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A Conversation with the Karrabing Film Collective

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ABSTRACT | This piece is a lightly edited transcript of a conversation with members of the Karrabing Film Collective – Lorraine Lane, Linda Yarrowin, Cecilia Lewis, Sandra Yarrowin, and anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli – interviewed by anthropologists Melinda Hinkson and David Boarder Giles. The Karrabing Film Collective are a community of Indigenous Australians and their whitefella collaborators who make films that analyse and represent their contemporary lives and also keep their country alive by acting on it. This conversation appeared first as Episode Eighteen of *Conversations in Anthropology@Deakin*, a podcast about ‘life, the universe, and anthropology’ based at Deakin University and produced by Giles and Timothy Neale, with support from the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University, and in association with the American Anthropological Association.

Keywords: Indigenous Australians; Aboriginal Australians; Indigenous film; settler colonialism; collaboration



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Introduction

The following lightly edited transcript captures a conversation with members of the Karrabing Film Collective – Lorraine Lane, Linda Yarrowin, Cecilia Lewis, Sandra Yarrowin, and anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli – interviewed by anthropologists Melinda Hinkson and David Boarder Giles. The Karrabing Film Collective are a community of Indigenous Australians and their whitefella collaborators who make films that analyse and represent their contemporary lives and also keep their country alive by acting on it. In the process, they seek to integrate their parents' and grandparents' way of life into their contemporary struggles to educate their children, create economically sustainable cultural and environmental businesses, and support their homeland centres. The Karrabing Film Collective have produced and tour internationally in support of films such as *Wutharr: Salt Water Dreams* (2015), *The Jealous One* (2017), and the winner of Best Short Film at the 2015 Melbourne International Film Festival, *When Dogs Talked* (2014). In addition, Povinelli is the Chair of the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University, and the author of books such as *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (2011), and *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (2016). This conversation appeared first as Episode Eighteen of *Conversations in Anthropology@Deakin*, a podcast about 'life, the universe, and anthropology' based at Deakin University and produced by Giles and Timothy Neale, with support from the Faculty of Arts and Education at Deakin University, and in association with the American Anthropological Association.

The conversation explored the meaning and practice of the Collective's grassroots, DIY approach to film-making, and the widespread critical success that has led them from Northern Australia to Paris, Berlin, Eindhoven, London, Guangzhou, and much more. While Povinelli's theoretical work has been highly influential on anthropology, the conversation here eschews that subject in favour of the relationships and community sustained and enriched by the Collective's work. Povinelli insists, she didn't come to talk about anthropology. And yet the conversation holds crucial lessons for anthropology, and any other interlocutors interested in decolonising theory and practice. The Collective articulates their experience of pressing contemporary issues, from the ongoing political and economic effects of racism and settler colonialism to the impacts of Australia's Northern Territory Intervention, now twenty years old, which has imposed strict police controls and welfare restrictions on Aboriginal life. In addition, the conversation explores relationships of community and mutual aid among the Collective, which includes distinct families and kin groups. As the reader will note, the conversation is full of affection, laughter, and unapologetic local inflections and terminology (at one point, Povinelli suddenly remembers to pronounce 'film' in the standard Anglophone way, rather than the vernacular 'fil'm'), indicative of the longstanding collaborations between each interlocutor that date back before the Collective's first film and even before Povinelli first studied anthropology. While Povinelli apologises that the conversation wasn't 'about anthropology,' these concrete, on-the-ground relationships are the very stuff of ethnographers' work. (Or if they aren't, perhaps they should be.)

If the history of anthropological knowledge is, as Ghassan Hage puts it, ‘white colonial knowledge of nonwhite cultures’ (2017) then the Collective positively eschews it. But if, as he simultaneously suggests, anthropology aspires to a universalist ethic that valorises and embraces humanity – all of us, in all our breadth and depth – or as Ruth Benedict put it, aims at ‘a world made safe for difference’ (1946: 15), then the Collective is one of its most beautiful examples. We leave the reader to decide.

DAVID: Thanks very much for joining us. So I wonder if we could just go around the table and introduce ourselves?

LINDA: Hello, my name is Linda Yarrowin. I’m one of the Karrabing Collective.

CECILIA: Hello, my name is Cecilia Lewis. I’m one of the Karrabing Film Collective.

SANDRA: Hello, my name is Sandra Yarrowin, from the Karrabing Film Collective.

MELINDA: Hello, my name is Melinda Hinkson. I’m an anthropologist at Deakin University.

LORRAINE: Hello, my name is Lorraine Lane and I am one of the Karrabing Collective.

BETH: My name is Beth Povinelli and I’m part of the Karrabing Collective.

DAVID: And of course I’m David Giles, your usual host for Conversations in Anthropology@Deakin. And we’re really grateful to have you all here. And we normally start off with a sort of icebreaker question. How did you all meet? How did anthropology show up on your radar?

BETH: We didn’t meet through anthropology. Anthropology had nothing to do with it, to be honest. (Laughing.)

DAVID: No, so how did you meet?

CECILIA: We met Beth when we were a child going to primary school back in 1984. We didn’t know who she were. She was some white lady. (Laughing.)

SANDRA: That come all the way from New York. I remember that one.

CECILIA: She came from New York. We used to go and sit with Beth every after school. Hang around with her. But we didn’t know her.

BETH: How old you been, Mom?¹

CECILIA: About seven or eight.

SANDRA: Ten, I think.

BETH: Seven, I think. Cecilia?

SANDRA: Seven. You was very young eh? You came to Belyuen.

BETH: Yeah. What? Twenty-one or something like that.

SANDRA: Nineteen or twenty, twenty-one. You were so young, yeah.

LINDA: Me, I guess being ten years old when I met Beth. She came over.

DAVID: How long had you been in Belyuen at that point?

BETH: Well I had been in philosophy at Saint John's College in Santa Fe out in the desert, and (laughing) I had – I don't know – I saw some movies actually, some Australian movies, like Chant of...

LINDA: ...Jimmy Blacksmith.²

BETH: (laughing) Jimmy Blacksmith – your dad!

SANDRA: Dad, yeah.

BETH: But I had no idea, of course. I didn't know anything. [Just] the great books – like Western philosophy. And I just wanted to get out of that country. So there was a fellowship to just get out of the country. So I said I wanted to go to Australia. And I was camping at Mandorah. And Big Truck Mom, your mom and that Kuma Mom came down and said 'What the heck are – who are you?' I said 'Oh I'm Beth Povinelli.' They said, 'How did you get here?' I said I was on a fellowship. They said, 'Oh do you know how to write a grant?' I said (confidently) 'Yeah I know how to write a grant.' They said 'Do you know anything about childcare?' I said (confidently) 'Oh yeah I know about childcare.' I didn't know *anything*. (Laughs) And they said, 'If you come and help us and work for that **Wulgaman**, that Big Truck Mom...'

SANDRA: **Wulgaman** Nuki.

BETH: '...Yeah, you can stay.' And from there, that's how I been come to be daughter of that one. That Big Truck Mother. I grew up in Louisiana. You know, outdoors, hunting turtle, everything, squirrel, frog, bullfrog. And another thing is my white family – my father's side family – we come from a little village in what's

now the Italian Alps. But it used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And on my white father's side, we think of our country as belonging to five families. And it's called Carisolo, and it's itself. We don't consider it to really be part of Italy or anywhere. It's just us. So I was just like, 'Wow this is like my family'. I don't know, and then I just stuck there.

Anyways at the end of the year they were involved in a big land claim. And by law Indigenous people can't just represent themselves through the Land Rights Act. They have to be represented by a lawyer and by an anthropologist. And those old people been say, 'Ah you don't seem like a stupid white woman. Why don't you come be our lawyer?' And I said 'I don't want to be a lawyer. All my life, I've been *not* being a lawyer.' They said 'What about anthropologist?' And I said 'What is *that*?' (laughing.)

And so that's how that anthropology part been come in. But anthropology, for me it's not what's important. For me anthropology is studying how white people continue to put themselves on top of my Indigenous family. No matter what they say, they're always really trying to just take money, or take stuff, or take information, or take land. And *that's* what I study. And I don't care about anthropology really. Maybe I shouldn't say that on a podcast.

MELINDA: No, it's a good thing to say.

BETH: I care about my family to be honest.

MELINDA: So we're going to come back to a lot of those questions.

BETH: But I'm done now. Their turn now.

MELINDA: You're all here in Melbourne for a very exciting business: to show Karrabing films at the Melbourne International Film Festival. Could you tell us what Karrabing is?

Linda: Well Karrabing is a low tide turning. It's just going out.

CECILIA: That's the meaning of the word. Meaning, how many, four different family groups – but we're all one family, brought together, living together. And we just call ourselves 'Karrabing.'

LINDA: We don't call ourselves through a family clan group, so we just use the name Karrabing. We all come from four different parts.

SANDRA: And the meaning of the 'low tide turning,' it's just, we know when the tide is going out that means we can collect and gather food.

MELINDA: So it's a good time? It's a hopeful time?

SANDRA: Yeah.

LINDA: It's a good time. Collect mussels, or crab.

SANDRA: Periwinkle.

CECILIA: Mangrove snake.

BETH: Maybe we could tell everybody how Karrabing started.

SANDRA: We was homeless... Living in a crowded house. Because we had that big thing, eh?

CECILIA: Riot, back in 2005... 2007.

BETH: There was a big riot.

SANDRA: Yeah. That's when we become homeless and things like that.

CECILIA: All our kids were very small back then.

BETH: Ah, 2007 eh? That riot was before the Intervention? Right before, eh?

CECILIA: Before.

SANDRA: Right before.

BETH: Like there was big riot, and then government been promise house, eh?... And then Intervention happened, and what happened to that promise?

SANDRA: Must've been forgot about us.

CECILIA: We tried to get justice. We couldn't.

SANDRA: Yeah, it was so sad in those days.

CECILIA: We lost everything... Went through justice, through court. Nothing.

SANDRA: Nothing.

LORRAINE: They burned my sister's house.

LINDA: Burned her house down.

CECILIA: We lost the house. And her car. Burned the car.

SANDRA: It was so sad.

LORRAINE: So sad, those days.

CECILIA: Took all my kids clothes. Bedding.

BETH: So we been wind up homeless in the bush. But there wasn't Karrabing being yet, eh?

SANDRA: No.

LORRAINE: No.

BETH: There was a day that we really came up with that idea of Karrabing eh?

LINDA: So we were all sitting down the beachside.

CECILIA: We was waiting for ABC mob to come and interview us... And we all gathered around, waiting. But that didn't happen. Somebody stopped it.

SANDRA: Because they don't want to know what the truth is, you know?

LINDA: Didn't want to know.

CECILIA: Didn't want to hear our side of the story. So we thought... 'Why don't we make a movie? And show them how we've been living, our lifestyle, struggle through life, and all that.'

LINDA: We been decided, sit around along the beachside talking to each other, 'Let's just do something for ourselves.'

CECILIA: You know, we tell our story a different way...

SANDRA: By making a movie.

CECILIA: ...by making a movie.

DAVID: And then you've made a couple of films now.

CECILIA: We made the first one...

SANDRA: *When Dogs Talked.*

CECILIA: ...was really about how we were struggling through life. And how I used to put up with my family overcrowding in the house, and the problem with Territory Housing and all that.

BETH: We won the Melbourne Cinema Nova Best Short Film Prize at the 2015 Melbourne International Film Festival.

LINDA: Yeah. And there was another one.

BETH: Then we been make *Windjarrameru*. And then the next one was *Wutharr*.

CECILIA: And *Windjarrameru* is about our young kids, who used to get blamed for stealing this and that, causing problems, and policemen always pick on them.

BETH: Even though the mining...

CECILIA: ...were stealing.

SANDRA: The mining was stealing, yeah.

BETH: Yeah the mining mob, stealing the whole country and meanwhile police are putting Indigenous young people in jail, eh?

SANDRA: Yeah.

BETH: It was about that. And then that third one was *Wutharr*, that saltwater...

LINDA: Broken down boat.

BETH: ...broken down boat. And different people got different ideas why the boat broke down. Like trying to show that we're all together. But we also got different ideas.

CECILIA: Beliefs too, you know, like our beliefs.

BETH: Yeah. So, like Linda...

CECILIA: ...believe in the law. Trevor believe in his ancestors.

BETH: And Suntu believe in – that just the motor broke down. (Laughs) They were just like 'No spare part, that's all.' And then that fourth one, *Night Time Go*? Based on a real story.

LINDA, CECILIA, SANDRA: *Night Time Go*, real story.

CECILIA: Nana's story. When my grandmother was in the war back in 1942 maybe?

MELINDA: I watched that one.

BETH: A lot of people don't know about those internment camps you know? Where they collected everybody, forced them onto internment camp, and [it was] really bad.

CECILIA: It was based a true story, where my grandmother and her family escaped from that camp, went back to the homeland.

BETH: But we changed the ending. **Gammon**. Like we say, then they got everybody to chase all the white people out of the whole Northern Territory. (Laughs)

CECILIA: (laughing) We wish that happened.

MELINDA: That's a big moment in that film. When your Melbourne audience watches that film, it'll be like a moment where everyone stops and just thinks, 'Oh,' because that's the moment where all the whitefellas in Australia, they get really, really frightened. 'Oh, Japanese are coming.' But then we see all those ceremony films that you put that film, celebration. It's like, 'Oh. Different way. Different story.' Different way of telling about that time.

BETH: Instead of celebrating that Japan been driven out, celebrating *white people* been driven out.

MELINDA: One thing that I heard you say Beth, on some films some time ago is that Karrabing is a schoolhouse made out of film. Now that might be long time ago. I don't if you still like that line...

BETH: No, that's right.

MELINDA: ...but I thought that was a really interesting way to think about what you mob are doing, like if it's a schoolhouse.

CECILIA: Yeah, to us it was a learning thing too. Most of us we don't know anything about technology. We get the young kids, they're really smart on it.

BETH: But also I've been meaning – like, we were been talking the other day – those young kids they want to make fil'ms. And so while they're making that fil'm...s... fil'ms. Films. (emphasises anglophone pronunciation) When they're making *films*.

CECILIA: (laughing) Get it right.

LINDA: And same time they're learning as they go along.

BETH: The stories.

SANDRA: Of the country, living off the land.

CECILIA: Stop them from drinking or whatever and getting problems with the police. And they get excited for travelling and all that.

BETH: Yeah. And when we go overseas, or even Brisbane, or wherever, they meet other people who have similar struggles. And they learn more about European history. When it was me, Over and Gabo first time go **la**, Eindhoven for that Van Abbe thing. And we were in that museum and they were showing all these pictures of the Dutch that – really in the north, those European in the north – from, I don't know, 1500s or something. Like looong time ago.

LINDA: (low whistle)

BETH: And were **killimbetgidja**, they were killing each other. Like bullocky them, hang 'em up, self, you know? Like from leg. And Over said 'Beth what the hell is... what is this?' And I said, I said to the curator, 'What is this?' And she said, 'Oh these are prints from when the Christians and the Catholics were slaughtering each other.' And I said to Over, 'Yeah see that's the thing they don't tell you, is that white people they first slaughtered each other, like bullocky. And when they were done with themselves they came and slaughtered you.' And Over went 'Woah.' So it's like better than school eh?

LINDA and CECILIA: Mmmm.

DAVID: Where have you shown the films?

CECILIA: Been to New York, London, and Paris when they played in the Pompidou and Tate Modern.

BETH: You been go Berlin. The HKV.³

CECILIA: We won one award in Berlin too.

BETH: Oh, we won one award in all of Europe – the world really. That Visible Award.

SANDRA: Yeah, I've got that thing at home, eh?

BETH: Yeah. And where did you just come back from?

CECILIA: China. Guangzhou. Whatever they call that place (laughing). I can't pronounce it properly.

BETH: And Gavin and everybody. Shannon we went to...

CECILIA: We went there this June, eh?

LINDA, BETH (agreeing): June.

BETH: Yeah. And those younger people and Suntu went to the Van Abbe in the Netherlands. Then we went to Helsinki and Stockholm. And we've been to...

LINDA: Sweden.

BETH: ...Sweden and, oh, we've been everywhere, really.

CECILIA: First trip they went to Jerusalem.

BETH: Qalandiya, Palestinian Biennale. Yeah. The three young kids.

CECILIA: I meant to go but my passport didn't come.

DAVID: That's a lot of places. When you go to a new place and you show the films to new people, does it change how you think about the films? You know, someone from China, or someone from Paris, they're going to have a different background, so they're going to see the film different.

LINDA: You know it just make we think that we are not just nobody. We are somebody. We've made it. you know. That we are doing something.

BETH: Yeah. I would say – but I'm asking you – it's interesting, because a lot of people they go out, they show their work, or they show their films, or show their book, or show their art, whatever, and they change it afterwards. They change how they do it or what they're doing. But my experience is mainly these films are changing us for the good, i.e. in giving real confidence.

LINDA: And also making us really proud of us too.

BETH: Yeah right? And keeping kids out of jail.

SANDRA, LINDA (agreeing): Yeah.

CECILIA: And being a role model to our kids too, you know?

SANDRA: Leave the past behind we, and go forward.

CECILIA: We don't want to live in the past anymore. We just want to keep going forward. Doing something like making movies was different for us. We didn't know that it would get this far, you know? That we'd be famous and all that. And travel. Most of them have travelled halfway around the world.

BETH: Yeah, it's like, anthropology, what is anthropology *for*? Is it for itself? Or what is philosophy *for*? Is it for itself? Or what is anything for, right? And if you ask me, the thing is only meaningful if it's for making the world better for the people that you are committed to. And you want their world to be better. It's not for itself, right? You don't go and use people to make anthropology better, or to make philosophy better. You go and use those things to make the people that you care about better. Like the films are better. To be honest, I think the films are getting better and better and better and better.

LORRAINE, SANDRA, CECILIA, SANDRA (agreeing): Yeah.

BETH: *But*, the point is to use the films to make the...

SANDRA: People

BETH: ...people better. If the films get better, or if anthropology get better, or philosophy get better, but the people remain the same or worse, *fuck it*. Fuck it all. To be honest. Burn the film. Burn anthropology. Burn philosophy. Because it's not doing what it's supposed to be doing. (hits table) Sorry. Is that too...

MELINDA: No, it's so true. But it's so hard, isn't it?

SANDRA, LINDA (agreeing): Yeah.

BETH: Why is it hard?

MELINDA: It's hard because government never listens. You know what I mean? The transformation is hard.

SANDRA, LINDA, LORRAINE (agreeing): Mmm. Yeah.

MELINDA: We can make together all sorts of wonderful things that might show a better world.

BETH: It's not about *showing*. It's more, well, if you want to know, it's pragmatism. Like in the old philosophical sense of pragmatism. It's like, you do this thing to make the world better. And the world is – don't you think Karrabing is more better than it was?

LINDA: Yeah, it's more better than it was before.

SANDRA: It was. More better than, you know?

LORRAINE: Yeah.

BETH: Yeah, you guys feel more better?

CECILIA: Feel much more better.

LORRAINE, LINDA: Yeah.

LINDA: You know, we are able to, if people come and ask, 'What's Karrabing about?' we open up and express ourselves.

SANDRA: We tell them.

BETH: And we left that community. Now you're on the Council. You got full time job. Him working. Like governments might never do anything. But if you wait for government, nothing's going to happen.

CECILIA: Best, you've got to do things yourself. Make things happen. Try to tell them. If they're not listening, well, find another way of doing things.

BETH: Another way doing things.

MELINDA: Sure. My favorite film so far is the *Jealous One*.

LORRAINE, BETH, SANDRA, CECILIA, LINDA (pleased, enthusiastic, laughing): Oh, Ah.

MELINDA: Yes. I like that. Really great. Yeah. And one thing that's going on in that film is this business of anthropology and government, together, always knocking down the country.

CECILIA: Yeah, they're stopping the Traditional Owners. Blocking the Traditional Owner trying to get to his country.

LORRAINE, BETH, SANDRA, LINDA (in agreement): Yeah.

MELINDA: So our friend, Tess Lea, turning up (imitates Tess' character's officious tone): 'You need authoris...'

MELINDA, CECILIA, BETH (in unison): '...sation.'

(All round laughter.)

BETH: She's a good actor that Tess. She plays those white people spot-on.

(All round laughter)

MELINDA: So I got those power things in mind a little bit.

BETH: No, that's right.

MELINDA: That's why I say that back, hey? So that question about how you make a good life, a stronger life. But at the same time, are always coming up against something stopping you to go all the way.

CECILIA: Yes. That happens a lot.

BETH: Well that's right and that's why what she just said was so cool. You go find another way around.

CECILIA: Yeah, you knock the fence down and keep going...

(All round laughter)

CECILIA: ...You don't worry about that padlock.

(All round laughter)

BETH: Yeah. Like I'll tell you a story. I would said this was 1995 and, Ben Scambury, who is now the head of Sacred Sites – right on Ben – was working in NLC on Native Title. He was in charge of Native Title. And we were doing that land claim. And all the old people and me, we started saying, 'Oh this is going to go really wrong. We'd better get all that information for like [unclear] downloaded into Beth.' Because you mob [were] still young. And so we could get it back to you. And one day, we were on a boat. And we were outside... So I had all the husbands, all the brothers on this boat. This kind of boats, **savvy**? And we were really tired. Long way to go. We got to this place called **Banagaiya**. And we were all really tired because you savvy, you know that wave? And we were all sharing so what everybody knows, just getting all, you know, passing around the stories. And Sheree Jane's Father said 'I'm never coming back. It's too far.' (laughing) And I said, 'You know, those white people never ever going to stop. No matter if we win or lose, they're going to keep going. Putting the pressure on. Testing, testing, testing. You wait. They're going to come here next time. Soon.' And that Sheree Jane's Father been say, 'Well, I'm just gonna make those old people do it.' And we're sitting there. And I looked at him. Suddenly I said, 'Oh my God.' I said, 'Do you know what brother? You *are* the old person for this country.' And he was only 38. And he's the oldest person in that family.

CECILIA: Diane, isn't it?

BETH: Oh Diane. Well. Okay. Whatever. [Oldest person] on the *boat*... But that's the thing. It's like, they're never going to stop.

MELINDA: So you guys, you had the longest land claim. I heard that, now, government's got to clean up that country. Before it gives it back. So I thought people might be interested to know what they did on that country for all those years that they've got to clean up now.

BETH: Oh what been poison mob?

LINDA: Asbestos.

BETH: Yeah, but also them PCPs. They had that thing. What that thing? That transmitter?

LORRAINE: Transmitter too, yeah. Where the dump were.

BETH: They had the military during the Japanese war. They had all that military stuff there. And that left all the PCPs into the ground...

SANDRA: In the ground, yeah.

BETH: ...and then asbestos and the transmitter radiation.

CECILIA: And then we had to tell people that land was poisoned. Because people still go hunt out there.

BETH: Yeah. And they put a little fence around it. Like a little area. And so we never went inside really the fenced area. Not really close up. But it ends up, it was *everywhere*.

CECILIA: Everywhere.

BETH: They were testing where the white people live at, yeah, they were testing their bore water all those years.

CECILIA: But they been finding where the poison is coming through the ground now from that old dump. That's why they closed that dump.

BETH: Yeah but only after they were giving the land back. They didn't give a damn before. They never tested our water.

MELINDA: Were they giving that country back, little-bit-little-bit? While they were holding some of that other country for cleaning up?

BETH: We don't know. No communication.

MELINDA (quoting Tess Lea's character again): Mmm... 'You need authorisation.'

BETH: You need authorisation. Maybe tell the story, where we were making that Windjarrameru fil'm. And how we found out that that other area was poisoned. Remember? We were shooting that scene? The fence scene?

CECILIA: You go. You get the big bucks. (laughing)

BETH: Oh we're shooting – you don't want to tell that story? – like *Windjarrameu* is about, okay, so there's four young boys came up with that idea...

CECILIA: Gavin. Kelvin. Reggie.

BETH: ...Really, those three came up with that film. So they said 'We want to do a film where we get accused of...'

SANDRA, LINDA (in unison): '...stealing...'

BETH: '...beer and get chased through the bush by police.' And then Jojo⁴ what you been add?

LINDA: The Ranger. It's just looking after Country and land, you know?

BETH: And then Over and Suntu added the miners.

CECILIA: And the miners, they were stealing... She was the ranger. And we sent Cameron to spy on them find out exactly what they was doing.

BETH: The rangers. So we shape up the story. Like somebody has an idea. And then other people add their bits on. And then we shape it into a story. So anyways we were shooting the scene where the four young boys are being chased by the cops. So we picked this little old fence line. And we said, 'Oh, we'll just shoot there. It's really pretty.' So we had the *pretend* cops running, chasing the young boys through the fence. And then the pretend cops stop, because we painted the sign that said...

CECILIA: 'Poison.'

BETH: 'Stop: Poison,' yeah. And we just painted it on a log. And we put it next to the fence. And so we shot that whole scene. It was really fun and funny and everything. And then we were coming out to the main road. And what do we find but *real* policemen?

LINDA: Because we been sitting outside.

BETH: Yeah. You mob been sitting outside. And then they were like 'Oh, real police.' So I decided, 'Oh I'll distract them.' So I went over to the real police. We had the fake police – the fake police and the real police, and me, I'm standing there. And I was like 'Oh, you real police, you should be in the next film. Ha ha ha.' ...But the real police asked us 'Where were you guys shooting? Were you in that restricted area?' And we're like 'Oh no, we weren't in the restricted area.'

We were on the dirt road that goes to this one little beach camp.’ And that police said ‘That whole area is contaminated.’

MELINDA: And you didn’t know?

SANDRA: We didn’t know that.

CECILIA: We just only thought that one little area with the fence around it.

BETH: Well we’ve been hunting, drinking, camping, eating.

SANDRA: Everything.

LORRAINE: Camp right there.

DAVID: So they’ve never come and said anything. So when do they come into contact with you really, people from government?

CECILIA: You think they care? They’re going to come and tell you?

DAVID: ...Well, or police. The whole state, really.

BETH: The police come every time when trouble’s around, people drinking.

LINDA: But they don’t mention it.

CECILIA: They don’t mention, or tell you where to go and not to go.

DAVID: And that’s all you ever see of government, is the police?

BETH: They just come to fine people for drinking. That’s it.

CECILIA: They give you a ticket for one can of beer.

LINDA: ...For one can!

BETH: How much ticket for one can?

CECILIA: A hundred and ninety-four dollars. For just one can, open.

LORRAINE: If they see you drinking it.

CECILIA: I only get three hundred and forty dollars a fortnight.

BETH: So one can, that wipes out your whole paycheck. People got fines for seven, eight thousand. Oh, the [name redacted] – she was in jail. Why was she in jail?

CECILIA: She had a fine for \$10,000, because she couldn't afford to pay it off.

BETH: So they put her in jail.

CECILIA: She was getting the same amount. Two-hundred-something dollars a fortnight and she couldn't afford the payment.

DAVID: The people I work with in America, a lot of them are homeless. And then they have the same thing. You get fined for sitting on the footpath. You get fined for sleeping in the wrong place.

BETH: Blackfella. African American.

CECILIA: Yeah, they'll fine you for urinating in a public place too.

SANDRA: Oh. Long-grass mob.⁵

BETH: But there's no toilet.

CECILIA: There's no toilet. Where else can you go?

DAVID: Yeah. So people get fines and fines and fines. And they can't pay their fines so they end up in jail. You know it's a cycle. So they end up coming out of jail. And then they've been in jail so they can't get a job. So they end up homeless again. So they get fined again. I mean one of the things I'm really interested in is the way the same things play out in the city, as in the country, but they affect different people. Same process of govern...

CECILIA: Same racism.

DAVID: ...Yep. Same racism. Same classism.

BETH: Well it is true that white – well, I am also white, with the sharp nose...

(All laugh)

BETH: ...So let's just say government – even if it's a progressive government, even if you get Labor or whoever, you know – to put it a **Berragut** way, accumulate capital and power over poor people. They share strategies. We know that.

DAVID: You know it's 2018, and you've been thinking about this together for 30 years now. Longer. Does anything feel like it's changed at this point?

BETH: Better or worse or same?

CECILIA: I'd say the same. You see anything changing?

LORRAINE: Nothing, eh? Not really.

SANDRA: I don't know. It's hard to say.

CECILIA: You can try and change, but then it falls back to the same problems. Same issues. Everyday life.

SANDRA: Yeah.

BETH: Look let's think about where everybody live at Belyuen. Like what color skin is in charge of all the jobs?

CECILIA: White people.

SANDRA: White people run it at Belyuen. All the local people in the community, they want to try to work, but they wouldn't give them a job.

BETH: But we also got a lot of stress and...

CECILIA: And you have some jealous people, get jealous of you when you try to do something.

SANDRA: Jealous people in that community.

BETH: And look, I'll put some truth on the table too. Because it's boring and nothing doing – there's no cars. And used to be, we just would drive around, got any kind of car, you know?

CECILIA: (laughing) With a busted up whatever.

BETH: Doesn't matter. Make it work. Like *before*. ...And we'd just saw off the top and go from Belyuen down to Bulgul. ...Registered? What's a registered car? We got no idea! People hanging off the side of the car. Whatever. *Now*, you try and even get five kilometers anywhere with a car – bang! Fine!

SANDRA: Policeman.

BETH: Like before, yeah, it was rough eh? But you could get anywhere. Just go. And now policemen everywhere. Since Intervention, all the money went into

police force. So now you're more locked up in those communities. So now we're more bored. More worse fighting. So, yeah, sometimes people get a job and they don't show up. Let's face it. But now, because it's more worse, and now people are more strict. They don't like give any slack.

LINDA: When you're at work, you only can use the car to use it for work things. But then again, see this white person always control you. You just have to use the car and take it back to where the workshop is and lock it up.

BETH: Yeah and they're always controlling.

LINDA: And it makes me really really upset, you know? Why can't we – we've got license, we've been trained to drive. Just, why can't they be equal with us? We all human beings.

BETH: And even with Karrabing going around the world, instead of – look I understand jobs. They need people to work in jobs. Okay, I understand that. But – it's like we were saying before with the anthropology or philosophy or film: what is it *for*? What is the communities for? Is it for making sure people turn up to work all the time? Or is it saying, 'This is Aboriginal land. These are Indigenous people, own this place. We should be building up Indigenous people.' So if, let's say Karrabing gets invited to go around the world. Do you say, 'Well, if you leave, I'm going to sack you and you're going to lose your job'? And instead of saying, 'Wow that's really great.'

LINDA: You go and explore the world.

BETH: You know it's really punitive. So I would say it's changing, but not, it's not like changing for the better. It's a just new thing you got try to go around, like **Gigi**⁶ been say.

LINDA: But it's just benefit of you know the people in the community. They want to do things, you know? Travel around the world. See the bigger picture, bigger world.

MELINDA: We're hearing these stories all over the Northern Territory at the moment. Same, same, same, same. In community. Very powerful stories.

SANDRA: Yeah? Same, same, eh?

BETH: But I would also like to not just be negative. Because on the other hand Karrabing just keeps doing it anyway.

DAVID: So all of you get together and write the stories yourselves?

CECILIA: Sit around together. Talk about it.

SANDRA: Sit around and tell stories, and things like that.

CECILIA: Who want to play the next part in this movie, that movie.

SANDRA: Play this part, that part.

BETH: Who's got an idea.

LINDA: We're doing one, we'll start up one hip hop. The young people...

SANDRA: The young people are going to do the hip hop.

BETH: Yeah. Kieran, Ethan, Chloe, and Telish had an idea do a hip hop one.

CECILIA: We are going to mix the hip hop with a little bit of corroboree in it.

DAVID: Can we find the music on the Internet?

BETH: We didn't do it yet. (Laughter all around) Come on! Hold on!

MELINDA: So you know, a lot of Aboriginal filmmaking mobs, they're making films, but they always go through their media association... You get a lot of good films. But sometimes people got to work very hard. They got to get that *grant* first.

CECILIA: Oh, we don't have that.

MELINDA: You know? So it's slowly, slowly, slowly. How do you do it without money? Or you bring special money? Or...

CECILIA: We don't get special money.

MELINDA: You just do it without money.

CECILIA: A.T.M. (Laughs all around)

BETH: We have gotten a couple grants. But where we been start this Karrabing thing...

CECILIA: There's you, Tess.

BETH: ...No, more. This Karrabing, not the...

CECILIA: **Mongbetung.**

BETH: Oh, **Mongbetung.** Yeah. Meaning 'money.' Me, I would say making the films can't cost my Indigenous family one cent. It can't cost one cent. They don't

got one cent. That's called settler colonialism and its racial impoverishment. It's got to – both in terms of money, hopefully, but also just in terms of what we're saying – it's got to be *building*. Building people. Building country. So, the deal is I pay to make the films. The first two we used outside Karrabing. We used a camera man...

SANDRA: ...Camera man, sound man.

CECILIA: ...Sound man, lighting men... And we've been used that director.

BETH: ...So we paid about three people outside. Which means that first short one we never been make any money. You guys never got anything. And then I was looking and I was like, 'God, we're paying all these white people – like I'm paying all these white people.' Plus it's frustrating because – they're *good* – like that Ian Jones, great cinematographer, did Ten Canoes – but we got to do it on their schedule because they're industry people. So that doesn't work for us so well. So we switched to iPhones. So I bought some iPhones. And then David Barker, who's a brilliant independent film guy – taught me how to edit. So each of these films, they probably cost me thirty, forty, sometimes fifty thousand dollars. Like, where you guys invite me to be *Professor Povinelli*, and you pay me money to talk to you (laughs), that all goes back into paying down... And then any money we make, where do we put that money?

CECILIA: In Karrabing.

SANDRA: In the Karrabing account.

BETH: Yeah. And then how do we decide how to use that money?

CECILIA: We have to have a meeting amongst ourselves. And we discuss what we're going to use it for. If we want to build an outstation or something.

BETH: So it's like a redirection machine.

MELINDA: So you keep all the money power for yourselves.

SANDRA: Yes. Yeah.

BETH: Yeah, so because I've got a sharp nose and I'm white – not *only* that but, you know...

CECILIA: But you're still *family*.

BETH: ...Yeah. But because *racism*. Yeah I'm family, you mob my family – I *hope*. I don't know...

CECILIA: You are! (laughing)

LORRAINE: We're family! (laughing)

BETH: Anyways, but *still* because...

SANDRA: Because colour.

BETH: Because coloured skin, resources still flow into to me. Yeah. So how do I redirect that back into...

CECILIA: Karrabing.

BETH: Yeah. So grants... really, in the end, it's going to flow it out to other people, to be honest.

DAVID: Does it sort of feel like you're wearing different hats at different times then? You've got to put the Professor Povinelli hat on to make the money flow? And then you take that hat off and put another one on to make the film?

SANDRA: Yeah.

CECILIA and LINDA (in perfect unison): Yeah, something like that.

BETH: Something like that. (Laughs) Like where we've been Guangzhou.

DAVID: So was that the first time you saw her give a talk?

CECILIA: Yeah acting like a professor. I never saw her do it in real life.

BETH: What did you think about that?

SANDRA: It was great.

LINDA: Another thing that I saw her, when she gave the profess...

CECILIA: Real **Berragut** come out of you. (Laughs)

LINDA: That's when she talked. **La** London?

BETH: London, yeah.

LINDA: *Full talk*.

LORRAINE and MELINDA (in unison): Full talk!

(Laughter all around)

BETH: And you know what Sheree Jane been say? ‘Aunty, why do **Berragut** – meaning ‘white man’ – go on and on?’

CECILIA: Never stop.

BETH: I said ‘I dunno.’ She said ‘*You too!* You can go on and on. Never stop.’

CECILIA: And all our family at the back, you know Karrabing mob [mimes sleep]. We was just falling asleep.

(Laughter all around)

BETH: Yeah, but, it makes us money, eh?

CECILIA: That’s what anthropologists do, eh?

DAVID: Anthropologists put people to sleep.

BETH: ...Since this is an anthropology podcast, I guess, it’s also like, yeah, I like standing up and saying, how to put it like? When I give a talk – like full on, full **Berragut**, full professor talk, like put on that thing. It’s like how do you say, ‘This is not about you understanding’ – it’s not about having the audience, like ‘Oh poor indigenous people.’ It’s about *you*. And no matter – like, let’s say me: I’m a good person, other than when I’m irrigating (laughs). But it’s not about whether I’m a good person or a bad person. It’s about the way, no matter if you’re good or bad, certain people *benefit*. Alright? So certain people going to benefit. Like if we say we’re family and we got real feelings and you know? Like seriously, that is really true. But nevertheless, they’re still going to separate us because I’ve got this kind of...

CECILIA: **Berragut**.

BETH: Yeah. And they’re still going to keep shoving value into me. So how to get people to say, that’s going to happen no matter what you feel. And it’s about how you benefit. How are you, like me, going to do something to interrupt that? To shake ‘em up. You can’t solve it. Like I cannot solve the problem. But at least we put it on the table.

CECILIA: Yeah.

BETH: You know? I could give all my money away and I can’t solve the problem. But at least it’s on the table.

DAVID: Can I ask another question? Because I'm interested in how Indigenous media is kind of a global thing now. Like there's Māori TV. And I have friends who live in America who've seen the Bush Mechanics video from Warlpiri Media. Have you seen that one?

SANDRA: Yeah I've seen it play. NITV.⁷

DAVID: Yeah. So I was just wondering if you look at Māori TV and think about how they did it? Or if you have people get in touch from other Indigenous groups? People are starting, I think, to listen to each all around the world.

BETH: We just do our own thing, to be honest. Do we?

CECILIA: Yeah, when you come. Savvy? We have to make a movie when you're around.

BETH: I don't know why you need me. But you guys come up with the ideas before I come here. But I'm always around.

CECILIA: You're the one with a car. And directing.

SANDRA: You're the director.

CECILIA: Miss Rush Rush.

(Laughter all around)

SANDRA: Give us time, you know, to get up. 'No, no, get up, get up, now.'

BETH: Nah, we been changed that model... You know that's an interesting thing because – what you would say? You would say 'focus.' Get everybody to focus, eh? I think people think, 'Oh well you just, you know, people will just do it or whatever.' But life on community – how much sleep you get sometimes? From fight to fight?

LINDA: You can't sleep. We have to sit up all night. Toss and turn.

SANDRA: You can't sleep.

LINDA: You have to come out and you know...

CECILIA: Check if you're alright.

LORRAINE: People come in the night time, sneaking up.

CECILIA: Them might burn you when you sleep. You don't know what's going to happen.

LORRAINE: Do something stupid.

SANDRA: You don't know what's going to happen.

LINDA: It's just not enough sleep.

SANDRA: Them kids, you know?

BETH: No sleep. [It's really hard. Like physically. I think people don't understand. Like, 'Why don't you stand up and...' You're physically exhausted.] People scattered away, everybody. Scattered out in the Bush. Let's say someone goes down to Beswick. Like Ethan is in Beswick. Which is great. So okay. Like Kieran and Ethan want to do the hip hop thing. How are we going to go get Ethan? We have no motorcar. We have motor cars but they're unregistered. So if we try and go get him – well you end up in jail. Or maybe you're trapped somewhere.

CECILIA: You get a fine.

BETH: And you get a fine. So once again what we face is – like with the **Karrakal**⁸ motorcar I gave to Suntu, once we fix it up, where are people going to get eight hundred dollars to register it? Well, I'll do that eight hundred dollars to register it. So it's like, 'director' is called 'focus person.'

CECILIA: Like that Karrabing motorcar. I can't find 1200 to buy that... Because it's not going to come out of my pocket. I'm going to ask you, eh?

BETH: Yeah. Or we can ask each other, 'Should we use some of our funding to fix up **Karrakal** and Karrabing?' Something like that. So it's like if you're going to make films that are truly grassroots, from really where it's at – not from industry where [they're] living in the, like a fantasy land... Like, even with those iPhones, I still haven't bought the new ones, because the new ones are going to cost like three thousand dollars. But where would three thousand dollars come from?

CECILIA: Good question.

MELINDA: Not out of the sky.

BETH: Not out of the sky...

MELINDA: One of the things that is really beautiful in all your films is you take the viewer on a journey through your Country. And a lot of people listening to us

have no idea what that country is like. Maybe somebody'd like to describe that Country a little bit? Because it's a lot of different kind of country you go through.

BETH: Meaning like saltwater country? What kind? What we got there?

LINDA: It's just, it's all connected, 'cause our dreaming site is all connected in story. And that's why we're all connected with our land.

CECILIA: Totem. Most of our film is on a lot of the Country, that's been shown on the film.

BETH: Also, like, I don't think people in this area of Australia – like we say there's freshwater, saltwater, desert, eh?

CECILIA: But we just say freshwater and saltwater.

BETH: What we?

CECILIA and LINDA (in unison): Saltwater.

SANDRA: And some fresh.

CECILIA: Yeah, maybe fresh.

SANDRA: Little bit fresh.

BETH: Which one do we think is best? Freshwater people or saltwater people?

LINDA, CECILIA, LINDA, LORRAINE (together): Saltwater.

BETH: And why?

CECILIA: Saltwater, you can eat all kinds of things. But plus, our dreaming's in it. We follow our ancestors.

SANDRA: And plus, we're in between fresh and salt.

BETH: I say, I people ask me, I say I like saltwater. Because saltwater you got the salt water *and* the freshwater. Because you got swamp.

CECILIA: And fresh meat to gather.

SANDRA: Goose. Freshwater.

MELINDA: And some of that swamp, that's like paperbark forest?

SANDRA, BETH (together): Yeah.

MELINDA: City mob here, they might not know that one. Really, really beautiful country, eh?

CECILIA: **Medang**, you savvy?

BETH: **Medang**, yeah, paperbark. Oh yeah, like in Jealous Ones where Over and Gabo and, well that swamp, or would – you see all those paperbark paperbark. Yeah. And on top of that Nunggudi Hill, that Black Water Snake Hill and looking over that, where they're standing up talking, top of that hill?

CECILIA: That view.

BETH: Yeah. You look over the biggest swamp. You know what they want to do with that big swamp area? Dam 'em up... that Daly River to develop the North make it the food bowl of the nation... they want to frack it and dam it.

CECILIA: Frack it and poison the water, more like it.

DAVID: And then there are probably people who will listen to this in New Zealand, in America. What do you want to say to them to close up?

SANDRA: Thank you all for listening.

CECILIA: Hope you enjoy our story and fil'ms.

BETH: ...Sorry it's not about anthropology!

Creole Terms:

Banagaiya: A place arrived at by boat.

Berragut: White person, whitefella.

Gammon: Not true, a lie.

Karrabing: Low tide turning

Karrakal: High tide (also a nickname for Beth's truck)

Killimbetgidja: Killing each other

La: Preposition or pointer (i.e. 'at' or 'that')

Medang: Lilly flower tucker.

Mongbetung: Money

Nunggudi Hill

Savvy: You know what I mean?

Wulgaman: Old Lady (e.g. 'Wulgaman Nuki' refers to Old Lady Nuki)

Notes:

1. Beth explains the kinship term: 'I am calling Cecilia Mother – i.e. she is my daughter.'
2. Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith is a 1978 drama describing the life and struggle of an Aboriginal man, the eponymous Jimmy Blacksmith.
3. Haus Kulturen der Welt, Berlin Centre for international cultural exchange.
4. A nickname for Linda.
5. 'Long grass' camping is a reference to Aboriginal people who leave their country or communities to camp on the outskirts of cities like Darwin. They are sometimes identified as 'homeless' or 'sleeping rough,' although for many reasons this is an incomplete description.
6. A nickname for Cecilia.
7. National Indigenous Television.
8. A nickname for Beth's truck.

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