



THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND  
AUSTRALIA

Eco-Fourth Cinema:  
Indigenous Rights and Environmental Crises

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## Abstract

This thesis compares a number of films made with or by Indigenous peoples in Australia and Brazil, from the year 2000. At the core of this research project is an investigation into how these films transmit Indigenous peoples' ways of knowing and relating to the environment, while reaching both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. The thesis's main hypothesis is that globalised audiences engage with Indigenous films, because they recurrently touch on universal environmental themes such as land disputes, water preservation and struggles for cultural maintenance. These productions do so while retaining and explicitly negotiating these audio-visual productions' regional and cultural specificities. The appeal these films have for international viewers is reflected through the rising number of film festivals exhibiting Indigenous themes, many of which advocate for environmental policies and sustainable lifestyles.

Indigenous peoples are key players in climate change debates not only due to their traditional knowledges and discourses on sustainability, but because they are survivors of a preceding type of unanticipated eco-territorial displacement, namely colonialism. Consequently, this research argues that the study of films made by or with Indigenous peoples can provide alternative perspectives to contemporary environmental debates, relating Indigenous rights and sovereignty with successful management of natural resources.

Due to their reliance and connection with natural resources, Indigenous peoples in Australia and Brazil are often the first to feel the impacts of environmental crises such as deforestation and droughts. Consequently, films about Indigenous sustainability display stories of resilience and survival that allow for the renegotiation of global and local meanings of natural resources. In the context of debates on epistemic decolonisation, this research takes on the challenge of studying these films in relation to the broader field of national cinemas and as part of what has been called Fourth Cinema by Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay. The concept of a Fourth Cinema differentiates Indigenous Cinema from the First, Second and Third Cinemas. It argues for the importance of Indigenous self-representation to overcome media stereotypes and to produce images that respect Indigenous core values. Further elaborating and supplementing the idea of Fourth Cinema, this thesis concludes with a discussion on the contributions of ecocinema. This recent genre has as its main characteristic a proactive and interventionist logic, raising public awareness for environmental issues. This thesis proposes the combination of Fourth Cinema with ecocinema leading to an "*Eco-Fourth Cinema*" as a space for Indigenous audio-visual productions to tackle environmental crises from the standpoint of Indigenous rights.

## **Declaration by author**

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, financial support and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my higher degree by research candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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## **Publications during candidature**

### **Peer-reviewed journal articles**

Frey, Aline. 2018 “The Flows of Xingu: Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Discourses in Brazil.” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 24, no.1.

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Frey, Aline. 2014. “Confinement and Violence in the Streets of New Brazilian Cinema.” In *Brazil in Twenty-First Century Popular Media: Culture, Politics, and Nationalism on the World Stage*, edited by Naomi Pueo, Wood, 55–71. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.

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Frey, Aline. “Indigenous Cinemas and Water Preservation in Australia and Brazil.” Paper presented at South–South Dialogues: Situated Perspectives in Decolonial Epistemologies, University of Queensland, Australia, 5–6 November 2015.

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**Contributions by others to the thesis**

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## Chapter One

### Introduction:

#### 1.1 Framing Indigenous Screen Production in Australia and Brazil

In this thesis, I discuss audio-visual materials made with or by Indigenous peoples in Australia and Brazil from the 2000s onwards. I use the term “Indigenous peoples” to highlight discourses of pan-Indigenous identity on struggles for Indigenous rights in local and global settings.<sup>1</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) is among the many intellectuals who argue that the term “Indigenous” is problematic, as it homogenises a diversity of communities, languages, traditions, histories, beliefs and cultures around the world. In line with her arguments, throughout the pages of this research, each Indigenous group is referred to in the manner in which it self-identifies. However, when the use of the word “Indigenous” is unavoidable or tactical, I follow Tuhiwai Smith’s recommendation of adding the word “peoples” after it. This is also a way of underlining the right for self-determination as prescribed in international law. Tuhiwai Smith punctuates the importance of using the word “peoples” in the plural, because it emphasises the differences/diversity among Indigenous cultures.<sup>2</sup>

The core of my research is to investigate how audio-visual productions have been transmitting Indigenous ways of knowing the environment and doing so by reaching different sorts of audiences. I argue that an important reason for the appeal of these materials to non-Indigenous viewers across the globe is the recurrence in them of environmental themes, such as ecological degradation affecting land and water, causing human deprivation of vital natural resources. Due to ongoing ecological concerns and recent economic global crises, these themes have increasingly gained worldwide attention. This is reflected, for instance, in the rising number of environmental film festivals (Monani 2008, 42; Willoquet-Maricondi 2010a, xi). In addition to this global appeal, these productions also

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<sup>1</sup> There are several organisations representing Indigenous interests internationally, including “the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), the Assembly of First Nations, Survival International, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Environmental Network, among others” (Mowforth 2014, 150). The discourse of Indigenous peoples as a united group is also strengthened by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I opted for the capitalisation of the term “Indigenous” as a way to recognise it as a legitimate identity – as with “Aboriginal” – rather than as a mere description/adjective. In doing that, I am also following several publications, including but not limited to Barclay (2003), Wilson and Stewart (2008), Knopf (2008), Columpar (2010), Alia (2010) and Pearson and Knabe (2015). Also, the Canadian Press Stylebook, the main reference book for media in Canada, adopted the use of the term Indigenous with capital I from 2017.

have gained local attention as they construct contemporary narratives of identity for present and future Indigenous generations (Wilson and Stewart 2008).

In this thesis, I analyse the ways Indigenous audio-visual materials display local aesthetics and include oral stories that, by incorporating mainstream environmental debates, are able to dialogue and engage with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. My central hypothesis is that these productions are based on the renegotiation of global and local meanings of natural resources. Consequently, they invite audiences to rethink their own relationship with the natural environment while promoting an urgent call for more sustainable ways of life, based on the reconnection with land and waterscapes. Additionally, these audio-visual productions recognise Indigenous knowledges and cultures as fundamental to the effective management of contemporary environmental crises.

Since the 1980s, Indigenous communicators across the globe have worked to increase their own first nations' rights to create and, especially, re-create their own images in diverse media formats, from community-based videos to mainstream feature films and television programs (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002). This international movement has been conceptualised in different ways: as "Fourth Cinema" (Barclay, 2003, 7), "New Media Nation" (Alia and Bull 2005, 106), "the Indigenization of visual media" (Prins 2004, 516), "visual sovereignty" (Raheja 2007, 1161) and "media sovereignty" (Ginsburg 2016, 583), among others. These concepts have been used to describe audio-visual productions that often challenge mainstream and/or ethnographic representations that alternate between romanticising and criminalising Indigenous peoples, cultures and knowledges. While mainstream media still presents Indigenous issues from an outsider's perspective, Indigenous media have focused on the tasks of self-representation. They showcase, as Indigenous peoples, their own views on local and global matters. This process of self-representation has also been strengthened by "constructive representations" (Alia and Bull 2005, 76), in which non-Indigenous peoples work in partnership to empower Indigenous voices and perspectives.

Australian history has witnessed several examples of partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups that have resulted in the making of audio-visual productions, including successful feature films. Carolyn Strachan and Alessandro Cavadini's creation of the company Reddirtfilms (1972) is a pioneering example of collaboration with Aboriginal communities in Australia. Among many films, the acclaimed *Two Laws* (1981), made in collaboration with the Borroloola Aboriginal community and based on their oral storytelling, is "widely considered to be a landmark documentary" (Davis and Moreton 2011) in which an "actual dialogue" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers resulted in a genuinely collaborative, cross-cultural production (Langton 1993b, 34). The film focuses on the Indigenous struggles against mining, land expropriations and cultural loss in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory.

In addition to cross-cultural partnerships, Australia's film industry has also seen many feature films directed solely by Aboriginal filmmakers. This growing list includes the names of Rachel Perkins, Ivan Sen, Wayne Blair, Richard Frankland, Beck Cole, Warwick Thornton, Catriona McKenzie and Michael Riley, among others. An important addition to this vibrant Aboriginal film production scene of Indigenous audio-visual self-representation has been the powerful platform provided by the National Indigenous Television (NITV) network, primarily dedicated to Aboriginal cultures. It became an independent channel in 2012 through the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and is responsible for disseminating Indigenous content across Australia, displaying both local and international Indigenous productions.<sup>3</sup>

In Brazil, many recent projects also involve partnerships between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous filmmakers who work on training or assisting with the production, circulation and distribution of Indigenous media. The most famous initiative continues to be the VNA — *Vídeo nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages] project, which showcases pioneering productions from Indigenous filmmakers. This project started in 1987 when Belgian filmmaker Vincent Carelli began training different Indigenous nations (such as Xavante, Panará, Nambiquara, Kuikuro and Mbyá-Guaraní) how to film and produce videos.

Alongside the VNA's prolific output it is important to mention the significant body of work of Indigenous filmmakers who have forged their own individual and independent careers apart from VNA. One example is that of Alberto Álvares, a Guaraní-Nhandewa actor, teacher, and filmmaker. His filmmaking oeuvre is centred on the production of documentaries about Indigenous cultures and ways of life, including, among others, *Arandu Nhembo'e – Em Busca do Saber* [In Search of Knowledge] (18min, 2013), *Karai ha'egui kunhã karai 'ete – Os Verdadeiros Líderes Espirituais* [The True Spiritual Leaders] (1h07min, 2014), *Tekowe Nhenpyrun – A Origem da Alma* [The Origin of the Soul] (49min, 2015), *Ywy Jahe'o – O Choro da Terra* [The Cry of the Earth] (5min, 2015), *A Procura de Aratu* [Looking for Aratu] (10min, 2015), *Um Pé na Aldeia e Outro no Mundo* [One Foot in the Village and the other in the World] (10min, 2016), *Nhema'en Tenondere – Além do Olhar* [Beyond the Gaze] (10min, 2016), *Yvy Ayyu – Vozes da Terra* [Voices of the Earth] (35min, 2016),

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<sup>3</sup> This Australian Indigenous presence and the timetable for its production and distribution through Indigenous networks was tardy compared to that of its trans-Tasman counterpart, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Māori director Barry Barclay made the landmark television documentary series on Māori, *Tangata Whenua*, in 1974. A Māori production unit was established within TVNZ in 1980, and 1982 would see the beginning of the first Māori-language television news programs. Barclay would go on to direct the first Māori feature film *Ngāti* in 1987, which was followed by Merata Mita's *Mauri* in 1988. A funding agency for Māori programming began in 1995. The first Māori television network briefly appeared in 1997, with more-secure and better-resourced Māori Television emerging in 2004, adding a second channel completely in Māori in 2008. For more, see Barclay (1990); Murray (2008); Smith (2016).

*Lágrima do Diamante* [Diamond Tear] (13min, 2017), and *A Dança Sagrada* [The Sacred Dance] (15min, 2017).

Another example of an Indigenous filmmaking career independent of VNA is that of Isael Maxakali, a teacher as well as co-founder of Paje Filmes, an Indigenous commercial video agency. Isael is part of the Maxakali Collective, the productions of which are mostly directed by him. A key partner is his wife, Suely Maxakali, who often produces, shoots, and even co-directs their videos. Examples of their work are *Tatakox* (2007), *Xokxop pet* (2009), *Yiax Kaax – Fim do Resguardo* [End of Shelter] (2010), *Xupapoyñãg* (2011), *Kotkuphi* (2011), *Yãmîy* (2011), *Mîmãnãm* (2011), *Dia do índio na Aldeia Verde* [Indian Day in the Green Village] (2014), *Quando os Yãmîy vêm dançar conosco* [When the Yãmîy Come to Dance with Us] (2012), *Kakxop pit hãmkoxuk xop te yũmũgãhã – Iniciação dos filhos dos espíritos da terra* [Initiation of the Sons of Earth's Spirits] (2015) and *Konãgxeka: o Dilúvio Maxakali* [The Maxakali Flood] (2016). The last of these films is a short animation conveying the Maxakali version of the Biblical flood story: as a punishment for men's selfishness and greed, the spirits send out a devastating flood. This video is entirely in the Maxakali language, with subtitles, and was featured in many national and international festivals, such as the Asinabka Film and Media Arts Festival, Ottawa, Canada, 2016; Indigenous Films and Arts Festival, Denver, Colorado, USA, 2016; XII Festival de Cine y Video Indígena, Michoacán, Mexico, 2016; Native Crossroads Film Festival and Symposium, Oklahoma, USA, 2017; and Brésil en Mouvement, Paris, France, 2017, among many others. It also received prizes at a number of festivals, such as best Brazilian short film at Shortcutz Rio de Janeiro (2016) and at Cine Kurumin VI (2017).

Besides these examples of work that is completely independent from VNA, another successful individual filmmaker is Takumã Kuikuro. This director started as part of VNA and went on to create the Kuikuro Collective and developed partnerships with non-Indigenous filmmakers, as in the case of *Itaõ Kuẽgũ – As Hiper Mulheres* [The Hyper Women] (Takumã Kuikuro, Carlos Fausto, and Leonardo Sette, 80min, 2011). This film is considered the first Indigenous feature film made in Brazil and was released on the commercial circuit. Kuikuro went on to direct *Karioka* (20min, 2014) and *Ete Londres / Londres como uma aldeia* [London as a Village] (30min, 2016). Both documentaries are a kind of reverse ethnography, where as an observer the filmmaker observes non-Indigenous ways of life and examines the differences and similarities between cultures. *Karioka* depicts Rio de Janeiro through an Indigenous gaze, while *Ete Londres* is set in London's "hyper-white" society, as he refers to Europeans.

Indeed, Indigenous film production in Brazil has been steadily growing. This production started in the 1980s and 1990s with the Video in the Villages (VNA) project and has grown largely thanks to the agency it grants to various different Indigenous nations/groups to become more systematic and frequent in their film production activity. This development is not only in evidence in

the number of films shown but also in the wider source of films in the Indigenous film festival Cine Kurumin. Until 2014 most films screened at this festival were produced by VNA filmmakers, whereas the filmmakers featured in the more recent 2017 and 2018 editions of the festival have a much more independent profile.

This prolific Indigenous production is mostly available for viewing online. Apart from VNA there are other Indigenous media groups such as *Vidas Paralelas* [Parallel Lives] and *Instituto Catitu* [Catitu Institute]. The *Vidas Paralelas* project has been relying on digital culture and new technologies such as mobile phones for making and distributing its videos. Indigenous students at the University of Brasília to maintain and enhance their connections with Indigenous communities, created it in 2010 as part of the demand. The project involves many different Indigenous nations, including, among others, the Pataxó, Kariri-Xocó, Potiguara, and Tupinikim. Students at the university engage the community to participate in photography and audio-video workshops promoting and displaying Indigenous contemporary life and social issues. Alexandre Pankararu, a teacher with the *Vidas Paralelas* project, directed with Graciela Guaranía—also a teacher with the project—the short films *O rio tem dono* [The River Has Its Owner] (2012), *Terra Nua* [Bare Land] (2014), and *Mãos de Barro* [Clay Hands] (2016).

While *Instituto Catitu* [Catitu Institute] also teaches Indigenous peoples to direct and produce their own films, its point of difference is its specific focus on training Indigenous women to act as communicators. A former VNA member, Mari Côrrea, created the institute in 2009. As the number of Indigenous projects grows, so too does the diversity of indigenous productions. The Institute's main film productions are *Para Onde Foram as Andorinhas?* [Where Have All the Swallows Gone?] (Mari Côrrea, 2015), screened at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris, France.<sup>4</sup>

In sharp contrast with Australia, however, Brazil made its first long-format Indigenous documentary only in 2011. *Itão Kuêgü* in Kuikuro and *As Hiper Mulheres* in Portuguese [Hyperwomen], directed by Takumã Kuikiro, was made a partnership with non-Indigenous directors Carlos Fausto and Leonardo Sette. This documentary centres on the Jamurikumalu ceremony, practiced only by women. In this ceremony, knowledge of songs and dances are transmitted from elder to younger generations. Compared to Australia, Brazil has less Indigenous production, and Indigenous audio-visual materials are not as available to the general public through media platforms. However, numbers are steadily growing. From 2013, when I started this research, to 2017, Brazilian

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<sup>4</sup> Instituto Catitu's official website: <http://institutocatitu.org.br>

Indigenous filmmaking has developed considerably with Indigenous peoples moving from the exclusive role of actors to the position of directors, and from collaboration to authorship.<sup>5</sup>

In the Brazilian case, the development of Indigenous media happened in parallel with intense political changes. From 2011 to 2016, the Brazilian government was led for the first time by a female president, Dilma Rousseff. Her election brought the hope of reducing gender inequality, as she appointed a significantly increased number of female ministers, advisers and undersecretaries. Rousseff was well known for her political history as a former guerrilla fighter, which had seen her imprisoned and tortured during Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85). She came to power after Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva's two successive terms as highly popular Brazilian president. Over these two terms under da Silva's PT— Partido dos Trabalhadores (Labour Party), of which he was a founding member—an estimated 20 million people moved out from extreme poverty, the country's economic inequality was reduced, and the internal economy boosted.<sup>6</sup>

However, from an Indigenous perspective, these terms under PT rule were not necessarily positive. For example, despite its human rights and diversity rhetoric, these PT-led governments did not increase Indigenous land rights over those that existed under the previous democratically elected right-wing governments of Fernando Collor de Mello (1990–92), Itamar Franco (1992–95) and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995–2003). As a direct consequence of the lack of priority given to dialogue with Indigenous leaders, land conflicts during the Lula and Rousseff years increased considerably, leading to escalating violence among and against Indigenous peoples. President Lula was accused of betraying Indigenous peoples after the elections, preferring instead to negotiate with the businessmen and political representatives that had been traditionally opposed to Indigenous rights (Vinding and Stidsen 2005, 199). The President and these politicians were widely seen as governing to protect and advance agribusiness in the northern region (especially by expanding the cultivation of soybeans and extensive cattle farming).

Despite its mixed record, da Silva's government, through its *Ministro da Cultura* [Ministry of Culture], created two key programs for social inclusion. The first, *Cultura para Todos* [Culture for Everybody], fostered as a right cultural production and consumption on the part of diverse cultural groupings in Brazilian society. The second program, *Cultura Viva* [Culture Comes Alive], focused

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<sup>5</sup> More recent examples of these changes are *Tekoha – O Som da Terra* [Sound of the Land] directed by Rodrigo Arajeju and Valdelice Veron (2017), which won best short film at the Brasilia Film Festival, and *Ava Yvy Vera – A Terra do Povo do Raio* [The Land of the Lightning People] (2016), which won best film at the Indigenous Film Festival Cine Kurumin and best feature film at the *VIII CachoeiraDoc – Festival de Documentários de Cachoeira* [Cachoeira Documentary Film Festival].

<sup>6</sup> Poverty reduction was a result of changes in the “labour market performance of low-skilled workers, an increase in their respective educational attainment and the adoption of increasingly targeted official income programmes” (OECD 2010, 50). Data shows that “between 2003 and 2008 there was a 43.03% reduction in poverty, corresponding to 19.3 million people leaving poverty” in the whole country (OECD 2010, 70).



on making the means of production available and accessible to marginalised sectors of Brazilian society. This latter program provided, for instance, Indigenous peoples with computers, video-editing software and cameras, enabling Indigenous filmmaking production to expand. This was a promising moment for Indigenous filmmaking in Brazil. As a result, in 2017, Brazil's international Indigenous film festival, Cine Kurumin, received a remarkable 87 submissions from Brazil, of which 27 were films directed by Indigenous filmmakers. The final program of the festival was symbolic of what can be seen as new moment in the Brazilian Cinema, allowing for the construction and representation of Indigenous peoples' selfhood.

The Australian context in relation to Aboriginal peoples' rights was also full of challenges from 2000s onward, most recently the government's refusal of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, declared in May 2017, during the National Constitutional Convention.<sup>7</sup> The statement main's goal was to provide constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It presented two main proposals: the establishment of a First Nations Voice—a permanent and independent Indigenous advisory body that can be consulted on policy and legislation-making concerning Indigenous communities—and a Makarrata Commission, to supervise processes of agreement-making with Australian governments. However, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull rejected out-of-hand the Uluru Statement (Brennan, 2017). It had been more than two decades in the making, from political and constitutional recognition and reconciliation. Prior to this refusal on the part of the federal government to provide Aboriginal peoples with constitutional recognition was the closure, in 2005, of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a representative Aboriginal governance body. This was followed by the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act of 2007, which authorised intervention involving military personnel in Aboriginal communities on their own lands over reports of child abuse.<sup>8</sup> This act provided for temporary suspension of community governance structures, and diminished self-determination. Leuzinger and Lyngard (2016) argue that as this act involved the compulsory acquisition of leases by the federal government it must be seen in the larger context of contemporary moves to diminish and restrict Aboriginal land tenure and ownership. Another issue was the feared closure of 150 remote Aboriginal communities by the Western Australian premier Colin Barnett. Although this did not come about, in 2016, WA government did later launch a reform of regional services to fund high-performing

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<sup>7</sup> After a year of consultation, the Uluru Statement was drafted by more than 250 Indigenous leaders. It was released during the National Constitutional Convention organised by the Referendum Council, funded by Federal Government. Full document: [https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru\\_Statement\\_From\\_The\\_Heart\\_0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF)

<sup>8</sup> In Australia there is a long tradition of the military being used in “emergencies”—usually associated with national catastrophes associated with cyclone devastation, floods and sometimes bushfires. What was unusual about this use of the military was that it was being exercised *outside of this context* for an emergency conceptualized in terms of “failed communities”.

communities, threatening to leave the ones in most need without alternatives. Finally, increasing contention over Australia Day—particularly in 2018—was given extra impetus by the Uluru Statement and its shabby handling by the federal government.

With the failure of the Uluru Statement to gain political traction, with the processes of Aboriginal reconciliation failing to provide meaningful change, and with no system of Aboriginal governance emerging to replace the ATSIC, the longstanding struggle over the appropriateness of Australia Day as a celebratory national day took on additional significance. Efforts to change the official date of Australia Day gathered momentum. It is annually celebrated on January 26, the date of the arrival of Captain Arthur Phillip’s fleet in 1788. This date first became a public holiday in the colony of New South Wales in 1818. In 1935 all Australian states and territories adopted the use of the term “Australia Day” to mark the date, but it was not until 1994 that it began to be officially celebrated at national level (Macnamara and Crawford 2013). Growing in symbolic meaning every year, Australia Day is an example of an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983): although quite recent in origin, it endorses a discourse of unity as part of Australian’s nation-building process. In this sense, ceremonies as “‘invented traditions’ have significant social and political functions, and would neither come into existence nor establish themselves if they could not acquire them” (Hobsbawm 307).

In 2018, former prime minister Tony Abbott, while discussing the need to change the official date of Australia Day, stated that in his opinion the arrival of the British had been good for all, including Aboriginal peoples. His statement had analogies with the sense of pride about the arrival of Europeans in Brazil, seen in Brazilian official celebrations of the “discovery” of Brazil by Portuguese settlers on 22 April 1500. However, similar to US history, the date that is today at the core of Brazilian national identity discourses is not that of colonial foundation but rather what is known as *Dia da Independência* [Independence Day], referring to the declaration of independence from the *Coroa Portuguesa* [Portuguese Crown] on 7 September 1822.<sup>9</sup> Marshall Eakin (2017) argues that it took more than a century to move from the proclamation of independence to the construction of an official discourse of Brazilian national identity.<sup>10</sup> One of the many reasons for this slow process

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<sup>9</sup> The process of independence has close ties with the European historical context, especially Napoleon’s incursions into Portugal, which forced the Bragança family transfer of the entire royal court to Brazil in 1807. However, with the return of the Crown to Portugal in 1821, leading to economic and political changes in its relations with the colony, the Brazilian elite—including Portuguese living in Brazil—started pushing for independence. At the time Portugal did not have the military and economic power to combat this tide, making the war for independence a relatively fast process compared to Spanish America (Bethell 1985). Independence ended neither slavery nor existing social inequalities, thus maintaining the previous colonial structure.

<sup>10</sup> In the shaping of Brazilian national identity discourses, Eakin argues that a crucial role was played not only by the State and hegemonic culture but also many other forces, including intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre, who brought the idea of *mestiçagem* (racial mixing) to the centre of the debate.

was the sheer size of the country's landmass, making most of the dispersed population even unaware of the existence of a national state.<sup>11</sup>

Respectively, Brazil and Australia are the fifth and sixth largest landmasses in the globe, both in the Southern Hemisphere. Brazil is much more densely populated, hosting 207.7 million citizens (IBGE 2017), while Australia has roughly a tenth of that population at 24.5 million (ABS 2017). The two countries have been enhancing their ties not only economically but also politically and socially albeit from a low base.<sup>12</sup> In the specific case of Brazil, Prime Minister Julia Gillard's visit to Brasília in 2012 to meet her counterpart Dilma Rouseff was the first official meeting of its kind held in Brazilian territory. Although these two countries "have historically adopted contrasting approaches to investment, industrial policy, and state intervention", they have been competing and cooperating in mining and agriculture sectors. Most recently both countries have emerged as major exporters of commodities to China (Hearn 2016, 131): competing in agricultural and mining, but also cooperating given their common interests in engineering, agricultural technology and market access/trade. In addition, globalisation has ensured that many of the same mining and agribusiness companies are operating in both countries. These common interests in mining and agricultural development pose a common challenge for Indigenous peoples fighting to protect their territories in these two countries. Although there are legal instruments that assure Indigenous rights to land in both countries, the majority of this land is in non-urban or undeveloped areas (Leuzinger and Lyngard 2016).<sup>13</sup> This shared context makes struggles for land and environmental preservation the frontline of Indigenous peoples' battles in these two countries.

Despite predictions that Indigenous populations in Brazil and Australia would decline from colonisation and even disappear in the processes of the consolidation of both nation-states, most recent official data shows that in both cases the numbers are steadily growing. According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE 2010), there are 896,917 self-declared Indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> But even here there are some important parallels between Australia and Brazil in that Australia's slow process of recognising, let alone celebrating, "Australia Day" owed to both the establishment of separate Australasian colonies on the Australian continent, in Tasmania and in New Zealand, which ensured that an "Australian" identity was always marked by strong alternate state-colonial and a larger regional identity with separate "establishment" days celebrated in the different states, themselves former colonies. Australia Day was a NSW celebration, not a West Australian one. Furthermore, like Brazil, Australia's non-Indigenous settlement, initially confined to limited parts of a continental landmass, has been in a continuous process of extension over the periods of colonial and then national government.

<sup>12</sup> The book *Australian–Latin American Relations* (Kath 2016) details many cultural and economic exchanges between these two regions.

<sup>13</sup> In this regard, an interesting case is the native title settlement involving the capital city of Perth and its surroundings (Young 2013). Native title agreement was reached in *Bennell v. State of Western Australia* FCA 1243 (19 September 2006). Judgment was overturned by the Federal Court in 2008, and to avoid a litigation process, the WA Government has been making agreements with Noongar peoples. As of 2017, the WA Government is offering a \$1.3 billion package of land, money and benefits over 12 years in exchange for Noongar surrendering their native title rights (Trigger and Hamlyn 2017).

peoples in contemporary Brazil. This accounts for 0.47% of the national population. A substantial and steady increase in the number of Indigenous peoples is apparent when the current census is compared with those of the 1990s and 2000s. The main reason is the increasing number of people, especially in urban areas, who are now prepared to self-identify as Indigenous. In Australia, the Aboriginal population reached 798,381, or 3% of the total population (ABS 2017). There, this growth is seen by demographers as the result of four factors: the decrease of mortality, the increase of fertility, a change in the definition of Aboriginal populations and a growing willingness on the part of Aboriginal people to recognise their Indigenous heritage and identity (Rowse 2017).

With comparable colonial processes resulting in multi-ethnic societies, it is no wonder that the Australian and Brazilian national cinemas have often dealt with similar topics and subjects. Despite these obvious connections, there is virtually no collaboration between individual filmmakers or in the related film and television industries between these two countries. Likewise, academic research comparing their respective cinematic productions has been scarce. Several reasons can be advanced for this:

1. The lack of scholarly and cultural communication between these two countries due to networks tending to be directed from North to South rather than between South and South.<sup>14</sup>
2. Language differences: Brazilian Portuguese is not one of the languages spoken by either Australia's historic non-English speaking populations (Italian, German, Balkan, Chinese) or its non-English speaking cultural and economic partners (German, French, Italian, Japanese and Chinese)—Australia is an English-speaking country with English language networks mediating its cultural production. By the same token while Brazil shares some of the same non-English speaking people it is more defined by its Lusophone and adjacent Spanish and French language networks with which participates culturally (Spanish and French-speaking).
3. Each country routinely compares itself to some other country. Australia compares itself to United Kingdom and the USA as nodes of the English-language system. Brazil compares itself to the USA and France as a dominant country within a larger continental landmass, to other Lusophone countries (Portugal and its other former colonies), and to other Latin American countries with which it shares a continent.
4. With respect to Indigenous issues, Australia compares itself to other colonies of British exploration and settlement such as Canada, New Zealand, USA and sometimes South Africa,

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<sup>14</sup> The Southern Screens Network is an example of expanding South–South exchanges. This network is about fostering South–South dialogue and bringing together researchers from South Africa, Latin America, Asia, Australia and New Zealand. It has hosted a couple of conferences which have led to academic exchanges. Deane Williams (Monash University), one of the convenors of “Cinema at the End of the World: Southern Screens” in 2015, went to São Paulo in 2017 as a visiting professor at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP).

whereas Brazil mostly compares itself to other Latin American countries and the USA (the latter especially regarding its history of slavery and race relations).

In this context a comparative study of these two countries' Indigenous filmmaking offers a valuable cross-cultural perspective on recent films made in Australia and Brazil. Both countries, despite their Indigenous peoples having been reduced to large-scale poverty and subaltern positions, have film industries that feature a relatively high proportion of films dedicated to Indigenous themes. However, a significant difference between the cinemas in both countries lies in the fact that in Australia many feature films have been directed solely by Aboriginal filmmakers, while in Brazil, Indigenous peoples are still relatively dependent on non-Indigenous partners for carrying out their productions, especially in feature-film production.

This difference owes itself to important distinctions of infrastructure provision between the two countries. Australia's filmmaker education and training policies, funding programs and creation of Indigenous broadcasting networks all serve as possible models for the development of Indigenous media in Brazil. However, at the same time, Brazil has had a more longstanding incorporation of the Indigenous into the narrative of nation, identity and history. I can provide lessons for Australia as it moves towards public forms of recognition, although constitutional recognition in Australia appears still a long way off. The *Constituição Federal* [Brazilian Federal Constitution] protects Indigenous people's rights to their traditional lands. This constitutional statement and protection is absent in the Australian case, where native title has grown up belatedly as a weaker form of property right.

On the other hand, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have the right to "own land and negotiate the extraction of sub-surface minerals" while in Brazil "the Union retains ownership of Indigenous lands" and Indigenous peoples do not have the right to sell land or explore surface resources (Leuzinger and Lyngard 2016, 434). Overall, the *Constituição Federal* [Brazilian Federal Constitution] recognises many more Indigenous rights than does Australia's, where Australia's Indigenous peoples "may submit a legal claim for land, but there are strict limitations on the land that can be claimed and the rights that can be granted" (434). In addition to the privileged position of Australian settler interests in land over those of the traditional owners, the native title legislation is always susceptible to amendments carried by the Parliament and Federal courts.

A comparative analysis between Brazil and Australia faces the challenge of bridging two different geopolitical areas often situated in economic polarities such as First World vs. Third World, developed vs. developing, or Anglosphere vs. BRICS. However, when focusing on Indigenous peoples' issues, the term Fourth World is useful underlining as it does the condition of social exclusion and inequality faced by Indigenous peoples independent of whether the national state under which they are legally circumscribed is part of the so-called First or Third World. In this sense, the term Fourth World has been used since the 1970s to designate the situation of Indigenous peoples

“who today are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches” (Manuel and Posluns 1974, 40). This term provides a common strategic framework for a culturally and historically heterogeneous group “that has remained firmly rooted in a land-based discourse” (Columpar 2010) across a significant number of countries in the Global North and Global South. Their connectedness with the natural environment as well as their struggles against mega-developments has provided a unifying discourse among Indigenous groups in local and global settings.<sup>15</sup> Taking as his starting point this Fourth World, Māori filmmaker and activist Barry Barclay (2003) coined the term Fourth Cinema as that cinema which is aesthetically and politically guided by an Indigenous core of values. In a later chapter, I will adapt Barclay’s concept to do a comparative analysis of audio-visual productions that, while portraying this unity-in-diversity, also advocate for Indigenous rights in the context of environmental crises.

The increasing number and variety of Indigenous cinematic productions challenge any attempts to homogenise their contents or aesthetics. By studying practical examples of Indigenous filmmaking across Brazil and Australia, this thesis investigates how the recent and growing Indigenous media production has been playing an important political and cultural role in creating contemporary portrayals of Indigenous lives. Indigenous media form an important part of contemporary Indigenous social movements, contributing to Indigenous empowerment, self-organisation, and their struggles for sovereignty (Schiwy 2009). This movement has been accompanied by a number of academic studies on Indigenous media.

However, in the specific field of film studies, there are relatively few studies of Indigenous films and filmmakers. Instead the focus has been on synoptic developments (Columpar 2010; but see Murray 2008). Secondly, as Stephen Gaunson (2013) argues, there is a lack of comparative studies connecting Australian Aboriginal cinema and Indigenous cinema around the world. While the lack of comparative study between Brazil and Australia can be explained in part by the language barriers presented by their being English and non-English speaking countries, there seems less excuse for the absence of comparison between proximate countries sharing the same language and continent. Despite the long history of ties in screen production and even policy-making connecting proximate countries in Latin America and Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) there has been little attempt to compare their Indigenous filmmaking contexts. This study will seek to remedy at least part of this lack by undertaking a comparative study of several Brazilian and Australian Indigenous films and their circumstances of screen production.

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<sup>15</sup> A key example is the movement against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) led by members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. This movement managed to congregate Indigenous peoples under the call “Mni wiconi”, which translates to “water is life” or even “water is alive” (Dhillon and Estes 2016). The pipeline is planned to transport barrels of crude oil, but the Standing Rock Sioux Tribal members argue that it will contaminate water sources and damage sacred sites.

In addition to contributing to the growing field of studies of First Nations cinema, this thesis also relies on oral stories, ceremonies, songs and crafts displayed in the films as primary and secondary sources of knowledge. In this sense, this project acknowledges media productions as an expression of “alternative literacies” (Boone and Mignolo 1994). Furthermore, it considers how these “alternative literacies” have become or are in the process of becoming a fundamental reference for contemporary environmental discourses, for example, by reclaiming environmental values embedded in Indigenous arts such as carving and weaving. Thus, besides providing a theoretical and practical contribution to the debate about the importance of land and water for Indigenous cultural/spiritual survival, this thesis aims to contribute to a necessary dialogue between academic film studies and contemporary/traditional Indigenous knowledges about environmental issues.

Climate change linked to global warming has been central to discussions concerning sustainability. One recurrent observation is that climate change not only alters the environment but also exposes human limitations in dealing with these alterations. Australian scholar Emily Potter (2013) argues that climate change creates a feeling of dispossession similar to that produced by colonisation. This is because climate change damages previous settlements, creating emergent reconstructions and re-appropriations of space. She notes that Australia is the “world’s driest continent”, that it has already witnessed processes of “desertification and soil erosion”, and that with its less reliable rainfall it is subject to regular droughts and flooding, conditions that make it particularly susceptible to any dramatic climate changes due to global warming (Potter 2013, 31). She then cites as examples of contemporary environmental and climactic events people’s displacement due to extreme weather conditions, such as intense heat waves contributing to drought and bush fires, or the 2011 floods in Queensland, when thousands of people needed to temporarily leave their homes and communities. This serves to underline at one and the same time the fragility of Australia’s environmental circumstances and the potential problems climate change may bring in exacerbating these.

At the same time, there is a trend in Indigenous media texts to foreground environmental policies and sustainable lives. These texts situate Indigenous discourses and actors in a central position with respect to the human vulnerability to climate change. This is not only because their traditional knowledges and discourses favour sustainability but also because they are survivors of another type of violent eco-territorial displacement, namely, the process of colonisation. Indigenous peoples have previously faced climate change in these places where it occurs, and their oral histories and connections to these provides a road map for how climate change might be dealt with in the future.

Disclosing and interrogating these ongoing Indigenous projects of audio-visual production and circulation, this thesis compares contemporary Australia and Brazilian screen media made by or

with Indigenous peoples and consider the larger—and different—national contexts within which they are both produced. Undertaking a close analysis of these First Nation films it provides the “cinematic aesthetic” dimension Gaunson (2013, 763) has identified as lacking in the discussion of Indigenous filmmaking. Gaunson identifies the limits of the current focus upon “political content” with respect to Indigenous films, which he says have unwittingly led scholars to end up excluding Indigenous films from aesthetic debates. With Indigenous filmmakers and their films rarely being situated within broader discussions on national and world cinema, I will be seeking here to give equal attention to both formal-aesthetic aspects of and the political significance of Indigenous audio-visual productions. My thesis aim is to study Indigenous cinema by considering and reinforcing its national and “global cinematic relevance” (Gaunson 2013, 760). As I am not searching for aesthetic uniformity but rather to recognise these productions as creative, political and cultural forms of expressions, I will be analysing different media formats (film, video and television). The main task of the close analysis of these productions is to investigate their final aesthetic result, considering both the methodology of their production (types of partnership, levels of Indigenous participation and autonomy) and their impacts on non-Indigenous audiences revealed through critical reviews and/or major political outcomes.

## 1.2 Indigenous Aesthetics

In this thesis, I analyse Indigenous media by paying close attention to the importance of culture in aesthetic production decisions and outcomes—to an *Indigenous aesthetics*. I prioritise Indigenous media that are capable, simultaneously, of negotiating local and global meanings between different traditions while avoiding the unrestricted incorporation of mainstream aesthetics. This stance is in line with US visual anthropologist Faye Ginsburg’s insistence that Indigenous collective media production and circulation is connected to its social relations in an *embedded aesthetics*:

With embedded aesthetics, the quality of a work is assessed according to its capacity to represent, embody, sustain and even revive or create certain social relations both on and off screen, respecting longstanding protocols appropriate to the group making the work. (2016, 590)

Ginsburg calls attention to Indigenous media’s fundamental role of enhancing Indigenous peoples’ own standards rather than their meeting or incorporating external values. With the development of digital technology, she sees a promising present and future for Indigenous “media sovereignty”. Ginsburg defines this sovereignty as “practices through which people exercise the right and develop the capacity to control their own images and words, including how these circulate” (2016, 583). In this sense, the Indigenous appropriation of media can be a privileged way to display Indigenous



cultures, values, aesthetics and knowledges, at the same time providing some distance from the mainstream media's appropriation of the Indigenous image for its commercial purposes.

Steven Leuthold, in the opening pages of his book *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art, Media, and Identity* (1998, 2), defines Indigenous aesthetics as “thoughts about aesthetic experience that developed independently of the Western tradition in various parts of the world”. I understand him here to mean that Indigenous peoples' concepts of art developed interculturally considering all the history of their contacts. In saying that, he wants to problematise global definitions of art while reinforcing the role of culture in artistic debates. More than that, he seeks to define Indigenous aesthetics as an expression of attachment to place. Leuthold specifically studies Native North American arts, but highlights that this sense of ties to the land is able to unite communities and spirituality into an appreciation of “a general aesthetic of place” suitable also for non-Indigenous peoples. Building on these insights, I also argue that Indigenous ways of portraying their territories, their places, attests to the importance of and connectedness between these places—land and waterscapes—inviting general audiences to rethink their own relation with the natural environment.

### **1.3 Pluriversal Worlds**

In Latin America, one of the effects of global economic and environmental crises has been increasing critiques of European-derived models of civilisation and progress. These models have been based, fundamentally, on the notion of universalism, that is, that all nations should teleologically reach the same goal: to be part of the project of Western modernity (Mignolo 2011, 23). The rise of voices against the grand narrative of modernity has been entangled with another trend: that of denouncing the destruction of Indigenous knowledges resulting from European colonialism and, at the same time, advocating in favour of non-European epistemological approaches. It is in this context that the term *pluriverse*, defined as “the coexistence of multiple interconnected worlds” (Escobar 2012, viii), stands in opposition to notions of globalisation and universalism, both of which are directly connected to the development of capitalist societies (xxxii). This epistemological shift, as explained by de la Cadena (2010, 360), enables a transformation from one perspective that “conceives politics as power disputes within a singular world” to a different one that allows for “the possibility of adversarial relations among worlds”. Pluriverse than means the possibility of a non-hierarchical coexistence of different economic, political, cultural and epistemic forces at the same time and in the same space, as these worlds are different but interconnected.

In the case of my research, two main ideas linked to the concept of pluriverse are fundamental. The first one is that there is no single/universal model of development that would allow for a hierarchical classification of a supposedly “poor” world versus a “rich” one (or the classic division of First versus Third World). In this sense, it is important to recognise the co-existence of different

but simultaneous models of development and categories of value that are not exclusively economic. The second idea linked to the concept of pluriversal worlds is that, epistemologically and ethically, they include not only humans but also all other forms of living beings. Therefore, while studying Indigenous audio-visual productions, I acknowledge that different worlds (pluriverses) have different reference points. As a corollary, this means that the anthropocentric Western model is only one model among others, and there are no criteria—other than cultural bias—for measuring or classifying one as better than the other. This understanding allows for in-depth analysis of Indigenous discourses on environmental debates. It considers the role Indigenous media is playing for the work of disclosing these pluriverse worlds and insisting upon their integrity and their voice and the importance of support for them.

#### **1.4 Fourth Cinema**

Is it the role of national cinema to revitalise visual discourses of national identity—by portraying idiosyncratic faces and cultures—or to provoke uncomfortable debates about disputed borders, geographic displacements, Indigenous sovereignty and land rights? Rather than locating Indigenous filmmaking inside the field of national cinema, my answer to this question was to adopt Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay's term "Fourth Cinema" (2003). The term emphasises Indigenous standpoints and counter-histories beyond the borders with and commitments to official national identity narratives. I have identified as Fourth Cinema productions directed by Indigenous peoples that are able to portray an Indigenous core of values. In Barclay's words:

The phrase Fourth Cinema comes as a late addition to the First-Second-Third Cinema framework with which you will be familiar, First Cinema being American cinema; Second Cinema Art House cinema; and Third Cinema the cinema of the so-called Third World. (2003, 7)

Paul Willemen (1987) has an influential formulation on the division between the three previous cinemas: First Cinema: Hollywood mainstream, industrial and dominant cinema; Second Cinema: European, art house, authorial, and counter-cinema; and Third Cinema: militant, socio-historical cinema influenced by Latin American, European and Soviet film movements and manifested in postcolonial cinema developed in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Although Third Cinema scholars and filmmakers did not confine this concept to the field of national cinema and proclaimed their internationalist aims, it was indeed a cinema circumscribed by the national sphere.<sup>16</sup> Fourth Cinema

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<sup>16</sup> National cinemas have always been internationalist as a project. A different kind of internationalism –that was more nuanced and less immediately integrative at a national level – was involved. National cinemas are a way of participating internationally in the cinema. They provide a container in which diverse kinds of filmmaking are authorized and sponsored.

shares Third Cinema's critique of colonialism, and both are similar in their decolonizing approaches, and in their aesthetic and political choices. However, they also have fundamental differences. The Third Cinema movement, particularly in Latin America, was grounded on the political principle of giving voice to cultural and national expression to inspire structural changes in the whole of society, in a socialist-Marxist direction. National, cultural and personal identities were a secondary consideration to be addressed after the social-historical process. On the other hand, Indigenous audio-visual productions revitalise "Third Cinema's project to decolonize film with aesthetics, knowledge, and viewpoints that are specific to Indigenous geographies, cosmologies, temporalities, histories, and cultural practices" (Shamash 2017, 133).

Paul Willemen's article "For a Comparative Film Studies" (2005) fits well within my study of two different yet comparable Indigenous cinemas, those of Australia and Brazil. Although these cinemas differ in terms of the histories of capitalist development within which they emerged, their impact on cultural productions, especially Indigenous film and video, place them on common ground for cultural debates. Willemen frames a fundamental question for comparative studies: "How does the encounter with capitalism generate specific cultural forms in particular geographical areas?" (104). This encounter, which Willemen sees as promoting modernisation, draws our attention to what the mechanisms are for economic but especially social and cultural protection, if available at all. This question was already present in Willemen's previous studies of comparative cinema. In his book *Looks and Frictions: Essays in Cultural Studies and Film Theory* (1994), Willemen initiates not only a conversation between cultural studies and film theory but also a revitalisation of the field of comparative cinema studies. For example, in Chapter 10 he considers the return of Third Cinema as a practice and a construct in the 1980s, now as

a cinema no longer captivated by the mirrors of dominance/independence or commerce/art but grounded in an understanding of the dialectical relationship between social existence and cultural practice. (1994, 175)

The Third Cinema of the 1980s was, then, no longer a cinema geographically restricted to the so-called Third World countries but a project for cinema to be an international movement grounded in national industries. This Third Cinema is often a cinema made by professional intellectuals within a socialist project in opposition to the dominant cinema. One way it differs from Fourth Cinema is that the latter is not based in the European tradition of Italian neorealism and English Grierson documentaries. Indigenous filmmakers started learning film technology, studying cinema, and engaging in local, community-based production.

An issue common to Third and Fourth Cinema can be the loss of political discourse in the name of an authorial production. Willemen refers to this as "Third Cinema" being received in Europe as a "Second Cinema", as an arthouse cinema. This happens because the more a film portrays a

specific social reality, the more likely it is that unaware audiences will view it as Second Cinema, due to their distance in space and time from its original reality. This phenomenon can only be avoided if the viewer becomes deeply committed to understanding the context of the film and the reality off-screen. But in the case of Fourth Cinema, the difficulty of accessing knowledge about specific communities can be a barrier for viewing Indigenous productions. They always risk being classified as art cinema.

In the 1960s, the Marxist internationalist proposal developed by Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas from the Cine Liberación group led to the establishment of a Third Cinema. Ziri6n views Indigenous cinema as perfectly aligned with the Third Cinema project:

*O cinema dos povos origin6rios coincide plenamente com o esp6rito do chamado Terceiro cinema, tal como defenderam Fernando “Pino” Solanas e Octavio Getino (1969): um cinema revolucion6rio, militante, ativista, que n6o se contenta somente em retratar o mundo, mas que se compromete com sua transforma76o. (Ziri6n 2016, 6)*

[The cinema of the original peoples is fully aligned with the spirit of what has been called Third Cinema, as put forth by Fernando ‘Pino’ Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969): a revolutionary cinema, militant, activist, not content with merely portraying the world but committed to its transformation.]

As Solanas points out, “For us, Third Cinema is an open category, unfinished, incomplete. It is a research category. It is democratic, national, popular cinema” (quoted in Willemsen 1994, 182). Third Cinema and Fourth Cinema are in accordance in many ways. However, the orientation of a national cinema can waver between these two. Although it has internationalist aims, Third Cinema is based on national and even regional identity, whereas Fourth Cinema is more a community-based cinema. In addition, Fourth Cinema continues to struggle for recognition and sovereignty within national states. In the case of Fourth Cinema, imperialism comes from within, including educational, political, and cultural forces that might erase traditional Indigenous expressions such as language, religion, and cultural practices.

Fourth Cinema advocates for Indigenous rights against the dominant forces and has culture and tradition at the forefront of the battle. Before he even used the term Fourth Cinema, Barry Barclay, in his book *Our Own Image* (1990) had already drafted the key principles of a Fourth Cinema. Drawing on his own experience as a filmmaker, he outlined the fundamental strategies he saw as necessary so that filmmaking technology and practices could be adapted to and be made fit for purpose to appropriately archive Indigenous ways of storytelling. He pointed to how the camera needed to learn to be a listener: “as the years go by, the camera is coming to be more freely invited into the M6ori community, and I suppose it is up to us as technicians to make sure our friend behaves

in a fitting way” (18). To act with dignity is central to Barclay’s way of filmmaking, as underlined in Stuart Murray book’s title *Images of Dignity: Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema* (2008). There, Murray summarises Fourth Cinema as “a point of address, an attitude towards film in its totality—production, screening, distribution, use—that constitutes the use of the camera by Indigenous filmmakers on their own terms” (Murray 2008, 18). He points out that Fourth Cinema was an “organic development” of Barclay’s career in film and television as well as of his travels overseas (28). During his contact with other Indigenous filmmakers, Barclay found they faced common challenges, including representing their own cultures, attending to the pressures of funding organisations and mainstream audiences, following commercial practises of filmmaking, and overturning stereotypes. While observing these commonalities, Barclay advocated for a proper space to practice Indigenous ways of filmmaking.

In the article “Sites of Exuberance: Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema, Ten Years On”, Christina Milligan (2015) studies Barclay’s legacy in relation to the growing industry of Māori filmmaking. She points out that Fourth Cinema was not only “about content and modes of production, but also about reception” (350). This is also a point addressed in Kirsty Bennett’s article “Fourth Cinema and the Politics of Staring”, as a cinema that is crucially speaking “to the people they represent” (2006, 23). Indeed, Barclay’s conceptualisation of Fourth Cinema was based first and foremost on making images that are respectful and mindful of Indigenous audiences. In “Indigenising the Screen, Navigating the Currents of Change, a Vision of Fourth Cinema”, Bristowe (2017) highlights that “the Fourth Cinema filmmaker is forever conscious that the story they are telling or retelling is not their ‘own,’ and does not exist in isolation from the people, their environment, or their beliefs and values” (276).

Barry Barclay’s formulations on a Fourth Cinema were based mainly on dramatic feature films produced in settler societies (Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA). He was concerned to create an Indigenous filmmaking that would be able to reach wide audiences without bending to commercial formulas while respecting Indigenous cultures and values. In my use of the term, I compare audio-visual productions, including documentaries, made in Brazil and Australia. These productions do not always fit perfectly within the notion of Fourth Cinema. A dramatic Indigenous feature film is still to be made in Brazil, and not all the Australian films that I studied were directed solely by Aboriginal filmmakers. I am also aware of differing levels of access to public funding and the different stages of Indigenous media development in Brazil and Australia. Yet, I still found discursive and aesthetic similarities in the Indigenous audio-visual productions made in these two countries that can well fit within the Fourth Cinema.

### **1.5 A Fourth Ecocinema**

The theme of the current environmental crises, linked to water and air pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss and global warming, is addressed through this thesis' acknowledgement of the fundamental contributions Indigenous epistemologies can make to future sustainable development and environmental engagement. Ecocinema is a relatively recent term used to refer to films that are concerned with humans' relationship with the environment and typically carry a message of awareness and call to action. Ecocinema's chief characteristic is that it is based on proactive and interventionist logics. As a concept it is meant not just to represent but also to intervene. It represents a filmmaking movement that is fundamentally generative, creating film festivals, connecting filmmakers, and garnering audience support through crowdfunding and other collective actions. Indigenous films have sometimes been included under this genre (Machiorlatti 2010). There is a wide array of film and TV practices that now make up this ecocinema genre. It can be further defined as a genre that encompasses films that provoke their audiences "to recognize ways of seeing the world other than through the narrow perspective of the anthropocentric gaze", so challenging human beings' yearning to occupy the centre of the universe (Rust and Monani 2013, 11). Scott MacDonald (2013) usefully contrasts eco-films with television commercial ads for cars and beers in which human dominance is maximised and celebrated. Run over by engines and male thirst, the landscape in these androcentric images is depicted without respect or sense of connection. Rather, it is controlled and explored by human (typically male) power and technology. In this respect, MacDonald views eco-films as an opportunity to disrupt the usual consumerism and (lack of) engagement with the natural environment—and do so in a more reflexive way so audiences are not consuming a product but are rather invited to think about specific issues and take actions which can change the actual scenario being depicted.

In addition to the idea of a cinema that incites audience action, ecocinema can also be related to films that call for the active contemplation and appreciation of the natural environment. For both Willoquet-Maricondi (2010) and MacDonald (2013), slow-paced films and long takes create the possibility of contemplation. They open a space for the re-education of audience perception that is necessary for environmental wakefulness. However, David Ingram (2013) argues that, as with any cultural and artistic product, ecocinema's effectiveness relies on changing audience behaviour and informing their later actions; yet this cannot be assured as it depends on the audience members' background and biases. Based on his studies of cognitivist film theory, he argues for the role aesthetic choices can play as tools for delivering films able to promote "ecological understanding" (43). He advocates for a "pluralistic eco-aesthetic" that encompasses films that are not even declared or classified as eco-films but can be included given their attention to environmental debates, including Hollywood mainstream productions such as *Sunshine State* (John Sayles 2002) and *Finding Nemo* (Andrew Stanton 2003).

Accordingly, I also identify the audio-visual productions studied in this thesis as part of ecocinema, based on the vital and complex connection between Indigenous peoples and their territories. In this thesis, I want to explicitly conjoin ecocinema and Fourth Cinema to acknowledge the focus and orientation of the films and videos I examine in this thesis which combine Indigenous ways of filmmaking with an environmental awareness and ecocinema's call to action.

Aboriginal writer Bayet-Charlton's phrase "We are the land, the land is us" summarises the spiritual and corporal connection that Indigenous peoples, despite the cultural diversities and specificities, have with their territories (2003, 171). This phrase and its sense of embodiment are repeated across Indigenous media in Australia and Brazil with slight variations in the different films analysed in this thesis. Bayet-Charlton explicitly differentiates the close relationship Indigenous peoples have with the environment from Western environmentalist discourses that emphasise the importance of preserving nature, especially through the creation of human-free reserve sites and natural parks. She points out that, while preservationist, these discourses often serve to justify colonial and postcolonial actions, including the removal of Aboriginal peoples from their lands and restrictions against traditional activities, such as hunting and gathering, in sacred sites (174). As an Aboriginal writer she argues that this type of environmental discourse, by depicting the land as a place of unspoilt wilderness, also represents Indigenous peoples in an anachronistic, romanticised and ethnocentric image of pure and noble savages: that is, as unchanging and ahistorical societies that, analogous to animals living in nature, have no interference or impact on the environment (173).

Controversies—and accommodation—between these two models of conservation have been gradually advancing, as shown in the book *Indigenous Peoples, National Parks, and Protected Areas: A New Paradigm Linking Conservation, Culture, and Rights* (Stevens 2014). This book acknowledges "the violent historical displacement of so many Indigenous peoples over the past 150 years to create national parks and other protected areas is now widely regretted in international conservation circles" (Stevens 2014, 6). Nonetheless, it shows how a new paradigm is emerging that embraces Indigenous values and knowledges while supporting Indigenous self-governance and placing them in a key position to establish effective biological and cultural dialogue. Further confirmation of this paradigm can be found in the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary volume of the United Nations' World Heritage Convention with its emphasis upon "the role local communities play in management and protection, to issues of ecosystem sustainability, and the maintenance of biological, linguistic and cultural diversity" (Galla, 2012, np)

In this same line, the films studied in this thesis showcase a mutual relation between humans and their territories where "sustainable development means meeting the basic needs for subsistence in partnership with nature. It means maintaining a spiritual and reciprocal relationship with nature and all living creatures and non-living things in it" (Tauli-Corpuz 1993, 12). Thus, I have coined the

term Eco-Fourth Cinema to refer to films displaying the intrinsic but dynamic connection Indigenous peoples have with the environment and other living beings. Although not all audio-visual production cited in this thesis fits this concept, it accurately describes those which are primarily concerned with Indigenous rights, both behind and in front of the cameras.

## 1.6 Chapters Outline

In the next and second chapter, Land Rights, I study feature films directed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers, focusing on the link between environmental preservation and land struggles. In the Australia part of this chapter, the main film analysed is *Mabo* (2012), directed by Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins. It focuses on one man's legal battle for recognition of Indigenous land ownership. By contrast the Brazilian film studied is *Birdwatchers* [Portuguese title *Terra Vermelha*], Marco Bechis, 2008), which centres on the violence endured by a contemporary Brazilian Indigenous group attempting to reclaim their traditional lands illegally occupied by agribusiness barons. Although *Birdwatchers* is directed by a non-Indigenous person, my choice to study this film took into consideration its standing in Brazil and internationally as the film that called attention to and provided visibility for Indigenous agency in contemporary land struggles. It premiered at the 65<sup>th</sup> Venice International Film Festival (2008), won Best Feature Film at the Festival de Cinema de Manaus (2008) and won the One World Media Award (2010)—One World, a non-profit organisation based on in the UK that promotes dialogues on human rights, cultural understanding and justice, awarded this last prize.<sup>17</sup>

Through a comparative analysis of *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers*, the chapter identifies the similar challenges facing Indigenous nations in both countries, especially the colonial dispossession of their ancestral territories and the postcolonial obstacles these nations face in reclaiming and exercising self-determination over their territories. This chapter also discusses the global environmental consequences of this dispossession, especially global warming due to deforestation and accelerated development. Departing from a close examination of these two films, the chapter concludes with a discussion of Indigenous perspectives on the environment, particularly the importance of land to Indigenous cultures.

In the third chapter, Water Rights, I discuss the relation between Indigenous cinema and environmental discourses focused on the theme of water. In particular, I explore the ways Indigenous epistemologies challenge liberal and anthropocentric definitions of water as human property. The main aim of this chapter is to study Indigenous films' different approaches to depicting environmental issues centred on the theme of water preservation. The main Australian film analysed here is *Ten Canoes* (2006). This was the first Australian feature film to be mostly shot in an Aboriginal language.

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<sup>17</sup> Official website: <https://www.oneworldmedia.org.uk/about/>



It was directed by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr. The film became a successful case of collaboration between a non-Aboriginal film director and the Yolngu people of Ramingining.

The main Brazilian feature film analysed is *Xingu* (2012). It was directed by non-Indigenous filmmaker Cao Hamburger. The film tells the history of the creation of the largest Indigenous national reserve in the world during the 1960s. This Indigenous Park is the product of a utopic project formulated by the *irmãos Villas-Bôas* [Villas-Bôas brothers] after centuries of Indigenous peoples' genocide and displacement. I chose this film because it was a mainstream production set in Indigenous territories coinciding with the construction of a nearby mega-dam, Belo Monte.

In order to better discuss the relationship between Indigenous cosmologies and environmental discourses/politics, this chapter relies on the notion of *Perspectivismo ameríndio* [Amerindian perspectivism] advanced by Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros (1998). Based on his work with and his learning from Amazonian Indigenous peoples in Brazil, Viveiros coined this term to challenge the common binary of nature and culture and their being set in opposition to each other. Another important concept is that of “philosophical animism”, developed by Australian eco-feminist Val Plumwood (2002) to criticise the deep separation between nature and culture, humans and non-humans, alerting to the necessity of creating dialogues rather than perpetuating dichotomies. Through a comparative analysis of *Ten Canoes* and *Xingu*, I show how these films display Indigenous discourses in favour of water rights.

In the fourth chapter, Cultural Rights, I consider audio-visual productions made by Indigenous collectives/communities/nations. In the Australian case, I attend to the short documentary *Footprints* (2015) directed by Aboriginal filmmaker Cornel Ozies. It tells the filmmaker's journey of rediscovering and reconnecting with his own culture through the course of the documentary. As he engages with it, he also assumes a position of registering and reclaiming the Djugan culture. The documentary was produced by the Indigenous channel NITV (National Indigenous Television) and was nationally broadcasted on the network. On the Brazilian side, I examine the documentary *A Gente Luta Mais Come Fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit] (2009), directed by Isaac Pinhanta and Wewito Piyãko from the Asháninka people. The documentary was produced as part of VNA—*Vídeo nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages] the most successful Indigenous video project to take place in Brazil in more than 30 years. In this chapter, I probe the role of culture in the respective contexts of the Djugan and the Asháninka way of life.

This comparative analysis of Indigenous media focuses simultaneously on aesthetic and political content. My main objective is to identify successful alternatives for Indigenous media production and distribution. The chapter aims to find points of convergence/divergence between Indigenous collective productions in Australia and Brazil to give visibility to their struggles for Indigenous cultural rights and sustainability.

The fifth chapter, Indigenous Rights, combines notions of ecocinema and Fourth Cinema to identify the emergence of Eco-Fourth Cinema in two Australian and Brazilian productions. In the Australian case, I look at the documentary *Connection to Country* (Tyson Mowarin 2017) that centres on the Indigenous filmmaker's activist role of promoting a dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to share the duty of caring for the country, reconnecting with the land and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage. The Brazilian film is *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá - Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [Two Villages, One Path], Ariel Ortega, Germano Beñites and Jorge Morinico 2008). This is a documentary about how surrounding environmental degradation has wiped out forests and animal life inside Indigenous territories, forcing Indigenous peoples to enter urban markets in a disadvantageous position, selling wood crafts as souvenirs to survive. I show especially how these two documentaries, directed by Indigenous filmmakers in Australia and Brazil, recall colonial events to trace the history of environmental and Indigenous exploitation to the development of these two national states. I also discuss the Anthropocene as an ongoing threat inaugurated since colonisation. This longer perspective on the Anthropocene positions Indigenous peoples as the most vulnerable of peoples and yet also as those best placed to deal with environmental changes due to their past and traumatic experiences of displacements and survival and as its first victims.

In the conclusion, I summarise the thesis' key arguments about the specific contributions an Eco-Fourth Cinema can make to the understanding of—and action for—sustainability and environmental crisis. I revisit the thesis' main hypothesis, namely, that these films invite non-Indigenous audiences to learn from Indigenous epistemologies and re-think their own relationship with their natural environment. Additionally, the conclusion argues that there is a trend in films dealing with Indigenous issues to portray the importance of traditional lands and natural resources for Indigenous peoples' survival. Finally, I claim that these films have the potential to make audiences aware of the impacts of human activities on global warming. Through the revisions proposed by these films and the action of my own filmic analyses, I show relevant similarities between Australian and Brazilian films made by or in partnership with Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples in both countries are geographically distant but very close in terms of their contemporary struggles and their sharing of a common experience of discrimination and poverty. Both groups stand as minorities fighting for centuries against the ongoing effects of external and internal colonisation. They both struggle to preserve their culture, language, lifestyle, land, water and natural resources. They stand as principled voices against the development of an economic model that sees nature merely as a collection of commodities.

As a non-Indigenous person, I have relied on the writings and interviews that many Indigenous authors and activists have given which have been aimed at understanding and sharing their Indigenous perspectives. This material presented clear patterns of the twinning of concerns for the destruction of

natural resources and the fighting for Indigenous rights. These are present in different but convergent ways in each of the films analysed in this thesis. Building on Moreton-Robinson's "Australian Indigenous standpoint theory", I see the need to situate the partiality/subjectivity of any researcher against the discourse of a universal Western white patriarchal knowledge. As she states, "intersecting oppressions marked by race, class, colonisation, culture, abledness and sexuality shape the production of knowledge and ways in which we are known and come to know and experience the world" (2013, 339). So, in this context I need also to acknowledge my position as a *mestiça* [mixed-race] woman researcher from Brazil who is continually making efforts at self-decolonisation.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis, I have translated to English all titles (films, books and articles) as well as all passages/citations that were originally published in Brazilian Portuguese. So, unless otherwise specifically indicated, all in-text translations are by this thesis's author. In the case of feature films and documentaries that have been widely circulated in English, the English translation of their titles are used. With indented block quotations and excerpted passages within paragraphs in Brazilian Portuguese, I cite the original in italics and then include in brackets my English translation immediately below it (if a block quotation) or after it (if within a paragraph). As I was unable to translate titles distributed exclusively in Indigenous languages, these remain with the original titles without English or Brazilian Portuguese translation. By acknowledging the epistemic forces that shape this research on Indigenous media, I highlight the creative and political role of Indigenous audio-visual productions in the rethinking of the human relation to the natural environment.

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<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Brazil's contradictory national identity discourses and educational system, while acknowledging the multiple ethnicities that constitute the nation, rely almost exclusively on Western literary and epistemological canons as models for teaching. It was only in the last decade (2000s) that the teaching of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous history and cultures became compulsory in Brazilian basic education. Federal laws no. 10639 (2003) and no. 11.645 (2008), [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/ato2007-2010/2008/lei/111645.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/ato2007-2010/2008/lei/111645.htm), accessed 10 June 2014.

## Chapter two

### Land Rights

“In early times whites lived like us in the forest, ... but once they created tools, machines, cars and planes, they became euphoric and said: ‘We are the only people to be so ingenious, only we know how to produce machines and merchandise.’ That is when they lost all wisdom. First they damaged their own land, before going off to work in other lands in order to endlessly create their merchandise. And they never stopped to ask: “If we destroy the earth, will we be able to create another one?”

—Davi Kopenawa Yanomami<sup>19</sup>

The text “Discovering White People”, written by Brazilian Indigenous activist Davi Yanomami, subverts the standpoint of colonial narratives by positioning European peoples as the distant ‘Other’. In an anthropological fashion, Yanomami describes the natives of Europe as belonging to a paradoxical culture that is able to produce ingenious machines and material goods but is doing this at the cost of possibly destroying the planet. To develop his main argument, Yanomami emphasises the colonial White/European consumerist relation to lands and natural resources that, according to him, has resulted in increasingly catastrophic consequences for the global environment. Although marked by an apocalyptic tone, his text is a representative account of the idea (subscribed to both by Indigenous and non-Indigenous analysts alike) that human activities play a central role in climate change.<sup>20</sup> This has been especially the case with the spread of Western industrial–urban models of civilisation from the nineteenth century onwards (Doran and Zimmerman, 2009). In line with Yanomami’s text, this chapter discusses past and present relations between environmentalism and Indigenous struggles. It closely analyses select Brazilian and Australian films from the 2000s onwards

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<sup>19</sup> This extract is cited in Stam and Shohat (2012). Davi Yanomami gained fame around the world as a spokesperson of Indigenous struggles for land rights recognition in Brazil. He is a shaman and writer, also known as the ‘Dalai Lama of the Rain Forest’ (Ortiz, 2014). He was one of the main leaders in the successful efforts to demarcate the Yanomami’s traditional territory in the 1980s. Due to his activism, in 1989, he was invited to represent the human rights organisation Survival International when it received the Right Livelihood Award, popularly known as the alternative Nobel Prize. In the same year, he also received the UN’s Global 500 Award, and was granted, in 2005, an honourable mention at the ceremony for the Bartolomé de Las Casas Prize in Spain. [http://assets.survival-international.org/documents/22/Davi\\_Yanomami\\_biography.pdf](http://assets.survival-international.org/documents/22/Davi_Yanomami_biography.pdf), accessed 12 January 2015.

<sup>20</sup> In this thesis, I focus on economic factors behind human-led climate change and understand the idea of “human activities” in line with Vitousek et al. (1997), who define it as firstly “the industrial and agricultural enterprises of humanity, and ultimately by the explosive growth over the past two centuries of both the human population and per capita resource use” (2).

to compare how land rights and sustainability themes overlap in productions made by or with Indigenous peoples in these two countries.

## **2.1 Resisting Invasions: Land Rights Struggles in *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers***

Australia and Brazil face analogous postcolonial issues, notably regarding Indigenous peoples' land claims and struggles against what they see as intensive/extensive farming and predatory mining, as well as for the recognition of Indigenous customary rights and traditional lands. Indigenous peoples around the world have often been depicted through dichotomous views: either as defenceless victims of a civilising process destroying their traditional ways of life or as opportunists willing to betray their cultures and peoples for European money or vices. However, Indigenous peoples' actions towards agriculture and mining are better understood by considering their ambivalent postcolonial challenges, particularly their wish to continue following their traditions while at the same time finding solutions for the survival of current Indigenous generations within capitalist–urban societies. O'Faircheallaigh (2006, 4), a specialist involved in negotiated agreements between Indigenous peoples and mining companies in Australia captures well this dynamic when he writes:

Aboriginal people in Australia are not romantic figures standing in the way of development but neither are they intent on peddling their heritage in return for material benefits provided by developers. They are driven by needs and ambitions that are part material, part cultural and spiritual, and they pursue these ambitions in an Aboriginal context that is highly politicised.<sup>21</sup>

Paradoxically, in what is seen as a postcolonial and decolonising era, the pressure upon land and Indigenous occupancy of lands in both Brazil and Australia is fraught, but in different ways. For example, although mining is a key player in both economies, the history and development of each national industry are notably different, especially with respect to their respective attitudes towards Indigenous peoples. In Australia, mining companies have had, with the adoption of various lands rights acts nationally and in various states and territories beginning in the 1970s, increasing obligations to consult and negotiate with Aboriginal communities which are taken seriously. Since the recognition of native title this has become one of the ways in which native title is recognised, leading to the implementation of socio-economic development policies such as those pertaining to training and employment (Limerick et al. 2012). However, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Australian mining companies is not without its conflicts and contradictions.

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<sup>21</sup> In a study based on close examination of 45 agreements between Aboriginal communities and mining companies, O'Faircheallaigh (2006) concludes that a successful relationship between these two parties depends on addressing the unequal social-economic position of Indigenous peoples in relation to mining companies.

In Brazil, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and mining companies involves legal disputes for land recognition. These governments have acted in the ways that they did in Australia before the contemporary land rights movement. They have tended to support unfettered expansion of mining and farming over Indigenous lands. However, as the Australian example shows, government actions attending to the demands of Indigenous movements are often followed by measures that undermine Indigenous autonomy as a whole. For example, the Brazilian government's relatively recent concession of self-determination for Indigenous peoples has been followed by abrupt cuts in public funding for social and health projects as well as community development (Baines 2001). In this context, Indigenous peoples are pressured to find alternative sources of income, including signing quickly negotiated deals with mining companies that have high economic interests in these Indigenous lands. This strategy allows for companies to enter into direct negotiations, though in disproportionately unequal positions, with Indigenous peoples. Consequently, as Baines (2001) has pointed out, mining companies provide compensation and welfare programs for Indigenous communities with the legal exploitation of Indigenous lands. These negotiations are then able to be represented as supportive of Indigenous self-determination and sustainability. As might be expected, these processes have particular implications for each Indigenous group, depending on the negotiated agreement.

Despite the differences in historical and legal contexts, environmental impacts caused by long-term mining in Australia and Brazil cannot be underestimated. For example, bauxite extraction in Brazil and Australia, both leading global exporters of this commodity, has notable environmental effects due to the method of "open-pit mining" of lands:

Not only the cleaning of the surface in the pit but also the construction of roads and stockpiles constitute disruptions to the local ecosystem. The restructuring of drainage systems or fragmentation of ecosystems by transportation networks may cause negative effects far beyond the mining site. (Martens et al. 2000, 53–54)

Despite the differences in national histories, Australia and Brazil have developed similar domestic economies and staples-export profiles, both strongly based on the exploitation of natural resources (Van der Eng and Kenyon 2014). Due to intensive use and commercialisation of land, water, minerals and timber since colonial times, both countries have experienced severe environmental issues, including deforestation, extinction of endemic fauna/flora and pollution of freshwater resources (Levy and Ross 2014). Ironically, the pressure upon land use has increased rather than moderated over the past several decades, with the consequence that both countries share a recent history marked by relatively rapid urbanisation and the continuous growth of farming and large-scale capital-intensive agriculture. In both countries this is making over, in some cases totally, rural and wilderness locations into monocultures. While there is a tendency to ascribe a lack of forethought and rapacity

to past colonial periods, a notable characteristic of the contemporary period has been the capacity of agribusiness and mining to relatively quickly transform the landscape and its uses beyond all recognition in ways that were not possible in the colonial period. Consequently, it is as much or even more a matter of dealing with contemporary practices of deforestation, extinction of fauna and flora, and pollution of freshwater uses than it is of exclusively dealing with the historical legacies of these practices.

Cinematic productions are inevitably linked to historical and contemporary national agendas. Considering the similarities and distinctions between these two countries, this chapter focuses on films concerning environmental issues produced by and/or in partnership with Indigenous peoples. I explore the ways through which these films attempt to communicate the importance of the environment to non-Indigenous and Indigenous audiences, while simultaneously revealing the complex relationships many Indigenous peoples have with—and want to continue to have with—natural resources and their traditional lands. This relation with nature, which conflates the existence of a community and a territory, is attested as crucial as “without connection to the land Aboriginal people are separated from the main source of meaning in their lives” (Wright 2001, 203). At the same time, this meaning also often implies improvising workable models as a means of subsistence. Lands provide access to natural resources (Gilbert 2006).

This connection involves spiritual meanings, with the term “country” embodying the complex feeling of “ownership and belonging” to the land (Rose 2013a, 130). A key way to understand this relationship in Australia has been through seeing it as a totemic system, which requires individuals/communities to take responsibility for specific living beings and landscapes.<sup>22</sup> This system of belief connects humanity and nature, allowing for a model of “long-term ecological management” that has implications for the whole environment (Rose 2013a, 127). In Brazil this connection to the land and its preservation is also present among Indigenous groups. The Guaraní concept of *tekoha*, for instance—defined as a sacred territory that needs to be taken care of—allows the Guaraní to fulfil their way of life (Melià 1990). As such, more than a mere place of origin or residence, the notion of *tekoha* has a fundamental role in giving meaning to social, economic, political, religious and cultural aspects of the community. While there is a tendency to view these Indigenous relations to land as a given and persisting as they do through time, there is an important way in which these relations are proposed as knowledges and understandings that need to be taken account of—adjusted and calibrated in the polity at large for new circumstances. Rather than being

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<sup>22</sup> According to Newsome (1980, cited in Rose 2013a, 137), the preservation of the red kangaroo is deeply connected with the existence of Aboriginal sacred sites in Central Australia. His studies confirmed that, in the middle of the desert, these sites coincide with an oasis that gathers together a great number of red kangaroos during drought periods. As these sacred areas are restricted from hunting, burning and even harvesting, they offer essential resources for these animals during periods of scarce food and water.

static they are present here as emergent. These debates, like the films themselves, are part of a public conversation in which Indigenous peoples are interlocutors and agents. As seen later in this chapter, the importance of traditional lands for Indigenous peoples' physical and cultural survival has placed them on the front line of environmental debates inside Brazil.

In both Australia and Brazil, diverse meanings have been attributed to the terms nature, territory and land. From the perspective of Indigenous peoples, however, these are key terms for understanding the interdependence of humans and the environment. Through a comparative analysis of the telemovie *Mabo* (2012), by Australian Aboriginal filmmaker Rachel Perkins, and the feature film *Birdwatchers* (2008), by Chilean-Italian filmmaker Marco Bechis, this chapter shows how these two films rely on different aesthetic strategies to narrate the challenges faced by contemporary Indigenous peoples to access and retain traditional rights over their ancestral lands. Finally, this chapter also aims to debate the political implications of these two films for their respective national societies and the role both films play in disseminating contemporary and self-constructed portrayals of Indigenous peoples to broad national audiences and to international circuits.

Drawing on the insights of Knopf's *Decolonizing the Lens of Power* (2008), my close analysis of these two films seeks to avoid an essentialist approach. I am not searching for a supposedly pure and ubiquitous Indigenous aesthetics. Rather, taking my cue from Knopf's study, I acknowledge that Indigenous filmmaking necessarily accommodates complex and hybrid forms in order to dialogue with Western aesthetics and narratives. By adopting Knopf's complex definition, I hope to avoid, firstly, reducing contemporary Indigenous' filmmaking and its diverse practices to a straitjacket of single kinds of films that would hold across Indigenous production in a set of technical and stylistic specificities valid across distinct cultures and places. Secondly, again following Knopf, I want to show (and the comparative analysis is as important here as the focus on range and variety of Indigenous screen activity) how the study of Indigenous films should not aim to confine itself to particularities but to seek the family of connections that a cross-cultural comparison provides.

Knopf also points out that due to the lack of an academic framework or terminology for the study of Indigenous filmmaking, it is still necessary to rely on Western film theories/criticisms. However, in order to avoid hegemonic filmic analysis, she adds that it is also important to investigate films from an interdisciplinary perspective, combining these analyses with postcolonial/decolonialist theories and perspectives emerging from Indigenous studies. It is worth noting that Knopf is studying North American Indigenous filmmaking in the United States and Canada. In this context, she deals with two neighbouring countries with a higher number of films directed and produced primarily by Indigenous peoples than in Brazil, and with a tradition of filmmaking associated with governmental institutions and anthropological patterns. In contrast, my comparative analyses attempt to bridge Australia, which has relatively well-developed Indigenous film production, with Brazil, which is just



recently starting to make progress in this field. So, I also analyse films made with the contributions and participation of Indigenous peoples but not necessarily directed or produced by them. In this sense, this thesis takes into account and theorises the importance of partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in the creation and subsequent interpretation of film meaning. Marcia Langton, in her agenda-setting report for the then Australian Film Commission, described as “Aboriginality” (1993b, 82) the current efforts of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to have an “intercultural dialogue”. She argues that this effort is a fundamental path to follow for mutual comprehension and interpretation. More than that, Langton sees these “intersubjective exchanges” (83) as crucial for the production of images and content that go beyond colonialist and Eurocentric representations. As a result, this thesis acknowledges the role of partnership in the process of decolonising cinema. Aiming to contribute to the field of Indigenous film studies, this chapter searches for convergences and connections between the audio-visual productions in Australia and Brazil, considering decolonial debates on the themes of Indigenous sovereignty and land rights.

## 2.2 Indigenous Filmmaking and Land Disputes in Australia

The director of *Mabo* (2012), Rachel Perkins, is a successful Aboriginal filmmaker whose creative career comprises a number of audio-visual productions for cinema and television.<sup>23</sup> These include the “operatic” musical *One Night the Moon* (2001), the historical documentary series *First Australians* (2008) and the first television drama series written, directed and produced by Indigenous Australians, *Redfern Now* (2012). Her musical *Bran Nue Dae* (2009), adapted from Aboriginal Jimmy Chi’s 1990 hit musical, was one of the most-watched Australian films of the year, grossing nearly AU\$7.7 million at the box office (Dallas, 2010/2011). Overall, Perkins’ works attempt to portray contemporary issues faced by Aboriginal cultures—and therefore matters of importance for non-Aboriginal peoples. They are works whose first audience is “Australian”: they are aimed at Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia, and they are works of public intervention into different flashpoints of Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal friction. Her works collectively underscore the overlapping feelings of pride and the difficulties facing Indigenous peoples living in between Aboriginal and Western cultures. Each are built around the assertion of Aboriginal agency exercised in quite different spheres of life.

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<sup>23</sup> It is noteworthy that Rachel Perkins is the daughter of Aboriginal activist and soccer player Charles Perkins (1936–2000). He was the first Aboriginal person to obtain a graduate degree and is well known for having organised, together with a group of interracial Australian students, the Freedom Ride of 1965. This was a bus trip through towns and the countryside of New South Wales to denounce segregation laws that restricted the access of Indigenous peoples to public spaces such as swimming pools, clubs, hotels and theatres. This was a successful grassroots enterprise, especially because Perkins and the students managed to call the attention of the media, which gave them positive coverage and, consequently, put local racism on the national agenda (Curthoys 2002). For more on Perkins’ work see his two books, *A Bastard Like Me* (1975) and *Welfare and Aboriginal People in Australia* (1990).

While *Mabo* is explicitly a political film and a biographical study, *Radiance* (1998) is a family melodrama. *Radiance* is about three sisters who not only live far from each other but also have very different lifestyles.<sup>24</sup> The oldest sister, Cressy (Rachael Maza), is a famous opera singer. The middle sister, Mae (Trisha Morton-Thomas), is a housekeeper who never left home and takes care of their mother. The youngest sister, Nona (Deborah Mailman), works as a prostitute and is pregnant. The three sisters reunite at their mother's funeral. This unexpected meeting ignites a recollection of memories from their childhood, as well as debates about their shared identity as Aboriginal people. This is best seen in the scene in which they catch a huge turtle and begin recalling their childhood days. However, as they recount their memories, the characters note a subtle but noteworthy difference between their past and present: as time has passed, they have forgotten how to kill the animal. Their distance from this practice—that of the ancestral ritual hunting of sea turtles—marks at the same time the recognition of a loss of an Aboriginality tied up with the cultural practice of sea-turtle hunting and the coming into existence of another kind of Aboriginal identity in its place. The scene takes place during a long night of conversation. While walking along a sandy beach barefoot (symbolically, closer to the land), the three sisters start to leave some of their differences behind as they share common remembrances of their past. They progressively reconnect with their Aboriginal identity. This reconnection is reinforced when, following the Aboriginal tradition of burning all the belongings of a deceased family member, the sisters set fire to their mother's house. This act of setting fire to the house is also an act of catharsis: they are also burning the family secrets, which allows them to move away and move on. After that, they jump into a car, embarking on a nomadic path that seems to have only one certainty: to continue reconnecting with their Indigenous identity and values, especially their deep relationship with the land.

The theme of Aboriginal connection to the land is also present in *One Night the Moon*, a musical drama set in 1932. In this case, Aboriginal ancestral relation to the land is explicitly contrasted with Australian settlers' relatively recent occupation of the land. This is clearly portrayed in the scene where police officer Albert Yang (Kelton Pell), an Aboriginal tracker, is forbidden from carrying out his work of searching for a European girl lost in the bush. The child's father, white farmer Jim Ryan (Paul Kelly), distrusts Aborigines and denies him access to his land. To emphasise the racially divided nature of Australia, Perkins creates two parallel scenes in which the two men sing as they walk around the same landscape. Crucially, they neither see nor hear each other. By alluding to the coeval but segregated paths adopted by the Aboriginal tracker and the white farmer, the sequence clearly emphasises the divide and contrast between the two cultures, the two ways of life they embody. The white farmer is depicted in a vulnerable position, as he desperately searches for his

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<sup>24</sup> This is likewise an adaptation of Louis Nowra's play of the same name. Nowra is a prominent non-Aboriginal playwright with a longstanding connection with Aboriginal people in his work.

missing daughter in a vast and hostile land. Ironically, though, throughout the scene, he sings the authoritative verses “this land is mine”. The lyrics highlight the general colonial assumption that, by unilaterally declaring domain over an overseas land, Europeans could domesticate it into their private property regimes. The verses suggest the settler’s distressed attempt to make a foreign land more familiar and, therefore, to increase his chances of finding his daughter. At the same time and by contrast, through a subtle change in the words, the Aboriginal tracker sings a verse with a completely different message: “this land is me”. In this way, the Aboriginal tracker also affirms his hope of finding the lost child, but for a distinct reason and through a different approach. He does not claim ownership of the land but rather a deep connection and contiguity with it, as if its geography was embodied within him.<sup>25</sup>

These contrasting positions between the white settler and the Indigenous man have sometimes been summarised as a fundamental divergence between “possession of” and “belonging to” the land (Foxwell-Norton, Forde and Meadows, 2013, 151). Perkins’ film can be read as an audio-visual metaphor of what Moreton-Robinson calls the dominant “possessive logic” of white settlers’ relationship to the land (2011, 646). Moreton-Robinson argues that this is a fundamental part of the white patriarchal society’s “mode of rationalisation”, as it historically affirmed the supposed intrinsic superiority of white males over Indigenous peoples to justify appropriation of their lands and bodies. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, this process of European domination, equally as evident in Brazil, was based on the notion of discovering allegedly non-occupied (or savage) territories and on the prophetic necessity of spreading the words of Christianity. After the emergence of modern nation-states, the control of Indigenous territories and populations was based on teleological and so-called enlightened theories of progress, as well as on race and gender discrimination that rationalised violence and provided legal/medical/moral justification for the white occupation.

In the next section, I focus on a specific legal doctrine and colonial construct known in Australian law as *terra nullius*. It was widely used to initiate and legitimise a legal system of land tenure from which Aboriginal people were excluded. Today we talk about it as providing settlers and courts in Australia with a unilateral justification of their process of occupation of Indigenous lands. The concept was not well known until Eddie Mabo’s High Court action, and most Australians, including many in the legal profession, had not considered how the Australian property system, as it

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<sup>25</sup> The casting of Paul Kelly to play the racist landowner provides another dimension to the film. He is not only a notable singer he is an intercultural figure working with Aboriginal performers and creating songs – most significantly “From Little Things Big Things Grow” which is about the battle for land rights which set “agribusiness” interests of Lord Vestey against the Gurundji people and their representative Vincent Lingiari. Kelly’s casting shows in the body of the actor that an another intercultural and respectful dialogue was possible than as now. And he is a representative of it.

was progressively rolled out in several state and territory jurisdictions, had its origins in dispossession through *terra nullius*. The legal idea of *terra nullius* was also central to the “Mabo case” portrayed in Rachel Perkins’ television film, which will be closely analysed in the next section.

### **2.3 The Doctrine of *Terra Nullius* and Land Rights in *Mabo***

In 1898, Alfred Haddon shot one of the first known visual recordings of Indigenous peoples. The leader of the Cambridge expedition to Murray Island, in the Torres Straits, used a 35 mm Newman & Guardia camera to record Indigenous peoples’ traditional customs and ceremonies. Of these recordings, only four minutes of motion images of men dancing and fire-making survived. This pioneering visual material is known as the world’s first ethnographic images recorded in the field (FitzSimons, Laughren and Williamson 2011). Initially, these were images that placed Indigenous peoples as both objects of curiosity and pleasure for the external Eurocentric gaze and as subjects for systematic anthropological inquiry. Undoubtedly, their performance would “appear as exotic and ‘primitive’ to European viewers of 1900”, especially to general audiences that “would inevitably be engaged in a sort of voyeuristic spectatorship” (Grimshaw 2001). In recent times, however, as a result of continuous and increasing Indigenous struggles for recognition of their traditional rights, these same images have been reappropriated by Indigenous peoples for a variety of purposes, including legal actions. One of the most remarkable cases of the use of this early ethnographic footage from the Haddon collection was during the Mabo claim of native title (1992) in the High Court of Australia (FitzSimons, Laughren, and Williamson 2011). In this case, after years of legal battles through the various courts, Torres Strait Islander and human rights activist Eddie Koiki Mabo helped to overturn colonial-inherited laws and force the Australian judicial system to recognise Indigenous traditional ownership of the land. He was able to do so in part because of the wealth of material and documentary evidence furnished by the expedition and the continuing anthropological research it had given rise to.

The political reappropriation of colonial images including moving images and their associated knowledges (such as anthropological knowledge) by Indigenous peoples to prove their traditional rights over the land provides an ironic example of the shifts and currents of power struggles in postcolonial settings. Although land and wealth are still generally concentrated in the hands of the descendants of white settlers, the Mabo case shows how Indigenous peoples have used colonial and Western epistemological constructs to reverse aspects of these colonial legacies. In this specific case, it forced the descendants of European settlers to acknowledge Indigenous peoples as subjects of their own histories. According to anthropologist Faye Ginsburg (2002, 51), this case symbolically stands as an example of Indigenous peoples using “screen memories in media to ‘talk back’ to structures of power and state that have denied their rights, subjectivity, and citizenship for over two hundred years”. Indeed, with the help of Haddon’s images, the judgment reversed the doctrine of *terra nullius*

and recognised Indigenous ownership of traditional lands in one of the Torres Strait Islands.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, the victory in the High Court set a precedent for other Indigenous peoples to have their native titles, traditional customs and laws recognised, giving them the necessary legal protection to manage their rights over their land.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, as Felicity Collins and Therese Davis point out in *Australian Cinema after Mabo* (2004), the 1992 High Court decision did not affect only Indigenous peoples. Their book analyses a number of cinematic productions, seeking to demonstrate changes on Australian cinema after the Mabo case. The authors claim that this landmark decision had a cultural impact that extended beyond legal realms, promoting debates on national identity and the reassessment of colonial history. The book also examines the ways that Australian cinema has, from the 1990s, devoted significant attention to the re-evaluation of two key themes: the “landscape tradition which anchored national identity to British settlement of the land” and the “feeling of being at home” (7). While previously related to European settlers, these two themes now had to accommodate the histories of Indigenous peoples, to acknowledge and discuss the theme of interracial coexistence and deal with the “shock of recognition” of Indigenous sovereignty (9). The book was released almost ten years before Rachel Perkins directed the telemovie *Mabo* (2012), produced by ABC TV and Blackfella Films. As seen later in this chapter, Perkins’s work is related to Collins’s and Davis’s argument that, after the Mabo case, cinema became a powerful instrument for Australians to revisit colonial themes with new breadth, especially regarding the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settlers.<sup>28</sup>

*Mabo*’s script was written by Sue Smith, a well-known scriptwriter whose works include the Australian television series *Brides of Christ* (1991), *The Leaving of Liverpool* (1992) and *Bastard Boys* (2007). *Mabo* is a television drama based on historical facts.<sup>29</sup> It narrates the legal battle of Eddie

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<sup>26</sup> Although a framework for land rights legislation had been developed since the mid-1970s and had been unevenly rolled out—mostly in the Northern Territory—before Mabo, different states had developed some of their own ‘versions’ of land rights. Mabo intensified and redefined these, creating a right that was inherent rather than legislated. Indeed, Mabo drew on traditions in Indigenous law in Australian law as with the ‘form of land rights’ found to exist in Papua New Guinea in the 1960s when PNG was an Australian protectorate.

<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, there were also legal cases in which ethnographic materials were used to delegitimise the claims of Indigenous peoples to traditional ownership of lands. For example, during a native title claim in Victoria in 1998, the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal group tried to prove their historical occupation of lands based on a comprehensive use of testimonies, storytelling, interviews and other oral history sources. However, Indigenous sources were seen as incomplete and untrustworthy, especially because they were not corroborated by European documents. To make things worse for the Yorta Yorta claimants, European-made written sources were used against them to prove that they did not live in the same traditional way as their Yorta Yorta ancestors and, therefore, had no right to claim ownership to their ancestral lands (Moreton-Robinson 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Before the Mabo decision ideas of Aboriginal self-determination were evident during the development of Aboriginal media associations such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA).

<sup>29</sup> The two mini-series *Brides of Christ* and *The Leaving of Liverpool* were landmarks in Australian television in the 1990s. *Brides of Christ* set in a convent school, showed the conflicts and doubts of a group of students and their religious teacher during the turbulent 1960s. *The Leaving of Liverpool* focused on the child migrant scheme, revealing slave labour and systemic abuse of children by church members in their orphanages.

Koiki Mabo, a man from Mer (Murray Island), to have his and his people's traditional ownership of the Murray Islands recognised under Australian law. This meant contesting the doctrine of *terra nullius* in the High Court of Australia. Historian Henry Reynolds (2003, 50) points out that the Mabo case resolution "gave retrospective validity to traditional tenure and overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* that had been at the very centre of the legal and moral justification for the forcible occupation of Aboriginal land". In 1770, based on the assumption of discovery, just after arriving in the Aboriginal eastern coast area (today, New South Wales), Captain Cook declared British sovereignty over the continent Europeans would come to know as "Australia" (Reynolds 2013). Captain Cook's act of non-recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and traditional ownership of the land inaugurated the foundational logic, so to speak, of Aboriginal dispossession, which was used for centuries to eject Aboriginal peoples from their territory, water resources and sacred sites.<sup>30</sup>

In 1788, through imperial decree, Captain Cook's claim of British sovereignty was reinforced by the military occupation and settlement of the eastern coast area by Governor Phillip (Reynolds 2013). Almost a century later, in 1879, the colonial government annexed Murray Island as part of the British Empire. It was against this historical background of a unilateral European decision to seize Aboriginal and Torres Strait lands that Mabo made an individual claim for the recognition of his land rights. However, as the court case unfolded, it developed into a collective battle waged by the inhabitants of Murray Island against the *terra nullius* doctrine. Eventually, this led to the Native Title Act 1993 (NTA), which obliged the Australian state, for the first time, to recognise the previous existence of Aboriginal peoples and their immemorial occupation of the land prior to European settlement. Sadly, Koiki Mabo did not live to see the conclusion of the case that resulted in the legal recognition of Indigenous land ownership. However, through the establishment of the NTA, a direct outcome of the *Mabo v. Queensland* case, his name is forever linked to the historical fight for reparation of Indigenous rights.<sup>31</sup>

Perkins' telemovie starts with grainy television news footage reporting the Mabo case in 1992. The strategy of using archival footage underlines the connection between reality and fiction; it

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[http://aso.gov.au/people/Sue\\_Smith/](http://aso.gov.au/people/Sue_Smith/), accessed 4 June 2015. An interview with Rachel Perkins explains the choice of Sue Smith as screenwriter for *Mabo*, alluding to her previous works based on historical facts, which aimed to balance narratives of private and public life. See [http://www.abc.net.au/tv/mabo/videos/?play=mabo\\_webex\\_writingresearch.mp4](http://www.abc.net.au/tv/mabo/videos/?play=mabo_webex_writingresearch.mp4), accessed 10 June 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Henry Reynolds (1987) argued that the British colonisers, as soon as they arrived in Australia, became aware that Aboriginal peoples had their own notions of land ownership, based on Indigenous traditional laws, and in a subsequent work (1996) explained that British colonisers deliberately opted to ignore Indigenous laws and codes, for the obvious reason that these could become an impediment to the settlement/occupation of lands.

<sup>31</sup> *Mabo v. Queensland (No 2)* [1992] HCA 23; (1992) 175 CLR 1 (3 June 1992), [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/sinodisp/au/cases/cth/high\\_ct/175clr1.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=~mabo](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/sinodisp/au/cases/cth/high_ct/175clr1.html?stem=0&synonyms=0&query=~mabo), accessed 12 Feb 2018.

implicitly assures viewers that what they are seeing is an adaptation based on real events. After this clever effect of establishing authenticity, a panoramic aerial view presents Murray Island, the place where Eddie Koiki Mabo (played by Jimi Bani) was born to viewers. There, he is seen still as a child, walking alongside his father. While they are fishing the shallow sparkling blue waters, Mabo's father teaches him the importance of living in the traditional way. This image is recurrent throughout the drama. It is used to assure the continuous connection between Mabo and the island, as well as with the memories of his father's lessons while Mabo is living outside Mer in North Queensland. A key scene of the telemovie is when Mabo, following his father's death, discovers that Australian law does not recognise his family's ownership of the land. Even though he was sure of his ancestral rights, he would need to pursue the challenge of proving his claim in accordance to the rituals and codes of the Western legal system. The clash between the Meriam people's neglected customary rights and the laws enforced by the descendants of white settlers is also shown when Mabo is invited by Professor Noel Loos and Henry Reynolds to give a lecture on Indigenous history at James Cook University. During this lecture, he explains that he is a Piadaram man, from one of the eight clans created by Malo, the Octopus deity. During Mabo's lecture, a student makes a satirical comment that the land cannot belong to him simply because of the wishes of a giant mollusc. On hearing that, Mabo replies that the act of someone planting a flag on the sand cannot erase over sixteen generations of Indigenous occupation of a territory. This conversation summarises the central points of Mabo's case: the clash between Indigenous customary conceptions of geography, genealogy, ownership and belonging to the land versus the colonial construct of *terra nullius* introduced by European settlers.

As the court case lasts for almost ten years, the film contextualises Mabo's own life within important moments in Australian history such as the rise of the unionist-supported movements for Aboriginal recognition and land rights demonstrations from the late 1960s. While centring on Mabo's legal case, the film also follows his personal life, especially his deep relationship with his wife Bonita (Deborah Mailman). In addition to taking care of their family, the couple also builds a Black community school whose curriculum centres on local knowledge from the peoples of Murray Island. Bonita's support, especially in looking after the children, was essential to allow Mabo to fight for Indigenous rights. However, Bonita's encouragement was not without the anxiety that, by confronting the Australian government, Mabo could be putting their family at risk. During a heated dialogue, for example, Bonita reminds her husband: "people like us can't afford to be troublemakers." In turn, Mabo replies: "Bonita, people like us have no choice but to be troublemakers." Being the film's protagonist, Mabo's answer is constructed as a heroic call for action, and as well to remind viewers that throughout the history of colonisation in Australia, the denial of Indigenous culture and rights have given them no other option but to struggle against punitive rules established in favour of white settlements. Mabo's use of the word 'troublemaker' also gives the viewer the opportunity to

reconsider its meaning. In Palm Island, just sixty-five kilometres from Townsville where Mabo lived for a time, the State of Queensland installed a penal colony that operated from 1918 to 1960, for “children, alleged troublemakers, unmarried mothers of ‘half-caste’ children, aged and sick, petty offenders and hardened criminals shipped from all over the state” (May 1987, 95). In this sense, Perkins’s narrative reappropriates the use of the term troublemakers, attributing it a positive—even redemptive—connotation. After all, Mabo is the undisputable hero of the narrative while, at the same time, having many legitimate reasons to rebel, and especially to cause problems for a legal system that he sees as causing the troubles of his people in the first place.

The telemovie *Mabo* can be defined as a biopic, as it is a film “minimally composed of the life, or the portion of a life, of a real person whose name is used” (Custen 1992, 6). Unlike most historical fictional films, *Mabo*’s recounting of events focuses almost exclusively on an individual’s life. It recounts historical episodes through the point of view of one single person and builds on a hero-narrative formula, which Dennis Bingham (2010) calls the “great man film”. In this sense, *Mabo* follows a trend in biographic films, telling the story of a real person through the artifices of childhood flashbacks (Mabo with his father living in Mer, Murray Island) and voice-overs (Mabo reading letters to his family) while relying on supporting roles of characters that both contribute to and serve as witnesses to the hero’s story (the supportive role of his wife Bonita in taking care of the children and the house by herself and also following Mabo into the courtrooms of Brisbane and Canberra).

As in most biopics, the film claims to have a deep connection with reality. It is constructed as a plausible rendering of both a man’s and a nation’s history. As its director Perkins employs many cinematic strategies in the attempt to narrate events as they really happened. For example, in order to enhance her claim of depicting a fact-based story, Perkins starts the film with archival television footage from the Mabo case. Additionally, the actual places where Mabo lived, worked and fought for Indigenous rights are used as film locations. Examples include shots of Murray Island, James Cook University, the Black Community School and the Brisbane Supreme Court. Another strategy to produce realistic performances was to involve Mabo’s family and other members of the Murray Island community. Mabo’s daughter, Gail, and Charles Passi’s son, David Passi, who are from Murray Island, acted as cultural consultants for the film. Perkins already had a relationship with Mabo and Passi’s families from the making of the documentary series *First Australians* (2008). In its final episode centred on Mabo’s life, entitled “We Are No Longer Shadows”. In that episode she interviewed Gail Mabo and David Passi.

Although making references to many historical sources such as letters, television footage, testimonies and documents, *Mabo* is still a dramatisation that uses cinematic tools to summarise, in a short and intelligible narrative, the complexity of several decades of a person’s life and of a country’s history. Considering the inherent limitations of the medium of cinema and television, *Mabo* does



achieve its main goal of fostering an emotional connection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences with the historical figure, Eddie Mabo. This is a result of the director's ability to promote identification and intimacy between the drama of the film's characters and those experienced by general audiences, especially by depicting Mabo's virtues (intelligence, leadership, obstinacy, commitment) alongside his weaknesses as an absent and even sometimes aggressive father and husband. In doing this, it follows the model of most biopic films, whose main themes tend to revolve around the often-tumultuous intersection between public and private life.

Such conflicts between the private and public realms are made explicit in a scene when Mabo's son is sick and brought to town for medical examination. Despite their delicate situation, the family is unable to rent a hotel room because of the owner's racism against Aboriginal people and end up having to sleep at the train station. Another moment where private life suffers due to public policies is when Mabo's father is dying. The Queensland government refuses his family permission to travel to Murray Island and undergo the traditional rite of the father looking into his son's eyes at the moment of death. In these two events, societal racial discrimination intervenes deeply in Mabo's private life shaping his public actions.

In aesthetic terms, Perkins's biographical film follows mainstream Hollywood norms, with predictable patterns in terms of *mise-en-scène* (acting, lighting and setting), camerawork, sound and editing. She also opts for what has been termed the "invisible style of filmmaking" (Lehman and Luhr 2008, 59), that is, the strategy of not calling attention to the form in order to leave viewers fully engaged with the film's content. This attempt to not call attention to the camerawork by making smooth cuts and applying conventional editing techniques is so familiar to contemporary viewers used to mainstream Hollywood films that it passes unnoticed. An emotional soundtrack sets the different moods of the film, intensifying viewers' feelings in happy or sad scenes, such as that depicting Mabo's father's death. In this sense, Perkins's direction is marked by a mainstream use of filmic language. In an interview about a previous work, *Bran Nue Dae* (2009), Perkins explains her aesthetic strategies in a way that might help to analyse the options she took in the telemovie *Mabo*:

The reason I make Indigenous works is to entertain, but also to give understanding and communication across the cultural divide. So I think it's good to have commercial leanings when you are doing an Indigenous work because so often our work suffers from not being seen by enough people... I want the work to be seen and be enjoyed. (Wills 2010)

Although not ground-breaking in aesthetic terms, *Mabo* does fall within the sub-genre of biopics identified by Bingham (2010) as "minority appropriation", which includes titles such as *Malcolm X* (Spike Lee 1992). Such films strategically use recognisable Hollywood styles in order to bring to the forefront those who are usually portrayed in marginal or stereotypical roles in mainstream commercial films. In this sense, *Mabo* is a rare film because it has an Indigenous person and political activist as

the main character. It also has an Indigenous woman as a director that manages to tell of and celebrate the overturning of *terra nullius* in Australia, through an Indigenous perspective.

*Mabo* is a film that reviews the theme of the Indigenous–settler relationship by celebrating the end of *terra nullius* as an act of national pride and recognition of Indigenous rights. This is especially clear in the last scene of the film, when Bonita and her son drive from Townsville to Canberra to hear the High Court’s final decision on the case. They are not able to arrive in the capital because their car breaks down in the middle of the highway. An elderly white Australian couple staying in a campervan shares their radio with them. This act of solidarity underlines the commonality of travel for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous in this instance. Bonita is travelling, meets other travellers, and shares the hospitality and solidarity of groups who are on the road. The group hears the High Court decision while sitting together on small camping stools. The fact that the couple is camping underlines white Australians’ position as temporary settlers of a place that originally did not belong to them. The group commemorates the positive verdict in the Mabo case with hugs and words of congratulations. Firstly, this celebratory encounter between Mabo’s family and the old white Australian campers functions as a metaphor for national unity, foretelling an optimistic and harmonious future for the country’s different groups if the right decisions are made. Secondly, this meeting amplifies the possibility of improving the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples through the recognition of Indigenous land rights.

In fact, since the land rights movement was by then thirty years old in its contemporary form, this has been a longstanding aim rather than a new one. However, the Mabo decision repositioned this claim, providing Aboriginal peoples with the legal powers to fight for it independent of the government. Thirdly, this scene reveals the overall mood of the 1990s, following a process of reconciliation that formally began with the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991. The Council had the initial function of helping the country to acknowledge Indigenous dispossession, disadvantage and discrimination, and it promulgated “reconciliation”. Consequently, the appropriation of traditional lands could become part of the national story intrinsic to British colonisation. Also, within the short timeframe of ten years prior to the centenary of the Federation in 2001, the Council had to progressively rectify economic, social and cultural inequalities historically suffered by Indigenous peoples.

Despite its stated good intentions, Damien Short (2008) interprets the reconciliation process as a way to perpetuate colonial dispossession and acculturation of Indigenous peoples. He argues that it resulted in the weakening of Indigenous pressure for a treaty to be signed, which had been increasing. The failure of the recognition process was made visible after the victory of the Wik people of Cape York. In 1996, they went to the High Court and were granted native title even though their land was used in pastoral leases. The impact of this controversial victory led to the Native Title Amendment

Act 1998, which basically restricted native title to a level that rendered it impossible for future Indigenous peoples to win a claim.<sup>32</sup> This outcome, rather than diminishing the importance of the Mabo and Wik cases decisions, reinforces them as “highly significant in unsettling the settler state’s moral and legal claims to the Australian continent” (Cerwonka 2004, 11). Collins and Davis (2004) argue that the Mabo case decision provoked a “shock of recognition of historical discontinuity”. In this line, Perkins’s film, released on the twentieth anniversary of the Mabo case victory, is a strong reminder of the still-incomplete process of acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty. The film finishes with the legal recognition of Indigenous land rights. The message conveyed is one of hope not only for Aboriginal peoples who formally secure their land rights. The film implicitly suggests that non-Aboriginal peoples also benefit from Indigenous occupancy of land since it has been relatively more sustainable, causing less impact on the environment and natural resources.

In a similar way to Perkins’s *Mabo*, the feature film *Birdwatchers* also focuses on Indigenous peoples’ contemporary struggles for land rights, this time in Brazil. As will be shown, the film revolves around the notion that the connection Indigenous peoples have with their traditional territories is not only linked to their present struggles for survival but also to the need to safeguard their ancestors’ spiritual bond with the land.

## **2.4 The Portrayal of Indigenous Peoples in Brazilian Cinema**

In Brazil, as in Australia, non-Indigenous men were responsible for the first known audio-visual records of Indigenous peoples. During the *Comissão Rondon* [Rondon Commission]<sup>33</sup> to the northern region of Brazil (1910–30), anthropologist and physician Edgar Roquette-Pinto made pioneering ethnographic records with the Nhambiquara and Pareci peoples (Peixoto 1995). His images show Indigenous peoples carrying out everyday tasks, such as preparing cassava root, spinning and weaving for the camera (Roquette-Pinto 1938, 124). Beginning with the earliest ethnographic images made during Cândido Rondon’s state campaigns in the 1910s, the tradition of filming Indigenous peoples in Brazil has become as in Australia extensive and varied. It has included documentaries and feature films that have received awards nationally and internationally, such as *Como era gostoso o meu*

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<sup>32</sup> The Native Title Amendment Act 1998 was part of Prime Minister John Howard’s Ten-Point Plan, which applied “massive curtailments of the hard-won land rights”, enabling state governments to validate and extend mining and pastoral leases (Strang 2000).

<sup>33</sup> Military officer Marechal Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon commanded *A Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas Estratégicas do Mato Grosso ao Amazonas* [The Commission of Telegraphic and Strategic Lines of Mato Grosso do Sul and Amazonas] (1910–30). The main aim of this commission was to construct telegraph lines across the Amazon basin. This was part of the process of border demarcation and integration of the northern region with the rest of the country. It has its Australian parallel in the Australian Overland Telegraph except in the Australian case this overland telegraph connected Australia to the nodal points in the British Empire in South-East, South Asia and Europe/UK.

*francês* [How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman] (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1971), *Iracema – Uma Transa Amazônica* [Iracema] (Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna, 1976), *Mato Eles?* [Should I Kill Them?] (Sérgio Bianchi, 1982), *Brava Gente Brasileira* [Brave New Land] (Lucia Murat, 2000) and *Terra Vermelha* (*Birdwatchers*, Marco Bechis, 2008).

Although varying greatly in aesthetics and genres, there is at least one characteristic shared in the production of all these Brazilian films: while Indigenous peoples act in the main and supporting roles and played roles in negotiating what was filmed and sometimes how it was filmed, they were never part of the crew behind the camera. As in Australia it took many decades for Indigenous participation in audio-visual productions to shift from exclusively acting and as informants to roles to directing, writing and producing. In Brazil, this shift seems directly connected to the development and popularisation of first video recording in the 1980s and 1990s and then digital technology from the 2000s. In Brazil, Indigenous peoples' attempts to direct and produce their own films began not as individual productions but as collective works. For example, the videos made by Kayapó peoples recorded "their own traditional ceremonies, demonstrations, and encounters with officials" as well as "their traditional knowledge of the forest environment" (Shohat and Stam 2014, 36). As later discussed in this thesis, since these early Kayapó videos, a creative production of Indigenous short films, documentaries and fictional features has been slowly flourishing in Brazil.<sup>34</sup>

In this section of the chapter, I undertake a close analysis of the Brazilian-Italian film *Birdwatchers* while in the next I consider it in relation to the Aboriginal production of *Mabo*. As will be seen, in contrast to the latter, the former was made with but not by Indigenous peoples. In distinction to the Australian film industry, which has a relatively long and extensive tradition of Aboriginal film production from the late 1970s and early 1980s, Indigenous peoples have yet to solely direct a feature film in Brazil. However, while *Birdwatchers* does not have Indigenous people in directing or producing roles, it does have a relatively high proportion of them in the main cast, including the Indigenous activist Ambrósio Vilhalva as the main actor. It makes the film a much-needed addition to the predominantly Euro-descendant-dominated Brazilian film industry. As will be detailed, it is also a seminal film in its defiant approach to portraying Indigenous issues in Brazil.

The film was a key work in drawing national and international attention to the current struggles of Guaraní-Kaiowá people in the south of Brazil. *Birdwatchers* was directed by Marco Bechis, an Italo-Argentine-Brazilian. This was not the first time that Bechis had focused upon the theme of land struggles. His Argentinian film, *Alambrado* [The Fence] (1991), is set in the remote Argentine

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<sup>34</sup> Vast material has been produced in partnership with non-Indigenous people since 1980s. Examples are projects such as VNA (1987), which already has a robust production of short films and documentaries, but also more recent projects such as *Instituto Caitu* [Caitu Institute] (2009) and *Vidas Paralelas* [Paralle Lives] (2010). This has its parallels in community-authorized and -enacted films such as *Two Laws* and the video work of Frances Jupurrurla celebrated by Eric Michaels in *For a Cultural Future* (1987).

southern region of Patagonia, close to the Strait of Magellan. *Alambrado* tells the story of a father of two who refuses to sell their land to an international company that plans to build an airstrip in the region. The tragic plot follows the reluctant single father trying to maintain an isolated life with his teenaged daughter and son. However, he does not hold a formal property title. Therefore, in his attempts to have the right to stay, he decides to build a fence around the property as evidence of improvement of the land. In this case, the fence represents his desperate attempt to hold his family together as well as to prevent the foreign invasion of his land and life. Marco Bechis's filmography is generally marked by political commitment of various kinds. Two of his other feature films, *Garage Olimpo* [Olympic Garage] (1999) and *Hijos* [English title Sons and Daughters] (2001), focus on the violence of state repression and assassination during the Argentine military dictatorship (1976–83).<sup>35</sup>

In the same way, *Birdwatchers* is a political film claiming a direct connection with real events. The project was a result of a meeting between the film director and the Guaraní-Kaiowá people through the office of Nereu Schneider, a human rights lawyer. After the initial contact, Bechis lived for two months with Indigenous activist Ambrósio Vilhava, who plays Nadio, the leading character of the film. Indigenous people with no previous professional acting experience formed the main cast. During the filming the Indigenous crew was encouraged to collaborate in the script, especially by suggesting changes to bring it closer to their way of life. In an interview, the activist and debutant actor Vilhava expressed his motivation for participating in the film as follows: "I always dreamed that one day we could show what our situation is like and tell the story of all of our relatives who have been murdered, mistreated and who have never seen justice".<sup>36</sup>

The Guaraní-Kaiowá ancestral lands are situated in a major agribusiness region of contemporary Brazil. The presence of Indigenous peoples on these fertile lands is seen as an impediment to progress by commodity exporters, who have lobbied the government to ignore the

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<sup>35</sup> Marcos Bechis' political commitment is evident in *Garage Olimpo* (1999), his most successful feature film, about the secret torture and murder during the military dictatorship of people in clandestine prisons, and whose bodies were thrown to sea. The film focuses on the journey of Maria, a young political leftist militant, tortured in the clandestine prison known as Garage Olimpo. The enduring violence inflicted on her, via physical and psychological torture, encapsulates the violence that many suffered at that time. Another of Bechis' feature films, *Hijos* (2001), is almost a sequel to *Garage Olimpo*. It also touches on the theme of the dictatorship, but this time focusing on the surviving children of those who were killed during the military regime, many of whom were thrown alive out of airplanes into the sea such that their bodies would never be found. The film shows the struggle of Javier, one of many orphans who were adopted and raised by military families. The plot revolves around Javier's anguish after he discovers that his adoptive father was a pilot of one of the military planes used to kill political prisoners and was possibly involved in the murder of Javier's biological parents.

<sup>36</sup> Tom Phillips, "Birdwatchers: A tribe's fight for justice," *The Guardian*, 11 September 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/sep/11/birdwatchers>, accessed 20 January 2015. It is worth noting here this film's parallel to Philip Noyce's first feature film, *Backroads* (1977) which is credited as 'the first film featuring Aboriginal people where Aboriginal people had a significant say in the making of the film'. See 'Backroads: Koori History Special Feature', accessed 6.4.2018 <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/backroads/history/history.html>

Indigenous plight and delay plans to demarcate ancestral territories. Brazilian Euro-descendant farmers in the region have also illegally employed armed gunmen to threaten Guaraní-Kaiowá families and even murder Indigenous leaders. Although the film *Birdwatchers* focuses on the specific struggles of contemporary Guaraní-Kaiowá in Southern Brazil, it alludes to the ongoing violence and tension that has characterised the relationship between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in the land we know today as Brazil, immemorially known by the various Tupí-Guaraní peoples through the toponym *Pindorama* — *Terra das Palmeiras* [Land of the Palm Trees].

## 2.5 Deforestation and Land Conflicts in *Birdwatchers*

There were an estimated five million Indigenous peoples in the land known today as Brazil before the beginning of Portuguese colonisation in the sixteenth century (Garcia 2011, 32). Official data shows that Indigenous peoples in Brazil form 305 ethnic groups speak at least 274 different languages (IBGE 2010). Of the Brazilian Indigenous peoples, the Guaraní are one of the most representative Indigenous nations of the Americas. This is not just because they are one of the largest groups but also because their traditional territories extend beyond the Brazil's national borders into Bolivia, Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay. The Guaraní population is divided into several ethnic subgroups including Kaiowá, Nandeva and Mbyá. Among them, the Guaraní-Kaiowá people have made international headlines because of the escalating violence associated with conflicts over land between themselves and cattle ranchers and soy and sugarcane farmers. As noted above, these conflicts resulted in the murdering and evictions of Indigenous leaders, such as Nisio Gomes, Osmair Martins Ximenes, Genivaldo Vera, Ortiz Lopes, Kuretê Lopez and Marcos Verón.<sup>37</sup>

While the Guaraní-Kaiowá people continue to pressure the government to demarcate their *tekoha* (traditional territory of their ancestors), FUNAI, the state's agency for Indigenous peoples, gives them the option to move to existing overcrowded reserves nearby. From a Guaraní-Kaiowá perspective, however, this is an impossible offer. The *tekoha* is an extension of the community itself. People and lands are forever bound together, from previous generations to future ones. Moreover, the

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<sup>37</sup> Nisio Gomes: "Brazil Indigenous Guarani leader Nisio Gomes killed,"

*BBC NEWS*, 19 November 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-15799712>, accessed 12 December 2014. Osmair Martins Ximenes: "Brazilian Guarani tortured and murdered," *Survival International*, 22 December 2009, <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/5389>, accessed 14 December 2014. Genivaldo Vera: "Indigenous teacher missing in Brazil after violence over ancestral lands," *Amnesty International*, 13 November 2009, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/11/indigenous-teacher-missing-brazil-after-violence-over-ancestral-lands-20091113/>, accessed 27 February 2018. Ortiz Lopes: "The Independent Reports: Brazil's Deadly Land Wars put Indigenous Leaders in Firing Line," *The Independent*, 23 July 2007, <http://www.mstbrazil.org/news/07232007-independent-reports-brazils-deadly-land-wars-put-Indigenous-leaders-firing-line>, accessed 14 December 2014. Kuretê Lopez: "Guarani Indian woman killed by gunman," *Survival International*, 12 January 2007, <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/2157>, accessed 14 December 2014. Marcos Verón: "Chief Marcos Verón: Brazilian Indian leader who died fighting for his people's rights," *The Guardian*, 28 January 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2003/jan/28/guardianobituaries>, accessed 12 December 2014.

areas associated with the reserves are too small to offer economic and cultural conditions necessary for their survival. As a result, many decide to live in provisional camps, set up between busy highways and the barbed-wire fences of the farms built over their country (Pereira 2006). One of the main consequences of this displacement is that suicide rates among Guaraní-Kaiowá are high not only when compared to those of other Brazilian nationals but also to those of any other population (Indigenous or not) of any country in the world. From 2006-2010 reports revealed a suicide rate of 76.4 per 100 000, contrasted with 6.9 per 100 000 for non-Indigenous people of the same region (Azuero et al. 2017).

In 2012, the Guaraní-Kaiowá people tried to call international attention to their tragic situation by sending an open letter to the Brazilian Government and its High Court. This poignant letter explained that they preferred a collective death as a nation than to be forced to leave their provisional camp, alongside of the *Rio Hovy* [Hovy River], near their *tekoha* Pyelito Kue/Mbarakay.<sup>38</sup> The letter was published just after a judicial decision forced them to evacuate the private property on which their provisional camp was set up. In a further response to the Brazilian justice system, this group of 570 Guaraní-Kaiowá refused to leave, stating that they would rather to die fighting for their land and for the right to have their bodies buried alongside their ancestors. This unbearable circumstance provoked a national and international commotion; leading to a social media campaign based on the slogan *Somos todos Guarani Kaiowá* [We are all Guaraní-Kaiowá].<sup>39</sup> Eventually, after widespread media activism and solidarity, the High Court revoked its decision. However, to this day, this group of Guaraní-Kaiowá remain homeless on the roadside, suffering from humiliation and violence directed at them by the farmers, while they continue waiting for the acknowledgement of their right to return to their *tekoha* just across the guarded fences.<sup>40</sup>

Guaraní-Kaiowá people are the main characters in the film *Birdwatchers* (Marco Bechis, 2008). It is noteworthy that the three different renditions of the title in Italian, Portuguese and English each have quite different meanings. The original Italian title *La Terra Degli Uomini Rossi* [The land of the Red Men] directly depicts Indigenous people as the owners of the land. The idea of belonging is reinforced in the implicit association between the redness that characterises the soil of the south of

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<sup>38</sup> The complete letter can be accessed at [https://docs.google.com/document/d/13L7SeDeSDgORmPl8VA10e45PJLv5ZEDSbD-Y\\_lsxmM/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/document/d/13L7SeDeSDgORmPl8VA10e45PJLv5ZEDSbD-Y_lsxmM/edit?pli=1)

<sup>39</sup> “Worldwide Protests for Brazil’s Indigenous Guarani-Kaiowá,” *Global Voices*, 28 November 2012, <http://globalvoicesonline.org/2012/11/28/worldwide-protests-for-brazils-indigenous-guarani-kaiowa/>, accessed 14 December 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Teresa Amaral/Aty Guasu, “Resistência Guarani-Kaiowá: Comunidades Kurusu Amba e Pyelito Kue começam a cavar covas,” [Guarani-Kaiowá Resistance: Communities Kurusu Amba and Pyelito Kue begin to dig pits] *Amazônia Legal em Foco* (blog), 30 October 2014, <http://odescortinardaamazonia.blogspot.com.au/2014/10/resistencia-guarani-kaiowa-comunidades.html> accessed 12 January 2015.

Brazil and the Indigenous skin tone. Created for European audiences, the Italian title used a familiar colonial trope of the supposed “red” skin of Indigenous peoples (in contrast to the “white” skin of Europeans, “black” of Africans and “yellow” of Asians)—though it is important to note that the use of this expression is seen by many Indigenous peoples as problematic because of its obvious connection with colonial times.

However, in contrast to conventional interpretations, author Nancy Shoemaker (1997) argues that the first European colonists actually used other terms, such as “brown of skin” and “tawny”, to describe Indigenous populations (628–29). She explains that it was only in dialogues between Indigenous peoples and English and French explorers during the eighteenth century that the term “red” applied to Indigenous people began to appear in historical sources (629). Based on historical evidence, she raises the hypothesis that the expression “redskin” originated in a specific group of Indigenous people who coined it as a way to differentiate themselves from European settlers. Accordingly, contrary to Eurocentric narratives, Indigenous peoples were the agents of their own identification rather than victims of colonial discourse.<sup>41</sup> Concerning the use of this expression, Hilger (1986) argues that it was only during the popularisation of Hollywood westerns (1920–70) that the association of Indigenous peoples as ‘red-skinned’ assumed a negative connotation. In the fictional North-American West, redness became associated with the supposed inherently bloody and aggressive nature of Indian warriors (diminishing their campaigns to protect their lands and cultural ways of life).

In any case, the Italian title may also be interpreted as an attempt to reappropriate the expression. It certainly reinforces the deep connection between Indigenous people and their ancestral land. By contrast, the idea of Indigenous land rights is completely absent from the Portuguese title for the film. Brazilian audiences know the film simply as *Terra Vermelha* [Red Land]. This shorter title may have been chosen to underscore the red hue of Brazil’s southwestern lands, especially as a sad reminder of the intense reds of the bare land after deforestation. However, the adjective red is more likely an allusion to the recurrent land conflicts between Indigenous peoples and farmers, which has resulted in the killing of many Guaraní-Kaiowá.<sup>42</sup> The shorter title, therefore, is better interpreted as a

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<sup>41</sup> Nancy Shoemaker (1997) does a comparative analysis between Indigenous peoples in the northeast and southeast of the United States. She develops two hypotheses to explain the origins of why Indigenous peoples were called “red”. In both, she argues that Indigenous peoples were responsible for calling themselves “redskins”. The first hypothesis was that they claimed to be “red” in order to differentiate themselves from the European peoples, who self-declared themselves as “white” and Africans slaves as “black”. The second hypothesis suggests that some Indigenous groups were already being called “red” by other ones, before European colonisation. In both cases, the author claims that red was a “logical category” conveniently adopted by Indigenous groups from the past and also in the present as a way of uniting a heterogeneous group of peoples (629). However, the author out points that this does not mean that the association with red skin is not contested nowadays, as the white settlers appropriated the term and gave it its current depreciatory meanings and uses, such as in the ongoing debates about the name of the US football team Washington Redskins.

<sup>42</sup> In 2008, year that *Birdwatchers* was released, 42 Guaraní-Kaiowá were killed in Mato Grosso do Sul (CIMI



grievance: that a land is red because it is soaked and stained with blood. On the other hand, the English title *Birdwatchers* avoids any reference either to the land or to Indigenous people. Rather, it focuses on the tourists that travel to Brazil for the expensive hobby of birdwatching. Furthermore, as foreigners visit the forest to watch native birds from a safe distance, the film's title also works as an ironic metaphor of the external gaze that most people have of Indigenous peoples and their issues.

Also, it is unavoidable to relate the title *Birdwatchers* to the colonial expression "blackbirding". This term is mostly associated with what began as an illegal and uncontrolled recruitment of Indigenous peoples to work on sugar and cotton plantations across Australia and the Pacific Islands (Connell 2007). Although blackbirding was initiated through a phase of kidnapping/forced labour, it was subsequently established under British Colonial Office pressure as a recruitment scheme with very low pay and restrictions on freedom. Clive Moore (1981, 610) calls these harsh capitalist conditions "cultural kidnapping", once the lack of information trapped the Islanders into a "legal system [that] operated in their employers' favour". Indeed, they were controlled/restricted in terms of travelling, drinking and buying land, and were exposed to medical treatments influenced by racist theories and their children forced into education in Christian missions (Moore 1981). Coming back to the English title, as the film develops, different from Pacific blackbirding, the practice of birdwatching does not involve any direct interaction with Indigenous peoples. For the tourists that come to Brazil to see native birds in the forest, Indigenous people are just part of the landscape. The director depicts tourists displaying a curious but distanced gaze towards Indigenous people. As I will describe, the film's opening scene invites viewers to see through tourist binoculars, reminding audiences of their own indifference towards the Guaraní-Kaiowá struggles.

The first scene in *Birdwatchers* is an overview of its main stage: the tropical rainforests of Mato Grosso do Sul, a state in the central part of Brazil. The aerial shot of a large river is followed by the soundtrack of animals (mammals, birds and insects), recalling the biodiversity of South America's tropical rainforests. The animal sounds are suddenly superimposed by that of a loud motorboat carrying a group of tourists, all of which handle a pair of binoculars and are dressed in army-like camouflage gear and hats. They are depicted as the stereotypical urban tourists visiting the Amazon region for the first time. With the camera focused on the lush tropical vegetation, we as viewers are invited like the tourists themselves to take a seat in the boat and look at the forest through a foreign gaze. This strategy is reinforced by one of the opening lines of the script, when a tourist points to the forest, exclaiming in amazement: *Veja!* [Look at this!]. Through a visual recitation of ethnographic tradition, the camera then shows a group of half-naked and face-painted Indigenous people coming out of the bush and staring steadily at the boat. The two parties exchange suspicious looks, and the

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2008, 59).

Indigenous group begins to shoot arrows at the boat. Even though the arrows end up in the river, they are depicted as sufficiently dangerous for the boat captain to speed away for the safety of his urban clients.

As soon as the boat leaves, the diegetic sounds are replaced by non-diegetic classical music. The piece is *Sacris Solemnis* composed by Domenico Zipoli (1688–1726), an Italian missionary and musician that worked with the Guaraní people in a Jesuit reduction. The music played at this point has a particular meaning. As anthropologist Alcida Ramos (1998) explains, the Jesuit reductions or missions were created during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as part of the Church's mission to acculturate and evangelise the Indigenous population. Thousands of Indigenous people were forcibly removed from their native lands and relocated to large-scale settlements governed by Jesuit missionaries. The control of Indigenous social and private lives by Christian missionaries included the compulsory teaching of the colonial language, religion, culture and arts. Internal revolts, external slave raids and the spread of contagious European diseases resulted in extremely high death rates and even the extinction of certain Indigenous groups. These factors constantly challenged the stability of these Jesuit missions. The use of Domenico Zipoli's song in the film connects past to present. It reminds the viewer of the ongoing nature of the colonial legacy endured by Indigenous peoples in contemporary Brazil. Another possible interpretation for the selection of this specific track is the director's awareness that, just as the Italian Jesuit Zipoli had introduced European art (through the teaching of Baroque instruments) to Guaraní in colonial times, he himself, also of Italian descent, was bringing another foreign art (cinema) to the Guaraní-Kaiowá. Therefore, the film director also makes the viewer aware that she/he is seeing the Indigenous people through an external gaze.

As the scene continues, the music accompanies the image of an Indigenous group leaving the forest and walking toward a highway. There, they meet with a woman with a four-wheel drive who hands them payment for their performance for the tourists. After complaining that it was less than the agreed amount, the Indigenous group jumps into the back of the pick-up truck. As it begins to move, they don urban clothing overtop of the native dress.

There is a shocking contrast between the first image of the Indigenous group dressed in traditional outfits and using rudimentary bows and arrows in the forest and the one of the same group negotiating money, dressed in western clothing and riding in the back of a pick-up truck. It explicitly invites viewers to rethink the stereotypical, romantic and idealised images of Indigenous people living in a frozen past reality. Rather, viewers are to reflect upon the current postcolonial and decolonising condition of contemporary Indigenous peoples in Brazil. In this way, they are portrayed differently from the ubiquitous images of native peoples still living as they were at time of the colonisers' arrival. The notion that Indigenous cultures have not progressed and remain frozen in the past is closely related to national myths constructed by the Brazilian Romantic art movement in the nineteenth

century.<sup>43</sup> Through both literary and visual works, Brazilian Romantic artists portrayed the sacrifice of Indigenous peoples, as though they were predestined to die in order for a Brazilian national identity to emerge (Schwarcz 2003). Based on the presupposition that “stronger” European blood would prevail over ‘weaker’ Indigenous blood, the Brazilian population was seen as naturally mixed (Schwarcz 1999). This Romantic tradition also built on the popular nineteenth-century trope of the Indigenous ‘noble savage’, who was uncorrupted by urban societies and still lived in an unadulterated natural state. Although many decades have passed, the Romantic tradition of seeing Indigenous peoples as having ‘pure’ cultures and as dying (or dead) races is still strong in Brazil. For example, most Brazilians still associate the Indigenous lifestyle with jungles and traditional feather-and-seed dress. This is very different from the situation of First Nations in places like New Zealand or the United States. Indeed, many Brazilians have difficulty accepting that Indigenous peoples can be urban dwellers and make use of modern technologies yet remain Indigenous while doing so.

The opening scene of *Birdwatchers* thus challenges viewers to reflect on this common stereotype. There, Indigenous peoples are portrayed alongside key elements of modern capitalism—a car, factory-made clothing, money. In showing Indigenous people using these elements, the film engages directly with the recurrent opinion of bigoted Brazilians that would deny Indigeneity of any person that lives in urban areas or uses Western items such as mobile phones, shoes and urban clothing. *Birdwatchers* addresses in various ways the recent increase in both murders of Indigenous leaders and the alarming suicide rates among their youth.<sup>44</sup> The sensitive theme of Indigenous suicide is referenced in the scene where two Indigenous teenagers, Irineu (Ademilson Concianza Verga) and Osvaldo (Pedro Abrísio da Silva, Guaraní name: Chirivy Poty’i), find two girls hanging from the trees. The community gathers for their burial, and one of the girls’ mothers throws her personal belongings, including a mobile phone and plastic bracelets, into the pit beside her. These objects may be interpreted as signs of the influence of non-Indigenous society upon the lives of the Indigenous teenagers and the possible negative effects on them. Later, after being reprimanded by his father for wasting money buying fancy sports shoes instead of food, Irineu commits suicide hanging himself in

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<sup>43</sup> Examples of Indigenous people portrayed as a vanishing race are present in novels by José de Alencar, such as *O Guarani* [The Guarani] (1857) and *Iracema* (1865), both of which narrate “cross-racial heterosexual romance—Indian men loving white women (*O Guarani*) or Indian women loving white men (*Iracema*)—as the generative matrix of a mestiço nation” (Stam 1997, 12). In these two romances the Indigenous protagonists die, leaving symbolic space for a new race to be born: the Brazilians. Paintings from the same period, such as Victor Meirelles’s *Moema* (1866) and Rodolfo Amoedo’s *O Último Tamoio* [The Last Tamoio] (1883), portrayed Indigenous individuals as the main character while also representing them in a dying state (Sadlier 2008).

<sup>44</sup> Jonathan Watts, “Brazil tribe plagued by one of the highest suicide rates in the world,” *The Guardian*, 10 October 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/10/suicide-rates-high-brazil-tribe>, accessed 12 January 2015.

the same way as did the girls. The two scenes draw attention to the negative effects of the Western way of life on Indigenous societies, such as individualism and consumerism.

Aware of these problems, after the girls' burial, the shaman leader Nhanderú<sup>45</sup> (Nelson Concianza) warns the community to leave the Indigenous reserve and move back to their *tekoha* (native territory) otherwise they will die. *Tekoha* is a key word in the film because of the centrality of this concept to Guaraní cosmogony. *Tekoha* does not only include the physical space, objects and living beings—including lands, waters, plants and animals—in contact with past and present Guaraní. Rather it is also fundamental for Guaraní to accomplish their *teko* (way of life), as the existence of a sacred territory is a prerequisite for the continuity of their economic, social and religious practices (Dussel 1994, 122). Although fundamental for the Guaraní survival, they have been displaced from their *tekoha*, initially by colonial settlers, and in recent times by corporate farmers whose development model is based on maximum exploitation of natural resources.

In the film, the conflict between these two antagonistic ways of understanding and belonging to a territory is shown in the scene where Nadio (Ambrósio Vilhalva, Guaraní name: Kunumi Taperendi) shares with his group the meaning of the word *tekoha*. Leaning against the fence, Nadio explains that what white farmers see as commercially lucrative land is actually sacred memorial site where their ancestors were buried and, consequently, where present and future generations would also need to be put to rest. Despite Nadio's claims, huge irrigation machines in the background show that the contemporary *tekoha* is part of a large-scale agribusiness enterprise.

Despite all the risks, the Guaraní-Kaiowá group decides to settle alongside their *tekoha* in provisional camps made of sticks, stones and rough canvas. While the camp is being set up, two Indigenous teenagers, Irineu and Osvaldo, jump over the farm's fence and head to the property's remaining piece of native forest. They go on a hunt for food for the rest of the group. However, the only animal that they manage to kill is a runaway cow that was ensconced in the bush. The shaman leader Nhanderú is not happy after the boys return with their prey. He tries to teach them a lesson by reminding them that although the jaguar and the snake have the power to kill, they are still friends and have lived together with the Guaraní for thousands of years. But he warns that cows should be seen as enemies because they live off the death and destruction of Indigenous lands. After hearing Nhanderú's tale, the young Osvaldo stubbornly replies that there are no animals left to hunt. During the entire film, there are no images of wild animals. The sterile landscape of the film, in this way, contrasts significantly with the world-famous postcard images of colourful and vibrant Brazilian

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<sup>45</sup> According to Guaraní cosmology, Nhanderú is the name of their main creator. First the world was perfect, and everybody lived as gods, but due to widespread misbehaviour, a huge flood destroyed this former world. Nhanderú then created the world anew as it is now, imperfect, unstable and susceptible to new destructions (Neira 2008).

rainforest flora and fauna. The scenery throughout the film is relentlessly monotonous and arid and the only animals constantly caught on camera are the omnipresent cattle. In the film, the once luxurious and biodiverse Indigenous traditional lands are reduced to a desert occupied by herds of grass-fed cows.

Brazil is a world leader in meat exports. Its annual international trade in beef is estimated to be around 2.03 million metric tonnes.<sup>46</sup> Agricultural lands in Southern Brazil, when not used for raising livestock, are generally planted in soybeans, which is also used as a protein source to feed farm animals. Rich entrepreneurs in the region have been accused of vast deforestation, both for clearing land for extensive farming and for the construction of dams necessary for the development of other industries such as mining. In the film, the core of the land conflict between Indigenous people and farmers is expressed in the exchange between Nadio and the farmer Moreira. The latter grabs a handful of soil and proudly exclaims that his father arrived on that land more than sixty years ago. He adds that his family has owned the land for three generations, expending money and labour to make it productive. He concludes by saying that his family's ownership of the land also produces food for Brazilians to eat. In reply, through a silent act, Nadio also grabs soil with his bare hands. Not saying a word, he opens his mouth and eats it. Through this unexpected gesture, he highlights a difference between Indigenous peoples' relationship of being intrinsically part of the land versus the distanced and exploitative relation of the farmer with his property. The mute action of the Indigenous leader can be interpreted as a form of shouting at the farmer: while you claim to be the owner of the land, I am the land. The land is not my property. It is an extension of my body.

This scene in *Birdwatchers* has analogies with the above-mentioned dialogue between the Indigenous tracker and the white farmer in Perkins's *One Night the Moon*. Both films explore cross-cultural conflicts resulting from opposing perceptions of belonging to and owning the land. In *Birdwatchers*, in retaliation against the Indigenous group's attempt to remain close to their *tekoha*, the farmer's private militia murders Nadio. Following the loss of his uncle, a drunk and inconsolable Osvaldo heads to the front of the farmer's house. In cathartic fashion, he screams out that he knows who has ordered Nadio's assassination. After crying out his anger, he walks alone to the forest and tries to commit suicide. However, at the last minute, he changes his mind, saying out loud: *Eu ganhei e você perdeu* [I won, and you lost]. With these words Osvaldo is not responding to the farmer but to Angue, a spirit that attacks vulnerable souls. In the film, Angue is depicted as the main figure responsible for the suicides of Irineu and the two girls. Angue targets those who are psychologically

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<sup>46</sup> For more on this, see "Beef Exports to the Middle East: Can Australia Compete With Brazil?", Future Directions International, 18 June 2014, <http://www.futuredirections.org.au/publications/food-and-water-crises/28-global-food-and-water-crises-swa/1752-beef-exports-to-the-middle-east-can-australia-compete-with-brazil.html#sthash.c9aQtrEo.dpuf> accessed 27 Feb 2018.

fragile or have lost their identity. When Osvaldo affirms that he has beaten Angue, he is stating that he is still strong enough to survive.

The final scene of *Birdwatchers* is a panoramic view of the remaining native forest inside the farm's perimeter. The camera gently follows the treetops until the greenery abruptly stops, revealing a huge deforested area. The aerial shot of a bare red land shows only a single remaining tree standing, surrounded by an eroded desert. The scene draws attention to the analogous condition of Osvaldo and the remaining tree. Both stand alone, uncertain of their survival in the face of the ever-growing power of agribusiness in the region.

Sadly, the scenes of brutality against Indigenous peoples seen in *Birdwatchers* are not far from current reality. Thousands of Guaraní-Kaiowá peoples are still living in improvised and precarious tents along highways. While under constant psychological and physical threat from farmers, they refuse to leave until they obtain legal recognition of their land rights. In fact, the tragic stories of some characters are based on real-life events experienced by the actors who interpret them. For example, similar to his character Nadio, the actor Ambrósio Vilhalva was a Guaraní political leader who led struggles for the recognition of Guaraní ancestral lands. Unfortunately, just as with his character, his life ended in tragedy soon after the film's release. He was stabbed to death in 2013 for causes that remain unclear but that most likely have to do with the defiant stance he took in relation to the farmers occupying the Guaraní-Kaiowá territory.<sup>47</sup> As the main advocates for Indigenous rights, Indigenous leaders have been the main targets of violence. By eliminating key leaders, farmers think they will dishearten the community as a whole. So far, this strategy has proved unsuccessful. Despite the collective sorrow, for every Indigenous leader that has fallen, others have risen to follow in their footsteps.

These murders undertaken on behalf of landowners point to one of the differences between Australia and Brazil: the rule of law and the extent of the exercising of that law. In Australia, although "all sorts of private brutality persisted," the last officially recorded murder of political leaders and activists by private militias and individuals occurred during the Coniston Massacre of 1928 (Reynolds 2013, 49). Indeed, the central issue in Australia is Indigenous peoples' deaths in custody. This is directly related to a disproportionate number of prisoners in Australia that are Indigenous.<sup>48</sup> In Brazil,

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<sup>47</sup> Fiona Watson/Survival, "Ambrósio Vilhalva, 1960–2013—an obituary," *Survival*, 11 December 2013, <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/9826>, accessed 20 January 2015.

<sup>48</sup> A Royal Commission was created to investigate Aboriginal deaths in custody from 1980 to 1989. The RCIADIC's findings exposed the alarming "Indigenous inequality before the law" (Brown and Wilkie 2002, 25). It showed that although the Aboriginal population represents only about 1.1% of Australia's total population, it represents 29% of prisoners. It made 339 recommendations to prevent Aboriginal deaths in custody. However, these have not been successfully adopted. A later report on Indigenous deaths in custody between 1989 and 1996 states that "Indigenous people are twice as likely as non-Indigenous people to be arrested in circumstances where assault occasioning no harm is the most serious offence. They are three times more likely to be imprisoned for such an offence. This indicates that provocative policing is continuing through

deaths through murder and assassination by private-sector actors are also not official but recurrent. This is mainly due to the inconsistencies between the legal system and government policies. Indeed, in Brazil, the state is often incompetent or unwilling to enforce the laws related to Indigenous customary rights. As written in the 1988 Brazilian Constitution, Indigenous lands are considered to be those territories

*são terras tradicionalmente ocupadas pelos índios as por eles habitadas em caráter permanente, as utilizadas para suas atividades produtivas, as imprescindíveis à preservação dos recursos ambientais necessários a seu bem-estar e as necessárias a sua reprodução física e cultural, segundo seus usos, costumes e tradições.* (Artigo 231, parágrafo primeiro)

[traditionally occupied by indigenous people in permanent fashion, those utilised for productive activities, those necessary to the preservation of natural resources on which they depend, and those necessary to their well-being, and physical and cultural reproduction, according to their habits and tradition] (Cited in Carvalho 2000, 468).

However, the acknowledgement of constitutional Indigenous rights has not always resulted in the formal/effective demarcation of lands. This contrast between the written law and law enforcement cannot be understood without considering the lobbying activities of mining companies and farmers—many of whom occupy strategic government positions as congressmen and ministers—with a high interest in the appropriation of Indigenous lands. By opposing these interests, Indigenous peoples have been even more successful than have those responsible for uninhabited parks in protecting tropical forests and pausing deforestation (Schwartzman, Moreira and Nepstad 2000).

In the context of increasing debates about the tragic consequences of global ecocide and climate change, Indigenous peoples have claimed that their knowledge and ways of life might offer solutions to Western-type development models. Indigenous activism tends to highlight their deep connection with the environment and their more sustainable way of life, which they see as less destructive than non-Indigenous models of development based on the logic of increasing production and consumption of goods associated with some forms of contemporary agribusiness and strip mining. As discussed in this chapter, many Indigenous peoples define themselves as belonging to the land rather than owning it. Because of this holistic interconnection between their bodies and their lands, Indigenous peoples often argue that they are natural protectors of the land. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, an Indigenous activist and former chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), argues that a great part of the world's "natural capital", such as oil, gas, timber and minerals, is situated in lands

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the use of the trifecta (offensive language, resist arrest and assault occasioning no harm)". See Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, "Indigenous Deaths in Custody: Report Summary", 1996, [https://www.humanrights.gov.au/social\\_justice/publications/deaths\\_custody/report\\_summary.html](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/publications/deaths_custody/report_summary.html), accessed 2 June 2015.

inhabited, managed and protected by Indigenous peoples (Mowforth 2014, 152). In this sense, the Indigenous struggle for land rights touches on environmental and development issues, as I will discuss in a comparative analysis of the two main films studied here, *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers*.

## **2.6 The Struggle for Land Rights across Indigenous Peoples.**

Both *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers* have similar opening sequences: an aerial view of their main stages. In the case of *Mabo*, just after television footage of the historic High Court decision, the film shows a panoramic view of Eddie Koiki Mabo's homeland, Murray Island. There, the young Mabo learns from his father the first lessons about the importance of living in the traditional way, particularly of fishing and farming for survival. In *Birdwatchers*, the opening scene is a bird's-eye perspective of the tropical rainforest. Initially, the Indigenous characters appear to be living in the traditional way, in a natural environment and out of reach from urban influence. This romantic portrayal rapidly changes in the following scene, when they remove their 'traditional Indigenous outfits' and receive payment for their touristic performance.

Although each film uses a different approach, both deal with the complex theme of tradition and its maintenance in the present. In *Mabo*, the opening scene containing idyllic childhood memories sets the importance of his homeland for his future struggles. Koiki Mabo carries fond memories of Murray Island throughout his adult life, which fuel his strength to continue his struggle for land rights. In *Birdwatchers*, though, the 'traditional' Indigenous habits are depicted as 'staged' products that satisfy foreign tourists' curiosity and prejudices. Ironically, they are forced to re-enact stereotypical visions of an Indigenous traditional lifestyle to provide a means for their survival in a world largely intolerant of their Indigenous traditions. Although still deeply connected with their *tekoha*, they are not able to perform their sacred traditional rites. Nonetheless, in order to survive, they perform a convincing mock ceremony, which is captured by the lenses of awed tourists. Though each film takes a distinct approach to dealing with the theme of traditional life, the main spaces of *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers*—respectively, Murray Island and the Brazilian rainforest—are central to both films' narratives. The actions and motivations of all characters are directly related to the feelings of either belonging to or possessing those spaces.

Another similarity is that both films include dialogue spoken in Indigenous and colonial languages. This strategy underlines the bilingual (even polyglot) condition of postcolonial Indigenous peoples, who speak at least one traditional language but are also proficient in the relevant European colonial language. In the case of *Mabo*, the film is in Meriam Mir and English; in *Birdwatchers* it is in Guaraní and Portuguese. In both films, the use of European languages alongside Indigenous ones asserts a powerful Indigenous presence and signals their respective cultural persistence. This usage also pushes their Brazilian and Australian spectators outside of their comfort zones *in their own*



*country* by forcing them to read subtitles, as most of them, including me, are only able to understand the colonial language. The multilingual scripting is then a way of lining up, so to speak, Indigenous and European cultures, situating them in equivalent power positions. As Fanon (1991, 18) has argued the acquisition and teaching of European languages by and to Indigenous peoples has always been central to the colonial project:

Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards.

In this sense, the use of Indigenous languages in both films is a reminder that, despite all homogenising efforts by modern nation-states to acculturate Indigenous populations, Indigenous cultures have survived. In a reversal of colonial direction, the films also provoke audiences who speak European languages to experience, momentarily, the position of being the 'Other'.

Another convergence between the two films is their focus on the sensitive theme of alcoholism among Indigenous people. In *Mabo*, in the opening scenes, Koiki Mabo is banned from Murray Island for disrespecting certain Christian moral codes, including alcohol intake. He meets his future wife, Bonita, during this period of frequent drinking. They are at Bonita's cousin's party. Mabo is completely inebriated, breaks a bottle of spirits, and is eventually expelled from the party. As he drags himself back home, walking in the gloom of lonely streets, a police officer stops him. Although not arrested, he is humiliated.

After the police inspection, he is allowed to continue his walk and ends up stopping over the train tracks. There, he performs a traditional dance from Murray Island. This is the moment when Mabo overcomes his alcohol addiction. The scene is symbolic: the act of dancing is represented as Mabo's reconnection to his Indigenous identity, replacing humiliation with pride. From this point in the narrative on, Mabo never again appears drunk. Even when he tries twice to buy drinks at a bar, the owner refuses to sell him any alcohol. These scenes make reference to state law enforced during the 1960s, which restricted Aboriginal people from drinking in public spaces and using liquor stores (McCorquodale 1984).<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Perkins's film touches on the difficulties faced by Aboriginals

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<sup>49</sup> The change in legislation did not include Aboriginal people living on reserves or missions. They were only allowed to drink from the 1970s onwards (Barber, Punt and Albers 1988). However, as soon as the ban on drinks was lifted, the number of bars and especially liquor takeaway stores in Aboriginal communities increased significantly. This contributed to problems related to alcohol addiction and violence, requiring a series of measures by community members (of Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek) and governments (of Queensland and the Northern Territory). These included the creation of several alcohol-restricted areas, especially near Aboriginal communities. Alcohol-banned areas and other restrictions are criticised by those who argue that focusing on rehabilitation programs and other support services, not on alcohol intake, would

trying to overcome their drug addiction while, at the same time, facing the burdens of racial profiling and discrimination. As discussed by Marcia Langton (1993a), the popular stereotype of the Aboriginal's addiction to alcohol predates the 1960s laws by many decades; rather it is another "colonial construction" (196) tied to the ethnocentric Western presupposition that "Aboriginal society [was] dysfunctional" as a whole (205). By laying the blame for alcoholism on Aboriginal people themselves, Langton argues that the caricature of the drunken Aboriginal erases the role that British settlers played in presenting and seducing Indigenous people to use this drug. So, while European settlers acted as colonial drug dealers, they also constructed the widespread narrative, which portrays Aboriginal people as victims of their own vices and addiction. As McKnight (2002, 16–17) notes, although Indigenous people already consumed beverages that contained alcohol or even mind-expanding ingredients, "what distinguished the alcohol introduced by Europeans was its extraordinary volume and that consumption was a feature of everyday life". Current studies agree that there are no specific ethnic groups who are more genetically predisposed or physically vulnerable to alcohol addiction than others. If certain Indigenous groups today face higher alcoholism rates, this issue can only be understood as a historical–cultural phenomenon directly related to the legacies of colonialism, including their violent dispossession of from their territories and forced acculturation.<sup>50</sup> A look at Australian drinking statistics could indeed dismiss stereotypes, as non-Aboriginal people on average are more likely to drink than Aboriginal people. The issue is that Aboriginal people are more likely to consume alcohol in harmful ways, especially larger quantities of individual intake.

Alcohol addiction among Indigenous peoples is also a recurring problem in Brazil. However, unlike Australia where discriminatory laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol apart from those enforced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been rescinded, a discriminatory law prohibiting the sale of drinks to Indigenous peoples is still in force.<sup>51,52</sup> *Birdwatchers* has many scenes depicting the negative impact of alcohol on Indigenous communities. In one of them, deprived of money to buy supermarket food, a Guaraní-Kaiowá group agrees to exchange their ox cart for grocery items. Satisfied with the deal, the market owner also offers alcohol to Nadio, the group's leader.

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be a better approach to reducing drug addiction (Hudson 2011).

<sup>50</sup> For research on the lack of data to support genetic theories of racial liability to alcohol in Indigenous populations, see Schaefer 1981; Hunter 1993; Thatcher 2004; Garcia-Andrade, Wall and Ehlers 1997.

<sup>51</sup> Law No. 6.001, 19 December 1973, declares that it is a crime to provide, by any means, alcoholic beverages to Indigenous peoples living in reserves or in isolated communities, with the penalty of detention from six months to two years. [http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/leis/16001.htm](http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/16001.htm), accessed 25 January 2015. Despite the law, alcohol addiction is still one of the main factors related to violence, diseases and death among Indigenous peoples in Brazil (Gorgulho and Da Ros 2006; Guimarães and Grubits 2007).

<sup>52</sup> In an apparently coordinated campaign to highlight Indigenous people's addiction and vulnerability to alcohol consumption, repeated political statements and media coverage played a central role in Prime Minister John Howard's decision to adopt a series of restrictive laws through the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act in 2007 (NTERA). See Nicoll (2012) for more.

While they negotiate the transaction, at the back of the market, the Indigenous teenagers Irineu and Osvaldo open and drink a bottle of *cachaça* [Brazilian rum]. Later on, the same market owner appears at the provisional Indigenous campsite bordering the farm fence. He says that he came to offer them work, but it is actually a trap. By convincing the Indigenous group to leave their campsite, the market owner was helping the farmers, who will soon send their private militia to destroy the tents. Nadio foresees the destruction but is too drunk to react or play the role of a leader. As his Indigenous friends jump into the back of the pick-up truck and head to the promised work, Nadio falls to the floor, shouting and begging them to stay. This scene anticipates the catastrophic end of the Indigenous occupation. Soon after, Nadio is murdered and, with him, much of the hope that the remaining group would continue fighting to recover their traditional lands.

In contrast to Mabo, Nadio is not portrayed as a hero. He cannot overcome his addiction, properly represent their plight or competently fight for his people. In real life, both Mabo and Ambrósio, the actor who played Nadio, dedicated their lives to Indigenous activism, especially concerning land rights. Although departing from a common cause, in the films, the end of their lives could not be more different. In the biopic tradition, Mabo is shown as a man who overcomes all pressures that life throws at him and deserves to be remembered in posterity. In *Birdwatchers*, however, Nadio is portrayed as a failed leader who will soon be forgotten. This is not to say that the heroism of Indigenous struggles is not present in *Birdwatchers*. However, in contrast with *Mabo*, viewers of *Birdwatchers* are invited not to identify with the troubles or contradictions of isolated characters but rather to recognise that, despite individual shortcomings, their struggle as a group is honourable and legitimate.

The directors' different backgrounds may explain *Mabo's* focus on the power and charisma of individual characters and *Birdwatchers'* opting to highlight the need for and strength of collective action. Undoubtedly, in their respective contexts, both Perkins and Bechis are equally committed to Indigenous issues. However, the fact that Perkins is an Aboriginal filmmaker adds an insider's perspective to her film. She became close to Mabo's family, who frequented the film set and advised her on the script. As a result, Perkins was able to compose a biopic that gets viewers to feel that they are seeing the lands rights battle through Mabo's own eyes. On the other hand, while Bechis built a close relationship with his film's cast, he is not an Indigenous person, and this fact may explain why he chose a script that focuses on the general theme of Indigenous collective action rather than a narrative based on the life of any Indigenous individual. It is no coincidence that, as a cinematic strategy, he avoided personalised/intimate views of the Indigenous people in his film. By moving away from biographical accounts or isolated character plots, he turned the viewer's attention to the collective dramas of the Indigenous community. The director's choice can also be interpreted as an

attempt to create scenes in a more culturally sensitive manner that avoids displaying personal/intimate information about the community or individual lives.

Australia produces a considerably higher number of Indigenous films than does Brazil. However, in both countries—and unlike Australia's near neighbour Aotearoa-New Zealand—Indigenous audio-visual self-representation is not yet at the same level as is the mainstream media representation of Indigenous groups. This is especially true considering the numbers of films made and funding received by Indigenous and non-Indigenous directors. The large number of images and content produced by state and corporate-owned media grew with the growth of Indigenous self-representation. Regarding this topic, Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton (1993b, 26) points out:

It is clearly unrealistic for Aboriginal people to expect that others will stop portraying us in photographs, films, on television, in newspapers, literature and so on. Increasingly, non-Aboriginal people want to make personal rehabilitative statements about the Aboriginal problem and to consume and reconsume the primitive (...) Rather than demanding an impossibility, it would be more useful to identify those points where it is possible to control the means of production and to make our own self-representations.

On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that Indigenous self-representations are not essentially good in and of themselves. After all, Indigenous self-representations are not exempt from falling into some of the same common racist or sexist stereotypes found in mainstream media. For example, although the strong relationship between Mabo and Bonita is emotionally moving and important to explain his activism, it also reinforces traditional phallogentric hero narratives. In this sense, Indigenous filmmakers face the same challenge, as do non-Indigenous filmmakers: to maintain critical positions regarding their own productions.

A last noteworthy similarity between these two films is their representation of the pride in being Indigenous. To urban spectators used to Western-capitalist signs of wealth, at first glance, Indigenous characters appear as materially deprived and belonging to a low-income class. However, soon viewers realise that Indigenous peoples are portrayed differently from the 'poor characters' in other films. They are not defined as individuals that lack material goods (money, houses, cars). Rather they enjoy an immaterial wealth measured in terms of their specific culture, religion and language, which is different from the coloniser/settler. Although both films show the ongoing suffering endured by Indigenous people resulting from the loss of land, culture and language, they also focus on their resilience and struggles to protect their identities and, more importantly, their deep connection with their traditional lands.

This chapter discussed how recent Brazilian and Australian films have portrayed differences between how Indigenous peoples and Euro-descendants understand the theme of land rights. This does not mean that all Indigenous or all Euro-descendants behave in oppositional ways. However, as

seen, cinematic productions tend to contrast Indigenous and European-coloniser views by underscoring two antithetical relationships: whereas for the former land ownership directly relates to a sense of belonging through ancestral and cultural connections, for the latter it is a matter of acquired property and economic production. Along these lines, the main argument of this chapter is that these distinct connections are perceived as resulting in opposite ways of managing the land. For example, over a long period of time, the coloniser's approach to managing the land is marked as the main cause of a series of environmental problems such as deforestation. On the other hand, Indigenous practices of forest-clearing to grow crops in a system of shifting cultivation have been seen as sustainable and ecological (Malcom and Gibbs 2007). The issue of land management not only persisted into contemporary settings; it increased with economic incentives for remaking whole landscapes through large-scale deforestation.

This was a theme discussed in the analysis of *Birdwatchers*, as the expansion of monoculture plantations and livestock production, and the building of associated agribusiness infrastructure such as roads and hydroelectric dams, are the main causes of deforestation (McMahon 2014). Brazil, which remarkably still has some of the largest areas of remaining original rainforest in the world (Delang 2008), also ranked first in deforestation between 1990 and 2005.<sup>53</sup> This environmental tragedy has local as well as global effects. While deforestation directly affects Brazilian communities that depend on the well-being of rainforests and rivers for their livelihood, it also adds to broader international ecological problems, such as rapid species extinction and climate change. After all, together with soil erosion and pollution, commodity-driven deforestation (McMahon 2014, 29) also results in carbon emissions that increase greenhouse effects.

In Australia, again similar to Brazil, the main reason for deforestation and forest degradation is agricultural expansion (Bradshaw 2012). In this sense, the overall level of environmental impact in these two countries is higher in areas managed by agribusinesses. For this reason, both films endorse the argument that most of the world's remaining natural resources should be under Indigenous lands and protection precisely because their cultures avoid predatory exploration. The film *Mabo* also depicts how the revision of the colonial construct of *terra nullius* allowed for a reassessment of the history of British colonisation that set the path for legal acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples' past and present dispossessions. Accordingly, *Mabo* finishes with the hopeful message that native title will help specific Indigenous people recuperate their lands and, consequently, that this will provide the planet as a whole with more chances of restoring its resources.

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<sup>53</sup> In 1990–2000, deforestation in Brazil was 2.68 million hectares per year. In 2001–2005, it increased to 3.1 million hectares per year (Delang 2008). Although the high rates persist, recent governments have managed to reduce deforestation, especially between 2006 and 2010. This decrease seems to result from the growth of agricultural activities on previously cleared areas (Macedo et al. 2012).

In this chapter, I touched on two key questions that will be further developed throughout this thesis. Firstly, can Indigenous peoples' ways of life offer contributions to the global debates on climate change and environmental collapse? And secondly, how are cinema productions in Brazil and Australia portraying Indigenous people as protagonists for solving contemporary environmental issues? These interrelated themes are particularly relevant in postcolonial nations, which have multicultural societies and tend to be vulnerable to world markets that favour environmental exploitation and therefore environmental 'makeovers' at significant scales as part of never-ending calls for more development as pathways for economic participation and global integration. However, along with the growth of these global economic pressures, local resistance, particularly Indigenous resistance, also gains strength. It too is connected with different kinds of global pressures towards sustainability and environmental protection, which *Birdwatching* deftly connects with the Indigenous agenda and struggles. This antagonistic relationship between local and global agendas was central to the close analyses of the films of Indigenous cinema in Australia and Brazil. The next chapter will build on these themes, this time focusing on films that portray Indigenous relationships with freshwater resources.

## Chapter three

### **Water Rights**

“We are in concert with the need to give voice to the Indigenous perspective of guardianship of all sources of water. We as Indigenous Peoples understand this as our sacred duty to protect our relationship to all elements. As our Elders have told us, Water has its own life force. Rivers and streams are like the arteries and veins of Mother Earth. The oceans are the sacred mat that links all Life. However, governments, corporations and many in non-Indigenous civil society do not consider the Indigenous teachings of water.”

—Indigenous peoples’ statement at the United Nations in 2011<sup>54</sup>

Despite cultural differences, the significance of the environment for Indigenous peoples around the planet presents as a unified discourse; this is especially evident among Indigenous leaders at the United Nations, who advance the claim for a spiritual and corporeal connection that many Indigenous peoples have with their traditional homelands/territories. This discourse is based on the common assumption that many Indigenous peoples need their traditional territories not only for their physical but also for their cultural and spiritual survival. On the other hand, these discourses accentuate the importance of Indigenous peoples to the preservation of their environment, as they historically have demonstrated great capacity for preserving and husbanding natural resources. In this sense, this stewardship relationship to the environment needs to be distinguished from the strictly preservationist and conservationist discourses which stress isolated wildernesses, and uninhabited parks and reserves which can be seen, as Bayet-Charlton (2003) contends, as a continuation of the colonial path of Indigenous removal in that it removes the Indigenous person from the very notion of preservation and conservation. In the Indigenous conception, the notion of taking care of the environment means having a reciprocal relationship with it. This conception also differs from a discourse of sustainable development in that it is focused on taking better care of the environment as an end in itself rather than sustainable development’s ultimate goal of the sustainability of the global marketplace.

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<sup>54</sup> A heterogeneous group of Indigenous organisations gathered together at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2011 (cited in Dahl 2012, 174).

In this chapter, my primary objective is to compare Australian and Brazilian films that centre on the relationship of Indigenous peoples to their water resources. Drawing on Indigenous knowledges research and de-colonising theories, I also explore differences between Indigenous and Western perspectives on the theme of water, as well as the consequences of these perspectives for the local and global environment. Central to my analysis here is Amerindian perspectivism. This concept was developed by the Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros and arose out of his work with Amazonian Indigenous peoples in Brazil. He developed the term to challenge traditional interpretations of reality based on the nature–culture dichotomy. Instead of separating humans from all other beings, he drew attention to Amerindian cosmovisions in which animals and humans share a similar condition of existence, thus dissolving the anthropocentric dualism between humanity and nature. This shift in perspective encourages the greater appreciation of an Indigenous metaphysics in which plants, animals and even the earth itself are not isolated objects.

Viveiros’s work is primarily based in Amazonian ethnography. However, a parallel to his concept of Amerindian perspectivism can be seen in the Australian anthropological work of Deborah Bird Rose. Rose has conducted extensive research on Aboriginal Australian and hegemonic Western perspectives, especially focused on the theme of human–animal relationships.<sup>55</sup> For purposes of this chapter, I take up Rose’s analysis of Australian Aboriginal notions of human and animal connectivity in relation to the work of Australian eco-feminist Val Plumwood. For her part Plumwood coins the term philosophical animism to characterise this connectivity. She uses the term to criticise the “hyper-separations” promulgated by Western philosophy that result in simplistic dichotomies such as “nature/culture, female/male, matter/mind” and “savage/civilised” (Rose 2013b, 94). In her view the viewpoints that promulgate nature’s inferiority also subjugate disadvantaged social groups, particularly women and Indigenous people, thereby inevitably entangling social and ecological justice. Plumwood adds that this hyper-separation further favours a subordination of one term by the other: the dichotomies render inferior all terms related to nature. In response to this hyper-separated worldview, Val Plumwood defends “interspecies communication” as key to the recognition and engagement with “earth others” (Plumwood 2002, 176).

Rose takes up Plumwood to support her analysis of the Aboriginal elder Steve Meredith’s discourse on the impossibility of hyper-separation between humans and nature. As cited by Rose Meredith argues that studying animals separate from humans is an impossible task, even at the level of highly specialised university studies. To understand birds, for example, it is necessary to study the

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<sup>55</sup> Among her extensive publications are *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), *Wild Dog Dreaming: Love and Extinction* (University of Virginia Press, 2011) and *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (UNSW Press, 2004). She is also co-founder of the international online journal *Environmental Humanities* (Duke University Press).



plants they eat. Of course, these are connected to the soil and water, while both are related to human activities. Meredith also argues that while one might feel superior for going to university to do research, another activity might be underway simultaneously, i.e., once researchers go to sleep (or once they die?), the ants they studied might carry out research on humans. Rose (2013b, 99) concludes that this animist perspective is based on the connectivity between all animal life and earth beings and “tells us that humans are not only acting upon the world, but that others are also taking notice and acting upon humans”. Rose’s studies re-examine the environmental consequences of a sentient world in which humanity/personhood/mindfulness is not restricted to humans.

The term ‘animism’ is not of Indigenous origin. It is a nineteenth-century colonial construct developed by E. B. Tylor in 1871 to convey the Indigenous principle that non-humans have souls/spirits. Current “new animism” studies focus on the social relationship between humans and non-humans, pointing to the relational ontology of animism (Harvey 2005). For example, Tim Ingold (2006) argues that Western dichotomies are historically contingent. They are only one of many possibilities for interpreting human–non-human relationships. He adds that although traditional Western thoughts tend to undermine human–environment connections, humans perceive their environment primarily because they are situated in it, within a “domain of entanglement” (14). In this sense, he concludes that Indigenous animism can work as a generalisation not based on a way of knowing but rather as a way of being in a world in continuous flux.

As developed in the next sections of this chapter, a direct consequence of this paradigm shift is the proposition that all living beings, including rivers and swamps, are not exclusively human domains but have rights of existence and perpetuation in their own right.

### **3.1 Indigenous Peoples Taking Care of Waterways in *Ten Canoes* and *Xingu***

For Australia, the primary feature film that I analyse is *Ten Canoes* (2006), directed by non-Indigenous filmmaker Rolf de Heer in partnership with Peter Djiggitj. The film portrays the connection between the Yolngu people and the centrality of their homeland to their culture, history and cosmology. Yolngu means ‘Aboriginal person’ and refers generically to the inhabitants of northeast Arnhem Land. As Yolngu is a generic label, there are specific names to acknowledge different clans, such as Manggalili and Djapu. The challenge in the use of any generic name is that it can homogenise a diverse group of people. For Morphy (1991, 40), a more accurate definition of Yolngu is as “a form of social organization, a culture area, a linguistic entity, or a social universe rather than [...] a named group of people”. The Arafura Swamp is a large and diverse inland freshwater basin belonging to and managed by Yolngu people. They are renowned for expertly deriving part of their subsistence from land and natural resources while at the same time preserving the ecosystem of the region (White 2003, 187). However, global threats such as the rise of sea levels,

the spread of non-endemic organisms and the introduction of grass-fed cattle present a contemporary challenge to the Yolngu people's practices of land and water care. Aboriginal ranger groups in the area were the first to observe and document the impact of these processes, but the consequences were of wider significance to the community and their longstanding natural and cultural resource management (Weston et al. 2012; Gorman, Saalfeld and Griffiths 2007).

For Brazil the primary feature film analysed is *Xingu*, directed by non-Indigenous filmmaker Cao Hamburger (2012). The title of the film refers to the eponymous river that also gives name to an Indigenous reserve, the first in Brazil. At the time of its conception in the 1960s, it was the largest Indigenous reserve in the world. The *Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park] remains a model of sustainability in the Brazilian context. Within its bounds Indigenous peoples like the Kalapalo and the Kuikuru live self-sufficiently mainly by relying on the river's resources. However, the survival of the Indigenous group living in the park has been challenged. Neighbouring deforestation and global warming are raising river temperatures and, consequently, decreasing fish stocks (Rosenthal 2009). Additionally, the current construction of the massive Belo Monte dam poses new threats to the biodiversity and ecosystems of the region, directly affecting the survival of the Indigenous peoples that rely on the river and its flows (Hall and Branford 2012; de Sousa Júnior and Reid 2010).

Each of *Ten Canoes* and *Xingu* enact Indigenous perspectives in quite different ways. Only Indigenous voices are heard in the Australian production; while in *Xingu* Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices are heard. Through the comparative analysis of these two films, I will discuss the aesthetic role of photography plays in showcasing the Indigenous relationship to nature, and the consequences of these for debates about global warming and anthropogenic climate change.

### **3.2 Aboriginal Peoples and Australian Water Resources**

While the U.N. Declaration of Universal Human Rights regards water as essential for human survival, Indigenous populations have been struggling for several decades to access and protect their water resources. Climate change only intensifies this struggle, provoking increasing environmental issues, such as reduced water accessibility (Altman and Jackson 2008). In parallel, the degradation of the ocean is an ongoing issue, especially due to accelerated economic development causing the growth of five major garbage patches across the planet's oceans. These patches are not visible to the human eye—they are mostly composed of microplastic debris settled beneath the ocean's surface, where it will reside for the next couple of centuries entering into the food chain (Moore 2008). This debris has minimal degradation, so it ends up in the food chain contaminating fish that are then consumed by humans (Sebille, England and Froyland 2012). Although devastating and extremely polluting, this high consumption and disposable way of life is actually quite recent in human history. In this sense,

Indigenous peoples can play a fundamental role in raising awareness of the necessity of sustainable use of the land, water and natural resources.

Altman and Jackson (2008) argue that Indigenous sustainability in Australia is demonstrated by how remarkably preserved and biodiverse are the areas they managed. They point out that Aboriginal lands contain the least damaged forests, streams and reefs in the country. The history of Indigenous management is often linked to a key term, TEK (traditional ecological knowledge), which Hunn (1993) describes as follows: 1. 'Traditional', meaning that it has been tested and transmitted through Indigenous generations, 2. 'Ecological', highlighting Indigenous interaction with the environment, and 3. 'Knowledge' that could be taken with them, i.e., even when they were hunter-gathers, knowledge served as a portable technology, thereby breaking the colonial link between the lack of tools/technology and primitivism. Berkes (1993, 3) defines TEK as "a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission", regarding the connection between all living beings to each other and their own environment. Thus, TEK is collective knowledge based on long-term mutual observation, understanding and interaction with a specific territory.

Studies with Aboriginal groups demonstrate that flexibility is a key part of their water resource management. In contrast to constructing dams, for example, Aboriginal flexibility guaranteed their stocks of water supplies through diverse means. "Indigenous people's main adaptation to uncertainty of supply was to develop social ties that enabled people to move to resources as they became available" (Rose 2005, 41). Another water-resource strategy was centred on rainmaking rituals. This low-scale intervention is not intended to completely transform the landscape or the water supply but to improve water resources at a specific space/time, thereby nourishing life (Rose 2005, 45). This practice is occasional and limited, not affecting a river's course or flow. It stands in radical contrast to the enterprises of dams and mining that Indigenous people have historically fought in order to preserve and nourish life on their own territories.

In Brazil, Indigenous traditional resource management saw controlled fires used as key tool by inhabitants of the Xingu basin. Customarily, it proved to have several benefits, such as stimulating the growth of sapé grass, which is very important for making housing roofing. It also made clay soils more malleable and helped clear land for gardening (Schwartzman et al. 2013). However, Indigenous peoples living near the *Rio Xingu* [Xingu River] have been noticing several environmental changes over the last decades: fire no longer dies out naturally, the air seems less humid, rain does not come as predicted and fire easily spreads through the forest. All these alterations resonate with scientific data on the impacts of deforestation and climate change in the region (Silvestrini et al. 2011; Nepstad et al. 2006). Observations of the Pleiades in the sky were used to determine rainy seasons for gardening practices, but this is no longer the case. With rainfall now unpredictable these traditional

associations are now unreliable (Schwartzman et al. 2013). On the other hand, as Indigenous peoples note all these changes in the behaviour of fire and water, they call attention to ongoing environmental alterations that may not be evident to others. Highly variable and unpredictable rainfall, which has led to diverse weather conditions and unstable surface water availability, is also a problem in Australia, a country that particularly struggles as an arid “highly water-scarce continent” (Burdon et al. 2015). During centuries of exclusive land occupation by Indigenous peoples, these local diversities were respected, as these people’s social and economic way of life was adapted to natural resource systems.

Before examining *Ten Canoes*, it is important to recall the modern history of the Yolngu people and its chronology of battles with the Australian state. In the early 1960s, the federal government leased the Gove Peninsula for bauxite mining (Eggerking 2013). In 1963, the Yolngu people responded by sending a petition presented as a pair of bark paintings to the government in Canberra. Three years later, a Swiss and Australian mining conglomerate resumed extraction activity through Nabalco, the North Australian Bauxite and Alumina Company. In 1968, the Yolngu went to court against the Commonwealth and Nabalco. This was the first Indigenous land-rights case in Australia.<sup>56</sup> The Gove land-rights case took three years (1969–71) and failed to acknowledge Indigenous rights. However, it galvanised a growing movement for Aboriginal land rights, paving the way for the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. The next protracted legal battle for the Yolngu related to their native title claim and was mounted in the aftermath of the landmark Mabo case in 1992, which overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* and ultimately resulted in the recognition of Indigenous native title as a form of land right.

All these legal processes included studies of Indigenous connectivity to water resources, such as “rivers, water holes, springs, saltwater [and] floods”, as well as different states of water transformations, as clouds or as smoke when in contact with fire; it included studies of human activities such as “hunting, fishing, food preparation and ceremonial activities such as rainmaking” (Toussaint, Sullivan and Yu 2005, 62). Taken together, the studies provided evidence of Indigenous people’s connection to their traditional territories based on their use of and relation to water resources. However, while Indigenous people now have legal ownership of 20% of Australian lands, their rights to recognised bodies of water are estimated at less than 0.01% of the country’s water resources (Jackson and Barber 2013). In Australian law, there is a distinction between land and water rights. This contradicts with the Indigenous understanding of “water and land as an interrelated and indissoluble whole—country” (Jackson and Barber 2013). As expressed by Neale and Turner (2015, 277), “a claim to water is not simply a claim to a resource. It is a claim to knowledge and to the

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<sup>56</sup> *Milirrpum v. Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia* (Eggerking 2013).

constitution of place”. In this sense, the separation between land and water rights violates the Indigenous integrated perspective of their territory as integrally connected and part of the “cultural landscape”, rather than divided into isolated resources (Jackson and Barber 2013). Aboriginal people’s connection to bodies of water is “construed spiritually, socially and jurally, according to the same fundamental principles as affiliations to terrestrial places in the land” (Langton 2006, 144). The Indigenous relationship with the ancient past and its connection with the present are therefore necessarily derived from divine beings that live in specific places, such as land, water and sky.

This standpoint is illustrated in *Ten Canoes*, wherein the swamp is a key element of the cultural landscape and waterscape for the Yolngu people’s cosmology as well as their social and economic life. According to Ginytjirrang Mala (1994, 5):

in the Yolngu world view, water is the giver of sacred knowledge, all ceremonies and lands. Whether it’s fresh or salt, travelling on or under the land, or in the sea, water is the source of all that is holy.

The life-sustaining connection between water and the community is portrayed in *Ten Canoes* as the swamp is defined as synonymous with life. The film was a successful collaborative project between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It earned the distinction of being the first Australian fictional film set entirely in the pre-colonial period. It is also the first Australian film almost entirely spoken in an Aboriginal language, predominantly Ganalbingu (Walker 2015). Contrary to fears that the need for subtitling would hurt international circulation, the film met widespread global acclaim. It received the Special Jury Prize in the Un Certain Regard category at the Cannes International Film Festival in 2006, as well as six awards, including best film and cinematography, at the 48th Annual Australian Film Institute (AFI) Awards. Sponsored by the Australian Film Finance Corporation, the Adelaide Film Festival and others, the film was directed by Rolf de Heer and Peter Djiggir together with the Yolngu people of the Ramingining community.<sup>57</sup>

### **3.3 Life is the Swamp: Indigenous Cosmologies in *Ten Canoes*.**

Film director de Heer was originally invited by one of the most famous of Aboriginal actors, David Gulpilil (Ridjimiraril Dalaithngu), to develop a film with his Yolngu community of Ramingining. In one of the director’s visits to the Ramingining community, Gulpilil suggested that they needed ten canoes (Palace Films 2006). De Heer did not understand the idea until seeing one of anthropologist Donald Thomson’s 1930s famed photos taken in Arnhem Land (Davis 2007, 14). The photo of ten

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<sup>57</sup> Nowadays, about 800 Yolngu people live in Ramingining. The town was created in the 1970s gathered around 15 clans that speak about eight different languages (Palace Films 2006)

canoeists was one among the vast collection of Thomson's material that gave a glimpse of life in the Arafura Swamp. Together the director and actor imagined a narrative would unfold from that photo.<sup>58</sup>

To make *Ten Canoes*, de Heer relied on Thomson's anthropological photographs as well as the community's own oral histories. The film brought the acknowledgment of Indigenous property rights to a new level as "the Ten Canoes Agreement recognises the Ramingining community's property rights for all artefacts and sets made for and used in this film" (Davis 2007, 6–7). The film was a collaborative project between de Heer and the Yolngu people, especially co-director Peter Djiggir and the actor David Gulpilil. The close relationship between de Heer and Gulpilil had begun years before on the set of the feature film *The Tracker* (2002), with the actor playing the leading role.

However, Gulpilil's career started many years before with *Walkabout* (Nicholas Roeg, 1971). This film was a remarkable achievement in Gulpilil's life, as well as a landmark in the history of Australian and world cinema. In the credits for *Walkabout*, the characters are presented without their proper names but rather simply as Girl (Jenny Agutter), White Boy (Lucien John) and Black Boy (David Gulpilil). The plot revolves around the journey of two white schoolchildren abandoned by their father (John Meillon) who after first attempting to kill his children commits suicide in the water-starved Australian outback. As the older sister and younger brother struggle to survive in the isolated, deserted land, they meet an Aboriginal boy. Their attempts to communicate initially fail. While Girl is unable to achieve meaningful communication, it is White Boy, mimicking the sounds and gestures of someone drinking water, who communicates with the Aboriginal boy. The latter promptly digs a hole with a wooden stick that functions as a straw, permitting them to drink the needed water. At the film's conclusion, the girl recalls the moment in which she swam naked along with her brother and Black Boy in a paradisiacal spring.

The film portrays Australia in dichotomous terms: as beautiful/dangerous, paradise/inferno, and welcoming/threatening all juxtaposed along a timeline demarcating while deliberately messing up pre- and post-colonisation Australia. The colonisers, the children, have the chance to learn alongside Aboriginal people to reconcile themselves with nature, free themselves from prejudices, and eschew their Western cultural and moral habits as they did when they shed their clothing for the swim. To a significant extent they make this journey with the Boy. But after the Girl refuses the Aboriginal boy's marriage proposal, he commits suicide, forever locking him into the past and her into not only regret but a growing awareness of her own story and her own involvement and complicity in the tragic events that have unfolded. The film is deliberately ambiguous at this point.

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<sup>58</sup> Donald Thomson worked extensively with the Yolngu community. He did not only take pictures; he was also involved with the Yolngu in resolving the Caledon Bay crisis of 1932–33, and his ashes were scattered in Yolngu country (Lambert-Pennington 2001). Gulpilil possibly remembered the photo because of Thomson's longstanding association with the Yolngu community until his death in 1970.

On the one hand the film could be suggesting with the Boy's suicide that the potential Edenic relationship between the white girl and the Aboriginal boy is ultimately impossible and implausible. In Wakulenko's (2000, 1306) analysis, the film exhibits the theme of Romanticism so evident in the European arts during the time of the English colonisation of Australia. For Wakulenko the film's white children abandoned in the desert by their father is a reference to the convicts that the English Crown deported to the distant Australian colony, i.e., strangers abandoned in Aboriginal lands. The suicides of both the English father and the Aboriginal boy can be interpreted as an allegory of the future path of the two white youths; subsequently, they became English Australians, able to re-create their civilisation and leave behind the Aboriginal lessons as a distant memory. But on the other hand, the impression of the film lingers suggestive of another reading. The Girl returns one suspects again and again to the defining experience of her life in the desert with her brother and the Boy. It is as if she is still coming to an understanding of what happened, of her own sexual awakening she did not quite understand, her complicity in what happened, and her own growing recognition of what might be her love for and attraction to the Boy as the defining relationship in her life. The film could even be seen as adamant on this point. The urban and sophisticated domestic artifice of her Sydney life appears to pale beside the luscious though spare desert and the sheer beauty and physicality of the Boy. It is as if she is coming to understand retrospectively both the Land and Aboriginality in and of the land. In this sense the film has come to acquire more especial significance after the Mabo decision and in the light of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights.

*Walkabout* features David Gulpilil, at age 15, as a non-English speaking Aboriginal boy. He is portrayed archetypally as the guide who bring the two lost children back to civilisation; but he is also portrayed as the guide to ways of being Aboriginal and of being at home in the landscape and becoming capable in its pathways and sustainability. If the children are travelling towards 'civilisation' the Boy is travelling Aboriginal lands according to his own path and his own light and rules. They each are given a glimpse of these paths.

As films can be analysed based on their explicit intertextual conversations, when compared with and in dialogue with other films that the same actor has been in, the suicide scene of *Black Boy* is revisited in Gulpilil's later film, *The Tracker*. These two films are united thematically, as one inverts the outcome of the other. In both, Gulpilil assumes the role of a leader/tracker introducing "the other" to the Australian land, not as an exotic place but as his country. *The Tracker* is set in the early 1920s, somewhere in the dry outback. As in *Walkabout*, water is absent. This accentuates the dry red landscape while addressing the dependence of the troopers on the tracker. Survival depends on his tracking skills and knowledge of the country, including making water accessible in an arid landscape because he knows where to find it.

In *The Tracker*, the tension-filled journey unfolds of an Aboriginal tracker (David Gulpilil) working for white colonial police officers that are searching for an Aboriginal man, who has been accused of killing a white woman. Crossing an unfamiliar arid desert landscape, the police officers are forced to rely on the Aboriginal tracker to accomplish their mission. Collins and Davis in their *Australia Cinema After Mabo* (2004, 14), analyse this film as “depicting the Australian landscape as a mythic space” where the characters are presented as “archetypal figures”. As in *Walkabout*, the credits present characters without proper names but rather simply participants as the Fanatic (Gary Sweet), the Follower (David Gameau) and the Tracker (David Gulpilil). The unjust and aggressive behaviour of the Fanatic against Aboriginal communities encountered by chance turns even the Follower against his commander. Collins and Davis (2004) suggest that the film encourages the audience to want the killing of the white commander by the black Tracker. The conflict between these two men culminates in the hanging of the Fanatic by the Tracker. When the Tracker refers visually to a rope in a tree, the viewer may recall the Aboriginal suicide portrayed by the same actor decades earlier; however, that intertextual reference to *Walkabout* is rapidly dispelled, as he does not turn against himself but against the white colonial man, the Fanatic.

The film’s dichotomy between good and evil people helps to define the ensuing events. There is no complexity in the character of the white colonial Fanatic. He is unethical, a murderer and a racist, and deserves to die in a summary way, like the way he has killed others. The Tracker simply hangs the Fanatic. The hanging is presented as a symbolic act of justice. In this sense, the *Tracker* is a film that enables the young Aboriginal boy of *Walkabout* to avenge his own suicide, as now he is the one who will survive the colonial encounter.

It is again as a guide that David Gulpilil introduces the audience to his own country in *Ten Canoes*. Again, he tracks his familiar landscape to invite an understanding of his people. However, this time, he is visually absent from the screen, only recognisable by his already distinctly famous voice in the voice-over narration. This omniscient narrator is in a very different position from historical ethnographic documentaries where outsiders analyse Indigenous people. Gulpilil and de Heer seem to be playing with this documentary convention to create a powerful effect of recognition. The film was released in three versions, the theatrical commercial format in which he is speaking in English and two DVD versions in which he speaks Mandalpingu with and without English subtitles (Palace Films 2006). In all of them, as the storyteller, he assumes the role of mediator and translator, someone able to understand both cultures.

In *Ten Canoes*, David Gulpilil demonstrates that his character was able to survive colonial contact, and that he now delights in presenting his own culture and cosmology. *Ten Canoes* is positioned as an ancestral story, as a lesson of sorts similar to *Walkabout*. The places and people are explicitly framed and highlighted as part of a storytelling. It is a telling that draws attention to itself,



foregrounding its artifice. This narrative option underlines the importance of the story to continue to be called upon in the past and in the present to orient oneself in the world. It is not a realistic portrayal but a narrative about the importance of Aboriginal Law and cultural maintenance.

While the narrator begins his story with the English expression “Once upon a time...”, he signals that this is not an English story. Rather it is about a time long before English stories. In this subtle way, he reminds audiences that his story is surely older than any English tradition of storytelling, as Aboriginal civilisation goes back at least 50,000 years (Kohen 1995; Jupp 2001). The history of David Gulpilil’s life—from a young unknown non-English speaking actor to his active role in inviting the director de Heer, providing the idea for making *Ten Canoes* and ending up being the film’s narrator—parallels the history of Australian national cinema itself and its relations with Indigenous people. His biography is a reminder of the gradual, ongoing increase in Aboriginal participation and the shift from misrepresentation and romanticism to self-representation and partnership.

In his narration, Gulpilil begins with an explanation of the intrinsic connection between the creation of land, water and life as understood in Yolngu cosmology:

This land began in the beginning. Yurlunggur, that Great Water Goanna, he travelled here. Yurlunggur made all this land then. He made this water. And he made this swamp that stretches long and gives us life. I come from a waterhole in this land Yurlunggur made... When I die, I will go back to my waterhole. I’ll be waiting there, like a little fish, waiting to be born again... It’s always like that for my people.

In the film’s opening scene, Gulpilil presents Yurlunggur as the primary creator of Yolngu people in Arnhem Land. In Aboriginal cosmology Yurlunggur is one name for the Rainbow Snake ancestral being (Leeming 2006). However, the narrator explains that Yurlunggur is not a snake but a water goanna spirit. This differentiation draws attention to the common problematic generalisation of Aboriginal cosmologies. Anthropologist Sallie Anderson (2001, 296) argues that, involuntarily, anthropologists helped reinforce and spread the erroneous conception of “the rainbow serpent as the pre-eminent creator figure” for all Aboriginal people in Australia. In using the specific Yolngu name and avoiding a facile reference that speaks to mainstream/general understandings of Aboriginal culture, the narrator underlines that this story is for both audiences: Yolngu and non-Yolngu simultaneously. Another example of the narrator’s effort to educate is his description of the time of creation without using the English term “Dreaming” or “Dreamtime”. While this term has been generally adopted when referring to Aboriginal cosmology, this concept does not account for the complex diversity of Aboriginal concepts. Swain (1993) points out that the expression Dreamtime comes originally from a mistranslation of the term *altjira* used by the Aranda people in Central Australia. Missionaries appropriated the term as the one with the closest meaning to ‘God’.

Anthropologists Francis James Gillen and Walter Baldwin Spencer were the first to translate the Aranda word as “the dream time” (Charlesworth 1984). On the other hand, T.G.H. Strehlow interprets the meaning of the term *altjira* as closer to “eternal, uncreated”. He translated *Altjira rama* as the capacity of seeing the eternal, an act that is possible for someone as she/he sleeps and dreams. Strehlow translated *Altjiringa ngambakala* as “having originated out of eternity, having originated out of one’s own self” and *Altjira rama* as “I see eternal things” or “I see with eternal vision” (1971, 614). By avoiding the term Dreaming, the narrator of *Ten Canoes* begins his story by stressing the perspective that will be present throughout the entire film: a narrative from the inside.

This presentation of a different world as viewed from inside, without the hierarchy of binary terms that colonial thought imposed on the continent and its people, is analogous to the concept of a pluriversal world put forward by Latin American thinker Walter Dignolo (2011, 176). For Dignolo, a pluriverse is “a world in which truth in parenthesis is accepted as universal”. It does not mean a project of a universal world but rather the possibility of the existence of simultaneous but different worldviews. In the specific case of Indigenous people, this is compatible with Victoria Tauli-Corpuz’s (2006, 13) claim that Indigenous people should have the right to remain separate and distinct from a mainstream model of development. She stresses that this position should be welcomed by nation states since Indigenous people are better prepared to preserve natural resources rather than destroy them for exclusively financial ends. The process of colonisation was not just about the imposition of power (through the implementation of economic and political systems); it was also a process of subjugation of knowledge and being (Dignolo 2011, 176). Therefore, the acceptance of a pluriversal world is the right to remain different without the connotation of inferiority.

Indeed, this is the case for the world as presented in *Ten Canoes*. The camera shows a bird’s-eye view that scans the landscape of Arnhem Land, the flow of the blue river bounded by the green vegetation of eucalypts and corkscrew palms and grass suffused with the sounds of the wind, birds, insects and thunder that foreshadows impending rain. Nature is presented as a living, moving force. The camera skims over the swamp, establishing the importance of the environment for the understanding of the narrative and the motivation of the characters. In fact, the surrounding forests and swamps are also characters. The camera in movement animates them, framing land and waterscapes not as static but live figures that are also part of the narrative.

After the astonishing image introducing the viewer to the Ararufa swamp, the narrator Gulpilil declares, “The swamp gives us life”. From these very first minutes, *Ten Canoes* invites viewers to see nature as a living force and being. The swamp is not a “biological commodity” that exists to be exploited for humans’ convenience (Tauli-Corpuz 2006, 15). As the film develops, anthropocentric views are challenged by the representation of the swamp as a key place of life, nourishment and death,

inviting viewers to accept the understanding as advocated by Plumwood (2002) that humans and nature are intrinsically connected.

The film's narrative depicts three different temporalities. The first one is the present time of the film wherein the storyteller Gulpilil informs viewers that he was a fish in the waterhole before being born. After dying, he will return to the same place to wait to be reborn. In the same way, he presents a second temporality of the film wherein Dayindi (Jamie Gulpilil), the younger brother, is being taught the Law through a story told by his older brother Minygululu (Peter Minygululu). This story is set in a third temporality, when Dayindi and Minygululu, as well as their ancestors, are still fishes in their waterholes waiting to be born. The story is set in a time after the beginning and following the big flood that covers the entire land. It is a time after the ceremony of Djungguwan that gave the Yolngu people their Law. The same Law, extant at the present time of the narrator, governed the ancient time. The story from ancient times is about Ridjimiraril (Crusoe Kurddal) and his three wives Nowalingu (Frances Djulibing), Banalandju (Sonia Djarrabalminym) and Munandjarra (Cassandra Malangarri Baker). His young brother Yeeralparil (Jamie Gulpilil) is interested in Munandjarra, the youngest wife. The story's moral lesson focuses on the importance of respecting the Law.

As the story unfolds, Ridjimiraril dies and his body is prepared for a journey. The family paints the design of his waterhole on him so that his spirit can find its way back to the same waterhole where he emerged. There he will wait to be born again, as previously explained by Gulpilil. The people sing and cry while painting his body. In this scene there is an intentional selective disclosure of Yolngu cultural information. The lack of explanations about the ceremony leaves the spectator unaware of the meaning of each act. By not elucidating on religious procedures, the film director affirms his reluctance to provide detail. This is their ceremony. The inquisitive viewer is not to be satisfied here. They are to be left wondering, and this is deliberate. What is being conveyed is that something else is going on there, but that something else is being withheld. This withholding of information compels the viewer to remain as a distant observer. This is reinforced by the fact that the songs are deliberately not translated. As the film does not decode one of the most dramatic scenes, the viewer is not entitled to access all the ceremony's meanings (Walker 2015). The film deliberately and strategically eschews giving explanations here while simultaneously gesturing to the possibility that more could be said or understood.

As the film gets close to its end, each one of the narratives is carefully wrapped visually. The aerial shot of the swamp is interrupted by the camera diving very close to the water, signifying that Ridjimiraril is back in his waterhole to wait to be born again in the cycle of continuous life. For Yeeralparil, following the Law, he takes responsibility for all three wives of his older brother. The narrator Gulpilil says that he does not know if Dayindi found a wife or not. In the film, this strategy

reinforces the parallel between this temporality and ethnographic documentaries where, different from fictional narratives, it is not possible to access information about the complete life of a character. As for the present time, Gulpilil concludes by saying, “Now you have seen my story. It is a good story. Not like your story, but a good story all the same”. His words are followed by a strong laugh, and the final credits are rolled to the ambient sound of the Arafura Swamp. These sounds that were present through the whole film reinforce the deep connection of the story with a particular and well-treated place.

The Indigenous characters of *Ten Canoes* are portrayed as those primarily responsible for nature’s preservation and perpetuation. Val Plumwood’s (2002) philosophical animism argues for the importance of communication between species, stressing that humans need to develop the capacity to listen and to converse with other species. Animism introduces the possibility that the notions of humanity/personhood are not universal and that different sorts of subjects/beings may apprehend reality from distinct perspectives. The use here of a generic concept such as Indigenous animism is useful as it puts together a thread of common concerns that draws Indigenous cultures closer to each other than to the mainstream societies against which they are often positioned and forced to contend with.

If it is possible to criticise *Ten Canoes* for presenting Indigenous life as static, repetitive and unchanging, a fundamental complement to it are all the audio-visual productions that followed the film and are available in the ‘Extras’ section in the DVD format. One of them, called “People, Place and Ten Canoes”, displays several contemporary images otherwise absent from the film itself. A black screen with white titles introduces each film character with her/his proper Aboriginal name and sometimes their profession in life. The sequence is made exclusively with still photos and ambient sound (composed of different types of birds and insects, as well as the wind and water). The first photos are from the film, presenting the actors/actresses with their costumes/make-up and using their everyday tools. The subsequent photos are from behind the scenes, showing their interactions with the camera, the construction of the canoes and finally images from daily life activities such as grocery shopping, driving a motorcycle or posing for a family photo. These images embody a third temporality, the one initiated by David Gulpilil in his voice-over in the film. These images create a feeling of continuity from the older as well as mythical times presented by the narrator. This may explain why in this sequence of photos the ambient sound is replaced by Gulpilil’s voice-over. He explains that his people are still living there in the swamp and sharing their lives but without the money required in the mainstream economy. He sings a song in his language, Mandalpingu, and then the ambient sounds of insects and birds return. This sequence of photos and sounds seems to give an invitation to meet the Arafura Swamp people of today and to learn about their lives. Again, it is in the DVD’s extra materials that contemporary life is presented as intrinsically connected with

traditional practices such as the hunting of longneck turtles and fishing. At the same time, some vanished practices are presented even though they are far removed from contemporary daily life activities. For example, a traditional method of hand-weaving a bag is depicted in which a woman reveals that she has seen the activity before but has never done it herself. Another impressive scene is of a young child who is invited to play with a breastfeeding clay doll, a copy based on one of the black-and-white photographs taken by anthropologist Donald Thomson in the 1930s. This sequence may be one of the reasons that the film *Ten Canoes* spawned an impressive number of follow-on projects (Palace 2006). One of them is included on the same DVD as *Ten Canoes*, the project *Eleven Canoes*. It documents the teaching of audio-visual production; filming and editing that resulted in five short documentaries made by students of the Ramingining community. *Twelve Canoes* is a bilingual website designed to talk about Yolngu people history, arts, culture and environment.<sup>59</sup> Other projects followed, such as *The Balanda and the Bark Canoes* (De Heer, Reynolds and Nehme, 2006), a documentary about the challenges of making *Ten Canoes*. As a *Balanda* (white man), de Heer recalls dealing with many intercultural challenges to realise the film, such as communication. He observes that a clear point of distinction between both cultures is their language structure. He argues that whereas the English language is about classification and categorisation, the Yolngu language is about connection and belonging to a unit.

All these projects seem to address possible criticisms of *Ten Canoes*, for example, its clear choice of avoiding discussion of and portrayal of the contemporary environmental challenges that Indigenous people are facing, especially with their water resources in the Ararufa Swamp. In *Ten Canoes*, Indigenous people respect the natural cycles of the right season for hunting goose eggs, for example. There is no mention of contemporary threats such as the presence of feral animals, weeds and fire as well as the intrusion of saltwater and the rising sea level. In this sense, the film's aesthetics not only reinforces the belief that Indigenous people are in balance with nature but also shows this to be the case. While it leaves all threats outside of the screen its telling of a pre-colonisation story is indissolubly linked temporally connecting past and present seamlessly. It is insistent here: there is no discontinuity and no break.

The fundamental role that Indigenous peoples' management of natural resources have for environmental conservation is also a theme in the other film that I analyse in this chapter. The Brazilian feature film *Xingu* advocates for an Indigenous way of life based on Indigenous ownership of their territory and resources. However, in very different way from *Ten Canoes*, the film gives little space to Indigenous voices and perspectives. It does, however, open the space for political and aesthetic debates on the representation of Indigenous peoples and their territories.

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<sup>59</sup> Official link is <http://www.12canoes.com.au>

### 3.4 Xingu: The History of a River, a National Park and a Film<sup>60</sup>

The *Rio Xingu* [Xingu River] flows from the west-central savannah region in the state of Mato Grosso to the Amazon River Basin in the state of Pará in northern Brazil. An impressive number of fish species—estimated at some 600—are thought to live in the river system (Camargo, Giarrizzo and Isaac 2004). Indigenous peoples have relied on the Xingu River’s resources for more than a thousand years (Schwartzman et al. 2013). The river has an expansive preserved forest corridor covering 280,000 km<sup>2</sup>. The river’s well-preserved borders are in sharp contrast to its almost totally deforested surrounds. In this region, agribusiness is the main economic enterprise. The region boasts extensive cattle ranching, logging and massive soybean plantations (Silva, Rodrigues and Pereira 2015). The Xingu River is renowned for its biodiversity and its role as a key resource for many different Indigenous peoples. However, it has been negatively affected by agribusiness in the surrounding region, most especially by the soybean plantations that use vast amounts of pesticides and fertilisers that contaminate the water and its marine life. It is believed that these chemicals are polluting the river and poisoning its fish, leading to many kinds of illness among Indigenous peoples, ranging from diarrhoea to cancer (Pyl and Pimentel 2011, 33).

In addition to these ecological and other threats, the Xingu River is also deeply affected by the construction of the giant Belo Monte hydroelectric dam.<sup>61</sup> The construction of such dams is an extreme and intense human intervention “in the hydrological cycle of rivers”. Dams cause long-lasting environmental “impacts through the disruption of physical-chemical and biological processes” (Camargo, Giarrizzo and Isaac 2015, 112). This is exactly the case with Belo Monte as a Brazilian megadam. The project, already underway, is creating a Xingu River Reservoir that will “interrupt the fluctuation of the water levels” and reduce “water flow volumes and [bring about] cyclical flooding in the downstream region of the dam and the future reservoir”, inevitably affecting the vegetation and wildlife as well as Indigenous populations’ lives (Cunha and Ferreira 2012, 159). The Belo Monte dam project on the Xingu River dates back to Brazil’s dictatorial years of the 1970s.<sup>62</sup> Over the succeeding decades, Indigenous peoples in partnership with organised social movements have fought against the realisation of the project.

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<sup>60</sup> I am drawing here upon my previously published research undertaken as part of my PhD. I have incorporated it here and further developed my arguments. The article’s title is “The Flows of Xingu: Indigenous Peoples and Environmental Discourses in Brazil”.

<sup>61</sup> Around the world, 40,000 massive dams have been built for diverse reasons, such as flood control, irrigation, fish farming, navigation, tourism and hydroelectric power generation, among others (Silva 2011, 2–3). Megadams have many side effects, historically displacing around 30 to 60 million people around the world (McCully 2004, 3).

<sup>62</sup> The first studies for creating the dam started in 1975 but at the time were put aside because the project met with strong opposition (Ebus and Kuijpers 2016, 135).

After years of judicial as well as political disputes, the construction of the Belo Monte project was legally approved with work beginning in 2010. As planned, it will become the third largest hydroelectric dam in the world.<sup>63</sup> It was approved over the vociferous objections of the affected local people and proclaimed in the name of the country's economic progress. Its proponents argued it would produce the energy necessary for aluminium production for the American Alcoa and Norwegian Norsk Hydro companies (Sheller 2014, 24; Ebus and Kuijpers 2016, 141). Aluminium is one of the most energy intensive metal-refining processes on earth. Mimi Sheller points out that the expansion of transnational aluminum corporations consumes huge amounts of electricity, straining the power generation system and depriving local populations of their own sources of energy. (2014, 21)

In this scenario, alternative energy arguments have served to rehabilitate large-scale hydro schemes and hydropower, now under the rationale that the energy they produce is green leading to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. However, in the case of Belo Monte, the construction involves significant social and environmental impacts from displacing the local population and generating green gas emissions through the flooding of native vegetation. Brazil has the second-largest forest area on the planet (OECD 2013). Although Brazilian energy comes mostly from renewable sources, the country is ranked fourth on the world's carbon-dioxide emissions list. This is due to the alarming levels of deforestation and the unchecked expansion of agribusiness. Another paradoxical reason is related to the development of green energy suppliers, such as hydroelectric megadams, to provide energy to highly polluting industrial activities such as mining. In this sense, it can be argued that the construction of the Belo Monte dam impacts Indigenous territories but also indirectly contributes to Brazil's carbon-emission challenges particularly in its build phase.

This controversy neatly encapsulates the debate over the proper administration of natural resources. The clash between the government's development project and the Indigenous fight for sustainability is above all an "environmental conflict", as it exhibits different—often conflicting—models of relating to nature (Fleury and Almeida 2013, 142). Despite the appeals of national and international social movements, activists, academics, Indigenous peoples, small farmers and fishers, the dam project was approved and its potential impacts rapidly exposed.

The construction of Belo Monte will be responsible for the flooding of vast areas of rainforest and the displacement of nearly 20,000 people from their homes (Ebus and Kuijpers 2016, 137; Terminski 2014, 240). Furthermore, the project of diverting the Xingu River has already resulted in

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<sup>63</sup> Its planned capacity is 11,000 MW; in standing, it will rank only behind the Chinese Three Gorges and the Brazilian-Paraguayan Itaipu dams (Jones 2010, 120–133).

the killing of many tonnes of fish.<sup>64</sup> In diverse ways, the construction of the Belo Monte dam impacts the lives of Indigenous peoples in the region. The lands of the Yudjá Juruna and the Arara do Maia peoples are the most severely affected territories because of their location. The construction of the dam will lower their water levels, thereby hampering locomotion on the river. It will also affect fish supplies with many species likely to not survive the increase in water temperature increase as the river's waters become shallower. In addition, water stagnation may increase the number of pests, generating serious health risks and the spread of diseases, such as malaria, that are already present in the region (Beltrão et al. 2014, 83). However, the environmental impacts of the Belo Monte dam go far beyond its immediate construction site, as the Xingu River is a key provider of food and transportation for many Indigenous peoples in the region.

The Xingu River crosses the lands of the Kayabi, Kuikuro, Ikpeng, Kamaiurá, Yawalipiti and Suyá peoples inside the *Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park] (Sevá 2011, 48). The park, which was established in 1961, is home to at least 6,000 Indigenous people (Durigan, Guerin, and da Costa 2013). As already noted, it covers a territory of 27,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Ferreira 2015, 15) and was the first Indigenous reserve in the country and the largest in the world at the time of its creation. Although the Belo Monte dam's main worksite and the flood area do not directly overlap into Xingu Indigenous Park, these will nevertheless affect the Indigenous peoples living there. For those in the Xingu Indigenous Park, the river is a key element of life as it provides their main source of food (Pyl and Pimentel 2011, 37).

*Xingu* is also the name of a feature film directed by Cao Hamburger (2011). The feature film tells the story of the creation of the Xingu Indigenous Park. Although it does not directly mention the Belo Monte dam, its release prompted vigorous debates about the dam. During the Amazonas Film Festival, the film's producer, Fernando Meirelles (well-known as the director of *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] (2002), stated that *Belo Monte é um dos maiores erros atuais* [Belo Monte is one of the biggest contemporary mistakes]. The irony was that one of *Xingu*'s main sponsors was the Brazilian state-owned corporation that is building the dam. The film producer explained the contradiction:

*É curioso, mas a Eletrobras é uma das financiadoras do filme e ao mesmo tempo maior interessada em Belo Monte. Isso mostra, em certa parte, que é uma empresa democrática. Eles sabiam que isso ia criar um debate. O que quero discutir é se queremos este progresso proposto pela usina.* (Meirelles online)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> In 2016, 16 tonnes of fish reportedly died during the filling of the Belo Monte dam. The North Energy Corporation was fined 8 million Brazilian reais, or US\$2 million. "Timeline of the Controversial Belo Monte Megadam in Brazil", *The Long View* (blog), *American Scientist*, 15 October 2005 (plus updates), <http://www.americanscientist.org/blog/pub/timeline-of-the-controversial-belo-monte-megadam-in-brazil>

<sup>65</sup> Valmir Moratelli, "Responsável por Belo Monte, Eletrobras financia filme sobre Xingu", *Último Segundo*, 4 November 2011, <http://ultimosegundo.ig.com.br/cultura/cinema/responsavel-por-belo-monte-eletrobras->



[It is curious, but Eletrobras is one of the film's sponsors and at the same time the party with the most interests in Belo Monte. Its support of the film confirms that it is a democratic company. They knew it was going to create debate. What I want to discuss is whether we want this progress proposed by the dam.]

*Xingu* film director Cao Hamburger also criticised the dam project, saying that even though the dam is located far from *Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park], it is impossible for its Indigenous inhabitants to accept that the river can be modified without affecting their lives.<sup>66</sup> For both producer and director, *Xingu* offers a great opportunity to rethink the idea of progress.

Cao Hamburger's most famous film is *O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* [The Year My Parents Went on Vacation] (2006), which was nominated for the Golden Bear award at the 2007 Berlin Film Festival. That film tells the story of the violent military dictatorship in Brazil during the 1970s. In this regard, the Hamburger filmography is similar to that of Marco Bechis, the director of *Birdwatchers*, the 2012 film analysed in chapter one. In his most famous film, *Garage Olimpo* [Olympic Garage] (1999), Bechis narrates the story of the violence enacted by the military dictatorship in Argentina during the 1970s. This coincidence between Bechis and Hamburger's filmographies, i.e., they both made films about military dictatorships as well as Indigenous struggles, suggests that the brutal treatment of Indigenous peoples has parallels with the brutality of the military state in the two largest South American nations, Brazil and Argentina. In the case of Brazil, official data shows that from 2003 to 2014 more than 700 Indigenous people were murdered and more than 700 committed suicide in just one of the country's 26 states, Mato Grosso do Sul (CIMI 2014). This violence is not solely inscribed on Indigenous bodies but also on their territories. The most contemporary case is the environmental destruction related to the construction of the Belo Monte Dam.

Although *Xingu* does not directly address the construction of the dam, it is a film that accurately portrays real events. It covers the history of the creation of Xingu Indigenous Park from its World War II origins in the 1940s to the 1970s. As Brazilian president Getúlio Vargas (1930–45) feared European occupation of Brazil's so-called 'empty' lands, he sponsored a 1943 expedition, dubbed *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West].<sup>67</sup> Its main objective was to occupy areas assumed to be uninhabited with low-income workers sent to build small towns and to live there.<sup>68</sup>

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[financia-filme-sobre-xingu/n1597353731416.html](http://www.fimbrasil.com.br/financia-filme-sobre-xingu/n1597353731416.html), accessed 10 January 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Natalia Engler, "'É um dos maiores erros atuais', diz Fernando Meirelles sobre a construção de Belo Monte", *UOL*, 4 November 2011, <http://cinema.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2011/11/04/se-o-parque-do-xingu-nao-for-afetado--na-minha-opinio-vai--outras-terras-vaodiz-caohamburger-diretor-de-xingu-sobre-a-construcao-de-belo-monte.htm>, accessed 10 January 2016.

<sup>67</sup> This Brazilian initiative and its rationale has an Australian parallel in Australia's large post-war migration program to "populate or perish" in the wake of the experience of the Second World War.

<sup>68</sup> In Australia, overseas interest in occupying vast lands of the north led to a foreign policy of increasing the

*Xingu* is a biographical journey that follows three middle-class brothers, Orlando (Felipe Camargo), Claudio (Jose Miguel) and Leonardo (Caio Blat), who joined *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West] expedition disguised as low-income labourers. Unlike most of the migrants, the three brothers were aware that the expedition was not going to find *terras desocupadas* [empty lands], but territories long occupied by Indigenous people. The lack of recognition of Indigenous use, possession and tenure of the land recalls the Australian history of *terra nullius*, under which 40,000 years of occupancy by several Indigenous generations were ignored (Reynolds 2003, 10). In Brazil, *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West] was seen as a national project to explore and exploit natural resources. It aimed to colonise and develop the Brazilian West by building highways to integrate it with the rest of the national territory.

### 3.5 The Meeting between Two Worlds

The opening scene of *Xingu*, an overview of a river, is similar to that provided in the Australian film *Ten Canoes*. In both cases, the pristine, clean and bright waters of the river is portrayed as an integral part of an Indigenous territory. As developed in each film's narrative, the river's cleanliness is directly related to a view of an isolated, wild, pristine place. The river is portrayed as an unspoiled and sustainable source of food and transportation for Indigenous peoples. However, unlike *Ten Canoes*, which is set in a distant past that depicts only non-motorised boats, the characters of *Xingu* use powerboats as the narrative progresses from the 1940s to the 1970s. In any event, progress still seems slow when compared to the mighty power of the river.

In *Xingu* as in *Ten Canoes*, the image of the river is followed by a voice-over sequence. However, in this case, the narrator is not an Indigenous person but a famous Brazilian actor, João Miguel who plays one of the film's main characters, Claudio Villas-Bôas, who became later a well-known anthropologist and Indigenous-rights activist. In this sequence, with his young voice he reveals that he is searching for a place in the world. In other words, the film's young hero is searching for an adventure. He promptly finds one: newspaper headlines are calling for people to join *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West]. These headlines outline the main intention of the march as being to create airstrips and to occupy 'empty' lands. To underscore the film's veracity, these headlines are followed by archival images of labourers digging the land.

As the film continues, Claudio Villas-Bôas, along with his youngest brother Leonardo, joins a queue to enrol in the expedition. In this scene, the camera adopts a documentary style, allowing other unidentified characters to occupy the centre of the image. This strategy conveys the fact that the brothers were only three among many men who joined the expedition. Subsequently, this

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national population in the area to better secure it. Fears of invasion was reinforced during the Pacific War, especially after the Japanese bombing of Darwin and the invasion of Papua New Guinea, both in 1942 (Williams and Newman 2006, 2).

documentary style is left behind as the Villas-Bôas brothers progress to centre stage in the narrative. Initially, they disguise themselves as labourers; in the end, they become the expedition's leaders. *Xingu* is told from their perspective. They are portrayed as heroes while the Indigenous people occupy the role of supporters and beneficiaries of their actions. During their journey, the Villas-Bôas brothers manage to contact the Indigenous people and work with them to create *the Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park]. As the narrative develops and the park comes closer and closer to creation, the three brothers advocate for Indigenous people's rights to retain their culture with minimal outside interference. Yet the film occludes Indigenous agency and presence and turns the creation of the Xingu Park into these white men's story positioning the park as his gift to Indigenous peoples. Although the film does not give direct voice to the Indigenous perspective, the director subsequently revealed that his script was based on stories from both side—the Villas-Bôas family members and the Indigenous people of the Xingu region. For Hamburger the different versions are complementary: while the first is inspired by the Villas-Bôas brothers' book *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West] (1994), the latter was based on oral stories passed down through generations. An example is the scene of the meeting between the Villas-Bôas expedition and a group of Indigenous people, set on the Xingu River. This scene was based on an oral story about the Villas-Bôas brothers' arrival, a recurring theme among the different Indigenous nations in the region (Almeida 2012).

In the film, the first meeting between the Villas-Bôas expedition and Indigenous people takes place on the Xingu River. The workers are paddling their boats when they first see them on the margins of the river, pointing their bows and arrows at the strangers while yelling and speaking in their own language. There are no subtitles to make the audience aware of what they are saying. The viewer is thus positioned on the side of the startled and frightened workers, who are not understanding a single word. Between the locals and the workers, the wide Xingu River flows, increasing the distance between them. When the atmosphere seems to have quieted down, Claudio calls to Orlando and some of the other men to cross the river and make contact with those they observed. Initially, the people receive their foreign guests with distrust, which suddenly turns into welcoming hugs.

In this scene of the first encounter between Indigenous people and the Villas-Bôas contingent, the director portrays the former as completely isolated and separate from the rest of Brazilian society. This first contact scene is constructed quite differently from the first meeting in *Birdwatchers*, which is depicted as taking place in the present. In it, the Indigenous people were speaking Portuguese as well as Guaraní; further, they were part of both worlds and using money, clothing and cars. In *Xingu*, Indigenous people and low-income workers meet in the 1940s as though they were back in the fifteenth century, when the Portuguese arrived for the first time in Brazil's Indigenous territories. What is different is that this time the intention is to negotiate relocations rather than to simply conquer people and property. As indicated, the expedition's formal aim was to construct airstrips and military

bases and to occupy areas that were deemed uninhabited from the Brazilian government's perspective. Aware of Indigenous people living in the region, the Villas-Bôas brothers aimed to contact them and negotiate these construction projects in exchange for legal recognition of their territories.

Although the scene of the meeting is based on Indigenous peoples' oral stories, the film does not translate into words their reaction on coming across the expedition. It does reflect the surprise and curiosity of the Indigenous hosts upon receiving such guests on their lands. Claudio Villas-Bôas gives his knife to the *cacique* — *líder indígena* [Indigenous leader] and Orlando introduces himself as well as his brother. The *cacique* also introduces himself as Zaqiri and his people as Kalapalo. The Villas-Bôas brothers give them a hard piece of *rapadura* (whole sugar cane), which they try but do not like. The Kalapalo bring the foreigners from the river's borders into their hinterlands. There, many people with questioning eyes and hands touch and gaze at the foreigners and their clothes, shoes and glasses. The director depicts them as enveloped with a mixture of curiosity and fear, as a child cries and screams while an old man inspects a glass, handling it as the completely alien object that it is for him.

The film does not develop the cosmological enquiries that probably emerged from this meeting with another culture. In his writings on the concept of "Amerindian perspectivism" Eduardo Viveiros (1998) challenges traditional interpretations of reality based on the nature–culture dichotomy which separates humans from all other beings, and instead draws attention to Amerindian cosmovisions in which animals and humans share a similar condition of existence, dissolving the anthropocentric dualism between humanity and nature. Viveiros then criticises his own use of the term "Amerindian perspectivism" and suggests replacing it, by moving from the idea of multiculturalism (we are all humans but from different cultures) to a concept of multinaturalism (we are all spirits but with different bodies). This distinction is well illustrated by Viveiros's analysis of Lévi-Strauss's anecdotal example of the distinctive reactions of Indigenous peoples with their European colonisers:

In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, whilst the Spanish were dispatching inquisitional commissions to investigate whether the natives had a soul or not, these very natives later were busy drowning the white people they had captured in order to find out, after lengthy observation, whether or not the corpses were subject to putrefaction. (Lévi-Straus 1973, 384, quoted in Viveiros 1998, 475)

Eduardo Viveiros uses this text to analyse the distinctive reactions: the Spaniards were concerned with whether Indigenous people had souls; the Indigenous were questioning whether the Spaniards had bodies subject to decomposition. Lévi-Strauss uses these texts to indicate how ethnocentrism is not unique to European colonisers but also to Indigenous people who likewise questioned the humanity of the unknown other (Viveiros 1998, 474). Viveiros stresses that in order to recognise the

humanity of the other, European colonisers were concerned about the local people's souls in terms of their own ability to convert them to Christianity. The colonisers considered that animals and plants are soulless, and thus were not human. The Indigenous people wanted to know if the Spaniards had a corporeal form or if they were solely spirits. He uses this example to emphasise that for Amazonian peoples, there is a consensus that everybody has a soul, that everybody is human. He develops the argument that, from this perspective, appearances are changeable with the removal of clothing. Accordingly, the perception of appearance is related to context and personal experience.

Viveiros's argument is that appearance is of great importance as clothing shapes identities. Therefore, if a person dresses like a white person, she/he can see the world as they see it. He gives the example of a mask that is used in a ritual, not as a carnival fantasy prop but as a working tool, such as one that allows a professional diver to breathe and survive in the deep sea. Thus, Viveiros argues that from the Amerindian perspectivism point of view the world is dangerous because identities can be readily changed and swapped, with one becoming the other. This is certainly the case for the jaguar that drinks blood. In the jaguar perspective she is drinking *cauim* (an Indigenous traditional alcoholic beverage) as in her world, she is human. In an argument similar to that of the Aboriginal Elder Meredith in Rose's research, who said that ants could also have been researching human activities, the perception differs from species to species. Therefore "Amerindian thought sees humanity as a point of view: we see ourselves as humans, but jaguars do too. And they see us, in turn, as prey" (Avelar 2013, 16). Eduardo Viveiros explains that it is the shaman who has the primary responsibility of dealing with multinaturalism as he/she is the key person to bridge communication between different spirits.

In *Xingu*, the meeting between the Indigenous people and the expedition workers resulted in the former developing a fatal cold. As they had never been exposed to the cold, the epidemic killed half of the Kalapalo people, including the *cacique* Zaquiri; subsequently, it spread all over the region. In the face of this deadly outcome, Claudio Villas-Bôas asserts that outsiders should not be allowed to invade the region ever again. His brother Orlando argues that the best idea was to bring doctors to vaccinate everyone in the villages. Claudio agrees, but concludes that in so doing they will be providing at the same time *o veneno e o antídoto* [the poison and the antidote]. The reciprocal violence against white colonists is not stressed in the film, apart from the scene where Claudio Villas-Bôas lead an attack on the ranchers occupying Indigenous lands. He is the one that motivates Indigenous rage and revenge, and he is the one to assert to the ranchers that the land has traditional owners. In Australian films this Indigenous rage can sometimes be seen as in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (Fred Schepisi 1978) where racism drives its eponymous character to murder. In the case of *Xingu*, the narrative leaves no space for Indigenous heroism.

As a way to reduce the devastating impacts of the non-Indigenous people who arrive to occupy the region upon Indigenous peoples of the region, the brothers create a plan to demarcate a closed and protected reserve, to be called Xingu Indigenous Park. The Park's primary objective is to give its Indigenous inhabitants the right to maintain their mode of life without outside intervention. This aim is made clear in a scene showing a conversation between Orlando Villas-Bôas and a high-ranking military officer. They are looking at a map of the Amazon region and negotiating the route for the *Rodovia Transamazônica* [Trans-Amazonian Highway], a massive project that was planned to cross through Indigenous peoples' territory. Orlando suggests revising the route in order to avoid crossing the lands of the Krenakarore, who were still uncontacted by outsiders. The military officer rejects the argument and concludes that is time to move them out because "*progresso é bom para todo mundo, ate mesmo para índio*" [progress is good for everyone, even for Indigenous people]. Orlando immediately disagrees: "*Não, não é não. Eu nem sei se é bom para a gente*" [No, it is not. I cannot even know if it is good for us]. This dialogue reflects the Villas-Bôas brothers' main objective in creating the park: delaying Indigenous people's contact with non-Indigenous societies. In their view, this was a destructive path to follow.

As the narrative progresses, the Villas-Bôas brothers are portrayed as having had no alternative other than to join an expedition to contact the Krenakarore. In a voice-over, Claudio justified their decision to make contact as follows: as non-Indigenous will eventually go everywhere, the only thing that the brothers could do was to be the ones to get there first. The film shows archival images of the *Rodovia Transamazônica* [Trans-Amazonian Highway] construction, a project that devastated a great range of forest. It also presents selected archival images of the actual Villas-Bôas brothers during the expedition and within the park. The viewer learns of the important contributions the Villas-Bôas brothers made to Indigenous rights which led to them to be nominated for a Nobel Prize in 1971.

The film concludes with a panoramic view of the park and text explaining that while the park is preserved, it remains constantly threatened. In this panoramic shot we vividly see the direct consequence of the creation of the *Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park]. From above it is an oasis of healthy, preserved green forest that stands in sharp contrast with the so-called *abraço da morte* [death hug] zone of the agribusinesses surrounding it (Santilli 2006, 216). In the film's final image, a shirtless Indigenous man vigilantly flies an airplane over the park, using the aircraft in the service of his people. Having a privileged view from the airplane is a necessary tool to observe and protect the boundaries of the park. The film then concludes by leaving this image as the primary legacy of the Villas-Bôas brothers: they were the protagonists who recognised that Indigenous ownership and management of the land was the best solution.

### 3.6 A Comparative Study of *Ten Canoes* and *Xingu*

Although it presented a fascinating piece of history, *Xingu* failed at the box-office. It attracted an estimated 370,000 people in Brazil (Ghetti 2012). The film's producer expressed deep disappointment in the lack of interest in Indigenous peoples and the conservation issues around Brazil's natural heritage.<sup>69</sup> The film's director, Cao Hamburger, attributed its poor reception to Brazilian antipathy towards Indigenous peoples (Guimarães 2012). But perhaps the reasons for its lack of success were more complicated. The film was made only after the Villas-Bôas family appealed for public support for a film to be made about the heroic saga of the brothers. In an interview, Hamburger revealed that the film was a difficult assignment. He was an urban director who had "never filmed without a door, window, chair, car, glass..." (Guimarães 2012). This challenge is reflected in the way that the director most frequently places the camera inside the Villas-Bôas shelter. It is through the Villas-Bôas brothers' gaze that the film presents its great diversity of Indigenous peoples. In this respect, *Xingu* is radically different from *Ten Canoes*. The fact that the latter had a much better reception nationally and internationally calls into question the director's argument that the film was a challenge because audiences were not interested in Indigenous peoples' issues. The fault may have lain elsewhere.

A possible explanation for the film's failure is that audiences may be more interested in a discourse that includes the "other" as the main voice. Unlike *Ten Canoes*, the Brazilian film eschewed the opportunity to create a narrative from the Indigenous perspective. The plot is instead fully invested in creating a heroic version of the Villas-Bôas brothers' actions. They are portrayed as the saviours, the ones responsible for the creation of the Park; it seems that the Indigenous people were there simply waiting for their arrival. Indigenous agency is backgrounded.

The film accentuates the Villas-Bôas brothers' ability to negotiate with the Brazilian government, thereby slowing the invasion of Indigenous territories while enabling the people to move to safer, more remote places in the forest. However, it is important to note that, as the Villas-Bôas brothers had to come from somewhere, so too did the Brazilian government have to be prepared to act in the way they did for the Villas-Bôas petition to work. From 1940, the Brazilian census has stressed that Indigenous populations were about to vanish or be completely incorporated into national society, losing their cultural specificities. In the 1960s, military government created the Foundation for the Indigenous Populations (FUNAI) to deal with these disappearing populations, aiming to accommodate them into small territories until they were completely assimilated. However, these populations have not decreased, and in fact have been growing over the last decades.<sup>70</sup> The problem

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<sup>69</sup> Alexander Goulart, "Fernando Meirelles comenta sobre a pouca bilheteria de 'Xingu'", *GAUCHAZH*, 5 May 2012, <http://zh.clicrbs.com.br/rs/entretenimento/noticia/2012/05/fernando-meirelles-comenta-sobre-a-pouca-bilheteria-de-xingu-3748389.html>, accessed 1 March 2018.

<sup>70</sup> As mentioned before, recent official data shows that the Indigenous population in Brazil is 896,917 that is 0.47% of the national population (IBGE 2010).

with heroic narratives is that this aspect tends to be downplayed: there is no space left to mention the *Estatuto do Índio* [Indigenous Statute] (1973) that guaranteed Indigenous land rights, or the *Constituição Federal* [Federal Constitution] (1988), which assured Indigenous peoples' rights to maintain their culture and way of life. The federal constitution was a fundamental tool for the legal recognition and demarcation of Indigenous territories. Although the creation of the Park saved many Indigenous groups from annihilation, when they relocated to the park their lands were left open to the invasion of ranchers and miners. Some of them, however, were able to reclaim their lands, such as the Ikpeng, Naruvotu, Kawaiwete and Waura (Schwartzman et al. 2013). Yet *Xingu* eschews the opportunity to create a narrative from the Indigenous perspective. The plot is instead fully invested in constructing a heroic version of the Villas-Bôas brothers' actions, as saviours. It does show negotiations between Villas-Bôas brothers and military officials, but it does not problematise the key role of the *Força Aérea Brasileira* [Brazilian Air Force] in establishing an air base adjacent to Indigenous lands as one of the government's demands in exchange for the park.

For *Xingu*, the director cast Xavante, Kalapalo and Kaiabi people among the other inhabitants of the Xingu National Park. However, their voices are rarely heard; furthermore, in only in one scene in which many different languages are spoken is their speech subtitled. In this scene, set at night, the members of the expedition, including the Villas-Bôas brothers, sit with some of the Indigenous people around a fire. Speaking in various languages, the people underline their need for land and water for survival. In summarising the statements, Leonardo Villas-Bôas develops the idea of creating the Xingu Empire of Indigenous Nations. This would act as a home for a number of different Indigenous ethnic groups. The scene concludes with Claudio sketching the project as a reserve with some *ocas* (traditional Indigenous oval houses) enclosed by a circular line (the limits of the park) as a means of protection.

This activity has an Australian parallel. Part of contemporary Aboriginal policy-making from early 1970s in Australia was to create just this sense of a pan-identity as a means of both recognising movements of Aboriginal people across the national territory as well as creating a sense of commonality of purpose and political agency. Key examples are the creation of the Aboriginal flag, designed by Harold Thomas in 1971, the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy facing the Old Parliament House in the national capital, Canberra, in 1972 and the Commonwealth/Federal government decision in the early 1980s to adopt a cultural definition of Aboriginality based on a person identifying as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person and being accepted by the community as such. In Brazil, Xingu National Park became a symbol of pan-identity assembling Indigenous peoples from four main linguistic groups: Arawak, Carib, Gê and Tupí (Garfield 2004, 139).



In *Xingu*, as well as in *Ten Canoes*, isolation is presented as a key element of preservation. Indigenous peoples only use the pristine and unspoiled waters and land for sustainable consumption. The paradisiacal setting of *Ten Canoes* is rationalised by its chronological setting before colonisation; the non-Indigenous people are not present to spoil either the place or its inhabitants. However, by electing to set the story in the past, the film was criticised for presenting “an emphasis on cultural loss” rather than showing the “dynamics of cultural change”, thus conveying an impression that authentic Yolngu culture is essentially extinct (Riphagen and Venbrux 2008, 268). However, *Ten Canoes* in its sheer making, as an artefact, seems more committed to showing the relevance of traditional storytelling for cultural maintenance in a time of great change. It offers an insider’s perspective. On the other hand, although *Xingu* also references Indigenous groups who still have no contact with whites, its narrative centres on its white messianic saviours. The film’s narrative trope focuses on the white characters that save the non-white ‘other’ from her/his miserable fate. In many aspects *Xingu*’s narrative follows this classical white saviour storyline:

The saviour then comes to admire the noble savagery and lack of pretense among the native, Indigenous, or local culture. And slowly the saviour comes to learn about the native techniques for defending themselves from the few bad white people of whom the saviour was formerly a part. In the end, the saviour might even identify more with the natives to the point of turning his or her back on the colonizing force. (Hughey 2014, 28)

In *Xingu*, the Villas-Bôas brothers deviate from the initial objective of the expedition (to deliberately occupy Indigenous territories) and transform it into a platform for negotiation with public authorities to save Indigenous peoples and territories.

The film uses a fast-paced narrative to compress four decades of dramatic political changes. It begins in 1943, with *A Marcha para o Oeste* [The March to the West], during the first term of the populist government of Getúlio Vargas (1930–45) and continues over his second term (1951–54). It crosses without mention the high-speed development years of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–61) and presents, in passing, the image of President Jânio Quadros (1961), who signed the decree for the creation of *Parque Indígena do Xingu* [Xingu Indigenous Park]. The military coup d’état led by three armed-forces generals (1964) is not directly mentioned. It is the news of the construction of the *Rodovia Transamazônica* [Trans-Amazonian Highway] that was undertaken during the military government of Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–74) that chronologically situates the narrative. Orlando Villas-Bôas summarises the political change in the country with the observation to Claudio that “*com essa gente não tem conversa*” [with these people there is no conversation]. From the 1940s to the 1970s, the brothers as well as daily life in the park do not change as much as the political landscape does. The film’s attempt to portray the entire history of the park, over so many decades,

results in a confusing storyline that is often difficult to follow—this might also have explained its lack of box-office traction.

In this respect, *Xingu* contrasts sharply with *Ten Canoes*. The latter tells a story that unfolds over centuries. Its slow-paced narrative and colour photography for ancient times and black-and-white photography for the more recent past radically distinguish the film's different temporalities while connecting and collecting them together. The display of Indigenous ownership and management of territories is dissociated from the invasive colonial history. In doing this, the film not only removes the colonial past but also the shaping forces of the present. In choosing to silence traumatic aspects of recent Australian history, the film offers a gaze of Aboriginal people living in better conditions. If the film lacks contextualisation, it concentrates in showing that the stories, the Law, are living things being enacted now in this time and place, presented to fit two purposes: Yolngu purposes and the purpose of allowing the world to see aspects of their stories, their cosmologies and epistemologies.

*Ten Canoes* is not a film about culture in transition but instead about a culture experiencing continuity. It calls viewers to experience a contemporary encounter differently—not immediately in their conflict zone but in the sharing of a story, which nonetheless importantly stages cultural differences. In the documentary *The Balanda and the Bark Canoes*, there are many statements by both de Heer and members of the Ramingining community involved in the making of the film that attest to their goals in this respect. For the Indigenous participants, these are framed in terms of achieving cultural preservation and respect. In this chapter, I have tried to show the connection between cultural maintenance and respect for the natural environment. Although de Heer's stated goals do not touch on issues of environmental sustainability at all, I draw references from *Ten Canoes* in order to explore the themes of water and water conservation, based on the film's narrative and form as well as on its circulation. The film serves as source material for activism and campaigning because it provides a visual narrative of a nature and a way of life needing protection against predation.

In *Xingu*, by contrast, Indigenous peoples are portrayed as those primarily connected to the natural environment. They seem to only use the pristine waters and land for their sustainable consumption. The notion of wilderness common to films centred on animals and remote parts of the world encourages the reaffirmation of Indigenous peoples as those capable of developing a relationship with their environment that is not destructive. However, it also creates a problematic representation of Indigenous peoples as part of the wilderness rather than recognising their “ecological agency” (Plumwood 2006). This is exactly the problem with “concepts of wilderness as an absence of agency”, which “lay the foundations for private property by erasing all other claimants (both indigenous human and nonhuman) as presences that might constrain annexation” (Plumwood 2006, 134).

As the film keeps Indigenous peoples deprived of their voices, they can be seen as part of the environment rather than as cultural and ecological agents. While astonishing photography depicts the preserved environment and Indigenous way of life, Indigenous cosmologies are not addressed in the film in the ways that they are made central to *Ten Canoes*. In the Amazonian cosmology, “the original common condition of both humans and animals is not animality but rather humanity” (Viveiros 1998) This shift allows for the comprehension of an Indigenous metaphysics in which plants, animals and even the earth itself are not seen as isolated objects. Thus, it is left to the viewers to conclude that for Indigenous peoples, humanity is not more important than the natural environment. In this sense, aesthetics (especially through photography) speak more forcefully than the direct (narrative) of the film content.

### **3.7 Pristine Views: Aesthetic Choices Strengthening Political Messages**

In the debate over entangled aesthetic and political adoptions, Roland Bleiker’s article “The Aesthetic Turn in International Political Theory” (2001) differentiates mimetic and aesthetic forms of representations in world politics. He points out that only the aesthetic allows for the idea of an inevitable difference between represented and representation. He uses examples of artistic productions, such as photography that although they can seem to be authentic reproductions they are actually shaped by a group of artistic decisions, such as framing and lighting.

Indeed, these choices make up the very essence of the photograph: its aesthetic quality. But, of course, they result from artistic and inevitably subjective decisions on form taken by the photographer; decisions that have nothing to do with the essence of the actual object that is photographed. (513)

Bleiker argues for the political value of aesthetic modes of representation, as those provide layers of perception and sensation. In this sense, I argue that *Xingu* and *Ten Canoes* do not exhibit Indigenous lands and waterscapes essentially as they are but from a certain perspective that values them, corroborating with a discourse that correlates with the central tenet of the Indigenous well-balanced relationship with nature. Even though these places are facing slow degradation from external causes, they still look undamaged and pristine on the screen. In both films, photography plays a key role, with a green and blue colour scheme accentuating live forests and pure waters.

The emphasis on panoramic views over the forest and river in the opening and closing scenes of the film highlights human beings as part of rather than above the environment. In doing so, it is possible to say that the film resonates with Indigenous animism and makes a critique of anthropocentrism, affirming that humans are not the most significant species of the planet. On the other hand, these panoramic views in the film can imply a detached and omniscient human eye watching an object that is nature. The contradictory uses of panoramas relate to debates on the

aesthetics of nineteenth-century Romanticism. In that period, the public would be invited to admire panoramic paintings representing topographical scenes. These immersive and very popular panoramic-landscape paintings sought to give viewers the illusion of being in another space. Alexander von Humboldt, a Prussian scientist who travelled to South America and wrote extensively about its natural environment, praised panoramas for their ability “to raise the feeling of admiration for nature.” (1859, 98) However, criticism of Humboldt’s travel narratives pointed out that these were inclined “to reduce America to landscape and marginalise its inhabitants.” In sum, if romantic representations of pristine landscapes are able to incite appreciation of nature, at the same time, they evoke and reinforce a colonial gaze that removes Indigenous people from the landscape. Consequently, these spaces are represented as wilderness without culture and custody.

The panoramic view from above can have different meanings. It can be interpreted as a traditional form of colonialism and mapping, but it can also be seen as specific Indigenous aesthetics. In Australia an example is dot paintings that depict an aerial viewpoint over the land in Central Desert and West Australian Aboriginal desert paintings. Eric Michaels explains that these “paintings depict, in terms of a religious iconography, geographical sites for which the painters have some special responsibility” (1994, 55). In both films panoramic views accentuate Indigenous peoples’ presence and ownership of the land. The pristine water and exuberant forests are part of an environment, historically protected and managed by Indigenous peoples. Therefore, the notion of taking care of the environment in these films means a reciprocal relation with it. Both films are quite different in aesthetic and political terms, as *Ten Canoes* incorporates Indigenous cosmologies and storytelling in much more profound way than *Xingu*. However, both films can serve to spark valuable debates on Indigenous water rights.

In this chapter, I have discussed how two recent Brazilian and Australian films, *Xingu* and *Ten Canoes*, portrayed Indigenous peoples’ ways of life as sustainable and respectful of natural resources. This message is highlighted by aesthetic choices such as panoramic shots of pristine forests and waterscapes. This does not mean that all Indigenous peoples living around the Ararufa Swamp in Australia or along the Xingu River in Brazil lived or are living in this way now. However, these two cinematic productions manage to associate Indigenous peoples with the sustainable use of natural resources, resulting in them living in an environment that is portrayed as well-preserved. Although *Xingu* does not feature an Indigenous voice as does *Ten Canoes*, both films transmit a message that advocates for Indigenous sovereignty as the only chance of preserving the environment and traditional Indigenous lifestyles. Environmental protection is shown as deeply dependent on Indigenous agency and management of their territories. In the case of *Xingu* this is more explicitly exposed in the film’s aesthetic choices than in its content. It is the panoramic views of the water and landscapes that create a hopeful view of the future of the planet in times of anthropogenic climate change. In the case of

*Ten Canoes* camera movement fosters intimacy with Indigenous characters, reinforcing Indigenous perspectives and knowledge of the environment.

This isolation was illustrated in different ways in the two films. In *Ten Canoes*, remoteness was suggested by setting the entire narrative in the past, a strategy that justified the untouched land and waterscapes. In *Xingu*, the isolation was geographic, with Indigenous peoples living remotely. In different ways both films advocate for the people to remain in control of their territories, as their permanence and agency represent the best chance of preserving nature and traditional Indigenous culture. In both films nature is not a human domain but a living being. Its preservation and perpetuation are deeply dependent on Indigenous management of their territories. This is more explicitly demonstrated in the films' aesthetic choices than it is in their content. It is the panoramic views of the water and landscapes that create a hopeful pluriversal world in times of anthropogenic climate change. In the next chapter, I build on the comparative filmic analysis of chapters one and two, to focus on contemporary battles for cultural rights as they find expression in Indigenous collectives of audio-visual productions.

## Cultural Rights

In the second chapter of this thesis, I examined films portraying Indigenous peoples' ongoing battles for land rights, as well as the relationship between Indigenous activism and local and global environmental debates. In the third chapter, I studied films portraying the importance of including water rights as part of Indigenous territorial rights, arguing that this benefits not just specific Indigenous communities but water preservation for the planet as a whole. In this fourth chapter, I discuss films that focus on Indigenous peoples' struggles to maintain something that, although physically intangible, is a solid pillar for their existence and resistance: culture. I argue that, along with land and water rights, cultural rights are key to Indigenous conservation and the sustainable development of their natural resources.

I use the term “cultural rights” in line with Konai Thaman (2000, 1), who defines it as the “collective rights of people who identify with particular groups, for self-determination, survival and sustainability” in the global context. In my comparative analysis of Indigenous audio-visual productions, I maintain that sustainable development by Indigenous peoples is connected to their traditional ways of knowing and cosmologies. I also acknowledge that, from an Indigenous perspective, “the protection of cultural rights” upholds their existence and “the development of their cultural, linguistic and religious identity” (Tauli-Corpuz 2010, 32).

### 4.1 Everyday Life and Collective Activism at NITV and VNA

In this chapter, I discuss the role of Indigenous filmmaking as a contemporary form of cultural expression that allows for the registering of many Indigenous cultural traditions such as music, dances, songs, painting and storytelling. Specifically, I analyse audio-visual productions made by Indigenous collectives in Australia and Brazil. The Australian focus is on the productions of NITV (National Indigenous Television channel). In the absence of a comparable Indigenous television channel in Brazil, the main project that I examine is VNA—*Video nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages]. This project manages an impressive collection of more than a hundred short films and documentaries, many of which are available online, made with/by around thirty different ethnic Indigenous groups.<sup>71</sup> My comparative analyses of Indigenous media in these two countries focus simultaneously on

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<sup>71</sup> In Brazil the term ethnic group is commonly used to refer to cultural differences between Indigenous groups. Anthropologists such as Alcida Ramos critiqued it for suggesting a transitional identity as if Indigenous groups must end up appropriated by a “mainstream nationality” (1998, 185). She suggests using the term Indigenous “nation” instead of “ethnic groups” as it gives more political strength.

aesthetic choices and political content. I pay special attention to productions concerned with displaying Indigenous sustainable practices in relation to struggles for cultural rights. In my analyses, I aim to find points of convergence/divergence between Indigenous audio-visual productions in Australia and Brazil.

During most of the colonial and indeed postcolonial periods Indigenous peoples in both Brazil and Australia were reduced to the status of objects of ethnographic accounts. In this sense, the films studied need to be understood as part of ongoing attempts to decolonise audio-visual productions in both countries. However, the attempt to produce stories by, with and for Indigenous peoples is not confined to either country: it is a worldwide movement. As Indigenous people moved behind the camera, they opened up the possibility of narrating their own histories through self-representation and/or authorial partnerships with non-Indigenous people. In this new scenario many Indigenous people have finally “seized control of the camera and its attendant technologies”, reversing the camera position and challenging colonial/settled representations of Indigenous peoples’ lives and cultures (Pearson and Knabe 2015, 16). However, it is important to ask: what are the aesthetic and political consequences of these reversals? Are they necessarily or explicitly found in all Indigenous audio-visual productions?

For Native American scholar Michelle Raheja, the answer to the latter question is ‘yes’. She sees Indigenous Cinema as displaying specific common Indigenous aesthetics “with their attendant focus on a particular geographical space, discrete cultural practices, social activist texts, notions of temporality that do not delink the past from the present or future, and spiritual traditions” (2007, 1167). For Houston Wood (2008, 1) “every Indigenous film reflects the specific storytelling traditions of the native peoples being represented” to “greater and lesser degrees”, while Colleen McGloin (2015, 134) in insisting on the specificities of Indigenous films, argues that it constitutes “a genre in its own right” with these genres reflecting “efforts to organize and hierarchize texts and cultural practices” so as to reach a determinate audience response. McGloin further argues there exist “multi-generic [Indigenous] texts” that, while appearing “to elude categorization”, are capable of disorganising “the arrangement of meaning and the organization of knowledge”. In these circumstances, Indigenous films as genre filmmaking work productively with “unclear, unfixed categories” (135).

As this list of attributes makes clear, films can be assembled under the Indigenous Cinema umbrella for a number of different reasons. One of these is to tackle colonisation and create a decolonising cinema. Barry Barclay uses the traditional division of First Cinema (Hollywood), Second Cinema (European arthouse films) and Third Cinema (postcolonial films from Latin America and Asia in the 1960s) to define Indigenous Cinema as Fourth Cinema. He argues that as cinema movement it provides an opportunity to “rework the ancient core values to shape a growing

Indigenous Cinema outside the national orthodoxy” (2003, 11). Indeed, this categorisation locates Indigenous films in a necessary tension with rather than as conforming to national cinema projects.

For its part national cinema is a key term for film criticism and theory, specifically for debates about national identity and discussions of filmmaking within specific national territories. As explained by Higson (1989, 36), the term national cinema is frequently used to describe films made within the borders of nation-states. However, because this term has been used in a variety of circumstances and discourses, there is no unanimously accepted definition for it. O’Regan (1996, 45) gets at this variety of purpose by defining national cinemas as “simultaneously an aesthetic and production movement, a critical technology, a civic project of state, an industrial strategy and an international project formed in response to the dominant international cinemas”. In this sense, even though national cinema productions are primarily a result of public and/or private domestic enterprises (state subsidies and tax-incentive legislation), their long-term survival depends on their capacity to circulate in international markets. Therefore, debates on national cinemas necessarily demand an understanding of the relationship between nationalism, citizenship and globalisation.

As Elsaesser (2005, 36) notes, nationhood exists “in a field of force of inclusion and exclusion, as well as resistance and appropriation”. Furthermore, he argues that national identity discourses “must repress differences of class, gender, race, religion, and history in order to assert its coherence, and is thus another name for internal colonization” (36). In Michael Schudson’s conception, Even though nation-states have been the primary focus of social membership over the last two centuries, transnationalism and sub-nationalism have been challenging its power, therefore, making nation-states more about delineating the terms for the staging of difference (1994). In this sense, I consider films as direct products of social, historical, cultural and political contexts of national cinema environments (their films and industries) that struggle to please, simultaneously, local, national and global audiences, markets and perspectives.

Is it possible for an umbrella term, such as national cinema, to be capable of accommodating Indigenous audio-productions when these films are not necessarily aligned with the cultural identity of specific nation-states? My view is that Indigenous Cinema can challenge the unity of a national cinema, presenting different cultural identities and nations that do not necessarily recognise or identify as part of a nation-state project. Indigenous Cinema can be part of state policy funding, but at the same time it also can diverge from national-identity projects such as of the promotion of postcolonial languages (Australian English and Brazilian Portuguese) or unified identities of citizenship (Australians and Brazilians), and especially unified nation-state sovereignty (Australia and Brazil).

Indigenous cinemas cover both documentary and feature-film production. Of these, it is feature film that has the highest profile, but as Pearson and Knabe (2015, 9) note, there were only a



little over a hundred Indigenous feature films released up until the year 2015. While the number is not impressive, it can be considered significant, if account is taken of “the extent to which Indigenous peoples are scattered in small numbers around the globe and have rare and decidedly uneven access to the funding, production facilities, and promotion and distribution deals” (Pearson and Knabe 2015, 14). However, the majority of these Indigenous feature films represent just a few of the extraordinary number of Indigenous cultures worldwide (Pearson and Knabe, 2015, 37). In this context, it is also important to consider the actual situation of audio-visual production and exhibition.

As accessibility to theatres is a real challenge for remote Indigenous peoples, other media are replacing and influencing the ways that films are made, displayed and circulated if they are to include their Indigenous audiences. Due to budgetary reasons, documentaries have been a prominent way of communicating about Indigenous contemporary issues (Wood 2008). This is exactly the case of the two media projects that I study here: NITV and Vídeo nas Aldeias (Video in Villages). Both use television, video and the Internet as their main vehicles to reach audiences.

In contrast to my second and third chapters, where I studied fictional films made by or with Indigenous peoples in various levels of partnership, here I focus on documentaries made by the two aforementioned media projects. In both, Indigenous cultures and everyday life are presented as points of friction between traditional practices and modernisation. This friction does not mean a transition to a European model of modernity, as if all societies would necessarily follow a similar developmental model. As Chakrabarty explains in his book *Provincializing Europe*, it is necessary to enquire

how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. (2007, xiii)

Consequently, European thought can be situated as a product of specific places and histories. Another postcolonial thinker, Walter D. Mignolo, uses the concept of pluriversality to break with notions of linear time and progress.

Western civilization would be merely one among many options, and not the one to guide and rule the many. In other words, there is no one trajectory that has the right to prevail over the other. (2011, 176)

In this sense, the audio-visual productions studied here are able to display Indigenous traditions that have existed since pre-colonial times and are facing contemporary challenges—such as cultural loss—that ask for decolonial action. Susan Miller (2008, 15), describes this process very well when she suggests that “decolonizing projects [should] include both the recovery of lapsed Indigenous practices and the utilization of non-Indigenous practices for Indigenous purposes”. For such projects, Indigenous peoples incorporate the use of filmmaking equipment to register/produce ancient as well as contemporary cultural practices. The main difference from the works analysed in the last two

chapters is that these productions are made firstly for an Indigenous audience and secondly for the general public.

I will first discuss NITV and a production broadcast on this Aboriginal television network, *Footprints*; then I look at the VNA—*Vídeo nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages] initiative and one of its productions, *A Gente Luta Mas Come Fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit: Trailer]; and finally I draw some interesting conclusions that connect both productions as part of a broader Indigenous collectivist activism for cultural rights.

#### **4.2 NITV and the Aboriginal Australian Media Landscape**

Before analysing the audio-visual production of NITV, a nationally broadcast Indigenous television channel, it is important to contextualise this channel within the history of the development of Indigenous media in Australia. The development of the Indigenous media landscape in Australia is deeply embedded in the community-based model as a strategy for self-determination (Rennie and Featherstone 2008, 60). Its history goes back to the early 1980s, when Indigenous peoples experimented with producing for local television, such as in Yuendumu (on Warlpiri lands) and Pukatja (in English, Ernabella) on northwest of Alice Springs. As a result, in 1985 the Warlpiri community at Yuendumu created the first Aboriginal television station in Australia. These developments were connected with and partly enabled by the expansion in this period of community (not-for-profit) broadcasting in a designated community radio sector. Eric Michaels wrote two seminal works on this: *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia, 1982–1986* (1986); and *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla Makes TV at Yuendumu* (1987). The former was a report commissioned by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). In the report, Michaels studied the impact of the introduction of television into remote Aboriginal communities. He tells how CAAMA (Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association) was established and supported as an Aboriginal-controlled and -managed community radio service in 1980s (one of whose creators, Freda Glynn, is the mother of Aboriginal filmmaker Warwick Thornton). In the latter book, Eric Michaels offers a compelling case of how Aboriginal cultural backgrounds determine aesthetic decisions by detailing the shooting of *Coniston Story* (Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, 1984). I return to this debate later in this chapter's section on Indigenous aesthetics.

Prior to these developments, in 1977, Kerry Packer, a media owner (then of Channel 9 in Melbourne and Sydney) and an entrepreneur, proposed to Malcolm Fraser's Liberal National Party coalition government a plan to expand television services across Australia via a domestic satellite. Consequently, AUSSAT, a government-owned national communication satellite system was successfully launched in 1985. This was no doubt "a transformational moment" in the history of Aboriginal television (Bell 2008). Mainstream broadcast television and radio were to be now accessible to Indigenous peoples living in remote communities. However, this novelty raised

concerns about impacts that mainstream media could have on Indigenous cultures (Rennie 2013, 92). The Federal Government launched its Satellite Program Services (SPS) to investigate the best way to expand domestic television services to take advantage of the satellite and work out its consequences for the existing television broadcasting system. It also commissioned Eric Wilmont to study the specific impact of the satellite on remote communities. This became the report, *Out of the Silent Land* (Willmot, 1984), CAAMA advised the SPS “that some Aboriginal communities in Central Australia were already producing video content” and “urged some system of local Indigenous broadcasting” (Meadows and Molnar 2002, 13). This last report when coupled with the findings of the AIATSIS research project on the impact of the introduction of television on remote Aboriginal communities, conducted by Eric Michaels largely in Yuendumu, led in 1987 to the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS). The idea behind this scheme was the development of a “community-controlled terrestrial service in remote areas” which would provide the resources for making and transmitting local programs (Rennie 2013, 92). These were made available to around 80 remote communities.<sup>72</sup> Although these local units prospered, criticism includes the fact that lack of training and consultation led to the use of technology for streaming mainstream media rather than the production of local content, as had been happening in some locations such as Ernabella and Yuendumu (Meadows and Molnar 2002, 16).

The documentary *Satellite Dreaming* (1991), produced by CAAMA, well summarises the history of Aboriginal broadcasting. It is based on interviews with CAAMA’s main members, such as Freda Glynn and Phillip Batty as well as Voya Rajic (SBS TV), Dion Weston (Imparja TV) and David Hill (ABC), among others. It narrates the challenges brought about since the launch of the AUSSAT satellite, especially fears of harming Aboriginal languages and cultures through the broadcasting of commercial television and English-language content. The documentary includes footage from the *Blackout* (ABC) and *First in Line* (SBS) series as well as productions from the Warlpiri Media Association (Yuendumu) and Ernabella Video Television. All these programs were acknowledged, advocated for, and sought to maintain Aboriginal cultures.

The Federal government created four RCTS (remote commercial television service) licences across the country in the North, West, Central and Southeast regions, though the Southeast one was never started (Jacka 1992, 1). CAAMA won the AUSSAT’s Central region footprint and, along with other Indigenous organisations, created in 1988 Imparja TV, the first Indigenous-owned commercial television station in the world (Meadows 2009, 516). For its part CAAMA had by then become a well-established community-run radio network serving Aboriginal communities and broadcasting in

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<sup>72</sup> At the time, BRACS provided great technology to the communities, including “a satellite reception dish, a decoder, a transmitter, a mast and an aerial, a radio studio including a microphone, FM/AM tuner, a cassette deck, two VCRs, speakers, a camera recorder, a TV monitor, a control panel (not a mixing desk), a remote TV control unit, a cassette tape recorder and a video camera” (Meadows and Molnar 2002, 16).

a number of Aboriginal languages across Central Australia. From its beginnings in 1980 as an Alice Springs-based community radio initiative it had also expanded its operations into community development, particularly cultural initiatives, including the CAAMA shop, an art gallery to sell community paintings and crafts, a record label for Aboriginal music selling cassettes produced in Aboriginal languages, and a video production unit circulating video newsletters.

If it had not received the licence to operate the Central region footprint, CAAMA's screen activities would have likely continued in the area of community-centred video production, circulation, with a creative unit like the Brazilian case of *Vídeo nas Aldeias*. Indeed, CAAMA's application for the licence was initially undertaken to ensure that there would be Aboriginal consideration in the service itself. Over the course of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal's Inquiry into the licence it became clear to CAAMA that they were a serious contender for that commercial television licence.

The history of CAAMA is an interesting one, as it soon became among one of the Northern Territory's favourite radio stations. It played a variety of music styles and aired public debates in at least six Aboriginal languages. In the 1984 CAAMA began producing video newsletters "for circulation to communities without access to radio" (Ginsburg 1993). Its community operations continued, but these needed to now run alongside operating an advertiser-supported commercial television service. CAAMA aimed at this time to establish services that could bring both information and entertainment to Aboriginal peoples in remote areas (Spurgeon 1989).

To accomplish its objectives in the 1990s *Imparja*, along with other television services in the area, created the CTN (Central Television Network). *Imparja* was able to use its position to restrict advertisements (especially those for alcohol), produce "local news services accountable to Aboriginal concerns" and help improve "non-Aboriginal perception of and relations with the local Aboriginal community" (O'Regan and Batty 1993, 173). Due to financial restrictions, it produced very few hours of local content and most of its schedule featured mainstream shows. In 2001 ICTV (Indigenous Community Television Service) used one of the *Imparja* channels to display community-based content in Indigenous languages (Meadows 2009, 516). In many ways a commercial television service was not the most effective vehicle for the development of Indigenous media and Indigenous media perspectives. The Aboriginal audience had very few of the characteristics desired by advertisers buying advertising time. They were not especially numerous; they were not a desirable demographic, being both substantially rural, remote and regionally based as well as disproportionately represented among the poor in urban areas; and they were geographically dispersed across the continent, making it difficult to assemble them as an advertising spend in a more regionally-defined television market.

In 2007 the NITV channel was created under John Howard's Liberal National Party coalition government (1996–2007). When it began broadcasting it brought to fruition a decade or more of policy development and consideration. Precedents had been established for such a channel in the

Aboriginal Peoples Television Network in Canada (1999), Taiwan Indigenous Television (2005), and most significantly for Australian policy makers the Māori Channel in nearby Aotearoa/New Zealand in 2004 (Ginsburg 2016).

In the same year the Howard Government established NITV is also conducted the Northern Territory intervention. It had previously dismantled ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) with the support of the Labour opposition under Mark Latham (2003–2005). The ATSIC had been a national representative body responsible for engaging with government to better plan and legislate Aboriginal policies. All these actions taken under the Howard government dismantled locally based decision-making and governance structures that had supported Indigenous media previously. It was in this context that NITV was established as part of a pay TV station transmitted by satellite.

With Labour back in power NITV was relaunched as part of SBS (the Special Broadcasting Service), a public broadcasting platform, in 2012 (Meadows 2016). NITV now operated, not under the auspices of a commercial television, but of public-service broadcasting. This move made it possible for people in the whole country, including remote communities, to watch NITV as free-to-air on channel 34 and as Foxtel channel 180. NITV then became one of the four channels operated by SBS (SBS, SBS Viceland, Food Network and NITV). For its part this was a more natural fit. The creation of SBS in 1980 had changed the Australian television landscape and “provided a schedule of alternative programming for ethnic, cosmopolitan, minority and marginal audiences” (O’Regan and Kolar-Panov 1993, 121). In *The SBS Story: The Challenge of Diversity* (Ang, Hawkins and Dabboussy 2008), the authors describe inner politics and challenges faced by SBS from its creation. These included media owner Kerry Packer allegations that SBS was dividing Australian society into ghettos, but also debates about its ongoing relevance, not only to specific ethnic groups but also to all Australians:

Foreign-language television is not supposed to be a medium for ethnic cultural insularity; it is not meant to create electronic ghettos, but to broaden the cultural horizons of all Australians beyond their own ethnocentric and monocultural comfort zones. (Ang et al. 2008, 76)

One of the consequences of SBS’s multicultural remit is that subtitling became common to Australian audiences. SBS’s commitment to cultural diversity and representing Australia’s internal cultural diversity led it to develop in the late 1980s the first Indigenous current affairs on prime time, *First in Line* (Ginsburg 1994, 373). In the 1990s it had its own Aboriginal Television Unit, broadcasting programs such as CAAMA’s *Nganampa-Anwernekenhe*, while giving support to the Warlpiri Media Association to successfully produce the program *Manyu Wana* for children. SBS was in a position to do this as it and Channel 4 in the UK innovated a TV publishing model whereby the channels sourced programming from a variety of independent producers.

Another public broadcaster also responsible for the development and delivery of Indigenous content is the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). The ABC is the principal public state-owned broadcaster and was established in 1932 along the lines of the BBC. The ABC, with its independent national news and current affairs service coupled with its significant regional reach through radio services, has long been associated with substantial and often sympathetic coverage of Aboriginal issues, with its documentaries and current affairs coverage has been critical to advancing Aboriginal issues and priorities. In 1987 the ABC also set up an Aboriginal Programs Unit (APU), responsible for the production of television series such as *Blackout*, *Kum Yan*, *Songlines* and *The First Australians* (Molnar and Meadows 2001). The *First Australians* was a variety show presented by Justine Saunders and Brian Syron (Donovan and Lorraine 2002). (Twenty years later the title and brand was taken over by a higher-profile Rachel Perkins documentary series broadcast on SBS in 2008.) The ABC's APU also produced on weekly current affairs radio program, *Speaking Out* (1991), which was followed than by the creation of the culture and arts program *Awaye* (Inglis 2006, 252). In *Framing the Future*, Morris and Meadows (2003) state that ABC "supports programming produced by Indigenous media associations through 'resource broadcasting' — a combination of regional and community stations using ABC transmitters" (87).

In 1996, the ABC screened *From Sand to Celluloid*, the first series of short films directed by Aboriginal people in Australia (Molnar and Meadows 2001). The two national public broadcasters, the SBS and the ABC, provided the first mainstream platforms for Indigenous artists and producers to develop "a range of programs within the paradigm of public sector television" (Ginsburg 2010, 90). Since then, through audio-visual productions, Aboriginal filmmakers have been able to develop a very important voice, "which allows them to critique and analyse the historical and ongoing effects of colonialism and, through self-representation, to empower a variety of contemporary Aboriginal identities, both traditional and urban" (Blackmore 2015, 62).

By 2017/18 the NITV weekly schedule was giving space to the community to tell their stories in different ways. This included programs such as: *Surviving*, presented on Mondays and centred on a one-person story and biography; *Desperate Measures* screened every Tuesday looked at historical moments and political movements; *Our Footprint* shown on Wednesdays provided a vehicle for elders to share their memories and knowledge of dreamtime stories and birthplace areas; *Around the Campfire*, broadcasting on Thursdays, allowed communities to present their own town and its special spots; *Unearthed*, broadcast on Saturday, was a talent show for teenagers, where they presented their skills from music to sports; and finally, *Finally, Ngurra*, screened on every second Sunday, presented Aboriginal language and knowledge, teaching diverse skills from cooking to bush survival to youth. In addition to these official programs, amateurs and volunteers could produce all sorts of audio-visual material by means of interactive user-generated content (UGC) to be shared on social media networks,

thereby maintaining the community-based model of media participation established by CAAMA and the Yuendumu and Ernabella communities.

#### 4.3 Vídeo nas Aldeias (VNA) as a Community-Based Video Project in Brazil

As there is no Indigenous television channel in Brazil, the main producer of Indigenous contents analogous to NITV is the VNA—*Vídeo nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages] project. It is mostly accessible online through its website. VNA is a pioneering project in the history of Indigenous filmmaking in Brazil. It was founded in 1987 by anthropologist Vincent Carelli as part of the Centre for Indigenous Advocacy (CTI). Carelli envisioned it as a way to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to address persistent problems such as land rights, as well as “*encontrar meios de subsistência e integração na economia nacional*” [finding means of subsistence and integration in the national economy” and accessibility to health and education] (Bilingual edition in Carelli 2004, 22).

Vincent Carelli, the creator of VNA, has been compared with Andrea Tonacci. Both avoid the classic ethnographic approach to filming Indigenous peoples (Bentes, 2007). Each is a European-Brazilian filmmaker. Both are singled out as bringing mobility to Brazilian cinema through the use of handheld cameras. And each has had extensive careers producing works centred on Indigenous rights and struggles. Key examples of Andrea Tonacci’s work include the documentary *Conversas do Maranhão* [Conversations in Maranhão, 1977–83], the television series *Os Arara* [The Arara, 1981–83], and much later, the feature film *Serras da desordem* [Hills of Disorder, 2006]. Given the significance of Tonacci and the comparisons that have been made between his work and that of Carelli, it is worth considering in more detail relevant aspects of Tonacci’s productions to sharpen our understanding of Carelli’s practice.

*Conversas do Maranhão* [Conversations in Maranhão] is a dialogue about the governmental process of land demarcation in Brazil. It shows the Canela Apaniekrá people’s dissatisfaction with this process, intertwining interviews with them with footage of their rituals and daily life. Fernão Pessoa Ramos (2012) points out that the documentary avoids taking a position, leaving it to the audience to develop their own discourse:

*A força do filme está na tranquila poesia de suas imagens, no seu ritmo que não violenta o tempo da sociedade que trata, na sua capacidade única de penetrar nos meandros do índio de forma sensível e profunda.* (Ramos 2012, 191)

[The film’s strength lies in the tranquil poetry of its images, in its rhythm that avoids disrupting the pace of the society it depicts, in its unique capacity to penetrate the intricacies of the Indian in a sensitive and deep way.]

Along the same lines, *Os Arara* [The Arara] depicts the establishment of contact with an isolated tribe, the Arara, which up until then had never met white people (Alvarenga 2012). Two episodes were made of this encounter forming a two-part television series. It shows the construction of *The Transamazônica* [Trans-Amazon] highway through Arara territory, dividing it into two. The series follows the attempts of anthropologists from FUNAI – *Fundação Nacional do Índio* [National Indian Foundation] to make contact with members of the tribe, demarcate their indigenous territory, and protect them from the advance of loggers in the region.

For its part the feature film *Serras da Desordem* [Hills of Disorder] recreates the journey of Carapirú, a survivor of the 1978 Amazon massacre that decimated the Awá-Guajá tribe. The film shows Carapirú looking back on his own history, from the massacre to his running through the forest alone and eventually his joyful reunion with his son. The film accomplishes this by recreating previous meetings, recounting how ten years after the massacre, Carapirú was found by Sydney Possuelo, an FUNAI employee.<sup>73</sup> At that time Carapirú was living in the Bahia countryside in Brazil's Northeast with a family that had taken him in and with which he could hardly communicate because he did not speak Portuguese. He then went to Brasília to meet someone from his tribe that was able to speak Guajá. By chance that person was Txiramukum, his own son, who was taken in by a farmer on the day of the massacre.

In *Serras da Desordem*, Carapirú speaks in his own language without subtitles, an approach Tonacci also used in *Conversas do Maranhão* and *Os Arara*. Tonacci's decision not to translate Carapirú was a strategy he used to highlight the lack of understanding in interlinguistic interactions (Cohn 2008). It was therefore designed to draw attention to the impossible task of comprehension between vastly different, not to say conflicting, world perspectives. In stressing the impossibility of dialogue between Indigenous people and a non-Indigenous audience, one might conclude that Tonacci uses images of Indigenous people to construct in an essentialist fashion conflicting characters, locked into mutual misunderstanding with little scope for the intercultural dialogue that Marcia Langton (1993) stressed as being so central to Indigenous people in the filmmaking process. Tonacci's work does, however, powerfully situate the palpable co-presence of two distinct worlds existentially inhabiting the same space. He does this by stressing their irreconcilability and mutual incomprehension. In situating them in this way, the film is silent as to how these irreconcilable worlds might be bridged. This reticence on the film's part lends itself to readings that suggest the film is declaring such bridging to be impossible. Tonacci's Indigenous people are not shown as capable of adapting and of being included in the present, and so seem to be excluded from the very possibility of living in a modern world other than in a liminal, marginalised capacity. This could be seen as

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<sup>73</sup> FUNAI [National Indigenous Foundation] is the government body responsible for establishing and carrying out policies relating to Indigenous peoples in Brazil.



lending itself to a romantic view of the Indigenous, which has them representing a naïve criticism of modernity. It is not clear that this is seen as an attractive “intervention” by Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.

By contrast VNA productions adopt an opposite strategy, that of making films to address all audiences—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—and so they are filmed in original languages and subtitled. This act allows these productions to present an intercultural practice (including among disparate Indigenous communities); rather than being intent on specifying the impossibility of intercultural dialogue, they seem intent on promoting the kind of intercultural space that Langton called for in her 1993 essay. Also, right from its earlier productions, VNA has made sure that the filmmakers and those responsible for the sound recording are fluent in the language spoken by the community being filmed.

In Australia, ethnographic filmmaking, which aimed to establish a dialogue between the filmmakers and the filmed, such as *Two Laws* (1982), was heavily influenced by the work of Jean Rouch. Examples of such dialogue in Rouch films include *Les Maîtres Fous* [The Mad Masters] (1954-55), *Jaguar* (1954–67), and *Moi, un Noir* [Me, A Black Man] (1958). Likewise in Brazil, films made by non-Indigenous people but focusing on Indigenous themes also took Rouch’s work as a model of participative anthropology. The best example here is the work of Vincent Carelli, who as we have seen was so central to VNA. His prolific filmography includes titles such as *A festa da moça* [The Girl’s Celebration] (1987), *O espírito da TV* [The Spirit of TV] (1990), *Iauaretê, cachoeira das onças* [Iauaretê, Waterfall of the Jaguars] (2006), *Corumbiara* (2009), and *Martírio* [Martyrdom] (2017).

The influence of Jean Rouch’s “prática de autoetnografia do documentário” [practice of documentary auto-ethnography] (Araújo 2014, 63) was also felt within VNA, where the ethnographic work was conducted by the local community of a member of it, as opposed to traditional ethnography, which was mostly conducted by outsiders. In this sense, the filmmaker is filming something familiar to him/her rather than exotic. Carelli explicitly declared the influence of Jean Rouch on VNA:

*Retorno, feedback, antropologia interativa ou compartilhada, como pregava Jean Rouch, são princípios muitas vezes declarados, mas raras vezes concretizados. (...) Ao invés de simplesmente se apropriar da imagem desses povos para fins de pesquisa ou difusão em larga escala, esse projeto [VNA] tem por objetivo promover a apropriação e manipulação de sua imagem pelos próprios índios. (Gallois and Carelli 1995, 67)*

[Return, feedback, interactive or shared anthropology, as Jean Rouch promulgated, are principles that are often stated but seldom realised. (...) Instead of simply appropriating images of these peoples for the purposes of research or large-scale dissemination, this project [VNA]

aims to ensure that Indigenous people themselves can control and decide how they are to be represented.]

Another example of Rouch's influence on VNA is that in its workshops with Indigenous filmmakers, VNA encourages filmmakers to avoid using the camera's zoom and instead get as close as possible to the situation that they are filming (Araújo 2014). In this respect they are enacting Jean Rouch's filmmaking dictum:

For me then, the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming. (2003, 38)

The VNA's initial goal was to film different Indigenous groups and share these images among them, creating an itinerant audio-visual library. In its initial stage, non-Indigenous peoples were responsible for creating all the audio-visual materials. In the second later phase, though, the project developed into a training program for Indigenous peoples, so they could make their own videos under the supervision of VNA's technicians. North American foundations were the first sponsors of the project. They were followed by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. At that point, few Indigenous Brazilian groups had ever had contact with mainstream television. After successfully releasing short films at international festivals, VNA started to produce a TV program called *Programa do Índio* [Indian Show]. In Brazil this title is an ironic pun: *programa de índio* is a common expression employed by non-Indigenous people when referring to a 'boring activity'. VNA producers were here reappropriating this derogatory expression to challenge misconceptions about Indigenous groups in Brazil. They sought to turn on its head the negative and ethnocentric meaning of the expression—that the lives of Indigenous people are uninteresting—by showing how 'programas de índio' could be engaging, fun and informative. The program was screened on a public regional channel for one year (1995–96). Although the program lasted only a short time and was not aesthetically innovative, it nonetheless had a significant impact on Indigenous audiences as the first-ever Indigenous program shown on television.

In 2000, film editor and producer Mari Correa joined VNA and helped to restructure the project as a whole, turning it into an NGO whose mission was to teach filmmaking to Indigenous peoples in Brazil. In this new guise VNA produced ten episodes of the educational programme *Índios do Brasil* (Indigenous peoples of Brazil) for TV Escola, an educational public television network administered by the *Ministro da Educação* [Ministry of Education]. During President Lula da Silva's term (2002–2010) it produced didactic material for schools following the passing of a law that made compulsory the teaching of Indigenous culture and history in national school curriculum. And it produced a series of six short films called *Olhares Indígenas* [Indigenous Views] that featured on *A'Uwe*, an exclusively Indigenous-content program presented by famous non-Indigenous actor

Marcos Palmeira. These short films were also shown on two public free-to-air channels, TV Cultura and TV Brasil (2008–2011). Since the ending of *A'Uwe*, there have been no subsequent, regular screenings of Indigenous productions scheduled on Brazilian television. VNA productions now need to be accessed online or through DVD circulation.

In terms of the VNA productions, Indigenous cinema is often conceptualised as collective production:

*um cinema em que o sujeito individual—tão central no cinema convencional—se converte em sujeito coletivo, e isso vale tanto para realizadores, como para personagens e espectadores. Trata-se também de um cinema artesanal, feito à mão, numa escala pessoal, mas que fomenta a criatividade coletiva, novas formas de sociabilidade e colaboração.* (Carelli, Echevarría & Ziri6n 2016, 6)

[a cinema in which the individual subject—so central to conventional cinema—becomes a collective subject, and this holds true for filmmakers as much as for characters and viewers. It is also an artesanal cinema, handmade, on a personal scale, but that fosters collective creativity, new forms of sociability and collaboration.]

This trend of classifying and organising Indigenous films based on a collective shaped by ethnic group identity is also made clear in the book, *V6deo nas Aldeias 25 anos: 1986–2011* [VNA 25 years] (Ara6jo, Carvalho and Carelli 2011). It focuses on five collectives: those of the Ash6ninka, Xavante, Kuikuro, Huni Kui and Mby6-Guaran6. A closer look at these collective productions reveals that specific individuals are involved in most of the works, for example, Zezinho Yube (for Huni Kui productions) and Takum6 (for Kuikuro ones). Of these five groups, in this thesis I study more specifically the collective productions of the Ash6ninka and the Mby6-Guaran6. From the very start of the VNA workshops, the Ash6ninka people found that producing and accessing their own images affected their perception of their daily life. As Ash6ninka filmmaker, Isaac Pi6ko, put it:

*O fato de ser ind6gena e diretor d6 a possibilidade de decidir o que mostrar e o que n6o mostrar para fora, de trocar experi6ncias com outros povos e de refletir sobre as mudan7as que nos interessam e, assim, sobre o curso que queremos dar 6 nossa pr6pria hist6ria.* (Isaac Pi6ko quoted by Marchese 2013, 210)

[The fact of being Indigenous and the director makes it possible to decide what to show and what not to show to others, to exchange experiences with other peoples and to reflect on the changes that interest us, and thus, on the course of our own history.]

Piãko is one of the first members of the Asháninka collective of filmmakers, along with Wewito Piãko, Tsirotsi Asháninka, and Adalberto Domingos Kaxinawá. Titles from this collective include *No tempo das chuvas* [During the Rains] (2000), *Shomõtsi* (2001), *A gente luta mais come fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit] (2006), *Uma aldeia chamada Apiwtxa* [A Village Called Apiwtxa] (2010), and *No tempo do verão* [In Summertime] (2012). In the thesis, I analyse the short documentary *A gente luta mais come fruta*, directed by Wewito Piãko and Isaac Piãko, on the challenges of preserving culture and the environment while maintaining a sustainable economy.

The other Indigenous VNA collective I study in this thesis is the Mbyá-Guaraní production. The main filmmakers here are Ariel Ortega, Jorge Morinico, Germano Benites, Patrícia Ferreira, Leonardo Ortega, Aldo Ferreira, and Ralf Ortega. They are all young (less than 30 years old) and related to one another, coming from important families with grandparents respected for being spiritual or political leaders (Brum and Jesus 2015). Their works include *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá – Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [Two Villages, One Path] (2008), *Nós e a Cidade* [The City and Us] (2009), *Bicicletas de Nhanderú* [Nhanderú's Bicycles] (2011), *Desterro Guarani* [Guarani Exile] (2011), *Tava, a casa de pedra* [Tava, the House of Stone] (2012), *Mbyá Mirim* (2013), and *Mario Reve Jeguatá – No caminho com Mário* [On the Way with Mario] (2014).

From the Mbyá-Guaraní collective, I look at *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá – Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [Two Villages, One Path], directed by Ariel Ortega, Jorge Morinico, and Germano Benites. This documentary takes up a theme that is recurrent in the work of this collective: that of migration, especially due to land losses that have been faced at different points in their histories:

*Mas, como em outros filmes dos Mbyá-Guarani, o cinema é um dispositivo nômade, ligado à experiência de perambulação desse povo tantas vezes expulso das suas terras.* (Brasil 2013, 261)

[But like in other Mbyá-Guaraní films, cinema is a nomadic device, linked to this people's experience of wandering, having been expelled from their lands so many times.]

In terms of the VNA main themes most productions fall into one of two major groups. The first is focused on filming as a way of preserving and passing down Indigenous cultural manifestations and memories to younger generations. The second is devoted to registering struggles for land rights and other claims (Gallois and Carelli 1995, 207). *Olhares Indigenas* [Indigenous Views] (2009) encapsulates both these trends. The series' documentaries are detailed portrayals of Indigenous traditional cultures while, at the same time, also depicting contemporary political struggles such as attempts to protect traditional territories from illegal invasion and communities seeking economic means of survival within the Brazilian capitalist market. Released both on television and at International festivals, the series is also available online on YouTube with English subtitles. The

series is composed of six short documentaries that provide a sample of Indigenous productions in different parts of Brazil. The various plots for these documentaries are designed to show different aspects of contemporary everyday life in Indigenous villages. Themes covered range from sustainable ways of life to the constant threats some tribes face in protecting their territorial borders. It also shows cultural exchanges between Indigenous worlds and the world outside.

#### **4.4 Indigenous Aesthetics on Two Different Platforms**

The platforms studied here (broadcast TV and video on demand in the case of NITV, and video-sharing websites and DVD in the case of VNA) reflect different aspects of the Australian and Brazilian screen media settlements. Each has different entailments. Each of them provides distribution platforms that determine the circumstances, in which people are able to experience, view, manipulate and access programming. NITV is part of the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network, a global network of Indigenous television broadcasters. The NITV model provides it with a pan-Aboriginal frame. It organises its programming in ways which recognise ‘Aboriginal-nation specificity’, connecting and stitching these local specificities within an overall national Aboriginal framing.

By contrast the Brazilian experiment starts off and stays to some extent with the particular. In the case of VNA it is possible to buy their DVDs on their website and watch their films on YouTube and Vimeo, but its programming is only intermittently available on broadcast networks, it has no catch-up TV portal for downloading or streaming. VNA is also available on IsumaTV, “a free internet video portal for global Indigenous media, available to local audiences and worldwide view” (Ginsburg 2016, 591).

In the Australian case NITV is a national broadcast channel operating within the framework of the SBS TV network and its digital channels and video streaming catch-up services. National broadcasting secures national coverage but is not as amenable to circulation via community networks as are the productions of VNA. This is because it is not built for that, although the *SBS On Demand* portal gives people a chance to stream programs and circulate them to some extent through community channels. TV, even with catch-up service infrastructure through *SBS on Demand* is still a supplement for programming that is on servers for limited periods of time. TV still favours more transient programming. This seems to be a “distribution” effect—a national television service and a different kind of streaming-based service—as much as a consequence of political calculation to limit the availability of content in this way. The political and policy priority represented in the emergence of NITV was one favouring the construction of an Aboriginal television network broadcasting programming nationally. The political end was one of staging nationally in the important broadcast

platform an Aboriginal presence, allowing Indigenous peoples to be at home in television and facilitate understanding among broadly dispersed Aboriginal communities. NITV is a product of this history. It seeks to retain a connection to community—i.e., to specific community/language groups—through “portfolio programs” that permit local recognition, *and* it seeks to develop programming that brings together and connects Indigenous communities. An example of programming that seems to serve both ends is the broadcasting of football games between Aboriginal teams. In the case of the VNA ‘programming’, the strategies are to focus on traditional practices, by recording festivities, and focusing on particular struggles for Indigenous rights.

Both models allow the diversity and range of Indigenous cultures to find positive expression while fostering and developing a sense of understanding, solidarity, commonality and recognition of common purpose among Indigenous communities. They also serve to project those communities, their concerns and their artefacts politically and culturally to broader non-Indigenous communities and agencies. Both Brazilian and Australian Indigenous contexts are defined by the intersection of ‘local’ cultures, peoples, languages and ways of thinking, behaving and relating to one’s relatives with those of Indigenous non-locals. This relation and intersection among Indigenous groups needs to complement, create and contribute to a larger “national” Indigenous understanding (a kind of Indigenous nationalism). The problem Indigenous actors in both countries face is of how to best develop ways of ensuring that their various ‘local’ concerns connect with ‘national’ productively and that the ‘space’ of the national does not compromise or erase the places and shapes of the local. This is the first problem in managing the identifiable differences between the various Indigenous groups and their relationship with one another. It turns on managing the relationship between these local scenes (which are longstanding and part of the broader history) and the development and extension of a ‘national’ scene that is built from both these elements and from attempts to communicate across these divides to improvise a respectful vocabulary in programming.

Both the Indigenous Brazilian and Aboriginal Australian also need to negotiate the problems that the low proportion of their population nationally creates for them: they each do not enjoy a natural visibility that would generate commercial dynamics of culture to support them. Consequently, Indigenous programming needs to relate to these wider cultural norms and spaces.

Through these several developments it is possible to say that Indigenous media projects are doing exactly what Michael Leigh argued they could and should do in 1988. These projects are “ensuring the continuity of their languages and cultures and representations of their views” (88). And by making their own films and videos, “they speak for themselves, [and are] no longer aliens in an industry which for a century has used them for its own ends” (1988, 88). So, as with the development of Indigenous film, it is important to ask what are the singularities of these projects. If the political content is easily identified, what is the aesthetic paradigm informing these productions?

Eric Michaels's *Bad Aboriginal Art* (1994) suggests one answer. It is a compilation of texts that gives a detailed account of how aesthetic debates about Aboriginal artworks might address the influences of culture, values, laws and knowledge of Aboriginal peoples. In saying that, his comprehensive study of Warlpiri artistic production makes the distinction between Aboriginal and European aesthetic tastes and the inevitable challenges this results in in terms of mutual cross-cultural evaluations and expectations. Consequently, differences between European and Aboriginal artistic codes generate challenges to the buying/selling of Aboriginal arts and other commercial and money-based activities. Michaels points out that one of the main difficulties in estimating the price of Aboriginal art relates to the importance given by Europeans to the issue of authenticity. For the European art market, authenticity is a key definition of creativity, originality and authorship of artworks. On the other hand, this measure can hardly be applied to Aboriginal artworks (especially the most traditional ones, such as painting) as they are based on traditional knowledge passed down collectively through generations. As Michaels explains it, in the case of Aboriginal evaluation of artworks, the key concern is authority and not authenticity. Authority relates, essentially, to the rights of representing and reproducing a group's culture, knowledge and values in different types of media. Therefore, the notion of authority places the artist not in the individual position of being a sole/original creator but as part of a collective system of shared information. "These works are to be judged first and foremost in terms of the social practices that produce and circulate them—practices that promote issues of authority, not authenticity" (1994, 213). In this sense, Australian Aboriginal artists are responsible for managing information and, above all, for protecting meanings and knowledge present in artworks from misappropriation by unauthorised people.<sup>74</sup>

Although acknowledging these cross-cultural dilemmas of art evaluation, Michaels emphasises that contemporary Aboriginal artists, aware of European art market demands, have been willing to negotiate their productions in order to bring benefits to their communities. As an example, he cites the exchange of "paintings for Toyotas" (1994, 54) by the Warlpiri people. In this case, traditional sand-painting designs were adapted to be painted on the doors of a primary school in the Warlpiri community and later reproduced and sold on canvas, raising enough money to buy two Toyotas. This exchange created a circle: from producing artworks inspired by places the painters were directly connected to and responsible for in the Dreaming, to obtaining cars to access and perform rituals on these geographically distant sacred sites. In this sense, selling the paintings only reassures the "continuity of the land and its Dreamings" (1994, 54), creating a very specific meaning to the artwork exchanging process, which prioritises, above all, Aboriginal traditions rather than European individualist authorial recognition.

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<sup>74</sup> Although the development of contemporary Aboriginal artworks is a fascinating topic, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate it. For more recent studies see Biddle (2016)

In more recent settings Laura Fisher cites Michaels's work as the most refined study on Aboriginal art in postmodern debates. Michaels was able to show that "rather than occupying a discrete realm of exotic authenticity", these collective works made by "Aboriginal painters and Aboriginal media producers had a unique facility for self-expression in a globalised world" (Fisher 2016, 86). In the specific case of media productions, Michaels' book *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla Makes TV at Yuendumu* (1987) offers a compelling case of how Aboriginal cultural considerations determines aesthetic decisions by detailing the shooting of *Coniston Story*. This video depicts the massacre of the Warlpiri people following the killing of a white dingo hunter by Aboriginal people in the late 1920s. The video was based on oral testimonies of Aboriginal people who, although not shown in front of the cameras, authorised the filming of the historical sites as well as narrated the facts. The Warlpiri filmmaker, Jupurrurla, shot the images with long pans of the empty landscape, as if the camera was following people walking across these historical and mythical spaces. As Michaels explains, Jupurrurla's video attempts to depict two parallel temporalities: the track of the ancestors in the Dreamtime and the trail of the police officers who executed the massacre. These two non-linear temporal events are shown simultaneously through the camera movement across the landscape. To a general audience, this might simply appear as a boring shot of an empty landscape. However, for the Warlpiri people, the display of these geographical sites and the camera movement following the paths of both the ancestors and the police officers are loaded with sensitive information and, therefore, emotion. This example emphasises Michaels' argument about the importance of cultural insertion/understanding in order to access aesthetic decisions and implicit meanings. He reinforces the idea that there is not a single measure to judge artistic productions.

Thus, artworks should be seen as part of a process and not as final products. This change of perspective makes it possible to evaluate aesthetic options that include the stages of production and circulation, rather than to look at artworks as static objects. Michaels' conclusion is that as soon as culture can be understood as a tradition that is communicated from one group to another, the central role of media is cultural maintenance or extinction. He proposes a *cultural future* based on

an agenda for cultural maintenance that not only assumes some privileged authority for traditional modes of cultural production but also argues that the political survival of Indigenous people is dependent upon their capacity to continue reproducing these forms. (1987, 173)

Therefore, he believes that Aboriginal media can appropriate technology either to subvert mainstream media or to incorporate external aesthetic values that are capable of putting Aboriginal culture at high risk. Another author to debate this challenge was American anthropologist Faye Ginsburg. She called this the "Faustian dilemma": just as media can give voice to Indigenous political agendas, it also can place at risk Indigenous cultures and languages (1991). Building on these ideas, in this chapter I



analyse Indigenous audio-visual productions paying close attention to the singularities of different Indigenous nations as well as to the ways in which local culture informs Indigenous artistic productions.

In the article “Embedded Aesthetics: Creating a Discursive Space for Indigenous Media”, Ginsburg (1994, 368) affirms that Aboriginal filmmakers and their communities have access to “imaginative, narrative, social, and political spaces” through their audio-visual productions, which permit them to rethink their present reality and potential future. In doing so, Indigenous media allows them to renew their “local cultural practices”, to insert “their histories into national imaginaries” and create “new transnational arenas” linking Indigenous peoples in a collective movement that is capable of making “their concerns visible to the world”. In the comparative analysis of Australia and Brazil, I show the possibility of communication and the similar concerns faced by Indigenous peoples in these two countries. In addition to the weekly programs, NITV also produces a series of documentaries. In this chapter, I study a series called *Songlines* that was successfully exhibited at the Sydney Film Festival 2015 before screening on television. It is composed of eight short documentaries made in remote regions of Australia. It was developed, financed and distributed by NITV in partnership with Screen Australia. The significance of this collaboration links back to debates on the relationship between the national cinema project and international market partnerships. In the case of Indigenous productions this relation reshapes national identity not only internally but also externally. It also allows for development as well as distribution of Indigenous productions to other Indigenous nations across the world.

#### **4.5 *Footprints*: The Reclamation of Djugan culture**

*Songlines* covers histories from Western, Northern and Central regions of Australia. As the title announces, its main theme is Aboriginal traditional culture, rendered in English as ‘songlines’. This word was incorporated into general discourse as the title of Bruce Chatwin’s book *The Songlines* (1987). It received quite a bit of criticism over its appropriation of Indigenous cultural concepts for commercial gain. Chatwin describes songlines as “Dreaming-tracks” for the Europeans and as the “Footprints of the Ancestors” or “the Way of the Law” for the Aboriginal peoples of Australia (2). Gammage explains *Songlines* (2011, 135) as the pathways of the creator ancestors across the land during the Dreaming time. They were and are still used as the main referents of Aboriginal space and time, serving simultaneously as atlas and calendar. Therefore, more than simple tracks, songlines allow those who are able to interpret them to know all aspects of a territory in its relation to time. *Songlines* reveal information about the right season, location and rhythm to use specific natural resources, such as where to find waterholes. They often coincide with trading networks of artefacts

and general goods. Historically, Aboriginal peoples used to exchange “raw materials, such as ochre and spinifex gum” as well as “corroborees, dances and songs” (Flood 1999, 246). During colonisation, European roads and trails relied on Aboriginal pathways, including Aboriginal exchange routes. Consequently, some of these traditional routes based on songlines nowadays coincide with the location of many Australian highways (Norris and Harney, 2014). Songlines were also exchanged between Aboriginal nations (Kerwin 2010). They moved from one nation to another, crossing many kilometres and different landscapes. McBryde (2000) has researched the historical movement of peoples and goods across the Australian landscapes. She raises the interesting point that, because of their cultural significance and ancient use, songlines should be included on the World Heritage List in same category as *El Camino de Compostela* [The Christian Routes of Santiago de Compostela], incorporated in 1994. Cultural landscapes were included in the World Heritage List as of 1992, and the first one recognised in Australia was the Uluru-Kata Tjuta in the Northern Territory of Australia. McBryde (2000, 169) advocates that in the case of the Aboriginal cultural routes, “the line of travel itself” could be designated “as the cultural property rather than specific places along the routes”. Another complexity of songlines is that they also embody Indigenous laws and religions. In Aboriginal traditions, songlines are transmitted through the teaching of histories, songs, dances, paintings, carvings, weavings and body paintings.

All the episodes in the *Songlines* series were shot on location, showing traditional sites of cultural significance to Aboriginal peoples as they relate to creation/Dreamtime. The series includes eight short documentaries, entitled *Footprints*, *Naji*, *Tjawa*, *Goorrandalng: Brolga Dreaming*, *Wardbukarra*, *Wurray*, *Bulun Milkarri*, and *Damari and Guyala: A Story of Two Brothers*. This chapter focuses exclusively on *Footprints* (Cornel Ozies, 2015). Following the common thread of the other documentaries in this series, *Footprints* is about a creation song. Its main theme, though, is the Djugan people’s reclamation of their culture as they re-learn their traditional songlines. I chose this documentary because it tells the history of a culture that was supposedly lost during colonisation. The documentary, thus, focuses on the key theme of Indigenous revival and its relation to Indigenous activism. My thesis is particularly interested in the role that filmmakers play in this revival. As I show, it is through Indigenous filmmaking that the Djugan songlines have been recovered and widely presented to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.<sup>75</sup>

Before analysing *Footprints*, it is important to contextualise the Djugan people’s history on the Kimberley coast of northern Western Australia. Their traditional territory was one of the first areas of settlement following the pearling boom during the 1860s and 1870s. The establishment of the pearling industry in this region profoundly affected traditional ways of life in the region,

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<sup>75</sup> This specific documentary can be streamed for free on the *SBS On Demand* website from within Australia, and outside Australia can be streamed and/or downloaded from Vimeo for a symbolic price.

with the recruitment of Aboriginal people to work on pearling luggers, and, in the hinterland, the direct competition with pastoralists over the resources of the land, sheep and cattle spearing and reprisal-killing expeditions. (Burke 2011, 101)

As a consequence, the Djugan (also known as Jugun or Djugun) were among the first Aboriginal peoples in the North of Western Australia to lose their lands, lives and identity. Historical accounts include killings in Roebuck Bay, imposed work on the pearling boats, imprisonment and exile from their traditional lands (Glowczewski 1998, 204). Anthropologist Norman Tindale (1974, 241) wrote about the Djugan, describing their location and fatally affirming “this tribe virtually is extinct”. The nearest Aboriginal group to the Djugan geographically is the Yawuru. There is still controversy over to what extent these two groups are ethnically entangled. Glowczewski (1998, 204) argues that this debate is part of a process of “unveiling identity diversification” based on two criteria: the traditional process of differentiation “based on country, language, rituals and kinship” and the modern project of resistance to globalisation that homogenisation of lifestyles. I would also add a third criterion, as Indigenous groups do benefit from the construction of a pan-Aboriginal identity in global settings. This is a direct consequence of colonisation. What existed prior to European arrival were many Aboriginal nations.

The discourse of the existence of a homogeneous group under the umbrella term of “pan-Aboriginal nation” is a tactic, and in line with the growing movement of Indigenous self-determination around the world (Martínez 1997, 136). It was also a Commonwealth/federal government tactic designed to deliver and address State-based social and cultural disadvantage and endemic discrimination. It was designed at a time when other tactics were being improvised, such as the category “Non-English Speaking Background” as a means to not only deliver services but also describe social disadvantage and calibrate services to meet such disadvantage (it was also designed to get groups, some of which had been warring in Europe and Asia, to come to Australia to cooperate and leave, to the extent that this was possible, old enmities at the door).

Contemporary Aboriginal identities around the region of Broome were shaped after World War II. In this period, the city gradually received many Aboriginal groups, “from the surrounding pastoral stations and missions, as well as the migration of Western Desert people out of the desert towards the coast” resulting “in a complex assemblage of different Aboriginal groups in Broome” (Burke 2011, 101). In 1994, this assemblage of Yawuru, Djugan and Goolarabaloo peoples resulted in the joint native-title claim signed under the name of the Rubibi Aboriginal Corporation (Ween 2011, 220; Burke 2011, 102). Although the claim was made together, the debate about the relationship between the Yawuru and Djugan persisted. Different sources led to the conclusion that Djugan was a dialect and a subgroup of Yawuru (Burke 2011, 128; Mamanyjun Torres 2006, 21) Anthropologist

Erich Kolig argues against this idea, saying that while there is very little evidence, it is possible to say that the Djugan were a separate group (Burke 2011, 154). This discussion was part of the native title process that took 16 years to be concluded. The Yawuru people won native title under a discourse of oneness as the court recognised “one normative system with an identical source of law and customs” (McHugh 2011, 130). Judge Merkel explained his final decision in the case *Rubibi Community v. State of Western Australia (No 6)*:

I have concluded on the balance of probabilities that, irrespective of whether in anthropological terms they were correctly designated to be separate tribes, the extensive connections and commonalities between the Djugan and the Yawuru (including their common Yawuru language) resulted in the Djugan being designated by the Bugarrigarra as a subset or subgroup of the Yawuru speaking community at and since sovereignty. (2006)

Pat Mamanyjun Torres, a writer and an Aboriginal woman from the Yawuru, the Nyul-Nyul and the Jabirrabirri peoples, interpreted this issue of separate identities from a less conflictive perspective. She narrates that “even though many of us are forced to live like and under white people, we still think of ourselves as Jugun and Yawuru and we are still part of the Jugun-Yawuru ‘saltwater’ culture and way of life”. (2006, 26) She recalls that many aspects of her people’s customary lives are still present in their daily lives today. She describes practices such as hunting and gathering bush- and seafood, as well as preparing traditional medicines and spending the weekend at specific sites to teach children about Djugan and Yawuru culture. Her account makes clear that Indigenous culture has been passed down through generations.

The revival of the Djugan’s cultural rights is the theme of *Footprints*. It portrays the recovery of Djugan songlines that were thought to be lost forever. The documentary starts with astonishing images of the Kimberley coast. It starts with a sunset on the sea followed by an aerial image of the orange sea with few trees. In voice-over, the narrator explains that this is the history of both the creator and the people’s reclamation of their culture. He says that this history starts with the creator Buguragarri/Bugarrigarra, who came out of the ocean and left his footprints on the Djugan landscape on the Kimberley coast of Australia. The narrator explains that the creator brought Djugan law and culture. His voice is followed by the image of a young man walking barefoot on a trail that passes through wet and dry red beach sands, small green vegetation and rugged sandstones. This sequence of the young man walking through a variety of such distinct settings creates a sense of distance. It also metaphorically connects the footsteps of the contemporary Aboriginal man to those of the creator Buguragarri, whose legendary and foundational journey across many lands helped to shape the continental island we know today as Australia. The narrator explains that the songs the creator gave the Djugan people teach them the boundaries of their land and the rules to follow. He adds that the

creator left a trail of knowledge that goes from Djugan country to the Northern Territory and even beyond. This trail of knowledge is the songlines that were passed through generations, connecting the Djugan to the neighbouring tribes. The image of an older man, now walking down a narrow path surrounded by bush, reinforces this continuity between different generations. The man walking presents himself as Brian Bin Saaban, a Djugan Law boss (ritual expert) born in the city of Broome. The image of the younger man reappears, now walking near big red sandstones. The narrator explains that the Djugan were warriors prior to European arrival. Colonisation resulted in the killing of many of their people, while their songlines supposedly disappeared.

The second character presented in the documentary is Roy Wiggan, a Bardi man that lived in Broome for many years. He was married to a Djugan woman. He tells about how he met Djugan people in 1945 and learned about their culture while seeing them dancing and talking in their own language. Roy sees songlines as important for teaching Aboriginal people how they lived in the past, what they lived for and how they lived by it. He affirms that it is about spiritual ties and self-respect with the language and anything else. In this, Roy Wiggan seems to agree with Brian Bin Saaban, for whom songlines are means through which Aboriginal people share their own histories with those of others.

Roy Wiggan tells of his sadness in seeing the ways people were living. He was afraid that all traditional knowledge, carried by elders such as him, would be forever forgotten. But a group of young men sought his knowledge and asked if he could teach them about Djugan culture. He then assumed the role of teaching the Djugan language and how to make boomerangs and *ilma*, hand-held ceremonial instruments of the Bardi people. The narrator describes *ilma* as a living artefact that was brought by the ancestors and embedded with spiritual energy, each being an element of the Dreaming and representing clouds, trees and water. Wiggan believes that the youth will start to dream by learning the language and the songs. He also explains the importance of the gwarn, a pearl shell tied around dancers' waists. Gwarn represent the saltwater people but also the rain, clouds and ocean. This explanation is followed by images of the group of youths dressing up to dance. They have gwarn around their waists and paint each others' bodies with ochre. The narrator explains that the ochre comes from the land, enforcing the connection between people and place. Wiggan recalls that the last time these songlines had been embodied to and by Djugan peoples was around 60 or 70 years earlier.

The interviews with both songlines custodians, Wiggan and Saaban, show that the reclamation of Djugan culture is an ongoing process. Both explain that the right people and ceremonies bring these songs "out from the dirt". By this they acknowledge that the songlines are settled on the land. The Djugan boys can "start to dream" with it only after their initiation. The documentary finishes with a message that the recognition of cultural rights involves acknowledgment of particular traditions. According to Isabel McBryde, to acknowledge Aboriginal traditions is a complex process

that calls for recognition of and respect for Aboriginal cultures:

It is no hard task to regard the features of the landscape as representational, symbolic of the presence of ancestral beings from the Dreaming. To move beyond this to accept these features as embodying the actual living presence of spiritual power and involving embodied, direct interaction with this makes demands of a different dimension. (2000, 156)

The documentary *Footprints* assumes this role by presenting the Djugan culture to audiences of varied backgrounds. The director of *Footprints*, Cornel Ozies, has worked on mainstream audio-visual productions with a curriculum that includes Indigenous and non-Indigenous productions. He is behind the cameras for the NITV cooking program *Kriol Kitchen*, and for other short documentaries for this television channel. In 2014, Ozies, who was researching the Bardi culture for his new documentary, *Footprints*, found that songlines from his own people, the Djugan, were not lost:

Originally I actually didn't think we had any song or dance from my particular region because we were the first to really be impacted by settlement. In my research, I was talking to one of the Bardi elders of the neighbouring tribe and he made the connection of who I was and my tribe. He said "I've got a song for you and I've got dances for you that I can teach you." (Williams 2016)

The elder that Ozies is referring to is Roy Wiggan, who knew some songlines that had not been performed for many decades. He taught the traditional language, songs and dances to young Djugan boys (including the film's director, Ozies). Wiggan passed away soon after this. Ozies says that cultural protocols prevented him from recording on camera and inserting many things in his documentary. He explains that the making of *Footprints* was a secondary outcome of the process: it was more about recording songs and dances to be kept for future generations. Putting them together as 10-minute pieces was a next step (Jopson 2016).

The experience of filming aspects of his own culture put Ozies in a position that went beyond the role of film director: he was also there to learn about his own culture, religion and law. This often led to the frustration of not being able to include everything in the film: "It was painful sometimes because we would learn this dance and I'm formulating how we're going to shoot this particular dance and we're practising this dance and then Roy says— 'Oh no, you can't show this one' "(Jopson 2016). Nonetheless, the documentary presents viewers with an amazing history, especially considering the cultural value of these songlines. *Footprints* gives a glimpse of Djugan culture to non-Indigenous audiences. At the same time, the theme of how the audio-visual documentation can be used in processes of identity revival—and all the possible implications in terms of rights—is relevant to Indigenous peoples in general.

The Native Title Act (1993) and the Aboriginal Heritage Act (1978) assure cultural rights in Western Australia to Aboriginal people. Both led to protection of sacred areas connected to the traditional Aboriginal culture. Ween (2011, 224) argues that Indigenous heritage legislation has strengthened Indigenous people's connection to the land, empowering Aboriginal peoples to protect their places and cultural practices from capitalistic aggressive enterprises in the form of building constructions, tourist developments and mining. As these decisions have a great impact on Aboriginal lives, "cultural rights cannot be divorced from social and economic rights" (Minnerup and Solberg 2011, 14). More than the acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples' cultural ties to the land, these rights need to ensure access to natural resources that relate to Indigenous lives at all levels. The reason this is important is that non-Indigenous people often see culture and environment as separate, so while they praise the preservation of Indigenous traditions, they don't respect the need to care for specific places—especially if these spaces stand in the way of "development". Cultural rights can only be empty if environmental powers do not accompany them.

Similar to Australia, Indigenous peoples in Brazil are also fighting for the reclamation of their cultural rights. Although these two countries have different histories of media development, the 1980s was a key decade for Indigenous self-representation in both countries. This is when video technology became widely available. It is in this period that Aboriginal television emerged, as well as "Aboriginal programs on television and Aboriginal organisations controlling television services" (O'Regan and Batty 1993, 174). This resulted in Aboriginal people having more influence on programs that involved Aboriginal content. In the case of Brazil, the 1980s coincided with the end of military dictatorship and censorship. During this time, parabolic antennas and new television networks brought diversity of information to Brazilian television (Prata 2002, 180). Indigenous movements were starting to make headlines despite the fact that mainstream media continued to project stereotypical images and discourses about the Indigenous people in Brazil. Indigenous self-representation only found space in grassroots and independent filmmaking movements, such as the ones happening inside non-governmental and non-profit organisations. One of the most successful examples of such a grassroots movement was the VNA project.

In the next sections, I do a close analysis of *A Gente Luta Mas Come Fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit: Trailer], which I will also compare to *Footprints*, an Indigenous production that has already been well foregrounded in the preceding pages, establishing in the process continuities and differences in Indigenous representations.

#### **4.6 The Role of Culture in the Asháninka People's Sustainable Way of Life**

*A Gente Luta Mas Come Fruta: Trailer* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit: Trailer] (2009) is a cleverly edited 4-minute version of the 40-minute documentary of the same title. It was directed by Asháninka filmmakers Isaac Pinhanta and Wewito Piyãko. Both versions are available with English and Spanish subtitles on the Internet through YouTube and IsumaTV. The short version is an edited work that includes most of the events presented in the longer version. The four-minute trailer portrays a group of Asháninka people living near the *Rio Amônia* [Amônia River] in the Brazilian state of Acre. Their traditional territories extend from the High Juruá and Envira Rivers in Brazil to the Peruvian Andean cordillera. The Asháninka are the second-largest Indigenous group in the Peruvian Amazon behind the Quechua. They are spread across three countries—Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. Historically, Brazil was the last of these three nation-states to claim traditional Asháninka territory. The Brazilian state of Acre was actually part of Bolivia until 1903 when it was transferred to Brazil under the *Tratado de Petrópolis* [Treaty of Petrópolis].<sup>76</sup> Of the total Asháninka population, only a small portion currently lives in the Brazilian part of the Amazon.<sup>77</sup>

In the late 1980s, an alliance in the Amazon between environmentalists, Indigenous groups and rubber tappers was formed to counter the rapid deforestation that was being caused by cattle ranchers and loggers. This alliance pushed for more sustainable development in the region. The struggle between the alliance and cattle ranchers and loggers had international reverberations after the murder of rubber tapper and environmentalist Chico Mendes by a cattle rancher in 1988. Soon after this murder in 1989 the *Aliança dos Povos da Floresta* [Alliance of Forest Peoples] was launched by Indigenous movements and environmental activists (Pimenta 2004, 133). Their activism was partially successful as it resulted in the creation of the country's first extractive reserve and of the national park of Serra do Divisor, as well as demarcations of Indigenous lands, such as the those of Asháninka of Apiwtxa. In 1992, the Asháninka of the *Rio Amônia* [Amônia River] area acquired legal title recognition of their 87,000 hectares of land (Pimenta 2008). Most of this population lives in the *Aldeia Apiwtxa* [Apiwtxa Village] (Pimenta 2013). The village name means “*todos juntos*” [all together], a reference made to many families uniting together to strengthen the process of obtaining land rights (Pimenta 2017, 149). This means that they are politically united into one village composed of many families, an arrangement that does not follow the traditional approach of geographical dispersal, revealing Asháninka adaptation to contemporary settings.

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<sup>76</sup> The *Tratado de Petrópolis* [Treaty of Petrópolis] was signed between the Brazilian and Bolivian governments on 17 November 1903. The third article of the treaty explains the terms of the exchange of the Acre territory: “Owing to the fact that the territories exchanged by the two nations are unequal in area” Brazil had to pay as compensation two million pounds. The money was primarily destined for “the construction of railways or other works aimed at improving communications and developing trade between the two countries” (Treaty of Petropolis 1903, 248).

<sup>77</sup> The official population of the Asháninka is 97,477 in Peru (INEI 2007) and 1,201 in Brazil (SIASI/SESAI 2013). Thus only 1.3% of Asháninka live in Brazil.



With animals becoming scarce in 1993 the Asháninka community banned predatory fishing and hunting practices in their territories. They also placed a three-year moratorium on the hunting of *tracajás* (*Podocnemis unifilis*, the endangered yellow-spotted Amazon river turtle) and their eggs. The population of *tracajás* duly recovered and sustainable hunting was again allowed soon after. The hunting of other animals has also been regulated since 1992. Hunting areas have been established through rotating periods, thus creating temporary refuge zones for the animals (Pimenta 2004). The Asháninka of Apiwtxa also avoid predatory fishing and farming as well as the planting of grains that demand deforestation. Instead they focus on handicrafts and sustainable cultivation of natural products such as native palm oils and essences.

Another of their signature enterprises was a project to promote environmental protection and agroforestry production in the communities on Indigenous lands and in neighbouring non-Indigenous areas. This project was signed with the BNDES—*Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social* [Brazilian National Development Bank] in 2015 for more than six million reais (two million dollars).<sup>78</sup> It was developed with the aim of providing a sustainable economic alternative to deforestation, to support initiatives that protect Indigenous territory and to strengthen local organisations in the region.

With the election of the PT—*Partido dos Trabalhadores* [Workers' Party] in 1998, the Acre State Government has been trying to deal with the state's environmental challenges by fostering alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Compared with other parts of Brazil, the Asháninka of Apiwtxa have been successful in rolling out sustainable development policies, which have gone hand-in-hand with public education policies. Asháninka children are learning the Asháninka language taught by local teachers using their own didactic material. However, despite this local state support, the Asháninka also need to deal with continuous threats along their border with Peru. They often have to organise expeditions to prevent illegal logging and narcotrafficking activities on their lands launched from Peru (Pimenta 2005, 4).

*A gente luta mas come fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit: Trailer] in its short documentary form shows the Asháninka's efforts at reforestation and preservation on their lands. It depicts their fight against Peruvian-based illegal cross-country loggers. And it shows how the Asháninka of Apiwtxa have been able to increase the number and variety of their sustainable practices since recovering their own rights to their lands.

The short film opens with two Asháninka children walking barefoot on a narrow clay track surrounded by banana trees on the one side and the green *Rio Amônia* [Amônia River] on the other. The filmmaker here employs a handheld camera, so viewers can follow the children as they speed

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<sup>78</sup> “BNDES assina contrato de R\$ 6,6 milhões com Índios Ashaninka do Acre”, 17 April 2015, BNDES, [https://www.bndes.gov.br/wps/portal/site/home/imprensa/noticias/conteudo/20150417\\_assinatura\\_ashaninka](https://www.bndes.gov.br/wps/portal/site/home/imprensa/noticias/conteudo/20150417_assinatura_ashaninka)

through the lush tropical bush. The option of using the camera in this way to emphasise the filmmaker's point of view states from the first images that this documentary is made from an inside perspective. The children are dressed in *kushma* (in Quechua), a traditional cotton robe and a strong symbol of their identity (Pimenta 2004, 130). The older boy, who is probably five or six, explains that they are in the garden he planted a few years back. He is proud of its abundance of fruit, but jokes that birds are eating most of them. Meanwhile, the younger boy is eating a piece of fruit. After finishing the last bite, he proudly announces that he will plant its seed. He simply throws it on the ground.

This image combines the child's innocent act with an explicit reference to Brazil's longstanding reputation for the abundance and fertility of its lands—a reputation Brazil has had since colonial times. In fact, the very first official report written by Portuguese settlers 1 May 1500, known as the Letter of Pêro Vaz de Caminha, is filled with references to the bountifulness of the newly “discovered” land. Caminha was the official scribe of the Pedro Álvares Cabral expedition that arrived in Brazil. In his letter to the King of Portugal, Dom Manuel, Caminha described a country “*é uma terra tão fértil que nela, em se plantando, tudo dá*” (Caminha cited in Chauí 1993, 95) [so well-favoured that if it were rightly cultivated it would yield everything] (Caminha cited in Ley 1960, 28). References to the fertility of the Brazilian lands have been a constant feature of Brazilian public discourse from colonial times right up until the present. This representation of Brazil has supported Brazil's historical place as a leading global exporter of primary products, from raw sugar in the fifteenth century to soybeans in the twenty-first. The public discourse of fecundity has historically and is still in contemporary times yoked to agriculture and agribusiness. The symbolic currency of Brazilian fecundity provides powerful support for agribusiness and in some ways, paradoxically, powerful support for the unfettered development of the land (and the removal of any obstacles to that development). Consequently, fecundity appears to be associated with the making over of natural landscapes for farming and agriculture rather than with their preservation. This economic logic is very hard to combat and creates significant difficulties for Indigenous peoples and their husbanding of natural resources on sustainable grounds. However, this fertility of the land assumes another connotation in the Asháninka documentary, one that it is not about the production and transformation of nature into exportable commodities but about reforestation for human and animals' local subsistence.

In the next scene, a group of children is watching the documentary inside the community house. Through this self-referential moment, the Asháninka filmmakers reinforce the idea that the main audience for the documentary are the Asháninka people themselves, especially its future generations. In the scene they are watching, a teacher is organising the children to plant seeds. He explains that the elders were able to pass their knowledge on, so they are now able to plant fruit trees,

palms, trees for timber and medicinal herbs. By merging the image of the children watching the documentary with the image of them planting in the field, the documentary suggests that knowledge can now be transmitted through the use of digital media. It also demonstrates how films are valuable tools to preserve and spread Asháninka knowledge. The next scene shows the Asháninka children planting in more systematic way. This scene is in direct contrast with the earlier one in which the young boy just throws the seed on the ground. Now the children listen as the teacher methodically explains the process: “*nós misturamos o composto com um pouco de terra, e depois que a gente misturou eles a gente pode plantar as sementes*” [We mix the compost with a little bit of earth, and after we mix them we can plant the seed]. The scene is intended to be didactic, not only so that the children learn how to plant from an elder but also so that a general audience can be invited to understand the Asháninka process of planting. Crucially this general audience, like the young Asháninka, are to learn from Asháninka elders. The following scenes then show children putting seeds inside plastic bags and planting palms. Part of the reforestation plan is to cultivate fruit trees that will attract animals, thereby promoting the sustainable hunting of animals.

The documentary highlights the impact of the invasion of their territories by illegal loggers. Indeed, this is currently the main concern of the Asháninka community of Apiwtxa. After devastating the bordering forests, the illegal cutting of trees is now reaching into Asháninka lands. A group of 30 Asháninka men check entry points into their territory to search for invaders. Isaac Pinhanta, one of the Asháninka filmmakers and a schoolteacher, explains to the camera that his people had felt a scarcity of animals for hunting and fishing from 1993. He explains to the viewer that this motivated the Asháninka to start a management plan to repopulate the forests and rivers with animals. In doing so, the filmmaker directly addresses the viewer, affirming his authority as someone who knows the history of the community from within. He is dressed in a *kushma*, a type of headwear (*amatheyrentsi*) made of palm and macaw feathers, a necklace of native seeds (*txoshiki*) and red face paint. This scene is followed by one in which *tracajá* turtle hatchlings are released into the river. The editing intercuts these shots with images of helicopters from the Brazilian army, who are helping the Asháninka to protect their borders against invaders coming across the border from Peru. The military burns an illegal pile of logs found in a forest hideout. Isaac explains the importance of this government control of illegal logging: if the cut wood is left in the forest it will dry out and could trigger an uncontrollable fire. He adds that the children need to learn and take care of all the things that are important to the Asháninka. Once again, the filmmaker-teacher asserts the pedagogical role of the documentary in succinctly registering key aspects of their daily lives.

The documentary's final scene is a celebration of the Asháninka's way of life. A fisherman takes a large *surubí* fish (*Pseudoplatystoma corruscans*) from the river. He proudly states that the Asháninka are not lazy. In blissfully showing that his food was caught as a result of his own efforts,

the fisherman is also challenging the enduring stereotype in Brazil that Indigenous people are lethargic and incapable of hard work. Meanwhile, the women then cook another fish over a wood fire for the rest of the group. It is as they are enjoying the feast that one of the men sums up the main message of the film, saying here it is like this, life is like this, we struggle but we eat fruit. These are the words that give the documentary its title. They summarise the Asháninka way of life as a routine of work and struggle that is rewarded with good fruits. Here “fruits” can be understood in a literal sense as fresh food (fish, wild animals, fruits and vegetables) but also metaphorically as the possibility for Asháninka peoples to fulfil their way of life and maintain their cultural traditions.

Pimenta (2004) argues that the Asháninka’s sustainable way of life is best understood in relation to their traditional knowledge and cosmology rather than from contact with western environmentalist projects of preservation. He explains that Asháninka beliefs condemn any hunting for more than what is necessary for subsistence. The main deity and most powerful creator is Pawa. At creation all beings were humans, but the animals lost their humanity to become sources of food.<sup>79</sup> As part of their hunting practices, the Asháninka respect the rules established by one of the sons of Pawa, Maninkari (meaning “the one who is hidden”), the guardian of the forest animals. So, to be successful hunters, the Asháninka believe they must respect basic rules such as only hunting when it is necessary (Pimenta 2004, 131). The documentary (neither the short or longer version) does not go into detail about this information about the bases of Asháninka cosmology, but it does make the point that it is portraying a society that is driven by a sustainable relationship with natural resources and an awareness of the human impact on nature. It provides an example of successful management of resources that is intricately tied up with the continuation of traditional ways of life. As the documentary is addressed first and foremost to Asháninka people, it endorses the role of filmmaking as a resource to ensure the maintenance of cultural practices.

#### **4.7 The Djugan and Asháninka Peoples: Indigenous Cultural Rights and Sustainability**

In this last section of the chapter, I compare the two main documentaries studied in this chapter, *Footprints* and *A gente luta mas come fruta*. I underline their aesthetic and political similarities, as well as possible lessons non-Indigenous audiences may take away from their audio-visual contact with Indigenous cultures. Additionally, I take the opportunity to discuss the role of Indigenous audio-visual productions in the debate on cultural rights and sustainable development. Both *Footprints* and *A gente luta mas come fruta* provide different levels of understanding depending on the viewer’s prior knowledge of the Indigenous groups and their particular contexts. This was made clear to me during

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<sup>79</sup> Eduardo Viveiros’s argument about animism, discussed on chapter three of this thesis, is applicable here as another example of animals that lost their humanity.

a Latin American Academic Conference held in New Zealand (AILASA 2016), at which I presented a paper on *A gente luta mas come fruta*. After my presentation, many in the audience approached me and commented on how the cultural background I provided stood in contrast with their first impressions of the film. They told me that at first glance the documentary's portrayal of everyday Asháninka life seemed to reveal an extremely poor/disadvantaged social context in comparison to living standards from a New Zealand perspective. This view was challenged when I explained aspects of Asháninka culture, especially their struggle to maintain many aspects of their customary ways of life, such as traditional practices of fishing and hunting. It was through my explanations that audience members were able to see the Asháninka peoples as empowered rather than marginalised. Because of their Eurocentric and urban standpoint, audiences initially did not perceive the positive aspects of these scenes. This suggests some of the difficulty involved in representing the unmeasurable value the Asháninka place on living according to their own terms, proudly maintaining their cultural practices. My interlocutors needed background information on the Asháninka's cosmological, geographical and political realities in order to decode and reassess what they were watching. This is an issue of framing, and not an uncommon one. Firstly, art of various kinds often requires this framing and this contextualisation to be legible. Secondly, miscommunication is a general problem in and with communication. In a way, I suspect that both the frame of NITV and that of the VNA initiative go some way to providing this necessary background. Indeed, the value associated with having your own platform—whether an online streaming or DVD service or a broadcasting channel—is that this framing is built-in.

The perceptual association between Indigenous ways of life and 'poverty' is common across Brazilian and Australian contexts. Aboriginal peoples, especially those living in remote communities adopting non-European practices, are commonly viewed in Australia as poor and marginal. A recent example was seen when former Prime Minister Tony Abbott announced his plan to close more than 100 remote communities in Western Australia, directly affecting more than 1,000 Aboriginals. He justified it by saying: "What we can't do is endlessly subsidise lifestyle choices if those lifestyle choices are not conducive to the kind of full participation in Australian society that everyone should have" (Stokes 2015). In tactically using the term "lifestyle choice", Abbott wanted to convey the idea that it is possible (and even desirable) for Indigenous peoples move away from the remote communities to be integrated into larger 'communities' that can support service provision of various kinds at scale (primary schools, health officers, police). However, Aboriginality is not a superficial 'choice' made by individuals opting to live differently from mainstream urban Australians. Rather, it is a collective way of life, with strong cultural and religious ties to the land that predates the arrival of Europeans by many thousands of years and through countless generations before colonial times.

The struggle to maintain traditional ways of life against aggressive models of development is a common experience of Indigenous peoples all around the world. As the Indigenous international activist and former chair of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) Tauli-Corpuz (2010, 10) stresses “Our Indigenous worldviews and philosophies, value systems, cultural, social, political and economic systems, which include our traditional livelihoods, were seen as obstacles to development and modernization”. Today, this struggle continues as national and transnational economic development priorities and interests become the main justifications (or pretexts) for continuing Indigenous dispossession. Such intensive corporate and political interest in the resources on lands that Indigenous people claim coincide and are buttressed by related views of Indigenous existence as boring, non-eventful and in much need of change. . However, as shown in the two documentaries analysed here, in places where Indigenous groups manage to stay in place, stories of cultural conservation and sustainability can still be powerfully told.

Gammage (2011) has drawn attention to the way that Aboriginal religious traditions connect conservation through the Dreaming through two related injunctions: that everybody needs to respect the Law and that everybody needs to leave the world exactly as it was found, no better or worse. Both rules “apply the same relations and obligations to all creation, guarding the universe by outlawing fundamental change, so making all creatures conservationist and conservative” (124). However, the exercise of these rules does not mean that Aboriginal people do not and have not intervened in the landscape: quite the opposite. They developed systems of land management based on the use of fire and on their deep knowledge of the life cycles of natural resources such as water. The difference then was that Aboriginal large-scale management proved to be based on “land care” rather than “land use” (Gammage 2011, 323). This care was not static or passive; it aimed to achieve balance in a continuing dialogue with plants, animals and their Dreaming links.

In the documentary *Footprints*, the Djungan songlines are presented as grounded in the landscape. As the narrator tells the creation story, the camera crosses different sites showing the ecological associations between place and religion. Moreover, the documentary enables the audience to see Djungan people revisiting and re-empowering these sites by keeping them alive through performance. The process of recording ceremonies also stimulates the revival of some cultural practices such as rituals that had not been performed for many years. At the same time, due to the cultural protocols of editing described by film director Cornel Ozies, the short film is also reticent: it allows only so much. Non-appropriable images and cultural property are not to be shown to general, uninitiated audiences.

In *A gente luta mas come fruta*, displays of the Asháninka way of life teach firstly Asháninka children and secondly the general public about traditional practices and sustainable management of natural resources. Both documentaries are definitely made to be more than merely educational or

entertaining. They do not just record and teach important knowledge about Indigenous cultural practices: they project its value. In this way both documentaries take on a political role advocating the twinning of the rescuing of traditions and their conservation with care for the land. In doing so both documentaries contribute to strengthening Indigenous rights in line with the United Nation's Indigenous declaration:

Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalise, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. (Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 13, 2007)

Most of *A gente luta mas come fruta* is in the Asháninka language; in *Footprints*, by contrast, the testimonies are in the colonial language of English, and the people speak of their struggle to learn and recover the Djugan language that was supposedly lost. Both documentaries provide alternative pathways for cultural maintenance as they record oral traditions. In doing so, they also strengthen the role of the media as a form of cultural expression as part of the Indigenous struggle for cultural rights, with access to the production and distribution of audio-visual materials a means to promote intercultural understanding.

Both documentaries share the fact of being made firstly for Indigenous peoples and secondly for general audiences. In this sense, they operate in a way that is consistent with Eric Michaels's notion of the Indigenous appropriation of foreign technologies to display Indigenous aesthetics. In both documentaries, the audio-visual format is bent to fit Indigenous filmmakers' purposes rather than to please wider audiences.

In the case of *Footprints*, the audio-visual format allows for the display of the complexity of songlines, presenting all aspects involved in them, such as storytelling, music, body painting and dances. Additionally, the first sequence of the documentary follows the path of the creator Buguragarri. The documentary was shot on location and the images geographically position the tracks of the songlines. The documentary depicts the connection between Aboriginal art and religion, displaying parts of the Djugan cosmology. The film's director, Cornel Ozies (2015), aptly summarises the meaning of songlines by defining them as "a library of information". He sees the role of the audio-visual as fundamental in documenting this oral tradition in order to keep Aboriginal culture and history alive. He insists that Indigenous people can and should use all available media formats in order to maintain their traditions. His affirmation is based on the fact that Aboriginal culture is dynamic. This is a point made by O'Regan and Batty:

It [Aboriginal television] is the product of contestations, divisions and the mobilisation of resources by particular agents within the terms provided by cultural and social systems. To fail to accord it that much is to fail to recognise a culture's transformative capacity and

therefore to regard any indication of cultural transformation on the part of Aboriginal communities as becoming less Aboriginal, more modernised, westernised. (O'Regan and Batty, 1993, 180).

A documentary such as *Footprints* is only possible due to Aboriginal cultural dynamism. The most obvious is the very relationship between Djugan ancestral practices and twenty-first century filmmaking. After all, the current and ongoing process of Djugan cultural revival is intrinsically based on the development of a documentary. It is in front of the cameras that the songlines have been remembered and recorded, transmitting oral stories through digital media.

Both documentaries relied on the conventional format of voice-over narration and testimonies. In both, Indigenous people assume the role of experts as they talk about their own histories, places of origin, traditions and ways of life. Neither of these two documentaries includes dissonant voices that question the perspectives of Indigenous peoples. Rather than attempting to create an unbiased narrative—there is no space here, for instance, for those interested in commercialising the lands—both documentaries take on a political role of exposition. In clarifying and explaining Indigenous perspectives on their own terms and on a terrain of their choosing they promote them. Necessarily partial, the many Indigenous people featured in these documentaries offer a wonderfully complex opportunity to hear alternative voices rarely heard in such a developed fashion in mainstream media. In this sense, Indigenous media is a type of “alternative media” as it allows “marginal and oppositional voices to contest the view of the world, values, and life-styles of the mainstream”, and in doing so stimulates the “circulation and growth of alternative subcultures and communities” (Kellner 1989, 144). The development of Indigenous media is fundamental to making their perspectives widely seen and heard.

In this chapter, I have shown the ways Indigenous audio-visual productions have been used to strengthen Indigenous cultural agendas. Collective media productions such as those of NITV and the various VNA projects are bringing Indigenous narratives, in their own voices and with their own images, not only to local but also global audiences. The rise of audio-visual Indigenous self-representation—made possible both by the accessibility of new media and the strengthening of Indigenous movements—is leading to political and aesthetic shifts. Indigenous cultures can now be produced locally and distributed on many levels: for their own community, for Indigenous peoples nationally, for national publics and therefore polities, and for international publics, through film festivals or online channels.

Despite the historical differences, the development of Indigenous media in Australia and Brazil share common challenges, but also indisputable achievements. Despite having particular national histories and colonial experiences, Indigenous struggles in both countries have involved violence, resistance, negotiation and appropriation of western technologies, such as those used for



filmmaking. The productions of both documentaries are undeniable examples of achievements, which are enabling Indigenous perspectives to be brought into national debates. My research is inspired by the work of Indigenous filmmakers of registering songlines, so they do not get lost in time. It also draws inspiration from the film activism of the Asháninka, who want to make sure their practices of planting and fishing are being taught to their children and also to non-Indigenous audiences. My research too sees Indigenous filmmaking as an attempt to increase Indigenous media visibility as well as to give it a long life. Moreover, writing about Indigenous culture is above all a way to acknowledge Indigenous cultural rights of perpetuation and aims to contribute to the successful development of a pan-Indigenous decolonial cinema.

In the next chapter, I analyse Indigenous audio-visual productions in relation to two concepts: ecocinema and Fourth Cinema. There, I propose the combination of these two in order to create an *Eco-Fourth Cinema* as a space for Indigenous audio-visual productions to showcase contemporary environmental issues through the perspectives and advocacy of Indigenous rights.

“Climate justice is about decolonization.”

—Kyle Powys Whyte

Potawatomi scholar Powys Whyte, from the United States, argues that Indigenous researchers are bringing new understandings of the human–environment relationship by recovering histories that reassess the relationship between colonial, capitalist and ecological systems.<sup>80</sup> Another theme identified by Whyte is the way Indigenous peoples reject the common view that climate change is something recent and unprecedented. By situating anthropogenic climate change within a *longue durée*, Indigenous peoples link contemporary debates with the ecological dimension of the impact of colonialism and its effects, including ongoing ones, on Indigenous traditional territories. As he argues in this chapter’s epigraph, climate justice is fundamentally “about decolonisation”. Addressing climate change is therefore entwined and closely connected with the process of decolonisation. Solutions to it must therefore involve actively dismantling persisting colonial power relations that continue to affect Indigenous peoples’ sovereignty and ability to exercise their rights. Whyte understands climate change as part of an ongoing environmental crisis dating back to colonial times. In this way climate change is given a historical and critical perspective that is, arguably, fundamental to dealing with the contemporary challenges of climate change and the creation of sustainable solutions to it. Climate justice is then about creating conditions for Indigenous peoples to guide their own lives based on their own knowledge and cultural traditions.

As I discuss later in this chapter, Australian and Brazilian Indigenous activists and filmmakers add a further dimension to this sense of *longue durée* in that they have a history of adaptation and active response to environmental crises, making them simultaneously first victims of climate change and the first peoples to live with and strive to improvise solutions to it. This chapter is about the entailment of these perspectives in filmmaking—an Eco-Fourth Cinema.

### **5.1 Eco-Fourth Cinema, Environmental Crises and Colonialism**

In the first chapters of this thesis, I described the connection between Indigenous filmmaking and global political agendas concerning three fundamental rights: land, water and culture. I addressed the connection between local Indigenous struggles for basic rights and impacts on global environmental

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<sup>80</sup> I had the opportunity to attend Powys Whyte’s lecture on the role of Indigenous research in the field of anthropogenic environmental change in 2016 at the 7th Biennial International Indigenous Research Conference, held at the University of Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

crises. In this final chapter, I turn to analysing Indigenous filmmaking's role in communicating global anthropogenic climate change through local narratives centred on Indigenous peoples' connections to country.

Through the film and video productions detailed in this chapter, Indigenous media production is evidently positioned within decolonizing processes, as it not only gives visibility to Indigenous perspectives and knowledges about environmental crises but also invites audiences to join in and support their efforts to reconnect with the natural environment and preserve and rehabilitate natural resources.

Powys Whyte is one of the authors in the recently published *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledge, Forging New Constellations of Practice* (Adamson and Davis, 2017), which tackles climate change through humanities-based scholarship. The approach taken in this volume is based on the notion of "ecological humanities" advanced by Australian scholars such as Val Plumwood, Deborah Rose Bird and Libby Robin. While not all versions of ecological humanities incorporate Indigenous perspectives as centrally as does theirs, the fact that these three scholars, associated with Indigenous studies, have been advancing these perspectives give this collection a particular strength and cultural politics. One of the book's main arguments is that climate change is best seen as another turn in a continuing history of colonialism and its consequences. This is made clear in the provocative title Powys Whyte chose for his chapter: "Is it colonial déjà vu?". His answer is an unambiguous "yes". For Indigenous peoples, climate change is not an imminent, apocalyptic and unknown threat. Rather, it is yet another manifestation of a series of environmental impacts that started with colonialism and extends to contemporary capitalism's impact on Indigenous territories and peoples. For Powys Whyte, what is specific about our current moment is that the massive and multifaceted scale of human interference on the environment due to economic practices is now putting the planet's life at risk.

Another academic and political activist from the Northern Hemisphere, Noam Chomsky, emphasised in a recent interview that although they are commonly associated with the past, Indigenous peoples are at the forefront of some of humanity's biggest future challenges:

It's a kind of incredible irony that all over the world the leading forces in trying to prevent a race to disaster are the Indigenous communities. I mean, anyone who's not living under a rock knows that we're facing potential environmental catastrophe, and not in the very distant future. All over the world it's the Indigenous communities that are trying to hold it back. (2015, 28:36–29:04)

Chomsky concludes his interview on a positive note, expressing hope that a future led by Indigenous peoples and values could unseat the current unsustainable model of development. The prospects of Indigenous activism reshaping world socioeconomics are unlikely, but Chomsky's optimism in

regard to Indigenous peoples' sustainable practices is backed by evidence. For example, while Indigenous peoples worldwide own a mere "22% of the global land area", this relatively restricted land area "harbours 80% of the world's biological diversity" ((Nakashima et al. 2012, 7). This disproportion corroborates a direct link between Indigenous peoples' rights and planetary sustainability. It also suggests the urgency of bringing Indigenous knowledge to the centre of debates about climate change.

The proposition that Indigenous people should play a leadership role in the work to halt climate change is based on a number of factors (Salick and Ross 2009; Cochran et al. 2013; Thomas and Twyman 2005). The first is that Indigenous peoples are the most exposed to environmental changes due to their reliance on natural resources as well as their "reduced social-ecological resilience" as a direct "consequence of centuries of oppressive policies" inflicted by dominant societies acting in Indigenous territories (Green and Raygorodetsky 2010, 239). A second factor is their local and empirical knowledge, which "may offer valuable insights into environmental change", and variability that can dialogue with "broader-scale scientific research", adding local accuracy (Nakashima et al. 2012, 6). Lastly, there is the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's biodiversity is located in Indigenous territories. This makes Indigenous peoples undisputable experts in preserving and dealing with multiple resources.

Because of this paradoxical position—of being the most vulnerable to *and* the most capable of dealing with climate change—Indigenous peoples are in an obvious position to provide both insights into and first-hand accounts of current environmental crises. However, it is necessary to ask not only where and whether Indigenous peoples' voices are being heard but also how Indigenous filmmaking communicates these issues. What is the role of Indigenous audio-visual productions in bringing Indigenous perspectives on climate to the general public? To answer these questions, I discuss links between Indigenous rights and climate justice in Australian and Brazilian films. I will also argue in passing for the importance of film festivals, especially Indigenous and environmental film festivals, in diffusing Indigenous perspectives and knowledges about the environment. From these festivals these film and video texts have moved into television, educational, community, for-profit and not-for-profit spaces.

## **5.2 Spreading the Message: Indigenous Perspectives Reaching Film Festivals**

Due to ongoing ecological concerns and recent global economic crises, themes such as deforestation, ocean degradation, Indigenous peoples' rights and climate change have increasingly gained worldwide attention. This is reflected in the rising number and popularity of environmental film festivals (Monani 2008, 42). These festivals provide a space not only to get films seen but also to

foster debates, which invite audiences to think about and imagine practical solutions. The presence of Indigenous films and filmmakers at these festivals endorses my hypothesis about the important role Indigenous media and peoples are now occupying in environmental debates.

Willoquet-Maricondi (2010b, 43) sees the boom in environmental film festivals and environmental filmmaking as evidence of the growing genre of ecocinema. This is a relatively new genre. It derives from the term 'ecocriticism', which began to be used widely from the 1990s. Ecocriticism is concerned with studying cultural texts of all varieties, including literary ones, for the connections they draw with the natural environment. An intrinsic part of ecocriticism is its activist and interventionist ambitions, which proceed alongside its task of discovering and creating new knowledge. The definition of ecocinema is directly related to ecocriticism in that it is the embodiment in filmmaking of ecocriticism's activist and new-knowledge-making ambitions. It:

overtly strives to inspire personal and political action on the part of viewers, stimulating our thinking so as to bring about concrete changes in the choices we make, daily and in the long run, as individuals and as societies, locally and globally. (Willoquet-Maricondi 2010b, 45)

The term ecocinema assembles together films that aim not only to raise awareness about environmental issues but also to provoke audiences to act in favour of the planet's wellbeing. Consequently, ecocinema embodies the idea of films that are able to encourage audiences to take action to help solve environmental issues on a variety of different levels, from the domestic sphere to the international stage. Inside the heterogenic field of ecocinema—and specifically in the context of Indigenous films—Machiorlatti (2010) sees ecocinema as having the goals of documenting and preserving local stories while at the same time “serving an expansive ecospheric function that privileges trans-tribal relations” (63). For her, these films' key role is to make audiences conscious of their actual disconnection not only from the natural environment but also from each other. In this sense, these filmic productions could create a desire for reconnection that would bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous in a new configuration.

In this chapter, I compare two documentaries directed by Indigenous filmmakers and showcased at these important film festivals. I use the concepts of ecocinema along with Fourth Cinema to discuss Indigenous political and aesthetic portrayals of the environment and their ethical understanding of contemporary crisis. The idea of Fourth Cinema is understood as related to the general conception of the Fourth World as “an international movement on behalf of Aboriginal rights that has remained firmly rooted in a land-based discourse” (Columpar 2010, 12). My definition of Fourth Cinema, as seen in previous chapters, is based on Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay's distinction between an autonomous Indigenous cinema versus a First, Second and Third Cinema related to the modern national state. He emphasises that although many aspects of Indigenous lives were affected and modified throughout the last centuries,

in as much as People and the culture survive at all, the ancient roots, the ancient outlook persist, an outlook with roots far back in time, an outlook—to a greater or lesser extent—outside the national outlook. (Barclay 2003)

This aesthetic and political division makes Fourth Cinema committed above all to Indigenous peoples' core of values and standpoints.

This is precisely the case for the two documentaries examined here: *Connection to Country* (Tyson Mowarin, 2017) and *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá—Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [Two Villages, One Path], Ariel Ortega, Germano Beñites and Jorge Motinico, 2008). *Connection to Country* was screened at the Seventh Environmental Film Festival Australia. This festival was created in 2010 in Melbourne. It has been expanding its editions to other Australian cities every year. It is a not-for-profit festival whose patron is the environmentalist Bob Brown and whose director is Chris Gerbing. The festival's main goal is to encourage audiences to not only debate environmental themes but also take actions and find practical and sustainable answers to contemporary challenges regarding natural resources. Before its Environmental Film Festival Australia screening, *Connection to Country* was premiered at the Sixty-Fourth Sydney Film Festival, arguably the most important of Australia's annual festivals, supported by the Federal Government (Screen Australia), the NSW Government (Screen NSW) and the City of Sydney. The Sydney festival was directed by Nashen Moodley and holds a prestigious place in Australia's cultural scene, exhibiting internationally and nationally awarded films alike. *Connection to Country* was nominated for the Documentary Australia Foundation Award for Best Australian Documentary. It was also screened on the television channels NITV and made freely available for streaming at SBS On Demand.

Implicit in its title, *Connection to Country* attempts to explain the Aboriginal connection to the land, showing their ongoing battle with the mining industry in the Pilbara region of Western Australia while insisting upon the enduring relationships between Aboriginal groups in the region. It recaps Aboriginal people's loss of their rights throughout European colonisation and settlement, while inviting viewers to rethink their own relationship with the environment and the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The second documentary, *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá*, was awarded best Documentary for 2008 by the FORUMDOC.BH. [Belo Horizonte Documentary and Ethnographic Film Festival Forum] in Brazil. This is a well-established annual film festival that was launched in 1997 with the intention of exhibiting and debating national and international documentaries.<sup>81</sup> The award for best

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<sup>81</sup> Its twentieth edition screened an Indigenous-themed film at its opening session: the documentary *Martírio* [Martyrdom] (2016), directed by Vincent Carrelli (founder of Video nas Aldeias), a film about the Guaraní-Kaiowá people's land struggles against agribusiness. This film was circulated in almost all festivals in Brazil in 2017.

film for an Indigenous documentary endorses the idea that self-representation is finding space within national debates at the same time as attention to Indigenous discourses and knowledges in the context of environmental crises is growing. The film was also screened in another film festival, Vídeo Índio Brasil (VIB), and on the television program *A'Uwe* on the public channel TV Cultura. This documentary tracks daily life in two Mbyá-Guaraní villages facing similar problems. Decreasing numbers of animals to hunt due to deforestation has led them to increasingly depend on selling wooden handicrafts to tourists. The documentary connects this growing reliance on the outside non-Indigenous market with the historical process of colonisation, loss of land rights and environmental crises.

Despite having been made nearly a decade apart, these two documentaries have remarkable similarities. Environmental problems in both are depicted as a consequence of colonialism and its disregard for Indigenous traditional knowledge and Indigenous input into the management of lands. In both documentaries their Indigenous filmmakers are talking not only about current environmental issues but also about the end of the world they knew and inhabited before colonisation. Consequently, from an Indigenous point of view, debates about climate change revolve around the notion of the much longer, ongoing and protracted end of the world they once knew, as well as how they have adapted, witnessed and resisted these changes over two centuries in Australia's case and five in Brazil's case. Métis scholar Zoe Todd (2016) from Canada draws a useful parallel between climate change and colonisation in just these terms<sup>82</sup>:

What does it mean to have a reciprocal discourse on catastrophic end times and apocalyptic environmental change in a place where, over the last five hundred years, Indigenous peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions? What does it mean to hold, in simultaneous tension, stories of the Anthropocene in the past, present, and future? (Online)

In questioning these overlapping crises, Zoe Todd provides data correlating the colonisation of the Americas with the very foundation of global environmental crises. She associates the colonial period with a new geological time, the Anthropocene. This term refers to a move past the Holocene, a comparatively constant period of 12,000 years after the last ice age (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). Todd cites "Defining the Anthropocene" by Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin (2015) to show that geological changes began to manifest themselves in a significant manner in the 1600s, just a hundred years after colonisation dramatically impacted Indigenous populations ways of life. As a consequence, due to massive depopulation in the Americas, farming declined excessively: "numbers

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<sup>82</sup> Zoe Todd garnered much attention for criticising Bruno Latour, who is well known for his debates on human and non-human worlds, for not properly acknowledging Indigenous scholars that have long been talking about sentient environments (Vansintjan 2015).

rapidly declined to a minimum of about 6 million people by 1650 via exposure to diseases carried by Europeans, plus war, enslavement and famine” (Lewis and Maslin 2015, 175). From the seventeenth century, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions rose to unprecedented levels.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, at least since colonisation, Indigenous peoples have been inevitably engaged with and at the centre of environmental debates. They had first-hand contact with anthropogenic impacts on the planet’s health. As such, although mostly ignored by academic literature and the settlers/invaders, Indigenous people should be seen as protagonists, veteran experts on debates around climate change and the Anthropocene.

Indeed, the term Anthropocene is better understood when it is directly connected with colonial processes. Otherwise, it presents itself as occurring without reference to the broader historical perspectives, including, critically, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples through which it occurred. In this sense, for Indigenous scholars such as Powys Whyte, the general concept of Anthropocene does not fit perfectly within Indigenous knowledge systems. Rather than placing humans in a central position, Indigenous peoples are more interested in finding environmental solutions that show how humans and nonhumans have a reciprocal relationship, considering that all beings are in relationships with each other and with the world. After all, placing humans as the main protagonists of history has not lead to solutions but rather to environmental destruction.

So, Indigenous peoples have long been living in “post-apocalyptic conditions” after the near destruction of their environments (Whyte 2017, 160). Surviving colonisation for Indigenous peoples has meant dealing with biodiversity loss, ocean degradation, forest destruction and other effects of industrial and development-driven societies. In sum, environmental crises might be seen as long having been entangled with the end of worlds, as Indigenous peoples once knew them and as the broader population might have once known them. As mentioned before, this sense of the *longue durée* is given a further dimension with the development of Indigenous media. Through this media, Indigenous peoples have been able to spread their local and historical perspectives and knowledge about environmental crises.

Thus, the contribution of Indigenous filmmaking to the debate over environmental crises is one of the reasons for Indigenous film festivals becoming popular. There are a number of examples in Australia. There is Sydney’s recently created WINDA Film Festival (2016), directed by Medika Thorpe and Pauline Clague, and mainly financed by Screen Australia, NITV and Screen NSW. The festival’s goal is to exhibit Indigenous films made around the world. Another example is the Solid Screen Festival (since 2014), directed by Jenny Fraser. The Australian version of the festival is held in Queensland and exhibits Indigenous women’s artistic productions including films. This festival is along the same lines as a third Indigenous artistic event, Boomerang, which includes film screenings

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<sup>83</sup> These new proposals provoked great scientific debate, which can be seen in more detail in the journal *The Anthropocene Review* (Oldfield 2015).



along with other activities (2013). This festival showcases a diversity of artistic presentation and is directed by Rhoda Roberts. The Nayri Niara good spirit Festival (2008) is directed by Aboriginal artistic director Ruth Langford and is a triennial Tasmania-based event focusing on Indigenous films, music and culture. It gathers together Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to share arts and knowledge. The Guringai Festival (2001) is directed by Susan Moylan-Coombs, Caroline Glass-Pattison and Sue Pinckham. It is concerned with celebrating Indigenous culture and heritage while promoting awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in the Northern Sydney region, where the festival is held. Finally, there is IndigifestOZ, part of the CinéfestOZ Film Festival, which focuses on national Aboriginal film production.

A similar situation has emerged in Brazil, with an increase in the number of spaces and places for the showcasing of Indigenous productions. These include the Mostra de Cinema Indígena Aldeia, now known as Biennial Indigenous Cinema, held in São Paulo since 2014. It is organised by the Núcleo de Cultura Indígena (Nucleus of Indigenous Culture) supported by Spcine (São Paulo City Council). Its main goal is to showcase Indigenous cultural diversity. It is coordinated by activist and environmentalist Ailton Krenak (Krenak people), an internationally known Indigenous leader in Brazil. Another biennial film festival is the II Mostra Indígena de Filmes Etnográficos do Ceará (Indigenous Ethnographic Film Festival, 2015), funded by the Ceará State Government to create a space for cultural exchange between producers, academics and Indigenous communities. Another example is the Mostra de Cinema Indígena produced by UNIR—*Universidade Federal de Rondônia* [Federal University of Rondônia] together with IFRO—*Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia de Rondônia* [Federal Institution of Education, Science and Technology of Rondônia], in 2017 held in the city of Rondônia. The festival has the objective of giving visibility to Indigenous themes. Audio-visual productions made with or about Indigenous peoples are also popular in other film festivals, especially those concerned with environmental themes. The list has become vast and is not restricted to the following: there is the Ecocine: Festival Internacional de Cinema Ambiental e Direitos Humanos, the first environmental film festival in Brazil, created in 1992 by Ariane Porto. Its twenty-fifth edition focused on Indigenous peoples around the world. The Festival Latino Americano de Cinema Ambiental—Fest Cineamazônia (2003) also now features Indigenous films prominently in its program, and in one of its editions it honoured activist Ailton Krenak. All these festivals promote themselves as providing a space for environmental debate and the development of sustainable change. Of all these festivals the Sixth Cine Kurumin (2011), directed by Thais Brito and organised by the collective *Espalha a Semente* [Spread the Seed], is especially notable. Financed by *Governo da Bahia* [Bahia State Government], *Banco do Nordeste* [Northwest Bank] and the *Governo Federal (Ministério da Cultura)* [Federal Government (Ministry of Culture)], this festival now takes place in different Indigenous villages each year. Although it is primarily aimed at Indigenous audiences, the

festival has been growing and consequently expanding its audience to non-Indigenous circles. In 2017, the theme of environmental crises was recurrent in Cine Kurumin's productions, especially films about Indigenous peoples' disputes with agribusiness, cattle ranchers and mining enterprises as well as the huge impacts of the construction of mega hydroelectric dams in or near Indigenous territories. These themes are portrayed as entangled and at odds with core Indigenous values, ways and means of resource management and cultural practices that are interrupted or damaged by the large impact of economic development in the regions.

### **5.3 Indigenous Voices on Climate Change**

Through these festivals and other forums Indigenous films are contributing to global environmental discussions. An emblematic case is the Indigenous Voices and Climate Change Film Festival hosted by the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen (2009). This festival was an outcome of the COP15 climate negotiations.<sup>84</sup> It was inaugurated with the goal of showcasing Indigenous perspectives on the environment and stories of adaptation to environmental change. There were three Aboriginal documentaries from Australia presented as part of this festival. The first was a short film entitled *Walking on Country with Spirits: Biodiversity Loss in Australia's Wet Tropics*, narrated by a Kuku Nyungkal Aboriginal woman, Marilyn. In the film its Aboriginal narrator explains her choice to live in the traditional way, without electricity and close to sacred places. Drawing on her experience, she points out that streams are not flowing and flourishing as they once did. The decrease in water levels is affecting numbers of local fish. At the same time the construction of dams and mines has resulted in polluted waterways for animals.

In the second documentary, *Fighting Carbon with Fire*, the traditional Aboriginal forest management technique of controlled burning is championed as a possible solution to the devastation wrought by uncontrolled fires. The third documentary, *Sea Level Rise*, was set in Kowanyama (meaning plenty of water) in northern Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria. There, an elder of the Kunjen people, Inherkowinginambana, talks about visible changes he is seeing in both water and landscape. He describes the danger posed to freshwater supplies by the increase in sea levels. Along with other elders, he points to how when sea levels rose in the past, natural stones were placed there to secure freshwater. The documentary finishes with him posing an open question: "When that whole ocean comes and rises up, where are you and me going to go?" His affliction is further emphasised by regional scientists' predictions that sea levels in the area will increase by 49–90 centimetres by 2070. All three short documentaries are compelling examples of available sources of Indigenous perceptions and knowledge being brought to bear upon contemporary environmental crises.

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<sup>84</sup> COP15 was the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties held in Copenhagen in 2009 during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

As the owners of the oldest continuous culture in the planet, Aboriginal peoples have witnessed many changes in Australian landscapes, including the melting of icesheets and the resulting rise in sea levels that caused extreme floods (Green, Billy and Tapim 2010). Geographer Patrick D. Nunn together with linguists Nicholas Reid and Margaret Sharpe (Reid, Nunn and Sharpe 2014) have catalogued twenty-one Aboriginal oral stories related to significant sea-level increase that happened between 7,500 and 13,400 years ago. They correlated these stories with scientific accounts of post-glacial sea-level increase on the Australian shores. By drawing these parallels, the authors aimed to show the importance of Aboriginal languages in understanding climate change. The languages carried knowledge about the history of the environment and human adaptation to climate change.

Aboriginal survival is a testament to Aboriginals' adaptability and their ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of an ever-changing environment. For example, in the Ice Age, Aboriginal peoples effectively adjusted "to profound environmental and climate changes and the loss of millions of square kilometres of their land in the rising of the seas" (Molnar and Meadows 2001, 260). Another example of Aboriginal management practice is "mosaic burning", a technique of "burning small patches of land to enable greater control of the fire front" that helps preserve ecosystems but is also able to support the country's aim of reducing emissions (Green, Billy and Tapim 2010, 340). This is on the basis that small bushfires produce less carbon than less frequent, larger bushfires.

Aboriginal knowledge of the country was also the theme of a series of four documentaries, all of them directed by Aboriginal filmmakers, entitled *You Are Here* (2017). These series debated national events and told personal stories through the eyes and voices of Indigenous people. The main presenter, Miranda Tapsell, a renowned Aboriginal actress, introduced each of the documentaries: *We Don't Need a Map* (Warwick Thornton), *In My Own Words* (Erica Glynn), *Occupation Native* (Trisha Morton-Thomas) and *Connection to Country* (Tyson Mowarin).

The main reason I chose one of these documentaries, *Connection to Country*, for study is that it exemplifies Indigenous filmmaking's pedagogical discourse on contemporary environmental crises. It was produced by Weerianna Street Media and developed in association with National Indigenous Television (NITV) and Screen Australia. It was also supported by Screen West, Lottery West, Create NSW and Screen Territory. It centres on Aboriginal people's ongoing battle for the preservation of historical sites in West Australia's Pilbara region. It works as a medium for Indigenous peoples to educate audiences as to how to understand local issues through Indigenous perspectives.

#### **5.4 *Connection to Country*: Aboriginal Knowledge of Australian Lands**

The first scene of the documentary uses a Google Maps location sign with an iconoclastic twist. The corporate pin, itself a symbol of Western-led globalisation, is painted with the colours of the Aboriginal flag (black, red and yellow) and also makes reference to the flag's design (a yellow circle surrounded by red and black). The appropriation of the multinational Google's sign reinforces the title of the whole documentary series: *You Are Here*. This strategy also reminds the audience that the country, Australia (where the documentary series was made), is located in Aboriginal lands. Thus, from the very beginning, the documentary invites its viewers to see that issues lived by Aboriginal Australians should be concerns for all living in this country. After this reworking of the Google pin, the documentary continues with a black screen and the sound of clapsticks playing, establishing Aboriginal people as the main characters of the story.

The first images are a panoramic view of Murujuga (Burrup Peninsula) in the Pilbara region. This view of the land and water mirrors the technique common to the films analysed in previous chapters. As mentioned, these panoramic views do not function as panoptical images of the environment, where nature is portrayed as an object, through differentiation and distance: on the contrary, they establish a connection between filmmaker and place. This is especially the case here because the place is well known to the filmmaker, who understands its history and has the authority to speak about it. Astonishing aerial images of the land and waterscape made by drones are followed by a voice-over of an elder Aboriginal woman speaking in Ngarluma. The voice-over represents the spirit of land: "Can you hear that sound? That's my winds carrying my story. My story touches everyone, everything, completely. This is my story, but it is your story too". Again, the documentary discourse endorses a sense of belonging that wants to include the wider audience.

In the next scene, the film's director, Tyson Mowarin, is showed setting up his drone. This shot sets the style of the documentary as ranging from the participatory to the performative. In his book *Introduction to Documentary*, Bill Nichols (2001) undertakes a comprehensive study of key issues involved in representing real people on the screen. He categorises documentaries into six distinct modes: expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, poetic and performative. The expository mode often features a "voice-of-God" narrator and "emphasizes the impression of objectivity and well supported argument" (107). It aims to give an accurate and objective portrait of reality. However, the omnipresent voice-over can convey an authoritative perspective, subordinating images to the aural narrative. The observational mode takes a "fly-on-the-wall" approach, with no dialogue with, or visible intrusion of, the filmmaker into the scene. The participatory mode, on the other hand, shows the filmmaker interacting with subjects in front of the camera through interviews, commentaries and/or provocations. The reflexive mode highlights the subjective choices made by the filmmaker during the construction of the documentary; the viewer is engaged with both the documentary's content and format. It is common to reveal filming equipment, giving some off-screen

context and provoking audiences to reflect on the filmmaking and editing process. The poetic mode “bears a close proximity to experimental, personal, and avant-garde filmmaking” (33). It can display an abstract representation of reality, relying on colours, sounds and moods. Finally, in the performative mode, the filmmaker is physically present in front of the camera, expressing her/his views and feelings of the world. It bears similarities with the reflexive mode, but here the filmmaker has a more direct and even personal relation with the thematic. In his development of these categorisations, Nichols also points to the possibility of mixing these modes within a single film. Indeed many documentaries display the characteristics of more than one of these modes.

Nichols points out that the growing movement of Indigenous people filming themselves, and thus shifting from the position of objects to that of agents, has motivated an inversion of practice. Instead of the anthropological film’s “speaking about others” there is in Indigenous film an approach taken of “speaking about ourselves to the other”. This provokes an “autoethnographic” turn—a process that “refers to the efforts of indigenous people to make films and videos about their own culture so that they may represent it to ‘us,’ those who remain outside” (18). It is interesting that Nichols’s (2010, 205) example of autoethnography and performative documentary makes sustained reference to documentaries made by Indigenous people in both Brazil and Australia:

Performative documentary shares a rebalancing and corrective tendency with autoethnography (ethnographically informed work made by members of the communities who are the traditional subjects of Western ethnography, such as the numerous tapes made by the Kayapó people of the Amazon River basin and by the Aboriginal people of Australia).

The Kayapó people in Brazil were probably the very first case of Indigenous people filming their own reality. In 1987, a crew from the Granada Television Channel, along with anthropologist Terence Turner (who had been working with the Kayapó since 1960s), worked on the series *Disappearing Worlds* (Turner 1991). As part of it, the documentary *The Kayapó: Out of the Forest* (1989) centred on Indigenous resistance against the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Xingu River by Eletronorte. In return for participating in the documentary, the Kayapó asked for a video camera, a monitor and other filming equipment that would enable them to film themselves (Shohat and Stam 2014). In 1990, Turner funded the Kayapó Video Project to teach them to use filmmaking equipment (Turner 1991). The Kayapó then went on to use the equipment to record all sorts of events, from ceremonies to political demonstrations, oral history and traditional knowledge.

Another example where filmmakers and the community developed a dialogue to make key decisions in terms of what and how to film was in Australia. The making of *Two Laws* with the Borroloola community represented an innovative and collaborative approach between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The documentary examines the clash between Aboriginal law and the law

introduced with colonisation—hence the “two laws” of the title. At the same time the documentary is about the meeting between two ways of storytelling. Shohat and Stam draw parallels between these two collaborative works with the Kayapó and Borroloola as both groups fight to preserve their land against further development:

In such works, Fourth World peoples present themselves not as naive primitives but as ecologically and politically sophisticated antagonists ranged against imperialist civilization. (2014, 37)

Returning to the participatory documentary mode as defined by Nichols (2017, 137) as a type of documentary in which “filmmakers do interact with their subjects rather than unobtrusively observe them”. This is a pattern used repeatedly in *Connected to Country*. It is evident in the filmmaker’s interaction with his environment to his attitude during the “interviews” which are conducted in the form of open conversations. The documentary also assumes a performative position. As defined by Nichols, the performative mode can be found in a documentary, which brings “the emotional intensities of situated experience and embodied knowledge to the fore” (2017, 151). This is clear in many parts of the documentary, as Mowarin discusses with members of his family in an emotional tone about their profound connection to the land. From the first scene to the last, the documentary continually puts on display all its artifices as a production. We are shown not only images of the filmmaker but also of microphones, cables and staging. This showing of filmmaking resources extends to the director preparing his drone on the ground and later operating it in front of the camera. In these several ways Tyson Mowarin shows himself as both a participatory and performative director.

At the very beginning of the documentary Mowarin repeats a statement that is commonly present in discourses about Indigenous connectivity with the land: “Our old people always say: the land does not belong to us, we belong to the land.” From this point on, he explains the aim of the documentary as an attempt to clarify Aboriginal people’s connection to country. His purpose is not just to demonstrate what the land means to them but to provide reasons why the land should be important to non-Aboriginal audiences. He introduces himself as an Ngarluma man from Roebourne/Ieramagudu, in the Pilbara region in West Australia.

The filmmaker chooses to talk about the Murujuga petroglyphs (rock carvings) the largest collection in Australia as a main motif to discuss Aboriginal connection to the land and their cultural legacy for both Australian and world heritage. As an Indigenous film director, Mowarin carefully explains certain cultural restrictions to his audience, such as the interdiction against the filming of certain places. As he records his own cultural limitations, the documentary reveals “the embodiment of an insider’s perspective, one that is attuned to cultural subtleties in the process of imagemaking as well as in the final image itself” (Lewis 2006, 180). He explains that the main reason behind these

filmmaking restrictions is that not all of the sites may be appropriately displayed to women and/or men.

As stone carvings, the petroglyphs are so many maps that guide people as to where to hunt for food and find water. They record the stories of the people and their connection to the land. Mowarin traces both back to 30,000 to 40,000 years ago. Inserted images of Egyptian pyramids are used to emphasise the point that Aboriginal rock art is much older than these more well-recognised ancient sites. Not only does Mowarin remind his audience how old Aboriginal heritage is here, he also affirms an insider knowledge. We actually know who made this rock art because Aboriginal culture is the longest-standing continuous culture in the world. In contrast with other archaeological sites elsewhere in the world, it is possible in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia to trace back and affirm that the Ngarluma peoples have been the ones living and caring for these sites since time immemorial.

In the documentary, Patrick Churnside, an Ngarluma man, provides a testimony on Aboriginal ways of relating to the country, comparing it to the actions of the white coloniser, which he says, lacks appropriate balance:

We live with the country. We grow with the country. From a white man's perspective, all they want to see is to benefit from the country. Take, take, take and take. Whereas we'll only take what we need, sort of, you know? You've got to learn to have a balance with Ngurra and in return, you know, the country will look after you.

Ngurra here is the name given to the country by the Ngarluma people. In his direct distinction between Indigenous and white people's perspectives when dealing with the land, he acknowledges nature as a living force that has needs of its own that need not only to be accommodated but also actively anticipated and worked with rather than against. More than this, nature here has its own agency: the priority is not the injunction to look after nature so much as to understand that nature looks or does not look after you, and you need to do everything in your power to ensure that it does look after rather than destroys you. In saying this, he defends a relationship, which is one of partnership and mutual benefit between nature and human beings. It is not a relation for the sole purpose of extracting from nature for profit.

The documentary avoids generalisations and makes distinctions between mining companies that are able to take account of Aboriginal people's knowledge and others that do not and cannot. This is clear in the scene in which the director arranges a meeting between Aboriginal elders and mining staff at a sacred site, Yarnda Thalu. The viewer has no clue of the tone of the dialogue until it really starts. The director and his friends gather around four mining company employees to explain that they have to avoid working on this specific site. An Aboriginal elder explains that some specific

sites should not be distressed because they are responsible for the balance of the region. He warns that some of them, if disturbed, can dry out the whole area.

This scene of miners attentively listening to Aboriginal explanations invites a rethinking of the place of “subjugated knowledges”, as Michel Foucault has defined the term. These are a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (1980, 82)

As Foucault explains, the main reason these knowledges have been disregarded is they do not make or are seen to have universal claims. Quite the opposite: they are extremely local and place-based. In the same scene, the elder emphasises that miners and Aboriginal custodians should work together to protect these sites. The miners’ faces are clearly disturbed. They indicate that they really needed the knowledge now being made available to them. Otherwise, how they could possibly know the importance of that place or the consequences of disturbing it? Although this is a registered site, it has already been damaged, being located very close to a mining road. The act of conveying this information provides the documentary with its sense of urgency. The dialogue between elder and miners summarises the immediate impacts and the importance of having these dialogues. The elder explains, “[t]his site here belongs to that sun there”, so to damage this site will destroy the country, make it like a desert. And the worker answers back: “Yeah, I want to know where these are before I have to grade a road now”. By staging this intercultural meeting, the documentary shows that Aboriginal connection to the country is not only about Aboriginal cultural preservation. It is about how to deal with the country in the present, so it can remain alive in the future.

Alongside these positive intercultural scenes bringing together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the documentary also gives a detailed account of many dreadful events since European colonisation. It traces a history of exploitation back to pearling boats onto which Aboriginal people were taken as slaves and forced to hunt for pearls in often-perilous seawaters (the West Australian coast is well known for its sharks and shark attacks on humans). The film also mentions the Flying Foam massacre (1868), where settlers from Roebourne murdered at least 60 Yapururra people, including women and children. The documentary shows how this entangled colonial history in the Pilbara region fits with and is part of a many-layered history, which extends from the site of the Flying Foam massacre to the Murujuga (Burrup peninsula), which is on the National Heritage List due to its abundant rock art. These heritage sites overlook “the industrial activities of salt mining, trains carrying iron ore to the port at Dampier and the massive Pluto LNG gas plant marked by a flame of burning gas” (Gregory and Paterson 2015, 140). All these make the Pilbara region a place that has the biggest iron ore export ports in the world and a destination for migrant workers, who constantly come in and out of the region, often on a fly-in, fly-out basis.



The documentary also talks about the assimilation police, sewing together compelling individual stories with major events in recent history. It shows a heartbreaking scene in which one of the elders visits his childhood home. The old and empty single-room shelter reconnects him with a time now long past. As his fingers touch the corrugated iron sheeting, he remembers making the house's roof without using nails. They had no money for this while he was living there. But he recalls his happiness in that he lived here as part of a nurturing family, along with his brother and mother. He recalls the day he was taken from his old home to a pastoral station when he was still a child. After that, he never saw his brother again. He was one of the many Aboriginal people who were forcibly removed from his family, his home and his culture. The removal policy was a widespread measure that affected countless Aboriginal families. The official report "Bringing Them Home" (Commonwealth of Australia 1997) concluded that at national level, from the period 1910 to 1970, between 1 in 3 and 1 in 10 Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and communities, with numbers varying between periods and regions.<sup>85</sup> Certainly, "in that time not one Indigenous family has escaped the effects of forcible removal" (31). In this sense, it is a tragic event comparable to the effects the First World War had over British families, as "everybody had lost someone" (Read 1998, 9). With the exception of the most remote communities, most Aboriginal families were affected in some way by the assimilation police.<sup>86</sup> Anna Haebich's *Broken Circles* encompasses her studies of systems of assimilation over 200 years. She underlines the historical process of which forced removal is a part:

Aboriginal child removal emerges as constituent with the processes of dispossession, depopulation and destruction of Aboriginal societies and cultures that began with colonisation and continue to affect Aboriginal communities to this day. (2001,14)

Haebich also underscores that it is impossible to know exactly how many children were affected by the policies due to the lack of accurate records.

However, the history of the stolen generations as portrayed in *Connection to Country* is not only centred on their removal from their families. It also deals with their physical separation from their country, including its land, water, plants and animals. As seen in Mowarin's film, this separation began with first contact. It began by not recognising Indigenous sovereignty over the place and continued with the displacement of children from their families and land.

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<sup>85</sup> This report was written by Ronald Wilson (President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) and Mick Dodson (Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner). It was tabled in Federal Parliament on 26 May 1997.

<sup>86</sup> The Australian documentary *Lousy Little Sixpence* (Alec Morgan, 1983), based on five oral histories, newsreels and archival images, is fully dedicated to tracing the rash effects of the assimilation policy as well as the fight of Aboriginal peoples who have to deal with the consequences of it. The documentary title refers to the very low payment promised children for their labour. Most never received any money.

Consequently, land rights also became a theme. Mowarin interviews Greg McIntyre, who was played by Tom Budge in Rachel Perkins's feature film *Mabo*, analysed in chapter one. McIntyre explains that pursuant to the Native Title Act, Aboriginal peoples are able to enter into agreements with mining companies to create protocols for the protection of Aboriginal heritage sites. However, he points out that the government has been making amendments to the Aboriginal Heritage Act since 2014. These amendments were designed, he claims, to diminish cultural heritage values attached to the land and allow developers and miners to freely explore for natural resources. Thus, mining is now affecting the cultural artefacts themselves. This includes not only rock art but also pits and fertility and burial sites. This interview is followed by inserts of historical footage of the *Mabo v. Queensland* Supreme Court Case. The irony of the process of native title is that nowadays, to ensure their rights, Aboriginal peoples are the ones that need to prove their connection with the land. This seems to be a second phase of a denial process that started more than two hundred years ago, when the British government stated and acted as if the land was *terra nullius*, a land belonging to no one least of all the original peoples.

In a sense, the documentary's title has a strategic function. On the one hand, it is a document attesting to the Ngarluma people's historical connection to their country. On the other hand, it foregrounds new attempts to displace Aboriginal peoples from their land, such as recent debates around the forced closure of more than a hundred remote Aboriginal communities.<sup>87</sup> Again, the issue touches on the struggle for and necessity of the Federal and West Australian governments to acknowledge Aboriginal peoples' historical connection with land. The documentary assumes the role of not only proving this connection but also educating audiences about the importance of the land to all people. Above of all this is a national matter, as there are hardly any native title in and Aboriginal lands in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania but much more in Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Southern Australia. The reason for this discrepancy is state control of land, the NSW legitimization of illegal squatting on lands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the granting of freehold title and the later practice of leasehold and control of state lands in these other states. As pointed out by Tim Rowse (2017, 119), these regional differences created the Indigenous "state" that is concentrated in Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory and South Australia.

The formation of this "state" can be explained by 1. State (meaning federal and state government) legislation creating reserves on Indigenous lands; 2. State legislation recognising Indigenous rights to lands, 3. State agencies and Indigenous institutions buying land using public

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<sup>87</sup> In 2014 Colin Barnett, as the Western Australian premier, announced a plan of to close 150 Aboriginal communities located in rural areas (Kagi 2014). In 2016, after much criticism, the plan shifted from the discourse of closure to an alert that funding to smaller communities would be ceased (Wahlquist 2016).

funding and 4. The state and resources companies negotiating the use of the land with Indigenous peoples based on native title.

The documentary revisits this national history, recalling recent and past events, bringing Indigenous perspectives to the centre of the narrative, of this national history. This centrality not only dictates the politics of the documentary's discourse but also its aesthetic choices. In doing so, the documentary fulfils one of Fourth Cinema's main goals, namely, to be fully dedicated to displaying Indigenous perspectives on the land as alive and having its own thoughts and will, creating a feeling of connection between land and people that is not only physical but also spiritual. This is exemplified in the scene that reveals the identity of the person behind the voice-over opening the documentary. Auntie Jean Churnside, a Ngarluma woman, is filmed recording her own voice and is presented by the documentary narrator as representing the spirit of the land. The director gives her basic instructions as to how she should pitch her narration in order to create suspense. As she represents the voice of the land spirit, the director reinforces his goal of displaying Aboriginal perspectives of the environment. In a previous scene, Kerry Churnside, another Ngarluma woman, explains that when they go fishing they should greet the places they visit, as the spirit of land is still breathing and living in the country. So, Aboriginal people are born with the responsibility of taking care of the country and interacting with nature in respectful ways. The film director explains that non-Aboriginal people might struggle to understand this because they live disconnected lives, far away from the land.

This is credited as a key reason for some of the governmental steps that have been taken which compromise connection to country. The Western Australia Government entered into the Burrup Agreement with Aboriginal groups, but subsequently, together with the Federal Government, broke these agreements to build natural gas plants and a landfill. As a consequence of these developments, some of the rock art was destroyed (Lewis and Lewis 2017; Mulvaney 2011,). And on a daily basis, the toxic by-products of the plant may be slowly affecting the remaining rock art. The Burrup development was a significant loss for Aboriginal people and environmentalists and for those concerned with Australia's national cultural heritage. Nevertheless, the uneasy coexistence between art and industry generated public recognition of the significance of these sites. WA mining companies have created two Chairs in Rock Art at the University of Western Australia and have undertaken the monitoring of these sites. Mining companies have sought to position themselves as protectors of these sites. And only recently, Aboriginal elders pulled the fence down and rearranged rock art pieces to where they belonged before. Another issue is that the WA government actively deregistered sites. The director sees these acts as a consequence of government officials and other policymakers being away and disconnected from the country. So, the documentary aims to explain Aboriginal responsibilities while calling upon non-Aboriginal people to take part in this work of caring for the country.

The director's pedagogical aim is reinforced when he searches for heritage sites in Australia. He finds out that a one-hundred-year-old sewage vent that runs beneath the land is actually located on a site protected by state heritage law. The sewage vent is ironically located in front of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Perth. The old sewage vent is considered a historical site because it is part of colonial/settler history. Ironically it can act as a metaphor for environmental destruction as sewer gases contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions. Yet, while the vent is protected, Aboriginal sites are dismissed. The film director reminds the viewer that Aboriginal heritage can also tell human history. He asserts the inclusivity of Aboriginal people by setting the example, inviting audiences to come closer and get to know Aboriginal people and their history on these lands. He confesses: "we don't know each other".

At the end of the film, the credits inform the viewer that the film is dedicated to Mowarin's daughter, Sharliya. This last act conveys the hope that the film's message will orient the viewer, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike, toward a sense of responsibility to future generations. By ending with this indication of a close relationship between the filmmaker father and his daughter, the documentary is not only personalising connection to country but also making it a family matter, and thus a concern for all families, all parents. The director explains that he makes films to gather, share and teach Aboriginal knowledge and ensure its transmission over time, just as it was transmitted to him. At the end of the documentary, he restates his aims:

I hope you understand now why I wanted to bring you here, to the Pilbara in Northwest Australia, and listen to the land the way we do and understand our connection to country. I wanted you to realise how urgent it is that we work together to make better decisions about how to balance mining and industry and heritage for the future. Our children's future depends on it.

The last scene is of the filmmaker's daughter breathing deeply while walking on the beach alongside her father. With this scene, along with the final words, the documentary assumes a form of modern storytelling that seeks to carry a hopeful message to wider audiences about the importance of the country not only to Aboriginal peoples but also to all future generations.

### **5.5 Indigenous Perspective in *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá***

Made almost a decade before *Connection to Country*, the Brazilian documentary *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* also concerns itself with the link between colonial history, heritage sites, environmental crises and Indigenous knowledge. *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* was the first documentary made by the Mbyá-Guaraní Cinema Collective. The Collective is a group of Indigenous filmmakers trained through the VNA—*Vídeo nas Aldeias* [Video in the Villages] project. As mentioned above, the documentary achieved national recognition and circulation through its participation in and subsequent

awarding of best film at the important film festival Documentary and Ethnographic Film Festival Forum.

In this documentary three Mbyá-Guaraní filmmakers, Ariel Ortega, Germano Beñites and Jorge Morinico, gathered to film in their own villages. Produced by VNA, it was financially supported by IPHAN—*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* [Brazil's National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute]. The documentary is divided into two parts with each portraying different Mbyá-Guaraní communities facing similar issues in two different villages. The first part of the documentary is about the Tekoá Anhetenguá village near the Brazilian metropolis Porto Alegre and the second focuses on Tekoá Koenju village, very close to the tourist town *São Miguel das Missões* [São Miguel Mission]. Due to the rapid development of areas surrounding these villages and the environmental crises they brought with them, such as the devastation of forests, these Mbyá-Guaraní communities were no longer able to plant, fish or hunt. Consequently, they had turned to handicrafts as their main economic activity: carving and selling wooden animals as souvenirs in the neighbouring city. The main theme of the documentary is the challenges they face as they adapt to a significantly degraded environment.

*Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* open with a shot of the entrance to the village, determining the importance of the location for the narrative. The second image is of one of the directors, Ariel Ortega, holding a hand-held camera. This strategy of appearing as himself in front of the camera signals to viewers, from the very first minutes of the documentary, that they will be watching it from the insider perspective of the Mbyá-Guaraní themselves. The combination of these first scenes, a specific place and person, provides a clue as to the documentary's focus: Indigenous people talking about their territories. In doing this, it establishes, analogously to *Connection to Country*, a close relationship between the filmmaker and his location. Both documentaries start from this affiliation to debate a range of Indigenous rights lost during a continuing colonial process.

Both documentaries are also performative and participatory documentaries, in which the filmmakers act as characters, conducting the narrative in front of the camera. Director Ariel Ortega is shown several times doing all sorts of things: dancing, making woodcrafts, talking with others, doing interviews and filming. He is a strong character able to explain his filmmaking methods to his interviewees. As he talks with other Mbyá-Guaraní, the camera registers a sense of intimacy between filmmaker and subjects that takes audiences closer to Indigenous ways of life. Caixeta de Queiroz (2008) has positively compared Indigenous Cinema in Brazil with the French tradition of *Cinéma vérité* developed by Jean Rouch in 1960s in that both favour the use of hand-held camera, direct sound

and long sequences without cuts, avoiding the use of zoom,<sup>88</sup> and both requiring a clear coalescence between filmmaker and subjects such that the subjects and their communities authorise in important ways the film and the filmmaker's involvement in making it.

The influence of Western filmmaking on Indigenous Cinema in Brazil has generated criticism and raised questions, most notably from Escorel (2006), about how foreign filmic traditions may have prevented the development of an Indigenous filmic language and perspective. From the earliest attempts to teach and train Indigenous filmmakers around the world, the search for a specific Indigenous aesthetic has been present. One example was the case of the Navajo filmmakers, examined by Worth and Adair (1972). There, after the experiment was over the teachers drew the conclusion that “a person's values and closely held beliefs about the nature of the world would be reflected in the way he edited his previously photographed materials” (Worth and Adair 29). However, it is important to ask what really distinguishes Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmaker's aesthetics and content, and more importantly, what is the relevance of these questions, especially when they are posed by outsiders. In particular, it is important to avoid a search for aesthetic authenticity in Indigenous films, as this is a very Western way of judging the arts. As Eric Michaels (1987)—whose own practice as a researcher was influenced by the work of Worth and Adair—points out, rather than authenticity, Indigenous art seems more concerned with the debate over who is authorised to make and display specific images: Aboriginal “art or video objects become difficult to isolate for analysis because the producer's intention is the opposite. Walpiri artists demonstrate their own invisibility in order to assert the work's authority and continuity with tradition” (34).

Along this theme, from the perspective of the Indigenous filmmakers, the questioning about an Indigenous Cinema style might be a valid issue, as Loretta Tood (2005, 107) enquires: “Have we truly decolonized our imaginations when it comes to how we represent ourselves in media—both in the aesthetics and content of our stories?” In making this provocative enquiry, Todd seems interested in understanding to what extent Indigenous peoples have internalised within themselves the coloniser's point of view, especially as the political and aesthetic aspects cannot be disentangled: are these stories made to entertain and inform viewers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) or to empower Indigenous people? The answer need not be one or the other. It might be both. Many Indigenous films assume the role of introducing local perspectives to a general public. In doing so, they assume a pedagogical role of bridging worlds that would not otherwise find a way to meet up. So, public spaces such as film festivals and television channels enable cross-cultural conversations to start. By reducing all sorts of distances, from the physical to the cultural, Eco-Fourth Cinema is

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<sup>88</sup> Caixeta de Queiroz (2008) explains this similarity as an effect of the Video nas Aldeias (VNA) process of filmmaking training due to the fact that one of the coordinators, Mari Corrêa, came from the French organisation Ateliers Varan and applied her knowledge and previous experience to the VNA workshops.

creating the possibility of a conversation that can achieve not only environmental awareness but also cultural understanding and political spaces for action.

This is the case for the documentary *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá*. As it begins, a caption announces the name of the first village where the narrative is to be set: *Tekoá Anhetenguá—Aldeia Verdadeira* [The True Village]. After establishing the location, shots of the surroundings reveal that the village is suffocated by the growing cities nearby. A group of young Mbyá-Guaraní men goes out hunting. They search for skunks and armadillos in their burrows, with no luck. Even the bees have left their hives. One of the boys compares the Mbyá-Guaraní people with the bees. The bees have fled in search of another place to live. The Mbyá-Guaraní too have moved away from their villages because they were unhappy there due to “white people’s” occupation of that space. As in the Australian example *Connection to Country*, non-Indigenous people are grouped under the umbrella term “white people”. This term is frequently used to distinguish ways of life or negative acts towards Indigenous people and the environment. Consequently, in both documentaries, environmental change is closely related to the actions of “white people”.

The group of young men enters a white person’s property that originally belonged them to collect wood. Deprived of animals for hunting, these teens prefer stealing wood to make craft souvenirs as a survival tactic. This practice of what has become trespassing is filmed without judgment. The documentary shows that without animals to hunt, carving tree trunks is their only option. On their way out, they hunt an orange thrush and cook it over an improvised fire to eat. Again, they explain, with no sense of distress, that they had killed the bird illegally. They are hunting as their ancestors did. The difference is that in the past they could hunt larger animals. The group of boys shows an area that was devastated, explaining that white people cleared the land to grow Australian eucalypts because they are only concerned with making money. They conclude by explaining that the reason they want their land back is to replant the native forest that had been there before this alien species was introduced.

While mapping the Mbyá-Guaraní’s struggle to maintain their traditional ways of life, the documentary also depicts their constant need to go to the city to buy supplies. One example is the scene in which a middle-aged woman travels to the city by bus with two young children. As she walks through the markets to buy tobacco, the noisy, crowded and busy city contrasts with previous shots of the calm and green village. As the camera follows her wandering around with her children, film audiences have the chance to rethink the market not as a familiar routine and communal place but through the strangeness of the Indigenous gaze. In the scene, the woman seems poorly integrated into the city and its commercial environment.

Although the documentary lacks shots of real animals in its hunting scenes, there is an abundant display of wooden animals, such as anteaters, armadillos, owls and jaguars. These

handcrafted souvenirs provide the animals that used to live in great numbers in the forest with a kind of spectral presence. The irony is that while white people's aggressive development is the main cause behind deforestation and the animals' extinction, they are also the target clients for these artefacts. They are the group to whom the Mbyá-Guaraní sells their souvenirs. The documentary includes a scene of a young woman with children sitting on the pathway of a busy city trying to sell her handicrafts, with no buyer in sight. This scene suggests that Indigenous crafts not only lack both artistic recognition and empathy but also any kind of adequate supply chain and sustainable organisation through which cultural value can be created and maintained. Exiles in their own land, the Mbyá-Guaraní are positioned as unfortunate people in need of charity who eke out a living by making artefacts "white people" do not want to an extent that would take this practice beyond subsistence level.

Another scene that encapsulates the devastating situation faced by the Mbyá-Guaraní begins with a car stopping in the village and announcing, through its loudspeakers, that it is selling fruit and vegetables. A man explains the situation:

*As pessoas brancas sempre nos olham mal, mas nos mantêm em um chiqueiro. Nós somos como pequenos animais em uma gaiola em que alguém entra e deixa um pedaço de pão. E se ninguém nos der nada, nós não comemos.*

[White people always look at us badly, but they keep us in a pigsty. We are like little animals in an enclosure that someone goes into and leaves a piece of bread. And if no one gives us anything, we do not eat.]

He sees this dependence as consequence of a process whereby everything is taken from the Indigenous people, they are fenced in, and the limits of their territories unsustainably diminished.

However, as discussed at the start of this chapter, Indigenous people are historically used to dealing with harsh environmental crises. The documentary refers to Mbyá-Guaraní cosmology on several occasions in order to explain the difficulties of daily life in "modern" Brazilian society. The same man who points to historical aspects of Indigenous marginalisation also invokes his religious beliefs to explain the lack of harmony on earth.

He says that for everything that *Papa Miri—Filho de Deus* [Son of God] created, his brother, Xãriã, made these same things more difficult. Papa Miri created the sweetness of the orange; his brother gave it bitterness and acidity. Papa Miri made the bees; his brother hid the honey in very difficult places. Papa Miri made the river straight; his brother added its curves. Xãriã went with his big hat walking in the bush and his hat caught fire. He fled, and his body caught fire too. A very strong wind blew, spreading his ashes everywhere. Some of his ashes became insects and others venomous animals. They came from the wind that blew Xãriã's ashes about. The incorporation of



Mbyá-Guaraní cosmological explanations underlines the insider's perspective sought by the documentary. It contrasts with white people's scientific explanations of events.

As the documentary unfolds, another attempt at hunting is made: a boy builds a bird trap but is not able to catch any animals. An elder explains to the camera that if they were living in a place with a forest, they could be hunting big animals such as boars. This sequence of events shows that the need for money to buy food is something that is particularly recent in Mbyá-Guaraní history. That was not the way that their grandparents, and for some, their parents, and even some still living used to live. The devastation wrought by accelerated development in the region exhausted natural resources and with this depletion went Mbyá-Guaraní traditional ways of life. As they were not traditionally used to buying food but rather farming, hunting and/or gathering it, this change heavily reshaped their way of life. Since they need money to survive, which they must source externally, they have had to engage with a foreign economic system in which they are in a very disadvantageous position without assets or a livelihood.

The second part of the documentary centres on *Tekoá Koenju—Alvorecer* [Dawn Village] located near *São Miguel das Missões* [São Miguel Mission]. This village, like the other one, is facing serious issues with hunting. As an example, the documentary shows a middle-aged Mbyá-Guaraní man examining his empty animal traps. He explains that his failed hunting attempts are due to the fact that nowadays only a few armadillos remain. He recalls that when the forest was alive, they could find an armadillo every three days. He also says that unpredictable weather has spoiled his corn crop and that without the forest he has nothing left to eat. So, he needs to collect bamboo to make baskets to sell in the city.

In another scene, a woman is shown making a small breadbasket out of bamboo while talking with another younger woman. The latter jokes that large baskets can be sold for \$10, 00 *Reais* - BRL [Brazilian Reais], but the older woman sells almost everything at \$5, 00 *Reais* because she has difficulties speaking Portuguese. The scene presents yet another challenge faced by this Indigenous group: they are native Guaraní speakers who need to sell their crafts to a clientele that does not understand the region's native language. This is despite the fact that Guaraní is one of Brazil's most spoken Indigenous languages with a high number of speakers and is one of the official languages of neighbouring Paraguay. Yet most 'white people' in Brazil cannot understand it. Again, a polarity is established between white people/Portuguese speakers/colonisers on one side and Indigenous people/Guaraní speakers/colonised on the other side. This communication issue adds to this unequal relationship, as the large baskets are sold cheaper because the seller is not able to negotiate higher prices.

In the next scene the two women, along with the man previously shown with his empty traps, are in conversation. They talk about how white people are accusing them of not planting crops

anymore and forgetting their own culture. The old woman says that the fact that they have a television does not make them similar to white people. With this affirmation, the woman is rebuffing a common prejudice against Indigenous peoples in Brazil, namely, the accusation that they have abandoned their traditional way of life by choice—an accusation levelled at them despite their territories facing environmental degradation due to white people’s development and encroachment upon them. On the other hand, when citing the use of the television as an example of Indigenous appropriation of white people’s culture, audiences are reminded by the Indigenous woman that using objects from another culture does not necessarily transform them. The inverse could also be the case: the fact that white people are purchasing or using Indigenous handicrafts does not transform the buyers into Indigenous people. The lack of forests is also integrated into Mbyá-Guaraní cosmology. A younger woman explains their contemporary difficulty thus: god already knew that the end of the forests was coming, and that was the reason that he made sure they knew how to make handicrafts such as baskets.

The filmmaker Ariel Ortega then sculpts a jaguar out of white wood and applies heat with a hot knife to make black spots. He explains that the next day, they are all going to *São Miguel das Missões* [São Miguel Mission] to film the selling of their handicrafts. There will be lots of people, including white children, who love to buy small bows and arrows. Early in the morning, a group waits on the side of the road waiting for the bus to the city. As soon as they arrive at the historical mission sites, one of them explains how their ancestors also walked in that place. This statement reinforces the Mbyá-Guaraní’s long connection with the place despite having lost official ownership of it along with their other territories. A man explains that white people took everything from them. Although their ancestors built these historical sites—forced to do so by Jesuit priests—white people own them, possessing what they did not build as their own exclusive patrimony.

In the following sequence, a group of schoolchildren and their teacher arrive at the historical sites. A woman asks if they really use bows and arrows for hunting or if they are just for play. Upon hearing that they are just for play, she loses interest and refrains from buying them. This scene again shows the ironic dynamic of white people searching for authenticity and appearing clearly disappointed and disenchanted upon discovering that Indigenous tools are no longer used for “traditional” hunting. At this point, the documentary has made the audience complicit in its discourse. Viewers have been following all the difficulties the Mbyá-Guaraní have experienced with so many failed attempts at hunting. In contrast to the tourists, however, the audience is already aware not only that hunting has become impractical and impossible in Mbyá-Guaraní villages but also that Indigenous people have been forced into a process of market integration and cultural loss in which they can only appear inauthentic.

A tour guide then explains that the *Tratado de Tordesilhas* [Treaty of Tordesillas] (1494) divided Indigenous lands between the Portuguese and Spanish (*A Coroa de Castela* [Castile Crown])

empires. To develop the lands, colonisers forced the Guaraní into slave labour. In the so-called process of civilisation, Jesuit priests started the missions, which served to simultaneously “protect” the Guaraní and render them “fit” for servitude at the bottom end of the market. Another tour guide explains that in 1609 the first *redução* established commenced. This is the name given to the process of gathering Indigenous people and settling them on a specific piece of land that they should plant for their sustenance. In keeping with “official” history, the guide justifies these *reduções* as having three main goals: to occupy the land, to disseminate Catholicism and to protect Indigenous people. For each of these goals the *redução* becomes a condition upon which a new civilisation can be born with a new culture and way of life. This tourist-aimed explanation, which visitors take in without critique or counter-narrative from an Indigenous viewpoint, takes on a specific meaning in the documentary.

By now, audiences are able to see things from an Indigenous perspective. The supposed celebration of the start of a new culture and way of life is now heard with scepticism. Celebration is identified with a forced process of colonisation suspending and limiting Indigenous rights. This process placed Indigenous peoples in a “transition to Christianity, civilization, assimilation, disappearance”; however, as Indigenous people and their culture remain alive and continue to appropriate Western technologies, they are integrated not only into the present but also into the future (Carneiro da Cunha 2009, 22). As audiences have been following the process of marginalisation faced by the Mbyá-Guaraní, including that of the filmmakers, the non-critical approach of the tourist guide can be seen as yet more evidence of processes of marginalisation at the hands of “white people”. The lack of Indigenous perspectives in the national and regional historical account of the events is patently obvious. But on the other hand, it is through the documentary that insider and critical perspectives are reaching wider audiences, that this national history legitimating present action is held up to scrutiny and condemned.

In the next scene a Mbyá-Guaraní man walks around the ruins of the *Igreja de São Miguel* [São Miguel Church]. The place today hosts the *Museu das Missões* [Mission Museum] which is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site (1983) and protected by the IPHAN—*Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional* [Brazil’s National Historical and Artistic Heritage Institute]. He tells the audience that although the Guaraní provided the labour to build all these buildings, which are now considered a historical site, they do not have any rights over these places. He adds that his ancestors brought building stones from distances as far as three kilometres using only the strength in their own arms to build these missions. He records how painful these memories are for his people. He notes how their role and their presence is underplayed in favour of those the Jesuits.

Another tour guide mentions the Treaty of Madrid (1750) signed between the empires of Portugal and Spain to redefine their zones of influence. The *Guerra Guaranítica* [Guaraní War] broke

out as soon as news arrived of the treaty at the missions in 1754. It resulted in the massacre of over 1,500 Guaraní at the *Batalha de Caiboaté* [Battle of Caiboaté] in 1756. This conflict happened due to the changes at seven missions following their transfer from Spanish to Portuguese administration. These missions were located in the border areas of the two Iberian colonial empires. Geographic and political changes resulted in a loss of interest in the border areas, which interfered with the missions' roles, sparking a crisis in the relationship between the Jesuit missions and Iberian Crowns. One of the most difficult corollaries of the Treaty of Madrid was the issue of the removal of the inhabitants from the missions that were formally moving from Spanish to Portuguese ownership.

Portuguese authorities were willing to accept the missions as long as they were handed over by Spain completely empty. Consequently, all Jesuits along with the Guaraní and their families and farm animals were forced to depart the missions, leaving behind only the land and their crops (Quevedo 1994). Historically, the battle of Caiboaté marks not only the decline of the Jesuit missions but also the violence of the coloniser wrought against Indigenous peoples. The Guaraní fought against a bi-national army and were massacred.

As the documentary unfolds, Ariel talks to a Mbyá-Guaraní woman as an inheritor of and a protagonist in this history. The Mbyá-Guaraní are only allowed to sell souvenirs to the tourists in the museum. She says that if they try to reclaim the place they too would be killed, thus repeating their ancestors' fate. A man complains that tourists should in good conscience buy things rather than just take photos. Ariel interviews a schoolteacher who says that his students are sad to see the situation of the Indigenous people, as they are dirty and begging for money to survive. The filmmaker interrupts his speech questioning the use of the adjective "*sujo*" [dirty]. But the teacher repeats: "*Sim, sujos e até pedindo dinheiro para tirar uma foto deles*" [Yes, dirty and even asking for money to have their photo taken]. The filmmaker asks back: "*Você acha que os indígenas estão vendendo sua própria imagem?*" [Do you think that the Indigenous people are selling their image?]. And the teacher emphatically responds: "*Sim, acredito que sim*" [Yes, I believe so]. Pedagogically, the filmmaker explains that many people take photos and film Guaraní people to use these materials for their own work and make money out of them. The teacher assumes that this might explain things. In this scene, filmmaker Ariel assumes a clear participatory position in accordance with what Nichols (2010, 179) describes:

Questions grow into interviews or conversations; involvement grows into a pattern of collaboration or confrontation. What happens in front of the camera becomes an index of the nature of the interaction between filmmaker and subject.

This short conversation between the teacher and the filmmaker is an extremely rare circumstance in the Brazilian documentary tradition. It is not usual to watch an Indigenous person directing a documentary in Brazil while at the same time holding the camera and calling out a white person's

prejudice towards Indigenous peoples. Another interesting point is that the teacher is able to change his mind during the interview, understanding and assuming that Indigenous people have their own reasons to not accept being filmed. This situation fits in well with Knopf's affirmation that:

as Indigenous people gradually take control over the image-making process in the domain of film- and videomaking, they cease to be studied and described as objects and become subjects who create self-controlled images of Indigenous cultures. (2008; xii–xiii)

In this sense, the filming of the encounter between the filmmaker and the teacher gives audiences an opportunity to reflect on their own prejudices against those who are marginalised, as they watch the dialogue through Indigenous people's point of view.

While the tourist group continues their visit of the mission, they recall historical events such as the expeditions of the *bandeirantes*. In the colonial period, *bandeirantes* were settlers who organised armed expeditions to explore the hinterlands of Brazil in search of gold and precious stones as well as to capture Indigenous people to work on their farms. These expeditions were called *entradas* (“entrances”—land invasions) and *bandeiras* (“flags”—raids). Over much of Brazilian history these *bandeirantes* have been popularly represented in a positive light as important figures in the founding of modern Brazil. However the cost to Indigenous peoples of the actions of the *bandeirantes* is now well documented by historians and documentary filmmakers. The official school curriculum and some films now acknowledge the brutal effect of the *bandeirantes* on Indigenous communities. However, few people outside academic history circles understand with any depth the depravity of these mercenaries and the barbarities they carried out against Indigenous people, including enslavement, killing, rape and forced religious conversion (Pacheco Neto 2015). This piece of history is emblematic of the complete disregard for Indigenous peoples' rights in the national story. Brazilian popular media continues to represent the *bandeirantes* in a positive light. Both accounts of the *bandeirantes* jostle for public attention. An example of the revisionist turn is the recently released documentary *Bandeiras* (Renato Batata, 2018), screened at the prestigious Brasília Film Festival. This documentary reviews archival material, opening the door to a historical and symbolic revision of the *bandeirantes*. It reflects on the construction and perpetuation of the mythology surrounding the *bandeirantes* in contemporary Brazil, constructing its narrative through a comparison of historical texts with interviews with the Indigenous people who suffered most from colonisation and even today peacefully continue to campaign to reclaim their rights to their lands. The film features interviews with contemporary leaders of the Guaraní in Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraguay. These interviews are interlaced with images of statues of *bandeirantes*, displayed in museums and public spaces, depicting them as heroes, accompanied by voiceovers by an actor reading official letters exchanged between priests during the colonial period.

At the same time there is a growing wave of popular literature and television—recalling the Australian debates around the “black armband” view of history—which call for an allegedly non-biased way of writing/interpreting historical sources in Brazil. Presented as an attempt to escape ideological interpretation, bestsellers such as *Guia Politicamente Incorreto da História do Brasil* [The Politically Incorrect Guide to Brazilian History] (2009) by journalist Leandro Narloch only serve to reaffirm stereotypes against Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous people and to promote a sympathetic view of the bandeirantes. This book was subsequently adapted as a television series by the same name on the History Channel in 2017. For the book’s second edition a polemical chapter was added arguing that the bandeirantes were not the murderers described in official school curricula, historical records and academic history. The book is far from being an isolated case, falling under a growing political movement in Brazil advocating for “*escola sem partido*” [nonpartisan education]. This movement, which emerged in 2004, is defined as “a joint initiative of students and parents concerned about the degree of political-ideological contamination of Brazilian schools at all levels: from basic to higher education” (cited in Macedo 2017). As a result of this pressure, the Congress and Senate are to vote in 2019 on inserting an “*escola sem partido*” program into the National Curriculum, which would allow students and parents to denounce and even sue teachers who provide ideological content in classroom. At this point, it is correct to say that after decades of the history books perpetuating an epic image of the bandeirantes, twenty years of revision has not been enough to rectify this as “*a figura do bandeirante herói ainda continua pairando como um paradigma histórico, exceto no restrito círculo acadêmico dos estudiosos do bandeirismo*” [the figure of the bandeirante as hero persists as a historical paradigm, except within the narrow academic circle of scholars that study them] (Pacheco Neto 2007, 115).

As in many other cases the parallel with Australian debates and history is clear: in Australia squatters similarly undertook largely illegal expeditions into Indigenous territories and land grabs to occupy them, decimating Aboriginal populations in the process. As in Brazil, similar political contestations emerged in Australia over this history of violence and war on the frontier between Aboriginal people and white settlers. As in Brazil this violence was minimised in favour of stories of peaceful settlement.

These relocations of Indigenous peoples from their territories recall stories told in *Connection to Country*. Just as in the Australian case, white people’s total appropriation of the space in Brazil radically disrupted Indigenous peoples’ longstanding relationship to the land. In both documentaries, historical events sometimes known to audiences are told through Indigenous perspectives and recounted as traumatic memories. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith put it:

Telling our [Indigenous] stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice. (1999, 34–35)

The narration of these events to the camera becomes a contemporary form of resistance and a means of correcting the record. Just as Indigenous peoples remember the *bandeirantes* not as heroes but as aggressive enemies, the documentary gives audiences the possibility of reconsidering their own knowledge of national history and national identity to revisit canonical episodes through a more critical Indigenous-inflected perspective.

Once again, Mbyá-Guaraní cosmology is brought to the centre of the narrative as the Guaraní group talks about M'Boy-Guaçu—Cobra Grande [Great Snake], who came some time before a fallen church bell had done so, a time when the walls all were covered with grass. In the late afternoon, the giant snake rang the bell with her tail. She ate a child. But every time that god Tupã saw that something wrong was happening he would bring in a storm. A lightning strike reached the bell and the snake fell. The stains on the walls are from the giant snake's fat and blood.<sup>89</sup> As the group walks through the ruins, the man points to the dark spots on the walls. Because Mbyá-Guaraní people made the documentary, the story is not set in opposition to any other version of the facts and audiences are encouraged to see the events only through the perspective of Mbyá-Guaraní cosmology.

Afterwards, the same man explains that before colonisation there was no such thing as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay or Paraguay. Their grandparents did not use these words. They just talked about the land between the rivers. Ariel says that the Guaraní did not stay in only one place but rather would stop for five years and then move on. They moved about freely. They could have never imagined that one day white people would put an end to the forests. Before Europeans arrived, Indigenous people had a system of clearing small areas of land to plant. Their rotation system meant they would move on to new places in order to ensure continuing land fertility and abundant animal supplies. Because of their dynamic understanding of their territories, Indigenous peoples are often classified under the derogatory category of 'nomad'. However, rather than wandering nomadically without any purpose or goal, they were following strict geographic patterns and exercising crop rotation skills inherited from their parents' and grandparents' way of life. Ariel explains that the Mbyá-Guaraní do not say "*esta terra é minha*" [this land is mine].

In this way, both Indigenous filmmakers, one in Brazil and another in Australia, share a similar discourse that clashes with white people's liberal tradition of defining land as alienable

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<sup>89</sup> The snake in this oral story should not be mistaken with the Amazonian Great Snake. Although there is extensive literature on the latter (Schaan 2016, Vidal 2007, Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1971), I could not find reliable resources on the Great Snake of the *São Miguel das Missões* [São Miguel Mission], apart from a short film, *M'Boy-Guaçu* (Albrecht, 2014), and a theatrical play *A Lenda da Cobra Grande* [The Legend of the Great Snake] directed by Carlos Carvalho (1980) on this theme.

individual private property. In both cases, filmmakers seem committed to the duty of teaching audiences that you do not own land but rather belong to it.

As the documentary *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* continues, a woman tells Ariel that a buyer asked her if the handicrafts were made of real native bird feathers. When she answered that they were dyed chicken feathers, the tourist declined to buy them. Ariel tells the woman that she should have answered with the provocative question: “*Devo matar pássaros apenas para fazer isso?*” [Should I kill birds just to make this?] Again, audiences are asked to reconsider their privileged position as tourists. By now, they know more about the difficulties of finding wild animals near the Indigenous villages. The incongruity of the touristic desire of finding authenticity in a degraded environment, as the scarcity of birds is linked to the lack of forests, is emphatically centred.

After the tourists leave the place, the Mbyá-Guaraní gather up with sad faces the unsold souvenirs. Ariel shares his insights with the group as this time he did not go there to sell but to film, so he could observe the process from an outside position. He says that now he understands that their sadness is not only because they did not sell everything but because of the situation that makes them look as if they were completely dependent on the buyers, as if they could die of starvation if they did not sell the souvenirs. The documentary finishes with a very sad statement as one of them recalls that some tourists even asked why they even stay in the place where their ancestors were killed. Finishing on this open question, the film seems to complete a cycle that explains the harsh situation of the Guaraní who depend on a hostile external economy that excludes them while at the same time blaming them for their poverty.

## **5.6 Ecocinema Encounters with Fourth Cinema**

Both the documentaries studied here share the fact that they made their way out of Indigenous communities in Australia and Brazil, each displaying Indigenous perspectives on a global stage at national and international film festivals and through circulation in commercial and not-for-profit cinemas and on television. Each brought local issues to non-Indigenous circles not as ethnographic accounts of the other, but as self-representation and resistance. Schweninger (2013) draws a distinction between images that use Indigenous peoples versus “imagic moments”. With the former, he makes reference to mainstream images where Indigenous people are shown as unnamed objects without history. These images coincide with the colonial discourse of power and control. On the other hand, Schweninger defines “imagic moments” as “ecstatic unions of place and time” in films of self-representation, survival and sovereignty. Although Schweninger centres his studies on fictional films, both documentaries analysed here display these same elements.

To conclude my analysis, I discuss how these films belong to a broader group of films that I identify as Eco-Fourth Cinema. As mentioned above, although made almost ten years before the



*Connection to Country*, the Brazilian production foretold elements that worked very well in the Australian documentary. In my analyses of these films I focused on three aspects. First, there was the presence of the director in front of the camera, making his own body and performance a cinematic strategy of authenticity. Second, the link was made between present events and the history of Indigenous peoples, connecting their contemporary struggles with the (post) colonial process in each country. Third, each film established an explicit relationship between Indigenous displacement and loss of sovereignty and today's environmental crises. These three elements operating in conjunction provide the grounds to classify these two quite different documentaries as examples of Eco-Fourth Cinema—a meeting of the concerns of ecocinema with those of the Fourth Cinema.

Aesthetically, both documentaries manage to convey a sense of integration with and belonging to the land. However, there is no single aesthetic connecting the films. As Dowell (2013, 2) contends, Indigenous Cinema presents a variety of aesthetic possibilities:

there is no singular Aboriginal media aesthetic, but rather multiple Aboriginal aesthetics that reflect the individual artistic expression of the filmmaker and the Aboriginal nation in which he or she is a citizen. (Dowell 2013, 2)

The two documentaries examined in this chapter confirm Dowell's contention that we are in the presence of multiple Indigenous aesthetics as each film presents their own particular aesthetic choices. *Connection to Country* opted to use voice-overs, a non-diegetic soundtrack and compelling drone-generated images, sharp photography and a well-controlled camera. Made many years earlier, *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* relies on less technology and financial resources. It opted for direct sound recording, the Guaraní language is spoken through most of documentary and a handheld camera was used to film conversations as they happened. Despite these differences, both were made with more than one camera, filming the directors in action and making them the catalyst of their narratives. Also, both film the landscape and talk about it as the main subject and theme. They also use archival images to recount colonial history and pedagogically explain Indigenous cosmology as part of Indigenous historical knowledge about the place.

Both documentaries are also in alignment with Machiorlatti's (2010, 65) definition of Indigenous Cinema as being at its core an "activist endeavor that looks to the past in order to make visible the enduring effects of colonization, to reclaim annihilated ways of being, and to envision an affirmative future". Indeed, not only do both documentaries recall traumatic events from colonisation, they also show ongoing struggles in the present, especially due to white people's impact on the environment, creating a hopeful space for dialogue to solve conflicts. In so doing, both documentaries are giving audiences not only knowledge but also inspiration to act.

I see the main goals of Eco-Fourth Cinema as being to promote environmental awareness based on Indigenous traditional knowledge of their territories, as inviting audiences to engage in

dialogue with Indigenous peoples about the *longue durée*, as identifying ongoing climate change processes as having started in colonial times, and as finding sustainable solutions that respect Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. In doing these things, the Eco-Fourth Cinema works as a tool for decolonisation, providing space for Indigenous histories and perspectives to be displayed not only within the communities but also outside of them, bridging dialogues with diverse audiences, especially through film festivals and television channels. Eco-Fourth Cinema also documents Indigenous knowledge and their connection with local environments. It provides patent proof of Indigenous resilience and resistance in the face of ongoing environmental crises.

Despite the many differences between Indigenous peoples in Brazil and Australia and their respective situations, I would like to conclude this chapter by pointing to some major commonalities they share, as portrayed in the two documentaries. Most importantly, both films show the cultural and spiritual connection Indigenous peoples have with their traditional territories. This is frequently expressed by their affirmation of belonging to the land rather than possessing it. Secondly, the documentaries show that both countries share a history of colonisation that includes forced displacement, genocide and state policies of violent acculturation. Thirdly, Indigenous peoples in both Brazil and Australia are seen in an ambiguous position: at the same time as being the most vulnerable group they are also shown as the most resilient. The location of Indigenous communities in their traditional lands and spaces when coupled with their continuing reliance on natural resources for different aspects of their daily life, from food to ceremonies, demonstrate Indigenous resilience. They are the ones that have been adapting and accumulating valuable knowledge and skills after surviving catastrophic changes in their ways of life since colonisation and having encountered previous environmental change in the past.

Both documentaries analysed in this chapter show Indigenous peoples to be at the forefront of anthropogenic environmental debates. However, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their territories should not be overgeneralised. Nadasdy (2005) questions the use of concepts such as environmentalism and conservation—both non-Indigenous ideas—to encapsulate and judge Indigenous practices. For Nadasdy (301) the idea of “ecological nobility” is problematic as it remains based on a stereotypical relationship between Indigenous peoples and nature. This relationship is sometimes idealised, such as when making references to the deep connection with Mother Earth, or condemned, such as when based on the negative impacts of Indigenous peoples’ actions towards specific animals or places. For Nadasdy the efforts of scholars, rather than being directed at searching for proof that Indigenous peoples are generally conservationists or environmentalists, should focus on the specific cultural practices and values they present in specific situations. Nadasdy also raises an interesting question: why have Indigenous peoples been taking on the image of ecological nobility? His answer is that, although stereotypical, this image reinforces discourses favourable to Indigenous

rights, such as land claims and sovereignty. For example, the image of Indigenous peoples as guardians of nature can be quite useful in legal battles for Indigenous land rights against deforestation. In this perspective, Indigenous peoples use ecological nobility as a tactical political discourse to assure their rights. The main issue is not to judge and classify Indigenous peoples as environmentalists on the basis of isolated actions but rather to understand them as part of a longstanding battle to protect and retain their traditional territories, natural resources and self-governance.

Throughout this chapter I have shown how Indigenous filmmaking has been portraying sustainable ways of life to offer contributions to debates on environmental crises. While dealing with the pressures of world markets that favour large-scale developments, Indigenous resistance has been acquiring strength and visibility. As a proof, the increase in Indigenous audio-visual productions is followed by their screening at the also-growing numbers of environmental and Indigenous film festivals. In this scenario, ecocinema together with Fourth Cinema become a strategic way to study Indigenous audio-visual productions such as *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá* and *Connection to Country* as it enables us to simultaneously look at these productions at the local and global levels, from an Indigenous local standpoint to globalised audiences that have been called to take action in favour of the natural environment.

## Chapter Six:

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the key role that films and videos produced by or with Indigenous peoples play in fostering environmental debates at local and global levels. Based on comparative analyses of contemporary Australian and Brazilian productions, I have argued that, beyond national and historical specificities, filmmakers from both countries share a commitment to foreground the strong connection between Indigenous core values and sustainability. To illustrate this connection, the thesis has focused on Indigenous films' political and aesthetic choices. Above all, I have highlighted how these productions follow a logic of non-anthropocentric storytelling in which lands and waterscapes are given as much prominence as human characters. Both discursively and visually, Indigenous productions also portray ecological degradation as a threat to the whole global ecosystem--from natural resources to animals and human lives. In doing so, these productions engage directly with ongoing debates over climate change and the environment. Additionally, in advocating for Indigenous epistemologies and ways of life these productions offer practical alternatives to contemporary environmental crises. In this way these productions can trigger viewers to rethink their own relationship with the natural environment and reconsider the importance of their caring for and reconnecting with it.

To better demonstrate the relevance of these audio-visual productions to global environmental debates, I have focused in this thesis on struggles for three fundamental rights: land, water and culture. Each of these topics was covered, respectively, in chapters two, three and four. In chapter one, I framed the thesis by underlining the historical similarities and challenges shared by Indigenous peoples living in Australia and Brazil. I also highlighted these two countries' growing economic and cultural connections as well as the importance of expanding collaborative and comparative academic research between them.

Indigenous peoples living in Australia and Brazil face similar post-colonial challenges. Their reliance on natural resources both for subsistence and for cultural means, for example, makes them particularly vulnerable to the effects on their territories of the ever-expanding mining and agribusiness economy of both countries. In the specific case of Australia, the Federal Government's rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart signals that constitutional recognition is still far away. In Brazil, although Indigenous peoples' rights to their traditional lands were enshrined in the 1988 constitution, many of them still await justice while living near their occupied lands, stuck on roadsides between busy motorways and the fences of cattle farms and soy plantations.

By doing a comparative analysis of these two countries, I sought to avoid generalisations while at the same time making possible connections between audio-visual productions made by or with Indigenous peoples that are living in different contexts. When I began my research in 2014, I acknowledged the significant gap between the low numbers of Indigenous audio-visual productions in Brazil as compared to Australia's relatively well-established Aboriginal media. However, over the course of my four-year doctoral program, I witnessed the steady development of Indigenous audio-visual productions in Brazil. This was made even more evident when I received an invitation to be one of the curators for Brazil's biggest Indigenous film festival: *Cine Kurumin*. This annual festival has been spotlighting Indigenous cinema since 2011. The 2017 was its biggest, and included, for the first time, an international section. It received 87 national submissions, 27 of which were directed exclusively by Indigenous individuals or collectives. The festival's final program, entitled "From my village I see the world", screened an incredibly diverse list of documentaries, shorts and feature films displaying Indigenous peoples' worldviews and perspectives on the contemporary challenges they face. Despite the variety of Indigenous stories, if there was an overarching festival theme it was the recurrent narrating of countless stories of resilience and resistance to socio-environmental impacts by developments on or near traditional territories, affecting their lands, waters and ways of life.

The struggle for land rights provided the main theme for chapter two. This key issue here has been one of uniting Indigenous peoples across distinct cultures and nation-states to defend and assure ownership and integrity of their territories in post-colonial settings. My discussion on land rights was based in the comparative analysis of two films: *Mabo* and *Birdwatchers*. The latter depicts how extensive and intensive farming has resulted in the destruction of original rainforest through the occupation of Indigenous territories. While narrating the clash between Indigenous peoples and farmers, the film visually illustrated the environmental consequences of this conflict by showing the increasing deforestation of Indigenous traditional lands. *Birdwatchers* operated through a clever script that bound together geographically circumscribed events occurring in a small corner of the Amazon with the pressing and global issue of environmental destruction. So, while the film was centred on the physical and psychological violence Guaraní-Kaiowá peoples endured when forced out of their traditional lands, *Birdwatchers* also opened a window for worldwide audiences to identify with Indigenous struggles as struggles whose outcome would have significant effects on the life of the planet itself. The close analysis of *Mabo* touched on similar issues, especially because the Australian film had at its centre the prosecution in a legal setting of the argument that Indigenous peoples have a sustainable-traditional relationship with natural resources and lands. While the film's narrative is centred on the heroic journey of a single Indigenous man who himself is an urban dweller, it recurrently shows Murray Islanders leading a traditional way of life, such as relying on low-scale

fishing and farming for survival. The film reinforces the idea that Indigenous peoples know how to live from natural resources without destroying and polluting the planet.

The third chapter was centred on water rights. Through the comparative analysis of *Xingu* and *Ten Canoes*, I pointed out the different strategies employed in both feature films to advocate water rights. Like *Birdwatchers*, *Xingu* was a Brazilian commercial mainstream film made by a non-Indigenous director. However, in contrast with *Birdwatchers*, *Xingu* neither gained the same traction with audiences nor did it manage to provide the same space for an Indigenous voice. Instead it portrayed the Villas-Bôas brothers as heroic white saviours situating Indigenous people as passive beneficiaries of this history. However, it is through its insistent panoramic images of riparian landscapes and Indigenous peoples within them that the film relates sustainability with water rights.

The pristine image of waterscapes is also a strategy used in *Ten Canoes*. However, in the Australian feature film, Indigenous people assume a key role at most stages of the film's production. It was co-directed by an Indigenous person and the Aboriginal community had leading voice on the casting process. *Ten Canoes* is not explicitly about how and why environmentalists and Indigenous groups sometimes agree on water-rights battles. However, it is one of the most compelling feature films that seek to promote Aboriginal people's connection with water in Australia. The film is not directly about the environmental and cultural challenges faced by Aboriginal peoples, yet it is inescapably caught up in these in terms of what it shows and claims. As pointed out in the third chapter, this film touches on the relationship between economic and cultural water rights through its storytelling without this ever being a central topic. It successfully presents the importance of water rights through an integrated perspective on Indigenous territories.

In both films, a clear choice has been made to avoid discussion and portrayal of the contemporary environmental challenges that Indigenous peoples are facing, especially with their water resources, in the two regions of Australia's Ararufa Swamp and the Brazilian Xingu River. In *Ten Canoes*, Indigenous people respect natural cycles, for example, the right season for hunting goose eggs. There is no mention of contemporary threats such as the presence of feral animals, weeds and fire as well as the intrusion of saltwater and the rising sea level. The same picture is portrayed in *Xingu*, as the river stands wide and robust. There is not a single polemic reference to the Belo Monte dam project that is changing the river's course, flooding rainforests all the while creating drought areas, and forcing entire communities out of their lands. One reason that may explain the lack of contemporary elements is that although these areas are experiencing gradual, externally driven degradation, they still appear undamaged and pristine on the screen. Therefore, the films' aesthetics reinforce the notion that Indigenous peoples are in balance with the environment, thus leaving all threats off-screen.

The fourth chapter was on cultural rights. Here, I studied two Indigenous audio-visual productions. In the case of the Australian *Footprints*, the filming process triggered the regeneration of cultural practices from the making of traditional artefacts (*ilma*) to the filming of performances and the revival of ceremonies that have not been practiced for decades. Similar to its Australian counterpart, *A gente luta mas come fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit: Trailer] displays many aspects of Indigenous traditional culture, such as language, garments, culinary practices, economic practices and the relationship with nature. But its focus is the ongoing struggles associated with native forest reforestation and keeping sustainable practices of fishing and hunting. Indigenous people filmed both documentaries. These films affirm Indigenous cultural rights to the keeping and/or reclaiming of their connection with their traditional territories. These territories are presented as places embedded with cultural meanings. In *Footprints*, cultural reclamation is an ongoing process in which the contact with the land allows the Djungan people to renew their dreaming and reconnect with their culture. In *A gente luta mas come fruta* the daily cultural practices are part of a process to restore nature and to realise an Asháninka way of life that seeks a balanced relationship with the natural environment.

The fifth chapter was on Indigenous rights. It was based on a comparative analysis of two documentaries directed by Indigenous filmmakers, *Connection to Country* and *Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá*. Both films attempt to portray Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, while touching on the complexities of maintaining traditional practices and knowledge in the face of the insistent pressure felt since colonial times for socio-economic development. While depicting Indigenous relationships with the land and waterscape, these films also advocate for Indigenous sovereignty over traditional territories, connecting sovereignty to in sustainable and respectful land management.

Building on Barry Barclay's idea of a Fourth Cinema based on Indigenous core values, I coined the term Eco-Fourth Cinema to encapsulate how these Indigenous productions both fit in with current debates on ecocinema (mainly centred on calling upon audiences to act for environmental justice) while pursuing an Indigenous agenda connecting Indigenous justice with environmental justice. As the number of these Indigenous productions has grown, they have found their way into film festivals, Internet channels, art houses, and public and private television programming. This has allowed Indigenous filmmakers and producers to connect with the general audience and filmmakers alike, bringing their eco-cinema Indigenous agency to public debates.

In this thesis, I wanted to debate Indigenous perspectives not analyse mainstream media stereotypes of Indigenous people. Furthermore, I wanted to do so without falling into generalisations. Although I am aware of the incredible diversity within Indigenous media production, I have paid particular attention to audio-visual productions concerning Indigenous peoples and their territories. By analysing a group of films and videos, I have shown how climate change and environmental crises

are an ongoing threat deeply affecting Indigenous ways of life. A key contribution of this thesis has then been to argue that these productions are able to make audiences aware of how large-scale developments on Indigenous territories are promoting neo-colonial forms of dispossession while also having severe impacts upon the natural environment. Even more, I have argued that these productions, while depicting deep Indigenous connections with and knowledge about the environment, also offer alternative ways of dealing with and understanding actual environmental crises.

Most of the growing numbers of Indigenous productions as Fourth Cinema in Brazil have been documentaries focusing on Indigenous cultures, ways of life and struggles for rights. However, it is only a matter of time before Indigenous people in Brazil begin filming their first feature films and experimenting with different genres, from dramas to comedies. In Australia, while this is already a reality, much is still to be done in terms of increasing screen diversity, especially on the mainstream media. As numbers of Indigenous audio-visual productions grow across screen genres in terms of their quantity, quality and distribution, there will be a need to research the ways in which Indigenous film- and video-making is developing, challenging and extending not only our ways of making films and producing film meaning but also our ways of making sense of and intervening in the world. To conclude, it is my hope that this thesis will expand interest in this growing field as well as offering insights into the important role Indigenous films and filmmakers play in contemporary debates about climate change, decolonisation and Indigenous rights.



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## **Filmography:**

*A Dança Sagrada* [The Sacred Dance] 2017 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*A festa da moça* [The Girl's Celebration] 1987 Director: Vincent Carelli

*A gente luta mais come fruta* [We Struggle but We Eat Fruit] 2009. Director: Isaac Pinhanta and Wewito Piyãko.

*A Procura de Aratu* [Looking for Aratu] 2015 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Alambrado* [The Fence]1991. Director: Marco Bechis.

*Além do Olhar* [Beyond the Gaze] 2016 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Arandu Nhembo'e – Em Busca do Saber* [In Search of Knowledge] 2013 Director: Aberto Alvares

*Bandeiras* 2018 Director: Renato Batata

*Bastard Boys*. 2007. Mini-series. Director: Raymond Quint.

*Bicicletas de Nhanderú* [Nhanderú Bicycles] 2011. Director: Ariel Ortega.

*Birdwatchers* [Portuguese title *Terra Vermelha*]. 2008. Director: Marco Bechis.

*Bran Nue Dae*. 2009. Director: Rachel Perkins.

*Brava Gente Brasileira* [Brave New Land]. 2000. Director: Lucia Murat.

*Brides of Christ*. 1991. Mini-series. Director: Ken Cameron.

*Cidade de Deus* [City of God] 2002. Director: Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund.

*Como era gostoso o meu francês* [How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman]. 1971. Director: Nelson Pereira dos Santos.

*Coniston Story*. 1984. Director: Francis Jupurrurla Kelly.

*Connection to Country*. 2015. Director: Tyson Mowarin.

*Conversas do Maranhão* [Conversations in Maranhão] 1977–83. Director: Andrea Tonacci

*Corumbiara* 2009 Director: Vincent Carelli

*Desterro Guarani* [Guarani Exile] 2011 Director: Ariel Ortega, Patrícia Ferreira, Ernesto Ignacio de Carvalho and Vincent Carelli



*Dia do Índio na Aldeia Verde* [Indian Day in the Green Village] 2010 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Ete Londres / Londres como uma aldeia* [London as a Village] 2016. Director: Takumã Kuikuro

*First Australians*. 2008. Director: Rachel Perkins.

*Footprints*. 2015. Director: Cornel Ozies.

*Garage Olimpo* [Olympic Garage]. 1999. Director: Marco Bechis.

*Hijos* [Sons and Daughters]. 2001. Director: Marco Bechis.

*Iauaretê, cachoeira das onças* [Iauaretê, Waterfall of the Jaguars] 2006 Director: Vincent Carelli

*Iracema—Uma Transa Amazônica*. 1976. Director: Jorge Bodanzky and Orlando Senna.

*Itaõ Kuêgü - As hipermulheres* [The Hyper Women] 2011 Director: Takumã Kuikuro, Carlos Fausto e Leonardo Sette.

*Jaguar* 1954–67. Director: Jean Rouch

*Kakxop pit hãmkoxuk xop te yũmũgãhã - Iniciação dos filhos espíritos da terra* [Initiation of the Sons of Earth's Spirits] 2015 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Karai ha'egui Kunhã Karai 'ete - Os Verdadeiros Líderes Espirituais* [True Spiritual Leaders], 2013 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Karioka* 2014 Director: Takumã Kuikuro

*Konãgxeka: o Dilúvio Maxakali* [The Maxakali Flood] 2016 Director: Isael Maxakali, Charles Bicalho.

*Kotkuphi* 2011 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Lágrima do Diamante* [Diamond Tear] 2017. Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Les maltres fous* [The Mad Masters]. 1954-1955 Director: Jean Rouch France

*M'Boy-Guaçu*. 2014. Director: Albrecht.

*Mabo*. 2012. Director: Rachel Perkins.

*Malcom X*. 1992 Director: Spike Lee.

*Mãos de Barro* [Clay Hands] 2016 Director: Alexandre Pankararu and Graciela Guaranía.

*Mario Reve Jeguatá – No caminho com Mário* [On the Way with Mario] 2014. Director: Mbya-Guarani Collective.

*Martírio* [Martyrdom] (2016). Director: Vincent Carelli

*Mato Eles?* [Should I Kill Them?] 1982. Director: Sérgio Bianchi.

*Mbyá Mirim* 2013 Director: Ariel Duarte Ortega, Patrícia Ferreira

*Mimãñãm: mōgmōka xi xūnîn* 2011, Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Moi, un noir* [Me, A Black Man] 1958-1959. Director: Jean Rouch

*Mokoi Tekoá Petei Jeguatá - Duas aldeias, uma caminhada* [Two Villages, One Path]. 2008.  
Director: Ariel Ortega, Germano Beñites and Jorge Morinico.

*No tempo das chuvas* [During the Rains] 2000 Director: Isaac Pinhanta and Wewyto Piyãko

*No tempo do verão* [In the Summer Time] 2012 Director: Wewyto Piyãko.

*Nós e a Cidade* [The City and Us] 2009 Director: Ariel Ortega

*O Ano em Que Meus Pais Saíram de Férias* [The Year My Parents Went on Vacation]. 2006. Director:  
Cao Hamburger.

*O espírito da TV* [The Spirit of TV] 1990 Director: Vincent Carelli

*O rio tem dono* [The river has its owner] 2012 Director: Alexandre Pankararu and Graciela Guaranía.

*One Night the Moon.* 2001. Director: Rachel Perkins.

*Os Arara* [The Arara] 1981–83. Directed Andrea Tonacci, Realized Interpovos and TV Bandeirantes.

*Para onde Foram as Andorinhas?* [Where have all the swallows gone?] 2015 Director: Mari Correa.

*Quando os Yãmiy vêm dançar conosco* [When the Yãmiy come to dance with us] 2012 Director: Isael Maxakali, Suely Maxakali and Renata Otto.

*Redfern Now.* 2012. Mini-series. Director: Rachel Perkins.

*Satellite Dreams.* 1991. Director: Ivo Burum.

*Serras da desordem* [Hills of Disorder] 2006, Director: Andrea Tonacci

*Shomōtsi* 2001 Director: Wewyto Piyãko

*Tatakox* 2007 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Tava, a casa de pedra* [Tava, the House of Stone] 2012 Director: Ariel Ortega, Patrícia Ferreira, Ernesto Ignacio de Carvalho and Vincent Carelli.

*Tekowe Nhenpyrun – A Origem da Alma* [The Origin of the Soul] 2015 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Ten Canoes.* 2006. Director: Rolf de Heer and Peter Djigirr.

*Terra Nua* [Bare Land] 2014 Director: Alexandre Pankararu and Graciela Guaranía.

*The Balanda and the Bark Canoes: The Making of Ten Canoes.* 2006. Director: Rolf de Heer, Molly Reynolds and Tania Nehme.

*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith.* 1978. Director: Fred Schepisi.

*The Kayapó: Out of the Forest.* 1989 Granada: Disappearing World Series. Director: Mike Beckham.

*The Leaving of Liverpool.* 1992. Mini-series. Director: Michael Jenkins.

*The Tracker.* 2002. Director: Rolf de Heer.

*Two Laws.* 1981. Director: Carolyn Strachan, Alessandro Cavadini and Borroloola Aboriginal Community.

*Um Pé na Aldeia e Outro no Mundo* [One Foot in the Village and Another in the World] 2016 Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Uma aldeia chamada Apiwtxa* [A village called Apiwtxa] 2010 Director: Ashaninka Collective.

*Walkabout.* 1971. Director: Nicolas Roeg.

*Xingu.* 2012. Director: Cao Hamburger.

*Xokxop pet* 2009 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Xupapoyñãg* 2011, Director: Isael Maxakali

*Yãmîy* 2011, Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Yiax Kaax: Fim do Resguardo* [End of Shelter] 2010 Director: Isael Maxakali.

*Yvy Ayvu -Vozes da Terra* [Voices of the Earth] Director: Aberto Alvares.

*Ywy Jahe 'o – O Choro da Terra* [The Cry of the Earth] 2015 Director: Aberto Alvares