

Wrapped in Cloth

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Abstract

In Canberra on 13th February 2008 Ngunnawal Elder, Matilda House, regaled in a possum skin cloak, welcomed all assembled on Ngunnawal land to witness the Apology to the Stolen Generation at the opening of the 42nd sitting of the Australian Parliament. Such hope was invested in the day and the full repercussions are perhaps yet to be felt.

One of the stylistic consequences of postcolonialism has been the global invigoration of ethnic/traditional dress and, in Australia, recognising that Indigenous culture is both innovative and is a continuing tradition, this has arguably opened the potential for a dynamic challenge to Western ceremonial dress practices through the wearing of possum skin cloaks at such a traditional event.

While ceremonial dress may seem removed from the day to day fashion industry, what has spawned is a slow growing Indigenous fashion industry that now runs an Indigenous Fashion Week. It has the usual key actors, such as the (Indigenous) supermodel, the (Indigenous) star designers and (Indigenous) celebrities that promote (Indigenous) fashion.

This paper focuses on the 'traditional' versus 'tradition' and West versus non-West. More particularly by using case studies such as, Ernabella Designs and Tiwi designs, the paper explores how the printed fabric cottage-industry that has been the bedrock of contemporary Indigenous fashion and has been the springboard for the industry. Balancing between using traditional motifs ascribed to individual Indigenous people and the demands of commercial ventures has been fraught with complexities.

Key words: possum skin cloaks, Indigenous dress practices, postcolonial

Introduction:

In Canberra on 13th February 2008 Ngunnawal Elder, Matilda House, regaled in a possum skin cloak, welcomed all assembled on Ngunnawal land to witness the Apology to the Stolen Generation at the opening of the 42nd sitting of the Australian Parliament. Photographer, Juno Gemes, was there to record this historic event and asked 'Why had this respectful and pleasant event never happened in the parliament before?' (Gemes 2008: 116; cf News.com.au: 2008))

Cultural revitalization through dress is an emerging practice for Indigenous Australians. It contributes to making intangible culture visible. Events such as

opening of the Australian Parliament, requires ceremonial, or at least formal dress for the key actors. Normally such dress practices have had their roots in British culture. In fact, all ceremonial dress from military uniforms, academic gowns, judicial dress through to suits, descend directly from the 'motherland'. Indigenous ceremonial dress has rarely played such a central role in the mainstream Australian political system. However, since the late 1990s in Australia, there have been thousands of ceremonies that have been prefaced, or are integral to, key cultural and political events. Since early 2000s the emergence of specific dress, not only indicate cultural revitalization and make more tangible the continued presence and survival of Indigenous people, but also signify the gravitas of the occasion through dress. Reversing a history of exclusion through non-western dress can mean reclamation of culture and identity for Indigenous people. Non-western fashion can be a potent political tool for revitalization of culture.

Arguably through the Apology, Australian politics is shifting in what the 'father' of reconciliation, Pat Dodson notes as a 'seminal moment in the nation's history' (2008). Curiously the media did not seem to comment or find it curious that Matilda House wore a possum skin cloak (made by Treahna Hamm). However, it is in one way interesting that the possum skin cloak is now considered as an 'authentic' Indigenous dress practice at this point in time, aligning with the sense of nationhood. This authenticity has flowed into other areas of cultural life in Australia, and intrepidly beyond the arts scene and the crafts sector towards the somewhat unforgiving fashion industry.

Traditional cultures and 'authenticity' are increasingly recognized as invented constructions for contemporary purposes (Alivizatou 2012: 38). The older debate of 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983) which gives reference to postcolonial politics of recognition, can be useful in thinking about reclamation of culture. It is through these invented traditions that cultural distinctiveness, such as the wearing of the possum skin cloaks, that Indigenous people are given a visibility and potentially positioned more powerfully. I argue here in this paper that there are positive repercussions for the fashion industry.

Dress and the postcolonial

The dress practices and clothing that arrived in the trunks, baggage and on the bodies of the white settlers in the early colony in Port Jackson of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were seen as part of the 'civilizing project' on both the Indigenous people who occupied the land, and the ne'er do well convicts (McQueen 1999: 1). Dress played a key role in the colony and, at times, acted as a controlling device, not only for the settlers, but also Indigenous people.

Unlike other British colonies, this new colony did not attempt to recognise, inherit or accommodate any previous legal system. The new white settlers in New South

Wales did not perceive that there was a clash with the established Indigenous culture. The bodies of Indigenous people could not be 'read' as signifying a comparable social order or indicate a comprehensible hierarchical political structure. In contrast, Britain at the outset adopted a military cultural system, displayed through highly decorative dress practices and discipline. It was essentially a military camp with soldiers, marines and convicts, employing concise Western markers of hierarchical fashion. This dress system with all its encoded signifiers filtered throughout the settler colony and to Indigenous people on the fringes of 'civilization'. Many governors of the day presented Indigenous 'chiefs' with military-styled gorgets in recognition of acts of 'loyalty' to the colony (Troy 1993). Worn out military clothing was also given to Aboriginal men to consolidate relationships.

This paper focuses on Indigenous dress practices, cultural revitalization enmeshed with the body politic and the implications for the embryonic Indigenous fashion industry. As well, it skirts around the catwalk and the 'motor' of fashion where the use of Aboriginal motifs in the Australian fashion system is cyclical (Maynard 1999). Jennifer Craik notes that exotic themes have been the leitmotif of new fashions and are the basis of fashion derivations (Craik 1994: 38). Another cycle that occurs in Australia, particularly in the 1980s, is termed as 'Australiana'. Since then, sensitivities to appropriation of Indigenous imagery have meant that there is recognition through copyright legislation that Indigenous people should have control of their own visual culture.

One of the stylistic consequences of post-colonialism has been the global invigoration of ethnic/traditional dress. In Australia, recognising that Indigenous culture is both innovative and is a continuing tradition, this has arguably opened the potential for a dynamic challenge to Western ceremonial dress practices through the wearing of skin cloaks at such a 'traditional' event. The flow-on effect has seen the emergence of a non-western fashion in essentially an outpost of Western culture.

While ceremonial dress may seem removed from the day to day fashion industry, this paper also examines the connection between Indigenous tradition and contemporary dress. There is a slow growing Indigenous fashion industry that now, with a developing critical mass, celebrates an Indigenous Fashion Week. It has the usual key actors such as the (Indigenous) supermodel, the (Indigenous) star designers and (Indigenous) celebrities that promote (Indigenous) fashion. The springboard for the industry has undoubtedly been the Indigenous silk-screen textile sector, whose origins were small cottage-industries out in the remote communities. The transformation from sacred/secret designs, once used exclusively for ceremony, to commoditization is significant and has been fraught with complexities. It has meant balancing between using traditional motifs ascribed to individual Indigenous people and clans with the demands of commercial ventures worn by unknown and unrelated people.

It is not only the translation of 'traditional' Indigenous works used in the fashion sector. As well, urban Indigenous artists also have been active in the production of printed textiles and are behind fashion labels. In particular, artists associated with Boomalli, an Indigenous art collective set up in Sydney in 1987, have contributed to Indigenous fashion visibility. Adrian Newstead through the Aboriginal Art Gallery, Cooee Gallery, has also been a key agent in the Indigenous fashion industry in Sydney.

Generally, we tend to think of Indigenous dress practice exchanges as being one way, from western to non-western dress, encouraged or pressured by Western sense of morality. The Mother Hubbard dress introduced by the missionaries in the tropical north of Australia is an example. Rather than eschewing any links with the missions, Torres Strait Islander women now celebrate this style of dress with vibrant tropical floral patterning, making it their own.

It is difficult to think of a non-Indigenous person now taking on 'traditional' Indigenous dress, (unless they are being initiated) what is far more acceptable is the use of 'traditional' motifs and patterning of textiles, arguably within the western fashion framework. Indigenous ornament and fashion is worn to display significant cultural capital: an affiliation with Indigenous people, land rights and self-determination, or as well as celebrating the creativity of indigenous people. The most predominate colours are red, yellow and black – the colours of the Indigenous flag designed by Luritja artist, Harold Thomas, in 1971.

Henry Reynolds has pointed out that Indigenous people have reacted creatively to European ideas, techniques, language and commodities (2007: 15). This is true of textile production and dress practices of Indigenous people. Their innovative creative outputs have not been limited to fashion, but also Aboriginals have made significant contributions to contemporary fibre and textile practices in Australia. Fashion and textiles are often intertwined.

In recent years, conferences such as the Selling Yarns 1 (2006), Selling Yarns 2 (2009) and Selling Yarns 3 (2013), the knowledge transmission has been from Indigenous makers to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous makers, museum professionals, artists and academics. In these forums 'traditional' and 'tradition' are challenged and West versus non-West seems to dissipate.

During the 2013 conference, delegates were, unsuspectingly, allocated groups to work with Indigenous instructors who patiently revealed and imparted their skills. These two sessions were devoted to hands-on making, giving a far greater understanding Indigenous fibre practice than any academic paper could have conveyed about revitalization. The experience of making was as important as the conceptual ideas about culture. Those intent on displaying their cultural capital, swanning around in glorious textiles and fibre art, were put to work. Those on the catwalk were put to work.

The bumpy road of the Australian fashion industry

The journey of mass production and commoditization of Aboriginal art and designs used in fashion is, and has been, a bumpy road. Along the way, appropriation and copyright infringements threaten the integrity of Indigenous works. Dependence on public funding through grants has been necessary. Bureaucratic misjudgement have plagued or played a part in the failure of some Indigenous community base businesses. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous have been to blame (Foley 2006: 4). Following up from seed-money, marketing and commercialization has not always been a steady route either. What also complicates the whole process is indeed separating out 'design' from the whole of complex and interlocking relationship between tangible and intangible Indigenous culture. Inserting design into the fashion industry has been challenging.

Australian Indigenous motifs have been appropriated by non-Indigenous artists and designers since the 1940s. At that time, painters, such as Margaret Preston, began the modernist engagement with Aboriginal art. The use of motifs in printed fabric also began in the early 1940s, by pioneer textile designers such as Frances Bourke, Nance McKenzie and Annie Outlaw. These fabrics were limited to interior fabrics and craft objects rather than fashion. These were modernist appropriations devoid of cultural and spiritual significance, surface patterns dictated by seasonal colours and fashion trends. Indeed, they have a look about them that locates the era in which they were created, rather than the often timelessness of 'traditional' art. However much we condemn this appropriation, it was a mode of cultural engagement between Western and non-Western cultures.

Since the 1970s, as use of Indigenous imagery began to proliferate in fashion and textiles. It started to 'have an increasing role in the imaginary of the Australian State' (Morphy 2008: 28). However, with that, unauthorized copying or 'cultural piracy' occurred. This led to a number of court cases, particularly when culturally sensitive works that were secret or sacred have been used commercially and without permission from the original artists or communities.

The Australian fashion industry as a whole has had a somewhat chequered career, based on European design and fashion systems (Maynard 2001). It was in the 1970s and 1980s that the look of Australian fashion came into its own as 'authentic' (Maynard 1999). It was a brief exciting and lively period lasting up until the implementation of the GATT Free trade Agreements that were put in place in the 1990s. These agreements essentially dismantled a large scale and protected mass-production of the textile and fashion industries in Australia.

It was in the halcyon days of the 1970s and 1980s that Indigenous imagery 'trickled up' and appeared on the catwalks and pages of fashion magazines, such as a Zhandra Rhodes photo shoot in the Olgas in 1974 for *Vogue Australia*, and then 'trickling down' through t-shirts on the streets, tourist haunts and swimwear

on the beaches (Maynard 1999). Arguably a number of designers were catalysts for the promotion of Indigenous designs, in particular Katie Pye, Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson. Although they began using Aboriginal motifs without sensitivity to spiritual beliefs or permissions, these designers ended up collaborating with a number of Indigenous communities. (It is important to note that this engagement has continued, but with the community as the brand rather than the European designers.) Again this was a mode of cultural engagement in a framework that has arguably facilitated the acceptance of Indigenous design within the mainstream world of fashion. 'Borrowing' motifs out of naivety was to pave the way for non-western fashion activity. The Indigenous spirit, the Mimi, was used as a design by Kee was a positive engagement with Aboriginal culture, but would never occur today.

Indigenous people have been making art as a long and continuous practice for the last 40,000 years. Anthropologists and archeologists since early twentieth century have constantly examined Indigenous people and recorded their intangible heritage. As well they collected tangible aspects of their cultures which have generally ended up in museums and 'keeping places'. Interestingly it has been at missions, former mission settlements and gaols that have been places where contemporary Indigenous art has been fostered in the last thirty years. The case studies of Ernabella and Tiwi Designs below illustrate this.

The resistance to recognize Indigenous arts practice as fine art has dissipated as booming prices soar at the fine art auction houses. In the Papunya Settlement in the Northern Territory Indigenous artists were encouraged to paint on initially on boards and then on canvas. Artists sold their works for under \$100. Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri sold *Love Story* for \$60 to a 'sheep farmer' in 1972. In 1990, *Love Story* broke records selling at Sotheby's for \$57,500 (Johnson 2010: 145-149). In 2008, Clifford Possum's *Warlugulong* sold for \$2.4 million to the National Gallery of Australia. Aboriginal art is now systematically collected by state and national galleries and collecting institutions, as well as collector for financial investment.

The rise of Indigenous hand printed textiles began in parallel with the rise of the Aboriginal art market, although never reaching the prices of painting (and sculpture). As well, world-wide, there was a general flowering of crafts in the late 1960s and early 1970s which looked to Indigenous people and their crafts across the globe for technique, the spirituality or philosophy embedded in making practices and, at times, for inspiration.

At this point both a grass roots movement of production and a top-down approach for infrastructure occurring. This may well be the cause of the bumpy road. In Australia, under the Whitlam Government (1972-75) the national Australia Council and state and territory Crafts Councils were formed. Within the Australia Council, the Aboriginal Arts Board was created. The Board assisted in providing advisors to arts communities. Along with the formation of overarching

infrastructures, was also the emergence of Western Desert painters at Papunya which catapulted Australian Indigenous art onto, not only the national stage, but the international art market.

Around this time, Indigenous artist, Jimmy Pike, began the long running textile and fashion company, Desert Designs. He had been encouraged to paint while incarcerated in Western Australia. In the 1990s, Indigenous designers and activists such as Bronwyn Bancroft in Sydney, from the Boomalli co-operative, and Ron Gidgup in Perth were making political statements through their works (Maynard 2001: 132) .

Two of the earliest communities to benefit from the funding of advisors through the Aboriginal Arts Board, were Ernabella, the oldest continuously operating Aboriginal art centre in Australia since 1949, and Tiwi Designs, set up in 1969. These centres have flourished. The arts industry is a major source of employment for a number of Indigenous communities.

Ernabella

The Ernabella (*Pukatja*) community sits within the Musgrave Ranges of South Australia. Anthropologists and researchers have been visiting since 1933. Originally a sheep station, it became a Presbyterian mission from 1936 – 1972. Today eighty six per cent of the population is Indigenous. The art centre was set up for the women, as there were little income opportunities for them, while the men worked on the station. The women built on traditional skills such as spinning fibres which were used for head dress, belts and ornamental wear. Sheep from the station were a ready source of fibre. Wool was spun and woven into rugs and shawls. These were styled on traditional sand patterns.

Winifred Hilliard was a local arts advisor from 1954 to 1986. In 1971, the women began to experiment with batik, using brushes instead of *tjanting* (the traditional Indonesian tool). Subsequently the works had a painterly style. With a grant from the Crafts Council of Australia, New York batik teacher, Leo Brereton, ran a workshop for the group. In 1974 three of the women travelled to Indonesia to see and work with batik artists there. The following year, Danish artist, Vivianne Bertelsen, went to Ernabella. She introduced a range of new dyes and waxes that overcame earlier difficulties (Kaus 2004: 22).

The label, 'Ernabella Designs', was established at this time. It is an umbrella for a number of regional groups and accommodates a variety of cultural and individual idiosyncrasies of styles. Utopia, one of the smaller groups, supplied Linda Jackson with batik silks for her fashion collections in the 1970s. Once art collectors began to collect lengths of batiks during the Indigenous art market boom, the transition of fabric into fashion slowed down (English and Pomazan 2010: 89). This label has been a steady development; however, the threat of digital printing, will undoubtedly affect the employment of Indigenous people working in the

workshops. Extracting 'design' from the meaning and making process is problematic.

Tiwi Designs

Melville Island and Bathurst Island are a twenty minutes flight from Darwin of the coast of the Northern Territory. The arts centre at Nguuiu, on Bathurst Island, also had been a mission, like Ernabella. Here the nuns taught women 'fancy work' to the women. Men worked on woodblock prints and carving. It was from the woodblock prints that textile printing derived. The Catholic Mission at Nguuiu and Pirlangimpi on neighboring Melville Island banned ceremonial activity. Ethnographers and anthropologists collected 'traditional work' that survived. It was after World War II that state galleries, such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, began intermittently to collect works as 'art'.

In 1969, Bede Tungutalum and Eddie Purantatameri, along with Giovanni Tipungwuti set up Tiwi Designs, a silk-screen workshop at Nguuiu. Like Ernabella, an art teacher, Madeleine Clear, was employed through the mission (Wood Conroy 2004: 141). Also through the Australia Council, in 1974 support was given for the initiative and provided money for a co-ordinator, Diana Wood Conroy (textile artist and archaeologist), to oversee the production and marketing of Tiwi Designs, Tiwi Pottery and Tiwi Clothing Company (in the 1980s renamed as Bima Wear). Silk-screening techniques were used at first on hand-frayed cotton wall hangings, tablecloths, place mats and dress lengths. In 1976, the printing enterprise expanded when it shifted premises. Here the production moved to hand-printing long lengths of fabrics. Many of these are still being produced (Williamson 2010: 5). As well there was a shift from figurative motifs to more conventionalised, all-over, repeat designs, aligning with the western fashion system (West 2007).

In 1981, curator, Adrian Newstead, from Coe-ee Aboriginal Art Gallery, held the first exhibition of Tiwi Design, in Sydney. He subsequently encouraged Indigenous urban fashion designers, such as Jenny Kee and Linda Jackson, to create garments from Tiwi Design fabrics (Kee 2010:). Hence, the entrance into the fashion arena. Kee and Jackson's store, Flamingo Park, exuberantly celebrated indigeneity through hand crafted textiles and fashion. The push to mass-production by advisors saw the collapse of the business in 19...at the same time the free trade agreements were put into place.

Wood Conroy made a visit back to the Tiwi Islands in 2002 and noted the vibrancy and confidence that has emerged from the silkscreen workshop, where not only was the Tiwi Design building painted in whole brilliant colours and geometric patterning, but the school, club and airport building sported the vast extension of their repertoire (Wood Conroy 2004: 155). Their vibrant visibility through cultural practices is evident, yet in a framework that is readable and accessible to all who visit. Today there are about 100 artists working with both contemporary and traditional designs.

What can be seen from these two case studies is that design has shifted away from the interior of the secret and sacred to the exterior, aligning in with contemporary lifestyles and national identity.

The politics of dress and museums

The growing visibility of Australian Indigenous dress practices has paralleled the political visibility of Indigenous people. The difficulty is in attempting to categorise as Indigenous dress practices. This can be delimiting. What is 'authentic', what is fashion, what is for the tourist market and what is for Indigenous people? These are just some of the questions that arise. In a country with difficulties in marking out a 'national' dress, such as Olympic uniforms, European Australians have to re-invent our 'face of fashion' regularly.

According to Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne Eicher, dress is more than clothing. They define dress as all body modifications and body supplements (1992: 1). This list includes a long list of dress practices and changes which are either permanent or temporary, such as body shape, grooming, tattoos, piercings, clothing, cosmetics, hair styling and other aspects of personal appearance. Specific to ceremonial Aboriginal dress practices have been body paint, scarification and removal of teeth. Also included are posture, gesture and voice, all of which are integral to the projection of identity through dress (Brake 1985). It is not only the external control of the body, but the internal control. Dress, body and society interact (Mauss 1973).

Few writers, apart from ethno-historians and anthropologists, have attempted to write on Indigenous dress practices as a social practice. Cultural and fashion theorist, Jennifer Craik, has included Indigenous dress practices, such as Olympic Indigenous athlete, Cathy Freeman, wrapping herself in an Australian flag and an Indigenous flag after her victory in the 1994 Commonwealth Games (Craik 2009: 417). Margaret Maynard wrote on the issuing and use of blankets to aboriginal people, protest t-shirts (as 'proud statements of Indigenous identity') and the impact of Indigenous design on Australian style in the 1990s (Maynard 2002). Sylvia Kleinert's account of possum skin cloaks has been a significant contribution to contemporary Indigenous dress practices (2010).

In looking at Indigenous dress practices as social practice, the post-colonial lens has been useful as the process of Indigenous revitalization continues unfolding. It can be used as a way into the complex interweaving of dress as agency, as social significance, as political significance, as well as economic significance. Identity plays a large role. Museums are also part of the story, albeit a thread woven through, strengthening and reinforcing the visibility of Indigenous people.

Museums have in the past been reluctant to engage with or connect to the fashion world. That has changed in the last twenty years or so as blockbuster fashion shows become a welcome income source, along with a broadening of

visitors, for many museums. It is not so much the fashion collections that play part of this story, but more the historic and scientific collections that have 'ethnographic objects', that is, tangible heritage of Indigenous people. The connection and inter-relationship between tangible and intangible heritage has not, until recent years, been recognized or seen to have potential to Western style museums, especially for 'ethnographic' dress. As Alivizatou has demonstrated, Indigenous collections can be enlivened with intangible heritage (2012). Dress is a necessary part of that.

In 1999, Museums Victoria invited aboriginal women, Treahna Hamm, Lee Darroch, Vicki Couzens, Debra Couzens and Maree Clarke to make etchings from rare nineteenth century possum skin cloaks from their collection. The skins were engraved with patterns.

"One of the old cloaks had 81 stories on its panels and no one knew them when we started", Lee says "but as we have gone on the stories have started to come back" (Kate Gerritsen 2006)

This story is often used as a very successful case of cultural reinvigoration. Darroch and Couzens ran a number of workshops throughout Victoria to, not only make possum skin cloaks, but to engage Indigenous communities, paralleling the critical community consultation that would have been done in the past. Thirty five cloaks were made for Indigenous community representatives to wear at the opening of the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne. This required many people getting together and making the cloaks across the state of Victoria (Reynolds 2005).

This possum skin cloak story looms large. It appears to have wide acceptance, as noted in the introduction. However, there has been a long incubation to the present currency of skin cloaks. Again, both from top-down and bottom up. The Koori Trust in Melbourne has several possum skin cloaks made in the 1980s and 1990s (Gibbins 2010: 125). No doubt the land rights movements (from the Yirrkala bark petition in 1963, to the Mabo case 1992 and the Wik case 1996), along with the support by the brief Whitlam Government (1972-75) facilitated acceptance. The 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous People was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly also re-affirmed commitment to cultural strengthening. As did the 2003 UN Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Obviously not all Indigenous people wore possum skin cloaks as everyday or traditional dress practice. The variable climate over the large land mass and the availability of possums limited its use. Kangaroo skins cloaks (*buka*) were also used. As with the possum skin cloaks, in more recent times, the use of kangaroo skin cloaks as a constituent of the body politic were used before possum skins had to be imported from New Zealand (As a protected native animal in Australia

they cannot be killed; whereas they were introduced into New Zealand and are a voracious pest.)

Since the 1950s, Indigenous Noonga elder, Ken Colbung, from Western Australia (WA) had been researching the whereabouts of the skull of an Indigenous warrior, Yagan. From the 1980s a concentrated search in the UK revealed that the skull had been buried in an Everton Cemetery, Liverpool. From 1994-97, there was considerable negotiation about exhumation and repatriation of the remains to the land where Yagan lived. Colbung wore the *buka* to bring the skull home to country (Martin 2007: 316). The wearing of the cloak was viewed by the press in WA as quite radical and the press trivialized the whole episode (Shoemaker 2000: 363). It was not until 2010 that the skull was finally laid to rest in a park especially designed as a memorial to the warrior. Workshops were organised by the WA Museum around the state to revitalize or reinvent authenticity of the making of kangaroo skin cloaks by Indigenous people for ceremonial use.

There are other hybrid forms of 'formal' Indigenous dress practices that have developed. Academic gowns worn by Indigenous students are often decorated with printed fabric designed by Indigenous textile producers or the mortar board tassel is in the colours of the Indigenous flag (University of South Australia 2013). Most Australian universities have made commitments to Indigenous Reconciliation and through that, Indigenous Australians have their heritage not only recognized but made visible during graduation ceremonies. The former Lord Mayor of Melbourne, John So, wore a combination of mayoral robes and Indigenous skin cloak for his portrait by Jiawei Shen. In 2010, Ken Wyatt, the third Indigenous Member of Parliament wore a kangaroo skin cloak for his maiden speech.

Conclusion

Upon the arrival of the British in south-eastern Australia, Indigenous dress practices, went into decline. By the mid-twentieth century, assimilation had all but removed such dress from the Australian wardrobe. Towards the end of the century, the revitalization and invention of Indigenous dress practices increasingly began to contribute significantly to the culture life in Australia, through what began as small acknowledgements of the prior custodians of the land to the Welcome to Country at the Apology to the Stolen Generation in 2010. A small, but diverse Indigenous fashion industry has begun, courageously in face of such a competitive sector. However, making a culture visible through dress is essential for Indigenous people in Australia. We understand that making power visible on the political stage is vital. This paper has examined both the grass roots revitalization as well as the top down mechanisms that are required. As well it has acknowledged the agency of museums, not so much as sparking catalysts but as facilitators along the way. Although the Apology has not translated into

political changes, it nevertheless is an important step along the way of Reconciliation.

The last words should go to the voice of Indigenous artist, Thomas Day:

This rug means much (more) to me than just a piece of arts for the games opening [Commonwealth Games]. To me, it is a representation of my ancestors' country and the knowledge that I have been taught. My great great grandfather (James Lovett) was one of the five men that produced the original Lake Condah cloak, so for me it is a journal of self discovery I suppose. I have always known my past and where I fit, but doing this cloak made me realize the significance of what I have done, particularly for my Nan.

The cloak I have produced is a map, or as I like to refer to it as a 'Cultural Footprint'. It is a map or guide, but I'm afraid its meaning has to remain a secret. I come from a proud people, a tribe of fighting Gunditmara. We were a proud people. I hope this cloak makes them proud of me.

Thomas Day sited in Gibbon 2010:141

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