NOONGAR DANDJOO: A Cross-Cultural Collaborative Approach to Aboriginal Community Television Production.

Coming Together by Dale Tilbrook

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor Philosophy of Murdoch University

2013
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Ethics approval number: 2009/067
ABSTRACT

Prior to commencing this PhD project, my research into community media revealed that Aboriginal people were mostly absent from Perth community television. In spite of participating in a consortium to establish community television in Perth, the Aboriginal community had not broadcast a single program by 2006 when this PhD project commenced. In this same year, the only Aboriginal community radio station in the south-west lost its licence and the local Noongar community were working towards re-establishing their radio presence. Thus, while Aboriginal community media in other parts of Australia were experiencing considerable success, Perth Aboriginal media appeared to be struggling. This prompted a series of questions that this research set out to investigate. How did the Perth Aboriginal community feel about community media? How strongly if at all did they want their voices to be part of the public sphere? Were there circumstances, particular to Perth, that were impeding the establishment of Aboriginal community media? What were the ingredients needed to establish successful Aboriginal community media in an urban environment like Perth?

The answers to these questions were sought through the production of an Aboriginal magazine-style television program series called Noongar Dandjoo, named after the Noongar tribal group who are the traditional custodians of the land in the south-west of Western Australia. Dandjoo is the Noongar word for ‘gathering’.

This project used an action research approach to investigate not only the creative outcome, Noongar Dandjoo, but also the all-important process of its production. The broadcast content provides evidence of the power of community media to support culture, contribute to a sense of community identity, and challenge mainstream media stereotypes and misrepresentation. The participatory process of production enables Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants to create a ‘third space’ which delivers benefits for all, and which emerges as a model for cross-cultural
collaboration. For Indigenous participants, the program contributes to a sense of empowerment as well as developing communication and production skills. Non-Indigenous media students participating in the program develop their cultural awareness and empathy for Indigenous issues, which in turn impacts on mainstream media representation as these same students are employed as media professionals.

The *Noongar Dandjoo* project is described within the context of Noongar history and culture, and community media theory and practice. The action research method is adapted to align with Indigenous ethical protocols and third space theory.

This thesis is accompanied by DVD copies of three series of *Noongar Dandjoo* which illustrate the action research process.
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ACRONYMS

ABC – Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABA – Australian Broadcasting Authority
ACDP – Aboriginal Communities Development Program
ACMA – Australian Communications and Media Authority
ADS – Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service
AFC – Australian Film Commission
AMC – Alternative Media Centre
ANU – Australian National University
APC – Australian Press Council
ARC – Australian Research Council
ATSIC – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee
BRACS – Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
CAAMA – Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association
CAS – Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies
CBAA – Community Broadcasting Association of Australia
DAA – Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DCITA – Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts
DEIR – Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
ICTV – Indigenous Community Television
MCCA – Media Culture and Creative Arts (Curtin University)
MEAA – Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance
MoU – Memorandum of Understanding
NAIDOC – National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NGO – Non-Government Organisation
NHMRC – National Health and Medical Research Council
NITV – National Indigenous Television
NNMA – Noongar Nation Media Association
RCIADIC – Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
RMIT – Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SBS – Special Broadcasting Services
SWALSC – South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
UNESCO – United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VAST – Viewer Access Satellite Television
WAALS – Western Australian Aboriginal Legal Service
WAAMA – Western Australian Aboriginal Media Association
WAARA – Western Australian Aboriginal Radio Association
WACC – World Association of Christian Communicators (WACC)
WAIT – Western Australian Institute of Technology
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research and writing of this thesis and the production of the Noongar Dandjoo television program is the result of my collaboration with many people over a period of more than seven years. The time taken to complete this project has been integral to its success because it is a project built on relationships and I have learnt through this process that real relationships take time to grow and bear fruit. Each of the relationships I have formed over the course of this PhD project has played an important part in shaping and guiding it. To remove the contribution of any one of the people I acknowledge here is to change the outcome of the Noongar Dandjoo project.

At the very heart of the Noongar Dandjoo television program is its host, Dennis Simmons. He has volunteered his time and energy to my students, to me, and to the program since its inception in 2007. Dennis has been the cultural bridge that brings us all together in a space filled with music, humour and friendship. Without Dennis the experience of creating our program could possibly have been a less positive one and certainly a less enjoyable one. My heart-felt thanks go to him and his beautiful family.

I wish to thank the Aboriginal people of Perth who have participated in this project. They have been generous with their time, their stories and their patience. They have been tolerant of my naïveté and forgiving of my mistakes. Michelle White, in particular, has been a valuable source of advice and ideas. The Noongar staff at the Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS), as members of the Perth community, play a special role here and have been welcoming and generous in guiding us through their culture and community. I wish to thank and acknowledge in particular Jeannie Morrisson, Cheryl Taylor and Dean Collard. Their help has been invaluable.
The students who have worked with me over the years have been enthusiastic in their willingness to come with me on a journey through an unfamiliar culture and community. Working with them has provided insights and knowledge about cross-cultural collaboration that I would not have discovered on my own. I thank them for their hard work and creativity, which is evident in the television programs that accompany this thesis.

My journalism colleague and friend, Russell Bishop, has worked with me on the production of each series of *Noongar Dandjoo* and provided the journalistic expertise needed for the program. Russell trusted my ideas and processes when we adopted participatory production techniques that were sometimes at odds with the professional, journalistic practices of the industry he proudly represents. His advice, patience and creative input have been invaluable and I feel fortunate that our paths converged to produce a relationship that has been crucial to the success of this project.

Glen Stasiuk is a Noongar man, a Murdoch University academic and a filmmaker. He volunteered to assist me as a cultural advisor throughout my PhD project. With my own lack of experience and knowledge of Aboriginal people and culture, Glen has provided advice, support and encouragement. Furthermore, he has always done so in a way that allowed me to feel safe and confident in exploring unfamiliar territory.

Kim Collard introduced me to the Ganma metaphor and the concept of third space when I attended one of his cultural workshops in the early stages of my PhD project. He has been generous in sharing his cultural knowledge and providing me with the *Coming Together* image that so effectively illustrates the idea of third space, Ganma and cross-cultural collaboration.

Thanks to Michael Woodley, Lorraine Coppin and all the people I had the privilege of meeting at the Juluwarlu media centre in Roebourne. I visited Juluwarlu in the early stages of my PhD when I was looking for a direction
to take that would allow me to better understand Aboriginal community media. Michael and Lorraine invited me on a ‘trip to country’ that I will remember as one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. My experience at Juluwarlu pointed me down the path that produced the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program. Thank you.

My supervisors Gail Phillips and Mia Lindgren have patiently encouraged and guided me since I first connected with them as an Honours student. They have trusted in my process and my ideas as this project evolved and developed over so many years. Gail in particular continues to amaze me with her knowledge, wisdom and hard work. She has not only been an excellent supervisor but also a role model for me as an early career researcher and academic. Thanks to you both. I feel so fortunate to have had you with me on this journey of discovery and learning.

My partner, Ron Elliott, has continued to support and encourage me throughout this project by engaging with my ideas, listening to me as I wrestle with choices and doubts, and steering me back on track when I’ve been distracted. The discipline and work ethic that he brings to his own writing have been an example to me. Thank you for all the things you do for me every day. My family too have been a source of encouragement and support – especially my daughter, Jessica, who has accompanied me on shoots and trips, and is always willing to help and ready to listen to my stories and ideas. Thanks also to Lynn Roarty for her time and care in proof reading my thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the Aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so (Stanner 1968, 25).

These are the words of anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, taken from his 1968 Boyer lecture\(^1\) entitled *The Great Australian Silence*. Stanner’s criticism of Australia’s blindness and indifference to its Indigenous people can be extended to the nation’s media who have been complicit in that silence. Indigenous academic Marcia Langton echoes Stanner’s criticism with her own observations of the media: “The easiest and most natural form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible” (1993, 24).

Until recently, Aboriginal voices have been not only absent from Australia’s history books but also from our television screens, our newspapers and our radios. Indigenous academic Colin Bourke argues that Aboriginal people “are hostage” (2003, 1) to images created by non-Indigenous Australians because in the past white experts controlled the lives of Aboriginal people and spoke in the media on their behalf. For much of white Australia, the media are the main channels of knowledge

\(^1\) The Boyer Lectures are named after Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Board member Sir Richard Boyer. He first suggested the annual lecture series that features prominent Australians chosen by the ABC board.
about Aboriginal people and audiences became familiar with two common media representations – the Aborigine as the subject of protection, and the Aborigine as the subject of correction. The first was the romantic image of the noble savage, the primitive, traditional Aborigine who lived in the bush and was in need of our protection; the second was the “synthetic, town-dwelling half-cast” who was to be feared and was the subject of correction (Mickler 1998, 100; Hartley and McKee 2000, 84). The good news is media representation of Aboriginal people is changing and Aboriginal people themselves can be credited for much of that change. Today there are Indigenous filmmakers, journalists and writers who are creating their own images of Aboriginality and ensuring their voices are heard. Recent cinema success stories such as *The Sapphires* (Blair 2012) and *Samson and Delilah* (Thornton 2009) are evidence of mainstream audiences engaging with Indigenous media. There is still work to be done, however, in repairing the damage done to Indigenous cultures and communities. If reconciliation is the objective, then the media play an important role and all Australians must participate in that work – not just as media producers, but also as audiences who can choose to listen to Aboriginal voices.

**Culture and Community Media**

At the time of white settlement Australia’s Aboriginal people were comprised of more than 250 language groups. Today, colonisation and forced assimilation have reduced that number to fewer than half of these language groups and many of those languages are in danger of extinction. While the federal government has abandoned assimilation policies to promote an agenda of self-determination for Aboriginal people, it is now the mass media that pose one of the biggest threats to traditional Aboriginal language and culture. In the words of one Torres Strait Islander man, in 1988, when television was introduced to the islands:

I feel they’re going to destroy the culture … if the commercial TV goes non-stop, then we’ll find that the younger people will lose the
culture that’s been given to us from generation to generation (Meadows 1995, 184).

In 1985 the launch of the AUSSAT satellite would deliver, for the first time, a television service to central Australia. For the large population of Aboriginal people who lived in central Australia there were mixed sentiments about the new technology. Many saw it as a threat to traditional language and culture – as a “cultural nerve gas” or a “neutron bomb that kills the people but leaves the buildings standing” (Meadows and Molnar 2001, 48). The Warlpiri Media Association, fearing the consequences that television would have on their remote community, chose to “fight fire with fire” (Meadows and Molnar 2001, 49), and on 1 April, 1985 they commenced a pirate broadcast of their own locally-produced television programs. Australian community television was born, and since then it has been in remote and regional Australian communities such as Yuendumu, where Warlpiri media are located, that Indigenous community media have been most successful and highly valued.

Community media in Australia, prior to the 1990’s, were largely ignored by academics and maligned by Australian audiences. This marginal and amateur status was an indication that Australians did not recognize the potential for community media to be a tool for social justice, to contribute to a democratic media and a healthy public sphere. However, in the last two decades the sector has grown in status as government legislation has acknowledged the important role community media play, particularly for marginalised and disenfranchised communities that are frequently ignored or stereotyped by mainstream media. Growth of the community media sector has also been aided by increasing academic research that has helped define the sector and contributed to a better understanding and appreciation of the role it plays. This research has revealed that community media is highly valued by Australian Indigenous and ethnic communities in particular and that these communities in fact represent the very reason community media was established in Australia (see Forde and colleagues 2009). Indigenous and ethnic community media demonstrate
how community media contribute to the maintenance of language and culture, and to creating a sense of identity and community.

Unlike the mass media that represent Aboriginal people as one national homogenous culture, community media recognise the diversity of Aboriginal culture. They are ideally suited to traditional Aboriginal culture because, as anthropologist Eric Michaels suggests, the "mass media is the inverse of the traditional and personal [Aboriginal] information exchange system" (1986, 3). By producing their own media, Aboriginal people can ensure that programs are produced and broadcast in culturally appropriate ways. Aboriginal community media organisations such as the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in Alice Springs and Goolari Media in Broome have an impressive track record of production and community support. These community media organisations are contributing to the maintenance of Aboriginal language and culture, and to a sense of identity for their respective communities. These are organisations where production and broadcast outcomes are wholly controlled by Aboriginal people.

While the aim for Indigenous controlled and produced media continues to be a priority for Indigenous people, it is inevitable that Aboriginal people will continue to be the subject of media produced by non-Indigenous people. With growing awareness of how the media have contributed negatively to racist attitudes and hampered the progress of reconciliation, there is also recognition of the potential for a positive media that can promote issues of social justice and be a tool for social change. Non-Indigenous program producers and broadcasters, especially the public broadcasters, are turning their attention to Aboriginal issues and employing industry protocols that attempt to ensure culturally sensitive representations of Aboriginal people and their stories. Unfortunately this is not the case for all genres of media, and the news media continue to be regarded with suspicion and hostility by the majority of Aboriginal people. It is commercial imperatives that now dictate the news cycle and professional journalists do not have the time or the resources that are
needed to seek out alternative and less accessible voices (see Davies, 2008). Even the public broadcasters with their limited funding must do more with less. This in turn impacts on the representation of Aboriginal voices and stories by the news media. An absence of Aboriginal voices in the news media is problematic because news and current affairs programs contribute significantly to the mainstream public consciousness, to political processes, and to public debate (Langton 1993, 5).

This thesis will argue that community media has an important role to play in addressing the absence of Aboriginal voices from the Australian public sphere. It will demonstrate how community media can be a vehicle for cultural maintenance and identity-building for Aboriginal people. It will also show, in terms of community impact, that the process of making the program is as important as the program itself.

_Noongar Dandjoo_

The traditional custodians of the land on which Perth is located are the Noongar people and it is home to a relatively large Aboriginal community. In 2006, when I commenced this PhD project, Perth was also home to a number of successful community radio stations and one community television station, Access 31. At that time, the Perth Aboriginal community rarely participated in community media. There had been an Aboriginal radio station, but this had recently shut down after twelve years of broadcasting. Access 31 had not broadcast a single Aboriginal program since its inception. Aboriginal community media in regional Western Australia was experiencing significant success, so what was happening in Perth that prevented the Aboriginal community from creating their own media? Did the Perth community want to create their own media? If so, what were the ingredients that would contribute to the successful creation and maintenance of Aboriginal community media in Perth? These questions became the subject of my PhD research.
The answers to these questions were explored over six years through a series of television programs called *Noongar Dandjoo* that I produced with my media students at Curtin University in collaboration with the Perth Aboriginal community. The decision to produce a cross-cultural collaborative program such as this raised new questions for my research and a new focus for this project. What approach to production can be employed that will contribute to a successful cross-cultural collaborative project such as *Noongar Dandjoo*? How can non-Indigenous students work with the Aboriginal community to produce a program with positive outcomes for all participants?

The answer for a cross-cultural collaborative project such as this is participatory action research. Employing an action research approach to the production of *Noongar Dandjoo* ensured that all participants, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, community and students, would benefit from the production. Action research allowed us to accommodate and respect cultural protocols and ensure that the program was truly representative of the Aboriginal people who chose to participate. There was no precedent that I was aware of for an action research approach to television production. Professional television production is a hierarchical and non-democratic process. Professional production techniques are employed to ensure the efficient use of time and resources to produce a television program that meets industry standards and audience expectations. How would participatory production techniques impact on our production processes?

An action research participatory process for our television production did evolve successfully and eventually proved to be as important, if not more important, than the program artifact itself. Furthermore the program’s process of production created what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as a ‘third space’ whereby two different cultures come together, learn from each other, and both are changed by the experience. Students’ personal interaction with the community resulted in a significant change in their attitudes towards Aboriginal people, and this was illustrated by feedback.
recorded over the course of the program’s production. Over time it would become apparent that this experience was not only contributing to the process of reconciliation for the participating students, but also for the wider community. As graduating students took up professional employment in mainstream media newsrooms their *Noongar Dandjoo* experience would start to impact on the mainstream representation of Aboriginal people, and therefore, on mainstream audiences. There is evidence that *Noongar Dandjoo* had not only achieved its objective of giving a community media voice to the Perth Aboriginal community, it was also working as what Tanja Dreher (2010) describes as a community media intervention. The program was not only speaking to a marginalised community media audience, it was also impacting on a larger mainstream audience.

**A Personal Journey**

This thesis and the accompanying DVDs represent an important personal journey for me. At the start of the project, when I recognised the absence of Perth’s Aboriginal community from the media, I was naïve about Aboriginal people and culture and had no idea where to begin to address the problem. I was advised by friends and colleagues to rethink my plans and I was warned of the pitfalls others had experienced when attempting Indigenous projects. However, it seemed to me that therein lay the problem: if issues of Indigenous disadvantage and social justice are ignored because they are ‘too hard’ or ‘too complex’ then how will the problems ever be resolved? I wanted at least to try.

The negative representation of young Aboriginal people is one of the biggest issues in the Perth media and so as a first step I volunteered to work with teenagers at Clontarf Aboriginal College. The college is located in Perth and attracts senior high school Aboriginal students from all over Western Australia. For two years I taught them filmmaking skills and helped them tell their own stories with video. Over this time it became clear that Clontarf did not really connect with the Perth Aboriginal
community. It could not, therefore, facilitate the connections needed to enable a community television production, and so did not fit with the objectives of my PhD project. How could I bring together the people, the equipment and the budget needed to produce a TV program? It was then that I decided to explore the idea of pursuing this as a University teaching project. I would then have the necessary equipment and technical infrastructure at my disposal, along with trainee journalists and crews who would themselves be able to benefit from a cross-cultural collaboration. While the program would not be made by Aboriginal people as I had originally intended, I could at least explore a production process with Aboriginal people. This process is described in the chapters that follow.

**Thesis Structure**

The structure and content of this thesis is informed by action research that requires the researcher to work with community participants to produce practical solutions to a problem. All participants contribute to the research process and solutions are found through action, although action is not the only outcome of an action research project. Self-reflection and reporting are equally important, because the sharing of knowledge and processes is what defines a successful action research project. Furthermore, the researcher informs his/her action research process by exploring and understanding the literature relevant to the issue, and by learning as much as possible about the community – the stakeholders – with whom he/she is collaborating. Action research is a constant cycle of look, think, and act, and so the structure of this thesis has been guided by these three stages (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998; Stringer, 2008; Tacchi, 2003). The early chapters of the thesis represent the ‘looking’ stage and provide the background, history and theory that are essential to a successful action research project. The final chapter and the DVDs represent the ‘think’ and ‘act’ stages, encompassing the production of the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program, as well as the thinking and reflection that resulted from that action.
Chapter One discusses the theoretical elements of the project that have informed many of the choices made about the *Noongar Dandjoo* production. The chapter explores the issues of media representation of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal identity in the context of community media which has demonstrated its ability to contribute to community and cultural identity. The theory of ‘third space’ is also discussed. Traditionally associated with post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha it is an abstract concept that is not easily defined and has been adopted by diverse disciplines as a way of explaining a meeting point in which difference is negotiated, power is challenged, and new concepts are born. Some of these alternative definitions of third space are also discussed in this chapter, but of particular importance to this thesis is the Ganma Metaphor, an Aboriginal concept of third space which describes the coming together of salt water and fresh water. It will be argued that community media in general, Indigenous community media, and *Noongar Dandjoo* in particular, offer a third space experience for participants where two cultures meet, difference is explored and understood, and people experience change.

As an academic research project as well as a television production it was essential that *Noongar Dandjoo* adhere to the cultural protocols that govern both domains. Chapter Two outlines the protocols for working with Indigenous people published by the Australian film and television industry, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), and the Media and Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA). These are important and useful guidelines for any non-Indigenous person undertaking a cross-cultural production or research project. However, the protocols are frequently problematic and do not ensure smooth sailing even for those who have apparently followed them to the letter. This chapter explores some of the issues that have emerged in relation to the published protocols, drawing on personal interviews with Aboriginal people as well as the accounts of Australian filmmakers who have worked with Indigenous people.
Chapter Three focuses on the methodology for the Noongar Dandjoo project, arguing that an action research approach may help to overcome some of the problems people have encountered when working with the established protocols. While the protocols are a useful starting point, participatory action research suggests a way of working that allows all participants to recognise and adapt to the specific circumstances of an individual project. Each community and each project is unique, and action research recognises this diversity and offers a way of working that is customised to each individual project. It recognises the frequently messy nature of life and of our communities. It recognises that mistakes are inevitable but that we learn from those mistakes and therefore improve our practice. The action research cycle demands reflection and reporting, and so this chapter outlines some of the essential aspects of an action research report. There are also important connections between action research, Ganma, and third space that are explored here.

Since Noongar Dandjoo was conceived and produced as a community media project, Chapter Four explores and defines community media with a particular emphasis on television and on Indigenous community media. Community media takes on diverse forms, but news media and journalistic practice are a focus in this chapter because the commercial imperatives of mainstream media are having a detrimental impact on news and information programs (see Davies 2008). The chapter shows how community media are well placed to provide an independent and alternative voice to mainstream journalism.

Chapter Five introduces the concept of three different Indigenous media models as articulated by the anthropologist Eric Michaels. In response to the federal government’s proposed launch of a satellite that would introduce television into central Australia, Michaels identified assimilation, pan-Aboriginalisation and cultural maintenance as three distinct types of Indigenous media, each supporting a different social model and contributing to a different public sphere. Michaels favoured the community media model because it was most suited to traditional Aboriginal culture,
but this thesis argues that all three Indigenous media models are essential, especially for an urban Aboriginal community like the Noongar community in Perth. Government funding initiatives and policies have demonstrated a lack of understanding of these different media models and the essential role each of them plays in contemporary Aboriginal Australia. Attempts to bundle all Indigenous media into one basket have been problematic. This chapter uses the Indigenous media organisations in central Australia as an example of the different models and discusses the launch of National Indigenous Television (NITV) and the consequences of the launch for Indigenous Community Television (ICTV).

As mentioned previously, action research requires the researcher to explore and understand the history and culture of a community in order to better understand the context of the problem his/her research will address. Chapters Six and Seven therefore provide the history of the Perth Aboriginal community and their media. These chapters attempt to explain the complexity of the Perth Aboriginal community and how their history has contributed to issues of identity and a struggle to maintain their own community media. When this PhD project commenced in 2006, Aboriginal community radio, established by the WA Aboriginal Media Association (WAAMA), had recently stopped broadcasting in Perth. The failure of WAAMA provides some valuable lessons for the future of Perth’s Aboriginal community media as well as other Indigenous community media organisations. In the absence of any other comprehensive overview, WAAMA’s history has been pieced together here with reference to government documentation, media reports, and personal interviews with the Aboriginal people who participated. It tells the story of how a strong cultural and community identity is essential to the success of Indigenous community media. This chapter proposes that it is this ingredient that has been most elusive for the Perth Aboriginal community and it is this ingredient that is contributing now to the success of a new Noongar radio station.
Chapter Eight is written in the form of an action research report that describes the production of *Noongar Dandjoo*, presents the feedback from the students and Aboriginal participants of the program, and reflects on the lessons learnt from the process of production. DVD copies of the three series of the *Noongar Dandjoo* program accompany this thesis and it is suggested that these are sampled before reading the chapter, then viewed more closely after reading. If the program is viewed and assessed purely on its production values, or on its appeal to a mainstream audience, then that assessment may fail to acknowledge the importance of the process of its production. The program was produced by undergraduate students at Curtin University, and broadcast on Perth community television and then on NITV with the primary objective of giving a media voice to the Perth Noongar community. *Noongar Dandjoo* was not produced for a mainstream broadcaster, and therefore, like any community media program, should not be judged by the same standards as a mainstream program. Its process of production is not evident on a simple viewing, hence this chapter – in reality an action research report – is essential to understanding its achievements and value. Interviews with students and Aboriginal participants are introduced as evidence of the program’s success and confirm its function as a third space that contributes to reconciliation.

The thesis concludes by arguing that the *Noongar Dandjoo* project offers a potential model for other cross-cultural media projects. The participatory action research process can be adapted to many other community or cross-cultural situations. The essential ingredient for success here is a desire by all participants to achieve a common goal. At the start of the project I had not anticipated how many wonderful Aboriginal people I would meet along the way, how much I would learn about Aboriginal people and culture, and how much I would be changed by this journey. My hope, therefore, is that others will be encouraged by my experience and accept the challenge of undertaking research and work that contributes to Indigenous social justice. There are rewards and benefits
for all who participate in such ventures – for the Indigenous participants, the non-Indigenous researcher, for the whole community.

On a final note, the words *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* are, of course, used throughout the thesis. I have heard people, on many occasions, take offence at being described as either one or the other – *Indigenous* or *Aboriginal*. A person may object by saying, for example, “I am Noongar” or “I am Koori”. Many others don’t object to either term. Both words, *Indigenous* and *Aboriginal*, are controversial in their use and emotionally loaded and so I wish to explain my use of the two terms and the Western Australian context in which I use them. I use the word *Indigenous*, and always with a capital ‘I’, to refer to the many individual and diverse first-people cultures in Australia and in other countries. Mostly the term *Indigenous* is used in a national context. Some Australian writers do not use the term *Indigenous* and prefer instead always to describe Australia’s first people as *Aboriginal* and *Torres Strait Islanders*. Western Australia does not have a large Torres Strait Islander population as most Islanders live on the east coast of Australia, especially in Queensland, hence my preference for the word *Indigenous*. Western Australia is home to a large number of Aboriginal cultures and *Noongar* is the name of the Aboriginal people whose traditional land is the south-west corner of Western Australia, including Perth. I use the term *Aboriginal* when referring to more than one of these diverse West Australian cultures. I do not use the term *Noongar* when referring to the Perth Aboriginal community in general because, in spite of living in Noongar country, there are many Aboriginal people living in Perth who are not Noongar. They come from other regions of Western Australia and therefore identify with a different culture. Whenever possible, if someone identifies with a particular Aboriginal culture, such as *Noongar*, then I have used that word to describe them (for a map of Australian Indigenous language groups see [http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/](http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/)).
CHAPTER 1

Theoretical Foundations – A Literature Review

In February 2011, Reconciliation Australia released the results of a 2010 survey that gauged the sentiments of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians towards each other and towards Indigenous issues. Called the Australian Reconciliation Barometer it shows that there is still room for improvement in the relationship between black and white Australia. As indicated in Illustration 1 below, the statistics are most concerning in relation to the representation of Indigenous people by the media, issues of trust, and white Australia’s lack of knowledge about Indigenous Australia (Stolper & Hammond 2010). The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal culture and a lack of knowledge and understanding about that culture are, among other things, two of the obstacles that hamper the progress of reconciliation. But how do we first define Aboriginal culture in the 21st century? Any definition of culture needs to recognise it as something that evolves, responds and changes to environmental influences. To a large extent, definitions of Indigenous culture have been created by the dominant colonising culture and these definitions are tied up in romantic perceptions of the primitive and authentic as represented by anthropologists and historians. Furthermore, the media, as a powerful influencing factor on what we know and understand about Aboriginal culture and Indigenous issues, are another contributing factor to non-Indigenous Australia’s sentiments about Aboriginal Australia. How can media contribute to solutions, contribute to reconciliation? These are issues that are addressed by this project and specifically through the production of the community television program *Noongar Dandjoo.*
Illustration 1: Australian Reconciliation Barometer

(Reconciliation Australia 2011, 5)
They are issues that are better understood through the theoretical lenses of post-colonialism, Indigenous identity, Indigenous media representation and community media. The following is a review of the literature that has contributed significantly to each of these areas of research and has, therefore, shaped this research project.

**Media Power and Representation**

A headline in the *Koori Mail* on April 6, 2011 reads “Nine Sue Over Race Identity Comments”. Herald Sun columnist, Andrew Bolt, is accused of racially vilifying nine fair-skinned Aboriginal people. In one of his articles, “It’s so hip to be Black”, Bolt writes:

> I’m saying only that this self-identification as Aboriginal strikes me as self-obsessed and driven more by politics than by any racial reality … That’s modern race politics at our universities and anywhere else where grants and privilege are now doled out. Hear that scuffling at the trough? That’s the sound of black people being elbowed out by white people shouting ‘But I’m Aboriginal too’…(quoted in Parker 2011, 7).

Because Bolt was sued for writing these comments the majority of media outlets framed this story as being about freedom of speech but it is also a story that is indicative of the issues of identity that continue to be problematic for Aboriginal people today. Years of government assimilation policy and the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families have made it difficult for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities to define who and what is Aboriginal. With government policy changing direction to encourage self-determination Aboriginal people, once forced to deny their identity, must now provide evidence to prove their Aboriginal heritage and defend their choice to identify as Aboriginal. (see Oxenham et al. 1999) Coupled with issues of identity is the representation of Aboriginal people in the media. Aboriginal academic
Marcia Langton (1993) addresses this issue specifically in her frequently cited essay *Well, I heard it on the radio and I saw it on television*. Langton recognises the power of visual media in knowledge-making for Australians because, as described by Annette Hamilton in a forward to Langton’s essay, “‘[W]hat’s on’ creates the context for what is known and hence finally for what ‘is’” (Langton 1993, 5).

If visual media have the power to influence what we know then media power itself must be questioned when considering issues of representation. The United States based ‘guerrilla video’ producers of the 1970s rebelled against the giant media networks there because they recognised the power of those networks to shape and influence the national consciousness. The guerrillas and the grassroots media advocates recognised that, in the interests of democracy, a wider range of voices, opinions and stories must be heard. The same issues of media power were also questioned at an international level by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which produced the McBride report (International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems 1980). Critics of the one-way, north to south flow of information expressed concern about cultural imperialism, whereby the values and culture of the modernised Anglo-American countries threatened the cultures of developing countries. The McBride report recommended the reform of global communication infrastructure in recognition of the imbalance of communication power between developed countries and third world countries. The United States and United Kingdom protested against the recommendations and withdrew from this UNESCO initiative, and decades later “evidence of its failure is overwhelming” (Rodriguez 2001, 7). The debate about communication rights has, since then, been left in the hands of non-government organisations (NGOs), community organisations, and grass roots community media advocates. These civil rights organisations now argue for communication reform in terms of the broader framework of basic human rights. One of these groups, the World Association of Christian
Communicators (WACC), summarises this view by arguing that communication rights:

… go beyond mere freedom of opinion and expression, to include areas such as democratic media governance, participation in one’s own culture, linguistic rights, rights to enjoy the fruits of human activity, to education, to privacy, peaceful assembly, and self-determination. These are questions of inclusion and exclusion, of quality and accessibility. In short, they are questions of human dignity (quoted in Howley 2010, 7).

In Australia, the continuing trend towards concentration of media ownership sees the majority of our mainstream media in the hands of a few. For example 70 per cent of newspapers in Australia are controlled by Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited – a statistic that academic Robert Manne told the government’s Finkelstein Inquiry was “not democratically viable” (Leys 2011). Legislative changes have exacerbated the situation. In 2007, the then Howard Government argued that with growing media convergence it was not practical for media ownership to be restricted to a single platform. It introduced the ‘two-out-of-three’ rule making it possible to own two of the three possible kinds of media outlets – radio, television or newspaper (Donovan 2011).

The expansion of choice thanks to digital technology and growing on-line independent media outlets has led to the assumption that people have access to more diversity than ever before. That may be so, but the evidence is that audiences still get the majority of their news from the traditional mass media. A 2010 study in Baltimore, by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, showed not only that the majority of people were relying on newspapers for their news, but also that the newspapers were driving the news narrative for other media outlets. The Centre’s later study, in 2012, showed there was very little original reporting by other independent or mainstream media (Pew Research Center 2012a). Television is equally dominant in Australia. On the
evening of Wednesday, September 26 2012, Australian ratings results suggest that 4,641,000 people watched a free-to-air television news bulletin across five cities in Australia (Knox 2012)\(^2\), a figure that represents a significantly large audience in a country with a then total population of 22 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). Corporate media giants have the unequivocal power to influence the public consciousness and political debate, especially through their production of news and current affairs. As Hartley and McKee note, “media are primary and central institutions of politics and of idea-formation; they are the locus of the public sphere” (2000, 4).

In *Flat Earth News* (2008), Nick Davies talks of the interference of corporate media owners and summarises the nature of this interference as a kind of prostitution, using Rupert Murdoch as an example of how the interference works. Firstly, media giants like Murdoch use their “media outlets to build alliances with politicians who, in return, will help with business” (2008, 17). Second, they will impose a political framework on their media outlets based on the political leanings of their audience and/or their political alliances – whichever is likely to bring the best financial rewards. For example, when Murdoch first bought the British newspaper, *The Sun*, in 1969, he knew his readership to be “unionised, working-class men, and so he imposed a relatively left-wing framework on it” (2008, 20). And finally, corporate owners will interfere with the reporting of news if a story poses a threat to their business, such as when Murdoch stopped a story in 1994 about corruption on the Malaysian Pegau Dam project because he saw a threat to his Asian satellite TV business (2008, 21).

Given these pragmatic realities, there exists a continuing challenge for small grassroots community media to make themselves heard and to have some impact on mainstream audiences. Rodriguez argues though, that the debate around community media has remained “trapped within a

\(^2\) Television ratings for individual programs are provided on a daily basis therefore the statistics provided here are for example only and September 26 is a randomly chosen date.
vision of politics and democracy rooted in …essentialist concepts of power, citizenship, and political action" (2001, 10). It is not enough to take the concepts of mainstream media and simply apply them at a local level. If community media is assessed in terms of its resistance to power, as a David versus Goliath battle it will always be assessed as a failure. Rodriguez resists assessing it in binary terms – by what it is not – and suggests community media be assessed by what it is. Theorists should consider community media as:

“… environments that facilitate the fermentation of identities and power positions. In other words, alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people’s senses of self, their subjective positionings, and therefore their access to power” (2001, 18).

Discussions of media power and access must include concepts of the public sphere, which has its origins with Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989, original publication 1962). According to Habermas, the public sphere was a place between civil society and the state, where citizens can engage with and explore matters relating to public and civil society. The public sphere, ideally, is free of external influence such as government or economic forces, it is universally inclusive, and provides free access to information to allow participants to form opinions that will influence the decisions made by a community. Pre-existing authority, such as that bestowed by wealth, ethnicity, or family status has no influence in the public sphere. Habermas saw public meeting places such as the coffee houses of Britain and the salons of France, as well as the press in its different forms, as the institutions that supported the public sphere. While Habermas’s original concept of the bourgeois public sphere has been challenged as idealistic and flawed, the term is still in wide use with the recognition of multiple and overlapping alternative public spheres that operate in opposition to the elitist ‘official’ public sphere (Howley 2010, 18; Thomassen 2010). Couldry and Dreher (2007) discuss three different contemporary forms of the public sphere:
the counter-public sphere, the Indigenous public sphere, and the diasporic public sphere (2007, 81). Globalisation, especially in big cities, requires the development of new public spheres to enable the “localisation of globalisation, opening up possibilities for place-specific politics” (Couldry and Dreher 2007, 81). Couldry and Dreher use Sydney as an example of a globalised city into which global media flows. Counter-public spheres are created by community media organisations that either work to address exclusions from the mainstream media, or work to supplement and/or reform the mainstream media. They use Sydney’s Koori Radio as an example of Indigenous media that are more likely to work outside the mainstream with little possibility of integration, while Assyrian Radio SBS is an example of diasporic media that supplement the mainstream (2007, 82). Couldry and Dreher seek to define these different forms of public sphere in order to illustrate that community media takes on many different forms and cannot be reduced to basic models of public sphere theory. Community media exemplify “not so much a simple notion of ‘counter-public spheres’, but rather the complexity masked by that term” (Couldry and Dreher 2007, 96).

In her discussion of alternative journalism, Forde (2011) argues that one of the many roles of the independent journalist is not only to serve a function inside their own public sphere, but also to “transplant this function to a larger audience, to see their own impact within the alternative public sphere move across…to other (larger) spheres of discussion and debate” (2011, 168). Likewise, Sandoval and Fuchs (2010) acknowledge the risk of alternative media contributing to a fragmentation of the public sphere that dilutes the capacity of minority groups to communicate with a larger audience. They make a similar point to Forde when they argue that in order to avoid alternative media projects becoming “individualistic spaces of withdrawal”, networks of alternative media should “develop political visions and practices and act together to form a larger political counter-public sphere [that has] the potential to support larger-scale political change processes” (2010, 143).
Again, diverse forms of community media do not allow for a neat summary of citizens’ and alternative media in terms of public sphere theory. Community media, in some instances, may contribute and help to interpret the mainstream public sphere, or they may create multiple smaller public spheres that operate outside the mainstream.

**Identity and Representation**

Recognising the power of the media to influence what we know, Aboriginal people have been fighting for their own media, for the opportunity to control the representation of Aboriginal people and culture, for decades. Representations of Aboriginal people in the media as produced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous program makers all contribute to identity. The issue of who and what is Aboriginal is a significant aspect of Langton’s discussion:

> For Aboriginal people, resolving who is Aboriginal and who is not is an uneasy issue, located somewhere between the individual and the state. They find white perceptions of Aboriginality disturbing because of the history of forced removal of children, denial of civil rights and dispossession of land (1993, 28).

Yet she describes the belief that only Aboriginal people can create true representations of Aboriginality as naïve:

> This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated other. More specifically, the assumption is that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other… (1993, 27).

She continues her argument by suggesting that “there are possibilities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work together on a film or television program, for example, and contribute to the construction of Aboriginal identity” (1993, 33).
In discussing the types of Aboriginal media production Langton recognises differences between Aboriginal communities living in urban Australia and those living in remote and regional areas. Because of the impact of assimilation policies over a much longer period of time and the impact on community as a result of this, media production by individuals is more common in settled Australia. The community media that is the focus of this project is more common in remote and regional Australia where “the aim is to survive as distinctive social and cultural entities” (1993, 12-13).

The absence of Indigenous community media in Perth had become evident to me as a result of my Honours research (Johnston 2005) and was a motivating factor for this PhD project. I was also aware of how mainstream media had shaped my own perceptions and opinions about Aboriginal people and culture – something that was achieved as much through the absence of Aboriginal voices in the media as it was by misrepresentation. Langton describes this as a form of racism:

The easiest and most natural form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible. Indeed, racism can provide a complete and satisfying comprehension of black identity (which is why it persists) and one that is linked to the viewer’s ideological framework (1993, 24).

While overtly racist media may be a thing of the past the journalistic practices of today can now be described as “new racism” that “is a more common explanation for the work that journalism does in perpetuating the view of a dominant ‘White Australia’” (McCallum and Holland 2010, 7).

Steve Mickler (1998) gives a shocking account of racist mainstream media representation using the example of one Perth radio ‘shock jock’. In his book the *Myth of Privilege*, Mickler describes the events leading up to a public rally in 1991 where 30,000 people turned up at Parliament House demanding incarceration for youth offenders. Radio 6PR’s talkback program *The Sattler Files* and its host, Howard Sattler, organised the rally
after a long campaign of sensationalising youth crime in Perth which, according to Sattler, was on the increase and out of control (1998, 52). Sattler’s campaign for justice included the identification of Aboriginal youth as the perpetrators of many of these offences, a personal campaign that commenced in 1991 with the death of three Aboriginal teenagers in a police high-speed car chase. Sattler’s on-air response to the deaths:

Well I say good riddance to bad rubbish. That’s three less car thieves … I think, they’re dead and I think that’s good (in Mickler 1998, 56).

Sattler’s quest for justice failed to acknowledge the murder of Aboriginal teenager Louis Johnson, who died as the result of the racist attitudes manifested not just by his attackers but the medical professionals who attended to him after his assault. Mickler raises a number of questions about public attitudes towards Aboriginal people such as:

… how it is possible that mortally injured Aboriginal people can simply be assumed to be petrol sniffers by medically qualified professionals; how [can] white people in responsible positions get the idea that Aboriginal people ‘are all the same’; how [is it that] negative stereotypes are circulated within society; and who is responsible for spreading them around (1998, 57)?

Mickler makes a strong case for the media’s role in shaping the “quite monstrous” (1998, 58-60), prejudicial public views of Aboriginal people, a case that had been made previously by two high level Government inquiries in 1991 – The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) and the Human Rights Commission National Inquiry into Racist Violence.

As a result of recommendations from the RCIADIC inquiry, two media forums entitled Telling Both Stories were held in Perth, the first in 1992
and the second in 1994. There were a number of recommendations from the RCIADIC inquiry that were the focus for these forums and the call for media organisations to set up new policies and procedures to assist in a more balanced and positive representation of Aboriginal people. One RCIADIC recommendation that is of particular importance to this project is number 207:

That institutions providing journalism courses be requested to:
a) Ensure that courses contain a significant component relating to Aboriginal affairs, thereby reflecting the social context in which journalists work … (Hartley and McKee 1996, 3).

John Hartley, then a Murdoch University academic and editor of the publication resulting from the forums, sums up the possibilities that the *Telling Both Stories* forums represent:

If media can influence negatively then they can also be at the forefront of progressive positive change. They have that capacity (1996, 73).

Scholars like Langton and Mickler have concerned themselves with the representation of Aboriginal people in the media, the media’s capacity to create prejudicial public views, and the ways in which the media define Aboriginality for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. The flip side to that discussion is the impact of mainstream media, especially media in which Aboriginal voices are absent, on Aboriginal communities and their culture. This has been the focus for two academics in particular who are well known and respected contributors to this area of research: Queensland journalist and academic Michael Meadows and anthropologist Eric Michaels.

Meadows’ chapter “Voice Blo Mipla All Ilan Man: Torres Strait Islanders’ Struggle for Television Access” in the edited text, *Public Voices, Private Interests* (1995), is a case study of several Torres Strait Islander
communities after the introduction of television from 1988. The Elders in particular were concerned about the impact television would have on the language and culture of the community, and to some extent their concerns proved valid. There was evidence of life changing in the Torres Strait Islands. For example, the routines of one island community, such as daytime fishing trips, were interrupted so that people could return home for the midday soaps. Children in another community used their island language less, and “did not sing ‘language songs’”, preferring to speak English (1995, 187). Some elders noticed an increase in violent crime that they attributed to television. There were also positive effects, however, such as children who preferred to watch television were therefore removed from exposure to alcohol and street crime. Exposure to English language programs had benefits for those Islanders who were confident in the strength of their own language and culture in their community. Because of this they perceived no threat from the opportunity to improve their English language skills, which is the language that gives them access to authority. All the island communities recognised the possibilities that television represented and, to some extent, these possibilities were being realised through the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) facilities. These facilities had been installed by government and allowed communities to interrupt mainstream television broadcasts with their own locally made radio and television programs. BRACS also allowed for communication between the Islands where they had previously relied on telephone or word of mouth. The few television programs that were made for broadcast via BRACS reflected a particular Islander perspective in the way the programs were made. It was reported also that the radio programs produced represent “voice blo mipla all ilan man, ‘our voice’” (Meadows 1995, 183). Unfortunately, installation of the BRACS systems did not include ongoing government support, such as maintenance of the equipment or training for those who would use it. This doomed the project to failure, but not before expectations had been raised about the potential of television for the communities. Consequently, there was universal criticism of the lack of programming specific to Torres Strait Islander communities with not even the weather report on the commercial
station including them. The value and importance of community-specific programs and community control over broadcasts was the key finding of Meadows’ case study.

Eric Michaels (1996) pursued a similar case study in the Aboriginal community of Yuendumu in the central desert of Australia. His research and resulting publication was in response to the government report *Out of the Silent Land* (Willmot 1984), which explored the impact of satellite television on remote Aboriginal communities in central Australia. Michaels criticised the government report for its lack of consultation with the very people who would be most impacted by the introduction of satellite television. The concern expressed by many Aboriginal people about the introduction of mainstream television into central Australia was shared by Michaels, who saw it as a potential threat to traditional culture and language:

"Indeed, I believe that the only chance remote Aborigines have to resist assimilation involves holding very tightly to their ‘law’. But I can claim this only as an opinion, not as proven fact" (1986, xv).

Michaels’ objective in spending time in Yuendumu was to better understand the culturally specific ways Aboriginal people use television, how Aboriginal people view television, and what impact it has on community life and relationships. His findings were similar to those of Meadows in the Torres Strait Islands, as he found the Yuendumu community using video production as a way of recording and sharing culturally significant community events. Michaels notes that “mass media is the inverse of the traditional and personal information exchange system” (1986, 129) that is typical of traditional Aboriginal culture and he lists three ways in which television as an information system contrasts with Aboriginal culture:

1) Television information is equally accessible throughout the society of viewers. Aboriginal knowledge is highly restricted...
2) Television information is widely dispersed geographically … Aboriginal knowledge is highly localized.

3) Television creates an external, archival, impersonal authority. Aboriginal knowledge is personal, with face-to-face retrieval and transmission, and not subject to contradiction by an external, impersonal authority (1986, 129).

Meadows and Molner’s Songlines to Satellites (2001) tracks the history of Indigenous television and echoes Michaels’ findings about the problems of mainstream media for Aboriginal people. They conclude that community media are best suited to represent the highly local nature of Indigenous culture but they also recognise the role played by mainstream broadcasters:

… but this is not an argument for Indigenous people to participate only in small media – access to mainstream media is an essential element of the Indigenous communication spectrum. The small media are ideally placed to complement the mainstream as they can offer community-specific programs in the languages of the area they serve. Mainstream media will at best take a pan-Indigenous approach, which makes it difficult to reflect the diversity of Indigenous languages and cultural agendas (2001: 70, emphasis in original).

In spite of the commendable efforts of public broadcasters in their production of Indigenous programming the Productivity Commission in 2000 recommended a dedicated Indigenous television channel. This has its own drawbacks though, as it risks ghettoising Indigenous programs rather than having them in a shared broadcast space that will be accessed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences (2001, 67). In considering the prospects for Indigenous television, there is also a tendency for government to privilege remote and regional Aboriginal communities, with little recognition that the majority of Aboriginal people live in urban centres. Since 2007, National Indigenous Television has
been a reality (discussed further in chapter 5) providing Indigenous people with the opportunity to produce their own programs; however, representation of Indigenous people in mainstream media, as indicated by the Reconciliation Barometer, continues to be problematic.

Studies such as those conducted by Michaels, Meadows and Molnar provide evidence of the detrimental impact mainstream media can have on Aboriginal culture and identity, while also highlighting the potential local media production offers for the maintenance of Indigenous language and culture. As will be discussed further below, Indigenous community media initiatives stand out as an important tool for cultural maintenance, for community building and for creating a sense of identity. However, as Langton points out, community media is more likely to be found in remote and regional Australia (1993). This raises the question of how community media contribute to cultural maintenance and identity in the city. Stereotyping, misrepresentation, and the absence of Aboriginal voices in mainstream media are as damaging for urban Aboriginal communities as for remote communities - perhaps even more so given the added challenges to cultural maintenance created by city living (discussed further in chapter 6). Culture is important, and is linked to strong and healthy Indigenous communities, both urban and remote. Community media is an important contributor to culture and identity, and understanding those links has been useful in attempting to create an urban Indigenous community media project such as Noongar Dandjoo.

**Community Media and Culture**

Community media is a movement gaining momentum and popularity in an increasingly globalised world. As mainstream media become more converged with centralised production facilities, there is an increasing desire for audiences to reclaim their voice and for audiences to see themselves and their local communities represented in the media they consume (Forde et al 2009, 39-40; Howley 2005, 136). This trend back to
the local is acknowledged at a national level with the federal government’s efforts to legislate for Australian content on television, and is reflected at a state level where mainstream broadcasters try to use localism as a selling point, eagerly promoting themselves as the station that knows ‘your city’ best. However, only community media is able to address those small and diverse communities that exist within the predominantly Anglo-Saxon culture that is white, middleclass Australia. Communities of Islamic, African, South American, and Indigenous Australians, for example, also want to hear their voices and see their faces and their cultures represented in the media.

There is strict government regulation that controls the allocation of community broadcasting licences in Australia, but the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) has registered a set of guiding principles with the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) reflecting ideals advocated by community media activists and supporters all over the world. (see Rennie 2006; Howley 2005) Anthropologist, Anthony Cohen, suggests that communities define themselves in relational terms - their expressions of commonality as well as their difference (1985), and this is worth bearing in mind when reading the guiding principles. According to these principles, stations endeavour to:

- Promote harmony and diversity in contributing to a cohesive, inclusive and culturally diverse Australian community;
- Pursue the principles of democracy, access and equity, especially to people and issues under-represented in other media;
- Enhance the diversity of programming choices available to the public and present programs which expand the variety of viewpoints broadcast in Australia;
- Demonstrate independence in their programming as well as in their editorial and management decisions;
• Support and develop local and Australian arts, music and culture in the station’s programming, to reflect a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity;
• Widen the community’s involvement in broadcasting;
• Demonstrate a commitment to participate in the development of the community-broadcasting sector at a state and national level in order to support continuous improvement across all community television service providers (Community Broadcasting Association of Australia 2010).

These guiding principles demonstrate that cultural maintenance is not necessarily a priority for community media, yet this third tier of broadcasting has been particularly successful at catering to culturally diverse communities as demonstrated by the large number of ethnic and Indigenous radio stations around Australia (see Forde et al. 2009). Indigenous community media is discussed in more detail in chapter 5, but it is important to note here that this objective, that is, the support and maintenance of culture, reflects the basic premise that cultural practice and identity are at the core of all human existence.

That the practice of culture is a basic human right has been recognised by the United Nations and supported by scholarly research. The Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2007. Australia was one of only four nations that voted against the declaration at the time, but later declared its support with the election of the Rudd Labor government. While the declaration covers all aspects of Indigenous political, cultural and land rights, Article 11 is of particular significance to this discussion on Indigenous community media:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future
manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artifacts, designs, ceremonries, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.

2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs (United Nations General Assembly 2007).

Community media is one mechanism through which to deliver the objectives outlined in Article 11, and there is an argument to be made that governments can contribute to positive outcomes for Indigenous communities by investing in community media initiatives and the cultures they support and represent. The evidence for the value of investing in cultural maintenance is mounting, and three research projects are listed here by way of example.

The Harvard Project on American Economic Development, founded in 1987 at Harvard University, has reported on the key essential factors that contribute to the economic success of diverse Native American tribes living on reservations. One of those key factors is culture:

Culture Matters. Successful economies stand on the shoulders of legitimate, culturally grounded institutions of self-government. Indigenous societies are diverse; each nation must equip itself with a governing structure, economic system, policies, and procedures that fit its own contemporary culture (Harvard Project 2010).

The Harvard Project research outcomes demonstrate that without recognition and understanding of cultural practices and structures, the economic development of individual tribes is undermined (Cornell & Kalt 1992).
Dockery’s research has similar objectives to the Harvard project but in his article *Culture and Wellbeing: The case of Indigenous Australians* (2010), he makes even clearer the link between culture, specifically traditional culture, and socio-economic wellbeing. Dockery suggests that “Indigenous culture should be viewed as a potential part of the solution to Indigenous disadvantage in Australia, and not as part of the problem” (2010, 315). He argues that the success of Indigenous programs should be measured in terms of wellbeing rather than simply socio-economic indicators. Dockery’s research establishes links between Indigenous attachment to culture and various wellbeing factors such as employment, health and alcohol abuse. Of significant interest to this project are the outcomes for city-dwelling Aboriginal people:

It is in the major cities that the maintenance of attachment to traditional culture seems particularly important for preventing Indigenous Australians from getting into trouble with the law. In terms of employment outcomes, benefits from strong cultural attachment are particularly evident in the major cities (2010, 327).

Finally, in 2009, researchers from Griffith University in Queensland completed the first ever survey of community media audiences with a specific focus on Indigenous and ethnic community media in Australia. Their research resulted in the publication of *Developing Dialogues* (2009), and revealed the importance of ethnic and Indigenous community radio and television in contributing to a sense of identity and empowerment, to the process of reconciliation, to the breaking down of stereotypes, and to the creation of a kind of “cultural bridge” (Forde et al. 2009,18) between these communities and mainstream society. For Indigenous communities in particular there was a great deal of passion expressed for their community media programs, and frequent acknowledgement of how these programs bring people together:
…to bring people together, one people sharing one idea. Sharing, talking, culture sharing, like respect [for] one another as one people … you can’t get that sense of community anywhere else (2009, 81).

Illustration 2: Map of Aboriginal Australia (Horton, 1996).

The value of each of the Indigenous community media organisations noted in Developing Dialogues is better understood with reference to a map of Aboriginal Australia (Illustration 2). Each of the coloured spaces represents a different Indigenous tribe or language group. It is not uncommon for non-Indigenous Australians to complete secondary school without ever seeing this map and therefore to only ever think of Aboriginal culture as one national homogeneous culture. Many non-Indigenous Australians are ignorant of this cultural diversity yet they have heard of Native American tribes like the Sioux, Cheyenne and Apache – Australians hear those names as children watching American ‘westerns’
on TV. Why not Aboriginal names such as Noongar, Koori, Nunga, Mardu and Yolngu?

That the community media model is best suited to the support of these numerous and diverse Indigenous languages and cultures is further supported by the research of the anthropologist Eric Michaels (1986) who observed the people of Yuendumu in central Australia. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, videotapes were being used as a kind of electronic message stick by the community. A pirate television station had been set up and demonstrated “that when television is introduced into a traditional culture under the control of the people of that culture, then television need not be destructive” (Batty 1986, xii). Michaels describes three different media models and the impact each would have on traditional Aboriginal culture and language. The first is described as ‘Assimilation’ whereby no special media services or programs are provided for Aboriginal communities but equitable access to mainstream media services are guaranteed. This model is best represented by our two national public broadcasters, the Special Broadcasting Services (SBS) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), who broadcast some programming specifically for Aboriginal people as part of their wider menu of programming. The second model Michaels labels as ‘pan-Aboriginalisation’, which recognises one national homogeneous Aboriginal culture where production is centralised, and could possibly deliver more political power to Indigenous people. This model is best represented by the now free-to-air NITV, operating under SBS auspices, catering specifically to Indigenous people and located in Sydney. Finally, Michaels suggests a model of ‘cultural maintenance’ that scales down the ‘massness’ of mainstream media and focuses on local, traditional culture and language. This is Michaels’ preferred model because it is best suited to the support and maintenance of the many diverse Aboriginal cultures and language groups that exist all over Australia and to encompass the many Indigenous community media organisations that currently exist, particularly in remote and regional Australia. It is this model that also
allows Indigenous communities to maintain control of their cultural knowledge and programming (see Michaels 1986, xv).

**The Third Space**

In seeking to understand contemporary Noongar culture and issues of identity, publications in the area of post-colonial studies are useful. Post-colonialism was introduced as a term in the 1970s when power relations established as a result of colonialism were questioned. Various scholars have discussed how minority cultures, such as the Australian Aboriginal culture, have been impacted by the dominant colonial culture, and have sought to understand and describe the consequences of two cultures meeting (see Bhabha 1994; Ashcroft et al.1995). Hybridity is a term used to describe the result of two converging cultures, while the space where two cultures meet is often described as a third space. There is no single definition of the third space, nor is there consensus on what happens within it, but there are common ideas and concepts running through the discussions of many of the post-colonial and intercultural communication theorists.

Homi K Bhabha is one of the most significant writers on the subject of post-colonialism and culture, which he describes in terms of hybridity and a third space. Indeed, the majority of academic writings on the subject of third space use Bhabha’s concepts as a starting point. He explains how the preservation of culture often means focusing on the primitive or traditional as perceived by the colonising culture. Popular notions of multiculturalism fail to recognise cultural difference and hybridity. In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994) Bhabha borrows a stairwell metaphor, from an interview with artist Renee Green, that helps to define his concept of hybridity:

> The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the
connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy (quoted in Bhabha 1994, 5).

Hybridity is not black or white, it is not polarised opposites. Bhabha proposes that culture has an interstitial existence whereby it moves beyond the present and creates history – makes it “post”:

…all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom…. The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation (quoted in Rutherford 1990, 211).

Looking at Bhabha’s concepts in the context of Maori culture in New Zealand, Paul Meredith describes hybridity as the result of colonial authority’s failure to “translate the identity of the colonised (the other) within a singular universal framework” and so producing something new: “Hybridity is positioned as antidote to essentialism” (1998, 2).

Also of central importance to understanding contemporary post-colonial cultures is Bhabha’s notion of cultural difference as opposed to cultural diversity. In simple terms, cultural diversity is understood to mean the same thing as multiculturalism. It assumes a dominant, usually white culture to which other cultures are compared. Multiculturalism tends to
essentialise culture, to define culture in terms of ‘the other’, the traditional, and may be compared to western culture. On the other hand, recognising cultural difference is to acknowledge that culture is changing and contemporary and sometimes cannot be defined or understood in terms of western culture:

Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics, or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity (Bhabha 1995, 155).

Robert Stam and Louise Spence describe anthropology as the academic offspring of colonialism, a definition that supports Bhabha’s explanation of cultural diversity, which is linked to anthropological visions of traditional Indigenous culture (1983, 111). Cultural diversity is linked to ideas of cultural exchange and the promotion of multiculturalism. Cultural diversity makes comparisons between past and present whereby the culture of the past is mythologised and idealised – an approach that functions as a form of control and containment. This was most evident in the Australian government’s past assimilation policies which attempted to ‘protect’ the authentic bush-dwelling Aborigines while at the same time treating as problematic the urban-living, “half-caste Aborigine” (Mickler 1998, 100). Media also, in failing to recognise cultural difference, in their efforts not to discriminate or to be indifferent to difference, fail in their representations of cultures that communicate differently:

A transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that ‘these other cultures are fine,
but we must be able to locate them within our own grid’ (Rutherford 1990, 208).

Cultural difference, on the other hand, recognises that culture is not simply “dualistic in the relation of Self to Other” (Bhabha 1994, 52). It is a process of enunciation, the creation of a conceptual third space in which culture is created, and eventually articulated. Cultural difference is represented by Green’s stairwell metaphor and it is the failure to recognise cultural difference that results in racism, prejudice and stereotyping.

Bhabha’s concept of third space is difficult to define. Ikas and Wagner, editors of the collection of essays called Communicating in the Third Space (2009), open their own discussion with:

Anyone who has closely read Homi K Bhabha’s works will know that there is no single, precise definition of the term third space to be found there. Maybe it is exactly this vagueness which explains the term’s attractiveness (2009, 96).

In support of this statement the text contains an eclectic range of interpretations of third space contained in the book by scholars from diverse disciplines. Edward W Soja is an urban planner who specialises in “creative spatial thinking” (2009, 49) and the impact of space on social structure and relationships. He discourages dualistic thinking – binary opposites that polarise. Rather than either/or he promotes the alternative both/and logic (2009, 49). Soja explores his ideas in the context of Henri Lefebvre’s theories on third space and political and social resistance. Lefebvre’s third space is radical and open to all possibilities.

Anything which fragments third space into separate specialized knowledges or exclusive domains – even on the pretext of handling its infinite complexity – destroys its meaning and openness (Soja 2009, 54).
Third space as a place of resistance to hegemonic power is one aspect that seems common to all discussions of this abstract concept and this is certainly true of Soja. He describes third space as “a meeting point, also a place of the marginal women and men, where old connections can be disturbed and new ones emerge” (2009, 56). He uses the term third space as an umbrella term for the radical, creative place where new concepts are born (Kalscheuer 2009, 37).

Bill Ashcroft discusses third space in terms of language. He explores the question of whether culture is carried in language, or whether the coloniser’s language be used as a tool to communicate the experience/culture of the colonised. Many post-colonial theorists argue that language is a tool of domination, that by adopting the language of the colonising culture Indigenous people lose their own culture and identity. But Ashcroft’s argument supports Bhabha’s third space as “a contradictory and ambivalent” place (2009, 108) that makes impossible that pure and authentic pre-contact culture:

This is the zone in which both cultures – colonizing and colonized – are changed. It is with this third space – the third space of language itself – that the transcultural work of postcolonial literatures is performed. This work occurs by means of the processes of appropriation and transformation that enable the third space to become a space of resistance as well as a space of sharing (Ashcroft 2009, 116).

Novelist Kim Scott is a Noongar man and acclaimed writer whose work exemplifies Ashcroft’s ideas about post-colonial literature. Scott writes stories about Noongar people, from a Noongar perspective. One novel in particular, That Deadman Dance (2010), is set on the south coast of Western Australia at the time of first contact with European settlers. The novel describes how the Noongar people appropriated some aspects of European life that they found useful. They were quick to adopt tools such as guns, forms of white culture such as a military drill into their own
dances, and the English language in order to communicate with the newcomers. The Noongar were so confident of their own identity and place in the land that they did not see this appropriation as a threat to their own culture. In his own work, Kim Scott uses the tools of European culture as a means of empowerment and resistance for himself and Noongar people. He writes in English using the European convention of the novel as the medium for his storytelling. His books provide a Noongar perspective on what was previously a version of history dominated by white stories. In this way Scott’s work exemplifies the words of Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, “English can be made to bear the burden of my experience” (quoted in Ashcroft 2009, 116). Scott’s novels provide a third space experience for his readers similar to the experience Indigenous community media provide for their audiences.

German academic Britta Kalscheuer deserves mention here also, and her third space has an anthropological perspective. She refers to anthropologist Edward Twitchell Hall’s definition of culture as an essential element of both personal and community identity. Culture defines a code of behaviour that ensures people subscribe to similar values and beliefs. In Hall’s words:

… no matter how hard man tries it is impossible for him to divest himself of his own culture, for it has penetrated to the roots of his nervous system and determines how he perceives the world. Most of culture lies hidden and is outside voluntary control, making up the way and weft of human existence (quoted in Kalscheuer 1990,188).

This assumption about the nature of culture and identity seems contrary to Bhabha’s concepts of the third space (or transcultural space - the term used by intercultural theorists such as David Thomas). Kalscheuer promotes the impression created by these intercultural theorists that the:
openness and flexibility of the in-between space or third culture seems to be temporarily restricted to the moment of cultural encounter. Once the members from divergent cultures leave each other, they again identify with the cultural patterns and values of their original culture (2009, 34).

Kalscheuer builds on Hall’s definitions of culture, and Hall’s definitions of culture and identity fail to recognise Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and third space whereby two cultures are permanently changed as a result of their meeting. However, I found their definitions useful in helping to understand aspects of Noongar culture that were alien to me. For example Kalscheuer refers to Hall’s explanation of how different cultures have different concepts of personal space and time. Each culture has its own rhythms and can be understood as either a monochromic or a polychromic culture:

...two systems which differ logically and empirically and which do not mix ... polychromic time is less scheduled and more spontaneous; people of polychromic cultures often do several things at once or break the rigid order of the schedule (2009, 30).

Hall’s definition helped make sense of my frequent encounters with the concept of ‘Noongar time’, which clearly fitted into the category of polychromic time and is something I will discuss further when describing the production aspect of this project (see chapter 8).

Kalscheuer then moves from anthropology to transcultural communication theory where ideas of third space and culture begin to overlap with Bhabha’s concept of third space. There is value in learning from the foreign, an encounter that takes place in a temporary in-between space where “tolerance, politeness and flexibility are underlying rules that facilitate the communication process” (2009, 34).
Bhabha’s third space is a place where cultural elements are creatively combined, power relations are challenged and recreated, where identity is altered. It is Bhabha’s idea of the renegotiation of power that Kalscheuer challenges and she refers to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988).

Here lies the problem: although Bhabha aims to point out ways, which allow marginals to become more powerful, he paradoxically fails to consider aspects of power. Marginals do not have the same chances to articulate their interests and the powerful representatives surely have an interest to keep their powerful position (Kalscheuer 2009, 39).

This question of opportunity for the marginal, the subaltern, to be heard is of particular relevance to community media whose foundations are built on the backs of community advocates who fought to give a voice to marginalised and under-represented communities and cultures such as those of Indigenous Australians. This thesis proposes that community media is a potential third space of encounter for diverse cultures and ideas. There is potential for encounter both in the physical space that is the community media organisation as well as in the metaphorical space of encounter between audience and broadcaster. The subaltern can, and do, speak through community media.

**Ganma: An Aboriginal interpretation of the third space.**

Kim Collard is a respected Perth Noongar community leader who provides cultural training and awareness for the wider community. He speaks of a third space that is created when two cultures physically come together as is the case when non-Indigenous people participate in Aboriginal cultural activities such as those that take place in National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week. Collard’s

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3 NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Events are held across Australia each July. See [http://www.naidoc.org.au/](http://www.naidoc.org.au/)
concept of a third space is influenced by Homi Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and the third space, but is not the same. Bhabha’s colonial context of hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (Bhabha 1994, 5), whereas Collard uses the concept of third space as a metaphor for reconciliation and for cultural collaboration.

Collard commissioned a painting by Aboriginal artist Dale Tilbrook entitled *Coming Together* and it illustrates a traditional Aboriginal story known as ‘Ganma’ (see illustration 3). The painting shows two rivers, one followed by black footsteps and the other by white.

(Illustration 3): *Coming Together* by Dale Tilbrook

Collard describes the painting:

I quite often use the Ganma metaphor which is the saltwater river meeting the freshwater river. Where those two rivers meet there is a whirlpool. And in that third space there is a lot of turmoil. It's like being inside a washing machine or a whirlpool. So that's that
contested site stuff. But if we sit, and we listen, and we talk, that place of turmoil starts to settle down. So the silt settles to the bottom and the freshwater rises to the top … My language we say ‘dat nyen kudditj, wangkiny yah’ which means sit and listen and let’s talk (personal communication, November 2009).

Noongar identity and contemporary Noongar culture is created inside Kim Collard’s concept of a third space within the culturally diverse community of Perth. It is Collard’s concept of third space and the Ganma metaphor that are central to this thesis because the Noongar Dandjoo project is a cross-cultural collaboration, a physical coming together for the Perth Aboriginal community and non-Indigenous media students. I would argue that Collard’s third space also represents Indigenous community media and the opportunity for people to ‘sit, and listen, and talk’, either as participants in Indigenous media production, or as audience and consumers of Indigenous media programs.

In conclusion, a more culturally diverse media contributes to a democratic public sphere and is recognised as a powerful tool in the maintenance of Indigenous language and culture and in creating a sense of identity. The history of Indigenous community media in Australia is testament to the importance of these local broadcasters to the communities they serve. The many diverse Indigenous communities that exist in regional, remote and urban Australia are each in need of their own community media initiatives to support culture and provide access to the public sphere.

The Noongar Dandjoo project is both an Indigenous community media project and a cross-cultural collaboration and so an understanding of the cultural and industry protocols that guide such a project is essential. These protocols are discussed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2

CHOOSING A METHODOLOGY:

INDIGENOUS PROTOCOLS

Before detailing the methodology employed in this project, another area of theory needs to be explored, namely that of the protocols that have evolved to guide producers working with Indigenous communities. This chapter will look at the history of the protocols, the principles they embody, and the problematic nature of converting them into production practice.

On May 21, 2012, the front page of the *Australian* newspaper bore the headline “Museum sidesteps criticism over bid to record songlines”. The story reported that the Australian National Museum is participating in a project with Western Desert Aboriginal communities that would record two songlines from the region. The project had been negotiated over a period of seventeen years and reached the point whereby the stories might now be recorded. However some community members were refusing permission to record on their land due to “increasing pressure to reveal their most closely held cultural secrets”. They accused the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian National Museum of degrading Aboriginal culture and accused women of “meddling in men’s law” (Rintoul 2012). Academics involved in the project argued that the project was totally community driven. It would seem that, as far as adhering to protocols, they had done everything right. Yet this story suggests that, in spite of adhering to protocols, non-Indigenous researchers and filmmakers can still get it wrong – things do not always run smoothly.

A history of colonialism and racist government policy has done irreparable damage to Australian Aboriginal culture. A desire to preserve Aboriginal
culture, to rebuild identity and to empower Aboriginal people has seen the
evolution of formal protocols that attempt to guide and inform non-
Indigenous people who wish to work with Aboriginal people and
communities. For the *Noongar Dandjoo* project, three different sets of
protocols were of particular relevance: the Film and Television Industry
protocols, the NHMRC ethical research protocols, and the MEAA Code of
Ethics for journalists.

**Film and Television Industry Protocols**

The history of the formal film and television industry protocols in use today
can be traced back to *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner in Arnhem Land?*,
written by Chips Mackinolty and Michael Duffy and published by the
Northern Lands Council (1987). These protocols were written to ensure
that Aboriginal communities in Arnhem Land would derive benefit from film
productions undertaken on their lands. The two most recognised
protocols for the film and television industry today are Lester Bostock’s
*The Greater Perspective*, published by SBS, and Terri Janke's *Pathways
& Protocols: A Filmmakers Guide to Working With Aboriginal People,
Culture and Concepts*, published by Screen Australia. The SBS document
produces guidelines based on six principles:

1) Program makers should always be aware of and challenge their
own prejudices, stereotyped beliefs and perceptions about
Indigenous people.

2) An Aboriginal view of Indigenous issues may differ from a non-
Aboriginal one.

3) Where non-Indigenous people produce programs on Indigenous
people they should do so in consultation with the Indigenous people
particularly with those who are the subject of the program.

4) Any dealings with Indigenous people should be conducted openly
and honestly.
5) No damage of any kind should be done to the lands of Indigenous people or cultural property, nor to the subject of programs.

6) The collection and use of information for a project should be done in such a way that it will not be used against or be considered detrimental to the people from whom the information comes (Bostock 1997, 9).

These protocols seem fair and appropriate and indeed are applicable to all types of production – not just to Indigenous people and programs. Bostock emphasises repeatedly throughout the document the power of media and film to counteract stereotyping and negative representation, and proposes several ways of putting the principles he has articulated into practice.

Bostock argues that colonial attitudes towards Aboriginal people have often resulted in researchers and filmmakers seizing raw materials for their own use. All benefits of the transaction flow to the white researcher while the Aboriginal community, who receive nothing, are powerless to prevent this. That there are mutual benefits, or reciprocity, for all participants is an important protocol to be respected by filmmakers. There is no doubt that media producers and researchers, past and present, have appropriated stories and songs from Aboriginal people. The example given at the start of this chapter is evidence of that history, and of the wariness Aboriginal people developed about sharing their culture with non-Indigenous people.

Obtaining permission from the community is also discussed at length. The filmmaker should make some effort to find out who, in a community, is authorised to give permission. Failure to do so can, Bostock explains, lead to rifts and disruption in the community that may take years to heal. Concepts of Indigenous community ownership are at odds with western concepts of the auteur whose intellectual and creative property is protected by copyright laws.
Bostock advises that Aboriginal participants be permitted to view a film or television program during the editing process and be given the opportunity for feedback on the edit.

Janke’s (2008) Screen Australia publication has a different emphasis and provides instead a set of guidelines that will assist filmmakers in establishing their own protocols adapted to individual and diverse circumstances. Unique case studies of Indigenous film and creative projects are presented throughout the publication to effectively illustrate diverse approaches to protocols and collaboration with Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal culture is not just one culture but rather many different and distinct cultures, and Janke emphasises this throughout his publication. There is recognition also that protocols apply equally in urban communities and that it is wrong to assume that Aboriginal people living in a modern and contemporary environment do not have traditional values. Protocols are not legally binding and Janke encourages filmmakers to formally incorporate protocols into contractual agreements.

Like Bostock, Janke encourages reciprocity, or sharing the benefits, and this is emphasised with examples of how this may be achieved by filmmakers. Payment is one option, but there are other suggestions such as sharing awards or profits, developing skills in the community, providing copies of a production for cultural preservation or contributing funds to community development projects such as a swimming pool (2008, 17).

Janke warns filmmakers about the time required for adequate and appropriate consultation throughout all stages of production. A failure to make that time available means a failure to consult, which in turn can lead to the need for costly changes later in the production.

This publication is particularly useful in the way it distinguishes between drama and documentary, and it includes a number of checklists to assist filmmakers in working through the protocols.
Ethical Research Protocols

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC 2007) have published guidelines for the ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and it is to these documents that academic researchers are usually referred (NHMRC 2003). Ethics approval from Murdoch University’s Human Research Ethics Committee for my PhD project was conditional on my reading these guidelines as well as Murdoch’s own Indigenous Research ethics guidelines (2013). The Murdoch Ethics Committee also required me to describe how I would choose interview subjects, to obtain written consent from all interviewees and participants, and to ensure that appropriate Indigenous advice was obtained for any elements of the project that were conducted outside of Perth. A Noongar Murdoch academic, Glen Stasiuk, also assisted in my ethics approval process by offering to act as a cultural advisor.

Murdoch’s ethics approval did not extend to the production of Noongar Dandjoo as it was produced as part of a Curtin University undergraduate course and was therefore subject to the code of ethics and policies that are applied to all Curtin student production work. For example talent consent forms and copyright clearance are standard practice for all Curtin media productions. As part of their professional development students are also required to be familiar with all industry codes of practice including the SBS and Screen Australia documents previously mentioned.

The NHMRC document is, however, central to any ethics consent process and commences by providing, in more detail than the film industry publications, some context for the protocols and guidelines. It explains how, in the past, Aboriginal culture and values were judged by the degree to which they were perceived to be “conforming to European customs and norms…The substantial errors of judgement that followed have had a significant impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples ever since” (2003, 2). Recognising cultural difference, in terms of both the
diverse individual Aboriginal communities as well as the different cultural perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, must underpin all research activities and relationships. ‘Difference blindness’ can be detrimental to research that is reliant on successful collaboration built on trust. The NHMRC states that “where trust persists, research can be sustained” (2003, 3). The NHMRC also recognises that simple compliance with rules or guidelines is not enough. It encourages researchers to “exercise nuanced judgment” and “move from compliance to trust” (2003, 4). Building such relationships, based on trust and integrity, lead to partnerships that “can withstand some difficulties” (2003, 5).

Six values underpin the NHMRC document (see illustration 4):

- Spirit and Integrity
- Reciprocity
- Respect
- Equality
- Survival and Protection
- Responsibility

The meaning of these six values for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provides the foundation for the guidelines and are at the heart of any ethical assessment (NHMRC 2003, 8-9).
Looking at each of these six values in turn, we begin with *Reciprocity* which is again a focus here because it is at the heart of Aboriginal culture and describes an obligation for all Aboriginal people to share and distribute resources. This responsibility extends to animals and other natural resources and is most commonly seen practiced in contemporary culture through the sharing of income and housing (NHMRC 2003, 10). As stated by Bostock and Janke in regard to filmmakers, there is an expectation that benefits from a research project will accrue to Aboriginal people as a result of their collaboration and participation in research.

*Respect* is foundational to trust and the NHMRC guidelines state it is “critical that respect underlies all aspects of the research process” (2003, 12). Publication of findings should not be given priority over feedback of findings to the community. Agreement should be reached at the outset over “when, how and who will engage in the research process” (2003, 12). Respect for difference is further clarified here with a reminder that “respectful research relationships acknowledge and affirm the right of people to have different values, norms and aspirations” (2003, 12). This acknowledgement of individual difference is of particular relevance to the *Noongar Dandjoo* project and will be discussed in chapter 8.

Respect for difference is further exemplified in the fourth value of *equality*. Some may take equality to mean ‘sameness’, and old government policies of assimilation were based on principles of equality and ‘difference blindness’. Aboriginal people seek recognition of their many diverse and individual cultures. Researchers can demonstrate equality by valuing the knowledge and wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ensuring all partners in research are equal, and ensuring benefits of research are equally distributed. The researcher should also attempt to distribute fairly the burden of research so as not to focus on particular groups or individuals (2003, 15).
Responsibility is another aspect of the NHMRC protocols that is core to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Research activities should not interfere with an individual’s responsibilities to country and kinship relationships. Bostock states the value of responsibility in terms of “do no harm” and this is reiterated here in the NHMRC guidelines (2003, 16).

Finally, Survival and Protection is a value that firstly recognises the many diverse and individual Aboriginal cultures and the right of Aboriginal people to protect and support their cultures. It also recognises that researchers, in the past, have marginalised Aboriginal Australians and their values when conducting research. This history has created a “collective memory” that is an obstacle to research today. Considerable effort is required to establish the trust needed to overcome this perception of research as an “exploitative exercise” (2003, 18).

Spirit and Integrity is of particular importance to Aboriginal people because it binds together all other values. It firstly acknowledges the connection and continuity of past, present and future generations. It also highlights the importance of the other five values in shaping the integrity of behaviour, and their role as a “touchstone for personal or community level action to renew or protect identity, culture and life” (2003, 19). The researcher must demonstrate that a project is respectful of these values both in terms of the community with which they are collaborating and through their own personal integrity and behaviour.

Journalism Protocols

News and current affairs programs are of particular relevance here because I have argued that it is this genre of television program that is most problematic in its representation of Aboriginal people. As discussed in chapter 1, the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) highlighted the role of the media in contributing to racist attitudes in the wider community and made recommendations that dealt specifically with journalistic practice and education. Today, 22 years
later, Aboriginal people still perceive the news media as racist and even hostile in their representations of Indigenous issues. This will be discussed in more detail in later chapters but for present purposes, the discussion of the code of ethics that governs professional journalistic practice is restricted to its relevance to Indigenous protocols.

The Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) have published a code of ethics for journalists. One of the twelve clauses is relevant to Indigenous representation and it reads:

Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability (MEAA 1995).

The only other ethical guideline for journalists that is relevant to Indigenous representation is a single clause in the 2010 Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice:

News and current affairs take account of personal privacy and of cultural differences in the community (Free TV Australia 2010, 4.1.3).

Australian public broadcasters have published their own guidelines and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) refer specifically to Indigenous Australians in its Codes of Practice (SBS 2010). They point all program makers, journalists and producers to the six principles outlined in Bostock’s Greater Perspective (1997). The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), on the other hand, has a far more generic code of practice that deals with “harm and offence” (2011, 11):

Avoid the unjustified use of stereotypes or discriminatory content that could reasonably be interpreted as condoning or encouraging prejudice (2011, 7.7).
These journalism codes of practice seek to steer a difficult path between guiding the ethical behavior of journalists while at the same time not interfering with principles of freedom of speech and the public’s right to know. Furthermore, as journalism academic Ian Richards explains, the MEAA code of ethics attempts:

… both to articulate ideal standards and regulate unsatisfactory conduct, an approach which, however laudable, cannot help but produce mixed values (2005, 59).

Richards provides a detailed analysis of the inadequacies and vagaries of each of the code’s clauses, and concludes that the MEAA code of practice is just one of the factors that might influence a journalist’s choices and behaviour. A “complex array of social and other factors” (2005, 68) also play their part, and include newsroom routines and culture, largely created by employers, along with the control exerted by those who finance the news.

These media codes of practice are in stark contrast to the industry protocols that guide filmmakers and researchers. I would argue that they do little to assist the non-Indigenous journalist in dealing with the complexities of Aboriginal culture. With the exception of SBS, there is no guidance here for writing Aboriginal stories or for working with Aboriginal people. However, calls for more regulation, or for better codes of practice, must be weighed up against the extent to which such guidelines might hinder professional journalists in their role as watch-dog or seekers-of-truth. The concern is that more extensive media regulation will impinge on freedom of speech and on freedom of the press. In 2012, this debate came to the fore when the federal government set up the Finklestein Inquiry to discuss, amongst other things, the need for greater media industry regulation (see http://www.dbcde.gov.au/digital_economy/independent_media_inquiry). None of the recommendations made by the Finklestein Inquiry have been adopted, but it is in this light that the RCIADC recommendation for all
journalism courses to include Indigenous issues is most pertinent. If journalists are to adhere to the broadcasting codes such as that of Free TV Australia that asks news and current affairs to “take account … of cultural differences in the community” (2010, 4.1.3) then better training and education becomes essential in fostering the appropriate cultural knowledge and empathy that non-Indigenous journalists need.

The protocols described above have taken on significant status and importance in the area of film and television production and for academic researchers. As an academic who is also a program maker and working with Aboriginal people, protocols are particularly relevant to me and to this PhD project. Upon commencing my PhD in 2006, I sought ethics approval from the university where I studied. As a newcomer to Perth Aboriginal culture and community, I looked to film industry protocols as a way of guiding my behaviour and ways of working with Aboriginal people. However time and experience have demonstrated that while these protocols may be a useful starting point, the reality of Aboriginal culture and community is far more complex than the protocols suggest. Even with the best intentions and strict adherence to protocols, things can still go wrong. As with any collaborative project, is it inevitable that collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will sometimes be problematic?

Knowledge of published protocols was essential as a starting point for the production of Noongar Dandjoo, but it was also hoped that understanding the pitfalls experienced by other cross-cultural collaborative productions would assist me in avoiding those same pitfalls. This discussion of protocols will also help to explain my decision to employ action research as a guiding principle in my own PhD project. If protocols alone cannot be relied upon to guide our ways of working then action research could assist the Noongar Dandjoo production by underpinning and operationalising those protocols.
** Appropriation

Film and television production is a creative process. The need for protocols in this industry is often discussed in relation to cultural appropriation, and the fields of creative practice provide many examples of cultural appropriation both in Australia and internationally. Cultural appropriation generally falls into three different categories. The first form of appropriation is obvious and involves the pilfering of tangible objects like a work of art. The other two categories are more subtle. A song, for example, may be ‘taken’ from a culture but this does not preclude a culture from possessing that song. This is a “non-rivalous” or non-exclusive possession of intellectual property (Ziff & Rao 1997, 4). The third form of appropriation is difficult to define because it includes acts of appropriation such as stealing a genre or style. Australian artist Elizabeth Durack provides an example of this form of appropriation when she controversially painted in an Aboriginal style and used the fictitious male Aboriginal name of Eddie Burrup to sell her work (see [http://www.elizabethdurack.com/burrup_6_storm.php](http://www.elizabethdurack.com/burrup_6_storm.php)). Artists, filmmakers, writers and musicians continue to debate issues of appropriation because the nature of creativity essentially requires an artist to interact with other texts. A 2002 *Insight* panel broadcast on SBS heard Paul Goldman, director of the controversial feature film *Australian Rules*, claim “the right to do what all artists do – appropriate stories”. The film drew intense criticism for its representation of a real life incident that led to the deaths of two Aboriginal boys. The author of the book on which the film is based, Phillip Gwynne, grew up in the town that features in the story. He knew the characters around which the story is based. He argues that it was his story, a story that he insists he has the right to tell. “But it was someone else’s story too…It is not a black story”, Gwynne says. “It is a white story that intersects 100 per cent with black peoples’ lives.” In response to allegations of racism, Gwynne says “he is not a racist, but he was naïve…he will never write about Aborigines again” (Ellingsen 2002). Indigenous actor and director Lydia Miller also
participated in the *Insight* program and adds to the discussion about *Australian Rules*:

I think that is the issue. It is about appropriation in some respects, because the Western notion of the artist as hero goes right up against Indigenous culture paradigms of cultural material belonging to the community from whence it comes from (Brockie 2002).

Ziff and Rao expand on Miller’s statement by pointing out that an:

“… author does not work tabula rasa but rather draws relentlessly on past creations … Any given text is a ‘tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture’” (1997, 4).

They go on to explain that appropriation can be multi-directional, but it is usually discussed in terms of the dominant culture taking from a minority culture. Even though it can happen the other way around, to think of appropriation in symmetrical terms does not recognise the political nature of the problem and the power relationships associated with it:

Today’s issues are about minority groups and subjects (the disempowered, colonized, peripheral, or subordinate) who are seeking to claim and protect rights to a cultural heritage (Ziff & Rao 1997, 8).

One of the most discussed consequences of cultural appropriation is the damage done to the integrity and identity of a cultural group. Arguments for the value of cultural identity in turn lead to questions of why we should be concerned about cultural distinctiveness. The importance of cultural identity has been discussed in chapter 1, but Ziff and Rao, in answering this question, include a thought provoking quote that further emphasises the importance of identity:
The success of oppressed groups depends on the construction of strong cultural identity. That identity becomes the glue that binds the movement. These images of culture allow for what bell hooks has called the ‘practice of self-love as a revolutionary intervention that undermines practices of domination’ and that allows struggles of resistance to endure (1997, 11).

The protection of cultural identity and integrity is a clear objective in the existing protocols for filmmakers and academic researchers in their collaborations with Aboriginal people. It has also been a key motivation for many non-Indigenous filmmakers who have made films in collaboration with Aboriginal people. Is respect for cultural integrity and a desire to protect cultural identity enough though to ensure a successful outcome for the researcher/filmmaker and the community alike when they undertake a collaborative project? The lessons learned, even from very recent collaborative projects, suggest that the answer is no.

**Protocols in Practice: The Filmmakers’ Experience**

The debate in the late 1970s about the rights of filmmakers to tell Aboriginal stories versus Indigenous self-representation has been resolved in favour of collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers. Marcia Langton, in her frequently cited 1993 work argues:

> There is a naïve belief that Aboriginal people will make better representations of us simply because being Aboriginal gives greater understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption of the undifferentiated other. More specifically, the assumption is that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other (1993, 27).

The protocols discussed in this chapter have been instrumental in making cross-cultural film and television production possible. Their impact can be
demonstrated by examining some cross-cultural filmmaking collaborations from the pre-protocols and post-protocols eras.

German director Werner Herzog provides the first example with his film *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984). It was made before the existence of formal protocols such as Bostock’s *Greater Perspective*. A hybrid film that is a cross between documentary and fictional feature, the film tells the story of the struggle for land rights between an Aboriginal community and a mining company. On its release, it was criticised both by Aboriginal and white audiences as flawed in its representations of Aboriginal culture, in particular for its romantic notion of the noble savage (see Peters-Little 2003c). The film failed to recognise a contemporary Aboriginal culture and presented a romanticised and idealistic version of traditional culture. Herzog was motivated to make the film after seeing Michael Edols’ films *Lalai Dreamtime* (1972) and *Floating, Like Wind Blow ‘em About – This Time* (1975). He was sympathetic to the Aboriginal fight for land rights and preservation of culture, and he was aware of his own lack of knowledge about Aboriginal culture. He therefore created his own fictional story, “an invented mythology”. In Herzog’s own words:

> I made it clear to them that the film is not their dreaming, it is my dreaming…I can’t bear it that there are so many people of all kinds, anthropologists, political activists and politicians, who claim they know exactly what has to be done with them, who claim to understand them completely. My understanding of them is limited, therefore I want to develop my own mythology (in Hurley 2007, 175-90).

While sympathetic to the Aboriginal cause and respectful enough of Aboriginal culture to admit his own ignorance, Herzog did not know enough to recognise protocols that would now be considered essential knowledge for anyone attempting such a project. He is accused of cultural appropriation. The ‘green ant dreaming’ does exist, but is associated with a different cultural group, outside of the community that features in the
film. This appropriation of an Aboriginal story, as well as the fictional treatment of an actual land rights court case, was problematic for Aboriginal participants in the film. These same participants were then denied the anonymity they needed to distance themselves from the film when Herzog named them in the film’s credits. *Where the Green Ants Dream* and its flawed processes are now cited as a valuable example of the consequences of a failure to understand and adhere to protocols. Andrew Hurley, in examining the cross-cultural collaboration that produced *Where the Green Ants Dream*, concludes that the “film squarely raises the uncomfortable possibility that, in some cases, the objectives of the various parties might be irreconcilable” (2007, 175-90).

By way of contrast, Michael Edols’ trilogy of films were also produced prior to the introduction of formal protocols and remain today as an example of successful intercultural collaborative filmmaking. *Lalai Dreamtime* was made in 1973-75, followed by *Floating, Like Wind Blow ‘em About – This Time*. The third, *When the Snake Bites the Sun* was made nearly ten years later in 1985 - 86. Edols distanced himself from Herzog’s film:

You don’t have to create any fantasy around the Aboriginal people. You can make a film around them, but you don’t have to make any fantasy, because everything they say about life lies in what they do and what they do is complete (Hurley 2008, 73-93).

At a time of considerable activity by ethnographic filmmakers, Edols perceived a failure by these filmmakers to capture Aboriginal culture. He considered himself a filmmaker “who is politically motivated and primarily interested in drawing attention and respect to the cultural values of other peoples” (Hurley 2008, 73-93).

*Lalai* is also a hybrid film, a mix of ethnographic documentary and drama, and is about the preservation of ancient cave paintings; a story that the Worrorra participants wanted to tell and includes them acting out aspects of their traditional lifestyle. Edols, like Herzog, was also accused of
idealistic authenticity as well as being accused by anthropologists for a lack of scientific analysis (Hurley 2008, 73-93). Yet the film was enthusiastically received by the community who participated and by wider national and international audiences. It is still respected today as a thought provoking and aesthetically beautiful film.

Floating was a more difficult film for Edols to make though this was also made at the request of the community Elders. They wanted to show the current situation of the Worrora people and “how the young ones were lost in drink” (Hurley 2008, 73-93). The final film, Snake, was produced after the death of Edols’ close Aboriginal friend and in fulfilment of a promise made to him. He returned to the community after being banished from it and being blamed for the man’s death. Edols is not just an observer in this film, but the storyteller and a participant and we see him take part in a traditional Aboriginal ceremony. It is this film that draws more criticism than the others. Academic Andrew Hurley asks the question, “[W]hat right does he have, as a white man, to tell these stories and to participate in these rites? To what extent should/must one take on a different mindset when wishing to engage in an intercultural encounter?” (Hurley 2008, 73-93). While the other two films are still valued by the community, Snake is criticised by the featured community as being self-indulgent and for breaching kinship rules. The fact that Snake was made in fulfilment of a personal promise to a friend, rather than at the request of the community, may be at the heart of the film’s less favourable reception.

Rolf de Heer’s film Ten Canoes (2006) was made after the publication of industry protocols and is possibly one of the most recognised recent examples of a successful cross-cultural collaboration. The documentary about the making of the film, The Balanda and the Bark Canoes (de Heer, Reynolds et al. 2006) demonstrates de Heer’s respect for the Yolngu participants in the film and his commitment to working with the protocols in spite of the considerable difficulty he experienced in doing so. He introduces the documentary by saying that the film will be made their way and “it would be the most difficult film I have ever made”. The issue of
respect features again, but as de Heer notes, this time in regard to the Yolngu’s desire for “more than history from this film. They want respect – respect for their culture from the Balanda (white man) culture”. Ten Canoes is particularly successful in demonstrating reciprocity. All the sets, costumes and props from the film were retained by the community, which has also benefited from offspring projects of the film. One of these projects, appropriately named Twelve Canoes, is an educational and beautifully designed website that explains Yolngu history and culture (see http://www.12canoes.com.au). The film is also noted for its unusual form of storytelling, which was innovative in the way it combined western and Yolngu storytelling traditions in order to appeal to a western audience while maintaining the authenticity of a traditional story. In doing so, de Heer recognises the cultural differences of his two audiences and demonstrates Marcia Langton’s suggestion that “one of the conditions of a successful collaborative film is that the intercultural exchange of its production is evident in the look of the film” (Langton 1993, 40).

Yet even de Heer, it seems, is to be criticised. In her essay about cross-cultural collaboration in Ten Canoes, Therese Davis accuses de Heer of being an artist-hero who is seen to wield the power of authorship (2007, 5-14). The film is also criticised for privileging a European notion of a “mythic time as a utopian past” (2007, 5-14), although Davis acknowledges that the film was not generally received in this way because of many of De Heer’s inspired choices, particularly in regard to casting which was controlled by the community. She also makes particular mention of David Gulpullil’s role in the film as narrator and his closing words: “This is not your story. But it’s a good one, all the same”. Davis continues:

Here the narration very consciously invites us to recognize this Yolngu story’s difference from western stories and, at the same time, to value this difference … Ten Canoes takes us back to the past not in order to ‘preserve it’, but to integrate it into the present and thus ensure what Eric Michaels once termed ‘a cultural future’ (2007, 5-14).
Ross Hutchens is the Perth producer of the successful SBS television series *The Circuit* (Jodrell and Hutchens 2007, 2009). Set in the north-west town of Broome, the program is about a Kimberley circuit judge, and many of the stories in the two series are Aboriginal ones. Hutchens, a non-Indigenous man with considerable experience in Indigenous-themed productions, recognised the importance of Aboriginal community collaboration in making the program and therefore established and adhered to protocols from the outset. Local Aboriginal community media organisation Goolarri were invited to collaborate in the production and played an important role in the program’s success. *The Circuit* is a textbook example of how industry protocols can work. Goolarri helped with gaining permissions and access to locations for shooting; Aboriginal cast, crew and writers were employed wherever possible; non-Indigenous crew were briefed and required to participate in a cultural awareness program; Goolarri viewed final cuts of each episode, and the production team donated training and equipment to Goolarri in exchange for their assistance. All agreements negotiated between the filmmakers and the community were formally contracted.

As a drama *The Circuit* is fictional and, like any successful drama, has good and bad characters. The success of any drama lies in its ability to make stories and characters feel real for an audience and it was here that compromises had to be made in order to make fictional stories and characters acceptable to the black community. Characters could not be associated with specific country or tribal groups and so were never heard to speak language or, for one particular character, to reveal the location of the ‘home’ to which he sometimes returned. This would allow characters to do good and bad things without their actions being associated with any particular tribal group. Hutchens describes adherence to this protocol as a compromise because it detracts from the characters’ authenticity and creates a ‘blandness’ to their fictional world. The same approach was taken when he worked with Richard Frankland on the comical feature *Stone Brothers* (2009) that was partly set in Perth. The characters were
not identified as Noongar, and the fictitious sacred stone at the centre of the plot was not associated with any particular tribe or country.

Hutchens is sanguine in his opinion of industry protocols and agrees that they are both useful and adequate. He argues that the days of filmmakers going into a community and “pinching stories” are a thing of the past because funding for films is clearly dependent on producers adhering to protocols (personal communication, June 2012). However, Hutchens’ uncritical support of protocols is not typical of all cross-cultural collaborations. Many filmmakers and researchers have encountered problems and have been vocal in their criticism.

Problems with Protocols

*Why I don’t want to be an ethical researcher* is a polemic article written by Aboriginal Studies researcher Mitchell Rolls (2003). He is scathing in his criticism of ethics committees who tell him how to conduct his research and he questions the assumption that they know what is good and right and that all must abide by their rules. Rolls argues that while ethics and research protocols have their place, they can also compromise the search for truth. In demonstrating how research will benefit a community, in getting permission from a community to conduct research, the word ‘community’ is particularly problematic. Who is the community? And when must the benefits be realised? “Why … do we assume that today we know it all, that somehow or other our generation has been blessed with a universal and timeless blueprint on how to conduct ethical research?” (2003, part 1). The assumption is that the anthropologists of yesteryear ‘duped’ Aborigines into working with them – that the elders with whom they worked were too stupid to know what they were doing. Rolls argues that the work done by these ‘evil’ anthropologists is now proving invaluable to the process of cultural revival and native title claims. A community may be divided on an issue, may disagree on the ethics of a research project. Again, the ANU example given at the start of this chapter is an example.
Does this make one group ethical and right, and an opposing group wrong? This sets up a potentially hurtful and polarising view “of there being good blacks and bad blacks” (Rolls, 2003, part 2).

It is not just non-Indigenous filmmakers and researchers who find the protocols problematic. Frances Peters-Little is a Murri woman, an ANU researcher and a filmmaker. She responded directly to Mitchell Rolls’ article and supports some of the points raised by Rolls, especially regarding the problematic notion of the ‘community’ from which permission must be gained (Peters-Little 2003a). Her article questions why some films are more agreeable to Aboriginal protocols than others. In another place, she highlights the requirement for release forms used by filmmakers and researchers as particularly problematic as they “place strain upon the relationship between the filmmaker and their talent, the moment they are asked to sign” (2003b, 2). Peters-Little also finds collaboration in post-production to be problematic. Many participants do not have the knowledge or understanding of filmmaking to contribute to editorial decisions in post-production and asking for their involvement can “actually heighten their defensiveness and unease.” She argues that copies of a film are best handed over after the film is complete but even this can be:

…disastrous if one of the many people who are filmed decides that the film is offensive or non-beneficial to their community or to themselves. In fact, the protocols are almost impossible to follow (2003b, 3).

In another article published in the feminist journal *Hecate*, Peters-Little talks at length about her experience in making the 1992 ABC documentary *Tent Embassy* (2002). She had difficulty in finding consensus on the film’s story, on who should be interviewed, on whose story should be told. She says in her article “the notion to make the film ‘right’ was of the utmost concern for me at the time” (2002, 51). In the end she made the film from her own perspective, but notes that it was her Aboriginal crew that were most restrained about the inclusion of controversial material while her
white executive producers encouraged her. After the film’s broadcast, she was harshly criticised by Aboriginal viewers for her representation of this significant and historic event. One viewer called the ABC to demand she be fired because the film failed to show their involvement in erecting the tent embassy (2002, 53). Possibly it was this experience that led her to respond to Mitchell Rolls’ article:

I didn’t think there was any such thing as absolute truth in any form of filmmaking and that some of our own high moral standards as Indigenous filmmakers often stood in the way of truth (2003a, para 2).

However, Peters-Little has reservations in her support for Rolls article when she quotes a Native American Arapaho filmmaker who argues that “there may not be any such thing as truth, but there is one thing for certain, and that is there is such a thing as a non-truth” (2003a, para 2). Peters-Little echoes this sentiment when she adds that “while there may be no such thing as ethical history, there is nonetheless such a thing as non-ethical history” (2003a, para 4).

The tentative support for protocols by both Aboriginal and white filmmakers and researchers is further evidenced by Kim Scott, Noongar author and Professor of Writing at Curtin University. He argues that protocols are important because they are about respect and “in a classical, Aboriginal sense respect is really primary… But there must also be room for other people to act as they wish and to maximise the chances for them to be truly respectful in their conduct” (personal communication, May 2012).

He has reservations about protocols which, when used in a contemporary world, can be a strategic way to get respect. The problem, he believes, is that such an emphasis on strategy means that even good intent can be hijacked. Protocols encourage the use of language that is bureaucratic and managerial which Scott argues can be reductionist and simplistic.
“Protocols can be used as a way of bossing people around”. They can be useful in a strategic sense and in the context of power relationships...

After all, that’s a motif of our shared history – and the need to win back respect – no, to grab respect; to use tools like protocols to grab respect … That’s all very important... and they help re-balance power, but I think I’ve seen protocols used as an excuse for a power play as crude as that which has made them necessary… you’ve got to leave space for individuals and groups to also negotiate in ways that allow both to come to new understandings (personal communication, May 2012, emphasis in original).

On one occasion, as I wrestled with a particular decision concerning the production of the Noongar Dandjoo program, a trusted Aboriginal participant declared to me, “Michelle, you have to break some eggs if you want to make an omelette”. I wondered if that was so. Scott is uncomfortable with the metaphor because it is usually an “Aboriginal egg that gets broken”:

I’m wary of those glib phrases that, to some extent, articulate lived experience but also give you a great little escape clause from continuing to attempt to be respectful of all concerned. Especially when it’s in the institutional frameworks – there’s timelines and resources – there’s plenty of pressure on to break eggs – the easiest eggs to break as soon as possible (personal communication, May 2012).

Glen Stasiuk is a Noongar filmmaker and academic at Murdoch University. He also has reservations about protocols while at the same time being respectful of them. He sat on the University’s ethics committee as their only Indigenous representative, but was then denied ethics approval from the same committee when he commenced planning for an ARC-funded film about the Aboriginal history of Wadjemup (Rottnest Island), an island
off the coast of Perth that was once a notorious Aboriginal prison where hundreds of Noongar men died. Stasiuk argues that it was inappropriate and unethical for the committee to comment on the legitimacy of his project, especially in the absence of an Indigenous representative on the committee:

There was no one there to argue for me from a cultural point of view … I fear for a young Indigenous academic or researcher … imagine if you’re a bit green – it could be really daunting – almost jeopardise a research project (personal communication, June 2012).

In reference to community, Stasiuk is clear about following protocols and about speaking to all the right people – ‘yarning up’ as he says. He acknowledges the difficulties in knowing who to speak to, but suggests that for an urban community like Perth there are obvious contact points in the form of recognised corporate bodies and Indigenous organisations who oversee specific areas of culture. For example, when making his film The Forgotten, about Aboriginal soldiers who fought in the world wars, Stasiuk went to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans Association. “Always try to go to the peak bodies, if there is a peak body structure, [otherwise] you go to the Elders – you use that old cultural way of going to the elders” (personal communication, June 2012). But even Stasiuk, with his experience and cultural knowledge, has problems sometimes in identifying the right people from whom to request permission. He explained problems he was encountering in the telling of a dreaming story in his Wadjemup film. Six or eight families, each of whom claim ownership to the story, believe their version of the story is correct and the others are incorrect. When I asked him how he deals with that he said:

It helps if you’re Noongar. It helps if you’ve got a strong family and a big family. It helps if you know your stuff. It helps that you can speak language. It helps that you’re older. It helps that you don’t
give a shit. You stand up and say this is the story I’m going to tell and you just take the wrath if it comes…I think I’ll do it right. I really fear if you were a non-Indigenous person trying to tell that story – you just leave yourself wide open…A non-Indigenous person trying to tell a dreaming story on Wadjemup? – good luck (personal communication, June 2012).

As for working with funding bodies like the ABC and SBS, he says he doesn’t want to work with them again and criticises the rigid structures around the filmmaking process that require him to work with a producer. Stasiuk sees this as problematic, especially when the producer isn’t Indigenous, and argues that when he goes into a community as “Glen, the Noongar filmmaker”, he is able to communicate at a ‘grassroots’ level. Stasiuk is also critical of the ABC and SBS who, as the funding bodies for the films he made for them, he says interfered too much with his storytelling:

Be prepared – they think they own you, your creativity, they think they own the product and they sort of think they own the community (personal communication, June 2012).

He says decisions are being made in Sydney and Melbourne that affect a community that is often thousands of miles away. Consequently, Stasiuk prefers to find independent funding. As an Aboriginal man, he feels best qualified to tell an Aboriginal story, and takes very seriously his responsibility to the Aboriginal community and the cultural integrity of his films. This raises the question of whether cultural protocols are equitably applied to Indigenous filmmakers. Are the filmmakers the inevitable ‘broken eggs’ that result from a cross-cultural collaborative film production? Do the protocols apply only to the Aboriginal subject in front of the camera?

When I interviewed Susan Coombes in 2010 she was the Executive Producer of the ABC’s Indigenous Programs Department. She describes
the ABC’s trend of outsourcing production to the independent sector as “depressing” and “a huge issue” and supports Stasiuk’s concerns about ABC control and cultural integrity. Even as an internal program producer Coombes has been:

... completely challenged by the community story and the integrity I want to keep culturally, and ABC editorial policies and guidelines. Sometimes it doesn’t fit neatly...at times we will make compromises on both sides. I fear loss of internal production – the more we go down the path of independent productions and the ABC having total control over that – I think that’s a really dangerous path to go down (personal communication, May 2010).

Warwick Thornton, when interviewed about his film *Samson and Delilah*, explained the importance of finding the right kind of funding for the film:

That’s because there are a lot of initiatives from everywhere, from ScreenWest or Screen Australia, for example, but it doesn’t mean they’re good initiatives for your film. So for something like *Samson and Delilah*, there were a lot of those indie-funding things. We steered very clear of those, just waiting for the right time and place. You see, you’ve got a script and it’s like a trump card. Playing poker, you don’t show all your cards. We think that way. So *Samson and Delilah* sat around for at least a year and then suddenly the AFC [Australian Film Commission] turned into Screen Australia and they had this shitload of money, and at this time they wanted to fund an Indigenous feature before they turned into Screen Australia. And BANG. As soon as we heard that, we put the script in... That’s how we work. I have a couple of scripts that don’t necessarily need to be funded right now but they’re there, down on paper, and the right fund will come along (Film and Television Institute of WA 2009).
It would seem every cross-cultural collaboration will experience varying degrees of success in working with protocols. Each different combination of filmmaker, researcher and community will produce a diversity of challenges and hence a different view of the value of protocols. Life is messy – and it gets even more so when negotiating a cross-cultural collaboration.

**Better Ways of Working?**

Journalism academic Lisa Waller (2010) argues that the professional ethics codes and protocols that journalists use as a guide for working in Indigenous communities are inadequate. In reference to ABC (ABC 2011, 1-24) and Australian Press Council guidelines (APC 2011) she says:

> This appears to be more a form of ‘cultural politeness’ designed to minimise obstacles to the journalist getting the story, rather than encouraging genuine attempts to understand, respect and reflect cultural differences (2010, 22).

Waller suggests that journalism should be considered as research, and advocates for the use, by journalists, of research ethics guidelines such as the NHMRC protocols summarised previously in this chapter. This could encourage journalists to recognise, respect and privilege an Indigenous epistemology rather than reinforcing the cultural assumptions of a dominant colonial culture. She offers Tony Koch as an example of how adherence to ethics guidelines can be translated into practical terms. Koch is a veteran Indigenous affairs reporter whose approach to his work is best described when he says “…you don’t go there to speak to them, you go there to listen, and that’s just a wonderful experience if you’ve got the patience for it” (quoted in Waller 2010, 20).

Academic Tanja Dreher also emphasises the importance of listening when she talks about community media interventions which are “activities and projects developed by people working with communities subjected to
media racism in order to alter or speak back to mainstream news media” (2010, 86). This will be further discussed in chapter 4. It is relevant here to note that the community media sector is premised on the importance of providing a voice for all communities – especially those that are commonly misrepresented or ignored by mainstream media. But what is the value of that voice if nobody is listening? For Dreher, the possibility of changing the media representation of minority and Indigenous cultures “becomes a question of changing the processes and politics of hearing rather than of speaking” (2010: 98). Dreher refers to Susan Bickford and her book *The Dissonance of Democracy* (1996), and explains that:

…political theory has consistently focused on the politics of speaking, but paid scant attention to listening. In addressing this omission, Bickford suggests that we must begin with a realization that how we listen shapes the ways in which others can speak and be heard (2010, 100).

**The Protocols and Noongar Dandjoo**

In considering the formal protocols and the lessons offered by the experience of filmmakers, researchers, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous collaborators, it was clear there were common elements among the most successful and positive of these cross-cultural collaborations. At the very core was respect - respect for difference, respect for voice, respect for culture, respect for the individual. In considering ways of working that would be best suited to the *Noongar Dandjoo* project, I recognised the importance of the published protocols discussed in this chapter. However the idea of shifting some emphasis from *voice* to *listening* made sense and I wanted to ensure listening was also a part of this project. As my research progressed I considered the extent to which *Noongar Dandjoo* could also fit Dreher’s definition of a community media intervention and this will be discussed in chapter 8 when the production of the television series is detailed.
In the next chapter, I discuss the methodology employed in the Noongar Dandjoo project and the advantages of an action research model which can serve as both a methodology and as a kind of underpinning protocol that would ensure respect, voice and listening were all part of the production process. Referring back to the omelette metaphor, if eggs were inevitably going to be broken, then my hope was that action research would ensure I would at least understand how and why they were broken, and how to avoid the same mistakes in the future.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: AN ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH

Don't be afraid to be confused. Try to remain permanently confused. Anything is possible. Stay open, forever, so open it hurts, and then open up some more, until the day you die, world without end, amen (George Saunders 2007, Ch2).

The *Noongar Dandjoo* project, and this PhD thesis, evolved from my personal concern about the absence of Aboriginal participants in Perth’s community media. My initial objectives were to understand why they were absent, what were the obstacles preventing an urban Aboriginal community from creating their own media, and what were the ingredients needed to create a successful Aboriginal community media program. To better understand these issues of community media participation, I decided to make a television program through a collaboration involving the Perth Aboriginal community and my university class of television production and journalism students. Since that decision and my first exploratory steps into the Perth Aboriginal community, this project has evolved and changed in terms of its objectives, its focus, and the processes of its production. With the decision to make a program came a new set of questions and priorities because, like any community media production, the process is as important as the outcome and this process included not just Aboriginal people but university media students as well. So I had to consider how non-Indigenous program makers could successfully collaborate with Aboriginal people to produce a community TV program. It is in this process of production that all the theory and research presented in this thesis come together. What protocols and ways of working should we adopt to create a successful program? How
could the concept of ‘listening’ (Bickford 1996) be incorporated into our program? How can Bhabha’s and Collard’s third space be created within our production process? If mainstream media practice is failing, then how can our production processes be better? I argue, and will show in this thesis, that the process of action research is a way of providing answers to each of these questions. The relevance of George Saunders’ quote will become apparent as this chapter progresses since his advice, to remain open and not to fear confusion, perfectly describes the action research philosophy.

There was a precedent for an action research approach to filmmaking, discovered while undertaking my Honours research into international models of community television. In 1968, the Challenge for Change filmmakers in Canada made films with people rather than about them when they successfully prevented the relocation of the poverty stricken and dysfunctional fishing community of Fogo Island (discussed in Chapter 4). I had already employed this philosophy of participatory production when producing another television series called RO-TV, broadcast on Perth’s Access 31 community television station in 2005 (see Johnston 2006, 29-42). The positive outcomes for participants in that program led me to consider a similar approach to the production of Noongar Dandjoo. When I then discovered and explored action research as an option, the connections to my previous program experiences producing RO-TV were clear, as was the choice to employ action research techniques for Noongar Dandjoo.

What is Action Research?

Action research (also known as participatory action research, or participatory research) is not a methodology but, rather, a way of working that may incorporate a number of different methodologies. It is a creative and holistic approach to research that is not easily defined but, as the name suggests, can be successfully employed when the researcher is seeking to create change through action, and change that results in action.
It is a relatively new concept, emerging after the First World War and the desire for empowerment and change that this era inspired (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003, 9-28; Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher 2007, 413). The researcher, who might be better labelled a “facilitator” (Stringer 1996, 24), does not work alone, but with a community or group who collaborate in the research, not as subjects but as participants and co-researchers. Action research is traditionally employed in the fields of education and social justice but is not restricted to these. Though difficult to define, there is some consensus about those elements of an action research project that are essential, and these will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, Reason and Bradbury (2001) provide a definition that reflects the characteristics of action research that are most relevant to the Noongar Dandjoo project:

… action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowledge in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons in communities (2001, 1).

The difficulty in defining action research comes from the diverse range of applications, philosophies, and approaches from which it has emerged. It is a term used to “describe the whole family of approaches to inquiry which are participative, grounded in experience, and action oriented” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, xxiv). Action researchers will employ a range of methodologies, which they may choose as being appropriate for a particular unique and individual community. There is no single approach, no right or wrong way of doing action research. The prime objective is to improve the everyday experience of people’s lives, to provide practical solutions to problems, and to create those solutions in collaboration with the people whose lives are affected: “…action research is participative
research, and all participative research must be action research” (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2). Like the Challenge for Change filmmakers, research is always done with people – never for or on people. Like community media production, the process is as important as the outcome. Kemmis refers to “emancipatory action research” and describes it as research done by practitioners – “something they do, not something done on or to them…” (quoted in Reason and Bradbury 2001, 91). Reason and Bradbury describe action research as a verb, rather than a noun – and as a work of art (2001, 2).

Budd L Hall is a co-founder of the International Participatory Research Network. The first meeting of this group, in 1978, produced the following definition that reflects the social justice and emancipatory nature of many action research projects:

1. PR (participatory research) involves a whole range of powerless groups of people – the exploited, the poor, the oppressed, the marginal.
2. It involves the full and active participation of the community in the entire research process.
3. The subject of the research originates in the community itself and the problem is defined, analysed and solved by the community.
4. The ultimate goal is the radical transformation of social reality and the improvement of the lives of the people themselves. The beneficiaries of the research are the members of the community.
5. The process of participatory research can create a greater awareness in the people of their own resources and mobilize them for self-reliant development.
6. It is a more scientific method of research in that the participation of the community in the research process facilitates a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality.
7. The researcher is a committed participant and learner in the process of research, i.e. a militant rather than a detached observer (Hall 2001, 173).
Hall reiterates the difficulty in describing the methods and techniques of action research (or participatory research, as he refers to it) and describes it rather as “a political or philosophical phenomena” or “a way of life” (2001: 173). But most importantly this is not research for research sake – expect something to happen. Communicating the results of an action research project is important, but the publication of a report cannot be the only objective or the only outcome.

Like Hall, Ernie Stringer’s passion for action research stems from its potential to change people’s lives. He argues that it must be “enacted in accordance with an explicit set of social values” (1996, 11). The process of enquiry must have democratic, equitable, liberating and life enhancing characteristics. As Stringer points out, if an action research project does not make a difference to the community, to the participants, in a specific way then it has failed (Stringer 1996, 12).

Illustration 5: Characteristics of Action research.
(Reason and Bradbury 2001, 2)
So while the field of action research offers very diverse definitions of its characteristics, while it may encompass a range of methodologies, and it may be employed in a variety of different disciplines Reason and Bradbury suggest five “broadly shared features which characterise action research” (2001, 2) (see illustration 5). These five characteristics reflect the unique nature of each action research project (emergent developmental form), and the practical nature of action research (practical issues) – that there cannot be theory without practice (knowledge-in-action). It reflects the democratic and participatory nature of action research (participation and democracy) and the valuable contribution it can make to human understanding and wellbeing (human flourishing).

**How to do Action Research**

An action research question, the problem to be solved, must come from the community itself. The project may stem from the personal interest or concern of an individual researcher, but the research issue must evolve in consultation with the community. The first step is to approach the community that will be the focus of the research, talk with them, and assist them to define the problem that will be addressed by the action research project. Because the individuals who participate in the research are involved not as subjects of the research but as researchers themselves, the desire for change must come from the community itself. Once there is some understanding of the problem, the researcher can collect as much background information as possible. Speaking to stakeholders, researching the history of a community, and observing activity and relationships, will provide valuable information and understanding for the researcher. In a cross-cultural situation, such as the *Noongar Dandjoo* project, this process is of particular importance and can be described as ‘ethnographic action research’. Tacchi, Slater and Hearn (2003) have produced an ethnographic action research guide after working with communities in the Indian sub-continent in the creation of Information and
Communication Technology (ICT) projects. Ethnography fits well with action research because it allows the researcher to “focus on understanding a specific place, in detail and in its own terms” (Tacchi et al. 2003, 11).

Tacchi and colleagues suggest starting with broad research and progressing to targeted research. Broad research will map and contextualise all aspects of a community – political, historical and social – and will help identify themes or ‘big stories’ such as poverty, identity or loss of culture. Targeted research can then commence, whereby the researcher may focus on specific groups, families or individuals and on specific issues. Consultation with research partners and acquiring permissions are examples of work done at this stage (2003, 15). It is also important, at this stage and at all stages of action research, to be critically reflexive and recognise how your own personal culture and history frame your views of the community and the individuals with whom you work (Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher 2007, 415; McNiff and Whitehead 2009, 24).

From here action research can best be described as a cycle or a spiral. Rather than a traditional linear process of planning and doing, action research introduces a third stage of observing and reflecting (Stringer 1996, 8-9; Tacchi et al. 2003, 2). As in illustration 6, there is an ongoing cycle of look, think and act:

![Illustration 6. The Action Research Cycle](stringer2008.jpg)
‘Look’ has already been described as the first stage of an action research project, but the process of observation and building a picture does not end there. The researchers keep returning to this stage after completing each of the other stages. They describe the situation as it evolves and re-evaluate. The ‘think’ stage requires participants to theorise, analyse and interpret what is happening. Why/how are things as they are? And then the participants must ‘act’; plan and implement what will happen next (Stringer 1996, 8-9). Tacchi and colleagues offer a series of questions that guide the participants through the process:

- What are we trying to do?
- How are we trying to do it?
- How well are we doing?
- How can we do it differently/better? (2003, 5)

There may be a variety of methods by which the action research cycle is done including surveys, interviews, or group meetings. Each project is different and the action research cycle can be adapted to suit the unique and individual circumstances of each community. Bob Dick (2000) emphasises the importance of not just participation, but the use of face-to-face procedures: “[W]hen people meet face-to-face … substantial attitude change can most often be achieved … allowing time for people to adjust to the changes might also be useful” (2000a, section 2). Recognition of and trust in the knowledge that people have is central to the process – because participants live the problems that action research seeks to address, they are also best able to offer the solutions. It is the on-going critical evaluation of an action research project by community participants themselves that validates the outcome and makes the process scientific: “Action research meets the test of action” (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003, 25).

Dick also recognises the creative and holistic process that is action research. Life is messy, and it may not be possible to articulate clear objectives or even clear questions at the commencement of an action
research project. However the action research process will allow ideas and objectives to evolve with each cycle:

… there are times when the initial use of fuzzy methods to answer fuzzy questions is the only appropriate choice. Action research provides enough flexibility to allow fuzzy beginnings while progressing towards appropriate endings (2000b, section 4).

‘Fuzzy beginnings’ describes the Noongar Dandjoo project well and there will be more on this and the program’s production process in a later chapter. What is most relevant to this chapter on action research as a method is the variety of processes for collecting feedback from all Noongar Dandjoo participants. Feedback from Aboriginal participants was collected most effectively through personal interviews, that were conducted prior to a production cycle and then again after the broadcast of a series. Students who participated in series one of Noongar Dandjoo produced their own video that described their experience, and anonymous written surveys were provided for student participants for all three series. It was only in series three, however, that students were surveyed both before and after the production cycle.

It is worth noting here that the ability to allow this project to evolve over a significant period of time has been essential to its success. Three series of Noongar Dandjoo have been produced and broadcast over six years with the action research cycle being repeated with each series. Prior to those six years was another initial two years of quietly exploring and seeking to understand the Perth Aboriginal community and a culture about which I knew very little. It is only in recent months that the fuzzy beginnings of this project feel like they have evolved into clear outcomes. Furthermore, the research issue itself has continued to evolve and may well continue to do so even after the submission of this thesis.
Why Action Research?

The word ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary (Smith 1999, 1).

Research into Aboriginal culture has, in the past, been informed by the European culture of the white researcher and is inextricably linked to colonialism. Aboriginal people and culture were judged by the degree to which they conformed to European culture. The damage done as a result of those ill-informed judgements, especially by government, and the barriers to research that have been created, are well known and have been discussed in previous chapters. The end result, as the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) states, is that:

The repeated marginalisation in research of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values has reinforced these barriers over time creating a ‘collective memory’ that is an obstacle to research today (2003, 18).

The suspicion with which Aboriginal people regard academics and the notion of research is evident in the need for the protocols and guidelines that now seek to guide researchers in their work with Aboriginal people. In this chapter, I argue that action research provides a model for working with those protocols and is well suited to breaking down the barriers, establishing trust, recognising reciprocity, and creating the change that is so desperately needed for Aboriginal communities.

Traditional research requires a researcher to stand outside a situation, observe, and then comment. It examines causal relationships: “If I do x, then y will happen” (McNiff and Whitehead 2009, 19). Action research challenges the traditional view that, in order to be credible, “research must remain objective and value free” (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003, 11). In their article Brydon-Miller and colleagues discuss their own enthusiasm for action research and introduce a global community of like-minded researchers. I identified with the action researchers quoted in this journal
article who passionately report on their community participation projects and extol action research as a process of knowledge creation that is “socially constructed” and recognising “that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction” (2003, 11). The action researchers in this article express dissatisfaction with traditional research methods, a sense of unease with the incongruity between the values they espouse and those they live, and a desire to connect their research with practice. Furthermore, as Brydon-Miller and colleagues note:

… action research goes beyond the notion that theory can inform practice, to a recognition that theory can and should be generated through practice, and, … that theory is really only useful insofar as it is put in the service of a practice focused on achieving positive social change (2003, 15).

Action researchers describe themselves as a community and, without exception, have a passion for social justice – they want to make a difference. They are a community of people who seek the social interaction and group activity that action research promotes. They are optimists who are tolerant of the unpredictable nature of their work. Brydon-Miller and colleagues refer to the ‘beauty of chaos’, the need for patience and the need to trust the people with whom you collaborate.

…‘messes’ sums up one of the ways a great many action researchers differ from their conventional social science colleagues. Messes are complex, multi-dimensional, intractable, dynamic problems that can only be partially addressed and partially resolved. Yet most action researchers have disciplined themselves to believe that messes can be attractive and even exciting (2003, 21).

The messy nature of action research is one of the reasons it has been slow to thrive in universities. Many action researchers have no university
affiliation and prefer to keep it that way, but advocates recognise the need to promote action research within the academy. Levin and Greenwood (2001) argue that universities are becoming more isolated from their communities, that research is often socially disengaged and self-referential, and that the community rarely sees any benefit from such research. What is the point of such research if it doesn’t create change? Much of the literature on action research is critical of the modern university’s failure to engage with community, to solve problems and to extend their learning beyond the walls of the institution. Levin and Greenwood suggest that embracing action research in the university will create students who are active learners, will unite mind and body by connecting theory and practice, and will connect universities with their communities by making them collaborative (2001, 104). Similarly, Hall argues that knowledge should not be something that is accumulated by academics as a kind of commodity that is traded for tenure or promotion. He contends that many of the professions that engage with the community – teachers, nurses and social workers – begin their professional lives at a university and “deserve to study, read and experience the ideas which make up participatory research” (2001, 177).

Quality Action Research

The self-reflexive nature of the action researcher will, of course, prompt them to discuss some of the drawbacks to the approach, such as the regret that most projects, while frequently successful at a local level, fail to have a more far-reaching impact for some of the global issues such as conservation and poverty (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003, 23). I would argue that the local nature of action research is the key to its success. Certainly, for the Noongar Dandjoo project, the recognition of a relatively small, unique community that is the Perth Aboriginal community was crucial, and I believe this is essential for work done in any Aboriginal community. The policies that are so frequently applied to an imagined, national, and homogeneous Aboriginal people are doomed to failure for just that reason – they are national in scope and do not recognise the unique
circumstances of each community. Indeed, the Western Australian Labor government, under the leadership of Geoff Gallop, showed some recognition of this problem when they released the document *Consulting Citizens* in 2005, in answer to the federal government decision to scrap the Aboriginal Torres Strait & Islander Commission (ATSIC). The document makes a commitment to include Aboriginal people in government decision-making and says:

> In the past, a large part of the problem has been policies formulated without the active involvement of the very people whose lives and livelihoods are going to be affected by them and whose support is needed for their success (Gallop 2005, 1).

Whether there is any evidence of the government making good on that commitment is another question, but at least there is some recognition of the need to rethink the ways in which Aboriginal people are consulted.

Using words like ‘messy’, ‘fuzzy’, and ‘holistic’ to describe something that is not easily defined may create the impression that action research is something done by hippies from the comfort of a beanbag. Many will acknowledge that there is still work to be done in creating and articulating stronger theoretical foundations for action research. In this regard, Olav Eikeland notes:

> I think most action research doesn’t understand itself in adequate ways, which often, but not always, means that action researchers have better practices than theoretical self-understandings (quoted in Brydon-Miller et al. 2003, 16).

This is of particular concern for someone like myself who is engaged in the writing of a PhD thesis that must consider theory while using an action research model in the production of a TV program. How do I write an action research thesis? Each of the authors discussed have gone some way to articulating those theoretical foundations, but of particular value
here are two texts – a paper by Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) and a book by McNiff and Whitehead (2009). Each specifically addresses the quality of an action research thesis or report. Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher recognise three common problems with the action research thesis. First, action research is often undertaken by practitioners who are seeking to improve their professional practice but do not have good writing and research skills. They choose action research because they think it might be easier. Second, some university academics are unfamiliar or even ‘hostile’ to the action research thesis, which makes it difficult to find a suitable supervisor. Third, the authors describe the examination process in western countries as a “bit like Russian roulette” because an examiner’s response to a thesis can be unpredictable (2007, 414).

In addressing these problems, both of the works cited have gone to some lengths to provide a theoretical framework, to clearly define action research, and to provide guidelines for the writing of an action research report or thesis. Many of their definitions have already been addressed in this chapter, but they have created a number of succinct lists that are helpful in further defining action research and clarifying what, as a first impression, may seem obscure. In summarising their definitions of a quality action research report or thesis the following should apply:

- Participants reflect on and improve their own situations.
- Their reflection and action are tightly interlinked.
- Their experience is made public.
- Data is gathered by the participants themselves.
- Participants are involved in the decision making.
- Participants work democratically. Power is shared and there is a relative suspension of hierarchical ways of working.
- Members collaborate.
- Participants engage in self-reflection, self-evaluation and self-management.
- There is progressive and public learning by doing and making mistakes.
- Participant reflection supports the idea of the self-reflective practitioner.

In short, effective action research is:
- Critical
- Reflective
- Accountable
- Self-evaluating
- Participative (2007, 415-16)

McNiff and Whitehead then provide a list of questions to assist the process of the action research project:
- What is my concern?
- Why am I concerned?
- What kind of experiences can I describe to show the situation as it is?
- What do I do about it?
- What kind of data do I gather to show the situation as it unfolds?
- How do I ensure the conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?
- How do I modify my ideas and practices in light of the evaluation?
- How do I explain the significance of my research? (2009, 18)

They also provide a list of standards by which practice demonstrates specific values:
- Improvement – participants live educational values of, for example, justice, freedom, inclusion, and independent thinking.
- Learning – from doing action research
- Collaborative enquiry – take other people’s ideas into account.
- Risk – appreciate that nothing is certain. You go on the journey nevertheless.
• Reflective critique – Deconstruct your thinking in light of new learning.
• Dialectical critique – You understand how you and your circumstances have been influenced by history and culture.
• New beginnings – the end of one action research cycle becomes the beginning of a new one (2009, 24).

Writing a report is crucial to the process because the knowledge, the research outcomes, must be shared to meet the democratic and participatory requirements of an action research project. In this way the validity of your findings are tested and articulated against your own personal values and standards, and then against the critical feedback of others. One of the common problems of report writing is the failure to be self-critical and reflexive. Rather than simply writing about what happened – what was done – the report must also consider the frames and perspectives through which a project has been viewed and assessed. McNiff and Whitehead outline each of these frames in terms of a different personal voice – your ‘I’s’ – and explain what is reported in each perspective:

Frame 1 - Your actor-agent ‘I’
From this perspective discuss what you have done, and what happened. What action did you take to address a problem.

Frame 2 - your explanatory ‘I’
The purpose of this voice is to explain why you took the action in frame 1. I did this because… I did this in order to …

Frame 3 - Your researcher ‘I’
Reflect on the actions taken in frame 1, and the explanation for that action in frame 2. How are your claims valid? What evidence do you have of the quality of the data collected from frame 1 and 2?
Frame 4 - Scholarly ‘I’

Test the validity of your claims against your own values, the values of others and against key writers. Engage critically with literature.

Frame 5 - Critically reflexive ‘I’

How am I aware of my own biases? How does my own culture, my own values, influence my thinking? I attempt to understand the validity of other people’s thinking.

Frame 6 - Dialectically critical ‘I’

Recognise how you are in a context that is shaped by historical, cultural, economic and political forces. These external influences mean you may not be able to do everything you want to do, so how do you compromise?

Frame 7 - Meta-reflexive ‘I’

You now look at all the frames together and offer an analysis of entire action-reflection process. What is the significance of your process in terms of how it contributes to your own learning and the learning of other people? (2009, 32-34)

Each of these action research perspectives will be addressed in chapter 8 of the thesis, which reports and discusses the Noongar Dandjoo project in detail. However, I do wish to focus here on the fourth frame, the scholarly ‘I’, in order to further expand the theoretical foundations of action research with reference to a number of writers who have used and reflected on the action research model in their own work, especially in relation to common themes such as democracy and participation. While the work of these theorists may not be labelled as action research, their philosophies share enough common ground to describe them as action research advocates.
Paulo Freire’s work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006) is a seminal work in the field of action research. Freire, as an educator, proposed that both the oppressed people and their oppressors were responsible for the problem and the solution. It was not merely up to the oppressor, or would-be rescuers, to save the oppressed. There was work to be done on both sides. A pedagogy must be “forged with, not for the oppressed” (2006, 48). Solutions to their problems must come from the oppressed themselves. The solutions offered by charitable outsiders must be recognised as paternalistic, as “ego … cloaked in false generosity” (2006, 54), that ultimately maintains the status of the oppressed. Freire’s pedagogy employs a process that distinguishes between systematic education, which can only be changed by political power, and “educational projects which should be carried out with the oppressed in the process of organising them” (2006, 54, emphasis in original). As with action research, Freire proposes the need for the community to identify the problem to be solved and to be a part of the process that finds a solution – for the researcher (or educator) to work with rather than for the community. He also argues for that self-reflexive characteristic of the action research cycle when he says that those who “authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly … to consider oneself the proprietor of revolutionary wisdom – which must be given to (or imposed on) the people – is to retain the old ways” (2006, 60). The people must also engage in reflection because “reflection – true reflection – leads to action” (2006, 60). The need for reflection is further discussed in Freire’s ‘investigation of thematics’, which is about the investigation of people’s thinking, the process of painting a complete historical and cultural picture similar to the ethnographic research of Tacchi and colleagues (2003) referred to above. Again, this is a shared process: “I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me” (Freire 2006, 108).
Freire, then, describes education as a mutual process. Rather than a process of narration whereby students are filled like empty receptacles, education is a process of learning and reconciliation for both teacher and student: “The solution is not to integrate them into the structure of repression, but to transform that structure so that they can become ‘beings for themselves’” (2006, 74). Freire argues against a traditional ‘banking’ system of education, which represents permanence, in favour of ‘problem posing’ education, which represents the opposite value of change. He says, “Education is ... constantly remade in praxis. In order to be, it must become”. Problem posing recognises the history and culture of the people, and it “accepts neither a well-behaved present nor a predetermined future – [it] roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary” (2006, 84). As with action research, Freire recognises the unique and individual circumstances of each community, the dynamic and ‘messy’ nature of life, and the importance of action to bring about change. The crucial connection between theory and practice that is espoused by action researchers is also emphasised by Freire:

...human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action (2006, 125).

Of particular relevance to the Noongar Dandjoo project is Freire’s discussion of cultural invasion. He argues for ‘cultural synthesis’ whereby the actor (or in this case the researcher) does not come to teach or to give anything, but rather to learn with the people. The actors are integrated with the people, there are no spectators, and both “co-author the action that both perform on the world” (2006, 180). It is here that Freire reflects Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity, cultural difference and a third space.

Cultural synthesis does not deny the differences between the two views; indeed, it is based on these differences. It does deny the
invading one by the other, but affirms the undeniable support each gives to the other (2006, 181, emphasis in original).

Freire’s argument for shared responsibility by the oppressor and the oppressed is echoed in academic Marcia Langton’s call for an end to ‘Indigenous exceptionalism’. As debate continues on changes to the Australian constitution that will recognise the unique status of Indigenous people, Langton argues that:

... many Indigenous people have developed a sense of entitlement, and adopt the mantle of the exceptional Indigene, the subject of special treatment on the grounds of race. Hundreds of Aboriginal people ... are fed up with this creeping postmodernist ideology of Indigenism and Indigenous exceptionalism (quoted in Robinson 2012, 19).

Alison Page, like Langton, is on the government panel for constitutional recognition and describes the “learned helplessness and entitlement mentality that is pervading Aboriginal society” as a bad thing (quoted in Robinson 2012, 19). As the title of the newspaper article which quotes Langton suggests, “Indigenous exceptionalism bars realisation of potential” (Robinson 2012, 19) – this is an argument that I believe Freire would support if he were participating in this debate.

Central to any theoretical foundations of action research is the need to communicate, the need for dialogue, and this is traditionally discussed in terms of voice and the right to speak. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, one of the main objectives of democratic community media is to give a voice to those who do not have access to, or who are misrepresented by, mainstream media. Susan Bickford extends the idea of communication and dialogue beyond this focus on voice and reminds us that voice is of little value without listening when she says, “both speaking and listening are central activities of citizenship” (1996, 4). She argues that conflict and difference are what make communication essential, and that political
listening does not necessarily require compassion or caring. Rather, it requires an attention to the role that listening plays in the process of communication and resolving conflict (1996, 2). Politics is not just about shared interests or values; it is about “what we do in the face of conflict about all these things” (1996: 11) – it is about communication. Bickford quotes Benjamin Barber in explaining what it means to listen:

‘I will put myself in his place, I will try to understand, I will strain to hear what makes us alike, I will listen to the common rhetoric evocative of common purpose or common good.’ The effort of listening is directed toward figuring out what unites us, and we accomplish this through the exercise of empathy (1996, 13).

Bickford’s ideas about listening give equal value to voice and listening: both are essential to the process of communication and conflict resolution. Furthermore, the self is not ignored in order to elevate the status of the speaker – speaker and listener are interdependent, have equal status, and both require conscious effort (1996, 144). Listening can be risky because there is a chance that what we hear may require change and growth, and that can be painful (1996: 149). Bickford values ‘courageous listening’ which requires each person to avoid extremes whereby one simply does not hear, or one simply exchanges their own opinion for another: “Both extremes avoid the effort and danger involved in creating a passageway between us” (1996: 153). Neither are the oppressed and disempowered exempt from the responsibility of listening. “They have always had to listen, and will continue to need to, in order to know what is at stake with those in power” (1996, 156). Bickford promotes an action research model when she explains that exempting the disempowered from the responsibility to listen equates to a lack of regard for them as equal partners. She says, “It is as though I am doing something for you, rather than now acting together (1996, 156, emphasis in original). Dennis Simmons, a Noongar man and an important participant in the Noongar Dandjoo program, talks about his mentor and Noongar Elder, Ken Colbung who would tell him over and over that listening was important.
Colbung’s advice was, “You’ve got two ears and only one mouth - so you should listen twice as much” (personal communication, August 2011).

Like Freire, Bickford recognises how our individual cultures and histories impact on perceptions and opinions. She describes people as ‘situated subjects’ with individual life worlds and this will inevitably impact on our relationships. For this reason, just speaking and listening will not always resolve a conflict but it does create the opportunity for what Bickford calls “a temporary gestalt shift in the face of conflict” (1996, 167). This, in turn, creates the possibility for future action and resolution. Bickford concludes with a criticism of mass media, its one-way communication, and its power to mould audiences into certain types of listeners with little opportunity to speak in response.

The media landscape has changed considerably in the 17 years since the 1996 publication of Bickford’s book. With advances in broadband technology, social media, increasing numbers of broadcast channels, and the advent of reality TV, audiences now have more opportunity than ever before to be heard, to participate, to speak back. But it is now the proliferation, rather than the scarcity, of media outlets that causes small voices to be lost in the noise. The problem remains the same – who is listening? Television is of particular concern because, as Neil Postman argues, television “is our culture’s principal mode of knowing about itself…how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly staged” (quoted in Bickford 1996, 180). Television broadcasts brief, catchy sound bites to a mass audience of isolated viewers. There is little opportunity for an audience to think about problems and respond. Bickford argues that a democratic society must compensate an audience of listeners with the right to respond in a “forum of equal social significance” (1996, 182). That is, because there is no forum equal to television, there must be public support for other media. I propose that the forum demanded by Bickford through which people may respond, where individuals speak and listen, is community media. How much listening goes on in community media is another question, one raised by
Tanja Dreher as discussed in chapter 2, but, as Bickford suggests, there is a responsibility for each of us, as citizens, to listen.

Continuing the focus on speaking and listening, I return to the Ganma metaphor, which was described by Kim Collard in chapter 1, and which Timothy Pyrch and Maria Teresa Castillo (2001) use as a metaphor for action research. They lament the lost voices of Indigenous knowledge but they are optimistic about action research because it welcomes the spiritual and intuitive nature of Indigenous knowledge. Dismissed and silenced by the academic and scientific gatekeepers of the modern world, action research and the Ganma metaphor now provide opportunities for those voices to be heard and the knowledge to be shared. As academics themselves, they find it difficult to write about their experiences because their academic training has “fragmented sense from soul” (2001, 379) but, in true action research style, they acknowledge that their stories would not be complete without readers.

Pyrch and Castillo were introduced to the Ganma metaphor of the mixing waters at a participatory action research conference in Canada, by an Australian team of “four white fellas and two Yolngu women” (2001, 380). The Ganma metaphor is attributed to the traditional knowledge of the Yolngu people of north-east Arnhem land in the Northern Territory but the Australian team explained that Ganma represented common knowledge. It was not part of ‘deep and abstract knowledge’ and so could be shared outside of the Yolngu world. The story told describes a river of salt water from the sea (western knowledge) which meets a river of fresh water from the land (Aboriginal knowledge). The two rivers come together in a lagoon, and where they meet, foam is created on the surface. The lines of foam represent the process of Ganma, and it is here that Bhabha’s third space and cultural difference are again reflected:

Some indigenous cultures believe that water has memory. When the two rivers meet to create Ganma, their waters diffuse into each other, but do not forget who they are or where they came from.
'Common' knowledge, like Ganma, is created from the histories of its sources. To give up one's history is to risk losing one's integrity but to share our history allows us to deepen our understanding of it (2001, 380).

Participatory action research invites people to share their histories, to 'sit and talk and listen' as Collard suggests, and is again reflective of Freire's cultural synthesis and Tacchi’s processes for ethnographic participatory research.

The foam in the Ganma metaphor cannot be captured in the hand but it may linger and reveal itself if hands are gently held out. Thus, knowledge will reveal itself if we are open to it and we allow ourselves to be 'permeated’ and create a knowledge that is not yours or mine but ours. “The more open we are the more able we are to listen” (2001, 381).

Ganma is illustrated beautifully in the documentary *Dhakiyarr vs the King* (Murray and Collins 2004). In 1933, Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda, a Yolngu leader, speared a white policeman who had chained and taken his wife. Dhakiyarr’s action was ‘legal’ under Yolngu law but, under white law, he was subsequently arrested, charged with murder, and taken to Darwin for trial. He was found guilty, but the conviction was overturned by the High Court and he was released from prison. Dhakiyarr never returned home. It is believed he was killed on the day of his release from prison, and his body has never been recovered. In the documentary, Dharkiyarr’s family look for answers to the mystery of his disappearance, they follow his footsteps from Arnhem Land to Darwin, and they seek reconciliation with the court that convicted him and the family of the white policeman. It concludes with a ceremony at the Darwin Supreme Court where large numbers of the white and black community, the two families, and members of the judiciary come together to honour Dhakiyarr. As two hundred Yolngu people dance and sing in the courthouse the subtitle appears on the screen, “Saltwater meets freshwater” (2004). (see illustration 7.)
Seventy years after the tragic first meeting of the families, members of policeman Albert McColl's family meet with the grandsons of Dhakiyarr Wirrpanda, who speared and killed McColl in 1933. Wuyal Wirrpanda (left) and Dhukal Wirrpanda are pictured with members of the McColl family.

Photographer: Peter Eve

When men of the law meet. Northern Territory Supreme Court Justices Brian Martin (left) and David Angel (right) and High Court Chief Justice Murray Gleeson (second from right) meet Yolngu Law Man Wuyal Wirrpanda.

Photographer: Peter Eve

Illustration 7: Ganma – salt water meets fresh water.

(Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011)
Talking about the film, producer Graham Isaac said:

We made our film specifically to present the point of view of a participant, to enrich our understanding of a story that is important not just to the Yolngu but to all Australians, one of the great iconic stories of our frontier history - not a 'black' or a 'white' history but a shared history, where both sides must understand and learn from the other in order to glimpse the full story (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011).

Pyrch and Castillo share another story told by a Yolngu educator that is, again, a metaphor for participatory action research:

Here are two Yalu (nest) and they are very different from each other but have some things in common. Between the Yalu there are rivers, mountains and all kinds of things that stop the miny’tji (clan designs) from seeing each other and they are worried about not seeing each other.

So they start planning and working out ways so that they can communicate/translate and be partners in sharing, doing, talking and doing things better for both ‘Yalu’ and help them in growing and developing the miny’tji and Yalu from both sides.

To do this they sat down with their miny’tji and made plans to improve their relationship and when they have made their plans they sent out messengers to deliver their plans and meet some place in between. They met in the middle and showed each other their plans, made changes, added more and put their plan so that there was some similarity with their plans.

This was a new start, a start to a new journey, they started doing things together, sharing culture, skill, ideas and languages. This is like Yolngu (yalu) and Balanda (white man)(yalu). We Yolngu
teachers are getting rom (sic) from the Balanda (yalu) and taking them back to the miny’tji we come from. The Balanda is also doing the same from their yalu, but this doesn’t mean that the Yolngu becomes Balanda and the Balanda becomes Yolngu, but they stay in their own djalkiri and yalu. We only can change skills, ideas and ways of doing things but not ourselves, we stayed the way we were, are and will be: Yolngu stays Yolngu and Balanda stays Balanda (2001, 380).

The Yolngu explained that they never do their action research alone – always in a group or “yaka gana’ which conveys the idea that one perspective is insufficient for understanding life” (2001: 383).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, a Maori academic, gives a detailed and historic account of western research of Indigenous peoples in her book Decolonising Methodologies (1999). She describes research as a struggle between the “interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other” (1999, 2). For Indigenous people, research is synonymous with colonialism and colonisation. The idea of post-colonialism is regarded with scepticism and best articulated by Indigenous rights campaigner Bobbi Sykes who, when asked, said “What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?” (quoted in Smith 1999, 24) – a sentiment I have heard repeated in my own personal communications with Aboriginal people. Smith argues that research has traditionally been conducted with little benefit for the Indigenous people who are the subjects of the research, and from a perspective that assumes western ways of viewing and understanding the world are the only way, the right way, and therefore superior. Some would suggest that attitudes have changed, but Smith asks who is more likely to say that – the researcher or the Indigenous people (1999, 56)?

The research conducted in relation to Indigenous people is frequently discussed in terms of a ‘problem’ – the ‘Indigenous problem’, the ‘Aboriginal problem’. Indigenous people are perceived to be the cause of
their own problems and to have no solutions to offer. This is continuously
communicated back to Indigenous communities by the media and
politicians, and because the term ‘research’ has come to mean ‘problem’
for Indigenous communities they switch off and resist research because it
merely reinforces that definition and contributes to a sense of
regularly in Australian media and a recent example in The Australian
newspaper highlights the frustration Aboriginal communities experience
when they are not included in conversations about solutions. The story
quotes a woman from a Gulf of Carpentaria community:

For Gloria Friday and her daughter Adrianne, the endless stream of
do-gooders passing through their remote town does little to help.
All come with ideas, but few listen to those of the locals – at least
that’s how they feel (Aikman 2012, 6).

Smith advocates research by Indigenous people as an important next step
in the process of self-determination and decolonisation – a process that
commences with and includes Indigenous politics and social justice
issues. It is essential to the process of self-determination that Indigenous
people become active participants in research and there are increasing
numbers of successful Indigenous research projects that have been
established within communities as well as academy-based projects. It is
the community-based research that is of particular relevance here
because community is such a difficult notion to define. It can mean a
geographically co-located community such as a tribe, or a community of
interest such as a women’s group, or a group of artists, or a political
group. What is important is that the word ‘community’ suggests a more
“intimate, human and self-defined space” (Smith 1999, 127) than the word
‘field’ which is used in traditional research language and suggests a space
‘out there’ from which the researcher is objectively removed. It is the
human, self-defining nature of community that connects action research
with Indigenous communities and causes Smith to emphasise the
importance of process for Indigenous community research:
In many projects the process is far more important than the outcome. Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate. They are expected to lead one small step further towards self-determination (1999, 128).

Smith describes Kaupapa Maori research, which is an approach to research that supports Maori researchers and research that benefits Maori people (1999, 183-93). It recognises and prioritises a uniquely Maori view of the world and a Maori approach to research. “Kaupapa Maori is a ‘conceptualisation of Maori knowledge’” (quoted in Smith 1999, 188). For this reason the role of the non-Indigenous researcher involved in a Kaupapa Maori research project is something about which Maori researchers will disagree, with some arguing that only Maori may do Kaupapa Maori research. I suggest, however, that there are aspects of Kaupapa Maori research that are reflective of action research. Of most significance is the importance of community consultation and participation, and the equal status of all participants as researchers. Kaupapa Maori research emphasises the need for research that benefits the community, the importance of reciprocity, sharing knowledge and reporting back to the community, and long-term commitment.

I was reminded of Smith’s passionate call for the support of Maori researchers in New Zealand when I attended a forum that was held recently at Curtin University where I work. The objective of the forum was to bring together all the people who were participating in Indigenous research from across the University to discuss the formation of a single Indigenous research group. There were a significant number of Aboriginal people at the forum and the discussion commenced, reflecting Smith’s words, with the proposal to prioritise the employment and retention of Aboriginal researchers at the University. Then a series of non-Indigenous faculty representatives presented a kind of audit of their various Indigenous research projects of which there were many. One speaker commenced her presentation with a confession to feeling ill-at-ease about
presenting herself as a person who researched Indigenous topics when she was not Indigenous herself. When questioned about her discomfort she explained it as a sense of guilt and responsibility for the suffering that Indigenous people had experienced. I wondered if two very different agendas might evolve from this proposed Indigenous research group with its Indigenous and non-Indigenous members each having different priorities. Whatever the outcome, there remains the question of the role of the non-Indigenous researcher doing Indigenous research. I too have occasionally felt ill at ease when asked to speak about my own research, but not because of a sense of personal guilt. It is more to do with a feeling of being an outsider who, with my blonde hair and middle class ways, calling myself an academic, represents everything that Aboriginal people do not trust. However, the way forward must include the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community working together. It is how we work together that matters and, while it may not hold all the answers, action research has something to offer.

Participatory action research offers a way of working whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can come together to work and create change. It offers a path to reconciliation by creating a space for talking, listening, and for doing together – for Ganma. However, time must be taken to reflect and think on what we do in order to understand how our individual histories, cultures and life worlds frame the way we think and act. Finally, writing and sharing action research is the crucial stage of the cycle that verifies the outcomes, because actions are critiqued and assessed by all involved. I felt confident that participatory action research was ideally suited to inform the process of production for our television program, Noongar Dandjoo.

A participatory action research process was followed and it is at this point that this thesis takes on a structure that reflects each of the 'look, think, act' stages of the cycle. Chapters 4-7 are about ‘looking’: they describe and report on community media and, more specifically, the Indigenous community media sector. As Tacchi and colleagues (2003) suggest, these
chapters begin with a broad context that includes history and the ‘big stories’ such as loss of culture. The chapters then become more targeted, with the Aboriginal community of Perth as the focus because they are the key stakeholders in the *Noongar Dandjoo* project. It was crucial to have an ethnographic understanding of the Perth Aboriginal community, their history and their media, and this was achieved through a variety of approaches. Personal interviews, historical and government documents, and literature from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors have all contributed to my evolving understanding of the Perth Aboriginal community and the role of Noongar media. Of particular importance were the personal interviews I conducted with Aboriginal people who had contributed to the establishment of Perth Aboriginal community radio in the late 1970’s. Other personal interviews were conducted with people who were instrumental in the establishment and management of current community media organisations in Perth, and some who were involved in national community and Indigenous media projects.

Chapter 8 represents the ‘think’ and ‘act’ stages of the action research cycle as it describes the self-reflection, planning and production processes for the *Noongar Dandjoo* program. This chapter also reflects the ongoing action research cycle, as feedback from stakeholders has been collected after each program series and used to inform subsequent productions. The initial feedback process involved personal interviews with prominent Aboriginal community leaders and with Noongar staff at the Curtin University Centre for Aboriginal Studies. With each series of the program my contact list of program participants and advisors grew and I would use that email list to regularly ask for program ideas, inform people of the progress of production, and to ask for feedback. I learnt that the most effective way of obtaining feedback from participants was by making personal contact and sitting down for a face-to-face conversation, usually over a cup of coffee. I would make time for these conversations in the weeks leading up to a new production, and in the weeks after the program had been broadcast. The people I spoke to were a mix of community leaders, program participants and Noongar staff at the Curtin Centre for
Aboriginal Studies. The program host, Dennis Simmons, was usually one of the first contacts for feedback because he was active in the community and would relay to me the comments he had received from family and friends. Michelle White was also a regular interviewee as she has a media background and, because of her community based work, was knowledgeable of current community issues and could offer sound advice on the appropriate people to speak to about particular program elements. I made sure that I contacted long term participants and people who had been involved with the program in the past, even if they had not participated directly with a current production. I frequently recorded feedback conversations and received written permission to use the recordings for my research and future publications.

When seeking feedback from community the conversations I recorded all commenced with the same questions, which were designed to be as open and non-leading as possible. For example, “What are your thoughts on the last series of Noongar Dandjoo?” “What could we do better?” “Do you have suggestions or ideas for the next series?” Series three is the best example of how the program was influenced by feedback. People had suggested on many occasions that the program was too ‘light’ and that it was missing opportunities to talk about some of the big issues in the Noongar community. This is addressed in more detail in Chapter 8, but the panel and live audience format that we adopted for series 3 was in response to those comments and attempted to address four themes that had been suggested by Noongar participants during interviews and discussions.

Producing Noongar Dandjoo is a full-time occupation. Even during periods of non-production (the program is produced every two years), community members would contact me with ideas for the program, or to request assistance producing videos about community projects and issues. For example I spent one semester producing short Noongar language DVDs to assist a newly formed language group in Perth. They requested my help and I was able to donate some time to their cause.
This in turn gave me access to more community members who, having met me, might then feel more welcome to participate in the program. There were often impromptu and informal conversations about Noongar Dandjoo and ideas for the program. For example, I attended a writer’s festival in Broome in 2013 and met an Aboriginal woman who knew Dennis Simmons, and who was familiar with the program and offered positive feedback. By the time the third series was produced my invitation, via email, for people to participate and offer ideas was met with enthusiasm with some responses coming from as far away as the Kimberley.

Action research informed the cycle of feedback and I attempted to obtain feedback from as wide a range of community members as possible. Twenty-seven formal interviews were conducted throughout the project, as well as numerous informal interactions with Aboriginal community participants and advisors. Action research is about participation and democratic processes, and it is these characteristics that make it well suited to the community media process, the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 4

COMMUNITY TELEVISION

In 2000, after twenty years of working in mainstream television production, I took up a university teaching role and commenced work with students who had access to a well-equipped multi-camera television studio. It was my job to teach them production skills and how to make a television program. I was also introduced for the first time to community media through an established relationship that the university had with a newly licenced Perth community television station for which the students produced programs. At the time I had no experience of community media and confess that, from what I had seen, I was disdainful of the new station and its collection of amateur videos produced by what I thought were television ‘wanna-be’s’. However, my students’ involvement with the station forced me to take more interest in community media and my eyes were opened by an interview I read with Tracey Naughton, an Australian community broadcaster and cultural worker (Horler 1993, 43-45). In this interview, Naughton acknowledged that most Australians saw community television as “aesthetically impoverished vanity video” produced by “broadcasting exhibitionists” but that is because:

In Australia people don’t make that connection between access and creating change. Here people don’t understand why we should have a CTV sector. We’re willing and ready to accept without question what we see and learn from existing television services (in Horler 1993, 44).

She explained that in countries like South Africa, and some South American countries, community media is valued as a powerful tool for social justice and change. Australian community media has matured and progressed since the 1990’s when Naughton was interviewed, with the most significant changes seen in the rise of scholarly research and
publications about community media, both in Australia and internationally. Prior to 2000, the subject was mostly ignored and undervalued by academics, but there is now a growing number of international academics who are actively engaged with and passionate about community media – many of them personally involved as practitioners. This chapter draws on that increasing level of academic engagement, and on recent efforts to better theorise community media in its many diverse forms.

Naughton’s words made me think again about the value of community media in Australia and I’ve been researching community television ever since. Consequently, the case study of Perth community television that was the basis of my Honours thesis (Johnston 2005) revealed that the Aboriginal community were not participating in spite of their involvement in the establishment and licencing of the Perth station, Access 31. This in turn led to my research into Aboriginal community media, an investigation of the reasons behind the absence of Noongar community media in Perth, and to the Noongar Dandjoo project. An understanding of the role of community media, especially in Australia, will in turn contribute to a better understanding of Indigenous community media. Like all community media, there are diverse forms of Indigenous media and the role each of them plays is unique to each individual community.

I wish to emphasise at the outset that community media has many diverse forms and each individual media project has its own unique objectives and processes. Much of the theory discussed in this chapter can be applied to any community media format, be it television, radio, print or internet. However, the focus of this chapter is community television because of my personal background and because television is the medium chosen for the Noongar Dandjoo project. The focus here is also Indigenous community media and so I draw from this particular sector of community media for example and illustration. I also acknowledge that Kevin Howley’s edited text, Understanding Community Media (2010), features prominently in this chapter. Due to its recent publication and its diverse range of contributing authors, I found it to be an invaluable and comprehensive text on
community media theory, featuring a large number of international case studies.

**Grassroots Media Beginnings**

George Stoney is widely regarded as the “father of public access television” (Howley 2010, 16), a term for community television used in the United States. A documentary filmmaker in the depression era, Stoney was an executive producer for Canada’s *Challenge for Change* program from 1968-70, and it was here that he came to appreciate the value of participatory production techniques for creating social and political change. Working with the impoverished community of Fogo Island he produced films *with* the community rather than *about* them, to assist them in communicating with each other and with government authorities who were planning to close down and relocate the community. The films were screened at community meetings, where they facilitated dialogue and contributed to a sense of community solidarity and identity. The success of the Challenge for Change project led Stoney to make more films across Canada and eventually to co-found the Alternative Media Centre (AMC) in New York City in 1970, which was to become the hub for the public access television movement in the United States. The AMC were responsible for uniting disparate groups such as video artists, community groups, and government regulatory bodies around the idea of access and participation for the creation of a democratic media. It is Stoney’s public access television that created the model for community media around the world (Linder 1999, 3-4; Rennie 2006, 49-52; Howley 2010, 16-17).

The emergence in 1968 of new technology in the form of video porta-pak cameras was a significant incentive for Stoney and the public access television movement. Where previously the expense and technical complexity of film cameras had made filmmaking inaccessible to the average person, porta-pak cameras put affordable, user-friendly technology out onto the street and into the hands of the non-professional. It was this new technology that also led to the formation of a second video
movement known as ‘guerilla television’ which emerged from the American left wing counter-culture, who saw themselves as revolutionaries challenging the power of network television (Harding 1997, 4; Linder 1999, 7). The guerrilla video movement was directly tied to the protest era and eventually disbanded, but ‘guerrilla filmmaking’, ‘radical media’ and ‘alternative media’, have continued as terms linked to community media.

Australia’s community media has strong foundations in radio and the first community radio station was licenced in Adelaide as early as 1972. However it was not until the 1990s that Australia opened the airwaves to community television as the result of lobbying by community media advocates (Australian Government 2012). Like their US and Canadian counterparts, participants here saw community media as a tool for social change. Though there is little evidence of political activism today, Australian community television has its roots in the advocacy videos of the 1970s and the community video access centres that produced them. Community action groups would form around local issues and they used video to document them. The videos played a role in effectively progressing the political process of those community issues when their producers screened them at town hall meetings or delivered them to politicians for viewing (Cook 1993).

Strict government regulation and the granting of only temporary licences led to a slow and difficult beginning for Australian community TV. The first television licence was granted in 1987 to a student community television broadcaster, RMIT, in Melbourne with test broadcasts being conducted in other capitals up until 1992. The strict regulations governing the community TV broadcasts and the absence of any long term vision or support for the sector hampered the development and growth of Australian community television throughout the 1990s. It was not until 2003 that the government finally announced that it would take applications for five-year licences that would be issued under the regulations and guidelines designed for the sector by the then regulator, the Australian Broadcasting Authority. The small degree of security created by the five-year licences
was later eroded by government indecision on the provision of digital spectrum for community television. A 2001 election promise to provide digital spectrum was not delivered until 2009, a delay that reportedly led to the demise of Perth’s station, Access 31. Today, five community television stations across Australia, including Perth’s new station West TV, now have digital access, but they continue to struggle in the shadow of a thriving community radio sector (Rennie 2007, 21; Australian Government 2012).

Indigenous community media in Australia have developed independently of other community media, with different objectives that will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. They are, however, an important part of Australia’s community television history and so Indigenous media are included here as part of that grassroots history. In 1977, new satellite technology was being explored, and with it the possibility of remote and central Australia having access to mainstream television for the first time. The federal government failed to consult the large Aboriginal population in remote and central Australia who would be affected by the new television service that was predicted to feature hand-me-down programs broadcasting out of Sydney and Melbourne. Many Aboriginal people feared that access to mainstream television would be like a “cultural nerve gas” (Meadows and Molnar 2001, 47), detrimental to Aboriginal language and culture. On the other hand, some saw it as an opportunity and lobbied government for the right to produce programming that catered to the large Aboriginal population of the region. In 1983, as community media advocates lobbied for Aboriginal television in Alice Springs, the communities of Ernabella and Yuendumu were determined to run their own media and so set up a pirate television station and began broadcasting locally produced, culturally appropriate programs to small remote communities in the Tanami desert region of South Australia (Rennie 2007, 25; Bell 2008, 76-88). It was actually these Warlpiri and Pitjantjatara communities that were the first community TV broadcasters, albeit without a government broadcast licence. Eventually, a radio licence was issued to the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association’s
(CAAMA) Radio 8KIN, the first ever licence issued to an Aboriginal owned broadcaster in Australia, and they commenced broadcasting in 1985. Imparja television, based in Alice Springs, was granted a commercial television licence in 1986 and today continues to operate one of the largest commercial broadcast services in Australia (Bell 2008, 282). It was these Aboriginal communities’ determination to broadcast that led the federal government to establish the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) in 1987.

The story of Aboriginal television in Australia is a similar one to Indigenous media stories in other countries. Recognising television as a valuable tool for maintaining language and culture, communities in countries like Canada and New Zealand have fought hard to have their own independent Indigenous television services. (Meadows and Molnar 2001, 66). Community media’s contribution to cultural maintenance is central to this thesis and will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Defining Community Media**

It was mentioned earlier that community media is a generic term that encompasses a diverse range of mediums and experiences. Reflecting that diversity is a variety of terms used to describe this type of media, including ‘participatory media’, ‘alternative media’,’ radical media’, ‘emancipatory media’, ‘independent media’ and ‘citizens’ media’ (Fuller 2007, 1; Howley 2010, 15). Each of these terms provides a hint of the context within which community media operates and the role it plays for each individual participating community. Rodriguez describes this role as “quilting a communicative space… a colourful quilt, [that] takes a myriad of different shapes and eclectic forms” (2001, 27). Ellie Rennie says, “community media is distinguished by its aspirations and motivations as much as by its methods and structures”(2006, 4). For example, the cultural maintenance role of a community radio station in central Australia, and the experience of those who participate in that station’s programs (see [http://caama.com.au/](http://caama.com.au/)) will be different to that of a Zimbabwean news
website (see http://www.newzimbabwe.com/, Ndlela, 2010: 8 -95), operating in a country where opposition to an oppressive government is actively quashed. In India, the need is different again and information and communication technology (ICT) projects are being developed to provide education and empowerment for those living in extreme poverty (Tacchi et al. 2003, vii-x). Rodriguez, who prefers the term ‘citizens’ media’, offers some insight into the complexity of community media forms:

… there is no neat model or formula of citizens’ media. Citizens have invented a multiplicity of formulas to bring into existence their own media communication practices. Every crevice in the legal, economic and political infrastructures has been milked for financial and legal resources. Therefore, citizens’ media come in all shapes… each newly found formula becomes a historical venture, changing and fluctuating over time (Rodriguez 2001, 64).

For the academics and advocates who have sought to define and understand community media, it is this diversity of form that has complicated research and theoretical development in this area. However, what is at the core of all these definitions and labels is that community and citizens’ media are “seen as an articulation of citizenship, when citizenship is seen as the day-to-day endeavour to renegotiate and construct new levels of democracy and equality” (Rennie 2006, 21).

Community media are non-commercial and not-for-profit organisations that are run mostly by volunteers – an aspect of community media operations that is essential to the maintenance of their independence because it protects them from government and corporate interests. Fairchild says that in his experience the only unifying principle of community media is “a common culture of volunteering, and passion” (2010, 26). This is important for community media advocates, given their growing discontent about a society in which Australians are “constituted as consumers with choices, not citizens with rights” (Fairchild 2010, 26). Community media encourage participation from their workforce at all levels, from program
making to station management. Furthermore, the participatory nature of community media allows for two-way communication between audience and broadcaster, rather than the typically one-way communication process of mass media. They also provide opportunity for a genuine reciprocal conversation between civic society, grassroots community, and larger public institutions such as government. It is the participatory nature of community media, the shared experience of production that reminds us just how important it is “for overcoming feelings of apathy and disenfranchisement that undermine democratic values, practices and institutions” (Howley 2010, 74). Nevertheless, the not-for-profit and non-commercial nature of community media that supposedly ensures its independence is also at the heart of much that ails a sector in which many of its broadcasters struggle for financial survival. As Rennie argues, it is the perceived binary relationship between civil society and the market, good versus bad, that creates:

… the tensions between community media and market participation
…The anticommmercialism associated with community media … may work to marginalise the sector and reinforce the interests and power of the commercial sector (2006, 35).

Commercial broadcasters mostly provide a hegemonic view of the world in order to appeal to a majority of viewers and therefore deliver maximum audience to their advertisers (Given 2000, 35-51). Community media, on the other hand, are more likely to represent alternative cultures and ideologies – those most at risk of being marginalised or disenfranchised by mainstream media owing to race, gender, politics or religion. It is for this reason that the term ‘alternative’ media is frequently used. Howley has problems with the use of this term arguing that this encourages community media to be assessed purely as something set up in opposition to dominant media. This results in the application of inappropriate criteria in evaluating its purpose and contribution and, fails to recognise that some community media are established to fill a gap caused by an absence of any kind of media. In other words:
Applying professional standards to alternative media misses the point … evaluating alternative media in terms of production values, audience size and profit-making acumen fails to appreciate alternative media in terms of their ability to transform social relations and encourage innovative forms of cultural expressions through new ways of organising media production (Howley 2010, 18).

While community media may be difficult to define there are two universal concepts that are vital to all community media – participation and access. Participation refers to community involvement in production processes and procedures, and access refers to the communication tools and resources needed for production. Together, these concepts facilitate community media’s “raison d’être [which is] two-way communication within the local community” (Howley 2010, 16).

**Globalisation, the Local and a Sense of Place.**

Each evening audiences are likely to see an advertisement on TV that features their local news team and promotes that news service as ‘your’ news. The channels that run those promotions know that the ‘local’ is valued by audiences, especially in what the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) calls the BAPH (Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart) states, and images of local landmarks and personalities usually feature prominently in these ads. But local is a value that is becoming harder to deliver for mainstream broadcasters. Technology has centralised television production to major cities such as Sydney and Melbourne, while other regions are connected via satellite and mostly transmit networked material with limited broadcast windows for the insertion of a local program (usually news). Even the non-commercial public broadcasters, like ABC and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), who are mandated to cater
to local audiences, are limited in terms of their ability to carry out that brief because of centralised production facilities and budget restrictions that force them to focus on a national audience. In 2012, *The West Australian* newspaper published an opinion piece by journalist Pam Casellas, who accused the ABC of failing to honour its charter as a national broadcaster. She writes:

\[
\text{Are you absolutely sure you are serving the needs of all Australian taxpayers equally? There are many of us who feel you are not, that you have chosen to look no further than Sydney. The rest of us are the ignored. Our views don’t matter (2012, 23).}
\]

Thus, as Vatikiotis notes, “[T]he public service model fails to satisfy the multiplicity of discourses articulated in the ‘nooks and crannies’ of civil society” (2010, 36). On the other hand, community television, founded as it is on principles of access and participation, produces significant amounts of local programming. The Community Broadcasting Foundation report for 2010 found that three long-term licenced metropolitan community television services were producing 166 hours per week of locally-produced programming (2010). The figures for radio are even more impressive with two-thirds of all stations reporting that they broadcast more than 100 hours per week of local content. If one takes into account all other Australian content broadcast by community radio, the sector far exceeds its commercial counterparts (Rennie 2006, 120; Forde 2010, 182).

The Australian government has recognised the role television plays in supporting Australian culture and identity by legislating for quotas of local content on television. But what qualifies as local? *The Broadcasting Services (Australian content) Standard 2005* states its objectives as:

\[
\text{... to promote the role of commercial television broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity by supporting the community’s}
\]
continued access to television programs produced under Australian
creative control (ACMA 2005a, 3).

The intent here is to promote Australian production and restrict the
importation of television programs from overseas – especially from the US
which, even with local content laws, dominates our television viewing
experience. But who and what is the community referred to by the
Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)? In the words of
Raymond Williams, “the process of communication is in fact the process of
community” (1961, 55), and so audiences could be forgiven for
concluding, from what television communicates to them, that the
community is white, middleclass, English-speaking, heterosexual and
living on the east coast of Australia. Certainly for remote and regional
Aboriginal communities there is little evidence of their identity or culture
reflected on mainstream television. Indeed, those glimpses of Aboriginal
identity that are reflected in the media focus on their ‘otherness’, in much
the same way as ethnic communities are portrayed. Aboriginal people are
frequently demonised by the media, or at least stereotyped as either
victims or villains (Phillips 2009, 19-32; Stewart et al. 2013), and this will
be discussed further in the next chapter. It is important to note here that
Aboriginal communities are just one example of the many diverse, minority
communities that make up the Australian population but do not fit neatly
into a homogeneous Australian culture or identity.

In considering the ‘local’, one must also consider ‘place’, or more
specifically a sense of place that is constructed by our physical
environment as well as by human activity, which can be as diverse as
industry and art. Cultural representations of place, such as film,
advertising and literature, tell us who is and who is not of a particular place
– they construct symbolic boundaries and so identify who is an insider and
who is an outsider (Howley 2010, 128). Technology has contributed to
globalisation in such a way that it could be argued ‘place’ doesn’t matter
anymore. Telephones, broadband and satellites allow us to be
‘connected’ to the world like never before. But a sense of place is crucial
to our identity, our sense of community and how we experience community. In a globalised world it could be argued that it has become even more important, and that community media can help to renegotiate and create a sense of place in a globalised era. Howley asserts that:

... place provides a basis for individual and collective identity formation. Indeed, our sense of self, and of others, is shaped in large part by our identification with, and our affinity for, a particular place. What’s more, we articulate a shared sense of place through ... ‘culture’ (2010, 9).

Howley reminds us that there is nothing new about globalisation (2010, 129). Processes of immigration, colonialism, international trade and mass communication are global events that are part of our history, but all these events have intensified in recent times. Media can help to keep us connected to the local by contributing to the creation of community identity and to a sense of place. Community media represent ‘local’ in a way that mainstream media no longer can. For Aboriginal communities in particular, connection to country and a sense of place is central to culture and identity. National mainstream broadcasters, especially public broadcasters such as SBS and ABC who produce a significant amount of Aboriginal programs, are less likely to recognise the numerous and diverse Aboriginal cultures that exist across Australia. Rather, Aboriginal culture is represented by these national broadcasters as one, national homogeneous Indigenous culture. On the other hand, Indigenous community broadcasters are able to cater to specific Aboriginal cultural groups, from the urban dwelling Noongar in Perth (see http://www.noongarradio.com/) to the small and remote communities in western and central Australia (see http://www.ictv.net.au/).
Process and Product.

For national broadcasters the criteria for success is focused on outcomes: programs and audience ratings. The success of each channel, each program, is assessed by how many people are watching and listening. For commercial broadcasters this is relevant to their financial success, because audience numbers translate into advertising dollars. For government-funded public broadcasters, similar quantitative measures are used to demonstrate their relevance and appeal to a national audience in order to justify their funding. Moreover, these all-important programs are produced by professional program makers in centralised production facilities. Rarely do audience members access or participate in production although there are exceptions, including reality television, game shows or programs recorded before a studio audience. However, apart from a few examples like the SBS program Insight (see http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/), or the ABC’s Q&A (see http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/), audience participation has little impact on production choices or what is communicated by the program.

In the community media sector the contribution to community, empowerment and identity-building goes beyond output. It is not just the programs broadcast by community media that make that contribution, but the process of their production as well. Rennie provides an anecdote that helps to illustrate a process that is created when people from diverse backgrounds come together. In this case a connection is made through dialogue and cooperation, albeit unrelated to production.

A volunteer insists that he will not work on a program “that’s contrary to Christ,” although he admits that he did help one such producer to get his car started: “his choke broke down and I helped him with his starter (laughing). Crawled right up under it and helped him with it, but I’m not gonna help him with his program” (Rennie 2006, 59).
In furthering our understanding of ‘process’ Howley uses articulation theory, which can be understood to mean ‘speaking’ and can also mean ‘connection’, as with a British ‘articulated’ lorry⁴. Cultural theorists use the term to discuss the connection between groups, ideas or practices. Howley suggests both meanings of the word, speaking and connection, are useful in thinking about community media because it emphasises the role of communication in “creating a sense of shared identity and collective solidarity between disparate groups and individuals” (2010, 64). Not only does articulation theory help us to understand the connections made between disparate groups and people, it also helps to differentiate individual communities. In Howley’s words, “communities are expressions of difference as well as commonality - there is unity in difference” (2010, 64). Furthermore, it is the process of ‘joining in’ that is most important in articulation.

The two vital elements of community media, participation and access, combine to produce another facet of process – a breaking down of the audience-producer barrier that is typical of mainstream media. The process of community media production means community, audience and program-maker are, potentially, all one and the same. An extensive survey in 2009 of Australian community media audiences provided clear evidence of community media’s unique producer-audience relationship:

The process represents a collapse – or at the very least, a weakening – of the traditional audience-producer barrier that defines media production, thus creating an environment which has enabled unique processes of identity formation ‘through dialogue’ (Forde et al. 2009, 17-18).

The survey demonstrated the immense value audiences, especially those in ethnic and Indigenous communities, place on community media, which

⁴ A vehicle that has a pivoting joint that connects one part of the vehicle with another part, such as a trailer. In the UK an articulated lorry is a combination of a tractor and a semi-trailer.
were frequently referred to as ‘ours’ (Forde et al. 2009, 144). Familiarity with community media presenters, recognition of them as ‘grassroots people’ and/or kin, a feeling of comfort with the language or ‘lingo’ used, all contribute to a trust and confidence that breaks down the producer-audience barrier.

The community media audiences recognise and value the difference that these ethnic and Indigenous community broadcasters represent, as well as the personal connection they feel with the community media producers. This echoes Bhabha’s concepts of hybridity, cultural difference and third space. The process of joining, of doing community media, of connecting communities, the process of articulation, is the process of creating a third space. And like the third space, articulation is not static but something that is constantly in motion, being remade and re-created (Howley 2010, 65).

New and Fragmented Media

If you type “broadcast yourself” into a Google search the first result will lead you to a YouTube promotional video inviting you to do just that – broadcast yourself (YouTube 2012). Technology has made it possible for anybody with a phone or a cheap camera to record his or her message and post on the Internet for the world to see. Web 2.0 could be assumed to herald a new age of media access, participation and democracy. The question could be asked, why bother funding community radio or television when anybody can have access to the internet, anybody can participate? Yet rather than the internet providing solutions, it seems only to have further complicated discussions regarding media democracy.

Otto Leopold Tremetzberger suggests that the internet’s emancipatory potential, its “democratic visions and hopes…remain unfulfilled” (2010, 53). Contrary to expectations of technology democratising information and knowledge, globalised markets continue to control the technology leading to “social homogenization” (2010, 53). While Google may state that its
“mission is to organize the world’s information and make it universally accessible and useful” (Google 2012), Tremetzberger questions Google’s potential as an independent public sphere when it is Google itself that gets to choose what information is useful.

The assumption of universal access is also flawed. Even with growing mobile phone ownership, access to online media is limited for impoverished communities and developing countries (see Barker-Plummer and Kidd 2010, 319). For the digital ‘haves’ with access to technology and time to participate, there is no need to encourage activity. The internet has become an ocean of trivia, blogs, video, advertising and information – there is no holding back. Everyone with access can have a voice. For the internet the question is no longer about who is participating but rather – who is listening? In The Video Activist Handbook written in 1997 Thomas Harding recognised, even in those early days of the internet, that the vast internet audience “presents a difficult problem. Can you access them? And if you do, will they listen?” (1997, 207). Similarly, Sandoval and Fuchs argue that merely giving people access to media production is not enough: “Participation remains very limited if people can only talk but are not heard” (2010, 144).

Shawn Sobers agrees with Tremetzberger and argues that the outward appearance of democracy that the internet offers is really just more of the same - media giants like Google ensuring that the economic powerbase doesn't change. He also recognises the vastness of the internet as a problem, and these are the “challenges faced by the stakeholders of the communication platforms – to avoid being drowned by the sea of individual voices now across the digital airwaves” (2010, 197). However, Sobers also reminds us again of the community media process and that all-important human need for the social interaction that is offered by participatory processes. He provides examples of the many different forms that participation and process can take: audience surveys, media education and analysis, film production, and skill development.
Community media is not just about servicing communication platforms, and Sobers reminds us that it is there also:

… to agitate mainstream services and encourage participation in civil society and decision making. Web 2.0 provides an effective bag in which to carry ideas, but it is the facilitation of the participatory process that will continue to ensure that critical questioning, participant-centred learning, and pastoral conversation take place in the journey toward filling up the bag, not just marvelling at its contents (2010, 198).

If the internet has limited capacity to provide a home for community media, then the answer must lie with traditional media platforms like radio and television – or does it? The future, or even the current status, of traditional broadcast media continues to be debated. In the modern media environment, “TV networks are stuck between a rock and a hard place” (Brook & Meade 2012, 6-8), as it becomes difficult for them to deliver the high production cost programs that audiences seem to want while at the same time battling profit-defeating factors such as rising costs, fragmented audiences, greater competition and internet piracy (Ferguson and Idato 2012). The statistics are a constantly moving target that only contribute to the sense of uncertainty surrounding the industry. For example television still has the biggest share of the total advertising dollar but numbers are slipping, with an expectation that online advertising will soon overtake television (Brook and Meade 2012, 6-8). Although accessing news is one of the most common online activities, the majority of the news originates from mainstream sources such as newspapers and network TV (ACMA 2011a, 1). There is an evolving generational difference between the way old and young people access media. Young people are more likely to access their news from the internet and to spend more time online than watching television (ACMA 2011a; Pew Research Centre 2012b). Yet, regardless of delivery platform the biggest screen in the house remains popular with 96 per cent of all video viewing done through a conventional television set (Oztam 2012). Competing with pay TV and the internet,
free-to-air broadcasters are working hard to ensure that television “remain[s] at the centre of the national conversation” (Brook and Meade 2012, 6-8) and so far they seem to be doing just that. Chief executive of industry body **Free TV Australia**, Julie Flynn, reports that 14 million people watch commercial TV – that it continues to be a “robust platform” (Brook and Meade 2012, 6-8). Programs originally made for television are being accessed via broadband, smart TV and ‘catch up’ TV, but these are still being viewed and experienced in the same way as broadcast television: it is only their delivery platform that is different. There is very little evidence of programs, of any genre, with the production standards audiences expect from television, being produced solely for the internet.

Remembering Raymond Williams’ words about communication and community, traditional mainstream media contribute, at a national level, to the creation of an Australian community and identity. The community represented by mainstream TV may be a homogeneous one that frequently fails to recognise minority groups, but it does offer a shared experience that the fractured and boundless wide world of web is less able to reproduce. TV, it seems for now, is a more effective communication platform than the internet. Therefore, to avoid the “individualistic spaces of withdrawal” that Sandoval and Fuchs (2010, 143) warn us against, the question remains – can we assume that community media and the voices they represent are better served by traditional delivery platforms like television and radio? There are no clear answers to this question. A crystal ball is needed to know the future of television in the age of the internet and converging media, but when considering delivery platforms for community media I suggest this will matter less as broadband becomes more accessible to remote and impoverished communities. The Australian government’s high-speed broadband network policy promises access for more people, including regional Australia (although the government is not guaranteeing access for all Australians, see [http://www.nbn.gov.au/](http://www.nbn.gov.au/)). However this relates purely to content delivery. What about the important media process already discussed? Even where delivery of community media programs may be via the internet rather than
through a traditional broadcasting model, this does not discount the importance of the community media process that brings people together in a physical space, to interact and have a dialogue. This is difficult to replicate in a virtual online environment.

Another advantage of traditional community media, as already noted, is its ability to break down the producer-audience barrier, and this too is difficult to achieve with internet media. The racist, senseless and cruel comments that are all too frequently seen on the internet, especially in social media, are usually posted anonymously with the confidence that the author will never have to come face-to-face with the target of their attack. Even mainstream program makers have some degree of anonymity owing to the scale of their broadcasting reach and the size of their audiences. The connection community media producers have with their audience, who are also their neighbours, friends and family, however, means that they must be accountable for what they do and say. Community broadcasters will meet their audience in the street the next day and will be called upon to account for what they say. To illustrate the value of creating a connection with audience, journalist Tony Koch’s way of working is a good example. He has been visiting, taking holidays, and reporting on the same Aboriginal communities in the Queensland gulf country for many years. Koch is not a community media journalist, but his way of reporting Indigenous stories is typical of a community media approach and provides an example of how important it is to have a personal connection with the people whose stories you tell. It is the time he spends with the people that has, over a long period of time, created the trust they have in him. He says that process has been hard work because “people are sick of journalists coming and writing horrible things about them”. (Waller, 2010: 26) Locals call those types of journalists and politicians “seagulls” because they “fly in, shit on them and leave” (Waller 2010, 26). Koch frequently sits down with people, face-to-face, and talks about the stories he has written and his reasons for writing them.
Koch argues for the importance of listening and his words echo those of Bickford who, as noted earlier in the theses, discusses the ‘politics of listening’ and argues that communication is about both speaking and listening. Community media are frequently discussed in terms of their ability to give a voice to minority communities, but if the producer-audience barrier is reimagined as a relationship, a dialogue, then listening is an equal partner in that relationship. The potential of Community media to speak and listen in their representation of minority groups means they play an important role in the construction and maintenance of alternative public spheres.

I have gone to some lengths here to make a case for traditional media platforms, but there is one area where the internet does come into its own as a valuable tool for communication, change and social justice. While Australian community television seems to be a politics-free zone these days, it is the internet that provides a communication platform for large numbers of advocacy and social justice organisations. These websites are similar to the video access centres of the 1970s, as they attract and bring together real and virtual communities around social issues. Barker-Plummer and Kidd argue that “web communication offers social change groups the chance to reach more people more efficiently and economically and to control their communication content” (2010, 323) by allowing them to sidestep mainstream media outlets and work independently. Some represent a physically co-located community as well as a virtual one, such as San Francisco based human rights organisation Global Exchange who ask you to join their team as a volunteer or intern (see http://www.globalexchange.org/joinx). There are also websites emerging that provide reason for optimism, in spite of the global nature of their content, because of their ability to support alternative journalism. For example, http://www.opendemocracy.net/about is a UK-based website whose mission is to be:

…accessible to all, … committed to human rights and democracy … ensure that marginalised views and voices are heard. [They]
believe facilitating argument and understanding across geographical boundaries is vital to preventing injustice (openDemocracy 2012).

Another way of thinking about alternative or radical media websites is to assess them in the same way as Forde defines the forms and practices of alternative journalism. There must be some attempt to fulfil a democratic purpose: “It must be anchored to something of a political … purpose, as moderate as that sometimes may be” (Forde 2011, 174).

One of the attractions of the internet for many advocacy groups is that their websites can be created and maintained at significantly less cost than traditional media – especially television. The Australian government has strict regulations in place to ensure the not-for-profit, non-commercial status of community television and radio. However the independence from government and corporate influence that this supposedly delivers comes at a cost. As noted by Rennie (2006) earlier in this chapter, Sandoval and Fuchs also remind us that the lack of commercial funding for independent and alternative media such as community television creates problems for continuous production and reaching a broad audience. They argue that:

… alternative media are not located outside the capitalist system and therefore are dependent on financial resources for the production and distribution of their products, which can hardly be obtained without making use of commercial mechanisms of financing like selling space for advertising [or for sponsor messages in Australia]. Using such capitalist techniques of financing contradicts the political aims of emancipatory alternative media that are critical of capitalism (2010, 143).

Community television in particular is dependent on sponsorship for financial survival because of the high costs involved in running a television station. This may offer some explanation for an absence on community
television of the politically controversial and social justice type programming that is more likely to be found on the internet. Community television is compelled to appeal to as a wide an audience as possible because, like all television broadcasters, they are hamstrung by commercial imperatives created by their running costs. They are stuck between a rock and hard place because they cannot rely on government funding as the public broadcasters do, and they are restricted by regulation in selling advertising as the commercial broadcasters do. In spite of the good intentions demonstrated by most community media organisations, and because community media must operate in a capitalist system, Indigenous issues and stories may not find their way to community television without specific funding to assist them. Indigenous people need their own community media spaces where they are not excluded by economic factors. I would argue that it is these economic factors that have partly contributed to the absence of the Noongar community from Perth community television.

**News, Current Affairs and Representation**

Many of the issues discussed so far about the role community media plays in addressing problems such as media diversity, a democratic public sphere, and the representation of minority communities are particularly pertinent to news and current affairs programming. Issues of stereotyping and negative representation by the media are not exclusive to news and current affairs, but it is usually these types of programs that are most frequently criticised. News and current affairs programs are one of the primary means by which we learn and make sense of the world, our communities and our political processes. As already suggested, those who own the media have significant power to influence the national debate and consciousness. The media and journalism in particular have an influential role in “the process of ‘imagining’ the modern nation state and our place within it” (Meadows 2005, 36). News and current affairs
programs, on radio and television, have considerable power in directing
discussion inside the public sphere.

The threat of modern ownership patterns on media diversity has already
been discussed in Chapter 1, but it is not only media ownership that has
an impact on news discourse. Journalists are at the heart of all news and
current affairs reporting, and the way journalists work is changing. The
economic imperatives that now drive the media are also impacting on
journalistic practice. There is clear evidence that journalists no longer
spend time in the field, with their sources, checking facts, because they do
not have the time or the resources to do it. Press releases, public
relations spin and other news sources have become the primary source of
information as journalists spend the majority of their time at their desks,
dependent on the internet and the telephone to do their job. They are
driven by time pressures because of staff cut backs and the up-to-the-
minute demands of new online media platforms as news organisations
with 24/7 rolling deadlines are judged by their ability to deliver a story first,
as it happens. A journalist may have to produce and continuously
repackage a story for internet, television and radio and update it every half
hour. The fallout of this is that the same voices, the same ‘experts’, are
presented for comment over and over. Time is not taken to check facts or
to look for alternative viewpoints and voices (Davies 2008; Donovan 2011;
Forde 2011). Bob McChesney, of the Free Press movement in the US,
summarises the problem with mainstream journalism:

A political analysis stresses that the reasons for lousy journalism
stem not from morally bankrupt or untalented journalists, but from a
structure that makes such journalism the rational result of its
operations (quoted in Forde 2011, 169).

The outcome of journalists spending less time in the field looking for
alternative voices is that minority groups are even less likely to participate
in the news discourse. Each dollar that is saved in newsroom operations
increases the likelihood of ethnic or Indigenous voices being
misrepresented or ignored. An Australian study of news and current affairs programs (Phillips 2009, 2011) showed that ethnic minorities are under-represented in these programs:

> When ethnic minorities are featured, they tend to occupy peripheral roles, and where they are allowed a central role, it is usually to be shown as threatening and menacing to the Anglo mainstream (Phillips 2011, 23-31).

The new racism is, though, usually expressed through the absence of ethnic and Indigenous people. Newsroom attitudes towards Indigenous stories are exemplified here by one Perth journalist’s experience. He explains how he was introduced to newsroom policy on Aboriginal stories when an employer simply declared to him that they “don’t do stories on boongs or suicide”. On another occasion, he had prepared a current affairs story about two Aboriginal policemen who had resigned from the police force on the same day, citing serious incidents of racist behaviour as their reason for leaving. The finished story was sent to Sydney for broadcast on a mainstream commercial network. When the story failed to go to air after a couple of weeks and the journalist asked if there was a problem with the story, a senior producer explained, “It’s the people in the story. They’re black. Nobody gives a fuck” (Anonymous, personal Communication, 2013).

It is the repetitive and daily routine of news and its use of stereotypes that “continues to enshrine racism at an institutional level” (Meadows 2005, 38). Alternative media, especially radio, internet and newspapers, frequently endeavour to address the issues of racism, absence and misrepresentation by mainstream media through their own journalistic practice. Indeed, audiences have demonstrated that the provision of locally-produced news is one of the main reasons for tuning in to community media (Forde 2010, 182).
In attempting to define alternative and independent journalism, Susan Forde suggests that it is mainstream journalism that is different. “The practices and raison d’être for alternative journalism have been around much longer than mainstream practices which have dominated for the past 100 years” (2011, x). It is the commercial and economic imperatives of media outlets that drive journalists to be objective and detached and hence better able to appeal to a mass audience (2011, x). Forde’s survey of community media news producers reported that they believe they are offering content that is “significantly different to mainstream news providers….We’re correcting mainstream media myths – providing options and different sides to stories” (2010, 186). Her analysis concludes that these journalists are driven by two things: to provide context to mainstream news stories and so better inform their audience, or to provide information to their audience in order to encourage them to “take part in democracy, in civic society – to participate, to do something” (2011: 165, emphasis in original).

Tanja Dreher approaches the problem of mainstream media’s representation of minority groups differently, arguing for what she calls “community media interventions” which she defines as:

Activities and projects developed by people working with communities subjected to media racism in order to alter or speak back to mainstream news media … These activities deliberately target the assumed mass audiences or general publics addressed by mainstream media …(2010, 86-87).

It is the active targeting of mainstream media and their audiences that distinguishes community media interventions from the community or alternative media activities that have been discussed so far. There are a variety of community media intervention forms, such as monitoring and checking the performance of news, teaching media skills so that community representatives can better represent their communities in the media; and creating opportunities for cultural awareness and learning for
journalists and journalism students (Dreher 2010, 85-103). However, for a community media intervention to be successful it is not enough to simply speak up – there must also be a willingness by media producers and audiences to listen. Dreher echoes Bickford’s words on communication when she argues that rather than limiting research of community media to “the dynamics of speaking up”, research is needed that also attends to “the politics of listening” (2010, 85). In other words:

> While the interest in community and alternative media usually focuses on participation and empowerment, here I emphasise the dynamics of difficulties of recognition (2010, 99).

Listening has been discussed previously as an essential element of both action research and Aboriginal cultural protocols – and it emerges again now as an important consideration in understanding community media. Ethnic and Indigenous communities have a voice through their participation and production of community media and often these voices are intended only for the Indigenous or diasporic public spheres within which they are created. These smaller public spheres must, at times, overlap with and intervene in the mainstream public sphere, and it is here that there is some responsibility for the wider community to participate in the process of communication by listening.

**Language, Culture and Identity**

There is one last role for community media, not yet discussed, that is of particular importance and value for ethnic and Indigenous communities – and that is the support and maintenance of language and culture. This important cultural maintenance role is best exemplified in Australia by Indigenous community media and it is central to this thesis. It was noted earlier that it was a fear of mainstream media impacting negatively on central Australian Aboriginal culture and language that led to the establishment of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA). All over Australia, Aboriginal media organisations are working,
with some success, to maintain language and culture, and to create a sense of community and identity.

Television is perceived as a threat to Indigenous culture more than any other “alien technology” (Meadows 1995, 182). Meadows quotes Aboriginal linguist Eve Fesl describing it as “cultural nerve gas” (1995, 183) and Rosemary Kuptana likening the introduction of television in the Inuit communities of northern Canada to a “neutron bomb...that kills the people but leaves the buildings standing” (1995, 182). Michael Meadows’ own example of the introduction of television to the Torres Strait Islands in 1988 (1995) was described previously in Chapter 1. The many examples of the impact of mainstream media on Islander culture is further described here by a community leader:

TV has changed our lifestyle. It’s almost impossible to hold public meetings anymore because no one will come. We need this in small communities and radio and television can’t take the place of this (1995, 197).

The Islanders were provided the opportunity to counter the effect of television on their culture with the introduction of the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) which allowed communities to interrupt mainstream broadcasting services with their own programming. This Government-sponsored BRACS scheme was badly maintained and managed, but it did introduce communities to the possibilities of community media (Meadows 1995; Rennie 2006, 121-22). Nearly fifteen years later, the aforementioned audience survey of Indigenous and ethnic community media provides evidence that this type of media is highly valued for its ability to maintain culture and language, especially in remote Aboriginal communities where English is a second or third language (Forde et al. 2009, 82). Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) provides programs to a range of diverse language and culture groups in central and Western Australia. When interviewed, one community elder explained the importance of these programs:
Interviewer: What does it do for young people?
Interviewee: They’re learning.
Interviewer: What do they learn?
Interviewee: Culture, and some inma (dances, songs). The older people have been dancing before and they’re watching and they’re learning from that culture… Very important one for children learning… later they singing and some people learning singing and dancing (2009, 82).

In concluding it seems appropriate to end this chapter where it began – with my motivation for studying community media, for focusing my research on Indigenous community media, and for creating the Noongar Dandjoo project. Forde, Meadows and Foxwell note how, within an already vibrant sector, Indigenous and ethnic community media are especially dynamic:

The Indigenous and ethnic community radio and television ‘sub-sectors’ … are arguably the most dynamic elements of this diverse network. In many ways, they epitomize the very reason that community broadcasting was set up in Australia – to afford access to the airwaves by marginalized communities. But they are also places where the processes of community media are perhaps most visible (2009, 155).

Indigenous community media has developed further and experienced some notable successes since those early days of BRACS. This will be the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

INDIGENOUS MEDIA

Based on the definitions of community media that were discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter now defines three different Indigenous media models and discusses the role each of them has in creating Indigenous community public spheres and in Indigenising the mainstream public sphere. As valuable and important as community media may be to each individual Indigenous community, other forms of Indigenous media must also be acknowledged and valued for the role they play in both the Aboriginal community and the wider non-Indigenous community. There is a danger, especially for government policy-makers and funding providers, in bundling Indigenous media into a single basket and treating all Indigenous media as the same. Such an attitude to Indigenous media fails to recognise the diverse roles of each media form. I also single out participation and access as two key characteristics of Indigenous community media that differentiate it from other forms of Indigenous media.

Indigenous and Community Public Spheres

Media play an important role in modern concepts of the public sphere, which is a virtual or physical space in which citizens can participate in a societal dialogue about ideas and issues that affect them. Whereas once it was assumed there was only one public sphere, it is now widely accepted that there are multiple and fragmented public spheres. As discussed in the previous chapter, the media provide opportunities for Indigenous people not only to participate in their own Indigenous public sphere, but also to participate in the wider, mainstream public sphere. Furthermore, Hartley argues that, “the kind of ‘media citizenship’ associated with national broadcast systems [has migrated] to sites based
not on national identity but on communities that [are] more fragmented, more international, more virtual, and more voluntary than heretofore” (2008, 78). This fragmentation of the media makes it even more important, therefore, for the Indigenous public sphere to encompass diverse forms of Indigenous media.

Indigenous media, along with other Indigenous narratives that emerge from such domains as academia and politics, form what Hartley calls the “universe of Indigeneity” (2008: 87). It has only been in recent years that Aboriginal people have been able to contribute their own stories and voices to that universe. Prior to the 1967 referendum that approved two changes to the Australian constitution ⁵, Indigeneity was a story constructed for Indigenous people, rather than by them (Hartley 2008, 87).

With the recognition of land rights, a growing political voice, and participation of Aboriginal people in diverse forms of media, the “universe of Indigeneity” now includes Indigenous voices and narratives (Mickler 1998, 100). Marcia Langton describes Aboriginality as something that:

… arises from the subjective experience of both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people who engage in an intercultural dialogue, whether in actual lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book (1993, 29).

However intercultural dialogues as part of an “actual lived experience” are rare for many non-Indigenous Australians, who are more likely to learn about Aboriginal people through media representations than through direct face-to-face dialogue. It is through media, more than any other form of communication, that Aboriginality or the “universe of Indigeneity” is created by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

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⁵ The 1967 referendum allowed for two changes to the Australian constitution that related to Indigenous Australians. Australians were asked to vote ‘yes’ to change sections 51 (xxvi) and 127 of the constitution that made special mention of Aboriginal people. The constitutional changes allowed the federal government to make laws and policies for Indigenous people (a right previously held by the states), and for Indigenous Australians to be officially counted in the national census (see Mickler 1998, 121).
By producing Indigenous media in all its diverse forms, Aboriginal people participate in the construction of a “universe of Indigeneity”, create their own definitions of who and what is Aboriginal, and contribute to the construction of Aboriginality in the wider non-Indigenous world. In other words, their participation in the construction of an Indigenous public sphere that includes diverse forms of Aboriginal media provides opportunities for that public sphere to overlap with other alternative and mainstream public spheres, while at the same time recognising each unique and local Aboriginal community. In this context, community media occupy a special place because of the importance of public participation that allows people to create their own community public sphere by producing their own cultural images and texts. This not only facilitates the strengthening of community social structures and identity, but also allows for communication with other alternative public spheres, thereby exposing other cultures to different ideas and ways of life (Forde et al. 2009, 132). Meadows argues that unlike mainstream media the intimate relationship between audience and producers that exists in Indigenous community media:

… is evidence for the existence of Indigenous public spheres … Indigenous media are diverse spaces where citizens are encouraged to speak and listen differently. The Indigenous public spheres that are created in this environment, in turn, interact or overlap with the broader public sphere where they facilitate introduction of alternative viewpoints, thus enabling predominant ideas and assumptions to be challenged (2010, 308).

Only limited opportunities exist outside of urban environments for Indigenous community public spheres to communicate beyond their own communities. In order to effectively support language, culture and community identity, Indigenous community public spheres and their respective media are more likely to be isolated from the mainstream, partly because of the fragmentation of the media but also because of their
For example, the programs broadcast on Indigenous Community TV (ICTV) are produced in small communities in central Australia and northwestern Australia and seen only in remote and regional communities who have access to Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST). They are not accessible on television in Perth or other Australian capitals. So while Aboriginal community media have an essential role to play for these small remote communities, Aboriginal media created for national and international audiences have a role to play as well. Screen productions created for national television and cinema contribute to a vibrant and healthy Indigenous public sphere that also has a greater potential to overlap and influence alternative and mainstream public spheres. This is where Eric Michaels’(1986) identification of three Indigenous media models, discussed earlier, can help us to appreciate the contribution of Indigenous media to the Australian public sphere.

Three Models of Aboriginal Media

From 1982-86 anthropologist Eric Michaels lived in the desert community of Yuendumu to research the impact of satellite television on the lives and culture of Aboriginal people living in remote communities. While the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) and other Aboriginal media advocates lobbied the government for an Aboriginal-controlled television licence, Yuendumu set up a pirate television station and were broadcasting their own culturally appropriate and locally made programs to Warlpiri communities. Michaels’ report, titled *The Aboriginal Invention of Television* (1986), proposes three separate models for Aboriginal broadcasting, each of them linked to a different social model and a different public sphere.

1) *Cultural maintenance*. This model supports language and culture, and locally based media production is the centerpiece of this system. It is a model designed to support traditional culture and avoid the problems technology represents for that culture.
‘Massness’ is reduced to a smaller scale for traditional society. Advantages in the vast transmission range that modern technology offers will be realised in the interactive uses by other, neighbouring remote communities. There is limited application for mass distribution beyond these concerned (Michaels 1986, xvi).

This model could also be labeled community media and is represented by the small Aboriginal community media organisations that now exist all over remote and regional Australia. Access to media production facilities and participation by community are key features of this model. Goolarri Media in Broome (see http://www.goolarri.com/) and Indigenous Community Television (ICTV) in Alice Springs (see http://www.ictv.net.au/) are examples. The cultural maintenance model contributes to Indigenous community public spheres.

2) **Pan Aboriginalisation.** Michaels explains that many non-Indigenous people think traditional Aboriginal culture impedes Aboriginal progress. If Aboriginal culture were homogenised so that it included fewer languages and cultural distinctions there would emerge the possibility for a national, political structure that gives Aboriginal people more power (Michaels 1986, xvi).

This model is based on the idea of a single national broadcaster and is best represented by National Indigenous Television (NITV) which began broadcasting in 2007 (see http://www.nitv.org.au/). To accomplish this, a point-to-multi-point service is emphasised to exploit transmission range and encompass all Aboriginal audiences. Production resources are centralised under Aboriginal control. The pan Aboriginal model contributes to a national Indigenous public sphere.

3) **Assimilation.** This model requires traditional culture to take a back seat with no protectionist policies or special services provided for
Aboriginal people. The only requirement under this assimilationist media model would be to ensure remote communities have the same access to broadcast services as city residents and that employment opportunities are created in mainstream media (1986, xvii).

Current national broadcasters such as the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) exemplify the assimilation model as they produce and broadcast Aboriginal programs, made by Aboriginal people to a national audience (see http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/livingblack and http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/programs/message_stick/ ). The government’s national broadband network (NBN) will contribute further to providing a media service that gives access to more people including those Aboriginal communities in remote and regional Australia. The assimilation model contributes to the Indigenisation of the mainstream Australian public sphere.

Michaels favoured the cultural maintenance model and used his research to lobby government for Aboriginal owned and run media in central Australia. Up to 30 per cent of the population in remote Australia is Aboriginal (1986, 98) and the introduction of satellite television to central Australia had the potential to be both a threat and a promise for Aboriginal culture. While some feared the impact of western television on traditional culture CAAMA saw the potential for Aboriginal television that could remedy the effects of European culture and the assimilationist policies of the past (see Bell 2008). The vast broadcast area that CAAMA would eventually service represented a diverse group of Aboriginal languages and cultures. For Michaels, this raised questions about media massness and “at what point does CAAMA become extended beyond its natural and accountable service area into areas where its languages may be inappropriate or unwelcome, and its content disapproved?” (1986,106). Michaels argued that mass media is the inverse of the traditional and personal Aboriginal information exchange system (1986, 3) and he noted
the important role that community-produced programs played in the maintenance of culture and language. Like Yuendumu television, cultural maintenance model programs are produced under the control of local Aboriginal people, and broadcast and viewed in ways that are respectful of kinship relationships and cultural protocols.

In 2013, central Australia provides examples of all three of Michaels’ media models and the social systems they each represent. However, this is as a result of local and disparate community efforts rather than of a considered national Indigenous media policy. Over two decades on from the introduction of satellite television to central Australia, CAAMA, which began life as an example of the cultural maintenance model, continues in Alice Springs as a robust centre for Aboriginal media production and training (see Bell 2008). It’s far-reaching broadcast footprint, though, means it is not now an ideal fit with Michaels’ definition of the cultural maintenance model.

Also based in Alice Springs is ICTV, that at present most closely represents Michaels’ first and preferred model of Aboriginal television because it provides access and participation for members of each of the remote and regional communities it represents. It is a community media model and it broadcasts locally-produced videos from remote Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. ICTV were broadcasting to over 150 remote Aboriginal communities on a second channel belonging to CAAMA’s commercial partner, Imparja Television, when they were displaced by the government funded newcomer to the Indigenous media landscape, National Indigenous Television (NITV), in July 2007 (see Meadows 2010, 307-24). As Rennie and Featherstone explain, ICTV and:

... community ownership resulted in content that targeted local priorities and cultural maintenance ahead of national narratives and their global context. NITV [as an example of Michaels’ second pan-Aboriginalisation model] was formed to address that imbalance (2008, 57).
The decision to take over ICTV's broadcast channel soured the launch of NITV. ICTV and the remote communities they represented felt betrayed by the NITV takeover, and feared that this new national broadcaster, located a world away in Sydney, could not possibly provide them with the culturally diverse service they had previously supported. The top down management and program acquisition structure of NITV sets them up as gatekeepers for access to the airwaves and they therefore represent a system that is incompatible with ICTV's production processes. Frank Rijavic, a documentary maker and former manager of the ICTV network, wrote to the then communications minister Helen Coonan:

The proposal to install a one-size-fits-all Indigenous Television service at the expense of ICTV, is looming as the biggest policy failure in Indigenous media since the invention of Aboriginal television in the Pitjantjatjara and Warlpiri lands over 20 years ago. It is a clumsy shotgun wedding between disparate Indigenous media interests that will set remote community media back a decade (2007).

Rijavec goes on to remind us that the special role of Aboriginal community broadcasters was recognised 20 years ago when the government delivered the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) to remote Indigenous communities. The needs of remote communities were recognised as being irreconcilable with the urban-based Aboriginal communities and therefore a single broadcaster could not accommodate both (2007). The minister had stipulated that ICTV programming be incorporated into the NITV channel, but this did not happen – it could not happen. In terms of Michaels' three model paradigm, the two broadcasters, NITV and ICTV, are incompatible.

Rennie and Featherstone pose a number of important questions relating to the NITV-ICTV dispute:
Can community media structures produce content capable of addressing national concerns and does it matter? Can a national service truly reflect the diversity of Indigenous Australia? Is the ICTV predicament a result of a general lack of understanding of community media and its perception as a marginal and ‘alternative’ service?” (2008: 65).

These questions presuppose an either/or decision for funding and government – one or the other, NITV or ICTV. Certainly the government’s agenda supported a single service and all the economies of scale such a model represents. Federal minister Helen Coonan, in 2006, summarised the government position when she said, “I would find it difficult to support a business plan that proposed an unnecessary duplication of management, content aggregation, editorial control or technical facilities” (Rennie and Featherstone 2008, 59). Rennie and Featherstone question the wisdom of choosing one model over another, and Michaels gives a clear warning against it:

Behind these [models] lie philosophies of Aboriginal development as a whole. Where a person or agency promotes one or another technology, they are advancing also a social model, and we have a right to demand that the model be explicit and then ask whether it is acceptable. Mostly, people ignore these issues. They say one system is desirable because it’s cheaper, or easier to sell to government, or it is just what the technology does. The fact is that there are many uses of technology, there are many technologies, and each has social consequences (1986, xvii).

For Nelson Conboy, a member of the ICTV Board of Directors, the disparities between NITV and ICTV are obvious both to him and to the remote communities he represents:

People don’t understand English so NITV doesn’t have any meaning for them – unless it’s in language…. People have to
understand that there’s a distinction between traditional people and non-traditional people (personal communication, May 2010).

So far there has been no either/or choice. ICTV had expected to continue broadcasting their programs through NITV but when this failed to happen they created an on-line service called Indigitube (see http://www.ictv.net.au/). They are now broadcasting again through the state government-owned, Perth-based Westlink satellite service. NITV had also been available to Australian capital cities via a pay-TV channel, but now broadcast nationally and free-to-air after moving to the SBS as a dedicated channel in December 2012, making them a truly pan-Aboriginal broadcaster. The launch of free-to-air NITV was marked by the broadcast of station promos that declared ‘free at last’.

Internationally acclaimed filmmaker Warwick Thornton, himself a product of CAAMAs training program, exemplifies Michaels' third model of assimilation. His feature film Samson & Delilah (2009), is a confronting Aboriginal story that has screened to international audiences. Thornton is one of a growing band of Indigenous filmmakers who are making films and television programs for a mainstream audience. Their work is not viewed in fringe festivals or via community media broadcasters, but in mainstream cinemas and national broadcasters such as the ABC and SBS. Other Indigenous stories that have had recent significant impact and success in mainstream media include Redfern Now (Perkins, 2012), First Australians (Perkins, 2008), Brand Nu Dae (Perkins 2009), and The Circuit (Jodrell and Hutchens 2007, 2009). Added to this list are a number of Indigenous television series such as Living Black (see http://www.sbs.com.au/shows/livingblack) and Message Stick (see http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/programs/message_stick/) that broadcast nationally. The importance of these types of productions is summed up by Rachel Perkins, Director and Producer for Black Fella films and SBS. Addressing the 1996 National Media Forum, she talks about “Indigenising the mainstream” and how drama contributes so effectively to
that outcome. She talks about impacting the mainstream in the same way as films like *Ghandhi* and *Malcolm X*:

> Feature films are really important to crack because the mainstream is really where the rednecks lie...when you go to the mainstream, it’s a different story ... The way to change people’s attitudes, I believe, is to move them emotionally. Drama is the way to do that (cited in Hartley and McKee 2000, 199).

Finally, Indigenous television in central Australia could not be discussed without also recognising Imparja Television, which is difficult to classify in any one of Michaels’ three models but fits best as an example of the assimilation model. Imparja is a privately owned commercial television company broadcasting a mix of mainstream programs delivered through the Nine network, and Aboriginal produced content such as NITV programs and CAAMA productions. They are not available nationally, but are broadcast throughout remote and regional central Australia and are totally owned and controlled by Northern Territory and South Australian Aboriginal shareholders. Imparja ensures that Aboriginal people not only have access to mainstream services, but that they also have control over that service and the business that makes it commercially viable (see Bell 2008).

It is interesting to note a common theme in the logos of some of these media organisations and the way they symbolise the idea of Aboriginal communication. For example, the name *Imparja* is an anglicised version of the Aboriginal word for tracks or footprints, which is symbolic of the traditional means by which Aboriginal communities exchange stories and information (Imparja Television 2012). Illustrations 8 and 9 below are logos for two Aboriginal media associations that illustrate the idea of Aboriginal communication. Each shows a central circle symbolising a community with radiating arms that reach out to other circles or communities (although the Warlpiri Media logo is no longer in use since they became PAW media in 2006). Called ‘dreaming tracks’ the logos
represent communication links between individual tribal groups. They also symbolise how the community is at the centre of the Aboriginal universe. As Michaels notes, “Aboriginal cosmology is ethnocentric” (1986, 142).

With colonisation and the displacement of Aboriginal people from their traditional country the traditional dreaming tracks have broken down (1986: 4-5). Cars and radios became important ways of maintaining dreaming tracks in a modern world, and now broadcast media contribute to that communication network. Michael Meadows suggests that “the Indigenous media sector is probably the only medium by which information can be effectively transmitted across the cultural and linguistic boundaries that have survived the impact of the past 212 years of white settlement” (2000, 29).

Each television model represents a different form of communication in recognition that contemporary Aboriginal people must engage with three different worlds or three different public spheres – the local Aboriginal community, a national Indigenous community, and non-Indigenous mainstream Australia. Each sector of Aboriginal media struggles for funding and access to the airwaves. The dispute between NITV and ICTV
is indicative of the incompatibility of each of the sectors. Unlike Canada and New Zealand, there is no special recognition of Indigenous language and culture in Australia’s Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (Meadows 2010, 311) and so each media producer must fight for their piece of a smallish pie that is labeled ‘Indigenous media funding’. This means that the same arguments must be visited over and again as each of these Indigenous media models and their associated producers justify the role they play. As others have argued, government must recognise the differences between broadcasters like NITV, remote community media producers like ICTV, and the independent filmmakers like Warwick Thornton, and ensure secure funding and access for each sector. Meadows warns against focusing on remote Aboriginal community broadcasters like ICTV because of the danger that it “diminishes the status of the majority of Indigenous peoples who tend to live in urban centres.” (2010: 311) At the same time, Meadows advocates strongly for locally produced media, regardless of where an Indigenous community is located, because each of these small broadcasters is recognised by each community as “their media playing a central role in their cultural survival” (2010, 312).

Michelle Lovegrove is an Aboriginal woman and an executive producer for the SBS Living Black radio program. She also argues the need for both community and national broadcasters and explains the role of a national broadcaster like SBS:

> Both services are vital…community radio, community television, community services are absolutely vital. But we don’t know much about each other. That’s what I’m trying to do – help other (Indigenous) nations get a better sense of some of these issues that are covered in mainstream media which is a very, very blinkered view (personal communication, May 2010).

While it is important to acknowledge the essential role of Indigenous community media because of their ability to offer access and participation, national broadcasters like NITV must be recognised as well for the
important role they play, as do the Indigenous programs broadcast by mainstream media. In understanding the role of each of these Indigenous media organisations it is helpful to recognise not only the public spheres to which they contribute, but also the degree of community participation and access each one provides. Most importantly, it is participation and access that defines community broadcasters and makes it possible for them to fulfil the cultural maintenance role for which they have been valued.

**Aboriginal Community Media**

In their 2009 publication *Developing Dialogues*, authors Forde, Foxwell and Meadows present the results of the first ever research into community media audiences and are enthusiastic in their findings about ethnic and Indigenous community media and the important role they play in cultural maintenance and community-building for their respective communities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Forde and colleagues argue that Indigenous and ethnic community media “are the very reason that community broadcasting was set up in Australia” (2009, 155). Interviews with about 200 people who identified as audience for Indigenous media revealed the success of the sector and the essential role these broadcasters play in their communities. They were reported to boost feelings of well-being and self-esteem by contributing to their audiences’ sense of pride and empowerment, providing role models, and in many cases diverting young people from less productive activities. Indigenous community media help to maintain social networks by assisting with communication between family, friends and other communities, and they help to maintain language and culture. Community media contributes to the maintenance and creation of culture by creating images and texts that represent a community’s beliefs and ideas and help them make sense of their existence:

Culture concerns our everyday frameworks for understanding and communicating our experiences of the world and importantly our
place (or identity) within it … Producing community media becomes a process of cultural empowerment (Forde et al. 2009, 130).

The continuing negative representation of Indigenous people by the mainstream media was considered problematic by many interviewees, who saw Indigenous media as an essential alternative to the mainstream media and the feelings of resentment created by a “focus on the bad”. In the words of one ICTV viewer: “Whitefella TV, that really saddens the people – too many fights” (Forde et al. 2009, 86). Indigenous community media are a tool for education, a primary source of local news and information, serve to promote Indigenous music and dance, and function as a cultural bridge between the black and white communities (Forde et al. 2009, 79-98).

Indigenous audiences trust and identify with the familiar voices and faces of their community media. The high production values and polished voices of mainstream media are associated with the same media that misrepresent and ignore them. Even in the absence of traditional language, hearing Aboriginal English communicates trust, as one Palm Islander interviewee explains:

It depends how you talk. You could talk like a whitefella or you could talk like a blackfella. I talk my way. I just be me…You communicate with your people and they know what you’re talking about in my language; my way; blackfella way; Murri way. They can relate to that, see? (Forde et al. 2009, 82).

It is these characteristics of community media, the unpolished performances and unprofessional production standards, which see it labelled as amateur and alternative. Yet it is these same stylistic traits that cause audiences to trust and value community media because they identify with and, in many cases, even personally know the producers of their local media.
Close Collaborations – Breaking Down the Producer-Audience Barrier

Cultural maintenance, community-building, the building of self-esteem and accessibility through production values have been touched on briefly as some of the features and benefits of Indigenous community media. I now wish to focus on one specific aspect of the sector: the breakdown of the producer-audience barrier. This aspect of community media is not only one of its most defining features but it is also one of the reasons for the action research approach employed in this PhD project.

Forde and colleagues discuss at length the breakdown of the producer-audience barrier as an aspect of community media that is of special importance to all participants, and it is participation and access that contribute to that barrier breakdown. Mainstream mass media and its centralised production facilities do not allow for audiences to have contact with program producers. Audiences have little or no influence on program production except by way of ratings, whereby the failure of a program to rate will see it removed from air. Journalists and program producers go about their work more or less anonymously and are rarely held personally accountable to their audiences for what they say or do. The producer-audience barrier break down is a valued and important feature of community media and indeed Foxwell and colleagues suggest “that the very nature of [the sector’s] engagement with audiences is a defining characteristic of the sector as a whole” (Forde et al. 2009, 126; Meadows 2010, 307-24). They also argue that the term ‘empowerment’ encapsulates the role of community media, both in terms of production and audience consumption: “It is the dissolution of boundary between producers and audiences which makes empowerment possible” (Forde et al. 2009, 128).

For Indigenous community media producers, this connection with their audience is also their connection with friends and family and is something they are reminded of constantly. This calls to mind Warwick Thornton’s short film, Greenbush (2005), which is set in an Aboriginal community
radio station and gets its name from a CAAMA radio prisoner request program. DJ Kenny is made accountable to his listeners when a caller berates him for calling them ‘boys’ instead of ‘men’. Kenny apologises on air after muttering under his breath “how am I supposed to know who’s been initiated and who hasn’t?".

Perth journalist Gina Williams has produced stories for an Aboriginal television series called Milbindi (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mVDBq99Q7A), has worked in mainstream media, and was station manager for Perth’s Noongar radio in 2009. Williams talks about her preference for working in community media rather than mainstream because community media makes her accountable, makes her choose her words carefully:

That’s the other thing about Aboriginal radio – you can’t hide from your community. We have a responsibility to our communities to do the right thing. I’ve been working in commercial media and I know how easy it is for journalists to go home and disappear… In commercial television in particular it’s very easy to just go and get lost. Aboriginal and community media doesn’t allow you that luxury. I have to go home and I have to face my Mum at some point. So what you do and how you represent your community – you have to be able to, at some point, front someone you’re representing and be able to explain to them why you did the things you did (personal communication, February 2009).

Another aspect of the producer/audience barrier break down that is of particular relevance to Indigenous communities is the ability for Indigenous community media to respect ‘sorry business’ and therefore respect culture. Often families of people who have died adhere to the traditional customs of not speaking the name of the deceased and removing all images of them from public viewing. Foxwell and colleagues provide the example of a musician who had died and so the community radio station did not play his music during the mourning period. After an appropriate period of time,
the family were asked if the music could be played again on the radio (Forde et al. 2009, 84). Mainstream Aboriginal programs such as those broadcast on SBS or ABC will give warnings that a program may contain images of deceased people and Aboriginal people have the option not to view the broadcast, but Indigenous community media can do more by strictly adhering to cultural protocols, removing the program altogether, and communicating directly with the family of the deceased.

It is this, the breakdown of the producer-audience barrier, the access and participation offered, that makes Indigenous community media so compatible with action research. The breakdown of the producer-audience barrier mirrors the breakdown of the researcher/subject barrier that is typical of action research (discussed in the previous chapter). In action research, the research participant is also a researcher. The facilitator must report back, and is answerable to, all research participants just as community program producers must answer to their audiences.

It is access and participation that makes community media an essential part of Indigenous community public spheres. These characteristics, together with non-professional production values, are the key features that make Indigenous community media incompatible with mainstream broadcasters like NITV, SBS and ABC. These big broadcasters have their own role to play in providing a portal for the wider community into Aboriginal culture, making it easier for non-Indigenous audiences to engage with Indigenous stories and making it possible for Aboriginal people to contribute to the mainstream public sphere. This is where news and current affairs comes under the spotlight, because it is through news style programs that mainstream Australia is most likely to encounter Indigenous people and it is here that the encounter is most likely to be problematic.
In spite of Aboriginal people being more active than ever before in creating their own media, and in spite of evidence that the Indigenous public sphere is overlapping with the Australian mainstream more than ever before, there continues to be media representation of Aboriginal people that focuses on the negative and the stereotype. For this reason, many Aboriginal people still see the media as indifferent, negative and sometimes even hostile. These perceptions are created by news media more so than by any other genre of media.

In February 2012, Noongar people erected a Noongar tent embassy on Heirisson Island (Matagarup), a small patch of land in the Swan River at the entrance to the city of Perth, to protest against the Western Australian government’s one billion dollar offer to settle the Noongar native title claim. Over the weeks in which the tent embassy story was reported, the media’s representation of the issue quickly changed from that of a peaceful demonstration by Noongar people over their sovereignty and land rights to one of their legal right to camp on Heirisson Island. The police and the Perth City Council responded to the camp as if it were an illegal activity, and the camp was raided several times by police in an effort to remove the protesters. Arrests were made and the protestors were labelled a "menacing Noongar nuisance" (Kerr and Cox 2012, 1) by the media, but the tent embassy stayed in place for several months. I was at the tent embassy one day to observe a press conference in which Noongar tent embassy representatives faced a line of cameras and journalists to explain their position on the land rights deal (see Illustration 10 below). Robert Eggington, an articulate and passionate Noongar leader, spoke for 15 to 20 minutes about the land rights deal and the Noongar people’s claim to sovereignty. I watched the news that night hopeful that his words might begin to help the non-Indigenous community of Perth to understand the complexities of the Noongar protest, but there was only a three-second grab of Eggington as the press conference was concluding. Key findings from a study analysing the media representation of the Noongar tent
embassy describe “the construction of Noongar nuisance and criminality, police entrapment and the real and unthreatening pleasure of Noongar sovereignty” (Kerr and Cox 2012, 1). The media’s representation of the Noongar tent embassy is a reminder that in 2013 the representation of Aboriginal people and issues is still problematic. If the media is a reflection of who we are as a nation, as a community, then there is still work to be done before reconciliation is achieved.

Illustration 10: Noongar Tent Embassy Press Conference – Matagarup
(Photographed by author, February, 2012)

These problems of representation are most evident in the news media, which are frequently singled out from other television formats. Hartley and McKee (2000), in their extensive study of Australian media representation of Aboriginal people, differentiate between news and other media when presenting their findings. Analysis of the news media has demonstrated that Aboriginal people are over-represented in proportion to their population, and that representations of them frequently portray them as “a problem” (Hartley and McKee 2000, 50). Similarly, Phillips includes
Indigenous people in her analysis of the media portrayal of ethnic minorities which found, as have studies in other parts of the world, that the Australian news media predominantly portray ethnic minorities as “other, and more likely than not as somehow threatening to an assumed Anglo mainstream” (2009, 19-32; Stewart et al 2013, 56). The analysis of media undertaken by Mickler, tracks Aboriginal representation from pre-citizenship years, when white authorities spoke on behalf of all Aboriginal people, to the 1990s when Aboriginal people had gained significant political force and agency. The public discourse changed in the 1990s to one of Aboriginal privilege, while the media continued to represent Aboriginal issues in terms of either ‘protection’, for the authentic bush dwelling Aborigine, or ‘correction’ for the problematic urban dwelling Aborigine. Even with growing political power Aboriginal people found that they were still excluded from those journalistic spaces where the “ordinary citizen” or “man in the street” (Mickler 1998, 126-127) was represented, and Mickler argues for their right to be “ordinary – the right to be sampled, surveyed, and statisticalised, as part of the ‘public’ at large – as rightful members of the communities of consumers, audiences, voters, citizens” (quoted in Hartley and McKee 2000, 46; see also Mickler 1998, 288-306). Mickler explains that this does not mean “cultural sameness” or that Aboriginal people are not different from non-Aboriginal people but rather the sense of ordinary that is associated with the majority, “the demos of democracy” (Mickler 1998, 290).

It is argued that “television news and current affairs is a genre of its own and tells its stories in its own way” (Phillips 2009, 19-32). Hartley and McKee argue that the very nature of news, its “generic imperatives, its prioritisation of the visual, make it adversarial, focusing on conflict and the negative” (2000, 336). Add to this the changing nature of journalistic practice noted earlier, and the structure of the news bulletin itself means that news is frequently criticised for its lack of analysis and context. Furthermore, news and current affairs play a special myth-building role in the creation of national identity and citizenship. Cottle says that TV news creates a sense of cultural citizenship because, “through its presentational
formats, [it] literally mediates the surrounding play of social and cultural power” (2001, 75), and McIver refers to news and current affairs as a nation’s cultural storyteller:

As narrative, news is orienting, communal and ritualistic … Through television, and especially through news and current affairs, people learn about their culture, about rights and wrongs, the familiar and the strange and the limits of their own community (2009, 48).

News as narrative, as myth, is contradictory to journalism’s claim to the status of fourth estate and therefore making it independent of the other three domains that are the judiciary, executive government and the parliament. Journalists traditionally see themselves as a kind of watchdog – not as storytellers. However, it is argued that the professionalism and objectivity that governs journalistic practice also serves to distance them from the very public they seek to inform, especially disenfranchised groups like Indigenous people who are frequently excluded from notions of ‘the public’ (Meadows 2005, 36). Mason also argues that Aboriginal people’s “traditional lack of voice in the media” (2012,167) contributes to their social exclusion. She suggests a link between journalistic practice and social exclusion and proposes that journalists can address this problem by adopting a more “unorthodox practice [of] journalist-source collaboration” (2012,167). This means being less dependent on official sources and instead seeking out non-official sources. Added to this problem of objectivity are the economic imperatives that have changed journalistic practice. There is little doubt as to how and why Indigenous people are frequently excluded from or misrepresented by mainstream journalism. Meadows summarises the significance of the news media to the non-Indigenous community’s understanding of Aboriginal people when he says “the cultural practice of journalism, as the primary method of framing experience and forming public consciousness … has played a central role in the representation of Indigenous people and their affairs” (Meadows 2005, 36-37). If news has
the capacity to create national culture, whilst at the same time journalistic practice excludes the voices of minority groups, it becomes apparent why the news media’s contribution to the portrayal of Aboriginality can be problematic.

In 1991, the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* released a report that recognised the media’s responsibility in shaping community attitudes towards Aboriginal people. The report contained four recommendations for media organisations and educators that would deliver fairer and more culturally sensitive media representations of Aboriginal people. The Royal Commission’s media recommendations were included in a section of the report entitled “Accommodating Difference: Relations Between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal People” that suggests that the media are the means by which that difference is accommodated (Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991; Hartley and McKee 2000, 48). Academic research and a series of media forums followed the Royal Commission, and John Hartley and Alan McKee are the authors of two resulting publications (Hartley & McKee 1996; 2000) Their writing reflects Bhabha’s recognition of cultural difference that was examined in chapter 1 of this thesis. They argue that difference must first be recognized before it can be accommodated and a dialogue ensue. They suggest that academia can contribute to the role the media must play in accommodating difference and therefore in promoting reconciliation. Furthermore, the Royal Commission recommended that:

... institutions providing journalism courses ensure that the courses contain significant components relating to Aboriginal affairs and media organisations should encourage formal and informal contact with Aboriginal organisations ...

The purpose of such contact should be the creation, on all sides, of a better understanding of issues relating to the media treatment of
Aboriginal affairs (Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 1991, recommendations 207-208).

The launch of NITV free-to-air on December 12, 2012 included a *Living Black* special featuring a history of Indigenous media and a discussion of Indigenous representation in the media (Kneebone, Scarr and Grant 2012). The question was asked, “Where does Indigenous journalism fit in?”. Some want Indigenous journalism to address the damaging stereotypes and negativity, while others argue for the same traditional journalistic codes of practice that demand balance and impartiality. Chris Graham of *Tracker Magazine* argues in the program that Indigenous journalism must be biased in favour of Indigenous people. He says, “the traditional model of journalism doesn’t work for Aboriginal people in Australia because Australians are so indifferent to the suffering of Aboriginal people” (in Kneebone, Scarr and Grant 2012). Marcia Langton has the last word on the topic. She finishes the program by agreeing that more Aboriginal media are important but so too is the fair, unbiased reporting by mainstream media of the tough stories about such issues as alcoholism and pedophilia. She says, “if you have a sugar coated view of the Aboriginal world … how are we ever going to fix these problems” (in Kneebone, Scarr and Grant 2012).

In 2012, I asked John Hartley if he thought there had been progress in the media representation of Aboriginal people and while he acknowledged the excellent work of broadcasters like SBS and NITV, he went on to say:

It is clear that the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, despite its high public profile and broad political support, made very little difference to the systemic practices and core statistics underlying the problem: Aboriginal people are still massively over-represented in incarceration populations; their treatment before, during and after custody is of a lower standard; abuses are not dealt with by media or regulatory agencies as they would be if the victims were non-Aboriginal. As far
as mainstream media are concerned I can’t think of anything that they do differently (personal communication, November 2012).

Regardless of the progress traditional media may be making in their representation of Aboriginal people there is no doubt that Aboriginal people are media savvy. Across a diverse range of media forms Aboriginal people are making a difference through their growing participation in media production. Grassroots community media organisations are providing the skills needed for Aboriginal people to engage with both Indigenous and mainstream public spheres.

**A Community Media Model: Juluwarlu**

The Juluwarlu Media Centre provides an example of just one form of Indigenous media. Located in the Pilbara town of Roebourne it is an example of and even a model for successful Aboriginal community media (see [www.yindjibarndi.org.au/juluwarlu/index.php](http://www.yindjibarndi.org.au/juluwarlu/index.php)). Roebourne is home to the Yindjibarndi people, and Juluwarlu run a successful training program for young Aboriginal people, producing programs and broadcasting on their own television channel. Juluwarlu was created by Yindjibarndi man Michael Woodley and his wife Lorraine Coppin. As a young man, Woodley left Roebourne to work in the mining sector where the majority of employment opportunities exist in Australia’s north-west. In spite of promising prospects Woodley, after some time, quit his job and returned to Roebourne to re-engage with his culture and his people. It was this experience of leaving his culture that motivated Woodley to set up the media centre. His objective was to record and archive Yindjibarndi culture so that Roebourne’s young people could leave the town to be educated and seek employment, knowing that their culture was safe and accessible any time they wanted to return. He and Coppin began with audio recordings of Elders telling their stories and speaking language. They then established a formal training program for young people to learn video production skills and began archiving audio-visual material. Another important activity involved mapping country, whereby the Juluwarlu team
set about creating an audio-visual record of sacred sites in Yindjibarndi country in anticipation of the need to negotiate with mining companies over land rights. When negotiations are required, they video these and replay them to the community via their broadcast facilities which allow them to interrupt the ICTV broadcast and insert their own programs.

Culture is Woodley’s passion and drive in establishing and managing the media centre, and trips to country are an essential part of Yindjibarndi cultural maintenance. The outings are attended mostly by children and Elders who spend time at locations of cultural significance for Yindjibarndi people. Coppin will lead a group of children through the bush telling them stories about the waterholes, the plants and animals they see, and teaching them language as they go. All the time, a Juluwarlu employee records on video the events of the day for archiving. Woodley and Coppin both speak about feeling lost before they reacquainted themselves with their traditional culture and how important it is to find that balance between white culture and traditional culture: both are essential. Coppin summarises Juluwarlu’s objectives:

This is my dream and always been my dream. I want our kids and us to have a balance with knowledge. They have the white man’s culture and they have Ngarda culture. So help us take this dream forward into the future – we’ll take the two together…for our kids (personal communication, July 2007).

Woodley and Coppin offer this balance and reconnection with culture to the Juluwarlu trainees who, while learning how to shoot and edit video, are also learning about their culture, many for the first time.

Also of great importance is the sense of community that the media centre creates. The trips to country not only allow for participants to learn about culture, but they also bring together Elders and children. At the centre itself there is always a group of community members and children who gather there without being directly involved with the media centre’s
activities. I am again reminded of Warwick Thornton’s short film, *Greenbush* (2005). In the film a growing number of people arrive at the radio station to sit and just have a cup of tea as DJ Kenny deals with the challenges of his job. Aboriginal community media centres are more than just broadcast and production centres. Many serve the dual purpose of community meeting place – a hub of communication and activity.

The success of Juluwarlu belies the challenges Woodley and Coppin face on an almost daily basis. Like all community media, fickle funding bodies make financial viability an ongoing problem. Changes to the funding of the training programs make it difficult to maintain the numbers of young Aboriginal people working at the media centre. Local companies also employ Juluwarlu to make corporate videos and while Woodley prefers to focus on cultural productions, he recognises the valuable income that the corporate productions bring in.

Added to the financial woes are the problems of the community itself. Like many Aboriginal communities, Roebourne suffers as a result of bad government policy and the forced relocation of different tribal groups. The Juluwarlu logo represents the four different skin groups that once dictated the structure of traditional Yindjibarndi life (see Rijavec 2005). Woodley’s involvement in community business, especially that relating to culture, is frequently disputed by other members of the community who question his right to speak or act on their behalf. For example, Woodley was asked to video negotiations over a land claim between local Aboriginal people and a mining company. One tribal group in particular were making claim to the land, even before ownership had been properly established, and objected to Woodley and Juluwarlu speaking and negotiating on their behalf. One of Juluwarlu’s trainees belonged to the claimant tribe, who sought to have the young man banned from the land because he was working with Juluwarlu. Woodley refused to proceed with any recording of the negotiations until the trainee was allowed back on the land. He was allowed back and the video production continued. This is a clear example of an absence of the producer-audience barrier, and Woodley explains
how he deals with this sort of politics. He makes every effort to be inclusive and open, and to consult everyone who may have a stake in an issue or in land. The politics are often inescapable, and he pushes on regardless. He endeavours to give his trainees the leadership qualities that will allow them to deal with these issues in the future because there will always be people who want to push their own agenda, and to further their own interests, and that needs to be recognized (personal Communication, July 2007).

Juluwarlu are now engaged in a fierce and lengthy battle with the Fortescue Metals Group (FMG) who are negotiating with the community for mining rights in Yindjibarndi country. Today, the media skills acquired by the community are being employed to document the battle with FMG and broadcast their cause to a national audience via social media and the internet. In recent times the story has been picked up by mainstream media. Yindjibarndi people are taking on FMG in the mainstream public sphere, and Woodley appears frequently as a polished media performer. Woodley’s dedication to fighting the mining giant, and the division that battle has caused in the Roebourne community, may leave him little time to pursue the cultural archiving and community building work he was doing previously. But even the fight with FMG is evidence that cultural maintenance is at the heart of Juluwarlu, clearly exemplifying Michaels’ (1986) first model of Aboriginal media. Culture is the reason they exist and why Aboriginal community media plays such an important role in each individual community. Juluwarlu offers access and participation to all Yindjibarndi-Roebourne people who, through their participation, connect with culture, create a community public sphere, and also have the potential to contribute to the mainstream public sphere.

Conclusions

The media and the public sphere are widely regarded to be one and the same (Meadows 2005, 36), yet both the media environment and the public sphere are becoming more fragmented. Programs are created and
delivered in numerous formats and for diverse audiences and so
Aboriginal people are producing media in diverse forms in order not only to
create and contribute to an Indigenous public sphere, but also to
participate and comment on the mainstream public sphere. McCallum and
colleagues present optimistic findings from their exploration of the ways in
which Indigenous people are engaging with mainstream media to shape
and influence policy agendas:

Indigenous people have become key media players....Indigenous
policy advocates use Indigenous public spheres and engage with
mainstream media and culturally competent journalists to keep their
policy agendas alive (McCallum et al. 2012, 104).

Aboriginal people are increasingly aware of the need to engage with the
mainstream public sphere or, as one research participant puts it, to
engage “in the same kind of formats and in the same kind of arenas where
they chose to take us on” (2012, 106). Aboriginal people are employing
all three of Michaels’ Aboriginal media models to actively participate in the
creation of Aboriginal identity and contemporary culture. There is reason
for optimism when taking a broader view of Indigenous media and how it
impacts on the mainstream. Hartley summarises the sector:

The growth and vibrancy of the Indigenous media sector itself, and
the number of Indigenous people working in the media and across
creative industries, meant that it was no longer wise to assume ‘the
media’ should be understood as an alien force that did something to
Indigenous people. On the contrary, they were clearly doing
something in the media, both individually and collectively — or
‘nationally’. What they were doing was having a narrative effect on
Australia ‘as we knew it’ (Hartley 2008, 93).

At the 1996 *Telling Both Stories* media forum, John Hartley expressed his
belief in the media’s capacity to contribute to reconciliation. He said, “I
believe the media are forces for progressive social change” (Hartley and
McKee 1996, 73). I would add that it is this potential for social change that is most relevant to the *Noongar Dandjoo* project. The *Noongar Dandjoo* project is implementing the RCIADIC recommendation to include Aboriginal content in university journalism courses and to provide opportunity for contact between Aboriginal people and media professionals. It provides a third space in which students learn to recognise and understand difference.

The *Noongar Dandoo* initiative has grown out of the recognition that the success of remote and regional Aboriginal community media organisations such as Juluwarlu has been difficult to duplicate in Perth. This research project seeks to better understand the challenges for successful Aboriginal community media in an urban environment by creating a cross-cultural and collaborative model of television production. Any prospect of creating a successful program, of initiating social change, had to begin with an understanding of the social and historical context of the community in which the *Noongar Dandjoo* project was initiated. It is this context that is provided in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 6

THE PERTH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

We respect the earth our mother, and understand that we belong to her – she does not belong to us. In all her beauty, we find comfort, wellbeing, and life that creates a home for everyone that has become a keeper of Noongar Country.

Look, Listen, Understand and Embrace all the elements of Noongar Country that is forever our home.

A Noongar Welcome (Yarran & Farmer 2008).

The Noongar people are the traditional custodians of the land situated in the south-west of Western Australia. Noongar country stretches from Perth, south-east to the coastal town of Esperance, and north-west again to Geraldton, and is home to fourteen different Noongar tribes or language groups. The Department of Indigenous Affairs divides the state of Western Australia into regions. The Perth metropolitan area is located in the wheat belt region and extends from Perth, east to Southern Cross, north to Jurien Bay and south to Mandurah. This is mostly Noongar country and has the largest population of Aboriginal people in the state with 30,000 Aboriginal inhabitants (Dept. Indigenous Affairs 2009). In the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics census, 27,104 people living in the Perth metropolitan area claimed Indigenous heritage (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). This is a relatively large Indigenous population, and in 2013, Perth is now home to a successful Indigenous community media initiative – Noongar Radio (see chapter 7). This was not the case when this PhD project commenced in 2006. While Aboriginal media programs in the north of the state, such as Goolarri Media in Broome, have experienced significant success, Perth has struggled to find a media voice for their Noongar people.
My ongoing involvement and interest in Perth community television alerted me to the absence of Aboriginal people in local media and prompted a number of questions that became the focus of this thesis. Why are Perth Aboriginal people absent from community television? Is there a desire for Noongar people to have their own media? What are the ingredients that encourage a community to participate in community media? As the action research cycle suggests a project must commence with research into the community itself. By first understanding who are the key stakeholders in an action research project, and what is the history and context of a problem, then it is possible to address the question of what action to take in answer to that problem. This chapter outlines the history of the Perth Aboriginal community and attempts to describe that community, as it exists today. I use the word ‘attempt’ because the Perth community is a complex and diverse one and is not easily described. What is presented here is the result of informal interviews with a number of high profile Perth Aboriginal people (see appendices 3 and 4), as well as a summary of available literature and government reports.

**Noongar Culture & History**

Lois Tillbrook produced the book *Nyungar Tradition. Glimpses of Aborigines of South-Western Australia 1829-1914* (1983), which was the result of a South West Aboriginal Studies project at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education beginning in 1977. A travelling display of Noongar history resulted in many Aboriginal people from all over the southwest of Western Australian coming forward to tell their stories and have them recorded in this book. The book includes an excellent collection of historical photos, maps, genealogies and an overview of Noongar history, and has been a significant source of information for the following summary of Noongar history and culture.
Illustration 11: NOONGAR TRIBAL BOUNDARIES

(Green 1979)
The south-west of Western Australia was settled by the British in 1826 at Albany and in 1829 at the Swan River Colony which is now the location of the cities of Fremantle and Perth. Prior to colonisation the region was home to a number of different Aboriginal tribes who had a common language called Noongar (or alternatively Nyungar, Nyungah, Nyoongah). The word means ‘man’ or ‘person’ and all the people who spoke the language came to be known as Noongar. The different spellings of the word Noongar is a demonstration of the different dialects that exist within the tribes. The tribe that traditionally occupied the land on which Perth is now located is called Wadjuk (Whadjug, Wajuk, Whadjuk). The other tribes that make up the Noongar Nation of south-western Australia are Amangu, Yued, Balardong, Binjareb, Wilmen, Wadandi, Ganeang, Bibelman, Mineang, Foreng, Wudjara, Nyaginyagi and Nyunga (see Illustration 11). They lived a semi-nomadic life hunting, fishing and collecting seasonal fruits and plants. As tribal groups moved around they came in contact with each other, an event for celebration, and for exchanging information and trading goods. Sometimes there was fighting between members of different tribes, but this was usually short lived (Tilbrook 1983, 3-4).

With British settlement, Aborigines were given all the rights of British subjects and were expected to adopt the culture of their colonisers. There was little acknowledgement of the Aborigines’ loss of land and traditional food sources as the British settlers occupied increasing areas of traditional Noongar land. A lack of understanding between the two cultures was the cause of an escalating number of disputes as the white settlers expanded their pastoral activities and came in more frequent contact with the Aborigines. For example, traditional Aboriginal law was unacceptable to the British legal system, as it often involved physical punishment such as spearing and even death for those who had broken tribal laws. Aborigines were punished under British law for carrying out traditional law. This is depicted in Karrie-Anne Kearing’s story of Weewar which has been turned
into a short film set in 1842, showing the capture of Binjareb Noongar warrior Weewar for carrying out tribal law. Weewar spears and kills the man who killed his son and is arrested and imprisoned for life on Wadjamup (Rottnest Island) (Stasiuk 2006). Another source of tension was the Aborigines’ use of a hunting method that involved ‘firing’ the landscape so that kangaroos and other game could be speared as they fled the flames. The white settlers were anxious about the fires damaging property and stock and held little sympathy for the Aborigines’ need to find food. The Aborigines, who lived semi-nomadic lifestyles in temporary dwellings, had no appreciation for the settlers’ lifestyle, their permanent homes and their fields of food crops. Tensions would erupt into physical conflict between Aborigines and white settlers that often resulted in deaths on both sides (Tilbrook 1983, 6-7). However, the Aboriginal death toll was significantly greater with some incidents described as massacres (Scott and Brown 2005, 72).

The loss of traditional land and food resources made it difficult to maintain tribal law and practices as the Noongar became more dependent on the settlers for survival. Aborigines were forced to choose between starvation and the acceptance of whatever limited employment opportunities were made available to them by the settlers. With time, this dependency and the consequent interaction of the Aborigines with the white settlers resulted in children of mixed descent who learnt to adopt both cultures, resulting in the evolution of “a body of custom and lore combining elements from Aboriginal life together with those of the introduced culture of the settlers” (Tilbrook 1983, 4). Kim Scott, in searching for his own Noongar ancestry in the book Kayang and Me, writes about the Noongar ability to adapt to the changing environment:

Different peoples? The same? Such things as dialects of a common language, ties formed by trade and intermarriage, ‘skin’ groupings, ‘totems’ and ‘moieties’ all imply various and shifting groupings, as do the differing experiences of colonization within and between the missions, ‘settlements’, reserves, country towns and
cities. Depending upon circumstances and temperament, there’s a range of responses available along a shifting continuum of accommodation and adaptation, resistance and assimilation … (Scott and Brown 2005, 26).

With increasing numbers of mixed descent people the question of who was Aboriginal became the subject of debate in regard to the administration of British law. Until 1898, Aboriginal people remained under the governance of the British Colonial Office and its appointed protectors of Aborigines. The state of Western Australia achieved self-governance in 1890 but the state’s indifference to its Aboriginal population was acknowledged by the British government, who waited another seven years before handing over responsibility for Aboriginal people to the newly created Aborigines Department. The department had little power and a budget of one per cent of state revenue promised by the then Premier of the state, John Forrest, for the welfare of Aborigines. However, with the state’s population grown to 180,000 and the part-Aboriginal population doubling to 1,000 the so-called ‘half-caste’ population had emerged as a problem. A white Australia sentiment dominated national policy and with the focus on minimising costs funding to this sector of the population was cut (Delmege 2005). At this point the government and the Aboriginal people themselves recognised two distinct groups of Aborigines, regardless of whether they were of mixed descent. The first group were those who identified with and lived a traditional Aboriginal lifestyle. The second were those who identified with and lived a traditionally European lifestyle and laws relating to Aborigines did not apply to them.

In 1905, an Act of Parliament known as the 1905 Aborigines Act changed the way in which Aboriginality was considered. Aboriginal identity was now biologically defined and had nothing to do with lifestyle. Anybody who was considered to be of more than one quarter Aboriginal descent was subject to the Act. All Aboriginal children became wards of the state and the Chief Protector of Aborigines was their legal guardian. The Aborigines Department took control of where Aboriginal people could live, and many
were moved to reserves created for this purpose. The Act established what is now referred to as the ‘stolen generations’. Kim Scott’s Aunty Hazel remembers how her family were subject to these harsh laws:

My mother was one of the Stolen Generations. She was sent to Carolup Native Settlement – now called Marribank – near Katanning. She was known as Nellie Limestone, but there were too many Nellies around so they changed her name to Sybil when they made her get married (Scott and Brown 2005, 8).

Non-Aboriginal people were prohibited from associating with Aborigines. All people of Aboriginal descent were prohibited from living in townships and white people were prohibited from living on reserves. The Act controlled “access to land, water, employment, education, the use of guns and dogs” (Delmege 2005, para. 6). To discourage miscegenation couples were required to seek permission to marry or else face prosecution. By 1936 the Act had been extended to give the Chief Protector of Aborigines A.O. Neville the power he had been asking for to ‘fix the native problem’. He boasted to a Conference of Aboriginal Administration in Canberra in 1937:

In Western Australia we have the power to take any child from its mother at any stage of its life, no matter whether the mother be legally married and … no half-caste need to be allowed to marry a full-blooded Aboriginal if it is possible to avoid it (Delmege 2005, para. 27).

This discriminatory Act of Parliament created far-reaching damage and consequences for Aboriginal people. Those who had been living as ordinary citizens were now subject to severe laws and penalties simply for being Aboriginal. For those not subject to the Act, it would be foolish for them to admit to any links with Aboriginal heritage through either blood or marriage, and so people were forced to deny their Aboriginality if their appearance allowed them to do so. The Act, with added restrictions in
1911 and 1936, was finally changed to *The Native Welfare Act* in 1963 and the trends of the previous decades started to be reversed as basic rights were restored to Aboriginal people (Tilbrook 1983, 4-5).

The impact of federal and state government policies that saw the relocation of Aboriginal communities and families has had devastating consequences for Aboriginal people to the present day. Evidence of the damage caused by these policies can be found in communities all over Australia, including the Aboriginal communities of south-western Australia. The removal of West Australian Aboriginal children from their families and homelands usually saw them relocated to either the Moore River settlement just north of Perth, or to the Carolup Mission south of Perth. Stephen Kinnane, in his book *Shadowlines* (2003), talks about his grandmother Jessie Argyle who was born in the Kimberley, Mirriwoong country, but removed from her family and transported to Perth – Noongar country:

I call myself a *marda-marda*. It is a Yindjibarndi term that strictly speaking means ‘blood-blood’. It is a term that nor-westers of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent use to describe ourselves. In the south, where Aboriginal people such as my grandmother were taken and placed in institutions, terms such as marda-marda were used instead of derogatory words such as ‘half-caste’ and ‘quarter-caster’. Thrown together and forced to learn English, a new language developed, mixing Kimberley Mulba and Yamatji lingo with that of a community of people, mostly women removed from their country, existing in Noongar country (Kinnane 2003, 17).

Another book, *When the Pelican Laughed* (1992) provides further evidence of the impact of government policies on families and individuals. It is an autobiographical account of the life of Alice Nannup, who was stolen from her family in Roebourne as a young girl and transported to Perth and then the Moore River settlement.
During periods of high unemployment, especially in the post-war years, Aborigines were forced into the city. With limited housing available, camps were set up on crown or vacant land that provided extremely poor living conditions for the inhabitants. From the 1930s, these fringe dwellers were constantly moved on when neighbouring residents complained of disease, poor sanitation and the presence of criminal types. Yet no funding or housing was provided, Aborigines were excluded from the same employment and welfare rights afforded to white citizens, and if they complained they were forcibly removed to the Moore River Native Settlement. The Aboriginal population of Perth had reached 892 in 1932 with 500 residents at the Moore River mission, the numbers swelling due to police arrests and transport of Aboriginal dissidents (Delmege 2005).

The referendum in 1967 saw the demise of the mission and reserve system. Aboriginal people were again on the move and in search of employment and access to welfare systems. A migration of Aboriginal people into the city of Perth meant they were now more visible to mainstream society (Mickler 1998, 115). What is traditionally Noongar country became home to Aboriginal people from all over the state. Most Aboriginal people in Perth will identify with two or more tribal areas in the state, depending on what ‘country’ their parents and extended family came from. For example, an Aboriginal woman introduced herself to me by saying: “I’m a Baladong-Noongar woman with links to the Kitja people of the east Kimberly through my grandmother’s line.”

Chris Birdsall, a research fellow at Curtin University, wrote her PhD thesis on Noongar family structure. Entitled All-One-Family she describes how a Noongar person will identify with a particular town depending on their family relationships and history. She describes Noongar kindred as ‘all-one-family’ because immediate family extends beyond the white Australian family structure of two parents and their offspring. A Noongar ‘all-one-family’ will include aunties, uncles, grandparents and cousins. ‘All-one-family’ members may each identify with different towns. In some cases
these towns will all be located in a particular region or ‘run’. For other families the towns with which they identify are located on a migratory route or ‘line’. This is the result of families who have been removed from homelands and over many years have attempted to migrate back to their traditional homes. Along the way they have stopped in a town where an individual may have married, started a family and decided to stay (Birdsall 1990, 182-84).

*Noongar of the Beeliar* is a short film about the Noongar history of the Swan River which features an interview with Richard Walley, a Noongar Elder. He explains further the Aboriginal connection with a particular town that may not be the town where a person is born:

… it [kinship connections] opens up the whole landscape for you. And even though it opens the whole landscape you still have an affiliation back to one part. So even though I have a connection all the way through, my affiliation is back in Pinjarra – and that’s what I’m talking about. You can’t explain it. Even though I wasn’t born there, it’s my grandmother’s country, and great grandmother’s country, and great grandfather’s country, you go back all through those areas – you find it is something beyond that. There is a spiritual link that pulls you back. And it’s not necessarily just me. It’s a lot of people who are looking for a place of belonging. Sometimes they find that place of belonging in very unusual places or sometimes they find it exactly where they were looking for it (Collard 2005).

The Noongar people celebrated on 8 July, 2003 when a Native Title Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the West Australian government and Aboriginal community members. The MoU is intended to guide the two parties in working together and in reaching agreement on land management objectives and uses. John Kobelke, then minister for Indigenous Affairs, said that as a result of the MoU:
agreements will come about through the development of a basic framework for planning processes, heritage protection, and raising the Noongar people’s participation in local government (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council 2003).

Soon after, in September of that year, members of the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) marched with members of 218 Aboriginal family groups who represented the entire Noongar nation. Together, they lodged a single Native Title claim in the Perth Federal Court that combines 18 different previous claims, covers all Noongar land, and would represent a new era for the Noongar Nation:

The Single Noongar Claim is already reaping huge benefits. The Single Noongar Claim is having a great healing effect amongst Noongar people, and is enhancing the relationship with the wider community. The Single Noongar Claim is rebuilding the Noongar Nation (South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council 2003).

For the Noongar people of Perth, the optimism symbolised by the Single Noongar Claim was significantly damaged in 2008. The land claimed within the Perth metropolitan area was the subject of a separate proceeding heard in September 2006. In an interim decision, the judge granted Noongar People native title over the whole of Perth, the first time traditional ownership had been recognized for a capital city. However, in April 2008, the State government successfully appealed the decision, with the court ruling that the Noongar people had failed to demonstrate the “continuous practice of their traditional laws and customs by a single society from white settlement to recent times” (Banks 2008, 4; Office of Native Title 2008). In challenging the Perth land claim the state government also challenged Noongar cultural integrity and this further strengthened the Perth community’s determination to create a greater awareness of a distinct Noongar culture (see Host et al. 2009). As mentioned in the previous chapter, this sense of unity was again challenged in 2012 when the Western Australian government came to a
billion dollar agreement with SWALSC that would supposedly settle the land rights issue, but which instead only served to divide the Noongar nation. Many Noongar people rejected the notion of ‘selling’ their land and disputed the right of SWALSC to negotiate such a deal with the government.

Identity

The impact of colonisation and state government assimilation policies has resulted in confusion and debate about Aboriginal identity. With ever-changing government and community attitudes about Indigenous culture, the issue of how to define Aboriginality has been questioned by both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Prior to 1967 Aboriginal people were subject to different laws than non-Indigenous citizens, and were managed under the jurisdiction of the Department of Flora and Fauna (Trees 1992: 2). Regarded as wards of the state they had no citizen rights and government dictated all aspects of their lives from where they should live to whom they should marry. It was possible for an Aboriginal person to be offered citizenship, but in return they had to reject all aspects of their Aboriginality. They were not permitted to speak their native language or to associate with other Aboriginal people. This was a particularly problematic choice for those Aboriginal people who looked white. Choosing citizenship provided an opportunity to escape racism and enjoy the freedoms of white society. For some it was about making the choice to survive – but it came at a high price. Kim Scott, a Noongar man of mixed descent, discusses his Aboriginal identity:

I was a young adult living and working among Aboriginal people of south-western Australia – Noongars – who repeatedly said, ‘You can’t be a bit and bit. What are you, Noongar or Wadjella (white fella)?... I knew very few members of my extended Indigenous family, and they were either ashamed to admit to their Aboriginality, or – like my father had perhaps been – too diffident to loudly identify themselves as Aboriginal (Scott and Brown 2005, 14-16).
Australia voted overwhelmingly ‘yes’ in the 1967 referendum that gave the federal government the power to enact policies for the benefit of all Aboriginal people in Australia. No longer would individual state government bodies control Aboriginal people’s lives, or speak on their behalf. Corporate bodies were formed that introduced Aboriginal political voices to the public sphere. But self-determination required funding and support from government, which in turn required individuals and organisations to provide evidence of their Aboriginality. So how to define Aboriginality? Skin colour is thought to be an indicator of Indigenous heritage, and it is often assumed by the non-Indigenous community that a darker skin colour is an indication of a greater connection with traditional culture. This is not the case, and Aboriginal faces are as diverse in appearance as those of the non-Indigenous population (Oxenham et al. 1999, 82). For those who had in the past denied their traditional culture, there was now reason to rediscover culture and embrace it. People who identify as Aboriginal are also eligible for a variety of government funding schemes and allowances. For example, ABSTUDY provides financial assistance to people studying if they meet the ABSTUDY definition of Indigenous (Centrelink 2009).

In discussing who and what is Aboriginal, Marcia Langton says:

For Aboriginal people, resolving who is Aboriginal and who is not is an uneasy issue, located somewhere between the individual and the state. They find white perceptions of Aboriginality are disturbing because of the history of forced removal of children, denial of civil rights and dispossession of land (1993: 28).

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6 To better illustrate differences in Aboriginal identity see Creative Spirits website http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-identity.html
She notes that legal scholar, John McCorquodale, has found 67 definitions of Aboriginal people, but the federal government has, over time, arrived at this definition:

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who:

- Is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.
- Identifies himself or herself as an Aboriginal person or Torres Strait Islander.
- Is accepted as such by the Indigenous community in which he or she lives.

(European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights 2009).

Yet Aboriginal identity remains problematic because definitions have been constructed by the dominant discourse – by governments, anthropologists and historians from white Australia rather than by Aboriginal people themselves. As Michael Dodson said in his 1994 Wentworth lecture:

The moment the question is asked, ‘Who or what is Aboriginal?’; an historical landscape is entered, full of absolute and timeless truths, which have been set in place by self-professed experts and authorities all too ready to tell us, and the world, the meaning of Aboriginality (Oxenham et al. 1999, 37).

Aboriginal people are having their own discourse about identity and they are reaching conclusions that are far more complex than the federal government’s three-point definition. For Aboriginal artists, writers and filmmakers this discourse is represented in their creative works where issues of identity are a recurring theme. For example, Aboriginal painter Robert Stuurman discusses his paintings that are about complex identities:
Society functions on a structured system of fixed identities because they tend to be conservative and predictable and therefore easy to manage. Variable identities are people who value the individual as unique which is shown through the emphasis of individual identity, what is your name, where are you from, who’s your mob? This is a sign of respect rather than interrogation. Variable identities collectively are elusive, resistant and cultural (sic) assertive (Stuurman 2004).

In this vein, Ivan Sen’s acclaimed film *Beneath Clouds* (2002) follows the journey of two Indigenous teenagers, Lena and Vaughn. Lena, who is fair and does not look Aboriginal, denies her Aboriginal heritage and instead seeks to identify with her absent Irish father. Sally Morgan’s novel *My Place* is an autobiographical account of the author’s discovery of her Aboriginal identity and a challenge to dominant white Australian history:

The kids at school had also begun asking us what country we came from. This puzzled me because, up until then, I’d thought we were the same as them…

One day, I tackled Mum about it as she washed the dishes.

“What do you mean, ‘Where do we come from?’”

“I mean, what country. The kids at school want to know what country we come from. They reckon we’re not Aussies. Are we Aussies, Mum?”…

“What do the kids at school say?”

“Anything. Italian, Greek, Indian.”

“Tell them you’re Indian.”

I got really excited, then…It sounded so exotic (Morgan 1987, 45).

A group of Indigenous academics from Curtin University’s Centre for Aboriginal Studies published a book in 1999 called *A Dialogue on Indigenous Identity: Warts ‘n’ All*. It is a record of a very personal discussion on identity and how to define Aboriginality. The dialogue was initiated after a Perth academic from another university was required to
prove their claim to Aboriginal heritage. The nine Indigenous academics that participated in the discussion, when reflecting on the process, all expressed their apprehension at being involved. Most expressed concern about how non-Indigenous readers would respond to a dialogue in which Aboriginal people themselves could not agree on a definition of Aboriginality. One participant, Darlene Oxenham, writes about the controversial and negative way in which Indigenous people are represented in the media. On the one hand, there is a representation that suggests the views and actions of one person represent all Aboriginal people; on the other, there is the representation whereby dissenting voices and opposing positions are highlighted:

Both these dynamics can place us in a no-win situation and do not do us, or our issues, justice ... so in some situations we are not allowed the right to disagree. We are expected to have only united all consistent opinions on things; otherwise our cultural credibility is brought into question (Oxenham et al. 1999, 151).

Kim Scott recognises the Aboriginal community’s questioning and distrust of some people’s actions and their claim to Aboriginality, and of how some individual’s behaviour in the assimilation years is regarded with suspicion, and blames a history of Noongar oppression. He talks about an ancestor who worked as a black tracker for the police:

It’s a problem for us: what to make of such an ancestor? ... Bobby apparently chained up other Noongars. Arguably, many different groups made up those now known as Noongar. Maybe that’s still the case, and perhaps after some generations of oppression we need time and space to reconcile amongst ourselves, even with those we might call brother and sister, before being rushed to reconcile ourselves to the status quo in other matters (Scott and Brown 2005, 48).
**Salt & Pepper**

Living in a large urban area like Perth has its own unique challenges for Aboriginal people working to rediscover culture and create a sense of community. Aboriginal people are scattered through sprawling suburbs and there is no obvious cultural centre or focus for the Aboriginal community. Camps and reserves that developed in Perth in the 1960s were closed in the 1970s by what came to be known as the government’s ‘salt and pepper’ policy. The idea was to house Aboriginal families within the white community to encourage assimilation and to avoid the low standards of health, hygiene, employment and education that existed in the camps, but as Delmege notes, “… in practice, families were dispersed and isolated in far-flung outer suburbs of Perth” (Delmege 2005). For Perth Aboriginal academic, Ted Wilkes, the policy has had a significant impact on the Aboriginal community:

> The situation in Perth, [compared] with people up north, is not different. The only difference is that in Perth we live amongst a multitude and a great big jungle of western and white systems and white people. So we are hidden out in the suburbs – we are a bit salt and peppered out… There’s been some social engineering going on … to salt and pepper the Aboriginal population throughout Perth (personal communication, February 2007).

Old people’s stories of the mission days at Moore River are often recounted as fond memories. In spite of harsh living conditions, hard work and malnutrition, the missions represented a kind of community to which people could belong (see Nannup 1992; Maushart 2003). In small regional towns that sense of community can be created as people find recognised meeting places that are easily accessed by everyone. While there are still some Aboriginal communities in outlying suburbs, today it is harder to find these concentrations and common meeting areas in the inner suburbs of Perth. Birdsall explains how, for Aboriginal women living in Perth, errands will take longer because of the physical distance.
between destinations. It is unlikely that you will meet friends and relations along the way, so people look to their own homes for that contact (Birdsall 1990, 222-23). However, there are a few places in the city where people have traditionally gathered and the inner city suburb of Northbridge is one such focal point. The area used to be home to the Coolbaroo League in the 1950’s. At a time when the city of Perth ‘practiced unofficial Apartheid’ and Aboriginal people were subjected to police harassment and curfews, the Aboriginal-run Coolbaroo League ran a dance once a week from 1946 to 1960 (Scholes 1996). The Coolbaroo Club was a place where Aboriginal people could meet, talk, dance and play music. People would travel considerable distances to attend the dances and they were not only attended by Noongars but by others such as Wongi, Yamatji and Mulba people who lived in the Perth area, as well as their white friends. The League also published an Aboriginal newsletter called the Westralian Aborigine that contained news relevant to Aboriginal people, as well as advertisements for the sale of Aboriginal cultural items. The League “became an effective political organisation, speaking out on issues of the day affecting Aboriginal people” (Collard et al. 2005, 26).

Bearing in mind questions of identity, a community of people with allegiances to a diverse range of places, and a population that is geographically disconnected, it was not surprising that when asked to describe the Perth Noongar community most Perth Aboriginal people interviewed during the course of this research project were hesitant in their answer. For some there was a sense of unease when asked this question. Many described the community as diverse and fragmented:

Complex, vibrant and yeh it’s a complex community, it’s quite a sophisticated community, the way that we operate, we operate on many different levels … (Williams, personal communication, February 2009).

I still think our Noongar community is still very strong and identifiable as a Noongar community but there’s just a lot more
stacked against it than elsewhere... Perth is like an area that has almost been neglected and of course that neglect equates out to internalised oppression and along with internal oppression comes in-fighting, domestic violence and all kinds of stuff. It's much harder to maintain a community presence in all of that than it is in a country town like Alice Springs. There are lots of different groups in Perth though too, which makes it difficult (Eggington, personal communication, April 2008).

There is an attitude held by government and the non-Indigenous community that urban dwelling Aborigines are not ‘real Aborigines’. There is a populist-romantic view that ‘Indigenous’ is linked with the original and the primitive – “the idea of ‘Indigenous’ [is] irreconcilable with modernity” (Meadows and Molnar 2001, xvii). Perth Noongar man, Dennis Simmons explains further:

They think that because we live in the city and we stay in a house – especially for Noongar people – they say Noongar people have got no culture. Well we do have a culture – we don’t have a law – but we do have a culture (personal communication, August 2008).

Kim Scott adds:

…most thought that there was only ‘oppression culture’ left in Noongar country – not ‘high’ culture, not creation stories, language and songs. I worried they were right (Scott and Brown 2005 14-16).

Associate Professor Ted Wilkes explains that in years past white fathers in particular turned their backs on their Aboriginal children and it was Noongar women who raised the children in a Noongar world:

White people who live in Perth don’t believe that Aboriginal people living south of the 26th parallel are genuine and real Aboriginal
people. They say, ‘they’re not real black fellas.’… We are Noongar. We are the genuine Noongars. We are the modern contemporary Noongar people. And for any white fella to say that we’re not is a misnomer. It’s an absolute lie. It’s a mistruth. And it’s a stretching of the truth again to meet their own selfish and ethnocentric views (personal communication, February 2007).

**Cultural Survival**

Steve Mickler, in his book *The Myth of Privilege* (1998) demonstrates how the mainstream media also subscribe to the idea that ‘real’ Aborigines don’t live in the city. He quotes John Hartley who describes media representation of Aboriginal people as falling into two categories – stories about protection and stories about correction – where the “‘real’, ‘authentic’ bush-dwelling Aborigines” require our protection, while the “‘synthetic’, town-dwelling ‘half-castes’” are discussed in terms of correction. According to Mickler, the media and public opinion show respect for the former and contempt for the latter (1998, 100). The federal government intervention policies implemented by the Howard government in 2007 focused on remote communities in central and northern Australia, and were preceded by a media barrage of images from these communities showing poverty, alcohol abuse and sexual abuse. Described at a public meeting by one politician as “squalour porn” (Lawrence 2006) these communities are the ‘real’ Aborigines that require our protection. Yet the city-dwelling Aborigines rarely feature in the media as a focus for government assistance. Indigenous funding programs are abundant and available for all Aboriginal people, including those living in urban communities, but the public perception is still that the ‘real’ Aborigines live in the bush. The Perth Aboriginal people interviewed for this study are aware of this attitude and often expressed anger when asked about it:

I hear it every day. Perth, along with Sydney and Tasmania were the most colonised regions of Australia. That was why we won native title. We had one of the strictest laws, strictest community
and language and boundary groups in the world. But we were heavily colonised and massacred. To still be here 220 odd years later, still speaking language, and being white skinned but still declaring our Aboriginality shows that we are a strong people. That we don’t have that stereotypical look about us – what we do is continue to relate with our family, continue to learn our culture, and respect our land. Those three things are what hold us together. As you move up north, yes it’s a lot different. There are still stories of people coming in off deserts for the first time in the fifties (Stasiuk, personal communication, February 2007).

There is still a very strong Noongar community that exists and I think once again it’s just harder because it’s a city that doesn’t want to recognise that. For instance the federal court said that Noongar people have got native title in the Perth metropolitan area but the state government has appealed that and said that Noongar people as a community, as a Noongar cultural group, really have lost all that connection and don’t exist. Government policies and things like that don’t treat the Noongar community as a community in general. It tries to think that in Perth there are all of these people and that there are some Aboriginal people that are very disadvantaged but there’s no real creating a sense of Noongar community and so Noongar people who are a part of the Noongar community are continually battling that sort of feeling and that sort of opposition (Eggington, personal communication, April 2008).

Some interviewees suggested there had been changes in the community in recent times and that language and culture are being embraced by more people. The non-Indigenous community has become more accepting of Indigenous culture. The creation of the Noongar Nation Movement is evidence of the Noongar community uniting, with men and women from all but one of the 14 clans joining the movement. The movement recognises the need for the Noongar people to set their own agenda rather than looking to government for assistance. A Noongar
woman from the Noongar Nation Movement was interviewed by the *Koori Mail*:

This is not about money or anything like that. It’s about coming together in unity as one people and getting it right for our children who aren’t even born yet. We’ve got to try and learn to do without government being so involved in our lives and to do that we’ve got to learn to trust each other again (Boase 2009, 35).

Noongar man, Dennis Simmons, is optimistic about the Noongar Nation Movement:

You know about our culture and this is how trouble starts, it’s just the way it is. Perth’s Noongar people – there’s 14 clans under that; and not one clan can speak for the other, that’s a very complicated thing, very very complicated. Say for me – I’m from the Yued people and the Wilmen people and the Whadjuk people country, but for me to do things here you’ve got to pay respect to the Whadjuk people ‘cos you’re in their country. But right now as we speak there is a Noongar Nation being set up and it will consist of the 14 clans. This will be a lot easier for the government people to deal with because they will have one member of each clan on there to speak to... It’s just so exciting, it’s a very good, positive thing happening (personal communication, August 2011).

There is a re-emergence of traditional culture which is most often expressed by the practice of welcome to country performed at the start of many official events including those that are not specifically for Indigenous people. This ceremony serves to recognise Noongar people as the traditional custodians of the land and as Australia’s first people. Also the Noongar language is spoken and heard more frequently:
I’ve been really surprised in recent times with the cultural activity that goes on in Perth, like people say, this is a very basic example, but people say like the Noongar language is dying or it’s dead. I am amazed at the number of people that speak Noongar, and you hear it more and more, and not just old fellas either, there’s young fella’s that have learnt to speak the language. I guess the thing with language too is that there’s other things that go with that, its almost like it’s the glue that holds everything else together. To me language, because I love words as well, but to me language is a sign of a culture’s health and the fact that we are increasingly hearing people use Noongar words and speak the language would indicate to me that actually it’s very healthy (Williams, personal communication, February 2009).

Anthropological discussions of Aboriginal culture are helpful in understanding better the complexities of contemporary Aboriginal culture. Birdsell quotes anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw who talks about Aboriginal culture as an oppositional culture created as a:

…‘response to the conditions of existence experienced by a group’. She [Cowlishaw] discusses various ways in which the culture of town-dwelling Aborigines’ culture encompasses the elements of their Aboriginality and also the ways in which bureaucratic ignorance of this culture has forced political consequences upon Aboriginal people (Birdsell 1990, 132).

Culture is a creative response to the conditions of existence experienced by a group. The Noongar community of Perth has evolved with a unique and contemporary culture that is the product of history, family and environment. Media can play an important role in supporting this unique culture and contributing to the creation of a sense of community and identity in an urban environment. The Perth Aboriginal community, in spite of the difficulties experienced over the years, are producing their own media in a variety of forms. Each of these forms gives access to
community, Indigenous and mainstream public spheres. It is this media that is discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 7

NOONGAR MEDIA

The following is an overview of the type of media, both community and independent, that is being produced in Perth by the Aboriginal community. It includes a detailed account of how the West Australian Aboriginal Media Association (WAAMA) was formed and eventually failed. To my knowledge there is no other record of its history, however, it provides essential background information that is relevant to the Noongar Dandjoo project. As action research suggests, the mistakes of the past should be recorded and analysed so that future action may be better informed. An historical record of WAAMA’s processes, achievements and failings is, I believe, useful for current and future community media producers as they work to improve the media representation of Perth’s Aboriginal community. This account has been compiled from personal interviews (see appendices 3 and 4), business documents, and government reports.

WAAMA – The Early Days

As previously mentioned, the The Westralian Aborigine published by the Coolbaroo League in the late 1950s is the earliest example of Noongar community media. Since then, there have been small local initiatives in media production but the most significant was the establishment of WAAMA. Although WAAMA’s 20 year existence ended badly in 2005, documenting its history and understanding what went wrong can provide valuable lessons for future Aboriginal media initiatives in Perth.

WAAMA had its origins in 1978 with a Perth Aboriginal radio program presented by Vi Chitty on radio 6NR located at the then Western
Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), now Curtin University. Chitty presented a music program, including her own songs, and was later joined by Ken Colbung who presented a current affairs style program called Wanjoo Bambooroo. By 1980, the Aboriginal programming had moved from occupying the odd half hour time slot to owning the entire Saturday night timeslot. Those involved over the next few years included producer Mark Cain, Aboriginal trainees Jeremy Garlett and Wayne Bynder, Les Lee, and a number of volunteers and students. By 1985, the 6NR team was broadcasting statewide on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and included a Thursday afternoon half hour news report. The program had developed into a sophisticated mix of programs that included Aboriginal writers, an Aboriginal women’s program, Aboriginal Christians, music requests, interviews and panel discussions. At this point the broadcasters, motivated by the launch of AUSSAT and the potential it presented for wider broadcasting opportunities, formed the West Australian Aboriginal Radio Association (WAARA).

In 1986, Aboriginal programs could be heard twice weekly on ABC regional radio, but it was at this point that several key personnel took employment with the ABC, depleting WAARAs numbers of experienced broadcast staff. Meanwhile, the opportunities for Aboriginal broadcasting offered by satellite technology were being enthusiastically taken up by regional broadcasters such as the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) in central Australia and Bunbury’s GWN in the south west of the state. WAARA recognised the need to look beyond 6NR and its urban broadcast possibilities. They recognised the need to expand their training and facilities beyond those offered by the small 6NR studios at WAIT. In September 1986, WAAMA was officially formed with a committee comprising members of local Aboriginal organisations. The objective was to expand their media activities to include all aspects of Aboriginal media, especially television. The Institute of Applied Aboriginal Studies was commissioned to review the role of WAAMA, a two week intensive training course was conducted for radio and print journalism trainees, and in February 1987, the premises at 176 Wellington Street,
Perth were leased from the Aboriginal Lands Trust for use as an Aboriginal media centre (WAAMA 1987, 3-5).

WAAMA members included a list of names that remain today as significant personalities in Perth Aboriginal media and politics – Rob Riley, Jeremy Garlett, Ted Wilkes and Mark Bin Bakar are a few. Their vision for the organisation was to provide a facility for media training, a broadcasting service, an Aboriginal news agency, a recording service for Aboriginal community organisations, the production of printed material such as newsletters and policy advice, and the recording of music and educational programs. WAAMA saw itself as becoming a focus, a kind of media hub, for Aboriginal media in the state of Western Australia. They proposed access and training for rural and remote communities wishing to establish their own media programs. They also proposed the further development of their relationship with the ABC to provide training for Aboriginal and community broadcasters and the placement of WAAMA trainees with the ABC for work experience. WAAMA also promoted the idea of providing a statewide Aboriginal radio service via the AUSSAT satellite network.

In March 1987, WAAMA submitted a funding application to the Aboriginal Communities Development Program (ACDP) outlining WAAMA’s history and their vision for the future. The funding sought from the ACDP was broken down into three projects:

1) For the establishment of radio production facilities at the Wellington Street studio – $200,000.
2) Capital equipment costs excluding the radio production studio – $78,760.
3) A Printing Operation – $10,000.

WAAMA also sought funding totalling a further $435,000 from the Department of Employment & Industrial Relations (DEIR) for training, the WA Lotteries Commission for two vehicles, and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) for salaries and operational costs (WAAMA 1987, 19-22).
The submission to the ACDP for funding includes a copy of the submission to the DEIR for training money written by WAAMA Chairman Brian Wyatt. WAAMA supports its argument for funding from the DEIR by reference to a review of Aboriginal radio conducted by the Institute for Applied Aboriginal Studies:

The general thrust of the review’s recommendations are that WAAMA, in order to meet the challenges and opportunities for Aboriginal involvement in media, presented by the growth of public and commercial broadcasting, and remote area satellite telecommunications, should transform itself from a modest group of metropolitan public radio broadcasters into a bold new organization with the objectives of developing Aboriginal involvement in all major areas of mass media (WAAMA 1987, 1.1).

The need to develop Aboriginal media is convincingly argued in the WAAMA submission. It argues that the expansion of mass media in general delivers the “formidable and all-pervasive” (1987, 1.1) cultural hegemony of non-Indigenous society that is detrimental to the revival and maintenance of Aboriginal culture. Media provides the opportunity for Aboriginal people to “strengthen their cultural and social identity” (1987, 1.1). Media can also provide educational tools, can inform on Aboriginal issues, and provide training opportunities for Aboriginal people. Six trainee positions were requested by WAAMA to commence in May 1987 – two radio trainees, two television production trainees and two print media trainees. A comprehensive and impressive outline of the training program was included in the submission (WAAMA 1987, 1.1 - 3.19).

The aforementioned review of Aboriginal Radio was also attached as an appendix to the submission. Entitled Voices from the Never-Silent Land, it is authored by Duncan Graham and its title suggests a response to the federal government’s 1984 report Out of the Silent Land: Report of the
Task Force on Aboriginal and Islander Broadcasting and Communications (see Chapter 5). The local review argues that whilst most Aboriginal broadcasters are relegated to community radio, a radio format that was launched by the Whitlam government in 1975, this is not the goal for which they should aim. The large audiences of mainstream radio will provide the public recognition and political force Aboriginal broadcasters desire – Aboriginal programs on mainstream radio should be the goal. They should not be “tucked away in some distant and apart media location” (Graham 1986, 3). This is not an unreasonable statement since, at this time, community radio was associated with ethnic broadcasting and amateurism, and their transmitters often had a limited range. This is one reason why the review proposes the ABC as an ideal host for Aboriginal programming. But the review goes on to offer reasons for the support of Aboriginal radio and reflects the arguments made by CAAMA in their lobbying for the establishment of an Aboriginal broadcasting service in central Australia. Aboriginal voices need their place in the public sphere to initiate debate and discussion of Aboriginal issues. The then current situation forced Aboriginal people to be reactive to debate, which is usually initiated by government through mainstream media. The non-Indigenous participants in the debate choose who will be the appropriate spokesperson on any given issue, and “This has led to a widespread view that Aboriginal issues are the concern of a few leaders and that the rest of the Aboriginal community is silent or unconcerned” (1986, 5).

The review delivers detailed recommendations on all aspects of establishing an Aboriginal radio station including training, administration, accommodation, promotion, professionalism, and programming. The community was canvassed for opinions on current Aboriginal programming and, while comments were encouraging, there were suggestions that greater variety and interest was needed from that which was currently broadcast:

An outsider unfamiliar with the richness of Aboriginal culture and the wealth of available talent could conclude that Aboriginal society
consists of Ken Colbung, some evangelical Protestant Christians and prisoners (1986, 25).

Efforts were needed to expand the variety of programs heard. The use of non-Indigenous broadcasters was also discouraged as this would “send the message likely to be interpreted by some people that Aborigines are incapable of doing the job themselves and that control of Aboriginal Radio rests in non-Aboriginal hands” (1986,25). This point reiterates a recommendation of the DAA task force in their Out of the Silent Land report.

Graham’s review cautions WAAMA about policy and structure, which when read with hindsight and with knowledge of WAAMA’s demise 20 years later, seems almost prophetic in places. In particular:

In an unstructured situation and in the absence of a clear philosophy and stated guidelines any radio organization lays itself open to manipulation. This can vary from a Government department flooding broadcasters with ministerial media releases which get used because other information is not readily available, through to a take-over by a particular interest group (1986, 28).

Also pertinent is the acknowledgement that country and western music is a preference for many survey respondents, but the review warns against allowing this genre to dominate air time at the expense of local Aboriginal artists. Furthermore, the implications of WAAMA’s title as a statewide broadcaster is also addressed as a point of caution, as the size of the geographical area to be serviced represented an enormous task.

WAAMA’s 1987 submission for funding demonstrated an awareness of community needs and expectations; a desire to provide the Aboriginal community of Perth with a quality media service that would engage, entertain and inform; an effort to seek out and heed the assistance and advice of appropriate consultants and partners, and a vision for growth
and advancement that would encompass all areas of media. They continued to provide Aboriginal programming to other radio stations for another five years until they eventually applied for a radio broadcasting licence in January 1992. WAAMA’s 1992 application reflected the objectives and aims of the 1987 funding submission but also promoted their intention to “transmit educational, informational and entertaining programming that will encourage Aboriginal community members and reach out to the community at large” (ACMA 2005, 3). This new application emphasises to a greater degree the aim to engage with the wider, non-Indigenous community as well as the Perth Aboriginal community. In keeping with previously stated objectives, the application demonstrated plans for a variety of different programs covering news and current affairs, music, Aboriginal culture, and educational material, and was supported by a broad range of individuals and community organisations. The Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) granted WAAMA its licence on January 23, 1993, and they commenced broadcasting on 16 May, 1994, with the call sign 6AR. The licence was renewed in October 1997 and again in October 2002 in accordance with ABA procedures for the renewal of community broadcasting licences. On 1 August 2003, the station moved to 100.1 on the FM band.

Community Voices

Interviews with people who had been involved with WAAMA conducted as part of this research project elicited a variety of responses, both positive and negative. Many were reluctant to share their experiences at the radio station or expressed disappointment with the way WAAMA had evolved. Others recalled the early years of WAAMA’s operation that produced encouraging results, especially in terms of the success of trainees. People like Gina Williams, Bevan Rankins and Michelle White were all trainees with WAAMA and went on to pursue very successful media careers in mainstream radio and television. WAAMA’s publication in the early 1990’s of the media liaison guide Yarning With the Media provides advice to Indigenous organisations on how to use the media and
effectively communicate stories. Here was evidence of WAAMA meeting its objectives to provide a print service for the Indigenous community. As well, a series of 13 five-minute animated children’s videos entitled *Bobtales* was produced by WAAMA in collaboration with Gripping Films and Graphics for broadcast on SBS in 1998. It also went to air in Norway. The videos were Aboriginal dreamtime stories animated with children’s drawings. This was further evidence of WAAMA delivering on its promise to work in all areas of media and to support Aboriginal culture:

> It was exciting to be involved in media at the time, we had political leaders like Rob Riley and Pat Dodson who was becoming a very strong voice at a national sort of level and so that was amazing. I got to work on reporting the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the brewery site – there was a protest down there – we were still marching the streets and doing all those sorts of things so to be part of that and to be reporting that for an Indigenous community organisation was absolutely amazing and was a brilliant experience (Williams, personal communication, February 2009).

In 1998, WAAMA was one of nine equal partners in the Channel 31 Community Educational Television Limited Consortium who were granted a test narrowcast sub-licence to operate on Perth UHF channel 31. The consortium oversaw the beginnings of community television in Perth, which was successfully established, but was subject to financial problems and difficult licence restrictions. A permanent licence was eventually granted to Access 31 in 2003 but this saw the end of the consortium and a restructure of the organisation. In that five-year period WAAMA were not represented on Perth community television and were not involved in any future activities with the station right up to its closure in 2008.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee (ATSIC) conducted a review of WAAMA in 2001 that revealed community dissatisfaction with the service, and it reported in 2002 that the community felt isolated from
the station. The ATSIC report recommended that regular surveys of listeners should be conducted by WAAMA, with the cost included in annual budgets. By 2003, the ABA had received informal complaints about WAAMA’s operations, but people working with the organisation and its radio station were already aware of problems and had been concerned for some time. The following are comments from Aboriginal people involved with WAAMA in various capacities and at various stages of its existence:

WAAMA – what a great concept that turned out to be. I did work experience at WAAMA in ’95 and saw firsthand that it wasn’t going to succeed. Again the gatekeepers – WAAMA was set up to be a WA Aboriginal Media Association with Indigenous content for Indigenous issues. Local – thus Noongar – and state and national. There was a story that came out at the time that went across the communication links about a racist comment made by a Queensland cricket player after winning Sheffield Shield. [One trainee] said this is the sort of stuff that we are required to get across the airwaves to show people that it’s not acceptable any more. He wrote up a beautiful report along the lines that this isn’t accepted anymore and gave it to the news manager and he said ‘no this is too controversial.’ I stood there at the desk and I nearly fell over. You can’t do this. I spoke up. I said, through your eyes – being a wadjella, or through the Indigenous community eyes? So the report that went out that day was about planting flowers across Kings Park. Some shit that was irrelevant to a social point of view. So that was when I knew WAAMA was in trouble (Stasiuk, personal communication, February 2007).

I think that people really saw not just the entertainment, the cultural significance of what was happening, they really saw the political significance of it as well and because our community like any is very diverse in its opinion; many people felt that their opinions weren’t being heard enough and therefore moved towards
destabilising the place and maybe getting control of the place so that their particular political view or what they thought of the world was given more prominence and unfortunately our community allowed that to happen. There wasn’t enough people to stop the disintegration of people tossing it up and turning it on its head. Really you have to understand the nature of localised Aboriginal community-based organisations that are always subject to different family controls and/or different faction controls (Eggington personal communication, April 2008).

Finally, the following is from a tribute to the late Clarrie Isaacs, an Aboriginal Elder and activist:

Not many people knew that Clarrie once became a trainee radio producer at WAAMA. He lasted two weeks. The reason he resigned was a wonderful one and it taught me a lot about the difference between western media and what should be offering here in Perth for Noongars. Clarrie said that he could no longer work for WAAMA because he could not be objective...he could not work in a job that meant he had to distance himself from social action. Perhaps this is what WAAMA should be about today? Where are our voices of protest on the airwaves...why are so many white people still so ignorant and racist? Have we lost our words of resistance? (Dowling 2003).

**ACMA Reports on WAAMA**

In May 2006, the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) (which replaced the ABA in July 2005) released a report on community broadcaster 6AR that details its investigation into the station and the consequential loss of WAAMA’s broadcast licence in October 2006 (ACMA 2006). The report is a record of complaints and concerns dating back to 2004, centred around issues of 6AR representing itself as a country music station rather than servicing the needs of the Perth
Aboriginal community. There were also problems with the way the station handled membership applications. The following are indicative of the complaints published in the ACMA report:

I saw Aboriginal radio change over the years from being a radio that you would listen to, that talked about the news and affairs of Noongar people. That doesn’t happen anymore…

100.9 FM was launched purely as a country music station.

WAAMA no longer has a vibrant system of traineeships run for Aboriginal community future employment in the media industry.

Qualified ex-staff and other skilled volunteers … have been refused the opportunity to volunteer on the radio station even though we are highly skilled and would adhere to station policy (2006, 11-12).

The ACMA report included a response from WAAMA to ACMA in December 2005, maintaining that they continued to represent the Perth Aboriginal community but that they also “intended to appeal to the wider community, not only Indigenous people, and that it must appeal to a wider audience in order to facilitate reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations” (2006, 12). WAAMA said that a mix of Indigenous and country music was played by the station, with an average of two songs per hour by Indigenous performers, or 15 per cent of all music played. Research conducted by WAAMA suggested that 55 per cent of listeners enjoyed their Indigenous music and 78 per cent enjoyed their country music. The survey comprised 85 people who were sourced from a list of 336 people who had taken part in station competitions. WAAMA also submitted the research findings of the Country Music Association of Australia that showed 34 per cent of adults enjoyed country music. Complimentary feedback had been received by WAAMA, and efforts to ascertain community approval had demonstrated that “more people approve of the format than disapprove” (2006, 18). Evidence of
promotional material for the station included a television advertisement with the logo ‘100.9 FM Country’ in the red, black and yellow colours of the Aboriginal flag. WAAMA argued that use of the phrase ‘Noongar Country’ did not identify the station with country music but was a phrase used by Indigenous people when referring to their traditional land. “100.9FM is proud to be an Indigenous radio station and does not try to hide the fact” (2006, 19). Recordings of sample news bulletins were not provided and WAAMA said that its “Indigenous staff lacked interest in properly gathering Indigenous news items, and a lack of access to transport prohibited staff from travelling to obtain interviews” (2006,15). ACMA informed WAAMA that complainants had provided examples of requests for membership to WAAMA that had been refused or ignored, and of volunteers being refused work experience including an Aboriginal journalism student. WAAMA responded that the reason for refusal of one applicant was their association with a “malicious and vexatious campaign” against the governing committee.

(ACMA, 2006: 29)

ACMA’s report concluded that WAAMA did not represent the interests of the Perth Aboriginal community. One regular program called Noongar Nights was singled out as a program of relevance to the Aboriginal community, but this represented a small percentage of total broadcast time and therefore did not represent the station as a whole. ACMA found that 6AR played mostly country music by overseas artists, with little programming that was of interest or relevance to the Aboriginal community, and did not have formal procedures for selecting and providing programs that were relevant. It was also found that steps had not been taken to determine preferences of the community, and that they promoted themselves as a country music station rather than an Aboriginal station.

ACMA’s reasons for the findings were that while Aboriginal people like country music, there was no evidence that they like it to the exclusion of all other types of music. They provided the example of Perth’s Groove FM
which had a similar problem through playing dance/urban music to the exclusion of all other types of music and who lost their licence as a result. The Aboriginal audience in Perth had been identified as a mostly young demographic and WAAMA did not demonstrate how they addressed the opportunities and/or difficulties that this demographic created. WAAMA provided no evidence of content of ‘talk’ program items that were of specific relevance to the Aboriginal community. ACMA acknowledged that community radio stations often lacked the resources to produce programs, but WAAMA was comparatively well resourced and a lack of program content relevant to the Aboriginal community was a concern.

Among other findings, ACMA found that lengthy delays in dealing with membership applications did not encourage community participation and denying membership because applicants expressed alternative views was not appropriate. As well, WAAMAs processes for determining membership needed to be more objective and existing WAAMA members did not have enough opportunity to participate in operational and programming decisions, and committee procedures such as meeting times needed to be better managed.

The report also noted that news and current affairs programs contained mostly national and international stories, with little reference to local impact and no interviews with local Indigenous people. In ACMA’s view, “community media should provide news and current affairs that complements rather than duplicates mainstream services” (2006, 22). The community broadcasting code states that news programs should “provide access to views under-represented by the mainstream media” (2006, 22).

**The End of WAAMA:**
ACMA concluded that WAAMA remained a suitable licence holder but applied special conditions to be met if WAAMA were to retain their licence and progress would be monitored. WAAMA responded to ACMA on 13 December 2005, with an outline of their plans for meeting the special conditions imposed upon them. They undertook to encourage
membership to WAAMA, introduce programs with more Indigenous content, contact Indigenous organisations for feedback and ideas, include more Indigenous content in news and more Indigenous music, and to employ two new trainees. ACMA’s request for proper research into determining community preferences for the station was considered problematic because, as WAAMA pointed out, there had been few responses made to previous requests for ideas and feedback from the community.

WAAMA’s public face suggested a determination to overcome their problems and continue operations. On 25 July 2006, the Department of Communication Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) met with WAAMA representatives to discuss further funding. WAAMA had already received funding of $4.9 million under the Australian Government’s Indigenous Broadcasting Program (IBP) from 1998-99 to 2005-06. They were offered funding by DCITA, but the money was refused, staff were sacked, and the organisation ceased operation on September 1, 2006. The registrar of Aboriginal corporations had already begun wind-up proceedings because the station was bankrupt. WAAMA’s community broadcasting licence was revoked by ACMA on 9 October 2006.

What went on behind the scenes of WAAMA is difficult to determine, but according to media reports at that time deals were transacted without full knowledge of all the WAAMA members. The premises at 176 Wellington Street, the long term residence of WAAMA’s radio studios, were sold to a third party company called 176 Investments Pty Ltd. Long time WAAMA members discovered that the property had been signed over to 176 Investments in October 2005, only weeks after WAAMA had purchased the property from the Crown. WAAMA purchased the property for $427,272 but it was then secretly transferred to the private company who paid $740,000. A company director, Angelo Lombardo, said the sale price had included $100,000 additional payment to WAAMA to facilitate the sale. Lombardo said that WAAMA had bought the property for the company. The land transfer deal was signed by Iva Hayward Jackson,
WAAMA chairman and a spokesperson for the Noongar Circle of Elders. According to news reports, Aboriginal Legal Service director Dennis Eggington, who helped set up WAAMA, said “the property deal was a gross abuse of trust that should be investigated by police” (Laurie 2006).


To date no police investigation has taken place and it is difficult to determine exactly where it all went wrong. In interviews with people involved with WAAMA, it is cautiously revealed that a power struggle within the organisation had seen the radio station fall into the hands of one family group and it was also operating under non-Indigenous management. It was felt WAAMA and 6AR, under this type of management, had lost sight of their original goals and objectives. As one interviewee explains, self-serving interests took precedence over the interests of the Perth Aboriginal community:
When some very important issues came out – we’re talking about children, we’re talking about the social set-up within Aboriginal communities in Perth – other Aboriginal people and their friends took control of the Media Association and restricted those leaders and genuine spokespersons because they had a selfish, devious interest in doing that. I would say that’s quite criminal because it then restricts the proper information that needs to be put out in the community (Eggington, personal communication, April 2008).

A review of community broadcasting history in Australia reveals that the sorts of problems experienced by WAAMA are not exclusive to Indigenous media. A search of the ACMA website provides a number of examples of breach of licence by community broadcasters for failing to provide appropriate opportunity for community participation. In 2004, Cumberland Radio 2CCR were found in breach of their licence when complainants accused the Board of Management of operating autonomously. Eurobodalla Access Radio 2EAR were in breach of their licence in 2007 for failing to encourage community participation (ACMA 2009). Even so, rather than consigning WAAMA’s history, with all its associated rumours, to the list of failed community broadcasters that are best forgotten it may be helpful to examine the lessons of the past in order to assist planning for the future. Understanding the nature of the Perth Aboriginal Community may offer some insight into how and why WAAMA failed. The following conclusions are however my own and represent the views of an outsider, of a Wadjella. I suggest that the diverse nature of the Perth Aboriginal community and the complexities of Perth Aboriginal community identity, contributed to the creation of problems for WAAMA that were possibly unavoidable at that particular time. Furthermore, this suggestion from Ted Wilkes may also offer some explanation for WAAMA’s demise:

… there needs to be some good resource development around how Aboriginal people might partake in media activities. Our people are still on the lowest income levels so encouraging our people to
contribute time and energy to media organisations on top of bringing up their children and coping with a lot of what we call ‘life stress events’ is a very big ask... You just need to understand some of that and maybe contributing to a little bit of the upkeep of a person’s will to do that (personal communication, February 2007).

The Aboriginal community has traditionally been reluctant to allow the non-Indigenous community to witness any sort of conflict or dissent from within Aboriginal ranks, and the problems with WAAMA are no exception to this. My interpretation of people’s reluctance to speak about WAAMA’s demise is that without a united front Aboriginal people perceive that their cultural integrity is under threat, which in turn may give the gatekeepers cause to prohibit their progress. The Noongar community are looking to the future when they are guarded about discussing the past, and in 2013 the future for Noongar media is once again optimistic. The determination to have Noongar voices represented in Perth media did not die with WAAMA.

**Noongar Nation Media Association**

With WAAMAs demise, the Noongar Radio Action Group was formed and worked for three years on the re-establishment of Aboriginal radio in Perth. The Noongar Nation Media Association (NNMA)\(^7\) evolved from here and its name acknowledges the continuance of a more united Noongar community that was first demonstrated with the Single Noongar Claim on Native Title in 2003. A 2007 application to ACMA for a community broadcasting licence reflects WAAMA’s original objectives:

> Our vision and commitment to Noongar Broadcasting is to provide radio programming that is made by and for the Perth Noongar

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\(^7\) Documentation provided by Peedac Pty Ltd and sourced from ACMA are inconsistent in the use of a title for the ‘Noongar Nation Media Association’. The company is also referred to as ‘Noongar Media Enterprises’, ‘Noongar Media Association’ and ‘Noongar Nation Broadcasting Association.’ I have chosen to refer to the company as Noongar Nation Media Association as this seems to be the title most consistently used by Peedac.
community to allow for our people’s voices to be heard on all matters that affect the Noongar people, lands and nation (NNMA 2007, 2).

Of particular significance in this application to ACMA is the consistent use of the word ‘Noongar’ and the focus on the Noongar community and the need for a radio station that represents Noongar culture and issues. By contrast, WAAMA’s 1987 application for initial funding only ever refers to the ‘Aboriginal’ community and had goals of catering to a statewide audience. Their 1992 application for a community broadcasting licence went even further by stating its intention to appeal to the wider non-Indigenous community as well as an Aboriginal audience. The NNMA recognises a unique and vibrant Noongar language and culture and consequently has a clear and specific objective in the representation of the Noongar community and identity (see Johnston 2011). In outlining their objectives the NNMA state that they aim:

To provide Noongar people with a media that recognises, respects and affirms our distinct identity and inherent rights and responsibilities in Australia [sic] society as Noongar people (2007, 3).

In meeting this objective, the Association plans to provide independent news and current affairs programs, language programs, to promote Indigenous musicians and artists, to support Noongar representative organisations, to provide training, and to support the development of other forms of Indigenous media (2007).

The promotion and preservation of a unique Noongar culture is a clear priority in the NNMA business plan. The reader is reminded of past government policies that have prohibited the practice of culture and contributed to the suffering of the Noongar people. Cultural integrity is also highlighted with reference to the Federal Court’s recognition of Noongar culture in the 2006 Noongar Native Title decision. Language is
discussed as an essential part of culture and will be a focus for Noongar media who promote the broadcast of traditional language programs as well as “Noongar English” programs.

The NNMA is supported by a number of Perth Aboriginal organisations that include the West Australian Aboriginal Legal Service (WAALS), Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service (ADS), Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, Abmusic Aboriginal Corporation, Yirra Yaakin, Marr Mooditj Foundation Aboriginal Health College, and the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC). It asserts that representatives of these organisations will be a part of the NNMA’s corporate governance structure.\footnote{Noongar Nation Media Association is a subsidiary company of not-for-profit Aboriginal managed Peedac Pty Ltd. For further details of their ownership structure see Appendix 1.}

The application for a licence was submitted to ACMA by Peedac Pty Ltd, a not-for-profit Aboriginal training organisation located in Cannington. ACMA granted the community radio licence to the NNMA in 2008. The Noongar Radio Action Group sought to have the premises at 176 Wellington Street returned to the Noongar Community and to again provide a home for Aboriginal radio in Perth. Instead, the radio station has been located at 207 Beaufort Street, Northbridge, which was the home of the Coolbaroo League in the 1950s.

Gina Williams is a well-known Perth journalist and singer. Her face became familiar to television viewers throughout the south of Western Australia when she hosted a long-running Aboriginal program called \textit{Milbindi} that was broadcast on GWN. She managed the setup of the new Noongar radio station and talks about the station’s value to the Noongar community:

\begin{quote}
Noongar people listen to the radio to catch up with what other people are doing, and I learnt that through \textit{Milbindi} - ‘oh we always
watch that show because it was always good that we could see our old mates that we haven’t seen in years’ and I think the radio presents that same opportunity. People understand and hear what’s going on elsewhere in their community … I think that Noongar media in particular plays a really important role in cultural maintenance. What we’re doing essentially is a modern take on a very ancient and traditional cultural activity. The story telling, the communication and stuff, our culture is a very oral culture and this is really an extension of that. It’s fantastic (personal communication, February 2009).

Williams explains how community media demands that she is accountable and highly visible to her own small community and therefore it is even more important to get it right. She gives the example of the Warburton community that introduced a complete media ban after a 60 Minutes crew failed to deliver the story they said they had come to do. Her experience with Milbindi demonstrated how gentle persuasion and honest representation of people’s stories was able to break through the mistrust Aboriginal people had of the media and give people a voice:

The media has this amazing opportunity to let people just be heard, which is all they want, that’s all anybody ever wants. It’s just an opportunity - if something moves them or changes them, you know - they just want to be heard (personal communication, February 2009).

Her enthusiasm for Noongar community radio is clearly evident in her discussion of the station’s goals and the Noongar community in general. The power and potential of the internet and the possibilities it represents are at the forefront of her vision for the station’s future. Potentially, Noongar radio could be heard throughout the southwest with satellite communities contributing programs to the broadcast, similar to the way National Indigenous Radio operates.
While representation through all forms of media is desirable, Williams is less enthusiastic about television. It is expensive and less immediate. At the time of our interview she was resentful of having to pay to view NITV and cynical about the mainstream broadcasters who she maintains all have an east coast bias:

You’re marginalised anyway being on the west coast and even more so if you’re an Indigenous person living on the west coast. You’ve got no chance of ever being heard about anything, unless you live in Broome perhaps. Because it’s nice there and that’s the authentic West Australian experience… in the Kimberley (personal communication, February 2009).

In the early stages of establishment the Noongar Media Board of Directors was comprised of Aboriginal members only. Michelle White, Glen Stasiuk, Gina Williams, Hannah McGlade and Jeremy Garlett were all original board members, all are Aboriginal, and all are experienced and capable media people. The training and experience delivered by WAAMA will provide the strong foundations on which the NNMA will grow. There is no need to seek out experienced Wadjella broadcasters or board members to assist with Noongar radio because that expertise is available within the Perth Aboriginal community. Already the station is different to WAAMA.

In 2011, I interviewed Michelle White who took over as station manager from Gina Williams. White was no longer at the station having ‘burnt out’ after a year and a half because of the huge workload she took on trying to make the station as good as it could possibly be. She admits that one of the mistakes she made was to put all her staff funding into on-air presenters, which meant that she alone was responsible for all other aspects of running the station. She is angry about the way the station is funded:

Morally, Aboriginal people need to be paid to be on air. The reasons Aboriginal radio stations exist is because there is under-
representation in the media. The government supports community radio stations – thinks they’re important enough to have yet won’t pay for radio presenters to be on air and that really pissed me off (personal Communication, September 2011).

White argues that the government is being hypocritical when they put significant money into training radio presenters yet fail to provide funding for employment:

> Let them have some sort of job outcome at the end of it…It’s fostering that welfare mentality. We’ll [the government] train you up but you’re not ever good enough to get paid (personal communication, September 2011).

White confirmed that the station was enthusiastically received by the community, especially as there had been no Noongar radio for some years. “There is so much love for the station”, she said.

**Perth Indigenous Filmmakers**

Perth’s community television station, Access 31, was broadcasting from 1999 to 2008 when financial problems forced them into liquidation. As already noted, Aboriginal programs and voices were absent from Perth community television throughout this time, except for the program *Noongar Dandjoo* produced in 2007 as part of this PhD project, and which is discussed in the next chapter. However, for a number of Indigenous filmmakers in Perth, broadcasting through community television, or even NITV, means their films will only ever be seen by a small niche audience. Their goal is to be seen by a mainstream audience – to speak to a wider, national community. Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton divides Indigenous Australia into remote and settled communities. She explains that since each of these types of communities has evolved from very different cultural and socio-political histories, they generally produce different types of film and video. The film and video produced in remote
communities is made with a community focus, intended for an Aboriginal community audience, whereas in settled Australia, film and video productions are more likely to be the creation of an individual author.

The nature of Perth’s Indigenous production scene supports Langton’s observation (Langton 1993, 12). Indigenous filmmakers in Perth have been productive thanks to a number of initiatives and funding opportunities aimed directly at new Indigenous filmmakers. One of the most successful of these programs is the Deadly Yarns series of short films (ABC 2005-11), financed through a collaboration between the ABC, Screenwest and the Fremantle Film and Television Institute. The success of the Deadly Yarns initiative can be measured in terms of the number of Indigenous filmmakers who have benefited from the program, the broadcast of the films on ABC television’s Message Stick to a national audience, and the period of time over which the program has run. This initiative has now produced six series of short films and illustrates Langton’s observation that independent production is more likely to thrive in urban communities. However, the issue still remains that Aboriginal community media, especially television, continues to struggle in Perth and it is this absence that is addressed by the Noongar Dandjoo program.
CHAPTER 8

NOONGAR DANDJOO

The *Noongar Dandjoo* television program is the central focus of this PhD, which was conceived and produced as an action research project. This chapter is therefore written and structured as an action research report as described in chapter 3. McNiff and Whitehead (2009), Zuber-Skerrit and Fletcher (2007) have summarised the elements of a quality action research report or thesis, and these include self-reflection, the involvement of participants in decision making, democratic processes, collaboration, and learning by doing and making mistakes. It is not simply enough to outline what has been done – an action research report must also reflect critically on outcomes and implications for future action. This is what this chapter seeks to do. The previous chapters represent the ‘look’ stage of the action research cycle whereby information about the Perth Aboriginal community as well as the Indigenous community media sector has been gathered in order to provide history and context for the *Noongar Dandjoo* project. The ‘look’ stage included engagement with literature and historical documentation, and conducting interviews with community participants. The foundations are laid to now plan and act – to enter the production stage of the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program.

Three series of the program have been produced over a period of six years, and each series represents a repetition of the action research cycle. After each program was produced and broadcast a new phase of reflection and consultation was entered into in order to collect feedback and critique the previous program and its processes. Self-reflection is an ongoing feature of each stage and each cycle.

DVD copies of three series of *Noongar Dandjoo* are included with this thesis. They represent eight hours of broadcast television and are
testimony to everything that has been discussed in this thesis so far. The DVDs should be viewed before reading this chapter, which draws together all the theoretical and cultural elements that contributed to the program’s production. The DVDs represent the action taken in the aforementioned action research cycle.

Introduction

The problem to be addressed by this project became apparent to me as a result of my Honours research into Australian community television that included a case study of Perth’s community television station, Access 31. The station was launched in 1999 by a consortium of nine different community and educational groups who all contributed to its funding and establishment. Curtin University was one of the original consortium members, as was the Western Australian Aboriginal Media Association (WAAMA). My research gave me a new understanding of the importance of providing media representation to minority and disenfranchised community groups and of how community television contributed greatly to a democratic Australian media. It came to my notice, while conducting my research, that the Perth Aboriginal community was absent from Perth community television. As one of the most disenfranchised communities in Perth, and as the regular subject of media stereotyping and racism, I had expected to see Perth’s Noongar community taking advantage of the opportunity to have a media voice through Access 31.

The action I took in response to this problem was to produce a series of magazine-style television programs called Noongar Dandjoo and to make these programs in collaboration with the Perth Aboriginal community. This was made possible through my teaching of a television production unit at Curtin University in which students produced a television program each year for broadcast on community television. The first series of Noongar Dandjoo was produced in 2007 and broadcast on Access 31 in 2008. By the time we produced series two in 2009, Perth no longer had a community television station, but National Indigenous Television (NITV)
was accessible in Perth via the Foxtel pay TV channel and so the program was broadcast via NITV. A third series produced in 2011 was also broadcast on NITV in spite of a new community TV licence operating in Perth. The launch of NITV free-to-air in 2012 saw a second broadcast of series three on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) channel 34.

The decision to make a cross-cultural collaborative TV program with the Perth Aboriginal community, rather than to facilitate a wholly Aboriginal produced program, created a series of research questions to be addressed by this project. The first, and most important of these was: how do I create a successful cross-cultural collaborative television program that is beneficial to all participants? The production had to be respectful of Aboriginal cultural protocols while also delivering expected pedagogical outcomes for the students who would be participating in the program. After six years and three series I feel confident in claiming, as I will demonstrate here, that the Noongar Dandjoo television program provides a model for successful cross-cultural collaboration. Using an action research approach to the program that included participatory production techniques, cultural awareness raising, and adherence to cultural protocols, the program has not only been successful in providing a media voice to the Perth Aboriginal community, it has also impacted significantly on the students’ attitudes and understanding of Aboriginal people and culture. Because the students are tomorrow’s media professionals, these changes can have a direct impact on the representation of Aboriginal people in the mainstream media, and I will demonstrate that the students have already taken their cultural knowledge, empathy and ways of working into their professional lives. Increased representation and changes to professional practice together can contribute to the pace of reconciliation within the wider community.

My own personal journey is particularly relevant to this project not only because of its action research approach, but also because my knowledge and experience of Aboriginal people is, I believe, typical of the majority of white, middle-class, urban residents in Perth, if not Australia. Prior to
commencing this project I had no experience of Aboriginal people or culture. I knew very little about Aboriginal history or politics. What I did know I knew from the media, and this could best be described as a negative and stereotypical attitude towards Aboriginal people. As a result of the positive and rewarding process of working with Aboriginal people on the production of *Noongar Dandjoo* my opinions and ideas have been changed significantly.

This chapter outlines the challenges and processes in creating the *Noongar Dandjoo* program, the reasons for making the choices I did, the feedback from participants, and the lessons I have learned along the way.

**Noongar Dandjoo Beginnings**

Community media is recognised in many countries as a tool for social change, providing a voice for the disenfranchised and misrepresented communities that are mostly ignored by the mainstream media (see Chapter 4). The communities in Australia who most value the empowerment that community media provides are the ethnic and Indigenous communities as described by Forde and colleagues (2009) in their audience study of Australian community media. For Indigenous and ethnic communities, community media contributes to cultural maintenance, it creates community identity, it contributes to multiple public spheres and it is a cultural bridge that contributes to reconciliation (see Forde et al. 2009).

In 2007, watching Perth’s Access 31, there was little evidence that this community media was working as a tool for social change. There were a few ethnic community programs but there were no Indigenous programs. The Aboriginal community in Perth was not engaging with the television station, WAAMA had failed, and the Aboriginal radio station had lost its licence. When I interviewed Access 31 station manager Andrew Brine in 2007, he had no explanation for the lack of Indigenous participation in the station. He suggested there was a lack of interest within the community,
and that the community had traditionally focused on radio. Given the
greater cost and time needed to produce television, this is understandable.
Brine also said that Access 31 were in discussion with the newly formed
NITV and were discussing the possibility of NITV programming being
broadcast to capital cities via community television stations (personal
communication, February 2007) – an idea that did not eventuate possibly
due to the demise of Access 31 in August 2008. West TV acquired the
new community television licence for Perth and commenced digital
broadcasting in 2010. When I interviewed their CEO, Tibor Mezaros, in
2009, he confirmed that there had not been any Aboriginal program
makers working through West TV either, and was as perplexed by their
absence as Brine (personal communication, March 2009). The cost, time
and technical skills needed for television were again suggested as
obstacles that led the Aboriginal community to focus on radio. The
reasons for an absence of Aboriginal community media have been
previously explored in this thesis, but my research into the reasons for that
absence also revealed a very strong desire within the Aboriginal
community for them to have their own media – both radio and television.

The question was how to initiate the production of an Aboriginal
community television program? I had no relationships inside the
community. There was no single Aboriginal organisation that I knew of to
approach with the idea to create a program. And so I suggested the idea
of making a short video project with students at Clontarf Aboriginal
College, a senior high school that was home for Aboriginal students from
all over Western Australia. Young Aboriginal boys are stereotyped and
regarded with suspicion on the streets of Perth more so than any other
Aboriginal people. Inspired by David Vadiveloo and the Community
Prophets project in northern Queensland that teaches filmmaking skills to
school children (see [http://www.voicesfromthecape.com/index.html](http://www.voicesfromthecape.com/index.html) ) my
idea was to give the students at Clontarf a voice in the media that would
address the stereotype and create a positive representation. I worked with
the students at Clontarf for two years and learnt a great deal about
Aboriginal culture and the challenges these teenagers faced on a daily
basis. They talked of being constantly harassed by security guards whenever they were in public places, and of how they were regarded with suspicion whenever they were on the streets. Many were dealing with the challenges of dysfunctional families, drugs and alcohol abuse. Added to this were the cultural tensions that bubbled under the surface of daily school life because the students are from different cultures, from different communities, all living and working together in Noongar country. The school and the students dealt with this very well, but I discovered that they made it work by just being teenagers and, like all teenagers, they wanted to be just like their peers. They rarely talked about culture or language. They showed little interest in Aboriginal politics or issues of social justice. They were interested in music, football and being with their mates.

The students enjoyed making the two videos that I produced with them and these were well received by the school community. The teacher with whom I worked was enthusiastic about the outcomes for the students. Working on the video together had provided an opportunity for the students to collaborate and to bond, which in turn created a more harmonious classroom environment. The progress the students made in their speaking and listening skills, and the growth in their personal confidence, were significant, and they all learnt a little about making a video. The videos were screened at the school, however, neither the students nor the school were interested in a wider audience. The possibility for a broadcast on community television was never realised because of the difficulties in obtaining consent from families and from the school and this was compounded by the aforementioned lack of desire from the school to have a wider audience.

It was at this point that I decided to try producing a program with my own students in the university. The reason I had not taken this option first was because I had imagined producing something that was under the creative control of Aboriginal participants and that I would merely assist in facilitating a production. My university students are not Aboriginal and this seemed less than ideal. However, as I learned more about action
research, I knew it might be possible still to give the Aboriginal community a media voice through a cross-cultural collaboration – we could produce something with the Aboriginal community rather than about them.

Curtin’s screen arts students and journalism students were routinely working together each year to produce a multi-cam\(^9\) studio based television program that was broadcast on Access 31. The students were traditionally left to devise their own program themes and stories, rarely resulting in a program of great substance or community interest. Music, fashion and movies were story ideas that frequently featured in their program and we were looking for a way to encourage the students to produce more challenging program content. I was also conscious of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) Report that had recommended universities include Indigenous affairs in their journalism courses. To my knowledge, there was little evidence that Curtin media students were being exposed to any significant amount of Indigenous studies and I saw the production of the television program as a way of rectifying this.

Employing an action research approach to producing the program first required a series of consultations that began with students for the broadcast unit. I attended classes that potential students were attending and put to them the idea of producing an Aboriginal television program in the next semester. The students’ response was enthusiastic and positive, and some expressed their support for taking on such a challenging program. I admit to being pleasantly surprised at the students’ positive response to the idea as I had doubts that they would like it. I believe it was the social justice nature of the project that appealed to them.

With Russell Bishop, the journalism lecturer with whom I collaborate to produce a program each year, we organised a meeting with

\(^9\) Multi-cam is a term used to describe a production technique which employs three or more cameras simultaneously to record or broadcast a program. It is predominantly a television studio production technique that allows for the live cutting of action.
representatives of Curtin’s Centre for Aboriginal Studies (CAS) and some other people who are recognised as leaders within the Perth Noongar community. We put to them our idea for producing an Aboriginal television program, the participatory production techniques we intended to use, and our reasons for wanting to produce such a program. The meeting acknowledged the negative media representation of Aboriginal people and the need for such a program to address this problem, and so those present at the meeting offered support and consent.

As a unit coordinator I also made it clear at the outset and in all future consultation with Aboriginal participants that I had to consider pedagogical outcomes for my students when making the program and these were explained at every opportunity. I would explain the educational context of the program at meetings and in emails at the start of semester and, without fail, people were always supportive and encouraging of the student experience.

Planning for Participatory Production

The collaborative and democratic processes we wished to employ throughout the production of the program required constant consultation with community participants and careful consideration about our production processes and how they would reflect an action research approach. The aim was to employ participatory production techniques and so my student production teams and I had to ‘think’ about what that meant in practical terms and how we would enact them.

At the start of the production cycle for each series of Noongar Dandjoo, Aboriginal people were invited to attend our classes where they would talk to the students about Aboriginal culture, history, and media representation. Our guest speakers talked about the injustices their people had experienced, but they did so without a trace of anger or blame. This was important to the process of encouraging the students to talk and ask
questions, which they did. The question that came up most frequently from the students was regarding their concern that they would say or do something offensive to Aboriginal people in the process of producing the program. This fear was put to rest with the assurance that as long as the intent and motivation for their activities was genuine and the students made the effort to ask questions when they were unsure, they would be forgiven any cultural mistakes they might make. Asking questions was emphasised as an important part of our participatory practice, not just to ensure adherence to cultural protocols, but also to provide every opportunity for Aboriginal people to engage with the program. Noongar staff at CAS were crucial to this participatory process, as they were accessible and welcoming to the students throughout the production cycle. I also realised after some time that, because the program has been planned specifically as a Noongar program, it was only Noongar staff that involved themselves with the program – staff that did not identify as Noongar were supportive but did not participate by offering cultural advice or program ideas.

Participatory production techniques were employed throughout the production process to ensure the programs were made with Aboriginal people rather than about them. Students were encouraged to consult with Aboriginal people about all aspects of the program’s production such as design elements, story content, and choice of interviewees. An email list was compiled that allowed me to make regular contact with all program participants on a regular basis so that I could inform them of the program’s progress, but also request advice and assistance when needed.

In the first series, we stated to students and Aboriginal participants that our program objective was to provide a positive representation of Aboriginal people and Noongar culture. The program was intended as a response to the negative and stereotypical representation of Aboriginal people that was regularly seen on mainstream television. It is worth noting that in 2007 there was a flood of what I had heard labelled as ‘squalour porn’ – graphic images of remote Aboriginal communities struggling with
poverty and alcohol abuse. These images were regularly broadcast in the mainstream media in the months leading up to the Northern Territory Intervention\textsuperscript{10}. It was this that influenced our choice to focus on positive representation. The second series, produced in 2009, pursued a similar objective based on the positive feedback that I received from Aboriginal participants. However, the 2011 series had a significantly more political focus. In response to suggestions from series two participants, it was suggested that the program could tackle some of the issues that are important to the Perth Noongar community, and four themes were agreed upon for four programs – culture, land and country, Aboriginal incarceration and Aboriginal politics.

Series one and two followed a typical magazine-style format that included studio-based links and interviews intercut with location-produced current affairs-style stories and studio-produced performance pieces. Series three, with more political themes than previous programs, comprised a studio-based panel discussion with a studio audience, intercut with location current affairs-style stories. This format was decided upon as the result of a meeting held prior to series three production to ask for ideas on program content and a preferred format. I suggested an audience for the program to provide an opportunity for as many voices from the community as possible to be heard, and in recognition that each of these themes would produce a variety of opinions and ideas. The audience and panel format were approved by that meeting, as were the four themes described above.

\textsuperscript{10} In 2007 the Australian federal government, under the leadership of John Howard, introduced new legislation that made changes to law enforcement and welfare provision in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory National Emergency Response, also known as 'The Intervention', was in response to reports of child sexual abuse and the publication of a report called \textit{Little Children are Sacred} (Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007).
In recognition of the political nature of the themes for series three, it was decided that the program would run for one hour rather than the usual 30 minutes. Mainstream media are frequently criticised for not providing history and context to news and current affairs stories, and so time was scheduled at the start of each of the series three programs to provide the background, history and context for each of the themes. The middle part of the program involved discussion of the themes, and then time was allocated at the end of each program for discussion of possible future solutions.

McNiff and Whitehead distinguish between different types of action and highlight political action as “the highest form of engagement” because it:

… signals people’s intent to take control of and transform their lives for the better. It is accomplished by people talking with one another … it is the main form of action in action research, directed towards human wellbeing and sustainability (2009,113).

All three of the Noongar Dandjoo series represented political action to some extent, though this was especially true of series three. A television program was produced in all three cases, but each series was intended as a response to the negative media representation and misrepresentation of Aboriginal people. Each series was intended to give a voice, political or otherwise, to the Perth Aboriginal community where previously there was no voice. The programs contributed to an Aboriginal community public sphere and to the wider Indigenous public sphere.

The changes made to each of the three series of Noongar Dandjoo were a result of consultation and feedback from the community. The changing and evolving nature of the programs reflect McNiff and Whitehead’s action research standards and values of learning, collaborative enquiry, risk, reflective critique, dialectical critique and new beginnings (see 2009, 24).
Illustration 13: *Noongar Dandjoo* Crew (series 1), 2007

Illustration 14: *Noongar Dandjoo* Crew (series 2), 2009
Illustration 15: Noongar Dandjoo Crew (series 3), 2011

*Putting Participatory Production Techniques Into Practice*

Adopting a participatory action research approach to the program's production required that it be translated into a production style and process that could be adopted by the students. What did a participatory style of production mean to the students as they went about the business of researching, shooting and editing their stories? How should we ‘act’? This was discussed in the first two weeks of class and, while we had guidelines established from the outset, this would become a part of the program-making process that would be continuously discussed and reassessed, as the action research cycle demands.

At pre-production stages we had first to decide what stories would feature in our program, though these initial discussions avoided specific story elements such as who would feature in the story and how the story would be told. The students then had to decide who would be the appropriate
people to speak in the story, and this was determined through consultation with Aboriginal advisors such as the Noongar staff at CAS. Armed with that advice, students could then approach people to ask them to participate in the story. The Aboriginal people who agreed to participate in the stories were given the opportunity to contribute ideas about how the story should be told. Only after a conversation with story participants could the students commence production. It was to be made clear to all Aboriginal story participants that this was their story, that they had control of the story from start to finish, and that their advice and ideas about the story were valued.

The same approach was employed during the story production process. Participants were encouraged to offer ideas about locations and the vision that was appropriate to the story. After editing, students were encouraged to send finished stories to participants for feedback and approval. Design aspects of the program, such as set design, graphics and titles, needed to reflect Noongar culture. Regular consultation with Aboriginal people was sought throughout all stages of design and production. Indeed, wherever possible, we would endeavour to have Aboriginal people involved with all stages of production.

I also set up an email list of Aboriginal people who would be regularly advised on progress and ideas throughout the production. Contacts were added to the email list over the course of the semester, and over the six years of program production. Story ideas were disseminated in the form of a regular update that included who was to be interviewed and where the story was being shot. Requests for assistance and advice were also circulated via email, and ideas, comments, and words of encouragement would come back. One example of the email consultation process was the decision to call the program *Noongar Dandjoo*. I sent the email asking for ideas about what the program might be called with a starting point that suggested the word ‘Noongar’ should be included in the title. I also suggested we were looking for a title or Noongar word that suggested community. A Noongar Elder suggested *Noongar Dandjoo* which means
‘gathering’. We also sought advice via email about the spelling of the word ‘Noongar’. There are several different spellings used by different tribal groups with various dialects. We were advised that all spellings were acceptable and so we chose the commonly used ‘Noongar’ because we liked the design symmetry of the double ‘o’ in each word.

To fully explore a participatory production process I participated in the shooting and editing of a story myself in collaboration with the program’s Noongar host, Dennis Simmons. This was for the second series, and I had by then established a good working relationship with Dennis so I felt confident I could talk to him about the process as we went. I offered him complete freedom to tell the story he wanted to tell – I would help and facilitate the crafting of the story, under his direction. Dennis had some experience in making short dramatic films, but no journalistic or documentary experience. He had many ideas for a story, but had difficulty narrowing those ideas down to something that would fit the format of a five-minute location story for inclusion in the program. After several weeks without progress I eventually had the opportunity to talk with him for a couple of hours about his ideas. Together we agreed on a story that would communicate how Noongar culture was practised and valued in the contemporary Perth community – see Episode 4 of series 2 for the finished story. There was little planning or communication between Dennis and myself during the production of the story. He would call me at short notice to come and shoot something he was doing on a particular day, and it felt to me as if we were making it up as we went along. As an industry professional this was not how I was used to working, and in fact I would encourage my students always to avoid such an approach to story production, stressing to them the importance of planning in their professional practice. Without professional training himself, Dennis could not know how to plan a production such as the one I proposed to him. I also had to consider that Dennis had a busy life beyond the program and it was difficult for him to make time for planning. He needed my help to make decisions about his story in order to get it made in the time we had available. I had then to find a balance between contributing my own
expertise to the story's production and at the same time giving Dennis as much opportunity to contribute as possible. Initially it was difficult to see how Dennis would contribute, but his desire to have a say in the story's production became clear on many occasions over time. For example, once we commenced production, I regularly offered him the chance to look at his performance on camera by replaying from the camera after each take. He was always critical of his own performance and would ask to do it again until he got it right. On another occasion, we made a trip to a special site where Dennis and his sons collected ochre. There was a brief ceremony on arrival at the site where he spoke to the spirits to tell them who we were. He showed a glimpse of irritation when I asked him to do it again for the sake of another camera angle but he obliged. After collecting ochre they danced to clapping and the tapping of ki-lees (boomerangs) to give thanks for what they had taken. He directed me as to where I could point the camera so as not to show any landmarks that might reveal the location of the site, which was not far from the outskirts of suburban Perth. He also made suggestions for what sequences we should shoot while there, and for interviews with his son and with a Noongar friend who had accompanied us.

We made a first edit of the story, and when shown it he had only one criticism, that was very clear in its purpose. There was a segment that showed them performing a spirit dance on arrival at a burial site. When we recorded the segment, Dennis later did a piece to camera that explained the significance of the site, but I had edited the segment so that his voice is heard at the start of the segment and over vision of the spirit dance. Dennis explained that the spirit dance had to come first. He could not speak at the site until the spirit dance was performed. If his voice was heard at the start of the segment people would think that he had not followed protocol when visiting the site. And so we changed it. Creating this story with Dennis helped me to understand the added time and effort required when employing a participatory style of production.
The participatory approach to production was applied with varying degrees of diligence by the students. For some, the production of the story in the shortest time possible was their prime motivation and therefore adherence to the participatory process was minimal. For other student groups, their efforts to apply our participatory guidelines were frustrated by participants’ lack of either ability or desire to contribute in a substantial way. Students frequently encountered the concept of ‘Noongar time’, or polychromic time as described by Kalscheuer (see 2009, 30), whereby participants seemed to have little concern for student deadlines or schedules. For many participants there was simply a lack of time to devote to story production. For others, it was a lack of ideas or knowledge to be able to contribute a great deal. But without fail everyone who did participate in story production welcomed the opportunity and encouraged the students in their efforts. Advice was always provided when the students put specific questions.

**Validity and Feedback: Student Participants**

As the action research cycle demands, I sought feedback after each production cycle from both the students and the Aboriginal people who participated in the program. Feedback from the students was collected through a written survey that students were asked to complete. In series one and two, the survey was very general, asking three questions regarding the negative and positive aspects of their experience in making the program. In series three a more formal survey, adapted from the Reconciliation Australia questionnaire (Reconciliation Australia 2010) was given to the students at the start and again at the end of semester. Feedback from Aboriginal participants was collected through personal interviews.

Students were surveyed at the completion of all three series of programs and all reported changes to their attitudes towards Aboriginal people (see Appendix 2). They said they had gained a better understanding of
Aboriginal people and culture, and that the program’s creation was one of the most rewarding experiences in their University life. The following is a selection of the anonymous student responses from all three series.

One Chinese student had been a victim of crime while living in the Sydney suburb of Redfern prior to moving to Perth. She admitted to initially being fearful of approaching Aboriginal people as a result of her past experience. After working on Noongar Dandjoo she wrote:

I’ve changed my opinions about Indigenous people after working with them for the last three months… I’ve been to AbMusic (an Aboriginal Music School) twice a week in the past 10 weeks. I have to admit that it was one of very few times that I felt I’m welcomed. I could be myself. It’s very strange, because I felt quite comfortable to go there and talk to anyone there, not having to worry about my language or my nationality (Student A, 2007).

The following comments provide further evidence of how the program provided the opportunity for students to learn more about Aboriginal people and culture.

Being given the chance to enter someone else’s culture first hand and be led on a journey through their heritage and existence is an experience beyond words (Student B, 2007).

One of the main things I have learned was that there are so many different Aboriginal groups across Australia such as Koori in NSW and Murri in Queensland… before this program I was not aware about this at all … I also got to meet a lot of Aboriginal people … I did not know any Aboriginal people personally. A lot of my friends have stereotypes about Aboriginal people … every day I was almost surrounded by Aboriginal stereotypes and it wasn’t good and through this program I have learnt a lot more about their culture
and I now simply just choose to ignore or correct people like that (Student C, 2007).

The project has made me aware and more knowledgeable of a culture I was quite naïve of ... I think it has made me a better person because I can address a community with the society I live in [sic] which has care for the land I live in and has helped make Australia Australia. It made me appreciate them more than previously before. In all, doing it on this topic has created more depth to the program than if we were left to choose our own (Student D, 2007).

I’m less afraid to handle Indigenous topics and stories as I have a greater cultural understanding. I also had fun working not only with the other people in our class, but with members of the Noongar community that I may otherwise not have met … We did more than just create a film and TV show, I think we participated in a cultural experience that we will always remember (Student E, 2007).

I spoke to the leader of the [Aboriginal dance group] quite often and he made me feel so good about myself as he was appreciative for the efforts we have all put into this project. His speeches on the Noongar heritage was very touching (as I’m sure you would have noticed in our opening night of the Gallery) and makes me feel so proud of all of us for the effort we put in … But basically the most things I enjoyed about the making of Noongar Dandjoo was the wonderful people I met on the way and the way everyone worked together cooperatively as a group (Student F, 2007).

I believe I have become more understanding of Aboriginal culture, and would become quite defensive of it if someone was to judge or make wrong assumptions about it … I have learnt so much myself too, and would be willing to learn more and tell more in the future (Student G, 2009).
Before the production, my perception of the Indigenous people was pretty much constructed by how they are represented by the media, most of the time in a negative way. Getting to work with them changed my perception completely (Student H 2009).

Working with Noongar Dandjoo broadened my perspective greatly (Student I, 2011).

Noongar Dandjoo was the most rewarding and amazing experience in my life. Meeting so many different Aboriginal people really opened my eyes and changed my overall perception of Aboriginal people as a whole (Student J, 2011).

As noted earlier, students were surveyed both before and after the production of series three. A comparison could thus be made between students’ attitudes and ideas before their participation in Noongar Dandjoo and again after the program’s completion (see Appendix 2). There were subtle shifts towards the positive in most of the students’ responses, but there was a significant change in the part of the survey that asked students about their overall impression of Indigenous people in terms of 11 different characteristics. Whereas the first survey saw that students were evenly divided about some qualities, almost all now saw Aboriginal people as friendly, good humoured, respectful and welcoming (see Johnston and Bishop 2012).

Surveys of each of three student cohorts also asked about the most difficult or negative aspects of production of the Noongar Dandjoo series. These are a sample of the responses:

… I did find it difficult to cope with. Many of their values were completely different to ours, mainly in terms of running on time and sticking to a schedule (Student B, 2007).
The worry that I might say something that will unintentionally insult or offend the people from the Aboriginal community (Student K, 2007).

I liked everything about it...I don’t think four programs is nearly enough! (Student C, 2007).

At the beginning I found it hard to talk and get in contact with the community ... at times I still feel naïve of the culture and I am always wary of whether I am approaching topics they do not wish to discuss or doing it the wrong way.... (Student L, 2007).

The most challenging aspect of working on the program was learning about (and adapting to) the cultural differences existing between ourselves and the Noongar people. For example, learning about the fact that the deceased cannot be named or spoken about. Time was also a big issue, it was difficult to make schedules etc when our talent was late or didn’t seem to understand the time restrictions we had. We also had to make sure everything we did was checked by the appropriate people – working out who could speak on behalf of others etc was difficult (Student E, 2007).

The students were also asked in what ways, if any, the program had been of value in their development and learning as a media professional.

Although camera framing and so on is very important being passionate is what makes the experience beneficial and makes it fun to make (Student L, 2007).

As a media professional and specifically as I am studying journalism my participation in this program has helped me a lot. I am now more aware of the Noongar culture and it should help me
when I need to interview someone who is Aboriginal (Student M, 2007).

Extremely beneficial. It has not only made me aware of the incredible amount of work that goes into a TV production but also of the fact that as media professionals we can strive to make a difference. Working on such a positive example of community media has opened my eyes to the influence TV has and has definitely encouraged me to work towards something worthwhile. I don’t want to be a self-obsessed journalist who perpetuates the very stereotypes we’ve worked so hard to oppose this semester! I want to carry the things I’ve learnt and the connections I’ve met into the future, and hopefully use these skills to become a better journalist than what I would have been without them. Overall it was a beneficial, positive (and tiring) experience! (Student E, 2007, emphasis is original).

I feel this program has helped me develop my social skills in terms of communicating and dealing with people…I learned that it is important to respect other people’s opinions… (Student H, 2009).

That working on Noongar Dandjoo might impact on future professional practice was illustrated by one of several of our graduates who had subsequently been employed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) as a journalist. Assigned to report on a Coroner’s inquest into the death of an Aboriginal man in police custody, she secured an exclusive interview with the family of the dead man. She confirmed that her approach to the family and her choice to spend time with them had been informed by her experience working on Noongar Dandjoo. She had dinner with them over two nights, including a meal hosted by her, she invested time, and the family agreed to tell her their story. The relationship between journalist and family was maintained over the many weeks that this story featured in the news (Student N, personal communication, 2008).
Another student was working in a Perth television newsroom for an industry placement not long after completing his work on *Noongar Dandjoo*. A story was listed for the day about a well-known Aboriginal man who had died in hospital while serving a prison sentence. The student contacted the man’s family for comment and learnt from them that nobody had bothered to contact them to inform them of the man’s death. The family had found out through the media. The student broke the story about this police neglect for the news bulletin that night, and then went on to cover another aspect of the same story when police denied permission for the family to have a funeral service on land that had once housed a Noongar community but had been shut down by the government. The student wrote in his industry placement report:

> After talking to a few people around the [newsroom], it became clear that a couple [of] journalists were particularly apprehensive about covering Indigenous issues with detail because of the ethical situations the stories can bring up. I think that attitude is quite unacceptable and believe it is important for there to be an Indigenous angle to many of the main stories in the news agenda. I know that it wouldn’t have bothered me as much if I never was involved in *Noongar Dandjoo* because I wouldn’t have had the understanding behind the situation of Indigenous people in Australia (Personal Communication, November 2011).\(^{11}\)

**Validity and Feedback: Aboriginal Community**

Interviews with Aboriginal participants after each production cycle revealed positive outcomes, which are noted in appendices 3 and 4. That programs such as *Noongar Dandjoo* can provide a sense of empowerment is reflected in this response from one Aboriginal community leader and program participant:

\(^{11}\) For a discussion of *Noongar Dandjoo* as a work integrated learning experience, or more specifically a service-learning experience, see Johnston, M. and R. Bishop (forthcoming in 2012). "Noongar Dandjoo: A work integrated learning case study." *Asia Pacific Media Educator.*
So that was pretty rewarding for me too to see people … from the Noongar land council who go to work, do a great job, but never get a chance to be interviewed or talk on radio, or tell their story. To see people who are working every day to make a better life for Aboriginal people, particularly Noongar people – it was wonderful. I welcomed the opportunity to be involved with it (D. Eggington, personal communication, April 2008).

Dennis Simmons, the host of the program, volunteered his time over the production of all three series and was asked if the experience provided personal rewards for him:

Oh definitely – definitely. I mean I had my face on the Noongar Dandjoo show. I was representing my people – the Noongar people in the show. Talking about positive things – things that mattered to us. I was so proud. I was so proud to be able to do that (personal communication, August 2008).

Feedback was also sought on program content and ideas for future programs. Another participant was supportive of the new format for series three because the issues discussed “connected” with Aboriginal people. Also:

… we got a lot out of it as Aboriginal people and I think conversely the message would have been spread a bit wider to the mainstream audiences. I think it was a good format… overall it was fantastic (D. Collard, personal communication, September 2012).

And this from another participant:

I think it’s probably one of the first times I’ve heard that kind of information being talked about in a public space. I think it’s good to hear stories being told in that fashion by young people … I didn’t
find it political at all in the sense that those issues are things that we
deal with everyday ... Some of the stuff I didn’t know myself, so it
was informative as well (J.Morrison, personal communication,
November 2012).

Michelle White, who co-hosted series three with Simmons, was also
positive about the new format of the program:

I think it’s a brave move to go in this direction because its much
easier to make fluffy pieces that are a bit timeless – that are more
profiley and featurey – but unfortunately that’s what a lot of people
resort to when they want to do something Indigenous because it is
easier to deliver that content whereas it’s a bit braver to take the
step to challenge – to take on the social justice stuff – and I
suppose that’s what the community really wants. They want a
forum where they can – because they don’t get on talkback – lets
face it, this community don’t get to talk about these things on
mainstream – even on the ABC most of the time – so having this
opportunity to be a part of that broader community debate – which
seems to happen around Aboriginal people but not include them –
is what I hope this will deliver (personal communication, September
2011).

Dennis Simmons preferred the format of series one and two that
highlighted the positive things people were doing, but agreed the
discussions that took place in series three were valuable:

The only way we’re going to get solutions to these huge problems is
for us to start having these conversations (personal communication,
August 2012).

The third series, with a studio audience, produced the most critical
feedback from Aboriginal participants. Several people expressed their
disappointment at the small numbers of people who participated in the audience and suggested ways of getting more people involved. This from one participant:

The concept and implementation of the Dandjoo program was of high standards however, the lack of audience decreased the impact of the program content. In saying that I was angry and upset … as to the apathy of the Nyoongar community in supporting this valuable and worthwhile initiative. I hope that you do not give up on the concept and can improve on delivering on all our aspirations for this program in the near future. If we have no bums on seats next time rope in some students from classes at Curtin, especially those studying Social Sciences etc. (David Collard, personal communication, June 2012).

I had made the decision to record on a Saturday as I thought it would make it easier for working people to attend, but feedback suggested this had been a bad idea. Attending the program’s production day was considered ‘business’ and weekends are for family and leisure. There were also comments about people talking for too long during panel discussions, or that people were talking on issues about which they knew little. It was suggested that academics, experts or Noongar leaders should do the talking.

Another aspect of the feedback process was an official launch for the program at the end of each semester. All participants, Aborigines and students, were invited and each launch has been well attended. The speeches made at the launch were overwhelmingly positive. The conversations that took place as people socialised were enthusiastic and supportive of the program and of the students’ achievements. I believe the opportunity for all participants to come together and celebrate is an important one, especially for the students, who are able to see and hear for themselves what Aboriginal people think about the program. It has
more impact on their understanding of the Aboriginal community than anything I could attempt to communicate to them in a classroom.

**Self Reflection**

It was in the production of series three that my research and knowledge of the Perth Aboriginal community’s history, the ‘look’ phase of the project, was of particular importance. Going from a pre-recorded magazine format to a panel format with live audience created a new series of production challenges as I tried to abide by the consultative processes that defined the *Noongar Dandjoo* series. My instinct during pre-production of series three was to have an *Insight* (see [http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/](http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/)) style format whereby one person leads the discussion with an audience in which every person has equal status. The pre-production meeting I held with the community voted against this format, with some people saying they had participated in an *Insight* program and were unhappy with the way the host directed and controlled the conversation, hence, we went with the panel format.

I had some understanding of the community’s politics, the importance of kin relationships and of how the two impact on each other. I also knew enough to know that I still knew very little. I would have to be very dependent on Aboriginal advisors and participants to get this right. My strategy was to be as inclusive as possible, to consult as widely as possible. My email contact list expanded significantly as people were eager to offer ideas and names of potential participants.

The political themes of series three and the live audience discussion-based format made its production a more difficult process for me because I was required to make judgement calls that I had not had to make in previous programs. I made mistakes and was frequently uncertain about how to deal with situations. For example, the process of choosing and inviting guests for the panel was particularly difficult. My intention was to provide the opportunity for as many people as possible to have a voice in
the program that would contribute to a community and Indigenous public sphere. I had hoped that by having an audience who would participate in discussion I would not have to deny anybody a voice. It was not that simple.

Offering somebody a place on the panel rather than a place in the audience gave them status. Even though I consulted as widely as possible about who should be invited on the panel, there were some people who were unhappy with the way I set up the panels and they let me know it. I invited a woman, who had participated in previous programs, to be a panel member only to be informed later that she was known in the community to be dealing drugs. The allegation came from several trusted sources who insisted she should not be speaking about culture, and I was compelled to retract my invitation which upset her greatly. The process of making that decision was difficult and I still cannot be certain that I did the right thing. On another occasion I tried to move somebody to a different panel on a different program because I was told he and another panel member had a very acrimonious relationship that might be problematic on production day. This resulted in a rude and angry email from the man I attempted to move, and I realised I was manipulating and censoring the program. On this occasion I questioned the advice I had been given to move him, discussed it further with other participants, and changed my mind. I apologised to him and left him on the same panel. It is worth noting that, on production day, both men conducted themselves well while strongly disagreeing with each other. I believe the opportunity for a dialogue that the program created was beneficial to both men. They were still talking long after the program had finished and, while neither changed their mind, they had seen the other’s viewpoint and acknowledged it.

Another incident involved an anonymous phone call from a woman who asked me to remove a panel member because Elders were unhappy with comments the panellist had made in the media. On this occasion I ignored the request because I didn’t think it was my job to censor on behalf of Elders. The Elders could approach her directly with their opinions and make their own request for her to remove herself from the
panel. I realised it was easy for Aboriginal people to make requests of me that suited their personal politics and opinions. They could remain anonymous while I was the public face on the front line taking responsibility for the program’s choices. I had to be aware of this and be cautious about finding that balance between listening to advice, considering different opinions, and applying my own values. Advice that comes from an Aboriginal person is not necessarily good advice just because they are Aboriginal. This seems like an obvious point to make, but my determination to have Aboriginal people advise on all aspects of the production was often in conflict with my own judgement and ideas.

It was mentioned earlier that some feedback on series three was critical of those who spoke because they didn’t know what they were talking about, or they spoke for too long, or they used the program as a way of pushing their own agenda. My thoughts here are that grassroots people, people who are not experts, leaders or academics are equally entitled to have a voice. At the start of each program I addressed the audience and explained that everybody who wanted to speak would have the opportunity to do so. The program would be edited for broadcast to fit the one-hour time slot on NITV, but DVDs of all four programs would be uncut and available to the community on request. However, even the edited version of the program included something of every person who spoke. Again, I did not want to impose my own values on the program, nor did I want to allow any other single person or political stance to influence the final program. Traditional Aboriginal culture may provide clear guidelines about who may speak, but such protocols are not so easily applied in a contemporary community like Perth. My democratic processes for making the program did not suit everybody’s idea of how it should be done, and I am aware that I have imposed my own democratic values on the program’s production. On this issue, my objective of Aboriginal control over the program was in conflict with my own personal values and I chose to adhere to democratic processes. On the other hand, I may be overthinking this particular criticism. It may not be a cultural issue, but rather that certain individuals were considered boring or ill-informed.
Either way, having adhered to an action research process, all participants have experienced the problems created by this approach and may now be more willing to be involved in any decisions that are made about future programs.

There is no way to avoid the difficult situations described above except to spend more time consulting and researching before decisions are made – something that is not always possible given the time pressures of producing a program series in only 12 weeks. While responses to my general emails were forthcoming prior to production, getting feedback from the community after production has proven difficult, as rarely will people offer opinions or ideas unless they are asked directly. For example, my request for feedback after series three via my regular contact list received only one reply and I had to make personal contact in order to get people’s opinions.

As far as future productions are concerned, my inclination is to return to our original magazine style program, and to avoid panels and audience discussions. I believe the issues tackled by series three can still be addressed by the format employed in series one and two, but without the difficulty of bringing large numbers of people together for a panel and audience discussion. If I were to make another panel format program I would inform participants of the feedback I had received, explain the problems, and ask them to suggest ways of producing the program to avoid those problems.

Over the six years of producing *Noongar Dandjoo* one of the most difficult things for me to deal with and change was my sense of ownership over the program. While I was eager for the community to participate and even take over the program’s production, I always felt that it was my program. As executive producer I had to take ultimate responsibility for its content, while as unit coordinator I had to ensure it was an appropriate and valid learning experience for my students. On several occasions I made decisions regarding the program that seemed inconsequential but were
based on assumptions about my own right, as an executive producer, to do so. Series one was broadcast on Access 31. When NITV went to air, I assumed another broadcast outside of Perth would be welcome – I was wrong. While many liked the idea, and while I had received signed general broadcast consent forms from all participants, I was not able to seek permission for this new opportunity from every person involved. Consequently, one man made a formal complaint to the university saying that people living in the Kimberley had seen the program and this had caused him problems. I withdrew the program from NITV so that it could not be broadcast again. On another occasion, I attended a conference in Queensland where I intended to present *Noongar Dandjoo* as a model for cross-cultural collaboration. I informally mentioned this to Noongar staff at CAS who said they would get back to me with permission to present the program in Queensland. I was embarrassed that I had not thought to formally request permission and they explained that the program’s content is their cultural and intellectual property, and therefore I needed permission. I subsequently received this email:

> We are quite happy for you to speak about the *Noongar Dandjoo* project as you have been working on this in collaboration with CAS for some time. You are one of the very few people who attempts to follow and respect protocol with us and we acknowledge your process. We are also happy for you to be a messenger for the Noongar story (personal communication, April 2010).

Some decisions were much easier to make because they could be clearly guided by protocols. When a man who featured in a story died just prior to the broadcast of series two I knew the process to follow. I visited the family to ask about the broadcast. We watched the whole half hour program together and the man’s wife said to me that it was too soon to broadcast his story. NITV had already confirmed that they would comply with the wishes of the family and were awaiting my direction on what to do. I assured the family that the story would not be broadcast, and I was invited to return six months later and ask again for the family’s permission.
I sent several DVDs of the program to the family at their request, and included a note on the front of all distributed DVDs that the episode that featured the dead man’s story was not for public screening. After six months the family asked for another six months, at which time they then sent me a message giving permission for the story to be broadcast.

The students were not the only ones to experience changes in mindset from this experience: the project has had a significant personal impact on me. Six years ago I would not have described myself as racist, but I was guilty of ignorance and of harbouring all the stereotypical preconceptions about Aboriginal people that stem from that ignorance. In learning about Noongar culture and history, in forming friendships and relationships with many Aboriginal people along the way, and in the many conversations I have had in completing this project, my ideas and opinions about Aboriginal people have changed significantly. I am more aware of the racism and indifference that exists within the Perth community. I understand the reasons for the social issues that affect so many of Perth’s Aboriginal people and I am sympathetic to those issues. I enjoy the humour and generosity that seems to be typical of so many of the Aboriginal people I meet. Having made that comment, I would add that I am also cautious about making any generalisations about Aboriginal people but instead recognise and value their difference and individuality. It is this potential for projects like this one to change attitudes for all involved that makes Noongar Dandjoo a third space project.

A Third Space.

The most significant measure of the success of the program is not the artefact itself as watched by a television audience. It is the community and student response to the participation process as well as my own personal journey through this project. Two cultures have collaborated, worked together, come together in a physical space for a dialogue, and each is changed by the experience. As discussed in Chapter 1, Kim
Collard’s image of two rivers coming together to meet in a single whirlpool of water is a perfect description of the third space that is the Noongar Dandjoo program. In considering third space I wish to acknowledge the valuable contribution of the program host, Dennis Simmons, who was the only Aboriginal person to audition for the role when we started series one. He has a foot firmly planted in both Noongar culture and white culture – Kim Collard described him as a third space man. His ability to communicate effectively in both cultures allowed him to work as a kind of cultural bridge that made possible the collaboration between non-Indigenous students and the Perth Aboriginal community. He not only made it possible, he made it fun. My students listened to him as he employed humour, song and dance to talk to them about what it meant to be an Aboriginal man living in Perth and the challenges of practising his culture. I doubt that the program would have succeeded without him, or at least somebody just like him.

The process of producing Noongar Dandjoo has not been as turbulent as Collard’s whirlpool image suggests, however. Mistakes were made, but the process has been enjoyable and rewarding. The program has been well received by the Aboriginal people who participated and there are potential ongoing benefits to the community, particularly in changing the way journalists represent Aboriginal people. Associate Professor Simon Forrest is the director of Curtin’s Centre for Aboriginal Studies and a Wajuk Noongar man. He said this about the program:

> It is a story of reconciliation. There are not enough of us to do all the things we want to do so Aboriginal people need to work with non-Aboriginal people to assist us to achieve our objectives (personal communication, April 2013).

Responses from participants suggest feelings of empowerment and some have reported the program has given them confidence to attempt other projects. Michelle White, who was one of the hosts in series three, had this to say in reflecting on her experience:
It was an absolute honour to be involved in the *Noongar Dandjoo* project in 2012. As a former News-Caff jorno, I really connected with the revamped format and I particularly enjoyed being a part of the panel discussions. The insights and stories shared by panelists were powerful, compelling and at times heartbreaking. It was refreshing to be a part of a project that allowed Aboriginal people to provide the expert analysis of topics relating specifically to our life experience.

On a personal note, the series reignited my passion for media and in particular, storytelling. I was so inspired by the experience I was bursting with ideas for projects … one of them actually came to fruition … I pitched and co-wrote a play called *Black As Michael Jackson*, which was presented by Yirra Yaakin and performed at the Blue Room Theatre.

Being involved in the series in a presenter/interviewer role also fired up a long lost passion for journalism. I have actually started writing feature articles again. I've had four features published in the Koori Mail and I've also started working on the first draft of a book.

Prior to being involved in the series, I had shied away from the media (albeit for a brief term as the CEO of Noongar Radio). *Noongar Dandjoo* was such a positive, affirming experience for me that it helped me find a long lost love for journalism (personal Communication, January 2013).

Michelle White’s comments illustrate the importance of participation and process. Most significantly, more voices have participated in the Perth community public sphere and the wider Indigenous public sphere due to community participation in the *Noongar Dandjoo* program – people coming together in the third space created by the program.
In 2008 *Noongar Dandjoo* series one won a West Australian Screen Award for ‘Best Community Television program’ and a national Antenna Award for ‘Best Indigenous Program’. In 2012 *Noongar Dandjoo* series three was nominated for an Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) award for ‘Best Tertiary Teaching Resource’, and it was highly commended in the category of ‘Best Broadcast Current Affairs or Issues Based Story’ at the JEAA Awards. It was also nominated for a Vice Chancellor’s Award for Excellence and Innovation at Curtin University. Each of these awards represents recognition and engagement by the wider community – by people outside the Indigenous public sphere. The awards represent a growing third space in which more people engage with the program as audience.

**The Future for Noongar Dandjoo**

I had hoped that eventually more Aboriginal people would become involved in behind-the-camera production work and that in the longer term the program would be taken over by the community. I was never able to find a way of making that happen. The time and money needed to establish a television program like *Noongar Dandjoo* outside of the university and in the hands of the community were beyond my capacity to deliver. When talking about this to Dennis Simmons, he agreed it was the wrong time for the community to take the program over:

> I would still like to see the show go on to the Aboriginal community – for us to take it on and put our own spin on it and do certain things and bring some younger people through training as well – but we’re probably not ready for that at the moment (personal communication, August 2012).

Over time I came to believe that a university was the best place for it. Mainstream broadcasters would have neither the time nor the money for participatory production techniques, even assuming that any of them had
the motivation. Furthermore, from its university base the program is able to maintain its independence from any corporate influence where external funding can easily translate into editorial control.

NITVs move from the Pay TV service to free-to-air SBS means that the Indigenous broadcaster and any future *Noongar Dandjoo* programs are finally available in Noongar country. Though the program was conceived for community television the demise of Access 31 forced the move to NITV, who have been a supportive and encouraging broadcaster. The new community television licence holder, West TV, had promised to broadcast series two once they were on air in 2010, but my requests to broadcast were ignored. They now require us to pay for airtime, in contrast to NITV who pay us for the program – valuable funding that is reinvested in the program’s continued production. Now that NITV are free-to-air in Perth the need to broadcast on West TV no longer exists. Furthermore, NITV are supportive of our protocols and accepting of our community television/student production aesthetic. We can continue to produce a community television style program but with the added advantage of a national, high impact broadcast outcome.

A university home will also ensure that Noongar Dandjoo will continue to meet the criteria of a community media production in spite of a national broadcast. Those values that are at the core of all community media, such as the articulation of citizenship, democracy, participation and access (see Chapter 4), will continue to be prioritised and practiced by the university production cohort. The student aesthetic mentioned in the previous paragraph is another important element of community media because the absence of a slick and glossy production style carries meaning. For today’s audiences, who are so familiar with television conventions, *Noongar Dandjoo*’s visual grammar suggests authenticity and grassroots origins.

If I were to categorise *Noongar Dandjoo* in terms of Michaels’ (1986) three Indigenous media models, I would maintain that it is a community media
program in spite of its national broadcast footprint. The program is representative of the Perth Aboriginal community and they maintain control over its content and dissemination. The fact that it is seen nationwide does not alter those aspects of the program.

Whereas my PhD project is coming to an end, Noongar Dandjoo will continue to be produced at Curtin University. The long-term aim was always to create a sustainable and enduring Indigenous program that would build on the links already established. The relationship that has been developed with the Perth Aboriginal community will be maintained and hopefully it will continue to grow. Another series has been produced in 2013 and broadcast on NITV in 2014. The NITV/SBS broadcast will, I hope, encourage more people from the community to be involved. As Dennis Simmons explains:

SBS will make a huge deal because not all people can afford Foxtel. If SBS shows Noongar Dandjoo it will get out to the regional areas, it will get out to our people; more people will see it, more people talking about it, more involvement – very simple stuff. Before people can talk about it they have to see it… I believe there is a desire for the community to see it. But also it’s a necessity. As a people we must have a TV show that looks, talks and deals with our issues and the things we need to do to progress forward as a people. TV is important because it’s one of the biggest mediums and a lot of the stuff that’s out there is negative. We need it – its important (personal Communication, August 2012).

Conclusions

Noongar Dandjoo is a third space production that provides the opportunity for different cultures to come together for a face-to-face dialogue and with each benefiting from the experience. An action research approach to the program makes it possible to employ participatory production techniques that respect cultural protocols. Even where non-Indigenous participants
have little knowledge of Aboriginal culture, by adhering to action research participatory processes it is possible to learn about and respect protocols while working. The program’s broadcast contributes to a Perth Aboriginal community public sphere and to the wider Indigenous public sphere. This in turn contributes to a sense of cultural and community identity, one of the roles of community media that cannot be delivered by mainstream broadcasters. Both the process of production and the broadcast artefact itself contribute to reconciliation, and this aspect of the program is summarised beautifully by one Aboriginal man I interviewed:

It tracks a path for reconciliation. It connects up to bigger issues than just a film production and it’s defining ways that we might collaborate and work together which is what Australia needs to do if it wants to find its soul. The Aboriginal question is an important one. This little journey that you take just represents the bigger picture of how they should be doing it (Dean Collard, personal Communication, September 2012).

The students who participate carry into their future, as media professionals, knowledge about and empathy for Indigenous issues and people. For the audiences of the program there is an opportunity to learn about Noongar people and culture as the program delivers stories that are positive and inclusive of Aboriginal voices.
CONCLUSION

The production of the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program is a model for participatory action research that demonstrates how theory and practice work together, how they inform each other, to produce a practical outcome in answer to a problem. Until the broadcast in 2008 of *Noongar Dandjoo* on community television, the Perth Noongar community had no television presence. Noongar radio had failed and was in the process of re-establishing itself. Indigenous independent film production was being successfully supported but there was no broadcast media representation of the Perth Aboriginal community. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) had recognised the media as the means by which cultural differences could be negotiated, and made recommendations for media education and for changes to the media representation of Aboriginal people. *Noongar Dandjoo* has acted on those recommendations. In 2013, it can no longer be said that the Noongar community is absent from community media with the successful broadcast of three series, or eight hours, of the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program. With Noongar radio also back on the air, Perth’s Noongar community now has a media voice.

This thesis argues that the program is also a model for cross-cultural collaboration and that the benefits of the program extend beyond the program artefact itself: the process of the program’s production is of equal value and importance. Furthermore, the process of producing and establishing *Noongar Dandjoo* provides lessons for how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can work together for the benefit of all participants, not just on the production of a television program, but quite possibly on any kind of community project.
The Program

In line with the recommendations of the RCIADIC the *Noongar Dandjoo* program addresses the problem of the absence and misrepresentation of Indigenous people in mainstream media. Positive stories were prioritised in the first two series to counter-balance the negative and stereotypical images of Indigenous people that were typical of mainstream programming. In series three we further politicised the program by focusing on issues that are of importance to the Perth Aboriginal community, but, unlike mainstream media working within the time and operational constraints of the daily news cycle, we were able to allocate enough research and broadcast time to accommodate history, context and the inclusion of as many Aboriginal voices as possible.

This thesis has argued that the focus on positive stories, and on the inclusion of history and context when discussing Indigenous issues, can contribute to reconciliation in the wider community. An understanding of Indigenous history, seeing positive and non-stereotypical representations of Indigenous people, and learning about Indigenous culture can help to change ill-informed, racist attitudes. Non-Indigenous audiences, whose ideas and opinions about Indigenous people have often been formed as a result of consuming mainstream media, now have the option of listening and learning as a result of hearing the *Noongar Dandjoo* stories. *Noongar Dandjoo* can therefore be categorised as a community media intervention that, as Tanja Dreher (2010) argues, targets mainstream media and their audiences. Ask the question, “Who is listening?” and the answer is not only a small and marginal community television audience. The programs were broadcast nationally on NITV and locally on Perth community television, thus giving a voice to the Perth Noongar community that recognises a unique and contemporary Noongar culture. Through the broadcast of the programs on national television the series has also contributed to a wider, national Indigenous public sphere.
The Process

As a community television production, and as an action research project, this thesis has argued that the process of producing *Noongar Dandjoo* is as important, if not more important than the program artefact itself. Employing a participatory action research approach to the program’s production had benefits for student and Aboriginal participants alike. Aboriginal people had the opportunity to tell their own stories with the confidence that they would continue to have control of those stories throughout production and into the future. The action research cycle ensured feedback and ongoing communication with all participants that meant that cultural protocols could be explained and respected throughout all stages of production. Ideas and feedback from Aboriginal participants were sought and acted upon so that lessons from each series could be carried forward to the next.

Aboriginal participants, in providing feedback for each series, reported feelings of empowerment and pride in the program. For several individuals there were very personal benefits such as professional development and a newfound motivation for further community and media work.

For the students who participated in the production of *Noongar Dandjoo* the benefits have been significant, and were an unexpected outcome of the project. I had not foreseen, in the early days of the program, how the students’ attitudes and understanding could change while participating. This has had long-term as well as short-term results. In the context of their university studies, the program provided an opportunity for the Aboriginal community and non-Indigenous students to come together, to have a conversation, and to learn from each other. The *Noongar Dandjoo* program created a third space experience that brings two cultures together to learn, to create and to reconcile. Now many have graduated and, as working journalists, they are in a position to have an impact on mainstream media’s representation of Aboriginal people. Through their
experiences on the program this thesis has shown how the knowledge they have gained of Aboriginal people and culture is impacting on their approach as media professionals to story selection and treatment, and hopefully will contribute to change in the culture of the newsrooms where they work to ensure a more culturally sensitive and respectful representation of Aboriginal people in the mainstream media.

It is worth noting that our Aboriginal participants have respected the student experience, without exception. Having made clear to all participants that the program must deliver certain pedagogical outcomes no one has ever questioned or criticised the way in which my course is taught or structured. Aboriginal people have been respectful and supportive of my students' learning experience. As for the students, while they have given regular feedback on course improvements both through university course experience questionnaires and the questionnaires I have given them myself, none have ever suggested changes either to our objective to produce a program with Aboriginal people or to our participatory processes.

Participatory action research is of particular importance to the Noongar Dandjoo process. This thesis argues that it is a way of working that assists the process of cross-cultural collaboration. In this context cultural protocols, rather than being seen as hurdles to be negotiated, are tools in the participatory action research process that assist in building cultural awareness. They also contribute to learning, with all participants having the opportunity to talk and then analyse and improve their practice. The existing protocols for film and television production as discussed in chapter two provide a useful starting point as a set of initial guidelines for cross-cultural production. However, this thesis shows how participatory action research accommodates the diverse range of personalities and cultures that a creative production such as this one will inevitably encounter. It is a way of working that recognises that mistakes will be made and that we learn from those mistakes. Our production process was similar to Kim Collard’s illustration of the third space as a whirlpool –
sometimes there were difficulties, mistakes were made and things did not always go as planned. Notwithstanding this, as action research demands, all participants in sharing the common goal of producing a successful television program have benefited from the process.

It is acknowledged here that the participatory nature of the program and its ability to provide a space for learning and understanding would be difficult to duplicate in a mainstream production environment. The time and effort required for participatory production is uneconomical, and giving editorial control to story participants is a practice unlikely to be adopted by professional producers or journalists. As the *Noongar Dandjoo* experience shows, however, giving Aboriginal people editorial control in no way compromises the program’s ability to deal with difficult issues. The process revealed the readiness of the Aboriginal collaborators to ask the hard questions – there is no need for non-Indigenous journalists or producers to do that for them.

**A Future for Noongar Dandjoo**

In an ideal world *Noongar Dandjoo*, over the past six years of its production, would have trained Aboriginal people from the Perth community to produce the program. In time it could be produced entirely by the Perth Aboriginal community who would have complete editorial control. The program would have on-going funding that would buy it air-time on community television and pay for a regular production team to maintain it. Theoretically, a broadcast on Perth community television would ensure it was truly representative of the Perth Aboriginal community and free of corporate influences. The program did not achieve these ideals.

Increasing Aboriginal participation in behind-the-camera production of the program remains a longer-term objective and I will continue to look for ways to incorporate community skills-building into the program. As for a community television presence, that has become a less preferable option
with the new free-to-air status of NITV through SBS. The Perth Noongar community identifies with the Indigenous broadcaster, NITV, and the majority of participants value the status and potentially larger audience that the national broadcaster offers. Certainly NITV is able to reach audiences throughout Noongar country, something that West TV is unable to do. I am hopeful that the NITV broadcast will encourage more people in the community to participate and the SBS alliance will not impact on NITV’s current preparedness to accept Noongar Dandjoo’s student aesthetic or our community media production processes. My concern is that SBS might become a kind of gatekeeper for NITV so that a student production, like the ICTV programs from central Australia, will no longer meet their standards for broadcast. In the past, when a story is withdrawn from the program for cultural reasons, NITV have adapted their schedule to accommodate the shorter program. They have been patient and helpful such as when our program sound levels do not meet broadcast standards, and they have assisted in the process of making the necessary technical improvements. If NITV were no longer able to support the program in these small ways, then it would become necessary to reconsider Perth community television as a broadcaster.

Is Noongar Dandjoo a community television program if it is broadcast on NITV rather than on community TV? I argue that it is because the process of its production is a community media process. The producer-audience barrier is virtually non-existent as the community is invited to participate and give feedback, and the program evolves as a result of that interaction. Like the remote and regional Indigenous community broadcasters the program contributes to the maintenance of Noongar culture and language, and to community identity. It contributes to a democratic media by giving a political voice to a marginalised community, and the program’s objectives are entrenched in issues of social justice. Noongar Dandjoo is a not-for-profit production and is produced independently of any corporate or political influence. Whatever the quality of the broadcast outcome, this does not detract from the community values embedded in its processes and objectives.
Looking to the future, there are plans for a web presence for *Noongar Dandjoo*. This is outside my area of expertise and beyond the scope of this research, and I will be relying on others to assist with this process. During production of the third series of *Noongar Dandjoo* I sought feedback and permission for the program to go on the web, and all participants were supportive of the idea. A website would complement the television broadcast but not replace it. It would work as an archive for the *Noongar Dandjoo* stories, and allow for the community to access them at any time. While distributing DVDs to the community has done a similar job, a website would provide easier access for more people. It would also allow stories to be added outside of the two-year production cycle that currently runs and is dictated by the university course structure and calendar. It is possible that the website may also function as another form of communicating with the community and collecting feedback. However, I would be cautious of allowing open access for people to post messages on the website as the incidence of racist commentary and bullying is all too common on the internet.

*The Perth Aboriginal Community*

At the start of this project one of my research questions was about the challenges for an urban Aboriginal community, like the Perth Noongar community, in producing and maintaining their own community media. How is the Perth experience different from the successful community media initiatives that are found in many remote and regional communities across Australia?

Knowing the history and culture of the Perth Noongar community helps to explain its complex and diverse nature. Government assimilation policies have done irreparable damage to Noongar culture and language, and Perth is now home to Aboriginal people and cultures from all over Western Australia. Building an identity and a sense of community is a work in
progress for the Perth Aboriginal community. Roebourne’s Juluwarlu media centre is evidence that establishing and maintaining a successful community media centre is not easy for any community. The problems of funding and community politics that Roebourne must deal with bedevil the Perth community as well. I suggest, though, that these problems are experienced on a bigger scale in the urban context. Perth has more people, more diversity of culture, is geographically bigger, and has more complex family and kinship structures. Added to this is a lack of recognition, by government and funding bodies, of a contemporary Perth Noongar culture. The attitude that ‘real’ Aborigines only live in the bush must be overcome so that the Perth community does more than just survive – they can thrive and grow. All the evidence shows that culture is no less important for urban-living Aborigines than for remote communities. Government and funding bodies must recognise the connection between culture and wellbeing and provide support to initiatives such as community media that can contribute to cultural maintenance and community identity.

Programs such as Noongar Dandjoo, the re-established Noongar radio, and the growing hub of Indigenous independent filmmakers in Perth are all contributing to a sense of community and identity. Recalling once again Michaels’ (1986) three forms of Indigenous media, each of these different forms of media has a role to play in the Indigenous community public sphere, in a wider national Indigenous public sphere, and in the multi-cultural Australian public sphere. For a diverse and urban Aboriginal community like Perth, participation in all three public spheres is essential.

**My Journey**

Of particular importance to this project has been my own personal journey. This is not just because I have employed an action research approach that demands self-reflection, but also because my change of attitude and ways of thinking is evidence of the success of this project and demonstrates its potential as a model for other cross-cultural collaborations: I have been
the subject of my own experiment. Six years ago, as a white, middle-class, urban-living academic with very little knowledge or understanding of Aboriginal people or culture, I was typical of a large percentage of the Australian population, confirmation of the accuracy of the statistics collected by the Australian Reconciliation Council that found Australia still has a long way to go towards reconciliation. In commencing this PhD project, I entered the third space that was created by producing Noongar Dandjoo and I have been changed by the experience. I have knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and culture that has created in me empathy for their issues of social justice, an interest in and passion for their culture, and a respect for their tenacity and strength in the face of adversity. All of this has increased my intolerance of racism and fueled my desire to do and know more. I encourage the establishment of more cross-cultural collaborative projects such as this one, especially in universities, so that others can undertake a similar journey. Projects such as the Noongar Dandjoo program can, and do, make a difference.
THREE SERIES OF *NOONGAR DANDJOO*

Following are DVD copies of three series of the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program. The television programs represent the ‘act’ stage of the action research cycle.

**Series 1** was produced in 2007 and broadcast in 2008 on Access 31 and on NITV.

**Series 2** was produced in 2009 and broadcast in 2010 on NITV.

**Series 3** was produced in 2011 and broadcast in 2012 on NITV. These DVDs are the uncut version of the program that were distributed to the community, rather than the shorter, edited, 60 minutes version that was broadcast on NITV.
SERIES ONE DVD
EPISODE ONE - CULTURE
The unique Noongar culture is one of the oldest on earth and series three of Noongar Dandjoo takes a look at the special place culture has in all aspects of Noongar life. This episode begins with an exploration and discussion of the link between culture and wellbeing. We meet gifted Noongar artist Ashley Brunt, tell the creation story of the Crocodile Dreaming and watch a lively performance from the talented Nitja Marmam beat group.

EPISODE TWO - POLITICS
Aboriginal Australians have long yearned for a stronger political voice and that dream may soon be realised. In episode two of Noongar Dandjoo, we meet members of the First Nation's National Party and discuss their ambitions, which include changing the Australian Constitution. We profile Noongar educator and elder Uncle Ted Penny and hear from talented young entertainers, finals.

EPISODE THREE - ABORIGINAL INCARCERATION
With the shocking number of young West Australian Aboriginal men and women in jail, some now call the white system of law the "injustice system." In episode three of Noongar Dandjoo, we investigate these awful statistics and examine alternatives to incarceration. We meet community activist and aspiring politician Dharwin Monie and go behind the scenes of the award-winning taxi show "Inside Out" to hear heartfelt stories from those involved in the program. Singer-songwriter Una Shay rounds out this episode with her hit "From This Day I Look Above.

EPISODE FOUR - LAND & COUNTRY
Like culture, land and country occupy a special place in the hearts and minds of all Noongar people. In our final episode of Noongar Dandjoo, we investigate calls for disenfranchised areas throughout the south-west of Western Australia to reflect their Aboriginal heritage. We meet talented artist Jannidee Nappy, discuss the teaching of Indigenous history in our schools and reggae band Oz Island close this series.

Produced by the School of Media, Culture & Creative Arts
Curtin University - Perth, Western Australia
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APPENDIX 1

Peedac is a company owned by Kaarta-Moorda Aboriginal Corporation (KMAC) which is also a not-for-profit community based organisation that provides a consultation service. Membership of this organisation is open to all adult Aboriginal people in Perth. Peedac owns one share of Noongar Media Enterprises Pty Ltd and the Peedac board of directors will appoint the Noongar Media Association board members in consultation with the station manager (see Illustration 1).

Noongar Media Association Ownership Structure

(O'Donnell 2007)
Appendix 2

*Noongar Dandjoo Series 1 & 2: Student Survey*

The following survey was given to students at the end of production of *Noongar Dandjoo* series 1 & 2.

_________________________________

Your involvement with *Noongar Dandjoo* has provided you with many learning experiences, some of which are professional ones that prepare you for a career in Television production or journalism. However the program was about Noongar culture and issues and therefore provided you with the opportunity to meet members of the Aboriginal community and learn about their culture. It is this aspect of the program experience that the following questions are related to, and on which I ask you to focus your answers. Thanks for taking the time to give me this important feedback.

1) What were some of the positive aspects of your involvement in the production of ‘Noongar Dandjoo’?

2) What were some of the negative, or most difficult, aspects of your involvement with the program?

3) Do you think it is important to hear Aboriginal voices in the media? Why?
Noongar Dandjoo Series 3: Student Survey

The following was distributed to students before and after their participation in Series 3 of Noongar Dandjoo.

1. I am …

☐ an Indigenous Australian.
☐ a non-Indigenous Australian
☐ an International student.

2. How important is the relationship between Indigenous people and other Australians for Australia as a nation?

☐ Very Important
☐ Fairly Important
☐ Fairly Unimportant
☐ Not Important at all.

3. Overall, would you say that the relationship between Indigenous people and other Australians today is…?

☐ Very Good
☐ Fairly Good
☐ Fairly Poor
☐ Very Poor
4. How would you describe the level of trust that other Australians have for Indigenous people?

- Very High
- Fairly High
- Fairly Low
- Very Low
- Don't Know

5. Which of the following is your main source of information about Indigenous people?

- The Media
- School / Education
- Other People
- Personal Experience with Indigenous People
- Family

6. The media present a balanced view of Indigenous Australia.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

7. How would you describe the level of contact you have with Indigenous people?

- Frequent Contact
- Occasional Contact
- Rare Contact
- No Contact
8. How would you describe the level of contact you would like to have with Indigenous people in the future?

- [ ] Frequent Contact
- [ ] Occasional Contact
- [ ] Rare Contact
- [ ] No Contact

9. How would you describe your knowledge about Indigenous culture and history?

- [ ] Very High
- [ ] Fairly High
- [ ] Fairly Low
- [ ] Very Low
- [ ] No Knowledge at all

10. How important is it that all Australians know about Indigenous culture and history?

- [ ] Very Important
- [ ] Fairly Important
- [ ] Fairly Unimportant
- [ ] Not Important at all

11. How would you describe the level of prejudice Australians hold towards Indigenous People?

- [ ] Very High
- [ ] Fairly High
- [ ] Fairly Low
- [ ] Very Low
- [ ] Don't Know
12. Indicate your level of agreement with these statements:

Non-Indigenous Australians are superior to Indigenous Australians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Indigenous people have a diverse range of lifestyles and occupations like other Australians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Aboriginal people who live in the city are not ‘real’ Aborigines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

13. Thinking about your overall impression of Indigenous people, would you say they tend to be….? (circle yes or no)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Orientated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good at Sport</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proud</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy Going</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good humoured</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard Working</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplined</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please use this space to write any comments that describe your attitudes and/or knowledge of Indigenous people and culture, especially relating to the Perth Aboriginal community. You may also wish to comment on your experiences in producing *Noongar Dandjoo*. 
Appendix 3

Sample questions from interviews with Aboriginal participants.

Questions for Aboriginal participants varied depending on their involvement with the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program, their past experience with Aboriginal and mainstream media, and their place within the Perth Aboriginal community. The following is a sample of the type of questions asked during an interview. However, my interviews with Aboriginal people were more like conversations and each one evolved differently as I listened to their individual responses.

**Questions relating to the *Noongar Dandjoo* television program:**

- What are your thoughts on the program?
- Do you feel that you gained anything from your involvement with the program?
- Do you have any criticisms of the program?
- What were some the most difficult aspects of the program for you?
- How do you think the program was received by the Perth Aboriginal community?
- Series three of *Noongar Dandjoo* was different – there were more challenges. How did we do?
- What feedback have you heard from the community?
- How could we do the program better/different?
- Do you want to see another series of *Noongar Dandjoo*?

**Questions relating to the Perth Aboriginal community:**

- Can you tell me about yourself?
- How would you describe the Aboriginal community here in Perth?
Do you think urban Aboriginal communities, such as the Noongar community in Perth, face different challenges to regional communities – especially in terms of the preservation of culture?

**Questions relating to Indigenous media:**

- Do you think media can contribute to the maintenance and practice of culture? If so, how?
- What role would you like to see media take in the support of Noongar culture?
- Have there been changes within the Perth Noongar community that may contribute to the success of Noongar media? (e.g. Noongar Nation Movement, more acceptance and practice of culture)
- What is your involvement with Noongar radio? How is it being set up to be different from WAAMA?
- Broadcasters like ABC & SBS produce Indigenous programs. Is it possible to create programs for a national audience and still successfully support Aboriginal culture?
- Do you watch NITV? What role do you think it has? Should Aboriginal programs be relegated to a specialist service such as NITV or would you rather see programs on mainstream television?
- If TV programs were made for the Noongar community what sort of content would you like to see that would support Noongar culture?
- There are aspects of Aboriginal culture that are not for public dissemination. What cultural sensitivities does a television program need to respect? What protocols and guidelines should be in place when making a TV program for or about Noongar people? Are any of these protocols specific to Noongar culture?
- What do you think of the current industry protocols?
- Are the current protocols enough?
- Are the protocols problematic?
- Do you think protocols apply to Aboriginal filmmakers?
- Do funding bodies interfere with your story or with the representation of your culture?
• Do you think there has been progress for Indigenous media in recent years – do you think this is enough or should more be done?
• Has the mainstream media changed in how it represents Aboriginal people?
Appendix 4
Interviews

Brine, Andrew: Station Manager, Access 31
   February 21, 2007 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Collard, Kim: Managing Director, Kooya Consultancies
   November 30, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Collard, David: State Aboriginal Coordinator, National Resource Management.
   June 29, 2012 Email Correspondence, Perth

Collard, Dean: Centre for Aboriginal Studies
   September 26, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Conboy, Nelson: Director Indigenous Media Services: Chair ICTV
   May 20, 2010 Interviewed by Author, Brisbane

Coombes, Susan: Head of Production, NITV
   May 20, 2010 Interviewed by Author, Brisbane

Coppin, Lorraine. Language & Archive Manager at Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation.
   July, 2007 Interviewed by Author, Roebourne.

Eggington, Dennis: CEO Aboriginal Legal Service; Adjunct Professor Curtin University.
   April 14, 2008 Interviewed by Author, Perth
Forrest, Simon: Associate Professor and Director, Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies.
April 5, 2013 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Garlett, Jeremy: Policeman and broadcaster.
May 7, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Hartley, John: Professor, Curtin University
November 14, 2012 Email Correspondence, Perth

Hutchens, Ross: Film and Television Producer
June 1, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Lovegrove, Michelle: Executive Producer, SBS Radio Living Black
May 20, 2010 Interviewed by Author, Brisbane

Martin, Kelrick: Filmmaker; previously Commissioning Editor NITV
February 12, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

McGlade, Hannah: Lawyer and Author.
March 6, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Mezaros, Tibor: Station Manager, West TV
March 5, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Mickler, Steve: Associate Professor, Curtin University
February 7, 2007 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Morrisson, Jeannie: Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies
November 6, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Roberts, Paul: Filmmaker
May 5, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth
Scott, Kim: Author and Professor of Writing, Curtin University
May 17, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Simmons, Dennis: Actor and filmmaker.
August, 2008 Interviewed by Author, Perth
August 17, 2011 Interviewed by Author, Perth
August 8, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Stasiuk, Glen: Filmmaker and Academic, Murdoch University
February 23, 2007 Interviewed by Author, Perth
April 22, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth
June 12, 2012 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Walley, Clive: Associate Professor University of Notre Dame; previously Curtin Centre for Aboriginal Studies.
February 19, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth.

White, Michelle: Manager of Aboriginal Arts and Culture Programs at Community Arts Network WA; previously Station Manager, Noongar Radio; previously journalist, ABC TV.
September 3, 2011 Interviewed by Author, Perth
January 13, 2013 Email Correspondence, Perth

Wilkes, Ted: Associate Professor, National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University.
February 15, 2007 Interview by Author, Perth

Williams, Gina: Singer; previously Station Manager, Noongar Radio; previously journalist, GWN.
February 24, 2009 Interviewed by Author, Perth

Woodley, Michael: Founder and Station Manager, Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation.
July, 2007 Interviewed by Author, Roebourne
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Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse 2007. Little Children are Sacred. Darwin: Northern Territory Government.


*Sydney Morning Herald*, October 20. Retrieved from  

Film and Television Institute of WA Inc. 2009. "Warwick Thornton Interview: Get a Story, Bro." *News and Articles*. Retrieved 25/06/12 from  


Rijavec, F. (Director) 2005. *Exile and the Kingdom*. Australia: Film Australia.


