

Rafal Nahirny
Wroclaw University

Welcome to *BabaKiueria!* Australian anniversaries and cultural forms of resistance

Abstract

One of the many negative consequences of colonialism is cultural hegemony of white males exercised in public spheres of former colonies. This privileged group has the ability to control, and thus to create and reproduce specific images of indigenous people in media such as press, television and cinema. Those representations, most often motivated by Eurocentric imagination and racial stereotypes, have not only legitimized privileged position of white men, but have also been internalized by colonized subjects over time. The article describes the process of taking control over their own image by the indigenous people of Australia. The author examines in detail subversive tactics and strategies used by creators of “BabaKiueria” (dir. Don Featherstone 1986). This short satirical mockumentary about postcolonial role reversal is the first film produced by Aboriginal Programs Unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The mockumentary shows Whites conquered and colonized by Aborigines. The author describes the attempts to destabilize a dominant white gaze which were supposed to challenge the official media image of Australian Aborigines. “BabaKiueria” is presented in wider historical context as one of many significant actions taken during bicentennial celebrations of “discovery” of Australia that were intended to make postcolonial public sphere more open, complex and polyphonic.

Key words: Australia, indigenous people, ethnocentrism, postcolonialism, cultural hegemony, resistance

Introduction

It is a bright, sunny day. We can hear the sounds of nature. The singing birds, however, start to blend with the music coming from a transistor radio. A group of people is relaxing by the sea. The atmosphere is carefree and time is slowly passing by. Two men are drinking canned beer and flipping sausages on the grill from time to time as they talk. A woman reaches for a well-roasted piece of meat. Meanwhile some of the people are finding enjoyment in playing the native sport of cricket. This idyllic scene starts *BabaKiueria* (1986), a short film by Australian director, Don Featherstone.

This peace does not last very long. One of the cricket players shows off with an amazing play. The ball flies through the air and lands quite far away, almost in the sea. A young boy walks to the water to pick up the ball. Suddenly, he notices something disconcerting on the horizon and runs to warn his parents and the rest of the picnic goers. The sunny weather and relaxation are abruptly disturbed by the unexpected guests coming from the sea.

The military outfits of the intruders, resembling the Confederate uniforms from the American Civil War, tell us that we see soldiers. A self-assured officer, commanding this operation, gets off the motorboat and walks on to the beach with a confident stride. The goal of this military operation is soon revealed. One of the soldiers carries a pole with a flag, which he solemnly plants in the ground. A military reconnaissance is annexing the territory that shortly before was a scene of a picnic, and starting an invasion. It is a military operation of a special kind though, as the forces belong to... the Aboriginal people. Only now do we start to notice that the people we were just watching as they were grilling and playing cricket seem to have something more in common than just shared relaxation. All of them, without exception, are white and appear to be middle-class.

The picnic participants are not protesting. They are too surprised by the turn of events. From the beginning, the whole situation is under the total control of the unwelcome guests. The commanding officer asks one of the men loudly and clearly, pronouncing slowly each sound: *What-Do-You-Call-This-Place?* The confused grill participant, who moments ago was throwing empty beer cans into nearby shrubbery, replies: *Err... barbecue area.* You can see the surprise in his eyes evoked by, on the one hand, the unexpected arrival of the soldiers and, on the other, by the banal nature of the question for which the answer should be obvious. The military man, not troubled by the presence of the picnic goers, turns to his comrades and, as if there is no one else with them,

says: *They call this place BabaKiueria*. Then he looks around and says, *Nice native name... colourful. I like it*. The cinematographer is emphasising the arrogant and domineering behaviour of the Aborigine by filming the officer from a worm's-eye view and the picnic goes from above. Every gesture, even the smallest one, which we witness during this short conversation, has a deep meaning and helps the filmmaker create a strong opposition between the native people, in this case white, and the intruders.

The post-colonial world upside down

In Featherstone's satirical film, the relations in post-colonial countries are taken under critical analysis by reversing the traditional roles of the coloniser and the colonised. Therefore, we are looking at the world where the white man, due to colonization, segregation and racial discrimination, has been pushed to the margins of society and found themselves at the bottom of the post-colonial hierarchy of the Aborigine country, to finally become a part of the "wretched of the Earth". They are now completely dominated and dependent on the will of the colonists' descendants, that is the black majority, which sets up favourable laws and holds the highest position in the country (including the position of the Minister for White Affairs¹). We watch as the white minority is relentlessly harassed by the police and other national public services and institutions that forcefully take away their children or force them to leave the lands traditionally inhabited by the white men (who, by the film's logic, are from typical middle-class suburbs). All those actions are of course justified with the concern for the wellbeing of the white man.

The film creators did not halt at transforming the depicted reality according to the cardinal logic of role reversal. We look at the white man through the eyes of an intermediary: the main character Duranga Manika (Michelle Torres), who is a successful and passionate journalist working for the Aborigine national television. Duranga, as she explains herself, has always been fascinated with the white man's culture. She is a socially committed journalist who is not indifferent towards social issues. She wants to help the white men live in modern society and so her reporting regards the obstacles on the way to full assimilation of the indigenous people of BabaKiueria. Because of this, Duranga puts a lot of effort into fighting unjust stereotypes concerning white

¹ The character of minister Wagwan is played by Bob Maza, an actor and activist for the rights of the Indigenous people of Australia, the president of the Aborigines Advancement League and delegate to the United Nations General Assembly.

people that are prevalent among the black majority. The report starts with a typical street poll in which random passers-by are asked about their opinions on white people. One of the interviewees, dressed in a sharp suit and presented with a modern office building in the background, replies upset: *Oh, I don't know. I've never met one.* He is clearly in a hurry and does not have time for such trivial things as white people's problems. Duranga is not afraid to tackle sensitive social matters. She wonders why the white people are protesting against turning a highway into a park. She also engages in the controversial problem of evolution and the issue of white man's intelligence. However, the most important character in the report is the Smith family living in the white ghetto (which is, as mentioned earlier, the suburbs), where they lead "a simple and uncomplicated life". Duranga declares that she decided to stay with a "typical white family" and maybe even become a part of it. Thanks to this, she will be able to learn the strange customs and beliefs of the white people and then present those to a wider audience (the Smiths are played by Cecily Polson and Tony Barry, actors easily recognizable to Australian TV viewers). By using this method, as they are subversively using the format of a TV report in accordance to the mockumentary's logic, the filmmakers make the post-colonial perspective of the white majority an important topic of their film.

The innocent subject

The more Duranga tries to understand the white man, the more cringeworthy it becomes for the viewer. The material gathered by her shows is, from the viewer's perspective, a series of amusing misunderstandings concerning the description of white man's culture. A collective barbecue becomes camping next to primitive fireplaces that make burning the meat very easy (which, to the journalist's bewilderment, seems to bring white people joy). Graffiti is depicted as a traditional art and thus being a set of enigmatic and magical signs, impossible to understand for the majority. Car wrecks become the peak achievement of white civilization. The betting shops are a place of a weird and irrational cult. The world of the white man is consistently made to look exotic in Duranga's report. This happens because the journalist is primarily interested in identifying each difference between the primitive culture of the white man and the sophisticated culture of the Aborigine people.

With this, the ambivalent role of categorising culture and ideology is unveiled before the viewer. In Duranga's report, they are used as mechanisms to show the *Other* as someone radically different from the dominating majority.

The white man is a wild man who—for inexplicable reasons—opposes any attempts at being civilized. The reason for this state of matters, according to Duranga, is to a greater extent the mentality of the white man and his irrational inclination to senseless violence (these opinions are accompanied by archive footage showing riots at a stadium caused by the fans of opposing teams and a street parade celebrating Second World War veterans).

Because of this, even attempts at disputing these stereotypes are, in their nature, humiliating for the white people. It is then that Duranga, unknowingly, displays her own superstitions and prejudice; for example, when she says that an old lady's flat is “surprisingly clean”, while trying to present the subjects of her report. In one scene, we see the Smith family as they all sit around the telephone and talk to their grandma. The journalist comments by emphasising the positive role of traditional family ties in white communities.

At the end of the film, Duranga is deeply convinced that she has come to a greater understanding of the uncomplicated culture of the white man. She takes pride in this before her viewers, yet at the same time she seems to lack basic imagination and empathy. She has spent a lot of time with the Smiths, but she is unable to really understand their existential situation. In one of the last sequences, the police forcefully separate the Smith family in order to drive their daughter to some unidentified social welfare centre as part of the “Whites Re-Education” program. The journalist comments in a dispassionate way: *Parting with loved ones is never easy. I said goodbye to my mother recently when she went for holiday so, I know how they feel.* The attempt at understanding the *Other* results in only shallow and superficial observations because in fact it is Duranga, not the Smiths, who turns out to be the main focus of the report. Duranga focuses on creating her own image as a journalist who is understanding, empathetic, and compassionate towards white people: a journalist who actively seeks social change and improvement of the difficult situation of the dominated minority. Even during the program, Duranga makes a speech to the employers, urging them to show good will and to give white people a chance at their businesses. It should be said that the Smiths do everything to maintain her preconception of them. They fully understand the nature of the entire project of which they have become part. Therefore, the Smiths' strategy relies on confirming every stereotype imposed on them. They feel powerless against the government, its institutions, public media, and individuals representing these. At the mercy of the majority, they are completely dominated and thus they hope that by accepting the roles of “good, peaceful whites” they will remain unnoticed. The Smiths are presented as colonized subjects². Helplessness and lack of control

² Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, (Boston: Beacon Press) (1970).

over their own fate makes them try to satisfy constantly those that have power or their agents. They will be consistently trying to create a sense of self-satisfaction in the national television journalist, even if it means perpetuating a false image of themselves in her eyes. This quite often leads to amusing situations perfectly depicted by the filmmakers. Asked what they think about the stereotype of a white man being lazy and reluctant to work, they immediately answer by saying they would choose hard work, cleaning up the garden or the house over picnicking with their friends without any hesitation.

Duranga, as she builds her status as an understanding individual who is committed to the cause, uses two kinds of discourse characteristic for white civilization. Apart from the language of cultural anthropology, she uses the discourse of social welfare. By this, she can be in the position of the ingénue subject. For Duranga, racism has only a mental dimension. Structural violence—with its systematic and institutionalized practice and meaning that work beyond an individual being—is omitted. That is why, in Duranga's opinion, the way to solve the issue of white people is to change the suspicious approach both sides have for each other. *And smile a bit*, says a police officer interviewed by the journalist. Changes on the systematic and political level are unnecessary. The dominating point of view consistently does not acknowledge the structural problems and deeper social processes. It aims in a completely different direction and the *Other* serves as a form of a mirror in which white people can see themselves as generous, caring and understanding.

That is why the makers of *Baba Kiueria*, instead of appealing to white people's nobleness, making them aware of the wrongdoing and difficult situation of the indigenous people of Australia, put them, to some extent, in minority's shoes. Insight does not come from manifesting empathy, but as a result of experiencing the Aboriginal people's experience by using the Smith family and how the film empathises with them. Compassion is, to some extent, a side effect, because the filmmakers are not trying to impose any moral obligations upon the viewer, only entertain them. The seemingly painless laughter conceals an ethical challenge requiring an authentic response from the audience.

Unsettling ending

The comedy in Featherstone's film is based mainly on the surprising approach of reversing roles and the skill with which the makers built an exceptionally realistic vision of an upside-down world, while paying attention to the smallest

details and gestures. However, the whole joke ends with a quite unexpected punch line that diverges from the atmosphere of the entire film. In the last scene of *BabaKiueria*, we see a TV set standing in the middle of an empty room. Suddenly a brick goes through the window, breaking it.

The ending may elicit a sense of uncertainty in the viewer. Until that moment, the story was developing according to the logic set by the filmmakers. The viewer is expecting another element of the world presented in the film to resemble a fragment of their own world. In this way, the story draws the viewer in and surprises them in the last scene. This can be seen as a form of confirmation of Duranga's vision of white people as prone to using force and easily resorting to violence. In this sense, it is the next part of the journalist's report that serves as a way to further amplify the effect and finish in a suggestive way.

Simultaneously, the ending scene does not fit into the traditional structure of a joke. Instead of defusing the tension, we are confronted with a punch line that unsettles rather than makes us laugh. Perhaps the brick was thrown by the Smith's son who, unable to accept his parent's humiliating submission, ran away from the police. Is it a sign of increasing frustration? In that case, the act of vandalism would become an act of cultural despair. Alternatively, maybe we are witnessing a start of resistance and political action that could transform into open confrontation. If so, maybe the Aboriginal journalist accidentally caught the moment of the rising of a new political awareness that aims to change the status quo. This, though, does not put all doubts to an end. Perhaps the creators themselves are directly expressing their own opinion in the final scene, discarding the formula of the mockumentary. After all, the brick is aimed at the TV set standing in the middle of the room, serving as a clear symbol of mass media controlled by the white majority. Would it be correct to understand that the filmmakers believe violence is an inevitable constituent for the process of political emancipation? The time of day could also be symbolic. It is evening and the night will soon come. Something ends and the time of uncertainty comes.

The film unexpectedly leaves the viewer with these doubts, instead of ending the whole joke with a funny punch line. We are laughing while watching the reversed world created by the makers of *BabaKiueria* makers because we feel safe. Mary Douglas, reflecting on the nature of tickling, points out that we feel amused only by the touch of people close to us. We know well that it is only a fake attack³. Likewise, while watching Featherstone's film, we know the history

³ For analysis of the tickling phenomenon, see chapter *Żarty* in the book: M. Douglas, *Ukryte znaczenia*, (Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki) (2007).

is different and in 1788 it was not an Aborigine canoe that reached the beach in Dover, but British ships which sailed into Botany Bay. If it were not for the ending, some viewers would probably finish Featherstone's film with a sigh of relief and immediately go back to the world where it is the white man who is in the privileged position.

The spectacles of power

The opening scene of the arriving Aborigine explorers turns out to be a historical re-enactment organized by the dominating majority as part of celebrating the anniversary of the start of the colonization of white men's world. It is a clear allusion to actual political and social events that were highly important to Australian people in the second half of the 1980s. Featherstone's film was shown on Australian television in 1986, a very special moment in the history of Australia, which was preparing for a grand celebration of the bicentenary of the arrival in 1788 by white colonists, i.e. the so-called First Fleet⁴. The fact that the organizing committee (Australian Bicentennial Authority) was founded in 1979 indicates how important this was to the then officials. The celebration was supposed to go on for the entire year and the organizers had a budget of 200 million dollars.

The formal celebrations of consecutive anniversaries of the beginnings of Australian colonization have a long tradition. In the 19th century, due to the centennial anniversary of the arrival of the first colonists, officials from the rest of the British colonies were invited to the celebrations, which lasted a week. In 1938, the celebration of the Sesquicentenary, dubbed by the press as a kind of carnival, lasted 3 months⁵. The members of the 150th Anniversary Celebrations Council decided that the main event would be a reconstruction of the raising of the British flag as the symbolic start of the Australian colonization. It was not in any way an extraordinary event for Sydney residents, who had been witnessing such spectacles since 1901, when, as part of celebrating the creation

⁴ The goal of this journey was establishing a penal colony in New Southern Wales. That is why most of the "colonists" were prisoners. The arguments and discussions concerning celebrating the beginnings of colonization resemble in many ways the controversies created by the Columbus Day, organized every year in the United States ever since 1937.

⁵ 'Sydney Celebrations Begin To-day. THREE MONTHS OF CARNIVAL', *The Age*, January 18 (1938), p. 12. All press materials were accessed by the author of this text by using Google News archive, <http://news.google.com/newspapers>, date accessed: August 26, 2016.

of the Commonwealth of Australia, a re-enactment of Captain Cook's landing in Botany Bay was staged⁶.

As part of the 150th anniversary celebration, it was decided to make the re-enactment special. In order to accomplish this, a replica of Supply, the ship on which the governor Phillip came to Australia, was launched. The audience was also to be entertained by an orchestra and planes flying above them. For the sake of dramatic effect, Aborigine people from Menindee and Brewarrina were brought and "quartered" in police barracks during the arrangements. The Aborigines were supposed to play the role of their ancestors, which meant playing the role of "savages" who, when seeing the boat with the governor coming⁷, would wave their spears and then run away in fear. Fortunately, the calmness and peaceful gestures of the British sailors and soldiers were allegedly enough to persuade the indigenous people to come back and welcome the foreigners in a friendly way⁸.

The re-enactment was planned to end with the raising of the flag. How to expand the almost minimalist form that Governor Phillip chose for this event almost 200 years ago was discussed. The ceremony of raising the national flag is not a particularly exciting event. In addition, the only thing the colonist did was to raise a toast for the King, which definitely did not help the people working on the re-enactment. Therefore, a fictional speech was prepared for the actor playing the role of the governor so that the whole event would be more formal and solemn. This is how a commentary was created which would explain to the viewers the significant character of this not very spectacular element of the whole re-creation⁹.

It is easy to notice that the members of subsequent organizational committees highly enjoyed historical re-enactments. In the eyes of government officials, they have become very useful tools of colonial education. Much to the audience's joy, the recreations made it possible to "reanimate" the past and at the same time "mythologize" it so that it would be imprinted into society's memory¹⁰. From a psychoanalytical point of view, almost compulsive repeating

⁶ Maria Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here*, (Cambridge – New York – Melbourne: Cambridge University Press) (2009), p. 37.

⁷ Stuart Macintyre, Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press) (2004) (chapter *Bicentenary Battles*).

⁸ "Sydney's Great Carnival. Huge Crowds View Impressive Historical Pageants", *The Age* January 27 (1938), p. 11.

⁹ This was the method used to deal with the basic weakness of historical re-enactments. See: Vanessa Agnew, 'Introduction: What is Reenactment', *Criticism* 46:3 (2004), p. 331.

¹⁰ During re-enactments, the historical process is reduced to events deprived of many conditionings. Additionally, the danger of re-enactment lies also in creating the illusion of

of the scenes showing the beginnings of the colonisation of the Australian continent functions as a symptom of neurosis and inability to deal with the traumatic past.

In 1988, a significant change happened in this regard. Jonathan King, a descendant of Philip Gidley King, one of the officers of the First Fleet and later governor of New South Wales (1800-1806), inspired by reading his ancestor's journals decided to re-create the whole journey of the first colonists. The second First Fleet was to set sail exactly the same day as the First Fleet and go the same way to finally enter Port Jackson in a triumphal manner on January 26, 1988, witnessed by a cheering crowd.

The organizational committee did not include King's re-creation in the official schedule of celebrations. Even more, he was not granted financial support, even though King had the support of two great Australian historians: Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey. A few factors were influential in the making of this decision, which was rather surprising in the eyes of the public.

King's project—and most of all the never seen before scale of the spectacle—caused it to be highly hazardous and expensive. The members of the committee also surely remembered the incident that took place during the celebrations in 1970. Witnessed by 20 thousand viewers, among them Queen Elizabeth II herself, two students dressed in uniforms from the era reached the beach in Botany Bay in a motorboat and “claimed” Australia in the name of King George and University of Sydney. Meanwhile, the “real” captain Cook was still slowly paddling towards the shore. According to the press, the audience appreciated the stunt and cheered for the two jokesters. Two years of planning and the audience was more interested in the police chasing after the students rather than the spectacle itself¹¹. If the whole project was successfully ruined by two students, then what to expect from determined and organized indigenous people and white activists supporting them, especially as the re-

the past being “us, only wearing funny clothes”, as Australian historian and anthropologist Greg Dening said. The illusion of being faithful to details causes the past in its totality and variety to disappear and it becomes an especially easy target for ideological manipulation. See: Greg Dening, “Endeavour and Hōkūle'a: A Theatre of Re-Enactment Histories”, *Humanities Research* (1997), p. 34.

¹¹ For more on this see James Curran, Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire*, (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing) (2010), p. 206. The press materials describing the audience reaction: “Capt. Cook Loses Out To A Speedboat”, *St. Petersburg Times*, April 30 (1970), p. 2; and “Cook in a speedboat intrudes on the scene”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 30 (1970), p. 4. From the interview with two students by *The Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, it seems that the stunt was only a student joke with no political motivations.

enactment of Captain Cook's landing on April 29, 1970 was met with controversy? Particular outrage was caused by a scene of armed confrontation between the Aborigines and the British that was allegedly caused by the natives.

The indigenous people of Australia were becoming more vocal in insisting on memorizing the victims of Australian colonization as part of the official event. This fight was expressed in a performance by an artist group from the northern territory called Aboriginal Memorial (1987-1988). Two hundred trunks, hollowed out by termites and traditionally used by tribes living in the north of Australia as coffins, were decorated in traditional markings to commemorate the victims of colonization who could not have typical funeral services¹².

King's project was also controversial for another reason. An excessive emphasis on the role of the First Fleet in the history of Australia would naturally distinguish above all the citizens who are descendants of the British immigrants. By refusing to support King financially, the committee avoided accusations of not only Eurocentrism, but also Anglocentrism, which suggests significant changes in the construction process of the national identity of Australians.

The committee finally decided that instead of another re-enactment, it would arrange a parade of sail ships that would conclude the regatta (*Dar Młodzieżowy*, a Polish sail training ship, took part in that regatta). The revival and accentuation of the romantic image of sea adventure made the complicated and sometimes traumatic past of Australia safe, almost harmless. In the organizer's vision, the Aborigines also played a part. The direct connection between the events of January 26, 1788 and the present was weakened and 200 years suddenly became 40 thousand years. The First Fleet sailors became the next people, after the Aborigines, who bravely challenged the seas and oceans to come to Australia. The story created by the elites became a narration of triumph of human spirit and will over the dangerous and hostile forces of

¹² By doing this, the Aborigine artists referred to the European traditions of commemorating fallen soldiers. One of the many memorial places like this is the ANZAC War Memorial in Sydney, built in 1934 for soldiers who died in the Battle of Gallipoli, which would later become an identity-building myth for the Australians (more on this: M. Haltof, *Kino australijskie: O ekranowej konstrukcji Antypodów*, (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria) (2005). By using the traditions and rituals of white men, the indigenous people made their own perspective clearer and more convincing. The creation of the Aboriginal Memorial coincides with the creation of a new perspective on the monument. This project could be included as part of "counter-monuments" described by James E. Young. See: James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today", *Critical Inquiry* 18:3 (2001), pp. 267-296.

nature. Making the past unclear and undefined clearly contrasted with the spirit of King's project, which aimed to make the re-enactment as faithful to real events as possible¹³.

Another example of a significant shift in the media strategy of constructing the national identity is an exceptionally long dispute concerning the main slogan of the celebrations that was supposed to present the nation to the whole world, guarantee the citizens a festival, and persuade the tourist masses to come to Australia. For a long time it seemed that "Living Together" would win over "The Australian Achievement". However, the more conservative politicians, who criticized the decision made by the organizers as marginalising the role of the British in the creation of Australia, forced the creation of another slogan: "Celebration of a Nation". The central point of view in the end shifted from the English identity to a multi-cultural one¹⁴ and during the official event the role of diversity and a new trans-national identity were emphasised. In the TV advertisement for the celebrations we see people of different colours, the celebrities of those days (sportsmen, artists, TV personalities), with different backgrounds, colourfully clothed, dancing while holding hands in front of Uluru (Ayers Rock) and singing "Give us a hand, let's make it friend!"¹⁵. A similar meaning can be found in the official promo film. At the beginning, we only see shots depicting nature. The unwelcoming and majestic Australian landscape is suddenly filled with smiling, cheerful people. Among the descendants of the European colonists, we can easily distinguish the faces of Aborigines and Asian people. All of them combined now make up the Australian nation. Next, there are scenes showing the energy and creativity that are, as the montage suggests, the result of the aforementioned diversity¹⁶. A similar spirit was present in the speech made by the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke in front of the Sydney Opera House, during which symptomatic words were spoken: *In Today's Australia, our very diversity is an ever-growing source of the richness, vitality, and strength of our community*¹⁷.

¹³ To learn more about the role of history in the celebrations of the Australian bicentenary, see the monographic edition of *Australian Historical Studies* 23:91 (1988).

¹⁴ For more concerning the disputes around the celebrations of bicentennial, see Stuart Macintyre, Anna Clark, (chapter: *Bicentenary Battles*).

¹⁵ Celebration of a Nation (1988, ad agency "Mojo/MDA"), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDxjLoTuAIA>, date accessed: August 26, 2016.

¹⁶ Celebration of a Nation (1988, Australian Bicentennial Committee), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdDHgJLW348>, date accessed: August 26, 2016.

¹⁷ Norman Abjorensen, "Day of contradictions", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, January 27 (1988), p. 60.

Media jiu-jitsu

Due to massive protests and voices insisting on including the Aborigine perspective as a part of the celebrations, the authorities at the national Australian television ABC boldly decided to create the Aboriginal Production Unit, an editorial team that would focus on and create programs concerning the Aborigines with the help of specialists. *BabaKineria* is the first material shown on TV that was produced by the APU.

In one scene, Duranga asks the Smiths if they would like to say something to the millions of viewers. The members of the APU found themselves in a similar position. Essentially, for the first time in history, they could speak to the millions of viewers with the help of Australian television in a way and terms they would find appropriate. In this sense, the mockumentary is an ironic meta-commentary for the situation in which the filmmakers found themselves. In one scene, Duranga makes a plea to the television authorities to consider hiring white actors or creating films telling the stories of white people.

The members of the APU, instead of trying to build a positive image in the eyes of white viewers, decided to take a very bold and risky move. Consequently, *BabaKineria* is not just another cultural auto presentation which aims, as per usual, to highlight the traditions and rituals of the indigenous people. Featherstone does not focus on helping white people understand and appreciate the “primitive” art or strange and exotic rituals that remained unchanged in a few enclaves in the deserts of the northern territory. The makers of *BabaKineria* also discarded the rhetoric of ecology and the tempting possibility of presenting the indigenous people as living peacefully with nature. Therefore, we do not see the Aborigines whose life style would function as an alternative to the soulless civilization of the white man and the progress, consumerism and alienation that comes with it. Instead of referring to the aesthetics of nobility and reviving the essentialist and romantic concept of tribalism, which would be easy to understand for a white audience, the first members of the APU created a film that effectively destabilizes the white gaze. As a result, they escaped the contexts of representing the cultural difference in media and built an incredibly subversive counter-history that effectively criticized the official discourse¹⁸.

¹⁸To read about the concept of contre-histoire by Michel Foucault and the subsequent concept of counter-history as a form of showing what is hidden and traumatic see: Ewa Domańska, *Historie niekonwencjonalne*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie) (2006); chapter 3 of *Monumentalna przeciw-Historia. Muzeum Żydowskie Daniela Libeskinda*; and chapter 4 of

The makers of *BabaKiueria* parodied the conservative love for historical re-enactments in the opening sequence of the film. Similarly to the creators of *Aboriginal Memorial*, they intercepted the cultural forms and rituals of white people to use against them in a way. As a result, they managed to critically analyse not only the incompetent attempts at understanding the *Other*, but also the paternalistic attempt at building positive image and the policy of social help and equal chances. All of this makes *BabaKiueria* an example of a practice called “media jiu-jitsu” by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam as it is a guerrilla-like and subversive creation that uses the practices and language of the authorities in order to show their true nature¹⁹.

Historical re-enactments of events such as the landing of Captain Cook or the landing of the First Fleet in Botany Bay can be classified as phenomena which cultural anthropology calls the spectacle of power: detailed research concerning them was started by Clifford Geertz in his study on the Balinese court operas²⁰. The critics of *Negara* accurately noticed that in the world presented by the American anthropologist there is no place for resistance, subversion or any attempts at resisting the ideology enforced by the spectacles. Perhaps we should also ask about the counter-spectacles.

It should be noted that *BabaKiueria* is not the only project that aims to criticize the spectacles of power. Similar events included the Aborigine activists organizing their own celebrations, during which a modified version of governor Phillip’s landing was presented. The central moment of this re-enactment was the throwing of the actors playing the British invaders back into the sea²¹. At the same time, Burnum Burnum, a member of “the stolen generation” and famous Aborigine activist, whose actions often took the form of political performances, planted a flag on the cliffs of Dover and made a famous declaration: *I, Burnum Burnum, being a nobleman of ancient Australia do hereby take possession of England on behalf of the Aboriginal people*. Burnum Burnum also pledged that the Aborigine colonists would recognize the right of English people to

Pamięć/przeciw-historia jako ideologia. Pozytywne Zbigniewa Libery. The concept of counter-history is also discussed in the monographic edition of *Representations* 26 (1989): *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory*.

¹⁹ Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, (London – New York: Routledge) (1997), p. 328.

²⁰ Clifford Geertz, *Negara: państwo-teatr na Bali w XIX wieku*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego) (2006) and *Wiedza lokalna: dalsze eseje z zakresu antropologii interpretatywnej*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego) (2005) (chapter 6: *Centra, królowie i charyzma. Refleksje o symbolice władzy*).

²¹ For more on this see: Mark McKenna, p. 160. The event report also In *The Sydney Morning Herald* (N. Abjorensen, p. 60). As the journalist observed, if the government can re-enact history, so can the Aborigines.

own private property²² (as opposed to white people, who did not respect the traditional law of the native Australians). He did stipulate that Aborigine sages would be on British coins, Pitjantjajara language would be studied in schools, and children would learn the art of hunting. Simultaneously, he assured his good will and calmed the British people by saying that he did not plan to poison the wells, add strychnine to flour, kidnap children, or take rare minerals back to Australia.

Today, *BabaKiueria* is an invaluable testimony to the dynamic changes taking place at the time in the national identity of Australians. In the first half of the 1980s, a group of Meriam people started High Court proceedings against the Commonwealth of Australia. The legal decision in the famous Eddie Mabo case overturned the colonial doctrine of *terra nullius*. Another symbolical event took place in 1985, when Uluru—an iconic Australian tourist attraction—was officially recognized as a sacred indigenous site and returned to its traditional owners. Featherstone’s film is also part of the gradual process of the creation of trans-national media²³. In the 1980s, Aborigine residents in distant regions of the continent,—the so-called remote communities—were creating their own local television with the help and support of activists and politically engaged researchers like Eric Michaels. The alternative media were a form of resistance against the cultural hegemony related to the dynamic development of satellite television; however, those two media ecosystems existed independently of each other. Only the access to the entertainment industry, and thus mainly to production and airtime on national television, would give the indigenous people a chance to reach a much bigger audience, and by doing so build empathetic trans-national connections between the indigenous nations and the white majority. The makers of *BabaKiueria* used this perfect opportunity to make a brave attempt to undermine the hegemonic status of the dominating mono-culture; an attempt which aimed to make the national identity of Australians celebrating the bicentennial anniversary of “discovering” their own continent more problematic and open.

²² Annie E. E. Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press) (2006), p. 223.

²³ See Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, *Introduction in: Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media*, ed. Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, (New Brunswick – New Jersey – London: Rutgers University Press) (2003).

References

- Agnew Vanessa, 'Introduction: What is Reenactment?', *Criticism* 46:3 (2004).
- Coombes Annie E. E., *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press) (2006).
- Curran James, Ward Stuart, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire*, (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing) (2010).
- Dening Greg, "Endeavour and Hōkūle'a: A Theatre of Re-Enactment Histories", *Humanities Research* 1:1 (1997).
- Domańska Ewa, *Historie niekonwencjonalne*, (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie) (2006).
- Douglas Mary, *Ukryte znaczenia*, (Kęty: Wydawnictwo Marek Derewiecki) (2007).
- Geertz Clifford, *Negara: państwo-teatr na Bali w XIX wieku*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego).
- Geertz Clifford, *Wiedza lokalna: dalsze eseje z zakresu antropologii interpretatywnej*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego) (2005).
- Haltof Marek, *Kino australijskie: O ekranowej konstrukcji Antypodów*, (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz/terytoria) (2005).
- Macintyre Stuart, Clark Anna, *The History Wars*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Press) (2004).
- Memmi Albert, *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, (Boston: Beacon Press) (1970).
- Nugent Maria, *Captain Cook Was Here*, (Cambridge – New York – Melbourne: Cambridge University Press) (2009).
- Shohat Ella, Stam Robert, *Unthinking Eurocentrism. Multiculturalism and the Media*, (London – New²⁴ York: Routledge) (1997).
- Young James E., "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today", *Critical Inquiry* 18:3 (2001).