Is green the new black? The representation of Indigenous Australians in the news media covering environmental affairs

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Abstract

As environmental, Indigenous, government and commercial interests at once clash in the mainstream Australian media, new discourses in the media representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples develop. This research asks the questions: How are Indigenous people represented in environmental news in the mainstream media? Who are the Indigenous sources of environmental news? And why are Indigenous people being reported as they are in environmental news?

The research reviews academic inquiry into Indigenous media representation in Australia and develops an understanding of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the environment. It then draws on the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism, racism and agenda-setting theory to guide a critical discourse analysis of eighteen print articles reporting on environmental issues that relate to Indigenous peoples. The articles, drawn from *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC Online* between October 2010 and August 2012, cover the Kimberley gas hub, Wild Rivers Act and turtle and dugong hunting debates. Interviews with environmental journalists, academics specialising in Indigenous representations, and Aboriginal Elders provide further depth to the analysis.

The findings demonstrate the mainstream environmental news media's complicity in Indigenous identity construction. Indigenous people were represented in environmental news as respondents to conflict, without self-determined governance, and without an acknowledgement of individuality and diversity. Indigenous voices were largely absent from the articles analysed, and when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were quoted, they were often misrepresented by homogenising perspectives and romanticising Indigenous sources.

The significance of the research is not only in guiding journalists in better reportage, but in shining a spotlight on broader influences of identity construction in Australian society.

Contents

Keywords

Indigenous Australians; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; media representation; conservation; environmental news media; post-colonialism; identity.

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1. Introduction

Australia has some of the last few pockets of pristine wilderness left in the world. Sparsely populated, it is a continent with diversity in landscape and wildlife. Cool old-growth rainforests in the south; harsh red desert in the centre; unspoilt tropical rivers in the north.

But the diversity runs deeper. The country's colonial history is young – less than 230 years – but Australia is home to the world's longest surviving cultures, those of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The divergence of these three fundamental characteristics of Australia – the environment, colonialism, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures – is of fundamental significance to the future of the country. It is this intersection, studied through the heuristic lens of the media, that this research aims to investigate.

The lens of environmental media colours media representations of Indigenous people in a different light to general news media. Indigenous Australia provides popular content for the mainstream media. Flicking through an issue of the nation's major broadsheet newspapers, *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, more often than not an image of an Indigenous person will appear – frequently in a regional or remote setting and bearing a grim expression – evoking "familiarly ambivalent feelings of disgust and fascination in audiences" (Nicoll, 2008: p1). But increasingly, as environmental issues move up the political and popular agenda, Indigenous Australia is being represented in a new way. This study aims to investigate these particular representations.

In Australia, it is widely acknowledged that there is a unique relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the land and water. According to the Federal Government's *State of the Environment Report* (2011), Indigenous Australians have become more formally involved in the management of their land and sea country. A challenging result is increasing media attention for Indigenous people and affairs within environmental media. Contemporary national news items draw the two realms together, for example through native title, wildlife conservation, national park management and mining activity. There are a

number of reasons why examining the representation of Indigenous people in environmental news media is significant.

Firstly, media coverage raises questions about core values and processes of society, and the way Indigenous issues are covered sheds light on the system as a whole (Hartley et al, 2000; Croteau et al, 2012; Turner, 1993). Media reporting of Indigenous issues in Australia has been the subject of intense public debate and the source of substantial academic inquiry (McCallum, 2007). Scholars of Indigenous media representation have found that media comment about Indigenous issues is almost universally despairing and negative (McCallum, 2007; Meadows, 2001; Mickler, 1998). The effect of these representations on broader society provides a significant motivation for conducting this research, in particular because Indigenous issues that are shown to be less consistently negative (Bayet, 2005).

Secondly, there appears to be a gap in academic inquiry about the relationship between Indigenous affairs and environmental issues in the media. This is evidenced by the comprehensive examination of recent studies about the media representation of Indigenous people and studies examining the relationship between the environment and Indigenous Australians (Bayet, 2005; Hartley et al, 2000; Meadows, 2001; Roberts, 1990). Specific research into Indigenous representation in the media tends to focus on health, violence, remote communities, celebrities and sport. This research, therefore, will provide a more developed and unique understanding of the relationship between the media representation of Indigenous people, and the reflection of this relationship on broader society.

This study evaluates the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues within mainstream print media reporting environmental news. Using critical discourse analysis of articles from *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC Online* covering three environmental events of national significant, this research aims to find patterns in reportage that offer a broader understanding of reporting practice, and analyse the social implications of the construction of Indigenous identity in Australia.

In seeking to expose and investigate these patterns, in Chapters 2 and 3, the research first analyses academic inquiry and theoretical frameworks related to the representation of Indigenous people in environmental news. This provides a foundation for a critical discourse analysis of mainstream print environmental news articles, and interviews with academics, Aboriginal Elders and journalists. This methodology is justified in Chapter 4 and then

applied, with research findings and discussion establishing ten discourses which focus a spotlight on the construction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity in Australian environmental news media. These are examined in Chapter 5.

The research follows the arguments by Cottle (2000) that news can provide crucial aspects through which imposed identities or the interests of others can be resisted, challenged and changed. It asks the questions: How are Indigenous people represented in environmental news in the mainstream media? Who are the Indigenous sources of environmental news? And why are Indigenous people being reported as they are in environmental news?

1.1. What's in a name?

There is a crucial point of semantics that must first be established when examining the discourses of media representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues in environmental media: terminology. The correct term to use when referring to the original inhabitants of Australia has been a fraught question: indigenous? Aboriginals? Aborigine? The Australian Government's *Style Manual* has changed its recommendation with every edition since 1978, reflecting the sensitivity of the issue and the lack of consensus on answers to these questions (Peters, 2007).

Following European colonisation, Aboriginal people were frequently forbidden from speaking traditional languages, and Aboriginal languages suffered enormous erosion as a result. English was used to describe and communicate with Aboriginal people and led to the use of inappropriate and often discriminatory language (NSW Department of Health, 2004). This is a source of the original sensitivity.

Although there are a number of perspectives and recommendations for the most appropriate terminology to use, there are some generally agreed upon principles (for example in Jamieson, 2012; Peters, 2007; Pascoe, 2008; NSW Department of Health, 2004; University of Queensland *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit Style Guide*, 2012). It is widely accepted that the word "Aboriginal" should be capitalised and be used only as an adjective and not as a noun. Also, when discussing a group of individuals, it is acceptable to use "people", for example, "Aboriginal people". However, because there are hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander socio-political and cultural entities, when referring to the group as a whole, it is appropriate to say, for example, "Aboriginal peoples".

The literature also establishes that there is some consensus among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that, in order to reject the coloniser's terminology, it is preferred to find a more specific term where possible, according to the person's traditional homeland. The *Little Yellow, Red and Black Book* (Pascoe, 2008) outlines that people from New South Wales and Victoria might prefer to be referred to as Kooris, Queenslanders as Murris or Bama, Tasmanians as Palawa, South Australians as Nunga and south-west Australians as Nyoongars. Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may prefer to be identified by a language label; for example, a Kabi Kabi man. Torres Strait Islanders generally do not mind being identified in that way (singular or plural) and may also prefer to use the name of their islands to identify themselves to outsiders; for example, a Meriam man. Socio-political groupings are also common in the native title area — by definition these groups are bound by their laws and customs. This can be reflected in the use of the word "nation" or "people", for example, the Bundjalung nation.

The literature seems to be divided about the term "Indigenous". The 2006 Australian Government *Style Manual* (p56) says of "Indigenous":

> Indigenous is a… useful, short generic reference covering all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is a subset of the broader term "Australian", and is widely acceptable for this purpose.

While the *Little Yellow, Red and Black Book* (Pascoe, 2008) confirms the term "Indigenous people" (capitalised when referring to Australians rather than indigenous people internationally) is acceptable, it relegates it to government officials and other people who want a word to encompass both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This language is also used in the United Nations with reference to indigenous peoples from all around the world. The term "non-Indigenous" was noted by some to be discouraged as unnecessarily divisive (Peters, 2006).

The University of Queensland *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit Style Guide* pointed out that it was important that material does not emphasise what may be termed the "exotic" aspects of Aboriginal life without any attempt to show how these form part of the social, physical and spiritual environment of Aboriginal groups, arguing that this leads to the perpetuation of an "exotic" stereotype of Indigenous people.

Overwhelmingly, the literature points to the importance of intent, context and personal opinion in choice of terminology (Jamieson, 2012). In that vein, this research aims to adopt respectful and accurate language, describing Aboriginality by country- or language- specific name where possible, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or Indigenous where otherwise appropriate.

This definitional challenge points to the power of published language in the representation of Indigenous people and issues. Subsequently, intent and context of language in the media has been widely criticised. These and more critiques will be further developed in the next section which aims to evaluate literature examining the representation of Indigenous people in the media.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Flora and Fauna: confronting media discourses

In 1991, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission published a Report on their *Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia* finding that racism was endemic in Australian media outlets and society more broadly. Similarly, academic literature overwhelmingly demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and issues continue to be fraught with stereotypes and misrepresentation in the mainstream media (for example, Due et al, 2011; Gardiner, 2003; Hartley et al, 2000, Meadows, 2001).

In Australia, journalism has played a central role in framing public discourse about issues of diversity and has, at times, been a key driver in the development of government policy (McCallum, 2011; Bullimore, 1999). Subsequently, journalism and media studies academics have analysed and critiqued the role that the media has played in constructing and representing news about Indigenous affairs. Academic research investigating the reporting of Indigenous affairs in Australia has a short history, reflecting both the late entry of journalism studies to the academy and the relatively slow development of media coverage of issues around cultural diversity in the country (McCallum, 2011) however central themes have been consistently constructed using strong methodology, in particular content and critical discourse analyses.

Major themes developed in the literature reveal the prevalence of stereotyping and negative subject matter when reporting Indigenous affairs, and the absence of legitimate participation by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in the construction of media discourse.

From the time of the first European contact in Australia, Indigenous people have been framed by contemporary media in terms of non-Indigenous ideologies – as the exotic Other, the noble savage, the ignoble savage, a dying race, welfare-dependent, the drunk, the activist, the threat to existing order, or the invisible (Meadows, 2001; Bayet, 2005). Colonial literature perpetrated insidious racial stereotypes and racist treatment (Meinig, 2004; Meadows, 2001). This is discussed further in the Theoretical Framework section on page 17.

Leading scholar in the field of media representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Michael Meadows, asserts that journalism practices remain complicit in creating and sustaining particular images of Indigenous people in Australia and beyond (1997; 2001;

2002). Academic inquiry into representations of Indigenous affairs in the media reveals frequent stereotyping and overwhelming reportage of negative themes. An important qualitative media analysis (Jakubowicz et al, 1994) found that during the 1980s, journalists overwhelmingly portrayed Indigenous people as a threat to the existing order, almost always reporting on Aboriginal people as a source of conflict and perpetuating the concept of "Aboriginal privilege" (where Indigenous people were portrayed as having unfair advantages). This is again exemplified by studies about reporting in the late 1990s, during the Howard Government's period in office, when there was a more general shift towards social conservatism and neo-liberal economic reform. ATSIC activism, native title and reconciliation were widely reported as "problems" and sparked "hysterical debates" amongst the general public (Nicoll, 2008: p3; Meadows, 2001: p1).

McCallum (2007: p21) further contends that there has been a contemporary shift in the coverage of Indigenous issues in the Australian media that has deteriorated to the point of a series of "moral panics", with Indigenous people framed as either victims or wrongdoers (Hartley et al, 2000). Indigenous identity and issues of social justice have become lost within a context of conflict and confusion, and the agenda continues to be largely dominated by the preferred news value of conflict (Meadows, 2001). Nicoll (2008: p6) found common themes in the media reporting of Indigenous affairs were failure of Indigenous governance, domestic violence and sexual abuse in Indigenous communities, and the linkage of labelled characteristics with past experiences of dispossession, child removal and unequal or stolen wages (which she termed, "Aboriginalising").

The literature has unanimously and consistently found that the representation of Indigenous people in the Australian mainstream media is characterised by negative themes, stereotypes and misrepresentation. Further to this, quantitative studies investigating the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander comment and perspective in the media have found that Indigenous people are underrepresented as sources for media coverage. Meadows (2001) argues that the silencing of Indigenous voices on a vast range of issues covered on a daily basis by mainstream and community media is a central theme within Indigenous media representation. His 1997 content analysis (Meadows, et al) found that of twenty eight news stories examined, only nine quoted Indigenous sources directly. Of fifteen television news stories about Indigenous issues analysed, only three included an Indigenous person speaking.

This is supported by a subsequent quantitative and qualitative study (Scott, 2006) of the print media's reporting on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) over four years. Scott found that although the majority of coverage questioned ATSIC's abilities, the media failed to include representation by the people directly affected by its operation, Indigenous people. Just eight per cent of the articles reporting about ATSIC's controversial Chairperson quoted an Indigenous person. Due and Riggs (2011: p147) found similar results in their analysis of the reporting about native title in the mainstream media in 2007 where Indigenous voices were only "rarely" included.

The literature also raises concerns about the Indigenous "leaders" chosen to represent Indigenous people (Meadows, 2001). Langton (1993) points to the media assumption that all Aboriginal people are alike and equally understand each other, without regard to cultural variation, history, gender, sexual preference, and so on.

The proposed solution almost universally supported by scholars in the field is the empowerment of Indigenous media. Langton (1993) argues that while Australian institutions may never be decolonised, there are ways to undermine the media hegemony. There is an obvious utility of Indigenous run and managed media outlets that have the capacity to actively challenge other more mainstream representations (Due et al, 2011) however despite a media history that extends back more than 160 years, there was no formal mainstream acknowledgement of the existence of an Indigenous media sector in Australia until 2000 (Meadows et al, 2002). Internationally, relatively few people from marginalised groups have access to the mainstream media, in terms of both accountability and ability to provide their own version of stories (van Dijk, 2001). As Deuze (2006) advocates, a participatory media culture encourages community-level communication, engaging new audiences and story-telling in a way that is formulated by audiences themselves. Currently, hundreds of heterogeneous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media outlets promote an alternative dialogue in Australian society (Meadows, 2001; Meadows et al, 2002).

Meadows (2001) contends that the media resort to stereotyping and misrepresentation to overcome their own clear lack of understanding of main points. In that sense, it is important as part of this research to better understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, in particular in relation to the environment. The next section aims to address this understanding. From this position, an assessment of stereotyping in the media can be better informed.

2.2. Language of the land: The unique relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures with the environment

Aboriginal cultural traditions are some of the longest surviving in the world, with paleoenvironmental studies dating the culture back at least 50 000 years (Roberts et al, 1990). According to traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spiritual beliefs, there are direct links between land, language and people (Rumsey, 1993). During an interview conducted in April 2012, Gunggari Elder Aunty Ethel Munn explained that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people traditionally hold a strong physical and spiritual bond with the Australian landscape through the Dreaming. For example, she said, Gunggari country is not called that because the people who lived there spoke Gunggari language, but because it is the region in which the Gunggari language was "planted" in the landscape by the Rainbow Serpent, establishing sites and leaving names for them in the Gunggari language. Gunggari People are Gunggari, she said, because they are also linked to those places through their filial relationships. According to the spiritual beliefs of Indigenous Australians, the descendants of the Dreaming ancestors have the responsibility of caring for sacred sites and preserving sacred objects by ceremonies that in turn ensure the well-being of the land (*Aboriginal Benchbook*, 2009). These responsibilities, together with the sacred sites and associated sacred objects, constitute, in Aboriginal terms, immutable title to the land (*Aboriginal Benchbook*, 2009).

Although almost 250 years of colonisation has brought radical changes in economic, social and governance structures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, many Indigenous people still live closely connected to their natural environment (Green et al, 2010). Over millennia living "on country", many of Indigenous communities have developed a sophisticated appreciation of their local ecosystems and the climatic patterns associated with the changes in them (Green et al, 2010).

The literature establishes strong links between new conservation management and Indigenous social justice processes and outcomes (for example, Barbour, 2012; May, 2010; Adams, 2008). Climate change and associated land degradation is a high priority component of the Government's environment agenda at the same time as the Indigenous estate—which includes some of the most biodiverse lands in Australia—continues to increase as a result of successful land and native title claims and the declaration of more Indigenous Protected Areas. There are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involving themselves as land

owners and managers, both in continuation of traditional custodian duties and in newly identified positions in land management (Langton, 1998). As a result, key issues include the continuing association between government land management decisions (including conservation) and colonial processes of Indigenous possession and dispossession (Adams, 2008).

An important argument outlined in the literature contends that romanticised views of Indigenous Australians and the ways they live in the environment are ethnocentric and simplistic (Head, 1990; Bayet, 2005). Literature examining historical assumptions which shape arguments about the role of Indigenous people and their traditional environmental knowledge in the management of their cultural and physical landscapes is only just emerging (Langton, 1998). The "ecologically noble savage", coined by Redford (1991), refers to the common stereotype based on the assumption that indigenous people from around the world live in perfect harmony with the environment. Redford argues that those who subscribe to this view cast indigenous people as true conservationists; custodians of the environment who live in "balance" and whose ecological wisdom and spiritual connections to the land can serve as an inspiration for those in industrial society who seek a new, more sustainable relationship with the environment.

The literature unanimously acknowledges that indigenous knowledge is tremendously important for many reasons (Redford, 1991; Langton, 1993; Rowland, 2004) however debate about the "ecologically noble savage" represents two different research threads. The first addresses the issue of conservation among native peoples and narrowly focuses on case studies of resource use of ethnographic, archaeological or historic sources. The second thread is broader and more humanistic and political in orientation, and considers the concept of ecological nobility in terms of identity, ecological knowledge, ideology, and the use of the idea of ecological nobility as a political tool by native peoples and conservation groups (Nadasdy, 2005). These debates serve to illuminate some of the ambiguities and complexities that characterise the relationship between indigenous peoples and environmentalism.

The literature argues that ecological nobility is flawed in a number of ways. It is argued that it denies the realities of indigenous peoples' lives, reducing the rich diversity of their beliefs, values, social relations, and practices to a one-dimensional caricature (Nadasdy, 2005). The image of ecological nobility is an unattainable ideal. According to Rowland (2005), particularly focussing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, when indigenous

peoples fail to live up to the unreasonable expectations of ecological nobility, a further distancing is perpetuated. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are given the impossible task of acting out pre-contact stereotypes of themselves produced by the colonising culture, with the effect of stigmatising and invalidating those who fall between the two.

According to Fabienne Bayet (2005), Indigenous people are ambivalent about environmental issues, since conservation values sometimes deny Indigenous rights to country and because there is no single overarching Aboriginal viewpoint (Bayet, 2005; Adams, 2004). Bayet's (2005) personal account of being an Ullagundahi woman in the environmental movement explores the relationship between the reporting of Indigenous affairs and the environment. She argues that conceptions of wilderness and conservation are a form of paternalism and dispossession because they conceptually remove Aboriginal people from the Australian landscape. According to Bayet (2005: p500), a perception of Aboriginal people as "super conservationists" has denied Indigenous people an independent dimension from "wilderness".

The balancing act some Indigenous communities have identified they must play between traditional and Australian laws and governance structures is another element of the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the environment. Tjarurru man Kado Muir (1998) articulates this in his account of being perplexed to learn through the native title system that there existed limited recognition of his traditional law within the Australian legal system. He states (1998: p1):

> The operation of Indigenous laws affect every facet of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples [sic] lives. Observances of these laws are then doubled with the observance of Australian laws. In many instances these laws collide, the area of property rights in land is the most public focus of this collision.

While state and federal policymakers often have little concept of local obligations, networks of kin and community, or traditional responsibilities, Indigenous people frequently walk a fine line between meeting community, familial, and personal obligations, and operating in accordance with Australian laws and regulations (Lambert-Pennington, 2007).

It is undeniable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures hold a unique relationship with the environment, but how far this cultural relationship can stretch to the responsibilities

of Indigenous people who share it is varied, and how the balance between traditional and mainstream structures can be reconciled poses substantial challenges.

This understanding of both the importance of Indigenous media and the balancing acts involved in relation to the environment and Indigenous people and affairs provides a foundation for examining environmental news reporting where it involves Indigenous issues. It raises various questions: What are the reasons Indigenous people and affairs are reported the way they are? And how does the misrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reflect on society as a whole? The literature points to a number of theoretical frameworks for understanding these processes, and these will be examined in the following section.

3. But why? Theoretical frameworks

The systematic repetition of racist ideas and stereotypes demonstrates the media's hegemonic cultural role. There are three main theories that together explain the representation of Indigenous people in the media: post-colonialism theory; critical race theory; and agenda-setting theory.

Post-colonial theory has become an important but contested lens through which a range of literary works have been analysed (Angel, 2008; Morley, 1995). The term "post-colonial" is resonant with the diversity and complexity of the many different cultural experiences it implicates. It involves experiences of various kinds: for example, place, gender, race, suppression, resistance and the fundamental experiences these were enacted through. Together these form the complex fabric of the field (Ashcroft et al, 2006; Loomba, 1998).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (2003) provides a foundation on which to assess media representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By examining European representation of the Middle East as the place of Europe's first and greatest colonial conquests, *Orientalism* illustrates the imprisonment of labels and identity. He argues the media play a key role in the process of entrenching racism at an institutional level through the routine, day-to-day reinforcement of stereotypes (2003: p26).

The Australian colonial context is characterised by a host of divisions and fissures caused by the country's colonial history, which hinges on convictism, exploration, the gold rush, the bush, and sentiment as a settler colony (Meinig, 2004). Post-colonialism covers all engagement and contestation within colonialism's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2002: p2) attribute this to "a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression". The representation of Indigenous Australians in the mainstream media is an example of that aggression.

As illustrated earlier, the misrepresentation of Indigenous people and issues in Australia has been commonplace throughout the country's European history in a range of contemporary media – school textbooks, colonial and contemporary news stories, television series, press photographs, postcards and films (examples in Meadows, 2001; Bullimore, 1999; Jakubowicz, 1994). According to Ashcroft (2001: p99), this has created a "false symmetry of history" in Australia.

Ashcroft's (2001) identification of the post-colonial attribute of the significance of society's dominant narrative, whereby the non-European subject is locked into a Western world view, provides a useful perspective on the media representation of Indigenous people and issues. As a cultural resource, the media has fulfilled a key ideological role in framing Indigenous people in particular ways since first contact.

Post-colonial structural and ideological power imbalances persist in the representation of Indigenous issues in the Australian media. Race relations in Australia are never a neutral process occurring on a level playing field, but instead emerge in a context of colonialism: a colonialism that has discoursed Indigenous people to their disadvantage since colonisation in the 1790s (Gardiner, 2003). Government agencies have begun to deal with the racism manifest in Australian society, but it is evident that the Aboriginal-coloniser relationship has not been resolved and that the deep struggle by Aboriginal people to defend and enhance their heritage is continuing (Jakubowicz et al, 1994).

The role of colonialism and imperialism in the construction of the "Other" has become a key concept in the contemporary analysis of racism. Stereotypes of Indigenous people have emerged out of a historical and political context within which stereotypes emerge and proliferate. They are founded and shaped by a historical legacy of colonialism, dispossession of land, scientific racism, oppression, and marginalisation of a population in their own country (Due et al, 2011). Hall (1995) argues that the mass media are among the apparatuses that generate and circulate ideologies, and thus reproduce stereotypes and myths that serve to reinforce white supremacy. In Australia, images of the "Other" have been closely linked with racial stereotypes and notions of racial superiority throughout colonial history.

In a seminal study of racism in the American and British media, Hartmann and Husband (1974: p165) found that the press projected images of white society in which the non-white population was seen as "some kind of aberration, a problem, or just an oddity, rather than as 'belonging' to the society".

Similar parallels can be drawn with the representation of Indigenous people in contemporary mainstream media. Media coverage of Indigenous affairs represents and sustains Australia's persistence as a "white state" across all dimensions of social, political, legal and cultural life, and the media's representations, while being dysfunctional for Indigenous people, operate effectively to support and perpetuate the collective interests and dialogue of non-Indigenous

Australians (Nicoll, 2008; Meadows, 2001). McCallum (2007: p8) describes this process as framing Indigenous people as a "threat to the existing order" of Australian society.

Racial categories are the product of generations of political struggle and ideological contestation (McCausland, 2004). Current understandings of race and racism have been informed by and emerged from theories developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century that centred on a belief that race and culture were biologically determined; that there were inherent differences between groups of people on the basis of their physiognomy which were genetically linked to differences in intellectual capacity or to certain kinds of behaviours or values. The current identification of people as belonging to particular racial groups, and the association of those groups with certain inherent characteristics, morals and values is a relatively recent phenomenon that is connected with migration, displacement, processes of imperialism and colonisation, and now discredited scientific theory (McCausland, 2004). Critical race theory holds that race is a socially constructed phenomenon with political implications regarding members of the "in" and the "out" groups (Stovall, 2010).

Jakubowicz et al (1994: p39) identified several racist themes that recur in the range of representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders by the non-Indigenous media:

1. An emphasis on tribalism, negative primitivism, entrapment in a backward culture;
2. A concern with the threat posed by Aborigines, through crime, violence and outbreaks into white society;
3. Aborigines as failures – unable to cope with the contemporary world, as undisciplined and incapable;
4. The victims of whites (the treatment can be sympathetic or unsympathetic);
5. Affirmative action, with the celebration of positive Aboriginal images;
6. Cultural appropriation – Aborigines and Aboriginality used as a stand-in for Australia, with their primitivism as 'spiritual';
7. The first environmentalists, the spiritual link to the land.

A second theme of critical race theory is the centrality of narrative in creating the space for the experiences of people from marginalised groups to be foregrounded in the analysis of race, class and gender (Stovall, 2010). Pervasive and negative stories, images and ideas about racial and ethnic minorities manufacture narratives that can then be used in an attempt to explain, justify and rationalise contradictions and problems in society (McCausland, 2004;

Hall, 1995). According to a report into racism in the Australian media by the Antidiscrimination Board of New South Wales (McCausland, 2004), systemic racism underpins Australian society in the laws and norms that result in the unequal distribution of economic, political and social resources. The report holds that racism in the media manifests as stereotypical or consistently negative portrayals of Indigenous people or communities, the racialisation of social or economic problems, or in the invisibility of Indigenous people in mainstream stories.

The rhetoric of Indigenous "problems" masks the considerable violence enacted against Indigenous communities since colonisation (Due et al, 2011). The literature clearly illustrates the complicity of the mainstream Australian media with ongoing acts of racism.

Studies on stereotyping and racism in the media have consistently found that the racism is institutional, not individual (Plater, 1993). That means it results from news values, editorial policies and other routines of news gathering that are not in themselves racist or consciously prejudicial. As McCausland (2004: p99) notes in the report for the Antidiscrimination Board of New South Wales, racism results from the fact that most "news stories are already written before an individual journalist is assigned to them, even before the event takes place... A story featuring Aboriginals is simply more likely to be covered, or more likely to survive sub-editorial revision or spiking, if it fits existing definitions of the situation". While it is important to remember that society often plays a part in shaping the news, there are forces that edit, gatekeep, frame and manipulate what audiences receive as news, often leading to media misrepresentations (Leduff, 2012).

Agenda setting theory, coined by McCombs and Shaw (2009), examines the process by which the mass media presents certain issues frequently and prominently with the result that large segments of the public come to perceive those issues as more important than others. That is, the more coverage an issue receives, the more important it is to the audience. It is the necessary editorial constraints, guided by agreed-upon news values, which result in the public's attention being directed to a few issues as the most important of the day (McCombs et al, 2009).

Through the agenda-setting process, certain ways of representing race gain currency and repeatedly appear in the media, and then become a kind of "truth" or "fact" which is difficult for the subject communities to challenge (McCausland, 2004). The International Council on

Human Rights Policy (2002) has identified some of the underlying tensions and challenges of agenda-setting to reducing racism and stereotypes in the media:

1. Reporting is essentially reactive. The breaking news culture undermines editorial and ethical reflection, which is crucial to informed human rights reporting.
2. The selection of news is event-driven. The news-driven information culture focuses on political and military events rather than social and economic processes.
3. The media determine what is newsworthy.
4. The editorial environment is information-loaded. In many cases, the human rights angle is only one of several possible angles on a complex story.
5. Angling constrains coverage. The perception of what would be of interest to the organisation's audience often determines the choice of angle.
6. The relationship between reporter and editor is crucial. Reporters and editors are both involved in deciding what stories are identified and selected, and how they are covered.

The influence of these elements of the representation of Indigenous people in the media is apparent. Coverage of Indigenous affairs is disproportionate to the actual population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; Indigenous Australia clearly provides marketable content, evident in the regularity with which it occupies valuable front page space and forms the subject of opinion columns, features and editorials (Hartley et al, 2000; Nicoll, 2008). Gardiner (2003: p240) points to contemporary Australian print media, where Aboriginal people provide an "endless resource of material for photo drama", that is, for depictions that are both visually compelling and that immediately convey a story, emotion, event, or location.

The need for quick descriptions for time dependent news stories often leads to stereotypes being adopted by the media as labels which function to familiarise an audience with a subject, thus reducing the complexity of a subject (Angel, 2008; McCallum et al, 2009). But as Due and Riggs (2011) argue, the pervasive stereotypes of Indigenous Australians seen in the mainstream news media, whilst conforming to news values, are problematic because of their reliance upon stereotypical representations.

News is the end product of a complex process which filters and selects topics and events according to a socially constructed set of categories, and the stories and angles used to cover

them are typically conservative and conventional, supporting mainstream viewpoints and beliefs about the world (Due, 2011). The media construct a definition of what race is and what it means for society, and help to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race (Hall, 1995; 1996). It is the stereotypes, shaped by racist and post-colonialist ideas and perpetuated through agenda-setting and news priorities, that construct identity in the representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues in the media.

The following section outlines the methodology chosen to analyse these processes in environmental news that relates to Indigenous people and issues.

4. **Analysis of media representations**: **Methodology**

Media texts – their language, their foci, their prominence – provide a microscope through which to analyse the representations of society. Fairclough (1995) points to the power of the media to influence knowledge, beliefs, values, social relationships and social identities. He advocates for the analysis of media discourse as an important element within research on contemporary processes of social and cultural change.

This research aims to analyse mainstream media texts representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues in environmental news. It uses critical discourse analysis of print media articles supplemented with qualitative interviews with journalists and public academics to expose patterns and trends that will reflect on broader society.

Critical discourse analysis provides researchers with powerful empirical tools that can lay bare the fine details of how language and discourse operate in ways that legitimate and privilege dominant representations of Indigenous people and issues in environmental news (Augoustinos et al, 2007). It offers analytic tools by which widely-shared arguments that serve to legitimate current constructions of social inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians can be questioned and challenged, and it bridges the questions of identity and power relations embedded in the use of language (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Critical discourse analysis provides an ideal framework through which to analyse the representation of Indigenous people in environmental media.

Using Fairclough's (1992) conceptualisation of discourse as a three dimensional phenomenon, the analysis applies a macro-scale filter, aiming to understand the politics of identity construction in the media text; a meso-scale filter, aiming to analyse the institutional journalistic practices of news making; and a micro-scale filter, evaluating the use of language in the sample articles. The benefit of this conceptualisation is that it contributes to an understanding of how journalistic and textual choices influence the construction of Indigenous identity while also examining the broader societal forces impacting the representation of Indigenous people in environmental news.

The key requirement in choosing the database was to select a sample that was relatively representative of contemporary broader trends and patterns. For any group, let alone a minority, news media is a means of wider attention being drawn to an agenda, of making voices heard, and potentially influencing change on issues important to the group. Which

views are covered, and in what ways, depends on the economic and political structure, the institutional role of the press and the characteristics of the media themselves (Pietikäinen, 2003). News, therefore, reveals a great deal about a society and its power relations.

Three major recent environmental news events that involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were therefore chosen to expose discourses in the representation of Indigenous people in environmental news. The first event is a proposed gas hub in the Kimberley, Western Australia. The Browse LNG project is a liquefied natural gas mining development planned for the Dampier Peninsula, a remote part of Australia renowned for its secluded beaches and biodiversity-rich land and sea wilderness. The Dampier Peninsula is the traditional land of the Jabirr Jabirr and Goolarabooloo Peoples, who have lodged a combined native title claim in the area. The proposed gas hub has reportedly caused divisions within the native title claim group because of the many competing interests regarding financial, conservation and cultural heritage issues raised by the proposed mining project.

The second event chosen for the critical discourse analysis is debate about the Wild Rivers Act in Queensland. The legislation aims to protect nominated rivers in the north and west of the state, selected because of their uniquely pristine conditions, biodiversity and significance to the country's ecological health. The protection of these rivers under the Wild Rivers Act prohibits certain development, including mining, from being undertaken in close proximity to the nominated rivers. Opponents to the Wild Rivers Act have argued the protected rivers fall largely on Aboriginal Land Act tenure, unfairly limiting economic opportunities for Aboriginal communities in those areas. Subsequently, the new Queensland Government has promised to repeal the Wild Rivers legislation, freeing up the rivers and riparian areas for development.

The final event chosen for analysis is allegations of animal cruelty in Far North Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands. The allegations of animal cruelty refer to the hunting of turtle and dugong by traditional owners in these areas and result from video footage released to the media of incidents of alleged cruelty. The reporting of the event led to intense public debate about the sustainability, legitimacy and legality of traditional hunting practices, and the new Queensland Government has subsequently changed animal cruelty legislation to address community concerns by revoking animal cruelty exemptions for native title holders.

The events were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, they are three very prominent environmental news events concerning Indigenous affairs. They have commanded national mainstream attention over extended periods. They have drawn on a number of typical stakeholders in such debates: for example native title organisations, federal and state governments, mining interests, conservation organisations and wildlife activists. The events have all caused intra- and inter- Indigenous divisions and involve core debates around self-determination and custodianship of country.

The events are also recent, and because the research aims to assess contemporary representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in environmental news, the sample selected was from the past two years, specifically between October 2010 and August 2012.

Research suggests that most members of the general public have limited direct access with Indigenous Australians (Meadows, 2001; Due, 2011). As such, much of the information the general public has of marginalised groups is typically gained from the mainstream media (Jakubowicz, 1994; Meadows, 2001). The mainstream media is thus centrally involved in constructing dominant discourses (van Dijk, 2001), and therefore provides the ideal database for the analysis of the representation of Indigenous people and issues in environmental news.

Print media articles from *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC Online* were chosen for the database. As forms of narration, print media stories inevitably involve political assumptions, ideology, social values, cultural and racial stereotypes and assumptions as well as specific textual patterns (Gillespie, 2006; van Dijk, 2001). In addition, news coverage of environmental issues that involve Indigenous affairs is most comprehensive in print format, providing a dataset with optimal depth of analysis.

The Australian, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC Online* were chosen because they represent the largest mainstream media organisations in the country: News Limited, Fairfax Media and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Australian Government funded) respectively. These news sources have the highest national readership for each company (excluding Fairfax Media's Australian Financial Review which has the company's highest readership but was excluded from the data because it focuses on business, finance and investment news rather than current affairs) (*State of the News Print Media in Australia*, 2007). Each print news outlet promotes their editorial values in revealing ways.

The Australian describes its editorial values as focussing on "leading and shaping public opinion on the issues that affect Australia, its residents and the Australian business environment" ('About Us', *The Australian*, 2012). This is unusual in that there is no mention of standard editorial values of objectivity and accountability. It emphasises the newspaper's influence on its readership and society more broadly. By comparison, the *Sydney Morning Herald* outlines the editorial values of honesty, impartiality, fairness, independence, privacy, respect and relevance ('Code of Ethics', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2012). In assessing editorial choices and the role of the reporter in environmental news media representations of Indigenous people, it is important to mention that a number of the articles published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* were reported by *Australian Associated Press*. *ABC Online* subscribes to the editorial values of the broader organisation: honesty, fairness, independence and respect ('Editorial Policy', *ABC*, 2009). These values are interesting to bear in mind while analysing the representation of Indigenous people and issues in environmental news.

Two articles were chosen from each publication about each event chosen for this analysis, making a total of eighteen articles analysed. As environmental news moves increasingly higher on the agenda, this database size provides a broad enough snapshot to identify ongoing trends while at the same time ensuring the currency of the research in reflecting contemporary discourse. The articles were selected using the database *Factiva*, entering key words for the events within the date range and for each publication. No key words were entered for Aboriginality to ensure certain terminologies were not missed. The search results were then browsed for appropriate articles. Within the search results, articles that focussed most heavily on Indigenous issues were chosen for the critical discourse analysis.

The articles were then qualitatively analysed and data collected in a table to appropriately record all information. The focus on language in critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to focus on the pervasive nature of stereotypes without levelling accusations at the journalists who wrote them. Instead, discourse analysis is powerful in its examination of racism and other powerful forces at play within institutions, and it highlights the ways in which such dominant institutions contribute to particular modes of oppression and domination (Due et al, 2011).

To further understand the various discourses uncovered in the analysis, interviews were also conducted with environmental and Indigenous affairs journalists and academics in related fields, and related conversations with Aboriginal Elders were recorded. Five journalists were

contacted (one from *Australian Associated Press*, one from Fairfax, two from News Limited and one from the *ABC*). Three journalists replied that they were happy to participate in interviews: Patrick Caruana from the North Queensland branch of *Australian Associated Press*; Brian Williams from News Limited's Brisbane tabloid newspaper, *Courier Mail*; and Ben Collins from the *ABC Kimberley*. The journalists were asked about their experiences in reporting environmental issues that relate to Indigenous people, and the professional, personal, practical and institutional pressures they face when reporting these issues. The academic professionals who were interviewed were Indigenous media representation expert, Professor Michael Meadows, and Badtjala artist and historian, Adjunct Professor Fiona Foley. The Elders whose contributions are included are Gunggari Elder, Aunty Ethel Munn, and Pitta Pitta Elder, Aunty Carmel Belford. Both have been heavily involved in their traditional owner groups' native title claims, provided media comment on behalf of their claim groups and participated in the organisation of community development programs.

The research aims to provide a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the representation of Indigenous people and affairs in environmental news media. It must be acknowledged that the researcher's perspective is an essential but also a flawed part of qualitative analysis. In addition, it is not within the scope of the research to investigate the prevalence of the discourses identified. Because these factors may limit the reliability and validity of findings, examples from the sample are included so the reader can make their own assessments of the evidence on which analysis and evaluation is built.

The analytic techniques aim to demonstrate and interpret the discourses deriving from the sample articles, also aim to apply these to a social context to provide a better understanding of identity construction as a result of the media representation of Indigenous people in environmental news. The following section outlines the results and findings of the application of these techniques to the data.

5. **Results of the analysis**

The critical discourse analysis did not uncover overt racism, and in fact, the sample of articles covering environmental news that involved Indigenous people and issues was, for the most part, limited to the use of stereotypes and negative subject matter. Overall, it seems that environmental news presents a more positive and fair representation of Indigenous people than general media coverage.

Unfortunately, despite these positives in environmental news representations of Indigenous people, negative discourses were exposed. Van Dijk (2001) argues that critical discourse analysis operates explicitly with the interests of dominated or marginalised groups in mind, and therefore is explicit in its aim to challenge ideologies that reproduce inequality. In adopting this analysis technique, it was very apparent that while the standard of the representation of Indigenous people in environmental news was better than that demonstrated in the literature covering other mainstream media, there were, unfortunately, a number of dysfunctional discourses that were quickly established in the data. The examination of media from a critical stance demonstrated the media's implicit construction of Indigenous identity and the relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people through representation of Indigenous people and issues in environmental news.

This research aims to identify the subtle, covert and thus malevolent ways in which stereotypes of Indigenous people are communicated, reproduced and legitimated, and it seems there is still vast improvement to be made even in a relatively enlightened subject matter. The discussion of findings will begin by acknowledging the positive trends identified in the analysis, and then examine ten discourses uncovered by the critical discourse analysis.

5.1. Positive Trends

The articles by the ABC, in particular, represented Indigenous people and affairs in a relatively accurate and fair way. The following example of the closing line from a feature article titled 'Changing landscape of Aboriginal and green politics' published on *ABC Online* on 10 August 2012 illustrates this open and equitable representation:

> *Example 1*
> More and more in places like Broome where black and green overlap,
> environmentalists will be faced with the reality that Aboriginal people have as diverse

views as any other race. The left won't simply be able to point at the right with accusations of ignoring Aboriginal people. The accusations will fly in both directions.

This paragraph acknowledges difference while at the same time deconstructing identity and stereotypes, thereby encouraging the reader to be open. What is it about environmental news that influenced a more fair representation? Journalist Brian Williams suggests that a potential reason journalists may be more sensitive to Aboriginal issues is that they are used to dealing with smaller, marginalised community groups (interview with Williams, 2012).

This provides a "best practice" example from which to analyse the negative discourses identified.

5.2. Absence of Indigenous sources

The first, most consistent and most obvious pattern in the sample was the lack of Indigenous sources quoted in the articles. Despite the primary focus of the reports on Indigenous issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices were very apparently missing. An example is an *Australian Associated Press* article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 March 2012 called 'Dugong, turtle cruelty claims spark stoush'. The article identifies the angle as very clearly Indigenous focussed with this lead par:

> *Example 2*
>
> Claims of animal cruelty and poaching among indigenous dugong and turtle hunters in the Torres Strait have sparked an investigation and a complex political battle.

The article goes on to quote Premier Anna Bligh, opposition environment spokesman Andrew Powell, federal Environment Minister Tony Burke and WWF Australia spokesman Darren Grover. These people are all non-Indigenous Australians. It is evident that the reporter has researched the article comprehensively and drawn on multiple perspectives, however the Indigenous voice misses out. It is as if the debate raging between the different parties is going on above the heads of the Indigenous hunters being accused, rather than in consultation with them.

ABC journalist Ben Collins argues that this is a result of a number of obstacles between Aboriginal people and the mainstream media, such as education levels and a cultural divide. He says factors such as these make it harder for journalists to interview Aboriginal people (interview with Collins, 2012). *Courier Mail*'s Brian Williams points to the geographical

constraints of involving remote Indigenous people in articles in a timely manner, and says he thought Indigenous people were left out of various articles "simply because the right person for comment could not be contacted" (interview with Williams, 2012).

A second element to the absence of Indigenous voices in environmental news is the use of non-Indigenous sources speaking on behalf of Indigenous people. There are a number of examples and two will be outlined to fully relay the nature of the representations. The first is an article titled 'Secret men's business threatens $30 billion gas bonanza' found in the Sydney Morning Herald on 5 December 2011.

The article's lead paragraph follows:

> *Example 3*
> A proposed $30 billion gas hub at James Price Point on Western Australia's Kimberley coast would disturb sites used for secret Aboriginal 'men's business', lawyers say.

The article goes on to quote the non-Indigenous lawyer representing a traditional owner of the Kimberley region. The lawyer goes on to explain the significance of the site:

> 'The essence of that law has been placed in the ground,' said Mr Green. 'Not only at the name places but at all points between those name places.'

> Mr Green said he had personal knowledge of the song cycle having 'attended a ceremony a number of years ago and witnessed for myself the actual songs.'

A second and particularly insidious illustration of the non-Indigenous source speaking on behalf of Indigenous people is found in an article titled 'WA premier hails Kimberley gas deal', an *Australian Associated Press* article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 30 June 2011. The article reports on a legal agreement between Kimberley traditional owners, the Goolarabooloo Jabirr Jabirr people, Woodside Petroleum and the Western Australian government.

The first half of the article quotes only non-Indigenous people, including the following quotes from the Western Australia Premier Colin Barnett:

> *Example 4*

> Mr Barnett said the negotiations had been exhausting and often emotional for the traditional owners…
>
> 'It is a project and an agreement which is perhaps the most significant act of self-determination by Aboriginal people in Australian history,' Mr Barnett said.

And, further into the piece:

> 'For the Aboriginal people of the area, this is probably… their historic roll of the dice, it has to be successful, it has to work,' he said.

With these quotes, Mr Barnett establishes a distinctly colonial, paternalistic tone, speaking on behalf of Aboriginal people about the significance of an agreement with the government.

As examined earlier, the absence of Indigenous voices in the media is well established in the literature, for example Meadows' (2002) content analysis found that the number of non-Indigenous sources used in news stories covering native title outnumbered Indigenous sources at a ratio of four to one. A consequence of the relative absence of Indigenous voices in environmental news is the effect of distorting media coverage to reflect the concerns of more powerful interests (Meadows, 2002). As can be seen from the above examples, the Indigenous issue becomes a political football, being kicked between the two sides of politics with Indigenous people sidelined.

There are a number of possible reasons and implications. When interviewed, *Australian Associated Press* journalist, Patrick Caruana (reporter of *Example 1*) says finding appropriate people to interview for stories related to Indigenous affairs can be "tricky", particularly when the story is located in a remote community. The avenues he uses for finding sources to quote are *Australian Associated Press*' databases and intellectual resources, local mayors, and community and advocacy groups. He acknowledges the limitations of this approach, arguing that it made it seem like "Indigenous people were incapable of polite disagreement". He says the quoting of non-Indigenous people on behalf of Indigenous people "tends to distort debates when such statements are reported unchallenged in the news media" (interview with Caruana, 2012).

The dialogue between reporters and Indigenous people is apparently problematic. It is possible that the limited use of Indigenous sources is due to ineffective, infrequent or

otherwise challenged contact between journalists and Indigenous people. Well regarded Indigenous affairs reporter Tony Koch points to the onus on reporters to show respect by making "a real effort to understand Indigenous people's worlds and their values and that this is achieved through listening" (in Waller, 2010: p27). This is exemplified in a case study from the Australian Research Council report, 'News Media and Indigenous Policymaking 1988-2008' that outlines the view of senior Walpiri people from Yuendumu in Central Australia that their agendas and perspectives are not heard in public discussion of Indigenous affairs because journalists don't listen to them or take an interest in issues they regard as important (McCallum, 2011).

ABC journalist Ben Collins' interview supports this perspective. Having lived in northwest Australia and reported on Indigenous issues for more than six years, he says there is a "cultural divide" and that it takes "time and immersion" to be able to best represent Indigenous people in the media. Living in northern Australia, he says, had taught him that it is important to know who speaks for what country, what the various family relationships are, and then attitudes from Aboriginal people towards the "foreign cultures" that journalist present begin to change (interview with Collins, 2012).

Koch also emphasises this need for maintaining longer term relationships and trust with Indigenous communities in order to fairly represent Indigenous viewpoints (Waller, 2010). According to Koch, geographical distance is a major challenge to the Australian media's ability to report well on remote Indigenous communities however he attempts to overcome this not only by travelling to the remote areas, but by inviting people from remote communities to attend conferences and meetings in regional centres.

Due and Riggs (2011) argue the absence of Indigenous voices demonstrates an unwillingness by non-Indigenous Australia to truly acknowledge the rights of Indigenous Australians to land. The nature of the debate being conducted "over the heads" of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people demonstrates a lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous people as equal participants in the issues, and their stakes to traditional ownership as being diminished when compared with ownership by non-Indigenous Australia. In fact, problematic use of Indigenous sources in articles was not restricted to the absence of quotes from Indigenous people.

5.3. Indigenous spokespeople who do not necessarily have a mandate

The research findings that Indigenous people are underrepresented in terms of quotes in the sample articles covering environmental news relates to another important discourse uncovered in the analysis: the use of Indigenous spokespeople. The most conspicuous example of this is the quoting of prominent Bagaarrmugu and Gugu Yalanji businessman and activist, Noel Pearson, in the sample articles covering Wild Rivers. Within the sample, Pearson himself is commonly the subject of the articles, for example in the *Australian Associated Press* article 'Pearson lambasts Fielding over Wild Rivers' printed in *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 May 2011. The article leads with this par:

> *Example 5*
> Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has blasted Family First senator Steve Fielding for changing sides on a bill to give indigenous north Queenslanders more say about development of their land.

The article does not quote Pearson until sixteen paragraphs into the article, with:

> 'What we sought was an equal opportunity to be heard in relation to our argument that the wild rivers legislation is a severe curtailment of our ability to develop in the future,' he told reporters in Cairns.

Pearson is evidently a charismatic and articulate media source, a perception that has drawn criticism from members of the Indigenous political community who argue his aggressive and outspoken nature lead to him being mistaken by the media as representative of Indigenous people. Pearson's advocacy of conservative positions has brought him widespread criticism from progressive commentators and academic cultural studies (Gibson, 2009). Graham (2010) argues that Pearson tells the mainstream media what they want to hear: that non-Indigenous Australia is not responsible for Indigenous problems. It is frequently asserted that Pearson's conservative opinions align with the mainstream media model, and in fact, Pearson regularly contributes as a columnist for News Limited newspapers, in particular, *The Australian*.

In a discussion with Pitta Pitta elder Aunty Carmel Belford on the subject of Noel Pearson's appearance in media covering Wild Rivers in August 2012, she said:

"What makes me so angry is that he [Pearson] is speaking for my country. I want Wild Rivers to protect my country but the media don't talk to me, they talk to him. I didn't vote for him but they listen to him like I did."

Aunty Carmel's message is seemingly echoed by other Aboriginal people, for example in an article in the research sample titled 'Wild rivers row splits indigenous leaders' appearing in *The Australian* on 1 October 2012. The article uses no direct quotes from Indigenous people despite reporting about Cape York Indigenous people who travelled to Canberra to show their support for Wild Rivers legislation:

> *Example 6*
> But other Cape York indigenous figures, including David Claudie, have been vocal in support of the state law protecting the rivers, travelling to Canberra to tell federal MPs: "Noel Pearson is not our spokesman."

Evidently, the disproportionate use of Noel Pearson as a source in the media has constructed divisions that have the potential to be played out both in the media and in the community. The frequent appearance of Noel Pearson in the media is a strong case in point for the problematic use of Indigenous "spokespeople" who are speaking on behalf of people for whom they have no apparent mandate. Pearson is not the only Indigenous person whose frequent use as a source for the media has been criticised: according Batjala academic Fiona Foley, Bess Price and Marcia Langton are amongst the small number of other individuals who have gained this notoriety (communication with Foley, 2012).

Foley looks to history to provide an explanation for the use of Indigenous media spokespeople who do not have a mandate. According to Foley (communication, 2012), Aboriginal societies across Australia used consensus-based governance structures, however colonists found it easier to choose representatives from the Aboriginal tribes they dealt with and so chose one Aboriginal man in each tribe to be the spokesperson for that group. The spokesperson was made to wear a metal breastplate to represent the designated role. Foley argues this process undermined traditional structures. She believes this process forms a significant foundation for the findings uncovered in this research that the mainstream media nominated an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander spokesperson for particular issues.

5.4. The homogenisation of Indigenous perspectives

A related discourse uncovered in the articles was the overall absence of acknowledgement of the existence of diversity within and between Indigenous communities. Indigenous people in the articles were locked into either of two sides of debates in a discourse described by Meadows (2001: p197) as "strict ideological limits" with virtually "no opportunity for alternative constructions".

An example of the homogenisation of Indigenous people in media articles can be found in an article from *The Australian* on 15 June 2012 titled 'Land title backdown on gas hub'. The first par reads:

> *Example 7*
>
> Kimberley Aborigines have bowed to threats from the West Australian government and Woodside and abandoned a bid to dissolve a native title claim, avoiding the suspension of more than $1 billion in benefits from the James Price Point gas hub.

The "Kimberley Aborigines" referred to in this circumstance is actually quite more specifically the members of the applicant representing the existing native title claim in the region, as opposed to referring to all Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. This reporting is inaccurate and has potential to be deleterious given litigation underway from people in the claim group, competing native title claims in the area and the potential interests of Aboriginal people living in the community who are not involved with the area's native title. The example prescribes not only an opinion, but emotions to an entire group, constructing a very definite identity for "Kimberley Aborigines".

A second example of the homogenisation of Indigenous viewpoints is the representation of all Indigenous stakeholders in Wild Rivers regions as falling into one of just two sides of the debate in an *Australian Associated Press* article titled 'Cape York boss slams MPs on wild rivers', published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 April 2011. The third paragraph of the article states:

> *Example 8*
>
> Indigenous groups in far north Queensland back the opposition's draft laws, which would require the state government to seek consent from traditional owners if it wants to apply wild rivers declarations.

This sentence implies that all Indigenous groups in far north Queensland speak with one voice on the issue. There has, of course, been much evidence, including in articles in the sample, of competing and diverse perspectives on the support of Wild Rivers legislation by Indigenous people and groups.

The potential reasons and implications for the homogenisation of Indigenous opinion and for the use of unrepresentative Indigenous spokespeople may be related. Meadows (2001) argues that journalists rarely look beyond the loudest voices to use as sources and it is evident in the sample that the articulate and opinionated sources are the ones more frequently quoted despite no clear evidence of their representativeness of the broader community they speak for. Underlying this contention is the argument made in the above findings about the absence of Indigenous people quoted in the sample; that limited dialogue between journalists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people constrains accurate, fair and appropriate reporting.

An institutional-level reason may the political alignment of the opinions of the spotlighted leaders and homogenised groups with the publishing media organisation. Practically, this points to the conservative political affiliations of Noel Pearson and others, who are chosen by News Limited as spokespeople for particular issues (Gibson, 2009). It draws the editorial focus of *The Australian* into sharp focus (see page 26: "leading and shaping public opinion on the issues that affect Australia"). The frequent use of the same people and resulting polarisation reported other news agencies illustrates the agenda-setting process at play.

The absence of acknowledgement of the diversity of Indigenous viewpoints through their lack of voice in the mainstream environmental news also points to further post-colonial processes and racial stereotyping. One-sided reporting that gives no voice to alternative perspectives leads to stereotyping and oversimplification of Indigenous affairs in the environmental issues being reported. Indigenous identity is relegated to the opinions of a few, rather than being demonstrated as a diverse population with equally diverse viewpoints.

This construction can be found in many of the discourses investigated in the research in varying ways.

5.5. Romanticised portrayals of Indigenous people

Another discourse that misrepresented Indigenous people in the environmental news sample was the romanticised portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures in the sample. When Indigenous people were represented as speaking for themselves rather than as spokespeople, a discourse exposed in the articles was the frequent representation of those people as noble or heroic. The sources were portrayed through an unrealistic lens with a focus on their appealing personality traits, rather than their opinions.

The most obvious example from the sample is in an article titled 'Unhappy hunting grounds' from *The Australian* on 13 March 2012. The article is supplemented by a photo of a man, hip-deep in the sea with his hands on his hips, gazing proudly out to the open ocean. The caption reads:

> *Example 9*
> Aboriginal hunter Phil Rist, in the sea at Goold Island, shows where seagrass beds used to feed dugong before Cyclone Yasi. He believes Aborigines must be seen as responsible traditional custodians.

The opening paragraph reads:

> Phil Rist is a proud Aboriginal man and hunter who is worried about walking down the street in his north Queensland town.

The article is clearly positioning the reader to sympathise with Rist because of his "honour" as an Aboriginal man. The human interest news value is emphasised with the article describing Rist's "voice cracking with emotion". The theme runs throughout the long article, drawing on the conflicts of traditional ownership using a mythologising mood.

The potential reasons for this approach are complex. As discussed earlier, enduring romantic notions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been criticised for receiving favourable treatment in the mainstream press because they lend support to the construction of the "Other", separating the dominant culture and reinforcing colonial constructions of the "ecologically noble savage" (Harding, 2007). When Indigenous people are constructed in this way, they are effectively frozen in the past and denied a true influence as an equal participant in current debate (Rowland, 2004).

In addition, "human interest" is accepted as a news value in making a story newsworthy (Conley et al, 2006) that by its very nature romanticises the lead character. There are obvious downfalls. The oversimplification of both a person and the context within which they live is a precursor to stereotyping as the individual is romanticised into a hero. This identity construction limits robust and open debate (Meadows, 2001).

ABC journalist Ben Collins says there is a lens through which some environmental journalists see that focuses this inaccurate emphasis on romantic representations (interview with Collins, 2012). Potential explanations that he points to are the personal values of the journalist and the influence of public relations management in promoting certain stories. He also argues that the ecologically noble savage was most likely to be portrayed by journalists who were "fly in, fly out", meaning they travelled to the remote area specifically to report a story. He says they don't have the experience to have met "Aboriginal business people" and understand the diversity within Indigenous communities (interview with Collins, 2012).

Again, the misrepresentation of Indigenous people and issues in the sample articles construct a false identity.

5.6. Themes of "opportunities" for "struggling" Indigenous people

The identity construction discourse continues through the findings with the apparent theme in ten of the eighteen sample articles of the disadvantages being suffered by Indigenous people and the economic opportunities being offered to them. An example of this discourse is in the *Australian Associated Press* article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 30 June 2011 titled 'WA premier hails Kimberley gas deal'. The following paragraph demonstrates the finding:

> *Example 10*
>
> Kimberley Land Council chief negotiator Wayne Bergmann said the deal was about creating "life-changing opportunity" for the region's indigenous communities and delivering for future generations.
>
> The agreement was a way for the region's Aboriginal people to address the problems of youth suicide and lack of economic opportunity.

The agreement refers to a $1.5 billion benefits scheme as a result of negotiations between a liquefied natural gas company and the Western Australian Government. There is obviously legitimacy to the angle in that the theme is introduced because of its relevance.

It is the persistence with which it is focused upon that establishes this discourse as a common thread in the sample. A second example, quoting Queensland Deputy Premier Jeff Seeney in an article titled 'LNP promises to develop Cape York as wild rivers laws buried' and published in *The Australian* on 1 August 2012 further demonstrates the discourse:

> *Example 11*
>
> "There has been no balance up until now. It's all been about protecting things, locking things up, taking away opportunities without any consideration of the long-term future of those Aboriginal communities."

Further into the article, a quote from Gerhardt Pearson (brother of the aforementioned Noel Pearson):

> "We're now placing the emphasis of economic development at the centre of attacking indigenous social dysfunction – the terrible welfare situation we have – and the need to encourage economic development and investment," Mr Pearson said.

Australian Associated Press journalist Patrick Caruana sees this as a reflection of the wider environmental debate which typically divides those who aim to promote economic growth and those who support environmental protection. He says the reporting of the conflict between economic opportunities and custodianship where it relates to the best management of land or resources is a manifestation of the same political divide.

This is an interesting perspective because it points to the agenda-setting role of the media in sustaining particular constructions of Indigenous identity. The broader implications of the discourse of debates around environmental conservation, economic opportunities and Indigenous disadvantage skew the focus of the debate, drawing disproportionate attention to those arguments. In the Australian context, there is an undeniable linking of the arguments with the mining sector (promotion of economic growth). Indigenous people and affairs are drawn in on this constructed debate with stereotyping and oversimplification of the situation as a result.

When discussing this subject, academic Michael Meadows described this process as being for Aboriginal people as if the media would "give them [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people] a voice and at the same time take it away" (communication with Meadows, 2012). The representation of Indigenous people as "struggling" and in need of "economic development" at the cost of environmental sacrifices both empowers Indigenous peoples to be part of the debate at the same time as constructing an identity which positions them in a less powerful position.

5.7. Use of conflict as a news value

In studies researching media representations of Indigenous people and affairs, the use of conflict as a news angle has been found to have disproportionate use (Due et al, 2011). The representation of Indigenous people and affairs in environmental news drew similar results in this study. Like the human interest angle, conflict is used to increase a story's newsworthiness, often at the cost of impartiality (Conley, 2006).

The *Australian Associated Press* article titled 'Pearson lambasts Fielding over Wild Rivers' that was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 May 2012 is a good example of this. The article begins with the following lead par:

> *Example 12*
> Indigenous leader Noel Pearson has blasted Family First senator Steve Fielding for changing sides on a bill to give indigenous north Queenslanders more say about development of their land.

Pearson's comments are further used to increase conflict:

> Mr Pearson also fired an angry tirade at Senator Fielding on Sky News.

> "It's just like Judas saying he's negotiated with Pontius Pilate some kind of alternative way of crucifying Christ," he said.

These plainly aggressive and provocative comments were made to Christian political party leader, Family First's Senator Steve Fielding. The actual story is Senator Fielding's decision to vote against a bill to make amendments to the Wild Rivers Act, but this has been sensationalised by quoting Pearson's inflammatory comments.

A second example, published in *The Australian* on 10 March 2012 and titled 'Outcry as hunters cruelty exposed' uses conflict to immediately divide the reader with the following lead par:

> *Example 13*
>
> One person's cruelty is another's inherent right to hunt when the interests of animal welfare and indigenous native title clash, as highlighted by harrowing new footage of a turtle and a dugong being slaughtered by traditional hunters in the Torres Strait.

The article goes on to graphically describe the deaths of two animals, caught on film. It then describes the "Other" side to the story:

> But indigenous community leaders yesterday insisted the hunting and killing of dugongs and turtles in the tropics was a birthright. The confronting methods were broadly in line with traditional practice and protected by native title. There was one key qualification – the animal must be dead before being butchered, indigenous hunters insist.

The article constructs a discourse between those who accept the traditional hunting and those who don't, and clearly entices readers to do the same.

The value of using conflict in an article is entertainment, however it is so prevalent in the reporting of Indigenous affairs that Plater and Eggerking (1992) argue an Indigenous issue does not become newsworthy until some conflict emerges with the Government or another authority figure. There is a sinister institutional element to the depiction of Indigenous people and issues in terms of conflict, in particular because the non-Indigenous reader is usually placed as either as observing the "Other", or as the protagonist or antagonist in the conflict itself.

Hartley and McKee (2000) argue there is a strange tradition in academic enquiry that outlines the news values and then criticises the news for using them. Journalist Brian Williams points to the need for professional journalists to supply copy on any subject that is deemed "sexy" by editors (interview with Williams, 2012). But he justifies this by arguing that reporting a non-event won't sell: "How do you get a story published that says a particular council is managing its affairs well?"

But the agenda-setting role of disproportionately using conflict as a news value is undeniable. This agenda-setting means the pervasive stereotype of Indigenous people is as respondents to conflict (Due, 2011). It is this stereotype that is the problematic element of the use of the conflict news value. It reinforces the identity construction at play throughout the research.

5.8. "Inner turmoil" faced by Indigenous people about how to cope with threats to country

As established earlier, custodianship and stewardship of Aboriginal land is a complex issue. A central and nuanced discourse in the sample articles was the reporting of the balance of traditional ownership, conservation and custodianship of country.

The Kimberley gas hub event centres on this balance. This is illustrated in the sensitive feature article published by *ABC Online* on 10 August 2012 titled 'Changing landscape of Aboriginal and green politics'. The article encapsulates the discourse with the following:

> *Example 14*
> It's part of the slow-burning story of native title. Twenty years after Eddie Mabo's posthumous victory, native title is starting to produce opportunities where Aboriginal people can have some real influence over what happens on their traditional country. When they want to preserve and conserve, environmentalists and the broader left instinctively stand in solidarity. But when Aboriginal people support industry and development then alliances are born that Australia is still coming to terms with.

This presents a new challenge for environmental news involving Indigenous people and affairs. *Example 14* is part of an article that is using feature-writing elements and therefore does not face the usual constraints of a newsroom. In the deadline driven news environment, the complicated and often conflicting roles of traditional owners can be oversimplified. An example of that is in the article titled 'Unhappy hunting grounds' published in *The Australian* on 13 March 2012. Regarding the Indigenous man quoted in response to criticism of turtle and dugong hunting in northern Australia, the article poses the question:

> *Example 15*
> How will he convince people in the street that this brutality makes him feel sick and that his Nwaigi people are committed to protecting turtles?

Further into the piece, it goes on:

> The furor surrounding traditional hunting is intensifying, just one of many rifts across Australia where indigenous cultural rights are clashing with mainstream and green sensibilities. And it is another example of native title holders fighting to preserve their hard-fought prerogative to make their own decisions about the use of their traditional lands.

These excerpts acknowledge the conflict faced by traditional owners but paint an oversimplified version of the balances between traditional ownership and environmental custodianship.

All mass media face restrictions on time and space. The balance of traditional ownership and conservation is complex, and devoting media space to complex issues has never been a strong point of mainstream news media. Journalist Ben Collins emphasises the responsibility as a reporter to "get the story right", and outlined an extra moral and ethical responsibility in the realm of Indigenous affairs because of the "history of disempowerment" (interview with Collins, 2012).

This responsibility is evidently not being accepted by all reporters and this is leading to stereotyping and oversimplification. The complicity of journalists in not accurately reporting the complex balance of traditional ownership leads to the construction of equally inaccurate identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

5.9. Environmentalists vs Indigenous people

The unique and nuanced challenges of reporting issues around traditional custodianship are echoed in a discourse identified in the sample in which conservationists and Indigenous people are pitched against each other. According to Nadasdy (2005), rrelations between Indigenous people and environmentalists are deeply ambivalent. This perspective was reported as a central theme in all three events. It was explicitly tackled by two articles in the sample. An *ABC Online* article published on 6 August 2012 and titled 'Aboriginal group attacks Greens over Kimberley gas hub' is one of those. The article states:

> *Example 16*
> An Aboriginal group that's been recognised as the traditional owners of land for which a gas hub is proposed has hit out at former Greens senator Bob Brown.

The article goes on to detail accusations by Jabirr Jabirr man Warren Greatorex against environmentalist Bob Brown. The article draws a spotlight to conflict between traditional owners and conservationists using one source to construct an oversimplified division between the two.

The element of oversimplification of this conflict is further exemplified in an *Australian Associated Press* article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 April 2011 titled 'Cape York boss slams MPs on wild rivers'. The article draws on the conflict between Cape York Land Council chairman Richie Ahmat and The Wilderness Society. It reports:

> *Example 17*
> Mr Ahmat accused the Wilderness Society of adding to the injustice facing indigenous people.
>
> "It is interesting to note how they always speak on behalf of the government," he said.
>
> "They are partners in the wild rivers injustice."
>
> The Wilderness Society angrily denied a suggestion from Liberal senator Guy Barnett, that it had worked with the Queensland government as Labor sought Greens preferences in marginal Brisbane seats.

The article draws divisions between the various stakeholders; sensationalising the conflict by using loaded terms such as "injustice" and "angrily denied". The reader is placed as an amused spectator to the conflict rather than drawn into either side, positioning the competing groups as novelties.

Journalist Brian Williams argue the media reporting of the divisions between conservationists and Indigenous people was explained by the Australian mining boom and the pressure it places on traditional owners, as well as the prominence of particular Indigenous people who are opposed to environmental agendas, for example Noel Pearson (interview with Williams, 2012).

Although there may be accuracy in the discourse of increasing divisions between conservationists and Indigenous groups, the different methods of framing these divisions provide an interesting reflection of the reporting of Indigenous people. These examples place

the Indigenous person or people again as protagonists in the debate and quotes from Indigenous people are consistently aimed at undermining conservationists in the debate.

The agenda-setting role of the media cannot be ignored here. It is useful for mainstream media institutions to exaggerate the conflicts between environmentalist and Indigenous interests for additional newsworthiness, and also for conservative political interests (Pietikäinen, 2003). There is an obvious result: the construction of an Indigenous identity as respondents to a conflict, and opponents of environmental protection.

5.10.   Lack of acknowledgement of traditional governance and custom

The construction of Indigenous identity is particularly undermined by the lack of acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination, and traditional law and custom in knowledge generation, negotiation and land management. The sample articles invariably frame the various events according to Australian laws and regulations. An example is in the *Australian Associated Press* article titled 'Dugong, turtle cruelty claims spark stoush' published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 March 2012. The article leads with:

> *Example 18*
>
> Claims of animal cruelty and poaching among indigenous dugong and turtle hunters in the Torres Strait have sparked an investigation and a complex political battle.

It goes on to list the various actions taken as a result of video footage of alleged animal cruelty, quoting first an investigation by the Queensland Government Department of Environment and Resource Management, then the former Premier Anna Bligh saying the issue fell within the Commonwealth Government's jurisdiction, then opposition environmental spokesman Andrew Powell criticising the Queensland Government's inactivity, then the Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke discussing existing programs, and finally a non-governmental organisation spokesperson Darren Grover arguing the solution was for the Government to fund more Indigenous rangers. As well as an absence of Indigenous sources quoted in the article, there is a blatant absence of an acknowledgement of traditional law and custom in managing the alleged animal cruelty.

Speaking at the National Native Title Conference in June 2012, Erub and Klakadoon/Waanyi man and North Queensland Land Council solicitor, David Saylor stated that animal cruelty

was not allowed according to traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander laws and custom; that this was not an issue about traditional hunting practices but about "rogue" operators. *Example 18* constructs the Indigenous people involved as spectators to the issue of traditional hunting rather than acknowledging their roles as the most qualified stakeholders to manage animal cruelty in traditional hunting practices.

This discourse demonstrates a pattern wherein mainstream media assumes Western governance as a leading model. The apparent colonial attitude again constructs an Indigenous identity that involves an inferiority and friction. It also creates an atmosphere in which opportunities are missed to collaborate for better outcomes for all participants. It is a discourse that is little acknowledged but is a significant contributor to the discourses uncovered in the sample.

5.11.   Terminology

The final discourse investigated in the sample was the choice of words used to describe Aboriginality. As examined on page 7, there are a wide range of perspectives within the literature and within Indigenous communities about the most appropriate terms to describe Aboriginality, however there are also some common guidelines, namely who is using a term and the intent with which they are using it.

There were some common trends in the articles that were consistent amongst the three publications. All three media outlets used the term "traditional owners", occasionally used language or clan names to describe a source's Aboriginality, and used the word "Aboriginal" only as an adjective and not a noun.

The most major distinction was with the use of the word "Indigenous". The *ABC* treated the representation of Indigenous people the most sensitively by capitalising the word, while *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* did not. The *ABC* also limited the use of the word "Indigenous", for example in the 700 word article 'Changing landscape of Aboriginal and green politics' published on 10 August 2012, the word "Indigenous" was not used, and the terms "traditional owners" and "Aboriginal" were.

If the use of terminology is primarily judged upon intent, it has to be said that the articles published in *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* were insensitive, judgemental and avoidant. The News Limited paper was the only one to use the word "Aborigines" in the

following lead par of *The Australian* article titled 'Land title backdown on gas hub' published on 15 June 2012:

> *Example 19*
> Kimberley Aborigines have bowed to threats from the West Australian government and Woodside and abandoned a bid to dissolve a native title claim, avoiding the suspension of more than $1 billion in benefits from the James Price Point gas hub.

While the literature does not conclusively condemn the word "Aborigines" as politically incorrect, it has been widely criticised as insensitive because of its colonial currency. The use of the word along with the language of the lead paragraph is derogatory. The sentence uses negative language of "bowed to threats" and "abandoned" to place the reader in a critical position.

The *Australian Associated Press* articles published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* used very limited specific terminology other than "indigenous" or "traditional owners", to the point where there seemed to be a deliberate avoidance.

The word "Indigenous" is recognised as an encompassing, useful generic term and in the space-restricted news environment, that is very important. More telling is the lack of capitalisation. Why would the two mainstream news organisations choose to go against the norm established by the State and Federal Governments? The lower case "indigenous" is used internationally – including by the United Nations – to refer to the original inhabitants, in particular as marginalised peoples. This may be a reflection of colonial attitudes to strip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of recognition of their unique national identity.

It is this discourse, along with the others listed above, that demonstrates the mainstream environmental news media's complicity in Indigenous identity construction.

6. **Conclusions**

The representation of Indigenous people in environmental news media is more fair, accurate and equitable than in general news, but it still constructs Indigenous identities that are fraught with inaccuracies, stereotypes and oppressive discourse. The review of existing literature examining the representation of Indigenous people in the media and the relationship between Indigenous people and the environment provided a foundation from which to apply these findings. The research drew on the theoretical frameworks of post-colonialism, racism and agenda-setting theory to help explain and understand the processes at play, and outlined critical discourse analysis and interviews as the methodology for analysing environmental news media representations of Indigenous peoples.

Ten discourses were uncovered in the sample of eighteen print environmental news articles from *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *ABC Online*. A prominent discourse was the flawed use of Indigenous sources in reporting environmental news, in particular the absence of Indigenous people quoted, the use of non-Indigenous people speaking on behalf of Indigenous people, the nomination of Indigenous spokespeople who did not necessarily have a mandate and the homogenisation of Indigenous perspectives. The use of human interest and conflict news angles was also exposed, with romanticised portrayals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and media battles between conservationists and Indigenous peoples found in the sample. Deeper and potentially more telling discourses found in the sample were themes of social disadvantage and opportunities of development, turmoils of traditional custodianship, lack of acknowledgement of traditional governance, and use of language that reinforces equality.

This research aimed to answer the questions: How are Indigenous people represented in environmental news in the mainstream media? Who are the Indigenous sources of environmental news? And why are Indigenous people being reported as they are in environmental news?

Unfortunately the answers to questions only raise more problems. Indigenous people were represented in environmental news as respondents to conflict, without self-determined governance, and without an acknowledgement of individuality and diversity. Indigenous voices were largely absent from the articles analysed, and when Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people were quoted, they were often misrepresented by homogenising perspectives and romanticising Indigenous sources.

The reasons Indigenous people are represented as they are in environmental news could stem from a number of factors. Institutionalised stereotyping leads to racism; post-colonial institutions lead to stereotyping. Agenda-setting processes mean illegitimate news values are perpetuated: the news environment means journalists are unable to legitimately report on Indigenous issues.

Among various other public portrayals, news representations are crucial in representing culture, people, politics and social life: news representations contribute to ways in which people see themselves, their own identity and that of others, and the relations between "us" and the "Other" (Pietikäinen, 2003; Zelizer, 1997; Hartley, 1996).

There are some important implications of these findings. The belief that the work that the media do has profound effects on the nature of Australian society underpins academic research into the reporting of diversity (Jakubowicz et al, 1994). The reflection of racist and post-colonialist media representations of Indigenous Australians on society as a whole draws attention to the need for government policy to emphasise the shift of the country's social fabric. And this is not just an Australian phenomenon. Post-colonial representations of indigenous peoples in American, Canadian and Scandinavian media have established similar flaws (Turner, 2012; Pietikäinen, 2003; Ashcroft, 2001).

More questions are raised about the effect these media representations have on audiences and on Indigenous peoples, the prevalence of identity construction, and whether media representations of Indigenous people are improving. The research also poses questions about the nature of Indigenous people with the environment, and how mainstream media and society can better understand and reconcile traditional law and custom with Western governance styles.

It is hoped that this study will encourage discussions about racism, stereotyping, prejudice and add to a broader understanding of the complex ways that Aboriginality continues to affect Australian attitudes and policy.

If there is one conclusion that can be drawn from the research, it is that time and immersion are the best tactics journalists can employ to fairly, accurately and equitably report on

Indigenous people and affairs with relation to environmental issues. It is hoped this analysis will contribute to impacting the way journalists frame Indigenous people and issues within environmental news reporting and that news organisations will work to provide readers with coverage that conveys equality and accuracy.

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