. I insisted on having the name changed to at least Spirituality, but this was not agreed upon simply because it implied that the episode might indicate that viewers would be watching a program which was about 'dreamtime' legends and myths, and nothing about the spirit of 'survival'. Not many of us liked the term survival very much either, since it was strongly felt that although it was a powerful word, it still connotes that one is just merely 'hanging-on' to life, and not actively 'participating nor growing' in one's life. After several weeks of telephone conversations, it wasn't until one of our many meetings, this time in Montreal, that I was confronted by a room of indigenous male producers who didn't understand why I couldn't agree to the concept of religious freedom. I frankly told them that I didn't know how I could approach that topic for an Australian audience. After much frustration and stubbornness on my behalf, it suddenly struck me that what they were talking about was not 'Religious' Freedom, because the word 'religion' did not resonate with me, but in fact, in place of religion, I thought it meant 'Law', that they were talking about 'law'. It should be odd that what others called religion would mean 'law' in an Aboriginal context. Eventually it was decided that the fourth episode would be called *Healing*, and not Religious Freedom. Healing in fact sat very well with all of us.

Stylistically it was agreed that each episode would incorporate visual images that reflected the topic of each program. The visual links would be natural elements. It was decided that Identity would incorporate visual representations of 'air', whereas Land Rights would be visual elements of 'earth', Self-determination was 'fire' and Healing would be 'water'. But for the 'breakers' the indigenous producers wanted to use a common weapon or symbol for all the indigenous groups. It was felt very strongly by the group that the use of a 'canoe' would be universal to us all, but again I disagreed. Although I admitted that Aboriginal people used canoes, it wasn't as significant to me as perhaps the Waka Waka is to the Maoris, or the Kayak to the Native Americans and Inuit, and it wasn't nearly as significant as canoes are for the Hawaiians either. So after much searching and painstaking discussion, it was agreed that a symbol or weapon was not appropriate.

For the narration it was decided that each nation would have to use their own narrator, as some of us, although speaking English, were not going to understand each other's indigenous accents. It was perplexing to executive producer David Leonard why the Americans complained that they couldn't understand Aboriginal storyteller Pauline McLeod's accent particularly when Pauline had been a presenter on the ABC's *Playschool* program. My role then was to compile the segments as a series, read and approve their scripts, produce the soundtrack with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra for the overall series (as opposed to each segment). Story editing was done with Tom Zubrycki who wrote the narration. At least three different crews were used for the Australian segments. Graphic artist Ann Connors and myself designed the 'breakers', which was the 'spiralling downwards' on a world map of the Pacific Ocean, without canoe. And for three long years I had outlasted two executive producers, four directors, and a new head of documentaries. With the overseas crews there

had been a turnover of crews from Canada, new directors from New Zealand, a completely new broadcaster from the USA, and two more countries introduced into the series, they were the American Samoa and Guam. But the series finally went to air after I had left Australia to live in the States.

After living in America I never returned to the ABC. There I had been a Rockefeller Fellow in the Media, Culture and History Center at New York University. It was like I had to first live overseas before I could be seen as an Australian, and that my films could be viewed by American audiences for their merit more than if I was an Aboriginal person. I couldn't imagine making films in Australia ever again, nor restrict myself to the notion of being an Aboriginal filmmaker, whatever that meant. I was an Aboriginal woman who loved making films. Suddenly now I had to learn how to make them without being confined to a cultural stereotype. I had to think how one could be completely personal while upholding my political views. Most of all I had to cherish my independence as an individual, a luxury that most Aboriginal people are told that they can never if they want to be of any value to their community. Therefore I suppose it was no accident that I should want to record this experience, and that I should want to write it out of my system.



**The team of *Blackout Two*, Aboriginal Programs Unit ABC TV 1989**

*Daniel Bobongie, David Sandy, Lorraine Wallace, Frances Peters-Little, Lorraine Mafi Williams, Susan Coombs and Bruno De Villenoisy*



**Excerpt from *Tent Embassy*, ABC TV August 1992**

*Nobles and Savages*



*Contest with spears, shields and clubs* by Joseph Lycett, ca. 1775-1828  
National Library of Australia, PIC R5678 LOC MS SR



*Natives of New South Wales as seen in the streets of Sydney*, Augustus Earle 1793-1838  
National Library of Australia, PUBL —0053-04

## Chapter Four

### *'The enduring Features': the noble savage in television documentary*

The sweet voice of nature is no longer an infallible guide for us, nor is the independence we have received from her a desirable state. Peace and innocence escaped us forever, even before we tasted their delights. Beyond the range of thought and feeling of the brutish men of the earliest times, and no longer within the grasp of the 'enlightened' men of later periods, the happy life of the Golden Age could never really have existed for the human race. When men could have enjoyed it they were unaware of it and when they have understood it they had already lost it.<sup>45</sup>

*J.J. Rousseau*

This chapter addresses the problem that despite the fact that Aboriginal image-makers have gained increased control over their images in the past decade, television continues to relive Rousseau's idea of the *noble savage*. These ideas persist not only in the images screened on television, but also, as discussed in the previous chapter, in the ways in which Aboriginal television is discussed. The task of getting rid of the desire to reproduce the *noble savage* in documentary films is an essential one that must be consciously dealt with by both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal filmmakers and their critics.

Yet going beyond the noble savage seems to be an extraordinarily difficult task. Latent desires for the '*noble savage* living in utopia' have been seeping into the colonial subconscious for several hundreds of years and it is unlikely such desires will disappear overnight. Many argue that only non-Aboriginal image-makers are capable of having *noble savage* imaginings about Aborigines, but this is not so. Both coloniser and the colonised continue to carry such desires, the coloniser because of their position of power in relation to Aboriginal issues and conditions, and the colonised because their traditional cultural values,

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<sup>45</sup> J.J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, translated and edited by G.D.H., Dent, London, 1973, as quoted in R. Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, Sydney, 1984, p. 144.



laws and communities have been repressed or overrun by the coloniser. One of the tragedies of colonisation has been that even after two centuries Aboriginal artists constantly struggle to find that place which colonial thinking has not contaminated. Non-Aboriginal people who seek to truly support Aboriginal artists are limited by their own colonial interpretations of the artists' work.

This chapter also critiques the binary framework underpinning the term '*noble savage*'. It argues that it is precisely because of its paradoxical nature that the notion of the *noble savage* has endured for several centuries, has proven itself pliable to new societies and eras. Before exploring those features in a twenty-first century context it is essential to review the context in which they were first referred to in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Australia.

#### *The 'noble savage in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*

The concept of the *noble savage* had been popularised long before Europeans arrived in Australia. Although many have thought Jean Jacques Rousseau coined the term, in his book, *The Noble Savage*, Cranston argues that authors and explorers referred to the *noble savage* (or the characteristics of the *noble savage*) as early as the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Proponents of the idea in one form or another included Christopher Columbus, Michel de Montaigne, Desiderius Erasmus, and Sir Walter Raleigh; Raleigh was particularly fascinated by the way *savages* obtained their food. In the seventeenth century the poet John Dryden said, 'I am as free as nature first made man, Ere the base laws of servitude began, when wild in woods the *noble savage* ran.'<sup>46</sup> By the eighteenth century the French meaning of the word 'savage' conveyed an uncorrupted innocence. Rousseau's statement, quoted above, demonstrates that the *noble savage* was a concept in which Europeans of his time

romantically viewed other cultures with a sense of superiority, and also that they peculiarly and paradoxically envied them. This in itself sets up a curious contradiction in terms and feelings about others and themselves and suggests that these desires existed for several centuries in their own societies.

So why did Europeans need to create the *noble savage*, and why were they compelled to find a utopian society? Gregory Claeys, in his discussion of the concept of Utopia, suggests that the simplicity of *savage* life was thought to be a crushing answer to early Greek philosophers such as Plato who valued the sophistication of humankind. Similarly, Maurice Cranston says the concept of *noble savage* gained popularity at a time when Europeans felt they had lost the ability to make use of nature's gifts, and were instead trapped in the tangled world of letters, magistrates, politics and commerce.<sup>47</sup>

Interestingly the motivations of scientists and artists who ventured into new worlds during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, looking for solutions to their own society's over-commercialisation and corruption, sound remarkably similar to a reasons given by a filmmakers at the Round Table conference in Braidwood in 2000. In a group of cross-cultural documentary filmmakers at the conference they discussed their views on why they made films about other cultures. Their reasons included: their own ethnographic interests, addressing past misrepresentations, political reasons, artistic reasons, desires for exoticism, financial reasons, to establish a new career in film and television because there are outlets for Aboriginal broadcasting, and finally trying to understand one's own society and its values.

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<sup>46</sup> J. Dryden, 'The Conquest of Granada, Part One, 1670', quoted in R. Jones, 'Ordering the Landscape', in I. and T. Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the First Australians*, Sydney, 1985.

<sup>47</sup> M. Cranston, *The noble savage: Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1754-1762*, London, 1991. See also R. Schaer, G. Claeys, and L. Tower Sargent (eds), *Utopia: The search for the ideal society in the western world*, New York and Oxford, 2000. Both books stress in great detail many complex reasons for European desires for utopia and

Utopia was thought to be located in a greater Southern Hemisphere that was relatively unknown to Europeans. They supposed the South to be the 'reflection' of the Eurasian land mass, balancing and contrasting the 'corruptible and tangled world' of the north.<sup>48</sup> Dreams of Australia as a utopian land of opportunity can be found as early as Lady Mary Fox's 1837 book *An Account of an Expedition to the Interior of New Holland* where she envisages the new penal society with all the promises of a utopian paradise. When Europeans actually encountered Aboriginal people on the Australian continent, they saw them through a 'double vision under the guise of objectivity'.<sup>49</sup> They saw Aboriginal people in the same way they saw the two hemispheres, that is, through a framework supporting a simplistic dichotomy of opposing poles. In other words, the world for them at that time meant that one is good or evil, black or white, north or south.

Even while they were discontented with their own 'ruined' society, and looking to other societies for new possibilities, Europeans could not bring themselves actually to shake off their 'twofold-coloured lenses' upon the world. No matter how 'enlightened' they imagined themselves to be, or how sympathetic their accounts and sketches, they maintained their racist superior attitudes over those they sketched, wrote about, and recorded. In exalting the people they met, they perhaps thought they were acting in a most *noble* manner themselves. Yet the 'scientific' knowledge they recorded, with its assumption that the indigenous peoples of Australia and the South Pacific were *noble savages*, endured perhaps regardless of their intentions.

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the noble savage. Their extensive works cover several European societies throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>48</sup> Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, pp. 2-3.

Audiences read the voyagers' and explorers' representations of Aboriginal people as *noble* and/or *savage*. In its historical and also our contemporary context; the notion of the *noble savage* was and is ambiguous. It does not have a fixed meaning and is not confined to a past time in history. Subliminal meanings of Aborigines as *noble* and *savage* have survived for centuries, and are in continuous use setting the framework of binary viewpoints about Aboriginal people and how we understand them. Often the English usage of the term *noble savage* implies ferocity and irrational violence. So *noble savage* has generally been read not as a single, coherent term, but as an ambiguity, an oscillation between the binary opposites of *noble* innocence and *savage* irrational ferocity. The term noble savage has several distinct meanings - 'patrons of nature's gifts', infantile creatures of innocence, black naked brutes, and 'torn between two cultures' which I investigate now in detail.

#### *Patrons of nature's gifts*

From what I have seen of the Natives of New Holland they may appear to some to be the most wretched People upon Earth; but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans, being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous, but with the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them...The Earth and the Sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life. They covet not Magnificent Houses; Household stuff; they live in a Warm and fine Climate, and enjoy every Wholesome Air...in short they seemed to set no Value upon anything of their own nor any one Article we could offer them. This in my opinion Argues, that they think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life, and they have no Superfluities.<sup>50</sup>

*Captain James Cook.*

James Cook recorded in his journal that Aborigines had no value or purpose for material goods, and perhaps this idea that Aborigines have no material need and that they all live in perfect harmony with the land, indeed are only authentic when they are next to nature, has endured the longest. The notion that Aborigines do not have any use for material goods and

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<sup>49</sup> D. Losche, *Double visions: Art histories and colonial histories in the Pacific*, Cambridge, 1999, p. 79.

are happiest when they are left to nature's gifts has been a politically powerful one. In some regards even Aborigines themselves romanticise their own lack of need for wealth, materialism and ownership.

The notion of Aborigines as living in perfect harmony with nature was present at the time of early settlement. In Joseph Lycett's 1817 painting, *Contest with spears, shields and clubs*,<sup>51</sup> the noble savage is portrayed engaged in harmless spear-throwing activity in green pastures of natural parklands. He saw the land and the Aborigines in a natural harmony. In contrast to Lycett, Augustus Earle's 1830 painting *Natives of NSW as seen in the streets of Sydney*,<sup>52</sup> shows them as somewhat tragic and brutish. It is interesting to note that in Lycett's time Aborigines were not considered a hindrance to white man's conquest for land, but by 1830 just four years after Governor Darling told white settlers to take vigorous measures for their own defence against the natives Aborigines were depicted as *savages*. Those who did not initially seek to plunder or establish settlement could afford to be romantic and idealistic; when the Europeans needed land and cheap labour, however, attitudes changed.

The idea of living in harmony with nature, with few material wants, remains a most popular theme in Aboriginal documentary films, well represented in nature and wildlife programs on the commercial networks from the Seven Network's 1960s series *Nature Walkabout* to their *World Around Us* program in 2001. Commercial television channels are not the only ones responsible for popularising this genre of documentary film making but the commercial networks have consistently aired programs that representing Aborigines only as

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<sup>50</sup> J. Cook, *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his voyages of discovery*, edited by J. C. Beaglehole, Cambridge, 1968, as quoted in H. Reynolds, *Frontier*, 1987, p. 96.

<sup>51</sup> J. Lycett (ca. 1775-1828), *Contest With Spears, Shields And Clubs*, NLA, 830, R5678.

<sup>52</sup> A. Earle (1773-1838), *Natives Of NSW As Seen In The Streets Of Sydney*, Rex Kivell Collection, NLA, NK1289/3.

hunter/gatherers. These representations of Aborigines as the hunter and gatherer in nature and wildlife documentaries reminds us that Commonwealth parliamentary ministers have at times had to combine the Aboriginal portfolio with responsibility for Australian flora and fauna. In these films, Aborigines, featured mostly as backdrops, supposedly teaching white friends (the protagonists - or the great white hunter, occasionally looking particularly uncomfortable with bare white feet) how to hunt and survive harmoniously with the land. Without a voice, these Aboriginal teachers serve to assure audiences just how skilful is the white protagonist's hunting and gathering abilities should he discover himself lost or starving. (Well, at least until such time as he is reunited with his invisible camera-crew in a 4WD to connect with a chartered flight back to a swanky Sydney editing room.)

*Infantile creatures of innocence*

In all questions of morality and in all matters connected with the emotional nature the blacks were mere children.<sup>53</sup>

*C.S Wake*

Darwinians believed that the adult European passed through the stages of human evolution while growing up, and Aborigines were still at the childhood stage. References to Aborigines as childish are too numerous to mention. The argument that Aborigines are childlike underpins and remains the foundation stone for most Aboriginal policy, past and present. Aboriginal barrister Noel Pearson continues to argue that it is a paternal and welfare mentality that chains Aborigines to their own social and cultural demise.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> C.S Wake, *The mental characteristics of primitive man, as exemplified by the Australian Aborigines*, JAI, 1, 1872, as quoted in H. Reynolds, *Frontier*, St. Leonards, 1987, p. 118.

<sup>54</sup> N. Pearson, *Our Right To Take Responsibility*, Cairns, 2000.

The image of an Aboriginal child is usually featured as being more likeable than an Aboriginal adult, and many films made a poignant statement about their inevitable and dismal future as an Aboriginal adult, if they are unable to 'escape' the Aboriginal community. Films that promoted the 'training' of Aboriginal children featured prominently in films depicting the *Round Australia MacRobertson Expeditions* 1928. Other films with this message can be seen on the *Dreaming Reels* volume one and two. Nowhere is the notion of 'Aborigines as children' more apparent than in the policy of fostering out of Aboriginal children to be raised and placed in white homes as a part of their assimilation and protection. There is a visual blueprint and constant reminder through films about how Aborigines were taken and educated as children by white authorities, such as the 1937 documentary *The Native Problem in Queensland*.

These earlier depictions of Aborigines as childlike have had consequences for filmmakers in recent times. Because of so many bad memories of how Aboriginal voices had been silenced, and white narrators had spoken for them sounding like a patronising parent, many white and black filmmakers now struggle with the question of narration in their films. Sometimes Aboriginal producers leave out narration altogether, as in the second series of *Blackout*. There is also the problem of deciding whether to use subtitles. Commenting on his personal filmmaking style Ian Dunlop says that with subtitles he struggled with not only language differences but in tidying-up Aboriginal English, because he felt that eventually it was just better that he translated word for word and then people could get their own gist of what is being said. But it's a risk all the time.<sup>55</sup> Voice-overs, if excessive, can appear to make filmmakers treat their talent and subjects in a patronising way. This is especially noticeable

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<sup>55</sup> I. Dunlop, Round Table discussion at Cross-Cultural Filmmakers Conference, Braidwood, 2000.

when it is a white voice over Aboriginal images, thus reverting to the representation of Aborigines as childlike.

The notion of Aborigines as childlike and close to nature fits with the idea that they are creatures of innocence, who can never be held responsible for their own actions. George Augustus Robinson the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Tasmania led the Bruny Islanders to Wybalenna where they would eventually die. One of Robinson's followers was Trugannini whose tragic life was followed by an even more tragic burial. Her head severed from the rest of her body was sent overseas and her bones were exhumed from the grave, burned, and scattered in the sea. Robinson saw the Bruny Islanders as unoffending and wretched Aborigines who were thought doomed for extinction. Robinson saw them as creatures of innocence and victims of injustice, and they would also be so.

But can't Aborigines take some responsibility for what happens today? In a conversation with Aboriginal documentary maker Cathy Eatock I mentioned how brave she was to tackle in her film *Speak Quiet, Speak Strong* the issue of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. What she successfully does is identify alcoholism as the main cause of domestic violence and tries to explain why. She does this by arguing in part that disconnection from their cultural values and practices disadvantages Aboriginal people, with the result that alcoholism and domestic violence are rampant. There are many documentaries arguing the case that Aboriginal alcoholism and domestic violence are because they have had their culture taken away from them. This is not an argument that 'white alcoholics' can make. It is as if they are arguing that the root cause of Aboriginal domestic violence and alcoholism is white oppression, thus individual responsibility is omitted. Hope for change is thus made solely dependent upon political outcomes, and not on personal development. Other films made by



non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal alcoholism and violence are Pat Fiske's *Night Patrol* which has been screened on the ABC several times, and Margaret Lattimore's 1990 film *Genocide*, which went to air only once on the ABC at 11.30pm during the week. *Genocide* was felt by the head of documentaries Mark Hamlyn, in consultation with Aboriginal producers in the APU, to be highly offensive and sensational rather than dealing with the issues that it set out to deal with. Lattimore's film it seemed lacked the sympathy it should have had for those powerless individuals who were victims of alcoholic abuse.

Another recent example of treating Aborigines as 'creatures of innocence' can be found in Darlene Johnson's film *Stolen Generations*. Powerfully produced, this timely film reiterates the message in Alec Morgan's film *Lousy Little Sixpence*. At the time of Johnson's film release, just weeks before Senator Herron challenged the very notion of 'stolen generations', the media ran amok opposing the term 'stolen generation', arguing that not every Aboriginal child and generation was stolen. This is a complex debate. Many Aboriginal people were offended by Herron's statement, whereas other Aboriginal people defended their experiences by saying that they were not stolen, and that not every adoptive parent acted with racist intent. Channel Nine's *Sunday* program conducted interviews with several Aboriginal people about their 'less than innocent' Aboriginal parents. There was some black and white footage of two Aboriginal girls climbing the staircase of their new 'white' home used in Morgan and Johnson's films, and featured in the *Sunday* program. *Sunday*'s presenter Helen Dalley interviewed the women in the footage, one who insisted her mother was not innocent in the adoption process, and she did not feel like a victim. Yet documentary filmmakers continue to use the footage of the girls as examples of stolen children abused by the system.

Seeing the world in simple dichotomies on television in fact does not offer the opportunity for explanation and dialogue between journalists, the viewers nor for Aboriginal people themselves. For example in 2000 Nine's *Sunday* program aired a cover story about the Aboriginal youth and violence in the towns of Moree and Walgett in 2000. I later wrote to the reporter Helen Dalley who sent me a copy of the program and a letter of reply. I told her that I had been visiting Walgett at the time of the airing of the program and I congratulated her on dealing with the story successfully. But many might be amazed that I had done so, particularly since they may find it difficult to believe that the vast majority of Aboriginal people in Walgett would even support the story. For me as it was with other Aboriginal elders I spoke with at the time we had felt it was accurate, not only about the poor relationship between the youths and the local police, but that the program demonstrated just how powerless and useless the police were in handling street violence. The fact was that Aboriginal adults were disgusted in the police's inefficacy and tired of the manner in which youth violence held their communities to ransom. Strangely enough the anti-police and anti-violence attitudes in the town were views shared by both blacks and whites. It wasn't presented as a black versus white story, but if someone needed to make a political statement out of the matter then it could very easily be presented as a black versus white issue, but that would perhaps not be what the locals would have been satisfied with. In Dalley's letter to me she explained that it was sometimes very difficult to make stories about Aboriginal communities because if you presented the story where you as journalist is coming from outside and saying something about a 'human' problem, then it sometimes gets interpreted as being a racial problem. Then you are accused of being racist. But being called a racist does not discourage Dalley to make Aboriginal stories, which is perhaps a good thing particularly when one considers that for every time a journalist was called racist they then lost interest in

making Aboriginal programs. Then just how many stories would be seen on television about Aborigines?

It seems that the more Aborigines claim innocence the more whites defend their guilt, or their lack of it. It has polarised the argument for an apology particularly for the present day Prime Minister. However John Howard is a Prime Minister who makes no personal connection to Australian history, or a time before him. He holds to no responsibility for reconciliation or the reputation of the Australian past in relation to Aboriginal people. He is someone who maintains his leadership by keeping Australians at opposite poles; like the republican debate, the refugee crisis, and the 'sorry' debate. Australians are divided between those having a deep concern and empathy for Aborigines and those who are desperate for Aborigines to disappear into white society.

*Black naked brutes*

They are ungrateful, deceitful, wily and treacherous. They are indolent in the extreme, squalid and filthy in their surroundings, as well as disgustingly unpure amongst themselves.<sup>56</sup>

*W. Wilshire*

The idea of Aborigines as close to nature had a nasty 'savage' side. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Aborigines were seen as non-human. The observations of artists and scientists were fraught with European double visions and value judgments, prejudices and discriminations, equating Aborigines as sub-human and animalistic. The examples of statements about Aborigines as possessing ape-like characteristics are abundant, and these followed numerous references to 'other' black and exotic racial groups centuries before. Just

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<sup>56</sup> W. Wilshire, as quoted in H. Reynolds, *Frontier*, 1987, p. 109.

about any or all of the Melanesian, Polynesian, Indian and Caribbean groups had been stigmatised with ape-like comparisons. Darwinian scholars and nineteenth century anatomical scientists extended their studies to the Australian Aborigines brandishing Aboriginal society as not having sovereignty over their land, and devoid of any governance and law and without civilization. Augustus Prinsep in 1833 likened them to Ourang Outangs.

Roger Barthelemy's drawings most resemble Aborigines with the feature of an ape and British Bulldogs. Leading medical scientist W. Ramsay-Smith, in his paper entitled 'The Place of the Australian Aborigine in Recent Anthropological Research', stated in 1907 that 'Aborigines furnished the largest number of ape-like characters than of any other race'. Animalistic comparisons continue today. The mythologising of Aboriginal desires to 'live in the dirt' or in conditions unfit for human consumption is a popular catch-cry for racists who believe that Aborigines choose their lives and opt to live in squalor, whether its in the ghetto streets of Redfern or in tin humpies on the outskirts of rural towns. This is highlighted in *Sixty Minutes* in the episode when Pauline Hanson says 'Please Explain?' She is at Palm Island asking Aborigines how can they live in such filthy conditions.

Nakedness was also taken as a sign of being close to animals. It was an important feature for artists and writers to record. John Hawkesworth, for example, wrote: 'All inhabitants that we saw were stark naked, they did not appear to be numerous nor to live in societies, but like the other animals were scattered along the coast and in the woods'.<sup>57</sup> Nakedness also has a sexual aspect. Anthropologist Nic Peterson says of photographer Kolodny 'in the mid 1900s clearly removed the tops of women's dresses revealing their breasts with deliberate erotic intention

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<sup>57</sup> J. Hawkesworth, *An account of the voyages undertaken by the order of his present majesty for making discoveries in the Southern Hemisphere*, 3 vols, London, 1773, as quoted in Gibson, *The Diminishing Paradise*, UK, 1984, p. 34.

primarily designed to accentuate racial difference'.<sup>58</sup> Representations of Aboriginal nakedness are closely tied to blackness. Aborigines remain as one of the very few groups in Australian society who have black skin and are divided up into caste systems and degrees of blackness. While people of Asian appearance are visual targets in the public sphere, immediate attention is not drawn to their degrees of Asian-ness or whether they are half-caste or quarter-caste. Other racial features and characteristics do not have the same perpetuating racist history, as those who have black skins or are descendants of those who are black. Blackness has its own history and is still stigmatised as impure, unattractive and soiled. This explains why images of black skin colour are minimal on television. If there are black-skinned people on television today in a non-political context it is because they are exotic or it is more likely they are from another country. Television aims to be pristine and pure. Aboriginality is not pristine in television terms; Aboriginal bodies and hair are more often than not seen on television as dirty and unkempt. Blackness on the other hand can also be seen to be shiny and exotic, as long as the blackness is not Aboriginal.

Nakedness can only be pure if cultural and non-sexual. White male photographers, artists, cameramen, and other image-makers photographing black men and women are supposedly non-sexual. People with brown skin on the other hand are not as restricted by the camera's lens to the same environments. Brown-skinned people are considered as both border-lined and flexible in any public space that is of 'Aboriginal' relevance only. It is still unusual to see brown-skinned people in environments that do not have a political or social context that is Aboriginal. Black skin is more often than not associated with and framed within natural landscapes and exteriors. If we see black skin in the cities they are in demonstrations or performances. Rarely do we see them in kitchens, or in public spaces like coffee shops and

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<sup>58</sup> N. Peterson, 'The popular image', in Donaldson and Donaldson (eds), *Seeing the first Australians*, 1985, p.

supermarkets, or going to work in their offices. Aboriginal 'blackness' on television is usually when the camera's lens frames them within an exterior environment, from the deserts to the sea, swimming or hunting amongst the water lilies and gorges; very rarely do we see blackness within the interior of buildings unless in the jails. People with black skin are almost always seen as people with uncombed or soiled hair. They are either wearing dust-ridden clothes, sitting in the dirt painting or within the confined spaces of harshness, depression and heat. And while there are many Aboriginal people living in these environments, the way in which white audiences read Aborigines in these surroundings is to read them as 'others' who do not live like they do.

People with black skins are also rarely heard speaking English. Those black voices we do hear are usually subtitled. Aborigines are rarely invited on television to talk about matters other than political and cultural. Only white people can talk about non-political or non-cultural matters. What we have learned to interpret as the voice of authority, neutrality and intelligence in broadcasting is white male voices that speak English. The same way many female broadcasters conform to the imaginary authority of the white male voice by lowering the tone of their voice on television to gain the same authority in their presentation. Yet the tone of Aboriginal voice, particularly non-English speaking people and Aboriginal men's voices, are generally softer than white men's voices or even black women's voices for that matter. So the black voice does not come across as convincing or authoritative, particularly when they are in an interviewing situation, for in this situation the white person is not just your average lay person, but your highly articulate journalist and broadcaster.

From early explorer artworks of the eighteenth century to the twenty first century, the issue of skin colour has shifted between the *noble* and *savage* poles. The black skin is now nobler,

while the fair skin is now more *savage*. White-skinned Aborigines have more difficulty with issues of authenticity. White skinned Aborigines are associated with being treacherous and un-authentic. While it was the ‘full-blood’ Aborigines who were regarded as treacherous on the frontiers of settlement, the ‘mixed-race’ Aborigines later took on this role. While it was thought that the ‘full-blood’ blacks were becoming extinct, the ‘mixed-blood’ was becoming a problem with expansion on the frontier. At the turn of the nineteenth century colonists began romanticising the black-skinned Aborigines as the pure and authentic *noble* bushman, but thought that ‘hybrids’ carried the bad in both white and black races. Children with black mothers and white fathers were worse than the pure blacks and white skinned Aborigines are far more treacherous.<sup>59</sup>

#### *Torn between two cultures*

One of the enduring themes in *noble savage* literature is the idea of the tortured *savage* torn between two cultures. Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627), Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, (1726) all depicted ‘modern men’ (white men) struggling to learn humility and tolerance for his fellow but outcast (*savage*) ‘brother’. The tortured *savage* is an anti-hero but befriends white men who ultimately betray or try to save or convert him. The *savage* is then almost always driven to extreme measures that usually end in his own demise. This classic dramatic format from seventeenth and eighteenth century literature continues to be used in many films about Aborigines, who are always ‘torn’ between two cultures and loyalties. An Aboriginal woman, Kangaree, in William Thomas Moncrieff’s 1831 operatic three act drama tragedy *Oh Van Dieman’s Land!* is torn between choosing the love of a white man over the love of a black man. A century and a half later,

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<sup>59</sup> I. Keen, *Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures In Settled Australia*, Canberra, 1988, p. 197.

Aboriginal characters in feature films like *Fringe dwellers*, *Jedda*, *Black Heart*, *The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith*, *Storm Boy*, *Blackfellas*, and *Walkabout* inevitably share the same fate.

The notion of Aborigines being ‘torn’ between cultures acts as a white explanation for the demise of Aboriginal characters, rather than a situation where the whites themselves take an active role in the Aborigines’ ‘inevitable doom’. Rather than accept white responsibility, it is easier to blame blacks for being lost between two worlds. Furthermore, this message is for blacks only: it is irrelevant to whites. Whites do not move between two worlds in this way, but are seen as capable of accommodating and integrating their pasts and futures, good and evil, positives and negatives. Whites are very capable of living within a multicultural society while maintaining their own sense of identity. It is only non-whites who supposedly do not know how to do this. They are supposedly traumatised and diminished by integration. If they do accommodate and integrate different cultures, then they are not truly Aboriginal. They become polluted and contaminated, and therefore less Aboriginal. Aboriginality when polluted dies, and so does the Aboriginal character or signifier in these plays and films. Documentary films that capitalise on this theme include *Two Laws*, *Exile and the Kingdom*, *Couldn't be Fairer*, *Genocide*, *Cracks in the Mask*, *Land of the Lightning Brothers*, *Not to Lose you my Language*.

#### *Doomed to extinction*

Erasmus wrote of the ‘happiness of the simpleton and blockhead for they are devoid of knowledge of their own death’. Australian whites in the nineteenth century thought Aboriginal people were doomed to extinction. As Henry Reynolds puts it: Metaphors abounded - the blacks were variously fading away, fading out, decaying, slipping from life’s platform, melting away like the snow from the mountains at the approach of spring, perishing



'as does the autumnal grass before a bush fire'. But metaphors were not enough for the inquiring mind. In his lectures on colonisation at Oxford in 1839 Herman Merivale argued that the declining Aboriginal population was not due to warfare, spirits, new epidemics or the destruction of game. There were 'deeper and more mysterious causes at work; the mere contact of Europeans is fatal to him in some unknown manner'.<sup>60</sup>

Herman Merivale's view that the disappearance of blacks (or black skin) was mysterious is echoed in the 1993 documentary *Black Man's House*, which at both the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals was awarded the prize best documentary. Steven Thomas' film cannot explain the countless number of Aboriginal lives lost in Tasmania under the care of Chief Protectorate George Augustus Robinson. Instead of stating the reasons why so many were dead, the film focuses on a group of contemporary Tasmanian Aborigines searching for their ancestors' graves so that they could be finally put to rest in a culturally appropriate manner, at the Wybalena cemetery. When this occasion takes place it is perhaps the most uplifting and high-spirited moment of the film. For the rest of the film Tasmanian Aborigines are presented as a morbid people whose skin-colour is not the same as that of their ancestors. The fiery and political savvy of well-known white skinned Tasmanian Aborigines like Michael Mansell and Jimmy Everett (who is in the film) are notably missing. It is clear Thomas capitalised on his Aboriginal subjects' desires to identify as Aboriginal although their skins were white, thus obviously making a personal connection to his white audiences. Throughout the film the music described by UTS lecturer Norie Neumark as a funeral dirge is juxtaposed against a repetitious graphic of Benjamin Dutterau's nineteenth century painting of the 'Conciliator' (George Augustus Robinson) shaking hands with the natives.

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<sup>60</sup> Reynolds, *Frontier*, p. 122.

Each time the graphic appears the camera zooms further and further into the clasping white and black handshake. The black/white handshake, a very powerful symbol in the Reconciliation movement, represents to me a black/white skin connection of unwritten negotiations between men only. *Black Man's Houses* is important because this film single-handedly includes many of the recurrent themes and images I wish to draw attention to: the significance of skin colour, infant-like characterisations, morbidity and the obsession with death or dying blacks.

Aboriginal filmmakers make ethnographic films that seek to record cultures and how 'others' see that culture. Wayne Barker who made film *Milli Milli*, about a sacred site belonging to his own community, for the purposes of cultural maintenance. Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins made *Walpiri Fire Ceremony*, ethnographically detailing the Walpiri's traditional fire ceremony. This film offers beautiful insights into the ceremonial kinship and lives of the Walpiri people in central Australia. Michael Riley's film *Malangi* was about the Aboriginal artist David Malangi. A 'day in the life' style film, it showed David's life of hunting, fishing, painting and included a narration of the Djungguwan Sister's Songlines. Riley's somewhat classical ethnographic film includes a minor point about how the government stole Malangi's images to put onto the first Australian dollar note without his permission.

But how do these films differ from the hundreds of ethnographic films made by white ethnographers? One major difference is the absence of a white protagonist, and several of the Aboriginal performers now had a voice. Renowned Australian ethnographic filmmaker Ian Dunlop for many years filmed Aborigines without sound and placed his narration over them, which is a practice that Perkins and Riley avoid.

Should we always speak favourably of ethnographic films when produced by Aborigines? Do Aboriginal producers have a monopoly of truth in the interpretation of other Aboriginal cultures in ethnographic filmmaking? Do we assume that all Aboriginal people are economically and culturally homogenous, have greater understanding of all Aboriginal communities and culture, and represent them accurately? Put in a white context, most people would agree that not all whites can represent other whites, yet to expect this to be the case in an Aboriginal context is not only patronising it is ludicrous. What may in fact be even more serious is the repetition and imbalance of images of Aboriginal people as *noble savages* living in perfect harmony with the land irrespective of whether the filmmaker is Aboriginal or not. Perhaps the stereotype is more of a problem than the question of whether one racial group makes 'truer' films than another racial group.

### *Conclusion*

What has become problematic for Aboriginal filmmakers is that while they and those who support their cause present sympathetic messages in their films, they remain bound by the same binary frameworks that set Aborigines up as *nobles* and *savages*. In turn, audiences have largely learnt to read Aboriginal text and image in terms of *noble* and *savage* desires. Current negative and positive images are both a part of this. There has been a constant oscillation between the *noble* and *savage* poles. The more some focus on the 'savage' aspect of Aboriginal life, the more others oppose them and stress the *noble* pole, and vice versa. Thus television and other media representations of Aboriginal people and culture continue to witness a war between *savages* and *nobles*, guilty and innocent, and blacks and whites. What has changed perhaps in the last few decades has been the inclusion of other groups, such as migrants from Asia, with a voice in Australian society who are outside these dichotomies. Ironically, however, the television programs about Aborigines rarely reflect this change. They

continue to focus mostly upon black culture versus white culture and the impact that they have upon each other and their tragic history.

When I interviewed Aboriginal documentary filmmaker Cathy Eatock in 2001, she said that what is missing is not topics about Aborigines but rather Aboriginal perspectives on matters other than colonisation and anti-colonisation issues. She gave the example of the 2001 Tampa refugee crisis off the coastline of Christmas Island where she said, that what was notably missing from the media hype was a balanced view on the refugee crisis, but also what an Aboriginal perspective would have given the debate. She argued that while any such subject is not necessarily specifically Aboriginal, that there were times that she wished she could see more people who shared her views being expressed on television.

Aboriginal filmmakers are confined to expressing themselves in anti-colonial discourse. They are yet to address the heterogeneous societies of Aboriginal contemporary and traditional culture, let alone modern Aboriginal class divisions that have emerged in the past three to four decades. Yet while there has been in recent years a leaning towards the *noble* pole, this thesis argues that neither pole is competent to represent Aboriginal people and culture. These opposing poles of unreal fixed European images and beliefs not only continue to fail but also cheat the wider Australian community out of understanding this country's history. For as long as black or white documentary filmmakers remain confined to the *noble savage* they are denied an opportunity to engage in an honest dialogue with each other. For as long as blacks continue to defend the *noble savage* whites will remain impotent to rid themselves of their *noble savage* desires. The responsibility lies with Aboriginal filmmakers to have the courage to challenge the *noble savage* if they want whites to cease their patronising and racist representations of Aboriginal lives, culture and history.

## Chapter Five

### *Aboriginal filmmakers, self-representation and community politics*

This is a critical time: Australians have seemingly abandoned the oversimplified excuses for racism given by Hansonism; the peak of the Aboriginal reconciliation movement seems to have passed; and Australians are enduring yet another term under a Howard Liberal government which is losing popularity. With the current upswing of Aboriginal people returning to producing documentaries for mainstream public television, the opportunity to scrutinize the reasons for racism and to place social and cultural divisions under the microscope is at an all-time high in Australian history, and there is much potential for adventurous and innovative Aboriginal television documentary. At the moment, however, Aboriginal television documentary seems to be losing its impact on audiences, and there are some important issues to be addressed by both black and white filmmakers. These issues centre around the enduring effects of *noble* and *savage* imaginings of the Aborigine on Aboriginal television documentary production.

In the current climate, films that present a polarised view of black *nobles* and white *savages* alienate viewers. While it is true that whites were responsible for dispossessing Aboriginal people of their land, their children, and basic human rights, this argument is losing its impact in the media for both black and white audiences - blacks because many of them want to move on, and whites because they have already said sorry and do not know what else they can do.<sup>61</sup> Even if colonisation is the problem, documentary filmmakers are supposed to be creative people who find new ways to provoke audiences, as Alec Morgan's film *Lousy Little Sixpence* did in 1982, when it first brought public attention to the issue of the stolen

generations. Here was a film that white audiences could identify themselves with, not because they had all had first hand experience with Aboriginal foster care, but because they could relate to what it was like to feel dispossessed by families. Morgan told me in interview that he thought his film made a large impact at the time because its subject matter was new and it struck a personal note with ordinary people.

Aboriginal television documentary has rarely had this kind of impact in recent years. When I asked Morgan if he thought that documentary films about Aborigines were losing their impact, he replied that perhaps audiences have become de-sensitised to Aboriginal affairs in general. At the Cross-Cultural Filmmakers Conference in 2000, filmmaker Pip Deveson said she thought that programs on *Messagestick* or *ICAM* were almost always 'spoon-feeding sugary messages to white audiences and would not allow for the Aboriginal talent or subjects in their stories to just breathe'. I agree with both Morgan and Deveson. In general, films about Aborigines are losing impact because they repeat the rhetoric of another generation, provide the same superficial answers to questions that have become more complex over time, continue to hammer messages and issues that audiences feel powerless to do anything about, or rest on the basic principles of *nobles* versus *savages*. I will focus my attention on the last of these points, the durability of the underlying theme of *nobles* and *savages* in documentary films.

These ideas survive in part because certain formal steps have been taken to protect the image of Aborigines as powerless *nobles* against a gigantic *savage* television industry. In this chapter, I look closely at the guidelines designed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to protect the interests of Aborigines, and investigate how these guidelines have affected the

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<sup>61</sup> Interviews were conducted by Tessa Rose on the Sydney Harbour Bridge for the IPU, SBS TV, at Corroboree

filmmaking process. In my view, these measures are becoming problematic both for Aboriginal filmmakers specifically and Aboriginal people more generally, since what underlies them is the idea that since Aboriginal people are *nobles* and not *savages*, their only problems come from the whites and what they have historically done to them. I argue that rather than hiding unconvincingly behind a thin veneer of cultural piety, half-truths, and an uncomfortable self-consciousness in order to protect their *noble* image, it would be more beneficial for Aboriginal filmmakers in the long term to initiate debates about their own communities. Aboriginal people might find it worked to their advantage to take on tougher and more realistic black issues in documentary films, even at the risk of further racist attacks and injustices.

#### *The notion of Aboriginal 'community'*

Underpinning the guidelines, and the protocols that protect them, is the notion that Aboriginal communities are gleefully homogenous in their political and cultural views and life experiences. Realistically, however, contemporary Aboriginal communities are far more complex and heterogeneous than many documentary films suggest. Yet it is very difficult for an Aboriginal filmmaker to expose this reality, for very deep historical reasons. Prior to colonisation Aboriginal societies had over five hundred language groups, all of which controlled their own territories, laws, and creation stories. With colonisation governmental policies diverted Aborigines from having control over their own identities, let alone their own lands. There was enormous pressure on Aboriginal people just to survive, under the terror of rape, torture, dispossession and massacre. Colonisers used divisions between Aboriginal peoples as a way to manoeuvre and advance their own cause. For example early white explorers, and police were aware of rival tribes within Aboriginal society, and used black

guides, trackers and Aboriginal mounted police.<sup>62</sup> Later, there were cruel and duplicitous welfare protection acts in each state, which further fostered Aboriginal mistrust and division to spread amongst themselves. It was not until Aborigines formed national bodies and organisations and created a flag in 1972, that they had any unified 'Aboriginal' identity. Given this long history of governmental interference, it is little wonder that Aboriginal people remain fearful of exposing their internal divisions.

Movements for Aboriginal rights have tended to emphasise the common interests of all Aboriginal people. While the Australian *Civil rights* movement of the 1960s brought attention to the racist segregation and deplorable conditions that existed in Australia, their success lay in rousing public support for full citizenship rights for all Aboriginal people. The Land Rights movement of the 1970s saw land as means to bring justice to Aboriginal people for land theft and dispossession. Land Rights was not just about sacred sites or owning property, but also about providing an economic base whereby Aboriginal people could control their own schools, build their own homes, mine and farm their own lands, protect sacred sites, and provide welfare services to deal with the abject poverty they endured. A major flaw in the Land Rights strategy was that those who fought for land rights were unprepared to deal with the problem of diversity in Aboriginal relationships to land, between those who lived in urban, rural and remote regions. Aboriginal people living in the remote regions of Australia who had not been dispossessed of their lands, received more support and push from the federal government for Land Rights than those Aborigines living in rural and urban areas.

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<sup>62</sup> H. Reynolds, *With The White People*, Ringwood, 1990, p. 16



At the same time, welfare services such as the medical and legal services erupted from the urban environment of Redfern, and the newly elected Whitlam Labor government implemented policies on self-determination that began to flourish across the nation. With the expansion of community welfare services, it is reasonable to understand why people's energies were diverted from a national Land Rights movement to focus on community services that dealt with their immediate problems in health, housing, employment, education, legal problems and local land management issues. In this context, the national Land Rights movement eventually died a laboured death. In the context of policies of self-determination, the concept of 'the Aboriginal community' now took on new meanings. There was an expansion of Aboriginal organisations in towns, cities and settlements where there was a relatively high population of Aboriginal people, and notions of governance and representation became essential concerns. However, it was anyone's guess how one was supposed to represent a community when there had been so many changes and inconsistencies in ideas about what a community is.

With an interest in these issues, I undertook research in 1998 into my own community in the township of Walgett, where I once grew up and now returned to in my late thirties. I wanted to understand why the lines and boundaries of my own community had shifted in such a short space of time. I interviewed friends and family members about my individual connection as a traditional descendant, and asked questions that would help me understand the new frameworks and notions of 'community' that dominated their identity, leadership and representation. Common views to be expressed included the following: Aboriginal communities were caring and sharing in all things; poverty and hardship was inevitable or even acceptable in the community; they had no need for material things; independence and individuality is not in the interest of the community; they were autonomous and did not need

outside control or help because solutions could only be found by those living within the confines of that community; and everyone's socio-economic, cultural opinions, experiences and expectations were shared. Other more general notions of 'community' fell somewhere between four different types, i.e.. grass roots, locals or local organisations and services, bureaucratic and the national Aboriginal population. There was also the idea that a division between 'community' and 'mainstream' exists and that the movement of Aboriginal people is fluid between the two. While there was a common view that every Aboriginal person belongs to the Aboriginal community, political views were dependent on where they lived, what occupation they had, and whether they were in the industry of assisting other Aboriginal people. Today very few Aboriginal people will admit that a part of what they do is without the intention of benefiting the Aboriginal community.

Although the concept of 'the Aboriginal community' had radically shifted in a short space of thirty years or so in response to policies of self-determination, what was more distressing for me to discover was how much Aboriginal organisations had become gatekeepers. The organisations, based on western notions of representativeness, insufficiently dealt with the more traditional notions of leadership and representation. Instead there developed new power relationships and divisions between those who controlled the organisations and those who used them. However that this is not to say that many of the community workers in the small towns are not stretched to the limit and do not commit themselves to their communities. On the contrary, many of the community workers are expected to achieve the impossible under the most extreme of circumstances in many of these small impoverished communities, which is precisely the reason for why the divisions are there in the first instance.

These conceptions of 'community' and these Aboriginal organisations have, however, created particular difficulties for filmmakers. There is always the difficulty that so-called leaders and community organisations may have an invested interest in controlling their films, and many urban Aboriginal artists find themselves subject to 'community control' and criticism. This seems to have been the case in ATSIC's decision to reject a proposal by Sydney's Aboriginal community television organisation, *Perleeka*, for an urban Aboriginal broadcaster in the early 1990s. When I interviewed Greg Eatock, secretary of *Perleeka*, he reflected that the underlying reason ATSIC had not supported proposals for a Sydney Aboriginal urban community broadcaster was its fear that *Perleeka* would monitor internal Aboriginal politics, ATSIC itself, and other Aboriginal community organisations.

Understanding that Aboriginal culture is multi-faceted, the concept of diversity and conflict is not new for Aboriginal people. Yet when Aboriginal filmmakers publicly express the diversity and internal conflict that occurs in their society they often suffer the consequences of community criticism, and their utmost concerns are diminished. Aboriginal filmmakers are faced with a choice between pleasing the community and defending their personal and artistic rights. One notable example of Aboriginal filmmaker being forced to go out on a limb to defend these personal and artistic rights is Tracey Moffatt, maker of films like *Nice Coloured Girls* and *Night Cries*, and also a photographer and artist. Marcia Langton, who had appeared in Moffatt's *Night Cries*, described Moffatt as an 'urban avant-garde filmmaker/photographer' who is 'comfortable with claiming the individual authorship of her works, while operating within the structures of an international independent film world, albeit addressing problematic issues of Aboriginal identity'.<sup>63</sup> But the 'comfort' that Langton says Moffatt enjoys may not have come easily. Having broken through the boundaries as they

were, Moffatt initially received harsh criticism from various sectors of the Aboriginal communities for her film *'Nice Coloured Girls'*. Their objection had been to Moffatt's reference in the film to Aboriginal women who had been drinking in a nightclub in Kings Cross and 'scoring' off a white 'captain'. So even though Moffatt received high acclaim from the world of white artists, filmmakers and scholars, she received criticism from some Aboriginal commentators.

*The development of guidelines for Aboriginal film and television documentary*

In the past two decades Aboriginal filmmakers have come under increasing scrutiny and pressure to protect the public image of Aborigines. This has led since the mid 1980s to the development of ethical guidelines directed at both white and Aboriginal filmmakers that are ironically proving to disadvantage Aboriginal filmmakers' freedom of expression and political control. The plan to make 'good' representations about Aborigines became bounded by legal and cultural protocols when a report written by Chips Mackinolty and Michael Duffy entitled *'Guess Who's Coming To Dinner In Arnhem Land?'* was published by the Northern Lands Council in 1987. Specifically concerned to ensure the production of films of benefit to the Aboriginal communities of Arnhem Land, the report suggested some protocols to guide documentary filmmakers when filming on Aboriginal land. The issues it dealt with ranged from the cost of film permits to how to make films of high moral standards about Aborigines. It dealt with land permits, sacred sites, privacy rights, editorial control, distribution, employment, environmental issues and legal rights. Although it for the most part talks about the shooting of *Crocodile Dundee* and with some reference to the ABC's *Big Country*, its states: 'Any kind of filming tends to be intrusive and disruptive. It should be understood that Aboriginal people, like anyone else, have their own lives to lead, their own concerns, their

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<sup>63</sup> F. Ginsburg, 'Production Values: Indigeneous Media and the Rhetoric of Self-determination', in D. Battaglia

own occupations. Quite simply, to Aboriginal people filmmakers can be a bloody nuisance. Documentary makers perhaps more so, as they are around more longer...Aboriginal people are far more polite than most non-Aborigines and out of respect for other people's wishes they really do not want to have anything to do with it. This is even more the case when Aboriginal people are confronted with plausible sounding white people speaking formal English. Furthermore, the people who apparently 'agree' may not have the traditional authority to do so'.<sup>64</sup> But I am wondering if the documentary filmmakers that Duffy and Mackinolty accuse of being more of a nuisance are not in fact ethnographers and anthropologist rather than television documentary filmmakers, who are under the same constraints as feature filmmakers? And I wonder who they may be referring to when they say have traditional authority? This is particularly disconcerting when one considers that a large proportion of those who run Aboriginal community organisations are not traditional elders with traditional authority.

In 1989, when a team of Aboriginal producers, directors and researched met for the first time in a production meeting at the ABC, we discussed how we were going to make documentaries different, exciting and provocative. One of the major issues we faced was our relationship with the individuals and communities we filmed. While we were learning a great deal about filmmaking and the ABC from the white filmmakers, they were learning from us about how they had to deal with cultural sensitivities and unwritten, Aboriginal protocols. Very often it was the task of the Aboriginal team to follow through the activities of filmmaking by maintaining links with the talent and communities we had just filmed. We sent them copies of the completed program, and kept in touch with people for months after the shoot. These

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(ed.), *Rhetorics of Self-making*, Berkeley, 1995, p. 122.

<sup>64</sup> C. Mackinolty & M. Duffy, *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner In Arnhem Land?*, Darwin, 1987, p. 6.

protocols were being generated on the hop by none other than ourselves, and what little contact we had with those few people with an interest in the issues.

In this way, the newly united team together came up with a temporary quasi-philosophy for making Aboriginal television documentaries. Some of the principles we developed were as follows:

1. We would not use spokespeople, narration or reporters. We would avoid having one person representing, summarising or speaking on behalf of anyone group, community or issue. We felt that the most powerful comments are those made by Aboriginal people who are *not* required to represent anyone else, and that it was time to be treated as people with the right to have an individual point of view.
2. We would be especially interested in interviewing Aboriginal people who were not previously deemed by other white journalists and the media as 'Aboriginal Leaders'. We aimed to interview Aboriginal people who were unknown but held strong and provocative views.
3. We aimed to interview Aboriginal people of all ages, who could talk about their own experience and perspectives.
4. We sought personal opinions rather than representing a 'community' or political line.
5. We treated (Aboriginal) talent as complex human beings and not just as the vehicles of issues.
6. Interviewing styles had to be more personal rather than intellectual or political, so that any one could be interviewed and that could open the opportunity to talk to people about how they felt as opposed to how they thought about anyone else.
7. During the extensive pre-production research period we aimed to ask all potential talent if they had specific interests they wanted to discuss. This would potentially introduce them to new ideas and issues, give them the confidence to have their say, and generate interest and audiences to the new program.
8. Stylistically using a *vox-populi* format, we would use as many black faces as possible, cross-referencing Aboriginal opinions nationally.
9. We aimed to promote Aboriginal music, with each episode including a music clip breaker with unrecorded Aboriginal bands who could produce video clips for their own promotional purposes as well as getting extra airplay on RAGE or Radio JJJ.

10. We set out to provide the opportunity to Aboriginal people to have some control over the production process by sending them copies of the transcripts of their interviews. We did not, however, send them copies of other people's interviews; nor were they able to see the whole program put together. It was important that they see only their own contributions, so as to protect the rights of other Aboriginal people to their own opinions.

This philosophy was not always followed in practice. Our eager intention to do the 'right' thing by Aboriginal communities were somewhat encumbered our individual styles and abilities, and by our desire to make stories about other topics.

In more recent times, the guidelines proposed by Aboriginal documentary filmmaker Darlene Johnson and presented to SBS in 2000 clearly demonstrate a more sophisticated knowledge of film production, funding bodies, and broadcasting networks. Proud of its engagement with indigenous Australians in film and television production, documentary and drama, SBS declared that both black and white filmmakers could make programs involving indigenous peoples and issues. They stressed their commitment towards supporting Aboriginal people in the film and television industry and culture, and aimed to affirm protocols of moral rights in stories. In every case the key principle was to maintain respect for indigenous traditions and heritage. Johnson writes: 'Development, production and dissemination of films involving Aboriginal issues and stories are subject to ethics common to media practice in all their works. And issues of appropriation, of respectful cultural representation, of equity and creative control are particularly pertinent to collaborative processes in relation to Aboriginal stories'. Johnson's guidelines, which aim to respect indigenous participants while working with indigenous cultural beliefs and values, indicate that filmmakers must inform indigenous participants of their rights as storytellers, within the filmmaking process; assist non-indigenous filmmakers to respect indigenous participants, while working with indigenous

cultural beliefs and values; and respect the integrity of the filmmaking process and facilitate cross-cultural education.<sup>65</sup>

If Aboriginal people agree to participate in films, the following procedures are supposed to take place:

- The filmmaker must be satisfied that the subject(s) fully understands the terms of the agreement and that this agreement is documented in clear plain English.
- When dealing with Aboriginal communities, filmmakers must seek the permission of the local Aboriginal organisations and permission to travel and film on Aboriginal land.
- Filmmakers shall pay the subject a fee as agreed.
- Subjects must be given the right to full consultation at all stages of the production process including the research and scripting stages, and during the filming and editing. Soon after an interview the filmmakers should give subjects a VHS copy of the unedited interview and explain to the subjects that if upon seeing the tape the subjects do not want it used or parts of it used now or in the future, they must tell the filmmaker as soon as possible, and the issues should be discussed.
- The Filmmaker should explain to the subjects that the interview would need to be edited and explain the process and commit to doing this in a way that won't take the story out of context.
- Subjects should be informed that parts of the interviews, and other footage not used in the film, would be donated to SBS or Screensound archives.
- They should then be asked to state whether there are parts of the footage about them that should not be used in any future programs.
- During the editing stage the filmmakers will show the subject a VHS copy of the edited version in progress to get their comments. The filmmaker must explain that this is at the stage when the parts of the film have been put together but not yet finalised. The subjects should notify the filmmaker as soon as possible if they believe that the interview as it appears in the edited version is not consistent with the story they told on camera, or does not truthfully represent their story.
- In the event of a death occurring during production filmmakers must be aware of the appropriate protocol. The filmmaker should be responsible for negotiating and defining with the relevant community members the specific protocols pertaining to that community. In the case of the death of a subject whose image has already been captured on film, the filmmakers must explain to the community the options of removing the

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<sup>65</sup> D. Johnson, *Indigenous Protocols*, Sydney, SBS Independent, 2000, p 2-4.



subject completely from the film, or pixillating i.e. masking the face of the deceased and/or disguising his or her voice.

- The filmmaker must also be responsible for drafting a disclaimer at the beginning of the film stating that viewers from the relevant community should take caution as the content in the program may contain scenes of deceased persons and or that the deceased person(s) image has been masked to avoid offence. In general, the filmmaker should respectfully consider the subjects opinions and discuss with them any suggestions they may have. The filmmaker should agree to consult with the subjects, and exclude from the final version anything in the filming of them that has not been agreed to.
- And finally if filmmakers are not prepared to agree to this they should make this clear to both the subject and SBS before agreements are signed. Filmmakers should be sensitive to the differences between an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal way of seeing and be aware that past bad practice has created considerable distrust. This protocol is a contribution to developing better ways of working together.

From these various sets of guidelines has emerged a general requirement that filmmakers should gain the approval of Aboriginal communities, individuals, and talent before being permitted to film them. This approval would be given on the basis of informed consent, and given on specially designed 'release forms'.

While release forms signed on the basis of informed consent have become as necessary to the filmmaking process as for academic research, they have become a contentious issue for some non-Aboriginal filmmakers who film across different cultures. This unease clearly demonstrated at the Cross-Cultural Filmmakers Conference in Braidwood, where the question was discussed in some detail. Academic and filmmaker David MacDougall, the convener of the Conference, said there is really no such thing as informed consent. One prominent non-Aboriginal filmmaker, Bob Connolly, described the release form as 'not worth the paper they were written on'. The filmmakers present agreed that release forms in fact place strain upon the relationship between the filmmaker and their talent, the moment they are asked to sign. They also hold any talent or filmmaker to the contract forever, protecting the funding body or the broadcaster more than the filmmaker or the talent. Finally,

they are ethically fraught because lawyers, for whom they are written, have no real appreciation of the intimate and difficult relationships between a filmmaker and their talent.

In their critical discussion of the release form, some of the filmmakers at this Conference gave examples of how release forms do not provide the guarantees those signing them think they will, for individuals often misjudge the effects of their appearance in a particular film. Because the filmmaking process is frequently a long and unfolding process, it is not unusual for even the filmmakers themselves to not know how anyone fares in their film until the fine cut stages. For example in observational films like *Facing the Music*, *Land Bilong Islander*, *Rats in the Ranks*, *Whiteys Like Us*, one is shooting the talent for several weeks or sometimes years. It is much harder, then, for those filmed to know how they will appear in the finished film. Yet the release form gives the impression that they can control this uncontrollable situation. MacDougall pointed out that sometimes you could even see people 'reconstructing' themselves in front of the camera, vainly trying to present only a public face, the moment they sign them. He gave the example of the film *Proud to Be British*, where the talent tried to give a very public presentation but a very private and personal side of them was revealed just the same. Filmmaker Trevor Graham talked about his experience when shooting *Tosca*, where individuals can misjudge how an audience will react:

There was a time when we were filming that a major fight broke out in the Sydney Opera House, tensions were brought to a head, and we had five cameras shooting it at the time. So every nuance, every piece, movement and word was intensely covered, but the dilemma was that the diva felt the film treated her unfairly. Not because we didn't air all the major pieces of the fight, but because in the interview with the conductor about the fight, when we asked him 'why were you so angry?' he said, 'I feel its because she is being very unprofessional'. But when you show it to an audience, guess who they sympathise with? Of course it's with the diva. So in the film the conductor comes out of it as a bit of a bully, but he's prepared to wear it, but she feels she was unfairly treated.<sup>66</sup>

In the MacDougall example we can see how the so-called rights and privacy of the talent are not necessarily protected when talent feel they are putting on their public face to audiences, and Graham's example shows that one never knows just who audiences are going to sympathise or agree with, even when the talent thinks they have been treated badly (or well) in a film.

There are many features of filmmaking that make it difficult to give interviewees control over the filmmaking process. Many people do not understand how films work. It is not unusual to find people who feel that their lives are not all that extraordinary, and are therefore bewildered why anyone would want to make a film about them in the first instance. There are many thousands of Aboriginal people for whom English is a second language, who live in remote and rural areas, or who have low incomes and literacy problems and have never been to an editing suite, let alone have extended knowledge in making films. Expecting those interviewed, the talent, to take equal control during a film's production can actually heighten their defensiveness and unease, particularly during the post-production stages. Bringing people into the editing suites or sending them videotapes of the process can actually induce anxieties that are needless or magnified. Many do not know how to view material whilst it is still under the editing process. Viewing a rough cut is very different from viewing the final film. With hundreds of hours in the 'can' a rough cut may have a duration of six or more hours, which is ultimately going to come down to one hour or so. Furthermore, a six-hour rough does not give a fine cut presentation, i.e. technical treatment to the film, like the juxtapositioning of images, graphics, super-impositions or musical tracking for example which can add a whole new meaning to an otherwise obvious visual message. Therefore

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<sup>66</sup> T. Graham, Round Table Discussion at the Cross-cultural Filmmakers Conference, Braidwood, February, 2000.

when talent are invited to come join the editing process they see film very different from the finished product, and it can be a despairing process in mollifying their sensitivities.

Making things even more difficult is the fact that in most cases, talent are the worst judges of their own voices/images and characters when looming larger than life on the screen. Others may not sympathise with the filmmakers' time and financial constraints, or may want to have control over what others are saying, or may disagree with the filmmaker's vision. Some talent make unreasonable requests, such as insisting that filmmakers include more interviews, shots or information. Therefore if we are to give talent and communities copies of the film it is best to hand them over after the final cut has been made. Yet this, too, can be disastrous if one of the many people are filmed decides that the film is offensive or non-beneficial to their community or themselves.

In fact, the protocols are impossible to follow. When observational documentary filmmaker Ivan Sen directed *Shifting Shelter* in 2001, he made a bold film in which we meet several Aboriginal teenagers who endure the repressive experience of being a black teenager in rural NSW. Seeing these teenagers as neither *noble* nor *savage*, the film gathers as much sympathy for as it does frustration with the talent, painting the landscape of their environment with as many colours as there are in real life. It seems unlikely that these diffident teenagers eagerly signed release forms or wanted to join Sen in editing the program back in Sydney.

Some of these difficulties can affect films made on any topic. One aspect specific to Aboriginal documentary filmmaking, however, occurs when the preamble to Aboriginal documentaries apologises to the relatives of deceased persons who may be included in the film. This protocol operates on the premise that in Aboriginal traditional law, in the advent of

someone's death their name or their belongings must never be spoken of. This tradition continues and now applies to photographs or images of the person. From my own experience, I question the practicalities of censoring people's images and names after their deaths. When I screened *Tent Embassy* to a group of students at the Australian National University in 1998, an Aboriginal student asked me if I had the right to screen the image of one of the (since deceased) founding members of the *Tent Embassy*. Although the film had images of many Aboriginal people in it who have since died, the particular person she was referring to had passed away only twelve months before. I made the decision that the man's important contribution to the history of Aboriginal politics had more meaning for me than traditional law, and I felt it was essential that we acknowledge and remember him and his name.

But this was not the first time I had encountered the problem. The first time was when I conducted interviews with my grandmother back in 1988. My grandmother, Doreen Peters, (nee Simpson) who had lived under the repressive policies of the Aboriginal Protection Board at the turn of the twentieth century, never faltered from telling her story and enjoyed lecturing to anyone who would listen about the way whites treated her as a child, while encouraging us to do the same. In my grandmother's own words she said that 'she was not ever going to say something that she did not want people to hear anyway'. Ten years later I used these interviews in a discussion paper I wrote for AIATSIS and dedicated it to her. Although she died a year before the discussion paper was completed, I am certain she would have been happy that it was finally published, and that her story could be remembered.

#### *On the impossibility of pleasing everyone*

Aboriginal documentary filmmakers constantly faced with the demand that they please every Aboriginal viewer. Yet this demand is misplaced and impossible to meet. One problem is that

one can never be certain how audiences are going to view a particular documentary film. Filmmakers can be more sympathetic to the talent than their audiences turn out to be, and vice versa. Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins and Tom Zubrycki's film, *Whiteys Like Us*, provides one example. This observational film follows a group of non-Aboriginal people who undertake a night course on Reconciliation. The group, whose members all have various opinions about Aborigines, are shown to be in conflict with each other, with hardly any of the participants coming to an agreement about what Reconciliation means. In one scene a young man begins to express his frustrations at what he feels are the unequal advantages that Aborigines have been given through positive discrimination policies. He reveals the intimate details of his life as a survivor of sexual abuse. Although he asks the cameras to be turned off they continue to roll. It is a poignant moment, which leaves audiences left to ponder our intrusion into his private life history, and trying to decide whether his own personal unfortunate experiences can justify his lack of sympathy for Aboriginal people and understanding of the need for some of the benefits they have been given. In Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson's acclaimed film *Rats In the Ranks*, Connolly says he was amazed at how the press fiercely criticised Leichhardt's mayor, Larry Hand, during the film's release. He says 'It was outrageous. We filmed what we thought was normal for politicians to be like and what they do, not that Larry was particularly ferocious, but this is normal territory for any of the politicians in the film and elsewhere. It was normal and par for the course, but the press capitalised on him as ferocious which I think affected his career'. Connolly, who went on to say that he never uses release forms, claimed that Hand knew he was fair game, and accepted that the filmmakers had a story to tell. Likewise, in the case of the latest Connolly and Anderson film, *Facing the Music*, some viewers saw Professor Ann Boyd as guilelessly trying to resist government cut backs on higher education spending, while others saw her as the anti-hero of musical studies in tertiary education.

This was also my experience as the maker of *Tent Embassy*. Some viewers interpreted the film to be taking a purely sympathetic view of the demise of the Aboriginal tent embassy, while others saw the film as an attack on the bureaucratisation of Aboriginal affairs. In my view, the film is about both and many other things, and the film reflects many opinions which are not necessarily my own. However it is amazingly common to hear comments from who strongly believe documentary films only have one meaning and interpretation, when in fact it is only their meaning and interpretation that they have read into it. Audiences, including Aboriginal audiences, who yearn to have their values reflected in films, have had to face the fact that the reasons they may like a particular film are exactly the same reasons someone else dislikes it.

#### *Giving back to the community*

In the past few decades with the advent of stringent policy and ethical guidelines written to protect their morals from public display, Aboriginal communities have become diligent about taking back as much as they have given 'outsiders' who wish to avail themselves of Aboriginal intellectual and cultural knowledge and property. Thus film crews, black or white, are required to adhere to the principle that one must benefit the community. But what becomes problematic is when black or white film crews are left deciding who is the community and how should they be benefiting them? Defining what benefits a community is not easily decided, and the guidelines provide little help on this issue.

Generally the notion of 'giving back' to a community assumes that film crews ask the community to suggest how their film can provide a practical outcome for that community. Independent filmmakers offer anything from shares in their production to having their films

used as evidence in native title claims.<sup>67</sup> It is not unusual for filmmakers to contribute to community organisations or individuals in the form of cash payment. This is not always the case; Ian Dunlop, who had been making films in Yirrkala and other remote regions of Australia for over forty years about secret and sacred knowledge, revealed at the Cross-Cultural Filmmaking Conference that he has never once had to contribute money to Aboriginal communities. For some, the mere mention of money can create difficulties. Trevor Graham gave an example of where his work with Eddie Mabo in *Land Bilong Islander* brought him to the uncomfortable crossroads of friendship, filmmaking, and money.

Graham said:

When you make a film you enter into a relationship and that involves exchanges on a variety of levels, it could be about developing friendships and money, and money is problematical, because films start off like some mutual agreement to a certain extent, and this was certainly how the film *Mabo* evolved from my earlier work with him. Our relationship had been developing for over six to seven years. So when I had made that film, Eddie's story had not been told; both films had been made before the High Court decision. The film was not just a legal or political issue; to me it had been a family story. It was just one man's story. But after his death I was asked by the family to return to help make another film about sea-rights, but I was told 'no, we don't want *you* to make the film, we want you to help *us* make the film'.

Barry Minchin pointed out that in the field of Aboriginal heritage, which is a subject he is most interested in filming, 'people who are in control of things conceal the real people involved, and they can ask for huge fees'. Supporting Minchin's statement was ethnographic filmmaker Gary Bryson, who said 'there are some places in central Australia where you can be charged with a \$20,000 fee if you are not careful or connected to the organisations'.

Ironically, the requirement to contribute financially towards benefiting the community harms Aboriginal more than non-Aboriginal filmmakers. Such a requirement can really only apply to (usually white) independent filmmakers who have control over the shares, interests and

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<sup>67</sup> N. Tyndale-Biscoe, Round Table Discussion at the Cross-cultural Filmmakers Conference, Braidwood, February, 2000.



sales of the film, or have it distributed or used for fund raising. Aboriginal filmmakers, on the other hand, mostly work for the ABC or SBS, who have policies that do not allow for this to happen, or they work for small community organisations that have no funds. The community being filmed may allow Aboriginal crews access without placing the same financial demands upon them, but this then leaves those crews obliged to that community much more than a non-Aboriginal crew, culturally, legally and politically. Thus ironically non-Aboriginal independent filmmakers have more control than Aboriginal filmmakers over the films that are made in Aboriginal communities, simply because they have more freedom with their films and because they control their own finances.

Much of the desire to control and monitor the actions of filmmakers comes from people who are convinced that white documentary filmmakers on television almost always deliberately make films with a surreptitious intention of rubbishing or mis-representing Aborigines. An increasing number of such people have gained a position of power to control the output of Aboriginal films. These same people also want to control Aboriginal filmmakers to ensure they present only a positive view of Aboriginal people and morals. This cuts to the very core of the whole purpose of Aboriginal filmmaking. If their value as Aboriginal filmmakers is due to their ability to delve deeper into the community, and debate the complex issues that non-Aborigines could not, then they are being effectively blocked by the control Aboriginal 'communities' exert over the filmmaker. If we continue to follow this line of thinking for much longer the result will be not only putting a stranglehold on those white (and black) filmmakers who want to expose racism in this country, but also paradoxically putting a gag on black creativity and self-criticism.

The notion that Aboriginal filmmakers possess a certain connection to 'truth' and instant rapport with any Aboriginal community or individual is naive. To think that Aboriginal filmmakers can shoot any Aboriginal community and capture the core of their history, politics, culture, personal relationships and social interactions without offending or misrepresenting anyone is presumptuous to say the least. Aboriginal filmmakers while they share in something that is essentially Aboriginal by necessity or nature does not guarantee that they can make stronger, more accurate or beneficial films for the Aboriginal community or individual than anyone else. There may be questions of filmmaking ability involved. As David MacDougall said at the Cross-Cultural Filmmakers Conference 'you can be someone who makes very bad films but speaks the language perfectly.' Furthermore, Aboriginal filmmakers can be just as conservative as white ones. When in 2001 I attended a conference in Sydney, a white student mentioned that the SBS Television crew interviewed her during the *Corroboree 2000* march across the Harbour Bridge, but her overtly political statement was edited out of the program. She assumed that conservative whites edited her comments, and was surprised to learn that Aboriginal people at SBS had produced the program. It constantly astounds me that some people are unable to comprehend that any Aboriginal person can be just as conservative in regards to political issues as the next person.

### *Conclusion*

Critics of those documentary filmmakers choosing to make Aboriginal programs for mainstream television ought to consider the impossible expectations they place on these filmmakers. Not only are they required to create, represent, and entertain audiences, but they are also required to protect the moral standards of everyone they film (regardless of whether

they agree with them or not). In addition, they are expected to benefit those communities in whatever form the community asks, while having to 'educate' the wider general audience. They must work within the restrictions laid down by executive producers, commissioning editors, as well as funding bodies and their assessors. It would be no wonder if those filmmakers who want to challenge audiences and include new ideas and styles in Aboriginal films were discouraged from further making films on Aboriginal subjects.

Amazingly, there are still many filmmakers wanting to make films about Aborigines. What is needed is a return to the environment that assisted with the quality and quantity of documentaries in the mid eighties. With the increasing numbers of Aboriginal filmmakers in recent years, and hopefully with a more relaxed attitude towards Aboriginal filmmaking from non-practitioners such as academics, community organisations, it is time to get back on track. And more. With a freer environment to work in, perhaps we can then begin to truly benefit the Aboriginal and Australian community as a whole. Pipe dreams perhaps, however I am reminded of an interview I did with my cousin who said 'You know Frances, the only people who can afford to romanticise our communities are those who do not have to put up with them'. And somewhere I still believe that his meaning is yet to be imprinted on film, for I suspect that at the very least if whites do not finally get message, at least Aboriginal audiences will.

## The Conclusion

### *“The End of the Journey”*

When I began the thesis I wanted to learn why my family and I, and perhaps many others, did not have the disdain for television that others had. I asked my father why did he think this was the case. He answered ‘that the people of his generation never had the same education to understand television the same way younger generations of Aborigines did’. He was referring to that first generation of Aborigines who went to universities and became political activists. It has been this generation who have inspired filmmakers and the media to take more sympathetic views of Aborigines, but now the questions remains whether or not the political sentiments that once worked for a generation two or three decades ago is being wasted on a new generation of Aboriginal filmmakers who are yet to make their own social and political views publicly heard. Perhaps instead of criticising the ‘savage’ stereotypes that previous generations objected to Aboriginal filmmakers now could be analysing the ‘noble’ stereotypes that are yet to be explored. Perhaps no matter how hard they try they are never going to please the older generation and need to do it for themselves. For example in Foley’s essay he compares the generation of Aboriginal producers to the work he achieved in the 1970s when he says:

Nevertheless, when the show...[*Basically Black*] finally aired it was the first all-Aboriginal television show and its use of humour, satire and ridicule has never been matched by the regular indigenous shows that emerged on public TV in the past decade. The fact that it was another 15 years before another all Koori show appeared, and also that to this day no regular Koori show has ever appeared on commercial television, speaks volumes about the extent to which the Koori community remain isolated, marginalised and all but invisible on Australian television today.<sup>68</sup>

As one might expect from the ever-inspiring and instigating radical that he is, Foley’s statement seems to have been aimed at a new generation of Aboriginal producers so that they

may take up the challenge and create their own political marks on Aboriginal history. Attacking the mythologising of the 'noble savage' is just one way to go.

So in conclusion to my thesis my intention has been to probe, demonstrate and prompt discussion amongst documentary filmmakers, scholars and the Aboriginal community about the endurance and futility of the *noble savage* in our imaginings. I wanted to bring attention to the comparable links between eighteenth and nineteenth century attitudes and images of Aborigines and the politics of Aboriginal self-representation. I have found it particularly perplexing why so many scholars have argued a sort of an 'invisibility' and a contempt for Aboriginal television documentary films, when in fact I believe that Aboriginal documentaries on television with all their intents and purposes, have perhaps been the most apparent and supportive of all mediums available to the general public. It is the point that I most wish to open discussion on. I have unreservedly argued a case in favour of filmmaker's rights, but this has not been so much as to detract from the rights of Aboriginal communities but to argue that Aboriginal rights include the rights for Aboriginal filmmakers to tell their stories their own way. I have chosen to challenge readers to consider the consequences and complexities of Aboriginal control in the media, but I also wanted to raise the question of how much control is too much control? In this thesis I have examined works, productions, guidelines, archival resources and research available on the topic of Aboriginal filmmaking in the mainstream, and I have referred much of this to my own personal involvement. This personal involvement is what I have referred to as 'yet another Aboriginal filmmakers journey' is slowly coming to an end. Well, for the meantime at least. However I hope that I can close this matter in the future on a more conclusive note, but for now there are too many unanswered questions in the pipeline, and I hope that this thesis has provided some avenues

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<sup>68</sup> G. Foley, *Koori Engagement With Television*, p. 3.

to explore further, and to open up the possibility for more Aboriginal filmmakers to ask even more questions of themselves and of others.

*Coming to the end of a journey*

It has been seven years since I left the ABC, which is approximately the same amount of time I spent there. The process of writing this thesis reminded me of my early experiences at the ABC and being a part of an international black and indigenous film and television world. Making Aboriginal programs for television was not only about making films but it was a time whereby I learnt as much about myself as I did making films. I am reminded of the enthusiasm we had for having the opportunity to do something that previous Aboriginal generations perhaps only dreamed of. And I am reminded of the personal changes that I had to undergo. I had entered into television thinking that I could 'give back' to my community, but eventually learnt that there are more reasons for making films than 'giving back' to the community. As a filmmaker I had learnt that messages would not be heard if one is not diligent about how one communicates them and I had learnt that it is okay for others to not want to agree with my political views. I am not responsible for the way people may think about Aborigines, but as an Aboriginal filmmaker I have the right to be creative and to express my own opinion.

In hindsight, I think that leaving the ABC when I did had been a smart move. I guess I got out before others took more control of documentary filmmaking. I left having the opportunity to learn more about my personal development and my relationships to the films that I had made, the people I worked with and the people who were in them. At the Round Table conference in Braidwood in 2000 I had the occasion to meet up with some of my film colleagues after some years. On the second day Bob Connolly had told me that he remembered me some years

before when we had both been invited to screen our films at the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival in Japan in 1993. Bob had accused me of carrying 'rocks on my back' at the time and perhaps he was right. I used to believe that Aboriginal filmmakers must carry the burden of responsibility for their communities. But I suspect there are many filmmakers who carry 'rocks' for their race, family, culture, community or country. One does not have to be black to know what that is like, in fact Australian filmmakers in general are only just beginning to drop the 'boulder for a national Australian identity' that has been thrust upon the backs of artists for decades who wear their 'cultural cringe' like a suit of armour. However there is a fine line between burden and responsibility, just as there is a fine line between exploitation and freedom, but more on this later.

#### *Why they make films*

Nevertheless filmmakers make films for different reasons, and their films have any number of reasons for being made, who they are made for, and how they are made. Strangely enough the reasons white filmmakers make films about Aborigines are similar to the reasons why Aboriginal people make them, however Aboriginal filmmakers are closer to their subject and talent than white filmmakers, yet it remains to be seen how they can use this closeness to their advantage. Some of the reasons why white filmmakers make films about Aborigines were for; ethnographic reasons; to address past mis-representations; political reasons; artistic reasons; to satisfy their desires for exoticism; financial reasons; for their careers; or they made films about Aborigines because they wanted to understand their own society's values through exploring the values of another culture. In my interview with Alec Morgan he repeatedly talked about honesty in documentary filmmaking. It was not about honesty in regards to being forthright with his talent or topics but that it was about being honest to the film. For him a good film is a film that is honest with itself, which he credits for the success

of *Lousy Little Sixpence*. But like all good films they are made by filmmakers who are more concerned about honesty rather than pleasing everyone who they come into contact with on their filmmaking journey.

*Aboriginal filmmakers are hindered*

I am reminded of an interview I made with ABC board member Dr. Roberta Sykes while shooting *Tent Embassy*, when I consider those Aboriginal filmmakers who are on a steep learning curve in the industry and how they are already being guided by others how to 'carry rocks on their backs'. I asked Sykes 'if she was disappointed that younger generations of Aboriginal people did not seem to develop their own political strategies for land rights like setting up a tent embassy etc.' She replied that while she could not begin to speak for other generations of Aborigines she nevertheless said that 'her generation had exhausted every possible avenue for change as they could at the time, but she suspected that her generation had also created the glass ceilings for the next generation of Aboriginal activism, and that this was what had disappointed her more than anything else'. Her point further reminds me how problematical it becomes when the situation for Aboriginal documentary filmmaking lags behind a mainstream Aboriginal documentary filmmaking industry with whom they are in competition with, without having the years to develop their own values as filmmakers. Encouraged to have a community purpose for making films, Aboriginal filmmakers are yet to arrive at the stage where they even want to make films for their own interest and satisfaction. Filmmaking is an expensive business and the Aboriginal film and television industry is highly exclusive in comparison to mainstream. Aboriginal funding initiatives for filmmaking come under the control and guidelines that are assessed by Aboriginal peers. Unlike the white film and television industry, the people who head their funding bodies like the AFC, or



executive producers are also well established practicing film producers who draw funds from the same sources as the first time Aboriginal filmmakers they supervise.

### *Aboriginal audiences*

Also denied the opportunity to watch their own views and immediate concerns and internal conflicts reflected in documentaries are Aboriginal audiences who are left watching quixotic versions of their daily lives. Aboriginal audiences deserve stronger programs about themselves and not just sad and angry stories about their relationship with whites and white injustices. Aboriginal audiences are diverse, intelligent and resilient, however white people could be forgiven for thinking that Aborigines spend their entire lives talking about them. Concerned with matters other than trying to prove their 'worthiness' to whites, Aborigines are also television viewers who have diverse views on anything from the 'sorry' debate to Australia's involvement in America's war against terrorism. Although argued by Tom O'Regan that television disrupted the domestic sphere of Aborigines more than it disrupted whites,<sup>69</sup> I argue that Aboriginal audiences are not necessarily 'disrupted' by television, but on the contrary possibly less brainwashed by television than whites. Aborigines on the other hand suffered the consequences of other policies and injustices that infringed upon their cultural values long before television came along. Whereas television had been the only means by which whites had entered their black homes in the early days of television, many Aboriginal women in Walgett like my grandmother watched television with absolute hilarity. Advertisements about white housewives singing, dancing and smiling while doing the housework, especially since she like thousands of other Aboriginal women, were domestic servants and thought that white women did not do their own housework properly. However today, watching the sanitised versions of their Aboriginal communities on television, which

supposedly protect their moral standards from public scrutiny, appears to be no less trivial and dismissive depiction's of their daily conflicts and lives in the community than the singing, smiling, dancing white housewives during the advertisements.

Peculiar to Aboriginal film and television is that opposing poles of *nobles* and *savage* representations of Aborigines in television both as an industry and in terms of images. The oscillation between the poles are oversimplified versions of 'good blacks versus bad blacks', 'real Aborigines versus un-real Aborigines, 'community blacks versus mainstream blacks', 'the rights of the individual versus the rights of the community' etc. But who and what determines such matters is inconsistent to say the least. Existing in Aboriginal identities, which are by no mean homogenous, is the issue that they are at worst ambiguous and contradictory, therefore attacking the issue of cultural identity and political diversity is a debate that is a necessary but healthy one. But in recent years there has been a tendency to lean more towards the *noble* pole.

Aboriginal people have much to lose from avoiding the internal debates of their communities in documentaries. By ignoring or protecting themselves against racist backlashes they allow for unsympathetic groups to run amok and unconvinced by romantic sympathisers. Just as explorers were led and advanced across country by rivaling tribesmen, or the Hawke government's opportunism to capitalise on a gaping hole in the national Land Rights movement, Australia's history is littered with examples of white exploitation of Aboriginal division. Divisions amongst Aboriginal people are generally kept silent unless taken up by vexatious shock-jocks on talkback radio. Television journalist according to my correspondence with Channel Nine's *Sunday* journalist Helen Dalley, confessed that the

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<sup>69</sup> T. O'Regan, 'Television and National Culture', in *Australian Television Culture*, 1993, quoted in Foley,

*Sunday* program have been inundated by letters and requests from Aboriginal people to enter into the internal politics in Aboriginal communities to expose more stories on misappropriation of funds, nepotism, black exploitation, violence from their own and sexual abuse stories etc. for as long as she could remember. But what makes it an impossible task for them is that they receive more requests to cover stories than they could possibly produce.

There is also the danger of being seen to be making racist attacks. Such is the case with David Bradbury's film *State of Shock*, where I had participated on the film's soundtrack. It had been a film about Alwyn Peters, an Aboriginal man from Weipa who murdered his wife while in a drunken rage. The mothers of both Alwyn and his wife expressed their need to have the film seen because they wanted outsiders to know the ordeals and threats from even their own family members in the community. Needless to say the response to Bradbury's film had received cool responses when we had launched it at the Valhalla Cinema in Glebe in 1989. From the examples made by Bradbury and Dalley, we learn that not all criticism is being rejected by Aboriginal people who are all too aware of the consequences they have to bear within and outside their communities. They possess a courage and honesty that nobody should be allowed to deny. Even if those who are unsympathetic capitalise on the marred reputations of Aboriginal individuals, there are many Aboriginal people who seek the media to help them as a last resort. For example, legal services can not take one Aboriginal person's case against another, and more generally whites are fearful of taking sides or having opinions about Aborigines who dispute each other in matters such as Native Title, exploitation in the workforce, sexual assault, child abuse, homelessness, and so on.

Even more perplexing for filmmakers who are dedicated to exposing and demanding equal rights for Aborigines, is the fact that they nevertheless live and work under the reign and

sufferance of an Australian society that hastily dismisses everything as 'political correctness gone mad'. Although I would call much of what they refer to as 'political correctness' to accurately mean 'social responsibility' instead, the burden that one feels they have to endure if they want to take an active responsibility in their community can be lightened if they replace the 'burdening' aspect with a desire to be honest. The truth is, or perhaps the most honest thing that one could say about making films is that you cannot please everyone, and there is no point in trying. But so far as filmmaking goes it can either free the artist or exploit them, either way that seems to be the nature of the industry. I found that it took time to find that I only wish to be honest to the films that I made first. If I am unable to do this then I would rather write yet another filmmaker's journey dispelling the myths of *nobles* and *savages* in the community, and who knows it may by that time be a topic in popular demand.

## APPENDIX A

### *Movietone News Footage 1931 - 1970*

1970	<i>Vol. 41 No. 30. Pottery Exports In Aboriginal...1970</i>
1963	<i>Through The Outback : [Unissued : V/A ... 1963</i>
1959	<i>367 Movietone Exclusive. The Drama Of The 'Sea Fox' 1959</i>
1958	<i>News. A1597 1958</i>
1957	<i>Vol. 28 No. 34. Ampol Trial : Tough going On...1957</i>
1956	<i>Vol. 27 No. 36. Export Import :Sydney Stage...1956</i>
1956	<i>Vol. 27 No. 52. Duke In Australia[V/A 7285]1956</i>
1954	<i>C1954. [Farming And Outback Activities] [V/A...</i>
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 17. The Queen Flies To south Aus...1954</i>
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 18. Royal Tour Towoomera-Perth ...1954</i>
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 41. Rough Ridin Back O' Burke1954</i>
1953	<i>Vol. 24 No. 14? Royal Tour Of Queensland 1953</i>
1953	<i>Vol. 24 No. 39. New Hospital In Outback : Di...1953</i>
1952	<i>Air Beef : [Unissued] [V/A 6005]</i>
1952	<i>News. [Aborigines And Rock Paintings : An A...</i>
1952	<i>News. C1952. [Pastoral Industry :Kimberley Region...</i>
1952	<i>Vol. 23 No. 35. Cruel Drought Devastates Cat...1952</i>
1948	<i>News. [Bimbimie Cary Bay Zoo]</i>
1942	<i>News. [Mackay Expedition]</i>
1939	<i>Aboriginal Ceremony. Palm Island, Qld.] 1939</i>
1934	<i>News. A0071 : [No. 02] 1934</i>
1934	<i>Vol. 05 No. 43 (Alternative Title) 1934</i>
1932	<i>Vol. 02 No. 48. Queensland Abos [Abos is the term they use]</i>
1931	<i>Vol. 02 No. 34. Movietone Penetrates The Back... 1931</i>

## APPENDIX B

### News and Current Affairs on ABC TV 1961 –1987

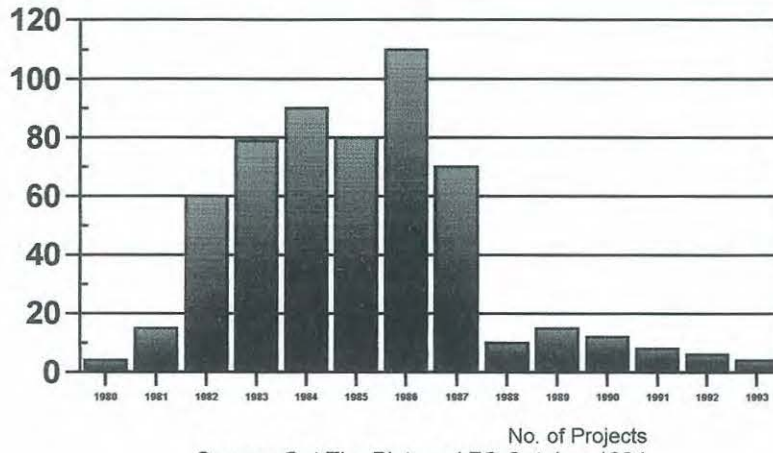
#### *Topic on Aboriginal politics only*

1987	<i>Fingal Bay</i>	1976	<i>Box Ridge</i>
1987	<i>Alice Springs</i>	1976	<i>Wallaga Lake Land Rights</i>
1986	<i>Government Backdowns</i>	1975	<i>Art rip off</i>
1986	<i>The Battle for Kakadu</i>	1975	<i>1975 News</i>
1985	<i>Birdsville</i>	1975	<i>1975 Wilcannia</i>
1985	<i>Black Death</i>	1974	<i>1974 Brown Skin Baby</i>
1984	<i>Vesty's legacy</i>	1974	<i>1974 No other way to live</i>
1984	<i>Labors Landmine</i>	1974	<i>1974 News</i>
1984	<i>1984 No Through Road</i>	1973	<i>1973 News</i>
1983	<i>1983 Flag</i>	1973	<i>1973 Racism</i>
1983	<i>1983 March</i>	1973	<i>1973 Orient Point</i>
1983	<i>1983 Protests</i>	1973	<i>1973 Dodge City</i>
1983	<i>1983 Discrimination</i>	1973	<i>1973 Moree</i>
1983	<i>1983 News</i>	1973	<i>1973 Papunya</i>
1983	<i>1983 Black Sickness</i>	1972	<i>1972 A bit of racism here</i>
1982	<i>1982 Why march?</i>	1972	<i>1972 Uncommon Law</i>
1982	<i>1982 News</i>	1972	<i>1972 The Day War Came</i>
1982	<i>1982 News</i>	1972	<i>1972 Maralinga</i>
1982	<i>1982 News</i>	1972	<i>1972 Aboriginal Day Demo</i>
1981	<i>1981 Mister Government</i>	1972	<i>1972 Black Mood</i>
1981	<i>1981 News</i>	1972	<i>1972 News</i>
1981	<i>1981 News</i>	1972	<i>Aboriginal Embassy</i>
1980	<i>Cape York</i>	1972	<i>Merged</i>
1980	<i>Land Rights</i>	1972	<i>Hidden Possessions</i>
1980	<i>Wilcannia</i>	1971	<i>Wattie Creek</i>
1980	<i>Black Unemployment</i>	1971	<i>Migrants in their own land</i>

1971	<i>Barren Future</i>	1967	<i>Race Relations</i>
1971	<i>News</i>	1967	<i>Ku Klux Klan</i>
1971	<i>Conference</i>	1967	<i>Wattie Creek</i>
1971	<i>Gove Report</i>	1966	<i>The Price of Equality</i>
1971	<i>Edward River</i>	1965	<i>Northern Territory Voting</i>
1970	<i>Toomelah</i>	1965	<i>News</i>
1970	<i>Aboriginal Drinking</i>	1965	<i>News</i>
1969	<i>Gove, Land Rights and Wrongs</i>	1965	<i>Equal Rights</i>
1969	<i>Land Rights</i>	1964	<i>The Right to Drink</i>
1969	<i>Out of sight out of mind</i>	1963	<i>Bourke</i>
1969	<i>News</i>	1963	<i>Right To Vote</i>
1969	<i>Moree and Walgett</i>	1962	<i>Buried History</i>
1969	<i>Aboriginal Miners</i>	1962	<i>Broome</i>
1969	<i>Land Rights</i>	1962	<i>Marble Bar</i>
1967	<i>Aboriginal adoption</i>	1961	<i>Casino</i>
1967	<i>News</i>	1961	<i>Darwin</i>
1967	<i>Panel Discuss. on Walgett</i>	1961	<i>Getting Together</i>

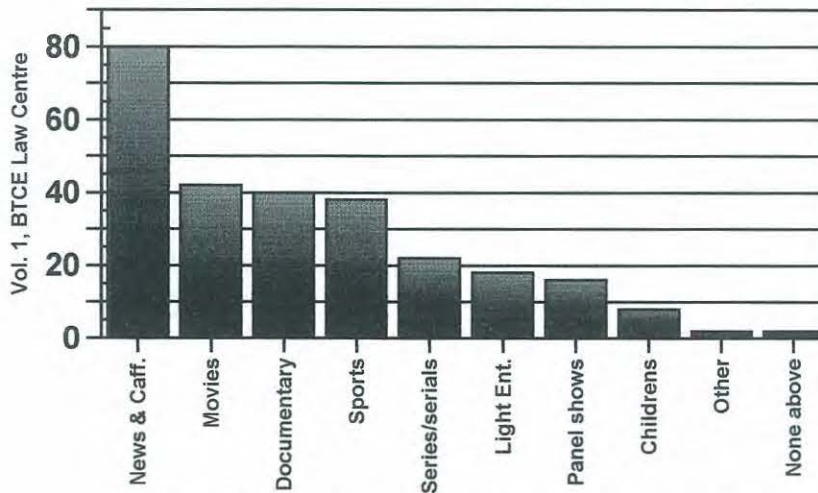
## APPENDIX C

**Total No. Documentary Projects**  
**Division 10BA: 1980-1992**  
**Financed by AFC**



Source: Get The Picture AFC October 1994

**Regularly Watched Programs on Television**  
**by Program Category**



Source: Communications Research Forum 1995.



## APPENDIX D

### *Programs produced by Aboriginal Producers for the APU ABC Television 1989-2002*

Year	Title	Program
2002	<i>Bumba Albert</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Searching For the Brown Boys</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Sunday Island</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Orphanage Girl</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>A Place of Peace</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Jamain</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Black Olive</i>	Messagestick
2001	<i>Black Tracker</i>	Messagestick
2001	<i>Mimi at Uluru</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Shifting Shelter,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Tent Boxers,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Willigans Fitzroy,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>A Walk With Words,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Back To Yamba,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Small Island Big Fight,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Bush Mechanics,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Wrap Me Up In Paperbark,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Healing Sounds of Bugarun Orchestra,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>In Search of Archie, Silent Legacy,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Defining Black</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>A Life In Photographs,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Blacktracker,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Straight From the Yarraman's Mouth,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Night Patrol,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Milerum,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Look Listen Speak</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Apatheka,</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Crim TV.</i>	ABC NIDF
2000	<i>Us Mob</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Black Out Back</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Saltwater Country</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Saltwater Rock</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Tudawali Awards</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Two Snakes - Uluru creation story</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Aunty Nan</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Cooking Capers with Jacko &amp; Smithy</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Frank Yamma</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Bob Randall</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>We're Not Lost - Jim Everett</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Rosalie Riley</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Finding Common Ground</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Nugget Coombs</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Olympic Dreaming</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Blood in the Ground</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Aboriginal Protest at Olympic Games</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Bob Maza</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Rosemary Lester</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Ali Golding</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Finding Common Ground</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Koori Knockout</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Lillian Crombie</i>	Messagestick

1999	<i>Noel Tovey</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Tony Liddle</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Jimmy Little</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Joe Rock</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Masie Watson</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Warumpi Band</i>	Messagestick
1993	<i>Aboriginal Culture</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Aboriginal Adoption</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Violence Against Aborigines</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Image of Aboriginal people</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Aboriginal Musicians</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Women's Conference</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Comedy Special,</i>	Blackout
1992	<i>Gammin Paradise</i>	Blackout
1992	<i>Deaths in Custody,</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Environment</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>IYIP Launch</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Entertainment</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Ringers</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Racial Discrimination</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Christmas</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Year of Indigenous People</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Poverty</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Black/White Culture Difference</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Landrights 22.12.92</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Koorie Culture, Koorie Control</i>	Kam Yarn
1991	<i>Oceans Apart.</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Debs Ball,</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Kids and Culture</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Malangi,</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Best Kept Secret</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Kevin Gilbert</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Poison,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Civil Rights,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Youth</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Black Santa,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Education,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Building Bridges</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Identity</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Dance</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Black Youth</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Women</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Black High School</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Spirituality</i>	Blackout

## APPENDIX E

*Programs Produced by Indigenous Programs Unit SBS TV 2000 –2001*  
ICAM Programs Only. The *First In Line* series had over 40 episodes but not listed here.

*2001 - Festival Of The Pacific Arts*  
*2001 - Survival 2001 Concert*  
*2001 - Torres Strait Island Adoptions*  
*2001 - Jodee Cockatoo*  
*2001 - Douglas Pitt*  
*2001 - Evelyn Scott*  
*2001 - Djakapurra Munyarryun*  
*2001 - Substance Misuse Part 1*  
*2001 - Substance Misuse Part 2*  
*2001 - The Cherry Pickers*  
*2001 - Indigenous Media*  
*2001 - Aboriginal Deaths In Custody*  
*2001 - Rosemary Wanganeen*  
*2001 - Pat O`Shane*  
*2001 - Native Title: Return To Ugar*  
*2001 - Nsw Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout*  
*2001 - Indigenous Boxers*  
*2000 - One Nation Part 1 & 2*  
*2000 - World of Dreamings*  
*2000 - Karma Waters Land Agreement*  
*2000 - Mental Illness*  
*2000 - TIDDAS*  
*2000 - Bunna Lawrie*  
*2000 - Evonne Goolagong Cawley*  
*2000 - Hunting and Sea Rights*  
*2000 - Troy Cassar-Daly*  
*2000 - Valerie Corbett*  
*2000 - Unemployment*  
*2000 - Indigenous involvement Sydney 2000*

## APPENDIX F

### Documentary Films Produced by Film Australia

*Films produced by Aboriginal filmmakers †*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Title</u>
1999	<i>Pearlers of the Coral Sea</i>	1989	<i>Dreamings - The Art of Aboriginal Australia †</i>
1999	<i>Islanders, The</i>	1989	<i>Breakthrough: Alice †</i>
1999	<i>Copyrites †</i>	1987	<i>You Can Do Anything</i>
1999	<i>Bobtales</i>	1987	<i>Women 88 †</i>
1997	<i>Special Treatment</i>	1987	<i>Land of the Lightning Brothers</i>
1997	<i>On Sacred Ground</i>	1986	<i>When the Snake Bites the Sun</i>
1997	<i>Boomalli - Five Koorie Artists †</i>	1986	<i>Uluru - An Anangu Story</i>
1997	<i>88.9 Radio Redfern</i>	1985	<i>Two Desert Families</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: O'Donoghue, Lois</i>	1985	<i>Never too late</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Little, Jimmy</i>	1983	<i>Peppimenarti</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Perkins, Charles</i>	1981	<i>Blekbala</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Langford Ginibi, Ruby</i>	1980	<i>New Rangers</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Kunoth-Monks, Rosalie</i>	1980	<i>Images of Man</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Durack, Elizabeth</i>	1979	<i>Yirrkala Film Project (22 films).</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Coombs. H.C. "Nugget"</i>	1978	<i>Not to lose you, My Language</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Brady, Veronica</i>	1978	<i>Becoming Aboriginal</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Bonner, Neville</i>	1978	<i>Aboriginal Dance</i>
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Bandler, Faith</i>	1976	<i>Walya Ngamardiki - The Land My Mother</i>
1996	<i>No Way to Forget</i>	1976	<i>Smokey</i>
1996	<i>Cultural Patterns (Australia)</i>	1975	<i>Sister, If You Only Knew</i>
1994	<i>Black Man Down †</i>	1974	<i>Namatjira the Painter</i>
1994	<i>Aeroplane Dance</i>	1968	<i>Change at Groote,</i>
1993	<i>Exile and the Kingdom</i>	1966	<i>Desert People</i>
1993	<i>Beating About the Bush</i>	1962	<i>Dances at Aurukun 1962</i>
1992	<i>Who Killed Malcolm Smith?</i>	1954	<i>Back of Beyond, The</i>
1992	<i>Kimberley Mob</i>	1948	<i>Aborigines of the Seacoast</i>
1992	<i>Shoalwater - Up For Grabs</i>		
1992	<i>Kakadu Man</i>		
1991	<i>Getting Together</i>		
1991	<i>Desert Tracks</i>		

## APPENDIX G

### Imparja TV Programming 16/02/2002 - 18/02/2002

#### *Local Production †*

<i>Monday</i>			<i>Saturday</i>			<i>Sunday</i>		
7am	Home Shopping	7.00	David Boske Ministries	7.00	BRACS†			
7.30	Creflo Dollar Ministries	7.30	Home shopping	7.30	Home Shopping			
8.00	Early Nine News	8.00	Yamba's Playtime †	8.00	Mass For You			
8.30	Today	9.00	Goodsports	8.30	Creflo Dollar			
10.30	Here's Humphrey	9.30	Today on Saturday	9.00	Small Business Sunday			
11.00	In The Box	10.30	Nganampa Anwernekenhe†	9.30	Business Sunday			
11.30	Home Shopping	11.30	Y?	10.30	Sunday			
12.00	Aerobics Oz Style	12.00	Bush Beat	12.30	Now You See It			
12.30	Entertainment Tonight	12.30	AFL Football					
1.00	Ten News			1.00	Soccer World Cup			
1.30	Bold & Beautiful							
2.30	Touched by an Angel	3.00	Football AFL	2.00	Movie <i>Tarzan</i>			
3.30	Oprah							
4.30	Judge Judy			3.45	Movie <i>Pet Shop</i>			
5.00	Huey's Greatest Hits							
5.30	Yamba's Playmates	5.30	Personal Best	5.30	Movie <i>Land Before Time</i>			
6.00	Y?	6.00	Cybergirl					
6.30	Pass The Buck	6.30	Ben Dark's Greatest Outback					
7.00	Neighbours		Adventures	7.00	The Simpsons			
7.30	<i>Imparja</i> National News	7.30	Ten News	7.30	Ten News			
8.00	Current Affair	8.00	Sports Tonight	8.00	Sports Tonight			
8.30	Shafted	8.30	Australia's Funniets Home Videos	8.30	Location Location			
9.00	Friends	9.00	Crocodile Hunter	9.00	Sixty Minutes			
9.30	Malcolm in the Middle							
10.00	Who wants to be a millionaire?	10.00	Football Rugby League	10.00	Movie <i>The Matrix</i>			
12.00	Titans	12.00	Football AFL	12.45	Football AFL			
1.00	City of Angels							
2.00	Late News							
2.25	On Track	2.55	On Track	2.45	On Track			
2.30	Close	3.00	Close	2.50	Close			

## APPENDIX H

### *Documentary films researched and/or mentioned in thesis*

*Archive sources 1917 – 2002*

*Films produced on Messagestick, ICAM, Kam Yarn, ABC NIDF and Blackout are made by Indigenous producers. Additional films made by Indigenous producers are indicated by †*

2002	<i>Searching For the Brown Boys</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Sunday Island</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Orphanage Girl</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>A Place of Peace</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Jamain</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Black Olive</i>	Messagestick
2002	<i>Bumba Albert</i>	Messagestick
2001	<i>Black Tracker</i>	Messagestick
2001	<i>Mimi at Uluru</i>	Messagestick
2001	<i>Festival Of The Pacific Arts</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Survival 2001 Concert</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Torres Strait Island Adoptions</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Jodee Cockatoo</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Douglas Pitt</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Evelyn Scott</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Djakapurra Munyarryun</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Substance Misuse Part 1</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Substance Misuse Part 2</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>The Cherry Pickers</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Indigenous Media</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Aboriginal Deaths In Custody</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Rosemary Wanganeen</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Pat O`Shane</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Native Title: Return To Ugar</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Nsw Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout</i>	ICAM
2001	<i>Indigenous Boxers</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>2000 Mile Cattle Drive</i>	Screensound
2000	<i>Shifting Shelter,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Tent Boxers,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Willigans Fitzroy,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>A Walk With Words,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Back To Yamba,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Small Island Big Fight,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Bush Mechanics,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Wrap Me Up In Paperbark,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Healing Sounds of Bugarun Orchestra,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>In Search of Archie, Silent Legacy,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Defining Black</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>A Life In Photographs,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Blacktracker,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Straight From the Yarraman's Mouth,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Night Patrol,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Milerum,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Look Listen Speak</i>	ABC NIFD

2000	<i>Apatheka,</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Crim TV.</i>	ABC NIFD
2000	<i>Us Mob</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Black Out Back</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Saltwater Country</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Saltwater Rock</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Tudawali Awards</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Two Snakes - Uluru creation story</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Aunty Nan</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Cooking Capers with Jacko &amp; Smithy</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Frank Yamma</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Bob Randall</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>We're Not Lost - Jim Everett</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Rosalie Riley</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Finding Common Ground</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Nugget Coombs</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Olympic Dreaming</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Blood in the Ground</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Games People Play</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>Aboriginal Protest during the Olympic Games</i>	Messagestick
2000	<i>One Nation Part 1 &amp; 2</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>World of Dreamings</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Karma Waters Land Agreement</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Mental Illness</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>TIDDAS</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Bunna Lawrie</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Evonne Goolagong Cawley</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Hunting and Sea Rights</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Troy Cassar-Daly</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Valerie Corbett</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Unemployment</i>	ICAM
2000	<i>Indigenous involvement Sydney 2000 Olympic Games</i>	ICAM
1999	<i>Pearlers of the Coral Sea</i>	Film Australia
1999	<i>Islanders, The</i>	Film Australia
1999	<i>Copyrites</i>	Film Australia
1999	<i>Bobtales</i>	Film Australia
1999	<i>Bob Maza</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Rosemary Lester</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Ali Golding</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Finding Common Ground</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Koori Knockout</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Lillian Crombie</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Noel Tovey</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Tony Liddle</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Jimmy Little</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Joe Rock</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Masie Watson</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>Warumpi Band</i>	Messagestick
1999	<i>The Two Sisters Story</i>	AIATSIS
1999	<i>Like Rubies in the King's Crown by,</i>	AIATSIS
1999	<i>My Place, My Land, My People (1 &amp; 2</i>	AIATSIS
1999	<i>NAISDA Promotional Video</i>	AIATSIS
1998	<i>Black Bronco,</i>	ABC
1998	<i>Inma Pulka: Big Ceremony</i>	AIATSIS
1998	<i>Oral History of the Walgett area</i>	AIATSIS
1997	<i>Special Treatment</i>	Film Australia
1997	<i>On Sacred Ground</i>	Film Australia

1997	<i>Boomalli - Five Koorie Artists †</i>	Film Australia
1997	<i>88.9 Radio Redfern</i>	Film Australia
1997	<i>Cracks in the Mask</i>	AIATSIS
1997	<i>Wambaya Language Project by Nordlinger, Rachel</i>	AIATSIS
1997	<i>Gularri: That Brings Unity by Mulchay, Shane,</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>Australian Biography: O'Donoghue, Lois</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Little, Jimmy</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Perkins, Charles</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Langford Ginibi, Ruby</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Kunoth-Monks, Rosalie</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Durack, Elizabeth</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Coombs. H.C. "Nugget"</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Brady, Veronica</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Bonner, Neville</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Australian Biography: Bandler, Faith</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>No Way to Forget</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Cultural Patterns (Australia)</i>	Film Australia
1996	<i>Purification Ceremony Caledon Bay</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>From A Long Time Ago - Hollow Log Painting</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>Hard Time Now... for the Children</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>Jaminjung, Ngaliwurru Ngarinyman</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>Dhapi Ceremony at Yirrkala</i>	AIATSIS
1996	<i>Baniyala</i>	AIATSIS
1995	<i>Jardiwarnpa - A Walpiri Fire Ceremony</i>	ABC
1995	<i>Storytellers of the Pacific†</i>	ABC TV
1995	<i>This is My Thinking</i>	AIATSIS
1995	<i>Conversations with Dundiwuy Wanambi</i>	AIATSIS
1995	<i>Dundiwuy's House Opening</i>	AIATSIS
1995	<i>Pain For This Land</i>	AIATSIS
1995	<i>Ceremony 1995</i>	AIATSIS
1994	<i>Two Bob Mermaid †</i>	Film Australia
1994	<i>Black Man Down †</i>	Film Australia
1994	<i>Aeroplane Dance</i>	Film Australia
1993	<i>Aboriginal Culture</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Aboriginal Adoption</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Violence Against Aborigines</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Image of Aboriginal people</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Aboriginal Musicians</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Women's Conference</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Comedy Special,</i>	Blackout
1993	<i>Exile and the Kingdom</i>	Film Australia
1993	<i>Beating About the Bush</i>	Film Australia
1993	<i>Black Man's Houses</i>	AIATSIS
1993	<i>Benny and the Dreamers</i>	AIATSIS
1993	<i>Faith Bandler</i>	AIATSIS
1993	<i>Milli Milli</i>	AIATSIS
1993	<i>Neville Bonner</i>	AIATSIS
1992	<i>Gammin Paradise,</i>	Blackout
1992	<i>Deaths in Custody,</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Environment</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>IYIP Launch</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Entertainment</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Ringers</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Racial Discrimination</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Christmas</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Year of Indigenous People</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Poverty</i>	Kam Yarn



1992	<i>Black/White Culture Difference</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Landrights</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Koorie Culture, Koorie Control</i>	Kam Yarn
1992	<i>Who Killed Malcolm Smith?</i>	Film Australia
1992	<i>Shoalwater - Up For Grabs</i>	Film Australia
1992	<i>Kakadu Man</i>	Film Australia
1992	<i>Tent Embassy</i>	ABC True Stories
1991	<i>Oceans Apart.</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Debs Ball,</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Kids and Culture</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Malangi,</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Best Kept Secret</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Kevin Gilbert</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Poison</i>	Blackout
1991	<i>Getting Together</i>	Film Australia
1991	<i>Desert Tracks</i>	Film Australia
1991	<i>Island of Lies</i>	AIATSIS
1991	<i>Kimberley Mob</i>	AIATSIS
1991	<i>Dance on your Land</i>	AIATSIS
1991	<i>Desert Tracks</i>	AIATSIS
1990	<i>Civil Rights,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Youth,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Black Santa,</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Education</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>Building Bridges</i>	Blackout
1990	<i>7 Colours</i>	Film Australia
1990	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 21</i>	Screenound
1990	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 22</i>	Screenound
1989	<i>Identity,</i>	ABC
1989	<i>Dance</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Black Youth</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Women</i>	ABC
1989	<i>Black High School</i>	ABC
1989	<i>Spirituality</i>	Blackout
1989	<i>Dreamings - The Art of Aboriginal Australia</i>	Film Australia
1989	<i>Breakthrough: Alice</i>	Film Australia
1989	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 18</i>	Screenound
1989	<i>Always Was Always Will Be</i>	Screenound
1989	<i>Amoonguna Mud Bricks</i>	Screenound
1989	<i>First Footsteps</i>	AIATSIS
1989	<i>Hunters and Gatherers</i>	AIATSIS
1989	<i>Djungguwan at Gurkawuy</i>	AIATSIS
1989	<i>Milbindi - Episode 01/89, Presenter, Craig Groves</i>	AIATSIS
1988	<i>Balgo</i>	Film Australia
1988	<i>ABC 2 21-Jan 88 Aboriginal Entourage From NT To Sydney -</i>	Screenound
1988	<i>Aboriginal Australia. Aboriginal Enterprises</i>	Screenound
1988	<i>Aboriginal Cricket Tour Of England</i>	Screenound
1988	<i>Aboriginal Events Of 1988</i>	Screenound
1988	<i>Black Magic</i>	AIATSIS
1987	<i>You Can Do Anything</i>	Film Australia
1987	<i>Women 88</i>	Film Australia
1987	<i>Land of the Lightning Brothers</i>	Film Australia
1987	<i>Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre</i>	Screenound
1987	<i>1987 Fingal Bay</i>	ABC N&Caff
1987	<i>1987 Alice Springs</i>	ABC N&Caff
1987	<i>Bush Medicine</i>	AIATSIS
1987	<i>Nutrition</i>	AIATSIS

1987	<i>Stranger in town</i>	AIATSIS
1987	<i>Well Baby Clinic</i>	AIATSIS
1986	<i>When the Snake Bites the Sun</i>	Film Australia
1986	<i>Uluru - An Anangu Story</i>	Film Australia
1986	<i>Aboriginal Essential Services</i>	Screen sound
1986	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 10</i>	Screen sound
1986	<i>1986 Government Backdowns</i>	ABC N&Caff
1986	<i>1986 The Battle for Kakadu</i>	ABC N&Caff
1986	<i>We believe in it - we know it's true</i>	AIATSIS
1986	<i>One Man's Response (2 reels)</i>	AIATSIS
1986	<i>Uluru - An Anangu story</i>	AIATSIS
1985	<i>Two Desert Families</i>	Film Australia
1985	<i>Never too late</i>	Film Australia
1985	<i>Aboriginal Alcoholics. 15.10.85. 31.22 - 36.15 -</i>	Screen sound
1985	<i>1985 Birdsville</i>	ABC N&Caff
1985	<i>1985 Black Death</i>	ABC N&Caff
1985	<i>Never too Late</i>	AIATSIS
1985	<i>We are the Landowner, That's why We're Here</i>	AIATSIS
1984	<i>Aboriginal Magazine. No. 04, 22, 15, 21, 18, 10, 05</i>	Screen sound
1984	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 04</i>	Screen sound
1984	<i>Aboriginal Video Magazine. No. 05</i>	Screen sound
1984	<i>Vesty's legacy</i>	ABC N&Caff
1984	<i>Labors Landmine</i>	ABC N&Caff
1984	<i>No Through Road</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>Peppimenarti</i>	Film Australia
1983	<i>Aboriginal Country Music Festival</i>	Screen sound
1983	<i>Aboriginal Health Worker</i>	Screen sound
1983	<i>Aboriginal Health Worker Conference</i>	Screen sound
1983	<i>Flag</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>March</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>Protests</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>Discrimination</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>Black Sickness</i>	ABC N&Caff
1983	<i>We Did It - South Australia</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>We Did It - Victoria</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>We Did It - Western Australia</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>In Memory of Mawalan</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>This is working</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>Ticket to Ride</i>	AIATSIS
1983	<i>Women of Utopia</i>	AIATSIS
1982	<i>Aboriginal Land Rights March; Australian Film Awards]</i>	Screen sound
1982	<i>Why march?</i>	ABC N&Caff
1982	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1982	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1982	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1982	<i>We Did It - Rockhampton &amp; Mackay</i>	AIATSIS
1981	<i>Blekbala</i>	Film Australia
1981	<i>Mister Government</i>	ABC N&Caff
1981	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1981	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1981	<i>My Country Djarrakpi</i>	AIATSIS
1981	<i>Narritjin in Canberra,</i>	AIATSIS
1981	<i>Percy Mumbler and Land Rights.</i>	AIATSIS
1980	<i>New Rangers</i>	Film Australia
1980	<i>Images of Man</i>	Film Australia
1980	<i>Aboriginal Land Rights, N.S.W.</i>	Screen sound

1980	<i>Cape York</i>	ABC N&Caff
1980	<i>Land Rights</i>	ABC N&Caff
1980	<i>Wilcannia</i>	ABC N&Caff
1980	<i>Black Unemployment</i>	ABC N&Caff
1980	<i>Blekbala</i>	AIATSIS
1980	<i>At The Canoe Camp</i>	AIATSIS
1979	<i>Yirrkala Film Project (22 films).</i>	Film Australia
1978	<i>Not to lose you, My Language</i>	Film Australia
1978	<i>Becoming Aboriginal</i>	Film Australia
1978	<i>Aboriginal Dance</i>	Film Australia
1978	<i>Walya Ngamardiki: The Land My Mother</i>	AIATSIS
1978	<i>Becoming Aboriginal</i>	AIATSIS
1978	<i>Three Dances by Gulpilil</i>	AIATSIS
1976	<i>Walya Ngamardiki - The Land My Mother</i>	Film Australia
1976	<i>Smokey</i>	Film Australia
1976	<i>Box Ridge</i>	ABC N&Caff
1976	<i>Wallaga Lake Land Rights</i>	ABC N&Caff
1976	<i>Madarrpa Funeral at Gurka'wuy</i>	AIATSIS
1975	<i>Sister, If You Only Knew</i>	Film Australia
1975	<i>Aboriginal Artefacts</i>	ScreenSound
1975	<i>Art rip off</i>	ABC N&Caff
1975	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1975	<i>Wilcannia</i>	ABC N&Caff
1974	<i>Namatjira the Painter</i>	Film Australia
1974	<i>Brown Skin Baby</i>	ABC N&Caff
1974	<i>No other way to live</i>	ABC N&Caff
1974	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1974	<i>Lurugu</i>	AIATSIS
1974	<i>Walkabout '74 by Mountford, Charles P.</i>	AIATSIS
1974	<i>Namatjira the Painter</i>	AIATSIS
1974	<i>Singing in the Rain - Yirrkala</i>	AIATSIS
1973	<i>Aboriginal Arts Board Seminar Resolutions.</i>	ScreenSound
1973	<i>Aboriginal Arts Board Meeting : 26 May</i>	ScreenSound
1973	<i>Aboriginal Arts Board Seminar Resolutions. Part One</i>	ScreenSound
1973	<i>Aboriginal Demonstrations During The Queen's Visit</i>	ScreenSound
1973	<i>[Aborigines Run Own Settlement]</i>	ScreenSound
1973	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1973	<i>Racism</i>	ABC N&Caff
1973	<i>Orient Point</i>	ABC N&Caff
1973	<i>Dodge City</i>	ABC N&Caff
1973	<i>Moree</i>	ABC N&Caff
1973	<i>Papunya</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>[Aboriginal Medical Centre : Redfern, Sydney]</i>	ScreenSound
1972	<i>[Airline Pilot Entertains Handicapped Kids]</i>	ScreenSound
1972	<i>A bit of racism here</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Uncommon Law</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>The Day War Came</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Maralinga</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Aboriginal Day Demo</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Black Mood</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Aboriginal Embassy</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Merged</i>	ABC N&Caff
1972	<i>Hidden Possessions</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>Aborigines Of The Northern Territory : Nurse Of The Outback</i>	ScreenSound
1971	<i>Wattie Creek</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>Migrants in their own land</i>	ABC N&Caff

1971	<i>Barren Future</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>Conference</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>Gove Report</i>	ABC N&Caff
1971	<i>Edward River</i>	ABC N&Caff
1970	<i>Toomelah</i>	ABC N&Caff
1970	<i>Aboriginal Drinking</i>	ABC N&Caff
1970	<i>Vol. 41 No. 30. Pottery Exports In Aboriginal</i>	Movietone
1969	<i>Gove, Land Rights and Wrongs</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>Land Rights</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>Out of sight out of mind</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>Moree and Walgett</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>Aboriginal Miners</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>Land Rights</i>	ABC N&Caff
1969	<i>People of the Western Desert Part 1- 18</i>	AIATSIS
1969	<i>People of the Desert Part 19</i>	AIATSIS
1969	<i>Flint Miners of the Nullarbor</i>	AIATSIS
1969	<i>Camels and the Pitjantjara</i>	AIATSIS
1968	<i>Change at Groote,</i>	Film Australia
1968	<i>Aboriginal Girls Make Their Debut</i>	Screensound
1968	<i>Across The Top</i>	Screensound
1968	<i>Wave Hill</i>	ABC N&Caff
1968	<i>The Change at Groote by Sargent, Stefan,</i>	AIATSIS
1968	<i>The Islanders by Mason, Richard</i>	AIATSIS
1967	<i>Aboriginal adoption</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>Panel Discuss. on Walgett</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>Race Relations</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>Ku Klux Klan</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>Wattie Creek</i>	ABC N&Caff
1967	<i>Desert People by Martin-Jones, John,</i>	AIATSIS
1967	<i>Prehistoric Rock Art of the Cleland Hills by Edwards, Robert,</i>	AIATSIS
1966	<i>Desert People</i>	Film Australia
1966	<i>The Price of Equality</i>	ABC N&Caff
1966	<i>Five Aboriginal Dances from Cape York</i>	AIATSIS
1965	<i>Aboriginal Rock Art</i>	Screensound
1965	<i>Northern Territory Voting</i>	ABC N&Caff
1965	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1965	<i>News</i>	ABC N&Caff
1965	<i>Equal Rights</i>	ABC N&Caff
1964	<i>The Aborigines Of Australia</i>	Screensound
1964	<i>The Right to Drink</i>	ABC N&Caff
1964	<i>Dances at Aurukun</i>	AIATSIS
1963	<i>Aboriginal Art : Unusual Talent At Darwin Eisteddfod</i>	Screensound
1963	<i>Bourke</i>	ABC N&Caff
1963	<i>Right To Vote</i>	ABC N&Caff
1963	<i>Through The Outback : [Unissued : V/A</i>	Movietone
1962	<i>Buried History</i>	ABC N&Caff
1962	<i>Dances at Aurukun</i>	Film Australia
1962	<i>[Aboriginal Story : Unissued]</i>	Screensound
1962	<i>Broome</i>	ABC N&Caff
1962	<i>Marble Bar</i>	ABC N&Caff
1961	<i>36 Million Pds Dam Goes Into Service :Warragamba</i>	Screensound
1961	<i>Casino</i>	ABC N&Caff
1961	<i>Darwin</i>	ABC N&Caff
1961	<i>Getting Together</i>	ABC N&Caff

1961	<i>Pearlers of the Coral Sea</i>	AIATSIS
1960	<i>[Aboriginal Gift Salon] (Alternative Title)</i>	Screensound
1960	<i>Animal Oddities. [Harmony In The Animal World]</i>	Screensound
1960	<i>Tumanu's People</i>	AIATSIS
1959	<i>367 Movietone Exclusive. The Drama Of The 'Sea Fox'</i>	Movietone
1958	<i>News. A1597</i>	Movietone
1957	<i>Vol. 28 No. 34. Ampol Trial : Toughgoing On</i>	Movietone
1956	<i>Vol. 27 No. 36. Export Import : Sydney Stag</i>	Movietone
1956	<i>Vol. 27 No. 52. Duke In Australia[V/A 7285]</i>	Movietone
1954	<i>Back of Beyond, The</i>	Film Australia
1954	<i>C1954. [Farming And Outback Activities] [V/A...</i>	Movietone
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 17. The Queen Flies To south Aus</i>	Movietone
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 18. Royal Tour Towoomera-Perth</i>	Movietone
1954	<i>Vol. 25 No. 41. Rough Ridin Back O' Burke</i>	Movietone
1953	<i>Vol. 24 No. 14? Royal Tour Of Queensland</i>	Movietone
1953	<i>Vol. 24 No. 39. New Hospital In Outback :</i>	Movietone
1952	<i>Air Beef : [Unissued] [V/A 6005]</i>	Movietone
1952	<i>News. [Aborigines And Rock Paintings : An A...</i>	Movietone
1952	<i>News. C1952. [Pastoral Industry : Kimberley Region...</i>	Movietone
1952	<i>Vol. 23 No. 35. Cruel Drought Devastates Cat...</i>	Movietone
1949	<i>Aboriginal Star : Harold Blair Sings To Children</i>	Screensound
1948	<i>Aborigines of the Seacoast</i>	Film Australia
1948	<i>News. [Bimbimie Cary Bay Zoo]</i>	Movietone
1948	<i>Aborigines of the Sea Coast by Mountford, Charles P</i>	AIATSIS
1945	<i>[Aboriginal Mission Life C1945] 1945 -</i>	Screensound
1945	<i>Aboriginal Mission Work C1945 : Out-Takes</i>	Screensound
1945	<i>[Aboriginal Mission Work</i>	Screensound
1945	<i>[Aborigines In The Community]</i>	Screensound
1942	<i>Aboriginal Children Refugees From Bombs</i>	Screensound
1942	<i>News. [Mackay Expedition]</i>	Movietone
1941	<i>Aborigines Are True Soldiers Of The King</i>	Screensound
1939	<i>[Aboriginal Boxers] : Queensland (Alternative Title)</i>	Screensound
1939	<i>[Aboriginal Spear Throwing]</i>	Screensound
1939	<i>Aboriginal Ceremony. Palm Island, Qld.]</i>	Movietone
1938	<i>1938 Car Race Arrive At Derby In W.A., Kimberley District</i>	Screensound
1935	<i>[Aboriginal Men Near Campfire In Arid Area. C1935]</i>	Screensound
1935	<i>[Aboriginal Mission? : North Queensland, C1935</i>	Screensound
1935	<i>Aboriginals Do Corroboree In Central Aust.</i>	Screensound
1935	<i>[Adelaide Museum Makes Plaster Cast Of Aborigine]</i>	Screensound
1935	<i>[Alice Springs : Christmas Races, Unveiling War Memorial</i>	Screensound
1934	<i>[Aboriginal Corroborees C1934]</i>	Screensound
1934	<i>Ab'l Play War Cry On Gum Leaves Before Downing Scots Team</i>	Screensound
1934	<i>News. A0071 : [No. 02]</i>	Movietone
1934	<i>Vol. 05 No. 43 (Alternative Title)</i>	Movietone
1933	<i>[Adelaide From W.A. ; Views Of Sydney</i>	Screensound
1932	<i>Vol. 02 No. 48. Queensland Abos [Abos is the term they use]</i>	Movietone
1931	<i>[Aboriginal Corroboree C1927 : V/N 123]</i>	Screensound
1931	<i>Vol. 02 No. 34. Movietone Penetrates The Bac..</i>	Movietone
1929	<i>[Along The Prince's Highway] (Alternative Title)</i>	Screensound
1928	<i>[Aboriginal Bush Feature Segments] (Alternative 1928)</i>	Screensound
1928	<i>Aboriginal Life (Alternative Title)</i>	Screensound
1925	<i>The Abo At Home 1925 - [Abos is the term they use]</i>	Screensound
1924	<i>[Aboriginal Life In The Northern Territory]</i>	Screensound
1919	<i>Aboriginal Ceremonial Dancers</i>	Screensound
1917	<i>Along The North West Coast Of Australia</i>	Screensound

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