

“The whole world is disintegrating” – The effects of mining and its representation in Indigenous filmmaking

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Contemporary Indigenous filmmaking frequently focuses on the irreversible alterations of history to both culture *and* landscape. As part of postcolonial ecocriticism, film has taken a powerful position alongside the global environmental movement to investigate the representation of such ecological traumas (cf. Narine *Eco-Trauma Cinema*).

Set in the Western Australian Kimberley region, the landscape portrayed in Catriona McKenzie’s 2012 coming-of-age drama *Satellite Boy* reflects the environmental and land rights issues intrinsic to this particular location. A film particularly criticised for its obliqueness in approaching political issues, however shows an Indigenous perspective to the country’s mining boom.

Images of extreme soil erosion and the persistence of the white man-made machinery, materials and non-biodegradable – unwanted, inerasable – objects within the natural landscape depict the permanent marking white colonisation has left on the Australian landscape. This vast terrain of fractured land acts as a metaphor for the now fractured culture, with the protagonists straddling the worlds of Aboriginal tradition and Western law. Thereby *Satellite Boy* spotlights the diversity of Indigenous narratives and the power of storytelling.

In addition to exploring concepts of mapping and erasure in a postcolonial context, this paper will further discuss the role of water and dryness. The movie strongly comments on the fear that then current and proposed mines in the Kimberley were threatening 80 per cent of the area’s rivers, wetlands and flood plains; resonating the Australian “mindscape of the Dry” by making for example, use of the iconographic galvanized water tank (cf. Cranston).

This generational drama, having induced little academic reception in comparison to other recent Australian films addressing Indigenous environmental knowledge such as *10 Canoes* and *Samson & Delilah*, subtly yet effectively reflects the objectives of activists such as the ‘Save the Kimberley’ group:

*If we lose our land ... or [if] our country is somehow compromised we will be lost both as individuals and as a race of man. We will become like others who have no place in this land or this world. We will cease to exist.*¹

Bio

Victoria Herche is a Lecturer and Research Assistant in the English department at the University of Cologne. She holds a M.A. in Theatre, Film and TV Studies, English Studies and German Studies and is currently working on a Ph.D. project examining contemporary Australian coming of age films. Her research interests include Film Theory, Australian Literature and Film, Indigenous Studies, Post-Colonial Theory, Popular Culture and Psychoanalytic Theory.

¹ “What’s at Stake? Culture and Traditions under Threat.” Save the Kimberley, <http://www.save-thekimberley.com/whats-at-stake/country-culture/>.