

**REVIEWS
and
ARTICLES**

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

"Exile and The Kingdom" is more than just a totally admirable, engrossing and moving documentary, it is a very important cultural/historical statement. It is the first complete account in Australian film history of the experiences of a single group of Aboriginal people from pre-colonial time to the present. Its unique power is in the breadth of its canvas.

The filmmakers have shaped the massive amount of material collected into a powerful document as powerful as a work by Henry REYNOLDS. It has the same weight, the same combination of flawless research and compelling argument.

The film sets itself up as the voice of the tribal people from its opening image and never deviates from its intention to let the people tell their own story. White Australians are rarely if ever given this opportunity to attend to history from an Aboriginal point of view.

Glenda HAMBLBY
Film Director/Writer.

I have been fortunate enough to have had an edit of the film which I have shown to a number of Nyungah, Yamatji and Injibarndi people. The response has been overwhelmingly positive, and is a credit to the integrity of the filmmakers in dealing with such a complex and often sensitive subject. The film provides not only a rare insight for non-Aboriginal people but also recognition for Aboriginal people who have felt the repercussions of government policy. In my opinion **"Exile and The Kingdom"** stands out as being the most comprehensive documentary made to date on an Aboriginal community in Australia.

David MILROY,
Aboriginal Spokesman and Musician.

"Exile and The Kingdom" avoids tabloid imagery and reductive explanations, allowing the narrative to unfold in a rhythm set not by the filmmakers but the subjects of the movie, the people who are telling their own story. In this sense **"Exile and The Kingdom"** has an accumulative power, which is something we expect from an arthouse movie rather than a documentary.

However, what is most impressive about **"Exile and The Kingdom"** is its tone - coolly analytical yet fiercely critical, unsentimental, yet with the power to enrage. ... After viewing the film one is left with an enormous sense of hope, a conviction that the indigenous peoples of Australia will survive and flourish.

Mark NAGLAZAS,
Film Critic
The West Australian

The program is splendid, of epic proportions, discrete sensitivity, great power and distinctive content.

Vaughan HINTON, Executive Producer
Australian Broadcasting Corporation

"Exile and The Kingdom" is a landmark in this state's history of documenting itself on film. It is thorough, relentless, comprehensive. It is accurate in history and strong in the views attached to these facts. **"Exile"** is a program made with the Aboriginal community it portrays. It was built from the ground up, rock by rock, over weeks and years. It is massively researched.

...Ten years from now, I hope, it will still be playing to audiences - children in Australian schools, for instance, who need to know what it was, and is, like to be Aboriginal, to be oppressed, to be human.

Paul ROBERTS,
Historian/Filmmaker/Producer

The project has been enthusiastically supported by the Australian Film Commission, as an impressive and authentic cultural work. For the viewer prepared to listen and reflect, this is a very rewarding, if wholly disturbing film.

...The work is panoramic and comprehensive, drawing on oral history from Aboriginal elders as well as colonial letters, records and still photographs.

... It makes the connection between Aborigines in chains in the late nineteenth century and the Aborigines in prisons and detention centres a century later. What we are presented with is a deeper understanding of the way the abuses and denials of the past inform the present.

The cumulative effect of the film is a sense of the extraordinary resilience of the Aboriginal people and their culture, the systematic repression of the colonisers continuing to the present day, and the economic motivation underpinning it all.

Carole SKLAN,
Project Co-ordinator
Australian Film Commission

Frank RIJAVEC and Noelene HARRISON, in my opinion have produced an extraordinary documentary. They have captured the magic of my people and created a most moving piece of work. Many members of the Aboriginal community are in agreement with me.

Jedda COLE,
Aboriginal Spokeswoman/Actress

CONTENTS

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

REVIEWS & ARTICLES

- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - Feature Article
Roebourne's Lost Kingdom*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - Winning film tops with its subjects*
- THE NEWCASTLE HERALD - Documentary Masterpieces*
- THE AUSTRALIAN - A window on Australia's civil war
Phillip ADAMS*
- THE SUNDAY AGE - Feasting on the meat of documentaries*
- PHOTOFILE - A Cultural Force*
- THE AUSTRALIAN - Rhythm of the exiles in our native land*
- THE WEEKEND AUSTRALIAN - The black man's burden
Phillip ADAMS, Feature*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - Arts Review: Pride, courage and
hope for community in 'Exile'*
- THE SUNDAY TIMES - Four Week Trip Lasted Five Years*
- FILMNEWS - Review: The Poisoned Chalice & Launch Report*
- EUREKA STREET - The Once and Future Kingdom*
- THE BULLETIN MAGAZINE - Truth to tell*
- IN THE PICTURE - Film Review*
- KARRATHA GUARDIAN - Roebourne film celebrates...*
- WESTSIDE OBSERVER - Indigenous Exile*
- FREMANTLE HERALD - Spirit of the land*
- GROK - Interview and Review*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - Education Liftout:
Moving portrait of tribal history*
- X PRESS MAGAZINE - Talking Frankly*
- FILMNEWS - From the cutting room floor*

CONTENTS

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

REVIEWS & ARTICLES ...Continued

- AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE JOURNAL - *Film Review*
- EDITIONS - *Like a meteorite*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - *Letter to the Editor*
- THE AUSTRALIAN - *from An open letter to David HILL*
Phillip ADAMS
- PANORAMA (Ansett in-flight magazine)
- THE PELICAN - *Beyond Hinch...*
- FREMANTLE GAZETTE - *Film changed Frank's life*
- SUBIACO POST - *Aborigines tell their stories*
- THE AGE - *Rewind, TV Review*
- THE BULLETIN - *TV Review*
- THE SUNDAY AGE - *TV Review*
- THE AGE GREEN GUIDE - *Blacks tell their tales*
- HERALD SUN - *Harsh reality of hot topic*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - *Rare view of tribal history*
- HERALD SUN - *Land of black deeds*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - *Star Rating... Don't miss.*
- THE NORTH WEST TIMES - *Exile film honoured*
- WALKING TOGETHER - *Roebourne wins Media Award*
- ENCORE - *AFI Award Winner*
- WORKERS NEWS - *A history of Aboriginal Dispossession*
- VARIETY - *Review by David Stratton*
- THE WEST AUSTRALIAN - *Elder fights his last battle*

VARIOUS PRESS ADDS

ROEBOURNE'S LOST KINGDOM



GUARDIAN OF THE SACRED: Injibandi elder Woodley King.

Roebourne Aborigines have a proud heritage which is depicted in a new documentary, *Exile and the Kingdom*, which opened at the Lumiere Cinema yesterday.

KAREN BROWN reports.

THERE was none of the usual glamour and glitz associated with a film's world premiere. But as the first images of *Exile and the Kingdom* filled the makeshift screen at the Roebourne Primary School, the excitement of the audience was tangible.

Beneath a canopy of stars on a still summer night, the calm and haunting voice of an Aboriginal elder drifted from a loud-speaker.

He spoke with pride, authority and love, and his words told the story of the proud audience — the Aboriginal people of Roebourne.

Movie critics will inevitably pass judgement on the merits of *Exile and the Kingdom* but, for film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison, the most important test has been passed with flying colours.

For the past six years the Perth-based pair have worked closely with the Injibandi-Ngaluma community of Roebourne to produce the two-hour documentary.

They earned the people's respect, trust and love and were adopted by the community as family members.

The result is a film which presents an Aboriginal view of history and gives a rare and personal insight into traditional Aboriginal law and culture.

In recent decades the media spotlight on Roebourne has presented a negative picture of a hopeless people living in drunken squalor.

In 1983 the nation was outraged by the death in custody of 16-year-old Roebourne resident John Pat. The horrifying details of his death were well documented by the media and given renewed prominence through the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Media crews from around Australia travelled to Roebourne to cash in on the abundant images of despair.

There can be no denying that white settlement and a history of insensitive government policy caused irrevocable damage to the Aboriginal people of Roebourne.

But white hands held the microphones and white eyes focused the cameras as white Australia heard the story of Roebourne.

For years the Aboriginal people have longed to tell their own story. Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison made that possible by listening to Roebourne's long-silenced Aboriginal voice and refusing to fall into the trap of sensationalism.

Rijavec initially went to Roebourne in 1987 to investigate Aboriginal/police relations but soon realised the topic was well-worn and of little interest to local Aborigines.

"People were sick to death of visiting journalists looking for material to flesh out their death in custody stories," he said. "They wanted to show their culture and tell the stories of the country they came from, especially the Fortescue River and Millstream, the heart of Injibandi country."

Shortly after his arrival Rijavec was invited to attend a children's culture camp. He videoed the youngsters as they danced, learnt crafts and travelled on expeditions into the bush.

At night, with the help of a generator, the images were played back to the delighted cries of the children and proud parents.

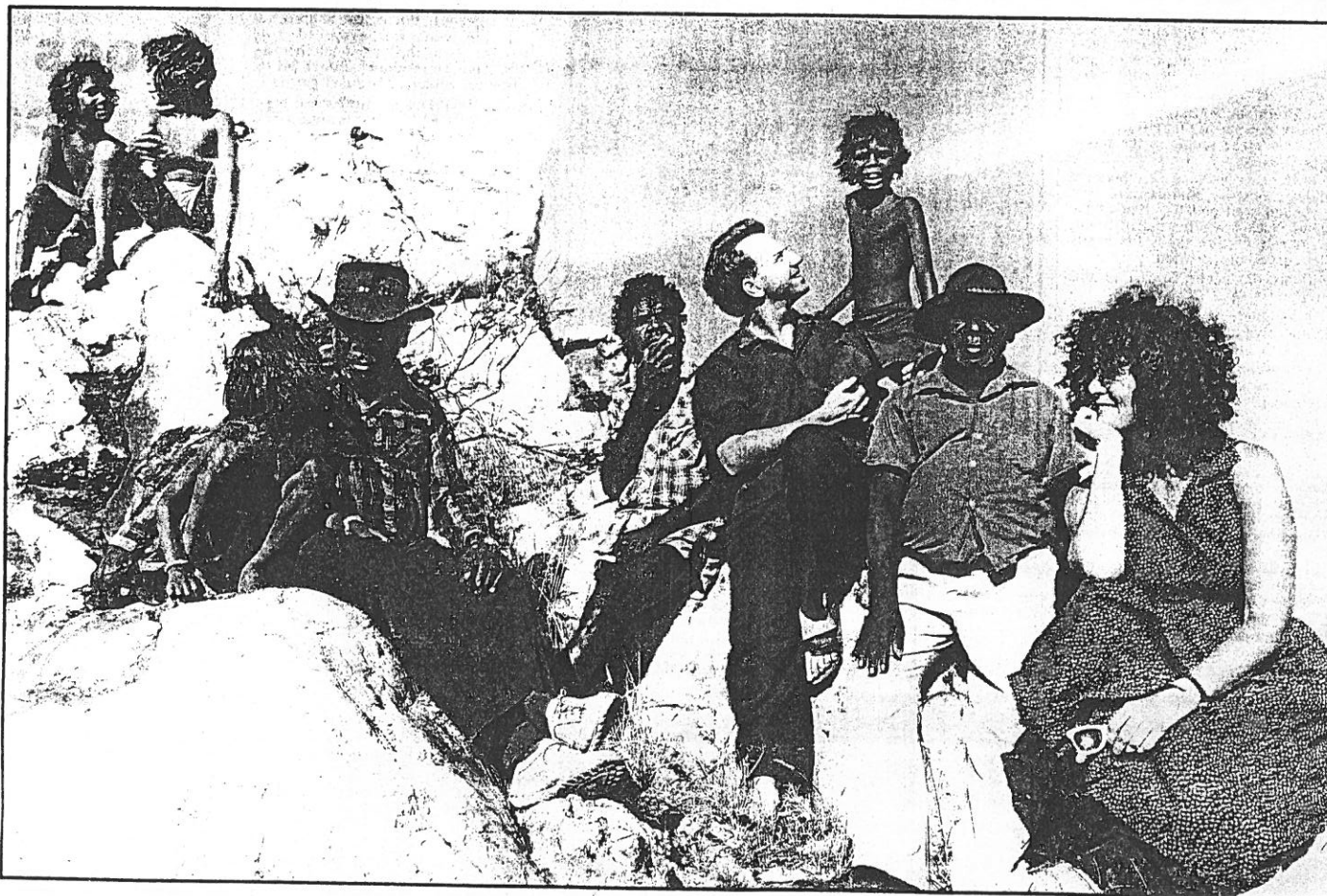
"That kicked off a lot of enthusiasm," Rijavec said.

"It was a breakthrough and people realised, maybe for the first time in their history, that video could work for them and do some good."

As the film took shape it became clear the people's primary desire was to present their experiences in the context of their rich mythology and culture, he said.

"That was the happy spirit of the film and that was always the driving force which made it possible for the other tragic stories to be told."

The film traces the history of the Aboriginal people from the creation of their traditional lands along the Fortescue River "when the world was soft".



ABOVE: Film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison chat with elders and children from the Cheeditha Aboriginal community. RIGHT: Narrator of *Exile and the Kingdom*, community elder Roger Solomon under a tamarisk tree from where his grandfather passed down stories of the Dreamtime. Pictures by SHARON SMITH.



FLASHBACK: Aboriginal station workers breaking horses in the round yard, around 1965. (Picture and top two pictures from *Exile and the Kingdom*).

The natural rhythms of their songs, stories and dances echo throughout the film, providing a stark contrast to the highly structured, stilted language of colonists and government officials.

Colonial letters, records and still photographs give an insight into the views of the colonial conquerors who ventured on to Ngaluma land in the 1860s and established the town of Roebourne on the banks of the Harding River.

The plentiful water supply and the proximity of the safe harbour at Cossack, a major pearling centre, made Roebourne and the country around the Fortescue Valley an ideal location for pastoralists.

The Ngaluma name for the town is Ieramugadu and for centuries it had been a significant place for Ngaluma Law.

But local Aborigines soon found themselves displaced from their traditional homelands, struck down by disease and utilised as a source of expendable slave labour.

The exile had begun.

Aborigines were imprisoned for absconding from their white masters and the old and the sick were kept in ration camps near Roebourne.

Some Aborigines managed to maintain contact with their tribal lands by working on the stations but this was to change in the 1960s when iron ore exports were given the green light for development and an equal pay award was introduced into the pastoral industry.

While a huge workforce of white males built new towns and white politicians espoused the benefits of mining, the Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banima and Gurrama

people were herded on to a reserve on the banks of the Harding River.

Unemployment, violence, alcoholism and imprisonment became a way of life.

In the 1970s the community was again moved, this time forced to live in a village of state houses near the town's cemetery.

The elders fought against this tide of destructive change and tried desperately to keep traditional culture and values alive.

But a generation of young Aborigines found themselves stranded between two worlds — belonging fully to neither.

One youngster who was caught in this cultural gap was the film's narrator, Roger Solomon.

Roger was born in Roebourne and was 12 years old when the mining boom swept through the Pilbara.

He has bad memories of serving time in the old Roebourne prison and by his own admission was once an angry young man.

"I only come good lately — if you'd known me 15 years ago you wouldn't step on my road," he said.

"I never used to like the old fellas and never used to listen to them. I've been through what the young people today are going through."

Roger is now 39 and suffering from mesothelioma. He contracted the disease while playing around the jetty at Point Samson where the lethal blue asbestos was loaded on to ships.

Mr Solomon helped script the film and is hopeful it will open many eyes in the white community.

"The film speaks to people and it shows the good side of Roebourne," he said.

"We have tried to tell the Government and mining companies about how we view this land."

"Now we can use this film as a voice for our community — not just Roebourne but for all Aboriginal people all over Australia. Our story is the same everywhere."

The involvement of the community's elders in making the film was particularly important.

"The people, especially the old people, are really glad that this film was made and they are really proud of it," he said.

"The elders are the key people who really speak for the land. Some of them have now passed away — but they speak of the land with power and passion."

Mr Solomon said the challenge now was to encourage young people to learn the law.

ALTHOUGH Aboriginal studies was now taught at the local school, law ceremonies and knowledge of the law ground could only be learnt through experience.

"They've got to pick up the law and take it into their own hands," he said.

"Every year I see the same four or five elders singing at the ceremonies and people of my age group get on to the young fellas and tell them, 'come on you guys, you've got to learn'."

"They've got to pick it up, take it off the old fellas, grab it and go for leadership — that's what it's all about."

"They've got to carry it on — if they don't it will be gone."

Thankfully, the number of young people willing to learn the law was growing each year, he said.

Roger Solomon is a respected spokesman in Roebourne and he tells the story of his people with conviction but without malice.

"I've done it (the film) on behalf of the old people and all Australian Aborigines," he said.

"This film will speak for all Aborigines and it will last."

Mr Solomon's faith in the film to educate and empower Aboriginal people is shared by many Roebourne residents.

As a mother of four, Tutsi Daniel is hopeful the film will encourage young people to be proud of their town.

She said the screening of the film had generated a lot of excitement in the town.

"It was their film and it was something for them — everyone felt good about it," she said. "The film shows the good side, shows people in the community caring for each other and for our children as well."

"The rest of the world doesn't know our world. It's been hiding behind the bad."

"If only people could realise and look around the corner and see the better things."

Mrs Daniel said that although young Aborigines had to find their place in the white world, they must also be spokespersons for their Aboriginal culture.

"We must be good role models to show them you must stand up and speak for your rights and what you think is right," she said.

"I found it hard — it's like you are always in the shadow of your culture. What was in my heart I needed to say and I felt right."



FLASHBACK: Molly Fishook clowns it up at the old Roebourne Reserve.



The Gurra Bunja cultural camp enables young people to learn about their rich heritage and Aboriginal language is now being

Through ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission), the Ngurin Aboriginal Corporation also funds a wide range of Aboriginal community programs.

After years of government promises, work has finally started on a public swimming pool and a sobering-up shelter was opened this year to care for those who remain affected by alcohol.

Aboriginal and police relations in the town have greatly improved. Officers are carefully chosen for the posting and the police station now runs an open lock-up based on trust.

The face of Roebourne is changing for the better but the people's fight to regain some control of their traditional homeland is far from won.

Exile and the Kingdom pays tribute to the Aboriginal people's love of this land and challenges audiences to view the world through Aboriginal eyes.

The honesty of the film is at times disturbing but the overriding message is one of hope. The language and culture of the Aboriginal tribes of Roebourne have survived 130 years of white occupation.

The exile continues but the kingdom lives on.

The West Australian

PERTH WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 1 1993

Winning film tops with its subjects

By SIMONE HEWETT

ROEBOURNE: Yilbi Warri and Kenny Jerrold reckon it took a television documentary to get the younger members of their community interested in their heritage.

The program, *Exile and the Kingdom*, last week won the United Nations Association of Australia's major media peace award.

Mr Warri and Mr Jerrold are elders at Cheeditha community, just south of Roebourne, which is home to about 80 Yinjibarndi Aborigines.

Filed in and around Roebourne at the request of local Aboriginal elders, *Exile and the Kingdom* traces the history, culture and mythology of a people driven from their native tablelands and forced to live in coastal communities.

WA freelance filmmaker Frank Rijavec wrote and directed the documentary, which was co-produced by Noeline Harrison.

The Aboriginal elders say that the program, shown on the ABC this year, was popular among local Aborigines, many of whom were involved in its production.

"It (the film) belongs to the people, they know it and they like it. They keep looking at it, especially the young people," Mr Jerrold said.

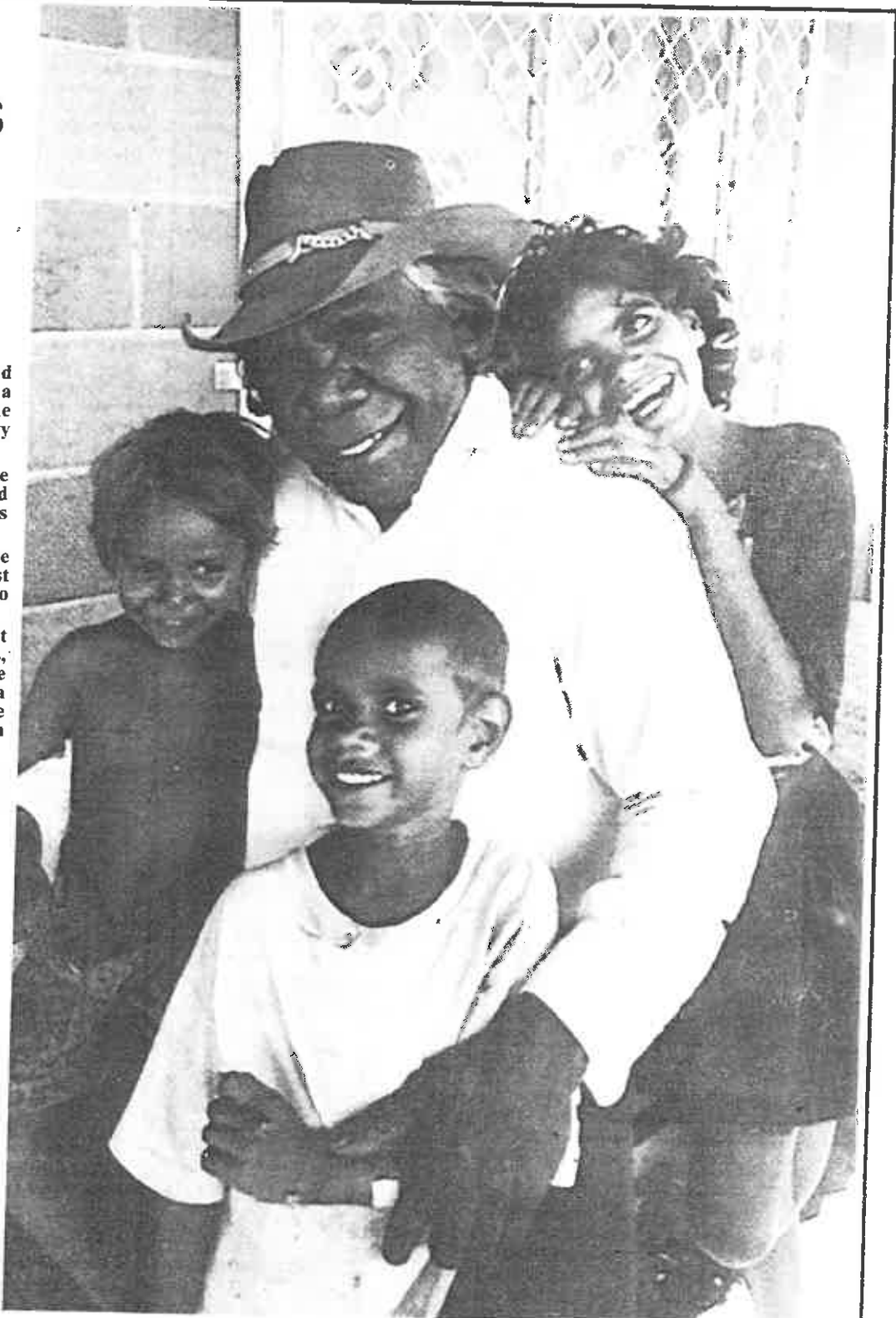
"The young kids wanted to know more about their culture after watching it.

"*Exile and the Kingdom* showed what was happening a long time ago, and that was good."

Mr Rijavec said he had set out to make a short feature film for the police, but changed his mind after speaking to Aborigines.

They felt Roebourne had had a lot of bad publicity and urged him to make a film about their land and where they came from.

"I talked to a lot of people, a lot of Aborigines, and they said it was a beautiful film," Mr Rijavec said.



LEARNING ABOUT PAST: Mr Jerrold relaxes with his grandchildren, Willy James. 3. Jackie Coppin, 5, and Jane Allen, 11. Picture: SHARON SMITH

Documentary masterpieces

ABC and SBS tune into Aboriginal culture. JAMES JOYCE previews two 'must sees'.

'It was the dispossession and removal of Aboriginal people from their land which has had the most profound impact on Aboriginal society.'
— Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody.

'All them millionaires, like Lang Hancock, he's a millionaire today from the blackfella ... and from all the minerals what they find, the blackfellas get nothing ... As long as they're rich, they're gone and we still poor. ... got no country.'

— Pilbara Aborigine.

WHEN 17-year-old John Pat died in police custody in the far-flung Aboriginal 'township' of Roebourne, 1600kms north of Perth, in 1983, he became a symbol for Aborigines of oppression and injustice.

But like the other 98 deaths investigated by the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, John Pat's death was an isolated manifestation of a much wider tragedy.

As the Chief Commissioner, Mr Elliott Johnson, QC, found: The nexus between inadequate or insufficient land provision for Aboriginal people and behaviour which leads to a high rate of arrests and detention is repeatedly and directly observed in the reports of the deaths.

It took the royal commission three years, \$30 million and 5000 pages in 11 volumes to reach this conclusion.

It takes *Exile and The Kingdom*, a documentary premiering on ABC TV at 8.30pm on Wednesday, 111 minutes to illustrate the same point and tell what is surely the definitive story of the Aboriginal experience — beyond and throughout white settlement — at the same time.

The ABC's decision to screen this film while the Mabo controversy continues is a clever ploy, but one with good reason.

Anyone who has ever passed judgement on the Aboriginal land rights debate should see *Exile and the Kingdom* before doing so again.

It is a stunning achievement for Perth film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noeline Harrison, who took four years to make the film.

In it, the people of an Aboriginal community — the Injibandi/Ngaluma tribes of Western Australia's remote Pilbara region — tell their story.

Offering a remarkable insight into the culture of the tribes, *Exile and the Kingdom* shows how the Injibandi/Ngaluma people have been misunderstood, ignored and abused since the coastal town of Roebourne sprang up as a centre for white pearling and pastoral endeavours in the 1860s.

But more than that, the film, which was written and narrated by John Pat's uncle, Roger Solomon, examines, articulately and compellingly, the cultural and spiritual significance of the population's deep affinity for its tribal laws and lands.

Director Frank Rijavec, Australian born of Slovenian migrants, described the film as a 'homage to the extremely beautiful and complex culture of the people who have taught me most about the country my family and I are so new to'.

'Writers have done their work well in capturing this country's dreams and histories,' he said. 'My challenge was to bring some of these to life on film.'

Exile and the Kingdom does this with some memorable images and a resounding narrative from Solomon, who died at Easter from asbestos-related mesothelioma.

That the film blends a persuasive land rights passion with a clear sense of historical and social perspective makes it a documentary masterpiece.



Images from two Aboriginal films showing on ABC and SBS.

From July 2 to July 8

A window on Australia's civil war

MABO versus Yobbo, round five. Public broadcasting comes out swinging with two dazzling programs to remind Australia's countless historical revisionists about what really went on in our proud land.

I'll be writing at length about Frank Rijavec's *Exile* and *the Kingdom* — which screens on ABC TV next Wednesday — in *The Weekend Australian* of July 10. Suffice to say that *Exile* and *the Kingdom* goes pretty close to being a masterpiece.

If the thought of looking at yet another politically correct doco on Aboriginality fills you with dread, let me reassure you that *Exile* and *the Kingdom* is different, both in what it sets out to do and in what it achieves.

Looking like an abbreviated version of the United States series *The Civil War* (in that it combines contemporary interviews with old photographs and voice-over reads from letters, documents and reports), it provides a riveting glimpse of Aboriginal lore and law and, for the first time in my experience, provides subtitles for those endless corroboree chants, thus revealing poetry of a quality that Alec Hope, Judith Wright or Les Murray would be proud to have penned.

However, it's the voices of the whites



PHILLIP
ADAMS

who appropriated the land from Aborigines in the north of Western Australia, little more than a century ago, that you'll find most instructive.

For example: "Three questions were always put by the buyer, of which the third was the vital one. How many acres? How many miles of fencing? How many niggers? The niggers always went as part of the stock. If there were no niggers, or not enough, the sale was off or the price dropped." (William Lamden Owen, 1889.)

No need to import slaves in Western Australia. They came with the territory.

Blood Brothers brings the sad story up to date by dramatising the life and times of the likes of Charles Perkins, Kev Carmody and Rupert Max Stuart. The epi-

sode on Stuart, who served a 25-year sentence in jail for a crime that few people could seriously believe he committed, brought back a rush of memories. Like the Ryan case, the Stuart saga galvanised public opinion and put the legal system, and its political operators, under unprecedented scrutiny. It's a story that Australia has conveniently forgotten, as part of its collective amnesia about the social and judicial mistreatment of Aborigines.

THE problem with programs like *Exile* and *the Kingdom* and *Blood Brothers* is that, finally, they preach to the converted. Yet even those wholeheartedly sympathetic to the continuing saga (the people that my distinguished colleague Paddy McGuinness dismisses as "the chattering classes", connected to what our historical revisionists deride as "the guilt industry") will be astonished.

We all knew things were pretty bad back in the 60s (that is the 1860s and the 1960s) but it still comes as a shock to be reminded just how bad bad was.

□ □ □ □



THE

AUSTRALIAN

JULY 3-4 1993

Feasting on the meat of documentaries

The Melbourne Film Festival
(Screenings and seminars at the Astor, Kino and Valhalla cinemas and at the State Film Centre)

THE festival's annual gathering of documentaries has long been one of its unsung highlights, and 1993 is no exception. This year's official "doco day" is scheduled for Tuesday at the State Film Centre (the Astor is "resting"), the 12-hour festival with-in a festival beginning at 11 am.

I haven't been able to preview the daytime offerings (which include 'Confessions Of A Suburban Girl', Susan Seidelman's memoir about her '60s adolescence in suburban Philadelphia, and a program of short documentaries) but, if the three locally produced films scheduled for prime-time screenings are any indication, audiences with lasting power are unlikely to depart dissatisfied.

The best is 'Exile And The Kingdom' (8.45 pm). Presenting an account of the history that lies concealed behind the facade of a small coastal town in Western Australia, it is especially timely in the light of the current brow-beating over the High Court's Mabo ruling. Directed by Frank Rijavec, who co-wrote the script with the film's narrator, Roger Solomon (whose Aboriginal name is Yirra-Bindirri), it leads its audience inside Aboriginal culture in a way that is unprecedented.

Divided into chapters, its alternative history makes it clear why the



TOM RYAN

FILM

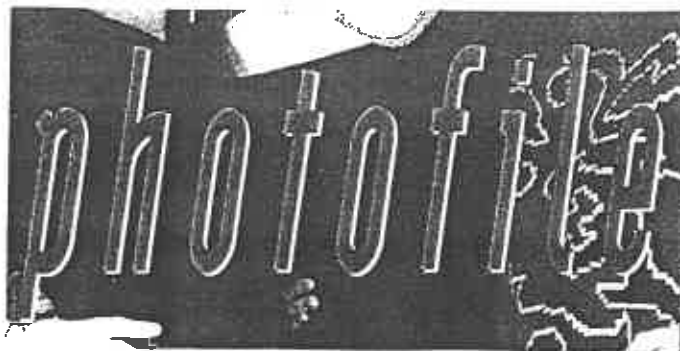
ly described as anthropological, it speaks with a compelling voice about the struggle for survival of an invaded people.

land is "holy" to Aborigines. Here, in particular, the focus is on the Indjibarndi and Ngarluma tribes, robbed of their homes, displaced from their sense of community by "the colonial hunger for land", and thrust together in the reserve town of Roebourne (Ier-amagadu). But the film's wider implications for a nation grappling with its ghosts are clear.

Nevertheless, 'Exile And The Kingdom' is not about the white conscience. It is a history of Australia (albeit a potted one) from an Aboriginal perspective, narrating "the story the media never tell about the really important things in our lives". These include "the Dreaming", the ancient myths about the gods of the land, the river and the sea, and the way racist, expansionist colonial forces seem bent on the destruction of the traditional foundations of Aboriginal lives.

Quite properly, 'Exile And The Kingdom' is an angry film. And, even if it is too neatly packaged to be strict-





images/readings/art

NOVEMBER 1993 EIGHT DOLLARS

A Cultural Force

Exile and the Kingdom

Stephen Muecke

I believe, bad and all that it is, that the greed of capitalism is the only driving force there is.

Lang Hancock, 1971.

If you drive through Roebourne, as I used to years ago, you will see things that don't appear in this movie—pub scenes from Hell. This, clearly, is a superficial touristy view which *Exile and the Kingdom* transcends immediately in a move which establishes the film's rhetorical strength from the start. The 'full story' of the Aboriginal peoples of the Roebourne area lies in the hinterland, back up the Fortescue river, into the 'holy land' of the dispossessed Injibandi/Ngaluma and other tribal groups. And by going inland and back in history the viewer will come away with a sustained historical argument over the two hours of viewing, a history which is supplemented with the cultural force of the poetry of the song-makers, musicians and ceremonial leaders of these people.

It is also a story which could be that of John Pat, the well-known teenage casualty of that hellish pub culture, whose case was a seminal one in the Black Deaths in Custody inquiry. If you asked why John Pat died, then the answer would have to be at least as long and complex as this film. But Pat's story is not highlighted here (that risk of sentimentalisation and individualisation is avoided) and remarkable restraint is shown in the treatment of the police ('they do their best', 'they just keep a lid on the trouble').

The film's argument is that colonisation is a process, not an event, and these people are shown to have survived, against all odds, the wave upon wave of colonialist exploitation—contact violence, massacre, pearling slave labour,

ration camps, station feudalism, town reserves, the mineral boom of the sixties bringing radical unemployment, Christianisation, welfarism, prison...

This material is presented in a skilful and well-researched amalgam of interviews with the local people and historical stills, clips and documents. The narration by co-writer Roger Solomon is restrained, the force of the argument being carried by the persuasive juxtaposition of statement and image rather than strident assertion. Opinion lies with the people interviewed rather than the script, while Solomon can endorse recent progress in his community with an irony that is more powerful than any pleading: 'but we have a nice new regional prison, built in 1984...'

The power of this film lies in its multidimensional rhetoric that pervades a global social space of indigenous rights and sows the seeds of an exemplary politics there. It marshals irony, didacticism, poetry and hard historical evidence and delivers them to a complex audience. This audience is future-oriented. It is, in part, those who will learn: the children, pupils, students, from the Roebourne epicentre out. It is the Injibandi/Ngaluma heritage which is being delivered here, we have explanations of the four-part ('skin') section system to explain how the society is integrated, how everybody knows where they come from so that they can know where they are going in their country, how the system is translatable to other kinship systems in other parts of Aboriginal Australia, how the kin system relates people to the plants animals, trees and rocks.

The survival of these Aboriginal cultures is demonstrated through the filming of parts of an initiation ceremony for young men. Clearly, very careful negotiations would have

had to have been made by the elders here, because it is often the case with Aboriginal cultures that, in the face of the accusation that you have died out, or that you don't even have a culture any more, you have to decide what to 'bring out' across the line which divides public from secret knowledge. If too much is revealed, neighbouring communities might complain that the culture is weakened through this exposure. At this point the filmmakers are a little disingenuous when they say that they couldn't film certain scenes at night because lights couldn't be used. It is rather the case that they would never be able to show *all* of an initiation ceremony.

Nevertheless, it is a stunning display of 'primitive' ritual to see that press of the big mob of bodies, then the huge field of green leaves that the initiates walk through holding their *nargas* out front so that the wind doesn't flap the material onto their tender penises. I say 'primitive' thinking of Dean MacCannell's recent book *Empty Meeting Grounds* in which he discusses O'Rourke's film *Cannibal Tours*. MacCannell discounts the whole idea of the primitive for this day and age—henceforth there will only be 'postmodern primitives'; the advance of capitalisation making it no longer possible to encounter authentic ancient societies (see also Baudrillard). One can only see 'primitives selling representations of primitiveness' at the fringes of the international market. This is not the case with this initiation scene in *Exile*. Because of the didactic and political context in which it is placed, this scene is authentic both in an ethnographic sense and in its own cultural terms. There is absolutely no sense of the participants performing, fudging or being embarrassed. It is a remarkable document of cultural survival.

Unlike capitalist versions of culture, in which goods, including ideas and creations, *accumulate*, Aboriginal cultures must calculate the *depletion*, exchange and spread of ideas in social space. The cultural stock is 'always there' being cared for on those sacred sites and waterholes, on those rocky platforms where it is so enchanting to see these old people in the film getting excited and singing, and the kids moving their feet for the dances they will soon learn, listening to songs like the wonderful *Kumbulina Song* quoted here:

...I stole the songs from the medicine man
and quickly left the noisy arguments in the camp.
I heard him wandering through the bush crying;

I vanished via the snaking trail in the sky,
Leaving the medicine man wandering in circles.
And there, a soft white hill,
like wet damper quivering;
and the medicine man disappearing into Djelgar Soak
Hurrying into that soft shaking hill...

Lang Hancock and the miners are just one of the latest waves of a capitalist greed model of culture that the film sets itself up against. But what chance does it have against industrial modernism? Where is the force of a surviving culture which seeks to amplify its voice via a film that will only have a few thousand viewers? Its answer, like some of the ecological ones it uses, is that of sustainability and control. The Aboriginal people do know how best to care for the country, for their vulnerable country whose resources are being plundered and damaged. Their ancient resources model was one of *limiting demand* for food and water resources by limiting population—for many men subincision came after circumcision. While we can't propose this measure to limit the world's demand for minerals, we can certainly balance the forces of culture against those of capital, such that the knowledges of the former infuse the latter with a whole series of measures like checks, controls, royalties and rights to sustain these living and ancient cultures.

□ □ □ □ □ □

Stephen Muecke's latest book is *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and Cultural Studies* (University of NSW Press). Thanks to Mary-Ann Jebb (Fremantle) and Lindsay Barrett (Sydney) for conversations which helped orient this review.

Exile and the Kingdom was produced in collaboration with the Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banijima and Furruma people by Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison. Co-writer and narrator: Roger Solomon. Distribution: Film Australia. 16mm/115min. 1993.

Exile and the Kingdom was awarded the Media Peace Award for 1993 by the United Nations Association of Australia together with the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Rhythm



Tragic twist... narrator Roger Solomon, left, died in April of asbestosis soon after the completion of a documentary about his people by Frank Riavec, right



Of the exiles in our native land

IT'S impossible to watch *Exile and the Kingdom*, a feature documentary on the history of Roebourne's Injibarndi, Ngarrluma, Banjima and Gurrama Aboriginal tribes, their dispossession and exploitation, and remain unmoved.

And it is difficult to imagine a more appropriate person to have captured these events on film than Frank Riavec. His life experience and the attitudes evolved from it have made him exceptionally well qualified to make a cinematic record of this community — people with unimaginably ancient ties with the land who were systematically removed from it and forced into a restrictive urban setting.

There's not a hint of bitterness, though. If it ever existed, it's long since been sublimated into a passionate concern for the underdog. And a profound attachment to the countryside has enabled Riavec to empathise powerfully with the near-mythical attachment Aborigines have to the land.

If he has succeeded in giving us a rare insight into the plight of a people — exiles, in a sense, in their own country — it will have been due in no small measure to Riavec's patience, his determination to bide his time, to adjust his filming schedules, not to the frenetic pace of the late 20th century, but to the age-old rhythms of an ancient community.

Riavec, with his co-producer Noeline Harrison, also agreed to show not just the difficulties of being Aboriginal in Western Australia but to celebrate the beliefs, customs and relationship with the environment the Injibarndis still find central to their lives.

"The key to making films like this," said Riavec, "is the right working relationship. If you haven't got that, you've got nothing. Confidence has to grow; it can't be hurried. And that's why the mass media get virtually nothing out of

communities like this. They want the 10-second news grab, and if they can't get it, they will say there was no one to talk to."

The small town of Roebourne, 1600km north of Perth, on the north coast of Western Australia, has been attractive to the media several times in the past couple of decades. In the late 1980s it became apparent that the influx of thousands of single white men into the town, there to service the mining industry,

Bulk of the people have a wealth of things to say, if confidence is built up and a conduit found into the community," says Riavec.

A youthful passion for the bush — roaming the countryside around Albany in the south-west of Western Australia — is an abiding and enchanting childhood recollection — made Riavec's exposure to Aboriginal landlore a revelatory experience.

"When you are in an Aboriginal com-

By NEVILLE COHN

created an appalling social problem. Then, in 1983, the death of 16-year-old John Pat while in jail became a major factor in a Royal Commission being set up to investigate the extraordinarily high rate of deaths in custody of Aborigines.

"What (news crews) were doing in Roebourne was walking down the street, filming the first person they met, probably drunk (because that's where the drinkers hang out)," and this is what would be offered as news. "But the

hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years."

Riavec's abhorrence of injustice towards Aborigines is undisguised. He is appalled by their history of virtual enslavement at the hands of early pearlers (in Broome) and pastoralists — and he compares their aeons-long associations with the land to their present lifestyle "herded into this reserve; this village."

"On first impression, it seemed as if they had been made subject to an extreme form of apartheid, a concentration camp concept — a kind of social engineering."

His anger is unmistakable when he talks of "how terribly alienated and dispossessed these people must feel... by a long tradition of colonial administrative practice and political paternalism."

There is tragic irony in the death from mesothelioma in April of narrator Roger Solomon, who lived in Roebourne Reserve and later the State Housing Commission Village. His commentary is a crucial and eloquent aspect of the two-hour documentary.

ful disease, also known as asbestosis, was a great blow, said Riavec. "I was with Roger when mesothelioma was diagnosed. When he came down for the film's premiere, he was in the last months of life." He was just 40.


"There used to be a lot of the deadly blue fibre around. It blows hard when the wind comes up in Roebourne. The fibre was everywhere."

"There were huge storage sheds for the stuff in Roebourne before being shipped out. The kids used to play hide-and-seek among the bags. Sometimes they would fall asleep on them, inhaling the fibres."

Riavec, who adds "there were doctors in the State medical services who had knowledge of the danger (of asbestos) but it was ignored by, basically, the voice of economics. Opening the West at that time was very much a part of the political agenda."

Exile and the Kingdom screens on ABC TV on Wednesday, July 7, at 8.30pm in honour of the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples. Next week is also NAIDOC Week — the National Celebration of Aboriginal Society and Culture.

THE voice of the redneck is loud in the land. People whose own culture is little more than country and western music and a few Eastwood movies rented from the video store can be heard laughing at any suggestion that our Aborigines might have had a culture. And the words of bigotry with a grammar school education make much the same point in their pompous, patronising letters to the editor.



PHILIP

ADAMS

conviction as well. The honourable justices are very slightly interested in the peering and native question." (Constable Payne, 1887.)

The Yaburba resisted the pearls' invasion for five years. Consequently, 40 to 60 Yaburba men, women and children were slaughtered by a posse of pearlers and squatters in 1888. It became known as the Flying Foam Massacre.

"The settlers were as justified in obeying orders as British soldiers when they shot at Kafirs, Zulus, Abyssinians or any other inferior race, for which they were frequently decorated with medals. There was no desire, wish or intention to deal anything but stern justice to savages, who are incapable of understanding any lessons, but might be right." (Alexander Robert Richardson, 1892.)

language are no more. Their land is known only for the North West Shelf gas, Australia's biggest resource development. But if you know where to look, you'll find a host of breathtakingly beautiful rock engravings that survived the black destruction. They make up one of the biggest and most important engraving sites in the world. Now hear the voices of the past—

"We have to report that there are a lot of natives camped at our station, all are old, one is blind and one is deaf and dumb. They are eating the food of those natives who are working on this place. Shall we cause them to be apprehended as vagrants or hand them over to the local police authorities as paupers, please let us know. Yours faithfully," (Meares and Cusack, 1905.)


Then, in the late 60s, after 100 years of working for the squatters, the Aborigines were told there was no place for them on the stations and they had to join the others in the reserves. This was because the government was now forcing the squatters to pay them white wages. So 100 years ago they were dispossessed from their tribal lands. And 30 years ago, after a century of hard labour, they were pushed off the farms that had enguined their country. Now they had to live in camps that became hopelessly overcrowded.

Over the past 18 months, 11 small children have died on the river. Over 50 per cent due to unsatisfactory living conditions. How many of those children survive appears remarkable." (Reginald John Sand, under-secretary of public works, 1956).

"Take the sale of a station. Three questions were always put by the buyer, of which the third was the vital one. How many acres? How many miles of fencing? How many niggers? The niggers always went last, as part of the stock. If there were too many niggers, or not enough, the sale was off or the price dropped. They are indispensable to the station owners, and if their race passes away, a great deal of the pastoral country will be shut up for good. White labour rates are too high for the pastoralist to pay." (William Lamden Owen, 1989)

"Tuesday 16th, arrived J. Best's home station at noon and arrested our natives on warrant for sheep stealing, and also took two native women as witnesses. Continued station trek arresting natives and putting them on the chain. Arrived

By 1900 the Aboriginal lands had been completely overstocked, the plains were eaten bare and waterholes overrun with sheep and cattle. Roos were shot in their



PHILIP

ADAMS

The settlers were as justified in obeying orders as British soldiers when they shot at Kaffirs, Zulus, Abyssinians or any other inferior race for which they were frequently decorated with medals. There was no desire, wish or intention to deal anything but stern justice to savages, who are incapable of understanding any lessons, but right is right." (Alexander Robert Richardson, 1892.)

age are no more. Their land is now only for the North West oil and gas, Australia's biggest resource development. But if you go where to look, you'll find a lot of breathtakingly beautiful rock engravings that survived the construction. They make up the biggest, and most important, engraving sites in the world. Now hear the voices of the pasto-

try good rocks on the Fortescue River. Anderson and Company are getting on very well. They have some of the best country in the north, in extent, nearly 1 million acres. There is about 5 million acres already taken up on this district which has made a great hole in the good country near the coast." (Alexander McRae, 1886.)

proper legal protection, bodily maintenance and Christian teaching. To occupy their land without such compensation is wrong and robbery." (Henry Hutton Parry, Anglican bishop, Perth, 1889.)

There were laws against slave trading but there was no fear of police among the squatters and peanners.

'It is almost impossible to get any written evidence in these cases, the feeling being so strong against the police for taking any steps against the peanners in favour of the natives. And it is impossible to get a

And now listen to a translation of an Aboriginal song that accompanied the initiation of boys into manhood.

Although the east coast was taken by the British in 1788, in the west, only a third of the country 124 tribes remained undisturbed until the British planted their flags on the Swan river in 1829. Greed for land ripped the colony and soon their best acreage in the southern part of western Australia had been taken. Within the next 30 years the tribal

ated to make them understand that we had taken possession and did not want their company. They are indignant at our endeavours to drive them away and very mainly ordered us off to the ship." Francis T. Gregory, government surveyor, 1861. Gregory's rifles finally decided the matter.) After good reports from the sur-



ARTS

EDITED BY RON BANKS

Pride, courage and hope for community in 'Exile'

FILM

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM
Produced by Frank Rijavec
and Noelene Harrison

Narrated by Roger Solomon

Reviewed by MARK NAGLAZAS

RECENTLY in these pages I argued that migration and exile were the defining experiences of the 20th century. I was, of course, referring to the millions of Europeans who were scattered across the globe in the wake of social and political disaster.

It is easy to forget, however, that exile is also central to the recent history of Australia's indigenous peoples.

Though they were not packed into cattle cars or shipped off across oceans, the systematic removal of Aborigines from their traditional lands was as culturally cataclysmic as anything happening in the Balkans today.

This dislocation is greatly exacerbated by the fact that the whole Aboriginal belief system is umbilically linked to the land itself.

Taking a native Australian away from his tribal lands is of the same order and consequence as wrenching the Bible from the hands of a devout Christian or telling a Muslim he can no longer read the Koran.

With such an undermining of traditional values, a violent severing from that which provides both spiritual nourishment and moral certainty ("the Law"), is it any wonder young Aborigines today find themselves in so much strife.

White people complain that their young no longer respect the values of their parents but do we ever allow indigenous Australians such an excuse?



Injibarndi elder Karri Monadee with *Exile and the Kingdom* co-producer Noelene Harrison.

This crucial issue is at the core of two recent WA films: *Blackfellas*, James Ricketson's adaptation of Archie Weller's novel and *Exile and the Kingdom*, a landmark feature-length documentary.

While *Blackfellas* sacrifices much of its cultural insight for the sake of entertainment, *Exile and the Kingdom* is unblinking in its determination to document the roots of the current malaise, to trace back the present crisis within Aboriginal culture and society to the historic dis-

ruption caused by the British invasion.

Beginning with a series of images culled from news reports about John Pat who died in a Roebourne police lockup in 1983, narrator and co-writer Roger Solomon explains that he was advised to look beyond the tabloid headlines and sensationalist television images.

"When we began to work on this film our elders said we should not start in the town but back up in my mother's country," explains Solomon. "They wanted to tell the world

that our story goes a long way beyond the town of Roebourne."

Thus the film-makers, who developed *Exile and the Kingdom* over several years in close association with Injibarndi, Ngarluma, Banjima and Gurruma peoples, begin this tale of loss and displacement on the tablelands of the Fortescue River, the actual and spiritual homeland of the various peoples who now reside in Roebourne.

Using a compelling mix of creation story, poetry, logic and argument the film-makers explain why the land provides the bedrock upon which Injibarndi-Ngarluma law and custom is built.

"The Law not belong to me," explains Alan Jacob (one of the numerous participants) pointing to the earth. "Law written here."

After detailing the "pre-history" (a word that seems inappropriate when dealing with Aboriginal culture and society) the film moves us through the period of white colonisation, unearthing appalling facts about the violent rule of British and pastoral overlords, to the mining boom of the 1960s.

Apart from its wonderful thoroughness and respect for the material at hand — *Exile and the Kingdom* breaks new ground in its ability to shape and order a vast amount of historical and cultural information — the real strength of this truly remarkable documentary is that it allows the Roebourne people to tell their own story.

By adjusting the rhythm of the storytelling to that of its subjects (a startling reversal to the practice of traditional documentaries), director Rijavec and his co-creators have produced a film that gives a section of our community a voice that is recognisably their own — a voice that resonates with pride, courage and an overwhelming sense of hope.

WHEN Fremantle filmmaker Frank Rijavec went to Roebourne in the State's North-West he planned a four-week stay to make a 20-minute video about the relationships between police and Aborigines for use in police training.

He ended up staying, on and off, for five years to produce a major documentary now set for national and international viewing.

For Rijavec discovered shortly after arrival that Aborigines in a town which had for some time been a focus of media attention, following the death of John Pat while in police custody, had little interest in discussing the subject of his proposed video.

What the people of Roebourne wanted was a film showing their culture and the effects of economic booms on that culture, told from an Aboriginal point of view. What they wanted was a documentary which would tell the stories of the country they had come from — from the Fortescue River, Millstream and the Hamersley Ranges; they wanted a documentary more of hope than self-pity which, by highlighting significant events from the past, could help them come to terms with the present.

Rijavec, whose other documentaries indicating a passion for landscape and people had already been seen on ABC and SBS, secured financial backing — some from Aboriginal organisations — and set about the documentary. But first he had to overcome the suspicion and mistrust felt by many Aborigines tired of the trouble-town image of Roebourne fostered in part by media reports.

With his co-producer Noelene Harrison he was invited to a culture-camp and videoed youngsters as they danced — images later played back at night via a television hooked up to a generator. The experience of recording this special event formed the foundation of Rijavec's relationship with the community and opened new doors.

Accompanied by elders he went into the hinterland along the course of the Fortescue River. He went on turkey shoots and came to appreciate turkey baked in river sand by Trevor Solomon, brother of Roger Solomon who narrates the two-hour documentary which resulted from Rijavec's extended stay.

IN time Rijavec and Harrison became part of Roger's family and were allocated "skin colors" and names. Rijavec became Banaka while Noelene became Burungu and at night, around the fire at Roger's house, the stories of the past began to tumble out.

For the past holds the key to much of the present for the Aborigines of Roebourne. First it was the pearling boom of the 1860's which made slaves of the Injibandi/Ngaluma people and displaced local Aborigines from their traditional homelands.



FOUR WEEK TRIP LASTED FIVE YEARS

Indjibandi leader Woodley
King at Jiddah, a scared site.

Then, almost a century later, came the iron-ore boom resulting in the development of new towns — Dampier, Tom Price, Wickham, Pannawonica and the regional centre of Karratha — which herded the Aborigines of Roebourne on to a reserve on the banks of the Harding River.

Social problems, like alcohol abuse, surfaced in the Sixties, too, and although elders struggled to maintain traditional values in a changing landscape, youngsters — like Roger Solomon — were trapped in a cultural no-man's land.

RIJAVEC was aware of the dangers of making his documentary *Exile and the Kingdom* — due to be screened by ABC in July — a cry for help from the helpless.

Instead the documentary, which was financed in part by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Ngurin Aboriginal Corporation, acknowledges that despite severe dislocation, the Roebourne tribes have sur-

vived with their language and culture intact.

Other major investors in *Exile and the Kingdom*, which cost about \$300,000, were the Australian Film Commission and the WA Film Council. The film, which has already had a successful theatre season in Perth, is set for a screening at several international film festivals as Rijavec sets about repaying the faith, and the money, of his investors.

But he remains concerned at the attitude of commercial television in Australia to full-length documentaries. "The ABC has shown that there is a good audience for documentaries which deal with subjects other than wildlife and travel," he says.

"There does seem to be a mind-set in commercial television about this and it's my view that the commercial networks could be doing more without jeopardising their ratings."

Exile and the Kingdom will be screened by ABC on July 7.

The poisoned chalice

Exile and the Kingdom

Australia 1992, dir: Frank Rijavec, dist: Frank Rijavec, r: 111 mins

The great achievement of this film is that it allows two related groups of Aboriginal people from the Pilbara region, the Injibandi and the Ngamula, to relocate themselves within the spatial grid through which we are used to seeing them. We have previously seen these Aborigines when the media has taken an interest in that's where John Pat died in police hands, a death investigated with memorable acuity by David Marr for *Four Corners*. Roebourne thus becomes the scene of a very familiar drama - cops vs Aborigines, and these Aborigines become known to us as "the Roebourne Aborigines", a mob who get our sympathy and even support without necessarily getting our understanding. As another oppressed community dwelling on the edges of an outback country town, we already "know" them; that scene is so familiar to our abhorring metropolitan reflexes that we need to know no more than that.

Roebourne gets decent in this film - robbed of its powers to define the speakers in *Exile and Kingdom*. We learn that only very recently (sixty years ago) has Roebourne had to be a place of relevance to the Injibandi. It's been the site of their "exile" (though there is a sense in which they've annexed Roebourne to their homelands): their "kingdom" remains the hinterland defined by the Fortescue River, a ribbon of green through the Pilbara's dusty red, a strip dense with the actions of the Marga (spirits of the Creations), a bit of dirt which some speakers in the film disconcertingly call the Bible.

Rijavec, Harrison and Solomon have marshalled an impressive body of Injibandi/Ngalmula testimony: in obliging us to relocate them, to see them not as fringed-wellers but as the keepers of that river and its snake Barimindi, they allow us a surprisingly effortless empathy with their country's meanings. Aerial shots of "lovely scenery" intercut with sequences of initiation ceremony and older adults' direct address to camera - if Injibandi were allowed jointly to manage the Fortescue Valley's Millstream National Park, the first twenty-five minutes of *Exile and Kingdom* could be adapted to become a promotional and explanatory



Above: Roger Solomon, narrator of *Exile and the Kingdom* directed by Frank Rijavec

Left: Ester Pat, wife of the narrator in *Exile and the Kingdom*

Fortescue River Country, there is an historical narrative. It is possible to think of Australia's colonial history in comfortably progressive terms: the pioneers massacred, the humanitarians following them at least tried to do something but got it wrong (assimilation), and now we are starting to wake up to our mistakes to put things right. Well, that schema won't do. True, there is nineteenth century massacre and enslavement to deplore: the Yaburara were decimated at King Bay by an authorised punitive posse of pearlers and pastoralists; in 1868, and legislation brought police down on any Aboriginal people who decided they had had enough of diving for pearlshell or sheepherding. But until the 1960s, the people of Roebourne's hinterland kept in touch with their country because able-bodied men and women and their dependents were essential cheap labour for the colonists sheep runs on their land. Continuing access to certain sacred sites afforded people powers to bring drought upon their new masters, making a hard, dry country for sheep. A gradual, mutual adjustment of colonised and coloniser was possible, if both used the country

From the 1920s, welfare ministered to those who could not stay on the stations, provided that they came down to the coast, to ration camps in Roebourne and Onslow; but the culture adapted to this effective expansion of the tablelanders' territory. The Whantu (snake) from the river fought the saltwater Wharlui of the coast people and made it alright for the tablelanders to live on the coast too.

It is the release from that pastoral and welfare paternalism which the narrators lament. *Exile and the Kingdom* is a provocation to try to rethink, from an Aboriginal point of view, the benefits of "citizenship". The sixties culmination of their frog march to equality is narrated as a disaster. With equal pay in the pastoral industry, people were no longer affordable to those running sheep on their country. While Roebourne reserve's numbers swelled, the government was yielding to liberal opinion and conceded Aborigines the right to drink. Then the iron ore boom of the late sixties and early seventies caused whites to pour into the region in unprecedented numbers, wallets stuffed with mining boom wages. Overnight, Roebourne became a brothel and then a welfare ghetto as the suburban dormitory towns were constructed elsewhere in the region, leaving Roebourne with a newly built Aboriginal village, serviced by a pub and a police station.

In Roger Solomon's words, "in the mid 1960s, our world turned upside down". As it is used by those telling this film's stories, the word "citizenship" is metonym for an insensitivity and suddenly imposed modernity. Quoted footage promoting the boom's impact does not mention Aboriginal people, celebrating instead the suburbanisation of a fearsome landscape. Two of the film's most striking sequences dwell on the cultural impacts of the sixties. We see a local woman baptised into the Pilbara Aboriginal church; and another narrates her saving from domestic violence). It is the ideology of this film were not so firmly in local hands, we might expect some cynicism about "missionaries" at this point. But that critique (metropolitan liberal) never comes; some old lawmen have got Jesus on their side to fight the frog.

No, the real threat to culture has not been Christianity. Roger interviews people of his own generation and younger in jail, and speaks to camera himself, to tell us that a generation lost their parents to drink. Roger thankfully recalls his

The once and future kingdom

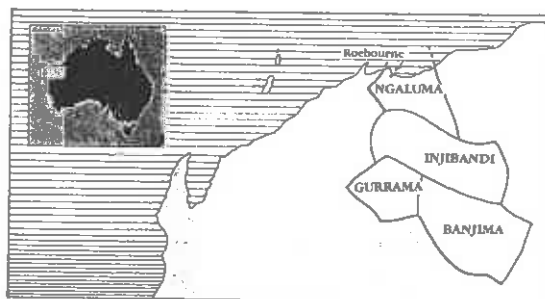
In the language of this country, the name of this river is Yarnda Nyirra-Na, 'Sun Mirror'. This is the story of the people who belong to the river, and the forces that took them away.

SO BEGINS *Exile and The Kingdom*, an extraordinary documentary film about the Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banjima and Gurrama tribes of Roebourne, in Western Australia's Pilbara region. The film tells the way they see their history, which for a white audience means that things are turned inside out. It should be compulsory viewing for any galahs still flapping around the notion that until white settlement Australia was *terra nullius*—no one's land.

Roebourne became known as a 'trouble town' in the mining boom of the 1960s. The reputation stuck after the tragic death of 16-year-old John Pat in a police cell in 1983—which, more than any other single event, led to the royal commission into black deaths in custody. But *Exile and The Kingdom* goes beyond breathless, 30-second television grabs such as 'The hot and dusty town of Roebourne will be known for one thing and one thing only ...' A white film crew, led by Perth independent filmmakers Frank Rijavec and Noeline Harrison, worked in collaboration with Roebourne's Aboriginal community for six years.

Rijavec first went to the town in 1987, with a brief for a film about relations between police and local

Aborigines. The police video unit had already shot some 'pretty abysmal' footage, and the Aborigines were lukewarm about the idea. But Rijavec's approach was different: 'As soon as the question changed and it became "there is a chance of making a film, what would you want to say, what do you think it should do, what hasn't been done before?"—that was the starting point. In a sense, the elders have directed what they wanted to show.' Early worries about another cameraman looking for quick 'stories' eased after Rijavec went bush for four weeks and shot video footage at a children's cultural camp. A generator was cranked up at night,



and young and old liked what they saw.

The film begins with tribal elders journeying up the Fortescue River to the tablelands where the *Marga* (creation spirits) sang and danced the first Law ceremony, 'when the world was soft'. The ground became hard in a later age and the circular track of their dance was preserved in a remarkable rock formation. The initiation of young men into the Law follows, binding them to tribal country and their spiritual ancestors, and the relation between kin groups and the land is

explained in clear, simple diagrams.

The violence and exploitation that began with the arrival of pearlers in 1863 is well-illustrated, using diaries, letters, official reports, photographs and film, mostly from WA's Batty Library. Many Aborigines chose to stay near their country by working on pastoral properties, and those unfit for work were fed at government ration camps on the tablelands until the 1930s, when the camps were shifted to Roebourne to cut costs. The introduction of equal wages for Aborigines in 1967 brought mass sackings of blacks on stations and they, too, drifted down to Roebourne. The iron-ore boom brought a depressing state-housing village near the town cemetery, thousands of single, boozing white men living in 'model' company towns—and no jobs for blacks.

The story is often grim: an elder is said to have died of a broken heart in the 1980s, when the WA government flooded a sacred valley to supply the mining towns. The vital natural water courses are controlled by the government, which is resisting a push by the tribes to regain a viable slice of their homelands. But *Exile and the Kingdom* is also full of hope, showing how the community has made headway against alcohol, and that increasing numbers of young people are going through the Law ceremonies.



Telling his people's story: Robert Solomon, narrator of Exile and The Kingdom

The once and future kingdom

The film's narrator, Roger Solomon, had his wild days during the bad times of the mining boom but gave up alcohol in 1984, after his nephew died in police custody. He began to work as an alcohol counsellor and together with his father, James, and brother, David, formed the Ngaluma/Injibandi dance group, which has revived many old corroborees. Roger Solomon, whose Aboriginal name is Yirra Bindiri ('Teeth Like Stars'), speaks with ease and authority in the film and co-wrote the script. He passed away at the age of 39, three weeks after attending the film's Perth premiere. The cause of death was mesothelioma, contracted as child from playing on a jetty used to load blue asbestos.

Another brother, Trevor Solomon, says the film brought 'everything out into the open' and the community are proud of it. 'Whatever we were talking about, we'd get the old people, we'd sit down and have a talk about it, make things straight by them and they'd allow so much to go out ... every time we spoke about anything about the land of anything we'd approach them first and get the AOK off them.'

The film premiered under late summer stars at Roebourne Primary School, followed by a two-week season in Perth and a performance by the 40-member Roebourne dance troupe at the city opening. Says Rijavec: 'A couple of very important people in the community have passed away and we were a bit worried about how people would feel. But in some ways, people don't feel too bad, they feel proud ... even the [direct] family. There's a record of some very special things that were said in a way that no one could say quite the same way again.'

One taboo the filmmakers faced was that no light could be shone on the *bundut*, the ceremonial singing and dancing for the public part of the initiations. The camera instead fixes on a fingernail moon in the night sky, and the sounds of singing and dancing do the rest. The film has traditional corroborees and story telling, snatches of church music and the 'one-string bush banjo'. It is a documentary worth seeing on the big screen, because the landscape itself stars through fine aerial photography.

The elders speak with the conviction of standing on their own turf,

helped by a filmic rhythm that is closer to breathing than to the rapid-eye movement of modern film editing. 'The Law not belong to me,' says one elder, Alan Jacob, pointing to the red earth. 'Law written here.'

Exile and The Kingdom has been accepted into WA schools and will be screened during the Melbourne and Sydney film festivals in June, and on ABC television on 7 July. It has also been selected for film festivals in Bombay, Singapore, Auckland and Wellington, and for the Berlin-based Aboriginality Festival, which will tour other German cities and London.

There is no taboo against using John Pat's name in print, but he was related to many of the participants in the film and is referred to in conversation as 'the boy that died'. The Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banjima and Gurrama people know who that means. And they know their story, just like Aborigines everywhere know their own story. It is whites who have to learn, and this film helps. ■

Mark Skulley is a freelance writer.

- Film Australia is distributing *Exile and The Kingdom* on video. Their number is (02) 413 8777.
- Roger Solomon's family gave *Eureka Street* permission to use his name and the accompanying photograph.

Truth to tell

A 'new approach' documentary on Aborigines has attracted significant international attention

BY VICTORIA LAURIE

The relationship between film-makers and Aboriginal communities has a history of confrontation, voyeurism and often a sense of betrayal for Aboriginal participants who thought the film-maker "understood". True collaboration is almost unheard of.

For example, *Genocide*, a controversial documentary focusing on the problems confronting tribal/urban peoples in Western Australia, owed more to the collaboration of the WA police than to its Aboriginal participants, provoking hostility from sectors of the audience at its first screening two years ago.

Rare: So Perth film-maker Frank Rijavec has achieved a rare feat with his film *Exile and the Kingdom*. A 110-minute documentary four years in the making, *Exile* depicts the life and times of the Indjibarndi/Ngarluma community of Roebourne in the north-west of WA. Community members are credited as associate producers and co-authors of the film. Roger Solomon, an Indjibarndi member with whose family Rijavec formed a close friendship on his first trip up north, is the narrator. Solomon also script-edited with Rijavec to ensure correct terminology and some highly poetic rendering into English of Aboriginal songs.

Cynics suggest that "collaboration" with Aboriginal people is, in reality, often a euphemism for manipulative handling of subjects by media crews with absolute powers of veto. But those cynics need look no further than the opening scenes of *Exile* for evidence of the profound care taken by Rijavec to allow Aboriginal autonomy on all aspects of the film.

One older man told him to "start with where we came from, not the town". So Rijavec immediately abandoned his idea of contrasting the Indjibarndi community's actual lives with bleak archival media images of Roebourne (site of the infamous John Pat death in custody that led to the royal commission).

"I soon realised they were sick of such clichéd images of them as hopeless victims," Rijavec says. "The question then became, 'What do these people think it's important to make a film about?'"

The answer was "country". In the first few minutes of *Exile*, the bird's eye of the camera sweeps over breathtakingly

beautiful tablelands around the Fortescue River and leads down to the "places of creation". There, elderly tribal guides describe how huge overlapping plates of rock indicate the "soft world" where "once the first Law ceremony was danced until the land went hard".

"That mythology underpins all contemporary law and relationships," Rijavec says, "so it was clearly stated that this must be the first sequence."

The film moves on through the historical reality of white interaction with the Indjibarndi people, incorporating research by co-producer Noeline Harrison that points to the symbiotic relationship between police patrols and the pearling

their culture. The film seeks empathy, not pity, from its audience.

The Aboriginal participants, all of whom had to give their permission before being filmed, had continuous access to Rijavec's film footage, which he showed "whenever I could, to whoever was around. I never directly asked 'What's in and what's out?'" but you'd get a gut response [from people] watching it, from enthusiasm for some material and a cool reception to other."

Problems: Obvious social problems, like alcoholism and juvenile delinquency, are candidly tackled in interviews with Aboriginal inmates of Roebourne jail, but are not directly captured on film. "There's public stuff and non-public stuff and it was important to respect this," says Rijavec. "I've seen a lot of films that I know as soon as I've seen them if the participants had had the choice about whether it should be played back to the whole world, they would have said 'No, we know this is worth talking about but we want to talk about it in this arena, not that one.'"

Despite its achievements and wide



Ensuring accuracy: *Exile and the Kingdom's* narrator, Roger Solomon

industry in the mid-1800s, which needed slave labour for diving.

Licence: Later, an Aboriginal man matter-of-factly displays his "dog licence" which, in the '50s and '60s, was granted to certain Aborigines who sought permission to live in towns. But the demise of their pastoral jobs and their exclusion from the iron-ore mining boom that revolutionised life in the north left a demoralised community huddled in reserves.

Unique footage of a recent initiation ceremony (filmed in wide shot with no close-ups, to reflect the communal nature of the event) reveals the great capacity for survival of the Indjibarndi people and

praise from Aboriginal groups, WA film-makers and even mining companies, *Exile and the Kingdom* was turned down by the recent Festival of Perth's film section. Apparently missing the point of the film, the festival committee suggested its narration should have been done by a "professional" and that the camera did not get close enough to the individuals involved in the initiation ceremony.

Regardless, *Exile*, which will be screened by the ABC later this year, has already been invited to several international film festivals and will be highlighted in the Pacific Arts Symposium in Adelaide this month. ■

in the PICTURE

WA's independent film and video magazine

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

Produced by Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison
Reviewed by Mark Naglazas

If you know from whence you come then there is no limit to where you can go.

James Baldwin

Storytelling, it is becoming increasingly apparent to me, is all about rhythm. One film is distinguished from another not by its structure or content or point-of-view - these attributes, as we have been taught by Vladimir Propp and the structuralists, are remarkably constant across all ages and cultures - but the pace at which the narrative unfolds. Whenever I assess a screenplay my degree of interest is usually determined by the rhythm of the storytelling. Conversely, if a film sets out to challenge conventions, the depth of that challenge can be measured by the time allocated to individual scenes and sequences. Jean-Luc Godard, in his 1956 essay on editing 'Montage My Fine Fine Care' (in *Godard on Godard*), stressed the importance of filmic rhythm: "If direction is a look, montage is a heart-beat."

Frank Rijavec, an experienced editor who earned an AFI nomination for his work on David Noakes' *How The West Was Lost*, clearly understands the relationship between storytelling

rhythm and cultural difference. Working in close collaboration with the Indjibarndi/Ngarluma community of Roebourne, Rijavec and co-producer Noelene Harrison have structured their soon-to-be released documentary *Exile and The Kingdom* according to the storytelling rhythms of the film's subject. Where other documentaries of its kind race ahead breathlessly, anxious to tie things up with a neat conclusion, Rijavec slows things down, allowing a scene to linger in order for the speaker to bring his or her story or opinion to its natural conclusion.

In an era when the disease of MTV-style rapid-fire editing is infecting mainstream movie-making (Eisenstein has a lot to answer for!) and harassed Japanese business executives are pondering the possibility of the 5-minute feature film, Rijavec is clearly moving, ever so purposefully, against the grain. Respect for the subjects of *Exile and The Kingdom* has prompted the filmmakers to begin at the beginning - not with the mining boom of the 1960's or the first white settlements in Western Australia, but the time before recorded history, the time of magic and myth. On the advice of tribal elders, as explained by narrator Roger Solomon, the filmmakers begin the story of the Roebourne people with the lands around the Fortescue River. The film argues that the relentless abuse which removed the Roebourne people from these traditional lands, the bedrock upon which Indjibarndi/Ngarluma law and custom is based, has led to the community's current problems. This 110-minute documentary is, above all, a beautifully logical and compellingly persuasive argument for land rights.

Because the filmmakers spend so much time detailing the origins of Indjibarndi/Ngarluma law, the

cornerstone of their identity as a race, the early material resonates powerfully throughout the rest of the film. As we move through history, from the white invasion that forced the rightful caretakers of the land into slavery and exile, to the excesses of the mining

Australian public was faced with the umpteenth documentary showing drunken Aborigines living in desperate squalor. The situation, such pictures tell us, is hopeless. Not in *Exile and The Kingdom*. By avoiding the temptation to wrench images out



Indjibarndi elder Woodley King (centre) at the 'bundut', creation place of Indjibarndi law

boom and the current problems with alcohol, we are never allowed to forget the significance and influence of tribal law and the land in which it is inscribed. In the same way that the Jews clung to the word of God through the darkest years of their history, the native peoples of Australia have looked to the land as the source of their strength. This is why one of the most moving scenes in *Exile and The Kingdom* shows a woman looking out over sacred lands now covered in water caused by the construction of the Harding Dam.

Most crucially, after viewing *Exile and The Kingdom*, one is left with an overwhelming sense of hope. In recent months I have found myself turning off the television when images of Somalia or Bosnia-Herzegovina invade the screen. I suspect that happened some time ago when the

of their context tabloid-style, and endeavouring to make story elements connect where the mass media only wants chopped up spicy morsels, the filmmakers have succeeded in giving the Roebourne people what they most desperately need to go forward - a map of the past. The Aboriginal community clearly understand the significance of the film - "This story captures the essence of Aboriginality, past, present and future," writes Kado Muir.

It will take an effort on the part of some non-Aboriginal audiences to latch onto the rhythms of this unyielding though never dull, hope-filled and extraordinarily articulate documentary. Which is, of course, the whole point. If a film such as *Exile and The Kingdom* is to be politically relevant it must invite and challenge audiences to alter their way of seeing and hearing, to force them to reflect critically - both on the act of representation and, more crucially, reality itself. In this sense, *Exile and The Kingdom* is a major achievement.



Lilla Snowball on the dam wall where many sacred places were drowned

**This Prime
Position
Can Be
Yours By
Phoning
85 4456**

The KARRATHA Guardian



Phone: 85 4456

Fax: 85 1962

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1993

Distributed free

Roebourne film celebrates local Aboriginal culture

A **THOUGHT**-provoking, conscience-stirring film had its world premiere last week in Roebourne.

Exile And The Kingdom was just a germ of an idea for Frank Rijavec back in 1987 but determination, belief in himself and exceptional input from the Injibandi-Ngaluma community of Roebourne (Jeramagadu) soon saw it become a reality.

With the help of Perth-based filmmaker Noeline Harrison and narrator Roger Solomon, the story of the culture and way of life of the Aboriginal people of Roebourne has been told.

"In the language of this country, the name of this river is Yarnda Nyirra-na 'Sun Mirror'.

"This is the story of the people who belong to the river and the forces that took them away," explained Roger Solomon to the

hundreds who had travelled to witness their history.

The film unfolded with a moving look into the Tablelands.

Tribal elders gave viewers a privileged glimpse of the beginning of the world and showed them the sacred places shaped by Marga (creation spirit) and Mingkala (skygod).

The audience was invited into the heart of the community to watch as it celebrated the initiation of its young into tribal law.

No matter how old, Aboriginal men are considered 'kids' until they go through the law and emerge a man. The boy dies and a man is born.

According to one elder in the film 'without our law we would be just like white people'.

Pilbara tribes were herded from place to place and along the way lost their dignity.

It is hoped through this film the world will see they have been

By **VICKI BRINKHUIZEN**

exiled from their country and their struggle with the new colonial order of the 20th century continues.

The country in the South West of Western Australia, the Wheatbelt and the Pilbara have all been primary elements in Frank Rijavec's works and Exile And The Kingdom joins an extensive list of exceptional works.

He firmly believes that writers in Western Australia have excelled in capturing the true meaning of the area's dreams and histories and it was his desire to bring some of this to life on film that spurred him on.

"My films always rely on special guides, on individuals and communities who are closest to the ground in each of the territories explored," he said.

"Exile And The Kingdom is a homage to the extremely beautiful and complex culture of the people

who have taught me most about the country my family and I are new to."

The film was originally intended to be a video about Aboriginal and police relations in Roebourne but it quickly developed into a much bigger story.

Noeline Harrison, co-producer, and Frank abandoned their initial concept and began work on the two-hour film that was to become a labour of love.

Like most Australians the only contact the filmmakers had with Roebourne, before the start of the film, was via media reports, particularly around the time of John Pat's death in policy custody and the Royal Commissions that followed.

It was in 1987 that Frank Rijavec, with great trepidation, set out for Roebourne to begin preliminary research. He received great assist from the Police Aboriginal and Community Relations Committee.

"I landed in Roebourne green, knowing no-one and with only a few names to contact," he said.

"After days of asking people what they would like to make a film about I soon realised that no-one was interested in discussing police-Aboriginal relations."

According to Rijavec people were sick of visiting journalists looking for material to flesh out their 'death in custody' stories.

"They wanted to show their culture and tell the stories of the country they came from."

It was out in the bush at a culture camp that things came into 'magic focus' for Frank Rijavec.

Here among the community spirit involving himself in daily games, expeditions, crafts, dances and meals a seed was planted.

"I videoed the day's activities and even encouraged a couple of teenagers to play a part shooting interviews," he said.

"At night a television was hooked up to a generator and the day's filming played."

"The response was overwhelming and the experience of recording the kids watching and learning about corroborees convinced the community of the value of making a film."

This formed the foundation for the working relationship Rijavec developed with community over the next six years.

Plans for the filming began with a series of 'unforgettable' research trips, in the company of several elders, out into the hinterland along the course of the Fortescue River to the 'fantastic' Hamersley Ranges.

The premiere was attended by people from all walks of life.

According to Member for Mining and Pastoral Tom Stephens, who was present on the night, the film represented a

very important piece in the portrayal of Aboriginal history for the people of the Fortescue River system and of the Pilbara region.

"The local Aboriginal people who participated in the production of the film deserve the heartiest of congratulations for their success. I believe Mr Roger Solomon has done an excellent job as commentator and guide for the film audience and its producers."

Mr Stephens strongly urged all residents to see the film, in particular the people of the Pilbara region.

"It (the film) gives an understanding of the complex history of the Aboriginal people of the region from early contact with white settlers through to the recent impact of the major resource developments of the region," he explained.

Mr Stephens stressed that Exile And The Kingdom was an immense epic in its scope and significance for audiences in Western Australia.

"This story is told in the authentic regional Aboriginal voice of Roger Solomon and its power grows without any need for sensationalism."

"I recommend it not only to people who have a desire to get to know and understand the Aboriginal people of the Roebourne community but to all the people of Western Australia."

According to In the Picture film critic Mark Naglazas it will take an effort on the part of some non-Aboriginal audiences to latch on to the rhythms of the documentary.

"It is hope-filled and extraordinarily articulate which is of course the whole point," he said.

"If a film such as Exile And The Kingdom is to be politically relevant it must invite and challenge audiences to alter their way of seeing and hearing and force them to reflect critically - both on the act of representation and more crucially, reality itself."

"In this sense Exile And The Kingdom is a major achievement."

The film, according to Rijavec, received a overwhelming response from the Roebourne community.

"They told me it gave them a sense of pride and, after all, the ultimate feedback would have to come from Roebourne first."



KARRI Monadee with filmmaker Noeline Harrison.



ROGER Solomon narrates the film Exile And The Kingdom.

L.J.HOOKER
KARRATHA

HOME OF THE WEEK

REDUCED \$5000
SOLID AS A ROCK — \$164,990
4 bedroom DUPLEX PAIR, air cond, large lounge area, carports, big paved backyards. Return 14.5% for the go getter investor.
View with **RODERICK CROFTS A/Hrs 85 1978**
NOBODY DOES IT BETTER
1093 Searipple Road, Karratha
44 2499

Indigenous exile

1983 is the Year of Indigenous People, a year intended to recognise the culture and the lives and plight of Australian Aborigines, North American Indians and Maori, the Lapps and a myriad of other people usurped by other people and races. GRANT COTTRELL looks at *Exile and the Kingdom*, a new film which focuses on the plight of Kimberley Aborigines.

Initially a continuation of his commitment to independent film-making and—as a first generation European Australian—identification with the land, *Exile and the Kingdom* became for Frank Rijavec a labour of love spanning six years.

The genesis of the film occurred when Rijavec, on research with assistance from the Police Aboriginal and Community Relations Committee, discovered Aborigines wanted to talk about the broader concerns and strengths of the community rather than the problems in the Pilbara region; the huge upheaval in the lives of local people demanded a greater exploration than the simplistic mass media concentration of the death of John Pat in police custody and the subsequent trials and Royal Commission.

Exile and the Kingdom begins with an overview of creation mythology and cultural history which succinctly and

sensitively portrays how the four main tribes of the region—Injibarndi, Ngarluma, Banjima and Gurrama—identify physically, emotionally and spiritually with the land. I was moved many times during the film by the sight of elders' complete identification with the very contours of the land, an identification that goes far beyond any European notion of ownership and demonstrates the polarity of "western" and native Australian philosophy; in "western" culture the land is owned, in Aboriginal culture the people are owned by the land. The traditionally European perception of a harsh, unforgiving land was for me turned on its head by the local peoples' tremendous depth of feeling and continuity.

This continuity, however, was disrupted by the arrival of the British in 1863. As the centre of the pearling boom, the Injibarndi and Ngarluma people were enslaved to create wealth

for pearlers and pastoralists, while the sick, elderly and others unable to work were banished to government ration camps, which by the 1930's were concentrated for economic reasons to the coastal lowlands of Roebourne, effectively exiling many from their tribal lands. By the 1960's the degradation of grazing lands and price falls for wool saw a decline in stations, and with the introduction of equal wages for Aborigines in 1967 cheap labour was at an end and most had to leave to join the others in town. Much of the archival footage in this part of the film has not before been seen, and through quotes from the writing of policemen, pastoralists and clergy is a devastating indictment of the arrogance and ignorance of the European intruders.

But the film doesn't set out to attack the bad guys and bemoan the suffering of the innocent: it moves beyond apportioning guilt and blame to a new ethos



of acceptance and change. Even the additional blows of the mining boom of the 1960's, in which Aborigines were effectively excluded from the workforce and exiled to a cluster of State houses around Roebourne's cemetery (irony upon irony, and deeply offensive to Aboriginal beliefs), have not completely destroyed the fabric of the community, and throughout the 1980's the community's struggle to reconnect their town-bred children with their roots has seen a revival in cultural reaffirmation.

The battle for rights to land is obviously imperative, as the film shows how such claims underpin Law Ceremony in which extended families from all over the Pilbara gather for the initiation of their young. The unbroken stream of power despite 130 years of occupation, is heartening and a call to arms for all those with a conscience. This film is a must, in turn enlightening, moving, lyrical and challenging. Beginning March 19 at the Lumiere, its not to be missed. ▼

Spirit of the land

by FRAN JOHNSTON

FRANK Rijavec and Noelene Harrison aren't the first film makers to spend four years pursuing a project. Nor are they the first to make a documentary about the Aboriginal people of Roebourne.

Exile and the Kingdom is not, however, typical of what you might issues from such a subject, particularly given the media's tendency to focus on aspects such as alcoholism and crime faced by the Roebourne community.

Instead, Frank and Noelene worked with the Injibarndi, Ngarluma, Banjima and Gurruma people to tell their story – from its very beginning when the world was created, to the present day.

When Frank first went to Roebourne in 1987, he planned to make a documentary about Aboriginal/police relations. He soon discovered the people of Roebourne didn't want to know about it – they'd had enough of journalists pursuing stories in a similar vein.

What Frank did discover was a group of people keen to tell their story from their own point of view. Collaboration with the community began in the pre-production phase and continued right through to post-production.

The result is a deeply spiritual and moving film – one which reflects both the struggle of the Roebourne community to survive 130 years of white settlement and their determination to keep their culture alive.

Frank believes Exile and the Kingdom works because it is the community's story – he just gave them the means to tell it. "Without their dedication and excitement, the film would have been nothing," he said. "It was their (the elders) excitement that kept me and Noelene going."

Making the film also became a lot more than work for the Fremantle film makers: "It was a journey of learning for us."

The experience had a profound effect on them. "Waking up at dawn in the

Pilbara is a spiritual experience," commented Frank. "It doesn't matter whether you believe in Aboriginal myths or not."

Talking to Frank, it is easy to see that commitment worked both ways in the

"The experience had a profound effect on the film makers."

production of Exile. Commitment and trust from the community to share their stories, faith (including the initiation of boys into the Law) and pain at being forced off their land, into slavery and then out of the workforce, and commit-

ment from Frank and Noelene to share the film making process honestly.

Exile and the Kingdom is an extraordinary document. Using archival notes and footage (much of it never shown publicly until now), along with the thoughts of the people of Roebourne, it captures the spirit of a community in a way that perhaps has never been done before. It doesn't select one angle or point of view, as is often the case with documentaries, but instead gives a thoroughly researched overview.

What comes across most strongly, and becomes an inspiration for the viewer, is the community's links with the land – it is much more than something to be used, or even a vehicle for spirituality. It IS their spirituality.

Exile and the Kingdom is screening at the Lumiere Cinemas on Wellington Street Perth for two weeks, starting Friday March 19.



• Roger Solomon narrates the story of his people in Exile and the Kingdom.



INTERVIEWS 20



FILMS 24



BOOKS 32



POEMS 33

By Glen Hooper

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

Frank Rijavec is an ex-WAIT student who has just finished the documentary film *Exile and the Kingdom*. The film, co-produced with Noeline Harrison, was made with the assistance of the Aboriginal community of

Roebourne. A first-generation Australian of Slovenian parents, Frank has won and been nominated for many awards for previous documentaries which embrace the people and country of WA, as well as having worked for SBS-TV.

Exile and the Kingdom has already been accepted by three international film festivals; the ABC and various government departments are also considering using it for education within their institutions.

On March 19, *Exile and the Kingdom* will have its Perth premiere at Lumiere Cinemas.

Taking time out from his time in Perth before the premiere, Frank spoke with *Grok*.

What made you decide to do a documentary on this subject?

The decision was made in 1987 after a short visit to Roebourne where I went to make an educational video about Aboriginal-Police relations. I got there, got to know a few people, but the original idea didn't really interest the people there.

This was of course around the time of the Black Deaths in Custody Royal Commission wasn't it?

Yes, that's right. By that time people in Roebourne were sick of having the media attention which only seemed to portray Roebourne in a negative light. The people had had to deal with that kind of media swarm since the 1983 death of a youth in custody and they had begun to really resent what the media were doing there. They were a bit nervous and really not interested.

When we got to talking further they sensed I was actually listening and looking for a way to make it work. They started saying: "If we've got a choice what we really want is to make a film about our culture and the country we're from".

Rather than Roebourne?

There are a lot of old people who grew up and were born in the Fortescue Valley. In the mid-60s they were all collected into Roebourne, so they felt it was really important to talk about "their" country, its culture and law.

One of their primary motives was for their kids who had grown up in Roebourne isolated from their country and that type of experience to have a better understanding of where they were from.

So that was their motivation?

Yes, plus the fact that they sensed they had control in



Karri Monades - Indjilbandi elder with Noeline Harrison - Co-producer and sound recordist.

where the film was going and what it was going to be about. With their assistance we were able to learn much more of the history of the region. My co-producer Noeline and I were able to learn even more by researching Police and Department of Native Welfare records in the Battye Library, as well as speaking to pastoralists and other people who had worked in the area.

What about your motivation?

The best parts of the film, or at least the best parts for me, were when we talked about and experienced through the film some of the ceremony and mythology of the country. That's when I think people felt most open, most enthusiastic.

There are many aspects of the film, especially the social problems experienced by the Aborigines and their tribal law which normally don't get covered to the same depth by the wider media. How is it you were able to go so much deeper?

The main reason was time. I spent 18 months living in Roebourne over a period of four to five years so the ideas and the relationships were developed over a period of time.

I made some really good friends and I've now got an extended family up there.

So you were pretty well accepted?

Yeah, I've been given a skin colour, I've got "brothers" there, we communicate regularly. In fact they're probably coming down to Perth for the premiere.

People realised it was a two way thing and that they had ownership, it wasn't me getting the stories out of them, it was them realising they had room to tell it their way, so they did.

They were involved with the editorial content then?

The process involved playing back rushes so they saw what had been done the week before and got a feeling for how it was going. A lot of stuff was written off as they weren't happy or they wanted to do it again sometimes and improve upon it.

What don't people in Perth know about Roebourne?

They don't know it as a community of people, you know it as a set of social problems because that's the way mass media chooses to represent it.

Generally the media has a very specific agenda in reporting anything and they have habits and tradition. Roebourne has traditionally been a place where the media goes to talk about deaths in custody, the social problems and degradation that occurred when the mining boom hit. Roebourne has been cast as a troubled town, that's pretty much all city people hear.

So is the media to blame for Roebourne's image?

Going back deep into the history of white occupation, white people have always considered Aborigines as less than white, less than human in a sense.

I think that still pervades in the way that people say: "Aborigines are lazy, they drink", those

kinds of cliches.

Those prejudices have been sustained and I think the roots are in the colonial ways of looking at Aboriginal people. That's why the media perpetuates that as well, but it's not necessarily the media's fault. The media's made up of members of the community, it's our education systems which have totally ignored what Aboriginal society was really about.

I learned stuff all at school about that society or what the experience of being colonised was about. Things are changing, but it'll probably take decades.

Can you see *Exile and the Kingdom* playing a part in that process of change?

Absolutely. Already the Education Department has shown a very strong interest in using the film for Aboriginal studies in secondary schools.

It's unique in that I don't think there are many documents on film that give an overall perspective of what it's like to be colonised and to be controlled by successive governments.

In a non-preachy kind of way the film also shows it's our European administration which has created the ghettos and many of the other related problems.

It's not that Aboriginal people as a race are coming apart because they lack certain qualities, it is because we as a power created that situation. We have to recognise that, we have to admit it.

What about for the people of Roebourne?

The response in Roebourne has been celebratory, the buzz in the town following the release of the film was incredible, really positive.

There was a lot of pride attached to the fact that there is this document that people can say there is more to this town than other people's attitudes allow them to see.

Just as important, it feeds back to the kids giving them pride which makes their parents much happier.

So do you think one documentary can change everything?

You can't change 130 years with two hours, it's a start though.

AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANK RIJAVAC



EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

Directed by Frank Rijavec

Reviewed by Glen Hooper

Exile and the Kingdom is a new documentary produced by Noeline Harrison and ex-WAIT student Frank Rijavec. Involving four years work within the Roebourne Aboriginal community, *Exile and the Kingdom* looks at the history of the area and its people from an Aboriginal and non-aboriginal perspective.

The Aboriginal history begins before the arrival of the colonists. Guided by the elders from the Roebourne area, viewers are given an understanding of the Aboriginal culture and traditions of law - an understanding that makes a mockery of the belief that before white colonisation no civilisation existed in Australia.

Many Aboriginal beliefs and traditions germinated in the region before spreading out and influencing other Aboriginal communities as far away as Uluru in the Northern Territory.

In two one-hour parts, *Exile and the Kingdom* moves from pre-history through colonisation and the twentieth century to the present, acting not only as a historical document but also as a guide to what the future holds for Roebourne.

Along the way, the audience discovers the true story of Roebourne, a townsite set up to expedite the controlling of Aboriginals by moving them to the town which for many of them has few links with the traditional lands their ancestors originally inhabited.

Not only were the Aboriginals coerced into moving to Roebourne but successive invasions first by colonists, pastoralists, pearl hunters and then the nickel companies totally rent the fabric of their society leaving it listing like a punch drunk fighter.

Rarely have these significant historical attacks been considered by the wider community as it unfairly defines Roebourne as a troubled town.

Thankfully, *Exile and the Kingdom*, by virtue of the length of time the film-makers were in Roebourne and the editorial support of the local community, takes viewers beyond the shortsightedness of stereotypes and offers many solutions and much hope.

Narrated by Roger Solomon, one of the major spokespeople for the Roebourne community, *Exile and the Kingdom* stays away from the common trap documentaries fall into of having the subjects mere players in a story. The film has a certain lyrical element to its



Roebourne's young men in the Regional Prison with the film's narrator, Roger Solomon (cntr).

narration which highlights the age-old oral tradition of its subjects.

Untrained in media presentation, Solomon not only narrates, but also becomes a subject of the documentary whenever he is required for a particular or personal insight into whatever is being discussed. His considered eloquence seeps into the pores of the viewers and opens them up to empathising with the film and its subjects. Forget Stan Grant, Roger Solomon is a major talent.

As a piece of film or as historical documentation, *Exile and the Kingdom* is equally excellent. The story is told with verve and occasional humour but always with a sense of respect for the subject being covered. The humanity of the people of Roebourne whether they be about to take part in a law ceremony or are incarcerated is truly poignant and makes this one of the better documentaries you will see.

Unlike the often scathing current affairs reports we see intermittently on television, *Exile and the Kingdom* succeeds in finding out the truth about Roebourne because its filmmakers spent so long crafting their document.

Community involvement and the trust placed in the filmmakers also allowed them to go where others have not and bring back a fair record for the viewers.

Anyone with an interest in history (black or white) should most definitely go and see

Exile and the Kingdom. It is an excellent documentary, all the better for its respectful synthesis between Aboriginals and non-aboriginals working on the project.

Exile and the Kingdom will shed much light on the true significance of land rights and the effect colonisation and years of neglect have had on the Roebourne community. At the same time, the film does not attempt to make viewers feel guilty about the past, it simply shows us how the community copes and struggles to regain its own identity.

I can't recommend *Exile and the Kingdom* highly enough. It is courageous, intelligent and arresting. Of equal importance, *Exile and the Kingdom* is the people of Roebourne's story, an honest, educative and insightful story.

Go see it.



VOLUME 25, ISSUE #3
MARCH 31, 1993
REG PUB WBF 018

EDUCATION INSIGHT

LIFTOUT

Moving portrait

The fruits of the increased emphasis on Aboriginal studies could be seen last week when students from two Perth high schools expressed their views after watching a new documentary film about Aboriginal people in the North-West. **DANIELLE BENDA** reports.

AN EXCITING new tool for the teaching of Aboriginal studies opens at the Lumiere Cinema, Perth, on Friday and its most enthusiastic advocates are the students themselves. *Exile and the Kingdom* is a deeply moving documentary film about the experience of Aboriginal people from around the Fortescue River in the Pilbara.

It is told from an Aboriginal perspective and narrated by Injabandi tribal leader Roger Solomon. It details the Aboriginal experience of the land from the time when the "world was soft" to the present.

The film shows the connection between Aboriginal people and the land. Tribal elders tell some of the legends and stories of Injabandi culture and the other tribes of the river flats.

It also goes through the history of European occupation. The effect of pearlers, pastoralists, government policies, alcohol and the mining boom in the North-West have had on the people is graphically illustrated.

It shows how Aboriginal people have held on to their culture and drawn strength from it to try to overcome the odds they have faced since being forced off their homelands.

Last week a group of Aboriginal studies students from Swan View and Hollywood Senior High Schools saw a special screening of the film.

Hollywood was one of the first schools to bring in an Aboriginal studies program and students from the school have travelled to Roebourne to learn from the Aboriginal people themselves.

The students were very enthusiastic about the film's value as an educational tool. "We have just



Children fish from a riverbank at Roebourne. Picture: ANNA KAINO, of Hollywood SHS.

of tribal history



Injabandi tribal elders James (left) and Roger Solomon, of Roebourne. Roger was the narrator of *Exile and the Kingdom*.

learnt a mountain of things. It is hard to explain," one student said.

A group of students said it was important to consider Aboriginal history from the perspective of Aboriginal people — rather than through the eyes of white people.

"The point is that it is so different to anything else — books and films — made by non-Aboriginal people," another student said. "From this film, you can comprehend their history."

The students agreed that the film helped them think about Aboriginal people as real people with real concerns and feelings. It would be relevant to the study of Aboriginal cultures Australia-wide.

"It gives you the basics of tribal relations, myths and legends, slavery, the relationship with the land," said one student. "It will help people understand a bit better what Aboriginal land rights is all about."

The students said the study of Aboriginal issues would not only heighten their own appreciation of Aboriginal people and their culture but also give Aboriginal people pride in their heritage.

THE film shows that many young people have lost their connection with the land and culture, but the students were reassured that many young people were getting back in touch with their roots.

Hollywood teacher Chris Hill said the film had relevance beyond the small community at Roebourne.

The students were not put off by the scope of change that would be necessary to enable people to go back to their homelands, despite pastoral leases and mines.

"Even on a minor scale it is really feasible," one said. "Just a little step is going to make a difference."

The students thought the film should be essential viewing for all politicians, policemen, pub owners, entrepreneurs and others who made decisions about Aboriginal people.

"You can't really make a decision unless you know something about them," said one. "You have to understand the people and their history before you can change things."

The film is divided into several segments which make it ideal to show to classes in episodes.

Bernie Ryder, who is in charge of the Aboriginal studies program at the Education Ministry, said he had recommended that schools show the film as part of Aboriginal studies courses.

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

EUROPEAN Australians often find it hard to understand why this country means so much to the Aboriginal people. After all, they don't buy and sell it for a tidy profit; they don't exploit it for economic gain; they don't even build dwellings to last.

In *Exile and the Kingdom* a groundbreaking documentary on Roebourne Aborigines by WA director Frank Rijavec, these absurd comparisons with white society are overturned and are replaced with an understanding of a culture which, despite the upheavals of colonisation, is still miraculously intact.

Narrated by Roger Solomon (Yirri Bindiri) a Ngaluma/Injilbandi community leader, *Exile and the Kingdom* (the title is taken from Albert Camus' book of short stories) is a triumph for the Roebourne community. It balances negative reporting on the town and imparts rich cultural traditions with honesty and pride.

Explains Frank: "The difference with *Exile* as a documentary is firstly, it's not a documentary about Aboriginal people, it's by Aboriginal people. I was just there providing the film-making skills and putting it all together."

"Their voice was very much in the front of the film. It's in the first person narration; not an objective narration from an anthropologist."

He is also quick to point out how this method actually affects the end result.

"The audience feels empathy and a lot closer to the people in the film. You build a better relationship with them as it's more seductive and more personal than other documentaries."

"This is not an anthropologist's view. It's the Aborigines saying 'this is our culture, it's alive, it's ours and here it is.'"

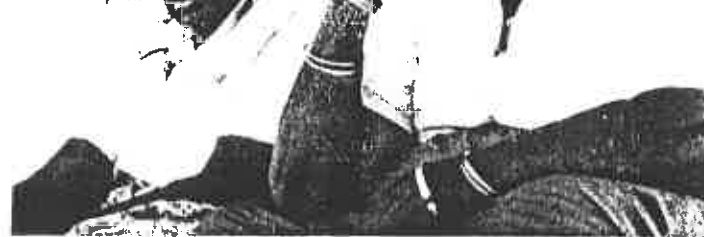
"This is not an anthropologist's view, saying 'look how wonderful this culture is'. It's the Aborigines saying 'this is our culture. It's alive, it's ours and here it is'. That makes a really big difference to how you view the film."

Roger Solomon does the talking.



Talking Frankly

Indijilbandi elders reflect on the past.



"It's not an aggressive film in the way it puts its politics either; it really tries to explain and put the record straight. So much stuff that's been said about Roebourne is so sensational and untrue that the inhabitants wanted to balance these negative stories out with something a little more positive."

"They'd had enough of the media shaming people with despairing and derogatory coverage. In a sense it is a bridge trying to overcome those clichés and getting closer to the people themselves."

Divided into historical segments on the history of the four major Aboriginal tribes around Roebourne, *Exile* concentrates on the upheavals which have plagued the community since white settlement and juxtaposes them against the wealth of myths and legends which keeps the Aboriginal culture alive.

"It serves as a window for a lot of European people who are willing to listen — and there hasn't been a lot of stuff that's accessible before, that came from Aboriginal people."

So, what started out as a documentary about police/Aboriginal relations for a police education video developed into something so much more.

"I went up there to get the Aborigines' point of view and they weren't that keen to discuss John Pat's death in custody [in 1983] anymore," Frank discloses.

"This was 1987 and they'd had so much negative media involved, they didn't want to relive it. They stressed that there are other priorities, like cultural ones."

And so began Frank's unique adventure and journey of spiritual understanding.

"I was in Roebourne for a month initially and I was really interested in listening to their stories. After a while, they decided to take me along to the country."

"Aborigines are finding their voice — that's the most important change."

"It was a fantastic adventure for me. I never dreamed I'd be living up there for 18 months. I thought 'Oh yeah, here's a really solid social justice film to be made,' but what seduced me into staying for so long was these journeys with the tribal leaders out into the country."

The experience of camping under the Pilbara sky and waking up to the magic of that place was at times quite emotional for me. It's a combination of the country, the stories and the way they are told."

For Frank, a first generation Australian of Yugoslav parents, the bush around Albany was his first love and it filled the gap created by the severed cultural ties of his parents' homeland. In this way, he identifies easily with the Aboriginal people's sense of exile and spirituality with the land.

"I can really relate to the Aboriginal's sense of country and place," he says.

"What really touches me is the beauty of this place and when you start looking at it in the timeless way they look at it from, it's a journey that I really wanted to make."

"It made me realise that just because they live in an urban situation doesn't mean that they've forgotten about the importance of certain places to them."

He goes on to divulge the film's success in its hometown ("the town was buzzing for a week afterwards"), international film festivals as well as in the south-west where Nyongah people have readily identified with the experiences of Roebourne Aborigines. But is this all totally a product of a more socially aware society?

"Aborigines wouldn't have been able to tell this story 10, 15 years ago," Frank agrees. "They wouldn't have been empowered to."

"There's the distinct feeling that what happens to them is happening to their country as well. The two are inextricably linked."

"Journalists don't go to Roebourne so glibly anymore and part of the reason is that Roebourne people aren't going to take it anymore. Aborigines are finding their voice — that's the most important change."

So what does *Exile* achieve for Australian society at large?

"It's a two way thing," explains Frank. "A lot of the older people wanted to tell those stories because they wanted to communicate with their kids who had grown up in the ghetto."

"The young people in Roebourne have responded really well to the film; they're really proud, especially teenagers who suddenly see images of their fathers and grandfathers in a mode of being leaders that they don't see in the town very often."

"It also serves as a window for a lot of European people who are willing to listen. And there hasn't been a lot of stuff that's accessible before that came from Aboriginal people."

You are left with no doubts as to who would benefit most from watching this.

— JULIA LANGHAM



Young men of Roebourne Prison with Roger Solomon (centre).



FROM THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR***Open air world premiere***

On a hot balmy night in February, in Roebourne, sixteen hundred km north of Perth, the local Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banjima and Gurruma community celebrated the world premiere of their feature documentary, *Exile and the Kingdom*, attracting over five hundred people to an open air theatre set up in the local primary school. The culmination of four year's work by the community, in collaboration with Perth-based filmmakers Frank Rijavec and Noeline Harrison, the night saw a parade of speakers involved in the project before the lamp was struck and the film sailed out through a sky of insects into the night. A hilarious mob of about thirty kids, on the lawn under the screen, provided a chorus of laughter, recognition and cheers. Local excitement continued for a week after the screening, spurred on by local media coverage and the feedback and enquiries coming to the community from neighbouring towns and Aboriginal communities. The reaction of mining companies and government departments who come under criticism in the film was surprising and gratifying; Hammersley Iron, the Water Authority, and the Department of Conservation and Land Management all had representatives at the launch, and all made a point of saying how moved they were. The WAWA rep said he had no idea how devastating the impact of their dam and their continuing exploitation of an oasis in the heart of Injibandi country had been, and would show the film to his "boss in the city", while the Hammersley Iron rep said he'd never seen anything that so clearly spoke about the effect of mining and development from an Aboriginal point of view. He promised that the film would be used within the company to educate miners. The community is now preparing to storm Perth for the film's two week season at the Lumiere Cinema, commencing March 19.

Video Review

Frank Rijavec (director), *Exile and The Kingdom* (Lindfield, Sydney: Film Australia, 1993). Co-produced by Rijavec and Aboriginal people from Injibandi/Ngaluma Tribes, Western Australia (screened recently by the ABC). \$164.95.

This film is a reminder that generosity of spirit and goodwill towards Aboriginal people has been strangely absent in Australia. Every so often, the Australian people have nudged resources a midge closer to Aborigines but, overall, until the High Court judged in favour of Eddy Mabo, the system has been reluctant to elevate Aboriginal demands in a way that would guarantee them a 'distinct' place within the institutional framework of government.

The film was produced by West Australian, Frank Rijavec and a number of Aboriginal people from the Injibandi/Ngaluma tribes in Roebourne, north Western Australia. It is a compelling plea for tolerance from people who want other Australians to understand the deeply significant relationship between land, law and Aboriginal society. The film (on video) provides a comprehensive introduction to the native title debates currently raging across the country. The Injibandi's primary task is to recount the origins of Aboriginal law and illustrate how their law provides the framework for assumptions about human occupation of the world. They aim to make their story as comprehensible to the rest of us as possible.

Their story begins in the world of the spirits, before the advent of 'law' or politics, in what is now the land of the Fortesque River. 'In the beginning', the spirits of creation, known as the *marga*, lifted the sky into place and, as they travelled along the river, their fires caused fog to gather over the waters. For the Injibandi/Ngaluma people of the Fortesque River region the beginning of 'law' is traced to a war between the *marga* and other creative spirits. Today, the potency of that law continues to extend thousands of kilometres east to Uluru in the Northern Territory. The preservation of this Aboriginal inheritance, and of the principles of the Australian democratic system as it now stands, is at the very heart of the debates over Aboriginal native rights.

The film is immediately captivating with a candid explanation of Aboriginal traditional family relationships and of the importance of contemporary Aboriginal initiation ceremonies. As the film progresses, white settlement threatens to destroy the very foundations of these people. Aboriginal social systems are held together by complex rules of law: Aboriginal skin (kinship) groupings are organised in a way that increases the integrity of the relationship between the human spirit and the environment. Such basic traditions are a fundamental part of the healthy development of social, political and economic life. Unfortunately, as white settlers arrived in the country and pushed north, the Aboriginal people suffered enormously. Anyone familiar with political events in Western Australia, including the death of John Pat in police custody, will know that the people of Roebourne have coped more than their share of the tragedy over the years.

For these Aborigines, deprivation, violent confrontation and ultimate dispossession followed wave after wave of white settlement. Used for cheap labour by the pearlers and then by the pastoralists, Aborigines were finally dispirited by over a century of living in the shadowy world of uncertainty created by a series of white ignorant governments. Aborigines now face the mining leviathan.

Their story is told without malice: Aborigines of the Pilbara region simply want us to look, lend an ear, be fair and judge for ourselves. All they ask is for understanding and support from fellow Australians.

The film was recently screened by the ABC in two 60 minute parts. Each part is segmented, the film is narrated by an Aboriginal person and there are subtitles. The film

is creative, clever and honest and it will make a substantially rich contribution to any Australian political history course in all schools and universities.

Exile and the Kingdom can be purchased by contacting Film Australia (above) or writing to PO Box 46, Lindfield, NSW 2070.

CHRISTINE FLETCHER
AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Some movies land like meteorites into our present battlegrounds — or they would, if conservative reviewing practices didn't cushion the impact. Of such is *Exile and the Kingdom*, which comes out of five years' work by the director, Frank Rijavec,

with Roger Solomon, of Injibandi and Ngaluma origin, as co-writer and narrator, and numerous collaborators both white and black. In a Pilbara made profoundly strange by sharp images of red cliffs and long valleys, the myth-marked rock shelves and glassy rivers filmed at knee-level, the speakers trace their habitation back to creation stories, and follow it through invasion and enslavement to the boom times of mining and the northwest shelf. The days of pearling and pastoral work at least gave Aborigines jobs and kept them linked to home country; then there were the two-edged swords of citizenship and drinking rights; the mining boom which offered no role at all for the first inhabitants, the ambiguous support of evangelical Christianity, the big expensive Roebourne prison; and the desperate pressure for land rights now.

With its enormous information content, its precise use of the archives — and in fact without any explicit reference to Mabo —

the film makes total sense of the High Court's findings and the federal government's present case. It operates succinctly, without shortchanging the complexities of each chapter, within the limits of classical documentary; the powers of insistent detective-work, of the motivated historical pursuit, with full *cinematic* attention to living witnesses, remain inexhaustible. There are no flourishes; the film proceeds with the stark clarity possible only to a story which knows where it's going, and why.

But they look without seeing. I heard a couple of supercool bureaucrats and a press reviewer fobbing it off as *worthy* (that's the terminator word these days), and claiming that it failed to "push the limits" of documentary. That bit of prattle was worrying. It suggested that in those quarters, as with the AFI, there's rather serious confusion around on means and ends.

Sylvia Lawson is a Sydney-based writer and critic

17 EDITIONS

\$3

August-September

AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL BOOKS AND IDEAS

The West Australian

PERTH FRIDAY APRIL 2 1993

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Instructive film

BEFORE making decisions that affect the lives of Aborigines in WA, such as approving mineral exploration in the Rudall River national park without consulting the Martu people living there or challenging land claims flowing from the Mabo decision in the High Court, Premier Richard Court and his Cabinet would benefit from viewing "Exile and the Kingdom".

It's a film on the history and culture of Pilbara Aborigines, told by the people themselves, which has been drawing big audiences in Perth, enlightening and educating schoolchildren and adults alike. — BARBARA HOLLAND, Mundaring.

The ABC must make the programs that the commercials won't make, can't make. And David, that gives you a lot of latitude. Almost by definition, the jewels in the ABC's crown would never have been countenanced at Seven, Nine or Ten. Paul Barry on Alan Bond? *Scales of Justice*? *Joh's Jury*? *The Exile and the Kingdom*?

P
H
I
L
I
P



ADAMS

THE WEEKEND REVIEW AUGUST 7-8, 1993

FEATURES

An open letter to David Hill

'This is the story of the people who belong to the river...'

By Petrina Coleman

YIRRA BINDIRI was just 12 years old when the mining bonanza of the 1960s completely changed his life. His stable, secure world turned to one of uncertainty and anger as he was forced to accept European conditions.

But Yirra, or Roger Solomon as he is known in white society, was not the first Aborigine to undergo the trauma of cultural adjustment. Generations of Injibarndi, Ngarluma, Banjima and Garrama people living near Roebourne, north-western Australia, have suffered similar adversity. Now, they are telling their story.

Roger, a community spokesperson, is the narrator of *Exile and The*



Yirra Bindiri is the narrator of *Exile and The Kingdom*, a new two-part feature film documentary that interprets the way of life of Aboriginal tribes in Western Australia.

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

Kingdom, a feature film documentary that has taken WA producer/director Frank Rijavec and producer Noelene Harrison four years to complete.

It's a two-part series that celebrates the culture and way of life of the Roebourne tribes. From Roger's first words – "This is the story of the people who belong to the river, and the forces that took them away" – *Exile and The Kingdom* tells the Aboriginal people's own story. Yet

it is not a hostile account of European intervention, but a story of hope.

Roebourne, 1600 kilometres north of Perth, remained one of the last regions to be affected by white settlement.

In the 130 years since Britain claimed the continent, the Kooris have been deprived of the land and the customs that were their birthright. They have survived slavery as pearl divers and withstood

ration camps. Some labored on cattle and sheep stations and for mining companies. They were first given part citizenship rights (known as "dog licences"), then full citizenship in 1967, but that did not repair the damage already done.

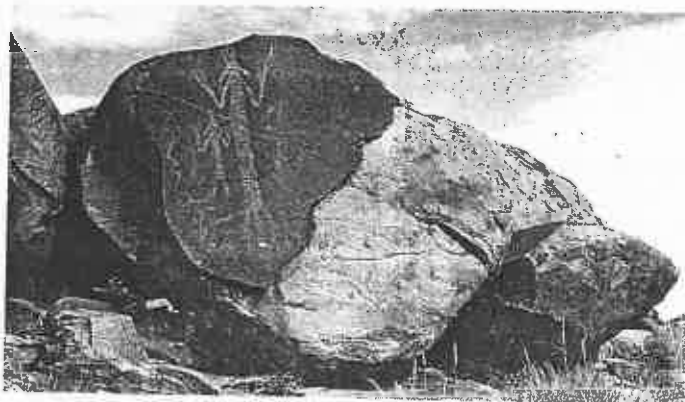
Roebourne became a modern-day ghetto, thriving on crime, alcohol and welfare rorts.

Today, the Kooris are fighting to change all this, coming to terms with their past and re-affirming their heritage and traditions.

A growing number of teenagers are taking part in the initiation process of Tribal Law, children are learning corroborees, and elders are lobbying government over the future of their land.

The cinematography of *Exile and The Kingdom* is little short of breathtaking, with striking landscapes and fascinating footage never before filmed of sacred ceremonies and sites in the Pilbara.

Exile and The Kingdom will probably screen at the Sydney and Melbourne Film Festivals in June. There are also plans to show it on ABC TV in July or August.



Beyond Hinch: Roebourne Tells its Tale



If someone says the word Roebourne to you, what springs to mind? Let me guess: north-western town with wide streets, red dust, drunken Aborigines, utes, brawls at night, a welfare town..... It's a fairly predictable scene, one we've watched often enough on current affairs shows where the "Aboriginal problem" is dealt with in the same tired old way. TV crew fly in, approach the most immediate contacts they can find (the drunk in the street), establish no deeper contact or rapport, file the report and fly out - all within, at most, one day.

Frank Rijavec is an independent film maker based in Fremantle who was confronted with these expectations and patterns in 1987 when he visited Roebourne. Four years earlier, sixteen year old John Pat had died in police custody, ultimately sparking trials and the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody. Now Rijavec was in Roebourne assisting the Police Aboriginal and Community Relations Committee in making a film to ease tension and generate understanding in the community. Rijavec found that the superficial approach had already made its mark on this project, and felt that this film, as with all the other media coverage Roebourne had received, had blundered into the situation without so much as considering what the Aboriginal people themselves wanted.

To the Roebourne Aborigines it was predictable and frustrating that white people sought to explain and make sense of the current state of Roebourne's aboriginal community without considering the past, their tribal law, and the systems in place that cut them off from their own rich culture. As Rijavec says: "People were sick to death of visiting journalists looking for material to flesh out their 'death in custody' stories. They wanted to show their culture and tell stories of the country they came from".

Through extensive research and the development of trust and

friendships, Rijavec and his team tapped into a far deeper, more vital community than ever before presented in the media. The result is *Exile and the Kingdom*, a two hour documentary soon to open at Lumiere Cinemas (March 19th) and later this year to be screened on the ABC.

As soon as the film begins, scenes of the Portescue River and the tableland around Roebourne transport you to that arid area. *Exile and the Kingdom* is visually rich, and indeed visually privileged in its access to tribal ceremonies and sacred sites. This is indicative of the trust between film maker and subject - the co-producer, Noelene Harrison, was even involved in a tribal ceremonial dance, the highlight for her of this four year project.

The essence of the film is found in the importance it places on the tribal law and accompanying culture of the Roebourne Aborigines. Rijavec shows us a community that, far from being the rootless, dying one of current affairs shows, is determined to keep and strengthen its own identity. The narrator, Roger Solomon, is from the Roebourne Aboriginal community, and as Rijavec and Harrison say: "We could not have wished for a more articulate, better qualified or eloquent voice for the film."

Many of us have very little idea about WA's history, particularly in the north-west. We may not know of the 1860s pastoral boom, the pearl booms around the coast, or the mining booms of the Lang Hancock years. But *Exile and the Kingdom* charts our often shameful past, vividly describing its effect on the Aboriginal tribes who were ultimately rounded up into reservations, (having been wrenched from their tribal lands), which made up Roebourne.

The point of all this is to suggest that there is much more to the current



Roger Solomon - narrator of *Exile and the Kingdom*

dilemma of Roebourne's Aborigines than the superficial dissection offered by Hinch and his colleagues in crime. Rijavec remarks on how many West Australians "can't see (that) the problems up there are directly related to the terrible oppression that started

suggests there is something in the people that is able to withstand and sustain a whole lot of pressures", he says.

Where are the Roebourne people going from here? *Exile and the Kingdom* paints a cautiously optimistic picture of a community driven by a renewed sense of its purpose. Tribal elders are passionately trying to pass their stories and knowledge on to a younger generation already lured away by TV and sport. They are working towards land custodianship, towards moving closer to their tribal lands and having a significant say in how these lands are treated.

Two weeks ago, the film was launched in Roebourne, with over 500 people from surrounding areas coming to see it. Rijavec describes the response it received as "overwhelming". He listened to the Roebourne people and heard that, for them, *Exile and the Kingdom* was an expression of their pride in their own tribal law and culture. Beyond this, there was an unanticipated open-mindedness amongst the various mining groups and government departments who saw the film, and Rijavec hopes there will be some kind of "positive dialogue" as a result.

For him, *Exile and the Kingdom's* main priority was to do good for the Roebourne Aborigines, in a practical and immediate sense. But the film was made very much as a long term tool for society and schools, that offers new insights and depths too often passed over by the quick, fly-by-night current affairs coverage given to the north-west. It is intelligent and compassionate, but more than anything accessible. Catch it at Lumiere from March 19th, or keep an eye out for it on the ABC later this year.



from the word go." Despite the onslaught of colonisation, the Roebourne Aborigines have retained an inner strength, against long odds. They have always been perceptive and ironic - calling police "Chainhands" from the days of chains; referring to their partial citizenship documents as "dog licences", and their full citizen rights acquired in 1967 as "drinking rights". Rijavec says this wryness is born partly of irony and wit, partly from dejection and defeat. Still, "it

FREMANTLE GAZETTE

A Community Newspapers publication

Fremantle Edition

Tuesday, March 16, 1993

Telephone 336 1122

Classifieds 227 6744

Film changed Frank's life

EAST Fremantle film-maker Frank Rijavec was sent to remote Roebourne in 1987 to begin research for an educational video.

Roebourne had a reputation for violence and death and Frank admits he was scared when he first arrived there with only the names of a few "contacts" written on a piece of paper.

Within a week, the feeling had been replaced with excitement and that something special could be happen.

The finished feature documentary, *Exile and the Kingdom*, opens for a two-week season at the Perth Lumiere Cinema from March 19.

Critics agree that something special did happen and the documentary has been described as the most comprehensive account of an Aboriginal community ever made.

"I went to Roebourne wanting to tell the story of the Injibandi and Nguluma people from their perspective," he said.

"At the time I did not anticipate living up there for 18 months, which is what happened.

"I had never experienced the friendship I found there and I became seduced into staying."

Frank said what he found in the spectacular country was a communi-

By JIM KELLY

ty that had survived the hardships of colonialism.

Early on, he decided the story would be told from an Aboriginal perspective.

Footage was constantly shown back to the community during filming to reinforce the idea that it was their documentary.

He was fortunate to meet Roger Solomon — a respected member of Roebourne's Aboriginal community.

Roger helped open doors to the community and was later chosen to narrate the film.

Frank said trust grew quickly and the Aboriginal people began to make it clear that their story began long before Roebourne was created.

"The film starts on the tablelands where their cultural history and myths were formed," he said.

"It continues on to the story of how they were forced from the country and into the town."

Frank would travel with elders to areas important to the Injibandi and Nguluma people and film them as they told their stories of creation and history.

He said many felt their history had been denied in Roebourne, where Aborigines were

made to feel ashamed of their culture.

In schools during the 1960s Aboriginal children were punished if they spoke in their own language in class.

One of the strongest recent memories for many of the community members was the impact of mining.

Frank said the booms of the 1960s and 1970s led to an influx of several thousand men whose impact on the Aboriginal community was devastating.

THE people who appear in the film talk vividly about this period and the violence and alcoholism that resulted.

But it has not been all bad news for Roebourne.

"Since the mid-1980s, Roebourne has been a town on the rise," he said.

"The people have lived through the really hard times and are now saying that they won't accept the suppression of their culture any longer.

"I don't know what the future holds for Roebourne but it can't ever be as bad as its past."

By the time filming was complete, Frank had become close friends with many of Roebourne's Aborigines.

He said the closeness he felt with the community helped him reflect the true nature of Roebourne and its people.



● East Fremantle film-maker Frank Rijavec (above), with his feature documentary *Exile and the Kingdom*, and Roger Solomon (below) who does the narration.





Roger Solomon delivers Aboriginality to Exile and the Kingdom.

Aborigines tell their stories

Fremantle director Frank Rijavec has created a powerful and entertaining documentary on WA Aboriginal life.

In the best sense of parochial, he has allowed the people of the Injibani Ngaluma, Banjima and Gurrama tribes from around Roebourne to tell their own stories.

The "feature documentary" format is appealing, not unlike the excellent *The Civil War*, with slow pans across black and white historical photos meshed with colour film of today's participants retelling their stories.

It's a thorough historical and sociological piece with an illuminating amount of information.

To non-Roebourne residents, it gives an understanding of Aboriginal creation, first white contact (Aboriginals forced to work as pearl divers), and the other side of the economic "miracle" after the dis-

FILM

Exile and the Kingdom
Lumiere

Reviewed by
John Hyde

covery of iron ore in the Pilbara.

After we watch the affinity of the local people to their culture and land, it's chilling to hear a voice-over by Sir Charles Court speaking of the area as largely uninhabited before mining.



'Exile and the Kingdom', screened on Channel 2, was a stunning portrayal of the near destruction of an Aboriginal culture. Pictured here are the film's narrator, Roger Solomon (centre), with men from Roebourne in the regional prison.



GIVEN the bigotry that the Mabo issue has uncovered in recent weeks, there probably are some this morning who believe that the pinkoes at the ABC deliberately timed the screening of *Exile and the Kingdom* (last night at 8.30 pm) to give the Aboriginal land rights cause a helping hand and to denigrate the mining industry.

It would be too easy, and grossly unfair, to denigrate this program as a product of what the miners and their supporters like to call, with a contemptuous sneer, "the compassion industry". Made by film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison with the help of the Indjibarndi and Ngamulma communities of north-western Australia, this was a stunning portrayal of the near destruction of an Aboriginal culture.

True, the mining industry, the graziers who have appropriated vast tracts of Aboriginal "Holy Land" during the past century and successive governments who have been hell-bent on development for development's sake did not come out of it very well. And yes, it would be hard for any white Australian not to feel shame and guilt after watching it.

There was more to this film, though, than the familiar story of how whole Aboriginal communities have been thrown off their land and left to rot in the squalor of reserves. Its strength was in its portrayal of a culture that remains completely foreign to white Australians, and which is now close to extinction.

In all of the hysteria over Mabo, what has been missing has been any understanding of why Aborigines feel such an attachment to their traditional lands. By allowing the Aborigines to tell their own rich and colorful story, without any apparent editorial interference from those behind the cameras, *Exile and the Kingdom* made a valuable contribution to the Mabo debate. This was a documentary of great merit, and a repeat screening should be compulsory viewing for all Australians.

ROSS WARNEKE's guide to weekend viewing appears in *Saturday Extra*.

The **BULLETIN**

TELEVISION

Exile and the Kingdom (ABC, Wednesday 8.30pm) is a courageous attempt to get behind the stereotypes and explore the culture and history of the Aborigines living in Roeburn in Western Australia. Frank Rijavec and Noelen Harrison spent four years making it and collaborated closely with the Injibandi/Ngarluma people. Their story is the familiar but still shocking one of dispossession, murder and forced labour followed a century later by unemployment, alcohol and imprisonment. It was the death of a 16-year-old Roeburn boy that helped spark the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody.

What makes the film more than just another trudge through the iniquitous history of white settlement is the insight it gives into the culture of the Injibandi/Ngarluma Aborigines. Television anthropology lost some of its credibility capering around campfires in *Millennium*; *Exile and the Kingdom* illustrates the deeper ways in which tribal law and ceremony determine identity. It represents an urgent plea for land rights, not as a political principle but as a vital and inseparable part of Aboriginal life.



DEBI ENKER
TELEVISION

IN the light of the currently raging debate about the implications of the Mabo case, two programs this week, dealing with Aboriginal Australia, seem particularly timely and topical. The skilful 'Exile and The Kingdom' (Wednesday, 8.30 pm, ABC), which screened at the recent Melbourne Film Festival, deals specifically with tribal history in the north-western region of Western Australia. But, more generally, this intelligently constructed two-hour documentary addresses the question of native title, and despite the legal and financial complexities raised by the High Court ruling, this film offers insight and a persuasive political perspective.

'Exile and the Kingdom' was developed by film-makers Frank Rijavec, Roger Solomon (Yirra-Bindiri) and Noelene Harrison with four tribes from the Roebourne (Ieramagadu) area and Solomon is a co-writer and narrator. The film's study of the systematic expulsion of tribal natives from their holy lands provides a damning history, a chronicle of exploitation and sustained disregard for

Aboriginal beliefs and traditional lifestyles. It is a tale of racism to rival the horror stories that incite outrage when they are told about South Africa or the American South. This eloquent film has a quiet passion and justifiable anger that only gradually emerge and it will be a revelation for urban whites for whom questions of native title and land rights might seem remote and impenetrably complicated.



THE SUNDAY AGE

4 JULY 1993

AGENDA

Green Guide

WEDNESDAY

7 July

WEDNESDAY

Blacks tell their tales

Exile and the Kingdom,
Channel 2, 8.30 pm

WENDY TUOHY

THE ABC's feature contribution to the International Year of Indigenous Peoples began as a project to better educate police in a small Western Australian town about how to relate to the Aboriginal population. However, says co-producer Noeline Harrison, the result is a much richer and more satisfying program than the original concept.

In this ABC Special the people of the Aboriginal community of Roebourne, in the Pilbara region of Western Australia, tell their own story about their culture, legends and, most important, law. We are let in on some of their creation and spiritual beliefs, and even given a privileged look at a law ceremony in which young men are initiated.

The fascinating rituals of traditional life are contrasted with passages of the dark history of colonialism, when indigenous people were enslaved as divers by super-competitive, ruthless pearlers.

The program offers much more than just a sophisticated plea for land rights in the region; it invites non-Aboriginal Australians to look a little deeper into Aboriginal issues than the hysteria over the High Court's Mabo ruling has engendered.

8.30 EXILE AND THE KINGDOM. An insight into the experiences and aspects of an Aboriginal community including its tribal laws, the effects of British colonisation, acts of slavery, the violent rule of pastoral overlords, the excesses of the 1960s mining boom, problems with alcohol, and the significance and influence of spiritual homelands. S (Preview: Page 3).

THE ~~ABC~~ AGE
Green Guide

Harsh reality of hot topic

FOUR years in the making, *Exile in the Kingdom* is part of the ABC's contribution to the International Year of Indigenous People.

And it is all the more relevant because of the furore over the Mabo decision.

Made by Perth independent documentary makers, Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison, it centres on four Aboriginal tribes in the north of Western Australia, explaining their rich and significant tribal law and the devastating effect of the arrival of Europeans.

The two-hour film opens in Roebourne, a coastal mining town now operating as an Aboriginal settlement, and the town that is infamous for the death of a local 16 year old that



EXILE IN THE KINGDOM

Tonight, 8.30pm, Two.

FEATURE length documentary



sparked the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody.

Narrated by Roebourne resident Roger Solomon, *Exile in the Kingdom* then takes us into the tablelands of the Pilbara and, with the help of tribal elders, outlines the origins of their law — their equivalent of the dreamtime.

However, harsh reality soon invades the film with the arrival of, first, pearlers, then stockmen

and finally the mining corporations, all of whom saw the natives as nothing more than slave labor.

Rijavec and Harrison have done a wonderful research job, incorporating voice-overs of transcripts from former policemen, magistrates and other figures of authority.

Their timing is excellent.

Aboriginal land rights is a hot topic and *Exile in the Kingdom* offers compelling evidence of the need for drastic action.

There have been broader documentaries on similar themes, and two hours will be a challenge to anyone who does not have a personal involvement in Aboriginal issues.

But perhaps that should be all of us. — G.M.



Frank Rijavec and Aboriginal elders. INSET: Noelene Harrison.

Rare view of tribal history

GIVEN that this is Western Australia and it is also the Year of Indigenous People, a combination of the two should make good viewing.

Add to that glowing reviews from critics, successes at Sydney and Melbourne film festivals and the ABC touting it as one of their best programs for the year, *Exiles and the Kingdom* promises to be very good indeed.

The feature-length documentary, on ABC tonight at 8.30, is based around Roebourne in WA's north and documents the roots of the current Aboriginal problems in society.

The culmination of four years' work by Perth film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison, the documentary uses the Aboriginal story of creation, poetry and dialogue to tell the Aboriginal version of history.

Exile and the Kingdom, narrated by Roger Solomon, tells of a community rich in tribal law and culture.

It explains tribal law and unearths the violent rule of the British colonisation, pastoralisation and the mining boom of the 1960s. It also looks at the growing problem of alcohol.

The film-makers worked closely with the Indjibarndi/Ngarluma community of Roebourne.

Exiles and the Kingdom is the latest of some very good shows about Aboriginal history — *Blood Brothers* on SBS continues next week — and indicates a growing awareness and desire by society to understand Aboriginal culture.

Herald Sun

Herald Sun, Wednesday, July 7, 1993

Daily TV Guide

103

Land of black deeds

"IN the western third of Australia, 124 (Aboriginal) tribes lived undisturbed until the British planted their flag on the Swan River in 1829," says Roger Solomon.

"Within 30 years, colonial hunger for more land pushed further north..."

In *Exile And The Kingdom*, the ABC's excellent documentary which screens tonight at 8.30pm, Aboriginal narrator Solomon takes us further north — to the black community of Roebourne, in Western

strengths of *Exile And The Kingdom* is that the producers have refused to use the program as just a vehicle by which to push the issue of land rights.

What we get is a sensitive insight into an Aboriginal community, its customs, its laws, its beliefs and its history as seen through the eyes of Solomon and his people.

While they point up the harshness of the effects of British colonisation, the often tyrannical rule of land barons and slavery,

they present, also, a critical self-appraisal of such issues as the community's problems with alcohol and coping with the mining boom of the '80s.

At 110 minutes, *Exile And The Kingdom* is a long haul, but producer/director Frank Rijavec and co-producer Noeline Harrison have, for the most part, delivered a documentary that holds one's interest.

The greatest tribute one can pay to this production and all involved with its presentation, is



ROGER Solomon... "superb" production.

that it is a work of great integrity.

In *Exile*, the ABC have showcased a superb piece of television for this, the International Year of Indigenous Peoples.

It is to be hoped it receives the audience it deserves.

PICK OF THE night

TWO: Aside from *Exile And The Kingdom*, the pick of tonight's offerings is *A Question Of Survival* (8pm) in which Geoffrey Burchfield discovers air pollution has joined coffee beans and pork bellies as a tradeable commodity in the US. ★ ★

SEVEN: *True Identity* (8.30pm) is a very funny movie, with black British comic Lenny Henry as a white hitman on the run from the mob. Henry's performance more than compensates for the occasional soft spots. ★

NINE: *Our House* (7.30pm) and *Money* (8pm) have proved to be a

popular double in their opening weeks, particularly the latter, which shows that the business of personal finance can be entertaining.

TEN: Coverage of actress Julia Roberts' surprise marriage to Lyle Lovett — the singer with the mushroom haircut — is the highlight of tonight's *Hard Copy* at 8.30pm.

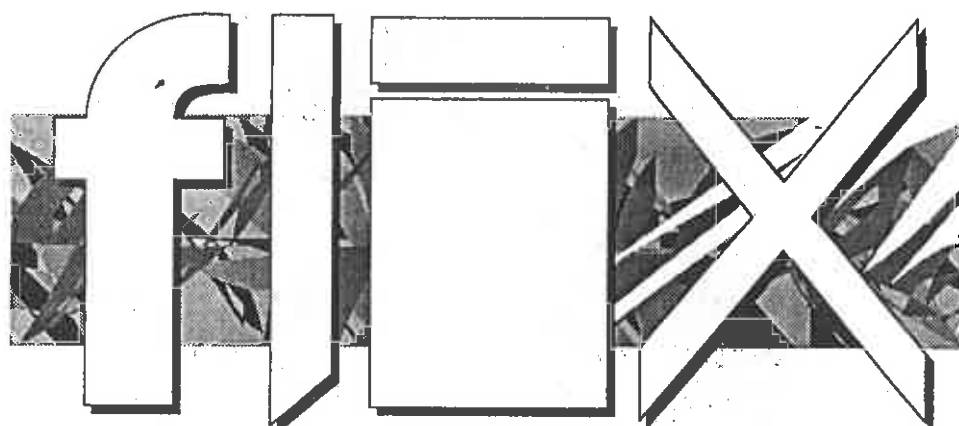
SBS: Liv Ullmann is on the tough end of questions on *Face The Press* (8pm). A solid performer that should enjoy better support.

★ ★ ★ Not to be missed
★ ★ ★ Very good
★ ★ ★ Better than average

REVUE

LIFTOUT

THE WEST AUSTRALIAN THURSDAY MARCH 25 1993



Compiled by Helen Crompton

FIRST RELEASE

RATINGS

- (5) Oscar material.
- (4) Steal a ticket.
- (3) Join the queue.
- (2) Wait for the video.
- (1) Try the test pattern.
- (0) Total lemon!
- (NP) Not previewed.

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM (G)

THE chosen documentary format is mostly traditional, highly structured, dense with information and moving in the extreme. Director/producer Frank Rijavec presents us with an embracing history of the people of Roebourne, where they came from and what they can look forward to. The understated, unsentimental eye of his camera makes the telling all the more poignant. Don't miss. **(4)**

Exile film honoured



ROEBOURNE resident Esther Pat, along with co-producer Noeline Harrison, travelled to Canberra to receive the special media peace award on behalf of Frank Rijavec and the people of Roebourne.

THE film *Exile and the Kingdom*, which celebrates the culture and documents the history of the Roebourne Aboriginal tribes, has won a major Australian film award in Canberra.

Produced and directed by Fremantle-based film-makers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison, the film won the 1993 Media Peace Award, presented by the United National Association of Australia and the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The film encompasses the Injibandi-Ngaluma creation of history and law, through colonisation, slavery during the 1880s pearling boom, systematic removal of Aboriginal people from tribal lands and the impact of the 1960s iron ore boom to present day struggles and celebrations.

The Media Peace Awards are for print, television, radio and news and acknowledge the vital role the media play in building a peaceful society, and the initiatives the media

can inspire to resolve conflict.

There were more than 14 awards presented during the evening, with the most prestigious being the United Nations 1993 Media Peace Award, which went to *Exile and the Kingdom*.

The UN Peace Award follows the success of *Exile and the Kingdom's* earlier nomination for Best Documentary and Best Achievement in Sound, at the Australian Institute Awards.

Film-maker Frank Rijavec was also invited to attend the special Indigenous Showcase at the Brisbane International Film Festival, where the film was screened last Sunday, September 5.

Narrated by Roger Solomon, who died earlier this year of mesothelioma, the inspiration behind the film came from a wish by the Roebourne community to tell their own story and be presented as human beings with a rich tribal law and culture, and not the hopeless victims as so often portrayed.

WALKING TOGETHER

CELEBRATING ABORIGINAL RECONCILIATION

ROEBOURNE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY WINS MEDIA AWARD

A documentary co-produced by an Aboriginal community has won a special United Nations Media Peace Award supported by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

The Council sponsored the prize to mark the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, and entries had to be responsive to the major themes and objectives of the Year.

The major award was won jointly by *Exile and the Kingdom*, a documentary telling the history of a Pilbara Aboriginal community, and *Blackout*, ABC-TV's Aboriginal television series.

Citations were awarded to the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* program for a report on the Inuit people of Canada, and ABC Regional Radio, Kempsey, for a program detailing the culture and history of the local Gumbaynggirr people.

The awards were presented by the chairperson of the Council for Aboriginal

Reconciliation, Mr Patrick Dodson, at a ceremony in Canberra in August.

Blackout is produced by the ABC's Aboriginal Programs Unit, which is staffed entirely by Aboriginal producers, directors and researchers.

Blackout, which covers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and people and activities of the wider community from an indigenous point of view, began in 1989 and has been presented annually since then.

In 1992/93 the series ran three nights weekly from December to mid-February—a total of 24 episodes.

Perth filmmakers Frank Rijavec and Noelene Harrison and the Injibandi/Ngaluma people spent four years making *Exile and the Kingdom*: a moving examination of the history of the people from Creation, through dispossession and exploitation, to the present.

Critics have described the film as a 'stunning achievement' and, 'a revelation for

urban whites for whom questions of native title and land rights might seem remote and impenetrably complicated'.

'That the film blends a persuasive land rights passion with a clear sense of historical and social perspective makes it a documentary masterpiece,' one critic said.

The film explores tribal law, the effects of development in the Pilbara on the Aboriginal people, and the agony of dispossession and the destruction of sites of significance.

The award was received by Frank Rijavec and Esther Pat, the widow of the film's Aboriginal narrator, who died earlier this year.

Blackout's award was received by Susan Moylan-Coombs.

To order a copy of *Exile and the Kingdom*, call Film Australia's Sales Department on (02) 413 8777. The price varies depending on the buyer—whether it is a teaching institution or a private individual for home use only.

ENCORE

THE PRODUCTION MAGAZINE

VOLUME 11 • ISSUE 19

NOVEMBER 18 – DECEMBER 8, 1993



The most excited AFI Award winner had to be Noeline Harrison, one of the winners for the sound on *Exile And The Kingdom* in the non-feature craft awards. She is pictured with writer/director Frank Rijavec (l) and Trevor Solomon, whose brother Roger narrated and co-wrote the two-hour production while battling asbestos-related cancer. The epic-style *Exile And The Kingdom* also shared the best documentary award with director Pat Fiske's *For All The World To See*. It took about five years to make and is a pre-colonial to present day history of the Aboriginal community in Roebourne on the coast of Western Australia, including the effects of the pearl, mining and pastoral booms. The production never got total funding but money was tipped in by the Australian Film Commission, the Western Australian Film Council, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority. Rijavec said it had a theatrical season in Perth and was shown on ABC TV in July. Film Australia is the distributor and London-based Jane Balfour Films, which holds the international rights, recently launched it. Rijavec is now developing a dramatic feature and a documentary on the effects of asbestos.

FILM REVIEW

A history of Aboriginal dispossession

REVIEW BY TERRI CAVANAGH

WEST Australian filmmaker Frank Rijavec has made an intelligent and moving film of the lives of the Aboriginal people of Roebourne, in close collaboration with the descendants of the Injibandi, Ngaluma, Banjima and Gurruma tribes, who were driven off their land along the Fortescue River over the last 130 years and forced into the coastal ghetto of Roebourne.

For the first time a film presents a slice of the history of the Aboriginal people, beginning with their creation myths, culture and kinship system, their life of primitive communism prior to colonisation and the brutal impact of capitalism as the "empty" land was systematically emptied of its inhabitants to make way for the squatters' sheep in the 1860s.

Narrator and co-writer Roger Solomon — a 40-year-old Injibandi/Ngaluma man who died earlier this year of mesothelioma — explains that for 100 years Aboriginal people were enslaved, first by pearlers and then by pastoralists.

When equal wages became mandatory in 1968, they were thrown off the sheep stations and sent into "exile" in Roebourne, where they were denied jobs and the basic amenities of modern life.

While the details and time frame may vary from region to region across Australia, the film presents the archetypal story of the ruthless destruction of Aboriginal society by capitalism.

Solomon introduces the narrative by saying he will tell "the big story the media never tells about the really important things in our lives". As the camera sweeps over the ancient landscape, he recounts the dreaming myths of the time "When the world was soft" and explains the *galtharra-na* or kinship groups which governed relations, marriage and obligations in Aboriginal society and which make "every community a huge extended family". Corroboree songs are translated, revealing their lyrical beauty and rich cultural traditions.

This is contrasted to the racist stereotypes of the mass media, which has typecast Roebourne as a "black trouble town," never attempting to go beyond the 30-second grabs showing alcoholism and despair — the visible effects of the systematic destruction of Aboriginal society.

We are shown footage of the 1983 funeral of Solomon's nephew, 16-year-old John Pat, who was beaten to death by police officers in Roebourne jail, and we hear radio reports of the death of another 25-year-old Aboriginal in Roebourne jail — arrested for stealing two blocks of chocolate from a car.

The film meticulously presents the history of this dispossession, using archival material from colonial reports and documents and photographs, some of which is made available for the first time.

Slaughter and slavery

When Governor Stirling established the Swan River colony in 1829 there were 124 tribes throughout Western Australia. Within 30 years all the land in the southwest had been grabbed by the squattocracy. Government

Gregory was sent north in 1861 to survey the land for future development. He wrote of his encounter with a party of 14 Aborigines:

"Our number being small, I determined not to let them enter the camp, I therefore tried to make them understand that we had taken possession and did not want their company. They were indignant at our endeavours to drive them away and very plainly ordered us off to the ship."

We are told enigmatically that Gregory's rifles finally determined the dispute.

In 1863 the first colonists arrived in the northern region and within 18 months three million acres were under lease.

An even more immediate threat to the Aborigines were the pearlers who used child slaves as young as 10 to dive for pearls. Professional slave traders began to kidnap and sell Aborigines. While this was illegal, the law presented no barrier, as Constable Payne reported in 1887:

"It is almost impossible to get any white evidence in these cases, the feeling being so strong against the police for taking any steps against the pearlers in favour of the natives. And it is impossible to get a conviction as well. The honourable justices are very slightly interested in the pearling and native question."

The resistance of the Yaburara tribe to this slave trading was quelled at King Sound in 1868, in a massacre which became known as the Flying Foam massacre.

One Alexander Robert Richardson defended the slaughter in his memoirs. "The

ROGER Solomon (centre) with prisoners at Roebourne prison

settlers in that party were as justified as British soldiers when they shot at Kaffirs, Zulus and Abyssinians or any other inferior race and for which they were frequently decorated with medals," he wrote. "There was no desire, wish or intention to deal anything but stern justice to savages, who are incapable of understanding any lessons, but might is right."

The Yaburara were wiped out, and their land is now the site of the giant North West Shelf gas project, but there remain important archaeological engraving sites, reputed to be among the most important in the world.

After the pearlers, the pastoralists began to enslave the

Exile and the Kingdom,

produced and directed by Frank Rijavec, co-written and narrated by Roger Solomon



Aborigines. William Lamden

Owen, warden of the Pilbara goldfields, wrote with unusual candour: "Take the sale of a station. Three questions were always put by the buyer of which the third was the most vital one: How many acres? How many miles of fencing? How many niggers? The niggers always went as part of the stock. If there were no niggers, or not enough, the sale was off or the price dropped. They are indispensable to the station owners and if their race passes away, a great deal of the pastoral country will be shut up for good. White labour rates are too high for the pastoralist to pay."

Forced employment of Aborigines without wages was legalised. Those who resisted were taken in chains to Roebourne jail, which frequently held over 100 Aboriginal prisoners, including children.

A Royal Commission was forced by the exposures of John Brown Gribble in his writings *Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land* published in London after they were suppressed in Australia. A voiceover has Commissioner Roth questioning the local jailer who admitted that there were 72 Aboriginal prisoners in jail at the time, of whom two thirds had no idea of their offence.

This Royal Commission, like every other since, made

no difference to this brutal situation: the exploitation intensified.

A series of still photographs show Aborigines in neck chains and underscore the name that is still given to police in the area: *Mundamaranga* — "chainhand" or, literally, "stonehand".

It is not accidental that across northern Australia, from the West to Queensland, a similar idiom exists in many Aboriginal languages for the police: In other areas it is translated as "men with the chains".

In 1889 a visitor to Roebourne, Samuel McLeon wrote: "On arriving at Roebourne we saw gangs of unfortunate Aborigines



ABORIGINAL prisoners at Wyndham Jail, in northern Western Australia, in 1902

CONTINUED OVER PAGE

Workers News

...CONTINUED



WOODLEY King, an Indjibabdi tribal elder, at a sacred site

chained to wheelbarrows with bullock chains, making roads. Others had the chains rolled around their necks and native bodies. The effect of the chains can be imagined in a climate where the stones get so hot that they cannot be handled. The sight was too painful for most of us from a free land."

Apartheid

By 1900 the land was completely overstocked and traditional hunting and gathering became impossible. Those who didn't work for the squatters faced starvation. The elderly and the ill were forced into government reserves.

In 1927 the tablelands ration camps were shut and the Aborigines were once more forced to move: this time to larger, more cheaply maintained, reserves on the coast, such as Roebourne. The only Aborigines remaining on their tribal lands were station workers, who worked for rations. But when equal pay came in 1968, they also were driven off.

In Roebourne an apartheid system prevented Aborigines from attending school or drinking in hotels. Aborigines could be granted citizenship exemptions (known as a "dog licence") if they could prove their "good character" and had cut off all contact with their tribe (apart from immediate family members) for a minimum of two years.

The only jobs available were loading asbestos, cleaning or trapping.

The mining boom in the mid-1960s had a devastating impact. Overnight the model mining towns of Karratha, Wickham and Dampier were built, oases of green with the most modern facilities, but with a colour bar that excluded the Aborigines from jobs or any of the benefits.

Under the impact of alcohol and the intrusion of mining the community at Roebourne "fell apart". Government bureaucracy forced them to move once more: away from the reserve to a housing subdivision next to the cemetery. All government services were shifted to the new mining towns with the exception of the welfare authorities, the police, and a new prison. Sacred sites were desecrated with the damming of the Fortescue river.

Aborigine Tim Kerr sums up: "They take all this country. We got nothing, they get rich off the blackfellas — all their millionaires like Lang Hancock. He's a millionaire today from the blackfella...we still poor, got no country."

No return to the past

The film's careful attempt to right the historical record is an important achievement. The question is therefore raised: what is the way forward for Aborigines and the rest of the working class?

One of the underlying themes of the film is that "cultural reaffirmation" and the revival of tribal lore — which has been on the verge of extinction as tribal elders die — and the winning of land rights will provide an antidote to the destruction of Aboriginal society. It presents the revival of initiation ceremonies, such as the bush circumcision of teenage boys, as a positive development.

While the attempt by Aborigines and other indigenous people around the world to reclaim their cultural traditions is understandable, it does not provide any solution.

The genocide committed against Aboriginal people was an outcome of the capitalist system of production, including the drive to introduce private ownership of land.

The clash between capitalist society and the primitive communism practised by the Aboriginal tribes was part of the process by which capitalism established its reign in every corner of the globe. As Karl Marx explained, it came onto the scene "dripping with blood and dirt from every pore".

Capitalism was able to dominate because it was based on a higher productivity of labour and more advanced technology. Its spread around the globe was historically progressive, despite the violent methods used to establish its hegemony, because it vastly increased the level of productivity and laid the economic basis for the next stage of human development — socialism.

Any attempt to "return to the past" within the framework of capitalism leads only to intensified oppression. A clear example is the imposition of work-for-the-dole schemes on Aboriginal communities. These Community Development Employment Projects encourage the development of Aboriginal capitalist layers to exploit the labour of the rest of the community.

Aboriginal people cannot go back to the primitive communist society of the past, as the film suggests. The values of Aboriginal society, based on collectivism, can only be taken forward in a higher form in the establishment of socialism.

Then, for the first time, the enormous productive forces assembled by man globally would be put to use to meet the needs of the world's population, not the insatiable thirst of the capitalist class for profit. This would create the economic foundations for a true flowering of human culture, based on the achievements of the cultures of all parts of the planet.

VARIETY

NOVEMBER 8, 1993

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

(AUSTRALIAN-DOCU)

A Snakewood Films production. Produced by Frank Rijavec, Noeline Harrison. Directed by Rijavec. Camera (color), Rijavec, Peter Kordyl; editor, Liz Goldfinch; music, David Milroy; narrator, Roger Solomon. Reviewed at Sydney Film Festival, June 19, 1993. Running time: 112 MIN.

Many documentaries have been made about Australia's tribal aboriginal people; this is one of the better ones. Filmed at Roebourne, in the northwest of Western Australia, the film vividly depicts the history and contemporary lifestyle of the Injibandi people and their tribal neighbors. Documentary is a natural for docu fests worldwide.

What's especially fascinating here is Australia's colonial history as told through aboriginal eyes. The current lifestyles of the Injibandi, Ngarluma, Banjima and Gurrama people are candidly explored.

Roebourne is notorious because it was the location of the 1987 death of John Pat, an aboriginal, while in police custody.

The film touches on this as part of a comprehensive, revealing and well-done study.

Pic scored high in the vote for best docu by the film festival audience.

—David Stratton

Elder fights his last battle

By KAREN BROWN

KARRATHA: Roger Solomon is facing death but is still fighting what he claims to be the most important battle of his life.

The 40-year-old Roebourne elder wants the right to be buried on his people's traditional land, rather than in the cemetery at nearby Wickham.

The site Mr Solomon has chosen, under a big gum tree on the banks of the Harding River, is part of an Aboriginal burial ground on the old Two Mile reserve at Roebourne.

The reserve was established in the 1940s to house older Aborigines no longer able to work on the land.

Mr Solomon spent his early years on the reserve and his brother, Paul, who died aged two, was one of more than 160 local Aborigines buried there. There is only one marked grave in the cemetery, which was last used in the early 1970s.

"I grew up there and I still remember going around Two Mile on a buggy," he said. "They were rough conditions with rough old shacks and humpies, but the people were quite happy."

"I always looked at that place as a resting place for myself. I'd like to settle there."

Mr Solomon has fought long and hard to gain rights for his people over the years but he knows this will be his last battle.

"This is one I'd like to win, the one I'll finish with," he said.

Mr Solomon has mesothelioma, which he contracted as a child while riding on trucks which carted bags of asbestos to the Point Samson jetty, about 20km north of Roebourne.

He said the burial site he had chosen was peaceful, unlike the Wickham cemetery, near the regional prison and the Roebourne speedway course.

"I can't get any sleep now — I don't want to be near the traffic then," he said.

He hopes that his spirit will be able to wander along the river in peace.

"It's important — it's going back to your roots, to where you began. I don't want to be buried where they (white people) want to bury me," he said.

Mr Solomon spent several years working as a heritage officer with the WA Museum's Aboriginal Sites Department and would like to see the reserve burial ground restored and developed as an Aboriginal cemetery for Roebourne residents.

Port Hedland heritage officer Louis Warren said the site had great significance in the social history of Roebourne and should be respected as such.

"Many Roebourne people lived and died here and they have strong ties to the land," Mr Warren said. "They don't want to see it turn into a dust bowl which is never visited and fades away with the memories of the elders."

He said it appeared the land had never been formally gazetted as a cemetery. Permission for the burial had to be sought from the Aboriginal Lands Trust and Local Government Minister Paul Omodei.

Roebourne shire clerk Frank Gow said the shire had no objection to Mr Solomon's request as long as permission was granted by the appropriate authorities.



FINAL WISH: Roebourne elder Roger Solomon wants to be buried on the banks of the Harding River at Two Mile reserve. Picture: SHARON SMITH

The West Australian

ESTABLISHED 1833

PERTH FRIDAY APRIL 2 1993

96 PAGES 60c



VARIOUS PRESS ADDS

EXILE AND THE KINGDOM

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Mar
19



LUMIERE

Entertainment Centre Cinemas, Wellington St. Perth 321 1575

THEIR LAW, THEIR HISTORY, THEIR TRIBAL VOICE . . .
A TOTALLY ENGROSSING AND MOVING DOCUMENTARY MADE WITH THE ABORIGINAL
TRIBES OF ROEBOURNE

A film by **Frank RIJAVEC, Noeline HARRISON**
and **Roger SOLOMON**

EXILE and

THE KINGDOM

"One is left with an enormous sense of hope, a conviction that the indigenous people of Australia will survive and flourish"

— Mark Naglázas, THE WEST AUSTRALIAN

SEASON STARTS FRIDAY 7:00pm.



LUMIERE
ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE CINEMAS WELLINGTON STREET, PERTH 3211575

Entertainment

**EXTENDED
BY
POPULAR
DEMAND**

THEIR LAW, THEIR HISTORY, THEIR TRIBAL VOICE . . .
A TRULY REMARKABLE DOCUMENTARY MADE WITH THE ABORIGINAL TRIBES OF ROEBOURNE.



EXILE and THE KINGDOM

Sat, Mon 2:15 & 4:30pm. Tues only 4:30pm. Wed 11:00am, 2:15, 4:30, 6:45. Thurs 2:15, 4:30, 6:45. Ends Soon

