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# *Jimbin Kaboo Yimardoowarra Marninil: Listening to Nyikina Women's Voices. Film as a Strategy of Resistance*

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# *Jimbin Kaboo Yimardoowarra Marninil:* Listening to Nyikina Women's Voices. Film as a Strategy of Resistance

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## Introduction

- 1 Nyikina people are the people of the Mardoowarra, the Lower Fitzroy River, in the West Kimberley region of Western Australia. The lived experiences of three Nyikina women and their families inform my research: Lucy Marshall (OAM) and Jeannie Wabi are Senior Nyikina Elders who grew up working on the early settlers' pastoral stations. They have both been instrumental in protecting Nyikina country, language, culture, and traditions, for most of their lives, through a wide range of educational and cultural actions. Their kin sister, Dr. Anne Poelina (2009; in Madjulla Inc., and Magali McDuffie 2012), is a generation younger: she was able to pursue a university education, and, guided by the senior women, established a non-government organisation, Madjulla Inc., in 1989, through which she advocates nationally and internationally for the rights of Nyikina people, particularly in the context of the rampant industrialisation of their land. The women, their families, and some Nyikina communities chose the medium of film nearly twenty years ago to protect their rights and country, and share Nyikina culture. Our paths met when the women invited me to collaborate on a film project in 2007: we have worked together ever since. This enriching collaboration has led me to undertake doctoral studies.

**Three Sisters: Jeannie Wabi, Lucy Marshall, Anne Poelina**

Jeannie Wabi, Lucy Marshall, Anne Poelina  
Photo by Ian Perdrisat

- 2 In my thesis, 'Jimbin Kaboo Yimardoowarra Marninil – listening to Nyikina women, from the inside to the outside: an inter-generational journey of cultural actions, economic and self-determination initiatives on Nyikina country' I explore Nyikina women's aspirations for sustainable community development, their engagement with, or disengagement from, the state apparatus, and the strategies of resistance and alternatives they have developed over the years in response to the failure of various government policies. By firmly grounding the women in their cultural landscape with visual story-telling, and carrying out a Foucauldian deconstruction of the historical, anthropological, and development discourses which have shaped their lived experiences, I reflect on the women's strategies of resistance and examine their agency in an increasingly neo-colonial context. I contend that film plays a paramount role in reclaiming these discourses, and reveals the often invisible counter-discourse, which the filmmaker / researcher's role is to 'make seen', and 'make heard', thereby giving a space to the subaltern where he or she can be listened to (Spivak in Landry and MacLean 1996: 292). In this paper, I would like to explore the use of film both as an empowering act of resistance to neo-colonial oppression, and as a decolonizing methodology (Smith 1999).
- 3 While this paper solely concentrates on the role of film in an Indigenous context, it is important to point out that ever since the beginning of Australia's colonisation, Aboriginal people have been engaging, both privately and publically, in dialogues with individual members of the settler society or government institutions at large: whether these dialogues took the shape of letters, petitions, witness statements, life narratives, and later on, autobiographies or films, they have been consistent in their presence both throughout time and space (Van Toorn 2001). Films represent only one of the many manifestations of this engagement – what Faye Ginsburg refers to as 'shooting back' (Ginsburg 1999: 295).

## Ethnographic Filmmaking in Australia

- 4 The concept of 'ethnographic filmmaking' never really appealed to me – in fact, this is not something I thought I was doing until someone labelled me 'an ethnographic filmmaker'. Early ethnographic filmmaking merely evoked images of explorers gathering footage of 'un-discovered' peoples, of the 'Other' in all its differences, 'oddity', and exoticism (see for instance, Curtis, *Land of the War Canoes*, 1914; or Johnson, *Among the Cannibal Isles of the Pacific*, 1918). Filmmakers filmed what they wanted their audiences to see, responding to 'folk culture' expectations (Ruby 2000: 10). These films were mainly 'expository films' (MacDougall 1998: 4), placing the filmmaker in the position of the 'all-knowing' observer and giving him unquestioned authority. Jay Ruby has argued that such films only served to uphold a 'colonial view of the world' (Ruby 2000: 7-10).
- 5 In Australia, starting in the early 20th century, numerous films were made about Aboriginal people, most of them concerned with ceremonies, and highlighting the reductionist notions of the primitive 'Other' of social Darwinism and biological determinism, and the deficit discourse (Fforde et al. 2013). Not much changed until the 1960s, when the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies set up a film unit with the main purpose of doing scientific research and archiving culture (Bryson 2002: 13-16). Non-interference was spoken about in theory – but in practice, mainly because of time and financial constraints, filmmakers were still directing people, choosing the times the ceremonies should be performed, and the clothes people should be wearing, all this in a bid for 'authenticity' (Bryson 2002: 25). The 'take your clothes off, throw on some ochre, and look noble' attitude, as Mackinolty and Duffy (1987) put it, was unfortunately the norm for a very long time. Through visual representations to non-Indigenous audiences, the concept of authentic 'Aboriginality' was defined as a negative: a problem to be solved (McKee 1999: 140-143) through accepted, repetitive, stereotyped representations of Aboriginal people; or a control mechanism through which European eyes would supposedly 'know' what Aboriginality was, thereby enabling them to dispense truths on Aboriginal people's wants, needs and requirements (Attwood 1992, in McKee 1999: 147), and to participate in the construction of an Australian 'national imaginary' justifying the country's colonisation (Hamilton, in Ginsburg 1993: 561).
- 6 In the 1970s and 1980s, with the growing awareness in Aboriginal communities of the power of visual representation in the media, conflicts emerged over offensive stereotypical representations of Aboriginal people, the good noble savage and his 'residue of culture', as Wolfe puts it, or the threatening, drunken man on the outskirts of towns – both enabling constructions of the 'Other' characteristic of a logic of elimination by the colonising power (Wolfe 1999: 27). Communities – such as Yuendumu in the 1980s (Michaels 1994) – insisted on more local content, produced by them locally, for local broadcast. As well as arguing for Aboriginal-owned media, and envisaging film as a tool for political resistance and cultural maintenance (Hinkson 2005: 158), Michaels found opportunities existed in collaborative filmmaking, but only as an interpretive act of negotiation between filmmakers and communities. Filmmakers, he said, should adjust to the rhythm and expectations of the community, and become catalysts, or conduits, working with and for Aboriginal communities (Michaels 1994: 36). Michaels argued that film could only be a tool for political resistance if video production became embedded in traditional forms, raising the all-important issue of authenticity (Hinkson 2005: 159). For

Hinkson, by emphasizing the traditional aspects of the Warlpiri films, Michaels overlooked their significant inter-cultural dimension, in terms of who participated in the projects, who was driving them, whose traditions were being engaged, and which meanings were being produced (Hinkson 2005: 164-165). Thus, collaboration was a feature of early ventures by Aboriginal media associations, and Hinkson suggests it still is (Hinkson 2005: 166). Film could therefore be viewed as a mediating object, in which form 'cannot be considered apart from the complex contexts of production and interpretation that shape its construction' (Ginsburg 1999: 296).

- 7 Governments discouraged 'local content' on the ground of economic imperatives (Michaels 1994: 37). However, a growing interest from the international community for Aboriginal cultures and political activism showed the need to communicate on a broader scale. Aboriginal people's agency continued to materialise in films, performances, festivals, and political actions across the world: thus, the 1980s saw numerous Aboriginal Elders, performers, and political activists travel to France, Europe and the United States to 'not only represent' their culture, as Arnaud Morvan argues, but to reproduce it and re-establish it, as a way of re-affirming their identity in a new context, empowering themselves, and creating new networks through old and new ways of connecting with people in an international space (Morvan 2011: 107). The use of the film medium also played an important part in the process of 'historical, political, and cultural consciousness-raising' (Turner 1991: 69) for not only did it bring Indigenous people's stories into the public light, but it also showcased Indigenous people as self-conscious agents of power filming the stories that were important to them (Turner 1991: 70). Representing themselves to the dominant power, Indigenous people were able to enter a process which would take them from self-conscientization to political mobilisation (Turner 1991: 70). Like the Kayapo people of Brazil, Nyikina people successfully made the transition from film subjects to collaborators and producers.

## Nyikina Films

- 8 In the 1980s, a film by Oliver Howes, *On Sacred Ground* (1980), retraced the fight of Noonkanbah people against a mining company wanting to explore a sacred Aboriginal site. Distributed internationally, it highlighted the Australian Government's colonialist policies, and to this day, still encapsulates Nyikina and Walmajarri Elders' aspirations and will to fight for their land rights. It was also the symbol of Indigenous solidarity and agency not only across Australia, with Warlpiri Elders bringing a ceremony to Noonkanbah in support of the protesters, but across the world (Glowczewski 2011: 2). In 1991, *The Kimberley Mob* followed the daily lives and trials of three brothers in a Nyikina community, running one of the first Aboriginal-owned cattle stations in the Kimberley, Mount Anderson, after the out-station movement. In 2000, professional filmmakers came to train and work with young people at Jarlmadangah Community to make a documentary, *Jarlmadangah Mob*. It followed the lives of the young people on their community as they talked to each other about their hopes, aspirations, daily lives and struggles. The film generated positive memories of growing up on community and is still watched enthusiastically by the children of the then young people in the film. In 1992, the Creation Story of the Fitzroy River by the ancestor Woonyoomboo was told and re-enacted in a film by Wayne Jowandi Barker: *Milli Milli* (Barker 1992). Appropriating the medium (Pink 2007: 179), Nyikina people realised the importance of preserving and

transmitting their cultural capital, their stories, traditions and songs, and began to produce videos and DVDs about Nyikina culture, such as the Madjulla Inc. video series, *Nyikina Cultural Activities* (2004). There was at the time a strong emphasis on the significance of Nyikina culture for the younger generations, as a way to ground their identities which for so long had been denied through removal and assimilation policies. Collaboration with non-Aboriginal filmmakers was often a feature of these productions.

- 9 When our collaboration started the purpose of our films was to showcase the various positive initiatives of Nyikina people for sustainable development in their communities, in an attempt to attract funding from government and non-government organisations alike in order to sustain a diversity of cultural projects, such as language and training programs (*Nyikina Language Hub*, 2010), the creation of a Wilderness Centre (*The Majala Wilderness Centre*, 2009), plans for a cultural centre (*The Nyikina Cultural Centre*, 2007), book publications (*Nyikina Stories*, 2010), cultural tourism (*Oongkalkada Adventures*, 2009), and awareness-raising films (*Mardoowarra*, *Living Water*, 2012). The atmosphere was one of energy and dynamism, positive achievements, and of hopes for the future.

#### Working With Lucy



Magali McDuffie, Lucy Marshall  
Photo by Josh Marshall

- 10 With the onset of the world financial crisis, this atmosphere underwent a radical change. In order for Western Australia's economy to continue to be competitive, the Barnett government decided to further develop the Kimberley, an ancient land rich in minerals, such as coal, bauxite, copper, iron ore, coal seam gas, diamonds, and other precious metals (Martin Pritchard in *Three Sisters: Women of High Degree*, 2015, 29:45). The intensity and extent of this push was unprecedented. The arguments put forward by the government were those of education, health facilities and housing for Aboriginal people in the area. Community divisions emerged, families split, and today the situation is a very different one to the one I saw when I first arrived in Broome in 2007. In a contemporary manifestation of the escalation of neo-liberalism within a settler-colonial context, the Kimberley, which had previously been somewhat protected by its remoteness, is

witnessing the invasion of a new kind of colonizer, the multi-national mining corporation, often operating with questionable ethical practices and escaping the gaze of the outside world. They have been welcomed by the Australian Government, again with the thought that Aboriginal land is empty and ready for exploration and exploitation – not much different, I dare say, from the days of *Terra Nullius*.

- 11 In this context, the voices of the women I worked with took on some political urgency. Our films, reflecting people's needs, values and perceptions, became tools for emancipatory action research (Pink 2007: 126). The women soon tackled the political scene, as it seemed to be the only avenue to defend their right to informed consent about what was happening on their land. Local actors thus became empowered within wider issues (Pink 2007: 22). Dr Anne Poelina became the Deputy Shire President of Broome in 2011, speaking and presenting our films at various conferences nationally and internationally, including UNESCO in Paris, about Aboriginal rights in the Kimberley, and about the need for an open debate at an international level, framed within the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Poelina, in *Mardoowarra, Living Water* 2012). Senior Elders joined the fight to protect the Kimberley and challenged government policies, particularly during the intense James Price Point-Walmdany campaign (*Walmdany Corroboree*, 2011) against the Woodside Gas Hub, brilliantly covered in Eugénie Dumont's film *Heritage Fight* (2012). Films became a tool to use in the lobbying of politicians both in the state and federal governments, as well as to disseminate information to national and overseas organisations. For instance, *Duchess IS Paradise* (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie 2014) was used as a submission to the Environmental Protection Agency of Western Australia against the proposed Duchess-Paradise coal mine on Nyikina country.
- 12 Our films, like moments in time reflecting the changes happening on the ground (MacDougall 1998), still followed the same basic principles of reciprocity, inclusiveness, and dialogic approach (Freire 1970) that had characterised them from the start. From filmmaker I had by then also become a PhD researcher. This required me to reflect on our collaborative process, and on the underpinning principles of Indigenist research, as well as the role of film within it – a necessary undertaking for any filmmaker, as Muecke points out: 'in the making of movies we have to consider not just the narrative in the production, the story-line, but the narratives about production – what 'we' think we are doing' (Muecke 1994: 6).
- 13 This is particularly well illustrated in the *Three Sisters, Women of High Degree* documentary (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie, 2015) in which I make an introductory statement about my position as a filmmaker, working with Nyikina women, and my overall understanding of our filmic and academic collaboration.

## Participatory and Emancipatory Filmmaking

- 14 One of the precursors of participatory documentary is French filmmaker Jean Rouch, who had a significant influence on *cinéma-vérité*, and formulated the main principles of participatory filmmaking and shared anthropology. The various principles that came out of his filmmaking practice bear extensive similarities with our own collaborative work, albeit in a different context. Very early on, Rouch developed the practice of 'returning to show the finished film to the people who had participated in its making' (Eaton 1979: 4). After editing the film in Paris he would return to Niger, screen it, and often record a

voice-over by the participants themselves: a unique and most forward-thinking approach at the time. For Rouch, feedback from participants was essential in the filmmaking process, creating mutual understanding, and giving them the dignity they were owed.

15 In 1971, Rouch stated that:

"The idea of film is to transform anthropology, the eldest daughter of colonialism, a discipline reserved to those with power interrogating people without it. I want to replace it by a shared anthropology. That is to say, an anthropological dialogue between people belonging to different cultures, which for me represents the discipline of human sciences for the future." (Rouch in Eaton 1979: 26)

16 Rouch was convinced that one day film would be a 'one-man system' (Eaton 1979: 40), whereby a filmmaker could work on his own in the field for extended periods of time. He saw this as the ideal to be achieved, intimating that film crews were too complex, too expensive, intrusive, and constituted an 'obstacle to participant cinema' (Eaton 1979: 55). True to his predictions, I am indeed a 'one-woman system' with usually only one camera, one tripod, one set of mics, a 'paring away' of technical means to suit the requirement of being extremely mobile at all times in order to be able to shoot at any moment, in any place. Rouch viewed the filmmaker as an ethnologist having to make sense of events as they happened in the field rather than consulting his field notes on his return. Rouch suggested that films should be constructed in the field, with the participants. In Rouch's opinion, films are a distillation of meaning, an open door to a world of knowledge that the written word cannot synthesize in the same manner, or as concisely (Eaton 1979). In our films, there is almost never a second take of events, discussions, meetings, or trips on country, because of time and budget constraints.

17 These direct narratives, in the form of conversations, enable a cyclic process with countless ramifications, encouraging the production of knowledge. As stories are told, more stories emerge from other people through a 'trigger effect' (Pink 2007: 16). Complementary historical research conducted at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, with a view to repatriate this material to communities through the setting up of the Nyikina Cultural Database, enables older recorded visual and audio material to be re-discovered, which itself becomes a talking point for further conversations. This has been an important component of my research.

## Deconstructing the Historical and Anthropological Discourses

18 The subsequent juxtaposition of re-discovered, and often incomplete, Western audio-visual archives and writings, with early recorded voices of Aboriginal people, whether written or audio-visual, enables a re-reading of past events and accepted discourses, and the emergence of a counter-history (Foucault 2003: 69). Alexander Forrest's diary of exploration of the Kimberley can be read jointly with Nyikina Elder Paddy Roe's oral history statement of his grand-parents catching the first glimpse of the party of white men advancing on their country (Durack 1977: 22). Archival newspaper articles relating stories of massacres are re-visited in interviews of Nyikina Elders today re-telling the terrible events (Rosie and Grace Mulligan in *Warlangkoooro-Kandarra, Stories of Noonkanbah Country* 2014). In fact, Rouch viewed film as a therapeutic device, in which people would become aware of, and then 'accommodate, the psychological disjunctions caused by colonialism' (Eaton 1979: 6). In this sense the camera takes on a performative role, and



becomes active rather than passive, an indispensable witness to lived experiences, and a catalyst for taking action – enabling people to give their own evidence of history, and to create their own archive (Foucault 2000). In the Kimberley, performances of the Jandamarra story, focusing on the heroic deeds of the famous resistance fighter, have enabled Kimberley Aboriginal people, as Barbara Glowczewski argues, ‘to digest historical conflicts’ (Glowczewski 2011: 10) and re-interpret and reclaim them through their own oral histories. This is illustrated in the film *Whispering In Our Hearts* (2002), by Mitch Torres, a Nyikina film director, about the Mowla Bluff massacre, which inter-weaves Aboriginal oral stories with police reports of the time, and which proved to be a cathartic experience for the young Nyikina and Mangala men acting in the dramatization scenes of the massacre.

- 19 Appropriated in this way, the film medium can also be a way of reclaiming ‘popular memory’, which is constantly being appropriated and recoded by the dominant power’s institutions (Foucault 2000: 161-162). As Henry Reynolds argues (1999), frontier violence against Aboriginal people was quite openly talked about and not necessarily hidden, contrary to what one may think nowadays. According to Tonkinson, the absence of these accounts in most of the 19th and early 20th century Australian historical writings on the settlement of Australia is conspicuous – referred to by Stanner as an ‘unremembering’ (Tonkinson in Gribble 1987: xiii). Even more conspicuous is the lack of awareness of these accounts within the broader public sphere, which film can somewhat rectify.
- 20 In further deconstructing the historical discourse, police records may shed some light on the treatment of Aboriginal prisoners, particularly in their omissions and silences – but certainly not as vividly and poignantly as Mick Michael Wiljaniny’s interview at the Old Derby Prison in 2008:

*"People been little bit weak, from chain, from hittin"...*

*Kartiya been hit 'im, tracker been hit 'im... with, I don't know, that whip... That stick.*

*I been still workin' strong, from all that whip. Kartiya been hit me all the time, with the stick, or the chain... Or with that rope, that prickly one rope.*

*Hit me, blood come aways, I never go hospital, and still workin'.*

*I am in the gaol house, in ol' man place here... Lookin' at all of them, ol' people from long way, all the police boys, they been working here, cart them people from long way station, bring them up here for court, and I been still here... I been lookin' at all the people from station, bushman people too, with the chain... And all that tree, that two white tree, tied up with the people, tied up with ol' people, and tied up... Lookin' down."*

(Mick Michael Wiljaniny, in Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie, *Three Sisters, Women of High Degree* 2015, 18:35)

- 21 The ‘xenographic’ intents of most early anthropological accounts (Wolfe 1999: 53) can also be re-read, corrected, added to, and re-appropriated in current Native Title applications. Previously undisclosed material can also be produced as an act of resistance, a counter-proposal establishing evidence of another truth, as in *Warlangkooroo-Kandarra, Stories of Noonkanbah Country* (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie 2014). Thus, as Cavadini and Strahan argued (Cavadini et al. 1981), film can be regarded as a process of construction, reconstruction, and transformation.

## The Counter-Discourse: A Multiplicity of Dialogues

- 22 Jessica De Largy Healy (2011), in her work with Yolngu people, uses the term ‘dialogic history’ to describe the process through which historical archives left by anthropologists,

or early filmmakers, can be re-claimed by Aboriginal people today to 'fill in empty spaces' (2011: 64). Relating their own versions of the stories they know, and engaging in a virtual dialogue with their forebears, becomes a way of recognising their contribution, of re-affirming their identity (Pink 2007), and re-appropriating the Western discourses. Thus film as a counter-history becomes not only a way of leaving a cultural record for future generations, but also a way to reinforce the Elders' version of history and re-actualise it. In the process of deconstructing and re-appropriating the historical, anthropological, and development discourses, it is therefore, in Spivak's terms, possible for the subaltern to speak (Spivak 1996), by listening to the numerous voices which intersect dialogically in the past, present, and future – in fact, 'completing the speech act' (Spivak 1996: 292). At this temporal, dialogical intersection, much like in Bookarrakarra, the Nyikina Dreaming, past Elders talk to present Elders, and present Elders talk to the young generations, and future ones. In our documentary, *Three Sisters* (Madjulla Inc., and McDuffie 2015), one such moment occurs when footage from the Noonkanbah events in 1980 and of Elders speaking up against drilling exploration is used, with permission of the families, to demonstrate the position of Kimberley people at the time regarding land rights and mining. On a more personal level, this dialogue also highlights the significance of the media space in connecting with the past, remembering, longing, speaking, and knowing (Pietikäinen 2008: 26). These statements from the past are re-examined in the current neo-colonialist context of rampant industrialisation of the region, and provide a solid point of departure for the current pro-sustainability stance of the Nyikina women I work with, in the development of their collaborative dialogues on wider socio-political issues (Iseke and Moore 2011: 19), and their vision for the future (Srinivasan 2006: 499). The past and the future thus become 'mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive' (Grixti 2011: 3).

- 23 In this dialogic process, our interviews are merely '*individual conversations*' (Doring, personal communication, September 2013). In fact, I often say that I have been interviewing people in the Kimberley for the past eight years and probably have never asked one question! This is because people are not talking directly to the camera, or to me, but to other people around us – we rarely do one-on-one interviews, and there is never a list of questions to answer. So when Lucy speaks in the film, she may be talking to Anne, who is sitting beside me, and more broadly speaking, she is talking to her grandchildren, to future generations, and sometimes to me, as an outsider and a witness, for a wider international audience. This multi-layered process forms part of an inter-generational and inter-personal transmission of knowledge in which Nyikina women can re-affirm their identity, and create new networks of understanding in the context of new social alliances. In a practical sense, such media projects not only promote the women's responsibilities for country, allowing them to reconnect with country through visits to important sites (Standley et al. 2009), but also re-affirm Nyikina identity and kinship networks. In *Warlangkoo-roo-Kandarra, Stories of Noonkanbah Country* (2014), the Mulligan family shares creation stories of, and explains family links to, the country around Calwynyardah. A wish was initially expressed by the family that these stories should be recorded. Through her involvement with the Nyikina-Mangala Native Title claim, Anne Poelina heard of this and facilitated the project, involving family members, myself as the filmmaker, and an anthropologist. We camped for a few days in Calwynyardah for the initial recording in 2013, and I went back in 2014 to do more work with both families and other elders, travelling to other sites of significance and recording stories. Outside of the

inter-generational transmission of knowledge, and the recording of stories of place and country, these trips took on a much more important role: they enabled Anne Poelina, her family, and the Mulligan family to reinforce already-existing kinship ties. Anne was able to further strengthen her relationship with the Noonkanbah community, and the place of birth of her grandmother.

Filmed Conversations: Lucy Marshall, Magali McDuffie, Anne Poelina



Lucy Marshall, Anne Poelina, Magali McDuffie  
Photo by Ian Perdrisat

- 24 As much as the film process forms an integral part of community building, it also comes to reinforce a sense of belonging to a wider network (Pietikäinen 2008: 29). The establishment of new research and collaboration partnerships between Nyikina women and Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientists from France, New Zealand, and the United States over the past four years also illustrates the significant role of the film medium in sharing ideas, networking, and disseminating information, particularly with the use of the internet. Prins and Srinivasan argue that the internet has become 'a vital space for archiving indigenous history, generating pan-Aboriginal dialogue, and informing transnational Web surfers about indigenous concerns' (Prins and Srinivasan, in Santo 2008: 330).
- 25 This is evidenced in the numerous, international Indigenous cross-platforms websites, YouTube, and Facebook sites which have come into existence to showcase positive images of Indigenous people and communities, and inform the global community of Indigenous concerns. Through a bottom-up approach, and by mobilizing grassroots movements and people globally, creating what Appadurai calls deterritorialized 'ethnoscapes' (1996), the vertical, binary relationship of power that characterizes the coloniser/colonised interaction can be challenged from a broader horizontal base, offering a possibility of resistance (Kwok 1999, in Srinivasan 2006: 503). The James Price Point campaign against the construction of a major gas hub north of Broome could be seen as one of the first

environmental campaigns fought almost entirely on social media, connecting 'protectors of country' and their allies nationally and internationally until its successful completion in 2014 (Muir 2012). Our film, *Walmadany Corroboree* (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie 2011), was, again, only one representation and moment in time of this protracted campaign – but also the inscription of an open, inclusive, ceremonial performance into a global space, with its screening at the Human Rights Commission at UNESCO in 2012, and its wide distribution on YouTube.

- 26 Through film, Nyikina women set out to create and foster a network of local and global relationships and connections. It is a world they are part of and want to engage with while retaining and promoting Nyikina identity and values. Our films are a conscious act to bring the facts they record into reality (Turner 1992, in Srinivasan 2006: 500). Local dialogue is always a vital necessity for one of our films to be conceived of and come into existence. Some of our films start as local information films, aimed at informing other Aboriginal communities in the region in a bid to apply the principles of free, prior, and informed consent (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2008, Articles 10, 11, 19, 28, 29, 32). The filmic process itself is thus premised on, allows for, and results in, intra-community and inter-community involvement, encouraging processes of identity-building themselves located in negotiations of complex alliances within what we should regard as heterogeneous, not unified, communities (Valaskakis 1993, in Meadows 2010: 312). *Mardoowarra Living Water* (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie 2012) followed this path, circulating first locally, then nationally at various conferences, to finally be shown in an extraordinary session at the Human Rights Commission at UNESCO in Paris in 2012. *What is Fracking?* (Madjulla Inc. and McDuffie 2015), made for Nyikina communities, is currently being translated into various Aboriginal languages to share information amongst other communities in Northern Australia, with more of an inter-community focus. The filmic process thus enables the women to create a broader network of connections to implement new projects, within new partnerships, and to continue to develop training, educational, self-representation, and more broadly self-determined development initiatives for their communities and others (Standley et al. 2009: 3; Salazar 2009: 509). This multiplicity of dialogues within our filmic methodology is well summarized by Jorgensen:

"The most dialogic ethnography is one based on dialogue (the methodological aspect); consists of dialogue (the epistemological aspect); and ultimately enters into dialogue (disseminating knowledge)." (Jorgensen 2007: 60)

## Film: Process, Perspective, and Performance

- 27 The global mediatization of Indigenous issues raises questions of commodification of culture (Santo 2008: 335). In an attempt to avoid this, our collaboration is always premised on 'our common humanness' (Poelina, personal communication, August 2014). Monetary gain from our films is never a goal, nor an indicator of popularity or success: priorities are not set within the traditional academic, research or distribution outputs. As such, our films are reflective of a meta-cultural dialogic process, in which all participants transcend cultural boundaries to work in a space of shared identities and commonness of aims – what Paul Falzone describes as 'transcendent ethnography' (Falzone 2004: 332). This process identifies the ethnographer as an often-anonymous mediator willing to forego career success and monetary gain for an ethnographic practice based on idealism, trust, confidentiality, and the empowerment of participants themselves (Falzone 2004:

332-335). Rouch conceived of the camera as an 'accelerator', allowing people to reveal themselves more rapidly than they would have otherwise, provided that trust be the essential founding element of their relationship with the filmmaker. In this process the filmmaker was not only accepted by the participants, but also integrated in the action (Eaton 1979). Paul Falzone describes this as belonging to an 'in-group' or 'out-group' status, in which the researcher, or filmmaker, is able to transcend their identity as a member of the out-group to achieve some level of in-group status, by working towards a superordinate goal which supersedes individual identities (Falzone 2004: 330-331). In our particular case, these superordinate goals could be described as shared environmental, socio-political, and family values – what Terence Turner describes as a 'convergence' of theoretical views and political values which drive the researcher to adopt an interventionist approach and become an active participant / activist in his or her collaborators' lives (Turner 1991:71-72). In my position as a filmmaker I am a catalyst, or a facilitator (Ruby 1995: 78) whose presence facilitates the women's initiatives, and promotes their agency, but I also have my own voice.

- 28 In this dialogic process, film perspective, and the position of the filmmaker as an outsider within, has to be examined. The films we make are 'Jimbin Kaboo' – from the inside to the outside. They are made by, with, and for the women, on their terms – not about them: content is determined by the women's priorities at the time of filming. We never work with a script, and the choice of locations, interviewees, themes, and stories are the women's only: they develop their own methodologies (Standley et al. 2009: 3). However, this is often a tricky balancing act, as I, as a filmmaker, also do have to make quite significant editorial decisions. Starting out as an almost invisible observer, or so I thought, I have had to concede that my position is much more complex and multi-layered: I am not invisible – a turning-point in the understanding of my role being the expectation of the women that I had to appear in our documentary, *Three Sisters* (2015). The knowledge of the women, their lived experiences, and their vision of the world, shape the content of our films – something that Pault, describing Jean Rouch's work with his Nigerien friends, calls an 'open-ended interaction' (Pault in Jorgensen 2007: 64), a process in which the filmmaker is strongly influenced by the participants' perceptions of reality. I must understand the women's world view in order to edit a film which will reflect it. For a French filmmaker with no prior knowledge of Nyikina ontologies, the visual inscription of landscape in the films, essential to ground the women in their cultural landscapes, required a long learning process – a shot which may look like a pan over an empty landscape to European or Australian eyes, will be loaded with meaning for an Aboriginal person (Michaels 1994: 93), as they will see ancestors' tracks, stories, and ceremonial places where a non-Indigenous audience will see only a creek, or a desert landscape. In *Three Sisters* (2015), the Mardoowarra (Fitzroy River) is a prominent character in the film, in which images of water, billabongs, creeks, soaks, springs, and significant sites on the river, are interwoven in the conversations with the women, through slow dissolves, as the river making its own statement of presence and existence – emphasizing the use of film as 'witness of place' (Verran and Christie 2007: 5). When Jeannie Wabi saw the completed film for the first time, and I asked her what she thought of it, she replied: '*proper water that one. Proper water...*' (Jeannie Wabi, personal communication, 2014). *Three Sisters* (2015) is not a film one could make in one short trip – it is a film that emerged after seven years of conversations, and, on my part, from a very progressive, albeit still minimal, understanding of Nyikina culture. For instance, the

telling of the story of Woonyoomboo, at the very start of the film, in which separate accounts of several Elders recorded at different times and in different places on the river are edited together and interwoven with images of the Woonyoomboo Story book, and shots of river and country, could only be edited in that way after I, as the filmmaker, had learned some Nyikina language, but more importantly, had understood the complexity, rhythm, and richness of the story: indeed, the rhythm of a story (or song), cannot be played with or altered – and two images cannot just be juxtaposed randomly and out of context (Glowczewski 2005: 27). The deep learning-to-listen, and learning-to-see, in the act of ‘becoming’ (Muecke 1994: 3), and the ensuing reciprocal relatedness, are only possible through long-term, close relationships with participants.

- 29 Film is both product, and process: a ‘finished’ film can only offer a small window over a much broader process of collaboration (Falzone 2004: 331) and cultural mediation (Ginsburg 1995: 256) in time and space. Over time, kaleidoscopic parts of stories and country, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, slowly assemble to create a broader web of meaning from which emerges a film which can be re-visited and re-edited at regular intervals for the needs of different audiences, or as external circumstances evolve and change. As such, our films are never a ‘finished product’ but are endowed with a fluidity characteristic of Aboriginal ontologies, illustrating the notion that culture is always ‘poised, in transition, between different positions’ (Hall 1992: 310).
- 30 Thus, the fundamental dialogic component of our methodology leads to a multiplicity of personal and inter-personal potentialities of relatedness, referred to by Langton as an inter-action, or inter-textuality between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Langton 1993: 35). Stephen Muecke describes this as an ‘in-betweenness’: when our collaborative paths cross, they create a third entity of mutual understanding, a ‘dialogue situation in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people participate in a mutual construction of identities’ (Muecke 1994: 251).
- 31 The films we make are a performative device connecting people to themselves and others locally, nationally, and internationally. In fact, they are the ultimate performance, encompassing all other cultural actions and acts of resistance into a visual interpretive story which is simultaneously a visual act of inscription and a unique lived experience of Indigenous singularities (Glowczewski 2011: 2), renewing old and forming new social alliances with other Indigenous singularities across Australia and non-Indigenous people across the world, much like in the rhizome effect described by Deleuze and Guattari (1972-1980). Multiple points of views are necessary for a ritual, in our case, a film, to be performed from a variety of positions, so that society as a whole can be regenerated (Glowczewski 2005: 27-28; 34), thus ‘allowing the emergence of meanings and performances, encounters, and creations as new original autonomous flows’ (Glowczewski 2005: 34).
- 32 As filmmakers, we can only tell good stories by living them, positioning ourselves within them, but we also become the stories we tell...

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## ABSTRACTS

Using film as a decolonizing methodology, in a collaborative and emancipatory action research framework, Magali McDuffie's research explores Nyikina women's aspirations for sustainable community development on their country in North-Western Australia, and their resistance to neo-colonial oppression. By carrying out a Foucauldian deconstruction of the historical, anthropological, and development discourses which have influenced their lived experiences, Magali reflects on the women's strategies of resistance (cultural actions, economic and self-determination initiatives), where film plays a paramount role in not only reclaiming the dominant discourses, but also re-affirming Nyikina identity, and disseminating knowledge. The films produced are thus both a dialogic and performative device connecting people to themselves and others locally, nationally, and internationally. As visual acts of inscription, they present a unique lived experience of Aboriginal singularities, renewing old and forming new social alliances with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, across Australia and the world.

En utilisant le film comme méthode de décolonisation, dans le cadre d'une recherche-action participative et émancipatrice, le doctorat de Magali McDuffie explore les aspirations des femmes nyikina en ce qui concerne le développement de leurs terres, situées dans la région des

Kimberleys, au nord-ouest de l'Australie, ainsi que leurs stratégies de résistance face à l'oppression néo-coloniale.

Par l'intermédiaire d'une déconstruction foucaldienne du discours historique, anthropologique, et des concepts de développement eurocentriques qui ont influencé leurs expériences vécues, Magali McDuffie évoque les stratégies de résistance des femmes nyikina (actions culturelles, initiatives économiques et d'auto-détermination), où le film joue un rôle primordial, non seulement pour contrer le discours dominant, mais aussi pour ré-affirmer l'identité nyikina, et diffuser la cosmologie nyikina à travers le monde. Les films produits sont donc à la fois un dialogue et une représentation qui engendrent des connections au niveau local, national et international. En tant qu'actes visuels d'appartenance, ils présentent une expérience vécue unique de singularités autochtones, renouvelant à la fois des connections ancestrales et instaurant de nouvelles alliances géo-politiques avec d'autres peuples, autochtones ou non-autochtones, à travers l'Australie et dans le monde entier.

Utilizando el cine como un método de descolonización dentro del marco de la investigación participativa y emancipatoria, el doctorado de Magali McDuffie explora las aspiraciones de las mujeres nyikina en relación al desarrollo de sus tierras, situadas en la región de Kimberleys, en el noreste de Australia, así como sus estrategias de resistencia contra la opresión neocolonial.

Mediante una deconstrucción foucaltiniana del discurso histórico y antropológico, así como de los conceptos de desarrollo eurocéntricos que han influenciado las experiencias vividas de las mujeres nyikina, Magali McDuffie evoca las estrategias de resistencia de estas mujeres (acciones culturales, iniciativas económicas y autodeterminación), donde el cine puede jugar un rol primordial, no solamente para oponerse al discurso dominante, sino también para reafirmar la identidad nyikina y su cosmología por todo el mundo. Las películas producidas son pues a la vez un diálogo et una representación que generan conexiones a nivel local, nacional e internacional. En tanto que actos visuales de pertenencia, presentan una experiencia vivida única hecha de singularidades autóctonas, reanudando a la vez conexiones ancestrales e instaurando nuevas alianzas geopolíticas con otros pueblos, autóctonos y no autóctonos, a través de Australia y del mundo entero.

## INDEX

**Palabras claves:** Culturas aborígenes, Pueblos Autóctonos, Australia Occidental, Kimberley, Pueblo Nyikina, Cine Etnográfico, Política, Entorno, Resistencia, Desarrollo

**Keywords:** Aboriginal cultures, Western Australia, Kimberley, Nyikina, Ethnographic Films, Politics, Environment, Resilience, Resistance, Development

**Mots-clés:** Cultures aborigènes, Peuples autochtones, Australie Occidentale, Kimberley, Peuple Nyikina, Film ethnographique, Politique, Environnement, Résilience, Résistance, Développement

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