

Chapter Three

Besides sports, Indigenous people in New Zealand and Australia sometimes became famous in another area of performance before and during the second half of the twentieth century: the performing arts. In music, singing, acting and other fields of entertainment, a small number of Māori and Aboriginal women became nationally, and sometimes internationally, known. Although this path to success was more well-trodden in New Zealand than it was in Australia, it became more common in Australia from the 1950s. As these women attained success in their chosen fields, their careers and personal lives were often written about in the media, as was the case for those who succeeded in the sporting arena. In this chapter, I explore patterns in depictions of Māori and Aboriginal women who became prominent in a variety of performing arts over the second half of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on narratives about New Zealand soprano Dame Kiri Te Kanawa. Several recurring threads of representation were evident in print media narratives about these well-known women, often resonating with ways of framing Indigenous women who had become well-known for their sporting successes. Within the context of broad social and political change, and of significant shifts in the entertainment industries themselves over this half-century, such patterns of representation were both maintained and transformed.

Māori and Aboriginal Women in the Performing Arts

As in other forms of entertainment and spectacle, in sport it was possible for Indigenous people to become well-known and celebrated before the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in New Zealand. Māori concert parties had showcased Māori musical talent and culture since the nineteenth century. Te Puea Hērangi organised a group, Te Pou o Mangatāwhiri, which toured the North Island raising money to build a marae (meeting place) at Ngāruawāhia and contributed to a cultural revival. Women such as Tuini Ngāwai, a prolific composer and songwriter, her niece Te Kumeroa Ngoingoi (Ngoi) Pēwhairangi, a songwriter remembered also for her efforts in advancing the Māori language, and orator Whaia McClutchie, were familiar names in relation to music and kapa haka (traditional performing arts). Individual singers also met with success, both within New Zealand and internationally. Fanny Howie, known on the stage as Princess Te Rangi Pai, performed to great acclaim in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century. Perhaps the earliest commercial recording of Māori music

was made in 1927, of Ana Hato and her cousin Deane Waretini.¹ New Zealand's first Māori film stars also appeared early. In the 1925 classic *The Romance of Hinemoa*, the cast was entirely Māori, with Maata Hurihanganui in the title role. Ramai Hayward, who as Ramai Te Miha was the star of the 1940 film *Rewi's Last Stand*, pursued a long career in film and television with her husband, filmmaker Rudall Hayward.

A number of Māori women also became nationally and internationally famous through their work as tour guides around the thermal areas found in the central North Island. Often also members of concert parties, guides entertained tourists as well as informing them, and performed Māori culture for visitors. As early as the 1860s women took tourists to see the renowned Pink and White Terraces at Lake Rotomahana. The 'hospitable reception of visitors' remained 'primarily a women's responsibility', according to Ngāhuia Te Awekōtuku, and by 1870 'guiding as a female occupation was established'.² One of the best-known of these early guides was Sophia (Te Paea) Hinerangi, who in Rotorua was 'the most famous woman of her time'.³ After the Tarawera eruption destroyed the terraces in 1886, tourist guiding became centred around the thermal village of Whakarewarewa. There, two sisters, Maggie (Mākereti) and Bella Thom, became particularly prominent as guides. Guide Maggie Papakura, as she was known to tourists, gained international status when in 1901 she guided the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. Another guide who became famous was Rangitīaria Denna, better known as Guide Rangi. Born at the end of the nineteenth century, she was as a child a member of a concert party, organised by Mākereti, which visited Australia.⁴ During her guiding career, she escorted many notable people, receiving the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) for her work in 1957. Newspapers across the country lamented her passing when she died in 1970.

In Australia, a rather different entertainment landscape prevailed. Aboriginal music was not embraced by European settlers as Māori music was in New Zealand. Although bands or choirs which gave popular performances were sometimes formed on missions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as at Yarrabah in Queensland, these groups appear not to have been well-known nationally. Few Aboriginal performers made recordings during the 1950s and

1 J. M. Thomson, *The Oxford History of New Zealand Music* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 203.

2 N. Te Awekōtuku, *Mana Wahine Maori: Selected Writings on Maori Women's Art, Culture and Politics* (Auckland: New Women's Press, 1991), pp. 77-78.

3 J. Curnow, 'Hinerangi, Sophia 1830-1834?-1911', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 July 2005, accessed 28 March 2006, available from http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/default.asp?Find_Quick.asp?PersonEssay=2H37.

4 C. Parekōwhai, 'Denna, Rangitīaria 1897-1970', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 7 July 2005, accessed 28 March 2006, available from http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/dnzb/default.asp?Find_Quick.asp?PersonEssay=4D12.

1960s, and while an increase in recordings by Aboriginal men was evident in the 1970s, only four Aboriginal women seem to have recorded their music in that decade.⁵ No Aboriginal people starred in films until the Charles Chauvel film *Jedda* in 1955, which featured Rosalie Kunothe-Monks and Bob Wilson, billed as Ngarla Kunothe and Robert Tudawali, in the lead roles. Indeed, during the 1960s and 1970s, ‘the dominant belief was that there were no Indigenous actors’ in Australia, and even after that view began to shift in the 1970s and 1980s, Indigenous actors continued to be viewed as ‘amateurs’.⁶ Moreover, it was not common practice in Australia for Aboriginal women (or men) to act as tour guides.

As John Ramsland and Christopher Mooney have noted, however, it was sometimes possible for Aboriginal people to reach national prominence in the performing arts before the 1950s, as it was in sport.⁷ Betty Fisher’s fame as a singer was fleeting, but it was Australia-wide. After she was evacuated from Croker Island Mission to Otford in New South Wales (NSW) during World War Two, Fisher appeared on radio 2UW’s ‘Australia’s Amateur Hour’.⁸ Considerable publicity came her way, including a feature in the *Australian Women’s Weekly* in 1946, in which it was observed that a meeting was to be held to consider her ‘future’ and that ‘offers of subscriptions for her training’ had been forthcoming.⁹ Fisher, however, returned to Croker Island, and although she continued to perform in the Northern Territory, her moment of national fame appeared to be over. Blues and jazz singer Dulcie Pitt, who performed as Georgia Lee, had a long and successful career in music. She first performed with her sisters and brother, before going on to a successful solo career, with her first recording appearing in 1949. During several years in London, Lee became known across Britain, due in particular to her performances with Geraldo’s Orchestra in its weekly BBC radio broadcasts. After returning to Australia in 1957, she continued her musical career, becoming in 1962 ‘the first female Aboriginal vocalist to produce an album’, *Georgia Lee Sings the Blues Downunder*, and continuing to perform until 1978.¹⁰

5 K. Barney, “‘Women Singing Up Big’: The Growth of Contemporary Music Recordings by Indigenous Australian Women Artists”, *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, no. 1 (2006), pp. 44-45.

6 M. Casey and L.-M. Syron, ‘The Challenges of Benevolence: The Role of Indigenous Actors’, *JAS, Australia’s Public Intellectual Forum*, no. 85 (2005), pp. 100, 102.

7 J. Ramsland and C. Mooney, *Remembering Aboriginal Heroes: Struggle, Identity and the Media* (Melbourne: Brolga, 2006), p. 319.

8 B. Fisher, ‘Talking History’, *Land Rights News* 2, no. 13 (1989), p. 30.

9 ‘Her Future – Island Mission or Concert Hall?’, *Australian Women’s Weekly*, 23 March 1946, p. 19.

10 Ramsland and Mooney, pp. 320-323.

Dame Kiri Te Kanawa

Within the long line of Māori musical success, a young singer appeared in the 1960s who rapidly became a well-loved celebrity in New Zealand. Kiri Te Kanawa reached a level of international fame far greater than any Māori singers or musicians before or since. Her life has been chronicled in three biographies, countless newspaper and magazine articles, and several television programmes. Yet although basic biographical details are easily obtained, her very fame obscures many details of her story. Born in 1944 in Gisborne, on the east coast of the North Island, she was adopted shortly after by Tom and Nell Te Kanawa. At this point, so early in her life, the mythology begins. Numerous accounts state that she was named 'Kiri' by the Te Kanawas and that this means 'bell' in Māori.¹¹ Such foreshadowing of singing success, however, is not evident in definitions of the word given in Māori dictionaries.¹² Te Kanawa began singing at a young age and was encouraged by her mother. The family moved to Auckland so that she could receive proper training for her voice and she attended St Mary's College for Girls, where she was taught by (Dame) Sister Mary Leo, one of New Zealand's most successful singing teachers. After several competition successes, including in Australia, she left New Zealand to study at the London Opera Centre, having been awarded a grant from the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand.

Most biographical sketches of Te Kanawa note that star status quickly followed after her highly successful debut as the Countess Almaviva in the Mozart opera *Le Nozze di Figaro* at Covent Garden in 1971. Her United States debut, as Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello*, occurred in 1974 and it too was enthusiastically praised in reviews, although she had replaced a fellow singer with only a few hours' notice. A further highlight of her career often mentioned in biographical accounts was her singing of Handel's 'Let the Bright Seraphim' at the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana in 1981, shortly after which she received the DBE (Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire). Te Kanawa began to give large outdoor concerts, including one for the Australian bicentennial in 1988, Opera in the Outback, and three free concerts for the New Zealand sesquicentennial in 1990, billed as Kiri's Homecoming. Later in her career, Te Kanawa set up a foundation to assist young New Zealand singers, the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation.

11 For instance: D. Fingleton, *Kiri Te Kanawa: A Biography* (Clio: Oxford, 1982), p. 6; K. Frost, 'Kiri – The Name Means "Bell"', *Thursday*, 8 June 1972, p. 18; A. Simpson and P. Downes, *Southern Voices: International Opera Singers of New Zealand* (Auckland: Reed, 1992), p. 220.

12 Translations of 'kiri' include 'skin' or 'bark', while 'bell' is translated as 'pere' or 'pahu'. See: P. M. Ryan, *P.M. Ryan's Dictionary of Modern Maori*, 4th ed. (Auckland: Heinemann, 1994), pp. 28, 114-115.



Figure 5: 'Kiri Te Kanawa, Wearing a Concert Gown of White Crepe', 5 February 1967.

Photograph. EP/1966/0479-F. Dominion Post Collection. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

Humble Beginnings and Natural Talent

Several narratives of Te Kanawa's life presented her rise to stardom from humble beginnings as an adopted Māori child in the rural New Zealand city of Gisborne as a rags-to-riches tale reminiscent of narratives of Evonne Goolagong's path to tennis success. Writing in the *New Zealand Herald* in 1990, Jane Phare referred to Te Kanawa as 'the Kiwi diva who rose from nothing to international

acclaim'.¹³ The next year, Jane Sweeney observed in the lifestyle magazine *Next* that Te Kanawa had 'come a long way from the baby girl whose adoptive parents said no to her at first because they wanted a boy'.¹⁴ Of course, narratives of humble beginnings are not restricted to Indigenous performers. Joan Sutherland, one of Australia's most famous opera singers, was described early in her career as having made a similar journey from a humble early life to world fame. 'The glorious voice of a former Woollahra typist has conquered the world of opera', the *Sun-Herald* proclaimed in 1961. The author, Margaret Jones, noted that Sutherland's success was 'all a long way from Sydney, a job in an office, and lessons at the Conservatorium'.¹⁵ Framings that emphasised class mobility could thus be as important in media portrayals of the famous as narratives that centred on ideas of gender or race.

However, such framings of Te Kanawa's path to success sometimes made reference to her Māori ancestry, implying that being Māori had made her rise to fame more improbable. In 1978, John Ross wrote in the *New Zealand Herald* that 'the Maori girl who arrived in London 12 years ago is now an international celebrity'.¹⁶ Phare remarked that Te Kanawa's success and fame were 'not bad for an adopted Maori kid from a poor background with a potential to sing well'.¹⁷ More recently, the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* ran an article in 2002 in which the author, Alice Fowler, stated that 'the great opera diva grew up in conditions which today would be called, at best, socially deprived'.¹⁸ Indeed, Te Kanawa herself has framed her story this way. In a speech to the Rotary Club of Auckland in 2004, she said that she had been 'born in Gisborne and came from very humble beginnings'. She spoke of her adoption and of growing up as a Māori child in New Zealand in the mid-twentieth century, recalling once 'being sent home from a birthday party by a school friend's mother – because I was Maori'. She had, she said, been able to 'pull myself up' only 'because of my mother and the pride of my father'.¹⁹

Bass-baritone Inia Te Wiata, who had a successful operatic career in London until his death in 1971, was also occasionally described as an unlikely star who had risen from a poor background. Ziska Schwimmer, in a profile of Te Wiata published in 1958 in the Māori Affairs Department publication *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, wrote that there had been 'little in [his] early background to lead

13 J. Phare, 'Swansong for a Songbird', *New Zealand Herald*, 26 September 1990, section 2, p. 1.

14 J. Sweeney, 'Prime Times', *Next*, no. 6 (1991), p. 86.

15 M. Jones, 'The Glorious Voice of a Former Woollahra Typist has Conquered the World of Opera: The Joan Sutherland Story', *Sun-Herald*, 3 December 1961, p. 43.

16 J. Ross, 'Kiri's New Role', *New Zealand Herald*, 27 May 1978, section 2, p. 1.

17 Phare, section 2, p. 1.

18 A. Fowler, 'Kiri – The Diva Opens Her Heart', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 24 June 2002, p. 8.

19 K. Te Kanawa, 'Kiri Te Kanawa Speech to the Rotary Club of Auckland', updated 2008, accessed 25 February 2008, available from http://www.kiritekanawa.org/pdf/2004_02_02_rotary_speech.pdf.

him to world fame or the life of a professional artist'.²⁰ A similar rags-to-riches narrative can also be observed in the Australian media in relation to famous Aboriginal singers and entertainers, both men and women. In a profile which appeared in the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board magazine *Dawn* in March 1952, well-known tenor Harold Blair was imagined as having once been 'a barefooted little aboriginal boy' on an Aboriginal reserve who 'never dreamed, even in his wildest flights of imagination, that one day he would stand on the concert platforms of the world, to receive the enthusiastic applause of tremendous audiences'. It had been, the article opined, a 'meteoric rise from the canefield labour to the concert platforms of the world'.²¹ Georgia Lee was described in an article in the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* in 1955 as 'a £2000-a-year London "blues" singer' who had once lived 'in a crowded native hut in Cairns'.²² Similarly, but decades later, the success of singer Maroochy Barambah was contrasted with the poverty of her childhood home, Cherbourg Aboriginal Settlement in Queensland, which was described as 'one of the most deprived towns in Australia'.²³ For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers, singing could thus be seen, like sport, as a field of achievement that could provide opportunities for social and economic mobility for those who were successful.

As was the case for those successful in sport, such an escape from disadvantage was sometimes represented as resulting from the good fortune of having natural talent. Narratives of natural gifts are not uncommon in biographical material about musicians, actors and other performers. In Te Kanawa's case, many of the profiles which appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout her career made reference to her voice as a natural gift or God-given talent. As Katie Pickles has observed, Te Kanawa's achievements were thus 'often constructed as determined by the "gift" of a pleasant voice box', rather than through her own hard work and resolve.²⁴ Indeed, Te Kanawa's success was frequently ascribed to a combination of natural attributes: her beauty, singing voice and acting talent. Sue Miles wrote in *50 Famous New Zealanders* that Te Kanawa's 'exceptional voice', 'considerable acting ability' and the fact that she was 'strikingly good looking' were 'a combination that carried her on to international fame'.²⁵ In 1976, in the *Bulletin* in Australia, she was said to have a 'beautiful voice and ... equally beautiful person', the 'fame' of which 'kept spreading', meaning that she was always in demand.²⁶ The repetition of such representations in narratives of Te Kanawa's life gave her little credit for her own successes in the competitive world of international opera.

20 Z. Schwimmer, 'Inia Te Wiata', *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, no. 23 (1958), p. 10.

21 'A Dream Came True! Our Singing Ambassador', *Dawn* 1, no. 3 (1952), pp. 8-9.

22 'From Native Songs to English Variety', *Courier-Mail*, 4 January 1955, p. 3.

23 R. Milliken, 'Songlines', *Good Weekend*, 20 January 1996, p. 15.

24 K. Pickles, 'Kiwi Icons and the Re-Settlement of New Zealand as Colonial Space', *New Zealand Geographer* 58, no. 2 (2002), p. 13.

25 S. Miles, *50 Famous New Zealanders: Portraits and Biographies of 50 of the Most Famous New Zealanders* (Auckland: Burnham House, 1985), p. 96.

26 B. Hoad, 'Heavenly Voice, Feet on the Ground', *Bulletin*, 4 September 1976, p. 44.

Narratives of natural talent could sometimes, for Indigenous performers, take on an added dimension of ethnicity. Natural musical ability is a continuing feature of stereotypes about Māori people, if not about Aboriginal people. Peter Downes, writing about Howard Morrison and the Howard Morrison Quartet in 1979, commented: ‘Put any four Maori boys together, give them guitars and ask them to sing, and the results almost certainly will be musical and entertaining’.²⁷ *Mana* magazine, which is produced by a Maori-controlled media organisation, contributed to this idea, publishing in 1996 a story called ‘What Makes Them Sound So Great?’, which profiled some of the ‘marvellous singers’ whom Māori family groups ‘keep producing’.²⁸

This recurring belief sometimes appeared in writing about Te Kanawa early in her career. In the programme for her Wellington farewell concert in 1966, the organiser and manager, Gladstone Hill, described having once heard Māori people singing ‘in one of those spontaneous outbursts of song, so typical of the Maori people’, and commented that listening to Te Kanawa brought back memories of that event.²⁹ The same year, in a feature about Te Kanawa, who had recently arrived in England to study at the London Opera Centre, the *London Times* observed that ‘to be the daughter of a Maori father is to be a singer’. The writer continued that according to ‘one New Zealander who is writing Kiri’s biography: “The Maoris don’t know how to sing a wrong note”’. Te Kanawa was quoted saying ‘Let’s say we’re musical – full stop’. The article’s author then observed that it appeared that ‘all Maoris can harmonize without being taught’, and that ‘one New Zealand surgeon has suggested that the construction of the Maori throat is quite different from that of Europeans’.³⁰ Much later, in 1991, a resource for schools noted that Te Kanawa ‘reflects the finest qualities of the Maori people in singing, graceful movement, relaxed and fun loving humour’.³¹ Such representations of Māori as naturally musical are complex, reflecting both the importance of music as a form of expression within Māori culture and a sometimes cherished identity as musical people, and less positive stereotypes of Māori as musical, cheerful and childlike entertainers.

While Aboriginal people were not often depicted as having natural musical talent, narratives of natural talent were evident in relation to the acting abilities of Rosie Kunoth (as she then was) and Bob Wilson when they starred in *Jedda* in 1955. In promotional material, Chauvel described Kunoth as ‘beautiful, intelligent

27 P. Downes, *Top of the Bill: Entertainers Through the Years* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1979), p. 86.

28 W. Harawira, ‘What Makes Them Sound So Great?’, *Mana*, no. 12 (1996), p. 15.

29 Programme for farewell concert, Wellington, 1966, ephemera collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

30 ‘Maori Girl Studies Opera Here’, *Times*, 31 May 1966, p. 13.

31 M. Leyden, *Celebrating New Zealanders* (Auckland: Michael Leyden, 1991), p. 81.

and a born actress'.³² Reviewing the film in the *News-Weekly*, E. S. Madden thought Kunoth and Wilson both had 'the instinctive sense of the dramatic so characteristic of their race'.³³ M. S. in the *Weekly Times* stated that they were 'like most Australian natives ... born mimics' whose 'almost flawless portrayals ... show how their natural talents have responded to clever direction'. M. S., in fact, suggested that Kunoth might be able to 'wrest the best actress "Oscar" from Hollywood's darling, Grace Kelly'.³⁴ This was high praise of Kunoth's acting in the film, but it was not praise of her professional skill and hard work; instead the praise was in large part for the direction, which had skilfully utilised her natural ability. The *Film Weekly* reviewer went further, commenting that 'through sheer animal magnificence, Robert Tudawali emerges as a strong screen personality'.³⁵ This remark equated the Aboriginal actors with nature and the animal world, giving Wilson no credit for any acting craft. These understandings of the work of Aboriginal actors as stemming from natural ability resonate with later narratives in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s identified by Maryrose Casey and Liza-Mare Syron. During this period, Aboriginal actors were often understood as being 'amateurs (however gifted)' rather than as professionals, and their acting as being natural in the sense that they were being themselves, witnessing to their own experiences.³⁶ Kunoth herself, however, remembered her acting as having been natural in a rather different way. Her experience of filming *Jedda* was in many ways a negative one, and she observed in an interview later in life that since 'most of the emotions' she was asked to act 'were fear anyway' her performance 'was natural'.³⁷

As with stereotypes which considered Indigenous people to have natural sporting ability, suggestions that Māori or Aboriginal success in music or acting was due to natural ability could operate to downplay the skill and hard work required to succeed. Such an implication could sometimes sit alongside a further stereotype of Māori people: that they were lazy. Te Kanawa has reportedly confessed to being fun-loving and disinclined to work hard when first studying at the London Opera Centre.³⁸ Narratives that connected this aspect of her life story with her ethnicity (rather than, for instance, her youth) could operate to reinforce these negative stereotypes of Māori. In her book *Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss Their Art*, Helena Matheopoulos commented that Te Kanawa had a

32 *Eve in Ebony: The Story of "Jedda"* ([Sydney]: [Columbia Pictures Proprietary], [1954]), National Library of Australia, Canberra.

33 E. S. Madden, "'Jedda" Could Begin a New Australian Era', *News-Weekly*, 12 October 1955, pp. 7-8.

34 M. S., 'Best Australian Film So Far', *Weekly Times*, 7 September 1955, p. 92.

35 'Reviews', *The Film Weekly*, 12 May 1955, p. 13.

36 Casey and Syron, pp. 102-103.

37 R. Kunoth-Monks, interview with R. Hughes, conducted 10 July 1995, in *Australian Biography* series, accessed 27 February 2008, transcript available from <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/kunothmonks/interview3.html>, tape 3.

38 For instance: R. Jacobson, 'Dame Kiri', *Opera News* 47, no. 12 (1983), p. 14; V. Myers, 'Candid Kiri', *New Zealand Listener*, 5 August 1991, p. 16.

‘calm, placid side’ to her character that was ‘given to bouts of lethargy’, which ‘those who know these latitudes consider typically Maori’.³⁹ Yet Te Kanawa has stressed that she worked very hard to succeed after that early period at the Opera Centre, and this hard work was often acknowledged in accounts of her life alongside comments upon her less rigorous approach when she first arrived. As Jane Sweeney wrote in *Next* magazine in 1991: ‘Those initial lazy ways at the London Opera Centre have long gone’. Te Kanawa, by then, was described as ‘follow[ing] a strict routine held together by a well-planned schedule’.⁴⁰ The teaching resource previously mentioned also commented upon the effort that had been required for Te Kanawa to achieve what she had, stating that her life was ‘a splendid example for young people that natural talents and hard work can bring great success’.⁴¹ Such narratives of her life thus combined reference to stereotypes of Māori as both naturally musical and lazy with admiration for the hard work required to become an internationally successful opera star. As in the case of sports stars, narratives which framed Te Kanawa’s success as providing an example of the rewards of hard work could also carry potentially negative implications. If determination and hard work, along with natural talent, were represented as the route by which obstacles might be overcome and success reached, one potential implication was that this route was open to all who chose to follow it, thus denying the existence of entrenched disadvantage in the lives of Indigenous people.

Exoticism and Glamour in the Performing Arts

During the 1950s and 1960s, and earlier, media representations of famous Indigenous women in the performing arts often combined fascination with them as exotic and primitive with depictions of them as glamorous and part of a modern world. In a 1969 article in the New Zealand young women’s magazine *Thursday* about the recent success of ‘coloured’ women in modelling, Joan Scott wrote that ‘coloured models’ were ‘glamour incarnate with a bit of primitive mystery thrown in’, as well as being naturally ‘graceful and feminine’.⁴² Thirty years before, the pictorial magazine *Pix* had published a series of posed photographs of guide Lena Hamana, in which she was mostly shown dressed in ‘ancient Maori dress’ rather than her usual ‘modern clothing’. In these photographs, Hamana was imagined to be enacting the daily life of a ‘Maori maid’ of three centuries earlier. Described as a ‘glamor girl’ in whom ‘ancient Maori culture’ remained alive, she was said to have ‘[thrown] off the mantle that civilisation has given her race’

39 H. Matheopoulos, *Diva: Great Sopranos and Mezzos Discuss Their Art* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1991), p. 211.

40 Sweeney, p. 88.

41 Leyden, p. 79.

42 J. Scott, ‘Black Is Beautiful’, *Thursday*, 10 July 1969, p. 13.

to pose for the photographs.⁴³ Fiona Paisley has argued that when Mira Szaszy (then Petricevich) attended Pan-Pacific Women's Association conferences in the 1950s, she was 'admired because of the combination of western modernization and "traditional" life she managed so glamorously'. Szaszy belonged to the newly-formed Māori Women's Welfare League, and was a recent runner-up in the Miss New Zealand contest. Central to the standing she and others like her gained at these conferences, Paisley contended, was the facility to 'appear one day in traditional dress and the next in fashionable suits'.⁴⁴

These two threads of representation were both evident in a booklet produced in 1962 about Maureen Kingi, who was chosen as Miss New Zealand that year. Throughout the booklet, photographs showed Kingi performing her duties as a beauty queen, either elegantly dressed in the style of the day, or dressed in the piupiu (flax skirt).⁴⁵ Although the piupiu was at the time New Zealand's national costume for international beauty contests, Spencer Jolly suggested some years later that Kingi could 'rightfully claim' it 'as her national dress' while other winners of the title had 'mixed feelings' about it.⁴⁶ On the front cover of the booklet, Kingi was pictured seated neatly in a traditionally carved window-frame, wearing a stylish dress and a string of pearls. This posed photograph encapsulates the juxtaposition of ancient and modern which was also evoked in the written text. The unnamed author(s) noted that 'her performances with the triple and double long pois as well as singing made her an unusual and interesting personality' when she toured the North Island.⁴⁷ Similarly hinting at exotic difference, Jolly wrote in 1974 that the crowd at the 1962 final had been 'captivated by the smile and lovely eyes of a dark skinned girl from Rotorua'.⁴⁸ Kingi's appeal thus lay both in her being Māori, and therefore an exotic and unusual winner of the competition, and in her being perceived as a modern girl. In her position as Miss New Zealand, both threads of representation were important, as she was able to be seen as both an authentic New Zealander who embodied the romantic appeal of Māori culture, particularly when she was overseas, and as a sophisticated and modern New Zealand girl.

Indigenous film stars in Australia and New Zealand were also portrayed in such contradictory ways. Looking back at Ramai Hayward's career in film, Jacqueline Amoamo wrote in the *New Zealand Listener* in 1993 that photographs used for publicity for *Rewi's Last Stand* (1940) showed Hayward as 'an exotic beauty as

43 'Day in Maori Maid's Life', *Pix*, 22 July 1939, p. 24.

44 F. Paisley, 'Glamour in the Pacific: Cultural Internationalism and Maori Politics at Pan Pacific Women's Conferences in the 1950s', *Pacific Studies* 29, no. 1/2 (2006), p. 76.

45 *The Story of Maureen Kingi: Miss New Zealand 1962* (Dunedin: Joe Brown Enterprises, [1962]), National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.

46 S. Jolly, *The Miss Parade* ([n.p.]: Southern Press, 1974), p. 105.

47 *The Story of Maureen Kingi*. A poi is a ball attached to a string, either short or long, which is swung and twirled whilst singing and dancing.

48 Jolly, p. 89.

striking as many of the current crop of Hollywood starlets'.⁴⁹ In Australia, in a phrase that neatly captured the appeal of the combination of exotic difference and glamorous modernism in the mid-twentieth century, Georgia Lee was termed the 'Dusky Bombshell' by media in Melbourne.⁵⁰ A number of accounts of the 1955 premiere of *Jedda* in Darwin described Rosie Kunoth's dress and appearance, placing her within the discourse of glamour surrounding a movie star and a premiere. Kunoth 'looked very charming', thought the *Northern Territory News*, while Chauvel's wife and filmmaking partner Elsa felt she 'looked a dream of a girl' and that 'her quite simple deportment gained the admiration of all'.⁵¹ Kunoth herself recalled the 'beautiful white frock with straps' that she had worn, and that she 'looked like a princess, or a queen'.⁵² The glamorous discourse Kunoth was placed within in media reports was what might be expected for a white film star, and she herself did not consider it entirely negative. She stated in a later interview that 'it became almost glamorous to be an Aboriginal person'. 'There was an Aboriginal girl standing up there looking nearly as good as Marilyn Monroe', she remembered.⁵³

Kunoth's attractive appearance was often mentioned in the media around the time the film was released. Several references were made to her skin colour, as 'a brown-skinned beauty', a 'comely chocolate heroine' or as having 'dark loveliness'.⁵⁴ These comments called upon her descent from an ancient tribe to add mystery to the glamour. However, such representations were significantly outnumbered by comments on her prettiness that did not mention her colour, subsuming her race under a focus on beauty and femininity. Part of Kunoth's appeal was also the shyness sometimes reported. M. S., writing in the *Weekly Times*, referred to her 'shy, unspoilt charm' and her 'soft accent'.⁵⁵ Soft voices and timidity had sometimes been considered attractions of Aboriginal women in the earliest days of contact. Such images imagined Aboriginal women within 'European aesthetic traditions'.⁵⁶ Descriptions of Kunoth in the media in the 1950s positioned her within Hollywood aesthetic traditions, even while deploying the idea of the exotic as part of her appeal. Liz Conor has shown that in the 1920s 'Aboriginal and Islander women were systematically constructed as premodern or "primitive" precisely through their perceived failure to *appear* modern'. Aboriginal women, Conor argued, 'were cast ... as illegitimate and

49 J. Amoamo, 'In On the Action', *New Zealand Listener*, 11 September 1993, p. 33.

50 Ramsland and Mooney, p. 321.

51 'Jedda Night Caught the Imagination', *Northern Territory News*, 6 January 1955, p. 5; E. Chauvel, *My Life with Charles Chauvel* (Sydney: Shakespeare Head, 1973), p. 146.

52 H. Chryssides, *Local Heroes* (North Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1993), p. 187.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

54 J. B. Glen, 'On the Rugged Trail of "Jedda"', *New York Times*, 31 January 1954, p. 5; "'Jedda's" Spectacular Premiere!', *The Film Weekly*, 13 January 1955, p. 12; B. McArdle, 'Jedda Opens New Cinema Field', *Age*, 24 August 1955, p. 2.

55 M. S., p. 92.

56 A. McGrath, 'The White Man's Looking Glass: Aboriginal-Colonial Gender Relations at Port Jackson', *Australian Historical Studies* 24, no. 95 (1990), pp. 197-199, 202.

unassimilable objects in the modern scene'.⁵⁷ By the 1950s in Australia, and apparently earlier in New Zealand, the construction of Indigenous women as exotic and primitive could sit alongside constructions of them as able to be assimilated into modernity, to become modern girls like their white counterparts.⁵⁸



Figure 6: 'Rosalie Kunoth-Monks', Steve Lorman.

Photograph. PH0141/0169. Northern Territory Library, Darwin.

Throughout her career, both in the media and in publicity material, Te Kanawa's being Māori was sometimes framed as adding interest to her story or as making her more exotic. Alan Armstrong, a reviewer for *Te Ao Hou*, suggested in 1967 that Te Kanawa's 'appeal' lay partly in 'her Maori ancestry', and he noted that she was 'unique' because she was 'the first Maori female singer of serious music to stand at the threshold of fame and fortune overseas'.⁵⁹ In the first biography

⁵⁷ L. Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 12, 206, original emphasis.

⁵⁸ For an illuminating discussion of the ways in which ideas of exoticism and modernity intersected in the 'racially ambiguous ... femininities' constructed by three Australian women in the first half of the twentieth century, see A. Woollacott, *Race and the Modern Exotic: Three 'Australian' Women on Global Display* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2011).

⁵⁹ A. Armstrong, 'Review of *KIRI, Music and a Maori Girl*, by Norman Harris in association with Kiri Te Kanawa', *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, no. 58, March 1967, p. 58.

published about Te Kanawa, an adulatory book written by Norman Harris when she was still in her early twenties, her Māori heritage formed a point of interest. The book began with a mythical story about Te Kanawa, ‘a warrior’ and ‘commanding’ leader, and ended with a description of her farewell from her ‘own people’.⁶⁰ This narrative of her life was written before it became widely known that she was adopted, which she revealed on British television in a BBC profile about her in 1975.⁶¹ Like other narratives written before this revelation, Harris presented her as a descendant of Māori aristocracy, adding to the exotic aura surrounding her. Pickles has observed this invention of ‘noble warrior connections’ for Te Kanawa, and the recurring transformation of such ‘chiefly connections’ into an aristocratic background.⁶² Te Kanawa herself sometimes reportedly referred to her Māori descent as making her exotic. In 1983 she was quoted in the *New Zealand Listener* stating that ‘I’m exotic because I have two cultures on my side’.⁶³ Almost a decade later, she reportedly said that she had come to understand her mother’s view that her Māori descent was the best part of her descent, and was quoted explaining that ‘it’s unique to be Maori, to sing opera, have a fantastic name; it’s all rather exotic and interesting’.⁶⁴ In 2008, biographical information provided on the website for the Kiri Te Kanawa Foundation continued to describe her as having ‘the exotic blood of native Maori aristocracy’.⁶⁵

Te Kanawa’s beauty was frequently mentioned in media reports about her, often with overtones of fascination with her colour. Pickles noted that Te Kanawa’s Māori descent was sometimes represented as giving her an exotic beauty.⁶⁶ In the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* in 1974 she was described as having ‘dark beauty’, and in 1980 as being a ‘dark-eyed, part-Maori beauty’.⁶⁷ The *Christchurch Press* in 1981 described her as ‘tall and slender, with the good looks that go with her part-Maori ancestry’.⁶⁸ This fascination was particularly evident in some profiles of her published in the international media. In the *San Francisco Chronicle* she was described in 1990 as a ‘handsome woman with enormous brown eyes and copper-tone skin inherited from her Maori father’.⁶⁹ Descriptions of Te Kanawa

60 N. Harris, *Kiri: Music and a Maori Girl* (Wellington: A. H. and A. W. Reed, 1966), pp. 7, 57-59.

61 Fingleton, pp. 154-155.

62 Pickles, p. 14.

63 T. Reid, ‘Kiri: Giving Something Back’, *New Zealand Listener*, 15 January 1983, p. 14.

64 Myers, ‘Candid Kiri’, p. 21.

65 ‘Kiri Te Kanawa Bio’, updated 2008, accessed 27 February 2008, available from <http://www.kiritekanawa.org/kiri+te+kanawa>.

66 Pickles, p. 14.

67 A. Gordon, ‘Film of the Mozart Opera “Don Giovanni” Brings Kiri Te Kanawa Close to Home’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 7 April 1980, p. 6; D. Webster, ‘“Sundays are for Cycling”’, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 18 November 1974, p. 6.

68 K. Coates, ‘Kiri’s Royal Wedding Performance Will Have a World-Wide Audience’, *Press*, 11 July 1981, p. 15.

69 R. Stein, ‘Daily Doings of a Down-to-Earth Diva: Kiri Te Kanawa Featured in San Francisco’s “Capriccio”’, *San Francisco Chronicle Datebook*, 21 October 1990, p. 21.

which imagined her beauty in these ways echoed earlier imagery of Māori women used on postcards in the early twentieth century. Jacqui Sutton Beets has shown how the ‘Māori maidens’ on these postcards were those whose beauty matched European ideals, while at the same time retaining the exotic allure of the ‘Other’. Those who were chosen for photographing often had, for instance, ‘large eyes’, ‘flowing dark hair’ and ‘olive (not black) skin’.⁷⁰ Written descriptions of Te Kanawa’s beauty often drew attention to her big brown eyes, golden skin or dark hair. In Australia, for instance, she was described as ‘a knockout’ in the *Courier-Mail* in 1987, with ‘golden brown skin, smooth as an egg’, ‘fabulous’ eyes which were ‘large, limpid brown’, and ‘marvellous, thick glossy chestnut’ hair.⁷¹ In the United States magazine *Opera News*, Lady Antonia Fraser extolled her skin as ‘the healthy color of a smooth brown egg’, and her ‘enormous’ eyes, which were ‘chestnut like her thick and glossy hair’.⁷² Publicity shots, and the carefully posed photographs which accompanied many articles in the print media, also sometimes highlighted these features of her appearance. Pickles has written that Te Kanawa was ‘objectified in a number of ways as a modern Maori Maiden’.⁷³ Like Kingi, Te Kanawa was thus sometimes imagined in ways which placed her as the modern embodiment of the romantic Māori maiden whose image had been so often used on the postcards of the early twentieth century.

Being thought to have exotic looks perhaps contributed to the recurring depiction of Te Kanawa as a woman who was particularly lovely within the already glamorous world of opera. Although she was often portrayed as having remained a down-to-earth and modest New Zealander, particularly during the 1980s and early 1990s, she was also often referred to as glamorous or as a diva. The latter is a common description of women who become internationally known as opera singers, particularly sopranos, and is a word that has come to carry both positive and negative connotations. Both the glamorous image and the down-to-earth image appear to have been encouraged by the marketing machine which was inextricably part of Te Kanawa’s career. Photographs in concert programmes were usually very glamorous, while those in magazines such as the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* showed her both in extravagant operatic costume or elegant dress and relaxing in casual clothes.⁷⁴ In the United States music magazine *Fanfare* in 1989, Nick Rossi observed the intertwining of these themes in Te

70 J. S. Beets, ‘Images of Māori Women in New Zealand Postcards After 1900’, in *Bitter Sweet: Indigenous Women in the Pacific*, eds. A. Jones, P. Herda and T. M. Suaalii (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2000), p. 18.

71 F. Herson, ‘Kiri Gives Her Regards to Broadway’, *Courier-Mail*, 29 August 1987, weekend section, p. 4.

72 A. Fraser, ‘My Heroine’, *Opera News* 51, no. 7 (1986), p. 21.

73 Pickles, p. 13.

74 See for instance: A. Barrowclough, “‘I Can Inspire True Passion’”, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 13 April 1992, p. 8; J. Davies, “‘Sometimes I Just Have to be Alone’”, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, 9 November 1992, p. 21; programme for An Evening Quayside with Kiri, Auckland, 1994, ephemera collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra; programme for Victoria State Opera Foundation Gala Benefit, 1985, ephemera collection, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

Kanawa's image as a star. Her life, he wrote, was 'a contradiction of parts' in that she was 'a consummate vocal artist *and* a devoted mother, an opera star of the first magnitude *and* a very warm, friendly, down-to-earth person'.⁷⁵ In 1991, writing in the Wellington *Evening Post*, Kate Coughlan detailed Te Kanawa's concern that photographs accompanying the story be beautiful, quoting her as stating that 'the glamour image is important to my career'.⁷⁶ At the same time, in an article in Brisbane's *Sunday Mail Magazine* in 1992 titled 'The reluctant diva', Te Kanawa was quoted observing that she was unlike many other singers in that she did not need a large retinue. 'I don't need all the glamour', she commented.⁷⁷

Te Kanawa's continuing popularity in New Zealand appeared to rest in part upon the representation of her as retaining an unpretentious and down-to-earth New Zealand attitude despite her fame and wealth. This was particularly evident in women's magazines such as the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, in which Te Kanawa was often depicted approvingly as an ordinary wife and mother, implicitly sharing something of the experience of the readers.⁷⁸ Slightly more than a quarter of the images published in articles about Te Kanawa collected from women's magazines showed her with her family or within a relaxed domestic setting, compared to just over six percent of the images which accompanied articles collected from newspapers and other magazines. Te Kanawa was often quoted in the *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* talking at length about her family life with her husband and two adopted children.⁷⁹ In 1991, Angela Lord began an article in the magazine by describing Te Kanawa 'in between' international tours as 'at home making a cup of tea and compiling a shopping list' in her kitchen.⁸⁰ Such articles often implied that they gave a privileged view into her life, revealing the real woman beneath the star persona. Lord observed that Te Kanawa was generally 'prepared to let the outside world see only the polished image of the Diva, carefully hiding the woman, wife and mother under the glamorous facade', and an article by Alice Fowler in 2002 was titled 'Kiri – the diva opens her heart'.⁸¹ Te Kanawa's great appeal, then, was the result of a combination of factors: her glamorous occupation and her beauty, her supposedly exotic looks and name, and her down-to-earth persona. If the latter was particularly important in the media in New Zealand, the glamour and mystery of her being a Māori opera singer was perhaps more central to many representations of her in the international media, particularly early in her career.

75 N. Rossi, 'An Interview With Dame Kiri Te Kanawa', *Fanfare* 13, no. 1 (1989), p. 499, original emphasis.

76 K. Coughlan, 'Dame Kiri: Behind the Scenes', *Evening Post*, 7 September 1991, p. 21.

77 G. Barrett, 'The Reluctant Diva', *Sunday Mail Magazine*, 1 November 1992, p. 17.

78 The trend in media narratives to locate Te Kanawa in the domestic sphere has also been observed by Katie Pickles. K. Pickles, 'Colonisation, Empire and Gender', in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. G. Byrnes (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 239-240.

79 For example: Barrowclough, p. 8; A. Lord, 'Dame Kiri: "If I Lost My Voice ..."', *New Zealand Woman's Weekly*, 15 July 1991, pp. 13-14.

80 Lord, p. 12.

81 Fowler, pp. 8-11; Lord, p. 12.

Representing Race, Representing Nation

Framings of famous Indigenous women in the media might market more than simply their own work. In the 1950s and 1960s, successful Māori women and men were sometimes represented as displaying the harmonious race relations believed to exist in New Zealand, and the success of the assimilation and integration policies, both to international and to New Zealand audiences. In the sporting arena, tennis player Ruia Morrison was once quoted saying that on one overseas trip she had made, she thought in hindsight that she ‘usually got the front berth socially to show we were racially integrated’.⁸² Joe Brown, who held the franchise for the Miss New Zealand pageant in 1962, was keen to impress upon the government the value of Kingi’s involvement in an international beauty contest, and her scheduled appearance on television in the United States, for promoting New Zealand as a tourist destination overseas.⁸³ Visiting the United States, Kingi was not just a ‘Beauty Delegate’ but also an ‘Ambassador of friendship and goodwill for her country’. In the booklet about Kingi produced by Joe Brown Enterprises, a quote from a camera operator at the international pageant stated that Kingi’s appearance on the television show ‘Who in the World’ had done ‘more good for New Zealand than anyone, anything ever done before’.⁸⁴ Across the Tasman, Miss Australia too was expected to act as an ambassador for her country. In 1961, the winner was Tania Verstak, a young woman who had been born in China, the child of Russian refugees, and who had arrived with her family in Australia in 1952. After her win, she was not only depicted in the media as ‘a glowing example of modern Australian womanhood’, but was also portrayed by the federal government as an ‘example of the success of its immigration policy’ and of the success of the assimilation process which immigrants were to go through.⁸⁵

In her overseas travels, Kingi might in a similar way represent to international audiences the successful and harmonious nature of race relations at home. Ensuring this image of racial harmony was potentially an important concern given international interest in the subject in relation to Australia and South Africa. When she spoke in California at the International Beauty Congress in 1962, Kingi spoke in part upon this theme. In New Zealand, she explained, ‘we pride ourselves in the concord and harmony in which we live with each other’. ‘I am an example of this integration’, she asserted, ‘for my mother is European and my father is Maori’.⁸⁶ The unnamed author(s) of the 1962 booklet portrayed

82 D. Simons, *New Zealand’s Champion Sportswomen* (Auckland: Moa, 1982), p. 237.

83 Jolly, p. 90.

84 *The Story of Maureen Kingi*, emphasis removed.

85 J. Ustinoff and K. Saunders, ‘Celebrity, Nation and the New Australian Woman: Tania Verstak, Miss Australia 1961’, *JAS, Australia’s Public Intellectual Forum*, no. 83 (2004), pp. 68-70.

86 *The Story of Maureen Kingi*.

Kingi and her family as exemplars of integration. Her Māori father was ‘a highly esteemed member of the staff of the Maori Affairs Department in Rotorua, a licensed interpreter (first grade) and a clerk of the Maori Land Court’. One brother was a carpenter, singer and entrant in male pageants, another brother was ‘one of only three or four Maoris holding a Bachelor of Commerce degree’ and ‘an accountant in Wellington’ studying for his Masters, and her sister was ‘employed by the Social Security Department and ... studying for her B.A. degree’. Kingi herself was ‘a student radiographer’. Prior to winning the competition, Kingi had been involved in Māori concert parties and had ‘participated in filmings and photographs for the publicity of Rotorua and New Zealand overseas’. She had been, the booklet noted, ‘photographed for post-cards and slides and ... filmed by the National Film Unit’.⁸⁷ As a modern embodiment of the exotic Māori maidens whose images were so popular on postcards early in the century, Kingi’s image was thus used to market New Zealand as an international tourist destination both before and after she won the Miss New Zealand competition. At the same time, her success, like that of her family, could be mobilised both to demonstrate overseas the superiority of race relations in New Zealand and to illustrate domestically the success of the integration policy.

Representations of Te Kanawa could also operate to show that integration was proceeding apace, and benefiting all, as well as that New Zealand had harmonious race relations. In the souvenir programme produced for her farewell concert in Wellington in 1966, Gladstone Hill hailed the concert as ‘an opportunity to show the world that in New Zealand the Pakeha would work for, and with, the Maori in the same manner and to the same extent as he would do for a fellow Pakeha’. In the farewell concert, he continued, ‘the Pakeha and the Maori combined and co-operated to honour this talented Maori girl in her pursuit of the highest honours in the world of song’. The concert programme also contained a copy of a letter from the office of the Minister of Māori Affairs, which expressed similar sentiments:

With a Pakeha mother and Maori father, Kiri represents all that is best in New Zealand ... As the Minister of Maori Affairs, Mr Hanan, mentioned to you, the developing pattern of full integration in New Zealand is admirably typified in Kiri ...⁸⁸

Te Kanawa thus appears to have been publicly embraced and presented as a symbol of New Zealand’s good race relations. Katie Pickles noted that in one early image of Te Kanawa as a young woman the ‘integration of Maori and Pakeha worlds’ was clearly evident in the ‘juxtaposition’ of the ‘traditional cloak’ which she wore with ‘modern hair and make-up’. Te Kanawa represented, Pickles suggested, ‘a national and international ambassador for New Zealand

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Programme for farewell concert, National Library of New Zealand, Wellington.

race relations’, someone who could be read ‘both as an example of integration and of assimilation’.⁸⁹ Unlike Kingi, Te Kanawa was not sent overseas explicitly to market New Zealand, but she was nevertheless depicted in ways which suggested that she too was imagined at least in part as an advertisement for her country.

If Australia did not pride itself on its exemplary race relations as New Zealand did, those Aboriginal people who did reach fame in the performing arts were nonetheless sometimes represented as exemplars of assimilated Aborigines. In 1962, *Dawn* reported on the events marking National Aborigines’ Day in Sydney, at which singers and musicians such as Lorna Beulah, Jimmy Little and Col Hardy had performed. Little and Hardy were pictured with soccer player Charlie Perkins and ‘singer-actor’ Candy Williams, and the group described as a ‘credit to their race’.⁹⁰ Harold Blair was likewise termed ‘a credit to himself, his people and his country’ in a profile which appeared in *Dawn* in 1952.⁹¹ Similarly, despite the anti-assimilation slant of *Jedda* itself, publicity material and articles about the film in 1954 and 1955 sometimes depicted Rosie Kunoth and Bob Wilson as assimilation successes, implicitly if not explicitly. Wilson was profiled in a publicity booklet, *Eve in Ebony*, under the headline: ‘Robert Tudawali – Civilised Savage’.⁹² *Dawn* described the stars as ‘two typical Australians, hard working and good living’ and ‘a credit to their race’.⁹³ Kunoth knew little about films when she was cast as *Jedda*.⁹⁴ Yet *Dawn* claimed she had a ‘favourite film star’, Stewart Granger, just like ‘white girls her age’.⁹⁵ Such depictions sat uneasily alongside portrayals of her as exotic, different or primitive, which were also evident in promotional material in the 1950s. *Eve in Ebony* ended its profile of her with the comment that she ‘retains the age-old, primitive emotions of her race’ and would ‘always be a somewhat unknown quantity with her charming will-o’-the-wisp quality’.⁹⁶

Kunoth was to some degree unusual, as an Aboriginal woman who became nationally visible in the press in the 1950s and 1960s, since at that time such celebrity was for the most part focused upon a small number of Aboriginal men. Those men included her fellow actor Tudawali, artist Albert Namatjira, boxer Dave Sands and singers Little and Blair. As Anna Haebich has argued, media coverage of their achievements and personal lives was shaped by ideas about assimilation then circulating, and they were represented both as embodying

89 Pickles, ‘Kiwi Icons’, pp. 13–14.

90 ‘Crowds Stood Still in Heart of Sydney’, *Dawn* 11, no. 8 (1962), pp. 1–4.

91 ‘A Dream Came True!’, p. 9.

92 *Eve in Ebony*.

93 ‘Jedda is YOUR Film’, *Dawn* 3, no. 9 (1954), p. 10.

94 Chryssides, pp. 180–181.

95 ‘Jedda is YOUR Film’, p. 9.

96 *Eve in Ebony*.

assimilation and as struggling to achieve it, as assimilated Aborigines and as men who lived 'between two worlds'.⁹⁷ Namatjira, before his tragic death, was 'promoted by the government as the public face of assimilation' in a documentary produced by the Commonwealth Film Unit in 1947.⁹⁸ Yet although the appropriation of such figures as embodying the success of the government's assimilation project resonates with representations of Kingi and Te Kanawa as exemplars of integration, what was perhaps most different in New Zealand was that there was not a history of significant debate as to whether Māori were able to be assimilated, as there was about Aboriginal people in Australia.

Successful Aboriginal people in Australia were also sometimes presented as having a potential role as ambassadors, able to show white Australians the capabilities of Aboriginal people, and perhaps also their ability to assimilate. Writers of promotional material for *Jedda* in the 1950s forecast a future for Kunoth in which she would represent the abilities and worth of Aboriginal people to white society. The writer(s) of *Eve in Ebony* declared that 'Ngarla Kunoth, beautiful aborigine girl, has become a proud ambassadoress of one of the greatest aborigine races in the world'.⁹⁹ *Dawn* also took up this refrain, contending that having 'proved herself a very talented actress as well as a charming young Australian woman', there was 'no doubt' that she would 'bring a great deal of very favourable publicity to the aboriginal people'.¹⁰⁰ The possibility of well-known Māori women fulfilling such a role as ambassadors for Māori appears not to have been publicly articulated in New Zealand, perhaps because any such statements might potentially have undermined the widely-held belief that New Zealand's race relations were harmonious.

At the same time, however, Māori women were sometimes represented as performing an ambassadorial role for all of New Zealand, both overseas in the case of Kingi and Te Kanawa and within New Zealand in the case of the Māori women who guided foreign and domestic tourists around the thermal areas. Te Kanawa was described in Auckland's *Metro* magazine in 1990 as 'our most prominent international ambassador'.¹⁰¹ Rangitīaria Denna, who was best known as Guide Rangi, was widely known and celebrated for her work as a guide, and guided a number of dignitaries and celebrities during her career. At her death, an editorial in the *New Zealand Herald* stated that she would be remembered, among other reasons, for having 'served New Zealand very well'.¹⁰² She was described in an editorial in the *Dominion* as 'an internationally renowned New Zealander'

97 A. Haebich, *Spinning the Dream: Assimilation in Australia 1950-1970* (North Fremantle: Fremantle, 2008), p. 353.

98 *Ibid.*, p. 355.

99 *Eve in Ebony*.

100 'Our Cover', *Dawn* 3, no. 10 (1954), contents page.

101 P. Shaw, 'Kiri: Another Opinion', *Metro*, no. 105 (1990), p. 150.

102 'Guide Rangi', *New Zealand Herald*, 15 August 1970, p. 8.

who had ‘personified this country more than anyone of the age’.¹⁰³ As a figure who could be perceived both as embodying Māori cultural heritage and as being integrated into Pākehā ways of life, Guide Rangi could be an ambassador for New Zealand to the rest of the world.

The appropriation of Māori women as ambassadors for the nation held echoes of the familiar appropriation of Indigenous images to symbolise the nation and to express its unique nature. Yet strong and successful women were not unaware of the potential for using their prominent position to promote their own message, and were sometimes able to undermine images of racial harmony and to reveal the struggles faced by Indigenous peoples. In a letter written to the readers of *Te Ao Hou* in 1962 around the time she gave her speech at the International Beauty Congress, Kingi wrote not about the harmonious nature of New Zealand’s race relations, but about the need for Māori to ensure their language and culture survived. She exhorted older people to help those who were younger to speak the Māori language, and younger people to seek an education as well as to keep the cultural arts alive.¹⁰⁴

Dennan clearly used her position as a guide to comment upon the situation of the Māori people after colonisation, as well as to argue for the retention of Māori culture and custom. Ngāhuia Te Awekōtuku argued that Māori women were used to promote tourism for more than a century, whether or not they were aware of it, and suggested that women such as Dennan had ‘dignified and also used the image’.¹⁰⁵ During her guiding career, Dennan ‘achieved wide recognition as a cultural ambassador’, as Cushla Parekowhai observed, communicating aspects of Māori life and custom to tourists as she guided them.¹⁰⁶ During a radio interview with her recorded in the 1950s, the interviewer observed that she had ‘long since been accepted by both our races as a spokesman for her own Maori people’ and that she knew ‘just how to interpret the way of the Maori to the Pakeha’.¹⁰⁷ In an autobiography she co-authored with Pākehā journalist Ross Annabell, Dennan recalled that she had realised when she began guiding that ‘most of the visitors were interested in Maoris as well as the geysers and the mud’ and that a guide ‘could well become an ambassador, serving by example to show visitors the true worth of our race’.¹⁰⁸ As she once stated, ‘I had one goal in life, to get the world to appreciate the name of a guide and a Maori.’¹⁰⁹ If she was sometimes appropriated as an ambassador for New Zealand to the rest of

103 ‘Death of Rangi’, *Dominion*, 15 August 1970, p. 12.

104 M. Kingi, ‘A Letter From Maureen’, *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, no. 40 (1962), p. 3.

105 Te Awekōtuku, p. 94.

106 Parekowhai, ‘Dennan, Rangitīria’.

107 S. Barnett and J. Sullivan, eds., *In Their Own Words: From the Sound Archives of Radio New Zealand* (Wellington: GP Books in association with Radio New Zealand Sound Archives, 1988), p. 28.

108 R. Dennan and R. Annabell, *Guide Rangi of Rotorua* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs, 1968), p. 74.

109 Barnett and Sullivan, eds., p. 27.

the world, Dennan also succeeded in subverting that appropriation, apparently considering that Māori were in need of an ambassador of their own. In this sense, Dennan and others like her were sometimes able to play a role analogous to that of the cultural mediator or interpreter, a role that scholars have suggested some Indigenous women played in frontier situations in the Americas.¹¹⁰

Changing Times in the Performing Arts

In the years following the late 1960s, Indigenous performers more frequently used their public roles to impart political messages, speaking out against discrimination, advocating change in the entertainment industries or promoting cultural revival. Using their fame in such a way became more possible in part because of wider social and political changes, such as the so-called Māori renaissance and the upsurge of protest activity by Māori or the growth in the Aboriginal rights movement, and in part because of changes in the entertainment industry itself. Film stars, for instance, gained greater independence from production companies in the last decades of the twentieth century and became more able to have a public voice apart from their film roles and establish a public persona. As well, different films began to be made, including by Indigenous directors and producers, and different television programmes to be screened, such as *Women of the Sun* in Australia, which told Indigenous stories. In Australia, Katelyn Barney noted some growth in the number of Indigenous women releasing recordings in the 1980s, and a ‘dramatic increase’ in this number in the 1990s.¹¹¹ Women such as Moana Maniapoto-Jackson in New Zealand and Justine Saunders in Australia were part of a new generation of artists, actors, musicians and singers from the 1970s who spoke out more vocally about the many injustices suffered by Māori and Aboriginal peoples. Depictions of women in the performing arts as exotic entertainers or exemplars of integration and harmonious race relations appeared in the media less often, and were sometimes replaced by portrayals as radicals or activists.

Moana Maniapoto-Jackson, a qualified lawyer who also worked in talkback radio and television, became known for her political views as well as her music, some of which was itself seen as political. Her commitment to utilising music to send ‘positive messages’ to Māori sometimes meant that she was ‘labelled as a radical’.¹¹² She was described by Rosa Shiels in the *Christchurch Press* in 1996 as ‘well known for her stance on social issues and her talking-head television

110 See for example: F. Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994); C. S. Kidwell, ‘Indian Women as Cultural Mediators’, *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 2 (1992), pp. 97-107.

111 Barney, p. 45.

112 W. Nissen, *Filling the Frame: Profiles of 18 New Zealand Women* (Auckland: Reed, 1992), p. 22.

appearances'.¹¹³ Another reporter, Michelle Cruickshank, commented in the *Sunday Star-Times* in 1998 that Maniapoto-Jackson 'is known as much for her mouth as her music' and 'uses every opportunity ... as a platform to promote her convictions'.¹¹⁴ Maniapoto-Jackson was once quoted commenting that 'it's amazing how people embroider things, misquote you and give you labels like "Maori rights singer"'.¹¹⁵ In Australia, Ruby Hunter sang of the struggles and survival of Aboriginal people, and of her own experiences as a member of the Stolen Generations. Justine Saunders was open about the struggles she faced as an Aboriginal woman in her acting career, and spoke out publicly about problems of discrimination in the industry. As she recalled, she had 'to fight the stereotype, the white interpretation of the Black story' that had seen her play characters who were 'raped and murdered', or 'the white man's fantasy' wearing 'a lap-lap' and having 'a bit of a love affair with the white man', which usually ended after her character died.¹¹⁶

As well, artists such as Maniapoto-Jackson and Maroochy Barambah promoted Indigenous music and language in their work. Barambah was described in 1995 as having become a 'torch-bearer for Aboriginal culture'. She organised a Barambah Beltout Festival in 1994, after a return to Cherbourg to speak to children about Aboriginal music led her to formulate an idea for 'an Aboriginal initiated multicultural festival'.¹¹⁷ Barambah was quoted in 1996 saying that 'I see myself as a pioneer of Indigenous music', something that had not been 'easy' given 'all the discrimination' in Australia.¹¹⁸ Similarly, Maniapoto-Jackson was sometimes quoted observing discrimination in the music industry, or commenting that it was difficult to advance Māori music. A particular problem she had faced was reportedly that songs with Māori language lyrics were more difficult to succeed with in a mainstream arena.¹¹⁹ Despite these difficulties however, the increasing numbers of Māori and Aboriginal women in the performing arts, and their increasing ability and willingness to speak on political matters, constitute a significant shift.

Rosie Kunoth-Monks, on the other hand, left the performing arts behind after the end of her role in *Jedda*. She entered a convent, and during those years learned more about the experiences of Aboriginal people.¹²⁰ Leaving the convent, she took a job as Aboriginal Liaison Officer in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs

113 R. Shiels, 'Sounds of the World', *Press*, 9 February 1996, p. 21.

114 M. Cruickshank, 'The Power of Language is Moana's Political Weapon of Choice', *Sunday Star-Times*, 15 February 1998, Revue section, p. 3.

115 Nissen, p. 22.

116 R. Sykes, *Murawina: Australian Women of High Achievement* (Sydney: Doubleday, 1993), p. 142.

117 C. Baker, 'Maroochy Barambah Belts it Out', *Artforce*, no. 89 (1995), pp. 6-7.

118 N. Wallace, 'A Voice from the Wilderness', *Courier-Mail*, 25 April 1996, 'What's On' liftout, p. 6.

119 Shiels, p. 21.

120 R. Kunoth-Monks, interview with R. Hughes, conducted 11 July 1995, transcript available from <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/kunothmonks/interview4.html>, tape 4.

in Melbourne. Her return in 1977 to Alice Springs to operate the Ayiparinya Aboriginal Hostel brought another awakening, as she saw great change since she had left, which she described as ‘cultural genocide’, wrought by alcohol, loss of culture and country, racism and bureaucratic problems in Aboriginal Affairs.¹²¹ She increasingly spoke out about the issues she observed. Kunoth-Monks became involved with the Country Liberal Party, and twice ran unsuccessfully for office in the Northern Territory seat of Macdonnell. Hindsight made her ‘glad’ later in life to have lost these elections, as she had ‘discovered ... that the policies of the party control you’.¹²²

Kunoth-Monks’ involvement with government continued in her time as Ministerial Officer to Paul Everingham, the first Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, until a plan to flood a sacred site made it impossible for her to continue. She held many positions relating to Aboriginal matters, including in the Aboriginal Development Commission, the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service and the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Royal Commission. Her return to the film industry came later in life and in a position of greater strength. She did not act again, taking instead a role behind the scenes, as a ‘co-ordinator’ for Aboriginal people involved in movies.¹²³ Later still, she returned with her family to her birthplace, Utopia Station, to live a traditional life, focusing on her responsibilities for preserving and passing down culture and land. Speaking on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation television programme *Message Stick* in later life, she noted that she was ‘not an actress’, and that her ‘purpose now is to retain our language and our land’ and to ‘hold onto our corroboree and our rituals’.¹²⁴ As she matured and increasingly spoke out about the problems she observed, representations of her began to shift, from depictions of a pretty, charming and shy young glamour girl to portrayals of a confident, outspoken or even formidable woman. In the *Bulletin* in 1990, for example, she was termed ‘an eloquent spokesperson for Aborigines’ who was ‘impossible to ignore’ when she had ‘a full head of steam’.¹²⁵ Yet she did not escape *Jedda*, as her starring role in the film was frequently referenced in the media to remind readers of her 1950s fame outside the Northern Territory.

Te Kanawa’s career has spanned these years of change, and her periodic returns to New Zealand for concerts or holidays have been to a changing society. Throughout her career Te Kanawa has acknowledged her Māori heritage, and has at times promoted Māori culture, language or music. In *Opera for Lovers*,

121 Chryssides, p. 196; R. Kunoth-Monks, interview with R. Hughes, conducted 11 July 1995, transcript available from <http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/kunothmonks/interview5.html>, tape 5.

122 Chryssides, pp. 196-197.

123 Ibid., pp. 175, 197-199.

124 R. Maza and R. Kunoth-Monks, ‘Rosalie’s Journey’, updated 29 April 2005, accessed 27 February 2008, available from <http://www.abc.net.au/message/tv/ms/s1307580.htm>.

125 ‘A Legend Laments’, *Bulletin*, 12 June 1990, p. 46.

a book she co-authored with Conrad Wilson in 1996, she commented that ‘although I was raised differently from other Maori kids – I was brought up white – I am Maori in every other sense’.¹²⁶ She produced a book of Māori stories in 1989, observing in the foreword that she had ‘had a very happy childhood surrounded by many Maori friends and relations’ and that the stories contained in the book were ‘my recollection of those tales that I remembered and loved best as a child’.¹²⁷ In 1999, she recorded an album of Māori songs, similarly stating in the album notes that the songs it included ‘were the background to my childhood in New Zealand’, and expressing her pleasure that she could ‘share these wonderful and unique sounds with people from around the world’.¹²⁸ In an article in the *New Zealand Herald* that year, she was quoted saying that the songs on the album were ‘ethnically correct’ and ‘as authentic as we can get’, whereas those she had recorded at the beginning of her career in the 1960s had been ‘more stylised’.¹²⁹ As well, Te Kanawa was more than once reported to have said that she hoped to be a role model for Māori. In 1987, she was quoted in the *New Zealand Listener* saying that ‘being Maori’ involved ‘being a reasonable role model’.¹³⁰

After leaving New Zealand in 1966, Te Kanawa lived overseas, returning to New Zealand only for short periods. For the major part of her international career, she was usually labelled in the media in terms of her New Zealand-ness, rather than her Māori-ness. After she travelled to London to study and work she began to be frequently described in the media as a ‘New Zealand soprano’ or ‘New Zealand singer’. Te Kanawa was sometimes quoted declaring that she represented New Zealand, rather than specifically representing Māori people. In 2004, she was quoted in the *Dominion Post* observing that New Zealanders who became famous were ‘spreading the good word about New Zealand and New Zealanders’ and ‘represent our country in the best and most positive way we can’.¹³¹ This statement echoes earlier depictions of famous Māori women as ambassadors for New Zealand as a whole on the international stage.

Te Kanawa remained largely apart from political issues during the majority of her career, focusing instead on her operatic work. In terms of ‘representation’ as advocacy, she might be said to have focused upon representing New Zealand, and upon representing classical music to an audience unfamiliar with it, rather than upon representing Māori or Māori concerns. Asked by a reporter for the *New Zealand Listener* in 1983 if her ‘international reputation’ meant that ‘she

126 K. Te Kanawa and C. Wilson, *Opera for Lovers* (Sydney: Hodder Headline, 1996), p. 250.

127 K. Te Kanawa, *Land of the Long White Cloud: Maori Myths, Tales and Legends* (London: Pavilion, 1989), pp. 7-8.

128 K. Te Kanawa, ‘Kiri: Maori Songs’ (Auckland and London: EMI Records, 1999).

129 D. Sampson, ‘Now is the Hour’, *New Zealand Herald*, 20-21 November 1999, p. D1.

130 P. Stirling, ‘The Diva Will Decide’, *New Zealand Listener*, 22 August 1987, p. 18.

131 R. McLean, ‘One Cool Dame’, *Dominion Post*, 11 December 2004, p. 4.

might have a bigger opportunity – to speak loudly on behalf of the Maori’s push for equality’, she was quoted responding that she had not felt ‘pressure of that sort’, that she was ‘brought up to be a singer and a small ambassadress for New Zealand’, and that she felt herself to be ‘a different sort of spearhead’.¹³² In a 1991 article in the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, she was quoted distancing herself from ‘activists’, explaining that ‘campaigning’ was ‘their mission in life’, and that her ‘mission is music’.¹³³ In relation to those who had tried to press her into acting as a spokesperson for Māori issues, she was quoted in 1993 as saying: ‘I tell them, if you want to advance my cause, then you will advance classical music’.¹³⁴

In recent years, Te Kanawa has occasionally commented on Indigenous issues. Her comments have not always been well received by Māori leaders in New Zealand, however. In 2000, she reportedly said that women should be able to speak on the marae ātea (the courtyard in front of the whareniui, or meeting house). The iwi (tribe) chairman of Ngāti Porou, Api Mahuika, was quoted in the *Dominion* stating that Te Kanawa ‘cannot dictate what rights should apply to women from other tribal areas’ and that she had ‘no right to speak for other iwi’ than her own. She should, he was quoted saying, return to New Zealand and learn about the situation before she spoke publicly on the matter.¹³⁵ The biggest controversy occurred in 2003, after she gave an interview to Melbourne’s *Herald Sun*. She was quoted saying that too many Māori lived on government benefits, did not work hard and had no pride. ‘I wish there were more Maori people with my sort of attitude’, she reportedly said, ‘but there are not’.¹³⁶ Several Māori leaders were reported to be ‘upset’, with many Māori Members of Parliament (MPs) reportedly seeing her views as lacking knowledge because she did not live in New Zealand, and as lacking understanding of Māori culture.¹³⁷ While several Māori MPs agreed that welfare dependency was a problem, such criticisms were particularly bitter coming from a fellow Māori, a woman who was extremely wealthy in contrast to the poverty and disadvantage that many Māori people faced, and someone who had lived much of her life overseas rather than in New Zealand working to improve the situation.¹³⁸ Te Kanawa’s position as a Māori performer has thus been in many ways different from that of other Māori people in the performing arts, both in the extent of her fame and in the lack of status she has had within Māoridom.

132 Reid, p. 14.

133 Lord, p. 14.

134 J. Moir, ‘Dame Kiri at the Crossroads’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 December 1993, p. 18.

135 J. Milne, ‘Kiri Backs Women on Maraes’, *Dominion*, 3 January 2000, p. 1.

136 R. Berry, ‘Lazy Maori Lack Pride, Says Kiri’, *Dominion Post*, 28 February 2003, p. A1.

137 ‘Dame Kiri Raised Leadership Issues for Maori, Minister Says’, New Zealand Press Association, 28 February 2003, accessed from Factiva, 29 July 2008.

138 See reported comments in: R. Berry, ‘Critics Hit Back at Dame Kiri Over Māori Work Ethic Claim’, *Press*, 1 March 2003, p. A3; R. Berry, ‘Kiri’s Concerns Valid, Says Peters’, *Dominion Post*, 1 March 2003, p. A3.

The Diva Effect

A much greater international celebrity than other women discussed in this chapter, and largely without leadership status within the Indigenous community, Te Kanawa was in many ways represented differently in the media as well. Portrayals of Te Kanawa were in some ways more like those of Sutherland, and of other international operatic sopranos, than they were like those of other Māori performers. Like Te Kanawa, Sutherland was sometimes depicted as an awe-inspiring diva with a lovely voice, although not generally as being physically beautiful as was Te Kanawa, and at the same time was often portrayed as a modest and friendly woman who retained the down-to-earth disposition often perceived as characteristic of both Australians and New Zealanders.¹³⁹ Moreover, available material about Te Kanawa's life and career displays the impact of a marketing machine much greater than that wielded by lesser celebrities. Journalists themselves sometimes commented on this marketing machine even as they perpetuated representations that drew on the accepted Te Kanawa legend or attempted to dismantle it. In 1994, one journalist observed in the *New Zealand Listener* that Te Kanawa's was a 'tenderly nurtured image' and argued that 'the Kiri we see [is] a confection created by more than 25 years of careful manipulation of performances, contacts and publicity'.¹⁴⁰ Magazine and newspaper features continually reported the same details of her career, narrated her life in similar ways and quoted her saying similar things in answer to the same questions. No other woman discussed in this book appears to have been the subject of marketing to the same extent.

Yet through the marketing it seems clear that Te Kanawa remained part of an earlier generation of Māori women who had become prominent in the performing arts. While a new generation of performers were increasingly vocal about discrimination in the entertainment industries, and in society more generally, depictions of Te Kanawa remained remarkably similar throughout her career. It was in the emergence of a new generation of more outspoken performers that Indigenous experiences of the performing arts in New Zealand and Australia converged most strongly. While New Zealand is backed by a longer and more numerous lineage of Māori success in the performing arts, parallels in the concerns of Indigenous performers from the 1970s, and in their ability to speak out, are evident across the Tasman.

139 For examples of these and similar depictions, see: 'Australia Awaits Joan Sutherland', *Woman's Day with Woman*, 15 January 1962, p. 8; A. Goddard, 'Opera Star Who is Still "Just Joan"', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1965, p. 13; M. Prerauer, 'La Stupenda is Back! And Despite All the Fame and Fortune, She is Still Our Joan at Heart', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 June 1974, p. 37; D. Riseborough, 'After 25 Years Still a Voice of Spun Gold', *Woman's Day*, 12 January 1976, p. 2; J. Yeomans, 'Our Modest La Stupenda', *Courier-Mail*, 29 June 1976, p. 5.

140 K. Stewart, 'Party on, Diva', *New Zealand Listener*, 2 April 1994, p. 44.

Conclusion

Te Kanawa emerged as a singer and celebrity within a long tradition of Māori musical success in New Zealand and internationally. Unlike figures such as Kunoth or Blair in Australia, there was no sense that her success was unique, surprising or a manifestation of a new phenomenon. Yet despite the different histories of Indigenous involvement in the performing arts in New Zealand and Australia, print media depictions of those Māori and Aboriginal women who did become famous in the performing arts evinced certain parallels. Whether it was as exotic beauties, as glamorous modern women or as models of successful assimilation, representations of these women did often echo each other. During the 1950s and 1960s in Australia, successful Aboriginal performers like Kunoth and Blair were often appropriated as public symbols of the success of the assimilation project. In New Zealand, performers such as Te Kanawa and Kingi were likewise depicted as embodying integration, although these depictions were not underlaid by a history of significant debate over whether or not Māori could be assimilated as were depictions of Aboriginal performers in Australia. Representations of both Māori and Aboriginal women often combined a fascination with exoticism with portrayal in the terms of modern and sophisticated (white) femininity. Māori women such as Kingi and Te Kanawa were sometimes imagined as representing New Zealand's harmonious race relations and successful policy of integration to the world, and to this extent were imagined as national representatives who could embody that nation to an overseas audience. Aboriginal women such as Kunoth had first to gain acceptance within Australia as having been assimilated into a homogenous, white Australian nation, a nation which by its very whiteness continued to exclude them. As a new generation of Indigenous performers emerged in both Australia and New Zealand in the 1970s and 1980s, and a new generation of activists became visible, New Zealand's comfortable image became increasingly tarnished. On both sides of the Tasman, the assimilationist dream began to appear lost.