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„Aboriginal Drama and the Clash between
Cultures: Black versus White Australia as Mirrored in
the Plays *The Keepers*, *Murras* and *The Dreamers*”

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*Aboriginal achievement
Is like the dark side of the moon,
For it is there
But so little is known.*

(Ernie Dingo)¹

¹ This is an extract from Ernie Dingo's poem "Aboriginal Achievement", to be found in Kevin Gilbert's collection of Aboriginal poems *Inside Black Australia. An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry*, p. 29.

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1. Introduction

On 13 February 2008, the world's attention was drawn to the history of race relations between Australian Aborigines and European-descended Australians as former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd voiced a public apology to all Indigenous peoples who had suffered (and still suffer from the aftermath of) colonialist injustices.² More recently, Australia's new Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced her government's intention to hold a referendum about the issue of officially recognizing Aborigines by making an amendment to the constitution. Both are examples of ongoing political advancement, which has been long-awaited by Australia's First Nations as well as many other international authorities as dispossession, large-scale extermination of entire Indigenous tribes and deliberate discrimination have been carried out since the establishment of the first penal colony in Sydney Cove, NSW in 1788. The difficulties (or complete lack) of crosscultural communication between the country's indigenous people and the European invaders became apparent soon after the arrival of British settlers to the continent; they continue until this day, which is why this thesis sets out to describe the nature of and possible reasons for culture clash in Australia.

The research focuses on two main questions, namely on how culture clash is constructed in the individual plays and whether they follow a political agenda. In this context, the function of political humor is analyzed and highlighted. In addition, examining how the very traditional (European) genre of drama is adjusted by the Indigenous playwrights in order to accommodate Aboriginal issues and cultural practices/beliefs is another point of interest, including the subsequent emergence of new dramatic techniques which make Aboriginal drama unique while, at the same time, enhancing the status of Indigenous culture. Three plays have been chosen for detailed analysis, partly because they are representative of contemporary Aboriginal drama dealing with the topic of race relations in Australia in the late twentieth century: Jack Davis's *The Dreamers*, first performed in 1982; Bob Maza's *The Keepers* which was premiered in 1988, and Eva Johnson's *Murras*, initially staged in 1988. All three texts are to be found in the anthology *Plays from Black Australia*, part of the *Currency Plays* series which was edited by Katherine Brisbane at Currency Press and published in 1989. All page references therefore refer to this particular edition. Even though a comparison to European theatrical texts seems inappropriate due to the uniqueness of Aboriginal drama, the chosen

² NOTE: Whenever the terms 'Aborigines', 'Aboriginal', 'Indigenous', 'Black' or 'Native Australian' are used, they refer to the entity of all Australian Aborigines as well as Torres Strait Islanders. In contrast, 'White' or 'White Australians', unless otherwise specified, denotes non-Aboriginal citizens.

texts could be categorized as social drama since they mainly deal with sociopolitical topics. Another reason why these particular plays have been selected is that they deal with different periods in Australian history, therefore depicting issues related to culture clash from various (historic) angles. However, all three texts were written and first staged in the nineteen eighties, a decade which followed groundbreaking legislative and social improvement for Indigenous Australians, creating an outburst of hope among Aboriginal people. By the beginning of the nineteen eighties, many enthusiastic campaigns and civil rights activities had proven to be unsuccessful. This generally hopeful, yet sometimes sobering and disillusioning spirit is clearly noticeable in the plays. However, despite the many mini models these texts might create of the world and reality as such, the focus of the forthcoming analyses, and hence the focus of this paper as a whole, is not solely on how real life is represented in these plays, but rather on how it is constructed by using dramatic or linguistic means. Gilbert's statement that "theatre does not mirror the so-called real but rather opens up new sightlines for reviewing national histories and identities" (viii) underlines this endeavor. Moreover, it is a set goal as well as a concomitant phenomenon of the line of argument employed in this thesis that alternative versions of commonly accepted historic truths are presented.

Despite occasional media coverage of Indigenous issues in Austria, the nation's scholarly community has not devoted enough attention to the topic of race relations as presented in literary texts of Aboriginal peoples themselves. Much research still needs to be done in this area. Therefore, this paper aims at providing insights into the nature of coexistence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, hoping to at least create awareness for the many injustices which yet need to be removed in order to build an egalitarian society. In addition, this thesis also wishes to help give Native Australians a voice and to acknowledge the achievements of Aboriginal writers in fostering the Aboriginal rights movement in Australia. The country's Indigenous authors have all but received the due respect and recognition the national and international (literary) public owes them. On the contrary, in Australia, the Aboriginal theater of the past twenty or thirty years has, according to Fitzpatrick and Thompson, been "a series of quiet but significant little revolutions" (qtd. in Gilbert 2). There, Black Australian drama is a „rapidly developing literature in its own right" and, needless to say, thus "worthy of serious critical, cultural, and academic consideration" (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 7). The examples found in this thesis speak of a prevailing lack of mutual understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens, authorities and politicians. As will become apparent in the course of this study, education, removal of

legislative disadvantaging as well as self-determination for Aborigines are the main stepping stones for a more harmonious intercultural future in Australia.

In order to gain insight into Indigenous playwrights' construction of Black and White relations in Australia, the following approach has been chosen: Starting with chapter two, the concepts and terminology used when discussing the issue of culture clash, including civilization, colonialism / colonization, segregation and White superiority, will be examined. Most importantly, a particular focus will be placed on the significance of a hierarchy of 'races' and similar racist theories for the Australian colonization process. After having explained the theoretical background of the research interest, section three then provides an overview of the historic events relevant for a discussion of Black and White relations in Australia. Part four then deals with the beginnings and characteristics of Aboriginal drama and the shared aims of most, if not all Native Australian playwrights, which include the (re)making of Aboriginal identity in contrast to widespread images among the (White) Australian public as well as the presentation of alternative views on selected historic events. Before moving on to the textual analysis of some particular instances of culture clash in Australia, chapter five provides information on the three plays *Murras*, *The Dreamers* and *The Keepers* as well as on their authors' lives as Indigenous Australians. Section six then sets out to illuminate the paper's research questions. A myriad of different forms of culture clash could be examined; however, the scope of this thesis does not allow a comprehensive coverage of all relevant issues related to the topic of culture clash. Therefore, a few aspects have been selected for closer analysis: The first topic to be discussed is that of identity and identity construction. Both the characters' own notions of themselves and their communities as well as other people's characterizations of a particular person or an entire group of people (they do not belong to) are considered, including the effects of two hundred years of White oppression on the Aboriginal self-perception. The next part deals with the connections between politics and power. Issues such as police violence, the extraordinarily high number of Aboriginal imprisonments and mysterious Black deaths in custody are important topics in all of the plays and illustrate the (still!) prevalent injustices committed by White authorities in Australia through segregationist policies. Among the results of discriminatory practices on Indigenous communities are poverty, destruction of family ties, high numbers of Aboriginal unemployment and alcoholics - all of which the three plays bear testimony to and which are examined in the next chapter. As a result of large-scale dispossession of Native tribes, Aboriginal identity and family unity were severely threatened due to the connectedness of their place of birth and the Indigenous mythology / Dreamtime, causing a feeling of

‘uprootedness’ clearly visible in *Murras*, *The Keepers* and *The Dreamers*. The fourth subchapter of section six focuses on how language is employed by the Aboriginal playwrights Johnson, Maza and Davis in order to mirror the subjugation of Indigenous nations by European settlers, while at the same time pointing out to the idiosyncratic (extra)linguistic features of tribal languages and, hence, the special qualities of Black Australian theater. In a final step, this section also comments on textual examples of Indigenous resilience, the various forms of this type of resistance against White oppression and the strategies employed by the playwrights to question White paternalistic rule and to subvert power relations - at least on stage.

The last chapter provides a conclusion, summing up the main findings of this thesis as well as making suggestions for measures which may promote reconciliation, national healing, the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and, more generally, contemplate steps which need to be taken in order to eradicate the currently still prevalent large gap between the quality of life of Black and White Australians. The eminent role of (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) Australian writers in this endeavor is highlighted.

2. Culture Clash

Before looking at textual examples of how the two cultures – European and Indigenous Australian – (may possibly) interact and in which ways their ‘Otherness’ becomes apparent, a closer look at the processes and lines of thought included in creating the phenomenon of culture clash should be taken in order to have at hand a broad overview of the philosophical and sociological theories involved.

2.1. Culture Clash - A Definition

Culture clash may be described as “interactions among disparate peoples” (Diamond 16) with two (or more) different constructions and perceptions of normality and as such also particular sets of values. Consequently, there is a clash of beliefs, which can be of varying nature and impact: Whereas mild forms of a clash of cultures can lead to puzzlement or bewilderment of all or some parties involved when confronted with a different normative reality, severe kinds of culture clash are characterized by animosity, in some cases even hostility, and are frequently “shaped through conquest, epidemics, and genocide [, leading to] [...] collisions” (Diamond 16).

In the Australian context, and hence the way I will be using the concept throughout this paper, culture clash can be defined as a hostile encounter or situation of coexistence in which two groups of people differ greatly with regard to, and thus disagree about, traditions, beliefs and way of life. Very often, as was the case in Australia, this situation leads to or is accompanied by feelings of superiority of one group over the other. When this conviction is paired with a desire of extending one’s territory and/or exercising power over another purportedly less civilized community or nation, something obviously underlying the British settlers’ minds, a policy of colonization may be the result. Fagan states:

The long centuries of Western discovery are a story of confrontation and non-comprehension, of cautious encounters between strangers, of searches for gold and brutal military campaigns, of profitable trading, land grabbing, and missionary endeavor. (Fagan 23, emphasis added)

The two civilizations, the British and the Indigenous Australians, clashed when the Natives realized that the intruders had come to stay and were usurping their homelands. In the name of civilization, the Aborigines were expelled from their native territory and subjugated as inferior to the British colonists.

A question which should be raised at this point is: What is involved in the process of civilization? The concept was developed by French philosophers in the eighteenth century who were attempting to find a binary opposite for 'barbarism'. The line of argumentation went as follows: Those who lived an urban, settled life and had received education were regarded as 'civilized'; those who chose a different life style were considered 'savages'. This concept came in handy for all colonialist endeavors as it provided a taxonomy by which societies could be judged according to their degree of humanity.³ Huntington comments that

during the nineteenth century, Europeans devoted much intellectual, diplomatic, and political energy to elaborating the criteria by which non-European societies might be judged sufficiently 'civilized' to be accepted as members of the European-dominated international system. (Huntington 41)

By making it clear what their antonym was, the British colonialists set up a definition of their cultural and political values. This is one example of a negative definition of identity which is achieved by establishing a border between self and other: "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (Huntington 21).

2.2. Colonization and Colonialism in Australia

The effects of culture clash in the Australian context - and as such the way in which I will be dealing with the issue in my thesis - are similar to the effects of colonization and will therefore be outlined in the following chapter.

2.2.1. (Definition and Characteristics of) Colonization

Osterhammel has defined colonization as "a *process* of territorial acquisition" (4). According to Osterhammel, colonialism is comprised of the following three characteristics: First, it implies the domination of one group which is "*externally manipulated* and transformed according to the needs and interests of the colonial ruler" (15). The second major component is "*cultural dissimilarity*" (ibid.) due to reluctance of the colonizer "to make cultural concessions to subjugated societies" (ibid.). From the nineteenth century onwards, this was justified by a number of theories on racial hierarchy.⁴

³ Cf. Huntington 41-41.

⁴ Refer to Chapter 2.3. for more details on Social Darwinism.

Thirdly, and closely related to the second point just made, this relationship of domination of a purportedly less civilized nation was legitimized by the European belief that, by colonizing certain countries, so-called 'savage' peoples could be made sophisticated. It was often argued that it was the foreign invaders' duty "to spread 'civilization'" (Osterhammel 44), thus make a 'barbarian' society cultured and leading it to "economic usefulness" (Scott and Laurie 45). This phenomenon has been termed the "white man's burden" (Osterhammel 16) and clearly illustrates the degree of European ethnocentricity as well as cultural arrogance.

Australia is a so-called "[o]verseas settlement colonization" (Osterhammel 6), which means that an outpost was established "across the sea in areas where relatively slight display of military power was required" (ibid.). Whenever resistance by the native population arose, it was met with violence on the side of the invaders. Hence, the two groups were segregated on both a social as well as on a territorial level.⁵ Furthermore, the Aborigines, who were relatively low in number compared to the British settlers, were considered "economically superfluous" (Osterhammel 7) and therefore expelled.

A settlement colony is characterized as displaying a tendency by the (White) colonists of "disregarding the rights and interests of the indigenous population" (Osterhammel 11). Its main purpose is to gain land for the new arrivals, who then become farmers and planters, and to utilize cheap labor of the Indigenous population.⁶ The example of Australia clearly falls into the category of what Osterhammel (11) calls a "'New England' type" of colony in which the dislocation and sometimes even extinction of the Natives is a common practice, as was also the case with the Native Indians in the British New England colonies.

2.2.2. (Definition and Characteristics of) Colonialism

Osterhammel defines "'colonialism' [as] a *system* of domination" (4). If, for simplicity's sake, we called colonization a process of subjugating and exploiting a supposedly inferior group of people, colonialism would be the outcome of such procedures.

Colonialism is by no means a new phenomenon; however, the modern form of colonialism we speak of today was only made possible by the advance of technology, including seafaring and navigation, paving the way for the establishment of large settlements across the ocean without losing political power over these colonies. European technology, guns, steel tools and

⁵ Cf. Osterhammel 6.

⁶ Cf. Osterhammel 11.

communicable diseases were the most crucial factors which enabled European nations/empires to subjugate or conquer other communities.⁷

One difficulty involving the definition of colonialism is its differentiation from the concept of imperialism, which is often (and erroneously) used synonymously. On the one hand, a distinction can be achieved on the basis of the terms' linguistic origins: *colonialism* comes from the Latin word *colonus* ('colony') meaning 'farmer'. This points to the fact that colonialism is associated with the arrival of permanent settlers who remain sovereigns of their home country. On the other hand, the term *imperialism* derives from Latin *imperium*, denoting 'empire' and, in the wider sense, the practice of command of one nation over another. Hence, the following distinction can be drawn: Whereas colonialism is founded on the notion that settlement in another territory will be permanent and dependent on direct control of the mother country over this new community, imperialism establishes colonies for "economic exploitation" only with "indirect forms of domination" and not necessarily with "significant permanent European settlement"⁸.

To sum it up, three main elements characterize colonialist thought:

- 1) "the notion of irreconcilable difference" (Osterhammel 108): The belief that Europeans are morally, mentally and physically superior to non-Europeans was one pillar on which the framework of colonialist ideas was built. In contrast to the many "heroic deeds that only modern Europe [could] achieve" (ibid.), non-Western societies were regarded as inferior on various levels: As far as technology was concerned, to the Europeans no one seemed more skilled to control nature according to their wishes than they themselves. Theologically, non-Europeans were perceived as subordinate due to their heathenness. Thirdly, on a biological level, Westerners were thought to surpass and outplay non-European citizens by means of racial aspects which were non-alterable. In environmental terms, non-Europeans were also inferior to Europeans because of their tropic climate that severely weakened their bodies and capabilities. The outcome of this "difference axiom" (Osterhammel 108) was, inevitably, racism, and as such the belief in a natural, God-given hierarchy of races with the "ruling colour" (ibid.) at the top of the spectrum and the "lower breeds of men" (ibid.) at the very bottom of the rung of mankind. According to Osterhammel "[a]t least in the three or four decades before World War I, it [this

⁷ Cf. Diamond 15-17.

⁸ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism>.

philosophy] was unquestioningly accepted by Europeans and Americans of nearly all political persuasions” (ibid.). However, crude overgeneralization should be avoided.

- 2) “a belief in the higher consecration of colonization” (Osterhammel 108): The “difference axiom” (ibid.) leads to a firm belief in the need for guidance of inferior races by superior ones. Particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this served as a means for legitimizing colonial rule. It was no longer based on a perceived privilege of governing other countries, but on the assumption that it was the Europeans’ duty to bring civilization to primitive societies and, thus, to conduct a humanitarian mission. This so-called “white man’s burden” (Osterhammel 110) was deemed so large that significant accomplishments in the endeavor to free colored peoples of their “usual bad habits” (ibid.) were not expected.
- 3) “the utopian vision of a purifying administration that obliterates all corruption and inefficiency” (Osterhammel 108): Europeans assumed that they as the “pinnacle of human achievement” (Fagan 25) were bringing order into the existing chaos of purportedly savage (i.e. non-Western) parts of the world, making them mini models of their own country of origin.

Osterhammel’s account of the nature of colonialism makes it clear why, in the context of the Australian Aborigines and as such for my thesis, the two concepts of culture clash and colonialism are so closely related. Therefore, it is worth quoting at length:

Colonialism as a form of European world rule completed its historical cycle in the third quarter of the twentieth century. [...] [T]he effects of colonization, whether positive or negative, are ubiquitous. The post-colonial world has retained forms of manipulation, exploitation, and cultural expropriation, even if colonialism itself belongs to the past. (Osterhammel 119)

Hence, it can be argued that culture clash is inherent in colonialist thought and practices because it is both a prerequisite, a constant companion as well as the natural result of these domination practices.

2.2.3. The Effects of Colonial Rule

Colonialism is not a practice that is decided on before invading a country, but only after conquest and a period of first contact. Following the model of Donald W. Meinig (qtd. in Osterhammel 41), eight phases for the process of colonization can be distinguished. These include the gathering of resources, trading with and plundering the Natives, claims of

sovereignty, military actions as well as the establishment of a settlement for non-military immigrants. As the final stage and end product of this process of colonization, a “complete colonial ruling apparatus” (Osterhammel 41) is set up.

As might have become obvious from looking at these steps of colonization, establishing a colony was barely ever possible without the use of violence. Consequently, the settlement frontier in Australia, particularly along the East coast, was a place where constant battles were fought. The “native subjects” (Osterhammel 42) were forcefully displaced and “every means, even genocide, seemed acceptable to the settlers” (ibid.) in order to gain new territory and to set up new posts for international trade. These violent actions were legitimized because the Indigenous Australians did not share “the same cultural code” (Osterhammel 42) and were therefore classified either as savages or “semi-civilised” (ibid.) – a line of thought which is clearly derived from Social Darwinism.⁹ Due to this cultural otherness which did not coincide with European ethnocentric beliefs, the Natives were deemed unworthy of human treatment and the right to land, for instance, which resulted in ruthless territorial appropriation of areas that had been the Aborigines’ homeland for over 40,000 years. This systematic expropriation has led to “irreversible pauperization” (Osterhammel 75) among the Indigenous Australians.

Additionally, native traditions and religious beliefs were undermined and suppressed; missions were founded in order to Christianize the Aborigines with varying success. While some individuals readily accepted the new system of beliefs, the majority of Natives “proved resistant” (Osterhammel 97). The European, monotheistic religion brought along not only a change in worship practices and beliefs, but also meant to alter other areas of Indigenous life: An extended family was not seen as the ideal for Europeans, who believed in the sanctity of the ‘nuclear family’. A linear notion of time (as contrasted with the Aboriginal concept of (life)time as circular and the interconnectedness between past, present and future) as well as a completely different moral understanding of what it means to be civilized with regard to the human body and sexuality should ideally be adopted by the Indigenous inhabitants of the continent according to the colonizers’ view.¹⁰

This civilizing process was built on the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment philosophies known today as the ‘four-stages thesis’¹¹: According to the Scots, each society would naturally move through the four stages of hunting, herding, farming and, eventually, commerce. This journey supposedly represented a linear development “from ‘savagery’,

⁹ See chapter 2.3 for more information on Social Darwinism.

¹⁰ Cf. Osterhammel 99.

¹¹ Cf. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism> for the following explanations.

through ‘barbarism’, to ‘civilization’”, and thus did not only count as substantial improvement on a material level, but first and foremost as a sign of “moral progress”¹² of the once primitive society. This Scottish historical narrative in turn confirmed Western ideals and celebrated the purportedly superior European lifestyle with all its economic and sociopolitical power and wealth.

Even though Australia has long been de-colonized and an official apology for restrictive, racist practices (including the traumatic experience of forcefully removing Aboriginal children from their families, now known as the Stolen Generations) have been issued and attempts at nationwide reconciliation have been made, instances of culture clash are still visible in Australian society today. It can only be assumed that, due to the long period of segregation and discrimination of the Indigenous population, a certain proportion of this ethnocentric, hegemonic worldview which is based on colonialism and positions the Aborigines on a very low social level can still be detected within the minds of a number of White Australians of European descent. This becomes obvious when taking a glance at the statistics¹³.

Regarding the social aspects, Indigenous Australians are clearly less well-off than any other ethnic group in Australia: Fay Gale and Joy Wundersitz’s research results, published in the journal *Australian Social Work* in 1986, stated that their research has shown that “Aborigines, both adults and juveniles, are disproportionately over-represented in terms of the number of offences laid against them and in the number of court appearances made” (21). Even though these results were gained almost fifteen years ago, not much has changed for the better: Indigenous people are still fourteen times more likely to be imprisoned than their White fellow countrymen today. In 1999, only thirteen percent of four thousand Indigenous homes, which were surveyed over a period of one year, had “functioning water, waste, cooking and cleaning facilities”¹⁴. Repeated complaints about refused memberships for all kinds of social clubs and communities on the basis of race have been recorded as well. Economically speaking, the situation is even worse: In 2008, only a little over half of all Aboriginal people in Australia between the age of fifteen and sixty four were employed. In 2006, only three percent of Aboriginal students completed a university degree. Taking a closer look inside the working world, one figure stands out: Of over sixty thousand Australian doctors, only 125 are

¹² The quotes in this sentence are all taken from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/colonialism> > *Liberalism and Empire*.

¹³ Statistical information taken from <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/>.

¹⁴ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/index.html>.

of Aboriginal descent. From a health perspective, it again has to be stated that Aboriginal Australians rank below other Australian citizens: Approximately twice as many Indigenous babies die under the age of one compared to non-Aboriginal babies, making the infant mortality rate among Indigenous children 2.3%. Roughly half of the Native adults, in some northern remote areas sometimes even up to seventy percent, are regular smokers. On average, Aboriginal people die twenty five years earlier than non-Indigenous Australians.

As can be understood by these unsettling numbers, discrimination is still present in all areas of Australian life today. Korff points out:

Even today Aboriginal people do not feel understood by white Australian politics. They claim that many legislative acts reflect a white point of view where a [sic] least a dual view would be necessary. Some activists even speak of "genocide" still going on in Australia today.¹⁵

A way out of this vicious circle still needs to be found.

2.3. The Framework for Australian Colonialism: Social Darwinism and Its Antecedent

Why is a sociological theory which took its origins from the Darwinian biological concept of natural selection important for understanding the process of colonization of the Aboriginal Australians? The answer lies within the ideological framework for colonization; a racist assumption shared by many White Australians goes as follows:

White immigrants to Australia built a literate, industrialized, politically centralized, democratic state based on metal tools and on food production, all within a century of colonizing a continent where the Aborigines had been living as tribal hunter-gatherers without metal for at least 40,000 years. [...] What further proof could be wanted to establish that the differences between Aboriginal Australian and European societies arose from differences between the peoples themselves? (Diamond 19)

This ethos served as the basis of colonization in Australia and many other countries all over the globe and can be, as will become clear in this chapter, directly linked to the ideology of Social Darwinism. But what is Social Darwinism and why was its theory employed by the British settlers to justify their colonial practices in the colonization of Australia and its native inhabitants?

¹⁵ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/discrimination>.

Social Darwinism is distinct from other theories of social change because of the way it draws Darwin's distinctive ideas from the field of biology into social studies. Darwin's theories about natural selection were concerned with the biological law according to which nature functions, namely that those who can quickly adapt to changing environments will survive and thrive whereas other creatures will become extinct. Darwin, however, did not apply these ideas to cultural selection and Eurocentric notions of civilization in which a racial hierarchy was established for means of exploiting and subjugating other nations; in fact, a diary he kept during one of his many overseas trips bears evidence of his contempt for genocidal practices and expropriation of indigenous tribes.¹⁶ Ward (293) called this a (deliberate?) misinterpretation of the Darwinian concept by saying that sociologists "conjured up in their own imagination" a false transfer of the biologically oriented theory of evolution, and, thus, points out, "I wish to protest in the strongest possible terms against the application of the term Darwinism to the race struggle" (293).

Before Darwin's model got published, Herbert Spencer, often called the "Father of Social Darwinism"¹⁷, had developed his elitist concept of the rich and powerful to be better fitted for successful economic and social life and for genetic reproduction. Spencer then ruthlessly altered Darwin's theory of natural selection by adding his own ethical values to it and by coming up with his theory of the "survival of the fittest"¹⁸ (a term which is often falsely attributed to Darwin himself).¹⁹ Since European economy and industry were advanced, Spencer argued that natural selection was at work there. Hence, the legitimation for racist, hegemonic colonization and imperialism was founded by arguing that it was "natural, normal, and proper for the strong to thrive at the expense of the weak"²⁰. Whereas Darwin's concept was largely value-free, Spencer's was clearly not; therefore, it again becomes obvious that Social Darwinism is only loosely based on Darwin's theory of natural selection.

Social Darwinism became a powerful philosophy and helped justify the colonial practices in Australia, North America and other parts of the world by pretending that it was the aim, if not to say the duty of the purportedly more advanced groups of people to "spread civilization" (Osterhammel 44) and to discipline the so-called 'brutes' in a British manner. In this way, it

¹⁶ Darwin wrote, "This is a dark picture. [...] Who would believe that in this age in a Christian, civilized country that such atrocities were committed?" (Barta, *Mr Darwin's Shooters* 24).

¹⁷ <http://library.thinkquest.org/C004367/eh4.shtml> > *Spencer and Social Darwinism*.

¹⁸ http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Herbert_Spencer.aspx.

¹⁹ Also see Diamond 17-20.

²⁰ <http://library.thinkquest.org/C004367/eh4.shtml>.

provided “an ideological cover for policies abhorrent to [...] humanitarian and humanist principles” (Barta, *Mr Darwin’s Shooters* 22).

Modern racism, however, was not originally unhinged with Social Darwinism in the second half of the twentieth century, but already existed beforehand. It was only through Social Darwinism, though, that racism was first based on concepts of biological difference and hence received a scientific aura, marginalizing the cultural aspect which used to serve as the marker of difference between civilized and primitive societies.

Finzsch argues that the Darwinian concept was “preceded by and overlapped with an archaic racism with genocidal potential, constituted by the visual othering of indigenous populations” (3). He is also hinting at the possibility of a coexistence of these two forms of justification of racism, which he terms ‘scientific racism’ and ‘archaic racism’.

Having dwelt predominantly on Social Darwinism so far, a closer analysis of the concept of what Finzsch calls “archaic racism” (3) should be provided for reasons of comparison. Finzsch points out that this form of racism was based on negative perceptions of both body and culture of so-called primitive peoples. He uses the term “visual othering” (3) to describe this phenomenon which is at the core of *archaic racism*. The perceived hideousness of indigenous tribes, their supposed lack of economic and social structure as well as their purportedly low linguistic refinement provided sufficient justification for colonizers to place “the indigenous Other at the very bottom rung of humanity” (Finzsch 4); it also provided a basis for the legitimization of the expulsion of thousands of Native peoples from their homelands, large-scale economic deprivation and exploitation as well as, eventually, the decimation of the indigenous population. The English language and British culture, institutions and laws were seen as the ideal; the indigenous were viewed as barbaric, savage, and primitive people devoid of humanity. Consequently, primitivism was at the core of colonial ideology and defined one cornerstone of what Finzsch calls *archaic racism*. A factor that gave additional boost to this racist line of thought was that the British who had come to Australia in the late eighteenth century, be it military or laymen, had already had their first experiences with native people, namely in North America. The British approached the Indigenous Australians in the same way, with exactly the same prejudices in mind, as they had approached the Native Indians in North America.²¹ Hence, the same rhetoric and practices were applied to deal with the unwanted Aboriginal Australians.

²¹ Cf. Finzsch 5.

This racist discourse helped to “define not only the superiority of western explorers, colonialists and imperialists over the colonized, but lay the ground for the latter’s exploitation, enslavement and eventual genocide” (Finzsch 6) by coming up with a “taxonomy of primitivism” (Finzsch 7). A firm belief in racial hierarchy as well as the wish “to bestow on the colonial gaze the character of scientific truth” (ibid.) generated *archaic racism*.

The conviction that indigenous peoples were “unworthy of life” (Finzsch 8) led to the development of two models of describing native tribes in the course of the seventeenth century. One focused its attention around the primitivism of the indigene, creating the figure of the “Ignoble or Primitive Savage” (8), the other glorified the native as a pure person with an admiringly simple lifestyle which many in the industrialized world might long for, resulting in the model of the “Noble Savage” (ibid.).²² The former served as a means of justification for slavery, expropriation and subjugation throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and was also the dominant line of thought in the colonization process of Australia and its native inhabitants. The latter, the image of the Noble Savage, only got taken up again in North America when the indigenous population no longer posed a threat to the colonizers’ endeavors. In Australia, however, the model of the ‘Noble Savage’ never really got a foothold in the minds of the colonizers since the Australian Aborigines only posed a minor threat to the endeavors of the invaders.

One of the most dominant philosophical legitimizations for colonial exploitation and domination was again connected with a taxonomy of humanity and the perceived value of a culture. Scottish Enlightenment thinkers presented a model of civilization which contained four stages: The first and lowest step in evolution was hunting and/or gathering, followed by herding, the third step being the cultivation of land and permanent settlement, before finally moving on to an economy based on commerce and industry.²³ In addition, these four phases were accompanied by hierarchical judgments about language and speech capability, again defining the degree of humanity of a people or nation. In 1802, James Grant wrote:

As there is thought to be a chain in Creation, beginning with the Brute and ending with Man, were I inclined to pursue the notion, I should be at a loss where to place my Bush Native, whether as the next link above the monkey, or that below it. (qtd. in Finzsch 16)

²² For a more detailed description of the model of the ‘Noble Savage’ see Fagan 123-147.

²³ Cf. Finzsch 10.

The Aboriginal Australians, alongside the Hottentots (Khoi Khoi) of southwestern Africa, were placed at the very bottom of the racial hierarchy. The following statement seemed to function as a mantra: “The darker the colour, the closer to savages” (Barta, *Discourses of Genocide* 46). Hence, the Scottish philosophers concluded, it was only natural to argue that those on the lowest level of evolution lacked a proper language. Because Australian Aborigines had never developed agriculture and their language differed greatly from European languages, the argumentation that the Native Australians were savage people seemed more than justifiable and became a cornerstone in the definition of what Finzsch has termed “archaic racism”, which, as has been outlined, rested on cultural arrogance rather than the belief in insurmountable biological differences. Hand in hand with the belief in the cultural, linguistic and economic inferiority and “backwardness” (Finzsch 19) of Australia’s First Nations went the notion of the Aborigines as a dying race: Because they were depicted as beings on the lowest level of the evolutionary scale and as having no work ethic, the colonizers were convinced that they would “soon die out” (Finzsch 17).

However, this idea was also used as a pretense for large-scale territorial expansion which brought with them the forceful acquisition of Aboriginal land by “land-hungry colonists” (Fagan 15). This procedure was legitimized on the false assumption that, because Indigenous Australians did not build permanent settlements, the “native inhabitants held no territorial claims” (Finzsch 13) to their homeland, which was defined as *terra nullius* or “res nullius” (Finzsch 12). The various Aboriginal tribes were thus defined as occupants, not as owners of the Australian continent.²⁴

2.4. Colonialism and Genocide

Moses and Stone, among quite a few other critical writers, claim that colonialism and genocide are “profoundly connected” (viii). Having dwelt on the devastating effects of colonialism, the comparison seems adequate, yet radical. Did genocide happen in Australia? Before embarking on a mission to answer this difficult question, a definition of the term genocide should be provided.

Moses and Stone describe genocide in terms of a process in which “culture-bearing groups [...] [are] destroyed by a range of policies that undermine [...] their ability to reproduce themselves culturally as well as biologically” (viii). Hence, genocide must not be mistaken

²⁴ Cf. Reynolds 133-137.

for, or confused with, mass murder since an element of careful planning is involved in genocidal acts.

According to Finzsch, two main elements characterize the “crippling” (Moses and Stone viii) of cultural groups:

- 1) “The mental element” (Finzsch 6): The intention of destroying a group of people, be it ethnic, religious, cultural, etc., is undeniable.
- 2) “The physical element” (ibid.): Killing and the causing of bodily harm are inherent in genocidal destruction. In addition, physical destruction, including measures to prevent births as well as the forceful removal of children, are a common feature of genocide.²⁵

The wish for the elimination of the other, purportedly less civilized and dominated group is inherent in genocidal discourse. Even though colonialism does not have to culminate in genocide or the desired extinction of a group of people, colonialism and genocide *do* appear to be “profoundly connected” (Moses and Stone viii). Very often, and most definitely also in the Australian context, the discourse of genocide portrayed the killing of thousands of Aboriginal Australians as a rightful act by “put[ing them] out of their misery” (Barta, *Discourses of Genocide* 41).

The question remains: Can we speak of genocide in the Australian context? Henry Reynolds, an acclaimed historian who has written numerous books and articles on Aboriginal history and rights, answers the question in the following way:

In a literal sense clearly no. The Aborigines survived the invasion. The population has been increasing for generations, although it has still not reached that of 1788. Many of those who died did so from disease; others were killed in an upsurge of conflict within Aboriginal communities. A rapidly falling birth rate may have been of greater demographic significance than a spiralling death rate. Yet even when those qualifications have been made the central question remains. Did significant numbers of settlers seek the total destruction of Aboriginal Australia? (Reynolds, *Frontier* 53/54)

Reynolds does not give a definite answer in terms of ‘yes’ or ‘no’; however, he makes his convictions clear by listing historical statements of colonialists who were arguing for the necessity of exterminating the Natives for the sake of the colony’s economic well-being.²⁶

²⁵ Cf. Finzsch 6.

²⁶ Cf. Reynolds, *Frontier*, 53-57.

One further point should be elaborated, though: not all Aborigines survived. Reynolds seems to view the Australian Indigenous population as one single community (“The Aborigines survived the invasion.”), but it should not be left unsaid that several tribes all over the continent became extinguished as a result of colonial rule and policies. The three textual examples to be dealt with in this thesis will help to cast light on this issue.

3. A Historical Overview

In this chapter, in order to be able to understand the upcoming discussions about and references to Indigenous history, a concise historic overview of all relevant events important for the (topic of the) intercultural relationship between Australian Aborigines and European settlers will be provided.

3.1. Ancient and Pre-Cook History²⁷

Australian Aborigines have been living on Australian territory for thousands of years. Whereas some sources argue that Indigenous history begins as early as 120.000 years ago in the Canberra area in NSW²⁸, the broad consensus is that Aboriginal tribes arrived in Australia approximately 60,000 to 50,000 years ago.²⁹ Regardless of the figure, Aboriginal culture is said to have “the longest continuous cultural history in the world” (Sabbioni, *Preface* xx).

At the very beginning of Aboriginal inhabitation, rock caves were used as shelter; stone tools and red ochre provided the basis for paintings and body decoration. Apart from cultural remainders from these earliest times, archeological evidence also shows that cremation rituals as part of spiritual life as well as bread-making processes (for which grindstones were employed to ground the grass seeds making up the bread dough) already existed as early as 30,000 years before the present. Evidence suggests that even the remotest parts of the country such as Tasmania had been settled by 20,000 BP. The Australian Aborigines lived as hunter-gatherers in a semi-nomadic style. Major climatic and geographic changes took place such as the flooding of the land bridge between the Australian mainland and Tasmania or Australia and New Guinea, causing the formation of the Torres Strait Islands, as well as the drying-out of several areas; all of which urged the Indigenous peoples of Australia to adapt quickly to the altered conditions. In addition, these climatic shifts also encouraged and developed new trade routes and ended others such as relations between mainland Australian and Tasmanian tribes, the latter of which became isolated approximately 13,000 years ago when Tasmania was enisled. Research suggests that the country’s present-day climate and geography were established some 10,000 years ago. Simultaneously, the boomerang, probably the best-known Australian Aboriginal icon, was developed around that time to hunt waterfowl.

²⁷ Subtitles in this historical overview taken from <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

²⁸ Cf. Sabbioni, *Preface* xxxv and xx, and <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

²⁹ Cf. <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/75258e92a5903e75ca2569de0025c188>, http://www.australianexplorer.com/australian_history, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/43876/Australian-Aborigine> and MacLeod (67).

Trade with non-Indigenous Australians started in the fifteenth century with the Macassans (Indonesians) along the northeastern coast of present-day Northern Territory and lasted until the early twentieth century when the South Australian government quit trade relations in 1906.

3.2. Early White History

The first Europeans Aboriginal Australians saw were Dutch traders as early as 1606, followed by Spanish sailors. Both non-Indigenous groups clashed with the Indigenous inhabitants, resulting in “several armed encounters”³⁰.

The point in time at which most history lessons in (Australian) schools start is the following: In April 1770, Captain James Cook landed on the East coast and claimed possession of it for the British Crown. However, it was not until 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip established the first penal colony at Sydney Cove that the European invasion began. At that time, the total Indigenous population was estimated to be between 750,000 and 1 million. Within days after British arrival, Indigenous resistance grew and conflicts rose, causing the first deaths within both non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities. The reason for the Native resistance was not the arrival of the British as such (they were used to seeing trade ships coming and going), but their “unrelenting seizure of all rights and uses of the land” (MacLeod 66). Whereas some Aboriginal tribes in the remoter parts of the country initially remained relatively unaffected by the increasing number of arrivals from Europe, those Indigenous communities dwelling in close proximity of the invasion zones immediately felt the devastating effects of colonization: the domestic animals Europeans brought with them such as cattle and sheep as well as feral animals, including cats, rabbits and foxes, changed the vegetation and polluted water holes. In addition, fish resources were quickly exhausted, kindling the discontinuation of one of their most vital food sources. Thousands of Aborigines perished due to malnutrition and starvation. The clearing of trees and the erection of fences drove Aborigines away from their original habitats, changing their initial economy and way of life forever. As the European settlers pushed further and further into native territory, the number of violent conflicts resulting in the killing of Indigenous peoples increased, forcing many Aboriginal communities to live on the borders of the invaders’ new settlements. Furthermore, another major factor responsible for the alarmingly fast-dropping number of Native Australians was the spread of diseases the

³⁰ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

colonizers brought in. Minor communicable illnesses for Whites like the flu, measles or smallpox were often deadly for the Natives who had no immunity to these diseases.³¹

Despite these ‘natural’ obstacles (like ecological change and spread of diseases) the Aborigines could not resist, there was notable opposition against the settlers, in particular against the keepers of herds and flocks of animals. Many atrocities were committed by either side, and guerilla wars were fought “all along the expanding front-line of white invasion”³².

However, some attempts of peaceful interaction between White settlers and Native Australians were made. Probably the most famous of these intercultural endeavors was that of Governor Arthur Phillip himself: Two men, Bennelong and Colebee, were captured in the Sydney Cove area with the intention of befriending Aboriginal people for the sake of peaceful coexistence and so as to establish communication with Indigenous tribes. Even though this endeavor seemed successful in the beginning, the radical step of holding captive another human being was doomed to failure: Bennelong, unlike Colebee who had managed to escape the colonizers shortly after being apprehended, was a well-respected leader of his tribe, and soon also won the hearts of the White settlers. He even followed them to England to learn more about British culture and language and made such notable acquaintances like the one with King George III. However, after falling ill with severe respiratory disorders, he was advised to return to Australia where he, alienated from his own tribe and not at home in the White world either, was banished from his Indigenous community; he died a broken man and drunkard in complete isolation. Meanwhile, violent encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups continued, causing Governor Phillip to abandon his plans of establishing peaceful coexistence between both parties and returning to England disillusioned.

With one of the few but influential advocates of a friendly policy towards the Indigenous population gone, restrictive legislation spread throughout the country. By 1804, settlers were given permission to shoot at Aborigines, who were still trying to defend at least some of their original territory and, due to the few remaining natural resources available to them after White colonization and the ensuing food shortages, sometimes were forced to raid (cattle) farms. In addition, the feared Native Police was established in order to kill off Aborigines living in close proximity to the settlements, radically decimating tribes in order to open up land for White settlement. Rigid laws regarding the movement of Aborigines were implemented,

³¹ Attwood and Foster (5), without the intention of belittling the devastating effects of colonization, point out that in recent historical research it was argued that European violence was not “the biggest killer of Aborigines”, but that the “phenomenal decline in the Aboriginal population [...] was largely the result of introduced diseases”.

³² <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/75258e92a5903e75ca2569de0025c188?OpenDocument>.

including the law which stated that no Natives are “to appear armed within a mile of any settlement and no more than six Aboriginal people are allowed to ‘lurk or loiter near farms’”³³. Dispossession of land and struggles for hunting rights led to even fiercer battles, and, for a few months in 1824, martial law was proclaimed in the Bathurst area after violent encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Massacres of Aboriginal tribes were committed on a frequent basis, and only few of the White perpetrators were held responsible for these murders.³⁴ Also, the first incidents of intentional poisoning of Natives occurred along the East coast in the same year.

3.3. Policy of ‘Protection’

Following the British Select Committee’s report of Australian colonies’ treatment of Indigenous peoples, in which White Australian colonization practices were fiercely criticized, several boards for protecting Aborigines were established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Whereas they were originally set up by sympathetic White Australians who were appalled by the hideous crimes committed against the Indigenous peoples and who felt that the Natives “could hold on [...] if [...] shielded from the forces that were killing them off” (MacLeod 74) and who destroyed their food and water supply, these aims soon triggered off systematic destruction of the Indigenous population and “all vestiges of Aboriginal culture” (MacLeod 88). Henceforth, a so-called policy of ‘protection’ for Aboriginal Australians meant the beginning of church-run, mostly Catholic missionaries and government reservations in order to expand and gain land for agriculture and more residential areas. Some missions clearly intended to destroy Aboriginal communities and culture by separating children and parents, by prohibiting the use of native languages and the holding of ceremonies, the regulations to wear European clothes and to provide manual labor. Abduction of Indigenous children from their parents and sending them to White foster homes had become a common practice at many settlements as well until well into the 1960s, leading to the traumatic experience of what is nowadays known as the ‘Stolen Generations’. Other missions, however, tried to incorporate local Aboriginal traditions. The policies adopted by the appointed protectors of the Aborigines largely depended on the religion, moral beliefs and convictions of the government settlement and/or church mission. Some Native communities readily

³³ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

³⁴ Upon hanging seven settlers for shooting and burning twenty eight Aborigines in a fight near Inverell in New South Wales in 1838, a public outcry followed since most White Australians could not understand “why anyone should hang for murdering Aborigines” (Sabbioni, *Preface* xxxvii). For a detailed list of massacres committed by White settlers, refer to <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

accepted the European religion and adapted to the new circumstances, whereas others tried to remain as separate as possible from the European intruders for as long as they could.

The protectors of Aborigines were authorized to create reserves, usually in remote areas and at 'safe' distance from cities and towns so as to limit possible contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Segregation was one of the declared goals of Aboriginal protection policy. Natives could then be forced to live there upon request by the protector in charge. Furthermore, almost every aspect of an Aborigine's daily life was controlled, including the raising of children, employment outside the reservations as well as the right to marry and to manage one's own finances. The use of Indigenous Australians as slave laborers was common; their wages never paid to them or even claimed by the State from the respective employers. It should take nearly 100 years for the Australian government to banish these various "protection acts".³⁵

3.4. Early 20th Century

The turn of the century marked the beginning of what soon became known as 'White Australia Policy': a range of government policies was employed to segregate Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal Australians. What had already started in the 1880s with trade unions calling for the government to protect White working men was finally made legal in 1901: The Commonwealth Constitution of Australia stated that Aborigines should not be counted as citizens and were henceforth excluded from the right to vote, to receive an old age pension and maternity allowance, to be employed in post offices or to enlist in army services.³⁶ However, not only Aborigines were targeted: The Immigration Restriction Act, which served as the basis of the White Australia Policy, also excluded other non-White or non-European immigrants from entering Australia, and thus further enhanced the government's goal of a purely White Australia. In 1934 under the Aborigines Act, as part of Australia's new assimilation policy with the goal of "ultimate absorption"³⁷, Native Australians were given the possibility of receiving access to the same rights as Whites if they expressed the wish to "cease being Aboriginal"³⁸. The same approach was taken later again when, in 1943, exemption certificates could be gained by certain Native people who were then exempt "from

³⁵ The official end to a variety of so-called protection laws under the protection policy was proclaimed 1984.

³⁶ Adversely to this legislation and the Defence Act of 1909 which prohibited anybody "not of 'substantially European' origin" to defend the nation at war, Aboriginal Australians served during World War I and II.

³⁷ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

³⁸ Ibid.

restrictive legislation and entitl[ed] to vote, drink alcohol and move freely”³⁹. These were called ‘dog tags’ or ‘dog licences’ by many Aborigines; however, some Native Australians still obtained these certificates as they provided the only available way out of poverty.⁴⁰ If the applicants could prove that they were of “good character and industrious habits” (Broome 174), the exemption certificate would be granted. Obviously, the government’s policy had shifted from that of ‘protection’ to assimilation in the 1930s with the aim of “purifying” or “de-aboriginalis[ing]” the Australian nation by making the Indigenous people “live like white Australians do”⁴¹. The campaign was a cunning “policy of absorption and naive social engineering to change Aborigines into Europeans with black skins” (Broome 175). Consequently, the first Aboriginal protests for equal treatment were held. Some achievements could be reached such as the extension of many social security benefits to Indigenous people and the right to vote for all Aboriginal Australians in 1962; however, the end of White Australia policy only came in 1973 when prime minister Whitlam and his government “gradually dismantled the policy, with the final vestiges being removed in 1973”⁴². Race as a means for denying immigrants to enter the country was officially no longer a valid factor.

Another traumatic experience inflicted on Aboriginal Australians was the nuclear tests conducted from the 1950s onwards, mainly at Maralinga, South Australia, despite the presence of Indigenous communities in close proximity to the test sites. Severe contamination and radiation sickness were the results, with hundreds of Native people forced to leave their homes. In much the same way, mining activities exploited Aboriginal territory and ran contrary to Indigenous beliefs of living in harmony with the land. For profit’s sake, Native communities and reserves were relocated in order to expand mining areas and to gain space for large bauxite deposits.

Following assimilation policies, ‘integration’ was the new key term used in politics to discuss Aboriginal issues. As of the mid 1960s, legislations were passed in order to improve the living conditions of Aborigines and to prohibit discrimination based on color and/or race. South Australia played a pivotal role in this process. It was during this period that many artists, writers and ordinary Aboriginal Australians grew hopeful in expectation of an end to discriminatory laws⁴³; however, most of these hopes were smashed. Even though overt

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Broome (174) for further information on exemption certificates.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/08abolition.htm>.

⁴³ This hopeful tone is well audible and detectable in several literary texts of this period. Examples include writings by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), Kevin Gilbert, Romaine Moreton, Eva Johnson etc.

discrimination was banned, covert segregation and discrimination were and are still present today.

3.5. Late 20th Century

In 1967, a milestone was reached: In the Commonwealth Referendum, ninety percent voted in favor of counting the Aborigines in the census as well as granting them citizenship. (This is why, today, this referendum is often called the “citizenship maker” (Chesterman and Galligan 193).) Furthermore, discriminatory legislation was made illegal, formally ending the rigid regulation of Natives’ lives by the White Australian government.

The 1970s saw the implementation of the legal changes made to the federal constitution. On the one hand, laws were passed in order to protect and worship Aboriginal culture, which triggered the Western Australia Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1972. Furthermore, to assist integration of Native Australians, it was decided to educate non-Indigenous Australians about Aboriginal culture and traditions. The Aboriginal flag, a powerful symbol of Aboriginal culture and history designed by Luritja artist Harold Thomas, was created and first flown in Adelaide in 1971.



This is a reproduction of the Aboriginal flag, designed by Aboriginal artist Harold Thomas of the Luritja nation of central Australia. It consists of three colors: red represents the earth of their native land Australia, yet has also been suggested to imply bloodshed; yellow is a symbol for the sun and the cycle of life, the giver of life; and black stands for the Aboriginal people as well as the night sky. Thomas endeavored to create a symbol that would unify Aboriginality in Australia.

On the other hand, measures were taken to (slowly and sometimes reluctantly) give Aboriginal communities back control over their own lives: discriminatory legislation was banned, some compensation was offered to Aboriginal communities for land loss and other forms of dispossession, and the removal of Native children from their families under the cover of “protection” was prohibited. Furthermore, many people who had been forcefully driven away from their homelands returned to their home estates and thus a traditional way of life.

“Limited land lease rights”⁴⁴ were given to Aborigines in the Northern Territory reserves, marking the beginning of the land rights struggle.

However, these measures taken still left a lot to be desired. Some serious legal restrictions for Aborigines living on reserves were maintained, including the censoring of mail, books and the control of “marital and sexual relationships”⁴⁵, wildly running against the new policy of self-determination which had been officially adopted instead of White Australia Policy and several other measures of discriminating against non-European Australians. Self-determination, as defined by the Australian government, meant having the right to maintain one’s culture and language and to freely decide over and manage all natural resources on Aboriginal territory. In short, it “empowered [Indigenous Australians] to identify, effect and direct the changes which [were] required” (Chesterman and Galligan 212). In the years to follow, partly because of increasing protests by non-Indigenous Australians, several laws were implemented in order to better the Aborigines’ lives: First, to name the probably most important and influential legislation, the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 declared it officially illegal to perform any kind of discriminatory acts on the basis of race, color of skin and/or ethnic origin. Secondly, the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act of 1976 transferred Aboriginal land formerly used as reserves back to the traditional owners, finally recognizing Indigenous land ownership. Despite these seemingly reconciliatory measures, mining companies still continued drilling even on sacred sites, violating Aboriginal rights as well as jeopardizing intercultural relations between Black and White Australians. The gap between those two groups, which still partly exists today, became evident in Australia’s bicentenary celebrations: Whereas non-Indigenous Australians regarded the year 1988 as a happy one, commemorating their arrival to the continent 200 years ago, Indigenous Australians felt it was “a year of loss and mourning, recognising the terrible damage done to Australia’s indigenous peoples by the historic act of European invasion” (Thompson 1). While non-Indigenous citizens call 26 January ‘Australia Day’, Aboriginal people chose to rename it ‘Survival Day’, hence taking a positive outlook on the future and celebrating their survival despite their painful history of colonization.

Nevertheless, attempts were made by the government to protect Aboriginal culture and tradition. Apart from the Western Australia Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1972, Aboriginal heritage was further taken under its wing through the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance of 1978. As a result of these cultural protection measures, Uluru Kata-Tjuta

⁴⁴ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

National Park, formerly known as Ayers Rock and one of Australia's most popular tourist attractions as well as a potent symbol of Aboriginality for Australia's First Nation communities, was returned to its traditional owners, the Anangu people, in 1985.

3.6. Recent History

Trying to come to terms with the country's violent history of colonization, the Australian government set up the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989 and The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1991. Up until today, both have remained vital institutions for the improvement of intercultural relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In 1997, the first National Sorry Day was proclaimed to remember the thousands of Aboriginal children who had been removed from their families under the pretense of child welfare as well as to give European Australians the chance to apologize on behalf of their ancestors for these crimes which were declared as acts of genocide in a national inquiry called 'Bringing them Home' report. Not until 2008 did the Australian government, under former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, officially voice their apologies "for laws and policies which had 'inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians'"⁴⁶. Supporting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) after refusing, for twenty years, to accept its principles of mutual respect, marked a new hopeful outlook on the future of peaceful interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. However, considering the fact that Australia was one of the four veto votes in opposition to the declaration casts a rather dim light on the situation. Despite considerable efforts and achievements, full equality for all Australians, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, has not yet been reached as the reconciliation process is still under way. It was started by the Australian Government in 1991 with the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The term 'reconciliation' is used to refer to "the bringing together of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or Indigenous, and non-Indigenous Australians. Supporting reconciliation means working to overcome the reasons [for the existence of] division and inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians"⁴⁷. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy, imprisonment rate and educational level are such gaps currently still in need for closing. Another important step towards a more balanced Australian society would be to overcome intercultural prejudice and racism through educating

⁴⁶ <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/indigenous/sorry/>.

⁴⁷ <http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/what-is-reconciliation>.

Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous children at school in order to minimize the perpetuation of unjustified and unqualified ethnic stereotyping while at the same time creating mutual respect between the two groups.

Several organizations have been formed with the aim of fostering (and ideally finally achieving) full equality for Black and White citizens, including *Reconciliation Australia*. This non-profit organization has set out to achieve reconciliation in Australia through raising awareness for Aboriginal culture and issues via education, promoting “best practice models”⁴⁸ as well as by encouraging new intercultural relationships.⁴⁹ Others, such as the Link-Up organizations which exist in every Australian state and focus on reuniting victims of the Stolen Generations with their tribal parents and/or extended family, provide measures that foster reconciliation on a more personal level and, hence, encourage national healing.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, the reconciliation process was greatly hindered when the Howard Government took up a policy called ‘practical reconciliation’, which largely denied the suggestions made by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Short claims that “[r]estrictive policy framing and lack of political will have ensured that official reconciliation is significantly out of step with indigenous aspirations” (507).

Up until today, a solution for the eradication of continuing inequality between Black and White Australians still needs to be found. While “successful reconciliation will require ‘innovation’” (Lederach 24), it should first and foremost “seek to achieve a simple cessation of hostilities, while addressing the harms that flow from internal colonization” (Short 507).

⁴⁸ <http://www.reconciliation>.

⁴⁹ See the above quoted website for more detailed information on the goals of *Reconciliation Australia*.

⁵⁰ Cf. MacLeod 88.

4. Why Drama?

Before starting an in-depth analysis of the three plays I have chosen, to some extent because they are representative of contemporary Aboriginal drama dealing with the topic of race relations in Australia in the late twentieth century, two basic questions should be answered: Firstly, what is Aboriginal drama? Which features make it unique? Secondly, why is the genre of drama so popular among Aboriginal Australian writers, and which features of this genre might be beneficial to the writers' (perceived or assumed) goals?

4.1. The Beginnings of Aboriginal Drama

After almost two hundred years of dispossession and armed with a legacy of colonization, Aboriginal drama developed out of a need for a redefined Aboriginal identity in the 1960s with the civil rights movement on the upsurge.⁵¹ The slow creation of an Aboriginal literary scene made up of poetry, drama and prose ushered in a "new phase of cultural communication" (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 5) in Australia. Before then, Black Australia had been "under the figurative microscope" (ibid.) of a foreign, mostly colonial gaze. Aboriginal authors then started to return the gaze by "analys[ing], pass[ing] judgement upon, criticis[ing], and occasionally prais[ing] White Australians" (ibid.) and thus "changed the specimen on the slide under the microscope" (ibid.)

The main aims of the majority of Indigenous Australian writers were and still are today to reflect on White Australia's violent history by giving Indigenous peoples a say as well as to celebrate Aboriginal survival, pride and heritage. Above all, however, Indigenous Australian drama is concerned with the search for a personal and shared Aboriginal identity – "that complex of attitudes, beliefs and mores which constitute Aboriginality" (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 265). Hence, these writers contributed or have contributed immensely to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues among White Australians and the rest of the world.

Jack Davis was without doubt the forerunner of today's Aboriginal Australian dramatists. In his plays *Kullark* (1979), *The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1985) and *Barungin (Smell the Wind)* (1988), he paved the way for a distinctive new subgenre of drama - that of Australian Aboriginal drama. His thematic focus lay on the portrayal of Indigenous (family) life and the struggle of finding an Aboriginal identity in present-day White Australia with its violent

⁵¹ However, not until 1971 was the first Aboriginal play ever written, Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers*, actually performed (cf. Shoemaker, *Black Words* 3).

history of colonialism – something in line with the ideas of Western poetic realism of that time. His formal focus, however, differed considerably from the model of the European realist conventions: While in many scenes naturalistically inspired, Davis's plays are deeply "steeped in myth" (Maufort, *Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)⁵², incorporating stories from the Dreaming and thus "fusing Western realism and Aboriginal myth" (ibid.). Hence, Davis's plays should not merely be viewed as "examples of twentieth century naturalistic European drama"⁵³. Mudrooroo calls for a heightened awareness of the "primary importance" (qtd. in Brisbane⁵⁴) of the spiritual and symbolic aspects in Davis's plays since they do not only function as a device to distract from the realist outline of the texts but as "integral parts pointing to the polysemic nature of Aboriginal drama"⁵⁵.

Seeing that he "set the formal and thematic standards of the then fledgling genre of Aboriginal drama" (Maufort, *Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)⁵⁶, Jack Davis can certainly be called the founding father of Aboriginal realism. His seminal role in the creation of an independent Aboriginal dramatic scene is unquestioned.

4.2. Some Defining Characteristics of Aboriginal Drama⁵⁷

Despite borrowing from the rich and ancient tradition of Western-style theater, Aboriginal drama, or described by Maufort as "Native appropriations of Western dramatic forms" (*Listen to Them* 56), differs from the Euro-American dramatic tradition in many ways, most prominently of course in its incorporation of Indigenous myth, storytelling and dance into the play. The frequent employment of sign language, which used to be an important part of traditional tribal communication and is still being used in today's urban Indigenous Australian communities, is strikingly different from European theatrical non-verbal articulation.⁵⁸

According to Carroll, Indigenous Australian drama is special in "structure, form, and style" (100-110)⁵⁹. One aspect which audiences largely unfamiliar with Black Australian theater notice first is the repetitive structure of key events, leading to a feeling of circularity. Closely linked to this concept of circularity, and in parts provoked by it, is the employment of two

⁵² Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

⁵³ <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

⁵⁷ This is also the title of Dennis Carroll's article on Indigenous Australian drama.

⁵⁸ Balme gives further information on the use of Aboriginal sign-languages and its unique nature.

⁵⁹ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

recurrent images with regard to place: On the one hand, the home of the typical urban Aboriginal family with its cluttered, run-down, impoverished and depressive atmosphere often serves as the primary location throughout the whole play. On the other hand, the second recurrent place image is that of open space and nature, which always emphasizes the connection between man and nature. After the ‘home scenes’, the parts of the play which are set outdoors have a liberating effect.⁶⁰

A second feature of Aboriginal drama is the extensive use of symbolism and myth. Due to the Aboriginal “propensity to think in symbolic ways” (Carroll 100-110)⁶¹, it seems to be generally accepted by a large majority of Aboriginal people that the Dreaming shapes their present lives, which is subsequently mirrored in the works of Indigenous playwrights. An “abrupt juxtaposition of scenes and episodes in different theatrical styles” of often “surreal quality” (Carroll 100-110)⁶², meaning the alternating use of realist and mythical elements, is the result. These layovers are not only a means of underlining the Aboriginality of the texts, but they are also a device “to indicate narrative shifts” (Carroll 100-110)⁶³.

The poet, novelist and critic Mudrooroo Narogin (previously known as Colin Thomas Johnson), who is often called the father of Aboriginal literature, describes this form of writing and theater performance as ‘Aboriginal realism’: According to Mudrooroo, it is a concept which “expands European realism by taking in certain supernatural aspects, characters and situations found in Aboriginal storytelling” (Maufort, *Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)⁶⁴. It thus upsets and undermines “the codes of referentiality of Euro-American dramatic realism through allusions to Native myths and storytelling” (Maufort, *Listen to Them* 56) as well as by adding supernatural elements from the oral tradition (i.e. storytelling and songs). Another prominent feature of Aboriginal realism is that it blends aspects from both the Western as well the Indigenous Australian cultural heritage, pointing out the difficulty of coming to terms with centuries of colonialism and dispossession under White colonial rule. It is furthermore an artistic comment on the two opposing worlds of the colonizer and the colonized. Arguably, this mixture of traditions Aboriginal realism borrows from, which is called “undecidability” (*Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)⁶⁵ by Maufort, is a silent but noticeable protest against the often unquestioned superiority of Western literary and theatrical models. Instead of the

⁶⁰ This, in itself, is a political statement. In-depth analysis on this specific topic will be provided in Chapter 6.

⁶¹ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

⁶² See above.

⁶³ See above.

⁶⁴ See above.

⁶⁵ See above.

negative term 'undecidability', the term multifariousness might be more appropriate when referring to Aboriginal drama.

According to Katherine Brisbane, publisher of Currency Press, the special quality of Aboriginal drama has always been and still is the life-affirming quality, "the irrepressible humour [and] the capacity to survive"⁶⁶:

There is violence in some of the plays, and anger, and despair; but the drive is to re-enact the past in order to come to terms with it. Which makes it a political act but also an artistic one.⁶⁷

The role of humor certainly is an essential part of Aboriginal drama and crucial for the tone and message sent out to the audience. Therefore, special attention will be devoted to the function of humor in my analysis of the three plays by Maza, Davis and Johnson to be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.3. New Developments in Aboriginal Drama

Lately, dramatists and playwrights have been experimenting with new forms and dramatic techniques based on the model of Jack Davis⁶⁸, which makes it increasingly hard to identify a handful of specific characteristics of recent Aboriginal Australian drama. This may serve the dramatists themselves well as there seems to be an aversion among many of them, including Canadian and New Zealand postcolonial playwrights, against any attempts of "rigid categorizations by white critics" (Maufort, *Listen to Them* 56) – for "fear of being ghettoized" (ibid.). One reason for the difficulties White critics and/or readers sometimes have with Aboriginal literature in general is that these texts, by borrowing from Western literary traditions, blend European and Indigenous cultural heritage, therefore creating a hybrid form of art which is "strikingly original" (Hosking 143) but which refuses to be neatly definable and allocable within one specific culture.

The challenging of "Anglo-Celtic expectations of what an Aboriginal play should be" (ibid.) appears to be another important notion. These ideas about so-called "pure and authentic" Aboriginal dramatic texts and productions may encourage "reinscription of hegemonic patterns of thought" (Maufort, *Listen to Them* 56) by White critics and clearly bear the mark

⁶⁶ <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Maufort calls this „Davis's template“ (*Listen to Them* 56) and points to Davis's pivotal role as a forerunner of present-day Aboriginal drama.

of colonialism and Eurocentricity. According to Tony Mitchell's investigation of critical strategies applied by White reviewers to Aboriginal drama, they "willingly overlooked any 'lapses' which transgressed the European rules and regulations of imaginary dramatic worlds [...], thus avoiding any engagement with the critical glance at white Australia" (qtd. in Filewod 368). A different viewpoint will have to be employed in the analysis of recent Aboriginal texts - refraining from comparisons to European literary works could be one way of achieving actual critical reflection on these works.

A look at the latest productions on the Indigenous stage shows that playwrights, through experiments with different styles and techniques, are on a search for what Maufort calls an "Aboriginal stage aesthetic, both thematically and formally" (*Listen to Them* 57); they "can be considered as embryos of an alternative canon" (Maufort, *Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)⁶⁹. These productions and texts resist containment and will have to be considered individually in order to give full justice to the works. The use of "other theatrical 'voices' has increasingly fragmented any (false) sense of a monovocal Australian drama" (Gilbert 3); recent Indigenous plays therefore certainly contribute to this understanding of a plurivocal world in which Aborigines get to represent themselves "as they see themselves, rather than as they are seen by others" (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 4).

4.4. What is 'Aboriginality'?

Much attention has been paid in the preceding chapters to the unique features of Aboriginal drama, which also help to reinforce Aboriginality. But what does this concept convey?

Discourses by non-Aborigines about what it means to be Aboriginal constantly reshape the category of Aboriginality in all its possibilities to be found in lived experience of Indigenous people, and are as such "intersubjective" (Grossman&Cuthbert 110). This may be one reason why Aboriginalities are never fixed and always changing; another explanation certainly revolves around the hybridity of present-day Aboriginal cultural manifestations, particularly in non-traditional settings where a connection with the native land can no longer be grasped. The Indigenous people living in cities therefore constantly have to adapt traditional practices to their surroundings and current living situation. Michael Dodson claims that Aboriginal identity is produced by both non-Aboriginal as well as Aboriginal people: through the perpetuation of certain White stereotypical images of the Australian Natives which have

⁶⁹ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

proved to be rather prevailing throughout the centuries on the one hand and, contrarily, through the relocation of Aboriginal identity as "*identities* produced through and within a varied and uneven history of Indigenous contact and interaction with, as well as resistance to, European colonisation" on the other (Grossman&Cuthbert 111). Dodson refuses to come up with a definition of what Aboriginality means as such a 'catalog' of characteristics would undermine people's right to self-determination, the establishment of their own identity as well as their right for change.⁷⁰ One particularly prevalent stereotype about Aborigines is that they themselves as a people as well as their cultural practices are "static, timeless, 'pure' and wholly self-referential" (Grossman&Cuthbert 111). Keeping in mind the above explained need for constant redefinition and adaptation of these cultural practices to an urban setting, many of these false attributes can be refuted immediately. How open to aspects from other cultures Aboriginal writing (or Aboriginal art, for instance) is has been illustrated in the previous section and will be outlined in more detail in this and the following chapters to come in the context of textual analysis of three contemporary Aboriginal plays. Another problematic area arising out of such rigid categorization of Aborigines by non-Aboriginal Australians is that of the silences it creates: Despite the many (over seventy per cent⁷¹) Aborigines living in cities, the most frequently encountered clichés of the lazy, drunk Aborigine who plays the didgeridoo while lamenting his/her fate drowns out "those versions and experiences of Aboriginal identity that do not conform to 'traditional' or 'timeless' models" (Grossman&Cuthbert 111). What is more, the discourses of the no longer 'pure' Aborigine who, to say it in Ruby Langford's words, "[is] the tribal one[...] out in the desert sitting on a rock" (qtd. in Hosking 141), have in turn created an Aboriginal reality which is fragmented and hybrid. According to Ian Anderson, Aboriginal Australians are thus challenged to show that they are neither extreme – pristine and hence judged 'authentic' by many, or 'hybrid' and hence 'inauthentic'. By creating such "cultural material" (Grossman&Cuthbert 113), Indigenous peoples have a fair chance of "undo[ing] the representational traps of authenticity and the inauthentic" (ibid.) and stopping a trend which "simultaneously idealize[d] and demonize[d]" (Hoorn 48) them.

This is why speaking of "Aboriginalities" (Langford, qtd. in Hosking 142) instead of the narrowly defined term 'Aboriginality', which is so often connected to stereotypical and archaic beliefs of non-Indigenous people about Aboriginal Australians, seems more useful

⁷⁰ Cf. Dodson 10.

⁷¹ Cf.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3238.0.55.001Main%20Features1Jun%202006?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3238.0.55.001&issue=Jun%202006&num=&view=> for the exact figures.

and plausible. The concept of Aboriginalities as such is constantly under "renegotiation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians" (Langford qtd. in Hosking 142).

4.5. Aboriginalities and Drama

We may never look inside a writer's mind, but from reading their texts and noting their main themes, conclusions can be drawn which seem plausible in the context of intercultural relations in Australia. The freedom of any author, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, to choose whichever genre they feel most comfortable writing in or which will have the desired effect on the readership should be treated with utmost respect. In addition, literary works (by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors) may not be written for their political message but for the aesthetic pleasure of the writer and/or reader only, and my interpretation may not be valid for each context. However, in the case of Aboriginal Australia, the political commitment is clearly visible:⁷²

Bob Maza, for instance, often stated that his main aim was to produce plays with a socio-political agenda in order to encourage his audiences to "commit themselves to social responsibilities"⁷³. Eva Johnson, author of the second play this thesis focuses on, is particularly concerned with the fight against restrictive, racist government policies -with a particular focus on the effect these had and have on women and children- as well as the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians. Jack Davis, author of the third text to be discussed in this paper, was no less politically active during his lifetime: A leading figure in the fight against racism and segregation, his political commitment had one simple goal: to bridge the gap between Black and White Australians. According to Katherine Brisbane, Jack Davis's writing and political activism inspired "other Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to use the stage as a forum for communicating with white people" – this act as such "was always political"⁷⁴. Davis himself, upon being asked whether Aboriginal Australian writers were political, replied that they all "started off as political people" (Shoemaker, *Interview* 115). Adam Shoemaker's analysis of Aboriginal writers and writings is worth quoting at length:

The power and impressiveness of Aboriginal writing stems from the authors' intimate knowledge of their subjects, their strong belief in what they are accomplishing through

⁷² Cf. Shoemaker's comments in "Black Words on White Pages" and Brisbane (exact page reference could not be verified; article read online at <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history>) for in-depth comments on the pivotal role of Aboriginal authors in the political movement for equal rights for Black and White Australians as well as with regard to the creation and preservation of a feeling of pride in being Aboriginal.

⁷³ <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/bobmaza1.html>.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

literature, and their socio-political involvement and awareness. Above all, this strength and distinctiveness derives from their exploration of what it is to be an Aboriginal Australian. (Black Words 122)

But why do they choose drama for advocating their political ambitions? Australian Aboriginal writers, with their oral heritage, seem to have a special affinity for literary genres that are open to oral aspects from traditional Native customs, including song, dance, and storytelling. Despite the large community of Aboriginal novelists, I would argue that Indigenous Australian poets and playwrights outnumber the novelists.⁷⁵ By discussing the many parallels between genre and goals, this chapter is trying to cast light on why drama seems such a perfect match for the shared ambitions of Aboriginal writers in Australia.

To start with, for the set aims of many Indigenous writers (including the three I am dealing with – Maza, Johnson and Davis), to decolonize Australia(n minds), to rewrite history and, in a broader sense, to promote reconciliation, the possibilities the dramatic devices offer seem to fit the purpose more than perfectly well: The “performative aspects of theatre” have a huge “potential to expand postcolonial notions of counterdiscursive resistance” (Gilbert, *Preface* vii). According to Gilbert, Australian Aboriginal theater “poses the Australian stage’s most trenchant challenge to the hegemony of imperialism” (51). Keeping in mind that most Aboriginal writers have been or were Aboriginal rights activists throughout their adult life, their “political engagement” (Carroll 100-110)⁷⁶ has become and serves as one of the most prominent features of Aboriginal drama.

A second reason why drama may seem more appealing and suitable to Aboriginal authors for their designated goals has got to do with immediacy. While it is tenable to say that poems, as a written literary medium, might reach a wider audience in comparison to plays, I would argue that the immediacy of the action on stage, intensified by the live movement and conversations of the actors, is greater for most people in comparison to reading a poem in private – this is what Shoemaker calls the “total sensory impact” (*Black Words* 13) of dramatic texts. My line of argumentation goes hand in hand with Gilbert and Tompkins when they say that “[p]ost-colonial *theatre*’s capacity to intervene publicly in social organisation and to critique political structures can be more extensive than the relatively isolated circumstances of written narrative and poetry” (3). In addition, “the visual attributes of

⁷⁵ Shoemaker claims that Aboriginal Australian authors favor poetry “over any other literary genre” (*Black Words* 11) and points to the large number of Aboriginal poets, who, however, are clearly outnumbered by White Australian poets. While the former primarily focus on Indigenous themes, their White counterparts tend to avoid dealing with Aboriginal matters in their poems. For a discussion on why Shoemaker believes that poetry is the most frequently chosen genre by Aboriginal Australian authors see Shoemaker (*Black Words* 11-12).

⁷⁶ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

dramatic production vastly enhance the overall emotional impact on the audience” (Nelson 33). The emotional involvement of the spectators can spread the message of the plays among a larger crowd and may therefore eventually help to create a less segregated, prejudiced world.⁷⁷

Due to these visual attributes of plays, there is an even wider array of possibilities of displaying experiences of subjugation, colonization, discrimination and genocide. A variety of dramatic devices and techniques which support the subversion of power relations and the indication of ethnocentric, colonialist practices and doctrines will be discussed in more detail in the textual analyses to come.⁷⁸

On another note, the aspect of orality, a significant feature of Aboriginal culture, and all its possibilities can be fully made use of in dramatic texts/productions.⁷⁹ “The stage provides space for re-creation of ancient rituals; it allows room for fuller expression of the orality of traditional Aboriginal culture” (Nelson 33). Hence, the theater is a place in which multiple voices can be heard and thus enables Aboriginal playwrights to speak out in public. Empowering the Other to speak and be heard as well as the gradual de-alienation of White Australians with regard to Indigenous customs is a prominent feature as well as an important goal of Aboriginal drama.

One major aspect in the process of colonization not to be neglected is language. It is an essential, yet not the only defining aspect of theater. The script can be reinterpreted by the performance and given an additional meaning which would not necessarily have been created by the written text. The gap between “what is said and how it is said” (Gilbert 23) is a powerful tool for making political statements on the basis of physical and metaphysical elements inherent in acting without verbally uttering open criticism. Furthermore, linguistic devices, in particular the use of Aboriginal languages, can help to create a new space for Indigenous peoples and voices simply by letting “the Other speak” (Gilbert 23) and by “deprivileg[ing] standard English as the normative code” (ibid.) to be used in literature and on stage. Most contemporary Aboriginal Australian playwrights chose or choose to use English, the language of the colonizer, “as a basic linguistic code which is necessarily modified, subverted, or decentred when indigenous languages are incorporated into the text” (Gilbert

⁷⁷ In terms of exposure, Jack Davis was of the opinion that written texts would reach a larger number of recipients than a play which, “if it’s a good play – might have been [seen by] a thousand” (Shoemaker, *Interview* 114).

⁷⁸ For a detailed analysis of some of the techniques used to reach the goal see Chapter 6.

⁷⁹ Further analysis on the aspect of orality in Aboriginal plays will be provided in Chapter 6.

and Tompkins 170). Hence, Aboriginal plays help to establish an understanding and “acceptance of Other voices and Other languages as viable, and indeed vital, modes of expression” (Gilbert 24). The immediacy of the action on stage may be called the most fruitful terrain for using speech, or in a broader sense, drama as a mouthpiece for the reversal of outdated and unjust power structures.

The fifth and last aspect to be considered in connection with the discussion on the superb suitability of drama for Aboriginal political goals is again of linguistic nature: the function of humor. Through witty comments and/or irony, political statements can be masked and may therefore seem harmless or be missed by parts of the audience and/or critics at all despite being quite biting. Humorous scenes, comments and notions are not only employed by Aboriginal authors in order to make them seem less serious and risky, but they are also one way of coping with the history of colonization and the effects on the Black community in Australia: Humor might make it easier to come to terms with the traumatic experiences inflicted on the numerous Indigenous tribes by the White colonizers and later by White public authorities. Fitzpatrick and Thomson highlight the strength inherent in this approach: “The comic sophistication of a shifting series of ironic self-representations on the part of indigenous Australians represents a profound rejection of both Otherness and victim status” (493). Instead of continuously complaining about the difficult position many Aboriginal Australians were and have been put into through the European colonization of Australia, Indigenous playwrights show that their people have moved on and are proud of their (cultural) survival by transferring the discourse of the play to a humorous level. Stereotypical White figures, for example, are used to show how clichés have been employed to depict Aborigines as unable to be successful, productive and hard-working members of society and, therefore, as a useless race. By generating stereotypical representations of White people, the audience is made aware of the falsehood implied in oversimplification and overgeneralizations. Hence, “awareness of one pattern of implied inferiority” (Fitzpatrick and Thomson 493) is created through the use of humor, and thus may be the starting point for more critical thinking among the audience about common national stereotypes.

Having dwelt on the parallels of the genre of drama and the intended goals of a majority of Aboriginal Australian dramatists, it can be concluded that Aboriginal drama “counteracts the historical erasure of Aborigines” (Gilbert 77). In addition, it may help to reverse power relations as plays could also be considered as ethnic memory in an artistically aestheticized form. Dramatic texts are therefore highly useful in the Aboriginal struggle for equality and

reconciliation. What is fascinating about most contemporary Aboriginal Australian plays is that they tend to move away from simple black and white drawings in which the Aborigine is the victim and the White person is the evil perpetrator; sympathy for the White society is offered to some extent as well as a feeling of pity for the ruthless White exploiters and their often heartless, cunning ways. In this vein, black resilience shows that most Aborigines abstain from retaliatory acts because reconciliation, a life in peace and a just society with respect as well as the 'fair go' for everyone often quoted in the Australian media seem to be the goal. One aspect which provides hope for reconciliation between Black and White Australians is the fact that most Aboriginal plays are produced and staged in a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists.

5. The Plays: *The Keepers*, *Murras* and *The Dreamers*

All three plays to be discussed here in detail were composed in the nineteen eighties, two of them (*The Keepers* and *Murras*) in 1988, a year in which White Australia celebrated its 200th anniversary of permanent European settlement. For Aboriginal Australians, on the other hand, the commemoration of this occasion was a sad reminder of two hundred years of racial discrimination. For the descendants of the Native inhabitants, 26th January 1988 marked an opportunity to draw attention to the pain and traumata inflicted on them and their ancestors in the process of British colonization, but first and foremost to underline the strength and pride of contemporary Aboriginal communities. This positive outlook on the future is implied in the term given to what Australia's non-Indigenous inhabitants call 'Australia Day': Australian Aborigines think of 26 January as 'Survival Day'. Due to the size and the amount of media coverage of the anniversary celebrations, the reverberations were far-reaching: More and more people, in Australia and around the globe, began to realize the extent of the Aborigines' struggle for equality and justice and the need for action to boost intercultural relations. In his speech on account of White Australia's bicentennial anniversary, Sir Ronald Wilson, the then President of the Uniting Church in Australia, pointed out that all of them (Australians) were "beneficiaries of the injustices that have been inflicted on those of us who were Aboriginal people. In varying degrees, we all contribute to, and perpetuate those injustices"⁸⁰. Many other statements were given on the same note, providing hope for Indigenous citizens that a new era had finally come.

When Jack Davis wrote *The Dreamers* six years earlier in 1982, he knew little of the possibilities the bicentenary year would bring for his fellow Aboriginal Australians. Nevertheless, his writing, and also the writing of his colleagues Eva Johnson and Bob Maza, were informed by such ground-breaking political changes in Australia as the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975, which declared it officially illegal to perform any kind of discriminatory acts on the basis of race, color of skin and/or ethnic origin. Furthermore, the several Land Rights Acts issued in the 1970s finally recognized Indigenous land ownership for the first time. The granting of citizenship to the native inhabitants of Australia in the Commonwealth Referendum of 1967, same as several Aboriginal Heritage Acts, were long overdue measures for the improvement of Black-White relations in the country and proved

⁸⁰ <http://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/20-historicdocs/133-bicentennialstatement.html>.

that non-Indigenous Australians had become aware of some of the glaring injustices done to the Aborigines.

The three plays were written after these crucial legislative changes were made and cover, to various degrees and in different ways, the implementation of those changes. The success or failure of those measures is one of the many issues employed for making political statements.

In Australia, the nineteen eighties were, as has been outlined, quite a hopeful decade despite ongoing incidents of injustice and racial discrimination which should long have been eradicated by then but proved to be extremely prevalent due to White racist attitudes. Theory and practice still were no matching pairs of shoes; however, steps had been taken to bridge the social, legal and political gap between White and Black Australians. The period between 1961 and 1988 was also one of “escalating Aboriginal self-confidence and achievements on many fronts” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 104). Aborigines no longer wanted to give in to racist practices and therefore increasingly engaged in protests. Famous examples of such non-violent protests by Aboriginal Australians were the Gurindji strike (or Wave Hill Walk-Off) on Wave Hill station in 1966, in which workers on the cattle farm demonstrated for better work and living conditions and, above all, the return of their stolen land; another historically important case was the ‘Tent Embassy’ campaign of 1972 in Canberra which fought for land rights and Aboriginal control of sacred sites and heritage. As such, there was much movement and stirring for Aboriginal issues in the 1960s, which have been described as to have “brought more important and lasting socio-political changes to the lives of Aborigines than any previous decade since the arrival of Europeans in Australia” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 6), and the 1970s, but the enthusiastic campaigns and organized activities proved to be more often than not disappointing or unsuccessful by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. Despite disheartening drawbacks, Aboriginal protest, once incited, could not be stopped and continues until this day with the Indigenous peoples voicing “their dissent clearly, articulately, and often stridently” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 120).

This generally hopeful, yet sometimes sobering and disillusioning outlook on the future is mirrored in all three plays. They all, however, cover a different time span despite being written in the same decade. While the action in Bob Maza’s *The Keepers* starts in the 1850s and as such the time during first contact between European settlers and the Aborigines, Eva Johnson’s *Murras* covers the late 1960s and early 1970s – a period in Australian Aboriginal history which saw the gradual dismantling of the so-called “protection policy” and in which “Aboriginal Australians consolidated their gains and continued to combat remaining

injustices” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 102). Jack Davis’s play *The Dreamers* is set in the early 1980s, a time which was filled with “abused confidences and unfulfilled promises in Aboriginal affairs” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 122).

Due to the different time frames, the historical allusions will be slightly divergent; however, the general tone of the plays is quite similar: The authors, believers in the possibility of reconciliation, often mirror the frustration felt by other Aboriginal Australians about both hostile White reactions to the legislative changes made in favor of Native Australians as well as frustration about unfulfilled promises made in the 1976 Referendum and other amendments. It is as if they were to say that “the advances that have occurred have not eradicated many inequalities and repressions” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 104). However, none of the three texts to be dealt with lack optimism and hopefulness for a better future. (Whenever necessary or fruitful, historically important references will be explained in the context of the discussion of individual topics in Chapter 6.)

5.1. Bob Maza: *The Keepers* (1988)

Bob Maza’s best-known play, *The Keepers*, is set on the south-eastern coast of South Australia in the Rivoli Bay area, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. The action later moves to the Gambier Mountain area of the eighteen sixties. The play deals with the topic of initial contact between the native tribe, the Boandik, and the earliest White settlers to coastal South Australia.

The Keepers was first performed in the Naracoorte Town Hall (South Australia) on February 25, 1988 by the Mainstreet Theatre Company. It was then revised for the Adelaide Festival of the same year and was also shown at the renowned Belvoir Street Theatre in Sydney.⁸¹

For this play, Maza received the National Black Playwright Award.

5.1.1. The Author

Robert Lewis Maza, a descendant of a Torres Strait Islander father and a Yidinjdji mother, was born on Palm Island, North Queensland, on 25 November 1939. He grew up in Cairns where he received basic education and consequently took a variety of different manual labor jobs. Today, however, Maza is well-known for his work as filmmaker, television and stage

⁸¹ The version of the play serving as the basis for my analysis here was further revised by the author after the staging at the Belvoir Street Theatre.

actor as well as for being a devoted Aboriginal rights activist. In the late 1960s, Maza moved from Cairns to Melbourne to join the Aboriginal Advancement League of which he would later become president. After reading Malcom X's works, Maza could no longer deny his desire to improve Aboriginal Australians' lives, whereupon he became an active participant in the Australian Black Power Movement. In order to point out the "Third World status"⁸² of his fellow Indigenous Australians to a larger audience, Maza traveled to New York as a delegate to the 25th United Nations Assembly in 1970.

Bob Maza played a pivotal role in the development of the Indigenous film and theater industry in Australia. His role as a clerk in the TV series *Bellbird* not only made him famous as an actor, but also altered the manner in which Aboriginal Australians were represented in the media. After moving to Sydney in 1972, Maza established the National Black Theatre in Redfern, a district in Sydney with a large Indigenous population. After promised funds had not been provided, the theater had to close down. In search of a substitute, the Aboriginal Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre was set up with Maza as artistic director. He put on a number of hugely successful plays, among them Jack Davis's *No Sugar* and Robert Merritt's *The Cake Man*, the latter of which was the first Indigenous play to ever have been published, broadcast on TV and to tour on international stages. Bob Maza also wrote dramatic texts of his own, including *The Keepers*, *Mereki*, and *Tiddalik*. His aim was to produce plays with a socio-political agenda in order to encourage his audiences to "commit themselves to social responsibilities"⁸³.

Among the many awards and prizes Maza won, his membership of the Order of Australia seems most prestigious. His "outstanding contributions to the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture in the wider community, at both national and international levels"⁸⁴ won him the Red Ochre Award. In 1995, he was appointed Commissioner of the Australian Film Commission, making him the first Native Australian to hold that position. Today, the Australian Film Commission awards a Bob Maza Fellowship of AUD\$10,000 each year to a distinguished Indigenous artist to help develop their career, celebrating and acknowledging Bob Maza's essential role in Aboriginal film and theater production to raise awareness for Indigenous issues. Maza's declared aim was to educate

⁸² http://afcarchive.screenaustralia.gov.au/archive/annrep/ar99_00/ar_006.html.

⁸³ <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/bobmaza1.html>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

people by entertaining them instead of “making them cry”⁸⁵ and to produce plays with a socio-political agenda.

Bob Maza, father of nine children, died on 14 May 2000.

5.1.2. Short Summary of the Play

The Keepers consists of two acts which are made up of eleven (Act 1) and ten scenes (Act 2). Whereas the first act deals with the initial encounters between Aboriginal Australians and newly arrived White settlers to the homeland of the Boandik people, the second act examines the effects of colonization on both Black and White.

The play begins with a depiction of the peaceful tribal life of Koonowar and Mirnat, members of the Boandik tribe of Southern Australia's south-eastern coast. Their harmonious existence is brought to an abrupt end with the arrival of the first immigrants to the area, among them Elizabeth and James Campbell, a young couple who has recently arrived from Scotland. Fear of the foreign intruders and the Natives respectively lead to violent encounters from both Black and White parties apart from the Campbells, who befriend Koonowar and Mirnat. Slowly, the two couples learn to express themselves in each other's language and henceforth gain knowledge about each other's culture. When Koonowar and Mirnat kill a White bullock driver in self-defense, Koonowar is made an outlaw in the White settler's community, triggering off a brutal headhunt. Koonowar has to hide in the outback for months, supported by James and Elizabeth who provide him with food and take care of Mirnat and her son. At the end of act one, however, both James, who remains true to his humanitarian beliefs of equality and justice for all, and Koonowar are killed in a violent fight with the angry mob.

In Act 2, Mirnat and Elizabeth, now in their fifties, share a house in a small town with their sons Daniel and Michael, who are now in their twenties. Their relationship is one of general love and respect; however, cultural misunderstandings, instances of stereotyping and colonialist thoughts are also present. The two ladies face problems of culture clash just as much as the two young men: Whereas Michael, the white son of Elizabeth and James, is a devoted writer of anthropological studies about the Boandik and a fervent advocate of the latter's culture and language with the goal of preserving the Boandik heritage, the black

⁸⁵ <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/bobmaza1.html>.

Danny is a well-respected, hard-working master builder and striving to become a member of the prestigious White local tennis club.

Both Michael and Daniel have an interest in the other community's life and tradition and strive for liaisons with girls of the opposite skin color; neither bond of affection turns into a relationship due to society's unwritten laws of racial barriers. In addition, Daniel learns of an incident when an entire Aboriginal community was poisoned with strychnine with no charges laid against the White prosecutors. When his membership of the tennis club is rejected for racist reasons despite Daniel's numerous attempts and he is confronted with the hopelessness of his endeavor to become a part of White society, the situation escalates: In an alcohol-driven frenzy, full of despair, the young man damages several White buildings and sets the clubhouse on fire. When the White community finds out, they take revenge by killing Daniel. The tragedy culminates in both boys being killed like their fathers were almost two decades ago – Michael because he steps in for Danny and is stabbed for being “a nigger lover” (*The Keepers* 225), and Danny because he faces the angry mob and dies fighting.⁸⁶

5.2. Eva Johnson: *Murras* (1988)

Murras is set in the late 1960s and early 1970s – a period in Australian Aboriginal history “which saw the beginning of changes to laws relating to Aborigines, including the abolition of the Aborigines Protection Board” (*Murras* 84). The play deals with one Native family who, under restrictive White housing policy, is resettled from a rural area and a traditional life into an urban neighborhood and their resulting “struggle to come to grips with white Australia” (*Murras* 84). It also and in particular focuses on “three generations of women” (Saunders, *Introduction* x), providing a unique perspective on the lives of Indigenous women.

Murras was first performed during the Adelaide Festival in March in 1988 at the Fringe Festival Centre and was directed by Eva Johnson herself.

5.2.1. The Author

Eva Johnson, a descendant of the Mulak Mulak people of the Northern Territory, was born at Daly River, Northern Territory, in 1946. When she was still a toddler, she was removed from her family and raised at Croker Island (Methodist) Mission. At the age of ten, Eva Johnson

⁸⁶ All excerpts from the three plays are taken from the anthology *Plays from Black Australia*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1989.

was relocated to an Adelaide orphanage where she was kept until she became independent as a drama teacher.

Johnson has been writing for the stage since the late nineteen seventies, but began composing poetry much earlier. Her anger at all kinds of racism and injustice targeted at Indigenous Australian communities, in particular the Land Rights struggle, was the incentive and catalyst for her writings. In addition, Johnson soon started devising dramatic texts. Her first play to be staged, *Tjinderella*, earned her first recognition in 1984 at both the 1st National Aboriginal Women's Art Festival as well as the Adelaide Fringe Festival. Further works include *When I Die You'll Stop Laughing*, *Onward to Glory*, *Mimini's Voice*, *What Do They Call Me?*, *Heartbeat of the Earth*, *Faded Genes* and *Murras*, the latter of which was also staged at the notable Black Theatre in Redfern, Sydney.

As a victim of the 'Stolen Generations', Eva Johnson continually focuses on this important issue in her works, including *Murras* and *What Do They Call Me?* Apart from this topic, the impact of restrictive, racist government policies on Aboriginal women and children such as the removal of children from their Indigenous tribes as well as the dispossession of land are recurrent themes in Johnson's texts.

Eva Johnson has won numerous prestigious prizes such as the Aboriginal Artist of the Year Award in 1985. She was the first Indigenous Australian to receive the Red Ochre Award in 1993 for her outstanding achievements regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and culture.

Apart from her contributions in the fight against injustices of all kinds, Eva Johnson, as a playwright, poetess, actor, director and teacher, is particularly attributed with "establishing space for the Indigenous woman's voice within Australian theatre"⁸⁷.

Today, she lives in Adelaide and still engages in Aboriginal matters and writing for justice.

5.2.2. Short Summary of the Play

Murras consists of four acts which are made up of one scene (Act 1), three scenes (Act 2), one scene (Act 3) and again one scene (Act 4).

⁸⁷ <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/Academy/author%20pages/..%5Cauthor%20pages%5CJohnson,%20Eva.htm>.

The first act is set in the year 1967. The family, comprised of the mother Ruby, Granny (her mother Elsie), the sixteen-year-old daughter Jayda and the thirteen-year-old son Wilba, lead a traditional life in a remote area. The father Charlie has died after falling prey to alcohol out of despair caused by the dispossession of his land. The first scene starts with Ruby doing household chores and listening to a radio announcement that the Government is implementing a new strategy to assist assimilation by moving Aborigines to the city. Despite her contempt for these forceful relocations and the reluctance of the rest of the family, Ruby is aware of the fact that there is nothing she can do and, therefore, seems to bow to White laws. She realizes that the top priority is for them to stay together. While Act 1 prepares the family for the move and shows the readers and/or the audience how they lived before the move to the city, act 2 deals with the upcoming implementation of the relocation policy as well as further signs of the dangers of culture clash: While Ruby is packing up their belongings, her daughter Jayda is molested by young white men who try to rape her, and Granny dies, returning to the Dreaming.

Act 3 shows the family already living in the city three years later in 1970. Jayda is now a domestic worker at a hospital and Wilba is finishing off school. He has trouble coping with racist practices and insults from school mates and the headmaster. Despite her mother Ruby, who keeps up her pride in her heritage and old traditions, Jayda is more and more assimilating to White society, also facing discrimination at her workplace. The readers also learn of hidden sterilization practices which were common under Aboriginal Protection Board policies. At a routine medical check-up, Jayda is informed of these experiments and that she, after receiving injections to make her infertile, won't be able to have her own children.

In the fourth and final act, which depicts the situation a few years later, Wilba has become a very dedicated activist for the Land Rights movement, taking part in numerous protests against discriminatory and restrictive practices by the White government and is often being arrested. His main concern is fighting against mining companies which are building mining towns on Aboriginal land – sacred burial grounds on which his father, grandmother and many other ancestors were buried. Wilba's goal is to stop officials to make false promises or to move them around "like cattle" (*Murras* 105).

The play ends with a lonely Ruby lamenting the fate of her family - scattered all over the place and no longer together, but "all gone" (*Murras* 106).

5.3. Jack Davis: *The Dreamers* (1982)

The Dreamers, one of Jack Davis's most successful plays, examines the destruction of Aboriginal tribal life as a result of Black and White culture clash and colonization practices which bring with them an imbalance of power relations. It draws a very sobering picture of the amount of alcohol abuse within many Aboriginal communities as well as on the dependence on social welfare money.

The Dreamers is a modified version of one of Davis's earlier plays, *The Steel and the Stone* (1973), which was too extensive for performance. On 2 February 1982, the recast *The Dreamers* opened at the Dolphin Theatre in Perth with Jack Davis playing the role of Worru.

In 1983, Davis's play *The Dreamers* was first staged outside of Western Australia including the Sydney Opera House Playhouse, before the production finally went on a world-wide tour through Europe and North America.

5.3.1. The Author

Jack Leonard Davis was born on 11 March 1917 in Subiaco, a suburb of Perth, Western Australia. He grew up in a family of eleven in Yarloop, a small mill town in Western Australia where his father worked in a timber mill. As a child of two "great storytellers"⁸⁸, he soon developed a sincere interest in words and writing. Reading his one and only book, a dictionary of English, was his greatest hobby.⁸⁹ From the age of fourteen onwards until his death in 2000, Jack Davis was a passionate writer of poems.

Alongside his siblings, Davis was sent to the Moore River Native Settlement at fourteen in order to acquire farming skills. It was at this settlement that he, for the first time in his life, until then untroubled, experienced harsh racism. The brutality and discriminatory policies of the White overseers at the settlement opened his eyes to the deep cleft between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and the resulting injustice against himself and his fellow Aboriginal people. After only nine months, Davis left the settlement with long-lasting impressions which would "inform much of his later writing"⁹⁰ and provide a basis for his future work as an Aboriginal Rights activist. For several years, Davis lived on the Brookton Aboriginal Reserve where he began to learn more about his people's language (Nyoongah)

⁸⁸ <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/jackdavis1.html>.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

and culture, finally fully mastering the tribal language as well as gaining deep knowledge of the Nyoongah traditions. Before becoming actively engaged with Aboriginal Rights and before starting to write professionally, Jack Davis worked a myriad of different jobs such as stockman, train and truck driver, boxer and horse-breeder – manual labor which brought him into contact with Indigenous tribal communities of rural Western Australia.⁹¹

Feeling that the relationship between Black and White Australians was steadily deteriorating through racist ideologies and the resulting exploitation of Aboriginal communities as cheap laborers by White companies and farms, Jack Davis decided to attempt to bridge the gap between Blacks and Whites in Australian society by fighting against racism and discrimination. His political commitment for the cause of equality for all Australians started early and individually with him protesting against curfews at the Moore River Settlement, which were intended to reduce Aboriginal presence in town, and it led to a short period of imprisonment. Later, this act of rebellion made him the Western Australian state secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in 1969, editor of the Indigenous magazine *Identity*, and chairman of the Western Australian Aboriginal Lands Trust. His contributions to the advancement of the intercultural relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians not only earned Davis respect as an activist on both a national as well as an international level, but also a British Empire Medal in 1976, the Order of Australia in 1985, and a Human Rights Award in 1987.

Jack Davis's significant additions to the Australian Aboriginal literary scene were numerous and encompass texts from various genres, including poetry, short fiction, autobiography and, most importantly, drama. Recurring themes in his works are discrimination and racism, the strained race relations between Black and White Australians, Indigenous deaths in custody, the Stolen Generations, the feeling of loss and uprootedness in urban Aboriginal communities, and the difficulty for young Aboriginal Australians of coming to terms with their heritage in today's modern world.

Jack Davis was the first Nyoongah playwright to gain both national and international fame and to be commercially successful.⁹² While he had started devising poems and short stories back in the 1950s, with his first collection of poems, *The First-Born and Other Poems*, published in 1970, the plays he is famous for today were written and made available to a

⁹¹ Cf. <http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=node/12061>.

⁹² Cf. <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/Academy/author%20pages/..%5Cauthor%20pages%5Cdavis,%20jack.htm>.

wider audience only in the 1970s and 1980s. These include *The Steel and the Stone* (1973), *Kullark* (1979), *The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1985), *Barungin* (1988), *Moorli and the Leprechaun* (1989), *In Our Town* (1990) and *Wahngin Country* (1992). Through dramatic texts, Jack Davis felt he could make the Aboriginal voice heard and give it a space in Australian society. Furthermore, Davis's texts helped advance reconciliation through fostering an understanding of Aboriginal traditional culture to White Australians and by "reconstructing the perceived images of Indigenous Australians"⁹³. In addition, Davis sensed that the genre paired up well with features of Aboriginal oral tradition such as dance, speech and song to have the most widespread reverberations. Growing up with "his feet in the white world [but also] in the black world" (Shoemaker, *The Real Australian Story* 29), Davis had access and could relate to both cultures. Henceforth, he was competent enough to give realistic insights into both communities.

Davis's play *The Dreamers* went on a world-wide tour through Europe and North America. In 1986, *No Sugar* won Davis the Australian Writers Guild Award for "best stage play of the year"⁹⁴. Moreover, *The Dreamers* was the first Aboriginal Australian play ever to have been performed in the United Kingdom.⁹⁵ Apart from making Indigenous issues available and more accessible to non-Indigenous citizens, Jack Davis's texts also played a pivotal role in bringing to the public's attention the injustice and atrocities committed against Native communities: His poem *John Pat*, in which Davis criticized mysterious and unresolved Black deaths in custody, led to the establishment of a royal commission on the issue.

His writings earned Jack Davis numerous prizes and awards, ranging from the Swan Gold Theatre Award in 1990 to honorary doctorates from Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia.

Apart from his own activity as a writer, Davis encouraged many other Aboriginal Australians to have their voices heard through literature: he helped found the Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists' Association in the early 1980s. He was also a member of the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies as well as the Aboriginal Arts Board. Two years before his death, Jack Davis was pronounced a Living Treasure in 1998. On 17 March 2000, he died in Perth, Western Australia, at the age of eighty-three.

⁹³ Cf.

<http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/staffhome/siryan/Academy/author%20pages/..%5Cauthor%20pages%5Cdavis,%20jack.htm>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cf. <http://www.liveperformance.com.au/halloffame/jackdavis1.html>.

Katherine Brisbane called Jack Davis Australia's "most influential black playwright, although he was not the first", inspiring "other Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to use the stage as a forum for communicating with white people. [H]e was always political"⁹⁶.

5.3.2. Short Summary of the Play

The play is set "in the present" (*The Dreamers* 4), meaning the early nineteen eighties. It consists of two acts which are made up of nine scenes (Act 1) and seven scenes (Act 2).

In the first act, the reader / audience finds out about the way of life and problems of the characters depicted: Dolly, mother of three children (Peter, Meena and Shane), is struggling to provide a positive environment for her offspring, who are surrounded by a weak father, Roy, as well as a drunkard cousin, Eli, who both spend their days drinking and gambling. Short periods of imprisonment are common for them and their friends. The family live off Social Service money, most of which goes into buying more alcohol instead of groceries and clothes for the children. Both Roy and Eli have become estranged from their ancient heritage, and neither Meena nor Shane, growing up in an urban area, receive an Aboriginal education.

In addition, Dolly takes care of the old Worru, who keeps going to and coming from hospital due to his declining health. Dolly and Worru are the only two to still uphold the values of their old Indigenous traditions, and are often found in a pensive mood. However, Dolly has been influenced a great deal by White Christian mentality (including ethics and religion), which she equates with decent living.

The second act shows the family as time has progressed: Meena and Shane are now teenagers and fully participating in White society: While Shane is a 'footy' (football) player, Meena's day revolves around her boyfriend and clothes. Despite her brightness and good grades, she wants to leave school for a job. Dolly, however, prohibits her to do so as she is aware of her daughter's potential to climb the social ladder and "really make something of [her]self" (*The Dreamers* 49). Furthermore, it is her declared goal not to let her offspring take the same path as most of her family members by falling prey to alcohol.

In the meantime, Uncle Worru's state of health has been steadily declining as his sense of identity is blurring. He frequently has daydreams, lamenting the fate of his people and the state of disconnectedness to their traditions. After his death, the play ends with Dolly alone on stage, thinking about her childhood in the Outback. Despite her hazy memories of a life long

⁹⁶ <http://indigenoustrights.net.au/person.asp?PID=998>.

gone, she will continue trying to remember the ancient rites and practices of her Nyoongah ancestors.

6. Main Issues of Culture Clash as Presented in the Three Plays

One aspect should be discussed before dwelling on the topic of Aboriginal and White identity /identities: "Aboriginal literature" can be defined as those texts "originating in the cultures and life experiences of people from different Aboriginal groups" (Hosking 141). Readers ought to be aware of the fact that, through European colonization and its ruthless displacement policy, Australian Indigenous individuals or entire communities were separated and mixed without respecting cultural and tribal ties. Therefore, many Native people and writers in particular are not sure of their precise ancestry, which in turn has stretched the boundaries of the definition of who can identify as an Aboriginal person.⁹⁷

For many years, Indigenous authors have challenged the notion of 'Aboriginality' as it is often perceived and perpetuated by the White media. In particular, television and film have repeated false or limited narratives about Australia's native population. Considering the media's influence on popular culture, it can certainly be argued that television and film have actively and noticeably influenced the "manufacturing of reality and [...] our apprehension of reality" (Rekhari 125). What is seen on TV is often and by many considered as 'real' and 'truthful' and hence incorporated in or even *as* their world view. Mudrooroo and many others claim that, for an Aboriginal person today and in the past, "there was [and has been] little choice" (qtd. in Perera & Pugliese 60) in the process of constructing Indigeneity; it was rather imposed on Aboriginal communities instead of freely created and/or assumed – "as something that can be willingly taken up, and as something that is untouched by processes of legal and governmental scrutiny and adjudication" (Perera & Pugliese 61).

It is therefore up for discussion what constitutes Aboriginality and who should decide over the identifying characteristics of a Native Australian person. These issues shall be discussed in the following chapter(s) whenever they occur in relation to the textual examples provided by the three plays.

⁹⁷ At present, national censuses work on the basis of self-identification: Those who personally consider themselves to be of Aboriginal descent and who identify as Indigenous Australians in the census are counted as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. For further information cf. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4705.0Explanatory%20Notes12006?OpenDocument>.

6.1. The Quest for Identity: Black vs. White and the Future of Cultural Hybridity

6.1.1. 'Us' versus 'Them': Self-Perception versus Social Perception

WORRU.

We stumble along with a half white mind.

Where are we?

What are we?

Not a recognized race

(*The Dreamers* 41)

An issue of ongoing importance and vitality for all Australians, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, is the focus of this quote from Jack Davis's play *The Dreamers* as well as this first chapter within the textual analysis of race relations in Australia. The questions of 'Who am I?' and 'Where do I come from?' are quintessentially human, and are of particular relevance in a country which has undergone major changes in the form of an invasion by foreign forces. One of the effects of this colonizing project by the British Empire, started in the late eighteenth century, is culture clash, inherent and virtually inevitable in such an endeavor. The settlement / invasion of Australia as of 1788 created two separate nations within one country: the White, i.e. Anglo-European community and the Black, i.e. the Indigenous population of Australia. It came as no surprise that, as a result of the forceful seizure of Aboriginal land, the two groups sought to establish their own identities, clearly distinguishable from that of the others. In most cases, not only in the Australian context but around the globe, this artificial border between 'us' and 'them' was, and still is set up through a negative definition, in short: by stating what one's own people are not. In this manner, Huntington claims, "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against" (21). It is this binary relationship between a 'We' and the 'Other' which often serves as a marker of group identity, which in turn helps to distinguish between one's own community and another one. This issue will be one of the main topics discussed in this chapter about identities.

In all three plays, the construction of Black as well as White identity is often achieved through such juxtaposing of the two disparate cultures. This technique will as of now be called the 'juxtapositioning technique'. The second method frequently employed in the characterization of the respective Black or White Other is what I call the 'derogation technique' since the

described subject or group of people are clearly presented in a negative light. This quote from the play *The Dreamers* is an example of the latter:

ELI. The *Wetjala's*⁹⁸ a lion, he eats. Aw, he eats, he eats everything: land, trees, rivers, forests, even people, 'specially people, I 'member old grandfather Kooroop used to say: 'Don't trust the *Wetjala*, he's a real *widartji*'⁹⁹. He'll kill you for sport and eat your brains and kidney fat.' (*The Dreamers* 53)

This excerpt from Davis's successful play *The Dreamers* deals, in a metaphoric way, with the White colonizer's greed and bloodlust which marked the settlement of the Australian continent. By employing the metaphor of such a powerful predator as a lion, Davis's character Eli points to the degree of violence used when dealing with Aborigines as well as the cultivation and exploitation of Indigenous land by Europeans. In addition, the common cliché of Indigenous persons as 'brutes' or 'savages' is reverted by equating the White man with a beast of prey, which again is a hidden statement on the brutality of White settlers, politicians, police forces and missionaries. Furthermore, this utterance presents an alternative view on history which runs counter to the common line of argumentation usually found in history books and (White) public opinion.

In Bob Maza's play *The Keepers*, the White man is compared to a snake:

KOONOWAR. Those *karato*¹⁰⁰ ... Y'know, I don't like to mix with them ... Makes my blood run cold when I think about how they keep changing their skin ... And you see their eyes? ... Got no colour, eh? (*The Keepers* 183)

Without doubt, some close study of common traits of the Anglo-European settler's physical appearance preceded this assertion of the White man's cunningness, which, according to Koonowar, is visible from his appearance. This is an example of a generalizing statement made on the basis of bad experiences with one or more persons of the community described, and as such belonging to the category of derogation. The entire Scene One of *The Keepers* is a comparison of Black and White at the beginning of European settlement in Australia and thus first contact between the two nations: White and Black customs (such as dancing, singing or clothing) and lifestyles (including the process of giving birth) are presented after one another and juxtaposed; however, in the end the songs sung by Elizabeth and Mirnat "harmonise"

⁹⁸ *wetjala* means "white person", but is a "corruption of the English 'white fellow'" (cf. *The Dreamers* 76). This term is not a Nyoongah term, but was created by Davis as a result of ongoing indigenization of Australian English when spoken by Aboriginal people (cf. Gilbert and Tompkins 178).

⁹⁹ A *widartji* is described by Davis as an "evil spirit" (*The Dreamers* 76).

¹⁰⁰ A snake (cf. *The Keepers* 229).

(*The Keepers* 171) and become one melody – a positive, hopeful symbolic outlook on the future of race relations in Australia.

In Eva Johnson's play *Murras*, the characterization of the White settlers is less metaphoric and more straightforward, which can be seen in the following example:

RUBY. They got no law, no shame. They no good. (*Murras* 96)

Ruby's comment mainly refers to the violent policies regarding Aboriginal land and everyday life, and hence is an example of the derogation technique. Both types of identity construction of self and other, the juxtapositioning technique as well as the derogation technique, are made use of in the following excerpt:

GRANNY. *Wudjella*¹⁰¹ don't know our lore, they got no spirit. They don't have one time, like us, don't have dreaming. They nothing people. (*Murras* 97)

Granny's characterization of the *Wudjella* is an archetypical juxtaposition of two clashing world views: that of the Aborigines and the Anglo-Australians, who she claims are void of culture and spirit. Because Whites, according to Granny, do not believe in anything, they are "nothing people" (97) in comparison to Indigenous persons. The same can be said for the following discussion between Granny's two grandchildren, Wilba and Jayda:

JAYDA. It's because we different, they don't understand us. They never seen blackfullas before, probably scared of us. They'd die if they had to live in the bush like us. (*Murras* 100)

The division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identities is also constructed (and sometimes reverted) through stage props, costumes and the overall use of space on stage: Aboriginal scenes usually take place in a natural setting in open spaces or at least the center of the stage if the action takes place inside. Whites are commonly portrayed in "cramped square and rectangular spaces" (Hosking 145) on the outside corners of the stage. This sends out a positive and hopeful message to Aboriginal audiences as it helps to (re)affirm Aboriginal identity as something alive and worthy of reproduction- not only on stage but also in real life in the form of cultural memory to be passed down to the next generation.¹⁰² (A detailed analysis of the connection between space and characterization / identity construction will be provided in Chapters 6.2./6.3.)

¹⁰¹ The term *wudjella*, deriving from the Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara languages, denotes White (i.e. non-Aboriginal) people (cf. *Murras* 107).

¹⁰² Cf. Hosking 146.

How do the two communities characterize themselves, though? Which aspects are drawn upon for shaping their group boundaries? What constitutes cultural identity? Does other people's view of one's own group influence self-perception?

As has become apparent from the above citations (and when taking a short glance at the history of the country's colonization), at the core of Anglo-Australian identity lies Eurocentrism, the belief that White settlers are superior to the Aborigines. This conviction helps to define their group identity by distinguishing themselves from the Indigenous peoples, the 'Other'. In the course of the colonization process, non-Indigenous (White) Australians have tried to reassert their identity by suppressing Aboriginal identity and attempting to fully assimilate them into Anglo-European Australia. Belief in God-given, irreconcilable differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, as outlined in detail in Chapter 2, provided the grounds for White abuse of power, the justification for ruthless appropriation of Aboriginal land and the extinction of several Indigenous tribes. Further analysis of textual examples from the three plays dealing with this issue will be provided in Chapters 6.2. and 6.3. White identity construction in the three plays, and most often also in real-life situations in contemporary Australia, is therefore heavily dependent on the perceived deviation of the White community's traditions from those of the Black (i.e. Indigenous Australian) population; White self-perception is usually composed of aspects relating to differentiations between themselves and Aborigines rather than based on their own group-specific markers.

6.1.2. The Construct/Construction of 'Aboriginality'

Two main criteria were and have been employed to identify 'authentic' Aborigines: culture and ancestry. The pillar 'culture' includes such aspects as religion, being (accepted as) a member of a certain Indigenous community, clothing, language, acceptance and daily implementation of a tribal way of life as well as residence in certain, probably remote, areas of the country.¹⁰³ These markers are far from being objective as well as ideologically loaded tools used by the Australian Government to dominate the lives of its country's Native people. Above all, Dodson argues, these definitions clearly focus on what the Indigenous population lacks instead of their unique and positive characteristics by assuming that authentic Aborigines are "'underdeveloped', 'primitive', uneducated [...] and 'backward'" (4) –as can be exemplified with the following quote:

¹⁰³ Cf. Dodson 4.

McGUINNESS. These people are savage, primitive people. [...] [M]ind a word of warning: keep both eyes open for this lot. No matter how well-behaved they appear, mark my words, they'll turn on ye... Bite the hand that feeds them, they will. (*The Keepers* 186-187)

These discourses construct Aboriginality in terms of backward-mindedness and old-fashioned ways of life; they stigmatize Native Australians as "remnants of a past doomed to extinction" (Dodson 4). A tragically realistic example of such false ascription of qualities can be found in a discussion between Danny and Michael in *The Keepers*:

DANNY. [...] It's all so ... pointless. Take me: when I was doing my apprenticeship, every shit job around they gave to me. [...]

MICHAEL. Well, you've got to be thankful for one thing, mate. There aren't many of your people who have got jobs, let alone become qualified tradesmen. Anyway, McElvoy thinks you're one of his top tradesmen. (*The Keepers* 198)

Michael, a White man, is marveling at his Black brother's diligence and skills with regard to his career. Even though he only wants to console Danny and means well, his surprise and wonder at the fact that an Indigenous person can be a successful member of the work force speak of his inherent belief in White superiority, which he was breastfed from day one on. Hence, Aboriginal identity "is formulated [...] in terms of absence" – in this case it would certainly be "a positive absence" since Danny "displays a lack of the congenital laziness of the native" (Perera & Pugliese 63).

Aboriginal voices have been largely rejected in the debate about what constitutes Indigeneity. This is why Dodson claims that a definition of what 'Aboriginality' means should only be generated by Indigenous peoples themselves, a request which is in accord with the UN guidelines of human rights.¹⁰⁴ However, public opinions and representations in the media of what 'genuine' Aboriginality means are prevalent despite all the attempts by the Australian Government or international boards promoting the implementation of human rights. Dodson argues that "Aboriginality will continue to be defined and constructed for Aboriginal peoples" (6) despite all (more or less honest) efforts to pass the power of self-definition to the Indigenous peoples themselves. Colonizers have always had a tendency to and a "pre-occupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling Aborigines and Aboriginality" (Dodson 3). This trend continues until today with local politicians insisting that only 'real' Aborigines with at least fifty per cent Indigenous blood be treated as Indigenous Australians.¹⁰⁵ More importantly, Land Rights claims also revolve around the

¹⁰⁴ Cf. The "Cobo Study" http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/MCS_v_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Dodson 3.

degree of Aboriginality, measured in "percentages of blood or clichéd 'traditional' experiences" (Dodson 3) and calling urban Aborigines bereft of their ancient heritage.

The assimilation policies of the Australian Government between the nineteen thirties and the nineteen sixties, as outlined in Chapter 3, had the clear aim of reshaping Aboriginality unless it could be extinguished and remade "within European paradigms of 'civilisation', rectitude and usefulness" (Grossman&Cuthbert 109). The following examples from the plays bear witness to this forceful act of identity construction:

ANNOUNCER. [...] 'The policy of assimilation seeks that persons of Aboriginal descent will *choose to attain a similar manner* and standard of living to that of other Australians and *live as members of a single Australian community* [...]. (Murras 85, my emphasis)

Inherent in this passage is the unspeakable violence which is used in creating an identity for someone else without letting them have a say in the role which is to be played by them. Perera and Pugliese speak of "identity-imposture" (59) by the dominant society which verges on psychological genocide. Another example is Danny, the Aboriginal young man in Maza's play *The Keepers*: Despite his diligence and the due respect he earns from his boss, he is forced by society to 'stay put' in a position which denies him access to a successful career, or a "bit of social climbing" (*The Keepers* 213), because of his heritage:

McELVOY. [...] Look, son, from the time I first set eyes on you I thought, 'This is a different sort of blackfella. He's not going to go walkabout ... or lay about the docks drunk ... No, he's gonna make something of himself.' I still believe that ... You have a lot goin' for ya ... but ya've gotta run in races that you've got a chance of winnin'. (*The Keepers* 213)

Furthermore, this passage is another instance of a 'negative absence definition', as described earlier, when the Aboriginal identity of the person considered is established through their lack of Indigenous laziness and uselessness which many colonial thinkers view as common traits of 'typical' Aborigines.¹⁰⁶

In addition, the traditions and languages of the Indigenous Australians were used as a juxtaposition in comparison to the ideas of the Enlightenment, hence creating a division between seemingly 'cultured' nations and an 'Other' which ranked lower on the evolutionary step produced by the believers of Social Darwinism (see Chapter 2.3.):

RUBY. Why does the Government want to give us a house in the city?

¹⁰⁶ Cf. Perera & Pugliese 63.

RUSSEL. To improve your housing conditions. To enable you to *live a normal life*. To *better* yourself. (Murras 91, my emphasis)

The markers of colonial thinking implanted in this half-Aboriginal officer, who grew up with White foster parents after being abducted from his Indigenous mother, are plain to see. A policy with the mantra "the white way is the right way" (Danny in *The Keepers* 215) left no space for otherness and demanded any deviation from the proposed guidelines to be persecuted. Various models of 'the Aborigine', reaching from the 'Noble Savage' to the 'Primitive Savage', were constructed according to current political or economic needs. Numerous examples of both are to be found in the plays:

McGUINNESS. Mrs Campbell, it concerns me to see you ... alone among ... native people. I cannot understand how Mr Campbell could allow you to be left unprotected ... These people are savage, primitive people.

ELIZABETH. Corporal, I have more to fear from my own kind, in the form of the riffraff who call themselves men, who prey upon simple defenceless native women [...]. (*The Keepers* 186)

McGuinness's depiction of the Native Boandik tribe as savage brutes is countered by Elizabeth's attack of White settler policies and thus reverted. An example of a depiction of Natives as noble brutes can be detected in a later act of *The Keepers*, when Elizabeth's son Michael is doing the defending of the Aborigines' culture towards an ignorant publisher:

MISS MURCHISON. [...] I believe there is very little interest in talking about the native or primitive cultures as such ... About how they live and what they eat ... You know ... But I believe readers would love to hear about their stories of their myths and legends ... Oh, I think the readers would love their campfire stories of the bush and the animals ... [...]

MICHAEL. Miss Murchison, I couldn't possibly degrade a culture that has ethics which your culture could not even comprehend. [...] My parents didn't spend their lives trying to help preserve the knowledge of a culture that has survived aeons ... for the likes of vultures like you. (211)

The reduction of Aboriginal culture to stories about animals and their surroundings told around the campfire –something many urban Australians might secretly long for – is a gross simplification leading to the belief that Indigenous peoples are naive and part of an ancient heritage which had no connection to the present at all.

These false and simplifying illustrations are still being perpetuated today, particularly on TV- which is why it could be argued alongside Michael Dodson that "'Aboriginality' has been made to fit the bill" (7). Needless to say, "the *noble* pole is just as harmful as the *savage* pole, simply because Aboriginal people are neither *noble* nor *savage*" (Peters-Little 17). Dodson

argues that what the White government policies have established as 'Aboriginality' is heavily dependent on colonialist ideologies. While he concurs that stereotypical representations of Aborigines "in fact contain elements of accurate representation" (8), he believes that "they have not been selected because they were true, but rather because the colonizing culture needed to think they were true. In the construction of 'Aboriginality' we have been objects" (ibid.). A call for more realistic depictions stands at the beginning and end of all critical studies on Aboriginal representations, and as such also in the three plays which all seek to do away with common clichés by ridiculing and hence reverting typical representations of Native Australians.

The numerous historical attempts by Whites to suppress Aboriginal identity have led to heightened interest on the Aboriginal side in reasserting and redefining their cultural identity, which is largely based on their close relationship with their native land, symbolized by the Aboriginal flag. The loss of land has a severe impact on the identity of Aboriginal people, as is visible in the following quote from *The Keepers*:

"KOONOWAR. This is my land ... This is me ... This land is us ... Our people are here in these rocks ... in those waterholes." (*The Keepers* 193)

A fragmented and distorted sense of self is often the result of forced removals or the dispossession of territory which had been a tribe's home for hundreds of years, and this confusion regarding one's identity which is so intrinsically linked to one's home area becomes manifest when Koonowar's wife Mirnat pleads him to take them away to a safer place without White settlers. Koonowar refuses to leave his native land because, to him, it would be to lose not only his home but also a (rather large) piece of himself. Eva Johnson portrays the same problem in her play *Murras*: Granny, as the personification of a traditional lifestyle in the bush, laments the taking away of land and children and refuses to be removed from her homeland:

GRANNY. [...] I born here, I die here, this my born place. They don't wanna try move me, I'll give it to 'em, true as God. (*Murras* 87/88)

In the end, Granny escapes from the Government's power over her own life and whereabouts by returning "to the spiritual world of her dreaming, returning to her ancestors" (*Murras* 98). Phrasing dying in this (euphemistic) way draws attention to the active decision against authoritative and paternalistic state interference and marks a symbolic assertion of self-control and self-determination.

6.1.3. Caught Between Two Worlds: Urban Aborigines And Their Struggle to Retain Their Cultural Identity

A topic all three plays address is the difficulty of many Aborigines living in urban areas who struggle to keep up the ties with their traditional Indigenous heritage despite their remoteness from native territory. The question these Indigenous people have to ask themselves is, “How, then, to reconcile a way of life tied to being a part of the land, whilst living in suburbia?” (Saunders viii). Frequently, the result of an urban life is the loss of the ancient connection between land and man.¹⁰⁷ Consequently, many people concerned are “experiencing a fragmented, confused or contradictory identification with their traditional culture” (Hosking 143), which can be observed also in the following excerpts from the texts:

DANNY. [...] I can still hear those words: ... ‘Keep your mind on the job’ ... ‘Put your shoulder to the wheel.’ Not one person gave one teeny weeny little thought ... about what I want in life ... about what I thought ... or felt. You all had me believing that white was right ... the white way is the right way. It’s alright if you are white ... like Michael ... my white brother Michael: ... confident ... successful ... an author. And what am I? Eh? I’ll tell you what I am: ... his little black shadow ... (*The Keepers* 215/216)

This passage exemplifies the discrepancy Danny feels inside of him: On the one hand, there is pride in his Native culture; on the other hand, the reader senses his desperation about the every-day racism he has been experiencing and which prevents him from making his own decisions in life. (This again is an illustration of the violence inherent in the act of making an identity for someone else – in this case Danny’s – in narrow terms of racial stereotypes.¹⁰⁸) Therefore, he is trapped between both cultures, meaning that he cannot decide whether he wants to be Black or White since he is aware of the social and political privileges of being non-Indigenous, but does not want to ignore his own people’s heritage either. By identifying as a member of the Boandik tribe, though, Danny becomes a victim of segregationist and racist policies:

LILLIPA. [...] I understand my poor brother Danny ... He’s lost in this land. One minute he want to be blackfella ... next he want to be whitefella ... Very sad. (208)

Lillipa accurately analyzes Danny’s confusion in racialized White Australia where the dominant group is that of the non-Indigenous people and where members of Indigenous communities are barely given any chance of succeeding in the business world due to the racial barriers which seem to be everywhere. Danny, an ambitious young man who wants to

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Hosking 143.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Perera & Pugliese 59.

be treated equally to his White 'brother' Michael, is highly aware of this glass ceiling which prevents him from freely choosing his career path, his wife (who may be a White girl) and his beliefs. In the end, his desperation maneuvers him into a status of victimhood from which he cannot free himself, turning himself into a representative of a stereotypical Aboriginal drunkard. This is just one example of the power of identity-imposture to alter or greatly influence a person's self-perception. Danny does not only face the difficulty of uprootedness, but also struggles with the fact that, due to his heritage, he will always have to deal with discrimination on a daily basis no matter how excellent his achievements are or how friendly he behaves.

Michael, in contrast, is the son of White parents (James and Elizabeth) and enjoys all the 'White privileges' his black 'brother' Danny longs for. Ironically, however, Michael decides to choose one career path which, despite the color of his skin, won't ensure success due to the ignorance of most Anglo-Australians: to preserve the culture of the Boandik – a tribe which only boasts three sole survivors: Danny, Mirnat and Lillipa. Since all three are immensely important to Michael and because he has always identified with their Native traditions and language, his main goal in life is the preservation of their ancient heritage – a goal which seems to be left forever unachieved with Michael's death. Had he chosen to bow to the taste of White Australian readers by narrating idyllic stories about the Boandiks' tranquil life, success as a writer might have come to Michael at the expense of his own peace of mind for showing no integrity with respect to his own convictions. Among those is the respect towards the Native tribe's traditions and philosophies, which he deeply admires and which make him believe that he is one of them:

MICHAEL. I learnt lots of things from the old people ... I'd been with them for so long ... I'm Boandik too ... or as good as being one. (*The Keepers* 206)

Michael thinks he belongs to the Boandik and clearly feels at home in both cultures. Hence, it could be argued that he is a half-caste in a symbolic way since he is caught between two worlds which do not seem to be compatible. Furthermore, the deep cleft between Black and White Australians, particularly during the earliest phases of settlement in which the most violent clashes occurred and as such the time the play is set in, did not allow for alliance, i.e. identification, with both parties. Therefore, Michael's commitment to the Boandik nation leads to his cruel assassination because he 'fails' to act in accord with the White world's beliefs of subjugating and discriminating against the Aborigines. It is also this hatred, caused

by the atrocities committed by the colonizers, which makes it impossible for Danny to accept Michael as a member of the Boandik:

[MICHAEL *mimes a kangaroo scratching*. DANNY *enters*. *He is a little aggro.*]
DANNY. What d’you think you’re doing, Mitch? ... Stop carrying on like a blackfella.
Here some mail for you.
[[...] MICHAEL *is annoyed at DANNY’s tone, plus the fact that DANNY has made him feel guilty about his fondness for the Boandik way of life.*] (*The Keepers* 206/207)

What this passage illustrates quite frankly is the problem of crossing the racial border and behaving in a way which might suggest social affiliation with the other group. Colonial thought causes Elizabeth to object to cross-cultural relationships:

ELIZABETH. [...] [H]e kept talking about marrying a white girl ... silly notions like that.
MICHAEL. That’s not a silly notion for Danny to marry a white girl ... I mean, if they love each other.
ELIZABETH. There’s a bit more to marriage than love, Michael. There’s a good many things ... like ... and stop raising your eyebrows and being so smug; you know what I mean: security ... a home ... a good job. All of that. (*The Keepers* 219)

What is inherent in Elizabeth’s assumptions is the belief in an endogamous society where, according to the Greek roots of the word, people should marry ‘within the tribe’ and refrain from entering marital bonds with a person from a different cultural and/or racial background. Another example of this conviction is Granny in *Murras*: The old Aboriginal lady is fiercely against adaptation of traditional Native life to fit White standards and is certain that no good will come from mixing with “*wudjellas*” (*Murras* 88). Hence, it can be concluded that adversaries of miscegenation are to be found in both Australian cultures, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Elizabeth in *The Keepers* apparently also thinks that Aboriginal people usually are not able to provide the basis for a stable married and/or family life, and therefore opposes Danny’s affection for a White girl. In the end, her son Michael becomes a victim of these racist and segregationist ideas, as can be outlined by the last few words Michael utters before his death:

MICHAEL. [...] The one thing colonials hate worse than a nigger ... is a nigger lover.
(*The Keepers* 225)

Michael’s main problem is that, due to his immense degree of identification with the Boandik, he has turned himself into a sort of half-cast - not on genetic terms, but on a personal level. His admiration and profound knowledge of the Boandiks’ language and culture have provided

him with enough insight into the culture that he could actually call it his own – which again means crossing the emotionally charged racial border. This is also an issue of concern for Danny, who attempts the same: He strives to be a member of the Anglo-Australian community which his adored girl Mary belongs to, and, in a broader sense, wants to lead a life in which he gets to make choices of his own without hitting a glass ceiling for racial reasons. This wish entails questions of assimilation for the sake of integration: Is it necessary to change one's identity in order to become an accepted member of the other group? The young Aboriginal man seems to be fully aware of this when saying that, "Being a blackfella you've gotta mix in the right circles" (*The Keepers* 207).

Jayda, the daughter of the Aboriginal Francis family in *Murras*, who is as well experiencing racism on a daily basis, especially in her work environment, is torn between her desire to fit in with her White friends and her resilience concerning her Blackness.

JAYDA. [*angry and loud*] Mum, I told you before. I'm working now and I can buy my own clothes. I can't wear anything like this. Shame job.

RUBY. What, you too good now? I always got clothes from there [the mission] before. You didn't say anything then. [...]

JAYDA. It's not that, Mum. I have to dress the same as my friends. I've got to be the same, Mum, or they'll laugh at me.

RUBY. Laugh, aye? You should be the one laughing, Jayda. [...]

JAYDA. But you deserve brand-new clothes, not hand-me-downs. You will always be nobody if you let them treat you like that. [...] They don't like it if you act like blackfulla, either. Sometimes I gotta be better, dress better, everything better than them. I can't be different, Mum. (*Murras* 100/101)

Jayda as well as Danny wish to be fully accepted by and integrated in the other, i.e. White, group without having to forfeit their sense of self and identity. This situation is what Maufort describes as the "contemporary predicament of the Black 'Other' in Australia" (*Transgressive Itineraries* 177). Jayda's resilience to stick to her Aboriginal heritage only becomes visible when she speaks to her younger brother Wilba about having to endure racist remarks and policies every day:

WILBA. [...] That *wudjella* headmaster make me real mad. He goes ... 'You have to learn to behave. We can't have you acting like a nomad down here.'

JAYDA: Now listen Wilba, it's not that different for me, either. I work in the kitchen with Russians, Italians, Greeks, you name it, but I'm the only Aboriginal, and boy do I get it. All the dirty jobs, bossed around, and I got to stop myself from getting mad. I don't want to lose my job so I just walk away. (*Murras* 99/100)

Both children have to face racism and discrimination on a daily basis, but react to it in different ways: While Jayda grows silent and diffident in order not to attract any negative

attention, Wilba turns defensive and expresses his anger at unfair treatment by fighting with his fists. Both change during the course of the play which mirrors a time span of a few years during their lives: Jayda, despite her initial reluctance to move away from her people's homeland to the city, adapts quickly but not without damaging effects to her self-perception (see quotation above). Assimilation seems to be the only option for her in order to climb the social ladder and stop the myriad of disadvantages facing her every-day life as an Indigenous woman. Wilba, on the other hand, refuses to be treated like a second-class citizen and in the end becomes an activist for Aboriginal rights. For him, assimilation is not an issue as he believes in his rights and the necessity of protecting his ancestor's heritage.

6.1.4. Traditional Aboriginal Identity and Possible Ways for Aboriginal Identities in Contemporary Australia: Jack Davis's *Worru*

Not without reason was *The Dreamer's* main character Worru, the prototype of an old traditional Aboriginal man, chosen to start this chapter on identity. Keeping in mind other examples of such representatives of the ancient Indigenous culture, the figure of Uncle Worru can be called Davis's finest dramatic model of a specimen of the waning traditional/old-style Aboriginal lifestyle: His recollections of the lost idyll in the bush (before the advent of the White man and the forced removals of Indigenous communities onto mission-run reserves) and the stories from the Dreaming¹⁰⁹ he communicates to his family members make him a "repository of cultural memory" (Mühlbacher 70), signified through his usage of the medium of storytelling, dance, and song. (The importance of the Dreaming for Aboriginal culture and identity can be clearly identified in Scene 4 of the play when Worru's accounts completely mesmerize the whole family and, for a moment, unites them with all their different beliefs and moral standards as descendants of the Nyoongah tribe. Furthermore, the significance of the Dreamtime is also acknowledged in the title of the play – '*The Dreamers*'.) Uncle Worru's deteriorating physical and mental health announce the end of this ancient heritage unless the situation changes dramatically. The fact that he is neither fully participating in the present (the time the play is set in) nor completely adrift in his memories of the past symbolize the precarious situation of the Aboriginal people and the looming loss of their culture.

The incorporation of the mythical figure of the Dancer into the play, interspersing the action in the present, not only presents a link to the ancient culture of the Indigenous tribes, but also underline the importance of the interconnectedness of past and present. The Dancer functions

¹⁰⁹ The Dreaming refers to the shaping of the world in the past but also relates to the present; it is "contemporaneously active" (Charlesworth, qtd. in Carroll 100-110).

"as a choral touchstone to the past" (Filewod 366) who also returns Worru to the Dreaming after his death. "[S]tylized episodes" (Carroll 100-110)¹¹⁰ like Uncle Worrus's trance-like arias in *The Dreamers*, the Mimi Dancer in *Murras* or the birth dance in *The Keepers* create a surreal touch and speak of the "recognition of Aboriginal reality stemming from the Dreaming" (Carroll 100-110)¹¹¹ and the belief in myth and spirituality. One of Davis's main messages seems to be that the past provides "symbolic anchors" (Nelson 33) for leading a content life in present-day White Australia with its still lingering atmosphere of dispossession and dislocation. Only through confrontation with the violent past is a healthy and peaceful life possible for the Aboriginal self by offering opportunities for the regeneration of Aboriginal identity.

A word of warning is silently spoken by Davis through Worru's death; however, hope is still alive through the figure of Worru's niece Dolly: In the final scene of the play, she promises to cherish her memories of Worru and her childhood in the bush – which is a silent promise to uphold Nyoongah values. The same can be said of the closing scene in *The Keepers* by Bob Maza: Mirnat is giving a speech which ends with the sentence, "This land is alive. It moves, it breathes ... we know because we are its *keepers*" (228) – an utterance which stresses the importance of the land for Aboriginal identity. This is a strong statement by the author, claiming that Aboriginal culture can survive through representing Aboriginal identity in any living situation, no matter how adverse the conditions may be. However, future positive developments and a truly egalitarian society rely on the acceptance of both a recorded White history as well as an oral Aboriginal history – two often diverging views of history which should both be considered when trying to create an exhaustive history of Australia. Davis believes that only a combination of old and new, Black and White, can succeed to make contemporary Australia a peaceful society with (the often quoted Aussie mantra of) a 'fair go for everyone' despite their many differences. Justine Saunders concurs with Davis when saying that "you can't go back to a traditional way of life, nor can you live a totally European way, with its alien spirituality. No, the way ahead is to try and keep what's good of the past" (viii). This may be achieved through passing on to their children the rich culture of the Indigenous Australians by employing the medium of orality – dance, song, and storytelling. Maufort encapsulates this when arguing that the authors "imply that the spirit of Aboriginal culture must be recaptured if the Native community is to survive in today's world" (*Transgressive Itineraries* 177).

¹¹⁰ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

¹¹¹ See above.

To conclude my findings, it can be said that what constitutes 'Aboriginality' was and unfortunately still is being largely influenced by the dominant, i.e. Anglo-Australian, society rather than Indigenous peoples themselves. As Dodson has outlined quite succinctly, the definition of group boundaries via juxtaposing an 'us' versus 'them' has constructed Aboriginality "in terms of how it compares with the dominant culture" (9) and thus focuses on the differences between one's own and the other group. Hence, there seems to be no space for a genuine friendship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. I would argue alongside Jack Davis that only a combination of Black and White can lead to a more harmonious, less strained intercultural relationship in Australia. In addition, Aborigines must be given (back) the right to determine their own identity and receive the chance to be themselves, no matter which boundaries the media and the public regard as appropriate for an Aboriginal person. Just as it is wrong to perpetuate stereotypical, overgeneralized illustrations of White Australians, it is counterproductive to only portray clichéd Aboriginal ways. By making fun of this, the authors apparently wish to communicating exactly this message to their readers.

6.2. Politics and Power

Throughout the history of Australia's colonization, the country's Native peoples were subjugated by the White settlers who gained immense power in the settlement/invasion process. White dominance over the land and its native inhabitants was frequently misused under the guise of protection policies and/or dubious moral beliefs in the superiority of the Caucasian progeny. So-called 'scientific' theories on race, claiming that half-castes were inferior and mentally as well as physically 'deficient'¹¹², were used as a justification for blatant discrimination.

When taking a glance at the country's history, it becomes obvious that, very often, political decisions were made on the basis of selfish, ruthless desires to expand British territory without respect for the rightful owners of Australia's land; these decisions were thus repeatedly and deliberately masked and crafted as benevolent actions carried out for the good of Indigenous people. Examples of such hypocritical political choices are abundant, for instance in the area of education: At the beginning of the nineteenth century, schools for Indigenous children, termed 'Native Institutions', were established with the aim of assimilating Aboriginal offspring to the White community of Parramatta, New South Wales. This decision was justified through the belief that it is the "white man's burden" (Osterhammel 16) to "civilize, educate and foster habits of industry and decency in the Aborigines"¹¹³. After the closing down of these institutions, Indigenous children were frequently prevented from enrolling at regular schools by dissenting White parents and officials who declared that it "is impractical to provide any form of education for the children of blacks" and that Aboriginal children "beyond the age of 10 couldn't keep up with white children anyway"¹¹⁴. Hence, separate schools for Aboriginal children were established with a syllabus focusing on manual work – a measure also encountered in the play *The Keepers* with the intent of keeping the Indigenous population in menial positions.¹¹⁵

This is only one aspect of a policy of assimilation aimed at destroying Native Australian traditions and beliefs – incidences like these can be found in almost every text by any Indigenous author dealing with the topic of colonization and culture clash. A feeling of superiority inherent in White Australian political thinking of the nineteenth and twentieth

¹¹² Cf. Chapter 2 as well as MacLeod (75) and Hosking (142) for more detailed information.

¹¹³ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Chapter 6.2.3.

centuries served as a seemingly legitimate reason for discriminatory acts. As Huntington points out,

[i]ncreases in [...] economic and military power produce enhanced self-confidence, arrogance, and belief in the superiority of one's own culture [...] compared to those of other peoples and greatly increases its attractiveness to other peoples. Decreases in economic and military power lead to self-doubt, crises of identity, and efforts to find in other cultures the keys to economic, military, and political success. As non-Western societies enhance their economic, military, and political capacity, they increasingly trumpet the virtues of their own values, institutions, and culture. (92)

In this way, the colonizers attempted to force Anglo-European values and traditions on the Natives, who in turn were supposed to forfeit their cultural identity and who had to struggle against (cultural, linguistic, and political) paternalism. Discriminatory laws were not only passed for educational matters, but also existed in the fields of health care and leisure activities, creating a deeply segregated society.¹¹⁶

Another example which makes apparent the arbitrariness of White rule is that of housing: Forceful relocations of Indigenous Australians from a rural to a city environment were administered on a large scale in order to gain land for cattle farms, mining activities and White settlements. Under the pretense of wanting to provide better living conditions for all Australians, Aborigines were moved to the cities in order to assimilate them into White society without compassion or respect for the strong connection between an Indigenous person and his birth place, which constitutes, as has been outlined in the previous chapter, a significant part of Aboriginal identity. These violent acts of displacement are the topic of the play *Murras* and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.3.

However, the personification of White despotism for many Aborigines was (and still is) the Australian police, who were responsible for the deaths of numerous Indigenous peoples in custody under mysterious circumstances. Racist thinking on the part of White authorities again comes in when considering the imprisonment rate of Aboriginal people, which is at present fourteen times higher than that of non-Indigenous Australians.¹¹⁷ Gilbert points out that the “links between imprisonment and the subjugation of indigenous peoples have become well established” (69) and speak of the blatant “institutionalized racism in the police forces of most Australian states” (69). This sad truth is mirrored in all plays with frequent references to

¹¹⁶ Many towns imposed bans of all kinds for Indigenous persons, preventing them from using public pools or restaurants, for example. In addition, designated areas were created for Blacks so as to keep them out of sight for White Australians.

¹¹⁷ Cf.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/CA5ACE72DF796D05CA257687001CDDA8?opendocument>.

police brutality, reflecting the authors' strong disapproval of such violent forms of discrimination and abuse of White power.

All of these (socio-)political measures mirror the subjugation of Australia's first nations by Whites and the undeniable connection between politics and power. The focus of this chapter will be on the extent of White dominance over Aborigines in all its various forms, including violence and harassment, judicial measures (unjustified imprisonments, expropriation of land) and racism, as represented in the three plays.

6.2.1. The Connection Between Politics and Power as Mirrored in the Plays

Eva Johnson's main topic in her play *Murras* is the marginalization of Indigenous peoples who were forcibly dislocated, and she deals with this issue from a female perspective. Apart from her focus on Indigenous women, Johnson unmask (hidden and often unquestioned) instances of White abuse of power and brutal acts of discrimination. Both other authors, Bob Maza and Jack Davis, also concentrate on the dialectics between politics and power firmly resting in the hands of White authorities. On the one hand, this focus is not a random choice – simply considering Australia's violent colonization history by British citizens explains the importance of this topic for Indigenous Australians - but has arisen out of a need to come to terms with a nation's traumatic experiences inflicted on them through foreign domination and suppression; on the other hand, the authors certainly chose to make this issue one of the main topics of their writings in order to put it up for open discussion in public and to stop the large-scale silencing of Aboriginal voices. As a result of this (sociopolitical) conviction to bring to the surface such unjust and unbalanced distribution of power in the Australian public and courts, numerous examples were embedded in the three plays which illustrate the misuse of power by White (public) authorities:

Jayda, Ruby's teenage daughter in Johnson's *Murras*, becomes the victim of a kind of sterilization practice which seems to have been employed quite frequently in order to keep the White race 'clean' (i.e. homogenous) and to depopulate Indigenous peoples:¹¹⁸ Whenever Sister, an employee of the local Welfare organization, visits the Francis family to perform her regular 'check-ups', Jayda is administered injections without the knowledge or consent of Jayda's mother Ruby. Only a few years later, during a routine examination at a doctor's office in the city, does Jayda find out about the true nature of these injections which were disguised as vaccine "to stop diseases" (*Murras* 102): she was made sterile. These cruel measures to

¹¹⁸ Cf. Gilbert 69.

‘control’ Aboriginal population (read counter Aboriginal survival) were taken on a relatively large scale with the excuse of wanting to produce only ‘civilized’ (i.e. Anglo-European) offspring who will be raised according to Western European values. Apart from the indescribable arrogance inherent in such actions, the violence of involuntary sterilizations is indisputable: depriving a young girl of the possibility of becoming a mother and hence taking part in the natural cycle of a female life, which traditionally includes giving birth to her own children, certainly belongs to the most hideous forms of oppression and subjugation. Taking such a crucial decision for somebody else speaks of incredible (cultural and personal) violence. Ruby, Jayda’s mother, is aware of the severity of this secretly committed crime:

RUBY. Jayda, you was only fourteen years old, still my baby. What kind of law they got? They mess around with our women’s business, they bring death to our land, shame to our children ... (*Murras* 102)

Ruby’s analysis is very accurate since she realizes that this was one of the many attempts by the Government to discontinue Aboriginal culture and population.¹¹⁹ It can also be viewed as a symbolic rape of the Aboriginal culture by White authorities, paralyzing whole communities for decades until either justice is sought or the tribe ceases to exist: Jayda’s “sterility becomes metaphorical of the impossibility for Aboriginal culture at large to perpetuate itself” (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 185) due to large-scale extermination policies of the White government. This same “paralysis” (ibid.) for fear of discontinuation of his own race befalls Wilba, Ruby’s son who becomes an Aboriginal rights activist, when he is handcuffed to a White policeman’s wrists in his struggle for equal rights:

WILBA. [...] They handcuffed me, my *murras*¹²⁰, to a *wudjella*¹²¹ cop. The bastards... a *wudjella* pig. (*Murras* 105)

Being handcuffed does not only mean not being able to take action or move around freely, but symbolically also stands for the paralysis that befell so many Indigenous peoples after experiencing White despotism and violence. Furthermore, chaining Wilba to a White police officer can be seen as an allusion to the attempts by White government to assimilate Aborigines into White, Anglo-Australian society and, thus, make them even with the dominant culture.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 185.

¹²⁰ The term *murras* means “hands” and derives from the Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara languages (cf. *Murras* 107).

¹²¹ *Wudjella* denotes a White (i.e. non-Aboriginal) person (cf. *Murras* 107).

Yet another example of an Aborigine suffering from White injustice and discrimination is Danny in Bob Maza's play *The Keepers*: The young Indigenous man, renowned for his skills as a tradesman ("the only blackfella master builder" (*The Keepers* 214) in the wider neighborhood), is in love with a White girl from a wealthy family who are all part of the local tennis club. Consequently, Danny wants to join this community in order to establish connections with his desired in-laws. However, the club is run according to a strict 'White only' policy. These racist rules prevent Danny from entering the club. This negative response is symbolic of White endeavors to keep Aborigines out of their life and to uphold segregation out of a belief in White superiority as well as a perceived need for White purity. Fear of miscegenation clearly plays a part in this case. When moving away from the microcosm of this example, the macrocosmic interpretation might suggest that Danny wants to join the club in order to be accepted in the White society and, as a result, also to be able to have a socially approved relationship with his beloved girl Mary. As a result of these (hidden) racist policies, Danny hits a social glass ceiling and is told by his boss that he cannot marry a White girl as this would mean crossing the emotionally charged ethnic borders (as outlined in great detail in Chapter 6.1.):

McELVOY. I wish I was wrong, son ... but I don't think you'll ever be a member of that club. [...] Believe me, Danny, I know what these bastards will do to you if you go playing in their yard. (*The Keepers* 213/214)

The hopelessness of his situation, which is brought about exclusively through his Aboriginal roots, makes Danny lose faith in a possible peaceful coexistence of Black and White Australians, ending in his own and his 'brother' Michael's death.

The next notable example of the irreparable harm White authorities were causing under the cover of "protecting" Aborigines is to be found in Jack Davis's play *The Dreamers*: Worru questions European superiority in his lament of the genocidal practices of the White colonizers:

WORRU.

The tribes are all gone,
The boundaries are broken;
Once we had bread here,
You gave us stone.

We are tired of the benches,
Our beds in the park;
We welcome the sundown
That heralds the dark.

White lady methyrate
Keep us warm and from crying,
Hold back the hate
And hasten the dying.
(*The Dreamers* 41)

To give somebody stones to eat may just as well be interpreted as starving them – Worru seems to suggest that this is what White authorities are doing under the cover of “protecting” Aborigines. The mention of methyrate, a substance contained in alcohol, is a clear accusation directed at government officials and police officers who deliberately introduced alcohol and other inebriating drinks to Indigenous communities. (A detailed analysis of the effects of alcohol and other narcotic substances on Aboriginal community life will be provided in the following chapter, 6.3.2.) Ironically enough, Aboriginal consumption of intoxicating beverages was and still *is* employed today to degrade them as ‘uncivilized’ and ‘barbarous’ on the one hand and to drive into (and keep) Blacks (in) precarious social positions. Hence, the smallest possibility of self-determination for Indigenous communities is often destroyed. Consequently, many Indigenous Australian families lead an impoverished life, which Davis depicts in a strikingly honest manner at the beginning of Act 2: the Wallitch family’s home is decrepit, drab and grey, and hopelessness seems to be a steady guest. On a daily basis, the family members are, directly or indirectly, confronted with problems such as chronic unemployment, frequent periods of imprisonment, alcohol addiction, dependence on welfare money and identity crises. This is what Maufort calls the “circularity of the Black predicament in Australia” (*Transgressive Itineraries* 180). By and large, it can be argued that this troubled situation is mainly a result of the large-scale displacement of Aborigines. However, the roots of the problems facing Aboriginal communities cannot only be sought within White colonialist policies despite the fact that it was European settlers who initially brought on many of these problems to Indigenous peoples. Jack Davis is one of the many recent Indigenous playwrights who does not falter to portray Aborigines as perpetrators who spiral themselves even deeper into misery and poverty, therefore diverging from the common depiction among Native Australians of the Aborigine as the innocent victim of the White regime. A fitting example can be found in *The Dreamers*:

DOLLY. [...] Oh Gawd, I wish we ‘ad a decent place to live in. No hot water, no locks on the doors, worse than livin’ in a bloody camp. [...] Why don’t you go down the Road Board? They’d put you on. Cousin William got a job there. [...] If you weren’t so bloody bone tired we’d get a good ‘ouse an’ good furniture. (*The Dreamers* 7/8)

Davis, who was an Indigenous person himself, certainly proved to be very courageous for drawing such unflattering depictions of his own people by implicitly suggesting that, to some extent, Aborigines themselves are to blame for their own and/or their entire community's plight for lack of active life-improving measures. Dolly, a "wonderful Jack Davis heroine" (Saunders, *Introduction* ix), is a positive example in contrast to her male relatives in *The Dreamers* since she "will make sure that Meena and Shane [her children] finish school, money or no money, and it's through her and Uncle Worru and the rest of the Wallitch family that we know that despite poverty, deaths in custody, bad health and white hatred, the *Nyoongah* spirit will survive" (ibid.).

An important and unique feature of Jack Davis's works is his careful crafting of both Black and White characters; he "skillfully manages to avoid setting up a crude opposition of 'black goodies' versus 'white baddies'" (Hosking 144). The playwright does not simply reverse stereotypes by presenting violent Whites as brutal and abusive beasts, but he achieves this reversal "in the process of representing Aboriginality" (Hosking 145). A discussion of all the various methods employed by the playwright to affirm Aboriginality without pointing an accusatory finger at White audiences (though not hiding his political criticism) will be presented in subchapter 6.5.2. In general, Davis can definitely be called the most positive of the three authors discussed in this thesis: As a reviewer of a 2002 reproduction of *The Dreamers* in Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre remarks, "Davis finds cracks of light in the humdrum, hopeless lives he holds a mirror to; his poetic eye turning the audience's collective gaze to bigger questions about social and political issues, the plight of Aborigines, including their self-abuse, and the need to maintain links with the past".¹²² In comparison, Eva Johnsons's *Murras* creates a somewhat grimmer outlook on the future of Indigenous citizens: The play ends with Ruby's lament of the scattering of all Aboriginal tribes¹²³. The play in general is "fuelled by a great anger" (Saunders, *Introduction* x) and seems to suggest that, especially with regard to the final scene, "Aboriginal identity has to be fought for" (ibid.). However, the ending is also one from which the audience learns of the beginning of Aboriginal protests against White injustice- among these protestors is Wilba, Ruby's son. Through the depiction of an "emblematic Aboriginal family, whose resistance against White domination represents the struggle of a nation at large" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 183), the crowd is left with a feeling of resilience. The same can be said of Maza's *The Keepers*: The play ends with a circular view of history and life after Michael and Danny, the

¹²² <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/03/31/1017206168397.html>.

¹²³ Cf. *Murras* 106.

two youngsters, have died in a very similar manner as their fathers more than twenty years ago. Despite this bleak denouement, Bob Maza conveys the notion that there is “a possibility of reconciliation between the two cultures” (Saunders, *Introduction* xi).

After witnessing aestheticized versions of historical atrocities, the audience cannot help but realize that most measures taken by the (early) White government, falsely guised under the cover of wanting to help Aborigines, led to unbelievable inhumanities and injustices. Hence, the dialectic between White politics and White power and their effect on Indigenous communities becomes obvious, explaining how an entire people could be spiraled into the “inner circles of hell” (Langton, *Trapped* 14) - including drug abuse (alcohol, cannabis, petrol sniffing), unemployment, use of pornography, family violence (often leading to rape and sexual abuse), bad health and other vices.

Apart from ample illustration of White authorities’ abuse of power, the three plays also mirror the full extent of control Anglo-European Australians have over almost any area of public and social life. The status quo is very often accepted by Black characters as unchangeable (yet not without anger and frustration) since they all have been exposed to the perceived immutability of existing power structures:

DANNY. [...] Being a blackfella you’ve gotta mix in the right circles [...].
McELVOY. I see. A bit of social climbing, is it? (*The Keepers* 207/213)

As is obvious in this example, Danny as well as his boss Mr. McElvoy are fully aware of the distribution of power among Australia’s citizens – firmly resting within Anglo-Australian hands. Danny’s only opportunity of climbing up the social ladder seems to be mixing with White folks – a fact which drives the young man into despair since his ambitions and diligent work can supposedly do nothing to make him appear ‘decent’ in the eyes of his White fellow townspeople.

Eva Johnson presents a similar example in *Murras* in connection with the regular Government check-ups performed by Sister, the lady who administers injections to Jayda which finally make her sterile. Despite their poverty, Ruby certainly does a good job raising her children, who are perfectly healthy (unless administered sterilizing substances by Welfare employees):

WILBA. What Sister want to check me for? She think I got germs, all time put that purple paint on me. I got no ringworm, *doolum*¹²⁴. No nothing. (*Murras* 87)

¹²⁴ “head lice” (*Murras* 107).

These visits are used as a means of controlling the lives of Aboriginal families and an attempt of assimilating them into White society by commenting on the harmful practices of Natives while praising the progressive way of life of Anglo-European Australians. Even though Black communities are aware of this fact, many, including Ruby, comply with White rules despite their arbitrariness. When the Francis family learns of their relocation into the city, Ruby immediately understands that there is nothing she can do to stop it from happening and, thus, reverts to submissive behavior:

GRANNY. They just move us around like cattle. Why don't you tell them we want stay here, we not...

RUSSEL. I have to make my report and I'll tell them for you, but I'm sure that when you see your new home you will probably change your mind.

RUBY. We don't understand this report business, but we do what they tell us. You want cuppa tea, Mr Rus? (*Murras* 93)

In the end, with the forceful relocation to an urban setting, White despotic rule again is confirmed and strengthened. However, the bluntness and callousness of the Aboriginal Liaison Officer Mr. Russel, representative of the Government's ruthless exploitation policies, is clearly visible to the audience and criticized severely in the following excerpt:

RUBY. What's gonna happen to this land? It still belongs to our people?

RUSSEL. No, there's to be a new highway put in here and a swimming pool close by for the townspeople.[...] Well, I hope the referendum improves things for you. Just think, it's nineteen sixty-seven now, and in twenty years' time these places will no longer exist. They will have been abolished and we can look back on this very day. That's what the referendum means: self-determination for Aboriginal people, and a better way of life. (*Murras* 93)

The irony of the 1967 Referendum, which granted Aborigines citizenship and the right to being counted as Australian citizens in a national census, is a bitter truth for Aboriginal audiences: In the name of self-determination, which suggests the end of despotism of Whites and the subjugation of Aboriginal communities, Native Australians were again forced to act according to White rules and were expelled from their homelands in order to "live as members of a single Australian community" (*Murras* 85). Quite obviously, assimilation as the abandonment of tribal beliefs, traditions and lifestyle is far from being able to lead a self-determined existence. Hence, the Australian Government's policy of self-determination can certainly be called paradoxical.

Uncle Worru of *The Dreamers* reaches his limits when trying to rebel against his hospitalization(s): Despite his firm wish to see an Indigenous doctor, he is taken to the same

White hospital which seems to only worsen his state of health. His aversion to the institution and its forms of medical treatment is unconcealable:

WORRU. [...] Next time I go to *Nyoongah* doctor, *boolyaduk*¹²⁵, Pinjarra¹²⁶. Get too many needles in this place. They no good, *warrah*¹²⁷. [...] Needles, needles. [*Pointing to his arms*] In 'ere, in 'ere [*pointing to his side*] an' in there; [*pointing to his posterior*] an' in there. I feel like a bloody *nyngarn*¹²⁸. (*The Dreamers* 14)

This dislike of White medicine and methods of treatment, when removed from their personal context, can be viewed as a symbol of White subjugation of Aborigines and the colonizers' repeated attempts to eradicate Indigenous culture and life. The needle may as well be interpreted as a general metaphor for the pain inflicted on Indigenous Australians since the arrival of European settlers.

The final scene of *Murras* restores hope to Indigenous audiences by portraying the growing Aboriginal rights movement Wilba takes part in: He no longer wants to be (symbolically) handcuffed by White abusive authorities and, hence, decides to stand up for his and his people's rights:

WILBA. We gonna march, Mum. Hundreds of us, not just me. We all going up there to sit on that land when the trucks and bulldozers come in. Those politicians, mob of ignorant *wudjellas*. I'm sick to the gut of their false promises of self-determination. Sick of their shit lies, their corrupt laws, their diseases, their gaols ... yeah, their chains, their chains. (*Murras* 105/105)

This passage seems to empower Aboriginal citizens. However, as the forthcoming historical developments showed, most of these hopes for more justice and the abolition of segregationist and discriminatory policies were shattered. As has been outlined in Chapter 3.6., full equality for Indigenous Australians has not yet been reached despite numerous achievements.

6.2.2. Imprisonment, Deaths in Custody and (Police) Violence

An issue most frequently linked to misuse of power by authorities is that of Aboriginal imprisonment and mysterious deaths of Indigenous convicts in custody. This public perception is not a mere stereotype, but is grounded in alarming statistics: twenty-four percent of all Australian prisoners are of Indigenous descent, while they only make up 2.5% of the country's population. To add to these startling numbers, it has been examined that an

¹²⁵ "one skilled in magic" (*The Dreamers* 72).

¹²⁶ A place in South-Western Australia, close to the coastal town Mandurah, Western Australia.

¹²⁷ *warrah* is a Nyoongah term for "bad" (*The Dreamers* 76).

¹²⁸ "echidna" (*The Dreamers* 75).

Aboriginal person is fourteen times more likely to be imprisoned than their non-Indigenous counterparts.¹²⁹ In the late nineteen eighties, these sobering facts caused a public outcry within the Indigenous community, triggering a long-awaited inquiry (called the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody) into the true nature of such horrendously high numbers of Indigenous deaths in custody. The findings of the study, which examined ninety-nine Aboriginal deaths between the years of 1980 and 1989, led to the conclusion that Indigenous people did *not die* in prison at a higher rate than non-Indigenous convicts, but that the imprisonment rate was much higher for Aboriginal citizens than for non-Aboriginal ones.¹³⁰ Gilbert, as mentioned before, has pointed to the undeniable links between imprisonment and oppression of Indigenous peoples by Whites; she also speaks of “institutionalized racism in the police forces of most Australian states” (69). A case which outlines this statement is that of John Pat, a sixteen-year old Aboriginal boy who died in jail after being assaulted and confined by off-duty policemen in Roebourne, Western Australia. An autopsy of the dead body revealed that John’s skull had been severely kicked and that his brain had been torn due to “massive blows to the head”¹³¹. Despite ample evidence, including the list of injuries as well as testimonies stating that the officers had cruelly attacked John Pat, no charges were laid against the policemen – a clear instance of miscarriage of justice. Jack Davis, for example, paid tribute to John’s tragic death by writing a poem entitled *John Pat*; it prominently features on the memorial erected in memory of the deceased in front of the (already shut-down) prison he died in.

In Jack Davis’s *The Dreamers*, similar examples are mentioned by Worru and Eli of friends and acquaintances who died in jail; in most cases, they refer to the notorious Fremantle Prison, which was famous for especially brutal wards and was decommissioned in 1991:

ELI [*shouting*]. Freeo? What’s wrong with Fremantle Gaol?

PETER. What’s wrong with it?

ELI. You git three meals a day and a hot shower. Not like this place.

[...]

ELI. Bullshit! I still reckon they knocked old Sandy off and dumped him back in the cell. Look you blokes, I’m tellin’ yuh, Sandy was as tough as an old boomer. Slept under bridges, ate ‘ard tucker all ‘is life. Heart failure, be buggered [...]. (*The Dreamers* 15)

¹²⁹ Statistical data derived from

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/index.html#ixzz13xKJmu6E> and .

¹³⁰ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/royal-commission-aboriginal-deaths-in-custody.html#ixzz142WdomkL>.

¹³¹ See above.

Eli is clearly hinting at the (allegedly undeniable) fact that his friend Sandy did not die of a heart attack as stated in his death certificate, but was rather killed by wards of Fremantle Prison. The tone of the entire conversation testifies the reputation the gaol has acquired as an institution which is a realm and safe haven of White despotism, sure to break almost any Indigenous convict's resilience.

Davis has Peter of *The Dreamers* speak very openly about this socially accepted (or at least neglected) evil:

PETER. Look, *Nyoongahs* buy their grog from *Wetjalas*, they break the law and they git jugged by *Wetjalas*. The lawyer's white, the cops are white, the magistrate's white, the warden's white: the whole box and dice is white. Put a *Nyoogah* against them all. I tell you we ain't got a bloody chance. (*The Dreamers* 15)

In this passage, the arbitrariness of the White social system and its all-consuming power are vigorously criticized. Indigenous citizens often are of the conviction that justice cannot be gained by involving *Wetjalas*, but that seeking help from White authorities only worsens the situation. After Jayda was chased by young White men who were trying to rape her, Ruby directly goes to the police station in order to clarify that she won't tolerate violent, dangerous behavior towards her people. No further mention of the issue is brought up again in the play, suggesting that no charges were laid by the police against the wild mob of White youth.

Bob Maza's play *The Keepers* also offers a few adequate examples:

JAMES. [...] How many black prisoners ever reached our courts?
McGUINNESS. A good many, Reverend ... [...]
JAMES. What about Slaughter Creek, over there at the Lagoons area? Not one black person was brought in alive.
McGUINNESS. It was an open conflict ... The whole place was a battlefield.
JAMES. There were women and children among the dead. Your deputies must have shown exceptional courage. [...] White men indiscriminately killing defenceless natives hardly needs a genius to see the white man's scales of justice.
McGUINNESS: Reverend, this is the frontier. Many injustices have happened...and undoubtedly will happen in the future. There is not the manpower to uphold the full letter of the law. [...] (*The Keepers* 190)

The brutality and arbitrariness of White officers' actions and the sending out of raiding parties in the interest of killing insurgent Natives certainly, as succinctly phrased by James (i.e. Bob Maza), are a sign of ruthless, selfish subjugation and territory expansion policies which again speak of an obvious imperialist mindset. This is exactly what Jack Davis's Dancer figure in *The Dreamers* addresses when singing sorrowfully, "The White man is evil, evil! / My people are dead. / Dead, dead, dead. / The white man kill my people. / Kill, kill, kill, / Kill" (69). On

another note, the brutality and selfish capitalist ambitions of the colonizers are addressed when Eli says, “The *Wetjala*’s a lion, he eats. Aw. He eats, he eats everything: land, trees, rivers, forest, even people, ‘specially people. [...] He’ll kill you for sport and eat your brains and kidney fat” (*The Dreamers* 53). The very epitome of White despotism, however, is the removal of hundreds of (mainly half-caste) children from their Indigenous families in the name of ‘child welfare’ because it was believed that half-castes “had been half-civilized by birth [...] and would be easier to educate and place in the workforce” (MacLeod 75). The true nature of these hideous measures was to assimilate Aboriginal offspring into Anglo-Australian society by providing foster parents for them or by taking them to (primarily Christian-run) missions where the children were to be educated in a European manner. Eva Johnson bears witness to the phenomenon of the ‘Stolen Generations’:

GRANNY. They still doin’ that now [removing half-caste offspring from their families), mothers hidin’ their babies. Covering them up with ash to make them look full-blood. (*Murras* 92)

A few scenes later, the audience learns of Granny’s personal experience with the practice of snatching Black children from their mother’s breast:

GRANNY. You know they tried to take Charlie away from me. One *wudjella* man wanted me, for himself. I told him I gave him away to ‘nother woman. But I hid him, hid him in my sugar bag. I was nearly sittin’ on top of him while I was lyin’ to that *wudjella*. He was a good boy, kept real quiet. I kept hidin’ him, until he met your mother. (*Murras* 97)

Forceful removals of half-caste infants from their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were carried out on a frequent basis approximately between the years of 1870 and 1969. These removals were administered by government agents, missionaries as well as welfare bodies and managed by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), which had the power to take away Indigenous children without the consent of their parents or a corresponding court order.¹³² Granny was well aware of this policy and therefore hid her son in a sugar bag – a powerful act of resistance against White injustice.

Generally speaking, the existence of the John Pat Memorial as well as all allusions to and explicit mentioning of Fremantle Gaol and other instances of White oppression of the Native Australian tribes are evidence of what Gilbert calls “resistance politics” (71), a major issue for Indigenous writers of the past and present. In various ways, the authors voice their concern about and anger at such (extreme cases of) White abuse of power and, hence, make this

¹³² Information derived from <http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/stolen-generations/#forced>.

outrage visible on stage. This is done in order to come up with measures to prevent the public from sweeping under the carpet and/or letting sink into oblivion John Pat's case, representative of all the Aboriginal deaths in custody. Chapter 6.5.2 will examine the (literary) methods employed by Jack Davis, Bob Maza and Eva Johnson to act against a collective neglect of these important social issues.

A solution to the problem of police violence may be found in case "the barriers between police and Aboriginal people"¹³³ can be broken down. The key is to "overcome some of the obstacles that have traditionally been present between police and Aboriginal people"¹³⁴ – a goal that can only be reached if the institutionalized racism targeted at Indigenous citizens is banned not only in theory, but in practice as well.

6.2.3. Discrimination and Segregation

Despite large-scale measures in order to ban discrimination and segregationist practices throughout Australia, Indigenous peoples today still suffer from injustice due to their cultural roots and color of skin. Already in the nineteen seventies, the Commonwealth Parliament was aware of the fact that there was urgent need for change:

Perhaps the most blatant example of racial discrimination in Australia is that which affects Aboriginals... There are still remnants of legislative provisions of the paternalistic type based implicitly on the alleged superiority of the white race in which it is assumed that Aboriginals are unable to manage their own personal affairs and property. Discrimination affects Aborigines so far as it concerns the administration of the criminal law and the enjoyment of civil, political, social and economic rights... It is clear that past wrongs must be put right so far as Aboriginal population is concerned and that special measures must be provided. (Commonwealth Parliament Debates, Senate, vol. 58, 21 November 1973, p. 1976; qtd. in Chesterman and Galligan 196)

These separation policies led and still lead to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples in the Australian society (cf. Gilbert 65). Eva Johnson makes this one of her main topics in her play *Murras* where she focuses on the marginalization of Indigenous peoples who were forcibly dislocated, turning them from so-called "fringe dwellers" [...] [p]eople who live between the city and their land" (*Murras* 88) into city dwellers who are supposed to "be same as white fullas" (ibid.). Johnson portrays their plight through her female characters Ruby, Jayda and Granny. Hence, examples of discriminatory practices feature in abundance:

¹³³ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/law/index.html#ixzz13xM7J0Ja>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

JAYDA. [...] I work for that *wudjella* woman in town and I know. Sometimes she follows me around while I clean up. And she just sit and stares at me, make me eat my lunch outside. She belts her children if they talk to me. (*Murras* 88)

Jayda's case makes it clear that White people's distrust often comes about without any reason: The girl is the personification of conscientiousness and diligence and certainly is not deserving of suspicion and ingratitude. Despite her good work, Jayda's employer treats her with mistrust and like an animal – making Jayda eat outside. Belief in White superiority is clearly at work when the White lady punishes her own children in case they speak to the Aboriginal teenage girl. Therefore, the Anglo-Australian woman actively participates in the segregation of Black and White children in Australia. In her other job at the hospital, Jayda is also openly discriminated against:

JAYDA. [...] I work in the kitchen with Russians, Italians, Greeks, you name it, but I'm the only Aboriginal, and boy do I get it. All the dirty jobs, bossed around, and I got to stop myself from getting mad. I don't want to lose my job so I just walk away. (*Murras* 100)

Her obedient, submissive demeanor is what keeps her going; however, it becomes a source of growing anger and despair at the injustice inherent in the White Australian conservative mindset and work ethics.

Wilba, Jayda's brother, is being discriminated against as well at his school:

WILBA. That *wudjella* headmaster make me real mad. He goes... 'You have to learn to behave. We can't have you acting like a nomad down here.' (*Murras* 99)

Despite the fact that Wilba was not the only one involved in the boys' fight leading to this racist reprimand, he is "the only one [who] got the cane" (*Murras* 99), which is evidence of the discriminatory practices not only at Wilba's school, but many other public institutions as well.

Bob Maza's *The Keepers* offers a variety of (mostly race hierarchy-based) illustrations of social and political discrimination against Indigenous Australians:

One example that has been mentioned before is that of Danny, who is trying to enter the local tennis club, but is denied access because he is of Aboriginal descent and therefore not welcome in the all-white circle. A similarly far-reaching decision is taken by Elizabeth when she, despite her good intentions, removes Lillipa from the house because she is afraid that Michael's growing affection for the young Boandik woman might ruin her son's good

reputation. Elizabeth's subliminally racist thinking helps to keep the White conservative, segregationist beliefs strong and alive. As discrimination starts within the mind of every individual, a collective change for the better (i.e. a society without racism and prejudice) cannot be forced onto people who are reluctant to reconsider and modify their ways of thinking. Even though the Scottish woman does by no means want to deliberately harm her friend Mirnat or any other Native Australians, her ignorance in the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture help perpetuate the status quo. Another fitting example is her changing of Mirnat's family name Koonowar (after her husband) into 'Canoa' without asking Mirnat because Elizabeth thinks this is how you pronounce and/or spell it. Even though this was not done in bad faith, it still constitutes an act of ignorance and a reconfirmation of White superiority. Additionally, Elizabeth's disregard of possible (and existing) differences between Black and White beliefs lead her to the conviction that her own religious and ethical values are righteous and universally true:

ELIZABETH. Those old superstitions are gone now, Mirnat. You're a Christian now, saved through the grace of our Lord. As Christians we have to save all people from the darkness of ignorance and superstition. (*The Keepers* 204)

This is an excellent example of how religion was employed as a means of subjugating and assimilating Aborigines, and how these beliefs in the inherent inferiority of indigenous peoples in general are often unquestionably adopted by followers of that religion.

That belief in the inferiority of the Aboriginal Australians guides colonial thinking also becomes obvious when taking another look at the characterizations of Anglo-European settlers (as discussed in great detail in Chapter 6.1.2.):

McGUINNESS. These people are savage, primitive people. [...] [M]ind a word of warning: keep both eyes open for this lot. No matter how well-behaved they appear, mark my words, they'll turn on ye... Bite the hand that feeds them, they will. (*The Keepers* 186-187)

Depictions of Native Australian tribes as primitive brutes in parts helped to justify the White colonizers' endeavors to gain land and kill off the Indigenous population. Most illustrations of the deeply racist Australian society, however, are located in the working environment:

Because the race hierarchy must not be overturned in the eyes of Whites, Indigenous people should therefore be educated in manual labor only (if they are being educated at all) in order to prevent them from climbing up the social ladder. One such case which outlines this conviction is featured in *The Keepers*: Clarendon House is an institution set up so as to give

young Aboriginal women something to do while making sure that they are still kept in menial positions, therefore abiding segregationist practices of most White-dominated communities.

MAYOR. This fine building has been chosen for a most just and humane cause. Remnants of a once lost and desolate race of people have been rescued from the brink of extinction. This once proud race were to fall victim to such simple diseases as the common cold. Smallpox also took a terrible toll on these poor simple people... But much ... much more lethal was man's age-old enemy: ... alcohol. [...] This building shall house twelve...dare I say 'chosen ones'? ... Yes, women shall be house trained and educated in the domestic skills of our society. Their training shall include cooking, housekeeping and childminding, so all you good ladies out there will have a good supply of well-trained housekeepers and 'nannies'. This fine home [...] will be a reminder of the fine pioneering stock of our nation. (*The Keepers* 196)

It is only possible through the sanctimoniousness of politicians that segregationist and discriminatory policies, which mainly serve the function of doing away with the 'Aboriginal problem', can be sold to the public as benevolent actions, picturing Whites as the saviors of primitive peoples who are unable to manage their own affairs. Additionally, the passage above is an excellent illustration of the policy of concealing and/or deliberately ignoring White atrocities directed at Australia's Native population: No mention of the introduction of alcohol to Indigenous communities by White people is made; diseases such as smallpox and influenza are instead used as the main reason for the many deaths among Aborigines throughout the history of Black and White contact. Not one word is said about the White man's involvement in Indigenous suffering and dying, let alone mention of massacres and genocidal policies. Ironically, Bob Maza has the Mayor, who conducts the inauguration ceremony of Clarendon House, refer to the perpetrators of such crimes as the "fine pioneering stock of our nation" (*The Keepers* 197). In this way, the author reverses this statement's content not only through the audience's knowledge of historical events, which by no means can be called 'heroic', but also by letting the play end with Michael's stabbing by the angry townspeople for being a "nigger lover" (*The Keepers* 225). Consequently, the wording 'fine pioneering stock' and the Mayor's further deceiving description of the first European settlers are automatically unmasked as sheer sanctimoniousness, impertinence as well as a blunt distortion of historic events.

6.3. Dislocation and Uprootedness

As has been outlined in great detail in Chapter 3, the Australian government's endeavors to eradicate Aboriginal culture was guised as policy of 'protection' and included such cruel measures as segregation, dispossession and the snatching of half-caste children from their Indigenous communities. Large-scale expropriation of Aboriginal people and concomitant relocations of Indigenous Australians from a rural to a city environment were administered for the purpose of gaining land for cattle farms, mining companies and White settlements. Under the pretense of wanting to provide better living conditions for all Australians, without respect for tribal practices and family ties, Native communities were moved to the cities in order to become assimilated into the country's White, Anglicized society. These violent acts of displacement are the topic of this section, which examines the portrayal of such measures in the three plays *Murras*, *The Keepers* and *The Dreamers*.

6.3.1. The Pain of Unbelonging¹³⁵

Connection to the Native land, family unity as well as leading a life in harmony with Mother Nature are quintessential aspects of a traditional Aboriginal existence. Once one or more of these features disappear, a feeling of disorientation and uprootedness is the result, as can be seen in a myriad of Indigenous Australian texts. Of course, also being kidnapped from one's family often leads to a feeling of uprootedness once the removed child learns of their original parents. Sally Morgan, Archie Roach and Eva Johnson, to name a few famous examples, are victims of these 'Child Welfare' policies.

The impact of such despotic White measures on Aboriginal life and identity and the emerging "loss of belonging" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 182) inflicted on entire Indigenous communities are clearly visible in Bob Maza's, Jack Davis's and Eva Johnson's works. As Maufort explains, "[i]n these plays, the loss of home and belonging, the sense of exile and alienation, and the concomitant quest for Aboriginal identity constitute themes lending the Aborigine tragic grandeur" (*Transgressive Itineraries* 177). Clearly, these feelings are the result of "decades of dispossession" (ibid.). Examples from the plays are abundant:

RUBY. Charlie, I seen too many changes. Moon, water, seagrass, dugong, parrotfish ...
all scattered. Granny gone. Wilba's *murras* are scarred by the *wudjella*'s chains. His

¹³⁵ This title has been borrowed from a book by Sheila Collingwood-Whittick entitled *The Pain of Unbelonging. Alienation and Identity in Australasian Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007.

murras are clenched fists now. Jayda don't make baskets no more. She bleeds from her womb the seeds of death. She carries the scars from the *wudjella's* medicine. There's no place for baskets here, she says. And my *murras* are too weak. They no longer carve. They are empty now. Moon, water, seagrass, dugong, parrotfish ... gone. All gone. (*Murras* 106)

While Ruby bemoans the destruction of family unity, the waning of Aboriginal traditions and the scattering of her fellow Indigenous peoples, the resulting feeling of disorientation and disconnectedness from her tribal past in turn create a crisis of identity. The same holds true for the following excerpt from *The Keepers*:

MIRNAT. [...] Y'know, I felt really bad when I left my country.

ELIZABETH. Mirnat, I never realised you felt that way. I mean you seemed so happy ... and pleased to be ... coming with us ... I mean ... it was you who kept everyone's spirits up with your stories ... You were always laughing. [...]

MIRNAT. Listen, Elizabeth ... I don't think you'll ever be able to understand the blackfella. You'll never know what it's like to see something ... precious as what our land is to us ... the Boandik ... to me. Oh, yes, my friend, I was laughing ... but that's so my people couldn't see I was bleeding inside. I had to be strong to give them hope ... It's no matter we lost our home ... our name ... everything ... We had to keep going ... We had to.

[*The friends sit close. They don't touch, but nevertheless share each other's presence.*]

ELIZABETH. Your name? You've got your name: 'Canoa'.

MIRNAT. That's not our proper name. 'Koonowar' is our name. I take my husband's name. [...] Elizabeth, in my way, Boandik way, our name has to be strong, so when my spirit goes to the Dreaming, to the land of the *koodoo*¹³⁶, it will find its way back to its resting place. [...] (*The Keepers* 202-203)

Mirnat's case is an example of a woman whose tribe was almost entirely extinguished and dispossessed. As is common knowledge, the history of resettlement of Australia's First Nations is a long one. In the beginning, Aboriginal people all over the Australian territory were driven away from their homeland, often murdered in order to force them off their native soil; subsequently, those who survived were transported to missions and reserves or became low-wage workers on large cattle farms where they were kept like cattle – fenced off from a life in freedom which they were used to. When legislation was passed in the 1960s, demanding that equal pay was to be given to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal stockmen, many station owners could no longer afford to remunerate and house Indigenous workers. Consequently, most Black employees were fired and sent to towns and cities where the "Welfare mob [had] a lot of money for [them] to live on" (qtd. in MacLeod 84). This is, to some extent, the reason for the use of fragmented scenes in many Aboriginal texts: the

¹³⁶ *koodoo* refers to "the land of the dead" (*The Keepers* 229).

seemingly chaotic and disconnected order of sequence is intended to mirror the feelings of Native Australians after their forceful relocations. Such an example would be the first two scenes of Act 1 in *The Dreamers*: The first one is made up of Worru's soliloquy in which he gloomily reflects on his people's fate and his seemingly untroubled life before White invasion:

WORRU.

[...] Now we who were there
who were young,
are now old and live in suburbia,
and my longing is an echo
a re-occurring dream,
coming back along the track
from where the campfire used to gleam.
(*The Dreamers* 6)

Ironically enough, Worru's idealized picture of his past is one which belongs to a time in which he and his extended family lived in "Mogumber settlement, a prison-like reserve" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 180). Despite being fenced into a reserve like livestock, Worru's memories of his time there appear to him like a paradise in comparison to his current living situation in the city, a symbol of his remoteness from his place of birth.

In contrast, Scene 2 takes the audience to the dire existence of the Wallitch family. They live in a decrepit house and are constantly confronted with problems such as chronic unemployment, alcoholism, and concomitant poverty. The displaying of such opposing worlds, a rural Indigenous and an urban non-Indigenous being, symbolizes the harsh changes in lifestyles imposed on Native Australians by White colonists and the state. According to Maufort, Davis alternates these scenes in order to suggest that such "co-existence of irreconcilable opposites" (*Transgressive Itineraries* 178) is a familiar feature of Aboriginal every-day life; in addition, the abrupt change in scene and content contradicts Western literary and dramatic principles of linearity.

Davis "identifies the core of the tragedy as uprootedness, i.e. the forced displacement of the Nyoongah people by the White settlers from their beloved natural environment into dehumanized suburbia" (ibid.). Due to this cultural and spatial uprooting, Worru is "trapped between the past and the present" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 179) and fails to come to terms with his traumatic experience of being forcefully relocated. The pain of 'unbelonging' is too severe for Worru to endure. "As a hybrid being, he seems condemned to die out" (ibid.), argues Maufort, and it appears justified to say that Davis is suggesting it is up

to the new generation, for instance Dolly and her children Meena and Shane, to achieve this bridging of the gap between the tribal and the Western worlds through a combination of old and new traditions.

Forceful relocations are also the topic of *Murras*, already introduced before the action begins: The stage directions reveal that the play's focus is "on one family and their struggle to come to grips with white Australia as they move from fringe dwelling to life in the city" (*Murras* 84). In Scene 1, the audience is introduced to the family members and, through a radio announcement on the ABC News, learns of the planned removal of Indigenous peoples from their "fringe dwellings" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 183) since the White Government has decided that Australia's Native communities are to be "helped and encouraged to help themselves" (*Murras* 85) in order to assimilate them to Anglo-European Australia. Later on, Aboriginal liaison officer Mr. Russel visits the Francis family to inform them of their upcoming move to the city, patronizes their way of living, and promises a "better" future:

RUSSEL. [*interrupting*] What I'd like to talk to you about is your new home. It's very modern, you'll notice the difference. It has electricity. [...]

[...]

GRANNY. Why does the Government want to give us a house in city?

RUSSEL. To improve your housing conditions. To enable you to live a normal life. To better yourselves. (*Murras* 91)

The half-caste Russel uses the prospect of modern amenities in order to justify the upcoming removal of the Francis family from territory they have lived on for hundreds of years, and that this same land will be used for constructing a highway as well as a swimming pool for Whites. Granny, just like Worru, cannot overcome her feeling of uprootedness and dies (in parts) of grief and despair. Hence, the connection between one's native soil and Aboriginal identity are again confirmed. In addition, Eva Johnson, in accord with Jack Davis and Bob Maza, points to the fact that a symbiosis of modern and traditional values must be formed in order for Indigenous communities to survive and thrive. This same hybridity of most present-day Aboriginal communities can be exemplified through the combination of dances in *The Dreamers*:

[WORRU rises and begins a drunken stumbling version of a half-remembered tribal dance. PETER turns the volume up and continues his own disco dance. WORRU pushes him aside and dances to the amusement of ELI and ROY, until his feet tangle and he falls heavily. [...]] (*The Dreamers* 18)

Worru and Peter symbolize old and new Aboriginal identities. While Uncle Worru represents the ancient custom of leading a rural life in harmony with nature and dies at the end of the play, foreshadowed by his fall to the floor and symbolically representing the waning of old ancestral existence, Peter stands for the young urban Indigene who does not feel a longing for the bush any more since he grew up removed from his ancestors' land in the city. Such young urban Aboriginal identity is illustrated in *Murras*:

[WILBA dances for two or three minutes, circling JAYDA. She rises slowly and joins in until the two are dancing. They dance towards the totem where the dance ends with a blackout.] (*Murras* 94)

Jayda and Wilba, who spend their first (approximately) ten to thirteen years as so-called "fringe dwellers" (*Murras* 88) between their traditional land and the cities (on reserves or in small rural towns), still remember parts of their ancient heritage. Despite the move to the city in their adolescent years and some identity troubles (cf. Chapter 6.1.3.) following the change in location and lifestyle, in which they experience "a fragmented, confused or contradictory identification with their traditional culture" (Hosking 143), Jayda and Wilba grow up proud of their ethnic and cultural roots.

6.3.2. Effects of Dislocation and Uprootedness: Alcohol, Unemployment and Poverty

Several references to the devastating effects of the colonialist, in parts also genocidal, practices of the White Australian government on the country's indigenous peoples have been provided throughout this thesis; however, a more comprehensive examination of the impact of forceful removals, dispossession, kidnapping of children and segregationist policies is still wanting. The consequences are manifold; therefore, only a few effects will be discussed here: those of alcoholism, poverty and unemployment.

It can certainly be said that all three authors very extensively deal with the first issue, alcohol abuse in Aboriginal communities. Eva Johnson's *Murras* briefly introduces the problem of alcoholism when Ruby talks to Aboriginal liaison officer Mr. Russel about her dead husband Charlie:

RUBY. He died from too much grog. Well, that's what they said. They used to come in cars and sell it to us, flagons of grog. They made lot of money, too. [...]

GRANNY. [...] He never forgot who he was; not my Charlie. He was hungry for the land. They stole it from him. [...] (*Murras* 90)

Obviously, Charlie did not only die from too much alcohol consumption, but also out of grief for losing his ancestors' land. In Davis's *The Dreamers*, almost every scene set in the Wallitch family's shabby home bears witness to the male relatives' alcohol addiction. This is only one example:

ELI. Well, what's on the programme for today?

[*Silence.*]

Anybody got any ideas?

[*Silence.*]

How about a bottle of *gnoop*¹³⁷?

ROY. Blood good idea. Take this cough off me chest.

[...]

About an hour later. The full bottle is now nearly empty. The heat and the alcohol are taking their toll. WORRU, now dishevelled, is slumped on the sofa asleep. (The Dreamers 11/19)

Using up the children's lunch money in order to buy more spirits becomes a regular misdoing and speaks of the men's alarmingly high degree of addiction. In despair, however, even Dolly, who generally despises the effect of intoxicating substances (on her relatives), reverts to alcoholic beverages in order to soothe her sorrows:

[[...] ROY looks at DOLLY, points to the flagon then to DOLLY. She nods. ROY pours the last of the port into a mug. The lights fade as he passes it to DOLLY. She drinks and passes it to ROY. Blackout.] (*The Dreamers* 40)

This passage demonstrates how alcohol is often used in order to drown one's sorrows in when all hope seems to be lost. However, the play refrains from justifying such practices by illustrating only two scenes later the dependence of Aboriginal communities on Social Service money:

SHANE. You better stop home tonight. I think Popeye's [Worru's] pretty sick.

MEENA. Yeah, I know.

SHANE. You better wait until they get home.

MEENA. They'll be drunk, anyway.

SHANE. Yeah, Social Service cheques today. (*The Dreamers* 45)

Likewise, Bob Maza's *The Keepers* testifies the problems arising out of Aboriginal alcoholism: Frequent mention of idle Indigenes getting drunk in pubs or at the docks mirror the common stereotype of the drunken Aborigine. However, despite sobering narratives of wide-spread alcoholism among Indigenous communities out of despair due to decades of social and political deprivations, dispossession and attempts of genocide by the White

¹³⁷ *gnoop* can mean both blood and wine. In this case, Davis makes a reference to red wine (cf. *The Dreamers* 11, 73).

government, Maza does not miss out on an opportunity to point out to the dangers of overgeneralization:

McELVOY. [...] Look, son, from the time I first set eyes on you I thought, 'This is a different sort of blackfella. He's not going to go walkabout ... or lay about the docks drunk ... No, he's gonna make something of himself.' (*The Keepers* 213)

As the audience will learn a few scenes later, this stereotypical characterization of the 'lazy Aborigine' is partly responsible for Danny's serious mistake at the end of the play, when he sets fire to the tennis clubhouse, ultimately leading to his death. The frustration about his society's unchangeable racism and the perceived pointlessness of his attempts to prove them wrong finally draws his life to a close. On another note, Maza uses this conversation between McElvoy, Danny's employer, and the young Aboriginal man in order to highlight that Indigenous people are to some extent to blame themselves for their own misery through making no effort to find a way out of poverty and alcoholism. Danny is the personification of a person who manages to escape the common Aboriginal plight of being dependent on Welfare money by keeping a decent job; tragically enough, his grief after finding out about White policies of deliberately poisoning Indigenous communities is too much for Danny to bear. In the end, he becomes a drunken maniac who commits the crime of arson.

When Davis, Johnson and Maza have their characters lament the demise of their tribal people through alcohol addiction (apart from other factors), the authors direct a clear accusation at those Government officials and police officers who deliberately introduced alcohol and other inebriating drinks to Indigenous communities. Initially, Indigenous peoples only consumed alcoholic drinks made from plants such as corkwood, coconuts and pandanus; due to seasonal changes, for example, access to these intoxicating substances was strictly limited. With the advent of White settlers who opened up the first pubs within weeks after their first arrival, alcohol and other methylated spirits were introduced to the Indigenous population as a means of remunerating them for slave work they had carried out. Subsequently, alcohol was also used as payment for prostitution.¹³⁸ In rare cases, alcoholic beverages were sold to communities with the clear intent of destroying Aboriginal family and community life, and as a result also Aboriginal culture at large.¹³⁹ It might also have been used as a welcomed aid for

¹³⁸ <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/aboriginal-alcohol>. Marcia Langton (196) also speaks of alcohol as a means of attracting Aborigines into settlements or in order to encourage Native men to engage in street fights which the White settlers would watch in amusement.

¹³⁹ At this point, the example just quoted from Johnson's play *Murras* should again be mentioned: Granny explains how Whites used to come to their Native reserves or dwellings in order to sell a large amount of alcoholic beverages to Indigenous people (cf. *Murras* 90). This is the only direct reference to this destructive practice of introducing Aboriginal communities to methylated spirits.

soothing abused and disgraced Aborigines in order to prevent them from fighting against systematic White despotism. The characters' lament is therefore a justifiable accusation against Whites for causing irreparable damage to Aboriginal Australians through the introduction of the "rivers of grog" (Langton, *Trapped* 1-17¹⁴⁰) to Native communities, driving hundreds and thousands of Indigenous Australians into addiction. Recent statistics have shown that, despite widespread clichés, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, on average, consume the same amount of alcohol.¹⁴¹ The reason why the wider public are reluctant to accept these proven numbers is that the media, intentionally or unintentionally, focus on those Indigenous citizens who tend to binge-drink. Therefore, it can be said that, while "Aboriginal people generally drink less than non-Indigenous people, those who do so are more likely to drink at hazardous levels"¹⁴². Still, White reporters and a large part of Australia's non-Indigenous society like to perpetuate the cliché of the ever-drunken Aborigine. Tragically enough, most of these people fail to realize that it may have been their own ancestors who sold alcohol to Aborigines in the first place. An example from *The Dreamers* deals with this particular topic:

PETER. Look, *Nyoongahs* buy their grog from *Wetjalas*, they break the law and they git jugged by *Wetjalas*. The lawyer's white, the cops are white, the magistrate's white, the warden's white: the whole box and dice is white. Put a *Nyoogah* against them all. I tell you we ain't got a bloody chance. (*The Dreamers* 15)

In a similar manner, Ernie Dingo, famous Aboriginal actor and TV presenter, states that

[t]here are more white alcoholics than there are black people in this country, so don't come at us with restrictions and Aboriginal laws about alcohol. [...]What you should be worrying about is who is giving them access ... who sells alcohol? Not black people.¹⁴³

Ironically enough, Aboriginal consumption of intoxicating beverages and excessive use of other addictive substances were and still *are* employed today to degrade Indigenous citizens as 'uncivilized' and 'barbarous' on the one hand; on the other hand, these popular depictions of the 'drunken Blacks' serve(d) as a means of driving into (and keeping) Natives (in) precarious social positions. Marcia Langton, in her article *Rum, Seduction and Death*, asks a question many others dealing with this paradoxical situation might also raise:

¹⁴⁰ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

¹⁴¹ Cf. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4715.0/> as well as

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/aboriginal-alcohol>.

¹⁴² <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/health/aboriginal-alcohol>.

¹⁴³ <http://www.news.com.au/entertainment/movies/ernie-dingo-blames-whites-for-aboriginal-drinking/story-e6frfmvr-1225809776726>.

[H]ow is it that one image, that of the 'drunken Aborigine', holds such a widespread ideological sway over such a long period of time? And why does it hold such sway when the real problems associated with misuse of alcohol in many Aboriginal communities are amenable to solution, when the rate of alcohol misuse in the Aboriginal community is actually less than in the general population, and when the focus of these campaigns is handfuls of bingedrinkers in the provincial towns whose plight deserves something better than vicious racist attacks?" (Langton, *Rum* 196)

An answer to these legitimate questions is yet to be found. Despite the biased perception of the general public concerning the number of Aboriginal substance abusers, alcoholism remains a serious problem for many Indigenous Australians. Consequently, those families and individuals affected often lead an impoverished life, which Davis depicted in a strikingly honest manner at the beginning of Act 2 of *The Dreamers* (as has already been illustrated): The Wallitch family's home is decrepit, drab and grey, and hopelessness seems to be a steady guest. Maza's Danny of *The Keepers* destroys his own as well as his 'brother' Michael's life after drunkenly setting fire to the local clubhouse, for which he and Michael are murdered by an intoxicated White mob as an act of revenge. Similarly, Eva Johnson's Ruby of *Murras* is widowed due to excessive drinking of her husband, and father of her children, Charlie.

Closely linked to the common depiction of Native Australians as drunkards is the portrayal of Indigenous peoples as primitive and as "having an innate desire for filth, indolence and being incapable of taking care of anything material" (Peters-Little 27). Therefore, Black Australians were often called members of a 'dying race' – a racist statement which was used to gain or sustain power over the Natives and to justify large-scale extermination of Australia's indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁴ In this way, due to systematic subjugation and exploitation of Aborigines as well as subsequently created alcohol problems among several Indigenous communities, they were often driven into poverty. The dire living conditions of many Blacks concerned are extensively illustrated throughout the three plays; the following examples are only a small selection of the most straightforward, obvious cases:

DOLLY. [...] I'm goin' to pick up Uncle Worru and send him home in a taxi. An' you two clean up, an' clean up properly. [ROY produces cigarette butts and breaks them open for tobacco.]

ROY. 'Ow about some *gnummari*¹⁴⁵?

DOLLY. Get yourself a job and you'll have plenty a smokes.

¹⁴⁴ The same phrase is used by various Aboriginal writers themselves when lamenting the steady decrease in Indigenous people or even the disappearance of several Native tribes throughout the Australian continent. The expression "dying race" in itself does not carry any racist meaning but acquired the negative connotation described above through the genocidal practices of the early Australian government with its secret hope that the First Nations might disappear anyways and, hence, have no further need for addressing 'Native issues'. For more information refer to chapter 2.3.

¹⁴⁵ *gnummari* is the Nyoongah term for "a mild, narcotic root" or tobacco (cf. *The Dreamers* 73).

ROY. Aw, come on love. Gimme another forty cents an' I'll 'ave enough for a packet.
DOLLY. You got enough here for papers; it won't hurt you to pick up a few butts, an' it won't be the first time.
ROY. An' it won't be the bloody last. (*The Dreamers* 11)

Due to unemployment, caused by both White racism as well as Aboriginal alcoholism, the family is caught in the poverty trap and apparently cannot escape it. Their miserable state is emblematically explained through the practice of recycling cigarettes in order to use up every last bit of tobacco left in the cigarette butts because they cannot afford to buy more until the next Social Service check is received. Even the mugs they use to consume their intoxicating drinks are “*chipped*” (*The Dreamers* 16). Another example which illustrates the financial hardship of an Aboriginal family struck by poverty due to alcoholism and dispossession can be found in *Murras*: When Ruby again brings home clothes from the mission charity, her teenage daughter Jayda, for the first time, refuses them:

JAYDA. [*angry and loud*] Mum, [...] I'm working now and I can buy my own clothes. I can't wear anything like this. Shame job.
RUBY. What, you too good now?
[...]
JAYDA. It's not that, Mum. I have to dress the same as my friends. I've got to be the same, Mum, or they'll laugh at me.
RUBY. Laugh, aye? You should be the one laughing, Jayda. [...] I'll take them [Whites] for everything they gotta offer. Jayda, it's *them* they *want* to treat us like this. I'll take them for every hand-out, ration, free pass, for every penny. As long as they *don't* think we like them, we sittin' pretty. [...] When you got no money for brand-new clothes, you have to feel proud in any clothes. (*Murras* 100/101)

To Jayda, the clothes from the mission are not only a sign of their poverty which she is ashamed of, but also serve as a marker of difference compared to her non-Indigenous work mates. On a different note, Jack Davis has his main character Worru receive clothes from the Red Cross at hospital, which look somewhat funny on him:

DOLLY. [...] Eh, where d'ya get your new clothes from?
WORRU. Sister give 'em to me; she get 'em from Red Cross. [*He shows off a new white handkerchief.*]
[...]
DOLLY. [...] [Y]ou gonna look like a real *bridaira*¹⁴⁶.
[...]
MEENA. Hello Pop, you look super. New clothes? You look real *moorditj*¹⁴⁷.
(*The Dreamers* 13/19)

¹⁴⁶ “boss, master” (cf. *The Dreamers* 72).

¹⁴⁷ “good” (cf. *The Dreamers* 75).

Worru's relatives are not used to seeing new garments on him, another hint at the family's pauperism. In addition, these clothes do not seem to fit Worru for they represent 'Whiteness' (note the explicit mention of the *white* handkerchief in the stage directions). In contrast, when Dolly offers to buy new singlets for the old man, he orders "Black ones, like me" (*The Dreamers* 51). Symbolically, the 'White' outfits simply do not fit because Aboriginal people do not want to assimilate; this rejection equals a refusal to abandon their traditional roots. Hence, Whites continue their marginalization and exertion of power over Indigenous citizens by keeping and driving them into a state in which they have to accept the colonizers' help in order to survive. Thompson points out that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders [...] have often been depicted as the passive recipients of the largesse or the charity of the European majority. This has been both demeaning and enervating, eroding self-confidence and entrenching a victim mentality which seemed to impose a terrible paralysis of despair.¹⁴⁸

Thompson's opinion is shared by Bob Maza, for instance, who presents an example which aptly illustrates what has just been said: When the town's Mayor officially opens Clarendon House, an institution established to give young Aboriginal women domestic training, the politician describes Australia's native people as "[r]emnants of a once lost and desolate race of people [who] have been rescued from the brink of extinction" (*The Keepers* 196) by Whites. No mention is made of the destructive policies followed by the Mayor's ancestors, leading the Indigenous nations into death and poverty.

An issue which needs to be addressed in a discussion of Aboriginal impoverishment and exploitation by European settlers and their progeny is that of unemployment. According to estimates from the last *Labour Force Survey* conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2009, the unemployment rate among Indigenous Australians is currently at eighteen percent.¹⁴⁹ In comparison to the number of non-Indigenous people without a job, this number is more than three times higher. Factors such as poor education, particularly in remote areas, adverse learning conditions in overcrowded houses which are common in many Aboriginal communities, as well as dependence on Welfare money, especially in the cities, contribute to the alarming redundancy numbers.¹⁵⁰ As has been illustrated several times throughout the last chapters, the three plays offer a myriad of examples mirroring this precarious economic state. Again, despite the mention of White responsibility for this plight, the authors' message seems

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.nla.gov.au/nla/staffpaper/thomp.html>.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/FD632DA9DB372177CA2577360017E08B/\\$File/62870_2009.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/FD632DA9DB372177CA2577360017E08B/$File/62870_2009.pdf) and <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/economy/index.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/economy/index.html>.

to be that Aboriginal people need to become active themselves by proving to the wider public and, more importantly, themselves that the common stereotype of the 'lazy Native' who receives money for buying cotton, need not be true, but that Indigenous peoples are successful members of today's society if given the opportunity.

6.4. Language and Culture Clash

Undoubtedly, a part of a people's identity is grounded in its shared language. In present-day Australia, this means that English as the linguistic code of the former colonizers and the dominant group meets a myriad of other languages, including those of ethnic minorities of immigrants such as Chinese (Mandarin), Japanese, Italian, etc., but also Aboriginal languages. Of the approximately two hundred and fifty tribal languages spoken before White invasion, only one hundred and forty-five of them remain today. It has to be added that only thirty-five of those are not in danger of extinction.¹⁵¹ Von Sturmer expresses his concern about the widespread (historic and ongoing) extinction of languages in the following way:

Yes, language matters. A society that is incapable of valuing the languages of its citizenry is a dangerous, stupid society. To ignore the languages of people is to ignore and to devalue the people that speak them. In contemporary Australian society Aboriginal languages are not only ignored but they are seen as 'holding people back'.[...] In other words, to be Aboriginal, and worse, to be Aboriginal and speaking an Aboriginal language, is to be in a disadvantaged, backward position. (von Sturmer 12)

Native languages were often forbidden after White invasion, imposing English on the Indigenous peoples as the language to be used for social, political, economic and all other communication. The re-naming of tribal places and historical events disempowered Aboriginal linguistic codes and also deconstructed Aboriginal identity. Therefore, the colonizers established "at least partial control over reality, geography, history, and subjectivity" (Gilbert and Tompkins 165), as can be demonstrated by the following examples:

PETER. Where's Watjerup, Popeye?

WORRU. *Kia*¹⁵², Watjerup, that's what *Wetjallas* call Rottnest. (*The Dreamers* 17)

Whereas this is a relatively neutral mention of the White practice of renaming Indigenous land and places, Maza provides an example which much more explicitly points to the abrasive measure of linguistically seizing land:

MICHAEL. I grew up with Boandik people ... We used to live at a place we call *Karra Mia Mia*: ... 'Camp of the Ferntree Wattle'. [...] Whitefella call it 'Rivoli Bay' ... '*Karra Mia Mia*' is a better name ... it's more ... *wa bunna*¹⁵³. (*The Keepers* 206)

¹⁵¹ Numbers derived from <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/language/index.html>.

¹⁵² "yes" (cf. *The Dreamers* 74).

As a “reaction against the dictates of White Australian society” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 232), Australian Aboriginal languages have been used (extensively or occasionally) in Indigenous plays for various reasons, which will be discussed in this chapter.

¹⁵³ No translation is offered by Maza for *wa bunna*; however, Elizabeth, when communicating with Mirnat, uses the expression and immediately afterwards translates it to herself as “very good” (cf. *The Keepers* 185).

6.4.1. The Culture Clash as Mirrored in the Language of the Plays

Not only actions, but very often also and even more so conversations are indicators of whether power is evenly or unevenly distributed in a society among coexisting cultural groups of people. As Gilbert and Tompkins point out, “[l]anguage is one of the most basic markers of colonial authority” (164) and, therefore, needs to be closely analyzed when endeavoring to examine the representation of culture clash in certain texts. That language is a very powerful tool for subjugating minority groups is illustrated on every page of the three plays; hence, it does not take long to arrive at the conclusion that the texts construct a (fictional) world in which Aboriginal people are dominated by the majority group of Anglo-Europeans, drawing a parallel to the real-life situation in Australia. In most cases, this condition becomes clear when looking at the groups’ characterizations of each other, a topic which has been dealt with extensively in Chapter 6.1.1. The findings gained there, namely that the two ethnic groups constantly define and (re)construct their separate identities through remarks and actions which set themselves apart from the other community, testify that Whites often display their political strength over Black Australians in various ways. Granny in *Barungin (Smell the Wind)*, another Jack Davis play, argues that *Wetj alas* destroyed her language, and this to her is the greatest sin of all since a loss of language implies a loss of connection to oral history and thus tribal land and culture. As this character points out, language is needed for the continuation of a community.¹⁵⁴ History provides the best examples of this argument: After having been removed from their Indigenous families, half-caste children were repeatedly prohibited to speak their native tongue in the missions or foster homes and were punished severely in case they disobeyed. As a result, these children often refused to pass on their traditional languages to their own offspring in order to stop them from being chastised like they themselves were when they were younger.¹⁵⁵ In this way, the White settlers effectively employed language as a tool to enforce their laws and culture on the country’s Natives while at the same time eradicating several tribal languages. Examples from the plays illustrating this abuse of power through linguistic means are abundant:

Upon accidentally killing a sheep from a White settlement, Koonowar of *The Keepers* is threatened by Vessy, a bullock driver, who addresses the Aboriginal man in broken Mootatunga (a language similar to Boandik):

[VESSY watches MIRNAT for a moment. Suddenly he points the rifle at
KOONOWAR and grabs MIRNAT with his free hand.]

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Gilbert and Tompkins 164.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

[VESSY] [To KOONOWAR] Time we go ... You no makem trouble. You come ... karato¹⁵⁶ law ... punish you for take this one. Me got this one lightning stick ... kill you, you try run away ... okay? [...] (*The Keepers* 184/185)

The abuse of power is mirrored in the bullocky's brutality and the rough language used when deciding to avenge Koonowar's taking of the lamb by stealing the latter's wife away. Maza counters this act of despotism on behalf of the White man by having him speak in very poor Mootatunga and acting in a brutish way, whereby the bullock driver is depicted as simple-minded and violent, therefore not worthy of respect or fear (if it were not for the weapon he carries). In this way, Maza's linguistic description of Vessy is in opposition to the common depiction of Aboriginal Australians as speaking poor English. The author points to the fact that even though Vessy has lived among Indigenous peoples for a while, he still cannot speak fluent Mootatunga. Hence, the conclusion most readers/spectators will arrive at will be that Aboriginal languages cannot be as primitive and simple as many imperialist-minded Whites might call them, again revitalizing and enhancing the status of tribal tongues.

Jack Davis has created a word that testifies the "indigenization" (Huntington 91) of Australian English when used by Aboriginal characters on stage: *wetjala(s)*, the term his characters use when speaking about White Australians, is a mixture of the words 'white' and 'fellow' (which is pronounced 'fella' in most parts of Australia).¹⁵⁷ This coinage mocks the diction of Anglo-Australian citizens and shows that Indigenous peoples are able "to appropriate the language of the imperial centre and use it for their own expressive purposes" (Gilbert and Tompkins 178). Such an example is illustrated in the following excerpt from *The Dreamers*:

ELI. Warders, they're no trouble. I know 'ow to handle them bastards: 'yes sir, no, Warden. I'll do it, sir.' All you gotta do is butter 'em up a bit. Play it smart. (*The Dreamers* 15/16)

As Eli describes in this passage, Black Australians often employ their detailed knowledge of White diction and pragmatic aspects of language in order to reach certain goals – usually in order to escape punishment, as is the case in the last example.

Another form of Aboriginal appropriation of linguistic means for their aim of decolonizing the Australian stage is implemented through the "recuperation of specifically oral forms of communication" (Gilbert 83). As Gilbert argues,

¹⁵⁶ *karato* is the Boandik term for "snake" (cf. *The Keepers* 229); however, it is often used metaphorically in this play to refer to Whites and their behavior.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Gilbert and Tompkins 178.

[t]heatre [...] allows the orality of oral cultures to be partially realized; it restores to the myths and yarns of indigenous cultures their topology as performance pieces, and in doing so dismantles the forms and conventions, and hence the ideologies, of imposed narrative structures. (Gilbert 82)

In accord with my line of argumentation brought forward in Chapter 4, “the validity of nonliterate representation” (Gilbert 82), i.e. Aboriginality per se, is affirmed while at the same time offering a powerful means of resistance against the hegemony of Western literary traditions as well as the unquestioned superiority of literate cultures. Hence, the imperialistic rule of the Anglo-Europeans is again destabilized. Gilbert goes on to illustrate this point by arguing that, frequently, the “least literate characters are the ones endowed with the most authority” (82). This statement can be verified by examples from all three texts: Among his male relatives, Uncle Worru of *The Dreamers*, as a member of the ‘old generation’, who still remembers life in the bush and who was not raised and educated in a European manner, is certainly the ‘least literate’ of all characters in the play. However, this does not mean anything to the Aboriginal community he belongs to; in contrast, he is held in high regard for his ability to tell stories and fluently speak Nyoongah. Similarly, Koonowar of *The Keepers* does not want to have anything to do with “those *karato*” (*The Keepers* 183). Therefore, it can be assumed that he has no knowledge of the Western concept of literacy, hence denying the “tyranny of the written word” (Gilbert 81). Still, Koonowar is the leader of their local Boandik tribe and certainly enjoys a lot of prestige within his community. In Johnson’s *Murras*, it is again the oldest character, Granny, who is presented as the most knowing one: She teaches Jayda “women’s business” (*Murras* 102), including dances, songs and stories to pass on to her children. Granny’s rich knowledge of Indigenous traditions makes her a person held in high esteem in the Aboriginal community. The status of the oral culture is enhanced through these persons of respect as well as the lively interaction between Indigenous characters: The fictional audience in plays, for example, the male relatives of Worru whom he tells his ‘yarns’ (i.e. stories) to, are “never passive listeners” (Gilbert 93) because they do not hesitate to ask questions, interrupt the speaker(s), or make comments and corrections regarding the performer’s/speaker’s actions.¹⁵⁸ In Indigenous drama, “the truth, if any, is in the telling” (Gilbert 87) and this truth, as should be added, is conveyed via extralinguistic modes of expression such as gesturing, miming or sign language. Thus, Aboriginal drama can be described as being “voluntarily multivocal” (Gilbert 88) through its incorporation of aural and visual images which immensely add to the linguistically conveyed message. One of these

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Gilbert 93.

non-verbal means of communication is Aboriginal sign language, which will be the focus of the following chapter.

6.4.2. The Use of Sign Language

Extralinguistic modes of communication have a long tradition in Aboriginal Australian societies, which have created a conventionalized sign system that is culturally specific and embedded in every-day Indigenous communication.¹⁵⁹ Whereas these symbols are effortlessly decoded by Aboriginal audiences, non-Aboriginal audiences must revert to other (non)verbal features to help them guess the meaning of the sign language, which constitutes a “valuable cultural experience” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 254). Jack Davis’s play *The Dreamers* offers quite a few examples:

WORRU. Who’s ‘ome?

DOLLY. Oh, just our lot, they all sittin’ around like that. [DOLLY indicates they are broke, by making a circle with her thumb and index finger.] (*The Dreamers* 13)

Even though the non-Native spectators/readers know of the chronic unemployment of Dolly’s relatives and their alcohol addiction, they will fail to grasp the full meaning of Dolly’s hand signal which indicates a zero, symbolically pointing to the fact that they are penniless.

The next two excerpts show that a myriad of signs exist for issues related to (police) violence and incarceration due to the (often wrongful) frequent encounters of Aboriginal people with the law (as outlined in Chapter 6.2.2.):

PETER. Yeah, an’ I give it to him, flattened him, [miming a heavy punch] *bukily*¹⁶⁰. Put ‘im right down in the *koop*¹⁶¹.

ROY. [miming handcuffs] You wanna watch it. (*The Dreamers* 12)

ROBERT. What happened, did they catch up to him?

DOLLY. No way. Old Harold reckon he done that. [DOLLY gives the Nyoongah gesture for running off. [...]] (*The Dreamers* 61)

In Bob Maza’s *The Keepers*, an even more prominent example of the (sometimes extensive) use of sign language can be found:

MIRNAT. *Nga nar bi ... Chaym?* [‘Where is James?’]

ELIZABETH. He’s gone ... Adelaide ...mmm, *wirra ... num*. [She attempts to explain in very poor Boandik, but at last reverts to the easier Boandik hand and sign

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Balme 162.

¹⁶⁰ “hit” (*The Dreamers* 72).

¹⁶¹ “urine” (*The Dreamers* 74).

language, translating to herself in English: JAMES has gone by boat to send some stores to sheep farms on the coast. [...]] (The Keepers 185/186)

The aspect that seems most remarkable here is that the use of sign language is not restricted to the Indigenous characters, but that non-Indigenous characters take the initiative in actively using the Native non-verbal means of communication because they find it easier to use for intercultural communication than their own or the Indigenous spoken language. What is more, this example helps to draw attention to the refined nature of Aboriginal sign languages which can be employed to convey complex messages. Therefore, Maza and Davis present “counter-discourse[s] to the privileging of natural languages in the Western system of values” (Balme 164), a system which has largely underestimated the complexity of this non-verbal form of expression. In this way, despite writing predominantly in English, the language of the colonizers, the authors manage to strengthen the status of Indigenous tribal languages as well as foster pride in Aboriginal heritage.

6.4.3. The Importance and Function(s) of Native Languages in Aboriginal Drama

The theater, in general, is a “particularly resonant space[...] from which to articulate linguistic resistance to imperialism” (Gilbert and Tompkins 166). Therefore, and because it might also be an expression of the authors’ personal appreciation of their tribal tongues, words and sentences, sometimes even whole passages, are incorporated in the three texts, creating a “hybrid blend of English and Nyoongah [or other native languages]” (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 179). What the (non-Indigenous) audience first notice are that the syntax, vocabulary and grammar of the tribal languages used (Nyoongah in *The Dreamers*, Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara in Eva Johnson’s *Murras* and Boandik in the case of Maza’s *The Keepers*) deviate from that of Standard Australian English, as can be exemplified in the following quote:

WORRU. [...] Anyway, they went around one corner and Cornell got a real fright and he shouted ‘choo’ and he pushed Milbart like that. [*He pushes PETER almost off his seat.*] And he said, he said, ‘Wart army yit’¹⁶², Milbart, git ober in de udder corner and help me balance this thing before it bloody tips over.’ [...] (*The Dreamers* 17)

In addition to the influx of Nyoongah phrases into the play, a creolized diction can be assumed from the way the sentence Worru recalls his friend Milbart saying is spelt out. The

¹⁶² Davis offers the following translation: “move along” (*The Dreamers* 76).

altered grammar and syntax according to which Aboriginal English functions (at least in certain parts of Australia) is visible in the following excerpt from *Murras*:

[RUBY *enters carrying a bag of clothes. She flops onto the sofa.*]
RUBY. Hullo, I'm buggered, phew. These *boogadies*¹⁶³ hurt my feet.
JAYDA. Mum, you been spendin' up real good, looks like.
RUBY. Just been to the mission. Jessie and me been driving around dropping off clothes to other *nungar*¹⁶⁴ families. Got few for you two. [...] (*Murras* 100)

Apart from being introduced to Indigenous Australian languages and Aboriginal English slang, the readers/spectators of the plays are also made aware of the vitality of some tribal languages today despite their large-scale disappearance in many areas. Hence, the extensive usage of the respective author's tribal tongue reminds the audience of the existence of Indigenous languages and might help raise awareness for and create an understanding for Indigenous attempts to perpetuate existing and healthy languages as well as to revitalize those tongues threatened with extinction.

An additional function of the mix between Native languages and English is the potential this blending has for the aim of decolonizing Australian theater and society: Political criticism and sarcasm can be mitigated by using, for example, Aboriginal sign language only fully understood by Indigenous audiences; mime and altering voice quality are often employed to mock colonizers. The following passages outline this beautifully:

ELI. Ten dollars and eighty one cents! Not bad, old Hawkeye, not bad at all! [*He pulls his eyepatch down and addresses an imaginary passer-by.*]
Got bad eyes, boss, this one got catarac', this one goin' fast. Can you spare forty cents, boss? God bless you, sir, God bless you, missus. [*Gesturing skywards*] Hey! Big boss! You up there! You listenin'? Hope you been givin' out some of them blessin's I been promisin' them *wetjalas*. [*He removes the eyepatch, puts it in his pocket and heads for the house singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers'.* [...]] (*The Dreamers* 52)

Apart from taking advantage of White people's stereotypical belief in the poor, penniless Aborigine begging in the streets, Eli also uses his knowledge of Christian songs to catch Anglo-European Australians' attention.

Danny of *The Keepers* employs the technique of what Gilbert calls "colonial mimicry" (85) when drunkenly criticizing White imperialistic, racist thinking:

¹⁶³ *boogadies* refers to the English term "shoes" (cf. *Murras* 107).

¹⁶⁴ *nungars* refers to Aboriginal people (cf. *Murras* 107).

DANNY. What's wrong, Aunt? ... Afraid the neighbours might start waving a finger?
... 'Look', they'll say, 'I told you those natives were no good .. Let's get them ...
Yes, let's put a little strychnine in their flour ... Let's poison their water holes ...'
(*The Keepers* 216)

Here, Danny's sarcasm and mimicry of an archetypical colonialist statement mirror his outrage at genocidal practices of early White settlers to eradicate local Aboriginal tribes. Apart from denouncing such abominable crimes, the mocking tone of his voice when rendering White racist comments clearly help to devalidate White authority and belittle the power "embedded in an imposed imperial language" (Gilbert and Tompkins 166).

Jack Davis and Bob Maza in particular create a lot of Nyoongah or Boandik dialogs in their plays, emphasizing that Indigenous languages are "viable codes of communication" (Gilbert 85). The mere presence of tribal languages reverses the power structures: Only if the (non-Indigenous) reader is willing to turn to the back of the book where the glossary is in order to look up the Native words used will they be able to follow what is being said; if they tire of doing this, though, or if they are watching a play being performed on stage, they will miss parts of the meaning. Hence, the non-Aboriginal audience becomes an outsider to some extent, which is precisely the feeling the authors and directors of plays want to create in order to forge sympathy for and create resemblance to what Indigenous tribes went through after British invasion.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, the blending of English and Nyoongah/Boandik/Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara in the three plays contribute to the reversal of "the historical balance of power" (Hosking 146) by presenting the tribal tongues as equally valuable and important means of communication. What is more, the English translations provided for the Indigenous terms at the back of the book are not sufficient enough to fully understand the context, connotations etc.¹⁶⁶ In this way, silences are created for anyone who is not fluent in the Native language used, which positions the European audience on the outside of the event and assigns them the role of the 'Other'.

6.4.4. The Function(s) of Aboriginal Humor

Even though all of the three plays discussed here render tragic stories about the plight of Aborigines, including genocide based on racism and greed for new land, the kidnapping of children, dispossession, dislocation as well as continuing discrimination in almost every part of social life, they contain quite a large amount of humor despite the fact that they are

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Hosking 146 and Gilbert 85.

¹⁶⁶ I am again referring to the anthology *Plays from Black Australia*, edited by Katherine Brisbane.

certainly no comedies.¹⁶⁷ “Aborigines ‘learnt to keep themselves alive by laughing’” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 233), Shoemaker records playwright Jack Davis explain the importance of humor for Aboriginal texts. The “distinctive Black Australian approach to humour” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 231) differs from Western concepts of humor because it is, as characterized by Indigenous writers, “one of endearment, often one of familiarity” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 234). Aboriginal humor is grounded in careful analysis of others; therefore, it often employs mannerism and impersonation.¹⁶⁸ Because many of the Indigenous texts written are produced and intended for their own people, the playwrights feel obliged to mirror as closely as possible the actual real-life situations, characters and historical events – an aspect worth mentioning in the context of this thesis which examines the representation of intercultural relationships between Black and White Australians.

Even though it has to be noted that the texts are aestheticized versions of the Black Australian reality as seen by a particular individual who happens to be a writer, the attempted “faithfulness [of Indigenous authors] to their perceived reality” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 236) allows the conclusion that the representations of culture clash in the plays are probably quite close to the lived experience of the author and/or a majority of Indigenous peoples. Jack Davis, upon being reminded of the fact that the historic documents he relied upon for the portrayal of past events had all been devised by White historians, pointed out that his renditions of the past are “*creative* distortions in line with what the meaning of the events was” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 251).

Humor and irony are important parts of Aboriginal culture and drama for various reasons. On the one hand, they “promote the cohesion of the Black Australian group” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 232) as humorous depictions and ironic comments are a feature of every-day communication (between Indigenous Australians). Hence, the familiarity created through the “mimicry and mockery of whites and the humorous celebration of their own lifestyle” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 233) has been enormously successful in uniting Aboriginal Australians and in forging a sense of pride in their shared Aboriginality. On the other hand, Black humor helps to “combat depression” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 232). A very prominent example of this function of Aboriginal humor features in Bob Maza’s *The Keepers*:

MIRNAT. [...] Y’know, I felt really bad when I left my country.

ELIZABETH. Mirnat, I never realised you felt that way. [...] I mean ... it was you who kept everyone’s spirits up with your stories ... You were always laughing. [...]

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Shoemaker, *Black Words* 234.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. Shoemaker, *Black Words* 235.

MIRNAT. Listen, Elizabeth ... I don't think you'll ever be able to understand the blackfella. [...] Oh, yes, my friend, I was laughing ... but that's so my people couldn't see I was bleeding inside. I had to be strong to give them hope ... It's no matter we lost our home ... our name ... everything ... We had to keep going ... We had to. (*The Keepers* 202)

As becomes clear in this excerpt, Indigenous authors refrain from writing in “an oppressive tone” (234) since they strive to avoid generating texts of indictment as this would perpetuate the role of the Aborigine as the passive victim of White despotism. By employing humor, irony and sarcasm, criticism of White hegemony and subjugation of Australia's Native peoples can be voiced in more subtle ways, while at the same time fabricating a unique style of text writing. Jack Davis in particular employs and depicts Black humor at its best in numerous scenes of *The Dreamers*, among them the following in which the Wallitch family is gathered around the kitchen table for a dinner of roast kangaroo:

DOLLY. Roy, you say grace.
SHANE. Do we only say grace when we are eating kangaroo?
ROY. [*putting his spoon back on his plate and swallowing*] We thank you, Lord, for what –
WORRU. You put some bacon in this?
ROY. We thank you –
WORRU. Bacon, *wah*¹⁶⁹?
SHANE. Ssh, Shss, Popeye, close your eyes.
ROY. We thank you, Lord.
WORRU. What for? Can't eat with me eyes closed.
ROY. We thank you, Lord, for what we have got.
WORRU. [*to SHANE, pointing upwards*] I forgot about that fella up there.
ROY. Oh, Gawd!
WORRU. *Choo*¹⁷⁰, *kynya*¹⁷¹, shame, eh? [*They all laugh, except ROY who tries again.*]
ROY. [*yelling*] All right, shut up! [*Guiltily*] We thank you, Lord, for what we got for ... your sake an' ours too.
DOLLY. Amen. (*The Dreamers* 34/35)

The role of the Christian religion, which many Aborigines were introduced to at missions and reserves, as well as Worru's disregard of it are the core of the humor in this scene. The next two quotes offer an example of Black humor in the form of a pun: Meena, Dolly's diligent daughter, is trying to finish a project for school but is disturbed by her mother's drunken cousin Eli:

¹⁶⁹ No translation into English is offered; however, the context suggests that *wah* is an expression like “eh” to ask for confirmation.

¹⁷⁰ “shame” (cf. *The Dreamers* 72).

¹⁷¹ *kynya* is another term for the English word “shame” (cf. *The Dreamers* 74).

MEENA. Do you have to have it that loud?

ELI. That's a solid song. Jimmy Little ... 'Baby Blue'. [ELI *sings along drunkenly and pretends to play a guitar.*]

MEENA. Wouldn't want to be in your shoes when Mum comes home. [She *storms out with her project and gets up on WORRU's bed.*]

ELI [laughing stupidly] I take 'em off, then. [He *flings his shoes about the room and settles down with WORRU to an evening's drinking [...].*] (*The Dreamers* 37)

In another scene at the beginning of the play, before Dolly is about to bring home Uncle Worru from hospital, the Aboriginal mastery in the field of puns is again demonstrated:

PETER. Don't you know how to milk a bowser?

ELI [*shrugging his shoulders*] Nah.

ROY [*feigning surprise*] Oh Eli, now, that's hard to believe.

PETER. It's easy, all you gotta do is pick the lock, then you gotta switch –

DOLLY [*interrupting, flicking him*] That'll do from you. If you wanta pick anythin' you can come down with me an' pick up Uncle Worru. (*The Dreamers* 10)

Dolly ends the talk about petty crime by making a play on words which is supposed to remind her male relatives of their responsibilities towards their family.

However, also Bob Maza is well versed in the art of rendering Aboriginal humor in his texts. In this excerpt of *The Keepers*, Indigenous humor is presented in the form of a prank on sanctimonious White politicians. When Michael and Danny are refused service at a fancy restaurant in town, they do not leave but choose a very prominent table in the center of the lounge, close-by the table of the town's political VIPs. After a while, the same table's conversation moves to the discussion of their country's Natives:

DANNY. [...] [T]he governor 's secretary came over in a loud voice [and] asked me if I could explain to the officials how one catches wallabies. So ... I said we need some gum leaves, which the secretary kindly enough went out and got for me. And I told them this very high piercing noise made by the gum leaf stops the wallaby in its tracks. And when we left they were all practicing.

MICHAEL. Fitting justice, I feel, to see all those blue bloods ... with matching blue faces. (*The Keepers* 200/201)

Through employing humor, irony and sarcasm, mannerism and mimicry, Indigenous playwrights have found a particularly convincing and entertaining way of pointing out the injustices their peoples have had to suffer from in White Australia. In this way, linguistic and extralinguistic means are employed in Aboriginal drama to actively reverse prevailing power structures.

6.5. Aboriginal Resilience

6.5.1. Examples of Aboriginal Resilience as Presented in the Plays

Since the beginning of the Aboriginal rights movement in the mid 1960s, Australia's Indigenous peoples (as well as a White minority of supporters of equal opportunities for all Australian citizens) have been fighting against social, political, legal and economic injustices that have been persistent ever since the first British penal colony had been established by Governor Arthur Phillip in Sydney Cove in 1788. The subsequent loss of land, disruption of family ties, native traditions and lifestyle, the forceful relocations into reserves and missions (and finally into urban areas), and the snatching of half-caste children away from their birth families led to severe traumatic experiences and a dramatic decline in Aboriginal health and wellbeing.¹⁷² As Huntington points out,

[i]ncreases in [...] economic and military power produce enhanced self-confidence, arrogance, and belief in the superiority of one's own culture [...] compared to those of other peoples and greatly increases its attractiveness to other peoples. Decreases in economic and military power led to self-doubt, crises of identity, and efforts to find in other cultures the keys to economic, military, and political success. As non-Western societies enhance their economic, military, and political capacity, they increasingly trumpet the virtues of their own values, institutions, and culture. (92)

This 'trumpeting' of White values and virtues degraded Aboriginal culture and systems of belief and led to a severe crisis in most Indigenous communities, which were forced to give up their traditional way of life and question their culture's validity. With the beginning of the Aboriginal rights movement, these doubts slowly but surely started to melt away. Convinced in the principle of justice and equality for all Australians, the Black movement began to grow, making notable legal and social improvements for fellow Native peoples while at the same time strengthening and reviving the spirit of tribal culture and belonging. Pride in local language and customs, rejection of Western, paternalistic regime and values were and are encouraged by Aboriginal politicians, writers and laymen – a phenomenon which Huntington termed "indigenization" (Huntington, 91).

Since the 1990s, reconciliation has been under way in order to "right the wrongs of the past" (Short 506). Despite the Government's assurance that justice will be provided for all Australians, be it Indigenous or non-Indigenous, the reconciliation process so far has been "little more than an assimilationist nation-building exercise" (Short 506). Moreover, it has

¹⁷² Cf. Short 493.

largely denied the wishes and goals of Indigenous Australian nations in the sense that such important issues as land rights and Aboriginal self-determination, including political autonomy, have been ignored. Even more so, Aboriginal resilience has been on a steady rise, refusing to be treated unfairly and as inferior people any longer.

This awareness of their right to justice and pride in their heritage is also mirrored in the three plays. Considering the limited array of possibilities for resistance which were at hand for Indigenous Australians at the time the plays are set in (this is particularly relevant for Bob Maza's *The Keepers*, in which the time of action goes back to as far as the 1850s), these refusals to comply with White hegemony portrayed here were brave acts of resistance and certainly provided a positive example for future generations to come. Due to the violent history of British-Indigenous relations throughout the colonization and invasion process, the arbitrariness of the White social system and its all-consuming power are vigorously criticized repeatedly. Aboriginal citizens were (and sometimes still are) often of the conviction that justice can not be gained through the help of *Wetjallas*, but that seeking help from White authorities would only worsen the situation. One example from Eva Johnson's play *Murras* confirms this sad assumption: After Jayda was chased by young White men who were trying to rape her, Ruby directly goes to the police station in order to clarify that she won't tolerate violent, dangerous behavior towards her children. Her son Wilba, however, tries to prevent her from involving the police lest the family friend Jumbo, who saved Jayda from the wild mob, gets in trouble: "WILBA. Don't go police, mum. They won't do anything, just throw Jumbo in jail, that's all" (*Murras* 97). Wilba's point cannot convince Ruby, though, since she is seeking justice, not revenge. It seems that Eva Johnson is suggesting that this is the right way to act against unfair and unlawful treatment. In *The Dreamers*, Davis also points out through Dolly, the only adult Indigenous character in this play who seems to be in control of her life and who has explicit aims (namely to raise her children in a way so that they will become successful, hard-working, well-educated members of society), that vengeance is not the way towards a peaceful, equal future: Dolly rejects petty crime and other forms of illegal activities her relatives are involved in, and it is her clear goal to keep her children out of mischief in order to enable them to lead a happy life without poverty: "DOLLY. No son of mine is goin' to gaol, not if I can help it" (*The Dreamers* 36).

Because of this attitude that *Wetjallas* (in particular the police and politicians) won't help Aborigines, the Indigenous characters of the three plays often revert to other measures in

order to seek justice for past wrongs committed by White Australians or at least to make an attempt of resistance. The most noteworthy examples can be found in Eva Johnson's *Murras*:

GRANNY. They still doin' that now [removing half-caste offspring from their families], mothers hidin' their babies. Covering them up with ash to make them look full-blood. [...] You know they tried to take Charlie away from me. One *wudjella* man wanted me, for himself. I told him I gave him away to 'nother woman. But I hid him, hid him in my sugar bag. I was nearly sittin' on top of him while I was lyin' to that *wudjella*. He was a good boy, kept real quiet. I kept hidin' him, until he met your mother. (*Murras* 92/97)

Forceful removals of half-caste infants from their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which is what Granny is referring to, were carried out on a frequent basis approximately between the years of 1870 and 1969. These removals were administered by government agents, missionaries as well as welfare bodies and managed by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), which had the power to take away Indigenous children without the consent of their parents or a corresponding court order.¹⁷³ Granny was well aware of this policy and therefore hid her son in a sugar bag – a powerful act of resistance against White injustice that did not only save herself and her son the pain of being separated, but also sends out a vital message of survival and resistance to her grandchildren whom she tells this story to. Through the act of hiding Charlie from Welfare or Government authorities, Granny points out to herself and her community that she will neither give up her right to family nor humane treatment. Both Jayda and Wilba, her grandchildren, continue Granny's spirit of resistance:

JAYDA. [...] I work in the kitchen with Russians, Italians, Greeks, you name it, but I'm the only Aboriginal, and boy do I get it. All the dirty jobs, bossed around, and I got to stop myself from getting mad. I don't want to lose my job so I just walk away. (*Murras* 100)

Event though Jayda does not rebel against unfair treatment at her workplace through, for instance, non-compliance, she silently expresses her resistance in the form of ignoring the injustices she has to suffer at the hands of her racist supervisor(s). In contrast, her brother Wilba becomes a civil rights activist and makes no attempt of hiding his emotions. In a very clear manner, he vents his anger against sanctimonious politicians and the Government policy of dispossessing Aborigines of their land:

WILBA. We gonna march, Mum. Hundreds of us, not just me. We all going up there to sit on that land when the trucks and bulldozers come in. Those politicians, mob of ignorant *wudjellas*. I'm sick to the gut of their false promises of self-determination.

¹⁷³ Information derived from <http://reconciliation.org.au/nsw/education-kit/stolen-generations/#forced>.

Sick of their shit lies, their corrupt laws, their diseases, their gaols ... yeah, their chains, their chains. (*Murras* 105/105)

Refusing to watch the Government continue with their outrageous procedures of stealing land from Indigenous peoples through forceful removals to urban areas while pretending to provide a better life for them was a necessary step towards the emergence of Aboriginal resilience and provided the basis for the reconciliation process. Ruby nourishes this process through her pride in being Black:

RUBY. [...] Let them think we different. I'll take them [Whites] for everything they gotta offer. [...] I'll take them for every hand-out, ration, free pass, for every penny. As long as they *don't* think we like them, we sittin' pretty. (*Murras* 101)

Ruby does not only want Whites to see that she and her people are different from them, she also strives to spark the fire of Black pride in Jayda because her daughter is experiencing a crisis of identity and the value of her tribal heritage, which is in many ways the opposite of Anglo-European traditions and values. It is this difference that Ruby wants to draw attention to and use as the core of Indigenous resilience and identity.

In Jack Davis's *The Dreamers*, both Peter and Eli's source of resistance against Eurocentrism is White stereotypes: Peter has a White lady pay for his bus fare as he "made out [he] lost it" (*The Dreamers* 21), therefore turning the White cliché of the impoverished Aborigine into a means of saving money while at the same time debunking such simplifying, Eurocentric depictions of Australia's First Nations. In a very similar manner, Eli sings Christian songs in the streets and makes money from it (cf. *The Dreamers* 52 and Chapter 6.4.3.). Apart from taking advantage of White people's stereotypical belief in the poor, penniless Aborigine begging in the streets, Eli clearly uses his knowledge of Christianity against White Australians in order to mock them and their culture. This is a very powerful act of resistance as Eli illustrates how subjective evaluations of a different community are, and that he himself can downplay White beliefs in the same way as Whites degraded Indigenous lifestyle, religion and heritage. It seems that "play[ing] it smart" (*The Dreamers* 16) with White people is his personal technique of keeping himself sane as well as of refusing to be discriminated against.

Bob Maza's *The Keepers* does offer a few examples of Aboriginal resilience despite the fact that the possibilities for such mild forms of protest were quite limited in the mid nineteenth century (the time period which the play is set in). Danny's practical joke he plays on the Mayor's dinner guests has been outlined already in Chapter 6.4.4. and certainly can be called a form of resistance against racial prejudice. Aboriginal resilience is also voiced by the author

himself. Ironically, Bob Maza has the Mayor, who conducts the inauguration ceremony of Clarendon House, refer to the British settlers who ruthlessly killed off and drove away thousands of Natives as the “fine pioneering stock of our nation” (*The Keepers* 197). In this way, the playwright reverses this statement’s content not only through the audience’s knowledge of historical events, which by no means can be called ‘heroic’, but also by letting the play end with Michael being stabbed by the angry townspeople for being a “nigger lover” (*The Keepers* 225). Consequently, the wording ‘fine pioneering stock’ and the Mayor’s further deceiving description of the first European settlers are automatically unmasked as sheer sanctimoniousness, impertinence as well as a blunt distortion of historic events. The author’s portrayal of these sanctimonious, half-hearted White attempts to “help” Aboriginal people automatically serve the function of unmasking the degree of White atrocities and power over Indigenous Australians as well as the latter group’s resilience (empowerment) through acts which refuse to conform with Eurocentric, hegemonic policies.

6.5.2. Aboriginal Resilience as the Reversal of Existing Power Structures as Presented in the Plays

As has been hinted at several times throughout this thesis, Aboriginal authors, including Bob Maza, Eva Johnson and Jack Davis, employ a myriad of different strategies to directly and/or indirectly question White paternalistic and imperialistic power structures. Apart from making political statements that can only be missed when choosing to ignore them, Aboriginal authors subvert Western dramatic standards and, hence, create a whole new subgenre - that of Aboriginal drama.¹⁷⁴ This rejection of the unquestioned hegemony of European literary and theatrical traditions is a continuation and/or artistic implementation of Aboriginal authors’ resistance against White subjugation, representative of all other Australian Indigenous peoples, and is an important form of Aboriginal resilience. It is achieved in two ways: Firstly, allusions or direct references to problematic issues in the history of Black and White Australian contact are presented (and commented on, giving Aboriginal Australians a voice). Secondly, a variety of aesthetic means are employed to challenge existing power structures as well as to illustrate the originality of Aboriginal Australian drama.

Starting with the first method, frequent mention of troublesome issues such as police violence, the extraordinarily high rate of Aboriginal incarceration and the despotically run missions in the name of Aboriginal ‘protection’ policies outline the sufferings Indigenous peoples had

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 182 and 186.

(and occasionally still have) to endure under White authorities. As exemplified in the previous chapter, the allusions to and direct references to Fremantle Gaol, for instance, prevent the audience (and as such the wider public) from sweeping under the carpet and/or letting sink into oblivion these hideous events; the playwrights also act against a collective neglect of these important social issues. Additionally, controversial issues such as the hidden sterilization practices, part of the (by some conservative colonialists still denied) genocidal intentions of the White government, the deliberate introduction of alcohol to Indigenous communities in order to destroy tribal family ties and traditional Native lifestyle, or the horrifying practice of forceful removals of half-caste children from their Native mothers are presented as mere historic facts without leaving any doubt about their actual credibility and historicity. Hence, widespread denials of these White atrocities, sometimes still perpetuated in Australian textbooks and political speeches, are counteracted, posing a potent challenge to White renditions of the one and only colonial truth of Australian history. At the same time, the Australian government's sanctimoniousness and despotism which failed to present numerous differentiating versions of historic events is uncovered, again stating that Indigenous peoples will no longer tolerate political cover-ups of atrocities committed against Australia's First Nations.

The second method adopted by the three playwrights Johnson, Davis and Maza to denounce the existing imbalance regarding the distribution of power between Black and White communities is much more subtle as it is voiced through a conversion into literary terms: The hegemony of European literary traditions is rejected in various ways, therefore creating an entirely new form of drama which resists any comparison to White Australian theater. The first strategy employed in order to adapt the traditional genre of drama to the needs of Aboriginal authors and content (and, hence, confirm and strengthen the vitality of present-day Aboriginal culture) is the circular manner in which plays are designed: The action in Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* commences and concludes with an Aboriginal lament: In the initial scene, it is Worru who bemoans the plight of his people, whereas his niece Dolly ends the entire play with a similar-minded requiem of the Indigenous predicament after Uncle Worru's death, which is foreshadowed many times. Likewise, Bob Maza's *The Keepers* begins and closes with the death of two men: Firstly, it is Koonowar and James who die in battle; approximately twenty years later, their sons Daniel and Michael are killed by an angry White mob. Similarly, Eva Johnson's Granny in *Murras* predicts the scattering of their tribe and dreads the disappearance of her people at the very beginning. Her apprehension in parts comes true when the news of Jayda's involuntary, hidden sterilization are received and is

repeated when Granny's daughter Ruby concludes the final scene with a lament of the loss of tribal unity. This circular action underlines not only the belief in a cyclical course of life, but also in a circular vision of history in general, contrasting Western assumptions of a linear movement of time and events (cf. Chapter 4.2.) and the Indigenous conviction that death "leads to a reunion of the departed with their ancestors in the Dreaming" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 182). Gilbert explains the Aboriginal concept of time and the authors' application of that concept in their texts: "Constructions of nonlinear time take different forms in various plays: juxtaposition, elision, and overlaying of different time frames; repetition of visual and aural images; representations of Dreamtime time; and the incorporation of historical documents into the enacted texts." (Gilbert 54) Jack Davis makes use of all these techniques in his play *The Dreamers* through his main character Uncle Worru: When the old Aboriginal man (day)dreams about his past – a time spent living on traditional land in traditional Indigenous ways -, present and past are no longer separable but appear to be amalgamated to Worru and the Indigenous audience, who believe that the present is innately connected to the past and vice versa. Both other authors also deal with the aspect of nonlinearity by using elisions in the form of time shifts: In the case of Bob Maza's *The Keepers*, a time period of roughly 50 years is squeezed into a performance (or reading) time frame of approximately two hours.¹⁷⁵ Eva Johnson indicates the interconnectedness of past and present when squeezing the events of several years into a few short sentences which conclude and begin two separate scenes within two separate acts:

[...] *The sounds of the bush can be heard. RUBY, WILBA and JAYDA enter and slowly gather all their belongings, Then they hear a bulldozer, off. The family exits.*

[Beginning of ACT THREE, SCENE ONE.]

The year is 1970. The family have moved to the city. (Murras 98-99)

Simultaneously to presenting an abrupt change in settings, the playwright juxtaposes current and previous incidents - events that decisively altered this family's way of life. Hence, the dramatic turns the lives of Indigenous communities took after White invasion are mirrored.¹⁷⁶ The sounds of the bulldozers and the bush are employed by Johnson as antithetical and belonging to two opposing worlds. No other means of telling or acting out could be more effective than these aural images in order to signify the radical changes that are under way.

¹⁷⁵ In the stage directions before the beginning of the action, the author explains that Elizabeth is "in her late twenties" in the first act, and already in her seventies in the final scene (cf. *The Keepers* 170); it can, therefore, be concluded that the play depicts approximately fifty years of the women's lives.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Mühlbacher 39.

Several other visual and acoustic symbols help to convey similar notions (for instance, the recurrence of the *murras* (hands) in Johnson's text, the thunder heard in initial scenes of Maza's *The Keepers* and Davis's usage of the Dancer figure in *The Dreamers*). In this way, Aboriginal concepts of time and life in general are reaffirmed.

Furthermore, Indigenous authors incorporate mythical elements into their plays, highlighting the importance of the Dreamtime for every-day Indigenous life while defying Western linearity. This is what Maufort calls a matching of "hybrid content with a hybrid form" (*Transgressive Itineraries* 183), pointing to the fusion of "Western realism and Aboriginal myth" (Maufort, *Unsettling Narratives* 105-110)¹⁷⁷ and the vast amount of topics addressed in Indigenous texts. The ending of *Murras*, for example, is "anti-climatic" (Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 186) – a clear sign used by Johnson in order to rebel against Western traditions as well as to create something new which cannot (and should not) be compared to (Anglo-)European plays. That the exertion of power by Whites is reversed on stage can also be exemplified through the authors' portraying of "Other(ed) versions of history" (Gilbert 53), for instance, the practice of snatching half-caste children from their Aboriginal mothers' breasts as outlined by Granny in *Murras*, or the frequent mention of mysterious Aboriginal deaths in custody - therefore leaving no doubt about the Aboriginal interpretation of history. The connection of past and present helps to reenact historical events from the Indigenous perspective, which is "a symbolic reclamation of space/place by and for Aboriginal culture" (Gilbert 53). An example from *The Keepers* is the depiction of first contact between European settlers and Native Australians: Whereas White accounts often claim that force was only used when necessary (i.e. out of self-defense), Maza's and other Aboriginal narratives paint a completely antithetical picture:

DANNY. [...] These are supposed to be peace times ... [Indicating ELIZABETH] These are supposed to be civilized people ... We're supposed to be the savages ... [To ELIZABETH] Yet none of my people have been the savages ... the barbarians that your people are ... [You] slither around and poison poor gentle people whose only wrong was they were on land that the worms needed. [DANNY pulls some papers from his shirt] [...] Here: ... a report of poisoned bodies of Aboriginal people ... Traces of strychnine found in flour ... found in water holes ... No charges laid (The Keepers 216)

Textual examples like this one leave the reader in no doubt about the truthfulness of the (fictional) events portrayed or the violence involved on the part of White authorities (in cases such as stealing half-caste children or secretly sterilizing Aboriginal girls), clearly drawing

¹⁷⁷ Exact page reference could not be verified; article read online.

parallels to actual historic incidents. The dramatic texts therefore help to create an alternative glance at the past by offering a comparison between historical events (as portrayed in history books) with “lived experience” (Hosking 145) of Aborigines.

Another important method of adapting the traditional Western genre of drama to the needs and aims of Indigenous Australian authors is through their use of space. The stage is an excellent means of demonstrating just how contested (cultural and political) public space is in Australia. The microcosms of the theater is again employed to mirror the macrocosm of the troubled relationship of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Davis, but also Johnson and Maza, show that White institutions such as hospitals (e.g. in *The Dreamers*) are merely used as “quarantine” (Gilbert 64) and are “troped as an anathema to the well-being of Aboriginal culture” (Gilbert 69), which can be exemplified through Uncle Worru’s case: His state of health only worsens after each return from the hospital, which is presented as “a claustrophobic white ice box cut into a wall” (Gilbert 69). Furthermore, the authors indirectly point to the fact that missions only function as establishments to systematically exploit and destroy Aboriginal communities.¹⁷⁸

On the one hand, space for Aboriginal culture and values is demanded through a positive (re)affirmation of Aboriginality. It is not only strengthened through the incorporation of such uniquely Indigenous features as dance, storytelling, song and the Dreamtime into the plays, but it is also constructed and explained through stage design and set up. As has been briefly mentioned in Chapter 6.1.1., the division between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal identities is in parts constructed through stage props and costumes: According to Hosking, Aboriginal scenes usually take place out in nature or in open spaces or at least the center of the stage, while White characters are mainly found in “cramped square and rectangular spaces” (Hosking 145) on the outside corners of the stage.¹⁷⁹ Whereas it is difficult to understand the full extent to which this method is realized on stage from only reading the plays, stage directions usually convey this set-up:

Even though Hosking’s claim that Aboriginal scenes are usually set out in the open cannot be verified in the two plays *Murras* and *The Dreamers*, two entirely urban plays (mainly) set in cities or towns due to the forceful removals of the Indigenous communities from their tribal homelands, this proposition holds true for the third play *The Keepers*: As the entire first act of Maza’s play is set in 1850, a time in which Indigenous tribes were slowly forced to forfeit

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Gilbert 64/65.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Hosking 145.

their traditional lives due to White invasion, the Natives are portrayed in their natural environment, leading a life in harmony with nature:

Moonlight touches the leaves of the bulrushes. The night is alive with the life of the swamp. Off, a curlew calls and a woman's laugh breaks the silence. She is a new mother, proud of her achievement. [...] MIRNAT [...] comes to the fireplace and puts the baby down, then goes to the sea to wash herself. [...] She returns and drinks thirstily from a coolamon¹⁸⁰ and eats hungrily the berries and other food from her dillybag¹⁸¹. [...] (The Keepers 171)

On the contrary, the Scottish settlers James and Elizabeth Campbell feel most comfortable when protected from Australia's wild and strange flora and fauna in their makeshift new home, a facsimile of a European residence:

The Campbell camp, evening. The sea is heard in the background. An earthen stove made from the clay of a giant ants' nest glows in a corner. There is a small oil lamp burning on a table. JAMES writes in a journal. He studies his work for a while, then stands, stretches and walks to the edge of the tent. He looks out across the dark sea. [...] (The Keepers 188)

Obviously, the Australian environment is adapted to European ideas of a civilized home within a wild and dangerous landscape; James therefore stops at the "edge of the tent", not daring to move outdoors into the darkness but remaining in the perceived safety of his home. In contrast to his Native neighbors, he and his wife do not feel an innate connection between themselves and the land they live on.

As soon as Act 2 begins and Mirnat and Elizabeth have moved to a city environment after their husbands' tragic deaths, the action is relocated from the natural environment of the bush into closed buildings, apart from a few scenes in the garden. In the case of the other two plays, *Murras* and *The Dreamers*, the setting is shifted to buildings like the characters' homes or offices since the Aboriginal families have already been dispossessed of their land and moved into towns and cities. However, through frequent narrations about their tribal past, nature is called back into the action and it could be argued that the audience is almost taken aback to the bush through the detailed, atmospheric descriptions of life in the bush, which is more than different to what urban Aborigines' existence looks like today:

WORRU. [...] I remember bee stung you on the *tjenna*¹⁸² once, down Kunjaberrin swamp, an' I 'ad to carry you 'ome on me *moorlin*¹⁸³, nearly six mile. [...]

¹⁸⁰ A *coolamon* is a carrying vessel used by Aboriginal women to carry water, fruits, nuts etc.

¹⁸¹ A *dillybag* is a traditional bag used by Indigenous Australian tribes for food transportation.

¹⁸² *tjenna* is the Nyoongah term for "feet" (cf. *The Dreamers* 75).

¹⁸³ A person's back (cf. *The Dreamers* 75).

DOLLY. Yeah, I remember.

WORRU. Good place summertime, *moorditj*¹⁸⁴, plenty *dytje*¹⁸⁵, honey, berries and them *kohn*¹⁸⁶, big like that, taste like ‘taters.

DOLLY. And them summer beetles, [*holding her thumb and forefinger about five centimetres apart*] they used to be that long and us girls used to get a piece of cotton from the sleeves of our dresses and tie notes on their legs and throw the beetle up in the air and they would fly away and we wished some boy would find them and read the notes. [*Laughing*] [...] (*The Dreamers* 25/29)

The transfer of Indigenous characters to urban settings and into “cramped square and rectangular spaces” (Hosking 145) only speaks of the violent relocation policy of the White government, again indicating the sufferings of Native Australians under the settlers’ pretense of wanting to ‘protect’ the Indigenous peoples. In addition, the plays mirror the segregation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens, drawing a parallel between the happenings on stage and the actual situation in many Australian towns in the past and the present. Hence, space is also used in order to indicate the “hermetically sealed worlds segregating racial groups” (Gilbert and Tompkins 155). As has been illustrated in Chapter 6.2.3., the three plays offer a myriad of examples of members of the two ethnic groups who are striving to become accepted in the other community, resulting in animosity and sometimes even murder as a punishment for trying to cross the racial border. These characters, for example Danny and Michael in *The Keepers*, are then penalized for their “attempts to negotiate the complex spatial structures of their town and society” (Gilbert 65). Generally speaking, these are attempts to desegregate the Australian society. The extent of both communities’ resistance against the contemplated togetherness and cooperation of Black and White is criticized severely by all three authors as this resistance greatly hinders reconciliation.

Another important means of subverting power relations is through employing “the most localized site of all – the *body*” (Gilbert 66, emphasis added). Through acting on stage, resistance against imperial structures is offered simply through being present. Hence, by speaking and moving, the colonized community can appear as active subjects rather than being portrayed as “manipulable objects” (Gilbert 67), as has so often been the case in White representations of the Native Australians in film, theater and other media. In accord with my line of argumentation brought forward in Chapter 4, Gilbert claims that “[p]erformance as the verbal and visual articulation of the body in space-time seems the most logical medium for enacting such resistance” (66). Dance, as one of the most important aspects of Aboriginal

¹⁸⁴ The Nyoongah word for “good” (cf. *The Dreamers* 75).

¹⁸⁵ “meat” (cf. *The Dreamers* 73).

¹⁸⁶ “wild potato” (cf. *The Dreamers* 74).

cultural life, features prominently in almost any Indigenous play; Davis, Johnson and Maza are no exceptions. Through incorporating mythical characters such as the Dancer or the Mimi Spirit into the plays, Indigenous authors reserve space on stage and within the plays' performance time for these essential aspects of Aboriginal culture, thereby giving them special emphasis and importance. Jack Davis's Dancer appears in almost every scene and either symbolically (through means of body movements, dance and songs) mirrors Uncle Worru's state of health (and as such the state of all Indigenous Australians) or fulfills the old man's silent wishes; the Dancer also appears as potent reminder of the fascinating ancient culture of Indigenous Australians which is worth preserving. All of these functions of the Dancer figure can be illustrated in the following passage from *The Dreamers*:

[Didjeridoo crashes in, the lights change. The DANCER appears at front of stage and in stylised rhythmic steps searches for stone flints, finds them, builds and ignites a fire. Carefully he lifts the fire in cupped hands and carries it to the escarpment where he blows it gently, igniting a careful fire, and sits warming himself against a dark night sky as the music climaxes and cuts.] (The Dreamers 52)

The Dancer in *The Dreamers* and the Mimi in *Murras* both play a vital role in the two plays because they symbolize Aboriginal identity and provide a link to the Dreamtime and Indigenous culture at large - despite the fact that they are "not otherwise [...] character[s] in the play" (Gilbert 74). Moreover, they signify Aboriginal resilience. The importance of Indigenous culture is also underlined in Eva Johnson's play *Murras*, which begins with an appearance of the Mimi Spirit:

The MIMI SPIRIT sits in a coiled position before the Great Rainbow Serpent motif. The didjeridu begins to play and the MIMI SPIRIT wakes and slides across the stage, awakening the earth spirits. This is the birth dance of the Aboriginal Dreaming. [...] (Murras 85)

The Mimi Spirit is encountered again in Act 2 in Granny's dying scene when returning her "to the spiritual world of her dreaming" (*Murras* 98) through performing a danse macabre, and concludes the play by moving its body in "a full circle" (106).

In addition to emphasizing the significance of Dreaming stories, a symbolic request for (sociopolitical as well as cultural) space, representative of the Aboriginal request for equal treatment and the ending of racist policies in Australia, is made in the following excerpt from *The Dreamers*:

[[...] *An intricately painted DANCER appears on the escarpment against a dramatic red sky, dances down and across in front of them, pounding his feet into the stage. [...]] (The Dreamers 18)*

The Dancer is positioned on the escarpment, visible to everyone, “at front of stage”. The act of “pounding his feet into the stage” marks a powerful statement, ensuring that Aboriginal people will survive despite White injustices. This sends out a positive and hopeful message to Indigenous audiences as it helps to (re)affirm Aboriginal identity as something vibrantly alive and to be proud of;¹⁸⁷ the oral culture of Australia’s Native peoples clearly is a part of “contemporary Black reality” (Gilbert 75) and a prominent marker of the Black resilience movement. Emphasizing this point is crucial since dance and song, in particular, are often falsely attributed with the past and, hence, seen as archaic by non-Indigenous peoples despite the continuing significance of these forms of expression for present-day Aboriginal cultural practices. By incorporating traditional dancer figures into the plays, Indigenous playwrights reclaim (cultural) space for Indigenous peoples – not only on stage but ideally also in real life.

Another “subversive tactic” (Gilbert 68) employed by many Aboriginal authors is based on costumes and (naked) bodies of Indigenous Australians. They can function as signs of the racial Other and of the differences between two ethnic groups. The initial scene of Bob Maza’s *The Keepers* is a superb example:

Two figures in leotards emerge from opposite sides of the stage. One is dressed completely in black, the other white. [...] MIRNAT enters carrying a baby wrapped in skins. She is still in black leotards, but now wears a kangaroo or wallaby skin. [...] [S]he studies her newborn child inquisitively and speaks to him in Boandik. [...] She holds him to the firelight to study him more closely. Lights crossfade to another area where ELIZABETH, the Scottish mother, still in white leotards, also studies her child. She is draped in a shawl or some other simple costume which implies the character. [...] (The Keepers 171)

As becomes obvious, Maza employs costumes in order to act against the portrayal of Indigenous Australians as primitive brutes (and, thus, “challenge[s] the imperial gaze” (Gilbert 66) – a depiction often perpetuated through White illustrations in film, TV, paintings, drama and written texts. In contrast, the author presents both women as being dressed in casual attire, doing their daily chores and taking care of their newborn babies. In this way, Maza focuses on the similarities of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people instead of sticking to common depictions of the inherent and insurmountable differences. Similarly, song and dance are incorporated in most, if not all Aboriginal plays because it is an integral part of

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Hosking 146.

Indigenous culture as well as an “equally important means of spatial telling” (Carter 346, qtd. in Gilbert 71) as speech. Again, Maza uses both media in the same scene of *The Keepers*:

[...] *The black dancer performs a dance of the home of the Boandik, then freezes. The Aboriginal chant fades out and slow, distant Scottish bagpipes are heard. The white dancer performs a dance of Scotland. [...] The Aboriginal mother sings ‘Warinor’; the Scottish mother sings ‘Brae Toraetor’. Though ages and distances apart, the songs harmonise. [...] (The Keepers 171)*

The author portrays dancing and singing as being important for both Indigenous Australian as well as Scottish (European) tradition and comments on the possibility (and potential) of “cross-cultural communication” (Gilbert 72). In this scene, the two women sing traditional songs of their home countries which, despite their vast differences, harmonize because they are sung for the same reasons. In addition, dance can be and is used as a vehicle to rebel against the hegemony of European theatrical conventions. Most Western critics downgrade the incorporation of dance and song into plays as mere adornment, but fail to acknowledge the meaning of these cultural practices not only for Indigenous culture, but the interpretation of the dramatic performance as well. Additionally, singing and dancing feature in theatrical texts to (re)gain “stage space (and thus a cultural space)” (Gilbert 73) for the colonized. They also stand for a “symbolic reclamation of Aboriginal land” (Gilbert 73), which can be understood when again looking at Jack Davis’s Dancer who is “*pounding his feet into the stage*” (*The Dreamers* 18).

Through making use of all these different dramatic means, Aboriginal playwrights make a “symbolic reclamation of space/place by and for Aboriginal culture” (Gilbert 53) in order to “undermine the legitimacy of white settlement and assert Other(ed) versions of history” (ibid.). This constitutes a powerful act of insisting on their right to cultural acceptance by the dominant group and speaks of the vitality of the Black resilience movement. Furthermore, it is a crucial statement since it acts against the feeling of hopelessness shared by many Aboriginal Australians because history has often taught them that staying silent will keep them out of trouble (with White authorities), or that their points of view are invalid anyway. Reclaiming space on stage sends out an important, potent message to Aboriginal audiences, suggesting that there is a place for them where their opinions can be voiced, will be heard and taken into consideration.

7. Conclusion

The thesis at hand has explored the troubled relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The three plays *Murras*, *The Dreamers* and *The Keepers* have been examined in detail in order to gain insights into the nature of and investigate possible reasons for such a violent clash of cultures between Black and White Australians, focusing on the selected issues of identity, power, dispossession and alienation, the linguistic manifestation of violent intercultural encounters in literary texts as well as Indigenous resistance against (cultural and political) settler colonialism. In this process, particular attention was paid to the (means of) construction of the problematic nature of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communication/coexistence instead of regarding the literary portrayals as a one-to-one depiction of reality.

As has been demonstrated in chapter 2, so-called 'scientific' theories of race, including Social Darwinism, served as powerful tools for the justification of the colonization of the Australian continent and its native inhabitants. These prejudicial concepts were then integrated into the colonizers' system of law and remained there until the late 1960s; some of these concepts still linger in present-day White Australia alongside restrictive policies which greatly hinder intercultural understanding between Black and White citizens. The potential of drama for the presentation and assertion of "Other(ed) versions of history" (Gilbert 53), has been expounded. As outlined in section 4, the use of cultural manifestations such as dance, song, storytelling and Indigenous languages clearly help to boost pride in Aboriginality while at the same time providing a myriad of different versions of present-day concepts of 'Indigeneity' for both rural as well as urban contexts; Native Australian drama also produces alternative views on historic events, therefore undermining the hegemony of White history writing which has more often than not left out Aboriginal voices and concealed shameful European atrocities. Indigenous authors brilliantly make use of the full potential of drama since it offers opportunities for the "remapping of space, the reframing of time, the relocation of sightlines" (Gilbert 2) as well as the redefinition of 'Aboriginality'.

The issue of identity construction has been explored in much detail, unveiling that two main techniques are employed by the authors in their plays: The first one draws on the differences between one's own community and another group, hence creating an artificial border between a 'we' and a 'they'. Therefore, this first method of characterization was termed 'juxtaposition technique'. The second means of constructing Black and/or White identity is the 'derogation technique', which focuses on the negative portrayal of the other community. It has been

revealed in this analysis that both Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous characters employed both methods. However, White identity construction relied much more heavily on an assertion of the (perceived and/or constructed) deviation of their traditions from those of the Black population. Consequently, it can be deduced that white self-perception (as presented in *The Keepers*, *Murras* and *The Dreamers*) is mainly based on a definition of what they are not in comparison to the other group rather than based on their own group-specific markers. In addition, the examination of this topic also revealed that the division between Black and White Australians in the texts is also set up and intensified through stage props such as costumes and the use of space on stage, secretly but noticeably celebrating and (re)making Aboriginalities. As has been illustrated throughout this paper, the concept of 'Indigeneity' is continuously being reshaped in Black Australian drama, therefore offering a variety of different concepts of 'Aboriginality' in order to resist the devastating effects common discourses often have on the self-perception of Native citizens. It is these arbitrary constructions of 'Aboriginality' as a counterpart to White (i.e. Anglo-European) culture that have the most disruptive influence on a peaceful coexistence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. It has also been propounded in this thesis that a more harmonious coexistence of Black and White cannot be achieved lest Aboriginal individuals are given (back) the right to freely determine their own identity instead of having a certain identity forced upon themselves by the wider public. Closely connected are the topics of chapters 6.2. and 6.3., which have demonstrated how the Indigenous characters of *The Dreamers*, *Murras* and *The Keepers* suffer from imperialist mindsets and colonialist practices which become obvious through the abuse of power by White politicians, policemen, lawyers etc. – another major cause of strained intercultural relations in the country. The section on Aboriginal resilience has demonstrated that the political agenda of all three authors is realized through the reversal of stereotypes, for instance by depicting violent White policemen or troopers who prove to behave much more like the brutes they claim the Aborigines are. In this way, Maza, Johnson and Davis publicly condemn the racist attitudes of the Australian police forces and Government. Through the incorporation of these issues into their texts, the playwrights stimulate a public discussion of these topics in order to encourage disclosure of the many 'dark sides' of the colonialist heritage in Australia's history.

Section four has shed light on another method of enhancing the status of Indigenous culture: Native languages (Nyoongah in *The Dreamers*, a mix of Ngarrenjeri and Pitjantjatjara in Eva Johnson's *Murras* and Boandik in the case of Maza's *The Keepers*) are used occasionally or even extensively in order to, on the one hand, point out that tribal languages *are* valid codes

of communication and, on the other hand, to reverse the practice of subjugating the country's Indigenous peoples via linguistic means. The fictional world set up in the plays draws parallels to the reality in colonial Australia with its aim of creating one homogenous society, including linguistic imperialism. The authors' usage of tribal languages as well as other modes of non-verbal communication constitutes a powerful symbolic act of resistance against the hegemony of Western literary traditions as well as the unquestioned superiority of literate cultures. Moreover, it has been propounded that the incorporation of Indigenous languages as well as extralinguistic articulation, for example sign language, offer clever modes of mitigating trenchant political criticism and sarcasm. Another result of the analyses of the plays is that Aboriginal humor is not only employed for entertainment's sake, but serves important functions: While providing a spirit of Aboriginal solidarity through elevating Black cultural and linguistic habits, the political value of Indigenous humor is comprised of its potential for (subtle) criticism of the colonialist structures that existed or still exist in Australia's society and system of law.

The final chapter of section six has illustrated numerous examples of Black resilience to be found in the three plays. It has been demonstrated that a variety of methods of resistance against White injustices are employed by the characters of the plays: They range from bearing through silent neglect of racist acts or remarks, avoidance of contact with non-Natives, attempts of inviting Whites to open discourse about their xenophobic behavior to brave acts of defiance and outright protesting. The depiction of most White authorities as ruthless, selfish and, in many cases, also sanctimonious is another technique chosen by the playwrights in order to denounce White paternalistic power structures whilst avoiding setting up crude oppositions of good Aborigine versus evil colonizer.

Another important endeavor of this thesis has been to examine how the rather traditional Western genre of drama has been adjusted by the Indigenous playwrights in order to incorporate Aboriginal issues and cultural beliefs. In conclusion, it can be said that various aspects of the oral tradition, such as song, dance and storytelling, as well as mythical elements from the Dreaming are introduced into the dramatic plot, pointing out the significance of these features of Indigenous mythology which are much more than simple 'adornment'. In addition, Black Australian plays are characterized by a circular design, mirroring the Aboriginal belief in the interconnectedness of past, present and future. Moreover, space on stage has been employed in order to empower Indigenous culture and to state that Aboriginal traditions and languages have their validity and a right to be acknowledged; this can certainly be classified

as “a symbolic reclamation of space/place by and for Aboriginal culture” (Gilbert 53). Subsequently, as has been expounded, entirely new dramatic techniques have emerged, making Aboriginal drama unique whereas simultaneously also distinguishing itself from Western theatrical traditions in order to escape comparison to European plays.

While writing this thesis and analyzing the nature of culture clash in Australia, suggestions for the reconciliation process have crystallized: First and foremost, education seems to be a major stepping stone for a less strained relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Gaining cultural knowledge about each other’s practices and values will certainly reduce the dangers of falling prey to common stereotypes. Secondly, each and every Australian citizen should be convinced of the occurrence of atrocities committed in the settlement process, including such contested issues as genocidal practices as well as the kidnapping of half-caste children. Only if these violent acts are recognized by every non-Indigenous person can the healing process start and restrictive, paternalistic legislation be fully eradicated. Thirdly, self-determination for all Native communities must be granted in order to end the long history of heteronomy of Aboriginal peoples by European authorities who claim to know what is ‘best’ for the Indigenous population. In this endeavor to advance the Black resilience movement in Australia, the country’s Aboriginal writers have played a significant role by supporting the struggle for equality. They have also kept the Indigenous spirit alive in times of great regressions in Native autonomy by pointing out that self-determination is crucial for the survival of the Indigenous heritage and that reconciliation does not entail letting go of national, social, or culture-specific identities.¹⁸⁸

An analysis of and a comparison to Aboriginal texts of other genres would have been an exciting addition to the close examination of three examples of the genre of Aboriginal drama; however, the scope of this thesis would have been more than exceeded if such an endeavor had been made. Such in-depth research, therefore, remains to be carried out in order to shed light on various issues, for example the comparability of crossgeneric examinations of Aboriginal authors’ methods of reversing power structures in Australia, the use of Indigenous languages and its functions as well as the methods of strengthening of Aboriginality and Indigenous cultural practices in literary texts other than plays.

In summary, the following findings can be presented: The portrayals of the sources and nature of the clash between the two cultures (Indigenous versus non-Indigenous) in Australia largely

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Shoemaker, *Black Words* 11, Maufort, *Transgressive Itineraries* 177, Brisbane as well as Shoemaker’s *Interview with Jack Davis* (exact page numbers for both sources not available, articles read online).

resemble the actual historic events in the history of the country's colonization despite the fact that the texts portray fictionalized versions of reality; however, they are significant examples of alternative views on White accounts of the settlement process and subsequent dealings with the First Nations. Therefore, it is valid to say that the playwrights follow a clear political goal and have both encouraged and kindled the Black resilience movement. Maza, Johnson and Davis, alongside most (if not all) other Indigenous writers, always strive for a reversal of power structures and aim at providing (cultural) space (on stage) for resistance against White superiority. The analyses of this thesis's research focus have shown that Aboriginal writing is always a comment on and a reaction to the White society surrounding it, but much more than that it is an "exploration of the nature of 'Aboriginality' itself: what it means to be black in Australia." (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 10). However, despite the fact that Indigenous literary production can certainly be identified as in parts having arisen out of a need to voice anger and concern about paternalistic colonialist practices, it is much more than trauma writing. Unique works have been created which seek to emphasize the challenges facing every Aboriginal Australian: tackling the enormously painful task of coming to terms with their peoples' violent past of being exploited over centuries while cherishing and adapting the remainders of their ancient culture to present-day Indigenous cultural practices and lifestyles. Above all, Aboriginal writing is a statement confirming that Indigenous Australians have not only survived centuries of subjugation, but that they have a voice and that their heritage is alive and vibrant.

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ABSTRACT

Despite notable achievements in the fields of politics and legislation, including the public apology to victims of the Stolen Generations by former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 and the recent discussions about constitutionally recognizing Australia's Aboriginal people through a referendum suggested by the Gillard Government, the issue of culture clash in Australia has lost none of its explosiveness as it is still an enormously socio-politically charged subject. This thesis explores reasons for and the nature of the strained crosscultural relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by providing a discussion of the concept of culture clash for the Australian context as well as analyzing its representation in three Aboriginal plays: Bob Maza's *The Keepers*, Eva Johnson's *Murras* and *The Dreamers* by Jack Davis. Manifestations of culture clash in the texts are examined by means of addressing the topics of identity, the connection of power and politics, dislocation and uprootedness, the function of Aboriginal languages as a form of resistance against linguistic imperialism as well as Black resilience against White subjugation. Moreover, the suitability of drama for Aboriginal issues is explained in detail. In a next step, the thesis sheds light on how the playwrights incorporate aspects from Aboriginal mythology and employ a circular structure, the (naked) body, space, Black humor as well as Indigenous (sign) languages in order to adapt the traditional genre of drama for the set goals of Black playwrights – to decolonize the Australian stage and to assert alternative versions of history – as well as to denounce past and present injustices directed at Native Australians by White authorities. Their political agenda and goal to provide aestheticized versions of history and/or reality are illustrated, permitting the conjecture that the portrayals of the clash between the two cultures largely resemble the actually occurring atrocities. In a final step, based on thorough study of Aboriginal needs and claims, preconditions and suggestions for measures for the advancement of the reconciliation process between Black and White Australians are proposed. The eminent role of Indigenous writers in this endeavor to foster national healing by closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens is highlighted.

GERMAN SUMMARY (Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache)

Trotz beachtlicher politischer und rechtlicher Errungenschaften in den letzten Jahren (hier seien insbesondere die national und international lange erwartete offizielle Entschuldigung des ehemaligen Präsidenten Kevin Rudd im Jahr 2008 an die Opfer der sogenannten „Gestohlenen Generationen“ [„Stolen Generations“], sowie die aktuelle Debatte der Regierung von Premierministerin Julia Gillard um die verfassungsrechtliche Anerkennung der Aborigines, erwähnt) hat der Kampf zwischen den Kulturen in Australien keineswegs an Brisanz und Aktualität verloren, da es sich hierbei immer noch um eine äußerst heikle soziopolitische Thematik handelt. Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht Gründe für und die Beschaffenheit der belasteten interkulturellen Beziehung zwischen indigenen und nichtindigenen Australiern, indem zuerst der theoretische Hintergrund zur Konzeptualisierung des Aufeinanderprallens der beiden unterschiedlichen Gruppen im nationalen Kontext erläutert und im Anschluss die literarische Abbildung dieses Kampfes der Kulturen anhand dreier Dramen von einheimischen Autoren analysiert wird. Dazu wurden die Stücke *The Keepers* von Bob Maza, *Murras* von Eva Johnson und *The Dreamers* von Jack Davis ausgewählt. Die verschiedenen Manifestierungen von Culture Clash werden, so wie sie in den genannten Dramen geschildert sind, anhand von Abhandlungen über mit dem Kampf der Kulturen in Zusammenhang stehenden Themenkreisen untersucht. Im Einzelnen sind dies Identität(skonstruktion), der Zusammenhang von Macht und Politik, Entwurzelung durch Enteignung und Zwangsumsiedelung, die Funktion von in den Stücken verwendeten Eingeborensprachen als Form von Widerstand gegen sprachlichen Imperialismus als auch die gemeinschaftliche Auflehnung und Standhaftigkeit der Aborigines gegen die andauernde Unterdrückung ihres Volkes durch die weißen Landsleute und ehemaligen Kolonialherrscher. Darüber hinaus wird die hervorragende Eignung des Genres der Dramatik für die Anliegen und Problembereiche der australischen Ureinwohner erklärt und verdeutlicht. In der Folge gibt die vorliegende Diplomarbeit Aufschluss über die Methoden, welche die Autoren einsetzen, um das traditionelle Genre der Dramatik für ihre dezidierten Ziele, sowohl die australischen Bühnen (symbolisch für die australische Gesellschaft als Ganzes) zu dekolonisieren als auch alternative Versionen der Geschichtsschreibung geltend zu machen, abzuwandeln. Zu diesen Mitteln zählen die Verwendung folgender Aspekte: die Eingliederung von Teilen der mündlichen Tradition und Mythologie der australischen Ureinwohner in die Stücke; kreisförmige, nonlineare Handlungsstruktur, (nackte) Körper, Räumlichkeit, Aborigines-spezifischer Humor sowie indigene (Zeichen-)Sprachen. Wie deutlich gemacht wird, dienen diese Elemente und Konzepte den Dramatikern auch dazu, auf

vergangene und aktuell vorherrschende Missstände hinzuweisen und diese auf Schärfste zu verurteilen. In diesem Zusammenhang werden die politischen Absichten der Autoren sowie deren Zielsetzung, künstlerisch aufgearbeitete Versionen der geschichtlichen Ereignisse und/oder der Realität zu liefern, erläutert. Dieses Vorhaben lässt die Vermutung plausibel erscheinen, dass die Illustrationen des Kampfes der Kulturen in den Theaterstücken den tatsächlichen historischen Gräueltaten sehr nahe kommen. Basierend auf intensiven Auseinandersetzungen mit den Bedürfnissen und Forderungen der Aborigines werden zum Abschluss Vorbedingungen und Vorschläge für den offiziellen Versöhnungsprozess zwischen Ureinwohnern und weißen Australiern angeführt. Für eine erfolgreiche Vergangenheitsbewältigung müssen auch die eklatanten Unterschiede zwischen indigenen und nicht-indigenen Bürgern hinsichtlich der generellen Lebensqualität und –umstände in den Griff bekommen werden. Es wird darauf hingewiesen, dass die eingeborenen Schriftsteller in einem solchen gesellschaftlichen Heilungsprozess eine Schlüsselrolle einnehmen.

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