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"'When our people say *Where is your country*, they are asking something deeper. *Who is your family*?' De-Essentializing the White Australian Family in Tara June Winch's *The Yield* and Gail Jones's *Sorry*."

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1. Introduction

As Winch's quote in the title of this paper signifies, overall, families are regarded as places of belonging. In practice, however, the concept of 'family' reveals itself as a lot more complicated, constituting a highly contested area in both the private as well as the public space, and generally evoking strong emotional reactions. Accordingly, ideas about 'normal' and 'dysfunctional' families have been around for centuries, informed by the ideals perpetuated in mainstream discourses on family. Such family assessments were, and continue to be, based on White-European standards of 'doing' family, standards which are taken as the figurative yardstick against which all 'other' family constructions are measured and, consequently, commonly represented as 'less than' the White ideals. Hence, what essentially constitutes a 'good' family is influenced and directed by essentialist views on both family practices and social groups (Korbin 29).

In the case of Australia, essentialist ideas about 'race', nationality and family have always been tightly intertwined. This is particularly evident in the way in which Indigenous Australian families – as one of the marginalized groups within Australia – continue to be represented and evaluated as inherently 'dysfunctional' within mainstream discourse. Concurringly, discussions on the significantly high number of Indigenous Australian children separated from their biological parents tend to omit the sociohistorical background and institutionalized discrimination at the basis of these separations. Adopting a Eurocentric deficit perspective (Korbin 29), the perceived problems of Indigenous Australian families, thus, remain decontextualized within mainstream discourse and are portrayed as stemming from the 'nature' of the families themselves.

In my thesis, I aim to investigate how the novels *Sorry* by Gail Jones and *The Yield* by Tara June Winch explore the interrelation of family assessment and essentialist convictions in Australia. Both novels are centered on female protagonists who are neglected by their biological

parents and find themselves implicated in alternative family constructions which compensate for their neglectful upbringing. With *Sorry* being set in the 1940s and *The Yield* comprising three narrative voices set between 1915 and the present, both novels address Australia's past – and, in the case of *The Yield*, current – discrimination and exploitation of Indigenous Australians. What sets the texts apart are the protagonists' ethnicities: *Sorry*'s Perdita is the child of White British parents, while *The Yield*'s August is part of an Aboriginal Australian family. It is this distinction which proves the two texts relevant for my research focus, as I expect them to evidence the difference in how Indigenous Australian and White Australian families are assessed within mainstream discourse.

Past literary analyses of Jones's *Sorry* – first published in 2007, i.e. one year before Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's official apology to the members of the Stolen Generations – have predominantly focused on the way in which the author implicitly addresses the need for a national reckoning with Australia's past (see e.g. Herrero, Zavaglia). Regarding *The Yield*, at this point, there are few research articles concerned with the book, likely owed to the recency of its publication. Those that have engaged with the text have focused on the transnationality inherent in Winch's writing (see e.g. Sharrad) and her portrayal of Indigenous Australian land ownership (see e.g. Heinz). My research aim of investigating essentialist beliefs behind the assessment of past and present Indigenous Australian and White Australian families has, thus, not been investigated in connection with either *Sorry* or *The Yield*.

In my analysis, I will draw on the interdisciplinary concept of essentialism and apply it within a close reading of the primary literature. With the overarching aim of investigating the essentialist beliefs on family, Whiteness and Indigeneity which the discursive assessment of families is based on, a number of sub questions arise. Within my thesis, I seek to analyze how the authors frame both the neglect of their respective protagonists and the care they experience via their alternative families. Moreover, by focusing on the intergenerational trauma of

Indigenous Australian families following the Stolen Generations, I aim to demonstrate the connection between Australia's sociohistorical background and the familial circumstances of First Nations people as shown within Jones's and Winch's texts. My research hypothesis reads as follows: I claim that the neglect the two protagonists experience by the hands of their biological parents can be said to mirror and, in the case of *The Yield*, be informed by, the past and present neglect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the 'motherland' Australia. Moreover, I argue that this literal and metaphorical neglect is based on discursively perpetuated essentialist ideas about 'race' and family.

In order to cover the scope of my research aim, this thesis is divided into six chapters. Following a discussion of the terminology used within the paper in chapter 1, the ensuing two chapters are centered on the theoretical concepts and theories which will inform my subsequent analysis of *Sorry* and *The Yield*. Firstly, I will provide an overview of the concept of essentialism which I will focus on psychological and 'racial' or cultural essentialism and the concept's reliance on the formation of in- and out-groups. In this first theory chapter, I will illustrate how essentialist notions further the naturalization of constructed concepts such as social groups or nationality as well as discuss the ideological implications of said naturalization. After these insights into the interrelation between essentialism and 'race', I will examine the sociohistorical background of White Australia's relationship with the Indigenous Australian population, a relationship which – as I will illustrate – is also crucially influenced by essentialist convictions. Secondly, the concept of family will be considered: here, I will discuss the continuous supremacy of the Anglo-White family ideal and the resulting pathologization of 'other' family constructions. Subsequently, my close reading of the primary literature begins with the exploration of the description of both the biological and the alternative families of Jones's and Winch's protagonist. In particular, I will closely consider how the authors frame instances of parental neglect as well as the compensation of said neglect via alternative families

and how these familial constructions deviate from the essentialist family ideal. In the second and final analysis chapter, the impact of national neglect in the form of the Stolen Generations on the following generations of Indigenous Australian families will be investigated. In so doing, I will illustrate how the essentialist beliefs about 'race' at the basis of this governmental intervention have been continuously circulated within mainstream discourse, resulting in their ongoing effect on First Nations families.

2. Notes on Terminology

2.1 Indigeneity and Whiteness

Due to the complicated etymological history of terms surrounding Indigeneity and Whiteness, it appears crucial to establish the terminology I will employ within the paper at hand.

Firstly, based on considerations about what is perceived as 'different' in our Western-centric world, all terminologies regarding 'race' will be capitalized. It is apparent that, while racial identifiers such as 'Indigenous Australians' or 'Black Americans' are capitalized due to being perceived as 'other', being 'White' is usually not equated with racialization. Regarding the North American context, Painter states that "in terms of racial identity, white Americans have had the choice of being something vague, something unraced and separate from race". As a reaction to this disparity, which, I would argue, concerns all Western-centered nations, I will capitalize all racial descriptors, thereby also adhering to the recent recommendation by the APA (2019). Similarly, the meaning behind my use of the term 'White Australians' needs further clarification. Within this paper, I do not use the term 'White' to refer to a so-called 'race'; instead, I apply it to Australian citizens who are not of Indigenous Australian descent and, importantly, who can be said to attain to the ideal of White mainstream Australia.

Moreover, when referring to the two social groups addressed within the thesis, I will refrain from using the dichotomy 'White' and 'non-White', as "'Non-White' implies a standard

of comparison and is imprecise" (APA). In comparing White Australians and Indigenous Peoples, one runs the risk of implying that the latter social group is not part of the general Australian population, which is why the use of a direct dichotomy such as 'Australian – Indigenous' would also be inappropriate (Centre for Aboriginal Health 4). Thus, rather than presenting Whiteness as the norm and non-Whiteness as something 'other' or using exclusionary terminology, I strive to evade this terminological hierarchy by employing non-dichotomous terms, namely 'White Australians' and 'Indigenous Australians', with the latter being used in different variations discussed below. Hence, in my attempt to properly address the social groups this paper is concerned with, I draw on terms that denote ethnic (see 2.2 for my comments on 'ethnicity) and cultural heritage, rather than 'race'.

Having considered the terms available to refer to people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, I have decided to employ the terms 'Aboriginal Australians', 'Indigenous Australians', and 'First Nations People(s)', as they are the terms predominantly recommended within the literature (see e.g. Common Ground Team, *First Nations;* Centre for Aboriginal Health).[1] In addition to deciding on the general terminology, a paramount aspect I want to acknowledge is the diversity of Indigenous Peoples. Despite the scrutiny surrounding the terminological choices addressed above, the terms appear to portray Indigenous Australians as constituting a homogeneous mass; I find it important to note that I acknowledge the multitude of distinct Indigenous Australian nations, their specific cultures and their languages. For this reason, if the authors of the primary texts informs the readers about the specific Indigenous Australian groups featured in *Sorry* and *The Yield*, I will refer to them by name.

[1] I will not employ the term 'Torres Strait Islander Peoples', as my analysis is predominantly concerned with Aboriginal Australians and at no point exclusively refers to the former group.

2.2 ‘Race’ and Ethnicity

Due to the fact that the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ both feature heavily in the theoretical literature discussed in my theory chapters, it appears crucial to comment on how I intend to use them. The two terms are commonly applied in ambiguous ways because “they refer to socially constructed concepts” (Spencer 41) and are, therefore, subject to constant change over time. In the following, I will briefly outline what ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ refer to and for which specific purpose I will use each term.

The use of the term ‘race’ is often associated with the concept’s “dubious scientific meaning” (Popeau 167), emphasizing the need for a precise definition.[2] The central assumption behind ‘racist’ thinking, namely that “Humans are […] discriminable into discrete, self-evident biological kinds” (Hirschfeld 3), has long been discredited by scholars such as Livingstone and, more recently, Marks. These scholars argue that distinct genetically based categories[3] such as ‘races’ cannot exist, as they are incongruent with what is known about human evolution (Livingstone 279; Marks 124). While laymen tend to think of ‘race’ as referring to a concept with a fixed meaning, in reality, its meaning is “socially constructed” (Spencer 41). To be more specific, Popeau defines ‘race’ as “a crude attempt at a biological explanation of human difference” (177), emphasizing that ‘racist’ thinking operates on the belief in a presumed biological ‘essence’ forming the basis of human categorization. My application of the category ‘race’ is informed by the contention that it is a socially constructed concept that has been – and continues to be – used as a basis for radical beliefs about humankind. I will, therefore, employ the term ‘race’ only when I am concerned with deconstructing those processes of naturalization and assumed biological categorization that the category ‘race’ is grounded in.

[2] It is due to this dubious nature of the category ‘race’ that I will use the term in single quotes only.
[3] While I am aware of the social constructionist nature of thinking in terms of categories (see e.g. Mallon), my paper is nonetheless focused on the act of categorization, as the concept of essentialism constitutes an ideologically charged way of categorizing both inanimate objects and people.

In comparison to ‘race’, I consider the term ‘ethnicity’ to be less conspicuous, as it is not based on assumed biological facts. Instead, ethnicity is grounded in a belief in different cultures and “associated with cultural unity, a cohesive *Weltanschauung* which seeks to define itself in relation to other value systems proclaimed by different groups” (Popeau 166) and “speaks of the social differences between groups” (Popeau 177). Within this thesis, I will employ the term ‘ethnicity’ to refer to groupings which are connected to specific cultural and social practices.

3. De-Naturalizing Notions of Essentialism

As the main research aim of this paper lies in de-essentializing and de-naturalizing notions of ‘normal’ family structures in Australia, it appears crucial to firstly define what the concept of ‘essentialism’ entails and what makes this concept relevant for my research focus. In this chapter, I will provide an overview of essentialism, its underlying strategies, and the ways in which it can be said to further specific ideological objectives.

In its broadest terms, essentialism refers to “views about belonging” (Barker 270). More specifically, it is concerned with seemingly ‘essential’ properties a being or an object possesses which are believed to determine its belonging to a certain group or category. These so-called ‘essences’, which essentialist thinking revolves around, are believed to be “unchangeable and eternal”; following Plato’s contemplations, “They represent a deeper and unchangeable level of reality than our everyday perception of the world’s changing and ephemeral objects” (Wagner et al. 364). ‘Essences’ are, thus, viewed as natural and universal, or in other words, as something outside of human influence. To provide an example of essentialist categorization, trees are believed to hold certain characteristics presumed to be ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ that make up the category’s ‘essence’ and that, therefore, render the category ‘tree’ a “natural kind” (Hanson-Easey et al. 364). The perceived ‘essence’ of an object or a being can consequently

be regarded as the deciding factor on whether an item[4] or individual has the ability to belong to a certain group or category or whether it does not.

Given the aforementioned characteristics of essentialist thinking, it appears obvious that the belief in a beings' 'essence' can constitute a tool with which to categorize the world. As Hanson-Easey et al. put it, "[E]ssentialism is most usefully characterised as a sense-making resource, allowing the world and its social structures to be cognized, ordered and, thus, oriented to, engendering a guide for social practice" (365). Consequently, essentialist thinking sorts the world into the in-group – individuals sharing what is perceived as a natural 'essence' – and the out-group – individuals who are believed to have a different 'essence' than one's own group. This line of thinking operates on the fact that both groups are "perceived as well-defined entities with a nature of their own" (Wagner et al. 363), making them appear mutually exclusive.

Now, having offered an overview of the processes of essentialist group formation, it is crucial to take into account the constructedness of 'essences' themselves: while laymen may believe otherwise, supposedly 'natural essences' are actually "socially constructed rather than natural" (Barker 273).[5] This definition refutes the aforementioned considerations associated with Plato**,** instead emphasizing the distinct human influence on the construction of so-called 'natural essences'. Hence, what is often considered as a certain social group's 'natural' character is actually based on human bias, or on what Yzerbyt et al. refer to as the "overattribution bias" (*Group Entitativity*). Following this bias, social groups are oftentimes perceived as entities with regards to their members (see 3.1.), a perception that leads to attributing the same characteristics viewed as being constitutive for the specific group to all of its members. Ultimately, this bias results in the formation of stereotypes: "As such, social attribution, that is, the process of explaining other people's behavior in terms of their shared

[4] Due to the fact this paper is concerned with the application of essentialist theories with regards to social categories, the subsequent discussion will exclusively be concerned with people, rather than objects.
[5] Because of this constructedness, I will exclusively use the terms 'essence' and 'nature' in single quotation marks.

group characteristics, may well be the process by which a group acquires a specific 'essence', thereby playing a crucial role in the emergence of stereotypic beliefs" (Yzerbyt et al., *Group Entitativity*). Once more, this quote emphasizes the constructedness of the supposed 'nature' of a group's members, and its character as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. What is more, in certain circumstances – which I will explore in chapter 3.2 – such essentialisms can be used to justify the discrimination of specific groups (Holtz & Wagner 413).

At this point it appears crucial to add that being engaged in essentialist thinking does not automatically equal being prejudiced (Barker 275). In other words, merely holding an essentialist belief of what a 'gay woman' is to be, for example, cannot be equated with having prejudices against this specific social group. Rather than that, the readiness to think of social groupings in terms of a shared 'essence' is widely believed to constitute an automatic human process assumed to originate in early childhood (Barker 274). Research suggests that the motivation behind this process is, again, "to perceive and organise the world in unambiguous ways" (Hanson-Easey et al. 364).

On the basis of this overview, the chapter at hand is divided into four subsections: I begin by examining the two types of essentialist theory I identify as the most relevant for my literary analysis, namely psychological and 'racial' or cultural essentialism. Both types illustrate how essentialism is contingent on forming so-called 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' with differing social standing. Subsequently, I will explore how essentialist convictions have helped to naturalize the concept of 'nationhood', a process that is amplified by the strategy of likening the nation-state to a family. In the final subchapter, I will show how the discursive representation of Australia as a 'family' was seen to justify the century-long mistreatment of the Indigenous population. In so doing, I will investigate how the theory of essentialism can be said to tie in with the concepts of nationality, Whiteness and Indigeneity in Australia, or in other words, how these three concepts are essentialized and ideologically charged.

3.1 Psychological Essentialism

As previously stated, essentialist thinking conventionally results in the formation of in-groups and out-groups. Within the area of psychological essentialism, this process of group formation plays an especially important role. Overall, psychological essentialism – a term coined by Medin and Ortony in 1989 – is concerned with the human tendency to 'naturalize' social categories by assigning them specific 'essences' (Hanson-Easey et al. 363, 373). Through these supposed 'essences', the social categories in question are regarded as if they were "natural kinds" (Hanson-Easey et al. 364), i.e. they are endowed with a "pseudo-biological" (Hanson-Easey et al. 363) character. Despite the inability to clearly define these perceived 'essences' which form the basis for the naturalization of social categories there is a common tendency to believe in their existence and, correspondingly, to assume that a certain 'essence' is shared among all members of a social category. The consequences of presenting a social category as a 'natural kind' include "a tendency to infer deep essential qualities on the basis of surface appearance, a tendency to treat even independent categories as if they were mutually exclusive, and a tendency to imbue even arbitrary categorizations with deep meaning" (Rothbart & Taylor 12), implications I will explore in the following.

In general terms, psychological essentialism consists of two main components, namely "entitativity" and "inalterability" (Hanson-Easey et al. 363). As a rule, the more a social category is associated with 'entitativity' and 'inalterability', the more natural it appears. Firstly, concerning the notion of entitativity, social categories are particularly prone to being considered 'natural kinds' when they are perceived as an entity consisting of a homogenous mass of category members. As a result, such categories are believed to hold considerable "[i]nductive potential", meaning that with regard to its members, "category membership is assumed to predict diverse and important knowledge of the person's other attributes, it is central in character" (Rothbart & Taylor 20). In other words, based on a social category's assumed

'essential' character, this inductive potential is expected to yield insights into the behavior of all group members, as the group's 'essence' "is supposed to cause its exemplar's surface characteristics" (Wagner et al. 367). This line of thinking not only applies to one's own social category – the in-group – but also to other social categories which are thereby perceived as well-defined out-groups.

The second dimension, inalterability, refers to the way in which "an individual or group can acquire or shed a category label" (Rothbart & Taylor 20). Consequently, social categories which are thought to be natural kinds are considered to possess a very clearly defined character as well as distinct boundaries (Wagner et al. 367). This results in an 'all or nothing' mentality which does not allow for social categories or their members to change, instead manifesting them as fixed entities. Providing an example, Rothbart and Taylor name "gender and race" (20) as two such social categories which are treated as if they were unalterable and clearly defined.

Now that I defined both entitativity and inalterability, I want to discuss their limitations and shortcomings to highlight how these two factors further the essentialization of social categories. Starting with the notion of entitativity, it completely disregards the aspects of temporal and cultural context: while "natural kinds have rich inductive potential because they reflect deep underlying regularities in nature that are stable over time", the inductive potential of social categories "reflects social values and beliefs and is variable across cultures and over time" (Rothbart & Taylor 22). Due to the fact that social categories are subject to constant change over time and cultures, equating social categories with natural kinds clearly misrepresent the former. Exemplifying this point of critique, Rothbart and Taylor refer to political or religious conflicts in places such as Northern Ireland (22). The researchers state how a belief in entitativity presents the causes at the root of said conflicts, i.e. the nations' 'essences' as "*inherently* conflict-inducing" (Rothbart & Taylor 22), thus ignoring the context in which the conflicts appear. In sum, the belief in entitativity fails to take the temporal and cultural

context of social phenomena and categories into account. In so doing, the latter are naturalized, while, in reality, they are dependent on said contextual factors.

Regarding the notion of inalterability, the conviction that the meaning behind social categories cannot change is easily refuted. While natural kinds cannot alter their membership to a certain category, social categories do not follow these same rules. Rather than that, they exhibit a higher level of flexibility, meaning that an individual can belong to more than one social category at the same time (Rothbart & Taylor 24). Moreover, what is associated with a social category – e.g. its social prestige – is actually not inalterable or fixed either. Following Rothbart and Taylor's (24) argumentation, scrutinizing how associations with the social category 'Jews' have transformed over the past decades proves this point well. While adhering to the Jewish faith used to be regarded as the decisive characteristic qualifying someone as a category member, belonging to the category 'Jew' was later perceived as tied to biological factors, culminating in an 'essence' of Jewishness.

To sum up, social categories are likely to be regarded as natural kinds if they appear high in both inductive potential – providing thorough information about their members – and in inalterability – having a distinct meaning with fixed boundaries – due to their assumed 'essence'. Notably, how social categories are estimated when it comes to these two aspects as well as to the societal value ascribed to these categories hinges on time and the specific culture in which they are evaluated (Rothbart & Taylor 25). The de-essentialization of social categories' inalterability and entitativity highlights the fact that, in actuality, social categories and their inductive potential are subject to change over time and cultures.

As briefly mentioned above, a social category's 'essence' is tightly connected to the evaluation of the category's prestige, a connection I will explore in the following. To reiterate, the practice of group formation in essentialist terms relies on embracing and establishing 'essences' as something that is not only natural but also unalterable, as an "[e]ssence cannot be

acquired or dispensed with because it is perceived as discrete and exclusive" (Holtz & Wagner 413). That being said, the desirability of such an 'exclusive essence' varies considerably, depending on the societal status ascribed to the particular social group. In the case of dominant groups, their 'essence' is represented as the ideal that can only be attained by a chosen few. The existence of these groups is, therefore, characterized by their markedly positive, desirable 'essences'. Contrastingly, the naturalization of marginalized groups is based on less desirable, if not disagreeable, 'essences'. Notably, the undesirability of these 'essences' only becomes apparent when they are compared to the ideal 'essences' of the dominant groups. Ascribing marginalized groups 'essences' that are less preferable can then be used to justify their ongoing marginalization and discrimination (Wagner et al. 369). Chapter 3.2 will yield more in-depth insights into these matters of group formation and the dynamics between groups, connecting them to the essentialization of cultural and 'racial' categories. These issues will feature as crucial points of analysis regarding the essentialization of social groups in Australia.

3.2 'Racial' or Cultural Essentialism

According to Allport, "in strict logic, an in-group always implies the existence of some corresponding out-group" (41). Applying Allport's theory to modern Western societies, the membership in the in-group or dominant group of a country is usually only accessible to the White mainstream, while the out-group or marginalized group consists of every group deviating from this supposed White ideal. I will begin this subchapter by exploring 'racial' essentialism and will then move on to illustrate how cultural essentialism has come to replace it despite both having the same meaning.

In general terms, 'racial' essentialism refers to the "contention that different racial groups possess different traits and characteristics" (Byrd & Hughey 9). Relating this back to essentialist group formation as discussed in chapter 3.1, this form of essentialism is, again, grounded in the belief that a social group possesses a certain 'essence'. More precisely, 'racial'

essentialism identifies group members based on 'race' and presupposes a 'racial essence' that is shared amongst all members of the group. Said 'essence' is then expected to yield telling insights into the behavior and values of all members of a 'racial' group. The social category 'race' is, therefore, regarded as the signifier of delimitation from other groups – meaning from other 'races' – as well as of sameness among the members of one presumed 'racial' group. Additionally, if a presumed 'racial' category is associated with specific physical traits, the belief in the category's existence as a natural kind becomes even stronger, since "category differences correlated with physical appearance" (Rothbart & Taylor 26) have an especially strong impact on the evaluation of a group's inalterability and entitativity (cf. chapter 3.1).

Correspondingly, both a particular appearance as well as a certain 'racial' affiliation are widely believed to be based on genetic properties. Due to the fact that "a social category that is described to have a genetic basis for its membership is treated as if it were a natural kind with an unchangeable essence" (Wagner et al. 368), 'race' constitutes an especially distinct marker when it comes to social categories. With regards to my discussion of normative and alternative family ties in chapter 4, I want to briefly comment on the fact that the issue of family constitutes another area that biologic or genetic essentialism pertains to. Referencing Zehelein (*Family Trees*), and Nordqvist and Smart, Zehelein states that "there remains an ineradicable perception of the significance of genetic inheritance […] for who we are, where we belong, and where we come from" (Zehelein, *Introduction* 15). Thus, a familial relation appears similar to an affiliation to a 'racial' group in that it is likewise believed to be high in inductive potential.

Explaining group differences in terms of biology is, however, not the only basis for 'racial' essentialism, as the second most common strategy of group formation in 'racial' essentialism follows the cultural approach (Morning 231). Referring back to the previously discussed concept of entitativity, while the biological approach sees genetic factors as predetermining a racial group's collective behavior, the cultural approach consists of inferring

information about a group's behavior from its cultural patterns (Grillo 165). While these two approaches exist side by side, the cultural approach to 'racial' essentialism is generally regarded as less controversial than its biological counterpart. Rather than being grounded in long-refuted claims of heredity, the cultural approach follows a seemingly 'non-normative' line of argumentation, claiming to be based on 'objective' observations of the supposed distinct and clear differences between cultures (Yalcinkaya et al.). In the current mainstream understanding, biological and cultural approaches are mostly blended together, with 'race' and culture commonly being used synonymously. Correspondingly, perceived members of one 'racial' group are not only believed to share a set of behaviors, but also to have one set of cultural values and customs all members adhere to (Morning 231). Using Morning's words, 'race' is generally thought of in "'culturalist' terms", meaning that it is equated "with the ancestry-based cultural communities that sociologists call ethnic groups" (8). This results in the fact that, although employing the term 'culture' instead of 'race' in order to define a social group's 'essence' may appear more ethically sound, they both refer to a very similar, if not to the same, concept. What is more, they also have the same effect: by applying either 'race' or 'culture' to explain the existing "social differentiation and inequality" in a society, "the underlying structural contradictions and hierarchies" (Gullestad in Eide, *Hand in Glove* 69) are obscured and, as a result, the socioeconomic differences within a given society are naturalized. Nevertheless, contemporary 'racial' discourse is oriented towards the seemingly innocuous approach of culturally based 'racial' essentialism, as it "is considered far more ideologically and rhetorically flexible than crude biological [essentialism]" (Hanson-Easey et al. 372). Regarding my research focus, I want to point out that this concept of culturally grounded 'racial' essentialism is apparent in the Australian sociocultural discourse, as elucidated by Hanson-Easey et al. The researchers describe Australia's socioeconomic discourse as a "covert ontological reasoning about cultural distinctiveness and incompatibility" and claim these reasonings to be "regularly

marshalled to justify segregation […] or illiberal policy interventions, while simultaneously mitigating against accusations of racism" (Hanson-Easey et al. 372). I will investigate Hanson-Easey et al.'s claims more thoroughly in the next chapter, where they will be connected to the relationship between ideology and ('racial') essentialism.

As I briefly commented on in the beginning of this subchapter, 'racial' or cultural essentialism propagates the notion that the 'racial' or cultural 'essences' of a group direct all group members' behavior, a belief which is clearly connected to Yzerbyt et al.'s "overattribution bias" (*Group Entitativity*). According to this concept, the individual behaviors of people considered to be members of the same social group are thought to be interrelated: "Specifically, when members of a group take a particular line of action and that group is perceived to be a coherent social entity, perceivers may well underestimate the causal role of the environment and credit instead some underlying disposition of the group members" (Yzerbyt et al., *Group Entitativity*). This means that the social, cultural, historical, or even personal context of a person's behavior is disregarded if said individual is considered as part of a certain group. In that case, the behavior is instead attributed to the group's supposed inherent 'essence'. Adding to that, Tawa defines the act of inferring behavioral patterns from someone's 'racial' affiliation – which he refers to as "behavioral essentialism" – as the "underlying assumption that races are real entities that possess behavioral attributes and minimal appreciation of variability […] within the racial group" (150). Thus, this definition not only points to the presupposition of a ('racial') group's high inductive potential, but it also alludes to the group's apparent homogeneity. Adding to this, Yzerbyt et al. describe these implications as follows:

> When a group is perceived as being an entity rather than a loosely knit set of people, its members are expected to behave in a more consistent manner, they are thought to be more similar to one another, they are categorized in a more undifferentiated way at the group level, and the discrepant members are assimilated to rather than contrasted from the prototype of the group. (*Group Entitativity*)

Here, the second part of Yzerbyt et al.'s explications appear particularly noteworthy as it makes mention of a so-called group 'prototype' that is based on the group's assumed 'essence' (*Group Entitativity*). Correspondingly, group members' behaviors are constantly evaluated in connection to said prototype in order to make sense of any deviating behavioral patterns. Rather than allowing such deviations to alter what is presumed about a group's 'essence', such "contrary evidence […] is perfunctorily acknowledged but excluded" (Allport 23). In so doing, possible irregularities are downplayed, and the image of the group members' homogeneity is maintained. Once again, this demonstrates the inescapable nature of group affiliations, which – as I discussed in detail – is especially apparent with regards to groups based on assumed 'racial' or cultural factors.[6]

3.3 Essentialism and Ideology

I already discussed the close relationship between essentialism and ideology in preceding chapters of this paper. On the basis of these considerations, I will now investigate how essentialism and ideology are jointly used within national discourse to realize certain sociopolitical objectives. Firstly, I will show how the discursively perpetuated synergy of essentialism and ideology helps to maintain a society's status quo, thereby naturalizing the marginalization of out-groups. Secondly, investigating 'strategic essentialism' I will highlight the ways in which essentialist images can be appropriated by marginalized groups to advocate for their rights.

As a preface, I want to comment on Foucault's conceptualization of 'power' which the discussion of ideology and discourse within this paper is based on. Foucault recognizes the omnipresence of power and its inseparable ties to our conceptualizations of ourselves and of

[6] This 'inescapability' is best conveyed through a more ideologically charged terminological alternative to 'essence', namely the term 'nature'. Its application emphasizes the aspect of inalterability and particularly the assumed inherence of a homogenized group's behavioral patterns (Yzerbyt et al., *Interplay* 144). Because of this, From this point on, I will employ the term 'nature' rather than 'essence' whenever a social group's assumed inherent behavior is discussed.

the world around us (Stone 246). In his view, power is not "imposed from 'above' a system or socius" (Nealon 24); instead, power is present in all aspects of social life and circulates within discourses. Hence, it is within discourse that "language and representation produce meaning" (Hall 6) and establish what is perceived as 'normal' or 'true'. Based on this, my following exploration of the impact of essentialist convictions is aimed at exploring how the power of said beliefs is perpetuated within discourses rather than claiming that essentialisms are created and used by individual actors.

3.3.1 Essentialism in Ideological Discourse

According to Siebers's analysis of the connection between essentialist thinking and societal issues, essentialism constitutes a 'lazy' way of approaching certain concepts because it avoids "to analyse and understand a problem" (382) by means of oversimplification. While I generally agree with this verdict, in my opinion, it puts too much emphasis on the purely cognitive aspect of essentialist practice, thereby overlooking the ways in which essentialism can actually be discursively performed. This sentiment is also expressed by Verkuyten who emphasizes the "discursive action" (372) inherent in essentialist practices. As such, essentializations can be regarded as "social acts performed in discourse", rather than exclusively being defined in terms of "something people perceive and think" (Verkuyten 372). Following this line of argumentation, essentialism goes further than 'merely' constituting a means of (social) categorization and can "perform a variety of social functions with different ideological consequences" (Verkuyten 372). Similarly, Kadianaki and Andreouli claim that essentialism constitutes a "representational process" (836), meaning that the discursive representation of a given social group has considerable ideological implications. Essentialism is, thus, "conceptualize[d] […] as an ideological device, a representational tool, the study of which offers a socio-politically embedded understanding of knowledge construction" (Kadianaki & Andreouli 837). By making note of the fact that essentialism is involved in "knowledge

construction" (Kadianaki & Andreouli 837), once more this definition explicitly draws attention to the crucial role discourse plays in perpetuating essentialist convictions. To be more precise, by including such essentialist representations in discourse, said representations are attributed with a sense of truthfulness, as discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, comprises exactly this act of "knowledge-making" (Keller 73) the researchers refer to. It can be argued that certain social groups and their supposed 'essences' are then discursively represented "according to the political interests" (Kadianaki & Andreouli 846) of those who wish to uphold the status quo, i.e. the dominant group in a given society (Hanson-Easey et al. 365; Yzerbyt et al., *Stereotypes*, 49). To be more precise, this objective of maintaining the status quo is realized through discourse: drawing on essentialist convictions about out-groups, supposed information about and, more importantly, 'explanations' for their behavior is perpetuated (Hanson-Easey et al. 365). By way of this practice, prejudices held against an out-group are thought to be justified (Allport 85) and the social positioning of the groups in question is rationalized, as "any treatment of its [the out-group's] members […] justified on the basis of their underlying essence is legitimized as natural" (Wagner et al. 367).

In addition to unveiling how essentialist ideas are discursively perpetuated to preserve existing social hierarchies, these explanations also highlight the fact that, within mainstream discourse, a marginalized group is almost exclusively characterized by the dominant social group.[7] As I previously noted, this is especially true for those social groups whose members are thought to share a presumed 'racial' or cultural 'essence'. Within mainstream discourse, these groups are constantly reduced to a specific 'nature' they are thought to possess. Discourse that perpetuates such essentialized representations of marginalized groups also works to dehumanize the group members and denies them their own agency, as "[p]rojecting essence is a sure way to deprive a member of a naturalized out-group of the ability to adapt, to change,

[7] The concept of 'strategic essentialism' poses an exception to this claim and will be described at a later point of this subchapter.

and to dominate his or her fate" (Holtz & Wagner 412). Besides alluding to the aspect of inalterability I discussed previously, this quote clearly illustrates the rigid corset non-dominant groups are confined in: the discursive overreliance on a group's supposed 'nature' denies its members the ability to alter this representation of themselves. As I demonstrated in chapter 3.2, this is due to the fact that any deviations from the group's supposed 'nature' are immediately reframed so as to assimilate them into the existing discourse. Thus, discursive group representations based on essentialist beliefs make it impossible for the out-group members to define themselves, as their actions are automatically assimilated into the naturalized group image perpetuated by mainstream discourse.

This mainstream representation of out-groups of a given society often has considerable effects on the level of inclusion of marginalized groups in the sociopolitical space, an issue which is also emphasized by Kadianaki and Andreouli. According to the researchers, essentialist discourse has a considerable impact on certain social groups' abilities to participate in what they refer to as "the social arena" (Kadianaki & Andreouli 846). To provide an example, in their analysis of Australian discourse about Sudanese refugees, Augoustinos et al. discovered a multitude of instances in which Australian politicians evoked essentialist beliefs in order to justify the discriminatory treatment said Sudanese received (332). It was found that the rationalization of said treatment was achieved by discursively naturalizing Sudanese refugees as, for example, inherently uneducated and criminal (Augoustinos et al. 332). By continuously pointing to this supposed 'nature' of Sudanese asylum seekers, Australian politicians perpetuated an essentialist representation of Sudanese refugees that helped to "homogenize and indeed problematize them [Sudanese refugees] as a group" (Augoustinos et al. 332). Adding to that, the researchers discovered an interesting and alarming dynamic initiated by this political discourse: firstly, the rhetoric concerning refugees portrayed them as possessing a certain shared 'essence' which was then drawn on as a way of justifying their exclusion from

sociopolitical participation. Secondly, distorting cause and effect, the consequences of said unjust treatment was then presented as stemming from the Sudanese refugees themselves, i.e. from their specific 'nature' (Augoustinos et al. 328). Thus, "the consequences of their refugee status (i.e. low education) is turned around and attributed as a reason for their exclusion" (Augoustinos et al. 328).

In sum, in this subchapter I discussed the close relationship between essentialist thinking, mainstream discourse and ideological objectives. To be more precise, I showed that incorporating essentialist representations about out-groups into mainstream discourse impacts said groups in a variety of ways. For one, it constitutes a way of either creating or limiting possibilities of social participation, thereby directly affecting whether marginalized groups can participate in a given democratic society. To illustrate this argument, I drew on the findings of researchers such as Augoustinos et al., thereby showing that essentialist discourse plays a crucial part in furthering the marginalization of certain out-groups, stabilizing the status quo of a given nation in the process. While the studies quoted above are predominantly concerned with discourse on migrant groups, I would claim that their findings can undoubtedly be applied to the Australian national discourse on the Indigenous Australian population. I will discuss this issue of Australia's discursive representation of First Nations people in the preceding theory chapters and will also feature it in my analysis of *Sorry* and *The Yield*.

3.3.2 Strategic Essentialism

Following my discussion of the mainstream essentialization of marginalized social groups through discourse, I want to briefly explore how out-groups can use their purported 'essence' for their own benefit. This appropriation of marginalized groups' essentialist representations in a way that is beneficial for the group itself is called 'strategic essentialism', a term coined by Spivak and connected to Marxist and postcolonial theory. Following Spivak, strategic essentialism denotes a group embracing its supposed 'essence' in order to realize certain socio-

political objectives (Wolff 619). More precisely, strategic essentialism is commonly defined as "[a] political tactic employed by a minority group acting on the basis of a shared identity in the public arena in the interests of unity during a struggle for equal rights" (Eide, *Strategic Essentialism*).[8] In this sense, "'[c]ulture' is a strategy" (Escárcega 8), purposely employed to (re-)claim rights or possessions a group feels it holds the rights to. Due to the fact that by engaging in strategic essentialism an out-group implements the very strategy involved in its marginalization, I would claim that it clearly constitutes a subversive act. This aspect is also highlighted by Escárcega who, focusing on Indigenous Peoples, views strategic essentialism "as acts of decolonization" which rely on the "appropriation of non-indigenous tools" (6) for the purpose of "legitimiz[ing] claims for social justice and rights (especially the right to self-determination)" (4). Hence, for the purpose of using essentialist mainstream representations of the group, completely disregarding the notion of group-specific 'essences' does not appear to be a useful approach, as it "may strip people and groups of identity" (Ryazanov & Christenfeld 9).

By employing strategic essentialism, a social group consciously emphasizes its entitativity to promote an image of distinctness. Hence, it "entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way" (Eide, *Hand in Glove* 76). A marginalized social group can, therefore, call upon the 'essence' it has been endowed with by the dominant group in order to establish itself as a social category with distinct boundaries. In the case of Indigenous Peoples,[9] the emphasis

[8] While literature on strategic essentialism is usually focused on its use by minority groups, Morton et al. argue that "essentialism is equally strategic when used by the majority" (36), thereby proving that to solely center the concept on minority groups would fall short of presenting a holistic view of the strategic use of essentialism. However, seeing as the preceding chapters were almost exclusively concerned with the dominant group's strategic application of essentialism, at this point, the issue will not be investigated further.

[9] Here, the term 'Indigenous' refers to Indigenous Peoples around the globe does not exclusively apply to the Australian context.

of the group's cultural entitativity is used as a means of "getting recognition as 'peoples'" (Escárcega 5) in order to achieve "the right to self-determination" and the ability to participate in the national sociopolitical arena (Escárcega 5). Furthermore, the practice of strategic essentialism provides Indigenous social rights activists and scholars with a platform to raise awareness of "the need to transform the system and structures that deny them peoplehood" (Escárcega 4), thus calling for structural change. Beyond advocating for self-determination, Indigenous Peoples commonly make use of strategic essentialism to advocate for their land rights by invoking an image of close connectedness between themselves and nature or land (Escárcega 15).

At the center of such claims for social rights and land rights, there is a conflicting relation between the actual lived experiences of Indigenous communities and the essentialist image that is required to make claims in the public sphere. To put it differently, employing strategic essentialism forces Indigenous communities to continuously renegotiate their relation between tradition and change, or as Escárcega phrases it: "within the politics of indigenousness one has to analyze how these two processes of containment and flexibility inform a strategic deployment of cultural symbols" (4). This dichotomy of tradition and change has two distinct implications. Firstly, overemphasizing the group's supposed 'nature' can have detrimental effects on group members' sense of self (Ryazanov & Christenfeld 9), as those who do not identify with 'their' image as publicized via strategic essentialism may feel excluded from the group (Escárcega 17). Secondly, by continuously highlighting the group's naturalized 'essence', it may inadvertently "encourage the survival of frozen identities" (Eide, *Strategic Essentialism* 2) – meaning stereotypical representations – associated with itself. Seeing as groups engaging in strategic essentialism predominantly emphasize their homogeneity by "playing to a stereotype" (Shortall & McAreavey 50), said stereotypes then appear to be confirmed through the image purported by the groups themselves, resulting in an even stronger

belief in the groups' 'essences'. In order to avert such "reductive views" (Eide, *Strategic Essentialism* 2) limited to a group's 'nature', strategic essentialism should be regarded only "as a temporary political strategy" (Eide, *Strategic Essentialism* 2) aimed at displaying collectivity; if said image of collectivity is achieved, "strategic essentialism should be forsaken" and instead, the differences within the group should be highlighted (Abdalkafor 44). Hence, the application of strategic essentialism poses a distinct dilemma: on the one hand, the concept can be used to advocate for the rights of marginalized social groups; on the other hand, it can lead to the reinforcement of an essentialist and "narrowing" (Eide, *Strategic Essentialism* 2) image of a group.

3.4 Essentialism and Nationalism: Mother Countries

Nationhood as such constitutes a rather abstract concept that is difficult to explain; justifying or denying someone's claim to nationhood, then, appears even more challenging. It is through the use of essentialist practices that the concept of nationhood is successfully presented as a natural phenomenon. Consequently, this naturalization enables the inconspicuous implementation and upholding of certain social hierarchies the nation-state is built upon. Accordingly, in the following first subchapter I set out to investigate the connection between nationality and essentialism; in particular, I will illustrate how the concept of the nation-state itself builds on essentializing processes. The subsequent subchapter is concerned with the use of the 'nation as family' metaphor, focusing on why this imaginary is so commonly employed as well as on its effects. My examination of the ties between discourses on nature, belonging and the nation-state are central for the analysis of my two primary texts because I will assess how the neglect the protagonists experience by the hands of their actual families can be related to treatment of Indigenous Australians by the national 'family' of the Australian state and its institutions.

To begin with, however, I want to briefly comment on my use of 'nationalism' which draws on the analysis of Billig. The term calls for further clarification, as it is commonly associated either with extreme types of patriotism (e.g. far-right movements) or with geographic regions which are located far away from Western nation-states (Billig 5). In other words, nationalism is regarded as "the property of others, not of 'us'" (Billig 5), resulting in a blind spot for the way in which nationalism is habitually incorporated in Western countries. Billig not only claims that nationalist thinking is deeply ingrained in Western nation-states, but he also discerns a motive behind its concealment: "By being semantically restricted to small sizes and exotic colours, 'nationalism' becomes identified as a problem […]. The ideological habits, by which 'our' nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed" (6). The fact that Western practices of nationalism tend to be concealed calls to mind the common non-markedness of Whiteness I referred to in chapter 2.1; in both cases, what is associated with the West is considered to be 'normal' and not worth investigating further. It is due to these considerations that, within the subsequent chapters, the term 'nationalism' will be applied to nationalist concepts incorporated in mainstream discourses of Western countries in general and, more specifically, in Australia.

3.4.1 The Naturalization of Nationality

As a first step, the concept of nationality and its connection to essentialism has to be investigated. For one, belonging to a given nation – thereby at least partly identifying with its national character – is commonly based on the belief in a shared cultural 'essence', or in other words, "there is a set of core national traits or values that define national identity despite superficial differences between group members" (Siromahov et al. 848). Not only does this definition imply an 'essence' or 'nature' which is supposedly shared by all individuals within a particular nation, but it also emphasizes the concept of entitativity (cf. chapter 3.1) as well as the willingness to assimilate potential deviating characteristics into the – allegedly objective

and natural – description of national character (cf. chapter 3.2). This interpretation points to the inclusive nature of nationality, as seemingly anyone who desires to be a part of the nation in question is accepted into it. On the flipside, tying the possibility of belonging to one's ability to embody the 'nature' associated with the particular nation can also be read as means for exclusion. In this sense, it is easy to claim that given individuals or social groups do not possess such a 'nature' and, therefore, cannot be regarded as a 'real' part of the nation. This interpretation becomes especially evident when considering that national belonging can also be tied to physical characteristics as part of a 'national character': nationality is thus "defined by some physical 'essence', such as genes or blood, or arising out of a connection with the soil of the motherland" (Siromahov et al. 846). Here, national belonging is understood to be predetermined by biological or genetic factors which are exclusively shared by those whose genealogy confirms their connection to the specific nation.[10] When these definitions of nationality inform the discursive representation of national identity, only a very curated group of people who can be said "to speak for the whole nation and to represent the national essence" (Billig 27) remains. Hence, nationalism is based on the discursive creation and maintenance of distinctive in- and out-grouping mechanisms that not only affect international dynamics (e.g. Tsukamoto et al. 2013) but, as has been explored, also have considerable influence on intranational relations and hierarchies.

The display of a nation's supposedly distinct in-group who are claimed to embody the national character constitutes an aspect in which the overlap of nationality and essentialism becomes most apparent. Despite the fact that "[n]ations are not 'objective communities', in the sense that they are constructed around clear, 'objective' criteria, which are possessed […] by all national members" (Billig 24), the discursive perpetuation of a national 'essence' naturalizes the concept and makes nationhood appear "somehow natural or objectively real" (Siromahov

[10] With regards to the nation-state Australia, this interpretation of national belonging, and especially the idea of a connection "with the soil of the motherland" (Siromahov et al. 846) will be discussed in 3.4.3.

et al. 846). This naturalization of nationhood goes even further and results in the presentation of the nation-state as something society is dependent on. Concurringly, through establishing the nation as a 'natural' phenomenon, the system of worldwide nations is regarded as a fundamental imperative for the righteous human existence and as an "eternal" aspect "of human existence" (Billig 26; 27). As a direct consequence, the naturalization of the concept of nationality also works to establish and maintain the hierarchical social structures at the basis of nation-states. Following McClintock, nations "are historical and institutional practices through which social difference is invented and performed" (61) and which are dependent on "naturalizing […] the social subordination" (McClintock 64) of certain societal groups. As I will demonstrate in the following subsection, this specific naturalizing tendency is most fruitfully executed by the discursive use of the 'family' metaphor.

3.4.2 The Nation as a Family: Hierarchies and Metaphors

In recent years, the regularity in which the 'nation as family' metaphor has been invoked within discourses on nationality has come under considerable scholarly scrutiny (e.g. Lakoff 1996; Lauenstein et al. 2015). The multitude of ways in which this metaphor has been incorporated into national discourse is, for instance, demonstrated by McClintock:

> We speak of nations as 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'. Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes, and are 'naturalized' into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of 'homelands' and 'native' lands. In Britain, immigration matters are dealt with at the Home Office; in the United States, the President and his wife are called the First Family. (63)

In view of this apparent omnipresence of the family metaphor, I will now investigate the reasons behind its countless applications. For one, the family as a social institution can be viewed as the "primary site of belonging" (Hill Collins 62) for an individual. Likening the nation to a family can, therefore, be identified as an attempt to elicit the same sense of belonging with regards to the nation-state. What is more, in their analysis of over 200 anthems, national poems

and other nationalist texts, Lauenstein et al. discern the 'nation as a family' metaphor's four main functions:

> Firstly, as Bourdieu (1996) has pointed out, families provide a structure for social relations. Secondly, families come with social roles and responsibilities, which are clearly ordered along gendered lines of production and reproduction. Thirdly, a family – unlike a sovereign state or a national, cultural education – is much more likely to come with positive emotional connotations. Lastly, family ties are predominantly understood as biological ties of blood relatedness; therefore, drawing on the family as a metaphor reifies social relations as biologically determined. (Bourdieu qtd. in Lauenstein et al. 311-312)

Regarding my own research focus on the (hierarchical) relations within the Australian 'family', the first two functions of the metaphor identified here appear most relevant and will be jointly discussed in the following. The first part of the quote emphasizes the fact that, through the application of the family metaphor, relations outside of the familial cosmos are presented as mirroring the ties within a family. While the second sequence points to the gendered hierarchy behind said social relations, I will firstly examine how the 'nation as a family' metaphor likens social hierarchical relations outside of the family to those within, with the aspect of gender being discussed later on.

To start with, it can be said that by making use of the 'nation as a family' metaphor, the establishment and maintenance of social relations and the according hierarchies are concealed. As discussed above, in likening these hierarchies to those at play within a family, they are naturalized and, therefore, taken for granted. Seeing as families constitute the space in which "[i]ndividuals typically learn their assigned place in hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and social class", such hierarchies are then perceived "as natural social arrangements" (Hill Collins 64). Thus, our sense of social relations is shaped by our knowledge of and experience with the familial order and are, therefore, associated with the same sense of normalcy and naturalness. As a consequence, inequalities within the 'nation as a family' are usually left unquestioned, because such unequal relations of power remain unacknowledged or even accepted in the realm of family life. Briefly returning to the category of 'race', this means

that the "presentation of the family as 'naturally' mono-racial" – a presentation that is extremely common in Western nation-states such as Germany (e.g. Poggioli) – results in the fact that "inequalities such as racial differences are legitimised and obfuscated" (Lauenstein et al. 314).

Moving on, Lauenstein et al. also address the intrafamiliar and intranational relations between the naturalized social roles shaped by gender norms. This means that the nation is not merely conceptualized as a family, but as a decidedly "heteronormative family" (Lauenstein et al. 324). Hence, on the metaphorical level, the national family is portrayed as consisting of mother, father, and their children, with the nation positioning itself in the role of the parent (Hayden 198). More specifically, the nation-state is predominately viewed as a mother figure, as evident in the use of common phrases such as 'mother country' or 'mother land'. According to Lauenstein et al., presenting the nation as a mother points to the "stereotypical embodiment of the female gender role […] to become a mother" (313). Accordingly, by applying this ideology on a national level, the nation itself can be understood as a mother to its citizens" (Lauenstein et al. 313). I will discuss the implications of performing the 'role of the mother' more thoroughly in chapters 4 and 5.

Despite the seeming centrality of women in the metaphor of the mother country, with regards to the national social hierarchy, women tend to rank lower than men. According to McClintock, this hierarchical order constitutes a prerequisite for the modern nation-state: within the British family of the 17th century, the subordination of "woman to man, and child to adult, was deemed a natural fact" (McClintock 64). By likening the newly emerging nation-state to the family, this supposedly 'natural' social hierarchy was adopted and applied to social hierarchy in general, thereby presenting it as a "category of nature" (McClintock 64). As a result, the White middle-class man was established as topping both the familial as well as the national hierarchy because – unlike women and children – he was "seen to embody the forward-thrusting agency of national 'progress'" (McClintock 67). While McClintock's examination is

centered on the 17th century, I would argue that this naturalized subordination has survived past these times and has continued to be a crucial prerequisite for the modern nation-state's existence, a claim which I will contextualize and justify in chapter 4. In addition, I believe that the mentioned social subordination extends beyond that of women and children and also includes the subordination of marginalized ethnic groups. This conviction is shared by Lauenstein et al. who – similar to McClintock's findings on the evaluation of women and children – detect proof of the "infantilisation of racial 'others'" (314) within their analyzed national texts.

Beyond the naturalization of social hierarchies, applying the family metaphor to nation-states also creates the vision of one pedigree and one 'family' history that is common to all nationals. This impression of the nation possessing "a national genealogy" (McClintock 63) is also coupled with a "belief in the nation's temporal continuity" (Siromahov et al. 846), or, in other words, the contention that the individual national is connected to all those who came before them and all those who will succeed them. This, again, seems reminiscent of actual families: ensuring that one's lineage is continued can still be identified as one of the most primal objectives behind starting a family. Hence, deciding to start, and, therefore, become a part of, a family and deciding to belong to a nation appear to operate on similar, if not the same, motives, namely hoping "to achieve a measure of immortality which will preserve his or her person and achievements from oblivion; they will live on and bear fruit in the community" (Smith 175). By discursively portraying the nation as a family with a shared history, nationals tend to develop a more emotional connection to their 'mother country'. As a result, individuals believe themselves to be implicated in a national 'us' backed by a long-standing national history (Siromahov et al. 846).

To sum up, in this subchapter I showed that the discursive perpetuation of essentialist ideas about nationality – i.e. a shared national 'essence' – can be said to have naturalized the

constructed concept of the nation-state. Moreover, I explored how this naturalization is furthered by the continuous application of the 'nation as a family' metaphor. Most strikingly, by likening the relations within a nation to those within the family, social hierarchies are presented as 'natural'. As a result, the institutionalized discrimination of women and racialized 'others' remains largely unquestioned, as it mirrors the hierarchies within the family and is, therefore, regarded as normal.

3.4.3 Australia as a Dysfunctional Family

Within this last subchapter, I will provide an overview of sociohistorical events and movements that affected Australia's self-conception as a national family. Here, I will connect Australia's history and self-construction as a nation to my interest in essentialism by looking at the relationship between White and Indigenous Australians. This exploration will be limited to sociohistorical developments that are connected to the issue of national belonging and relevant for the timeframe in which my two primary texts are set.

As I pointed out in 3.4.1, the possibility of belonging to a nation-state depends on the institutionalized norms and ideals of a given nation. In Australia, this issue of belonging is inextricably tied to the country's history of colonization by a White settler population: "Who belongs, and the degree of that belonging, is inextricably tied to white possession. The right to be here and the sense of belonging it creates are reinforced institutionally and socially" (Moreton-Robinson 18). The reason behind this can be traced back to the international legal construction of 'terra nullius', i.e. "a land of no one" (Russell 5). This image of Australia as 'unowned' before the arrival of the British emerged towards the end of the 19th century (Russell 40; Buchan & Heath 7). Judged against the White-European standard, the Indigenous people of Australia did not fulfill the perceived requisites of actually owning the land, requisites which were inextricably tied to the cultivation of the land through "idealized white (and male) will and physical exertion" (Heinz 7). By presenting said White conceptions of ownership as the

norm, “any other forms of land use, tillage, or animal husbandry” (Heinz 7) did not ‘qualify’ as cultivation at all. Based on these regulations, Indigenous Peoples were not acknowledged as the original owners of the land (Brennan 39; Russell 41); instead, the settlers regarded them as “part of the landscape and thus not human” (Moreton-Robinson 29), or in other words, something ‘savage’ to take possession of (Heinz 6). By portraying the Indigenous Australian people as possessionless savages – a belief promoted by philosophers like Locke and Hume (Bretherton & Mellor 82) – their exploitation was justified. Moreover, White settlers regarded themselves as following altruistic motives, as they supposedly ‘gave’ the First Nations Peoples the “gift” of civilization (Buchan & Heath 6; 9). Via this discursively circulated dichotomy of ‘civilized’ versus ‘savage’, “Indigenous social forms are constructed, not simply as different or incommensurable, but insufficiently developed and therefore inferior to European social forms” (Buchan & Heath 9).

This contention of the superior White individual goes hand in hand with the prevailing national myth of ‘the’ White Australian (male) citizen whose most distinctly Australian characteristics include “courage, self sacrifice and mateship” (Waterhouse 18; Salter 32). According to this national myth, it was said characteristics as well as their dedication and heroism which enabled the White colonizers to establish Australia as a ‘civilized’ nation-state (Moreton-Robinson 5; Nettelbeck 101). This Australian self-characterization is, thus, inextricably tied to the belief in pre-settler Australia as ‘terra nullius’, which is why scholars such as Moreton-Robinson (19-31) have vehemently criticized it. Despite these critiques, such ideas about White Australia’s heroic past and the contention of ‘terra nullius’ are still part of the national narrative, as evidenced in contemporary Australian media representations (Moreton-Robinson 29; Turner 108). While these representations feature First Nations people predominantly as “nomadic props […], [while] representations of whiteness [take] the center stage” (Moreton-Robinson 30). As opposed to the Indigenous Australians, the White characters

in these media representations distinguish themselves "through virtue, intelligence, resilience, […] and hard work" and are shown to have 'made' modern Australia, thereby "effectively disavowing Indigenous sovereignty" (Moreton-Robinson 30).

This White Australian national myth connects to my discussion of nationalism because both are intertwined with notions of 'land'. As noted earlier, one's "connection with the soil of the motherland" (Siromahov et al. 846) is regarded as one of the ways of establishing national belonging. Seeing as the Indigenous people of Australia fulfill this 'criterion' above all other societal groups in Australia (Moreton-Robinson 11-12), it would appear logical that their national belonging would be rightfully acknowledged. However, because of the two predominant national myths – firstly, the superiority of the White settlers who 'developed' and, own Australia, and, secondly, the existence of First Nations people as merely "part of the landscape" (Moreton-Robinson 29) – the Indigenous claim to land, and therefore to belonging, is effectively nullified.

In the logics of 'terra nullius' and the myth of the ideal White Australian citizen, it is imperative to continuously perpetuate the image of Indigenous people as 'less than' White inhabitants within mainstream discourse in order to uphold the supposed legitimacy of the formers' dispossession. Hence, "[i]t is intolerable for an Indigenous subject to be figured as original in the Australian imaginary precisely because of his/her real claim to that place, a claim that therefore is disavowed" (Foord 147). This paradox demonstrates that the colonizers' urgency to claim ownership of Australia was not only based on their perception of Indigenous Australians as 'savages', but also on the fact that their very existence represented a threat to the supremacy and belonging of the White population. Widely regarded as a sociohistorical turning point leading to the abolishment of the 'terra nullius' dogma, the Australian High Court's

decision on the Mabo case in 1992 conceded the fact that Indigenous Australians are the original owners of the country and have a right to its lands (West-Pavlov 6; Russell 5).[11]

A second related sociohistorical development with high relevance to both *Sorry* and *The Yield* is the forcible removal of Indigenous Australian children between the 1880s and 1970s, most commonly referred to as the 'Stolen Generations'. Australia's national reckoning with this chapter of its past was triggered by a pamphlet by historian Peter Read in 1981 which comprised personal accounts by members of the Stolen Generations and brought to light the long history of child removal policies targeting Indigenous Australians. Read's text as well as the *Bringing Them Home* report (Commonwealth of Australia) published in 1997 revealed the systematic relocation of an estimated 50,000 Indigenous children from their families to primarily church-owned institutions (Dodson 6) and, from 1957 on, to White Australian families (Read 20). Within said institutions, First Nations girls and boys were trained for unskilled labor and subsequently sent out to work in White households (Dodson 6, Commonwealth of Australia). Separating Indigenous children from their families was thought to resolve the so-called "Aboriginal Problem", i.e. thought to grant control over "Aboriginal people who could not, or chose not to, live as white people wanted them to do" (Read 3). The goal was, thus, to assimilate the "redeemable" children into the White Australian population in order to 'save' them from having to lead an Indigenous existence thought to be marked by inferiority (Dodson 6). 'Redeemable', here, referred to so-called 'half-caste' children, meaning Indigenous children of partly White descent. Due to their "dilute strain of Aboriginal blood", it was surmised that the White guidance would help them realize their 'essence' of Whiteness instead of their Indigenous 'nature' associated with "aberrant characteristics" (Tindale 67). To justify and legalize the children's removal, Indigenous parents were often accused of neglecting them (Dodson 6). The definition of neglect was based on the direct comparison of Indigenous family

[11] This view of the end of 'terra nullius' is, however, disputed by scholars such as Kramer and Moreton-Robinson who detect its prevailing existence in contemporary Australian society.

practices to White-European standards, wherein everything deviating from this norm was automatically deemed neglectful (Dodson 6). For instance, extended family constructions, poverty or simply being Indigenous were taken as grounds for the children's removal (Commonwealth of Australia; Read 23). At the same time, the decision on who was neglected disregarded the fact that most First Nations people were not granted the necessary socioeconomic prerequisites for fulfilling White norms (Dodson 6). Instead, the hardships caused by institutionalized discrimination were regarded as a direct consequence of the 'nature' and supposed innate 'racial essences' of Indigenous people. Aside from accusing parents of child neglect, the separation of Indigenous Australian children was further facilitated by "displacing the rights of parents" (Commonwealth of Australia) through official legislation. Thereby, the Australian states legally took on the role of the children's parents, so that by the 1930s "the state had become the custodial parents of virtually all Aboriginal children" (Haebich qtd. in Van Krieken 303).[12] This forceful 'adoption' of Indigenous Australian children by the Australian government constitutes the basis for my claim that the Australian nation's neglect of its 'children' can be likened to the neglect experienced by the protagonists in *Sorry* and *The Yield*. More strikingly, the nation's actions as a 'parent' to its First Nations population can be identified as the cause for much of the characters' familial problems (see chapters 5 and 6). To sum up, the institutionalization and ideological basis of Australian child removal politics outline how essentialization and its construction of an innate 'racial character' established a circular system of self-fulfilling assumptions. Through the perpetuation of these 'essences', the national status quo is maintained and the effects of this status on marginalized social groups is ignored.

After more than a century of forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families, by the late 1970s the overt separation of First Nations families for assimilationist purposes was ceded (Elder 26). The topic was eventually publicly discussed in the wake of the

[12] In some states, e.g. Western Australia, this legal guardianship was carried out through a so-called 'Chief Protector of Aborigines'.

aforementioned findings of Read (1981) and the *Bringing Them Home* (*BTH*) report (1997). These documents not only lifted the taboo on discussing the Stolen Generations, but also revealed the deep and on-going sorrow its members experienced as well as the resulting intergenerational trauma within the Indigenous Australian population, as summarized by Dodson:

> The disproportionate levels of alcohol and substance abuse in Indigenous communities have been directly linked to policies of removal as has the high level of mental illness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Policies of removal have also had a profound influence on the capacity of many Indigenous people to parent their own children. The effects of removal have been generational and they continue to reverberate through our communities. (7)

There are, however, also members of the Stolen Generations who defend the governmental intervention and characterize it as having improved their lives (Read 25), a sentiment which is continuously invoked by many conservative observers (Bielefeld 96). Additionally, the publication of the *BTH* report was met with intense criticism based on a perceived lack of objectivity and the fear of disproportionate "compensation payments" (Haebich, *Forgetting* 1033), thus highlighting the widespread unwillingness to acknowledge the nation's responsibility for the maltreatment of generations of Indigenous Australian people.

The third sociohistorical aspect relevant for my analysis is the need for reconciliation and the corresponding national apology to the Stolen Generations. Despite the published findings of the *BTH* report in 1997, the administration of John Howard, who was Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007, refused to offer an official apology to the Indigenous Australian Peoples (Cuthbert & Quartly 178).[13] In Howard's view, it was not justified to make the current generation of White Australians take responsibility for "past wrongs" (Barta 203), especially as, according to him, the Indigenous generations had been 'saved' rather than 'stolen' (Haebich, *Forgetting* 1034). Howard's successor, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, fulfilled his campaign

[13] In reaction to the Mabo decision, former Prime Minister Paul Keating, who commissioned the *BTH* report, delivered the famous 'Redfern' speech in 1992 that resembled an apology. However, neither Keating nor the Indigenous Australian population refer to it as such (Manne).

promise of offering an official national apology to the members of the Stolen Generations and, on February 13th 2008, officially said 'Sorry', a term of high significance for the First Nations people of Australia (Healing Foundation 19). In his speech, he acknowledged the atrocities suffered by the Indigenous Australian community and emphasized the resulting intergenerational trauma still prevalent to this day (Bielefeld 95). Moreover, Rudd implemented the *Closing the Gap* (*CTG*) framework aimed at creating equity between Indigenous Australians and White mainstream Australians with regards to education, life expectancy and employment (Barta 209; Australian Government). While Rudd's apology was celebrated as a crucial milestone in (Indigenous) Australian history, its portrayal of the mistreatment of Indigenous Australian people as an issue solely located in the past attracted considerable criticism. Not only did this representation fall short of "recogniz[ing] the depth of their historical trauma" (Barta 210), but it also concealed the ways in which racial discrimination has continued to be sustained by contemporary governmental actions (Bielefeld 102; Cuthbert & Quartly 184). Thus, instead of constituting the beginning of a national conversation as desired by many members of the Stolen Generations, for mainstream Australia the apology instead signified its "finalisation" (Wahlquist).

This unmet need to address the persisting "colonial power structure" (Bielefeld 88) at the heart of the country is highlighted by the prevailing separation of Indigenous children from their families "at 10.6 times the rate of non-Indigenous children" (Family Matters). Past child removal policies have continued to affect current legislations, however, they are concealed by the claim of legality and carried out "by the welfare system or by the operation of the juvenile system" (Dodson 6). While the operations of the former are justified by the same Eurocentric claims of neglect as during past assimilationist efforts, the latter represents "the convert practice of criminalising" (Dodson 6) the Indigenous youth resulting in their incarceration (Douglas & Walsh 62). Moreover, the current welfare policies are, again, partly based on reversing cause

and effect: if a child's parent was a member of the Stolen Generations, or was otherwise "a child in care", they are automatically considered as an unfit parent and, therefore, more likely to be separated from their child (Douglas & Walsh 63). Accordingly, the majority of the *CTG*-goals have not been attained, which has largely been attributed to the failure to take Indigenous voices and experiences into account (Lowitja Institute 2).[14]

To conclude, in chapter 3, I provided crucial insights into the strategies behind, the and the effects of essentialism. While I discussed a variety of different areas in which the discursive perpetuation of essentialist views can be identified, they are all connected by the main mechanism of essentialism, namely group formation. Through the representation of a certain social group – be it 'racial' groups, cultural groups, nationals or the like – as possessing a distinct 'nature' or 'essence', there is a continuous implicit construction of the in- and out-group. I also showed that the naturalization of a certain out-group's undesirable 'essence' is then drawn on to justify the group's marginalization and the underlying structural discrimination. Moreover, I discussed the common discursive application of the 'nation as a family' metaphor, establishing how its use portrays nations as natural phenomena and amplifies the above-mentioned effects of essentialism. In 3.4.3, I demonstrated how deeply these essentialist naturalizations are ingrained in the Australian national discourse on 'race' and showed that they continue to maintain the existing social hierarchies within the nation. Drawing on the insights from chapter 3, I will analyze in how far essentialist practices impact the lives of Jones's and Winch's White Australian and Indigenous Australian characters.

[14] Addressing this issue, in 2020, the *CTG* was renamed "National Agreement on Closing the Gap", signifying a "genuine partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations" (Australian Government).

4. Sociocultural Norms and the Family

Before engaging in the above-mentioned analysis, in this last theoretical chapter, I want to revisit the concept of 'family' that was featured in 3.4.2 in connection to naturalizing nationality. As has been touched on, the concept of family is inextricably tied to the establishment and upholding of the existing social hierarchy within a given nation-state (Bourdieu 23). Despite the fact that, in this context, the idea of family is so regularly invoked, the definition of what actually constitutes a family seems less certain (Silva & Smart 1). While, on the one hand, the family is commonly regarded as a "fixed […] symbol of absolute values" (Chambers 1), on the other hand, this supposed certainty appears to be continuously undermined by 'other' forms of familial phenomena such as extended families or divorce. Moreover, the term 'family' itself has been subjected to scrutiny: 'family' is now associated with significant ambiguity and is not considered to holistically represent the existing diversity of familial constructs (Chambers 2). To solve this perceived problem, sociologists such as Silva and Smart suggest the use of alternative terms like 'kinship' or 'personal life'; reacting to this proposition, Gilding strongly argues against substituting the term 'family', as it could lead to the concealment of the "power dynamics" (763) behind the construct.[15] According to Bourdieu, these power dynamics are produced and constantly reproduced through family discourse, "which, while seeming to describe social reality, in fact construct[s] it" (19). Hence, what we believe to know about 'normal' as well as 'problematic' families is actually the product of century-long discourse marked by political ideology. Family discourse constitutes a way of idealizing a specific family type over others, therein reproducing "normative prescriptions about the proper way to conduct domestic relationships" (Bourdieu 20). Thus, the aim of this

[15] For a more detailed overview of the differing strategies employed to overcome this terminological conundrum, see Gilding 2010.

chapter not only lies in discussing which family norms exist, but also in demonstrating the potentially detrimental effects of perpetuating such prescriptive norms.

4.1 Family Norms and Ideals

For centuries, the White nuclear family has been the idealized, if not reified, norm for what constitutes a family. A very particular image of the 'normal' or even 'ideal' family has been sculpted out and popularized through the previously mentioned family discourse, which will be briefly outlined in the following.

In addition to being "Anglo-white" (Chambers 10), according to Hill Collins, "ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children" and are "[f]ormed through a combination of marital and blood ties" (62). These ideal families exhibit a decidedly patriarchal structure in which the household income is earned by the father figure while the mother figure takes care of household and children (Hill Collins 62).[16] With regards to the family's actual structure, the majority of family research disregards the idea of extended family ties, instead representing the ideal family as an "isolated unit" (Chambers 18), limited to mother, father and children. Via family discourse, the superiority of such families is presented as natural and as a social reality which "has always been that way" (Bourdieu 19). Hence, as has been discussed in relation to essentialism, the constructedness of the ideal family is concealed and naturalized by discursively portraying it as something "belong[ing] on the side of nature, the natural, the universal" (Bourdieu 21).

An image which is regularly reproduced in (political) discourse about the family is its apparent endangerment. According to this framing, the family – although habitually portrayed as something fixed and unbreakable – is continuously under threat by phenomena such as divorce or so-called 'alternative' families (Silva & Smart 1). The supposed necessity of saving

[16] It has to be noted that this idealized view of the housewife has changed since the publication of Hill Collin's text in 1998. Nevertheless, the patriarchy can still be identified as the prevailing social system in the world (Vince).

the ‘normal’ family from ‘others’ is stressed by claiming that its collapse would inevitably lead to the decline of societal moral standards (Chambers 116). By perpetuating this allegedly imperative function of the family, it can be used as a “regulatory ideal that inferiorises and discredits alternative experiences” (Chambers 3). Hence, the “Anglo-white nuclear family [is taken] as the norm against which to measure ‘other’ family forms” (Chambers 10), automatically pathologizing any deviations. While it is still promoted today, this ideal and the corresponding conventions were particularly prevalent in the British Empire in the 19th century, where the ideologization of the family reached its peak: the “intrinsically racialised familial ideals” were transferred into the British colonies, where they “functioned as mechanisms of cultural control” (Chambers 37). Thus, despite the fact that a vast number of people in the ‘mother land’ Great Britain were unable to attain this ideal themselves, the conventions of the Anglo-White nuclear family were regarded as the norm the Indigenous population was to strive for; not being able to conform to this norm was equated with “savagery” (Chambers 36, 37).

Lastly, as pointed out before, family discourse also influences the way in which people think about and, especially, act out belonging to a family unit. By adopting a viewpoint inspired by Butler’s explorations of ‘Doing Gender’, it becomes clear that in order to fit into the family norm, one has to act accordingly. As summarized by Chambers, family can be considered as “something that has to be scripted, performed and treated as a staged spectacle” in order to “reproduce continuously the essence of family-ness” (27) and to demonstrate one’s conformity to the set family norm. Once more, this notion of performing family highlights the constructedness of the idealized White family norm.

4.2 Deviating Family Constructions and the Issue of Neglect

As already established, in order to use the ideal Anglo-White family as a regulatory norm, an 'other' is needed that seemingly threatens this ideal. There is, thus, a constructed correlation between the existence of deviating alternatives and the demise of the 'normal' family. The question of what constitutes a 'bad', 'problematic' or 'dysfunctional' family is always dependent on its comparison to the idealized norm. Hence, the assessment of families is based on an ethnocentric deficit perspective, i.e. shaped by what certain familial entities fall short of when compared to the seemingly natural White norm (Korbin 29). One type of family construction that is commonly regarded as 'abnormal' and which I will discuss in detail in my analysis are extended family networks: such networks, commonly associated with African American or Indigenous families, do not conform to the previously mentioned ideal of the nuclear family and are, therefore, viewed as "deviant and disorganised" as well as "inherently pathological" (Chambers 12).

Families which – for reasons of "being extended rather than nuclear, for being over-reliant on relatives beyond the household, […] for having too many children, for a lack of middle-class aspirations, for being poor" (Chambers 13) or other – do not conform to the naturalized norm are subjected to intense criticism and penalization within contemporary family discourse. families who due to. The most tangible effect of such penalization can be located in welfare or family policy. Due to the fact that such policies are centered on the White nuclear family ideal (Chambers 19), they regard nonconforming families as "the problematic" and as in dire need of governmental intervention (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2208, 2212). This, again, highlights the fact that the family discourse within White Western nation-states and their corresponding welfare policies are organized around the aforementioned deficit perspective. Such welfare interventions are, therefore, aimed at assimilating 'other' family structures into the White norm, rather than taking the families' sociocultural context into account.

One of the mechanisms behind the naturalization of the idealized family norm is the concealment of why certain 'others' are habitually pathologized. Within the realm of family discourse, it has consistently been implied that marginalized social groups' deviations from the norm are due to their specific cultures (Chambers 12) as well as their "values, aspirations and psychological characteristics" (Chambers 57). This is also inherent in the use of the term 'dysfunctional' when referring to certain families: it intimates that the family's inability to attain the norm is based on the family's own decision, or in other words, on its unwillingness to conform to the norm (Chambers 99). In actuality, these groups are held to a racialized standard that, due to institutionalized discrimination, they simply cannot meet, and one that is not even achieved by the majority of those it was originally based on (Chambers 17). Thus, "structural inequalities are constructed as matters of choice and ambition" (Phoenix 2324) instead of being revealed as the social regulatory mechanisms they are. The fact that being able to have a so-called 'normal' family can be discerned as a privilege is also discussed by Bourdieu. He states that "the naturalization of social arbitrariness causes it to be forgotten that, in order for this reality called 'family' to be possible, certain social conditions that are in no way universal have to be fulfilled" (Bourdieu 22). The image of the ideal family has, thus, been successfully naturalized to the point of obscuring the institutionalized inequity it is built upon.

Another reason for families being labeled as 'dysfunctional' is the accusation of them being neglectful towards their children. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) "[n]eglect includes both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or other family member to provide for the development and well-being of the child – where the parent is in a position to do so" (10). Such neglectful behavior can concern a multitude of factors such as "health", "education" or "emotional development" (WHO & ISPCAN 10); amongst other consequences, neglected children may suffer from developmental delays and may exhibit

a heightened chance of substance abuse (Stoltenborgh et al. 346). Referring to 3.4.3, I already discussed the high degree of subjectivity the label 'neglect' can be applied with in connection to the Stolen Generations where it was exploited as a means of justifying the wrongful separation of Indigenous Australian families. This malevolent instrumentalization of the term highlights the dangers of randomly ascribing it to families without considering the context. Concurringly, Korbin stresses the need to also base the judgment over neglect on the cultural context in order to distinguish "which aspects of a family's behaviours are 'cultural' and which are 'abusive' or 'neglectful'" (31).

In those cases in which families are found to be neglectful, the issue of child neglect evokes strong emotional responses from people, as it goes against the very 'essence' associated with parenthood: neglectful parents fail to "nurture and care for their offspring" and thus "violate some of our most cherished views of human relationships" (Korbin 30). Interestingly, the assessment of said 'violation' is tied to the essentialization of motherhood, in that "[m]aternal love and care are supposed to be a given" (LaChance Adams 2) because they are supposedly based on "the essence of motherhood" (LaChance Adams 4). Deviating from this ideal of the nourishing, loving mother in one way or other results in being labeled a "bad" and "mad" (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 203) mother. Not only do such labels minimize women's actual "lived experiences", but they also diminish their "agency […] by denying their ability to make any degree of choice" (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 203). Hence, in order to assimilate women who diverge from the idealized image of 'the' mother into the discourse of motherhood, they have to be portrayed as inherently 'bad' or 'mad' in order to justify the absence of their motherly 'essence'. The intensity with which the 'nature' of mothers is discussed results in differences in the assessment of motherly and fatherly child neglect, as will be demonstrated in chapter 5.1.

To sum up, through Western discourse, the idealized norm of the Anglo-White, heteronormative, nuclear family has been established as a regulatory norm against which 'other' family constructions are measured and, as a result, pathologized. This pathologization is particularly common regarding familial characteristics that are associated with 'racial', marginalized social groups, such as extended family constructions. Through the naturalization of the idealized family norm, the institutionalized discrimination at the basis of portraying deviating families as 'dysfunctional' is concealed and, moreover, furthered by welfare policies. Constituting of the ways of labeling families 'dysfunctional', I discussed the issue of neglect, referring to universal definitions by the WHO and ISPCAN as well as pointing to the need for taking the sociocultural and socioeconomic context into consideration. Finally, I discussed how differently child neglect is assessed when it comes to the evaluation of the mother or the father of the children.

The preceding chapters constitute the theoretical and conceptual foundation for my following close reading of Jones's and Winch's novels *Sorry* and *The Yield*. In discussing the concepts of psychological and 'racial' or cultural essentialism, I showed that a belief in group 'essences' or 'natures' leads to the formation of in- and out-groups with differing societal standings. It was revealed that the belief in a group's entitativity and inalterability is especially strong when 'racial' groups are considered, with the temporal and cultural context remaining unacknowledged. I then went on to discuss the ideological implications of the perpetuation of essentialist views within mainstream discourse, identifying the maintenance of the status quo and the concealment of inequalities behind said status quo as its most impactful effects. Focusing on the idea of nationhood, I demonstrated how discursively circulated essentialist ideas work to naturalize nationality, a process that is even furthered by invoking the image of the nation as a family. Based on this, I explored the Australian nation-state's treatment of its 'family members', focusing on Indigenous Australians. Lastly, my theoretical exploration

provided crucial insights into the concept of 'family' and the mechanisms behind labeling families as 'normal' or 'dysfunctional' within modern Western nations. In my subsequent analysis, I will show that Jones's and Winch's novels provide ample ground for discussing the impact discursively perpetuated essentialist views have on families of both White Australians and Indigenous Australians.

5. Biological Parents, Alternative Families, and Neglect in *The Yield* and *Sorry*

In the two Australian novels *The Yield* and *Sorry,* both Tara June Winch and Gail Jones initially situate their female protagonists August and Perdita within flawed, 'dysfunctional' biological families. Over the course of the novels, both protagonists discover alternative family arrangements which compensate for the lack of care and attention provided by Perdita's and August's birth parents. In this first analysis chapter, my focus lies on closely investigating both the original family lives of the protagonists as well as the girls' connection to their respective alternative families. In the first subchapter, I will illustrate in how far the parental treatment portrayed in *Sorry* and *The Yield* can be identified as instances of neglect. In addition, I will show how these instances can be categorized in terms of the different types of child neglect included in the novels. Subsequently, I will focus on the alternative families the protagonists become part of. Here, I will demonstrate how these alternative family arrangements compensate for the neglect by the protagonists' biological parents and discuss how these alternative families can be considered as deviating from the naturalized White family norm while still being 'good' families for the protagonists.

I base the categorization of child neglect on publications by the WHO and ISPCAN as well as on the conceptualization of Stoltenborgh, et al. which were featured in chapter 4.2. It is important to note that, within these publications, the assessment of what constitutes neglectful actions is grounded in the Eurocentric White standard of 'doing' family and, therefore, does not

take potential cultural 'others' into account. While I will use the terms 'neglect' and 'failure' in my subsequent analysis, I am aware of the harshness associated with them: the two terms are inherently judgmental and have the potential to pathologize rather than describe a familial situation. Because of these considerations, I want to emphasize that in employing terms such as 'neglect' or 'failure', I aim to highlight how the treatment of the protagonists are assessed according to the idealized White norm. While I do agree with the categorizations of child neglect by the WHO and ISPCAN as well as by Stoltenborgh et al. when applied to *Sorry* and *The Yield*, my goal is not to claim that all instances of child neglect within the novels constitute parental 'failures' per se. Instead, I aim to demonstrate the instances of neglect I identify within the novels and argue for the acknowledgment of reasons behind such neglectful parental actions which will be discussed in chapter 6.

Before I begin with the analysis outlined above, I want to briefly comment on the temporal settings of and the narrative voices within *Sorry* and *The Yield*. Whereas Jones's novel is set during World War II and focuses on the White Australian protagonist Perdita, Winch incorporates three different timelines and narrative voices in her novel. Firstly, there is August, Winch's protagonist, whose narration is set in the present, i.e. circa 2019. Secondly, the narrative voice of August's grandfather Albert Gondiwindi recounts his life, starting in circa 1950 and ending with his death in August's present.[17] Thirdly, Winch includes a letter from the year 1915 that was written by a Reverend Greenleaf. In it, he chronicles his time as a missionary in the country of the Gondiwindi. Due to the focus of my subsequent analysis, I will limit my explorations to the narrations provided by August and Albert.

[17] As Winch states in her 'Author's Note', the 'Gondiwindi' are inspired by the author's own Indigenous heritage, namely the Wiradjuri People whose language makes up Albert's dictionary (see Winch 337).

5.1 Neglectful Biological Parents

While it does not constitute the primary focus of either novel, both Jones's and Winch's texts feature the issue of parental neglect, presenting it as part of the protagonists' backstory. Based on the discussion of neglectful behavior in chapter 4.2, the neglect described in both novels exceeds what the WHO and ISPCAN define as "isolated incidents", rather taking on the form of "a pattern of failure over time" (10).

Before I go on to discuss the examples within *The Yield* and *Sorry* which, according to the WHO and ISPCAN as well as to Stoltenborgh et al., can be classified as instances of child neglect, I want to comment on the narrative perspectives of the two novels. These narrative perspectives determine what kind of and how much information readers are provided with, ultimately directing how the parents' actions are perceived and assessed. In both novels, the narrative perspectives are the children's – August's and Perdita's –, meaning that their experiences are at the center of the narrations. However, it is August's and Perdita's adult versions whose narrative voices convey the childhood perspectives. Due to the narrators' temporal distance to the events in the novels, one would assume that August's and Perdita's narrative voices also have an emotional distance to their childhood memories. Their styles of narration, however, indicate otherwise, as the protagonists regress back into the mindsets of their childhood selves. This is especially obvious in August's case, whose memories are rich with synesthesia. Reminiscing about Australia she states that: "she still couldn't remove the scent and taste of dirt and diesel and flesh and muddied water from that grey hemisphere of her mind" (Winch 8). While Perdita is able to consider her parents' perspectives in some regards, for instance acknowledging Stella's own loveless upbringing (see Jones 8), overall, both narrators are exclusively focused on how their childhood selves perceived the events described in the novels. As a result, the parents remain rather abstract entities, with August and Perdita providing no information on the motives or causes behind their parents' actions. August's and

Perdita's inability to perceive their memories beyond their own child-perspectives points to their inability to separate their present from their past and, thus, overcome their childhood traumata. This insight is crucial for a balanced analysis of child neglect in the novels, as it highlights the influence the perspectivization has on how readers perceive and assess the parental actions.

Starting with Winch's protagonist August, the relationship her sister Jedda and her have with their mother Jolene is portrayed as very intimate and affectionate, with August stating that Jolene would regularly "snuggle with them" (Winch 38) and kiss their foreheads before they went to sleep (see 39). Despite the fact that the novel offers little to no information on the girls' relationship with their father Mark, I would argue that – for the most part – August and Jedda's life with their parents is not marked by "[e]motional neglect", i.e. failing to provide children with "adequate nurturance and affection" (Stoltenborgh et al. 346). However, while August cherishes these intimate moments with her mother, her narration explicitly acknowledges that, in these instances, Jolene would always be "high" (Winch 38). Further emphasizing the impact of Jolene's addiction, August's childhood memories include no mention of her mother's behavior when sober, a fact I will comment on in the following paragraph. As a direct consequence of Jolene's addiction, August's childhood is characterized by a sense of instability. There are no set daily routines or structures which the daughters can hold onto, with August commenting on the fact that when she "was a little kid she couldn't rely on the certainty of even a day" (Winch 302). According to Stoltenborgh et al., this "failure to provide adequate structure" (346) can be identified as the one instance included in *The Yield* that can be labeled as 'emotional neglect'.

At this point, it appears crucial to comment on Jolene and Mark's representation as rendered through August's retrospective narration. By portraying Jolene's character exclusively in terms of her addictive behavior, August renders her in a way that is concordant with the

prevailing stereotypes about Indigenous Australians circulated within the White Australian mainstream discourse. According to these stereotypes, the affiliation with the social group predetermines the behavior of its members, or in other words, there is a strong belief in the inductive potential of the group of Indigenous Australians (see 3.1). One of the types of behaviors thought to be 'essential' to First Nations individuals is the propensity to regularly drink alcohol in unhealthy measures (University of Sydney; Pedersen et al. 111). The fact that such stereotypical views about minority groups commonly work to reverse cause and effect through the power of discourse will be discussed in chapter 6. With regards to Mark, his apparent non-involvement in his children's life is also congruent with the common stereotypical perception of Indigenous Australian parenthood, particularly with the presupposed behavior of fathers. In the eyes of the White Australian mainstream, First Nations fathers are mostly absent from their families' lives, act irresponsibly and center their lives on drinking alcohol (Ah-See; Faulkner et al. 151).[18] Mark's almost complete absence from the narrative, thus, appears to affirm these deeply essentialist beliefs.

While I would claim that Jolene predominantly cares for her children's emotional needs and shows them a lot of affection, August's narration features striking instances of "[p]hysical neglect", as August's parents fail "to provide adequate nutrition" as well as "supervision" (Stoltenborgh et al. 346) for their daughters. The sisters are regularly left to themselves, so that their mother can pursue her drug addiction in another room:

> Sooner or later their mum would leave the room. Then they could hear nothing but the Rolling Stones through the house until Jolene would forget to feed them dinner and they'd go and rouse her. Then it took a long time because their mum was always doing everything from scratch in that state and last minute and halfway through she'd forget and fall asleep. So Jedda and August would finish cooking while she slept, they'd make their favorite beans on toast, and when she woke they'd have washed their plates, brushed their teeth, and they would be tucked in; Jedda tucked August first and then herself. (Winch 39)

[18] The fact that such views are still part of the contemporary Australian mainstream is evident in the recent publication of a cartoon depicting an intoxicated Indigenous Australian father who, when pressed by a police officer, is unable to remember his son's name. This cartoon was published in the national daily newspaper 'The Australian' on National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day in 2016 (Australian).

This excerpt sheds light on two neglectful actions which appear to result out of Jolene's substance abuse problems. Firstly, by falling asleep during the cooking process, she puts August and Jedda in a potentially dangerous situation, as she leaves her two young daughters – at this point, they are both under ten years old – in charge of the kitchen. Secondly, Jolene disregards her children's need to eat, leaving the task of making food to August and Jedda themselves.

This issue of food is an important marker of neglect and is, therefore, featured in numerous passages of *The Yield*. August's retellings include multiple remarks on the fact that there was rarely any food available in their childhood home:

> At her parents' home there wasn't much edible to a child, only devon meat if they were lucky, white-bread loaves gone too fast, fruit that was too old and destined to be thrown away, and food bank goods that needed to be worked into something else. Jedda and August both used to snack on uncooked sticks of spaghetti, dipping the ends into the sugarbag. Chewing them to a paste. (Winch 37)

For August, her physical response to the "shambles of her childhood" (Winch 38) consists of overcompensating for this lack of food. As a result, she develops an eating disorder, leading her to immediately devour every food item she can find as if "something animal would come over her" (Winch 51). This quote also indicates the low socioeconomic status of August's family. As both parents are unemployed (see Winch 38), the family appears to depend on "food bank goods" (Winch 37), or in other words, it relies on the help of charitable organizations. This constitutes another instance in which Winch represents the family in accordance with existent stereotypes about Indigenous families circulated within national discourse. In this view, Indigenous Australians are represented as rarely holding jobs, with the supposed majority being dependent on so-called 'handouts', i.e. welfare (University of Sydney; Pedersen et al. 88).

In the rare case that her parents' fridge is stocked, August secretly eats the food within, which leads to aggressive outbursts by her parents: "When August's parents found the fridge bare they'd scream, bang things, slam doors. Her father, who had a hard face would take off his leather belt and loop it, […] and *whack!* the leather strips together." (Winch 37). As discussed

previously, this portrayal of Mark as being prone to violence – despite the fact that he does not actually hurt his children or his wife – constitutes another instance in which his representation corresponds with existing stereotypes about Indigenous Australian fathers. Despite the fact that – as opposed to *Sorry* – August is not directly confronted with violent acts, this sequence demonstrates Jolene and Mark's incapability of tending to their children's physical and emotional needs. Instead of considering the cause for August's binge eating attacks, they yell at her and scold her for it.

Beyond her parents' apparent emotional neglect, August's childhood memories allude to Mark and Jolene not attending to their children's school education which, according to Stoltenborgh et al., constitutes clear "[e]ducational neglect" (346). August recounts how the girls' teachers continuously complained about Mark and Jolene forgetting to "bring them [Jedda and August] to school on time, or to sign this and that, or to pick them up" (Winch 38). Not only does this passage demonstrate the parents' educational neglect, but it also shows the reader how the girls' school evaluates Mark and Jolene as parental figures. Instead of discussing their points of concern with the parents themselves, the teachers make Jedda and August responsible for their parents' behavior (see Winch 38). The school thereby infantilizes Mark and Jolene, denying them the ability to properly care for their own children. In line with the convictions behind assimilationist efforts (see chapters 3.4.3 & 6.1), August and Jedda's Indigenous Australian parents are seen as not mature enough or, following the belief of the White settlers, as not 'civilized' enough to know how to take care of their daughters (Nakata, *The Infantilisation*). What results out of this infantilization is a pathologizing dichotomy: on the one hand, First Nations individuals are commonly portrayed as irresponsible and childlike, on the other hand, actually behaving in such a way is immediately penalized by the White Australian mainstream. Hence, within the national discourse, Indigenous Australians are confined to this vicious circle which, much like the governmental representation of Sudanese refugees

discussed in 3.3.1, distorts the cause and effect behind Indigenous actions that are deemed 'irresponsible'.

In a similar vein, Jolene and Mark appear to fail at providing "safe living conditions" (WHO & ISPCAN 10) for their two children. As stated by August, their house consisted of "wet walls that gave them asthma and the mold that grew like a grotty birthmark in the folds of the wallpaper and across the ceilings" (Winch 39), already indicating the health hazards these features pose for the children. Additionally, the reason for her parents' arrest, namely growing "ninety-five marijuana plants […], kept vibrant by long fluorescent warming lights" (Winch 39), can be regarded as further proof of their inability to provide a safe environment for August and Jedda. August's description of Mark and Jolene's care for their marijuana plants distinctly contrasts with how they treat their children. Whereas the plants are nurtured and literally and metaphorically provided with 'warmth' to help them prosper, the children are living in squalor marked by the aforementioned mold and humidity. While, according to the WHO and ISPCAN, this can be categorized as significant parental neglect, once more, August's narration neither explicitly addresses the family's socioeconomic status nor the potential reasons behind said status. In so doing, the description of the family's living situation portrays Mark and Jolene as undoubtedly neglectful, without giving the readers insights into their perspective.

Moving on to Jones's protagonist Perdita, her childhood experiences differ considerably from those of August and Jedda's, as it is undoubtedly marked by what Stoltenborgh et al. would call intense 'emotional neglect'. The image Jones paints of the Keenes's family life is completely devoid of love and affection, with Perdita's biological parents being mainly indifferent towards their daughter. Within the very first pages of the novel, Perdita discloses the details of her loveless relationship with her parents Nicholas and Stella, somberly labeling her existence a "mistake" (Jones 4). Perdita describes her parents' utter distain for their child, claiming they had planned to abort her and – when their plan did not come to fruition – hoped

that she would be stillborn (see Jones 22). The contempt Nicholas and Stella have for their daughter does not change once Perdita is born, which is made evident by Jones's description of the birth. By way of the author's linguistic choices, Perdita's nativity is rendered as an animalistic, chaotic event devoid of any emotion or joy: "It was the wet season when Stella heaved me out, wetter than the air, smeared with her inside life of fluids and juices, yowling, irascible." (Jones 24).

While Stella suffers from post-natal depression, regarding her baby as "a bloody mess and utterly unlovely" (Jones 24), according to Perdita's narration, Nicholas exhibits especially strong feelings of dislike for his daughter: "He wished privately – although he knew it was a sin – that the newborn baby would not survive. In the nights of sleeplessness that followed, Nicholas felt an evil, irrepressible resentment [towards Perdita]" (Jones 25). As indicated by Perdita's narration, her childhood-self is painfully aware of her parents' viewing her as "worthless" (Jones 27) and claims that she "knew this melancholy status from earliest childhood" (Jones 4). Hence, Nicholas and Stella's dislike of their daughter and their unwillingness to show her any affection are mirrored in their child rearing techniques which are markedly impersonal and emotionless: "both treated me as a smallish adult, arranging a regimen of behaviour, insisting on rules and repression, talking in stern, pedagogical tones. Neither thought it necessary to express affection, nor to offer any physical affirmations of our bond" (Jones 4). Considering the expression "smallish adult" (Jones 4), it appears striking that Perdita, as a White child, is treated as a mature, responsible adult while August's parents are continuously infantilized. I would argue that this constitutes another instance in which the evaluation of a person's maturity and responsibility is based on the 'nature' ascribed to their social group. According to essentialist beliefs, thus, Indigenous Australians continue to be infantilized, while White Australians are automatically perceived as mature.

Perdita's relationship with her parents is thus marked by the emotional distance between them and characterized as a "battle" (Jones 4) none of them can win. While Jones portrays Perdita's relationship with her father as devoid of any sympathy, the protagonist expresses her affection for her mother at multiple points in the novel, despite being "unconvinced of her love (since she had never been a mother who might embrace, or kiss, or reach inadvertently to caress)" (Jones 49). Perdita's craving for her mother's approval and Stella's apparent disregard for her daughter become most evident in their rare shared emotional moments which Stella always cuts short. One such instance happens during Stella and Perdita's time living in a convent in Broome, where they await their evacuation to Perth. While Perdita sneaks out to wander around the bay, Japanese fighter planes execute an attack on the town, leaving it in a state of chaos and despair (see Jones 131-132). After successfully sheltering from the attack, Perdita returns to her mother's side:

> When Perdita made it back to the convent, still clasping her pearl shells, her mother wept when she saw she was safe. […] [S]o it was just she and Stella again, clinging to each other, pleased at least to have each other alive, and wondering together what on earth would come next. Perdita had been expecting a scolding, but found instead the unusual gift of her mother's tears. But Stella was blowing her nose and wiping her eyes, and already beginning to turn away. (Jones 132)

At first glance, this sequence appears to render an emotional scene between mother and daughter in which Stella embraces her daughter, demonstrating her love for Perdita to the point of crying. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that, especially for Stella, this tearful reunion has little to do with the bond between mother and daughter. Rather than that, this passage makes evident how the emotional reaction is instead due to both Stella and Perdita's fear of being alone, or in other words, due to their realization to "at least […] have each other alive" (Jones 132). While Perdita appears to hope for a prolonged moment of affection, Stella abruptly ends their embrace. As always, Stella is the first to turn away, leaving behind Perdita and her emotions.

The loneliness and hopelessness inherent in Perdita's relationship with both her parents is mirrored in the family's living situation. As Nicholas – and later Stella – becomes obsessed with the coverage of World War II, he covers the walls of their house with newspaper cuttings depicting gruesome war scenes:

> Cuttings from the *Western Mail* began appearing tacked to the walls: grainy and imprecise vistas, buildings aflame beneath flourishes of smoke, figures huddled in bomb shelters, sometimes with insect-like masks, a German plane – one of the most imprinting and memorable images of all – heading downwards, like a crucifix, straight into the earth. (Jones 62)

For Perdita, who does not know any different, the outlandishness of her father's fanaticism and its graphic exhibition on their walls becomes evident only through the shocked reaction of her best friend Billy Trevor (see Jones 63). In the Keenes's home, the boy is confronted with a way of family life that decidedly deviates from what he perceives as 'normal'. As he cannot assimilate this way of 'doing' family into the system of norms he is used to, he is completely shocked and overwhelmed. Billy's assessment of Perdita's family home can, thus, be said to represent the perspective of the White Australian mainstream, again showing that the evaluation of a family as 'dysfunctionality' depends on its comparison to the idealized White norm. Correspondingly, the boy's intense physical reaction to her childhood home is characterized as an eye-opening moment for Perdita: for the first time, she is confronted with the fact that her perceived 'normality' decidedly deviates from the existing norms of the White Australian mainstream. Perdita, who previously attributed her living situation simply to "parental peculiarity" (Jones 63) now realizes the abnormality of her family home when compared to the societal 'normal'.

Returning to the depictions of war within the family home, I argue that they can be compared to the intrafamilial relations of the Keene family: as previously stated, the family dynamics are equated with a "battle" in which "there were only losses" (Jones 4); accordingly, their tumultuous family life is mirrored in the depictions of war scenes, visualizing the inner

workings of the Keene family. In concurrence with likening the family home to a battle ground, Perdita's childhood is marked by her father's violent acts against her mother and the domestic help Mary. Perdita's presence does not deter Nicholas from lashing out against the women, in one instance "striking her [Stella] with an audible whack to the cheek" (Jones 34), in another "sending her flying backwards" (Jones 79), leaving Perdita paralyzed with fear. As conceptualized by Stoltenborgh et al., "allowing children to be witnesses of domestic violence" (346) exposes them to emotional neglect. The omnipresent threat of violence posed by Nicholas once more signifies the family's 'dysfunctionality' and the instability inherent in Perdita's life with her biological parents. Hence, whereas August's childhood home in *The Yield* is characterized as detrimental to the children's physical health, Perdita's family home negatively affects her mental wellbeing.

In addition to these instances of emotional neglect, Nicholas and Stella's physical neglect of their daughter is made apparent from the beginning of the novel. The carelessness with which they treat Perdita can be observed from the moment of her birth, with Nicholas, reacting to his strong dislike of his newborn daughter, temporarily moving out of the Keenes's home. What appears striking is the fact that he does not return to care for his daughter once Stella is taken to the hospital "for a rest" (Jones 26). Instead, he leaves the infant to be cared for by so-called "station blacks" (Jones 26) who are in the employ of the Keenes's neighbors. Nicholas's handing his child over to complete strangers further underlines his disregard for Perdita and his "failure to provide […] supervision" (Stoltenborgh et al. 346) for the child. The intensity of Nicholas's neglect becomes especially apparent when contemplating his disdain for Indigenous Australian individuals whom he attributes inferior 'essences' to (see chapter 6). Despite his contempt, he entrusts the First Nations women with his newborn daughter. Having returned from her hospital stay, Stella appears similarly uninterested in her child, "barely notic[ing] her daughter's absence" (Jones 29) while Perdita is cared for by the Indigenous

women who help raise her. This complete disregard for her baby's needs and the nonexistence of Stella's emotional bond to Perdita can be viewed as the leitmotif of Stella's performance of motherhood. Her treatment of Perdita develops from disinterest to disdain when, following the murder of Nicholas, the girl develops a severe speech impediment. Similar to August's parents' apparent disregard for the emotional trauma behind their daughter's binge eating attacks, Stella views Perdita's impediment as a direct attack against herself and is furious with her (see Jones 100). Jones, once again, makes it absolutely clear to the reader that Perdita is aware of Stella's intense contempt for her child: "And now, as she put it, she was a widow, alone, and burdened with a stubborn, idiot child. She raged and scolded. She told me to pull myself together" (Jones 11). Her frustration over Perdita's stutter, however, does not prompt Stella to get help for her daughter, and she instead revels in "her power" (Jones 151) over the almost mute Perdita. Therefore, Stella not only neglects to seek professional help for her verbally impeded child, constituting another marker of physical neglect (Stoltenborgh et al. 346), but she also uses Perdita's disorder to her own benefit.

Lastly, much like August's parents, Nicholas and Stella neglect Perdita's education by "failing to enroll [her] in school" (Stoltenborgh et al. 346). While August's parents' educational neglect is presented as stemming from their alcohol and drug addiction, in Perdita's case, it is Stella's "distrust of outsiders" which outweighs "her hesitation of mothering" (Jones 35) and, thus, prompts her to homeschool Perdita. As described by the protagonist, Stella's approach to homeschooling is rather erratic, leaving Perdita with "an addled version of the world; so much was unremembered or misremembered, so that the planet reshaped into new tectonic variations, changed the size and outline of countries on shaky hand-drawn maps, filled up with fabricated peoples and customs" (Jones 35-36).[19] At a later point in the novel, Perdita comments on the

[19] This account of Stella's teachings is reminiscent of medieval conceptions of the world as depicted in maps produced at the time. Much like her description of the world, medieval maps included "distorting the form of seas and continents" (Friedman 38) and depictions of "monstrous men" (Friedman 37) believed to live in the foreign parts of the planet.

uselessness of Stella's teaching in the 'real world', characterizing this "maternal inheritance" as something that "would serve to humiliate her" (Jones 65).

Having discussed the different instances and forms of neglect presented in *The Yield* and *Sorry,* it now appears crucial to investigate how parental neglect is framed in the novels. In the case of August, the neglect exhibited by her parents is presented as inextricably tied to their alcohol and drug addiction. Not only is the portrayal of Jolene and Mark's parenting limited to passages chronicling their intoxicated behavior, but, as mentioned before, Winch's protagonist also creates a striking juxtaposition of her parents' devoted care of ninety-four marijuana plants and their neglectful treatment of August and Jedda. Nevertheless, August emphasizes that her parents were not "mean and bad parents, just distracted, too young and too silly, rookies" (Winch 39). Over the course of her narration, August also alludes to her parents' problems stemming from the past, for instance stating that "it felt like life was muffled by some great secret" (Winch 38). Based on the strong correlation Winch establishes between alcohol abuse and intergenerational trauma within the Indigenous Australian community – an aspect which will be explored in chapter 6 – it can be assumed that August considers this trauma as the root of her parents' ailments and of the subsequent breakdown of their family.

As already noted above, August's portrayal of her parents mirrors the existing stereotypes about Indigenous Australians as circulated within national discourse. In my opinion, this portrayal and the complete concealment of her parents' perspectives from the narrative denies Mark and Jolene's agency and reveals August's internalized racism. She regards their belonging to the social group of Indigenous Australians as pre-determining their behavior, thus presenting the group as high in inductive potential. Consequently, Mark and Jolene's addictions and their neglectful parental actions are implicitly attributed to the 'nature' of First Nations people. According to Paradies and Cunningham, August's demographic is especially likely to express views rooted in internalized racism, with the probability being even higher if an

individual does not have a connection to their Indigenous Australian cultural heritage and country (562-563). As August finds her way back to her culture, it remains unclear whether this reconnection influences her implicitly essentialist views on Mark and Jolene. When Jolene is released from prison towards the end of the novel, the narrative is still exclusively told from August's perspective, with Jolene remaining an object within her daughter's description. Nevertheless, I would argue that despite Jolene's 'voicelessness', the phrase "she [Jolene] was there then with eyes alive with something buried" (Winch 304) implies a change in how August regards her mother, portraying her as an individual with agency for the first time.

Whereas August presents Jolene's neglectful care as tied to her mother's addiction problems, Jones's Perdita connects the neglect she experiences by the hands of her mother to Stella's mental health problems which are repeatedly discussed throughout the course of the novel. The narration of Perdita's early childhood links her mother's inability to show affection to her apparent post-natal depression (see Jones 25) and later presents said lack of affection as connected to her developing dementia (see Jones 75). As a character, Stella is, thus, positioned in the role of the "mad" and "bad" (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 203) mother. On the one hand, the people around her acknowledge her mental illness to some extent, whereby a correlation between Stella's 'madness' and her neglectful behavior towards Perdita is assumed. In this sense, Stella's "agency" (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 203) is denied as her mental health problems are believed to direct her actions. On the other hand, in the eyes of outsiders, knowledge of Stella's mental illness is not enough to absolve her of her responsibility for Perdita's neglect, as it goes against the so-called "motherhood mandate" (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 204). This 'mandate' refers to the cultural myth that a woman's primary purpose in life is having and caring for children, a belief that is deeply ingrained in Western discourse on motherhood (Weare, *Bad, Mad or Sad* 204). Hence, Stella's perceived deviation from the obligatory mandate cannot be excused by her mental illness: in order to assimilate Stella's motherly actions

into the discourse, the people around her attribute her 'crime' of going against the norm of 'the' mother to her being inherently bad and "wicked" (Weare, *The Mad* 346). The fact that this type of assessment of child neglect is gendered, centering on the mothers, is evident in Jones's *Sorry*, as the evaluation of Nicholas's fathering differs drastically from that of Stella's performance of mothering. Perdita's childhood retellings regularly make note of Nicholas's menacing behavior which is mirrored in his obsession with war:

> Nicholas told his daughter that it was only a matter of time before Australia would be attacked, and that he would be summoned, in a leadership role, to defend the hapless Australians from the evil Hun and their allies. There would be unimaginable suffering, he said, and hideous mutilations. There would be air raids and bombings. The sky itself would burn. As he sipped his tea, gleefully misanthropic, Perdita and Mary exchanged frightened glances. He was like a shadow they lived under. He had become darkened and impersonal. (Jones 54)

Despite this maniacal, fear-inducing behavior, Nicholas's mental health is never questioned in the same way Stella's is. Instead, his neglectful, and at times malicious, treatment of his daughter is regarded as a matter of course, seemingly even by Perdita herself. In instances in which outsiders' views on the Keenes are incorporated into the narrative, we learn that Nicholas is predominantly disdained for his 'posh' attitudes, making him "buggered in the head" (Jones 103). While people resent him for this, they offer no comments on his performance as a father. In contrast, Stella's behavior is directly connected to her inability to be a 'real' mother, as made evident through her assessment by the Keenes's neighbor, Vera Trevor. Upon visiting Perdita in her family home, Mrs. Trevor concludes that the girl "needed proper looking after. A mother. A real mother" (Jones 67). While Stella is not directly condemned for her inability to properly look after Perdita, Mrs. Trevor's assessment nevertheless highlights how Stella's behavior is connected to being an unfit mother. Her neglectful actions are, thus, interpreted as "violations of the very definitions of *mother*" (LaChance Adams 28), whereas the issue of a 'proper' father is not even considered. A similarly gendered way of assessing child neglect is evident in the way Winch's protagonist frames the neglectful care she experiences. As stated previously, the

portrayal of child neglect in *The Yield* is almost exclusively limited to describing the actions of August's mother, while her father appears to have little significance in their family life. Through her retrospective narration, August renders Jolene as being primarily responsible for neglecting the care of August and Jedda, highlighting once more how the assessment of child neglect differs depending on the parent's gender.

Within this subchapter, I highlighted those passages in *Sorry* and *The Yield* which can be said to illustrate child neglect according to categorizations by the WHO and ISPCAN as well as by Stoltenborgh et al. Following said categorizations, I found that both novels feature instances of physical, emotional and educational neglect of different variations. Moreover, I commented on the fact that by limiting their narration to their own child perspectives, the protagonists do not take their parents' points of view into account, thereby denying the readers insights into the reasons behind the parents' actions. Hence, while the two protagonists make note of their parents' ailments – Perdita comments on Stella's mental health problems, while August views her parents as inextricably tied to their addictions – they do not explicitly acknowledge where these issues may stem from. What is more, I showed that the assessment of child neglect is markedly gendered, as the mothers of both Perdita and August are presented as being primarily responsible for the care of their children. The subsequent subchapter is concerned with Perdita's and August's alternative families. Here, I will demonstrate how these families provide the protagonists with more stable and loving communities and discuss how these families deviate from the idealized White family norm.

5.2 Deviating or Alternative Families

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, both August and Perdita discover alternative families which compensate for the neglectful care of the girls' respective biological parents. In this subchapter, I will demonstrate the forms and practices of said alternative families and discuss in what ways they deviate from the family ideal presented in chapter 4.1.

In *The Yield*, following their parents' imprisonment, August and her older sister Jedda are firstly taken to an "emergency foster house" until their grandparents Albert and Elsie fight for the right to have the girls live with them in their home, a former mission called "Prosperous House" (Winch 39-40). In her grandparents' home, August experiences for the first time what it means to be properly cared for. In describing August's life with Albert and Elsie, Winch, once again, highlights the issue of food, offering a direct comparison between the 'dysfunctionality' of the girl's life with her parents and the stability of her alternative family: in her grandparents' home, "it was the food that they lived for, the food that they shared with every person who stayed or worked in and around the house – food was the center" (Winch 51). Moreover, in contrast to her parents, Albert and Elsie instantaneously recognize that August's insatiable hunger stems from within, with Grandfather Albert stating that "August, when she arrived to live with us, would scream and weep, and yell out 'I'm hungry,' but she was *ngarran* ["weak, hungry, depressed"], she was all those things." (Winch 33). Elsie and Albert shower their grandchildren with affection as well as attention, and generally regard them as their own daughters (see Winch 53, 106). In their care, August experiences a degree of stability, support, and attention her parents were unable to provide for her (see Winch 302).

Her grandparents, however, are not the only individuals who care for August and her sister: during August's childhood at Prosperous she is surrounded by her aunts and cousins, which provides her with a large community. Despite this, August decides to run away and move to England towards the end of her teenage years, a reaction most likely triggered by the mysterious disappearance of her sister Jedda. Years later, when August returns to Prosperous to attend the funeral of her grandfather, however, she realizes that she feels "as if she was home" (Winch 231) there. This sentiment is most vividly depicted at the end of Winch's novel, written in the style of an epilogue:

> And August is still here in Massacre Plains, in the Valley with her nana and Aunt Missy and Aunt Mary too. All the family, all the Gondiwindi mob. All the women together,

> Joey too. She had run away looking for something, run her fingers through the reeds beside foreign rivers, down the spines of books, dipped into holy water in the European churches. She realized she'd fled there for Jedda […]. (Winch 302)

Hence, I would claim that August's feeling of belonging is not only based on her connection to the land itself, but that it is predominantly created by the extended family she is surrounded by. This claim is supported by August's referring to her family as a 'mob', a word Aboriginal Australians use to define "who they are and where they are from" (Centre for Aboriginal Health 10). By explicitly identifying herself with this 'mob', August denotes her belonging through her connection to both the community and the country of the Gondiwindi. The inseparable connection between the country and community of Aboriginal people is also illustrated in the quote used in the title to this thesis, namely Albert's statement that "When our people say *Where is your country*, they are asking something deeper. *Who is your family*?" (Winch 34).

Over the course of *Sorry*, Jones's protagonist Perdita is part of three alternative family constructions with which she compensates for the lack of her parents' care. As mentioned in the previous chapter, three Indigenous Australian women – Jukuna, Sal and Daff – are hired in Perdita's early childhood to relieve Nicholas and Stella of their parenting duties. It is these three women who provide Perdita with the love and care she needs; while Stella is treated for her depression, "[t]he baby meanwhile flourished in black arms, which found and embraced her. Perdita grew chubby, contented and well" (Jones 26). In narrating the care of Jukuna, Sal and Daff, Jones places a distinct emphasis on the physicality they offer Perdita, which her own mother is unable or unwilling to provide: "If it had not been for the Aboriginal women who raised me, I would never have known what it is like to lie against a breast, to sense skin as a gift, to feel the throb of a low pulse at the base of the neck, to listen, in intimate and sweet propinquity, to air entering and leaving a resting body" (Jones 4). As will be explored in chapter 6, it is this physicality and communality which Perdita's father Nicholas – who fancies himself an important anthropologist – identifies as one of the main 'essences', and weaknesses, of

Aboriginal people. Until the age of six, Sal and Daff attend to Perdita's needs and she, thus, regards them as her "alternative mothers" (Jones 76). In their care, the girl experiences the meaning of belonging for the first time: together with Billy Trevor, Perdita is included in Sal and Daff's visits to their Indigenous community who immediately embrace and cherish the two children. Once more, Jones stresses the factor of physicality present in these Indigenous communities (see Jones 32) and immediately follows up the description by Perdita concluding that her parents would have never been able to provide her with this kind of care, as she states that they "were incapable of understanding" (Jones 32) it.

After the sudden disappearance of Sal and Daff and the further deterioration of Stella's mental health, Nicholas decides to take on a young Walmajarri girl named Mary. Perdita, devastated by the absence of Sal and Daff, immediately feels connected to Mary, a feeling which is again marked by physical touch: "At some point in the procedure Mary took her hand and stayed close, instantly affectionate, in an implicit companionship. It was a fond, easy handclasp. Perdita felt the lacing of their fingers. This was the moment, the very moment, that Perdita began to love Mary" (Jones 48). Henceforth, the two girls refer to each other as 'sisters', with Mary – much like Sal and Daff before her – compensating for the care and affection Perdita's parents fail to provide. As opposed to Nicholas and Stella "only Mary, finally, could be relied upon to notice her, her own small life, there in the background" (Jones 63). Additionally, Mary makes Perdita feel like she belongs to someone again: not only does Perdita share a close bond with the Walmajarri girl herself, but Mary also introduces her to a nearby Aboriginal community she regards as family and incorporates Perdita in it, telling her that "since Mary had a designated daughterly role in relation to Mandjabari[20], Perdita was included as a sister" (Jones 72). Perdita is delighted by her inclusion in Mary's "skin group", interpreting it as being "implicated in a wider pattern, where there would always be someone, somewhere,

[20] Mandjabari is an Aboriginal woman who is part of Mary's community.

to know of and look after her" (Jones 72). Upon learning about her new kinship ties, Perdita decides to also include Billy Trevor whom she regards as a brother (see Jones 72-73). The intimate relationship between Perdita, Mary and Billy is especially precious to the protagonist, who, at different points of the novel, refers to it as "another family" (Jones 56) and as "their own little tribe" (Jones 65). The variety of terms used to denote familial belonging in these passages of *Sorry* indicates an interesting view on naturalized conceptions of family. In referring to each other as 'sister' or 'brother' and by considering themselves as a 'tribe', Jones's characters imply genetic ties between them. In reality, however, these communities are not based on genetic relations, and thus do not correspond with the idealized image of 'the' family (Hill Collins 62). By demonstrating the intensity of Perdita's non-genetic relations (i.e. to Mary, Billy and their Aboriginal community) and presenting it in opposition to her genetic relations (i.e. to her biological parents), Jones de-naturalizes the image of 'the' family and the primacy of biological relatedness. Hence, the narration of Perdita's relationships to these alternative families implicitly demonstrates what Nicholas and Stella are incapable of providing for their daughter in terms of care, affection and sense of community and belonging. Nevertheless, Perdita repeatedly stresses the fact that Mary is "not a mother, but a sister" (Jones 49) to her, emphasizing the inexplicable, yet strong connection she feels with Stella. Contrastingly, I would argue that the intensity of Perdita's connection to her father Nicholas is far surpassed by her relationship with Mary. This claim is based on the fact that, after Mary falsely confesses to the murder of Nicholas and is taken away, Perdita appears consumed with sorrow about Mary's absence and her resulting "overwhelming loneliness" (Jones 97) as opposed to mourning her father: "no details bruised my heart to make me feel anything more profoundly than I had felt the loss of Mary" (Jones 100).

The third alternative family mentioned in *Sorry* consists of Ted and Flora Ramsay, a middle-aged White Australian couple who become Perdita's foster parents when Stella's mental

health deteriorates completely. Both Ted and Flora are shown to go to great lengths "to make Perdita feel at home" (Jones 157). Flora, in particular, is very affectionate towards her foster daughter, tucking her into bed and kissing her on the forehead every night (see Jones 156). Moreover, much like August's grandmother Elsie does, she shows Perdita how to cook (see Jones 158), while Ted teaches her his woodworking skills (see Jones 157-158). Similar to August's grandparents who acknowledge the cause behind August's binge eating habit, the Ramsays decide to treat Perdita's stutter by taking her to see a speech therapist (see e.g. Jones 158). In so doing, the foster parents address an issue Stella was unable or unwilling to acknowledge, demonstrating the ease with which the speech impediment could have been tended to. These descriptions of the Ramsays, who are the only alternative White family in either novel, portray Ted and Flora as adhering to the ideal of what a family should provide. They shower Perdita with affection, attention, and support and are characterized as a prototypical 'good' White Christian couple "who [says] grace before dinner" (Jones 156). Through the eyes of the White Australian mainstream, Ted and Flora, thus, constitute the most 'normal' alternative family within both novels. Despite the fact that August's grandparents provide August with similar care and love as Ted and Flora do for Perdita, it is the Ramsays' "Anglo-White" (Chambers 10) ethnicity that renders their family more norm-adherent.

Having described the alternative family constructions present in both *The Yield* and *Sorry*, I now want to discuss in how far they deviate from the norm of the idealized White family. Firstly, with regards to Perdita, she is not biologically related to any of her three alternative families. Because of this, the families deviate from the constructed "naturalness of the traditional family" (Chambers 2), as this naturalization requires biological ties between family members (Chambers 2; Hill Collins 69). Secondly, the ethnicity of August's and Perdita's alternative family members can be identified as going against the White norm of the ideal family: except for Perdita's foster parents Ted and Flora Ramsay, both Perdita and August

belong to alternative families that predominantly consist of Aboriginal individuals. While said deviation from the White norm is obvious in Perdita's case, this assessment requires further clarification when applied to August's alternative family. Judging by the fact that said family is biologically related to her and has the same ethnicity as her, at first glance, this familial construction appears adherent to the family norm. However, as discussed in chapter 4.2, non-White family practices are consistently presented as deficient when measured against the White ideal. Consequently, both August's biological parents as well as her alternative family are regarded as "the problematic" (Ribbens McCarthy et al. 2208) and as deviations from what is perceived as the 'correct' way of doing family in a Western-oriented society (Chambers 10). To sum up, from the perspective of the White Australian mainstream, Perdita is believed to genetically belong to an outwardly norm-adherent Anglo-White family; in comparison, the Indigenous Australian alternative families she establishes throughout *Sorry* decidedly deviate from this family norm. August, on the other hand, is regarded as coming from an inherently deviant family, due to the Gondiwindis' ethnicity (Dunstan et al. 323-324). Therefore, from the point of view of the White mainstream, both August's biological parents and her alternative family arrangement are pathologized. Thirdly, due to them being extended, the protagonists' alternative families can be said to be further 'problematized', seeing as they deviate from the norm of the family as an "isolated unit" (Chambers 18). Based on the fact that, in Australia, "non-nuclear family arrangements" (Walter 137) are most common in Indigenous families, the 'essence' ascribed to extended family structures, i.e. being "inherently pathological" (Chambers12), is equated with the 'nature' of Indigenous individuals (see chapter 6). As a result, the national discourse represents Indigenous extended families as "deviant and disorganised" (Chambers 12). In considering the way in which outsiders assess *The Yield*'s Gondiwindi family after Jedda's disappearance, this view on 'the' Aboriginal family becomes plainly evident: "Slipped through the fingers of careless people. Anyone watching the TV that

week must've thought it – that Jedda was just a little brown girl gone missing from a messy brown family" (Winch 259). What this passage illustrates is the deficit perspective through which Indigenous extended family networks are commonly evaluated (Korbin 29). The family being 'brown' appears to be equated with it being 'messy' which in turn leads to outsiders considering Jedda's vanishing as something to be expected from 'this kind' of a family and, thus, as nothing alarming. This ties in with the assimilationist contention that taking children away from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander parents was not to be considered malevolent, as it was supposedly in the 'nature' of Indigenous families to quickly forget about their stolen children (Barta 202). Again, the discursive representation of Indigenous Australian families as inherently 'dysfunctional' indicates the prevailing idea of White family practices and relations as 'normal'. Compared to this norm, Indigenous extended families are regarded as the flawed 'other'. As will be further examined in the next chapter, such devaluations of non-White social practices culminated in the 19th to the 20th century, where the Australian administration's practice of equating extended Indigenous family structures with deviancy resulted in the separation of countless First Nations families.

In the preceding paragraph, I discussed the way in which Indigenous families in *The Yield* and *Sorry* are essentialized in terms of their supposed negative 'essences'; however, I would argue that Perdita's comments on her alternative Aboriginal families can be read as an essentialization of the families in terms of their perceived positive 'nature'. Instead of characterizing them as disorganized or 'messy', Perdita equates Indigenous families with community and belonging. During her time in Perth, having to take care of her increasingly erratic mother, Perdita feels incredibly lonely, as she is ostracized by her classmates due to her speech impediment. As soon as she spots an "Aboriginal encampment" (Jones 143), however, Perdita is sure that "she would be accepted, even welcomed" (144) by them. Perdita thus essentializes and romanticizes 'the' Aboriginal family and attributes it the unified 'nature' of

being a place of belonging, love and care. Both Perdita's positive stereotyping and Nicholas's negative essentialism proceeds along the same lines, namely ascribing Aboriginal people certain "behavioral attributes" (Rothbart & Taylor 26) on the basis of their supposed 'racial essence'. In so doing, father and daughter deny Indigenous individuals their own agency and limit the characterization of the social group to specific positive (Perdita) or negative (Nicholas) properties (Holtz & Wagner 412). This illustrates that Perdita's romanticizing Indigenous communities leads to the same perpetuation of essentialist beliefs about the social group as Nicholas's negative views do (see Kay et al. 291).

As this chapter has shown, when compared to the idealized White family norm, the families of both August and Perdita can be identified as sites of child neglect involving varying degrees of physical, emotional and educational neglect. While Winch's *The Yield* is focused on how past neglect affects the present, showing her protagonist in her present healing process, Jones's *Sorry* details Perdita's childhood with her neglectful parents and is markedly centered on the family's past. Moreover, both Jones and Winch focus their narration of parental neglect on the role of the respective mothers. In so doing, the representation correlates with the way in which family discourse commonly trivializes the role of the father in situations of child neglect and instead primarily condemns the mother for failing to properly nurture the child. However, the way in which the two novels handle this discursive representation markedly differs: Winch's portrayal of Mark appears to affirm the trivialization of fathers, as Mark's influence both on August's past as well as on her present is presented as peripheral at best. Jones, on the other hand, contradicts the sidelining of fatherhood: she instead illustrates the profound impact Nicholas's behavior has on Perdita which culminates in her murdering her father. Regarding the alternative families presented in *Sorry* and *The Yield*, I argue that they manage to compensate for the neglect the protagonists suffered by the hands of their biological parents, and provide them with a sense of community, belonging and structure which they were missing

before. Through the continuous comparison of August's and Perdita's alternative families to the norm of the White nuclear family, the Indigenous family arrangements in question are nevertheless reduced to their "difference, deficit, and dysfunction" (Walter & Andersen 10) and thereby pathologized. In the subsequent chapter, I will expand on this deficit perspective through which Indigenous families have been, and still are, assessed by mainstream discourse in Australia and which have resulted in different forms of governmental intervention.

6. Governmental Interventions and Intergenerational Trauma in *The Yield* and *Sorry*

The previous chapter discussed instances in *Sorry* and *The Yield* which, based on assessments by the WHO and ISPCAN as well as Stoltenborgh et al., can be classified as depicting child neglect. Following this examination, I will now show how Australia, as a formerly self-styled surrogate 'parent' of Indigenous Australian children (see 3.4.3), can be said to have neglected 'its' children through the governmental intervention of the Stolen Generations. The focus of this chapter is two-fold: firstly, I will investigate how essentialist ideas about Whiteness, Indigeneity and family have continued to inform the discursive evaluation of First Nations Peoples' family practices; secondly, I will demonstrate the ongoing impact that past governmental policies and interventions such as the Stolen Generations have on the lives of Indigenous families in Australia in the form of intergenerational trauma. In so doing, I want to highlight how an understanding of Australia's past treatment of Indigenous Australians is imperative for comprehending the hardships faced by contemporary Indigenous Australian families such as August's. This acknowledgment of the national past is commonly disregarded by the Australian nation; instead, the mainstream discourse continues to perpetuate the image of 'the' Indigenous family as inherently 'dysfunctional'. In order to investigate this issue holistically, this chapter is divided into two subchapters. Firstly, I will analyze the way in which *Sorry* and *The Yield* treat the topic of the most well-known Australian governmental

intervention, namely the Stolen Generations (see 3.4.3). This first subchapter is based on the narration of two members of the Stolen Generations, namely August's grandfather Albert in *The Yield* and Perdita's non-genetic sister Mary in *Sorry*. Within the discussion of the characters' experiences, I will focus on the essentialist beliefs regarded to justify their removal from their biological families, highlighting how the discursive essentialization of Indigenous Australians as inherently 'dysfunctional' aided and justified family separations. Following the discussion of the intervention's impact on the immediate family members of Albert and Mary, the second subchapter explores how these traumatic experiences continue to impact Indigenous Australian families in the form of intergenerational trauma. Lastly, by considering the case of Perdita, an Anglo-White child in Australia, I aim to demonstrate how governmental interventions and outsiders' assessment of child neglect differ depending on the ethnicity of the child in question.

6.1 The Stolen Generations, Essentialist Beliefs and their Immediate Impact on Families

The governmental intervention of the Stolen Generations is featured in both *The Yield* and *Sorry*, albeit through different narrative lenses. In Winch's novel, it is August's grandfather Albert whose narrative voice provides information on being separated from his family and being instructed in a Boys' Home. Albert describes his experiences in the form of a dictionary that he writes to preserve the Gondiwindi language: for every language item, he includes a corresponding story from his own life. As a result, his memories on being taken away from his family and on the aftermath of the experience are scattered throughout the novel. I argue that this nonlinear style of describing Albert's childhood trauma is emblematic of the ongoing effect it has on him all throughout his life, emphasizing how such experiences can never be completely left behind by those affected. In *Sorry*, it is not Mary's – who is actually affected – but Perdita's voice through which the reader learns of Mary's experiences as a part of the Stolen Generations. The choice of Jones, a White Australian author, to render the Walmajarri girl voiceless in this

context has been criticized by numerous literary commentators who claim that "silence – even respectful silence – can become a form of erasure" (Herrero 287). On the other hand, by rendering the story exclusively through the White protagonist Perdita, Jones evades the "illegitimate appropriation" (Herrero 287) of Indigenous Australian voices. In my opinion, choosing to tell Mary's story through Perdita points to the way in which "White ways of knowing and seeing" are commonly "structurally privileged" (Salter 33) in Eurocentric nations. Accordingly, sociohistorical accounts on matters concerning non-White social groups – in this case First Nations people – are only considered credible if they are recounted by a White person. Hence, I would argue that by describing Mary's experiences through her White protagonist Perdita, Jones aims to amplify the credibility of the Walmajarri girl's story while evading the aforementioned danger of appropriating the Indigenous Australian experience.

Both Mary and Albert are removed from their families as children, the former at six years old (see Jones 55) and the latter at the age of three (see Winch 26). Albert's narration does not provide the readers with a 'justification' for his being separated from his family. Due to the fact that the Gondiwindi are based in New South Wales (NSW)[21], his removal was most likely 'justified' by accusing his biological family of neglecting the children, as "[i]n that state Aboriginality was automatically and legislatively associated with neglect" (Dodson 6). Following the family separation, Albert lives in a so-called 'Boy's Home' where the boys are regularly punished and where a little affection from one of their teachers is regarded as extraordinary (see Winch 42). Similarly, having been stolen from her mother because of her light skin, Mary is firstly taken to Balgo Mission and, when "Mission fellas noticed that she was unusually smart", to the orphanage 'Sister Clare's' (Jones 55). In both of their cases, the Aboriginal characters come to live in spaces meant to assimilate them into the White Australian way of life. This objective is made explicit in both novels: in *Sorry*, Mary's stay at Sister Clare's

[21] My conclusion is based on the aforementioned fact that the Gondiwindi are modeled after the real-life Wiradjuri people who live in NSW.

is supposed to teach her "to be a whitefella, […] to learn all them whitefella ways" (Jones 55-56); in *The Yield*, the sign above the entrance of the Boy's Home reads "Think White. Act White. Be White" (Winch 23).[22] These statements clearly demonstrate the 'racial' or cultural essentialism that underlies the removal of Indigenous Australian children like Mary and Albert. This form of essentialist thinking is especially highlighted in *Sorry*, in which characters such as Perdita's father Nicholas or the Keenes's neighbor Vera Trevor express their beliefs in the inferior 'nature' of Indigenous Australians and the superiority of White people, thus perpetuating myths about both the assumed in- as well as the out-group. Keeping in mind the convictions behind the implementation of assimilationist policies (see 3.4.3), I would, therefore, claim that Nicholas and Vera represent the mainstream White Australian zeitgeist of the time, a claim I will elaborate on in the following first subchapter.

6.1.1 Essentialist Beliefs behind the Stolen Generations

Nicholas, having studied the fairly novel discipline of anthropology, migrated to Australia to conduct field research on Indigenous Australians, hoping to "uncover the mystery of what he liked to call 'elemental man'" (Jones 7). Denoting "the powers of nature" as well as "primitive" ("Elemental" 568) desires, Nicholas's use of the term 'elemental' reveals his opinion on Aboriginal people: to him, they are in opposition to the supposed White 'essence' of being civilized. Correspondingly, Nicholas regards Indigenous Australians as "base, unintelligent and equivalent to children" and believes "that they held in their behaviour and beliefs the origins of sex [and] aggression" (Jones 7). This short summary of Nicholas's convictions provides ample material for a closer analysis. Firstly, likening Aboriginal people to children appears reminiscent of the treatment of August's parents by their daughters' school, which I discussed in 5.1. Considering the fact that *Sorry* is set during World War II, i.e. long before August's

[22] According to Grant, the Cootamundra home in New South Wales actually had such a sign hanging in one of its dormitories.

timeline, this parallel highlights the long-standing tradition of infantilizing Indigenous Australians within the Australian national discourse (Elder 24).

Secondly, Nicholas's explicitly essentialist comments throughout Jones's novel are predominantly centered on physicality. It is these comments in particular which continuously demonstrate how beliefs in the 'natures' of White Australians (constituting what Nicholas considers the in-group) and of Indigenous Australians (the out-group) affect how these groups' behavioral patterns are assessed. Upon his first contact with an Aboriginal community near the Keenes's home, Nicholas is repulsed by the communality they share (see Jones 19), interpreting it as revealing their 'nature' of being backward. Seeing as essentialist beliefs are amplified if the social group in question is associated with certain physical traits – in this example with a darker skin color – Nicholas's bewilderment at the Indigenous Australians' "shiny black bodies" (Jones 23) points to his strong belief in their 'essential' properties. Due to the fact that Nicholas associates physical touch with the family practices of Aboriginal Australians, he appears determined to evade this familial feature and does not offer any form of physical affection to his family members. Instead, Nicholas appears to regard the battleground as the only space in which the display of physicality is acceptable (see Jones 53). As opposed to the disdained communal practices of Indigenous Australians, he evaluates the physicality expressed in wartime as the epitome of Anglo-White masculinity, as it is aimed at defending the British Empire's "right of governance" (Jones 7) and is thus decidedly 'civilized'.

Thirdly, Nicholas's aforequoted conviction – connecting Indigenous Australians to the "origins of sex" (Jones 7) – once more echoes an essentialist idea perpetuated in the White Australian discourse of the time, which was used to justify the separation of First Nations families. Indigenous Australians – especially Indigenous women – were commonly associated with "sexual promiscuity" (Van Krieken 301) and were made responsible for the increase in

biracial children in Australia which was considered problematic.[23] This "problem of hybridity" (Van Krieken 303) was, thus, attributed to "some underlying disposition of the group members" (Yzerbyt et al., *Group Entitativity*), i.e. the 'essence' of Indigenous Australian women. By way of this framing, the real reason behind the growing number of biracial children, namely "the conduct of white men and their pursuit of sex with Aboriginal women" (Van Krieken 303), was concealed. This extreme hypocrisy can also be detected in *Sorry*: Nicholas, repeatedly promoting the idea of Indigenous Australian women's promiscuity, rapes Mary as well as the Trevor's young cook Martha, eventually even impregnating the latter (e.g. see Jones 60; 28). Once more, the narration reveals the difference in assessment of in- and out-group, with Nicholas regarding his and his peers' sexual behavior as "manly and justified" because "[a]ll the white men did it" (Jones 28).

Lastly, Nicholas's primary research hypothesis consists of claiming that, due to their 'nature', Indigenous Australians are unsuitable for "twentieth-century Australia" (Jones 71). In his view, the only possibility for overcoming this obstacle lies in altering what he considers 'essential' to Aboriginal people, namely their focus on community. He states that because of their thinking "in communal, not individual terms […] they were always bound to the past, to tribal savagery" and believes Indigenous Australians are unable to survive in what he refers to as "the modern world" (Jones 71). In his convictions, he especially stresses the fact that Indigenous Australians do not appear to be driven by capitalist ideas as supposedly evidenced by his observations that "they were always poor and could never accumulate property" (Jones 71). Thus, he equates not adhering to this White socioeconomic standard and the corresponding idea of civilization with savagery because Indigenous Australians' 'nature' is supposedly "lacking" the possibility to be oriented towards "modern progress" (Nelson 161).

[23] The existence of biracial children was problematized because they were believed to "inherit the 'vices' of both races" (Van Krieken 301), a combination which was thought to result in decidedly non-progressive individuals.

This last essentialist idea of Nicholas is, again, based on actual beliefs behind assimilationist efforts according to which Indigeneity was "an unsurmountable obstacle to the capacity to take a 'normal' part in European-Australian social life" (Van Krieken 298). According to the national discourse of the time, First Nations peoples' only chance of overcoming their 'nature' was to be taught how to behave according to White Australian norms, an 'education' which was focused on Indigenous Australian children. Winch's *The Yield* incorporates the beginnings of this supposedly well-intentioned White re-education of Indigenous Australians in the 19th century by providing the perspective of Reverend Greenleaf and, as mentioned previously, by describing Albert's 'education'. In Jones's *Sorry*, it is the Keenes's neighbor Vera Trevor who considers herself as fulfilling the role of the 'benevolent' White teacher. She regards it as her duty to take in Aboriginal Australian girls who were

> each sent by the Protector of Aborigines to learn the craft of cooking and cleaning. These were 'half-caste' girls, in need of assimilation. Mrs Trevor […] thought it her duty to civilise them, and to teach them good behaviour and habits of tidiness, to induct them into submission and quiet compliance. (Jones 21-22)

Here, it becomes clear that Mrs. Trevor is fully convinced of the fact that assimilating and 'civilizing' Indigenous Australian girls is crucial. Her conviction points to the intensity with which the essentialist ideas about in- and out-groups was circulated within Australian discourse. Once more, the Indigenous Australian way of life is automatically equated with not being civilized, if not regarded as utter savagery. The passage also illustrates what the desired 'good behaviour' of Aboriginal Australian children was to entail, namely being subservient, or in other words, to adhere to the rules made by White Australians without protesting. Hence, the desired result of this 'education' of First Nations children was to facilitate the "management and control" (Jones 12) of all Indigenous Australians. In the particular case of Vera Trevor, however, the narration does not provide insights into what she perceives to be the general aim behind her 'teaching' young Aboriginal Australian girls. As evident in the quote above, she

appears to be primarily focused on fulfilling her 'duty' to the nation, presumably disregarding the ideological objectives inherent in the assimilationist practices she helps to carry out.

Despite the fact that Vera Trevor repeatedly praises her "domestic help" (Jones 21), she nevertheless appears to be unable to overcome her essentialist convictions, a claim I base on two passages in *Sorry*. Firstly, through the narrative voice of Perdita, the readers learn that Vera Trevor is glad about the company offered by the Indigenous Australian girls in her 'care' as she would otherwise feel lonely without her sons (see Jones 21). Despite this, Mrs. Trevor clings to her negative beliefs about the 'nature' of Aboriginal Australians, calling Sal and Daff – her domestic helpers – "mongrel no-hopers, […] layabout blacks" (Jones 33) when the girls spend time with other Aboriginal people in the bush. Having been praised for their good – i.e. 'White' – behavior by Mrs. Trevor before, when in the company of other Indigenous Australian people, Sal and Daff are ascribed specific behavioral traits associated with their 'racial' affiliation, namely laziness and unproductivity (see Morning 231). Secondly, Mrs. Trevor speaks highly of her Aboriginal Australian cook Martha, calling the young girl "her best cook ever" (Jones 92). When she discovers Martha's pregnancy, however, Mrs. Trevor does not believe her claims of having been raped by Nicholas Keene (see Jones 92). In concordance with the previously discussed belief in Aboriginal women's 'nature' of sexual promiscuity, Mrs. Trevor is convinced that Martha is lying about Nicholas's violent actions and immediately sends the young girl away. The woman, thus, "blame[s] the victim" (Van Krieken 303) and Martha's supposed 'racial nature' for the unwanted pregnancy.

Both of these examples showcase the strong belief in the entitativity and inalterability of Aboriginal Australians' 'nature'. Despite the fact that Vera Trevor has decidedly positive experiences with her domestic helpers, enjoying their company as well as their skills, she, nevertheless beliefs in the need to change them. Similarly, during Nicholas's contact with his

'research objects', he gets to know Indigenous Australians whose characteristics do not tie in with his supposed knowledge about their 'nature':

> Yet his categories seemed irrelevantly abstruse when faced with these shy black people, who would make no eye contact but had a good sense of humour, who seemed – surprisingly to him – intelligent and quick-witted, and were at home sitting on the earth and hunting and gathering its produce" (Jones 21-22).

Hence, despite getting to know Aboriginal individuals who counter what Vera and Nicholas believe to know about the social group, they nevertheless both hold on to their essentialist convictions. In line with Allport's (23) and Yzerbyt et al.'s (*Group Entitativity*) explanations, I would claim that those behavioral patterns of Indigenous Australians which deviate from Nicholas's and Vera's essentialist ideas are disregarded by the characters so as not to "modify the generalization" (Allport 23).

Having demonstrated that White characters like Nicholas and Vera share the discursively perpetuated essentialist beliefs about Aboriginal Australians at the center of assimilationist efforts, I now want to comment on Jones's implicit comment on assimilationist practices through her protagonist Perdita. Perdita, spending the majority of her childhood with Aboriginal Australians, perceives her Anglo-White ethnicity as inferior to Indigeneity and regards her light skin color as a "mark of implicit deficiency" (Jones 73). By demonstrating her Anglo-White protagonist's desire to be assimilated into the Walmajarri culture,[24] Jones implicitly comments on the abstractness behind the Australian government's assimilationist efforts. More specifically, the author showcases how one specific social group's apparent 'superiority' over others is determined by the prevailing ideological discourse of the social system the groups are implicated in. Due to the fact that Perdita is not yet aware of said discourse and the institutionalized social hierarchies it perpetuates, she prefers the culture which she associates most with community and care, i.e. the Walmajarri culture (see chapter 5.2).

[24] Seeing as Perdita shares the closest bond with Mary – who is of Walmajarri heritage – at this point, I consciously refer to the 'Walmajarri' culture so as to do justice to the diversity of Indigenous Australian Peoples.

What is more, during her time spent with Mary, Perdita's 'assimilation' into the Walmajarri way of life also becomes evident in certain behavioral traits, as noticed by Mrs. Trevor: "both girls simultaneously turned and directed with their chins, Aboriginal style, out the window to the left. *Poor mite. Like a blackfella*" (Jones 66). Mrs. Trevor automatically views such habits typically associated with Aboriginal Australians as problematic and agonizes over what she perceives as Perdita's increasing assimilation into Indigenous Australian culture.

6.1.2 Immediate Effects of the Stolen Generations on Indigenous Australian Families

Following my discussion of the essentialist convictions behind the Australian government's separation of Indigenous Australian families, in this section, I aim to illustrate how these separations immediately affected the families of removed children as well as the children themselves. For this purpose, I will draw on the information provided by Jones's Mary and Winch's Albert.

As I noted in the preceding subchapter, both Mary and Albert are removed from their respective families at a very young age. During the years away from their families, Albert and Mary primarily mourn the loss of connection to their mothers[25], and, in Albert's case, to their siblings. Correspondingly, *Sorry* and *The Yield* show that the mothers appear to be most severely traumatized by the forceful removal of their children. Rendering her story to Perdita, Mary talks about her mother's death which she only found out about in passing (see Jones 56). She tells Perdita that her mother "rolled into a fire, so lost in grief, and so irremediably heartbroken, that she did not care to remove her burning self from the unholy flames" (Jones 58), illustrating the profound trauma experienced by the families of the members of the Stolen Generations.

[25] As noted in 5.1, it appears striking that the central characters in both *Sorry* and *The Yield* appear to either have a rather insignificant relationship to their father (Perdita and August) or to have no relationship to their father at all (Mary and Albert).

While this section is centered on the families' experiences, it appears crucial to briefly comment on how Mary's reaction to her mother's death is received, as it can be identified as another instance of in- and out-group thinking as investigated in 6.1.1. Having heard about her mother's passing, Mary grieves for her in the Walmajarri way, i.e. by taking a rock and striking at her head, ultimately drawing blood (see Jones 56). The nuns at Sister Clare's convent immediately punish her for this style of grieving and state that "her behaviour was unChristian" (Jones 56). Hence, even in this context which is deeply traumatizing for the child involved, the White Australian nuns pathologize the cultural practices of the 'other' – in this instance Walmajarri People – by contrasting it with supposedly 'normal' behavior of Christian White people.

Moving on to Albert's family, he renders his mother's reaction to the removal of her children in a way that is reminiscent of Mary's mother. While his mother's grief does not result in her death shortly after her children's removal, as appears to have been the case for Mary's mother, it leads to a life-threatening long-term illness, namely to alcoholism. According to Albert's narrative voice, after losing her children, his mother was "defeated" and turned to alcohol, ultimately drinking "her death, when the grog *duri-mambi-rra* [ill, to make ill]" (Winch 156). What appears striking is her reasoning behind choosing to drink: stating that White Australians were "always insulted by her no matter what she did" because of her Indigeneity, "she let herself do the most insulting thing she could think of – take the poison they brought with them and go to town" (Winch 11). Her seemingly purposeful use of alcohol can, thus, not only be identified as a way of dealing with her trauma, but she also frames it as a resistance strategy. In this view, Albert's mother specifically chooses alcohol – the 'poison' imported by White settlers – as a response to the continuous pathologization Indigenous Australians have to endure. By indulging in alcohol consumption, she, hence, gives the White settlers actual cause for "always [being] insulted by her" (Winch 11). In so doing, however, she also inadvertently

affirms the 'nature' ascribed to First Nations people to justify child removals, which – as I have discussed previously – represented Indigenous Australian families as inherently 'dysfunctional' and oftentimes falsely accused the parents of being alcoholics (Commonwealth of Australia).

Following the discussion of how the mothers reacted to the removal of their children, I will now turn to the governmental intervention's effect on the actual children, i.e. on Mary, Albert and Albert's sister Mary.[26] Starting with Mary, while Perdita's narration regularly makes note of the fact that Mary is extremely self-assured and appears well-balanced, there are nonetheless clear indicators of her deep emotional trauma. Finding out about her mother's tragic passing can be identified as the most palpable trigger for her trauma, with the narration stating that Mary "wanted her own death" (Jones 56) after learning about the incident. Her mother's death also plays a key role in the most pivotal scene of Jones's novel: Perdita, seeing her father rape Mary, stabs Nicholas to death. In order to protect her non-biological sister, Mary falsely confesses to the crime and is taken to prison (see Jones 193-194). During one of Perdita's visits, Mary tells her about her reasons for taking the fall for Perdita, stating that "[m]others and daughters, they need each other" (Jones 203). Hence, Mary's own trauma of having lost her mother moves her to prevent her sister from experiencing a similar fate.

In the case of Albert, while his narrative voice informs the readers about some details of his experiences as part of the Stolen Generations, it rarely makes his childhood trauma explicit. Whenever Albert writes about his time in the Boys' Home and the traumatic memories attached to it, he immediately turns to more positive aspects:

> When I was little and in the Boys' Home, I never forgot our people on the river. […] I'd think about my *minhi* across the country in the Girls' Home, and my urine would run like quicksilver over the hessian cots, onto the stone floors to wake my schoolmates. I was just three years old after all. I never forgot her. She was just a baby, Mary was, when we were both taken away. That's a sad story with a happy ending because we found each other again. (Winch 26)

[26] To prevent any confusion between Jones's and Winch's Mary in the following paragraphs, I will refer to Albert's sister as 'Mary (*The Yield*)'.

His way of portraying these experiences can be interpreted in two ways which, I would argue, are not mutually exclusive. Firstly, by focusing his story on the more positive aspects, his style of narration can be read as an empowerment strategy. I claim that in continuously redirecting his memories, he pursues the goal of not letting his life be determined by this childhood trauma. Instead, he tries to stress the positive things in his life that happened in spite of these traumatic experiences. Secondly, this style of storytelling points to the fact that his trauma remains unresolved, as he appears to gloss over the details of his traumatic childhood experiences. As I will discuss in 6.2, Albert's apparent inability to truly overcome his traumata is shown to affect his family, particularly his daughter Jolene. Staying on the topic of family, I would claim that Albert's experiences as a member of the Stolen Generations also impacts his performance as a father. In his quest to provide his wife and children with a better life and, as previously noted, to not let his life be determined by his traumata, he is solely focused on working. As a result, he is a rather inattentive father to his daughters, as he himself admits (see Winch 43).

The trauma of Albert's sister Mary who, at the time of being separated from her family, is merely an infant (see Winch 26), manifests itself in her inability to show affection (see Winch 26). Albert's narration explains his sister's manifestation in terms of the contrast between his experiences in the Boys' Home and her time at the Girls' Home. Whereas Albert was fortunate enough to have a teacher who treated the boys with kindness and hugged them (see Winch 42), he surmises that his sister Mary "never got a hug at the Girls' Home because in a warm embrace she froze" (Winch 42). Mary (*The Yield*) herself implicitly comments on her affectionless upbringing in the care of White Australians and connects it to her own performance as a mother, stating that she loved her son "more than she was ever taught" (Winch 158).

The investigation of Albert, Mary and Mary, three members of the Stolen Generations, clearly demonstrates the effect this governmental intervention has on Indigenous Australian family life. This impact is rather indirect in Mary's case, however, I would argue that her

childhood trauma is responsible for her inability to ever start a family of her own, as it prompts her to spend her life in prison for a crime she did not commit. While Albert and Mary (*The Yield*) are both shown to have started a family, Winch's novel reveals that their traumatic experiences impact their performances as parents, with Mary (*The Yield*) finding it hard to be affectionate and Albert focusing so much on leaving his past behind that he is not fully present during his daughters' childhood. In the subsequent chapter, I will explore how the parents' childhood traumata can be said to affect the following generations of their families.

6.2 National Neglect and Intergenerational Trauma

In the subchapter at hand, I will discuss the continuing impact of past assimilationist efforts on Indigenous Australian families. In order to pursue this research focus, the analysis will be centered on Winch's *The Yield*, as the novel tells the story of three generations of the Gondiwindi family. Despite the fact that Jones's Mary is a member of the Stolen Generations, her story is not relevant for the following investigation: seeing as – due to a false confession triggered by her childhood trauma – she spends her life in prison, Mary is unable to start a family of her own, therefore making it impossible to examine her family's intergenerational trauma. Moreover, while I will only address Jones's Anglo-White Keene family peripherally in this subchapter, it can be regarded as the norm against which Indigenous Australian families such as the Gondiwindi are evaluated as 'less than' within mainstream discourse.

Based on the information rendered through Albert's and August's narrative voices, I will examine how Albert's unresolved traumata caused by national neglect – i.e. the governmental intervention of the Stolen Generations – can be said to impact his descendants. The Gondiwindi are, thus, understood as representing the general Indigenous Australian population, as the actual existence of this intergenerational trauma has been repeatedly proven over the years (e.g. Nadew). Moreover, within this discussion, I will demonstrate how the aforementioned Australian national neglect is currently repeated through the act of forgetting:

as this chapter will show, the pathologization of Indigenous Australian family practices that was used to justify the Stolen Generations is still part of today's Australian national discourse. Strikingly, this current discursive representation of First Nations families fails to acknowledge the past treatment of said social group through governmental interventions like the Stolen Generations and the resulting intergenerational traumata. By disregarding this sociohistorical background, the problems a large number of Indigenous Australian families face – for instance, family separation and financial hardships – are decontextualized and the families are, again, represented as inherently 'dysfunctional'.

6.2.1 Manifestations of Intergenerational Trauma in Winch's Gondiwindi Family

The fact that the members of the Gondiwindi family suffer from intergenerational trauma is addressed at numerous points throughout the novel by both Albert and August. Within his dictionary, Albert at one point declares that "[w]e were like roos in the headlights, the old people, my old mummy, me and my sisters, even my daughters, growing up around sad ghosts on the Mission" (Winch 277). This statement clearly illustrates the long-standing traumata that affects the different generations of Gondiwindi. By referring to 'the old people', Albert puts the traumata in a wider context than the Stolen Generations, seemingly identifying the origins of these intergenerational wounds in the time of the British invasion. Through August's narration, the reader is then confronted with the ongoing impact of the mistreatment of Indigenous Australian families, as she represents the fourth generation of Gondiwindi featured in Winch's novel. In chapter 5, I already discussed one of the ways in which August's inherited trauma, amplified by the disintegration of her own family, manifests itself, namely through compulsive binge eating attacks. As stated by Winch herself, August's binge eating constitutes her way of trying to fill the metaphorical void caused by the family traumata ("Tara June Winch"). This is also amplified by a statement of August's towards the end of the novel: "it's the grandkids who inherit everything their ancestors did before. They carried the past with them, though they never

knew" (Winch 303). Her declaration highlights that the intergenerational family trauma spans even further than Albert appears to have anticipated, even affecting the Gondiwindi grandchildren. Hence, Winch's novel draws attention to the fact that Indigenous Australian families' traumata caused by national neglect have been affecting numerous generations – from 'the old people' to August and possibly beyond.

As I commented on in 5.1, the behavior of August's mother Jolene can be regarded as a striking example of how the traumata of members of the Stolen Generations are passed on to the following generations.[27] Despite the fact that August, who cannot see past her own childhood perspective (see 5.1), fails to provide context for her parent's neglectful treatment of her sister Jedda and her, she nevertheless hints at her mother's underlying traumata. At various points in the novel, August indirectly refers to the connection between Jolene's substance abuse problems and an undefined ominous past that she refers to as the "great secret" (Winch 38). Correspondingly, August is convinced that Jolene's misfortunes in life are due to her inability to "see herself out of a cage" (Winch 205). This statement, again, seems to allude to the influence of an apparent unresolved trauma on her mother's life, which appears to be the cause for both the metaphorical confinement within Jolene's own mind as well as for her physical internment in a prison cell. As I discussed in 3.3.1, one's adherence to a marginalized social group, in this case Indigenous Australians, commonly results in a feeling of confinement caused by the inability to move past the associated group 'nature'. I would, therefore, claim that Jolene's feeling of being 'caged' indicates the depth of her trauma; she appears to have internalized the supposed 'dysfunctional nature' that has been attributed to First Nations families for centuries. By implicitly portraying said internalization, Winch highlights how First Nations parents can feel as if the 'nature' ascribed to them via mainstream discourse were

[27] Due to the fact that August provides the readers with very little information on her father Mark, I will center the following examination on her mother Jolene.

inescapable. In addition to the internalization of negative 'essences' of Indigenous Australians by August (see 5.1) and Jolene, Albert exhibits similar tendencies:

> 'Do you remember when Poppy put that sign outside Prosperous?' August asked. […] *'No Grog, No Cash, No Yarndi, No Good Times Here.'* […] ''Member family got pissed off – said he was typecasting us?' […] 'And then I could hear everyone arguing out on the back deck about this sign. Arguing that they weren't this and we weren't that. Defending ourselves in our own home.' (Winch 280)

Through this sign, Albert seemingly wants to strongly reject the existing stereotypes about Indigenous Australians' high likelihood for, for instance, alcoholism ('Grog') and marijuana consumption ('Yarndi'). By feeling the need to put up the sign, however, Albert simultaneously affirms said stereotypical associations, a fact which is strongly criticized by his family. I argue that this familial discussion is representative for the way in which First Nations individuals and families continuously have to prove that they do not match their essentialist representation as perpetuated within mainstream discourse.

As noted above, *The Yield* demonstrates how the overrepresentation of pathologizing portrayals can easily be internalized by First Nations individuals (Stoneham 7), a phenomenon that is evident through Winch's rendering of Jolene. I would moreover argue that Winch's depiction of Jolene illustrates how Indigenous Australian parents' having to cope with both intergenerational traumata and the constant misrepresentation of First Nations families can lead to the inadvertent affirmation of the commonly perpetuated Indigenous 'essences' of, for instance, alcoholism and inherent family 'dysfunctionality'. Jolene's inherited traumata are most evident in her alcohol and drug abuse as described by her daughter's narrative voice. Her substance abuse problems are clearly reminiscent of the alcohol addition of Albert's mother discussed in 6.1.2. I claim that by repeating this theme, Winch once more emphasizes the way in which the trauma caused by national neglect replicates itself, affecting the following family generations. [28] As stated by Albert, alcohol – which he refers to as "poison in its own right" –

[28] See Wilson et al. for further information on Indigenous Australians' relationship with alcohol.

is commonly used as a form of self-medication in order to deal with trauma, because to "poisoned spirits [it] looks like prayer" (Winch 276). Attempting to treat one's traumata with alcohol is, however, not only practiced by Albert's mother and his daughter Jolene but is also apparent in the fourth generation: August herself admits that she uses alcohol "to be numb. Her drink of choice was always oblivion" (Winch 205). This intergenerational practice of "self-medicating with alcohol and other substances" (Nadew 1674) to deal with the trauma caused by the past separation of Indigenous Australian families has been found to be extremely common among the First Nations population (see Nadew). Despite this connection being well-researched, the policies aimed at decreasing the relatively high levels of alcohol abuse among Indigenous Australians continue to disregard the sociohistorical cause behind it. This results in the fact that "the effect [of intergenerational trauma] on individuals, family and community is magnified" (Nadew 1675) instead of being treated. What is more, by dismissing these sociohistorical factors, the further essentialization of Indigenous Australians as typical 'drunks' (University of Sydney) as well as the internalization of such images – as evidenced by Albert's sign – is promoted.

6.2.2 Differences in the Assessment of Child Neglect Cases in White Australian and Indigenous Australian Families

As I analyzed in chapter 5, both Jones's as well as Winch's protagonists are removed from their biological parents through governmental interventions. What I aim to demonstrate in this section are the differences between said interventions in an Anglo-White (Perdita) and an Aboriginal Australian (August) family. My objective is not to claim that either family's care of their child is more or less neglectful than the other's, but rather to discuss which factors are at the root of the differences between the two instances of governmental intervention.

To reiterate, in *Sorry*, Perdita is taken to a White foster family only when her mother's mental health condition completely deteriorates and the girl has to steal to provide for Stella and her (see Jones 154). Moreover, the family's neighbors as well as the whole town of Broome

are aware of the 'dysfunctionality' within the Keene family (see e.g. Jones 40, 66). Hence, despite a large number of people around Perdita knowing about her neglect, she is allowed to stay with her parents until there is no other option. In my opinion, the fact that knowing outsiders do not find it necessary to intervene in Perdita's neglect is based on the fact that, outwardly, the Keenes adhere to the naturalized norm of the Anglo-White family as outlined in chapter 4. Due to this apparent White 'normalcy', the 'dysfunctional' elements within the family – i.e. Perdita's clear neglect – are disregarded, as "[d]eficiencies in the treatment of children are almost always understood as somehow 'external' to European culture and civilization" (Van Krieken 297). This truth behind this claim becomes even more apparent when contrasting the intervention in Perdita's case with real-life governmental interventions in Australia: due to the "high levels of surveillance […] by welfare agencies" (Dodson 6), First Nations children are 10.6 times more likely to be removed from their families than White Australian children are (Family Matters). Indigenous Australian families are, thus, still pathologized and the parents' fitness for caring for their offspring continues to be questioned. This is also apparent in *The Yield*, where August's narration states that, following her parents' arrest[29], Jedda and her "shook there [in the emergency foster home] for days until their nana and poppy drove down and didn't leave until the girls were safe" (Winch 40), thus alluding to their grandparents having to fight for the right to care for August and Jedda. This passage once more demonstrates that Indigenous Australian families continuously have to prove their parental abilities in order to be allowed to care for their children, as the adults' maturity and ability to represent "the interests, welfare and love of Aboriginal and Islander children" (Nakata, *The Re-Making*, 398) is persistently questioned within the White Australian nation.

[29] It has to be noted that the severity of Mark and Jolene's punishment appears unwarranted, as the cultivation of marijuana plants is usually penalized in the form of a prison sentence only if no other type of punishment is deemed possible (Armstrong Legal).

To conclude, as this final chapter has shown, the governmental intervention known as the Stolen Generations continues to impact the lives of Indigenous Australian families today. Having discussed the manifestations of intergenerational trauma apparent in the Gondiwindi family, it has become obvious that contemporary welfare policies aimed at improving the lives of Indigenous Australians have to take this sociohistorical background and its ongoing impact into account. By disregarding the families' traumata, the belief in First Nations peoples' inherent 'dysfunctionality' is furthered and the deeply essentialist contentions at the basis of past assimilationist efforts are discursively reinforced.

7. Conclusion

Within this thesis, I analyzed how the two Australian novels *Sorry* by Gail Jones and *The Yield* by Tara June Winch implicitly and explicitly address the essentialization of the concepts of family and 'race'. By adopting an intersectional approach, my close reading of the two novels showed that essentialist ideas about Whiteness, Indigeneity and family, which the assimilationist efforts known as the Stolen Generations operated on, have continued to be perpetuated within Australia's mainstream discourse. My analysis draws attention to the fact that said discursively circulated essentialisms work to further the belief in Indigenous Australian families' 'nature' of being inherently 'dysfunctional'. Accordingly, I discussed that Australia's mainstream discourse tends to focus on these pathologizing representations of First Nations families, whereas the reasons behind hardships faced by the families, namely their institutionalized discrimination and essentialization, habitually remain obscured.

With regards to the essentialization of Perdita's and August's biological parents and alternative families, I found that the attributed 'natures' strikingly differed depending on the ethnicity of the family members in question. Whereas Perdita's White Australian parents and foster parents are evaluated as mature and rational adults, the Indigenous Australian families depicted in the novels – comprising of August's biological parents and her alternative family

as well as Perdita's alternative families – are constantly associated with 'dysfunctionality', laziness and immaturity. As a result, the fitness of First Nations individuals to care for the children is continuously questioned by outsiders.

Staying on the topic of alternative family constructions, I discussed that the protagonists' alternative families – which, except for Perdita's foster parents whom she lives with towards the end of *Sorry*, exclusively consist of Aboriginal Australians – provide the girls with those aspects of care their biological parents were unable to offer. Despite the love, care and structure offered by said alternative familial constructions, the White Australian characters within both novels regard them as 'dysfunctional' and detrimental to the children's development. This disregard for Indigenous Australian families is, again, owed to the 'nature' ascribed to them within mainstream discourse.

By considering the viewpoints of White Australian characters in *Sorry*, I demonstrated the deep-rootedness of essentialist beliefs on the supposed 'racial other', in this case Indigenous Australians. Additionally, I found there to be a long-standing tradition of reversing cause and effect with regards to ascribing a certain 'nature' to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: more often than not, consequences stemming from the discrimination and exploitation of Indigenous Australians are presented as being due to their own innate 'essences'. As mentioned above, I discovered that this is especially true for the way in which familial problems of Indigenous Australians are portrayed and assessed within mainstream discourse. In constantly neglecting to acknowledge the nation's past, these representations of First Nations families obscure the underlying factors of intergenerational trauma and its various manifestations. Thus, within my analysis of the primary literature, I was able to verify my research hypothesis formulated in the introduction to this thesis. Having scrutinized the neglectful treatment of Jones's Perdita and Winch's August as well as the experiences of those characters shown to have been members of the Stolen Generations, the close connectedness of

Australia's past as the "nursing mother of injustice" (Winch 72) and the hardships faced by a large number of Indigenous Australian families has become obvious. As noted before, this national neglect is continuously repeated by concealing the factors at the root of these hardships.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis I was unable to analyze all of the ample material both *Sorry* and *The Yield* provide for the analysis on the intersection of essentialist views on family and on 'race' in Australia. Comprising three timelines each topicalizing a crucial time in Australian history and describing the lives of different generations of Indigenous Australians, it is especially *The Yield* which lends itself to further scholarly scrutiny which, I am certain, it will receive in the future.

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9. Appendix

9.1 Abstract (English)

While, in its broadest sense, the concept of ‘family’ is predominantly connected to the idea of ‘belonging’, in reality, it constitutes a highly contested area in both the private as well as the public space, generally evoking strong emotional reactions. In addressing how Gail Jones’s and Tara June Winch’s novels *Sorry* and *The Yield* illustrate the interconnection of the essentialization of both family and ‘race’ in Australia, my thesis is part of the ongoing discussion of what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘dysfunctional’ families in Eurocentric nation-states. In my close reading of the primary literature, I draw on the interdisciplinary concept of essentialism as well as the sociohistorical Australian background as a White settler nation in order to demonstrate how the discursive assessment of Australian families has been informed by essentialist beliefs on family, Whiteness and Indigeneity. In my thesis, I argue that the essentialist convictions at the heart of the assimilationist efforts known as the ‘Stolen Generations’, namely the belief in the families’ inherent ‘dysfunctional nature’, have prevailed within mainstream discourse. As a result, the struggles faced by past and present generations of First Nations families are presented in a decontextualized fashion, effectively obscuring significant factors such as intergenerational trauma and institutionalized discrimination.

9.2 Abstract (German)

Während das Konstrukt ‚Familie‘ im weitesten Sinne mit der Idee der ‚Zugehörigkeit‘ verbunden wird, stellt es im praktischen Sinne ein heiß diskutiertes Thema im öffentlichen wie auch im privaten Raum dar, das intensive emotionale Reaktionen hervorruft. In meiner Arbeit untersuche ich wie die Romane *Sorry* von Gail Jones und *The Yield* von Tara June Winch das Zusammenspiel der Essentialisierung von Familie sowie von ‚race‘ in Australien darstellen und beteilige mich dadurch an der fortlaufenden Diskussion darüber, wie ‚gute‘ und

‚dysfunktionale' Familien innerhalb eurozentrischer Nationen definiert werden. Meine Analyse basiert auf dem interdisziplinären Konzept des Essentialismus und stützt sich auf Erkenntnisse über den soziohistorischen australischen Charakter als weiße Siedlernation. Ausgehend von dieser theoretischen Basis zeigt meine Arbeit auf, dass essentialistische Überzeugungen über die ‚Natur' indigener australischer Familien aus der Zeit der assimilatorischen Bemühungen Australiens – bekannt als die ‚Stolen Generations' – auch heute noch fest im Mainstreamdiskurs der Nation verankert sind. Diese ständige diskursive Repräsentation des essentialistischen Glaubens an die inhärente ‚Dysfunktionalität' indigener australischer Familien hat den Effekt, dass die Probleme früherer und gegenwärtiger Generationen ohne Kontext dargestellt werden. Signifikante Hintergrundfaktoren wie generationenübergreifende Traumata und institutionalisierte Diskriminierung werden dadurch erfolgreich verschleiert.