**Babakiueria (**[**1986**](https://aso.gov.au/titles/year/1986/)**) https://aso.gov.au/titles/shorts/babakiueria/notes/**

**Synopsis:** This is a drama pretending to be an ethnographic documentary examining the customs of the white natives of ‘Babakiueria’, from the perspective of the country’s black colonisers.

Babakiueria is named as a result of first contact between the colonisers and the natives. Arriving at a barbecue area, the settlers ask the locals, ‘What’s this place called?’. Presenter Duranga Manika (Michelle Torres) looks back at this moment and at white people’s place in contemporary Babakiuerian society. She also spends time with a ‘typical’ white family.

**Curator’s notes by**[**Kate Matthews**](https://aso.gov.au/about/curators/#matthews-kate)**:** *Babakiueria* uses role reversal to satirise and critique Australia’s treatment of its Indigenous peoples. Aboriginal actors play the colonisers, while white actors play the indigenous Babakiuerians. The filmmakers have fun presenting Australian cultural stereotypes like the barbecue and football as strange ‘native customs’ seen through the eyes of an ethnographic observer, presenter Duranga Manika.

According to director [Don Featherstone](https://aso.gov.au/people/Don_Featherstone/), the question of how to portray both black colonisers and white colonised was the subject of a lot of discussion during development. Ultimately, rather than involving any profound representation of their respective cultures, the transposition is literally skin deep: black people colonising a land of white inhabitants.

The ruling Babakiuerians demonstrate a paternalistic, patronising attitude towards the 'natives’, even the well-meaning but comically condescending presenter Manika. In some cases, Indigenous cast members based their characters’ mannerisms on white Australian public figures – for instance, Featherstone says Bob Maza based his Minister for White Affairs on Queensland’s premier at the time, Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

At the heart of the story is a single white family, who are subject to attitudes, laws and social experiments drawn from the past 200 years of Australia’s history. These include being branded as lazy, having their daughter removed from them and then their home.

*Babakiueria* was made in 1986, two years before Australia marked its bicentenary of white settlement with extensive public celebrations. In reference to this, Babakiueria’s dominant culture prepare to celebrate their own anniversary of colonisation. Meanwhile Babakiueria’s central indigenous white family respond to their situation with helpless containment, seeming loath to reveal their true sentiments to the cameras. Other works exploring the bicentenary include the documentary [*One People Sing Freedom*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/one-people-sing-freedom/)(1988) and comedy series [*D-Generation – Series 1 Episode 1*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/tv/d-generation-series-1-ep-1/)(1985).

The relationship between subjects and camera is an important element. The mockumentary form allows *Babakiueria* to approach its serious themes with a light touch. The film has the appearance of a contemporary documentary but also recalls the tone of early ethnographic films, photography and written reports.

Featherstone’s experience as a documentary director is why producer Julian Pringle approached him for the job. Featherstone approaches the film as a documentary, using a tripod-mounted camera for interviews and hand-held cameras for more ‘unexpected’ moments. The film is largely shot on location. Notably, a scene at the Anzac Day march was filmed at the actual event.

Recent Australian mockumentaries include feature film [*Kenny*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/features/kenny/)(2006) and Chris Lilley’s TV series [*We Can Be Heroes: Finding the Australian of the Year*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/series/we-can-be-heroes/) (2005) and [*Summer Heights High*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/series/summer-heights-high/) (2007). [*Kath and Kim*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/series/kath-and-kim/) (2002–present), while not purely a mockumentary, also uses elements of the form to poke fun at Australian suburban life. Rob Reiner’s mockumentary *This is Spinal Tap* (1984, US) made international waves not long before *Babakiueria’s* release.

Screenwriter Geoffrey Atherden wrote the landmark sitcom [*Mother and Son*](https://aso.gov.au/titles/series/mother-and-son/) (1984–93) about a man’s relationship with his aging mother. It is interesting that one of the aspects of white culture that he singles out for comment is the abandonment of elderly people in homes.

*Babakiueria* was produced in-house for the ABC, as part of a series of stand-alone short dramas. As well as screening on ABCtelevision, it screened for many years in the Australian Museum. Internationally, it was awarded a 1987 United Nations Media Peace Award.