CELEBRATING COMMUNITIES: COMMUNITY FESTIVALS, PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING

ISABEL JACKSON

THE AUSTRALIAN CENTRE, SCHOOL OF HISTORICAL STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

PARKVILLE, VICTORIA

jacksoni@unimelb.edu.au

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ABSTRACT

Community festivals and celebratory events acknowledge people, places and anniversaries and provide sites for social interaction, community participation, and expression of group identity. They act as artefacts of local concerns and interests and as a means for achieving political and economic ambitions and as a vehicle for meeting social and community needs. Individuals' participation in community festivals is seen as a means to connect and to reconnect to community and to society, and as a way of fostering or maintaining social capital. Increasingly it is acknowledged that they are also sites for self-actualisation and provide opportunities and potential for challenging the social and political status quo. Using the "Awakening" segment of the Opening Ceremony of the XXVII Olympiad in Sydney, and a presentation by the One Fire Dance Group in the Opening Ceremony at Williamstown Festival, Victoria, as case studies this paper will explore potential impacts and outcomes of performers participation in festivals. Specifically it will address the potential for preparation and for performances to advance Reconciliation and contribute to understanding of Australian self-identity.

The landmass we know today as the continent and country of Australia existed, in Classical and European imagination, before its colonisation as part of the British Empire in the late 1700s. Although its tangible existence is now known to the Western mind and it has a political reality, the search for its intangible national character continues.

Concerns about the establishment of a specific Australian national identity has been coloured by Australia's status as a settler nation and the memory of dispossession of native peoples implicit in the settlement process. For Australia, as with many settler nations of the "new world," there are cultural dilemmas in its conceptualisation as a nation. These dilemmas are grounded in "incommensurable differences" between a "sense of belonging, home and place" and between descendants of the original inhabitants and descendants of the "coloniser/migrant" (Moreton-Robinson 2003, p. 23). They find expression in discussion of cultural heritage practices, particularly in examination of how national iconographies achieves their status, and processes through which their status is maintained.

Australian nationalism and identity is often personified in heroic stereotypes on a theme of defence of country and conquest of the landscape. That the images are invariably Anglo-Saxon, and exclude Aboriginality and other non-white identities (Moran 2002, p. 668), results from history and from politics. Moreton-Robinson argues that the exclusion of "the Indigenous" national belonging was a necessary consequence of Australia's inextricable status as a British colony (2003, p. 25), whereby governmental policies and legislation known collectively as the "White Australia Policy" exercised strict control over non-Anglo migration. The effect was that in many creative works the presence of non-Anglo or Aboriginal characters were a useful plot device for signalling threats to the main characters, suggesting moral danger and social decadence, or furnishing particular scenes with exotic ambience. Rarely did the characters act as protagonists or did their activities provide a central narrative. Indeed, the "Aboriginal" characters were more likely to be an amalgam of Indigenous identities as is a commonly applied use of the term and so for the purpose of this paper the term "Aborigine" or "Aboriginal" will be used to describe populations pre-settlement and their descendants in a generic sense. Where possible the name of specific communities will be used.

The 1973 removal of race as a criterion to determine immigration selection (Markus 2001) reflected post World War II immigration but also signalled a move away from assimilation and towards multiculturalism. The same thinking that promoted multiculturalism, a way of acknowledging and valuing cultural difference, underpinned a growing avocation for a special place for Aboriginality and Aboriginal traditions (Moran 2002, p. 668) in Australia's image of itself. Challenges to terra nullius, combined with the development of a land rights movement and "Reconciliation" process (Scott 1998) highlighted issues of Aboriginal peoples' relationship to land and the centrality of this relationship to Aboriginal identity were part of this avocation. Combined, these factors affected Australia's self-image, especially the location of expressions of Aboriginal cultural activities within the context of communal belonging.

This paper will outline how performances and presentations by Aboriginal Australians in community festivals and celebratory public events can act as a means to maintain and retain elements of Aboriginal identity and have a potential to develop a shared national identity. It will use as case studies the *Awakening* segment of the Opening Ceremony of the XXVII Olympiad, Sydney, 15th September 2000, and a presentation by the Melbourne-based group One Fire Dance Group in the Opening Ceremony at Williamstown Festival, Victoria, 12th April 2008. Discussion will be in relation to the role and practice of community festivals and celebratory public events and these sites' particular characteristics especially their potential as sites where self-identity and belonging might be

generated or sustained. Particular reference will be made to the experience of participants in the two case studies and context of the two activities. Material for this paper is drawn from personal observations, interviews and informal conversations with participants, existing research in the area, theoretical and empirical studies, and promotional material in the public domain generated by the festivals themselves or their sponsoring and supporting bodies. Unless otherwise noted, comments regarding the Williamstown Festival are based on personal interaction with the festivals as an employee of Hobsons Bay City Council, the Festival's major sponsor.

THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATORY PUBLIC EVENTS

Australian and international research on community festivals, typically, explores the role of cultural signifiers in social identification and identity performance (Duffy 2000; Duffy & Permezel 2007). Some research examples illustrate a role for festivals and events in claiming space and making places (Smith 1993), or provides empirical evidence of social relationships that shows the existence of "an internal conceptual coherence" within popular culture (Suggett 1996, p. 79). Other research explores the social and economic impact of festivals (Chalip 2006) while others indicate social and mental health impacts of community-based festivals on specific populations (Barraket & Kaiser 2007; Mulligan, James, Scanlon & Ziguras 2004). Such research intersects with scholarship related to nationalism, community participation, social capital and social cohesion that builds on theoretical positions associated with the work of Benedict Anderson and Homi Bhabha (Alleyne 2002; Fortier 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006).

Related literature focuses on the substance, location, and existence of "community" and what is understood to constitute "culture" and "cultural" practices (Anderson 1991). The substance and materiality of "cultural practices" such as music and dance, their genesis and the meanings they are said to represent, are often read through a text of "signifying practices and social formations" (Bhabha 1996, p. 53). Communal locations, sites and texts such as festivals and events provide such a text. The presence or absence of particular groups or individuals on these occasions provides an additional layer of understanding – an insight into the "operational meaning" of the event and its context within a social structure (Turner 1982, p. 20). Turner proposes that although there might be a certain amount of euphoria associated with an event, and a "perception of shared emotional states" – a "communitas" – the feeling of fellowship is temporary (p. 21). Grimes notes that participants in "successful" celebratory occasions experience "a flowing surge of animated energy" that manifests in various ways but that "unsuccessful" occasions "have the aura of a hangover" (1982, pp. 278-279). Perceptions of a "successful" experience of an event have "positional meaning" based on an individual's relationship to that event and the social structure that provides the event's context (Turner 1982, p. 21). In contrast, Jankowiak and Todd White identify communitas as being characterised by "loss of status distinctions, boundaries, and a sense of merging that manifests itself in a profound sense of emotional fusion or psychological state" (1999, p. 336). They note, however, that much of the usefulness of "communitas" as a way of understanding events has been lost because of the looseness of application of the concept in specific situations. Nevertheless, an understanding of community festivals and celebratory public events can provide insight into how they might operate as sites of communitas.

Individually, community festivals can take many forms and come into existence in a variety of ways. By their nature, they bring "many members of a society into a single sociocultural space for a limited period of time" during which conflicts between conflicting sections of that society are in abeyance (Turner, p. 21). Typically, they share structural and logistical commonalities, for example, they are expected to be held on a regular basis, as well as carry expectations that they are organised by members of a community and that support is given to them by their community (Duffy 2000). In this sense community festivals acquire grass-roots relevance and are

presented as forms of celebratory intention related to these aspects of community presence (Duffy and Permezel 2007). Although they might occur spontaneously, they are commonly related to "expectable culturally shared events" such as life events, seasonal changes or religious beliefs and provide opportunities for personal creative inventiveness within culturally defined frameworks (Turner, p. 12).

Community festivals that provide for creative inventiveness, especially in arts-based cultural practices, are an opportunity for people to express and explore their dreams and ambitions. They can disrupt "social time", create "an intensification of behaviors" and create a shared experience that could well exist beyond the established social order (Stewart 1988, p. 87). In commemorating or celebrating a particular event they are an opportunity for a cessation of everyday activities, they can be a means to provide for social reconnection around a common interest (Etzioni 2000; Nasr, Abu Bakar & Bagader 2001). Although the associated activities and events may have no intrinsic value, they become the cornerstones of "the integrative rituals" built around them and serve as "strong boosters of commitments and bonds" diluted through daily mundane activities (Etzioni 2000, p. 45). Inherent fantasy elements allow participants to connect to their "history and glories" as a means to envisage their future, while behaving "blithely, disregarding normative ideals of behaviour" (Nasr *et al* 2001, p. 243). In these ways, they provide sites for communities to celebrate themselves and their activities, and to position themselves for the gaze of their own members and the gaze of the outsider.

Community festivals can be associated with carnivals through their potential for re-envisaging self and as a space for the explicit and the implicit to co-exist as people hide their true selves in the created activities (Da Matta & Green 1983). Within this space, there is potential for the world to be turned temporarily upside down through "fair-ground" spectacle including enactments of gender role reversals, or animals trained to act as humans (Nugent 2005). However, community festivals tend not to be opposed to official culture and rarely are they infused with "utopian radicalism" in opposition to elite society (Lindahl 1996, p. 57). They might include parodied social behaviours, as associated with the carnivalesque (da Matta & Green 1983; Lindahl 1996), but are more likely to profile activities that maintain the position of "old ways, old laws, old families [which hold] positions of absolute control" (Lindahl 1996, p. 57). Within this paradigm there are, however, opportunities and potential to challenge the social norms and to offer alternatives to political status quos by presenting an idealised past, or for an imagined future and for elaboration of new modes for relation between people (Pomorska 1984). The case studies, *Awakening* and One Fire, illustrate such potentials. Both were component parts of programmed activities that featured items of purely entertainment value but others within which historical episodes and figures were caricaturised, acquired cartoon-like behaviours and/or become saturated with irony, however, both case studies used their setting as a means to advocate for specific political and social outcomes.

The Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games outlined the host city and country (Atkins 2002). Typical of modern Olympic ceremonies, it provided a gargantuan spectacle of symbolic and emotional significance to the contemporary culture of the host nation, but also gave "a window to the soul" of Australia and it laced Sydney on a pedestal (Ryan 2002, p. 85). The creative team for the Opening Ceremony devised a narrative that juxtaposed the characters of a young white girl with a male Aboriginal elder; she experiences her journey as a dream and he is the spirit guide for the dream. *Awakening* provided the spirit guide character and provided the setting for the unfolding of the other segments. The Opening Ceremony at Williamstown Festival, in a slightly different vein, acknowledged the traditional owners of the lands on which the Festival was being held. The presentation by One Fire provided information about the people and their culture as a reference point to the contemporary community.

The Sydney Olympiad was a large scale, large budget event with a national focus and an international audience whereas Williamstown Festival is small scale, community based festival aimed at a local audience. Both events provided social and political contexts for exploration of community identity and of belonging, and both performances were within a broader program of activities. The events and their contexts provided opportunities for the Aboriginal performers to present cultural material to a predominately non-Aboriginal audience and to engage with that audience. Analysis of the two performances will discuss the performance opportunities as a catalyst for performers' exploration of their own cultural backgrounds. It will outline the development of the performances and discuss the potential of such performances to enhance the Reconciliation process between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia.

CASE STUDY 1: AWAKENING

The *Awakening* segment in the Opening Ceremony began with a guide and songman character calling together the Aboriginal peoples of Australia to welcome the world to the Olympic Stadium, on the ancestral lands of the Bidjigal people (Foley 1998). The segment ended with the lawmaker and an ancestral spirit, a "Wandjina", throwing down a lightning bolt for cleansing and regeneration of the earth, which was symbolised by a burst of fireworks.

Developed over approximately four months, *Awakening* involved more than a thousand people from communities from across the continent and the Torres Strait. Participants of *Awakening* included people living on tribal lands and in urban settings, as well as young and older individuals. Rhoda Roberts and Stephen Page, the artistic directors aimed to reflect the breadth of Aboriginal experience – urban or non-urban – by incorporating ancestral elements and contemporary. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contributed to the overall production, including ideas for the segment, music and choreography. Some communities presented individual components within the *Awakening* segment, while other components included a mix of communities. Some communities presented adaptations of ceremonial song and dance in typical use within their communities. Choreographies were created for people who, for a variety of reasons, may have had very little, if any, contact with their own Aboriginal heritage. These dances included a variety of traditionally styled movements with elements of contemporary dance (The Awakenings 2001).

A ceremonial design was the basis for the performance layout and costuming, as much as possible, was traditionally based. Dancers wore costuming, including body paint and ornamentation, associated with their communities, and metallic finish ochre was used for the more contemporarily styled dance sequences. Mischievous Mimi spirits from Arnhem Land were adapted into stylised stilt-walking figures, and a depiction of a Wandjina spirit from the Kimberley area of northwest Australia figured on a backdrop, which dominated the performance area. The Wandjina's roles, bringing the life-giving monsoon rains and bringing people together, were reflected in a large-scale backdrop depicting the Wandjina.

Bangarra Dance Theatre, itself a "contemporary tribe" (Meekison cited by Ryan 2002, p. 89), was entrusted to provide experience, contacts and discretion needed in the development and presentation of *Awakening*, especially in the use and adaptations of material, and the negotiation of associated protocols. Additionally, many of its company members provided artistic, technical and logistical support.

CASE STUDY 2: ONE FIRE DANCE GROUP

The One Fire Dance Group operates on a much smaller scale than either Bangarra Dance Theatre or the International Olympic Committee but faces similar issues in the development of its performances.

In an interview on 16 May 2008, John Tye, a foundation member of One Fire, described how One Fire began in a suburban backyard in Melbourne in 1995 with a group of young people from the local Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) School. In the KODE school where cultural activities are emphasised, the particular needs of Indigenous students are catered for, "credence is given to traditional ways" and relatives and community members are welcomed into the school at all times (Winkler nd). Activities that grew into One Fire were ways to give the young people an insight into their culture. It was intended "to give them something to work with and to steer them away from some of the problems and issues they were experiencing" including self-destructive, anti-social and criminal behaviours (Tye 2008, pers. comm. 16 May). Artists and Elders, both local and from other areas, developed the students' cultural knowledge, the songs and dances and their meanings, and assisted in the making instruments for use in performances. One Fire's first performance, in 1995, was at the KODE School where many of the members and their families were students.

Over the years One Fire has developed a core repertoire and a core group of performers. Of assistance in this development were family connections within the group: many members are Yorta Yorta, others are Gunditjmara and Wiradjuri. Many members had grown-up together and the group's performance repertoire is based on input from all its members. As described by Tye, this process has enabled the group to develop its own performance pieces based on common themes across tribal groups and also to have guidance regarding protocols for performing this material.

One Fire performs at festivals and corporate events as well as conducting cultural information sessions, particularly for schools. Their presentation at Williamstown Festival combined cultural and educational material and included background information about the individual items of its performance, particularly who would have performed the material and for what purpose, and how specific dances and songs would be used in a ceremonial function of welcome. Typical of the performance were pieces that teach young people about collecting food and resources and the dangers that might be involved in this activity.

The presentation culminated in a "Welcome to Country" given by an Elder of the Wurundjeri people, one of the five groups that make up the Kulin Nation on whose land the Festival was held.

DISCUSSION

The location of Aboriginality in an Australian communal identity and of Aboriginal cultural material at these festivals and events is problematic in the context of a community belonging – the event organisers contextualised *Awakening* and One Fire as having specific symbolic significance within the programmes. Their juxtaposition with the remainder of the programmes, which emphasised escapist entertainment, raises issues about their reading by the audience. Whether it is appropriate for them to be highlighted as discreet segments or woven into the overall programme is coloured by the special status of Aboriginal Australians: a separation from the main programme highlights this status but can be read as marginalisation or exclusion. Tye addressed this dichotomy in reference to One Fire and the position of their performances at events. The dichotomy's implications was discussed by participants and by commentators on *Awakening* who saw an Aboriginal presence located outside mainstream Australian identity (Elder 2007; Kociumbas 2003; Lenskyj 2002; Reed 2003; Ryan 2003). *Awakening*

was seen as "a palimpsest, in which the Indigenous presence was written over by the non-Indigenous narratives (Reed 2003, p. 95) and a reiteration of a belief that 'real' Aboriginal people were, and are, located only in the 'outback', where they eschew material culture in the pursuit of rare and higher things" (Kociumbas 2003, p. 132). The commentary on *Awakening* was, however, at odds with the reported experience of the participants. Roberts and Page found the occasion to be an invaluable opportunity for different clans to learn about each other, to come together, and to mix and blend together traditional and contemporary Aboriginal cultures (The Awakenings 2001). For Page, the Opening Ceremony itself and the development stage of *Awakening* was like a big "corroboree", a ceremonial gathering within which individuals and nations bring and share their stories. Participant communities used *Awakening* as a chance to show and to share their culture with others; individuals commented on being able to meet others and opportunities to show others in the group what they do at home, and to take back home what they had learned (The Awakenings 2001). In her critique, Reed noted that *Awakening* slotted comfortably into the Olympic operating notion of "belonging-in-parallel" – within which "Indigenous cultural symbols and rituals" contribute to "the euphoric … experience of brotherhood of man" intrinsic to these events – but that this type of experience is, by its nature, ultimately temporary (Reed 2002, p. 85).

Individual experiences of events are understood through participants' common understandings of the activities and their context. The community of a common belonging, described as " 'in-common' community", is "so frequently premised on exclusion" (Elder 2007, p. 28) that "exclusion" is an inherent condition of the definition of identification and group belonging (Hall 1996, p. 2). The exclusion/inclusion can be used however as a strategically or politically in the context of community festivals and celebratory public events. It can take the form of proportional representation – numbers or status – of groups within the larger community, and the degree of control or influence members of minority or marginalised cultures might be able to exercise over their depictions within the overall event. Exclusion/inclusion processes can be exercised deliberately or they might be structurally embedded in event planning, delivery and operations. Resultantly, as suggested in relation to *Awakening*, "even when [event organisers] are trying to be good, the end result can be that racism is reinforced" (Elder 2007, p. 36).

As noted by Elder, the Olympic Games was an opportunity to illustrate key aspects of Australia's national stories (2007, p. 31). The Opening Ceremony achieved this by drawing on representational codes about being Australian but maintained the centrality of *terra nullius* to the phantasm of dominant national stories. Despite the time given to *Awakening*, as "a celebration of the beauty and power of Indigenous people themselves" (The Awakening 2001), no mention was made of the difficult parts of the national story. Elder argues that this might "seem fair enough in a feel-good ceremony", but Aboriginal people became invisible as the national story unfolded, not represented in either a positive or negative light, and excluded even from tableaux such as the pastoral industry, in which they played an integral role (2007, pp. 33-36). Additionally, a welcome by the local Koori community, conducted immediately prior to the main Ceremony was excluded from the televised activities and from the commemorative DVD (Elder 2007). At the Williamstown Festival, an Aboriginal presence was limited to the opening event and not reflected in other activities. In informal discussion, the coordinators attributed this to a lack of resources to develop an appropriate through component. Nevertheless, this was the first time that there was such a presentation, it was promoted strongly, was well received and generated interest in developing activities for future Festivals, particularly within the context of the cultural heritage of the Williamstown area.

A cultural heritage value for this type of presentation, principally to the development and process of the segment and resultant outcomes, was evident in *Awakening*.

Atkins, Artistic Director responsible for the Opening Ceremony, saw the Opening Ceremony as an opportunity to highlight Aboriginal performing arts as part of a unique cultural element of Australia (Atkins 2002). Page and Roberts, Artistic Directors for *Awakening*, saw it as an opportunity to show the breadth of the surviving Aboriginal cultural heritage (The Awakenings 2001). In the end, logistical and contextual demands of the Opening Ceremony influenced individual components of *Awakening*, for example the formation and duration of dance pieces. There were issues around the time needed for songs and dance that are usually done in "ceremonial time" yet had to be adapted to the tight timing demands of the event (The Awakenings 2001). Similarly, dances that are very self-contained and usually done in a small spatial area were required to travel across the arena. A concern that could arise from altering cultural performance items is the extents to which cultural material can be altered and still retain its intention for the participants. Documented observations from the artistic directors and the performers indicate that the performers themselves made changes to their material. This was seen strongly in the processes for adaptation of the Wandjina and Mimi spirit figures done in consultation with the custodians of the spirits, and with the designers and engineers who oversaw their fabrication (The Awakenings 2001).

Equally important to this discussion and these criticisms of *Awakening* is an understanding of the term "traditional" relative to cultural material and the featuring of so called "traditional" material in these events. "Traditional", in this sense refers to actions and understandings that draw on connections to lifestyle, beliefs and practices and is at the expense Aboriginal performers have made their name in many forms and styles. In Aboriginal societies many of these actions and understandings relate to familial rights and responsibilities, and a sustainability-based relationship with the environment. As described by Tye (2008, pers. comm. 16 May), traditional lifestyle is not about the types of clothes that are worn or the dwellings lived in but are foundations on which decisions are made and actions taken. Thus, within these parameters, the performances used by One Fire and in *Awakening* are "traditional". The designation traditional neither precludes use of technologies in the performances nor suggests that the performance material has no current meaning or function; in fact, the reverse seems to be true. In the development of *Awakening* and in presentation and development of performances by One Fire, individuals and communities with custodial access and responsibilities for song and dance spoke of the connections that the material made between them and their lives. Additionally, getting to know the traditional material can be seen, as with the impetus for One Fire, as establishing a platform from which other things can be explored and, especially for youth who are "at risk", it can assist in making meaningful connections in their lives. In the preparation for *Awakening* individuals who were disruptive to the rehearsals were under threat of being sent home so, as one child remarked, "we [were] all real good" (The Awakenings 2001). However, at one of the coordination meetings, Page remarked that there were some who were pulled out but kept re-appearing next morning. Roberts believed they were the ones who would benefit most from a project such as this.

CONCLUSION

For much of the twentieth century "White Australia" enabled being white European, English-speaking and British to be the benchmark against which desirability could be measured. It ignored the social and lived realities of the continent's Aboriginal peoples and the lives of their descendents, and gave credence to a British legal understanding that the continent was *terra nullius*. Tye identifies the process of continuing One Fire and the presentation of cultural material as being part of an ongoing message about pride in self and in one's Aboriginality, and as a reminder that Aborigines and Aboriginal culture haven't disappeared. This is a direct connection between an understanding of oneself and one's background, a participatory role in the community, combined with love for the physical and the cultural heritage of a location, with a sense of belonging to that place (Tye 2008, pers. comm. 16 May).

Tye's sentiments are reflected in literature that links feelings of "belonging" to an historical connectedness as part of a past and future continuum, and of feeling social connectedness to others (Miller 2002; Yuval-Davis 2006). This sentiment reflects an understanding that an individual's sense of "community" and group identity based on ongoing relationships best understood through action, shared interests, and personal sense of attachment to an identified physical location (Cohen cited in Alleyne 2002, p. 608).

Celebratory public events and community festivals provide culturally and physically defined spaces, where communities can celebrate themselves and their activities. These events also position participants for the gaze of their own members and the gaze of the outsider. They operate as sites for self-identity and of shared belonging by "shoring up commitment to one shared ('common') set of beliefs and practices" (Etzioni 2000, p. 45) and provide opportunities for people to connect to their "history and glories" as a means to envisage their future (Nasr *et al* 2001). They also provide sites of understandings of physical place, individuals' relationship to that place and their sense of belonging and connection to others. In Australia, such events provide opportunities for re-profiling Aboriginal people within the national social landscape, to operate as a catalyst for maintenance and growth of Aboriginal culture, and as an opportunity for increasing cultural understanding between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. Aboriginal performances in public events and community festivals safeguard against destruction and disappearance of cultural practices and foster opportunities to raise awareness of the relationship between oneself and experience and the physical environment. They have the potential for connecting differing understandings of what it means to be an Australian, within the constructed and imagined Australian identity, and help create a shared sense of belonging based on an understanding of experience.

As celebrations of a communal self, community festivals and celebratory public events offer a dual potential of presenting a sense of personal truths, and of exploring an imagined potential self. Celebrations and explorations of communal self are seen in Australian celebrations/festival, at both a national and at a local level. An examination of the conditions and context, and the presentations themselves, of *Awakening* as part of the Opening Ceremony of the XXVII Olympiad, and a presentation by the Melbourne based group One Fire Dance Group, in the Opening Ceremony at Williamstown Festival, indicate potential ways for overcoming the hurdle of representation of specific sectors of the broader Australian community. Both examples indicate how a collective approach by the Aboriginal participants produced presentations with meaning and relevance to the participants and significance within the overall program. The observed and stated experience of One Fire and *Awakenings* performers, and more importantly the inclusion of Aboriginal self-representation, is a vital part of that experience as Australia continues to develop as a nation. Australia is a settler nation negotiating separation from its colonial origins and its place in a globalised world. In the process, it continues to redefine its self-image in response to political and social change. A key element of this is the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia. The case studies of *Awakening* and One Fire Dance Group show that preparing for performance and presentation of Aboriginal cultural material provides mechanisms to negotiate individual belongings and relationships with other individuals. The experience of the participants, and the context of the presentations, shows that preparation and performance at public events and community festivals positions/re-positions Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experiences. Together they can facilitate a common future.

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