

# Glossary

**ABC TV – The Australian Broadcasting Corporation** is the national broadcaster. The Indigenous Programs Unit, formerly the Aboriginal Programs Unit, of the television division was established in 1989, following recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

**Aboriginal Arts Board (AAB)** Now the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board of the Australia Council for the Arts, the federal funding body for arts and culture, the AAB was established in 1973 by the Whitlam Labor Government.

**Aboriginal and Islander Dance Theatre (AIDT)** was established as an ongoing performance group in 1976. It originally consisted of young people participating in *Careers in Dance*, a full-time dance training course for Aboriginal and Islander students initiated in 1975 by the Aboriginal Arts Board and led by Carole Johnson. The company, which eventually became NAISDA (National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association) College, expanded to include teachers, graduate students and advanced students. AIDT became a professional performance group in 1988 and was formally launched as a company in 1991 under the artistic directorship of Raymond Blanco. Prior to that date it operated without a formal structure.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people/Indigenous people** An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is someone who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous and is accepted as such by their specific Indigenous community or the one in which they live. Indigenous people in Australia live in remotely located communities – ‘remote’ from metropolitan areas, not in relation to their traditional country – rural regions and urban settings in all parts of the country. The effects of colonisation and displacement over two centuries severely impacted upon thousands of Indigenous people, who were driven from their traditional lands and often had access to their languages and cultural practices denied or fractured. However, over the past three or so decades there has been a resurgence of cultural pride and activity throughout the country, particularly among Indigenous people living in towns and cities. Comprising less than 2 per cent of the overall population of Australia, they face many obstacles in gaining equal rights with non-Indigenous Australians.

**Aboriginal flag** was designed by a Luritja–Wombai artist, Harold Thomas, in 1971. It was first raised by Thomas at Victoria Square, Adelaide, on National Aborigines Day, 12 July 1971. It was flown at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra the following year. Of the three colours in the flag, black symbolises Aboriginal people, yellow represents the sun, the constant renewer of life, and red depicts the earth and also ochre, which is used by Aboriginal people in ceremonies.

**Aboriginal National Theatre Trust (ANTT)** was established in Sydney in 1988 as a direct result of the First National Black Playwrights’ Conference, held in January 1987 at the Australian National University in Canberra.

**Aboriginal reserves** in New South Wales came into being after the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Board in 1883. Reserves were established in many areas of New South Wales as land grants, proclaimed during the reign of Her Majesty Queen Victoria (1838–1901). Although the last missions in New South Wales were closed in 1850, many reserves were often referred to as ‘missions’ by the Aboriginal residents. Elsewhere in Australia, missions such as Yirrkala in north-east Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, continued well into the twentieth century.

**Aboriginal Tent Embassy** On the morning of 26 January 1972, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy appeared on the lawns of the Provisional Parliament House, Canberra, manned by a number of prominent Indigenous activists and drawing black and white supporters from everywhere. Both the embassy and the newly created Aboriginal flag, flying from the tent pole, represented the unity of purpose of Indigenous people across Australia. The embassy effectively demonstrated that Indigenous people are members of a nation separate to white Australia and that they intended to see this reflected in the political process.

**Agitprop** is a slang word applied to any form of mass media, such as a television program or film, that tries to influence opinion for political, commercial or other ends, especially if it aims to convince people, through the use of highly emotional language, of problems in present-day society or politics (which may or may not exist if analysed in an unbiased manner). Agitprop sometimes, although not always, uses indirect methods to reach its goals, such as conveying a political message via a television drama that’s marketed as a form of entertainment rather than political education.

**Ancestral beings** are spiritual or mythical beings whose existence preceded human life on earth and who, through their epic journeys, created the landscape as it is today. They may be human or animal, animate or inanimate, and in many cases transform from one thing or state to another. They are a continuing influence on the world through processes such as spirit conception, and provide the underlying source of spiritual power.

**Ancestral past** refers to the time when ancestral beings occupied the earth, or the dimension in which ancestral beings still exist.

**Assimilation** was a policy pursued by Australian governments towards Aboriginal people which forced them to adopt Euro-Australian lifestyles and eventually to become assimilated within the Australian population as a whole. The policy often involved the repression of

(opposite) Screen grabs from *Kangaroo dancer* 1994 Blackfella Films

Indigenous cultural practices, and in many parts of Australia was associated with the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. In the 1970s assimilation was replaced by policies that provided Indigenous people with far greater autonomy, resulting in increased recognition of their rights and the value of their cultural practices.

**Bark painting** refers to the practice of producing paintings on sheets of eucalyptus stringy bark that have been flattened over an open fire. Today, the tradition is most closely associated with Arnhem Land in northern Australia, but evidence suggests it may have been more widespread at the time of European colonisation, in regions where bark was used to make huts and shelters.

**Black deaths in custody** The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was established in 1987. The Commission examined all deaths in custody in each State and Territory which occurred between 1 January 1980 and 31 May 1989, and the actions taken in respect of each death.

**Blak** is a term coined by Indigenous artist and activist Destiny Deacon in the early 1990s as a direct means of 'refiguring and redefining the English colonisers' language', ie subverting black to blak.

**Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative** was established in Sydney in 1987 by 10 Aboriginal artists. The founding members were Bronwyn Bancroft, Euphemia Bostock, Brenda L. Croft, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Tracey Moffatt, Avril Quail, Michael Riley and Jeffrey Samuels. Boomalli, meaning 'to strike, to make a mark', is a language word from at least three nations – Bundjalung, Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri. Exhibitions held by the members of the organisation have left their artistic, cultural and political marks on the city of Sydney and all those who have experienced them.

**Clan** A group of people connected by descent who hold certain rights in common. In many parts of Australia, rights in land and paintings are vested in clans, often (but not always) formed on the basis of descent through the father (patrilineal clans). However, such clans are by no means a universal feature of Australia.

**Corroboree** A word used across much of Australia to refer to Aboriginal ceremonies. It originally came from the language of the Dharuk people from the Sydney region of New South Wales. Corroboree is also noted as being from the French word *caribiberie*, meaning dance.

**Dreamtime/Dreaming** are terms first used by W.B. Spencer and F. Gillen to refer to the time of world creation or the ancestral past. It is a fairly literal translation of the Arrernte word *altyerrenge*, which corresponds with similar terms in many other central-Australian languages. The term has been overused in popular literature and has almost become a cliché, but nonetheless refers to an important component of Aboriginal cosmologies.

**Freedom Ride** In 1965 a group of university students, led by Arrernte activist Charles Perkins, conducted a highly publicised 'Freedom Ride' through northern New South Wales to expose the apartheid prevalent in the region.

**Indigenous** There are two distinct Indigenous groups within Australian territory: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. Aboriginal people are not a homogeneous mass but comprise hundreds of distinct nations throughout the continent, each with their own

languages and dialects, just as many different nationalities constitute Europe.

**Kinship** refers to connections between family members. Among Aboriginal groups this term covers relationships both within and between generations, and through both mothers' and fathers' lines of descent across many generations. People also have kinship with certain animals and plants through common descent from or relationship to a particular ancestral being/creation ancestor.

**Koori** is the generic term that Aboriginal people from the south-eastern region of Australia use in reference to themselves. Indigenous people in some northern areas of New South Wales refer to themselves as Goori or Murri.

**Land rights** Since the 1960s, the matter of land rights has been one of the major political issues for Indigenous people in Australia. Until the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people were not even considered full citizens in their own country and had no rights to their land. Since the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, Indigenous people in many parts of northern and central Australia have gained title to their land. However, in many other parts of Australia, Aboriginal rights in land remain minimal. Since the Mabo judgement of the High Court in 1992, however, the possibility of extending land rights through native title claims has existed, though to date it remains largely untested. Indigenous people throughout southern regions of Australia, in the east and the west, are currently seeking native title to their traditional lands.

**Moiety** literally means a division in two halves. In Australia, it refers to a division of society into two intermarrying halves, with a corresponding division of the whole universe along the same lines.

**Murri** is the generic term that Aboriginal people from the northern part of New South Wales, and throughout Queensland, use in reference to themselves.

**NAIDOC Week** – formerly NADOC Week – was founded in 1957 to focus Australians' attention on the Aboriginal communities in their midst. The abbreviation stands for 'National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee'. Since 1940, the National Missionary Council of Australia (NMCA) had been encouraging churches to observe the Sunday before the Australia Day weekend as Aboriginal Sunday. The NMCA had taken up a suggestion by William Cooper, who, following his successful promotion of a 'day of mourning' on Australia Day 1938, had written to that body seeking help in establishing a permanent Aborigines Day. In 1955 the NMCA changed the date to the first Sunday in July and secured the support of federal and state governments, as a result of which NADOC was formed. The establishment of the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs boosted the activities of NADOC, which in 1974 became an all-Aboriginal body. In 1975 NADOC extended Aboriginal Day into National Aborigines Week, during which the Aboriginal people's cultural heritage and contribution to Australian society are celebrated. Various activities are arranged for each day of the week wherever it is celebrated. Since 1976 the committee has run as a federal body and in 1989 the word 'Islander' was added to the title.

**National Black Playwrights' Conference** The First National Black Playwrights' Conference was held in Canberra in January 1987, at the Australian National University. It was organised by Brian Syron (1935–1993), an Aboriginal actor and director with international experience. Syron was also instrumental in establishing the Australian National Playwrights Conference in 1973. The second National Black Playwrights' Conference was held in Sydney in 1989.

**National Sorry Day** was established on 27 May 1998, one year after the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families was published. It is held in recognition of the Stolen Generations, and was established in response to the National Sorry Books. These books travelled the country and were signed by thousands of non-Indigenous people as a sign of profound regret for injustices to Indigenous people in Australia over the past two centuries.

**Native title** On 3 June 1992 the High Court of Australia passed a judgement in recognition of traditional laws and customs of Indigenous Australians in relation to land or waters, through the historic Mabo case. The High Court called this type of ownership 'native title', which means a title owned by Indigenous people. The Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993* recognises and protects the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' common law native title rights and interests. Land rights are grants created by governments. Native title is a right that has always been there from the beginning of time.

**New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)** was established in Sydney in 1977. The AECG is a community-based organisation designed to promote discussion amongst the diverse Aboriginal communities involved in developing Aboriginal education policy in New South Wales. The AECG focuses on empowerment and self-determination with equity, cultural integrity and the community base fundamental to their beliefs and practices. The organisation advises the New South Wales Minister for Education and Youth Affairs as well as other key government departments and the New South Wales Teachers Federation.

**New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout** was established in 1973 by the country's oldest Aboriginal rugby league football club, the Redfern All Blacks, officially founded in 1944 in inner-city Sydney. The Knockout is played in the previous year's winning team's city or town and has become a contemporary form of corroboree, drawing thousands of Aboriginal people together over the October long weekend to celebrate and encourage their teams' performances and catch up with family and friends.

**Rapport Photo Agency** was established in 1980 by Caleb Carter, Bruce Hart, Robert McFarlane, Philip Quirk and Rob Walls.

**Redfern** sitting on the fringes of the City of Sydney, is the oldest surviving urban Aboriginal community in Australia. Within this small inner-city suburb, there are a number of Aboriginal organisations that complement and supplement the work of organisations in the heart of the city. These organisations include the first Aboriginal Medical, Legal, Housing, and Child Care Services, as well as the home of the Black Theatre Company and the Eora Centre.

**SBS Television – Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)** is Australia's multicultural and multilingual public broadcaster. SBS is unique. Its radio and television services broadcast in more languages than any other network in the world. Sixty-eight languages are spoken on SBS Radio. Programs in more than 60 languages are broadcast on SBS Television, and Online, and SBS New Media provides text and audio-on-demand services in more than 50 languages.

**Stolen Generations** Indigenous children have been forcibly removed from their families and communities since the very first days of the European occupation of Australia. In that time, very few Indigenous families have escaped the effects of removal of one or more children. The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families concluded that between one in three and one in 10 Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970. These children are referred to as the 'Stolen Generations'.

**Terra nullius** describes the British legal fiction that Australia was an unoccupied land at the time of its invasion by the British and therefore became a settled, as opposed to a conquered, land. Hence Indigenous people were deemed to have no existence in law. In 1770, Cook declared Australia *terra nullius* – 'empty land' – invalidating the 250 or so distinct nations that had inhabited the continent for thousands of generations. *Terra nullius* was overturned in 1992 by the High Court of Australia, following a 10-year action by Koiki (Eddie) Mabo and four other Torres Strait Islanders, inhabitants of the Murray Islands, for a declaration of native title to their traditional lands.

**Tracker/tracking** Aboriginal police and police trackers played important roles during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first experiments with 'native police' forces commenced in Victoria in 1837, with subsequent forces set up in 1839 and 1842. Members of the native police forces were all male. Many Aboriginal men and some women worked as police trackers. Their bush expertise was used to assist in police hunts on a casual basis, while others worked for longer stints, with duties such as doing the rounds, grooming horses, and offering general assistance. Often they were only paid a few shillings a week, with rations supplied to their families. Aboriginal trackers were immortalised in Aboriginal oral histories and in fictional works such as Ion Idriess' *Mantracks* (1935). Henry Reynolds' *With the white people* (1990) depicts the important role of the trackers in Australian history.

**Tribe** has not proved a useful term in Australia. 'Language group' and 'clan', or simply 'social group', are the preferred concepts.

**Urban Aboriginal art** is a term which first came to prominence in the 1980s in response to the new generation of urban-based Indigenous artists, working predominantly in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne and Perth. The term is somewhat problematic, suggesting a juxtaposition between urban and traditional Indigenous art, which was never the intention of the original artists involved in the movement. 'Contemporary Indigenous art' is a more inclusive term and refers to all Indigenous art being created today, irrespective of media or style.

## Notes

This glossary draws on a number of sources, all of which are listed below. Some entries are direct quotations; in other cases the texts have been used as sources of information.

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Us Mob drummer and singer, Rock against Racism gig, Melbourne c.1984  
black-and-white photograph Cathy Craigie