FROM INVISIBILITY TO HISTORICITY: A STUDY OF SELECTED PLAYS OF JACK DAVIS, JANE HARRISON AND LEAH PURCELL

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DECLARATION

I, ***M.C. Lalthazuali***, hereby declare that the subject of the thesis ***From Invisibility to Historicity: A Study of Selected Plays of Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell***, is the record of work done by me, that the content of this thesis did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the thesis has not been submitted by me for any research degree in any other university or institute.

This is being submitted to the Mizoram University for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English.

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M.C. LALTHAZUALI

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION

Out of the Aboriginal[1] non-history there has emerged a group of sensitive and self-conscious writers among Australian Aborigines who reclaim identity and claim to have their history which is more misrepresented than forgotten. The Aborigines were not invisible non-entities when the white Britishers encountered them on the Australian land, they were not invisible when wars were massacres of hostile black tribes, or when their children were snatched away from home to fill the servants quarters, Christian churches, and to serve the Imperialist expansionism. But in the early white histories they were simply nonexistent. As expected the Aborigines had no written history to challenge and answer the white man's records, the so-called histories of Australia. But as Aboriginal races they are not devoid of their oral stories. With such stories as the backdrop to new developments in modern history, some Aboriginal writers have brought out their life-stories in the form of literature which the world takes cognizance of as important for a tribe or community's identity marker. Some of these writers especially dramatists are selected for the present study. Jack Davis, a male author and two female authors Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell are studied in order to place in view their human concerns and struggles which write their history as a counter-balance to other historians. The underlying reason for Indigenous playwrights and writers need for reconstructing their history stems mainly from the catastrophic and complex nature of the Aboriginal's encounter with colonialism. They have not only been colonized but have been permanently rendered the most victimized and marginalized people in their own land.

With the growing migration of the white Europeans they were completely outnumbered and so the chances of any radical political action or any sustained cultural resistance are insignificant. Moreover the post-contacts displacements of Aboriginal people in reserves and missions had a profound impact on their lives, which continued to have deteriorating effect on their culture. Thus, it becomes imperative for the Aboriginal writers and playwrights to challenge, examine, recognize, accept, and affirm their past, though it

might represent their conquest and dispossession. Having a link with the past is necessary for racial self-retrieval and for creating an acceptable and emancipating sense of individual and cultural wholeness. It also becomes therapeutic for the cultural fracture instigated by the destructive impact of colonial subjugation and a requirement for cultural retrieval and for a continuing struggle against white oppression. In the first hundred years since the arrival of the Europeans, the Aborigines were invisible; they lived on the fringes of the white society. The white colonizers robbed the Aborigines of their land rights, destroyed their religion and deprived them of the language, culture and tradition. They felt the Aboriginal people as heading for inevitable extinction.

To first put things into perspective, a brief history of Australia's colonization becomes essential. The British Empire comprised of the dominions, colonies, protectorates, mandates and other territories ruled or administered by the imperialist, United Kingdom. This imperialism originated with the overseas possessions and trading posts established by England between the late 16th and early 18th centuries. At its height, it was the largest empire in human history and, for over a century, was the foremost global power. By 1922, the British Empire held sway over about 458 million people and covered more than 33,700,000 Km2 (13,012,000 sq. m). As a result, its political legacy, linguistic and cultural legacy remained widespread. At the peak of its power, the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" was often used to describe the British Empire, because its expanse around the globe meant that the sun was always shining on at least one of its territories. Since 1718, transportation to the American colonies had been the outcome of a penalty for various criminal offences in Britain. When Britain lost its thirteen colonies in 1783, it turned to the newly discovered lands of Australia.[2] In 1770, James Cook discovered the eastern coast of Australia while on a scientific voyage to the South Pacific Ocean, and claimed the continent for Britain, and named it New South Wales. In 1778, Joseph Banks, Cook's botanist on the voyage, presented

evidence to the government on the suitability of Botany Bay for the establishment of a penal settlement, and in 1787, the first shipment of convicts set sail, arriving in 1788. After a grueling eight-month voyage from Portsmouth, the First Fleet reached Australia and sailed into Botany Bay on 18 January 1788. On 26 January, 1788 (now Australia's national day), the British flag was raised at Sydney Cove, and the land became a 'settled colony' and a dominion of the Crown. Under common law, all those born in dominions were British subjects. Aborigines therefore became British subjects but lost any proprietary rights in the land they inhabited. Upon annexation of the colony, ultimate title to all land was vested in the Crown. Captain Arthur Phillip, a naval officer, was appointed the first governor of Australia (Flood 33).

The original inhabitants of Australia before the British arrival were the Aborigines. Australian Aboriginal culture was complex and extraordinarily diverse. It is one of the world's longest surviving cultures, which goes back at least 50,000 years. They were semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers, with each clan having its own territory from which they made their living. These territories or traditional lands were traditionally demarcated by geographic boundaries such as rivers, lakes and mountains. Aborigines were supremely skillful in adapting to their environments. They all shared an intimate understanding of, and relationship with the land. For the Aboriginal people all that is sacred was localized in the landscape. It was the basis of their spiritual life. In short, the land and identity were inseparable. With the establishment of Britain's penal colony in 1788 in Australia, the lives of the Aborigines changed radically. All local attempts to resist the white colonizers were effectively quelled; and the Aborigines came under the control of colonial government. With passage of time, the Aboriginal people were evicted from their traditional land, deprived of their traditional bush food and got continually devastated by disease, malnutrition, poverty, alcoholism, violence and despair. They lost their language, their culture and ancient ways of worship. Rape and

abduction of Aboriginal women became common. Most Aboriginal people existed on the fringes of towns and pastoral properties or were herded into reserves and missions. Until the 1960s, they had no citizenship, no voting rights. The state was the guardian of all Aboriginal children and many (mostly half-castes) were taken away by force from their families to be raised in institutions. They have become aliens, outsiders or the other in their own land.

From their first contact with the Aborigines in 1788 in Australia, the white European settlers saw the Aborigines as naked, dirty, savage, pagan and uncivilized. One European wrote in 1888 that the Aborigines were 'wandering, restless, half-starved, lazy, dirty naked savages, homeless and miserably depraved by superstitious and terrors, distrust and fear' (Broome 93). They were even compared to dogs as in 1835, Reverend W. Yate told the government inquiry that he had heard again and again what people said of the Aborigines, that they were nothing better than dogs, and that it was no more harm to shoot them down as it would be like shooting a dog (Broome 34). The white[3] Europeans viewed their Christian religion and European values and practices could "civilize" the Aborigines. So, in order to "civilize" the Aborigines, the white government set up reserves for the Aborigines, those who stayed at the reserves were provided food, clothing, etc. In these reserves the Aborigines were not allowed to perform their religious rituals. There were many rules imposed by the white colonizers that the Aborigines had to follow, and if the Aborigines did not follow those rules they were kicked out from the reserves. The problem faced by the Aborigines was that, inside the reserves they were taught to live in the European lifestyle and so they tended to forget their skill of hunting and gathering. So when they were kicked out from the reserves, their life support stopped, as they were made dependent on the support and aids provided by the Europeans. They had become dependent on the European invaders since their land and food sources were taken away. This framework of dependence was symbolized by the annual feast and blanket distribution that governor Macquarie had instituted in 1817 at Parramatta. In

succeeding years Aborigines came from almost 150 kilometers away to receive this handout which they perceived as easy takings. No article of trade in return was demanded and the blanket could quickly be traded for alcohol, food or tobacco. By the 1830s the government transferred the blanket distribution to the interior and suspended it in 1844, because it encouraged idleness much to the anger of some of the Aborigines (Broome 39). Therefore, within a short span of time the white European colonizers were able to achieve their goal i.e. making the Aborigines fully dependent on them, thus rendered themselves an ownership of the land and the people in it.

The white Europeans felt that their culture is superior to all others, especially to indigenous cultures, and they felt that it was necessary for European culture to subjugate and assimilate Indigenous cultures in European cultures. This complex of superiority has pervaded the Eurocentric world for centuries. Even Western thought has viewed indigenous people as inferior. With this thinking, they assumed that the Indigenous people needed to be saved and civilized from their own social structures and cultures. They felt that they needed to teach the indigenous people their Western lifestyles, culture and religion. The Europeans and Western thinking could not comprehend or acclimatize with the nomadic and communal cultures of the indigenous peoples. Europeans and Western culture viewed indigenous peoples as outlandish, in need of enlightenment and need to conform to Western standards. Therefore, since the first white settlers had arrived in 1788 in Australia they had tried to impose their own values, customs and beliefs on the Aboriginal peoples.

In executing the colonizing discourse, the colonists employed different and clandestine methods to achieve their goal of colonization. The first colonial method was to acquire land, primarily through the Western Policy of Discovery. The prevailing international (European) law concerning the ownership of newly discovered lands held that the inhabitants only had sovereignty over that land if they practice agriculture, construct buildings and

towns. If the Europeans discovered land inhabited by an agricultural people with recognizable systems of government, the European discoverers could think of possession of that land only with the consent of the inhabitants. However, if the land was either uninhabited, or inhabited by a people who did not use the land (in the European sense of use) then according to prevailing ideas of international law it could be freely taken (Broome 30). So in the case of the Aborigines of Australia, when Captain Cook arrived, the Aborigines wore no clothes, did not till the soil for agriculture and had no buildings or any perceptible forms of government. They decided that Australia was 'terra nullius'[4] that is a wasteland that could be taken. At this point, they did not imagine that non-Europeans might have had their own cultural conception of land, their own religious idea of non-possession of land. So the British government was convinced that Australia was 'terra nullius' and took possession of it without asking the native inhabitants. The Policy of discovery justified the white colonizers in taking the indigenous Aboriginal land because they assumed that they discovered the land. Europeans always used the language of discovery as self-justification, which will not address the inherent irony in discovering a land of treasure but not in discovering any native of the place. The Indigenous Australian playwrights have aimed to address this constructed irony with their narratives.

The white Australians generally assumed that the Aborigines of Australia had not effectively resisted the coming of the British, as they had not been prepared themselves for a war and, therefore, they spread the notion that Australia was settled in rather than invaded. However, it has been proved that the Australian Indigenous people had strongly resisted the invasion of their lands, and that frontier history of Australia was a bloody one. However it is impossible to say precisely how bloody, as an indication of the number of indigenous deaths, it is estimated that there were 11,500 Indigenous people in Victoria at the time the land was taken up at Port Phillip; but hundred years later the proportion was only 800; 93 percent had

been killed or displaced. It is estimated that approximately 100,000 indigenous people lived in Queensland in the late 1700s, but the population had been reduced to 26,670 (Moreton-Robinson 5). The frontier conflict was related to the fact that the Indigenous people and White Colonialists came from entirely different cultural backgrounds. And as land was essential to the survival of both peoples, they both have different attitudes towards its use. Therefore, conflict between the two cultures was inevitable. However, earlier historians have not shown any interest in writing or documenting about the conflicts between the two cultures. As in the words of historian, Henry Reynolds 'the other side of the frontier' (Reynolds 50) was not mentioned in the histories written by the earlier white historians.

Thus, the resistance by the Indigenous people is not mentioned in the histories written by the whites, and the misdeeds of the Europeans are buried as non-issues. The hidden stories that were never told by the whites have begun to be told by the Indigenous people in the form of narratives which work as a counter history against the dominant history written by the whites. As W.E.H. Stanner, white Australian anthropologist argued in his book, *After the Dreaming*, there was a "Great Australian Silence" that had written Aboriginal people out of Australian history in the twentieth century (qtd. in Wheeler 156). Stanner further argued that the exclusion of Indigenous people from Australian histories, rather than being 'inattention' on a grand scale, was an active frame, 'a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape'. 'What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practiced on a national scale' (qtd. in Casey 137). Historian Walter Murdoch commented in an introductory text, "When people talk about the history of Australia they mean the history of the white people who have lived in Australia" (ibid.).

White obliteration of Aboriginal history and culture in Australia has been as much work of the pen as of physical violence. Aborigines have been written out of literature, out of the law, out of history (Arthur 55). In this context of the exclusion of Aboriginal versions of Australian histories by the white historian, focusing on the first encounter of the Europeans and the Aborigines highlighted in *Kullark* is significant. One of the select playwrights, Jack Davis's plays symbolizes the tragedy of the *Nyoongah* (*Nyungar*) Aborigines in the southwestern part of Australia viewed through the eyes of the Aborigines. Along with the other Aboriginal writers, Jack Davis relies heavily on black oral literatures, and for his historical sources he looked upon the documentary materials that were almost entirely collected by whites and stored in white Australian institutions. Davis's first play *Kullark* (home) has been described as a 'documentary on the history of Aboriginals in Western Australia' (Casey 138). In *Kullark*, Davis's depicted the arrival of Captain Stirling and his comrades and their first encounter with the Aborigines in 1827. At first both the parties were amazed and at the same time, were terrified of each other. After the Aborigines left the scene Captain James Stirling addresses the audience as if they were attending a meeting in England:

> The natives are fascinated by the color of our skin, believing it to be painted white, but care must be taken in all dealings with them, for they are vengeful and capricious and will not hesitate to resort to offensive weapons. The intention I adopted, therefore, in dealing with the natives, was to avoid all possible means of quarrel with them, and the necessity consequent thereon of rendering them hostile to future settlers in revenge for the severe measures we should obliged to take, if put to our defense. I am happy to say in this plan I was not disappointed (Davis, *Kullark* 15).

Captain Stirling's words indicate the racial prejudice and assumptions that white British invaders had of the native Australian and how inclined they were in taking over the land of Australia. It also shows how ready they were in resorting to violence in their dealings with

the native. The first Europeans were so light-skinned, the Nyungar believed them to have come from the traditional island of souls of their own ancestors, and called them djanga, 'the dead' – their own dead relatives returning. Ironically, the coming of 'the dead' meant death to many Aborigines (M. Berndt xv).

At first the Aborigines did not bother much about the white intruders, as they had no idea that the white intruders intended to stay and take over their land. As time passed, the Europeans began to feel greedy in acquiring the land and the authorities forbade handing food to the natives and even having friendly attitudes. With the growth in the establishment of the British penal colony, the British began to acquire more lands and even the hunting grounds of the Aborigines. They viewed the land as a commodity to be owned, and the authorities distributed the land to the white settlers, as Captain Stirling announces, "By authority vested in me by His Majesty the King. I do hereby authorize William Patrick O'Flaherty to take up a selection of one thousand acres on the Upper Swan River…" (Davis, *Kullark* 18). On the other hand the Indigenous people view(ed) the land as an integral part of their life, religion, and culture. As a nomadic hunter and gatherer, the Aborigines began to lose their hunting grounds, which resulted in scarcity of their food supply. If the Aborigines were seen hunting on the grounds hoarded/owned by the whites they would be shot. Therefore, conflict began to rose between the two parties, which later resulted in the death of Yagan in 1833; Yagan was an important and symbolic figure of the *Nyoongah* people. In *Kullark*, captain Stirling and his friend Mr. Fraser, a botanist to the colony, viewed the Aborigines as 'savages' from their very first encounter. However, among the white settlers, there are a couple named Will O'Flaherty and his wife Alice, who are friendly with the Aborigines. The couple even finds that the natives were actually intelligent as Alice reads her diary:

> I am sure that Meg would never believe me if I told her that there is a native here who actually appears to be intelligent and who has already learned several words of English. He calls himself "Yagan" and often comes to visit us…I find him rather fascinating, really. Sometimes he brings a catch of fish to exchange for flour…He's a decent soul, my Will, and he believes it is good to share our food supplies with the natives… (Davis, 22).

The couple also helps the natives and hands out food to them. As the Aborigines began to lose their hunting grounds due to the white settlers, they used to sometimes steal from the white settlers, which is not liked by the whites and so they feel the need to set up a militia force. So Captain Stirling announces:

> I hereby proclaim that whereas the safety of the Colony from invasion and from attack of hostile native tribes may require the establishment of a militia force, which on emergency may be depended upon to assist. His Majesty's regular troops in the defense of the lives and property of the inhabitants of the territory, all male persons whatsoever between the ages of fifteen and fifty are hereby required to enroll themselves in the militia of the country (Davis, *Kullark* 21).

With the establishment of the militia force conflict between the natives and the white settlers began to become more violent. The white settlers were not allowed to share their food supplies with the natives and the authorities prohibited even friendly contact with them. As Alice reads from her diary:

> … There have been a number of incidents here resulting in the deaths of the natives… Lives are being lost for a mere sheep or a bag of flour. It's a tragedy, that's what it is, a tragedy (Davis, *Kullark* 25).

This shows the violent conflict of the invaders and natives, which were ignored and discounted by the white colonizers in talking about Australian history.

Like many of the contemporary Aboriginal writers, Linda Briskman feels that Aboriginal people were excluded from the pages of the white Australian history and remained nameless men and women (Briskman 12). Therefore, with this view in mind, it becomes imperative for the Aboriginal writers to bring out their existence from that of their invisible status to historicity. Thus, the Aboriginal writers are writing from their perspectives and are determined and focus on creating contradictory version of the white history that confront a formidable corpus of white- authored historical and quasi-historical discourse that misrepresent and discard the Aboriginal role in the story of Australia. A few quotations of white texts that represent the body of writing that has shaped white Australians perception of the Aborigines are needed in order to understand and witnessed the white Australians depiction of the Aborigines and their culture. By the 1840s, at the height of the southern frontier war against the Aborigines, some Europeans were claiming that the Aborigines were not merely savages, but not even men, 'being a species of tail-less monkeys'(Broome 95). In 1843 father Raymond Vaccari, a Passionist missionary, in his letter to Archbishop Polding wrote, "Among these evil dispositions of the aborigines I may mention an extreme sloth and laziness in everything, a habit of fickleness and double-dealing, and uncontrollable vindictiveness, so much so that they will stop at nothing in the pursuit of revenge. They are deceitful and cunning and prone to lying. They are given to extreme gluttony and if possible will sleep both day and night" (qtd. in Broome 95). This was a convenient view of colonists who claimed that killing Aborigines was no worse than destroying wild dogs. In 1899 Richard Simon, a historian, asserted, "The Aborigines are nothing but nomadic huntsmen, and this very circumstance is the reason for their low intelligence level and scantily developed artistic sense…They are entirely devoid of imagination" (qtd. in Arthur 56). Henry Parker the editor of The Empire – a Sydney based newspaper that was progressive by prevailing standards – complained in an editorial published on 30 January, 1851 of the

Aborigine's "mental imbecility" and remarkable inferiority" (qtd. in S. Nelson 31). F.T. MacCartney, an influential Australia historian, poet and literary critic, in his 1967 article titled "Literature and the Aborigine" claimed "on a lower mental level than any ordinary thoughtful man amongst ourselves" (qtd. in Arthur 56). Even more insidious and politically more dangerous than McCartney's blatant racism are the more subtle strategies of writing Aborigines completely out of history. P.R. Stephenson, a contemporary Australian historian, wrote; "Australia is a whole continent, unique in its natural features, and unique in the fact of its continual uniformity of race and language. We are the only continent on earth inhabited by one race, order and government, speaking one language and sharing one culture" (qtd. in Arthur 56). In this way the Australian historians are ignoring and excluding the very presence of the Aborigines in a land which was once theirs.

Historically, the white Australian texts similar to the ones quoted above supported in forming racist ideologies which functioned as instruments of preservation as well as transmission of those ideologies. Tools of imperial domination, such text have assured an easy victory for the Europeans in their cultural and political conflicts with the indigenes; the Aborigine Culture, with its exclusive reliance on oral – performance forms, was until recently unable to counter these white – authored texts and the ideologies embedded in them (S. Nelson 31). Aboriginal orality was helpless in the face of European literacy. The very absence of any Aboriginal challenge simply granted further validity to the racist assumptions of the European- generated discourses. As Kateryna Arthur argues, the unequal conflict between Aboriginal and European Australians has indeed been "to a large extent, the struggle between literacy and orality" (55). An oral tradition has no defense against the white convictions of the Aboriginal people. The issues and the contentious nature of oral tradition is further emphasize in the next chapter.

In order to expose the lies and chicanery of the colonizers, it becomes imperative for the indigenous writers to voice themselves in fiction, poetry and drama, all of which carries a political character. More than poetry and fiction it is the Aboriginal drama that is effectively able to dramatize the Aboriginal experiences under the white colonizers. The Aboriginal playwrights have also used theatre to dramatize their stories in order to resist the white construct of black life. The main concern of their plays is to create national and international awareness about the problem of the Aborigines in Australia. These plays play an important role also in awakening the conscience of the white Australians. However, with the progress in creative writing, Aboriginal writers shift the theme of their writing from resistance to representation, to assimilation and self- determination, and from self-determination to reconciliation. Moreover, the persistence of the earlier themes, however subdued, in their later works, evidences that the historicity of the Aborigines has been ideologically suppressed by colonial regimes. According to Marcia Langton, "Aboriginality is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, imagination, representation and interpretation" (Langton 119). Aboriginality remade even for theatre would definitely point at a continuity of self-awareness as the Aborigine without historical breaks that the white histories like to project.

The present thesis therefore has undertaken to study the Aboriginal plays. The Aboriginal playwrights used theatre to bring out their stories of personal or historical experiences of Indigenous life, predominantly verbatim, biographical and autobiographical, taken from real stories. Indigenous people have started to redefine themselves and are trying to break the stereotypes constructed by the white Australians. Michael Dodson asserts that what the Aboriginals need is to resist essentialism which make them a fixed, unchangeable category and the necessary human characteristics are denied them which might allow them for transformation or variation. The resistance to white oppression and representation of Indigenous people is expressed or shown in many forms, which attract sound postcolonial

perspectives. When Aboriginal playwrights began to claim ongoing space on the main stages of Australian and international theatres, their main aim were to challenge and break the silence that surrounded their history and survival. In the context of problematic history, marginalized Aboriginal identity and culture, three important Aboriginal writers Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell are selected for this proposed thesis. Both male and female playwrights are selected in order to complement their works in theatre and to gauge the difference between the two sensibilities, male and female, in reacting to the common Aboriginal problems- colonization and the loss of the native identity and the mode to reclaim identity in performance. Thus, theatre is used as a way to express social and political criticism and has often been used as a political tool, reflecting the cultural situation of the country. Post-colonial performers have used theatre as a tool of resistance, a form of interrogation of the dominant myths and a way of sharing or building an identity.

The modern history of Indigenous Australian writings is widely held to have begun in 1964, with the publication of Kath Walker's first collection of poetry *We are Going*. Walker's poem in the 1960s and 1970s in particular challenge easy and complacent distinctions between the "creative" and the "critical" and her writing during this period can be situated within the context of what is known as "resistance literature" (Grossman 2). She wrote many books, beginning with *We Are Going* (1964), the first book to be published by an Aboriginal woman. The title poem concludes:

> The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.
>
> The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.
>
> The bora ring is gone.
>
> The corroboree is gone.
>
> And we are going.[5]

This first book of poetry was extraordinarily successful, selling out in several editions, and setting Kath Walker as one of the Australia's highest-selling poets. Walker who later changed her name and adopted an Aboriginal name, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, continued to hold a prominent place as an Aboriginal poet and activist over the next twenty years till she passed away in 1993 at aged 72. With the increasing numbers of Aboriginal writers, soon productions of Aboriginal works began to occupy the different genres of writings; poetry, drama, prose and fiction in Australia. Kevin Gilbert's *The Cherry Pickers* (1968) was the first Aboriginal play which was performed in 1971 at the Mews Theatre in Sydney. Kevin Gilbert produced many other plays and his work, like Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker), was focused on 'shattering the wall of misunderstanding' (Casey 16). It was also during this period that Jack Davis began his commitment for performance first found expression. Davis had been attracted to writing plays after reading a script of a short play by Oodgeroo in 1970. He found the potential of the medium interesting and 'an exciting way of reaching a wide audience' (Casey 134). Though, Jack Davis was the contemporary of Kath Walker and Kevin Gilbert, his works shifted from that of resistance to reconciliation. In most of his plays Jack Davis takes up the theme of the squalor and the meaninglessness of some of the contemporary Aboriginal living, combined with nostalgia for a traditional Aboriginal past. He wants to present the situation of the Aboriginal as seen through the eyes of the Aboriginal people.

In the early 1980s the Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatist Association (AWOLDA) was formed in Perth at the initiation of writers such as Jack Davis. The aims of the association were to stimulate Aboriginal writing, provide an editing service and promote the inclusion of Aboriginal writing in courses at secondary and tertiary levels (Casey 166). In response to this need, 1987, Brian Syron, Justine Saunders and Lesley Fogarty initiated and organized the First national Black Playwrights Conference and Workshop in Canberra. The

aim of the conference was to encourage and nurture writers and the creative process. At the conference nine plays and five film scripts were workshopped. These included *Man Hunt* (1968) by Oodgeroo, *Coordah* (published 1989) by Richard Walley, *Murras* (published 1989) by Eva Johnson and *Hijacker* (1987) by Eric Walmott and Richard Guthrie, as well as by Kevin Gilbert, Jimmy Everett, Mudrooroo, Bob Maza, Vivian Walker, Archie Weller and Jack Davis. The directors at the conference included Ernie Dingo, Bob Maza, Jimmy Everett, Vivian Walker and Richard Walley. In a documentary shot during the conference, Kabarra the First Born, some leading Indigenous Australian playwrights set the context for their work and their hopes for the future. Jack Davis, with national and international tours to his credit and decades of fighting for Indigenous rights, sounded an active and positive note:

> I can see in the near future we'll have our own theatres, our own publishing houses…within the next ten years. Twenty years ago…the white Australian public…didn't believe [Aboriginal people] were capable of writing…They were brought up with the concept that Aboriginal people were children. [Images of] the mission and the dying pillow were still in the minds of white Australians.
>
> Now we are very vital part of the Australian scene…This conference shows how quickly [the poets and the playwrights] came forward. Once the opportunity was given to us we grasped it and we used it (Casey 167).

There were many immediate outcomes of the 1987 Black Playwrights' Conference. One was the establishment of the Aboriginal National Theatre Trust (ANTT). At the conference many people had argued for the need for a national theatre organization. The ANNT, based in Newtown, Sydney, was officially incorporated in May 1988. It was inclusively Indigenous enterprise managed and staffed by Indigenous Australian. The aims outlined for ANTT reflected the concerns of the conference participants and provided a challenging brief. They were:

- to establish and maintain a national Aboriginal theatre
- to complement existing Aboriginal arts organizations
- to be responsible for national linkage of Aboriginal performing arts groups
- to encourage performance of Aboriginal works
- to present and tour, inside and outside, Australia, public performances of Aboriginal theatre of cultural and artistic merit.
- to act as a central resource for Aboriginal directors, actors, producers, technician sand writers and to provide training in these fields (Casey 169).

Other aims included the establishment and maintenance of an Aboriginal theatre network on a national and international level and through this network to stimulate and develop investment research and sponsorship in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts. Interculturally, the ANTT aimed to promote the recognition of Aboriginal cultures within Australian education systems and to promote cross-fertilization between Australian mainstream contemporary theatre arts and Aboriginal culture.

With the growing increase of Aboriginal playwrights and production of plays, the 1990s were a time of intense and high profile activity both artistically and politically for Indigenous Australians. The number of works by Indigenous artists that were produced and toured nationally and internationally increased significantly, as more and more new artists negotiated for space in a political climate that focused on Indigenization from a range of perspectives both positive and negative. Jack Davis's prediction in 1987 that Indigenous artists would be operating their own independent, ongoing theatre becomes a reality. The process of building bridges of understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was a major motivation behind theatre work produced by Indigenous artists through the 1970s and the 1980s. The arts played a pivotal role in this process. As Djon Mundine has observed, 'most non-Aboriginal people's contact with Indigenous Australians is

through Aboriginal art' (Casey 212). The struggle to achieve recognition as people and artists had been an ongoing theme within the work of Indigenous Australian artists. The socio-political implications of the critical responses and programming decisions in relation to theatre by Indigenous artists were heightened. Under these conditions, artistic control of processes and production continues to be primary importance for the Aboriginal playwrights. The first Indigenous-controlled theatre companies were established in the early 1970s, and since then there have been various attempts in different cities to set up such companies. In the 1990s three companies were established: IIbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative in Melbourne, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Arts in Brisbane and Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre in Perth.

John Harding, Kylie Belling, Bev Murray and other members of the Victorian community established IIbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative in 1990. Since its inception IIbijerri has been Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled. It produced many plays which represent the predicaments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced under the white Australians since colonization. Throughout the 1990s, IIbijerri produced show aimed at community education and also focused on creating new work dealing with major issues affecting Indigenous communities. This theatre was the one who commissioned Jane Harrison to research and write a play about the 'stolen generations'. Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Arts was established in 1993, and Indigenous artists who have been producing theatre work often in collaboration with Brisbane-based theatre companies formed the company. In 1995 and 1996 the company began producing new plays by Indigenous artists aimed at mainstream audiences. In 1995 it produced *Murri Love* (1995) by Cathy Craigie, as part of the Fringe festival in Brisbane in May. The play deals with domestic violence and friendships. Then later that year Kooemba Jdarra produced the inaugural season of *The 7 Stages of Grieving* (published in 1996) by Wesley Enoch and

Deborah mailman at the Metro Arts Theatre. Kooemba Jdarra has continued producing already extant plays, developing new work, and working in detention centers, schools, hostels and community centers. Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre was initially established as a youth theatre company in 1993, in 1997 the company formally broadened the focus of their activities to wider community, while continuing youth and community-oriented programs. This theater was established on a similar basis to Kooemba jdarra as a community based theatre.

The practices and priorities of the Indigenous-controlled companies created space for Indigenous artists both within and outside the roles designated to them by non-Indigenous communities. In order to achieve this, the Indigenous companies continually negotiate a number of specific issues on common. For IIbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative, Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Arts and Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre their communities have, since the beginning, been a priority. Despite the socio-political challenges of the 1990s and the pressure to conform to others' agendas, the range and volume of theatre work successfully produced by and with Indigenous artists continued to increase. Works in the 1990s, ranging from the highly successful domestic tours and international tours of shows such as *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *Stolen* and *Box the Pony*, in many ways consolidated the achievements of the 1970s and 1980s. Despite the multiple pressures, Indigenous artists continued to expand the focus of their writing, both men and women, pushing the frame of representation and against the frames of reception (Casey 266).

The selected Aboriginal playwrights, Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell had written their plays in a less ideologically charged tone compared to the earlier works of some Aboriginal writers. A little biography and works of the selected playwrights will be useful here as introduction to Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell respectively. Jack Davis was born in Perth in March, 1917 spent his childhood in Yarloop, about 140 kilometers to the

south of Perth. He was a notable Australian playwright and poet of the 20th Century, also an Indigenous rights campaigner. At a young age Davis was outraged and indignant at the treatment of Aboriginal people by the white Australians. There were many policies carried out by the successive white Australian governments on the Indigenous people since colonization and over the years, Davis became enraged by the injustices of an apartheid system, he began to write poetry as a means of expression. In Perth Davis joined the Aboriginal Advancement Council and began agitating for changes in government policies. For five years, he was editor of the Aboriginal periodical *Identity* and helped many Aboriginal writers. The magazine was a national, quarterly publication, which began in July 1971 and focused on Indigenous issues, for Indigenous readers, and Davis was the first indigenous editor. *Identity* operated with two main aims. One was to provide a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander opinion. The other was to provide a public outlet for the 'expression of the literary and artistic talents of the Indigenous people of Australia' (Casey 131). Davis was strongly dedicated in trying to bring out the works of the other Aboriginal writers and he believed that print media was the best way to express Indigenous Australians viewpoints. As he went on to say years later on the launched of his book *Kullark/The Dreamers* (1982) in February 1983:

> We used to speak in those days when we were talking about politics – black politics – of how we were going to make ourselves heard within the white Australian society. And even in those days when we went back to our little dingy rooms, we said (referring to, among others Kath Walker [Oodgeroo], Faith Bandler, and Ken Colbung), 'Well we've gotto write about this, we've got to tell the people' (Casey 131).

Davis went on to become a well-known and respected playwright and actor, and continued to write his very moving and popular poetry. He spent his early years fighting political battles

over land rights and racial equality in Australia. He became Director of the Aboriginal Center in Perth during 1967-71 and, in 1971, the first chairman of the Aboriginal Land Trust in Western Australia. He was also the first President of the Aboriginal Advancement Council Western Australia. As an activist Davis played an important leadership role and he made major contributions to intercultural relations in Australia, a contribution that has been acknowledge through a range of awards. His awards include: the British Empire Medal for Services to Literature and the Aboriginal people of Western Australia, 1977; members of the Order of Australia, 1985' WA Citizen of the Year, 1985; the Australian Medal, 1986; Human Rights Award, 1987; and the BHP Award, 1988.

Davis's contributions as a writer are equally extensive. He wrote stories in prose and for performance about the early Indigenous/European wars, Stolen Generations, the treatment of Aboriginal war veterans after world wars, assimilation policies etc. His plays mark and anticipate major points of transition in the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. As another Aboriginal writer, Mudrooroo describes it, Davis wrote in order 'to enrich Australia's culture and conscience by centering Aboriginal experience since invasion' (qtd. in Casey 130). Davis's intent was to produce Aboriginal oral literature and history in general and so provide information about Aboriginal oral traditions for urban Aboriginals who through various protection and assimilation policies had been isolated from their own traditions. Jack Davis will always be remembered as a great humanitarian and for his writing about Aboriginal history and culture and for his unyielding struggle for justice for his people. He gained national and international recognition for his work and made immense contribution in helping to bridge the gap between cultures and communities. His works includes poetry, dramas and prose, and Davis' first book of poetry *The First Born and Other Poems* was published in 1970. His poetry, which expresses a yearning for a past connectedness with the land, is innately political. Being an Aboriginal

Noongar, much of his work dealt with the Australian Aboriginal experience. He has been referred to as the 20th Century's Aboriginal Poet Laureate.

As a child, Jack Davis and his brother Harold were sent to Moore River settlement (a settlement that housed Aboriginal people from across Western Australia) north of Perth with the promise of training in farm work but he left when this didn't eventuate. This experienced he had in the Moore River Settlement is reflected in most of his plays. His love for writing plays found expression in a number of plays andhis plays are *Kullark* (1979), *The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1985), *Honey Spot* (1985) *Moorli and the Leprechaun* (1986), *Barungin* (1988), *Plays from Black Australia* (1989), *In our Town* (1990) and *Wahngin Country* (1992). He passed away in March 2000 aged 83.

Jane Harrison, an Indigenous Australian writer and playwright was born in 1960. She is a descendant of the Muruwari people of New South Wales from the area around Bourke and Brewarrina, Harrison grew up in the Victorian Dandenongs with her mother and sister. She began her career as an advertising copywriter, before beginning work as a writer with Ilbijerri Theatre Company. Her best-known work is *Stolen*, which received critical claim and has toured nationally and internationally. In 1992, the Ilbijerri Theatre Co-operative commissioned Harrison to write *Stolen*, a play about the lives of five Aboriginal people from the "stolen generations". Tackling the issue the "Stolen Generations"[6], *Stolen* premiered at the Playbox Theatre, Melbourne in 1998, and has had productions every year since - in Melbourne and country Victoria, Sydney, Adelaide, and Tasmania, the United Kingdom (twice), Hongkong and Tokyo, along with readings in Canada and New York (2004). In Sydney, it was performed at the Sydney Theatre Company, directed by Wayne Blair. *Stolen* won the Kate Challis RAKA award in 1998. Harrison's other plays include *On a Park Bench* which was a finalist in the Lake Macquarie Drama Prize. *Rainbow's End* premiered in 2005 at the Melbourne Museum, and toured to Mooroopa, and to Japan in 2007. *Blakvelvet* is

Harrison's most recent play; it won the 2006 Theatrelab Indigenous Award. Harrison also contributed a chapter to *Many Voices, Reflections on experiences of Indigenous child separation*, which was published by the National Library of Australia, Canberra. As well as writing, Harrison teaches Cultural Studies to Indigenous performing arts students at Swinburne University. She lives in Melbourne with her two daughters.[7]

The selected play of Jane Harrison *Stolen* refers to the "Stolen Generation". It is about the sufferings and the traumatic conditions of the Aboriginal children who were removed from their families and the way it weaves common elements of the stories of many Aborigines who were removed from their families at a young age. Although the earlier white Australian governments denied the existence of 'the stolen generations', *Stolen* vividly reveals the history of separation and the abuses that the children underwent while in the care of the whites. However, *Stolen* is not about putting blame on white Australians, as the playwright Jane Harrison in the 'playwright's note' commented, "My brief was to tell many stories, not just one…what impressed me most was the lack of bitterness from the many survivors of these policies and I've tried to mirror that attitude in the play. *Stolen* is not about blame, it is about understanding and acceptance" (Harrison vii). The plight of the 'stolen generation' children holds as an important theme in most of the Aboriginal writings.

Leah Purcell was born on 14 August, 1970 in Murgon, Queensland. She is an Indigenous Australian actress, director and writer. She is a film, television and theatre actress, singer, director and playwright. She is the youngest of six children of Aboriginal and white Australian descent. Her father, a white man, was a butcher and a boxing trainer. After a difficult adolescence, looking after her sick mother who died while Purcell was in her late teens, problems with alcohol and teenage motherhood, she left Murgon and moved to Brisbane and became involved with community theatre. She began her professional career in 1993 in *Bran Nue Dae*. In 1996 she moved to Sydney to become presenter on a music video

cable television station, Red Music Channel. This was followed by roles in the ABC television series 'Police Rescue' and 'Fallen Angels'. She co-wrote and acted in a play called *Box The Pony*, which played at Sydney's Belvoir Street Theatre, the Sydney Opera House and the 1999 Edinburgh Festival, and in 2000 at the Barbican Theatre in London. Leah had won numerous acting awards and the play-script for *Box the Pony* won NSW and Qld Premier's Literary Awards. She then wrote and directed the documentary *Black Chicks Talking*, which won a 2002 Inside Film Award. She went on to appear in many roles in film and theatre. Leah Purcell has also won The Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award 2014. The Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright's Award was established to encourage the telling of Indigenous stories with the aim of fostering understanding and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. 'Most non-Indigenous Australians are largely sheltered from the lives of Indigenous Australians,' said Hamish Balnaves. 'For many, they only see news reports of the Indigenous community's interactions with police and justice, and motherhood statement from governments. This award is about creating the opportunity for Indigenous playwrights to tell their own stories directly to an audience that needs to hear the unfiltered reality of Indigenous experiences.'[8]

Leah Purcell's *Box The Pony* (1997) is a monodrama which portrays the rawness of contemporary Aboriginal experience. It is semi-autobiographical story of Leah Purcell, a young girl growing up in a bush community and how she overcomes obstacles and free herself like a "bungaburra" (blue crane). Through this play we are taken to a world of an Aboriginal woman. The play deals with such themes as the plight of the children of the stolen generations, racial prejudice, alcoholism, survival, endurance, family ties, self-determination and, of course, reconciliation. *Box The Pony* helps in unpacking the hidden assumptions of racism, to understand its entanglement with class, cultural ignorance and fears of the "other" conceives by the white Australians. The play is in the form of stories told by Leah Purcell

and as a collaborative work, which synthesizes the native oral tradition and the European genre of drama. In using the European genre of drama, Sonja Kurtzer commented, the dominant culture requires Indigenous writers to conform to white genre of writing that enables the manufacture of acceptable representations of Indigenous authenticity for its white audience (Kurtzer 182).

This thesis examines the selected works of Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell for a number of reasons. Jack Davis while highlighting the present predicament of the Aborigines in Australia, in most of his works we also find the historical account of the Aborigines which were "white washed" by the white historians. The production of Davis works confronted colonial framings of Indigenous people. The sole selected work of Jane Harrison of the present thesis *Stolen*, touches the theme of the 'Stolen Generation', which is pivotally important and inherently present in almost all the works of the Aboriginal writers. Leah Purcell monodrama *Box The Pony* is a semi-autobiography play in which she plays all the sixteen characters. The characters central to the play are all women and it deals mostly with women issues. Purcell touches on themes that are inherently important in the writings of the Indigenous women. In this play she engages even the themes of domestic violence, racism, survival and inner strength, self-determination and to locate the place of female in the Aboriginal community.

The works of semi-autobiographies and autobiographies became very common among the Australian Indigenous writers since the 1990s and it is especially prevalent among women writers. There are many notable works, which are worth mentioning and among the plays, monodramas such as Leah Purcell's *Box The Pony* (1997), Deborah Mailman's *The Seven Stages of Grieving* (1998) and Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* (2002). Using their diverse stories, the writers and performers through their performance contest the generalizations of Aboriginal people on the basis of racist attitudes of the white Australians.

As Hilary Glow argues, monodramas are "notable and distinctive for capturing the particular nature of Indigenous experiences in order to achieve a new set of negotiated meanings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (qtd. in Wheeler 162). The selected playwrights sought to tell their people's stories and counter negative representation of the Aboriginal people. They wanted to produce their versions of their histories against the misrepresentation of the white Australians. They wanted to retell the younger generations of Aborigines that the white Australian historians had misrepresented them. The experiences and personal journeys in these monodramas are as varied as the individuals who write and perform them. Many of these monodramas are based on autobiographical details of the performer's or writer's life; others combine details from many lives into a representative central character or characters (Wheeler 162). As Leah Purcell in her introduction to her book *Black Chicks Talking* states, "If these sorts of books aren't written then there will be another generation that will grow up in ignorance of the plight of Indigenous Australians." She introduces her book as "our way of giving you a little look into some of our lives" (Purcell xiv).

The present chapter "Introduction" has made an attempt to briefly introduce the selected playwrights, while keeping in view their central artistic preoccupations which bring to a focus the Aboriginal identity vis-à-vis the mainstream Australian historical viewpoints. The Aboriginal poets and playwrights have succeeded fairly in challenging the white Australian myths about the Indigenous people and in the process, recovered their life-stories and rewritten their status of presumed non-entity by historicizing themselves for the world humanity to take cognizance. Reclaiming identity under a dominant structure of power and politics as prevailing in Australia is not an easy get-away for the Aboriginal artists and writers. However, writing their side of Australian life has tremendously impacted the nature of history in postcolonial Australia and all possible future histories, for that matter. Hence,

the present thesis has undertaken to study in greater detail the playwrights' concerns and issues to historicize their cultures in the historicist frameworks of art and literature in view of many threats to their identity and existence.

ENDNOTES

[1] Whenever the terms 'Aborigines', 'Aboriginal',' Indigenous', 'Black' or 'Native Australian' are used in the thesis they refer to the entity of all Australian Aboriginal people i.e. the native inhabitants of Australia before the British invasion.

[2]"British Empire." *Wikipedia:The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation Inc., Mar. 2015.Web. 26 Mar. 2015.<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BRITISH EMPIRE>

[3] In this thesis, whenever the term "white" is used it refers to the non-indigenous, Europeans, colonizers, the Anglo-Celtic descendants who came from Europe to settle and rule over Australia and its native inhabitants.

[4]*Terra Nullius* is a Latin expression deriving from Roman Law meaning "land belonging to no one", which is used in international law to describe territory which has never been subject to the sovereignty of any state, or over which any prior sovereign has expressly or implicitly relinquished sovereignty. Sovereignty over territory, which is *terra nullius*, may be acquired through occupation, though in some cases doing so would violate an international law or treaty. The British followed the conventions adopted by European nations over the previous two centuries for legally acquiring unowned land, or *terra nullius.* This Latin phrase translates as 'nobody's land', and was actually not used with regard to the colonization of Australia until the later twentieth century. In legal terms, *terra nullius* means 'land over which no previous sovereignty has been exercised' or more simply 'land of no sovereign power' (Broome:30, Flood:19)

[5]"Oodgeroo Noonuccal" *Wikipedia*: *The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 17 Mar. 2015. Web. 26 Mar. 2015.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oodgeroo_Noonuccal>

[6]"Stolen Generations", the term first used by historian Peter Read in 1981. He made it the title of a brief, 21-page pamphlet he wrote for the New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. The full title was: *The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children in*

New South Wales 1883 to 1969."Stolen Generations" refers to the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families in Australia which is widely believed to have begun in 1910 to continue till the 1970s.

[7] "Jane Harrison (Playwright)." *Wikipedia*: *The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.,16 Dec. 2014. Web. 17Dec.2014.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/jane_Harrison_(playwright)>

[8] "Leah Purcell." *Wikipedia*: *The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., Web. 17 Dec. 2014. Web. 18 Dec. 2014.<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leah_Purcell>

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CHAPTER – II

THEATRE AS A RESISTANCE AND REPRESENTATION

Resistance and representation are very wide areas in which a number of dramas of colonial relations and post-colonial analysis eliciting subversion of those relations have been enacted. In the Aboriginal drama the Aboriginal playwrights have re-appropriated prevailing stereotypes about the Aboriginal people in their scripts and performances, attempting to make apparent the colonial assumptions made by the colonizers. In all the selected plays of the present thesis, the playwrights such as Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell share a common theme i.e. the Aboriginal experience in the white dominant society. They depicted the historical displacement of the Aborigines and their associated loss of identity as a consequence of more than two centuries of colonization. But while Aboriginal playwrights detail the catastrophic effects for indigenous peoples made by the Europeans of Australia, they often propose methods of deconstructing Eurocentric epistemological and ontological systems, of reconceptualizing place and space in order to undermine the imposed legitimacy of white settlement and assert Other(ed) version of history (Gilbert 53). The Australian Aboriginal playwrights have consistently utilized the potential for theatre performance to create different frames for images and representations of indigenous Australians. They strike immediate rapport with the multicultural audience in the theatre by dramatizing their stories. In the act of performing their plays in Australia and other countries they awaken the conscience of international community, which in turn exercises moral pressure on white Australian. A clear example of this was the creation of the World Council of Indigenous People (WCIP) in 1975, officially sanctioned by the United Nations as a non-governmental organization, and also a French Society for the Promotion of the Culture of Australian Aborigines has been in existence since 1980.

The western world of the performing arts became increasingly interested in both traditional and contemporary Aboriginal culture. In 1978, the New York scout, Elaine Gold, visited Australia with a view to securing scripts of plays written by Aborigines, for possible

presentation at Joseph Papp's Shakespearean Summer Festival in Central Park, New York. Four years later, Robert Merritt's play *The Cake Man* was invited to the World Theatre Festival in Denver, Colorado, in July 1982 where it was so enthusiastically received that its two weeks season was sold out. After two years Jack Davis's *No Sugar* was Australia's representative at the same festival and held both popular and critical acclaim. In May 1987, Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* was also received for a four-week season in Portsmouth (Shoemaker 1-3). The dramatized stories of the Aboriginal playwrights have the power to resist the lies perpetrated by the government and at the same time they serve the purpose of passing on the stories to their children, ensuring the preservation of their history and culture. There are two main sources for a narrative about the history of theatre production by Australian indigenous artists- one is the text-based reviews of productions. The other is indigenous community knowledge, and is largely a series of individual oral records. They worked to bring out the historical perspectives by turning to oral sources in the form of interviews with Aboriginal people. The main concern of the Aboriginal plays is to create national and international awareness about the problem of the Aborigines in Australia. The message of resistance is embedded in myriad ways their plays which may be collectively called 'Resistance Theatre'.

The white colonizers viewed the colonized subject within the ambit of their cultural standards and deemed the other as uncivilized and barbaric. Through education or general colonialist cultural relations, the colonizers projected themselves as superior to the colonized subjects and taught them authoritative identity of themselves. However, the colonized subjects of Australia since the 1960s and 1970s have started to redefine themselves in two ways: trying to break the stereotypes constructed by the whites and trying to reconstruct the white construct of indigenous life, culture and history. The Australian Aborigines' imagination of freedom and search for identity must have been spurred by worldwide

political destabilizations of colonial regimes in the mid- twentieth century. Different post-colonial writers have extensively examined this context; in particular Edward Said examined this context in his famous work *Orientalism*, which is mainly a study of how the Western people viewed the Eastern people in terms of their religion, way of life, etc., and it can also mean the assumptions about the East by the West.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* forms an important background for post-colonial studies. In *Orientalism*, Said emphasizes the erroneous assumptions and also questions various ideas and thoughts accepted as standards on individual, academic and political levels. Said calls into question the underlying assumptions that form the foundation of Orientalist thinking. It may be observed that a rejection of Orientalism entails a rejection of biological generalizations, cultural constructions, and racial and religious prejudices. It is an erasure of the line between 'the west' and 'the other' (Sered 2011). Said argues that the West's view of the Middle East and Islamic World is distorted by an indulgent epistemology of 'Otherising'. The West viewed the East as the 'Other'- ferocious, savage, barbaric and uncivilized. So, Said rejects these assumptions of the Western people and urges the Western thinkers to reexamine their assumptions based on Christianity and Textualist attitude, i.e. an attitude conceptualized by the text written by those earlier Western scholars who were biased in their writings about the Middle East and the Islamic people. As Gina Wisker, remarks:

> Said discusses Orientalism as a Western institutional way of dealing with the Orient, the East, and as he uses discourse analysis inspired by Foucault, he notes the Orient is dealt with 'by discourse, describing, teaching, ruling, settling: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over 'the Orient'… 'the Orient' is also used to suggest the Far East and the treatment of others who are culturally not white; and Western imperial/colonial…Non-Western people

are depicted as ill-educated, violent, savage, less than human and also, often, fascinating because exotic" (Wisker 202).

There is less to dispute that the Europeans viewed the Aboriginal society in terms of European values and so they developed a complex of superiority towards them. This feeling of superiority led them to have a paternalistic attitude towards the Aborigines. And what is crucial is they felt the need to change them according to their beliefs and what they felt necessary, in order to reproduce all European self-images.

In his essay "Jack Davis and the Emergence of Aboriginal writing" Bob Hodge states "For more than a century Aboriginal Australia had been constructed through a discursive regime that can be termed 'Aboriginalism' a regime that functioned to what Edward Said has called 'Orientalism'" (Hodge 98). He continues that Aboriginalism, like Orientalism, is a familiar strategy of imperialism, and Australian Aborigines have been mediated throughout the English speaking world. Aboriginal culture is 'known' in Britain and America, yet, because of the strategies of Aboriginalism Aboriginal writers and artists were not taken as experts on this culture, respected and deferred to. The disadvantages of this situation for Aborigines were by no means trivial. In spite of Aboriginalism's claimed knowledge of Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal people felt themselves victims of a profoundly racist misunderstanding from the dominant society in Australia. Aboriginalism disvalued living Aborigine and severely limited the way in which they were allowed to produce and communicate their sense of Aboriginality to a wider community (Hodge 99).

The term 'Aboriginalism' is scarcely mentioned in the writings of Aboriginal writers, this may be due to the difference in opinion of the different writers in its implications to post-colonial writings. An Aboriginal writer Ian Anderson in his introduction to '*The Aboriginal Critique to Colonial Knowing'* also states that it would be a mistake to argue that indigenous critical writing and post- colonial analysis are one and the same thing. Here he quotes Linda

Tihiwai Smith who says that, "…The field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous people, our ways of knowing and our current concerns" (Anderson 23). He goes on saying that in the context of settler colonial states, such as Australia, colonial structures have never been dismantled. Colonial ways of knowing are not historical artifacts that simply linger in contemporary discourse; they are actively reproduced within contemporary dynamics of colonial power (Anderson 24). Yet this fundamental observation does not really seem to have penetrated mainstream post-colonial theory. Ian Anderson's argument is understandable, which would approve of an evolutionary growth and change of power relations within the established political order. In political terms, alteratively, no Gandhi, no Mandela, nor even Martin Luther King is allowed possible beyond the colonial order or epistemologies. This conviction has not convinced Australian Aboriginal writers, so far.

However, in the *Post Colonial Studies Reader* Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, in their introduction to '*Ethnicity and Indigeneity'*, states:

> The indigenous people of 'settled' colonies, or 'First Nations', have in many ways becomes the cause célèbre of post-colonialism. No other groups seem so completely to earn the position of colonial group, so unequivocally to demonstrate the processes of imperialism at work (Ashcroft, Bill. et al 1999: 214).

They also state that 'post colonial' can apply to white settler/invader colonies as much as to the indigenous people (Ashcroft, Bill. et al 1999: 213). This latter reasoning seems more convincing for the present study is not averse to utilizing postcolonial perspectives to do justice to Aboriginal writings.

Aboriginal theatre is definitely energized by anti-colonial perspectives in the first place, which usually takes on spurs from post colonial frameworks, since the theatrical representations of Australia's marginalize peoples took roots in the post-colonial era across

the world. In regard to these debates and issues we have perceived in this theatre common topics such as found in postcolonial theory. Some of these are underlined by Lois Tyson perceptively in her book, *Critical Theory Today- A User Friendly Guide*:

- The native people's initial encounter with the colonizers and the disruption of indigenous culture.
- Othering (the colonizers treatment of members of the indigenous culture as less than fully human).
- Mimicry (the attempt of the colonized to be accepted by imitating the dress, behavior, speech and lifestyle of the colonizers).
- Exile (the experience of being an outsider in one's own land or a foreign wanderer in Britain).
- The struggle for individual and collective cultural identity and the related themes of alienation, unhomeliness (feeling that one has no cultural "home", or sense of cultural belonging), double consciousness (feeling torn between the social and psychological demands of two antagonistic cultures), and hybridity (experiencing one's cultural identity as a hybrid of two or more cultures, which feeling is sometimes describe as a positive alternative to unhomeliness).
- The need for continuity with a pre-colonial past and self-definition of the political future (Tyson 427).

These themes are also very much present in the writings of the colonized people of the imperial power, whether they are the settlers nation like that of the Americans, white Australians etc., the natives (the original inhabitants) and the nations who gained independence from imperial power. Although some of their experience under the imperial might be different from each other but much of their experience is common such as

oppression, racism, identity crisis etc. Thus, the definition of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their book *Post Colonial Studies Reader* is relevant:

> Postcolonial theory involves discussion about experience of various kinds: migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe such as history, philosophy and linguistics, and the fundamental experiences of speaking and writing by which all of these come into being. None of these is 'essentially' post-colonial, but together they form the complex fabric of the field (Ashcroft, Bill. et al. 1999:2).

The Aboriginal playwrights used theatre to bring out their stories of personal or historical experience of indigenous life, predominantly verbatim, biographical and autobiographical, taken from real stories. The resistance to white oppression and representation of indigenous people is expressed or shown in many forms in their writings, which have sound post-colonial perspectives.

Helen Gilbert, in her book *Sightlines: Race, Gender, and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre* states, "Aboriginal theatre, developed over the past two decades, poses Australia stage's most trenchant challenge to the hegemony of imperialism" (Gilbert 1998:51). Though theatre is growing rapidly, it also becomes increasingly difficult to define because there are plays about Aborigines written by whites and those written by the Aborigines themselves are also collaborated with white directors to cast and produce. Referring to literary productions, critics such as Mudrooroo express reservations about the Aboriginality of any text that is not wholly produced – written, published, and presented-under Aboriginal control (ibid.). Yet this kind of classification of Aboriginal writing especially performance text is very difficult, because theatre is rarely a site where the conventional notions of authorship and authenticity are validated. The notion of authorship

and authenticity is very complex in theatre comparing to other narrative genres as it involves mediation at a number of levels. For example *Box the Pony* by Leah Purcell though an autobiographical play is collaboration with Scott Rankin. Leah told her life story to Rankin and Rankin picked out stories and events that would suit good theatre. In the postmodern era, the notions of authenticity as well as authorship are much disputed concepts; even thinkers like Roland Barthes and Derrida in turn supported by Freud, Lacan, Marx and Nietzsche of gone by eras have deconstructed the 'concept' and 'intention' of author. While Barthes has announced the death of the author, Foucault performed the death of the subject, and Derrida disputed and rejected the logocentrism of western metaphysics outright. Coming back to Leah Purcell's theatre, thus, the notion of authorship and authenticity becomes very complex in regard to the text of *Box The Pony*. Sarah Rubidge in her essay, *Does Authenticity matter? The Case for and against authenticity in Performing Arts* (1996) states 'Plays are written for performance, not publication… In any play, intentions other than those of the author are involved in its creation. These include those of the designers, directors, composers as well as, of course, the performers' (Rubidge 228).

Still, performance text may sound very difficult to define and may seem precarious as it seems, it could be examined within the post-colonial context. Within the post-colonial frameworks that promotes "hybridization" and "literary contamination" as weapons of cultural transformation; thus delimiting notions of an authentic indigenous text becomes a far less useful task than examining how the multiplicity of *indigenized* elements of a text might be deployed (Gilbert 51) to subvert colonial metanarratives. Though political freedom of self-determination is not allowed to natives, the Aboriginal writers' creative resistances appear all the more worthy of genuine support even from postcolonial nations as well as postcolonial epistemologies. Because, the Aborigines' new approach to identity issues more subversively questions colonial paradigms and master narratives of authenticity. There are criticisms about

using postcolonial perspectives to certain writings emerging from colonial structures in place. Gina Wisker in her book, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Literature*, quoting New Zealand writers, Johnston and Pihama in her book: "For Maori women in colonial setting (we avoid to use the term postcolonial since we believe that this country remains very much colonial) much to ourselves has been denied, and hence, for many Maori women there is an ongoing struggle to center ourselves, to deconstruct colonial representations and to reconstruct and reclaim knowledge about ourselves" (Wisker 7- 8). Even Wisker cannot deny the borderline of convergence between postcolonial critiques and Maoris' nascent critical awareness of colonial representations.

All the selected playwrights used oral sources as their main foundations in writing their plays. Oral sources were used by the Aboriginal people to talk about their past. With the help of these oral histories, scholars of history and anthropology have compelled the Europeans to hear the Aboriginal perspectives of the in past rather than non-native narratives maintained to deprive and effectively silenced the Aborigines. Thus, it has become essential for the Indigenous people of Australia to reclaim their culture, identity, history, and land rights and to counter the kind of history produced by the whites. As the writings of the Aborigines is mainly based on the oral histories, the authenticity of the oral tradition can be much debated, because there can be a dispute of validity of memory in constructing the past. But, we may remember that the Aboriginal playwrights and writers do not base their writings on just one account of an individual, it is formed from interviews and writings of those who have experience firsthand or witness past events. Jane Harrison was commissioned to write *Stolen* in 1992 by the IIbijerri and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative based in Melbourne. During the course of writing the play, Harrison read thousands of oral transcripts and spoke with many members of the Stolen Generations of Australia. She heard countless stories from stolen children about abuse, rape, the trauma of parents who were told that their

children were dead and the trauma of children who were told their families were dead or had abandoned them, and being taken away as children and to have their own children taken away as adults and of forced servitude to white families. In *Stolen* (published 1998) Harrison weaves together the stories of five Aboriginal children stolen from their families and who were put up in an institution. The play does not move in chronological order, but switches between past and present. On the series of events the story traces each child's individual journey and experience of grief and abuse they faced in their lives. At the end of the play each cast member (who actually once was stolen into white institutions) steps out and tells his or her own story. Some cast members, like the characters in the play have tragic stories to tell. This moment, is crucial in many senses, i) claiming ownership of these stories. This claim helped the suppressed and blurred history into a gestation, ii) self-revelation, self-empowerment and realization of identity, iii) generating solidarity with the silenced, perhaps self-denigrated Aborigines, iv) disseminating information across a multi- cultural world including whites. The theatre breaks the centrality of the dominant non-indigenous audience. It also challenges the tendency to generalize all Indigenous people as having the same experiences (Casey 221).

Thus, hearing accounts directly from indigenous people who had had the experience maternally of the policies and practices of the colonizers had an immense impact in changing the consciousness and perspectives of the nation (Briskman 13). Theatre also assists in the maintenance of spoken languages that are essential to oral traditions and their transmission of history, culture, and social order. Oral cultures emphasize not only the sound and rhythm of language and its accompanying paralinguistic features, but also the site from which it is spoken. A dramatic focus on oral traditions opens up the possibility of challenging the tyranny of the written word through which many imperial languages claim their authenticity. By restoring to oral discourses their topology as performance pieces, theatre allows the

orality of post-colonial languages to be fully realized, especially since each performance defers and deflects the authority of any written script. This descripted (performative) model of orality refers not to a language that has never been written, but to one which is *unwritable* at its moment of enunciation. While orality's utterance is unable to be inscribed, the inscriptions/utterances prohibited by censorship can be inferred in performance. Expressing that which has been forbidden in a public forum like the theatre can be effective in challenging a repressive law or state (Ashcroft et al 1995:166-167).

New historicists believe that the writing of history is a matter of interpretation, not objective display of facts. For them, the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text and context create each other (Tyson 283). Oral tradition of narrating histories is used by different writers in different parts of the world, and is present in every society. Orality of history and written discourse of history are equally subject to further investigations, since written history more involves the historian's point of view constructed in turn by his culturally colored ideologies and prejudices. Australian histories written by white elites are testamentary of such attitudes and therefore cannot claim to be true and factual in any scientific sense. Oral tradition is like one kind of tool that historians, anthropologists and sociologists have used to give a chance to ordinary people to voice their opinions in written histories. Oral documents record all those important things that the written documents prejudicially ignore, and above all, in the present context, obtain the Aboriginal point of view (Briskman 13). Moreover theatre, according to Helen Gilbert, "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). She emphasizes, "Orality is a practice and a knowledge, a strategic device potentially present in recuperating indigenous voices, potentially in de-scribing empire" (95). Thus,

Aboriginal theatre re-activates Aboriginal stories to their performative value in real indigenous life besides recovering from abandoned sources the lost memories of tribes.

Most of the Aboriginal playwrights and writers make use of their oral history, as they have no written record of history. For example, Jack Davis used two main weapons in his writing i.e. his Aboriginal use of white histories and European modes of thought. The other is his use of such aspects of Aboriginal language and cultures as have survived in urban Aboriginal societies (Hodge 100). The most powerful among the Aboriginal historical plays of Jack Davis is *Kullark*, a carefully researched work in which many of the characters are based on and named after historical personalities such as an Aboriginal legend Yagan, Captain James Stirling, founder and first Governor of the Swan River Colony, Mr. Neale, Superintendent of the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement and his wife Matron Neale, black tracker named Bluey and Mr. A.O.Neville, Chief protector of Aborigines in Western Australia. *Kullark* (1979) is the first full-length play Jack Davis and the actions moves between different time frames and places in Western Australia: the Yorlah family's kitchen in Perth in 1979, a scene from the Swan river in 1827-34, the Moore river settlement in the 1930s and the Yorlah family in their camp at the edge of the town in 1945. The play does not move in chronological order, this device is used by Davis to represent a complex set of parallels and opposition between past and present, dramatizing the different possibilities and strategies that were available at different times while also seeing many fundamental continuities (Hodge 100). The fictional versions of the Yorlah family portrayed in *Kullark* is also the experiences and stories with which Davis was familiar; his stories were from the Aboriginal past as told to him by his family. The past and the present of the Yorlah family intermingled in the play to provide an insight into the present-day problems and issues faced by the Nyoongah Aborigines. In the play, we see one character, Alec Yorlah as a man with low expectations who has turned to alcohol as a way to cope. As his son's disgust with him

grows, we find flashback of young Alec returned from the war hoping to live as an equal to a white man in his own country. *Kullark* is about the experiences of Nyoongah in Australia in a single piece of work. For Davis the focus on *Kullark* was not primarily on reclaiming the past. It is the present and the place for indigenous people in the present that was Davis's main concern. As Davis states:

> (The stories from my family) are still very important to me but I write about my own experiences and very much from urban Aboriginal point of view… Our culture didn't die when Captain Stirling arrived- there is a new urban Aboriginal culture emerging that remembers the past while looking to the new (Casey 140).

Kullark poses challenge to the imperial methods of historical construction because within the teaching of Australian history, thewhite historians particularly mentioned the basic premises such as myths of terra nullius and the images of heroic pioneers.As story of colonization has been described in a school reader in 1911 as:

> The story of our winning is peaceful a one. It is the story of fine colonization. In this case there were no powerful tribes to oppose our settling in the land: the original inhabitants were few in number, and of a very low order of civilization. Their occupation of the country was of such a sort as to strike no roots in the soil (Casey 138).

This projection of the Aborigines as passive onlooker of the European colonization made it important for the Aborigine writer to contest the European concept of colonization and historicism of Australia. It is particularly challenging for Aborigines of Western Australia as they had witnessed or heard stories of the events of the century-long history of resistance at the frontiers of settlement. The image projected in this reader denies the history as remembered by the Aborigines. It wiped out the history of resistance at the frontiers of settlement, from the battle of Pinjarra in the early 1830s to the Oombulgarri (Umbali)

massacre in 1926 by police and settlers in Kimberly. These two incidents were projected and highlighted in Jack Davis's *Kullark* and *No Sugar* respectively.

There were many notable massacres of the Aborigines by Whites and vice versa. In *No Sugar* Jack Davis used the historical record of documented play. He is able to establish a simultaneous position as a chronicler of, and participant in, the Aboriginal past. He is doing this by using one of his characters Billy. Billy's recounting of the Oombulgarri (Umbali) Massacre is as follows:

BILLY: Big mob, 1926, kill'em big mob my country…

Big mob politzmans, and big mob from stations, and shoot 'em

everybody mens,Koories, little yumbah. (he grunts and mimes pulling a trigger)

They chuck 'em on a big fire, chuck 'em in river.

(*They sit in silence, mesmerized and shocked by* Billy's *gruesome story*)

JIMMY: Any-body left, your mob?

BILLY: Not many, gid away, hide. But no one stop that place now, they

all go another Country.

JOE: Why?

BILLY: You go there, night time you hear 'em. I bin bring cattle that way for

Wyndham meat works. I hear 'em. Mothers cryin' and babies cryin',

screamin'. Wai wai! Wawai! Wawai!

They sit in silence staring at Billy who stares into the fire (Davis, *No Sugar* 67-68).

Billy's account of the massacre of his people in the Kimberly region is adapted from the report of such a massacre by Daniel Evans, taken down verbatim by the novelist Randolph Stow and quoted in full in his book *To the Islands*, Picador, 1983 (Davis, *No Sugar* 117).

The Aborigines in return responded with violence. At first revenge was taken on those Europeans who were thought to be responsible, however as time passed the violence and

conflict between the Europeans and Aborigines escalated as the violence began to took sexual form as well. Rape and abduction of Aboriginal women became common as Reverend Threlkeld at his Lake Macquarie mission in 1824 wrote that he was tormented at night by the shrieks of girls, about eight or nine years of age, taken by force by the vile men of New-castle (Broome 45). Though the Aborigines tried their best to resist the European invaders, all their attempts were effectively quelled by the Europeans as they were more powerful with their guns, horses and the 'Native Police Force'- created specially to fight the Aboriginal resistance and eventually it helped end the resistance of the Aborigines. The 'native' police force was established in Port Phillip in 1842, in New South Wales in 1848 (officially in 1855), and in Queensland in 1859. "They marked the absolute rock bottom of government Aboriginal policy. Not only was violence against the Aborigines being institutionalized, but several hundred Aborigines were being encouraged to hound and kill other Aborigines in the service of colonial expansion" (Broome 49). Young Aboriginal men joined these forces for a number of reasons- they were promised uniforms, wages and education, and to many, it seemed to be a means of survival as the Europeans outnumbered them anyway and murdered those who resisted them and got in their way. Stories of European atrocities spread widely and fear crept into the hearts and minds of many Aborigines. As Dr. Aileen Moreton Robinson quote Elsie Roughsey's grandfather, who told his son; "Never kill a white man, because that fellow got plenty more like him, to come here and kill us all" (Moreton-Robinson 4). Thus white Australian government strategized a multi-pronged policy to stabilize its hegemony in a hostile land, which disputes telltale the grand myth of Australia's great silence.

Some allied perspectives too need to be discussed in the present context. One of the most important methods used by the colonizers in their process of colonization was to make the colonized subjects forget their language. Many British officials no doubt possessed some

good intentions towards the Aborigines, but the desire to possess, to dominate, to colonize, was at odds with their humanitarianism. The contradictions between conscience and belief in British supremacy arose again and again in the history of Australian colonization. For instance, in 1838 Governor Gawler addressed the Aborigines in Adelaide: 'Black men. We wish to make you happy. But you cannot be happy unless you imitate white men. Build huts, wear clothes and be useful… you cannot be happy unless you love God… Love white men… learn to speak English. If any white man injure you tell the Protector and he will do justice' (Broome 31). Thus, it became very important for the colonizers to make the colonized subjects learn their language in order to understand and communicate effectively which would help them in their process of colonization. The British officials taught some English language to some of the natives in order to have a proper communication with the Aborigines so that could turn to the advantage of the colony. Some of the British officials even kidnapped the Aborigines when they could not find anyone willing to come into contact with them. These captured Aborigines were forced to learn English so that they could act as mediators between the two races.[1]

One of the main features of imperial oppression is the control over language and therefore, language plays an important role in the writings and studies of post-colonial literature. "Language is a fundamental site for struggle for post-colonial discourse because colonial process itself begins in language" (Ashcroft, Bill. et al. 1999, 283). Therefore it becomes one of the most crucial indicators of colonial authority. The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing defines itself by seizing the language of the center and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first one is the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second one is the appropriation and reconstitution of the

language of the center, the process of capturing and remolding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 37). One of colonization's missions was to enforce the English language on the colonized subjects in order to control them more easily. One method of installing the overarching power of an imperial tongue is to prohibit the 'old' language. Forbidding people to speak their own tongues is the first step in the destruction of a culture (Gilbert and Tompkins 164). As one of the characters in Jack Davis's play, *Barungin* (Smell *the Wind)* (1988) Granny Doll states that the *wetjalas* (whites) 'killed [her] language' (1989:36), which, to her, is the most monumental crime that the *wetjalas*could have committed. The loss of one's language leads to the loss of oral history that could have far-reaching implications in the loss of culture, tradition, customs and beliefs. Indigenous children were frequently taken from their parents to be educated in schools and homes set up by the colonizers and there the children were taught in the colonizer's language. In these schools and homes the children were not allowed to speak their own languages and they would be harshly punished if they disobeyed.

Language is wholly related with the speaker's perception of freedom of expression and dignity, but could both be diminished if the colonizer denies and rejects the linguistic legitimacy of indigenous languages. Language's 'system of values—its suppositions, its geography, its concept of history, of difference, its myriad gradations of distinction—becomes the system upon which social, economic and political discourses are grounded' (Ashcroft *et al.* 1999:283). The authority that the imposed language commands is much the same as the authority of literate, official history over the unwritten, changeable histories of the colonized subject. The naming and interpellative functions of the imperial language exacerbate the disempowerment of indigenous peoples/cultures. To name people and places in English, replacing any earlier constructions of location and identity, is to establish at least partial control over reality, geography, history, and subjectivity. Interpellation, or ascribing

subjectivity to—here—the colonized subject, equally denies the existence of a previous subjectivity or selfhood. The interpellative process of European languages frequently resulted in a reductive and simplistic construction of colonized subjectivity as 'other', ignoring the necessary cultural and personal individuation that selfhood generally presumes (Gilbert and Tompkins 165).

However, the prevalent power of the imperial language has not been entirely successful in its attempt to eradicate local, potentially resistant languages that threaten the boundaries of imperial authority. The Australian experience as well as situation in this regard is not materially different from the African experience. In order to resist the colonialist ideology and recover their pre-colonial cultures, some native authors, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Africa, write in their own local language. The reason for Ngugi's abrogation of the English language can be seen in his chapter on "The Language of African Literature" from his book *Decolonizing the Mind* in which he reads, "In Kenya English became more than a language, and all has to bow before it in deference" and he goes on stating,

> One of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. The culprit was given corporal punishment – three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks – or was made to carry a metal plate around the neck with inscriptions such as I AM STUPID or I AM A DONKEY… The attitude to English was the exact opposite: any achievement in spoken or written English was highly rewarded; prizes, prestige, applause; the ticket to higher realms. English became the measure of intelligence and ability in arts, the sciences, and all other branches of learning. English become the main determinant of a child's progress up the ladder of formal education…orature (oral literature) in Kenya languages stopped…Thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds…Language as culture is the

> collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is the most indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next… Language as communication and as culture is then a product of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world…I believe that my writing in Gikuyu language, a Kenyan language, an African language, is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenya and African peoples (Ashcroft *et al.* 1999:290).

However, many more writers have felt that this appeal to some cultural identity is doomed to failure, and that the determination to use the language as an ethnographic tool has been a more common of post-colonial writers. The appropriation of the colonizer's language is alternatively a subversive strategy and a subtle rejection of the political power of the standard language. By adapting the alien language, such writers and speakers construct an 'english' which amounts to a very different linguistic vehicle from the received standard colonial 'English'. As Bill Ashcroft demonstrates, "the belief that the English text is unable to communicate a 'non-english' cultural meaning is based on the misconception of the way language 'means'. Meaning is seen to be a constitutive interaction within the 'message event'" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1999:284). However, the critical point still remains why the colonizer did not encourage the native language to prosper, and why he did not write history of a people in their own language. The other important thing to note is that when some writers abrogate the English language, they face the difficulty of surviving in a publishing industry, both in their own countries and internationally that requires the use of the English language.

On the other hand there are many indigenous writers from former British colonies who prefer to write in English such as Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who had said, "[F]or me there is no choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it" (Tyson 422). There are also people/writers who follow Achebe and they state that English provides a common language for the various indigenous peoples within the third and fourth world nation, who use a number of different local languages, to communicate with one another. English reaches across many local dialects, it is understood. But does English help the native language grow to a competent state of literary expression? The colonial paradigm could least afford such imaginations. Jack Davis also commented on his view in regard to the use of English language:

> I had always been interested in language, and found the English language and its history exciting to study. The hidden roots of English, in particular Latin and Greek, made the dictionary a constant source of fascination to me. Now that I was living among the Nyoongahs, that interest embraced the Nyoongah language (qtd. in Crow and Banfield 55).

Here Jack Davis expresses his appeal to both English and his native language. He seems to show no resentment against English.

The use of Creole and Pidgin language also promotes to subvert the authority of Standard English. Created from the combination and mixture of different languages, Pidgin and Creole derive from contact between the colonized subjects and the colonizers in some post- colonial cultures. The term 'Pidgin' tends to refer to linguistic forms which have arisen from the blending of one imperial language with an indigenous language, whereas 'Creole' often points to the input of several source languages. Pidgin and Creole are considered as inferior versions of particular imperial languages as it lacks correct grammatical structures. Although their vocabulary commonly derives largely from appropriated and indigenized

European words, Creole and Pidgin languages also maintain significant pre-contact elements, particularly in their phonology, syntax, and lexico-semantic structures. Creole languages are prominent in regions where there has been a significant hybridizing of disparate cultures (Gilbert and Tompkins 184). Jean D' Costa, the Jamaican Children's author, among other writers, uses the concept of the 'Creole continuum' to describe the Caribbean writers:

> The [Caribbean] writer operates within a polydialectical continuum with a creole base. His medium, written language belongs to the sphere of standardized language which exerts a pressure within his own language, community while embracing the wide audience of international Standard English (Ashcroft et al. 2002:44).

This variable use of language—referred to as 'code switching'—can be an effective means of abrogating the imperial standard in favor of a culturally significant discourse (Ashcroft et al. 2002:46). Within the continuum, Creole languages are now becoming accepted not only as the mass vernacular but also as a more democratized language for art, commerce, and education. This movement represents a refusal to accept the imperialist judgment that Creole or dialect languages should be suppressed since they are 'corruptions' or 'bastardisations' of a pure model (Gilbert and Tompkins 185).

The Pidgin languages used by some post- colonial writers perform a similar resistance to the imperial language. In almost all of Jack Davis plays he uses Aboriginal Pidgin English. For instance, when Worru talks about Billy Kimberly:

> WORRU: Ole Billy Kimberly, *kia*, not young Billy; that old man was *moorditj* with *kylie*. He could make it go three times 'round that football ground and come back right near his *tkenna*, An' he use to ride that 'orse, 'member: Black – Black 'abit. [*Clapping his hands and laughing*] An' when 'e used to ride that 'orse you couldn't see him at night 'cause 'e was black and the 'orse was black. Proper moornawooling, them two.

> *Kia*. [*Laughing*] An' when 'e used to ride up the river the kids used to hide in the bushes and call out 'Wahrdung…Wahrdung…Black Crow…Black Crow…' an' he used to allus carry a long *gidtji*, nor'-west one, an' he would ride over to them boys and yell out, 'Which boy call me black crow, which boy call me black crow? And them boys would laugh and *doogeearkiny* down the river (Davis, *The Dreamers* 93).

Thus, in using Creole and Pidgin English post-colonial writers are appropriating as well as abrogating the English language in order to subvert the Standard English maintained by the imperialists. As Ashcroft *et al*. states in *The Empire Writes Back*:

> The theory of the Creole continuum, undermining, as it does, the static models of language formation, overturns 'concentric' notions of language which regard 'Standard' English as a 'core'. Creole need no longer be seen as a peripheral variation of English… the concept of what actually constitutes 'English" consequently opens itself to the possibility of radical transformation. It is indisputable that english literature extends itself to include all texts written in language communicable to an english speaker (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 46).

Most of the Australian Aboriginal writers write in English, however, there are writers like Jack Davis, a Nyoongah, who also deliberately used untranslated Nyoongah words in most of his works. For example, he used Nyoongah words such as '*wetjala*' which means a white person, a corruption of the English 'white fellow'. Nyoongah characters use the term *'wetjala'* (singular and plural) to refer to whites; this is not an Aboriginal word as such but a new term created from the English: 'white' and 'fellow' (usually pronounced 'fella' in Australia) have been merged and given a different pronunciation. Such changes in the lexicon illustrate the colonized subjects' ability to appropriate the language of the imperial center and use it for their own expressive purposes. This indigenising process often has affective as well

as referential functions; in other words, it produces languages which operate not only to convey new cognitive information but also to establish group identity. There are also many other Nyoongah words in Davis's plays, like 'boondah' for money, 'kienya' for shame, 'kia' for yes, 'unna' for isn't it?, 'moorditz' for good etc. (these Aboriginal words are selected from Jack Davis's plays) Leah Purcell also uses traditional Murri language and Murri English in her play *Box The Pony*. The use of "this composite 'impure' language survives in words and phrases embedded in vernacular English, it functions as a secret code that excludes members of the white audience, giving them the salutary experience of not quite understanding what is going on" (Hodge 103). This technique is continuously used by almost all Aboriginal playwrights and writers and it is one of the most important dramatic devices used in the Aboriginal theatre.

The use of this "technique of selective lexical fidelity which leaves some words untranslated in the text is a more widely used device for conveying the sense of cultural distinctiveness. Such a device not only acts to signify the difference between cultures, but also illustrates the importance of discourse in interpreting cultural concepts" (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 63). The deliberate use of untranslated words clearly suggests that the language which informs the text is an 'other' language. When a playwright chooses an indigenous language over English, he or she refuses to submit to the dominance of the imposed standard language and to subscribe to the 'reality' it sustains. Indigenous languages can be broadly defined as those which were native to a culture prior to colonization; however, it should be noted that such languages undergo changes, mostly at the lexical level, as speakers adopt 'foreign' words and invent new ones to describe a changed order of experience. Given that colonial authorities often banned the use of indigenous languages, especially in public places, their presentation on stage can represent an act of defiance and an attempt to recover cultural autonomy. It could also suggest that by using these untranslated words the writers in a way

urge and wish that the non-indigenous spectators or audience would bother to look up the meaning or learn the Indigenous language, if not words. “While in semiotic terms, language resonates with every other theatrical signifier, it is often viewed by audiences as the fundamental and most important system through which a play ‘means’. When colonized people hear dialogue spoken in their own tongue—and not in the ‘correct’ British English often erroneously assumed to be the only language worth staging—they understand it through literal, metaphorical, and political frames of reference which are specific to their own culture and experience” (Gilbert and Tompkins 168). The use of an indigenous language on stage therefore ‘localizes and attracts value away from a British “norm” eventually displacing the hegemonic centrality of the idea of “norm” itself’ (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 35-36). In regard to this, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins define post-colonial performance as including the following features:

- acts that respond to the experience of imperialism, whether directly or indirectly;
- acts performed for the continuation and/or regeneration of the colonised (and sometimes pre-contact) communities;
- acts performed with the awareness of, and sometimes the incorporation of, post-contact forms; and
- acts that interrogate the hegemony that underlies imperial representation (11).

Thus, with the points mentioned above it could be concluded that it is not wrong or uncritical to study and view the Australian Aboriginal drama in the light of post-colonial theory. Post-colonial stages are primarily significant areas from which to enunciate linguistic resistance to imperialism.

Indigenous Australians playwrights utilize subversive techniques in theatre by borrowings from western literary and stage models and at the same time they symbolizes truth telling in the act of speaking about their versions of history. They produced a number of

auto-biographical Aboriginal works such as Scott Rankin and Leah Purcell's *Box the Pony*, Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman's *The Seven Stages of Grieving*, and Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Want to Play House* etc. As Helen Thomson quotes, "Hybridity in various forms is a well-documented postcolonial strategy that can be confronting and subversive and sometimes has a particular fitness in expressing the mixed racial and cultural heritage of many Aborigines. It also complicates assumptions that naturalism is the stage convention to which Aboriginal writing has almost exclusively adapted itself" (Thomson 136). In Deborah Mailman's semi-autobiographical play, *The 7 Stages of Grieving* she comes forward and approaches the audience in the 22nd scene 'Plea' and what she reveals is what most Aboriginal playwrights want to do:

> You know there has always been this grieving,
>
> Grieving for our Land, our families.
>
> Our cultures that have been denied us.
>
> But we have been taught to cry quietly
>
> Where only our eyes betray us with tears.
>
> But now, we can no longer wait,
>
> I am scared my heart is hardening.
>
> I fear I can no longer grieve
>
> I am so full and know my capacity for grief.
>
> What can I do but...perform.
>
> These are my stories.
>
> These are my people's stories.
>
> They need to be told (Mailman 73).

Stolen, by Jane Harrison, provides an interesting example of an adaptation of fictional biographies into a different realm of truth-telling, through the device of linking the five

children's stories with the real-life stories of the actors, each of whom tells the audience, as actors and Aborigines, at the end of the play, of their own family's involvement in the stolen generations narrative. It also fore grounded an issue that has become an important theme in most of the other Aboriginal plays. The fact that it was originally commissioned by the Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-op- erative indicates that it is not entirely inaccurate to describe the play as an adaptation of oral history into performance art. It represents a selection of representative stories from the vast oral history archives of Aboriginal Australians, only some of which have found their way into print. Its power also derives from the incorporation of so many other Aboriginal narratives, usually recast in various white dis-courses, all of which are have been caused by child theft. These range from serial child theft, sexual abuse, alcoholism, suicide in custody, cultural con-fusion, violence, mental illness to physical and psychological cruelty. In *Stolen*, the negative, racist stereotypes of Aboriginality can be deconstructed to reveal their source in the grotesque imbalance of power between black and white, neatly captured in the utter powerlessness of black children in an orphanage.

In *Stolen*, the character of Jimmy while representing the Stolen Generation children at the same time he also represents members of death in custody. Jimmy is always told that his mother was dead, which, he didn't believe in the scene "Your Mum's Dead":

JIMMY: She's not dead, she's not.

…

MATRON: [voice over] Just forget her.

JIMMY: She's wouldn't have left me alone, she's going to

come for me, just you wait… (*Stolen* 12).

Jimmy is always in a quandary of whether his mother is alive or not. The Matron keeps on telling him that she's dead and to forget her, but, Jimmy is hopeful of reuniting with his

mother. The feeling of being unloved and left alone makes Jimmy angry that he finds no purpose in obeying the government, police or officials, which very often lets him gets into trouble with the law. He is frequently in and out of jail and he describes himself as a 'thug and a thief'. It was during his visit to a bar after just being released from prison that Jimmy learns about his mother. At first he didn't believe, as he is always the impression that his mother is dead. After the mention of his mother's name, he was filled with shocked and excitement:

> JIMMY: Willy what? Wa-ju-ri! Willy Wajurri. Fuck me dead.
>
> [*He laughs*.] So my mother's not dead – those lying bastards.
>
> And I've got a family. It's a long time since I've seen my
>
> people… so I've got a mother, eh?… I've got a mother (Harrison, *Stolen* 27).

Having found out about each other Jimmy and his mother are very excited and at the same time anxious to meet each other. In the scene "What Do You Do?" the son and the mother project anxiety in the prospect of meeting each other is seen:

> JIMMY: What do you do when you meet your mother for the first time in twenty-six years? Shake her hand? Give her a hug? Do I show her me footy trophies, and me chool reports?
>
> JIMMY"S MOTHER:Twenty- six years is a long time. Gees, what if I don't recognize him? What'll I say to him?
>
> JIMMY: Do I say, 'Hi, Mum, what's new? How have you been? Where have you been all my life?' Do I give her twenty- six Christmas presents and twenty-six birthday presents? Bloody hell, I don't even know when her birthday is…
>
> JIMMY"S MOTHER: Maybe we'll be like strangers. Maybe he'll be
>
> ashamed of me. He probably doesn't even know how much I've missed…
>
> …

JIMMY"S MOTHER:Will he like me?

JIMMY: She might not even like me.

JIMMY"S MOTHER:Will he love me?

JIMMY: Will she feel like my mother…? I don't even

know what having a mother feels like (Harrison, *Stolen* 29-30).

The heart of a mother has not dried up, but the heart of a son is not grown in absence of the mother. Jimmy's mother ardently writes letters to Jimmy which he never gets hold of. She is also searching and enquiring about him and at long last when they are about to meet finally, there is a poignant twist of fate. Jimmy's mother has always warped a present for Jimmy of all the twenty-six years he was kept away from her. Before meeting her son she pulls the presents out of the box and lays them on the floor. She takes time to consider each one, as they represent all the love she was not able to give her son. Then she collapses and dies. At the same moment Jimmy stands happily, oblivious of his mother's death, says: "I'm finally going to meet my mother" (*Stolen* 30)

His mother's death is a heavy blow for Jimmy's troubled soul. There is a profound grief in his words: "Oh Mum, if you'd just held on a little longer…" (*Stolen* 32) A lifelong quest and effort to be with his mother has come to nothing, Jimmy seeks refuge in suicide. The prison warden finds him hanging.

The warden shines her light on Jimmy's letter. Anger, despair, sorrow and finally resignation well up in Jimmy as he speaks from his noose:

They kept saying she was dead… but I could feel her spirit. Mum was alive and I waited for her to come and get me, to take me home. I was just a little tacker, for god's sake…Dear Mum, forgive me. I have sinned. I've been a thug and a thief – but I've never stolen anyone's soul… Oh, why couldn't you have lived a bit longer just so I could meet you? I waited so long. Brothers, don't give up fighting. Don't let it

> happen again. Don't let them take babies from their mother's arms. Someone's gotta fight. I just can't no more. They stuck a knife into me heart and twisted it so hard. Prison don't make you tough, it makes ya weak, ya spirit just shrivels up inside. I'm going now, to be with my mother. I can't fight. I'm punched out. My only wish is that we go to the same place. Willy Wajurri (Harrison, *Stolen* 33-34).

Jimmy's suicide note contains significant messages of the plight of the stolen generations. The statement "I've been a thug and a thief – but I've never stolen anyone soul" is an implication that white Australia has stolen his soul by depriving him of his family, his culture, religion etc. Jimmy is punched out he couldn't fight it any longer, he has been subjected to so many cruelties that he doesn't have the strength to fight back. However, he urges his fellow sufferers to continue to struggle against the oppressive measures that have rendered them into their miserable conditions.

The Jimmy story is not only a trace of the endless torment and persecution of the Aborigines under white colonizers. It also tells the story of many Aboriginal deaths in custody. It also challenges the white Australians notion of the history of Australia in the form of many such personal experiences being narrated in the theatre. He presents Australia's Aboriginal history in a language that goes straight to the heart, a language that could shake up the latent conscience of the white Australians and make it view with horror its appalling subjection of the unfortunate inhabitants. Wesley Enoch, the director of *Stolen*, commented, "It reminds the audience that they haven't just sat through a show. They sat through people's lives." The *Stolen*' narrative brings to view a significantly different notion of the soul other than the white man's concept. It is resoundingly a living concept which houses all relationships in one place and furthers their growth. This seems to truly reflect the original Aborigine's natural spirit.

A literal adaptation of a black narrative which could be included in the field of semi-autobiography or biography, can be found in Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*, first performed at the Carlton Courthouse in February, 2002. In this play we find a deliberate blurring of fictional character and autobiographical confession. The main character, Jack is a prototype of the author, Richard Frankland himself, whose experience as the only indigenous member of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody cost him dearly. Jack begins with a direct address to the audience:

> Imagine that you're a Koorie, that you're in your mid-twenties, that your job is to look into the lives of the dead and the process, policy and attitude that killed them. Imagine seeing that much death and grief that you lose your family, and you begin to wonder at your own sanity. Imagine when the job's over but the nightmares remain and the deaths keep on happening more than ever. What would you do? Where would you put the memories? What would keep you sane? Who do you think could understand what you carry inside you? (Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead* 221-222)

In the play Frankland is giving witness to Aboriginal deaths in custody, and as the only indigenous participant in the investigation, he assumes the burden of spokesperson for his culture. The play is a massive subversion of the official report, converting its official form and conclusions into a testimony that claims for the subjugated narrative all the power of performance, its huge emotional affect, its confrontation of actors and audience in the same time and place, its demand that the spectators witness the ongoing cost of killing black people while they were in police custody. In fact it draws upon all the power of the imaginative work, of a work of literature as well as performance, using songs and music, for example, to great effect, to make us understand the horrendously destructive cultural encounter that has characterized black/white relations in Australia from the start (Thomson 138).

Like *Stolen*, *Conversations with the Dead* dramatizes a series of stories about individuals with whom, because they are dead, Frankland can only imagine conversations. Where Harrison's play encapsulates five characters out of hundreds of stolen stories in *Stolen*, *Conversations with the Dead* similarly condenses into a handful of stories, the 124 deaths in custody in an eight year period, of which 99 were investigated, and for which no one was ever charged (Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead*, 232 & 242). The play not only represents the official report that was in part written by the play's author, but also an imaginative adaptation of the many spoken sources behind this report. Frankland was almost broken by the ordeal of listening to the narratives of death; his torment is seen throughout the play. In a scene where his prototype Jack addresses the audience:

> Sometimes you have to be what you don't want. Maybe its fate, maybe it'swhat meant to be, maybe you have to use this pain to help others. My pain, your pain, our pain (Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead* 231).

He feels the pain of the death and at the same time he feels guilty as he is employed by the white Australian government as one of the members in Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody. He feels guilty to his fellow Aborigines as he says to David, a character in *Conversations with the Dead*, whose dead body was examined by Jack:

> So I get to feel guilty because your life and death make me more well-known, because your experience becomes mine and our lives become more so intertwined that I don't know where one begins and one ends (ibid.).

Richard Frankland was deeply tormented by his job at the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody and at the same time he felt that he was able to help his own people and understands them better. His projected his ordeal and pain in the play, as in one scene Jack, addresses the audience:

> I have death in me and on me and I can't get rid of it. Sometimes I am too scared to hold children because I feel like I am sucking the life from them and I can see death when I walk down the street…
>
> In fact, when I walk down the street I see pain in people's faces and I know that they have lost someone recently or that they are having a hard time.
>
> Like I said earlier, I see the faces of the dead, and I see the world through a mother's tears all the time. I can see sadness in the streets, pain in people's faces, grief in their hands and the way they walk. I can see loneliness like a man sees a long-lost brother, I do see hope sometimes… and love, I see love, from pain and grief, this is what hurts most of all (Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead* 260).

Frankland's profound understanding of the Aborigines who died in custody is emphasized throughout the pain and his own feeling of powerlessness permeated throughout the play. The mental agony he has gone through and the deep scaring of his psyche is found in a scene where his prototype Jack, once again address the audience:

> I'm looking for hanging points, 'cause every morning when I wake up I talk myself out of killing myself. But I go through the motions, I find the hanging points in my house, start off my bedroom and then work my way through the lounge into the backyard.
>
> I don't think I'll ever do it but I try different stuff out…(*Conversations with the Dead* 264).

This scene clearly suggests his quandary and at the same time the last line indicates his aversion to suicide unlike the character Jimmy from *Stolen*, who urges his fellow Aborigines not to give up fighting, but give in to suicide. Although, Frankland felt the mental torment and pain in examining the Aboriginal dead body in custody and also the dilemma by having to convert them into a white Australian official document. He found some kind of healing in

then undertaking a further adaptation into a play, where some of those voices could be given a public airing. As his mother Tina Saunders, in an interview said, "He couldn't speak about it, but I always knew he'd write something out of that pain" (Bunworth "interview").

The theme of survival is another one important aspect in the Aboriginal writings. Most of the Aboriginal writings have carried the message 'we have survived'. It is a message that runs through Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* and *Kullark*. In *Kullark*, Davis develops the theme of survival and sustained Aboriginal resistance. The sentiment of the entire play can be seen in the last part of the play when a black actor came forward with a poem and ends the play as:

> With murder, with rape, you marred her skin,
>
> But you cannot whiten her mind.
>
> They will remain my children forever,
>
> The black and the beautiful kind.
>
> The black and the beautiful kind (Davis, *Kullark* IV).

The pithy sentences here are characteristics of the Aboriginal spirit. The Aborigine paradigm of 'black and beautiful' proudly dismisses the other paradigm of white as beautiful. This is recognition and acknowledgement of native identity with forceful conviction. However, though they survived oppression of different kinds under the white dominance, *The Dreamers* addresses the problems of how the Aborigines survive in the suburbia with an Aboriginal sense of identity, as Worru an Aboriginal old man puts in the first scene:

> 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 campfires used to gleam (Davis, *The Dreamers* 73).

In *The Dreamers*, Jack Davis takes up the squalor and meaninglessness of some of the contemporary Aboriginal living, depicting the lifestyle of a typical Aboriginal urban household in the 1980s, combined with nostalgia for a traditional Aboriginal past. The play makes clear that the current social problems and demoralization of the Wallitch family have long historical roots.

The title of Davis's play brings into memory the relevance of the 'dreamer' to the Australian past. The Australian Aboriginal 'dreamer' is a spirit with transformative powers. He is usually accompanied by clapsticks and the music of the didgeridoo, the dreamer appears as a (male) dancer who is only visible to the audience and to certain chosen characters. He represents the pre-contact past (when traditions, laws, and taboos were observed without the interference of white society) and functions dramatically to highlight the destruction of Aboriginal culture that has ensued since European settlement. This emphasis on the past does not mean, however, that the dreamer is fixed in time and place; rather he is a timeless figure situated outside, and in opposition to, the bounded and quantifiable spaces of western empiricism (Gilbert and Tompkins 236). As a link between the present and the ancestral world, the dreamer's tasks include 'dancing' the spirit of a dying person back to the land of his or her individual dreaming. Performatively, the dreamer embodies indigenous tradition since he is costumed, adorned, and marked with ceremonial paint as a cultural icon that signifies Aboriginality. The Aboriginal dreamer performs subversively as he claims all areas of the stage, his dance reinforcing the tangible *presence* of the Aboriginal past in spite of western encroachment upon indigenous time and space. Davis's *The Dreamers* centralizes its spirit character for precisely this purpose: while the derogated body of Uncle Worru is prominent at the level of realistic action, the metamorphic

body of the dreamer supplies a surrealistic frame that stresses the persistence and resistance of Aboriginal culture. At times, the dreamer also temporarily imbues the ill, diseased, or frail human body with 'super-human' strength (ibid.).

Like in *Kullark*, the past and present are intermingled skillfully in the character of Worro, as memories both happy and sad. Survival and inner strength is also one of the themes of Leah Purcell's *Box The Pony*. It is a semi- autobiographical story of Leah Purcell, a young girl growing up in a bush community, and how she overcomes and frees herself like "bungaburra" (blue crane). The play is a one-person show which portrays among other things the rawness of contemporary Aboriginal experience. Leah creates Steff, her alter ego, to retell her life, which is characterized by a difficult upbringing to a nearly disastrous young adulthood and then to a triumphant later life as Leah, an acclaimed performer and boxer. The word box is used in two ways in the play: "to fight" and "to package something" and the final scene determines that Leah will not be boxed up; instead she's going to fight her way out as she says in the scene: "I came from a long line of champions." *Box The Pony* records the struggle of many Aboriginal people by tracing Leah's life.

One of the important characteristic features of Aboriginal writing is representing life in stories with subtle humor. The Selected playwrights have all used humor in their works, though none of their plays could be termed as a comedy. In almost all the works of Jack Davis humor plays an important part, as in *The Dreamers*, humor is an important component of the Aboriginal self-image. In the scene Act One – Scene Seven of *The Dreamers*, we find the conflicting convictions, which dictate the life of the Aborigines i.e. between the traditional Aboriginal religion and modern Christianity. As the Wallitch family is sitting down to a meal of roast kangaroo:

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*?

SHANE: Ssh, ssh, Popeye, close your eyes.

ROY: We thank you, Lord.

WORRU: What for? Can't eat with my 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! (Davis, *The Dreamers* 103).

This is subversive of the Christian paradigm which was brought to the Aborigines. The Christian sacred habit is not borne out of conviction. Worru's casual tone of playfulness does undermine not too deep a belief but with a tinge of irony. This language aspect also uncovers the nexus between other forces of power relations in Australia.

Though the language barrier between the Aborigines and the missionaries facilitated to the Aborigines efforts to remain traditional, the Aborigines were not prepared to comprehend some Christian concepts. They had no understanding of hell, no knowledge of geography to place the events of the Bible, and no comprehension of the Christian parables about flocks and shepherds for they had never seen sheep. When shown Biblical pictures, the Aborigines saw only a white God, a white Jesus, a white angels and a black devil, and were naturally alienated by this European color symbolism of white as good and black as evil. The Bible stories to them were a story of power and injustice. Therefore, the Christian message was either confused or was not accepted as it was intended (Broome 117). According to

Richard Broome, “If the European missionaries all over Australia had been able to detach themselves from association with European power and cultural dominance, they might have gained more Aboriginal converts. As it was, they remained colonial managers as well as men of God, and this mixture alienated the Aborigines” (Broome 119). Thus, missionaries in colonial cultures are interesting and ambiguous agents of empire. Although they were very well intentioned towards the indigenous people they encountered, they have little regard in preserving the indigenous cultures. The missionaries occupied a very ambivalent and ambiguous position within the Aboriginal cultures. They were driven by the ideas that Christianity could bring a better tomorrow for the ‘pagan Aborigines’. While most other Europeans in contact with the Aborigines did little to change Aboriginal ways, the missionaries tried to strike at the heart of Aboriginal culture, defeat it, and put Christianity and European customs in its place. Though the Aborigines resisted this attack for a long while, but great changes have occurred and the battle has been lost in some communities. The heartening thing is that a number of missionaries saw the value of Aboriginal culture from the outset, and that others were flexible enough to change their opinions. As pastor Albrecht of Hermannsburg mission in central Australia once remarked: ‘When we first came here we thought we had found the only people in the world without a religion. Now we have learnt that they are among the most religious people in the world’ (Broome 123). As Johannes Fabian has argued, not only ‘the crooks and brutal exploiters, but honest and intelligent agents of colonialism need to be accounted for’ in order to build up a nuanced, complicated vision of colonialism and its aftermath (Johnston 105).

Though, there is violence, sorrow and suffering in Davis’s plays there is humor and endurance, which is bitter sweet. Davis’s great skill is his ability to balance conflict between police and prisoners, “protectors” and their “cares”, magistrates and defendants- with the usage of a little humor relevant to their situation as we find in the scene from *No Sugar*:

SERGEANT: Look, there's nothing I can do about it except put in a reminder to the Department in Perth. Why don't youse go around to St.John's and ask the vicar?

MILLY: For blankets? He'll give us nothin', he's like that.

GRAN: (*adopting a praying attitude*) Yeah, when he come to Gubment Well he goes like that with his eyes closed and he says the Lord will help you,

and now he prays with his eyes open, 'cause time 'fore last Wow Wow

bit him on the leg… musta wanted a bit a' holy meat (Davis, *No Sugar* 43).

Here, Gran is making fun of the vicar, throughout the play we find ironic humor in a subtle manner. The humor seen in many Aboriginal plays derives from the traditions and particular skills of the Aborigines, especially those of mime and impersonation. In his interview with Adam Shoemaker, in talking about the distinctive Aboriginal world view, which was reflected in the Aboriginal drama, Davis's states:

> Oh, yes. You see, we've always been acting. Aboriginal people are the greatest actors in the world... we've acted up before magistrates, we've acted up before the police, we've acted up before social workers; we've always done our own mime. It's not too long since we were introduced to television and all that type of thing, and when we lived in the Bush we had our own way of doing these things ourselves, so that's why it's not so difficult for me to find an Aboriginal theme.... Like the man who burns his feet and he doesn't even know his feet are alight. He's standing on the fire and he says, [imitating voice] 'By Crikey, I can smell somethin' burnin' there! You fellas burn an old bag over there somewhere? Or you burnin' kangaroo skin?' [New voice] 'Uncle! You're standing in the fire! Get out of the fire there!' He never wore boots for forty years and he's got callouses on his feet that thick, and he was standing in the fire. His feet were burning and he didn't even know it! And laughed-you know that, [claps] that went around the camp for a week. Well, little incidents like that, you know, that

> carry on all the time-it's not very hard to put 'em down on paper. I'm sure the Aboriginal playwrights have seen that (Shoemaker 111-116).

The humor is often critical but is never really offensive. Adam shoemaker rightly states in his book, *Black Words, White Page*, "The mimicry and mockery of whites and the humorous celebration of their own lifestyle has been one way in which blacks have opposed the encroachments of European society, and have asserted their own independence and capacity for endurance" (Shoemaker 233). He also stated that this reliance upon laughter in the midst of adversity is an important element in the Aboriginal self-image. It is one which emerges very clearly in Aboriginal literature, particularly in Black Australian drama.

To corroborate his statement, he further quoted Australian anthropologist Anna Haebich who has commented: "Aboriginal people keep on laughing to stay afloat. In interviews they emphasize the good times and it's very hard indeed to get them to talk about the bad times" (ibid.). Moreover, humor serves as an important twofold to undermine white authority and to reinforce agency: Blair [an indigenous film director] uses humor to chide or subtly mock or 'take the piss' out of non-Aboriginal viewers, and contest their perceived 'knowledge' of Aboriginal people and their preoccupation with notions of cultural 'authenticity'. Humor also in a way emphasizes the action of the Aboriginal subjects through non- confrontational, but as an active and effective mode of resistance. Humor then is not only a means of making the audience laugh. The non-Aboriginal viewers or theatre-goers are sometimes laughed at by the playwrights and performer without them acknowledging it. The humor and mimicry could act as an important means of non-confrontational ways of resistance. Mimicry, according to Bhabha, is an exaggerated copying of language, culture, manners and ideas. This exaggeration means that mimicry is repetition with difference, and so it is not evidence of the colonized servitude. In fact, mimicry is also a form of mockery, it

mocks and undermines the ongoing pretentions of colonialism and empire. According to Homi K Bhabha:

> Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference…mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal (Bhabha 122).

Bhabha further comments: "Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history. For the fetish mimes the forms of authority at the point at which it deauthorizes them. Similarly, mimicry rearticulates presence in terms of its 'otherness', that which it disavows" (Bhabha 130). Thus the colonized subjects, in the aspect of this thesis i.e. the Aboriginal playwrights are resorting to mimicry to unsettle the artistic domination of the Western and European canon. Their use of mimicry is clearly subversive: rather than signally a form of cultural cringe, it creates a "third hybrid space" which de-stabilizes rigid aesthetic Western categories (Maufort 105).

Colonial discourse essentially wants the colonized subjects to be like the colonizers but at the same time they do not want them to identical, they just want them to meet their so called standard i.e. European or western standards. When the colonized subjects act and dressed like the colonizers they were mocked by their own people. This is why derogatory term like 'coconut' etc. came in existence among the colonized subjects. In both the plays of Jack Davis's *No Sugar* and *The Dreamers*, there is a mention of Billy Kimberly, a black tracker, who used to track and bring back the run-away Aborigines to the Settlement. He was called and teased by his fellow Aborigines:

> ‘Wahrdung…Wahrdung…Black Crow…Black Crow…’ an’ he used to allus carry a long *gidtji*, nor’-west one, an’ he would ride over to them boys and yell out, ‘Which boy call me black crow, which boy call me black crow? And them boys would laugh and *doogeearkiny* down the river (Davis, *The Dreamers*, 93).

Thus, the Aboriginal writers used humor and mimicry to relive themselves of the repressions faced by them, to critique the colonized modes of colonization and as a resistance tool against the hegemony of white Australians. Using these techniques the Aboriginal playwrights are (re)presenting their version of history in Australia. It may be acknowledged that the Aboriginal theatre sharing with other genres of Aboriginal literature has been able to dramatize more creatively the past of Australian history as suppressed or marginalized. This theatre while representing the Australian reality becomes another cultural mode for recovering Australian history from its assumed non-existence to historicity.

ENDNOTES

[1] The first prisoner who was captured by the Europeans was Arabanoo, he was captured at Manly. Arabanoo quickly learned the language and proved to be quite a gentleman. Unfortunately he died in the smallpox epidemic which wiped out half of the Gamaraigal in mid 1789. In the following November, Bennelong was kidnapped but this clever fellow escaped six months later with a smattering of English (Broome 31).

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CHAPTER – III

THE BODY AS A SITE OF ABORIGINAL IDEOLOGY AND IDENTITY

The ‘difference’ of the post-colonial subject by which he or she can be ‘othered’ is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body; skin color, eye shape, hair texture and body shape, are read as indelible signs of the ‘natural’ inferiority of their possessors (Ashcroft et al. 1999:321). The Englishmen were influenced by the notion of ‘black’ as dirty and evil and ‘white’ as clean and pure. The English saw the Africans as ‘savages’ who were violent, lecherous, treacherous, and akin to the apes of Africa (Broome 29). The first Englishman to document Australia, the then New Holland, William Dampier, wrote in 1688: “*The inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world… They differ but little from Brutes… They have great Heads, round Foreheads and great Browls. Their Eye-lids are half closed to keep the Flies out of their Eyes”*(Thompson 2011). So, generally the body became the dominant feature in which the colonizers determined and undervalued the colonized subjects. As noted by Franz Fanon many years ago, this is the inescapable ‘fact’ of blackness, a ‘fact’ which forces on ‘negro’ people a heightened level of bodily self-consciousness, since it is the body which is the inescapable, visible sign of their oppression and denigration (Ashcroft et al. 1999:321).

Performance, as an embodied encounter, between people of different cultures occupies a crucial position within the processes of recognition and misrecognition of the other (Casey 155). In the context of the Australian aboriginal people, performance has been a pivotal point of encounter between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The colonized subjects are concerned with rejecting the colonially determined markers and descriptions of themselves. They actively take part in trying to redefine themselves in their writings and are redefining their identity on stage in order to overthrow the traditionally stereotype assigned to them. This oppositional process of embodiment, whereby the colonized creates his or her own subjectivity, ascribes more flexible, culturally laden, and multivalent delineations to the body, rather than circumscribing it within an imposed, imperialist calculation of otherness.

The post-colonial stage offers opportunities to recuperate the colonized subject's body—especially when it has been maimed or otherwise rendered 'incomplete'—and to transform its signification and its subjectivity (Gilbert and Tompkins 205). Hence, the Aboriginal playwrights have used theatre to reconstructs the white constructs of black life, culture and history.

As theatre's medium of articulation is space, it becomes a vital element in theatre study. Theatre is consistently about space and it is always "a multifaceted space" (Tompkins 3). The space in the theatre adjusts to include several dimensions comprehensively, including all the surroundings and places that are in real spaces and also the imagined spaces for performance. The theatre is frames and sets in such a way that it intersect with the world off stage. Or, as Anne Ubersfeld explains, 'the stage symbolically represents sociocultural spaces….In one way, theatrical space is the place of history' (Tompkins 4). Space in theatre is sometimes difficult to characterize as it could have number of possible meanings. In Australia, the Aboriginal space performed in Australian theatre contests conventional Australian history and culture, theatre became a contested space as Gearoid O Tuathail puts it:

> The struggle over geography is also a conflict between competing images and imaginings, a contest of power and resistance that involves not only struggles to represent the materiality of physical geographic objects and boundaries but also equally powerful and, in a different manner, the equally material force of discursive borders between an idealized Self and a demonized Other, between 'us' and 'them'. Viewed from the colonial frontier, geography is not just a battle of cartographic technologies and regimes of truth; it is also a contest between different ways of envisioning the world (Tompkins14-15).

O Tuathail's analysis of geography and space of both the colonizers and the colonized perspectives in regard to land rights, nationalism, settlement etc. depicts the unsettlement that take place in a place like Australia. The history of white settlement in Australia is precarious and cause cultural anxiety. The white settlers have the notion that Australia was an empty land, owned by no one (terra nullius) and therefore the white history overlooked the killing, taming or ignoring the indigenous peoples and the redistribution of the lands among the European settlers. The indigenous people started to talk about the real history of the settlement and contestations of the white history actively take place in their writings, especially in theatre. A key part of theatre's potential social significance is the public performance of theatrical events in a context that facilitates a dialogue with ideas, however performance alone is not enough; theatre needs to be historicized as well (Tompkins 7).

In Aboriginal theatre, the body itself is the site of greatest potential resistance to white Australians conceptualization of the Aborigines in Australia. Helen Gilbert, while discussing "body politics" quotes Elizabeth Ferrier, "the body is the site of greatest potential resistance to imperialist structurations of reality" (Gilbert 66). Performance as the verbal and visual articulation of the body is seen as a logical medium for enacting such resistance, as it enables to defy the imperialists' scrutiny, which strives to subjugate the indigenous people in constructing their being as inferior being. Performance allows the colonized subjects to position themselves as a speaking, moving subject rather than manipulated objects. And as the culture of the Aborigines is a preliterate culture it does not privilege the written word, thus performance offers them spaces in theatre in which their versions of history might be represented. And giving importance to the body can sometimes be very advantageous on the part of the indigenous playwrights in reconstructing post-colonial subjectivity, because European colonizers conceptualization of the Aborigines has been both deceptive and convincing in their construction of the colonized subject as an inscribed object of knowledge.

The Aboriginal playwrights try to do away with the ideology of the white i.e. their construction of their own body as superior and the Aboriginal body as inferior.

The Aboriginal playwrights and writers are now in position to accept and representing their body in their own way. They try to subvert and break the stereotype of the whites who believe and constructed that they were superior because of their skin color. In his plays Jack Davis, skillfully address the unsighted accounts of settler history and literature on a number of levels; he intelligently brings the black body to visibility through individual characters, dancers and also through group interaction. *Kullark,* for example, reverses colonialism's racial standards in a comic depiction of first contact when Mitjitjiroo responds to Captain Stirling's proffered hand by rubbing its skin vigorously to see if the white stain can be removed:

> STIRLING: [*slapping his chest*] Captain Stirling…Stir-ling.
>
> [*He extends his hand in a friendly gesture*. YAGAN *and* MOYARAHN *are reticent but* MITJITJIROO *advances*. *Instead of shaking* STIRLING'*shand he rubs it vigorously*, *to see if the colour will come off*. *Astounded*, *he runs back to the others*.] (*Kullark* 14).

This gesture, along with the Aborigines' astonishment at the strange appearance of the Europeans, denaturalizes the white body as the dominant sign of humanity. In a related scene when Captain Stirling in trying to be friendly with the natives says:

> STIRLING: Have we got anything we can give them?
>
> FRASER: My butterfly net?
>
> STIRLING: I don't think they would attach much value to that. No, something colorful. Your coat and trousers.
>
> FRASER: I beg your pardon, sir?
>
> STIRLING: Take your coat and trousers off, Mr. Fraser.

[FRASER *does so*]

FRASER: Sir, is this really necessary?

[FRASER *folds his trousers neatly*. STIRLING *offers them to* MITJITJIROO. *With* STIRLING's *help*, MITJITJIROO *dons the coat*, *but hands the trousers to* YAGAN, *who tries to put them on as a coat*. STIRLING *moves to help* YAGAN, *but raises his spear*. *They began to enjoy their new clothes*.]

MOYARAHN: [*Screaming*] Allewah, allewah! ['Look out, look out!]

Kynya, kynya, niijuk. Warrah bok, arrah bok. ['Shame,

shame, this clothing is bad.'

[*Didgeridoo music and clapsticks fade in*.]

Baal warramut, warramut. ['They are bad, bad.'] *Yuarl*

gnullarah kooliny.Yuarl gnullarah kooliny.Yuarl, yuarl, yuarl.

['Come, let us go. Come, let us go. Come, come, come.] (Davis, *Kullark* 14-15).

The scene here highlights the different opinion of the white Europeans and the native Australians, while the white Europeans believe that clothing is a sign of civility the natives clearly differ, as to them it is a bad sign. It evokes fear and mistrust in the female character, Moyarahn. European clothing does not bring a particular level of civility desired by the invader but functions instead as a wayward signifier that might provoke white audience to shift their perspectives – to see themselves as the others of their Others (Gilbert 68).

In *Stolen*, Jane Harrison also uses this kind of reversal technique in the scene, "Sandy's Story of a Mungee". Sandy tells the story of a Mungee in order to help Ruby get over her fear of dark. The Mungee was an "outcast from the mob", who would sneak into the Aboriginal people's camp and "stole one of the children" and ate them up. The mob couldn't catch the Mungee as he came under the cover of darkness. As Sandy continues:

> …The mob were frightened and upset and crying. They tried hiding the children but the Mungee always found them. 'The Mungee's stealing our babies', they cried to the elders. 'What are we going to do? We can't catch him because we can't see him in the dark!' The elders thought about it and came up with a plan. They would cast a spell on him. The next day the elders waited for the Mungee, and when they sensed his presence they threw magic powdered bone all over him. It stuck in his hair and on his skin and couldn't scrub it off. The Mungee was turned into a pale skin and that was his punishment. He would never be able to sneak into the camp to steal the children because he would be seen. And the people would know. And the people would never forget. … It's not dark you need to be afraid of (Harrison, *Stolen* 10).

Here Sandy's story skillfully portrays ironical reversal of the dark, evil, child-eating Mungee who is being exposed and punished and made into a "pale skin", and reminds Ruby that it is not dark that ought to be feared. There is a direct hinting of the Mungee as the white Australian government who stole children from their black mothers and all the children as the children of the "stolen generation". "The Mungee came for them, in big cars, disguised as 'welfare,' or church ministers, and they gobbled up in a powerful bureaucratic system solely and simply because their mothers were black" (Thompson 16). In the context of the Aboriginal people, the white ideology of evil, associated with the dark/black, is in now in the guise of white stealing children from their parents.

In theatre, the actor's body is one of the most prominent symbols; the physical body is prominent from other symbols because of its ability to suggest diverse meanings. As drama is the most primal method of artistic expression, mediated by no pigment, print, or lens, it communicates directly through the raw material of the pulsating human body; its rhythmic movement, sounds, and presence (Figueiredo 82). The performing body indicates the meaning of the drama through its appearance and actions. It also indicates categories like race

and gender and also express place and account of the story through skillful mimic and action. Furthermore, the body relates to all the other adjuncts of theatre such as costume, stage setting, lighting, music, acting and dialogue and needless to say with the audiences. Thus, it can be said that the body functions as one of the most charged sites of theatrical representation. The colonial subject's body contests its stereotyping and representation by others to insist on self-representation by its physical presence on the stage. The colonized subject's body, according to Elleke Boehmer, has been an object of the colonizer's fascination and repulsion (and, in effect, possession) in sexual, pseudo-scientific, and political terms:

> In colonial representation, exclusion or suppression can often literally be seen as 'embodied'. From the point of view of the colonizer specifically, fears and curiosities, sublimated fascinations with the strange or the 'primitive', are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images.... [T]he Other is cast as corporeal, carnal, untamed, instinctual, raw, and therefore also open to mastery, available for use, for husbandry, for numbering, branding, cataloging, description or possession (Gilbert and Tompkins 203).

The self-representation of the colonized bodies on the stage as performing agents is discernibly essential for post-colonial theatre. In narrative writing the race of the characters tends to be obscure if the author does not give detailed description. However, in theatre, the actors' race and gender can be known by their being merely on the stage and the movement of the body on stage provides many possible sites for decolonization. Thus, Aboriginal theatre becomes very political and it tends to be relevant to their present situation. Their stories through drama help in revisiting their place in history and how they got to the present and revealed the structures of power through which they have been controlled.

Jack Davis for instance is a good example of how Aboriginal artists have developed a strategy of resistance against European hegemony through the use of Western structure of drama in order to foster the issue. Davis received his education from the white Australians and through this it paved a way for him to develop a literary career in Australia. In his plays, Davis describes the condition of the Aborigines in his country, Australia, where discriminations take place. He represents the injustices that Aborigines had to face in society led by white settlers. Davis introduced the Aboriginal art form and 'gave a new status to performance by Aboriginal artists' (Brisbane 3) most obviously by working with Aboriginal performers and including Aboriginal dance and music. He also made various use of white contribution and did not hesitate to use the white method and form in order to serve an Aboriginal discourse. The presence of the colonized subject body and awareness in one sense or another is one of the features which are crucial to post-colonial rejections of the Eurocentric norms. In Jack Davis's *Kullark* the naked body of the Aborigines as costume acts as an agent of resistance that functions as a wayward signifier that might perturb white audiences to shift their perspectives – to see themselves as the other and their Others as the subject (Gilbert 67). In *Kullark*, Davis's uses Aboriginal actors for the characters of Aborigines in the play. In the scene where the white Europeans meet the Aborigines for the first time at Swan River in the year 1827 the Europeans view them as savages because they were carrying a spear and were naked:

> STIRLING: Mr. Fraser a British colony would stand a better chance of
>
> prospering here on the Swan River than anywhere in the world.
>
> FRASER: But, sir, it'll soon be dark.
>
> STIRLING: Just a bit further, Mr. Fraser! Come on man!
>
> [YAGAN, MITJITJIROO and MOYARAHN *enter*, *clad in kangaroo skin capes. The men carry spears, the woman a* wahna.]

FRASER: Look sir, savages (Davis, *Kullark* 13).

Here Davis depicted a situation where racial prejudiced was formed by the white colonizers in their first encounter itself with the Aboriginal people.

In the Anglo-European theatre, when non-white characters were portrayed on stage white actors played the characters, and the differences in appearance were constructed with costume, make-up, and/or mask. William Shakespeare's Othello, for example, was played by a white actor whose skin was blacken and put on a curly-haired wig to fit the character of a black moor. The white-Australian theatre, being an imitative of and influenced by the Anglo-European theatre, the Aboriginal people were hardly projected in the white drama/play and even when they were portrayed; the non- Aboriginal actors played the characters. According to Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, "When racially marked characters are played in this way, the resistance potential of the fictionalized black/colored body is compromised by the 'way- ward signification' of the actor's whiteness. Matching the race (and/or gender) of the actor with that of the character does not mean, however, that the performing body completely escapes the web of imperial inscription. Rather, the body is inevitably 'read' through multiple codes and contexts and shaped not only by the narrative structures of a play itself but also by its audience" (Gilbert and Tompkins 206). They further states that historically, this has meant that when the non- white actor performed on western stages, his/her body generally carried a kind of mystique that both heightened and detracted from its significance. Another mode of misrepresentation consistent with colonial attempts to figure racial others as inferior and/or subordinate was thus conventionalized (ibid.). Thus, it becomes important for the Aboriginal playwrights to present the colonized subjects on stage in order to subvert the conventionalization of the Aborigines by the white Australians.

However, when a colonized subject wears the dominant culture's costumes, he or she is never simply framed by and within imperial representation. Most often, some kind of

appropriation is at work so that imposed or adopted dress codes, like hegemonic language(s), are changed or otherwise 'indigenized' in order to suit their new context. Even in situations which seem to present a simple case of acculturation, there is always a separating gap between western clothes and their colonized wearers, especially when the usual race or gender significations are complicated rather than clarified by dress. Because it is in a position to manipulate costuming codes, theatre praxis can exploit this gap to foreground the ideological apparatus of representation itself (Gilbert and Tompkins 247). In *Kullark,* for instance, the Yorlah family who features the Aboriginal people of the 1970s were wearing the 'dominant' costumes. However, one of the characters Jamie Yorlah, a young Aboriginal student enters the stage 'with an overnight bag and a guitar case, liberally plastered with land rights stickers' (Davis, *Kullark* 22) thus demonstrating the potential politicality of costume.

With the production of *Kullark* (1982), Davis confronted the colonial framings of the Aboriginal people. *Kullark* stars Aboriginal actors and the image of Aboriginal people on the stage strongly highlighted the message that the Aboriginal people are alive and part of the present. For many of the non-Indigenous audiences it was the first time they had seen Aboriginal people on stage as ordinary people, rather than as examples of archaic forms and traditional dancers (Casey 140). Thus, after the performance of the play when white members of the audience approached the Aboriginal actors, it was often the first time they had spoken to an Aboriginal person. The physicalized stage presence of Aboriginal actors cannot be undervalued in discussing the counterdiscursive possibilities of the body in performance (Gilbert 67). But one cannot hold the notion that only black body could truly represents the Aboriginal people in performance and what constitutes Aboriginal or non- Aboriginal identity is neither fixed nor objectively measurable. However when white actors play indigenous roles as they have been in earlier periods of Australian theatre, the resistance potential of the fictionalized Aboriginal body is compromised by the "wayward significance"

of its whiteness, manifest in the actor despite the illusion created by the role (ibid.). Therefore in the selected plays *Stolen, Box the Pony, The Dreamers, No Sugar, Kullark and In Our Town*, the playwrights used Aboriginal actors to perform their play.

In *Stolen*, at the end of the play each actor steps forward briefly to recount his/her own autobiography: each one shares some of the experiences of the acted autobiographies, which they have just performed. This functions as an effective validation of their speaking positions, of the communality of loss and shared racial identity. It blurs white literary distinctions between biography and autobiography in a unique way. The deliberate autobiographical stance and the blurring of acted and "real" roles strengthen the impression that this is in a sense pan-Aboriginal, that these stories exist indeed in the Aboriginal community (Thomson 25). The performing Aboriginal body is a symbol of resistance in three ways. Firstly, as a physical body, the very presence of the body on stage signifies the 'racial other' that resists appropriation through the metaphysics of its insistent presence on stage. Secondly, as a social body, it contrasts the ideologies of the Aborigines and the whites. Thirdly, as an artistic body, it bridges the gap between the physical and social, grounding Aboriginal voices and perspectives in the theatrical subject (Gilbert 66-67). The performing body on the stage, in a way, releases the Aborigines from the control of the written text. In general, the post-colonial body disrupts the constrained space and signification left to it by the colonizers and becomes a site for resistant inscription. For instance, the decapitate Yagan in *Kullark* signify the history of the Nyoongah in Western Australia which is communicate through the actor's body. The colonial subject's body contests its stereotyping and representation by others to insist on self-representation by its physical presence on the stage (Gilbert and Tompkins 204). Costume and body movements (like Aboriginal dance, which is present in most of the Aboriginal plays) are most effectively used in the Aboriginal theatre as an agency of the decolonizing body and to expose the ways on how hegemonic regimes have

masked the Aborigines as invisible and blank spaces. As well as harnessing costume as a strategic marker that might resist imposed identities and/ or abrogate the privilege of their signifying systems, the theatrical body can function to recuperate postcolonial subjectively through movement. As Cynthia Novak argue,

> The body and movement are social realities interacting with and interpreting other aspects of the culture. Structured movement systems like social dance, theatre dance, sport, and ritual help to articulate and create images of who people are and what their lives are like, encoding and eliciting ideas and values; they are also part of experience, of performance and actions by which people know themselves (qtd. in Gilbert 70).

As one of the main features of colonialism has been the operation of European power over non-white peoples, therefore emphasizing on race is widespread in post-colonial drama, particularly when the projected audience includes a high proportion of white (or otherwise dominant) viewers. Like many former colonial countries, Australia has a long legacy of racism. This had greatly affected the Indigenous peoples in various ways. It is perhaps a natural tendency for human to feel superior to other humans, and this belief of superiority of one's group and culture is termed ethnocentrism. However, this ethnocentrism often leads to racism i.e. a prejudice that contains more than just a feeling of cultural superiority. Racism occurs when two groups see themselves as being physically and racially different and when one group claims the alleged inferiority of the other group is caused by the innate physical differences of its members. This more extreme form of prejudice occurs when one group seeks to dominate and exploit the other through invasion, economic control or slavery (Broome 91).

According to Broome, the first Europeans in Australia were generally ethnocentric in their attitudes to the Aborigines rather than racist, since most of them claimed a cultural

superiority over the Aborigines, and not a racial superiority. Most early colonial officials and many others who were strongly ethnocentric still believed that the Aborigines had the ability to be as capable as Europeans if given European education and culture. Therefore they tried to change the Aborigines, but they also considered them theoretically as equal citizens. As racist idea began to dominate the colonists' thinking, they argued that no matter what education and help the Aborigines were given, they could never equal the European. Thus policy changed to protection and discrimination and the Aborigines lost even their theoretical equality. This shift from a hopeful to a pessimistic view, from ethnocentrism to hard-line racism, which began from the moment of first settlement, was finally completed well before 1900. Broome further states that there were multiplicity of factors which causes racism in Australia, firstly, the cultural and physical differences between the Aborigines and the Europeans. The Europeans viewed the Aborigines in terms of European values and thus saw it negatively. They stressed that the Aborigines did not wear clothes, build houses, till the soil or have recognizable religions, kings or forms of government. It never occurred to them that a hunter-gatherer society in a warm climate had no use for clothes, permanent houses or agriculture. The Europeans were also clearly wrong when they thought that the Aborigines had no religion, law, leaders or forms of government. Seeing the world as they did, the Europeans rated their own society as the highest on the scale of human development and Aboriginal society as the lowest. Yet Aboriginal society was not 'primitive' as Europeans claimed, but simply different. There is no doubt that the Aborigines in turn did not understand why the Europeans wore heavy clothing in warm climate or bothered to build homes and grow crops when there were hundreds of varieties of food in the bush for the talking. Aboriginal philosophers would have rated European society low, and much European activity as valueless. Also both groups were generally unimpressed by the physical appearance of the other. The pale eyes, thin nose, fair hair and white skin of the Europeans

shocked the Aborigines, so much so that they at first thought them spirits of the dead. The Europeans in turn were startled by the ritual ornamentation and the animal fat applied to Aboriginal bodies, their flat noses, their black skin and their nakedness.

The second factor behind the growth of racism was the concept of 'savagery' and a whole range of related so-called scientific theories. The word 'savage' conjured up the mental image among Europeans of a wild, pagan and uncivilized person who practiced murder, cannibalism and so on. The Aboriginal 'savage' was claimed to be dirty, lazy, fickle, of low intelligence, and treacherous, murderous and aggressive at the same time as being cowardly. The third factor was the need to rationalize the dispossession of the Aborigines' lands and the exploitation of violence that had accompanied it. One way of achieving this was to claim that the occupation of Australia was governed by higher laws than those of man. In 1850 McCombie argued that it was right that the European should dispossess the Aborigines 'as it could never be intended by a wise providence that fine continents, capable of maintaining millions of inhabitants in comfort, should be abandoned to the support of a few savages without a habitation or a foot of land in cultivation'. Similarly reverend J.D. Lang echoed this in 1856 by his argument that 'God's first command to man was "Be fruitful – multiply and replenish the earth". The European colonizers viewed the Aborigines as useless savages and the Europeans were glorified as 'pioneers'. In this way European colonization was justified. The Europeans were not pioneers, because the Aborigines preceded them by 50,000 years. The pessimistic and racist view of the Aborigines gradually became predominant (Broome 92-94).

The reservoir of racial ideas held by a growing majority of Europeans in Australia received new impetus when Charles Darwin's ideas about evolution in the plant and animal worlds was applied by some people (but not Darwin himself) to mankind. Darwin had argued in his *The origin of Species* (1859) that different species evolved through a mechanism of

'natural selection' or 'survival of the fittest', by which favorable variations survived and developed to form new species. The previous form died out. Many who believed in the superiority of the white race argued that Darwinian thought, when applied to human societies, explained why the black races seemed to fade away in the face of European colonization. Social Darwinism came to be widely accepted in Australia by the 1880s. After all, 'survival of the fittest' seemed to explain what many others, and the weaker ones faded away, The *Age* in January 1888 commenting on the decline of the Aborigines stated:

> It seems a law of nature that where two races whose stages of progression differ greatly are brought into contact, the inferior race is doomed to wither and disappear…The process seems to be in accordance with a natural law which, however it may clash with human benevolence, is clearly beneficial to mankind at large by providing for the survival of the fittest…it may be doubted whether the Australian Aborigine would ever have advanced much beyond the status of the neo-lithic races in which we found him, and we need not therefore lament his disappearance (Broome 96).

Such fanciful theorizing was echoed around the colonies for at least another 50 years. For instance, Vincent Lesina told the Queensland parliament in 1901 that 'the law of evolution says that the nigger shall disappear in the onward progress of the white man. There is no really hope at all'. Evolutionary theory led to a world-wide interest in the Australian Aborigines because it was believed that they were an exotic and 'primitive' race of man. The *Australasian Anthropological Journal* in 1896 alleged that once Aborigines passed puberty 'the sutures of the cranium begin to consolidate, and the forepart of the brain ceases to develop as it does in other races' (qtd. in Broome 97).

Scientific interest in the Aborigines led to worse things, including bizarre grave robbery by scientists. Foreign and Australian museums collected row upon row of Aboriginal

skulls to indulge the fancies of anatomical theorists. Truganini[1], who died in 1876, dead body was stolen from her grave and placed in the Hobart museum, until given a decent burial in 1976. Jack Davis in *Kullark* enacts a relevant theme using the story of South Western Australia Aboriginal legend, Yagan. The decapitated Aborigine in Davis's *Kullark* highlights the inhumanity of the invaders when they decapitate Yagan and skin him in order to remove his tribal markings for a souvenir. Yagan was caught and hanged in 1833 by the white settlers and his death led to the battle of Pinjarra in 1834. His body was decapitated and his head was smoked and sent to England. In *Kullark* Act I Scene VII, Jack Davis reenacts the story of Yagan's death:

> ALICE: Yagan is dead… He then hacked off Yagan's head with a knife and skinned the body to souvenir his tribal markings.
>
> [*She exits.*
>
> *'Rule Britannia' plays softly, as an English scientist carrying a small polished jarrah box enters through the revolving screen, again revealing the Union Jack. He takes a letter from the box and reads*.]
>
> SCIENTIST: 'To Mr T.J.Pettigrew, F.R.C.S. Dear sir. I am sending you the head of an Aboriginal native of a tribe that frequents the recently formed Swan Colony. Known as Yagan, he was believed to have been a leader of his people and ever disposed to violent and criminal activity. His nature was sullen, implacable and ill-tempered, in short a most complete and savage villain. This head was removed by his killer in order to obtain a reward of some thirty pounds. It was then smoked in the stump of a tree for three months, which has preserved the head, but caused the facial features to shrink, and the hair become somewhat lank.
>
> [*He produces the head from the box.*]

> I hope nevertheless that this piece will prove of phrenological interest and a worthwhile addition to your collection (*Kullark*, 32-33).

The story of Yagan and the scene portray here clearly affirms the detrimental attitude of the colonizers towards the Aborigines and the vandalism of the image of the Aborigines, calling them 'most complete and savage villain'. Yagan's head was labeled 'the Chief of the Swan River, Australia' and was presented to the Liverpool Royal Institute. In 1894 the head was lent to the Liverpool City Museum where it was exhibited for over seventy years…it was only after major campaigns by a number of indigenous people that Yagan's head was finally returned to Western Australia in 1997 (Casey 138-139). As a powerful sign of brutality, the murdered or mutilated body features across a range of drama from various countries and generally operates as part of a strategic critique of imperialism's policies and practices. It was the "science" of phrenology that influenced the Europeans' views on other races in the 1840s and 1850s. Those practicing this "science" believed that the shape of the head influences the size of the brain and thus the intelligence itself (Broome 90). The feeling of superiority became to be based on racial differences.

In portraying Yagan in *Kullark*, Davis suggests that the mutilated black body functions within the colonizing culture as a fetishized object. His overall project is to reinstate the corporeal presence of the Aborigines in history—and, on a metatheatrical level, in theatre—at the same time as he details the colonizers' attempts to annihilate all signs of difference (Gilbert and Tompkins 210). The main aim of this is most fully developed during Yagan's ceremonial dance, as he chants and dances in Scene Two. The dance movement of Aboriginal character, painted in ceremonial paint, intensifies 'the body's agency as a site of resistance that unsettles the pageant of imperial history' (Gilbert 68). Reference to such atrocities does not mean, however, that *Kullark* simply stereotypes its characters according to race, reassigning the connotations of 'black' and 'white' in the process; rather, this play, like

Davis's other works, carefully stages the misunderstandings brought about by discourses of racial otherness in a context where it is possible for conceptual gaps to be bridged (Gilbert 68). Davis main venture is to restore the bodily presence of the Aborigines in history. According to Elizabeth Grosz, the body is never simply a passive object upon which regimes of power are played out:

> If the body is the strategic target of systems of codification, supervision and constraint, it is also because the body and its energies and capacities exert an uncontrollable, unpredictable threat to a regular, systematic mode of social organization. As well as being the site of knowledge-power, the body is thus a site of *resistance,* for it exerts a recalcitrance, and always entails the possibility of a counter strategic reinscription, for it is capable of being self-marked, self-represented in alternative ways (Gilbert and Tompkins 203).

Jack Davis's *Kullark* was written and designed in such a way that Davis could bring out the stories he had heard from his family, witnessed and experienced juxtaposing with documents from the historical record and intermingled with aural and visual presence of traditional Aboriginal story- telling through dance and song. In performance the stage is divided into a small interior space and a larger exterior space. The external world of Western Australia was represented by a painting in neo-traditional style of Waargul the Rainbow Serpent (the creator spirit of the peoples of south – west Western Australia) outlining a map of the Swan River. Waargul was painted on a screen, which was opened and cut by sections of the action. This helps shift in the framing of the past and the present. *Kullark* encompasses an extensive amount of Noongar predicament and experiences in a single piece of work. The result is a 'panoramic reframing of history', demonstrating the near annihilation of Aboriginal peoples and cultures but emphasizing the survival of Noongar people in the

present (Casey 136). In *Kullark*, Davis focus was not primarily on reclaiming the past. It was the present and the place for Indigenous people in the present that was Davis main concern.

Racist beliefs are myths and yet they have been extremely powerful in shaping human affairs over the past few centuries. The racist claims that all the people of one race have common characteristics and abilities. Therefore it is clearly convenient to stereotype people like claiming all Australian Aborigines are lazy, uncivilized, dirty, low intelligence etc. This kind of general prejudice avoids the tedious need to assess each individual on his or her merits. However racism is also unscientific, because no satisfactory test has so far been devised to prove that traits and abilities in people come from their racial heritage rather than their own genetic, social and environmental background. As the UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice of 27 November, 1978 stated:

> All human beings belong to a single species and are descended from a common stock… Any theory which involves the claim that racial or ethnic group are inherently superior or inferior, thus implying that some would be entitled to dominate or eliminate others, presumed to be inferior, or which bases value judgments on racial differentiation, has no scientific foundation…(Broome 92).

The declaration added that such theories are 'contrary to the moral and ethical principles of humanity'. However, it came to dominate the thinking of most Australians by 1900 and beyond.

Racism affects the oppressed groups in a number of negative ways. It led to the development of low self-esteem, mistrust of the dominant culture, internalized racism, and denial. Most black people, particularly those working in mixed-group or white settings, have to cope with everyday racism whether they are conscious of racism or not. It becomes part of the narrative of the community in an 'us and them' perspective. Racism at different levels is seen as a natural part of life and repeated experiences of racism affect a person's behavior

and understanding of life; one's life expectations, perspectives of oneself and one's groups and the dominant group. In many ways racism contribute to the psychological reality of people of color in coping with their life. Living with racism becomes a central and defining element in the psychology of marginalized people and/or people of color. In many ways, life is a struggle for people of color. Even for those who have 'made it' and have overcome obstacles, different forms of racism emerge that need to be confronted. Racism is inescapable in the white dominated society like Australia.

European ethnocentrism was inextricably a part of the colonizing project; the belief that all things Western and non-Indigenous qualities were superior and all things Indigenous were inferior was initially imposed since their first contacts. This kind of perception was specifically constituted to control the lives of Indigenous people. In turn, it has had a predominant influence on Indigenous Australians' self-perceptions, and, therefore, it becomes imperative for the oppressed people to reclaim a sense of pride, dignity and self-worth as well as validating their own cultural histories and values. Despite the considerable changes in Australian society, racism is still a reality for member of marginalized groups. Racism is invasive, pervasive and unrelenting. Racism imposes itself on daily living for people of color. The effects of racism cannot be underestimated. 'Race is about *everything*—historical, political, personal—and race is about nothing—a construct, an invention that has changed dramatically over time and historical circumstance ... race has been and continues to be, encoded in all our lives' (Thompson and Tyagi ix).

As skin color is the marker for objectifying difference in the social construction of race, the colonized subjects are concerned with rejecting the colonially determined markers and descriptions of themselves. The Aboriginal playwrights are trying to portray their predicaments in Australia through theatre of the racist attitudes they face because of their skin color. As racial prejudice and racist onslaughts of the white Australians are found in

most of the Aboriginal plays, this chapter highlights the racial persecution portrayed in Jack Davis's *In Our Town* and Leah Purcell's *Box The Pony*. Davis's *In Our Town* is about questions of location, ownership, identity and identification. The play is set in the immediate aftermath of World War II, somewhere in small-town Western Australia. The play continues Davis's family saga, tracing the dilemmas of the Millimurras a decade after the era in which his other play *No Sugar* was set. Now the family is living on the outskirts, but with the return of their war-hero son David, they seem to have an opportunity to move into the town, where the white townsfolk live. This kind of opportunity is very rare for the Aboriginal family and their story traces the various problems faced by them with the progress of the play. The play is about interracial friendship, romances and institutionalized racism. In the play one of the Aboriginal characters David Millimurra and a white young man Larry Moss were best friends during the war, David was a friend and a protector for Larry during their time in the army. But, after the war when they returned to their town, though Larry is still very fond of David, problems begin to arise due to their different status in their society as a "white man" and "black man". When Larry introduced David to his sister Sue Moss, there is mutual attraction between the two, which gradually grow into romance. Everyone in the town is against their relationship once it becomes public knowledge. In conversation between David and his father Sam Millimurra:

SAM: Looks like the town's gunning for you son.

DAVID: Yeah.

SAM: What are you gonna do about it?

DAVID: [*laughing*] They're worse than the bloody Japs. (*In Our Town*, 49)

In the same conversation, Sam tells David about his conversation with Sue Moss's father in regard to their relationship, "He wants you to break off your friendship with Sue". Sam continues:

SAM: They have a different outlook on life to us and sort of sly approach. You know what I mean?

DAVID: Yeah, I know what you mean, Pop, seen it in the army. Yeah in the army…

SAM: In the army or not son, this town is after you (Davis, *In Our Town*, 50).

This line is a crucial one, for what Davis establishes clearly and consistently here is the fact that the town itself – unnamed and repellent – is one of the main characters of the play. Here, the town becomes doubly dangerous. It is not only a collective expression of the hatred of its inhabitants but a target which seems too big for David to aim at, despite his military records (Davis, *In our town* xi).

Larry who has been the best friend of David also begins to change his attitude as his father Jim Moss says, "The town's starting to talk" (Davis, *In Our Town* 47). Larry in his conversation with David tells: "David, you got to understand things are different now we are back in civilian life" (54). This line shows that though Larry considers David as a good friend, he doesn't want relation with him that the town is against, he is scared of the town as he says, "I've lived here all my life and I know the character of this town and everybody in it" (55). When David asked him whether their five years in the army together open his eyes, Larry replies, "Those five are in the past." (55) Larry is also caught up in the institutionalized racism of the whites, and the skin color of David becomes a problem for him as he says, "David you're black. Sue is White, and the town was beginning to talk about her association with you" (54). The significance of the town here also emphasizes Davis dramatic skill because it illustrates the psychological ploys of denial and rationalization which occur in situations of racial conflicts. In other words, he shows how bigotry operates: how people try to mask individual acts through generalized reference to the community at large. There are many relevant scenes and dialogue to validate the racial bigotry of the whites throughout the play. The exchange between the Publican and Davis in Act two is also relevant:

DAVID: Two bottles of Orlando please.

PUBLICAN: [*shakes his head*] Sorry.

DAVID: Sorry…what do you mean?

PUBLICAN: I've been told not to serve you any bottles.

DAVID: By whom?

PUBLICAN: The Sergeant.

DAVID: I want two bottles of Orlando.

PUBLICAN: I'm sorry, but I can't serve you, right!

DAVID: Orlando…two bottles

PUBLICAN: Look, don't blame me. I'm just following orders (Davis, *In Our Town* 40).

This scene suggests the real nature of Australian society dominated by white people. Though David was given citizenship rights after returning from World War II with medals, and was allowed to settle inside the town, this kind of institutionalized prejudiced still persists upon him wherever he go.

David's mother, Milly Millimurra and Sue's mother, Mrs. Moss upon meeting, talks about their children's relationship, Mrs. Moss says: "My daughter is a strange person I some ways. She's always on the side of the underdog." When Milly retorts back saying, "My son is not an underdog", Mrs. Moss replies, "But he's black" (Davis, *In Our Town* 52). As Frantz Fanon in his essay "The Fact of Blackness" states, "And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema" (Ashcroft et. al. 1999:323). This is exactly the kind of condition David and his family faces in the real world of white Australia. As Sue also accuses his brother and the town people: "If David's skin was white he could sit in this café as long as he likes. He

would be safe. He's right, you're all against him because he's black…" (Davis, *In Our Town* 37).

This kind of institutionalizes prejudice, called by sociologists as caste barrier and others may even call it naked racism is found in all the selected plays of the present thesis. One of the themes touches by Leah Purcell in *Box the Pony* is also the institutionalized prejudice of the whites, issue arising from the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal coexistence in Australia. Leah encounters racism when she first arrives in Sydney:

> LEAH:…Good car. Straight to Sydney, Eastern Suburbs, real flash.
>
> Had to live somewhere, right? So I go to a real estate agent.
>
> 'G'day'…and true's god, the woman behind the counter looks
>
> at me and says, 'We haven't any money, we haven't any
>
> money, take whatever you want.'
>
> So I took a one-bedroom flat.
>
> See, blackfella not greedy (Purcell and Rankin, *Box The Pony* 33).

Leah describes Sydney as a racist city, but she presents her plight in the city with a tinge of irony that she uses to mock the situation. She also dramatizes another encounter with a white woman:

> LEAH: …Another time, I'm walking down the street and this lady
>
> comes out of her gate and, true's god, it's like a bloody cartoon.
>
> She grabs her bag and goes…
>
> *As WHITE WOMAN frightened by seeing a blackfella up close, she clutches her handbag to her chest and blinks, stopping in her tracks as if she fears Leah might hit her.*
>
> Like I was going to hit her or something… (*Box The Pony* 36-37).

In Scene 7 “Doing Coffee in Sydney”, Leah again mocks the whole concept of racism and laughs at the white people:

> …In Woollahra, people do coffee on the footpath. Now this is hard for a little myall black gin to understand. Because up’ome’der you drink on the footpath because you’re not allowed into the pub.
>
> These gubba fellas just don’t do coffee on the footpath, their dogs, which they treat like children, do gunung!
>
> *Wiping feet as if having trodden in gunung*.
>
> That’s filthy. That’s stinkin’, thas dirty that! And they got a cheek to say blackfella dirty!
>
> One time I see this woman doing coffee and pancakes, and I recognize her…she’s the woman who somersaulted in scene one. And I’m thinking, white woman can’t be wandering around in my story! That’s cultural imperialism! That’s bloody racist!
>
> She recognizes me and sniffs like this…
>
> *Sniffing as snobby white woman*.
>
> Funny that because that gunung don’t seem to worry her. I go like this [*wave friendly*] and she goes like this…
>
> *Scared, with her hands pulled up to her chin over her cup of coffee* (*Box The Pony* 67).

Leah Purcell’s descriptions of the racist attitudes of the white women give an insight into how the Aboriginal women perceives the black/white culture cohabitation in Australia.

Since the 1990s, theatres have increased the number of indigenous performers, even though a ‘strictly color-blind approach to casting remains rare’(Gilbert 132). It means that even though there are policies which claim that the Aborigines have similar access to

different kinds of roles as the white actors, it is difficult for theatre companies to offer non-racial marked roles to Aboriginal actors. So when they cast Aboriginal actors in their play, it is mostly on political grounds and issues. Even when Aborigines are 'cast in non- indigenous roles' the purpose most of the time is 'political or interpretative' (Gilbert 133). Indeed there are direct issues that link to the body in performance and the body of any actor cannot be separate from the history in which it is placed. The Aboriginal body represents the marks of past colonization and that is why it would be quite normal for this audience to 'read marks of indigineity into the overall stage picture' (ibid.) and give the play a political interpretation even though this would not be the intention of the play. The problem is that Aboriginal performers find it difficult 'to be recognized as simply artists with skills to match those of their non-indigenous peers' Indigenous bodies 'signify', they have a 'degree of interpretive mobility on the stage' and have difficulty being seen as freely connotative bodies (ibid.). According to Jon Erikson's:

> The problem of the body in performance' is that 'when the intention is to present body itself […] it remains a sign nonetheless […] not enough of a pure corpus (ibid.).

This means that even when the playwrights have no intention of showing any kind of racial implications in their play, the idea of race and cultural belonging still appears.

The stage settings, movements and costumes are techniques most effectively used by Aboriginal theatre to expose the ways in which Aborigines have been suppressed by the penalizing regimes of the empire. Davis's *Kullark* parodies the "civilizing" gestures of clothing the native is presented as a preposterous mockery when Fraser was forced by Captain Stirling to offer his shirt and trousers to Yagan and Mijitjiroo on their first contact. Also in *No Sugar* in a letter to Mr. N.S. Neal (Superintendent, Moore River Settlement) from Mr. A.O. Neville (Chief Protector of the Aborigines) says, " I was a little concerned to see so many dirty little noses amongst the children. I'm a great believer that if you provide the

native the basic accoutrements of civilization you're halfway civilizing him" (Davis, *No Sugar* 24). These scenes shows the white colonizers believed in clothing the Aborigines with their attire would "civilize" them. Both the texts' emphasis on the mission as a place that uses clothing to discipline and sanitize the indigene points to the intersecting oppressions of Christianity, Western government, and imperial medicine (Gilbert 69). That the "body politics" of the mission system are designed to effect the depopulation of the indigenous peoples is clearly illustrated in Eva Johnson's *Murras* (1988) through references to the deliberate and systematic sterilization of pubescent Aboriginal girls, who now "carry the scars from the wetjella's medicine" (ibid.). In *The Dreamers*, one of the characters, uncle Worru death seems to be evident from the moment he enters the corridors of the white hospital. The white hospital is not only projected as an institution that is cursed, it the "whites" themselves that is metaphorically projected as a cursed to the well being of the Aboriginal culture. Resisting the existent and symbolic power of the colonizers' clothes is a continuing endeavor for many of the Aboriginal characters in theatre. The Aboriginal playwrights have marked their field of representation by clothing the Aboriginal characters with white men's clothes such as the costumes of the black tracker, dressed in uniform given by the white authorities. The theatrical costumes are used by the Aboriginal playwrights for the purpose of deconstructing the white colonizers ideology of western clothes through mimicry. The mimicry and mockery of whites and the humorous celebration of their lifestyle has been one way in which blacks have opposed to the encroachments of European society, and have asserted their own independence and capacity for endurance. Jack Davis has succinctly stated that, historically, Aborigines "learnt to keep themselves alive by laughing" (Shoemaker 233).

In colonialists' historical accounts, Aboriginal dance has been encoded as the expression of savage or exotic Otherness within a discourse that represents Blacks as objects

to be looked at rather than as self- constituting subjects (Gilbert 70). W. Robertson constructs Aboriginal dance during a corroboree as the picturesque signifier of less than human behavior. He wrote in 1928, "The whole programme was wonderful in its savage simplicity. The weirdly painted natives, issuing from the dense blackness of bush to perform the dances, looked more like wraiths than human beings". He further stated that the spectacle resembled "a picture that would have suited Dante's *Inferno*, as with gleaming eyes and frenzied movements they approached the fire" (ibid.). This was the kind of perception that the white colonizers had during the process of their colonization i.e. characterizing tribal dance as primitive. Robertson's failure to acknowledge the dancers' subjectivity prevents him from discerning any functional aspects of the corroborree vis-à-vis Aboriginal culture and certainly blinds him to the possibility of resistance politics. (Ashcroft et al. 1999:343) It is this kind of representation of dance that is problematized in contemporary Aboriginal drama if movement is seen as part of identity formation and reclamation. Therefore, these kinds of categorizations and notions are exactly what the Aboriginal playwrights are trying to break.

In Jack Davis's *No Sugar* Billy Kimberly and Bluey, while working for the white administrators as trackers for runaway Aborigines from the camp, dancing in corroboree gives an opportunity to transgress their assigned role of tracker/informant. In Scene VI, while Jimmy, Sam and Joe are painted for a corroboree, Bluey and Billy enters and join them. This scene is the only scene in the play that these two trackers and the other encamped Aborigines have harmony between them. During the corroboree, individual identity is both created by, and subsumed in, group identity as culturally coded movement that gives valence to each performer's dance, allowing participants to shed their everyday roles determined within white hierarchies of power. In this sense, the dance acts as a shaman exorcizing evil. It is also an occasion for the exchange of cultural capital between tribes, and for the contestation of white dominated space (Gilbert 1992:140-141). Traditional enactments such as ritual and carnival

demonstrate that the performing body can help to regenerate and unify communities despite the disabilities, disintegrations, and specific disconnections of the individual bodies involved (Crow and Banfield 231). Thus in projecting peaceful corroboree-ing of the native policemen and the encamped Aboriginal men, Davis is able to maintain that a whole or completed sense of self is not characteristic of the colonized individual subject identity but also an Aboriginal identity a whole.

Dance features in all the selected plays of Jack Davis. In *The Dreamers*, uncle Worru links the past and present through his stories and physicalizes the alienation between the past and the present when he loses touch with reality and locks into moments and events from the past. A shadowy dancer and visuals of the past allow the audience to share his memories. In many cases, transformations of the postcolonial body are theatricalized through rhythmic movement such as dance, which brings into focus the performing body. For a description of dance as a culturally coded activity Gilbert and Tompkins states:

> Dance has a number of important functions in drama: not only does it concen-trate the audience's gaze on the performing body/bodies, but it also draws at-tention to proxemic relations between characters, spectators, and features of the set. Splitting the focus from other sorts of proxemic and kinesic – and potentially, linguistic – codes, dance renegotiates dramatic action and dramatic activity, reinforcing the actor's corporeality, particularly when it is culturally laden. Dance is a form of spatial inscription and thus a productive way of illustrating – and countering – the territorial aspects of western imperialism. Dance's patterned movement also offers the opportunity to establish cultural context, particularly when the dance executed challenges the norms of the colonizer. In this way, dance recuperates post-colonial subjectivity by centralizing traditional, non-verbal forms of self-representation. (239)

The dancer in *The Dreamers* is like a spirit who is only visible to the audience and to Worru, accompanied by clap sticks and the music of the didgeridoo, the dancer appears as a male. He represents the pre-contact past (when traditions, laws, and taboos were observed without the interference of white society) and functions dramatically to highlight the destruction of Aboriginal culture that has ensued since European settlement. As a bridge to the ancestral world, the dancer appears in front of a dying person back to the land of his or her individual dreaming. Performatively, the dreamer embodies indigenous tradition since he is costumed, adorned, and otherwise marked (usually with ceremonial paint) as a cultural icon that signifies Aboriginality. The dancer appears three times in *The Dreamers*, he appears whenever WORRU's health is at a low point. In his last appearance he comments:

> [*…A narrow shaft of light reveals the* DANCER *sitting cross- legged on the escarpment against a night sky. He sings sorrowfully*.]
>
> *Nitja Wetjala, warrah, warrah!*
>
> *Gnullarah dumbart noychwa.*
>
> *Noychwa, noychwa, noychwa.*
>
> *Wetjala kie-e-ny gnullarah dumbart.*
>
> *Kie-e-ny, kie-e-ny, kie-e-ny,*
>
> *Kie-e-ny.*
>
> ['The White man is evil, evil!
>
> My people are dead.
>
> Dead, dead, dead.
>
> The white man kill my people.
>
> Kill, kill, kill,
>
> Kill.'] (Davis, *The Dreamers* 137)

Although in the spatial histories of the Aborigines, "the voice enjoys no special privileges" however, "dancing and drawing are equally important means of spatial telling" (Gilbert 71). The solo dancer in *The Dreamers* functions at structural, thematic, and mythic levels. The dancer not only reconstitutes Aboriginality through a discourse of the body and its performance but also recontextualizes the rest of the dramatic action (structured largely according to European genres) within the temporal and spatial frames of an Aboriginal metaphysics (ibid). So, when dance is incorporated in Aboriginal plays, it is used as a factor for identity formation and to create space for themselves rather than just a medium for an effect. Therefore, Aboriginal playwrights carefully incorporate dance intrinsically to show the meaning and framework of their plays, instead of just a mere representation of their stories. The performance of dance reinscribes the stage, and by implication, the land, as shared space rather than merely the precinct of the white majority (Gilbert 75). The performing of Aboriginal dance and body as an act of cultural reclamation creates a presence that counteracts the historical removal of Aborigines according to white Australian historical accounts. The dancer performs subversively as he claims all areas of the stage, his dance reinforcing the tangible presence of the Aboriginal past in spite of western encroachment upon indigenous time and space. Davis's *The Dreamers* centralizes its spirit character for precisely this purpose: while the derogated body of Uncle Worru is prominent at the level of realistic action, the metamorphic body of the dreamer supplies a surrealistic frame that stresses the persistence and resistance of Aboriginal culture (Gilbert and Tompkins 236).

Just as dance music and songs also play a significant role in the lives of the Aboriginal people and enacted in the Aboriginal theatre. In *The Dreamers*, whenever Worru health was at a low point, along with the dancer the sound of didgeridoo is playing in the background, loud enough to be heard by the audience. The song "Run, Daisy, Run" also has a significant importance in *Box The Pony*; it is played whenever Leah and Steff face problems

in their lives. The song is integral to the narrative of *Box the Pony* it complements the storytelling. The song is composed by Leah Purcell, which became very famous in Australia. As Leah states in her interview: "'Run, Daisy, Run' is my third song that I ever wrote and it's about my grandmother's story. And it's sort of become the unofficial national anthem for the stolen generation. I literally wrote the song in five to ten minutes. No sort of, even, drafts. At that stage, my grandmother had died. She died when I was ten. And this song came out of me and I believe that she wrote that song through me, because I don't remember writing it." She further states that:

> I wasn't brought up in traditional culture, I wasn't brought up on my traditional lands, and I wasn't brought up with my language. I wasn't brought up with the ancient songs and the dances that my ancestors before me have done from Dreamtime. So I think as an urban, contemporary woman, I have to make my corroboree up about the day so when I do 'Box the Pony', I'm corroboreeing. That's my corroboree, that's my story. (Grasswil, "Queen Leah")

Leah Purcell strongly believes in Aboriginality and she believed that her ancestors have given her the ability to be a storyteller, a songwoman and a performer.

Post-colonial theatre addresses one of the most interesting techniques in the presentation of a narrator who is simultaneously staged in the shape of a different actor. Even though *Box The Pony* is a semi-autobiographical monodrama, Leah Purcell plays all the sixteen roles and split the main character into two, the adult Leah and Steff, the younger alter ego of Leah. The splitting subjectivity is able to suggests the various and often contending underpinnings that the white colonizers had of post-colonial identity, whereas attempts to achieve a subjective 'wholeness' may merely replicate the limited significations of the colonizer/colonized binary through which imperialism maintains control over the apparently unruly and uncivilized 'masses'. Thus split subjectivity can be viewed, on a number of levels,

as potentially enabling rather than as disempowering (Gilbert and Tompkins 231). If imperialism conventionally assigns the colonizer and the colonized to roles which determine how power is exercised, the splitting of the colonial subject's self into several varied entities enables him/her to split from the general site of disempowerment. This separation removes both the colonizer and the colonized from their assigned positions of power and impotence; instead of being fixed and unitary, both subject positions are fragmented and dislocated. This means that their interrelationships can be re-evaluated in the light of a shifted power dynamic of negotiation rather than essentialism, opening up possibilities for new kinds of expression. Working in opposition to exclusionary identity politics, split subjectivity enables the recognition of several—even, potentially, all—of the factors and allegiances that determine the syncretic colonized subject (Gilbert and Tompkins 232).

The monodrama is an important medium for exploring post- colonial subjectivity because it is almost always biographical or autobiographical. Women in particular employ this form as it befits the expression of an identity often fractured by multiple discourses. Monodrama focuses solely on a single performing figure who expresses the 'splits' through at least two distinct methods of subject deconstruction. First, a single actor might play *one* character who usually adopts several different personae; or, second, the actor might perform *multiple* characters who, in turn, may or may not present different selves to the audience. The first kind of monodrama expresses the split subjectivity of one *character—hence,* the transformations of the performing body are relatively subtle—while in the second kind, the *actor* 'splits' into a number of subjects, a process which usually requires radical metamorphoses, especially when the body shifts across categories such as race and gender (Gilbert and Tompkins 233). Leah Purcell uses both the method in her play, *Box The Pony*. Plays which use one actor to embody multiple characters usually aim for fluid action and role changes in order to emphasize the performativity of the body and thus to frustrate viewers'

desire for a fixed and unitary subject, which is exactly what the playwrights are trying to subvert.

In trying to break the white ideology of the "black" people as an object to be looked as dirty, evil, lecherous, uncivilized etc., the Aboriginal playwrights are projecting and stripping their physical, social and artistic bodies in theatre. The Aboriginal playwrights in recognizing the fixed opinion of the white in regard to their skin color are challenging the white construction of their bodies. They openly projected their dilemmas in the white construction of race and body image because of their skin color. Frantz Fanon had rightly states their quandaries in regard to his skin color, as he says, "As I begin to recognize that the Negro is a symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 1999:325). The unfortunate and helpless position of the black skinned colonized subjects to continue hating themselves because of their skin color began to deteriorate as they began to learn to accept themselves. As Fanon continues, "In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through human being to reach out for the universal." Fanon further concludes the feelings of the colonized subjects position when they learn to accept themselves quoting Merleau Ponty:

> There are times when the black man is locked into his body. Now, 'for a being who has acquired consciousness of himself and of his body, who has attained to the dialectic of subject and object, the body is no longer a cause of the structure of consciousness, it has become an object of consciousness (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 1999:326).

The colonized subjects are now consciously questioning and challenge their subjected position. David, one of the characters in Jack Davis's *In Our Town* claims, "we are all the same underneath" (Davis, *In Our Town*50) this could be an implication of Davis's idea that racial differences are only skin-deep.

Thus, with the above observation Aboriginal theatre has a highly political overtone, which surfaces a complex questions such as what is the relationship of politics to culture? How does social change result in cultural change – or can various cultural practices initiate or precipitate change? And also there can be a question like how does theatre helps in changing the perspectives of the dominant society? These kinds of questions have often been asked, and many theories and writers have attempted to answer these questions. For instance, Terry Eagleton offered some answers in his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, in this book Eagleton states that "nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology", and also states his limitation in trying to define the term. However, in this book he offered a long list of the definitions of ideology, which indicates a variety of meaning (1991: 1). In the concluding part of his book he argues that 'the rationalist view of ideologies as conscious, well- articulated systems of belief is clearly inadequate' (1991: 221), and therefore defines ideology as 'a matter of "discourse" rather than of "language" – of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of signification as such' (1991: 223) Eagleton is interested in that place of 'relational' intersection where negotiation ceaselessly occurs for the human subject where one is 'always conflictively, precariously constituted' (ibid.). Recognizing the 'lethal grip', 'tenacity and pervasiveness of dominant ideologies', Eagleton goes on to argue that:

> There is one place above all where such forms of consciousness may be transformed almost literally overnight, and that is in active political struggle. This is not a Left piety but an empirical fact. When men and women engaged in quite modest, local forms of political resistance find themselves brought by the inner momentum of such

> conflicts into direct confrontation with the power of the state, it is possible that their political consciousness may be definitively, irreversibly altered. If a theory of ideology has value at all, it is in helping to illuminate the processes by which such liberation from death-dealing beliefs may be practically effected (1991: 223–4).

The Aboriginal plays studied in the present thesis are those that self-consciously attempt to transform consciousness and initiate active political struggle. 'Political theatre', 'theatres of crisis', 'post-colonial theatre', or theatre made for 'social change' are those publicly enacted events that often take place during, and/or inspired by periods of social and political crisis and/or revolution (B. Zarrilli, 221). Thus, in presenting their 'black' body on stage the Aboriginal playwrights are able to voice their ideology and are able to produce their own versions of their culture, history, identity, from that of invisibility to historicity.

ENDNOTES

[1] Truganini was born in 1812 on Bruny Island, south of the Tasmanian capital Hobart. She was a daughter of Mangana, Chief of the Bruny Island people. In her youth she took part in her people's traditional culture, but Aboriginal life was disrupted by European invasion. By 1873, Truganini was the sole survivor of the Oyster Cove group, and was again moved to Hobart. She died three years later, having requested that her ashes be scattered in the D'Entrecasteaux Channel; she was, however, buried at the former Female Factory at Cascades, a suburb of Hobart. Within two years, her skeleton was exhumed by the Royal Society of Tasmania and later placed on display. Only in April 1976, approaching the centenary of her death, were Truganini's remains finally cremated and scattered according to her wishes. Truganini is often considered to be the last full-blood speaker of a Tasmanian language.

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CHAPTER – IV

PROBLEMS OF ASSIMILATION

The process of assimilation policies carried out by the white Australian government has been a major concern for most of the Aboriginal writers and playwrights. The Aboriginal playwrights through performance have portrayed the nature and consequences of assimilation policies. These assimilation policies have a number of negative consequences in the Aboriginal society which successfully resulted in the loss of their culture, traditions, languages etc., needless to say their land and rights to land. The concept of assimilation had a long program, even politically blatant, in Australia. It showed its masks among the missionaries and government officials in the early nineteenth century, and within the protectionist regimes that were set up in the later. The concept was variously named as merging, absorption and assimilation. These concepts of "absorption" or "mergeance" could mean the genetic dissolution of Aboriginals into white "blood", or, the "breeding out of colour" (Moran 2). It could also mean the cultural absorption of Aborigines or part-Aborigines into the white society and combination of both biological and cultural absorption. In 1947, A.O. Neville, Commissioner of Native Affairs in the state of South Australia offered a written solution to the "Aboriginal Problem":

> Scientific research had revealed that skin pigmentation could be bred out of Aborigines in two or three generations. If I could only have the money and the legislative power to start a selective breeding programme I could, in a matter of sixty to seventy years, solve the "aboriginal problem" by breeding a race of white Aborigines (McLaren vii).

The course of assimilation includes various objectives. While there was an important reparative trend- doing something to "uplift" those who had been neglected at best, and treated appalling at worst, by the Australian nation—there was also destructive trend, responding, in some instances,to paranoid fears concerning the future of the white nation, and

in others to the perception of the incompatibility, or undesirability, of Aboriginality in the modern Australian nation (Moran 2).

The process of assimilation has developed in Australia due to many factors. By the middle of the nineteenth century the protectorate experiment had failed and the very survival of Indigenous people was being questioned. The Indigenous people were forced off their land to the edges of non-Indigenous settlement, dependent upon government rations if they could not find work, suffering from malnutrition and disease, their presence was felt by non-Indigenous people as unsettling and embarrassing. The white colonial governments viewed Indigenous people as a nuisance. The violence and disease associated with colonization was characterized, in the language of social Darwinism, as a natural process of 'survival of the fittest'. According to this analysis, the future of Aboriginal people was inevitably doomed; what was needed from governments and missionaries was to 'smooth the dying pillow' (*Bringing Them Home Report* 4). Land was made available for reserves and missions for the segregation of the Indigenous people and Chief Protector or Protection Board were assign responsibility for their welfare. By 1911 the Northern Territory and every State except Tasmania had 'protectionist legislation' giving the Chief Protector or Protection Board extensive power to control Indigenous people (Moreton-Robinson 6). The shift in government policy from one of extermination to protection, which some has argued was brought about by the political activity of the anti-slavery and humanitarian movement in Britain. This movement was influenced by the theory among the British scientist community that Australian Indigenous peoples were a dying race in need of saving. The Indigenous referred to were those classified as being of "full descent" or biologically pure(Moreton-Robinson 6). In 1997, the *National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* found that:

> By the late nineteenth century it had become apparent that although the full descent Indigenous population was declining, the mixed descent population was increasing. 'Most colonists saw them as being in a state of racial and cultural limbo'. In social Darwinist terms they were not regarded as near extinction. The fact that they had some European 'blood' meant that there was a place for them in non- Indigenous society, albeit a very lowly one. Furthermore, the prospect that this mixed descent population was growing made it imperative to governments that mixed descent people be forced to join the workforce instead of relying on government rations. In that way the mixed descent population would be both self-supporting and satisfy the needs of the developing Australian economy for cheap labor (*Bringing Them Home Report* 24).

De Lepervanch argues that the change in Indigenous policy could be linked to the way in which "economic expansion had provided the setting in which some political and social reforms could be made sacrifice by or danger to the existing order" (qtd. in Moreton-Robinson 7). Thus the hegemony of the white Australian society and social structures was forcefully established and maintained. The Indigenous people were forced on to reserves and missions under strict laws and repressive control.

In 1937, when it became obvious that the Indigenous population was not dying out but continuing to increase due to white men either raping or having consensual sexual relations with Indigenous women, the first joint State-commonwealth conference on Native Welfare was held (*Bringing Them Home Report* 33). So, in April 1937, the first ever national conference of the principal administrators of Aborigines met in Canberra, A.O. Neville, Western Australian Protector of Aborigines, asked the conference, "Are we to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there were any Aborigines in Australia?"

(Notaras 1). The conference discussion was dominated by the Chief Protectors of Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory: A.O. Neville, J.W. Bleakley and Dr. Cook respectively. Each of them presented his own theory, developed over a long period in office, of how people of mixed descent would eventually merge into the non-Indigenous population. The conference was sufficiently impressed by Neville's idea of 'absorption' to agree that:

> ... this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end (*Bringing Them Home Report* 26).

Henceforth, the States began adopting policies designed to assimilate the Aboriginal people in to mainstream Australia. Neville's idea of merging or absorbing the so –called 'half-caste' Aborigines into the European population by a process of encouraged inter–breeding had won the approval of all the delegates to the conference – who were more or less universally alarmed by what they thought of as 'the problem of the half –caste' (Manne 210). Thus, there was a change in policy from passive "protection" to a policy described as "assimilation" at the 1937 Conference of commonwealth and State Aboriginal authorities. Protection Boards became Welfare Boards (Prentis 84). One of the motivations for assimilation was related to the nationalist message entailed initially in the quest for a "white Australia": the need to maintain national homogeneity. This urge for homogeneity was expressed in different ways in different periods. Initially the concern was to preserve the link between white race, nation and territory. As racism lost legitimacy after the Second World War, the emphasis turned to the preservation of cultural homogeneity, as a source of national cohesion and national progress (Moran 2).

In the name of protection Indigenous people were subject to near-total control. Their entry to and exit from reserves was regulated, as was their everyday life on the reserves, their

right to marry and their employment. With a view to encouraging the conversion of the children to Christianity and distancing them from their Indigenous lifestyle, children were housed in dormitories and contact with their families strictly limited. It should be noted that the missionaries were one of the major agents of assimilation. Since 1820s the missionaries took up the Christianizing of the Aborigines. Most were sincere Christians who treated the Aborigines like fellow human beings, even though they patronizingly believed that they were uncivilized and pagan. The missionaries also protected the Aborigines from abuse and treated their illnesses. They made an effort to learn the Aboriginal culture and languages, although this was usually done with the aim of further undermining it (Broome 36). The methods of the missionaries were quite similar with those of the government's earlier efforts, although they give more importance to Christianizing. By the 1920s more than 20 Christian missions were established in the northern regions of Australia (Broome 105). The missionaries confused the Aborigines as they did not carry guns with them and they even refused the sexual advances of the Aboriginal women who were seeking to exchange companionship for food and tobacco. The missionaries did not directly approach the Aborigines, they would hang gifts and food on trees and at first those gifts would only be taken, but eventually the Aborigines were persuaded to move their camps closer to the mission. The missionaries would distribute food after the Aborigines had sat through strange rituals which they later knew to be church service. The Aborigines soon realized that the missionaries claimed to have powers similar to their own sorcerers. The missionaries revealed these 'powers' when they applied some Western medicine to sores or diseases and when that worked; it appeared to be a miraculous cures for the Aborigines. The missionaries used the language the other understood speaking of invisible spirits, of gods, devils, angels and spiritual powers, and they seemed ready at times to defy Aboriginal belief and knowledge. Whether it was the missionaries' food, their powers or presents persuaded the Aborigines to move closer the

mission which changes their semi-nomadic lifestyle to a more sedentary way of life. However, the Aborigines at the missions experienced difficult conditions; they generally had to suffer the ethnocentric and racist attitudes held by many missionaries who viewed Aboriginal culture as pagan, uncivilized and inferior. Reverend E.R. Gribble, an Anglican missionary all of his life, typically described the Aborigines as 'children' who belong to a 'degraded and depraved race' which must be uplifted. Some fundamentalist missionaries saw the Aborigines as pagan enemies who, like forces of darkness, had to be triumph over. Even favorable missionary views were paternalistic, rating the Aborigines 'as good as any other native' (Broome 108).

The missionaries soon found out that the adult Aborigines had little interest in Christianity so they concentrated on the children. They were segregated from their parents in dormitories and were taught Christianity, about God, sin, goodness and salvation. The missionaries were successful in convincing the Aboriginal parents to leave their children at the missions. They achieved this by persuasion and by threatening withdrawal of rations. The Aborigines were also often thankful to be able to leave their children at the dormitories to be fed and cared for, as it was harder to obtain their traditional food since the European encroachment on their land. On the other hand, there were also times when the Aboriginal children were forcibly taken in the dormitories. "Reverend Watson of the Wellington mission gained recruits by kidnapping. Aborigines in the area were forced to hide their children when he was near" (Broome 37). Life in the dormitories was one of control and correction. The missionaries interpreted their Christian ideas into rules and regulations in the hope that the Aborigines would be Christians by simply following them. Children who were taken away from their parents were put in Missions and at times they refused to obey discipline. Others found a wide range of ways of refusing to cooperate, or fulfilling the European's expectations. The dormitory routine failed to break the ties of the children from traditional

life, but the considerable time absorbed in it succeeded in limiting the depth and richness of their traditional knowledge. Many dormitory children were left between the Aboriginal and European world. The Aboriginal people in the missions were made to depend on the food handouts by the missionaries and this dependence was further increased by the loss of hunting skills due to lack of practice and also the dormitory based children received insufficient bush education.

As the missionaries were keenly dedicated to bringing about change in the Aborigines and making them Christian, both Westernization and Christianity attacked the Aborigines. However, in spite of all these situations there were very few Aboriginal Christian converts as Bishop Gsell wrote of the Bathurst Island Mission in 1954: 'even after thirty years of work we still could not claim one single adult convert' (Broome 118). Though the language barrier between the Aborigines and the missionaries facilitated to the Aborigines efforts to remain traditional, the Aborigines were not prepared to comprehend some Christian concepts. They had no understanding of hell, no knowledge of geography to place the events of the Bible, and no comprehension of the Christian parables about flocks and shepherds for they had never seen sheep. When shown Biblical pictures, the Aborigines saw only a white God, a white Jesus, white angels and a black devil, and were naturally alienated by this European color symbolism of white as good and black as evil. The Bible stories to them were a story of power and injustice. Therefore, the Christian message was either confused or was not accepted as it was intended (Broome 117). According to Richard Broome, "If the European missionaries all over Australia had been able to detach themselves from association with European power and cultural dominance they might have gained more Aboriginal converts. As it was, they remained colonial managers as well as men of God, and this mixture alienated the Aborigines" (119). Thus, missionaries in colonial cultures are interesting and ambiguous agents of empire. Although they were very well intentioned towards the indigenous people

they encountered, they have little regard for preserving the indigenous cultures. The missionaries occupied a very ambivalent and ambiguous position within the Aboriginal cultures. They were driven by the ideas that Christianity could bring a better tomorrow for the 'pagan Aborigines'. While most other Europeans in contact with the Aborigines did little to change Aboriginal ways, the missionaries tried to strike at the heart of Aboriginal culture, defeat it, and put Christianity and European customs in its place. Though the Aborigines resisted this attack for a long while, but great changes have occurred and the battle has been lost in some communities. The heartening thing is that a number of missionaries saw the value of Aboriginal culture from the outset, and that others were flexible enough to change their opinions. As pastor Albrecht of Hermannsburg mission in central Australia once remarked: 'When we first came here we thought we had found the only people in the world without a religion. Now we have learnt that they are among the most religious people in the world' (qtd. in Broome 123). As Johannes Fabian has argued, not only 'the crooks and brutal exploiters, but honest and intelligent agents of colonialism need to be accounted for' in order to build up a nuanced, complicated vision of colonialism and its aftermath (qtd. in Johnston 105).

The impact of missionaries influence on the lives of the Aboriginal people may be considered as mixed blessings. On the one hand, the missionaries protect the Aborigines from the brutality of the other European settlers and used their position to stop the tradition of initiation and polygamy practiced by the Aborigines. Initiation was condemned and most missionaries opposed polygamy. However, it should be noted that, sometimes change came to traditional culture not because of the pressure of the missionaries but their presence and example caused a shift in community ideas. And therefore, though there were many Aborigines who were adamant in trying to keep up their traditional way of life, there are some who wanted to do away with some of their traditions like polygamy and initiation,

which the missionaries opposed and condemned. Thus, the Aborigines themselves who were attracted by the missionaries' ways took advantage of their presence to modify practices that they found irksome (Broome 116).On the other hand, the paternalistic attitude and the dormitory life in the missions had disabled the Aborigines in living their life outside the missions. It was not easy for the Aborigines to take up new responsibilities, even if it means their life, after so many years forced dependence and inadequate training. When the missions' regimes came to an end, the Aboriginal people had to make far- reaching adjustments to their way of life. The quandaries of the Aborigines caused by the impact of the missionaries is succinctly sums by Uncle Herbie and Joe in *In Our Town*:

> UNCLE HERBIE: Kia, wetjala cunning fella alright. When they come here they had the Bible and we had the land..now –
>
> JOE & UNCLE HERBIE: Now they've got the land and we've got the Bible! (Davis 44)

Here Davis highlight the similar quandaries shared by not only the Aborigines of Australia but also all the indigenous people in different parts of the world in their encounter with the missionaries which impacted their lives, religion, culture, customs, etc.

The Federal Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, actively pursued the policy of assimilation in reference to Aboriginal people as a way of improving their way of life. He, like many others before him, believed that they could improve their treatment and conditions, if they could be encouraged to be more 'white'. Assimilation for Aboriginal people was seen as a positive policy by many people - as were the policies of paternalism and protectionism. In 1961 Hasluck, then Minister for Territories described this policy as follows:

> The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community

> enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians. Thus, any special measures taken for aborigines and part-aborigines are regarded as temporary measures not based on color but intended to meet their need for special care and assistance to protect them from any ill effects of sudden change and to assist them to make the transition from one stage to another in such a way as will be favorable to their future social, economic and political advancement (*The Policy of Assimilation*).

He further revealed in another statement:

> We do not want a submerged caste or any other social pariahs in our community but want a homogenous society (Hasluck 35).

These statements substantiate that assimilation was about what white Australians want, i.e. what they want first for themselves and what they want for the Aborigines. Since colonization Aboriginal Affairs policy has been dominated by attempts to subjugate the distinctness of the Aborigines. The white Australian Policy for assimilation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has consistently asserted the dominance of the mainstream discourse over the voices of Indigenous peoples. This approach is based on fear of the differences, the unknown and the strange qualities of the Aborigines which unsettled the white people's perception of "civilized" living. It also reveals the white Australians inability to embrace the differences of the Aboriginal culture, tradition and customs and be enriched by it.

The economic depression of the 1890s (which is highlighted in Davis's *No Sugar*) and the collapse of the pastoral industry led to the displacement of the Aborigines from their land to the Reserves. These Reserves were set up by the European authorities in order to adopt greater control over the lives of Aboriginal people. The White Australia policy came about in

this era along with greater surveillance and restrictions on Aboriginal people. The segregation of Aboriginal people on the Reserves that in part resulted from structural economic change allowed the assertion of Australian identity as a white nation (Norman 73). Therefore the setting up of reserves in Australia became a vital key to dispossess many indigenous people of their traditional lands. Hence, it can be said that within a short period after the arrival of the Europeans on the frontier, the Europeans put the Aborigines in what they called Reserves/Camps/Missions. The white Europeans aimed at denying indigenous people self-determination and the ability to control their future. After being dispossessed of their land and their hunting grounds, the Aborigines found themselves under the control of newly created supervisory authorities. These laws were never understood and never consented to by the Aborigines at any point in history. They were never part of a system that self-certified itself as benefactor. The fact is they were effectively sidelined, silenced and made invisible in history. The Aboriginal playwrights thus seem to write their presence into history.

In his play *No Sugar* (1985), Jack Davis draws attention on the depression year. It was a hard and difficult time even for the white European settlers, and it brought exceptional hard times for the Aborigines. The state authorities round up the native population of Northam and transfer them to Moore River Settlement. *No Sugar* is about the enforced relocation of the Millimurra family to the Moore River Settlement, just like the Yorlah family of *Kullark*, Davis first play, and the tribulations faced by the family. With *No Sugar*, Davis was portraying life under the apartheid Acts of the 1930s and the 1940s to audiences conditioned by the assimilation Acts of the 1960s and the 1970s and undergoing a transition towards multiculturalism in the 1980s (Casey 152). Davis dramatized the words and behavior of real historical figures such as A.O. Neville, the chief protector of the Aborigines, and Mr. Neal, the superintendent of the Moore River Settlement. Davis relies heavily on oral literatures and his stories were from the Aboriginal past as told to him by his family (Casey 136). His story

seems authentic as Davis himself spent several years of his youth in the Moore River Settlement. The white authorities segregated the natives in the reserves from the whites in order to prepare them for assimilation in the mainstream Australia, as A.O. Neville speech on his Australia Day visit to the Moore River Settlement tells the encamped Aborigines:

> …I was reminded that the world is in the grip of depression and that many people are suffering from hunger and deprivation of many of the essential elements which make for a contented existence. But you, in this small corner of the Empire, are fortunate in being provided with adequate food and shelter… It doesn't hurt to remind yourselves that you are preparing yourselves here to take your place in the Australian society, to l ive as other Australians live, and to live alongside other Australians; to learn to enjoy the privileges and to shoulder the responsibilities of living like the white man, to be treated equally, not worse, not better, under the law (Davis, *No Sugar* 97).

Neville, with his paternalistic attitude is proud of himself and the government in looking after the Aborigines, providing them food and shelter. However, he is furious when the Aborigines alter and modify the hymn 'There is a Happy Land' with a parody that sums up their condition in the Settlement:

> There is a happy land,
> Far, far away.
> No sugar in our tea,
> Bread and butter we never see.
> That's why we're gradually
> Fading away. (Davis, *No Sugar* 98).

Neville is so angry and immediately tells them to stop singing, he is appalled by the 'disgraceful demonstration of ingratitude' and swears that the Aborigines 'will live to rue this

day'. And as for the punishment he announces that 'there will be no Christmas this year' (ibid.).

The motive for these mission services was hardly pure philanthropy; it was one of the schemes used by the white governments on the Aborigines so that they could assimilate them into the white society. The missions were considered to be indispensable agents of implementing the new policy of assimilation. As early as February 1947, A.P. Elkin had informed a conference of mission officials that it was essential for their institutions to:

> Have a positive economic and welfare policy. In addition to the spiritual… [they] should set out to teach the native to meet the new era of civilization, which must, of necessity, make its impact on him in the future (Shoemaker 68).

When Joe and his lover Mary (from *No Sugar*) and the Yorlah family (from *Kullark*) eventually escape and are discharged from the Settlement, they are under strict surveillance of the police and the white authorities. They are not allowed to move freely from one place to another without prior permission from the white authorities. Under the Aboriginal Acts in different parts of Australia; Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, New South Wales Northern Territory and South Australia, the white governments established rigid control over all Aborigines (unless exempted), which ensued to a loss of civil rights i.e. the right to move freely from one place to another, the right to freedom of association and marriage, the right to control one's property and earnings, and the right to vote, drink, work, carry guns and own dogs. Without the permission of the white authorities the Aborigines were not allowed to work outside the reserves, they were confined to the settlements and they under total control of the settlements managers who were ready and eager to use the powers given to them under the Act. As Rowley remarked: 'Aboriginal administration in these places became an issue as remote as that of gaols or asylums' (qtd. in Broome 31). These white European authorities were given the responsibility of administrating and implementing to bring about coercive

assimilation. Eventually, these supervisory authorities assumed almost complete control over every aspect of the indigenous peoples' lives. Their aim in dispossessing the Aboriginal people of their lands, along with controlling their lives, resulted in the native's loss of self-determination, identity, and culture. Eventually the Aborigines moved into the European settlements. Many Aborigines came to the settlement to obtain European food well before the traditional foods in their area were exhausted. As Annette Hamilton has stated:

> When the news came that the whites had abundant, if strange, food, more than they could possible eat, this was like news of Eden- or the super water hole, in Aboriginal terms. Hence, just as they had always moved to the sources of food- the ripening figs, the run of witchitties, so they moved to the whites, not in order to take part in white society, not in order to experience social change, but in order to beg the food (Broome 56).

In most areas this act of 'coming-in' was forced upon the Aborigines due to military exhaustion, disease and starvation. Some of the Aborigines came to the settlements voluntarily out of curiosity for the white intruders. However as time passed the desire for food was the main reason why some of the Aborigines decided to stay in the settlements as they were provided with food and shelter, because with the European settlements it was harder for the Aborigines to live their semi-nomadic lifestyle as their lands were used and cultivated by the Europeans which made it difficult for them to find food. The act of 'coming-in' whether forced or not, demanded a great deal from the Aborigines. Aboriginal women had to form liaisons with European men; the Aborigines had to work in European fashion and generally lose a great deal of control over their lives. Some of the young were tempted by white culture and yet through it all, they were determined to retain their Aboriginal culture. By 'coming-in' they were further decimated by disease, alcohol, and

inter-tribal fights. Even the European foods they sought were not particularly good for them (Broome 58).

As mentioned earlier Davis relies on the oral histories of the Aborigines, in *Kullark*, he reenacts the history where the entire population of the Northam camp, were rounded up by police and dumped at the Moore River Settlement. A narrative of the Indigenous history thus conceived becomes significant when the Euro-centric narratives are grossly suspect. As a white actress on the stage retells:

> WHITE ACTRESS: On January seventeenth, nineteen thirty-
> three, eighty-nine Aborigines, the entire
> population of the Northam Camp, were
> rounded up by police and dumped in the
> Moore River Settlement. The Northam Shire
> Council said they had scabies and were a
> health risk.
> *And a black actor continues*:
> BLACK ACTOR: At Moore River it was found that only four of
> the eighty-one had the disease (Davis, *Kullark* 46).

Here Davis, depicted the first generation of the Yorlah family where Thomas Yorlah, his wife Mary Yorlah and their two children were among the victims. We find the family's resistance of this enforced settlement and their helpless situation. When a policeman comes to arrest Thomas Yorlah showing a warrant arrest to him, Thomas is dumbfounded, as he says:

> THOMAS: Gawd almighty, what for?
> POLICEMAN: You are being arrested under Section Twelve of the
> Aborigines Act.

THOMAS: I don't even come under the Act. I'm only a quarter native blood. I don't live on the reserves and I never took government blankets, rations or nothin'.

POLICEMAN:Well, I don't know about that. I don't decide these things. All I know is you're on my list so as far as I'm concerned I've gotta put you on that train.

THOMAS: Train? You're takin' us to Moore River?

POLICEMAN: That's the law. Any native under the Aborigines Act can be moved from any area to any other area (Davis, *Kullark* 47).

Thomas Yorlah pleaded the authorities saying that he could very well take care of his family without help or assistance from the government "protectors". However, he and his family could not avert themselves from the white authorities. While they were in Moore River Settlement, Thomas persistently runs away from the settlements with his family but the black tracker, Bluey, who ardently obeyed the whites, would always catch up with them and brought them back to the settlement. When Thomas Yorlah continues to plead, the Superintendent of the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement, Mr. Neale replies, "Only that you're wasting your time. You'll never get an exemption, Yorlah, I promise you that. And I don't want you asking for permission to go down to Perth again, because I don't intend to give it. As far as I'm concerned you can stay here in Moore River and bloody well rot" (Davis, *Kullark* 51). This encounter eloquently reveals the lacunae of the settlers' laws and the natives' reasonable concerns.

Though the Yorlah's family is so helpless in their situation, the father, Thomas Yorlah is still persistent in getting out from the Settlement. He says to his wife:

We're getting' outta here. I got a plan. Mr. Neale says he'll never let us go, but if we keep runnin' away he's got to get sick of us and 'e'll give in… (Davis, *Kullark* 53)

Every time they run away they are always caught and Thomas was put in prison and his family are always sent back to the Settlement. After six months Thomas would get out of prison and he would then planned again on escape from the Settlement. This escape and imprisonment repeated several times for Thomas and his family as he says:

> Well, I just got back from Fremantle. Not Fremantle town, Fremantle Gaol. Done six months. [*He laughs*.] And tomorrow, we're off again. It'll take 'em e month to catch us, an' by that time I'll have the kids lookin' healthier and their sores all better. I don't know how many times I gotta run away, or haw may times they gonna put me in gaol, but im gonna keep comin' back for my family, you'll see (Davis, Kullark, 54).

And when the Yorlah's family is finally freed from the Moore River Settlement, Thomas joyfully exclaims:

> Well, we won, we won.
>
> [*He laughs*.]
>
> Me, Mum and the kids. Four times I run away and four times I got six months' gaol. That's two years, twenty- four months, eh! But by Gawd it was worth it. Yeah, every night in the boob was worth it, an' if I had to I'd do it all over again. Yeah, I'd do it all over again (Davis *Kullark* 54).

However, before they were finally released from the Settlement, they were warned, "not to return to any of the following towns Northam, Toodyay, York or Beverly" and if they visit any of these places again they will be brought back to the Settlement. They were further ordered not to apply for assistance from the Aborigines Department and were not allowed in any town after six in the evening (Davis, *Kullark* 55). The scene also shows how common and usual it was for the Aboriginal people to be imprisoned, and how lightly they took on

being imprisoned by the whites authorities, never for a time consigning to death their natural urge for freedom.

In *Kullark*, the action moves between different time frames and places in Western Australia:

> The action of the play moves from the kitchen of the Yorlah household in a country town in the South West of Western Australia,1979, to a farm in the Pinjarra area between 1829 and 1834, the Moore River Native Settlement in the 1930s, the Yorlahs' chaff-bag humpy in 1945 and other associated areas (Davis, *Kullark* 6).

Thus the play starts with the scene of the Yorlah family's kitchen in Perth in 1979, and then shifts to the first contact between Europeans and the Nyoongah people, the Moore river settlement in the 1930s and the Yorlah family's humpy in 1945. The action of the play doesn't move in chronological order and we are taken back and forth to the different time frames. By using this technique Davis is able to reenact stories of the past intermingled with the present, which give the audience and the reader good theatre- and collapse of the historical progress that, the European privileges.

One of the most prominent methods of assimilation, which had a great impact on the history of Australia directed toward the Aborigines, was educating the Aboriginal children. In order for the natives to be assimilated into the Western culture, it was thought that they had to be educated in the Western way. The white European administrators felt that the indigenous peoples were completely incapable of educating their own children. In relation to Indigenous children, the conference in April 1937, also resolved that,

> ... efforts of all State authorities should be directed towards the education of children of mixed aboriginal blood at white standards, and their subsequent employment under the same conditions as whites with a view to their taking their place in the white community on an equal footing with the whites (*Bringing Them Home Report* 26).

Therefore in implementing this scheme many Aboriginal children were taken away from their parents and were put up in institutions/missions set up especially for them. In relation to the indigenous children, A.O. Neville the Chief Protector of the Aborigines, who headed the Conference, says:

> It is my opinion that these half-castes can be made into useful workmen and women, but unfortunately they are most often found in communities whose influence is towards laziness and vices, and I think it is our duty not to allow these half-castes, whose blood is, after all, half British, to grow up as a vagrants and outcasts as their mothers now are. A half- caste, who possesses few of the virtues and all of the vices of whites, grows up to be a mischievous and criminal subject. It may appear to be a cruel thing to take an Aboriginal child from its native mother, but it is necessary in some cases to be cruel in order to be kind (Davis, *Kullark* 41-42).

The Indigenous children were forcibly and involuntarily taken from their natural parents to institutions, which taught them to act in a "civilized" manner. One of the characters, Black Actor, in *Kullark*, speaking over the music says:

> The police would just arrive and take the child and put him on a reserve or a mission where he could learn to live white, to assimilate. While the children played in the Settlement compound – huge wire fences, concentration camp fence – the old women would come up and call them over, hold their hands through the compound fence and tell them who they were, who their mothers were, what their skin was, and what their totems and dreamings were. The children were caught, belted by the authorities, and told not to mix with those dirty blacks (Davis, *Kullark* 42).

The language of *Kullark* is mostly marked by gestures that speak eloquently of the relationships now controlled by the aliens and of the powerlessness of the Aborigines who suffer without ventilating their grievances. Sadly, many of these children never saw their

biological mothers again and never learned the ways their ancestors had lived for thousands of years, as the Black Actor continues:

> The child grew up and had to roam,
>
> From the mission home, he loved so.
>
> To find his mother he tried in vain,
>
> Upon the earth they never met again (Davis, *Kullark* 43).

Poetry and pain combine to articulate the inarticulate sadness, here. Furthermore, this western educational scheme required the complete desertion of the indigenous culture. The most catastrophic aspect of the assimilation policy was that it led to many children being taken away from their parents and families and placed in foster care or groups' homes. These children have come to be known as the 'Stolen Generations'. Carmel Bird aptly summarizes the themes of removal across all regions of the country:

> The children could be taken at any age, and many of them were taken from their mothers at birth or in very early infancy. Most of the children so taken were put up into institutions where the other children were mostly Aboriginal, of mixed race, and where the staffs were non-Aboriginal. If a child was adopted or fostered out to a family, the family usually was white. The objective of all this activity was to absorb the Aboriginal children into white society, to force them to forget and deny their Aboriginal heritage and blood, and to bring about, within few generations, a form of breeding-out of all Aboriginal characteristics (Briskman 6).

The policies and practices of the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their families are seen through the voices of the Aboriginal people. Their accounts of these experiences are highlighted in the writings of almost all the Aboriginal writers today. The forcible removal of children from their families was one of the most inhumane methods of implementing assimilation policies. The removal of Aboriginal children from their families was

systematically carried out, in an attempt to break down the social structure of Aboriginal culture (Read 1998:13).

IIbijerri, one of the Indigenous theatre companies aimed to produce shows to bring about community education for the Indigenous people. Jane Harrison, a descendent of the Muruwari people of New South Wales, was commissioned to research and write a play about the 'lost children', based on the experiences of members of the community. At first the project was named *The Lost Children*, but it was later changed to *Stolen* and the script development process began formally in 1992. In the course of writing *Stolen*, Jane Harrison read thousands of oral transcripts and spoke with many members of the 'Stolen Generations'. *Stolen* is about the sufferings and the traumatic conditions of the Aboriginal children who were removed from their families and it weaves common elements of the stories of many Aborigines who were removed from their family at a young age. The play features five protagonists Jimmy, Sandy, Shirley, Ruby and Anne, each character brings out the different kinds of oppression faced by the Aboriginal children, the five characters become the representative of the experience of all the children who were stolen from their families. As Bridget Galton in her article "Aboriginal Sin of Australia Exposed" observes, "The scandal of thousands of Aborigine children forcibly snatched from their 'unfit' parents by the Australian government and placed into homes in the '50s and '60s is vividly realized in this moving drama" (Galton 2001). While exposing 'the aboriginal sin' of white Australia, Harrison has tried to weave a narrative to exploit the natural human sympathies and successfully portrayed the human tragedy wrought by the 'civilizing' strategies of white settlers even in the mid-twentieth century.

In *Stolen*, one of the character Shirley who is stolen as a child becomes a mother whose children are again stolen, though *Stolen* is a fictional play, in the autobiography of Sally Morgan, her grandmother, Daisy shares the same fate as Shirley, she was stolen as a

child and her children were also snatched away from her by the authorities as she says, “That was the way of it, then. They took our children one way or another” (Morgan, *My Place* 340). It is hard to distinguish fact from fiction in Harrison’s play. Their stories confirmed how generations within a family were stolen. It was the government policy to take away the children from their family in order to assimilate them into white society. “Near the beginning of the last century, the then so-called protector of Aborigines declared that the policy of removing their children caused family no distress. ‘The mothers soon forget.’ They didn’t, and Stolen is here to make sure that we don’t either,” commented Lyn Gardner in her article on *Stolen* (Gardner 2001). The white invaders could never forget symbolic mother, their Crown Queen of Britain; but the irony is their Australian Government adopted the sinister policy to force forgetfulness on Aboriginal children and mothers.

The ‘half- castes’ children were particularly targeted by the government officials and taken away from their parents and put them in different institutions which is set up especially for them so that they could be absorbed into white society. These children, it was hoped, would then assimilate and intermarry into mainstream society. The Welfare officers were removing children solely because they were Aboriginal, it was intended and arranged so that they should lose their Aboriginality, and that they never return home (Read 2002:57). In *Stolen*, one of the characters, Sandy, whose birth was the result of his mother being raped by a white man was always on the run from the Welfare, who tries to take him away from his mother and community. In the scene “Hiding Sandy”, his cousin, aunt and uncle talks about how they’ve tried hiding Sandy from the Welfare. As the Welfare was always after Sandy, he was always hiding and running, this makes Sandy filled with anxiety and fear, as his uncle says:

> UNCLE: When I took the boy in he had nothing but the shirt on his back
>
> and a wild look in his eye. He couldn’t sit still. I’d take him down to the river and

slowly he'd start breathing again. We'd catch a few fish and have a yarn, and he'd even crack a smile now and then. But then someone dobbed us in, and they took him. Sad to see the boy go (Harrison, *Stolen* 4).

The tale moving on the borderline of raw reality unveils what is not said here; and a peep into the unsaid uncovers the true savagery of the civilized man. The family and communal effort to hide Sandy from the Welfare proved futile and he couldn't understand why he was targeted:

SANDY: Always on the run. But I don't want to go. Can't I stay here? I haven't done nothing wrong. I wannastay. I don't wanna go (ibid.).

The Sandy story is one of the many Aboriginal children who were forcibly taken from their families. Children were literally stolen from their families and communities and removed from their traditional way of life. As Peter Read points out, "It is probably fair to say that except for the remotest regions of the nation, there was not a single Aboriginal family which had not been touched by the policy of removal. Everybody had lost someone" (Read 1998:9). In the real sense, the wild, Aboriginal Australia was stolen from its inhabitants.

In *Stolen*, there are four scenes in which the children are make to line up "in the right order of lightest to darkest" (*Stolen*5) In "Line-Up 1", the children stand expectantly, straightening their clothes and looking eager. Sandy doesn't quite understand what was going on. Shirley nudges him and explains in a whisper:

SHIRLEY: A lady and a man are coming.

RUBY: Matron said they're gunna take one of us home.

SANDY: Back home…?

SHIRLEY: Not our home, Sandy, their homes.

SANDY: Oh. Do ya get to stay there forever?

ANNE: But why…?

Anne *is ignored as* Jimmy *answers over her to* Sandy.

JIMMY: Nah, just for the weekend.

SANDY: Oh. Do ya get more to eat than the rotten food here?

JIMMY: Christ, anything'd be better –

SANDY: Do ya have to scrub the floors…?

JIMMY: Nah!

ANNE: But why…?

RUBY: Shhhh.

As the golden spotlight falls on each of them in turn, they sell themselves in their own particular way. Shirley straightens her dress. Sandy flattens his hair.

JIMMY: [*stepping forward*] I make my bed real good (Harrison, *Stolen* 6).

Jimmy is very hopeful of being chosen by the white couple, but Ruby is chosen because "*in the bright light she looks white*". Jimmy ends the scene with a hopeful note: "They're gunna choose me one day" (ibid.). The conditions faced by the children in the homes were so harsh that they desire to be adopted or fostered to a white family. The food was poor and the menial work in which they were trained become a heavy load for the children. The lighter skinned ones were adopted into white homes, however, the children in some cases faced sexual exploitation, like Ruby in *Stolen*. In the scenes, "Unspoken Abuse I" and "Unspoken Abused II" of *Stolen*, we find Ruby returning from her weekend trip with her weekend parents, when her friends asked her what she ate, she replied 'fish and chips', they asked what gift she got she replied that 'he' gave her a doll and when they asked what else he give her, she softly replied "I promised not to tell" (*Stolen* 8 and 15). These scenes clearly suggest that Ruby was sexually abused which she feels too shameful to share with her friends. This kind of pain and confusion, results in loss of identity, loss of confidence in an identity, and Ruby has become

crazy beyond reach when her black family finally finds her. She is the veritable witness to all our hypocritically civilized missions that the homes boast of.

The children put in the institution were not allowed to speak their language and practicing their ceremonies were forbidden. They were taught to deny their Aboriginality so that they could assimilate into European society. The Aboriginal families were kept in the dark about the whereabouts of their children and ensure that they could not trace them. As a result the children grew up without any family ties and social and cultural identity. The feeling of loneliness and emptiness let them consort to violence, delinquency, alcohol, drugs etc. Some of them fell victims to low self- esteem and feelings of worthlessness like, Ruby, or feeling of rage, powerlessness and hopelessness that leads to suicide like, Jimmy. The problematic part of the assimilation policies is that as the white administrators were so intent on the removal of the Aboriginal children from their family as Robert Donaldson, chief inspector of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board, addressed the Australian Catholic Congress in 1909:

> We have today, 3,200 children growing up in our midst, three-fourths of whom range from half-castes to almost white, with no prospects ahead of the great majority, under the present system, but lives of idleness and vice… under the evil influences and bad examples of the adults, they almost invariably drift into an aimless, useless life of idleness and immorality…. For adults we can only make their track as smooth as possible – they will soon pass away, but the children require our gravest consideration…. Amongst all those who have had a large experience with the Aborigines, and who take deep interest in their welfare, there is no difference of opinion as to the only solution of this great problem, - the removal of the children and their complete isolation from the influence of the camps. Under no circumstances whatever should the boys and girls be allowed to return to the camps, except on a

> short visit in an emergency, and then only by consent of the department. In the course of a few years there will be for the camps and stations; the old people will have passed away, and their progeny will be absorbed in the industrial classes of the colony (Read 1998:10).

The results of this rhetoric action lead far-reaching implications on the life of the children who were stolen from their parents. It is not only the rape, sexual exploitation, the physical and mental abuse, the feeling of being unloved by their families, the insanity, loneliness and the hopelessness that results in suicide, but also the identity crisis faced by the children who were adopted by the white families.

In *Stolen*, Anne is 'chosen' by the white family because of her skin color i.e. 'her milky white skin' (Harrison, *Stolen* 16). It is obvious that it is the light skin of Anne that weighs in her favor for adoption. She was adopted as an infant by white family and she never knew about it until she was informed by her white parents that her real mother, an "Aboriginal lady," is dying and wants to see her. Anne is horrified to discover her Aboriginal origins, she is confused and angry as she breaks down: Mum… Dad! Mum! Dad! Why? This is a nightmare!" (14). Her white parents told her that she could go "to see her … once" and that "no one need ever know". Anne's attitude is quite ambivalent after she had visited her birth mother, her Aboriginal family had told her "Yeah, and you have to come back to us-it's where you belong, girl" "We lot have to stick together, you know" (28). On the other hand she has her white family who told her "You're one of us, Anne- we've brought you up as one of our own," "We've given you everything- a home, an education, a future," and "Don't you appreciate all we've done?" (28). She is confused of where she truly belongs, she is fully assimilated within white culture, but there is a pull of filial loyalty that surpasses the barrier of space and absence. Anne's case veritably projects the human dilemma which is constructed by caring but unlovely systems. Harrison raises radical questions about one's

indulgence resulting in another's deprival and deprivation. In the scene, "Am I Black or White?" (Harrison, *Stolen* 28) Anne's mind is caught in crossfire, conflicting voices of her adoptive parents and Aboriginal family close in on her asking, "Who do you think you are?" (29). She is uncertain of her identity; this uncertainty of identity is what the white officials had wanted, as Bridget Galton observes, "It is as if the children's bewildered identities are the desired outcome for a society that wants to rub out their people's existence" (Galton 2001). However, in the last part of the play in "Anne Scene", Anne declares, "I don't know where I belong anymore…But hey, it's Mother's Day and I've got to make tracks. [*She pulls out a box of gift-wrapped chocolates*.] I got Mum some milk chocolates. [*She pauses, then pulls out another box*.] And I got my mother some dark chocolates. [*She laughs and pops one in her mouth*.] Either way, I love them both" (*Stolen* 34). The scene here suggests that Anne is able to reconcile and is accepting both the white and the Aboriginal world. However, there can be many difficulties faced by an individual, as Peter Read observes, "I think that returning to one's Aboriginal family after a lifetime on the other side is the most difficult journey one can undertake in the whole of modern Australia. But it can happen and it does happen. Life will never be perfect but with courage, understanding from your two communities and a bit of humor, most returning Aborigines make their own way back into the communities" (Read 1998:12).This increasingly reestablishes the fact that the call of the blood is not stifled by all super structural ivory dwellings. The natural bond of the blood subverts the entire colonialist project of assimilation, which is bent on breeding a sense of shame for being what is naturally one's own, in the first place.

In *My Place*, when Sally Morgan finds out about her Aboriginal heritage, she is very excited, however her own sister Jill, who did not share her excitement, says, "It's a terrible thing to be Aboriginal. Nobody wants to know you…You can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal!" For Sally mother and grandmother, their Aboriginal identity

was also something, which they were both ashamed of. Daisy admits that she 'wanted to be white' (Morgan 336) and Gladys says that 'she just doesn't want be Aboriginal' (229). As Anne Brewster observes, "*My Place* is a testimony to the effects of the assimilation policy, introduced in the late 1930s, which attempted to bring about the absorption of Aboriginal people into white society, thereby erasing their cultural difference. During the 1940s and the 1950s both Daisy and Gladys felt ashamed and fearful of identifying as Aboriginal. They denied their Aboriginality and attempted to repress their memories of the past" (Brewster 17). Almost all of her life Daisy had attempted to conceal her Aboriginality. Morgan describes Daisy's attempts to identify as white during a visit by the rent man. In order to impress the rent man, whose power she has always feared, believing that he might one day evict them, rhapsodizes with him over the wonder of God, she says, 'here are you and I, both white", Sally overheard their conversation and finds it ridiculously funny, but then she is overcome with sadness and asks herself: "why did she want to be white? Did she really equate being white with the power of God, or was it just a slip of the tongue? I realized, with sudden insight, that there must have been times in her life when she'd looked around and the evidence was right before her eyes. If you're white, you can do anything" (Morgan 107). This shows the powerlessness of the Aborigines against the white as Daisy feels the need to pretend her Aboriginality and present herself as a white person despite her skin color. Daisy was always frightened and suspicious of the government, when Sally mocked her for being suspicious of the government she told Sally, "…You don't know what's the government's like, you're too young. You'll find out one day what they can do to people. You never trust anybody who works for the government…" (Morgan 96).

There are many people who are part- Aboriginal but who prefer to remain unknown to their family or community, or who doesn't want to acknowledge their Aboriginality. Deborah

Mailman an Aboriginal actress, playwright and performer was denied of her Aboriginality, as she says in an interview,

> "I love my dad very much, my mum too, she's my best mate, but my dad denied me my Aboriginality. Denied maybe too strong of a word, but he didn't encourage the exploration of my Aboriginality…It was the whole sense of shame I guess... Dad would tell us we were better than that. I think what he meant to say was that we could do something with our lives. We have opportunities out there to improve our lifestyle if we choose to take them. And choose them I did. But for a long time when I was a teenager, Dad and I used to have huge arguments: he'd say, 'No, you are not Aboriginal.' Knowing that we were, I was really confused about being a 'Blackfella'…" (Purcell 2002:3-5).

When Deborah Mailman was awarded AFI awards for Best Actress, she was given the label of being the 'first Aboriginal' to win an AFI award and that's when one of her relatives called up her Mum and Dad and said, "She's got no right saying that, because she's not Aboriginal." Mailman made a comment about them as she said, "For some reason they don't acknowledge their Aboriginality…I guess that family member is still in denial over their Aboriginality" (Purcell 2002:4-16). Mailman also commented on why she thinks that her family didn't want her to acknowledge her Aboriginality with understanding as she said, "I look back now and see that Dad and the family wanted the best out of life and what they were seeing around them, in their time, from society in general, or what was being portrayed of black communities in the media, was not positive" (Purcell 2002:17).

There are Aboriginal descendants like Deborah Mailman, who are actually proud of their Aboriginality, like Anne from *Stolen* and Sally Morgan in *My Place*, who later found out about it and claim their Aboriginality. However, the moment they acknowledge and reveals their Aboriginality, they are questioned with, "What tribe?" "What language?"

"Where they came from?" "What they used to do?" etc. They are often faced with these types of questions that they really find difficult to answer, as they know little about their culture, heritage and background. Gladys Milroy, Sally's mother had also inhabits a complex and ambivalent identity, she married a white man Bill Milroy and told her children that her mother Daisy had come out on a boat from India in the early days (Morgan 99) until Sally began her quest for their family history. However, when Sally found out about their Aboriginal identity she defends herself saying "it was only a little white lie" (Morgan 135) and encouraged Sally to write about their family history and urged her mother Daisy to co-operate with Sally in her quest. Gladys even accompany Sally and her family when they travel to Pilbara to meet their Aboriginal relatives. Meeting her Aboriginal relatives made her acknowledge her Aboriginal heritage and she finally realized as she says, "All my life, I've only been half a person" (Morgan 233). The white policy of assimilation cannot address the problem of 'feeling' and 'value' which remains ambivalent in the midst of all riches and comforts and reasons provided by white Australian regimes. Peter Read in his book *The Lost Children* suggests that, "Aboriginal identity is recoverable" (Read xvii). Though it can be said that it is recoverable to an extent, the pain, the anguish and the dilemma is sometimes hard to cast away by the victims of the separation. Charles Perkins, the most famous separated child of all, puts it this way:

> We're gone. Taken away. My youth was taken from me by Australia,White Australia. When Aboriginal children are separated it dies, it dies: Gone for ever. Never return. The connection is never made again. You always stay a bit different. You may want to look down on people, or may want to act differently, or you may have different values, for good or for bad. But you are different. That's the way it is and that's the way it will always remain (Read 1998:16).

However, there are more optimistic reflections in the writings of some individuals, who like Sally Morgan feel complete in finding out about their Aboriginal heritage, Pauline McLeod expresses in her poem “The Yearning of My Soul”:

There was another part of me,

Another part of my life.

My natural family taken from me;

Hidden throughout my life.

The feeling was becoming stronger,

I could no longer ignore the call.

Something was happening within me.

Breaking down my hidden wall,

To become a person complete;

A woman becoming whole.

Black and Beautiful,

For the first time I listen to the YEARNING OF MY SOUL (Read 1998:18).

The white Australian government actively and aggressively pursued the policy of assimilation in reference to Aboriginal people as a way of improving their way of life. They believed that they could improve their treatment and conditions, if they could be encouraged to be more 'white'. Many people saw assimilation for Aboriginal people as a positive policy as it was seen as a way of improving the Aborigines and merging them to white culture.

As assimilation became a key policy for the government, more and more Aboriginal people were forced off the reserves and into the towns and cities. Many Aboriginal people wanted to move to cities and find work - to get away from the control of the reserve manager or to be self-determined. But when they came in the cities they faced racism and discrimination, and instead of being assimilated into 'white' society, they were mistreated by

the white society. The Aborigines were prohibited to enter the white domains and were forced to live on the fringes of society in poverty and unemployment. In many rural areas segregation became widespread, and Aboriginal people were shunned from the hotels and bars and other public places run by whites. Throughout Australian history a racist attitudes towards Aboriginal people had been one of the major issues. When the Aboriginal men worked under the white people they were lowly paid. Coercion, exploitation and wage injustice persisted in the industry throughout the era of assimilation…For sixteen years between 1933 and 1949, the Aboriginal minimum wage in the Northern Territory pastoral industry was pegged at the lamentably low level of five shillings per week (along with some allowance for food, tobacco, and clothing) (Shoemaker 1992:67). This condition is highlighted in Davis's *No Sugar*, when the sergeant who said that their men were too lazy to work confronted Gran and Milly, they replied:

> MILLY: Look, last week my Joe cut a hundred posts for Skinny Martin and you know what he got? A pair of second hand boots and a piece of stag ram so tough even dawg couldn't eat it; skinnier than old Martin 'imself.
>
> GRAN: And we couldn't eat the boots (Davis *No sugar* 23).

The working condition of the Aboriginal people was very poor and that sometimes they would even receive their wage in used goods, which were of no use or goods to them. Another example of wage exploitation of Black Australians was ubiquitous:

> During 1954, rates of pay for Aboriginal workers in the … area were about half of those demanded and received by white employees doing the same work… Frequently Aboriginal employees were persuaded to take cheap wine (sweet sherry or muscat) in lieu of part of the wage due to them (Shoemaker 1992:71).

Under this kind of condition the feeling of powerlessness permeated the minds of the male Aborigines more than the female. The conception of this feeling of powerlessness in the face

of racial discrimination by the male Aborigines could be corroborated in the words of Brian Crow and Chris Banfield in their introduction to *An Introduction to Post- Colonial Theatre*, "What has happened, in the historical relations between whites and blacks, is that because of its belief in its racial superiority, associated with the economic and military dominance of colonialism, the white race has disrupted the reciprocity of this fundamental process of recognition. The black person looks for the human recognition accorded him by the other; but when the other is white, that acknowledgement is withheld, and the black is deprived of his 'certainty of himself'. So the black man 'makes himself abnormal'; and the white 'is at once the perpetrator and the victim of a delusion'" (Crow and Banfield 3).

Another characteristic of the assimilation policy was the lack of right to citizenship of the Aborigines in Australia. The Indigenous peoples of Australia were not recognized as citizens. The right to vote was finally granted in 1962 and the white Australians gave the seal of approval in the 1967 Referendum, which required Aborigines to be counted in the census and allowed the Commonwealth Government to make laws for the Aborigines anywhere in Australia (Prentis 88). Before the 1940s, Aboriginal people could not become citizens, but after the Second World War they could be counted as citizens if they applied for a certificate, which is if the white authorities think that they are entitled. By having a certificate, however, they had to give up all ties with the Indigenous community, including their families. In New South Wales it was known as an 'exemption' certificate; it exempted someone from being a person of Aboriginal descent. To be able to vote, to be able to move around with no restrictions, to be able to buy alcohol; basically to be able to make any sort of decision about their lives, Aboriginal people had to deny their heritage and their families. The government saw citizenship as a lure to make Aboriginal people assimilate. They promoted the certificates as a good thing and encouraged those who were 'civilized' enough to apply for them. The majority of Aboriginal people who compared them to 'dog licenses' looked upon

these exemption certificates with contempt. Racial discrimination and segregation, and expressions of racial difference more generally, were problems that could be ameliorated by policies of assimilation (Prentis 88).

When World War II came to an end, for most of the Australians it was a time of relief and celebration. However, the celebration was short lived for the Aboriginal Australians in many parts of the nation. Many of the Aboriginal men took part in the war, and in the army they were treated equally with the white Australians, which made them feel national integrity towards Australia. But, when they returned home they were faced with the same treatment-racial prejudice and discrimination. In *Kullark*, Alec, who served in the army for five years during the war was discharged with citizenship rights. He was so happy to finally got citizenship, in a moment of soliloquy he holds up his citizenship card and says, "Well do I look any whiter to you? This certificate says I'm now white, so I gotta think white an' act white…But now it's nineteen forty–five an' I gotta make a new start." He smiles wryly and looks at his card and continue to say, "We already got a name for these things, we call 'emdawg collars. You know so the police can just look at this and tell who we are…" (Davis, *Kullark* 59). When Alec returned home to his parents in the reserves and told them that they have now the permission to leave the reserves as he got himself the citizenship rights, his mother replied, "Aw, that'll be 'ard. *Wetjalas* still the same in this town, still don't like *Nyoongahs* (60). However Alec was optimistic and replies, "Army life, tent. Home life, tent. There'll be some changes so don't forget to look around for that house next week, Mum." (61) The next day when Alec met a policeman he was trying to prevent him, but the policeman, who was already aware of his citizenship rights caught up with him any way and told him to get off the reserves quickly. He also told Alec to make sure that the rest of their relatives stay away from their house after they moved to town. He further told him to turn his rights if they can't keep the 'standard'. After the policeman left, Alec in a soliloquy says,

"Well, did you hear him tellin' me to keep on the straight and narrow? Can't have no 'lationsvisitin', can't live on the reserve. Citizenship don't sound much like freedom to me. I seen a lot of blokes die in the war for freedom. None of 'em would call this freedom, none f 'em." (63) The story of Alec and his family in the play, *Kullark*, is just one example of the predicaments of an Aboriginal family. There are thousands of families who shared the same experiences in the real world of 'white' Australia. The play radically questioned the high values proclaimed by the written rights and written laws, because the ground realities for the Aborigines remained unchanged and discriminatory.

Most of the prominent Aboriginal writers today are half-castes, quarter-castes or octoroons. So the complex questions such as, who is a 'real' Aboriginal? is often asked about the Indigenous people and their works. In *My Place*, Sally Morgan talks about her experienced during her studying in the University, she got the opportunity for getting Aboriginal scholarship which she applied for, and got. But, her friends who had always known them as Indians question it and the authorities confronted her for obtaining the scholarship under false pretenses. However, she got out of it without any further trouble. This may also be the reason that triggers her quest of belonging – her Aboriginal heritage. Her stories in *My Place* became part of a process of reclaiming her Aboriginal identity. With the success of her autobiographical book *My Place*, Sally Morgan has been challenged by a number of critics about her Aboriginality. The charges are that *My Place* articulates a 'bourgeois individualism' and 'an acceptance of middle-class values', she is also said to be lacking in authenticity when her work has been compared to that of 'traditional Aboriginal genres'. In general it can be said that Morgan's novel was well received by the white audience but not so well by some sections of the Indigenous community. For example Mudrooroo has said with reference to Sally Morgan that, 'it is considered ok to be Aboriginal as long as you are young, gifted and not very black' (qtd. in Brewster 14). Jackie Huggins in

her essay, “Always was always will be” has criticized *My Place* by saying that “I read the first chapter three chapters and thought I was reading the life of a middle-class Anglo woman. I could not identify anything that told me Morgan was an Aboriginal person except the part about our common Aboriginal study grant.” She further commented, ‘Aboriginality cannot be acquired overnight’ (Huggins 62-63). So it seems that according to Huggins, Mudrooroo and some writers who critique Sally Morgan feel that *My Place* is well received by white audiences because it is less threatening for the white Australian audiences.

Aboriginal writers like Mudrooroo and Jackie Huggins critiquing their own Aboriginal counterparts further complicates the whole idea of being an Aboriginal person and makes it more contentious. According to Jackie Huggins, “genetic inheritance does not only determine identity in an Aboriginal society, as there are other inescapable and compounding factors which influence ‘being’ Aboriginal.” She further states, “Solely swallowing the genetical cocktail mixture does not constitute ‘being’ Aboriginal, as so many Johnny –come –latelies would have whites believe” (Huggins 63). Huggins finds it difficult to accept those Aboriginal people who had been living unaware of their Aboriginality and later claimed to be an Aboriginal and especially those who had lived hiding their Aboriginality and passed themselves to be non- Aboriginal in the first place. She strongly asserts that, “Most Aboriginal people never ceded their identity, no matter how destructive, painful or bad the situation was. We vindictively remember those who have passed and unlike whitefellas and, largely, those who study us can never forget nor forgive these traitors. Their jumping-on-the-bandwagon trips are questioned and usually not accepted by their staunchest critics, whom they presume should now be their firmest allies and ‘family’. Instant coffee doesn’t mix easily with pure spring water” (Huggins 62). However, with all the critiques and issues of Sally Morgan’s Aboriginality, there are Aboriginal critic and writer such as Marcia Langton who defends Morgan’s *My Place*. According to Marcia Langton, *My Place*, “recasts

‘Aboriginality’, so long suppressed, as acceptable, bringing it out into the open. The book is catharsis. It gives release and relief, not so much to Aboriginal people oppressed by psychotic racism, as to the whites who wittingly and unwittingly participated in it” (Langton 117). In regard to the debates and issues of Aboriginality, Huggins is also aware and of an opinion that Aboriginality is always being theorized, intellectualized and trivialized by those who have never felt the passion, anger or the pain. And that when Aboriginal writers publicly analyze and criticize each other it can be perceived as infighting and when non-Aboriginals do the same it is considered as a healthy exercise in intellectual stimulation. Thus, she encourage others, particularly Aboriginal people, to comment her work as she says, “to stifle our own debates between each other denies the richness and diversity of our Aboriginal lives” (Huggins 65).

Mudrooroo, who openly made statements about Sally Morgan, whom he excluded from his definition of Aboriginality, was also later questioned about his Aboriginality. He was born as Colin Thomas Johnson and later changed his named to Mudrooroo Nyoongah and Mudooroo Narogin. In early 1996, a member of the Nyoongah community questioning Mudrooroo’s Aboriginality approached journalist Victoria Laurie. Informed that Mudrooroo's sister, Betty Polglaze, had conducted in 1992 that traced her family back five generations, Laurie contacted Polglaze who told her that she could find no trace of Aboriginal ancestry in the family. Laurie subsequently wrote an article for her newspaper titled *Identity Crisis* sparking a scandal that received nationwide media coverage in 1996/97. A request by the Nyoongah community to substantiate his claimed kinship to the Kickett family was not acknowledged because he was overseas and then in the process of relocating interstate. On 27 July 1996 the Nyoongah elders released a public statement: "The Kickett family rejects Colin Johnson's claim to his Aboriginality and any kinship ties to the family".Mudrooroo's writings had placed emphasis on kinship and family links as key features of Aboriginal identity. His

rejection of his biological family deeply offended the Aboriginal community. The resulting scandal and public debate over issues of authenticity and what constitutes Aboriginal identity led to some subject coordinators removing Mudrooroo's books from academic courses and he later said he was unable to find a publisher for a sequel to his previous novel. However, he was to publish two further novels after the campaign to destroy his writing had pushed him into a position where anything he said or did would be seized upon as somehow proof that he was guilty. Mudrooroo's silence is mostly misinterpreted and used to promote other versions of how this all happened. Initially, many people came to Mudrooroo's defence, some claiming it was a "white conspiracy" or a racist attack on Aboriginality with some claiming Polglaze's "amateur sleuthing" was being exploited. An Award winning Indigenous author Graeme Dixon called on Mudrooroo to come forward and tell the truth, stressing that it was important to "out" pretenders and reclaim Aboriginal culture. Several authors see evidence in his writings that Mudrooroo deliberately assumed an Aboriginal identity to legitimize his work when in his early twenties; although it remains possible he was unaware. Editor Gerhard Fischer believes that it was Dame Mary Durack who "defined and determined" his Aboriginal identity in an article published in 1997, Mudrooroo described Durack's foreword to his first novel as the origin of the "re-writing of his body" as Aboriginal. Mudrooroo later replied to his critics, stating that his dark skin meant he was always treated as Aboriginal by society; therefore his life experience was that of an Aborigine (“Mudrooroo” *Wikipedia*).

It should be noted that Mudrooroo was one of the most prolific black Australian authors and academicians. As writings cannot be totally separated from the author’s own stories of the social conflicts and political realities of the discourses of representation and ideology, or the textual space, from which they come. The writings of Mudrooroo also reflect the mental and physical tensions and the complex narrative of identity and belonging, which are inherent in the writings of the Aborigines in Australia. Mudrooroo was accused of not

being an Aboriginal in so many ways and also of the possibility that, as a young man of color he may have consciously misappropriated an Aboriginal identity as a way of changing the story of his own life and finding a place to belong. All these charges has emasculated his authority as a spokesperson for Aboriginal peoples and overshadow his contributions as an author towards the development of Australian Indigenous literature as for over thirty-five years, Mudrooroo has represented himself as an Aboriginal man. In her essay, "'What Matter Who's Speaking?' Authenticity and Identity in Discourses of Aboriginality in Australia", Carolyn D'Cruz examines the complexities and cross-cultural protocols of speaking rights in the light of a late 1992, early 1993 debate published in *Oceania*– a journal of the Asia-Pacific region. Of the six debaters, just one claimed Aboriginal status, Colin Johnson i.e. Mudrooroo. D'Cruz raises the question of Johnson's discredited right to speak on behalf of Aboriginal peoples. She demonstrates the complexities and stratifications informing the status of the speaking subject within essentialist discourses of identity politics – the different contexts, rules and procedures already in play before one even begin to speak. Her observation is that "complexities are always at work when speaking positions are reduced to the [essentialist] definition of an identity, regardless of whether the bearer of that identity can be authenticated" (D'Cruz 2001).

D'Cruz is of the opinion that there is no doubt that narratives of (White) Australian history are riddled with the exclusion and suppression of Aboriginal voices and that there is also no doubt that constructions of Aboriginality in Australia are saturated with the legacy of European invasion. She further states that this is clearly illustrated through tracing the conception of Australian Aborigines in discourses of European colonial administrations in which she quotes Hollinsworth quoting Atwood in 'Discourses on Aboriginality':

> The concept 'the Aborigines' has been generally used as though such a self-consciously identified group had existed at first contact with Europeans, but this is to

> prescribe, retrospectively, a definition to the aboriginal peoples at a period when they had no such sense of themselves. Before 1788 or even much later, they did not conceive of themselves as 'Aborigines' any more than the European invaders thought of themselves as 'Australians' (D'Cruz 2001).

According to D'Cruz, the categorization of 'Aborigines' in this way produces two related problems for current discourses concerning constructions of Aboriginal identities. First, such categorization has had the effect of homogenizing the diversity of peoples articulated through indigenous regional terms such as Nyoongahs, Kooris, Wongis, and Murris, to name a few. Second, these diverse voices are forced to present themselves within Eurocentric discourses (D'Cruz 2001).

Therefore, it is apparent that within the Aboriginal community there has been many contestations, questions, problems and issues in regard Who is Aboriginal? What is Aboriginal? There has been uncertainty and confusion in the characterization of Aboriginal people because they are also categorized as 'full blood', 'half-caste', 'quadroon' 'octoroon' etc. and also whether or not an Aboriginal person lived in a 'native's camp'. After the land rights and the momentous self-determination of the Aborigines in Australia, Aboriginality becomes a source of pride rather than shame to many. However, as mentioned earlier there has been many contestations in regard to who is the real Aboriginal? They are many people who shared the same fate as Mudrooroo, who were accepted as Aboriginal but were later accused as non-Aboriginal. Debbie Oakford, who was convinced of, and claimed her Aboriginality, went on to study about indigenous culture and became deputy chair of an indigenous sporting conference in Canberra in 1996 and later joined the regional council of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was also accused of being fraud. In 1997, two Tasmanian Aboriginal women, Edwina Shaw and Joanne James, took Oakford and ten other candidates for the ATSIC board to court, claiming they were not

Aboriginal. In April 1998, the judge ruled that Debbie Oakford was mistaken about being Aboriginal. She was then forced to resign from ATSIC, yet four years later she continues to identify herself as Aboriginal. “It doesn’t matter what the judge says,” she asserts. “I know who I am and that’s all that really matters” (Guilliatt 18).

Since Australia’s colonization the Aboriginal life experiences have been defined by non-indigenous constructions of race, the measuring of authenticity by blood, half-caste or quarter-caste and even octoroon. This kind of categorization is also another scope of the implementation of assimilation policy. Since 1981, Aboriginality has been defined for government purposes, using United Nations criteria, as follows:

> An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such in the community in which he or she lives (Birns and McNeer 26).

Aboriginal writer, health educator and practitioner Ian Anderson demonstrates the intricacies of meaning in this way:

> As I am an Aborigine, I inhabit an Aboriginal body, and not a combination of features which may or may not cancel each other. Whatever language I speak, I speak an Aboriginal language, because a lot of Aboriginal I know speak like me. How I speak, act, and look are the outcomes of a colonial history, and not a particular combination of traits from either side of the frontier. I agree with Deloria that representations which describe Indigenous peoples (or any other people) as caught “between two worlds” become “conceptual prison” (Birns and McNeer 25).

However, there are other Aborigines who argue that Aboriginality and Aboriginal are colonial terms in their homogenizing and appropriating functions. Aboriginal writer Anita Heiss said, “There weren’t any Aborigines in Australia before invasion. There were simply people….”(Birns and McNeer 41). So, according to some people Aboriginality is a colonial

construct. This conception is again argued by some who believe that, “Aboriginality does indeed mark the essence of being and belonging of the original Australian people in that the term ‘Aboriginal’ has a specific historical usage and context that should not be forgotten” (Birns and McNeer 26). So, according to some belief the challenge to remove or replace Aboriginal is an attempt at erasure. With the contestations and debates about the term “Aboriginality”, the Commonwealth definition relies on High Court opinion as mentioned earlier. It is social more than racial: an Aboriginal is defined as a person who is a descendent of an Indigenous inhabitants of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal and is recognized by members of the community in which she or he lives as Aboriginal. The vast majority of Aboriginal people preferred this definition over the racial definitions of the assimilation era. Administration of the definition, at least by the commonwealth for the purposes of providing grants or loans, requires that an applicant present a ‘certificate of “Aboriginality”’ issued by an incorporated Aboriginal body under its common seal (Langton 116). With the issue of authenticity being debated in the Aboriginal community, Nadine McDonald, in an interview says that, a true Aboriginal is surely, “not a little fella on the hill with a spear and one leg upon his knee!” He accepts that it is really hard to maintain a sense of culture while living in the western environment, as he has no traditional links to where his people come from. According to him, “…if you hold it in your heart and you live your life with your culture in your heart, then it doesn’t matter what you wear on your feet” (Marshall and Beattie 65).

It is apparent that the Aboriginal life story has become the dominant form of story-telling for many Indigenous writers. However, the success of earlier works by Indigenous writers seems to have constrained the up-coming writers in their ideas of what represents ‘authentic’ Aboriginal literature. It should also be noted that there can a difficulty of writing ‘authentic’ Indigenous life story when they had been removed from their families, or grew up separated from their communities if they had to write the all the experience faced by the

Aboriginal people since British colonization of Australia. The Aboriginal people faced colonization in a different and diverse ways, while some may be very peculiar with the stories of despair, devastation, loss, poverty, infant mortality, and high imprisonment etc. there may be some who did not experienced all these. Therefore, who is it exactly who determines what is 'authentic' in regard to Indigenous stories? Two relevant issues here need answers which would subvert the Australian paradigms. First, are the white audience/authors competent to define, even decide, what is to be traditional Aboriginality? Secondly, if Aboriginality cannot be acquired overnight, well, can it be dissipated through hideous programme deployed by the white Australian alternatively? Can the white-ness with all its characteristics nuances be acquired overnight even through assimilation policies? It is true that the white Australian construes these issues in the essentialist manner. Therefore, these essentialist or logocentrist paradigms deployed to generate the white reproductions of assimilation objectives are being critiqued and questioned by Aboriginal playwrights in no uncertain terms. Therefore, Aboriginal literature deals mainly with identity- with the complex of attitudes, beliefs and mores which constitute Aboriginality. It might seem that the Aboriginal playwrights too moved in the direction of essentializing their identity. It is right to argue, if the white remains white, unchanged and uncontaminated despite taking black wives, why the black is designed to lose or waste black Aboriginality? This logical paradox too indicates the white Australian as a conformed patriarchal mind which the Aboriginal is not in spirit or in function. This is why Michael Dodson urges his fellow Aborigines and asserts that what the Aboriginals need is to resist essentialism which confines them to be fixed unchangeable, and the necessary characteristics that refuses them to allow for transformation or variation (Dodson 39). As the Australian Indigenous community seeks to reclaim its voice from the oppressor, notions of authenticity are being redefined. The term 'freedom of expression' currently has little meaning in the contested arena of Aboriginal literature

(Kurtzer 118). Thus, assimilation policies carried out by the white Australian government have far-reaching implications in the lives and writings of the Aborigines of Australia since British colonization.

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CHAPTER – V

CONTESTING REPRESENTATION OF ABORIGINAL FEMALE EXPERIENCES AND IMAGES

Australia's colonial history which entailed the forced removal of Indigenous people from their land and culture; their subsequent experiences of alienation and the loss of power and control over their lives has been well documented (Reynolds 1981:2). In these documents, we find that the political struggles of Indigenous men and women have occupied Australia since colonization. Subordinated people have experienced their domination differently even within the same society; so, in general, the predicaments and experiences of male and female under colonization differ. Therefore, the experiences, the traumatic conditions and the struggles of the Indigenous male and female in Australia differ, although there are a number of similar aspects to their sufferings and struggles. The present chapter focuses on these different perspectives of both male and female under the white dominance which are highlighted in their respective works. But, it should be noted that their major concern is the native experience born out of the policy of colonization that was adopted by successive white Australian governments. However, the selected playwrights, Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell had written their plays, like many of their contemporary writers, in a less ideologically charged tone as the political scene gradually changed for the Indigenous people. Jack Davis in his interview with Adam Shoemaker 1982, when talking about Indigenous demonstration and other political activism says:

> They've had their usefulness, but that's gone now... you could put up a tent today and people would laugh at it... now it's time for the people with the pen to take over. I always believe that the old axiom, 'the pen is mightier than the sword' is really true. And, I always like to modernize that phrase by saying, 'the biro is far, far better than the gun'! (Shoemaker1982:155).

So as Jack Davis mentioned in his interview it has become more appropriate for the Aboriginal people to voice their experiences and opinions in writing rather than carrying out political demonstrations and activism in asserting their right in Australia.

In *The Dreamers*, Jack Davis takes up the theme of the sordid and the meaninglessness of some of the contemporary Aboriginal living, combined with nostalgia for a traditional Aboriginal past. This play tells a story of contemporary Western Aboriginal family, the Wallitch family living in a city in the present time (The exact year when the events of the play take place is not given, however 'the time is the present' is stated at the beginning of the script). The family experiences the obscurity of being an Aboriginal family living in a place and time dominated by the white European cultural beliefs. In this play Davis shows how the Aboriginal characters' lives are influenced by the combination of both cultures i.e. the white European culture and the Aboriginal culture. *The Dreamers* shows the effects of dispossession in the Wallitch household, which speaks for the whole lot of Aboriginal family living in urban Australia at the time. Even though the Wallitch family lives in urban area, their housing is of a very low standard. Dolly, the only adult female in the family, comments on that:

> 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 (Davis, 75- 76).

They do not have locks on their doors and when the family members want to have hot water for washing themselves, they have to warm the water in a saucepan on the stove. This presents a case for arguing, mainly between the children -Meena and Shane:

> DOLLY: Come on, you kids. Hurry up, water's ready.
>
> MEENA: I'm having it first.
>
> [MEENA *and* SHANE *enter arguing*.]
>
> SHANE: No, you're not, I am.
>
> MEENA: I am! You can have it after (Davis, *The Dreamers* 74).

This quarrel leads to a small fight, which leads the kids to spilling the hot water and have to wash in cold water. Eli, a cousin living with them, compares their home to a prison:

> 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 (Davis, *The Dreamers* 83).

Their situation is really bad that even prison seems a better place to live than their own home.

In *The Dreamers* Dolly's yearn for a better and decent house to bring up her family is also seen in her judgement on her husband Roy when she says:

> DOLLY: [*to* Roy] You? If you weren't so bloody bone tired
>
> we'd get a good 'ouse an' good furniture (76).

In most of Davis's plays the male characters are depicted as fond of sitting around drinking rather than finding work. When Dolly leaves the house to collect uncle Worru from the hospital the adult males in the house Roy, Eli and Peter even spend the children's lunch money to buy alcohol. Their fondness of alcohol leads to insobriety and their indulgence in petty crime and imprisonment. Some Aboriginal men who could not cope with the problems of being poor and without hope sank into alcohol oblivion. The impact of the European intrusion had generally affected the role and status of men more than that of women, and thus many Aboriginal men, especially the unemployed, slipped into aimlessness (Broome 156). One of the characters Eli even deceived people by creating himself as a disabled one-eyed man and begs on the street, it helps him scrounge money from passers-by in front of a shopping center:

ELI: [*pointing to his eyepatch*] Yeah, me and old patchy had a good day, Pop. [*He takes it off and puts it in his pocket*.]

WORRU: Patchy?

ELI: Yeah, we were doin' all right outside the shopping centre today, yeah, getting' fifty cents a bite. One wetjala bloke, hippy, he gave me two dollars (Davis, 105).

He later shows how he begs in Scene Two:

ELI: Ten dollars and eighty one cents! Not bad, old Hawkeye, not bad at all. [*He pulls his eye patch 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 (Davis, *The Dreamers* 120).

Eli's main source of income is by begging, and the money is usually spent on alcohol. Superficially, many Aborigines who saw the play interpreted it as 'It is too close to home,' some remarked, 'Won't this simply reinforce the stereotype Europeans have of urban Aborigines?' Davis's message, however, is less shortsighted (M. Berndt xiv). In *The Dreamers*, Davis portrays the damaging Australian Aboriginal communities with the pervasive alcoholism, violence, petty crime and imprisonment, incessant unemployment and dependence on welfare, and a feeling of estrangement and hopelessness that slowly eat away the desire for individual, family and communal progress and development. Davis's realistic documenting of these ills, without false nostalgia or romanticism, is an admirable feature of his drama, requiring a great deal of courage and integrity when writing about and on behalf of

a people as oppressed and historically despised as black Australians to be prepared to depict so uncompromisingly the negative features of their way of life (Crow and Banfield 65). Jack Davis admitted that *The Dreamers* has political overtones less than his previous play *Kullark*. He further commented that:

> *The Dreamers* is a very cruel play, with a psychological twist which I think very body can grasp, and everybody can suffer from: and that's the degree to which we sink because of our feelings. We can't rise above them-our frustrations which we face every day-and the degree to which we can sink in terms of alcoholism and drugs and all that type of thing (Shoemaker 1982:112).

As most of the Aboriginal writings emphasize the importance of their family, extended family and the close bond shared by their entire community, Jack Davis's drama also mostly stages the family living space in the bush encampment or a modern suburban house. In notes to performances of his play in Australia, 'Aborigines in the audience were always deeply moved to see themselves in the characters up on stage' (Crow and Banfield 66). To see the representations of the ordinary everyday lives of themselves and to depict the minute details of their social relationship with the whites occurred side by side; and their environment on theatre is in a way therapeutic for the Aborigines, as they are able to see their dispossessed position and experience self-recognition which has never existed before for them. Davis has been able to critique the white representations of the Aborigines by presenting the quandaries, positions, feelings and values of his people in his characters that sound authentic to the Aboriginal audiences. In depicting the harsh realities of everyday Aboriginal existence and the pathos of an individual, family and communal life without any design to embellish the Aboriginal people, Davis is able to strongly protest the extreme injustice and deprivation of his people, whose lives have been so devastated by the colonial subjugation. In his autobiography, he observes that he began working in theatre already

firmly convinced that 'writing was the best means of influencing public opinion and bringing about an improvement in the Aboriginal situation' (Crow and Banfield 68). Davis's pioneering work as a playwright, poet, actor and all round social activist on behalf of Aboriginal rights made him one of the most prominent man in his community and an inspiration for younger Aboriginal writers and performers. Ronald M. Berndt in his introduction to *Kullark (Home) The Dreamers* rightly sums up Jack Davis and his works as, "Jack Davis dream is of an Aboriginal heritage – not in terms of the past as such, but as a symbolic anchorage for the present, a sure refuge within which people can be positively identified, providing emotional security, a sense of belonging, and a meaning to life. Pride in being Aboriginal is indelibly inscribed in his writing, indicating firm roots which go deeply within the total Australian scene, far beyond the recent past, into its very beginnings" (M. Berndt xiv).

Though Jack Davis touches on themes, which are inherently important in the Aboriginal writings, but as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, there are certain themes in which he differs from the female playwrights. Indigenous women playwrights are working and writing about themes in order to bring Indigenous Australian women's experiences, history and topics to the fore. They express their identities as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunties, and convey pride in being women, and highlight the important roles of Indigenous Australian women in their communities throughout Australian history. For the Aboriginal women the white European colonization meant invasion, dispossession, destruction of culture, abduction, rape, exploitation of labor and murder. Dr. Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes that Indigenous Australian women experienced the colonization process differently than men – 'their sexuality was policed and contained and their children removed from the influence of kin and community, their bodies were used by white men as sexual objects and many were forced to become domestic servants' (Moreton-Robinson 8).

Indigenous women have started to talk about their histories through autobiography, novel and poetry. One of the predominant genres or forms of Aboriginal literature today is the autobiographical narrative or life story (Brewster 7). Although Aboriginal male writers have also continued to produce autobiographical narratives, the Aboriginal women playwrights are able to candidly produce their experiences and social conditions under the white European colonizer as seen and experienced by them. Dramatic narratives of women are critiques of the white European history and Aboriginal male works remaining silent about Aboriginal women's particular situations. As Helen Thomson quoted Joy Hooton in her essay *Aboriginal Women Staged Autobiography*, "No document has a greater chance of challenging the cult of forgetfulness than a black woman's autobiography" (Thomson 25). Here the 'cult of forgetfulness' is what the white Australians deliberately forgotten in matters relating to the indigenous people- the invasion, the violence, the stolen generation etc. Aboriginal autobiography such as *Box The Pony*, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, *My Place* etc. takes the reader and audience on a journey through the other Australia. Thus these texts function on many levels: a personal recollective narrative acts, as historical correctives, and as repositories of traditional lore and folk wisdom (S. Nelson 32).

Jennifer Sabbioni, in her essay, *Aboriginal Women's Narratives: Reconstructing Identities* states:

> The role of Aboriginal women has been shaped to fit the theoretical and ethnographic frameworks employed by scholars and we have been the malleable subjects made to fit the mould…White male historians prior to the 1980's, were more concerned with the formulation of attitudes and values of the dominant society and, in the pursuit of innovative interpretations, they can be accused of taking part in a national 'cult of forgetfulness' in terms of Aboriginal people generally. Moreover they can be accused of recreating a world of the past where only Indigenous male existed. Aboriginal

> women became faded figures on the backdrop on the historical stage of Australian history (Sabbioni 74).

She further charged white historians Reece, Stanner and Broome in particular. According to her, these historians have used the collective and white- constructed term "Aborigines" to connote maleness and have prevented female imagery from emerging out of their writings. She criticized Broome for excluding women in his writing of Aboriginal Australian history and quotes Joyce Belfarge, who states, "Broome maintains the chain of gendered dichotomies of public/private, culture/nature and mind/body in its construction and depiction of the privilege voiced masculine and the disappeared silent feminine" (ibid.). Aboriginal women are colonized in ways that differ from their men. So in their writings Aboriginal women playwrights differ from their male counterparts based on their own experiences and opinions rather than the historical facts created by the white Australian historians who have ignored gender and racial issues.

Bill Ashcroft, et al. in their introduction to *Feminism and Post-colonialism* states, "In many different societies, women, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonized' by various forms of patriarchal domination. They thus share with colonized races and cultures an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression" (Ashcroft et.al 1999:249). This statement is true to a number of extents in different parts of the world where societies are mainly patriarchal. But it seems evident that in the Aboriginal Australian society, women seem to enjoy equal status in almost all spheres of their life except in their religious rites. Women seemed to have endorsed the ritual division of labor more easily, accepting their formal subordination in the religious sphere, because in other sphere they were not so subordinated (H. Berndt 75). Karen Jennings quoted Annette Hamilton in her essay *Ways of Seeing and Speaking About Aboriginal Women in Black Women and Documentary Film,* "white observers have substantially misunderstood the

position of Aboriginal women in traditional society because they have attempted to use a western model of male- female relationships which is inapplicable" (Jennings 113). Traditional Aboriginal women were regarded as in no way socially inferior to men. In the different spheres of life the traditional Aboriginal men and women though they have succumbed many changes they seem to share almost equal status in their society. However, in certain spheres of life their social duties and obligations differ. In regard to religion, Aboriginal and outside views agree that the initiated men take the dominant role and that women play a subordinated part. However, women are responsible, as much as men and in some areas carry the major responsibility (H. Berndt 66-67). In relations between the husband and wife also, in most instances the husband is formally dominant. However, in actuality, the balance is likely to be fairly even depending on their conditions in the family.

In the ancient times, where there was no modern weapon to hunt and gather food, the male Aborigines used spears for hunting food. A spear carries a symbol of maleness while a basket or a wooden food-carrying dish could be a symbol of femaleness. A digging stick used by the female Aborigines, which is very similar in form and structure to a spear, is also a female symbol. The female Aborigines carry a digging stick, a domestic tool that indicates that they have contribution in food gathering. In the food quest, the digging stick and the spear complement and supplement each other in a conventionally accepted division of labor. A woman's digging stick can serve double duty as a fighting stick (H. Berndt 72). In *Kullark* in the scene where the white European and the Aborigines meet for the first time, the female character Moyarahn casts a death wish on Stirling and Fraser, and she marks the ground in front of them with her *wahna* (digging stick), and gestures to the sky and then exit (Davis 15). The scene indicates the women used of their digging stick to show her resistance to the white invaders.

Women play important role in the Aboriginal family, this is seen in their writings. In all the selected plays of Jack Davis the adult female characters are the ones that hold the family together. For instance, we find Gran and Milly in *No Sugar*, Dolly in *The Dreamers*, Millie Millimurra in *In Our Town*, and in *Kullark* we find three families; two generations of the Yorlah family in different time frames and places and one family in the Pinjarra region in 1827-34 when the white Europeans first set their foot on the Swan river (Western Australia). In *Kullark* itself we find the changes in the role of female characters in Aboriginal family. In the scene where the Aboriginal family first come in contact with the white Europeans, the female character Moyarahn (wife and mother) was so frightened and suspicious of the whites and calls them 'devils, devils' and do not want to have anything to do with them. But, her husband Mitjitjiroo and son Yagan were curious to find out about the white invaders which eventually led to the death of the son Yagan. Moyarahn is seen only in this scene which may indicate that at these times, women role is quite invisible in the family and didn't have much say in the family. With the progress of time in the play, women roles are changing, during 1930-1945 though it is the male character, Thomas who runs the family, the female character Mary became visible in the family with decision making; and when the time shifts to 1979 (present time when the play was written) the adult female character Rosie is the one who holds her family together.

According to Catherine H. Berndt in her essay *Digging Sticks and Spears, or, the two-sex Model* states that women seems more capable of adjusting to colonial subjugation than men as she says:

> The contact situation has reinforced this domestic-centred orientation, emphasizing either individual interests and welfare or, at best, the well-being of the nuclear family rather than the 'community' as a whole. And perhaps because women did not have the same corporate commitment to their traditional heritage as men did, they appear to

> have taken more readily to the new life of mission and government and pastoral stations…In that new kind of life, a wider range of choices was open to Aboriginal women than to Aboriginal men. Depending on the context, their new roles could include sexual as well as domestic relations. They were admitted more readily into the central living quarters of these stations, to undertake various domestic tasks, including the care of young children. They were regarded generally as more biddable, more submissive, easier to keep under control…Also, and again according to circumstance, it was often easier for women than for men to continue to bring in more or less regular, though small, supplies of traditional food: in arid areas, particularly, they ere not obliged to move so far from the homestead or the settlement. On the whole, then, outside contact enhanced woman's already strong domestic and economic status and at the same time decreased the extent of her *formal* subordination *vis-à-vis* men (H. Berndt71-72).

This statement can cause disputes and could be debated in many ways; however Berndt also states that 'this is something that needs more discussion' (72). It should also be noted that what the white European colonizers aimed was to destroy the culture and tradition of the Aborigines, and in doing so they overthrow the whole concept of the religion, domestic and economic situations of the Aborigines. They segregated the Aborigines in Settlements or Reserves and they provided them their basic needs, and the Aboriginal people were not allowed to move away from these Reserves. Domestic dependency was born out of colonialism and was consolidated with oppressive and trenchant government policies designed to sever the physical and spiritual cohesion of Aboriginal people (Sabbioni 12). With the progress of time, we find the importance of women in the family under the white colonization; they play a vital role in the family. Patsy Cohen, an Aboriginal woman explains the rise to power of women in her book *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs*:

> I think after the contact with white people came in and destroyed the cultural kinship system and the way that blackfellers lived, they upset everything. They stripped the men of all their pride and respect and I think it was these, the likes of these old matriarchs that sort of kept the men goin'. They were really strong for the men, these old women, 'cause just imagine in them times the hardship and the pressure that's put on them (109).

While women were strong and carried the family through crisis after crisis, others, like some of their husbands, submitted to despair (Broome 155). Sally Morgan in her interview has also said, "In a lot of Aboriginal families, actually, the women are very strong. In many families I know they carry the weight of the family…in most Aboriginal families there is always at least one strong female character with a grandma or auntie or somebody like that who holds everything together" (Brewster 10).

As Aboriginal women have come to occupy a focal position in Aboriginal family and communal life, the family becomes a woman-centered arena and a site of women's knowledge and practices. So the autobiography of women has come to be an important source of history. According to Helen Thomson, "These autobiographical works constitutes a strong challenge to official versions of Australian history. They create a counter discourse that contests not only the content of conventional histories, but the so-called objective basis of their methodology, underpinned by humanist assumptions that are hostile to the challenges of otherness and difference" (Thomson 29). Aboriginal memory preserves the unwritten black history of colonization, which has been emerging in the public arena in the form of life stories of Aboriginal women (Brewster 6). In contrast to Jack Davis the two selected female playwrights, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell touches themes of the stolen generation, violence, rape, gender issues in depth, though Davis also highlights these themes in his plays, these are but highlighted in subtlety.

In attempting to assimilate Indigenous women as domestic servants, the government was constructing and defining who they were and how they should behave (Moreton-Robinson 11). When Auber Octavius Neville became the chief Protector of Aborigines in May 1915, he learnt about the shortage of domestic workers for the middle class settlers. He was able to meet the demands by establishing special institutions that trained young Aboriginal women as domestic servants thereby creating a pool of readily available workers. Between 1931 and 1940, about 523 Aboriginal women were engaged in domestic service. And between 1920 and 1950, a number of Aboriginal women from the Moore River Native Settlement in Western Australia were employed as domestic servants (Sabbioni 8-10). This kind of situation is highlighted briefly in Jack Davis's *No Sugar*, the girls were trained to become domestic servant in the Moore River settlement. They were separated from their family and trained in an institution, and were trained by the white people who were in-charged to look after them. In a scene where the two young Aboriginal love birds Joe and Mary met in secrecy:

JOE: Them *wetjalas* treat you all right?

MARY: *Gudeeahs*? Matron and Sister Eileen are all right.

They try to be nice, but I don't like Mr. Neal. He

scares me.

JOE: He don't scare me.

MARY: I don't like the way he looks at me.

JOE: Well, you got me now, for what I'm worth.

(*He laughs*)

MARY: He's always hangin' around where the girls are

workin'; in the cookhouse, in the sewin' room. And

he's always carryin' that cat-o'-nine tails and he'll use

it, too.

JOE: Bastard, better not use it on you or any of my lot.

MARY: He reckoned he was gunna belt me once.

JOE: What for?

MARY: 'Coz I said I wasn't gunna go and work for *guddeeah*

on a farm.

JOE: Why not? Be better than this place.

MARY: No! [*with shame*] Some of them *guddeeahs* real bad.

My friend went last Christmas and then she came

back *boodjarri*. She reckons the boss sons used to belt

her up and, you know, force her. Then they kicked her

out. And when she had that baby them trackers choked

it dead and buried it in the pine plantation (Davis, *No Sugar*, 62).

This scene clearly shows the condition of Aboriginal girls in the white institution. The first part of the conversation shows that the white women are a little bit nicer to the young girls and are unaware of the cruelty and sexual harassment of the white man towards the Aboriginal girls. But there is also a slight suggestion that the Matron, Mrs. Neal is aware of her husband's Mr. Neal (Superintendent of Moore River Settlement) behavior in their conversation on Scene V. When Matron asks Mr. Neal about his whereabouts the previous day she interrupted him while he was replying her question saying, "To spend a day in the hotel drinking. Don't imagine no one sees you come in, the condition you were in- fine example" (Davis, *No Sugar* 63). This scene implies that the Matron also knows about her husband's misdemeanor but doesn't care enough to report him to higher authority. The conversation between Joe and Mary also shows the helplessness of the male Aborigines in

the situation faced by the female Aborigines. The last part of the conversation shows the predicament of the young Aboriginal girls who were sent out to white Australian houses for domestic servants. They were forced by their male employers and eventually got pregnant by them and their babies were either killed or taken away from them.

In 1931, A.O. Neville in his annual report disclosed that "in the previous year thirty one women had been returned pregnant, the majority to white men" (Sabbioni 8-10). Aboriginal women were exploited physically, sexually and emotionally while they worked as a domestic servant in the white household. Daisy Corunna epitomizes the position of the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women:

> We had no protection when we was in service. I know a lot of native servants had kids to white men because that was forced. Makes you want to cry to think how black women have been treated in this country (Morgan, *My Place* 337).

The fate of the young Aboriginal girls was not only susceptible to sexual exploitation in the domestic service; they were not safe in the Settlement itself. The so-called Protectors were also the ones who were a threat to them and there is a slight suggestion in the above-mentioned conversation between Joe and Mary in Scene IV of *No Sugar*. In conversation between the same people in Act II Scene II, Mary begins to cry and Joe coaxes her to tell him what is the matter and Mary reply:

> MARY: Mr. Neal.
>
> JOE: Yeah, what about him?
>
> MARY: He's trying to make me go and work at the hospital.
>
> JOE: Well, what's wrong with that?
>
> MARY: Everything.
>
> JOE: You get better tucker.
>
> MARY: It's more than that, Joe.

JOE: What d'ya mean?

MARY: When Mr. Neal sends a girl to work at the hospital, it

usually means…

JOE: Means what?

MARY: That he wants that girl … for himself (Davis, *No Sugar* 69).

This conversation between the Joe and Mary discloses how the Aboriginal girls in the institution were susceptible to sexual harassment even by the 'protectors' of the settlement. These protectors were employed by the white government to look after them. The lives of young women were governed by suppression and strict discipline, and if they run away or take a leave from the institution where they were trained or from their employers without the permission of the authorities, the black trackers or police hunted them down and returned them to the Settlements where they were severely punished. They were not allowed to disobey orders or back-answer the white staffs. One woman recalls being reported to the office because she back-answered the sewing teacher. She recalls:

> The tracker came for me and I had to go over to have all my hair cut off, bald. I used to wear a hat: it growed again though. You used to get your punishment of 'em, all right (Sabbioni 17).

In *No Sugar*, when Joe and Mary run away from the Moore River Settlement a black tracker Billy is ordered to capture them but when he catches up with them Joe fights him back and he returned empty handed to the Settlement. Joe and Mary try to settle at Northam but Mr. Neal put out a warrant to capture them and while Joe is away in his work the police took her back to the Settlement and Mary returns in a very pregnant state:

MATRON: She's here.

NEAL: Dargurru?

MATRON: Yes.

NEAL: Oh, good. Aren't you needed down the hospital?

MATRON: Just remember, the girl is pregnant and unwell.

NEAL: Don't worry, I won't touch her (Davis, *No Sugar* 92).

When the Matron exits, Mary was brought inside Mr. Neal office. Mr. Neal told Mary to stay in the nurse's quarters and work at the hospital. Mary refuses to comply, as she very well knows that Mr. Neal had a hidden agenda, which is the reason why she ran away with Joe in the first place. Mary back answering and refusal to work in the hospital makes Mr. Neal very angry as he says:

NEAL: Millimurra seems to have learnt her well. Well, I'm going to

unlearn you.

[NEAL *grabs her*. BILLY *holds her outstretched over a pile of flour bags*. NEAL *raises a cat-o'-nine tails*. *Blackout*. *A scream*.] (Davis *No Sugar* 93).

The scene is horrifying and it displays the whites unscrupulous nature in their dealing with the Aborigines. Mary is in a very pregnant state, but it does not keep Mr. Neal from belting her. The white Australian government claimed that putting the Aborigines in Settlements was a way to improve and civilize the Aboriginal people. However, the scene undoubtedly indicates the barbaric nature of the white authorities in their treatment of the Aborigines. The 'docility' of the Aboriginal women was achieved through oppressive training, punishment, rewards, and enforced dependency upon the white bureaucracy which placed them in employment, determined their European employer, and administered their finances as well as their purchases. The Aboriginal domestics become complaint to their exploiters (Sabbioni 9).

Daisy, the grandmother of Sally Morgan in her autobiography *My Place* also shares the same fate as Ruby from *Stolen*; they were both employed as domestic servants and were abused sexually by their employers. Ruby, who is abused as a young girl could not cope with her condition; hers is a story of deprivation, racial persecution, sexual exploitation, nervous

breakdown and descent into mental derangement. She is so totally shattered by life abrasive experiences that all sense of belonging and identity is lost and she has come to identify herself with domestic labor for which she was trained by the welfare, as she keep on saying, "Don't need no home of me own. Got enough to do"("Adult Flashes" *Stolen*, 1). This kind of pain and confusion, results in loss of identity, loss of confidence in an identity. Ruby has become crazy beyond reach when her black family finally finds her. Daisy, though she did not lose her mind, carried the child of her employer, Howden Drake- Brockman, whom she considered to be her own father, as she says, "I …think…my father was…Howden Drake-Brockman' (Morgan, *My Place* 162). Here is the suggestion of incest, though she never admitted the father of her daughter, Gladys, in her story there is a slight suggestion in which she says, "…Everyone knew who the father was, but they all pretended they didn't know. Aah, they knew, they knew. You didn't talk about things, then. You hid the truth…Howden died not long before she was born. When I came home from hospital, he said, 'Bring her here, let me hold her'. He wanted to nurse Gladdie before he died" (Morgan 340). Ruby and Daisy kept a secret that they never share with anyone. Daisy told Sally and Gladys, "I'm taking my secrets to the grave" (Morgan, *My Place* 162) even when she finally agreed to tell her story Gladys told Sally, "… she says she's still going to keep her secrets, but anything is better than nothing" (Morgan, *My Place* 320). In the scenes, "Unspoken Abuse I" and "Unspoken Abused II" of *Stolen*, we find Ruby returning from her weekend trip with her weekend parents, when her friends asked her what she ate, she replied 'fish and chips', they asked what gift she got she replied that 'he' gave her a doll and when they asked what else he give her, she softly replied "I promised not to tell" (*Stolen* 8 and 15). These scenes clearly suggest that Ruby was sexually abused which she feels too shameful to share with her friends. Daisy and Ruby were both shamed by their experiences that they refused to share

their stories with anyone. They felt so ashamed of themselves that they find it difficult to attend church services, as Daisy in her story reveals:

> I 'member the minister at Christ Church started… he went on and on, tellin' us how we must safe ourselves for marriage. It was very embarrassing, we couldn't look at him. Most of us had already been taken by white men. We felt really 'shamed…I never went back there, I was too 'shamed to say why (Morgan, *My Place* 337).

Stephen Muecke suggests that Daisy Corunna's refusal to reveal her 'secrets' to Sally Morgan is an act of resistance to the demand to speak (Muecke 25). Knowledge is power, and the revealing and imparting of knowledge is always an act of power, as is keeping secrets (Brewster 24). Therefore by resisting the demand to speak and reveal information can be seen as a way of the Aboriginal people asserting ownership of their lives and their culture thus, establishing their power, just as the white colonizers had silenced them and were silent about the "real" histories of Australia. However at the same time the act of telling about the past is also a kind of resistance against the lies of the white oppressors and has a therapeutic effect and gives a sense of liberation. This is exactly what the playwrights have been doing by utilizing the oral narratives in order to assert their presence in Australian history.

Rape of Aboriginal women was very common. Sandy one of the characters in *Stolen* was born as a result of his mother being raped by a white man in the desert. In "Desert Sands", Sandy narrates his story in a manner of traditional story telling. He talks about his people, his home and his mother. He narrates stories his mother told him:

> …The land where my people come from is covered in red sand and in the old days, the women, to try and stop the white man from rapping them, would shove sand inside themselves. Anything to stop the men from raping them, anything. [*He becomes quieter*.] And that's what my mother did, but it didn't stop them so I came

> along. My mother she loved me, but she called me Sandy anyway. She sure had a sense of humor that one (Harrison *Stolen* 22-23).

Sandy's story highlights the sexual violence of the white men towards the Aboriginal women. The women were so helpless in their situation; they would do anything they could to avoid rape but as Sandy's mother, their struggle against the white men ended futile and many 'half caste' children were born out as a result of rape. The whites again took these children away from their Aboriginal mother which created trauma and psychological problem for many of the mothers as well as their child.

In *Stolen* one of the character Shirley who is stolen as a child becomes a mother whose children are again stolen, though *Stolen* is a fictional play Sally Morgan's grandmother Daisy in her autobiography *My Place* shares the same fate as Shirley, she was stolen as a child and her children were also snatched away from her by the authorities as she says, "That was the way of it, then. They took our children one way or another" (Morgan 340). In *Stolen*, in the first scene, "It Rained The Day" Shirley, as a child peeps out from under the bedspread and talks about how she was taken away from her mother. She describes her looking out from the back of a car as she is being driven farther away from her mother. In the second scene of "It Rained The Day", Shirley, as a mother talks about her helpless situation:

> It rained the day they took my son. I stood there getting soaked to the skin and watched the back of that big black car and his little face, so little. It only took a few moments, they didn't say anything to me. They just came and this woman picked him up and put him in the car. Someone went and fetched my husband and he ran after the car, and he ran and yelled at them to stop- and I stood there in the rain and couldn't talk (Harrison, *Stolen* 9).

Shirley stands speechless and her grief cannot be expressed in words. The stories Daisy and Shirley confirm how generations within a family were stolen. It was the government policy to take away the children from their family in order to assimilate them into white society. "Near the beginning of the last century, the then so-called protector of Aborigines declared that the policy of removing their children caused family no distress.' The mothers soon forget.' They didn't, and Stolen is here to make sure that we don't either," commented Lyn Gardner in her article on *Stolen* (Gardner 2001).

Leah Purcell's *Box The Pony* also touches theme that depicts the constraints placed on women and the unequal opportunity of male and female in a family. As Leah in Scene I expresses:

> I come from a long line of champions.
>
> My brothers…Patrick and Rodney Purcell, both Queensland champs.
>
> My nephews…Darren and Nathan Purcell, Billy-jo Angus, all Australian, Queensland, Wide Bay, South Burnett, golden Gloves champions. But Nathan, he'll be our Olympic hopeful!

She combination punches on bag.

> And then you got…Leah Purcell – Australian Champion…

Leah punches the bag. It swings out and in, and collects her. She falls to the mat.

> …baby sitter.
>
> I wasn't allowed to box, because I was a girl. Up'ome'der, all the girls got to do was cook, clean and look after the kids.
>
> The boys got all the deadly things, the trophies, the
>
> Golden Gloves…
>
> The brain damage.
>
> *Combination punches on the bag*.

Fighting was big up'ome'der…people would fight like hell.

But the men and women would fight differently… (Purcell, *Box The Pony* 29).

The play also highlights the sexual and domestic violence faced by Steff, an alter ego used by Leah. In re-telling her life she follows 'Steff' from a difficult upbringing in Murgon, to a nearly disastrous young adulthood, and then to a triumphant later life as Leah, an acclaimed performer (*Box The Pony*127-128). She is often abused by her brothers and in a scene "Steff Goes Wild", her brother after hearing that Steff is pregnant, grabs her by the hair and pulls her:

BROTHER: Myall little black bitch!

STEFF: Don't touch me, what are you looking at? (Purcell, *Box The Pony*85).

This kind of incident is familiar in the life of Steff. The male characters in her life are often abusive and violent. In Scene 13 "FACE", Steff's boyfriend bashes her during a party for no reason:

BOYFRIEND: Come 'ere bitch!

Her BOYFRIEND (represented by a punching bag) pulls her towards him, she pushes him off

STEFF: Don't!

STEFF pulls away.

BOYFRIEND: I said come here!

He pulls her again.

STEFF: Stop it!

Again she pulls away pushing him off.

BOYFRIEND: Come here.

The bag is pushed, swinging a long way out.

STEFF: Piss off, leave me alone, don't you ever…

The bag swings back and hits her, lifting her. The bag has become the boyfriend. STEFF holds herself in close to the bag. She is being punched by the BOYFRIEND, between each line.

BOYFRIEND: You being a smart bitch [punch], big notin' yourself

[*punch*], little pretty bitch [*punch*], pretty bitch [*punch*].

The BOYFRIEND hits her, knocks her to the ground. As he yells he tries to get to her face. She hides it from him, protecting herself.

BOYFRIEND: Give us your face…give us your face…I said give us

you face…give us your face!

It dies down, he has obviously left. STEFF lies there, and then slowly sits up. The bag is swinging menacingly nearby (Purcell, *Box The Pony*109-111).

The scene is horrific as it clearly highlights the domestic violence faced by Aboriginal women in their own family and community. As the scene progresses, we find Steff's little daughter Jess, crying in the hallway, who thinks her mummy is dead.

STEFF: Jess…ssshhh…Jess…Jess, come here bub.

Don't cry baby…have a story eh? Just you and me…

Jess ssshhh. He's gone now. Oh Jess, Mummy's so tired.

You're gonna have to help me, bub. Help me, Jess, please (*Box The Pony* 111).

Here, Steff is clinging to her little daughter for comfort just as her own mother Florence did to her. She is finding herself in the same cycling destructive life as her mother, as she says to her daughter:

I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry. Do you forgive Mummy? It's happening all over again. Me and Mum. There's no way out (*Box The Pony* 113).

Steff is scared that she and her daughter are going to be like her and her mother Florence. She is so afraid that she briefly contemplated killing herself and her daughter however, she fight to free herself from a seemingly prescribed future.

All the male characters have a very little role to play in *Box The Pony*, as the characters central to the play are all women and it deals with women's issues. The male characters are presented with their patriarchal dogmas which completely ignore the feelings of women. They are violent and often take women for granted. Steff's father is mentioned as a matter of fact in the first scene and briefly mentioned again when Leah recalls her life as Steff:

> Steff'd box. Like a boy, in silks. Great techniques, her dad'd say, 'If only you were a boy, Australian champion.' But she didn't want trophies, she wanted protection… (*Box The Pony* 109).

The brief mentioned of her father here again only suggest his male chauvinistic attitude and his neglect of his own daughter's needs. Thus, it can safe to say that in the Aboriginal writing, "Women's stories often concentrate on the domestic sphere and on relationships rather than on events or achievements" (Bright 135). Therefore, in regard to the selected playwrights of the present thesis also, it is true to say that Leah Purcell and Jane Harrison are dealing more with the physical and sexual violence in the domestic sphere and also relationships within the Aboriginal community while Jack Davis's plays gives us more insights into the historical part. Although, it should be remembered that all these playwrights touches themes that are inherently important to the Aboriginal experience which vehemently presents their historicity.

Though the writings of the Aboriginal women touches themes like domestic and sexual violence, gender issues etc., they further challenge mainstream feminism. The basic premise of the Indigenous critique of white feminism is expressed in Moreton-Robinson's

influential study *Talkin' Up To the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, in which she claims, "An Indigenous woman's standpoint is informed by social worlds imbued with meaning grounded in knowledge of different realities from those of white women. And we have become extremely knowledgeable in ways that are unknown to them" (Moreton-Robinson 11). She uses the term "white' in her book because according to her skin is the marker for objectifying difference in the social construction of "race". She further states that, "In Australia, blackness was, and is congruent with Indigenous subjugation and subordination" (Moreton-Robinson xx). Moreton-Robinson also argues that her personal experience as an Indigenous feminist academic led her to challenge white feminism's subject position of dominance and seek alternative discourses among African American, Latin American and lesbian feminists. It is precisely these discourses, according to Moreton-Robinson, that contest the representation of the universal "woman" as a white middle class woman and propose models of diversity and heterogeneity, stressing cultural differences and specific particularities (xvii). She further states that:

> All Indigenous women share the common experience of living in a society that deprecates us. An Indigenous woman's standpoint is shaped by the following themes. They include sharing an inalienable connection to land; a legacy of dispossession, racism and sexism; resisting and replacing disparaging image of ourselves within self-defined images; continuing our activism as mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters, grandmothers and community leaders, as well as negotiating sexual politics across and within cultures. Such a standpoint does not deny the diversity of Indigenous women's experiences. Indigenous women will have different concrete experiences that shape our relations to core themes (Moreton-Robinson xvi).

Moreton-Robinson further claims that Indigenous women's life writing, which foregrounds the Indigenous women's self- presentation, actually reveals that their realities and life

experiences are grounded in different histories from those experienced by white women. These experiences include, for example, government-imposed, sometimes unpaid, work as domestic servants, which more often than not went hand in hand with sexual abuse from the white "masters" and work exploitation from the white "mistresses." Other suppressed experiences concern state-controlled family life policies, such as separating children from their families and forced sterilizations. In this way, Moreton-Robinson argues, Indigenous women's life writing "unmasks the complicity of white women in gendered racial oppression. They reveal the imperative to negotiate Indigenous subjectivity in relations with white women". She further comments:

> We are conscious of a dominant subject position that we actively resist through the deployment of a variety of subject positions. Our resistances are therefore not reducible to overtly defiant behaviours. They are multifaceted. Our resistances can be visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, explicit and covert, partial and incomplete and intentional and unintentional. They are profoundly political acts that are neither one dimensional or fixed and they do not always lead to conflict and self-destruction (Moreton-Robinson xxiii).

Moreton-Robinson points out that the history of white feminists' relations with Indigenous women in Australia actually demonstrates the way the Western feminists normalized themselves and positioned themselves as the knowing subjects, constructing Indigenous women as the Other (Moreton-Robinson xxiv). As Jayda and Ruby in *Murras* mentions:

> JAYDA: Mum, come here. Remember when Granny said *wudjella* woman got different way to gadjeri woman? They don't have woman's dreaming, special dance, *Inma*. Then she said, 'Jayda, you not forget your stories now, you keep them sacred for your children, not *wudjella'*. Granny call them nothing people, got no spirit.

RUBY: They all nothing people. Granny and I teach you your own women's business. And that Sister, she take everything away from us (Johnson, *Murras*101-102).

The scene clearly signifies the ignorance, misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the white women in their treatment of the Aboriginal women.

With the growing of feminism, non-Indigenous women began to find interest in the Indigenous oppression in the Australian society and they began to look at Indigenous women as victims in Australian society and victims of patriarchal institutions. Jennifer Sabbioni remarks, "The misrepresentation of Aboriginal women entered a new phase when feminists belonging to the dominant culture chose to speak for all their sisters, black and white constituting all women as the oppressed" (Sabbioni 1996:75). They preferred to look at Indigenous women as victims of male domination. However, in their attempt to illustrate male domination, they have allowed their subjectivity as white sisters to enter the debate and have failed to recognize the history of non-Indigenous women as oppressors and exploiters of Aboriginal women (Sabbioni 1996:75). The life writings of Indigenous women show the attitudes of white mistresses towards their Indigenous female servants, as Margaret Tucker's recollection of having to continue with chores, even though she was ill, reveals:

> My mistress asked me why I was limping. I had to show her the leg. She gave a gasp and ran out of the room to the telephone. She called the doctor. I was sitting on the garden seat near the kitchen door when he came. I don't know what she told him, but she said later that if the wound had gone a fraction deeper it would have reached the bone, and I would have had to have my leg off. She also said the doctor said the Aborigines had no feeling, we were like animals, and our wounds just heal without any trouble. It didn't worry me. Things could not have been any worse anyhow. I had to sit everyday for nearly a week under the trees out the back on that garden seat with

> my leg up. She brought dishes to me to wash up. I cleaned the silver and peeled the vegetables, all because the doctor said I had to sit down and I was not to use the leg. She grudgingly gave me food such as broth, because the doctor said I was to have it. I never told her how the sore started. I suppose it would not have made much difference. One morning I was washing up outside with my legs up. I did not do something properly. She was in a bad mood and I copped it as the saying is. She boxed my ears as she held me by the hair. She slapped my face I cried, "Don't, you are hurting me" (Tucker 199-200).

The life story of Margaret Tucker clearly shows that white mistresses were also agents of colonization and racial imperialism. As Marnie Kennedy says, "[w]e Aboriginals are a good example of white exploitation. We were slaves, to be worked long hours and as long as we could stand for little pay and most times with no time off" (Moreton-Robinson 11).

With the rise of nationalism in the 1880s, concerns over the nature and future of Australia was growing and pronatalism was part of the agenda as interests of defense and race came together in the desire for both to increase the number of white Australians and to exclude 'others' (Farrell 122). Here the 'others' meant the Aborigines. As the white women were seen as superior to the Aboriginal women so, white mothers were assumed to have the ability to reproduce superior class future citizens. Thus, in order to free the white European women from everyday incessant tasks so that they could pursue biological reproduction or activities which would enhance their social status, the Aboriginal women and young girls were used to carry out the domestic tasks. The Aboriginal women and girls were used by the ruling white Europeans as a material always ready for exploitation. Protective measures for women workers were generated as part of the Australian settlement. Concepts of motherhood and maternalism played a central role in these restrictions. *The Factories Act 1904* prohibited women from working between 6 p.m. and 8 a.m. or for four weeks after confinement. The

Piddington Royal Commission (1911-12) was persuasively pronatalist. In addition to recommending restrictions on night work, overtime and the lifting of weights, Piddington suggested that married women be allowed to work if they were sole breadwinners, and that they be issued work permits only after judicial scrutiny. His report noted that factory work for married women was 'obviously inconsistent with the normal duties of a married woman's life', and that it discouraged reproduction which could lead to 'race suicide' (Farrell 148). The Piddington Royal Commission was only interested in the procreation of 'white' race.

Thus, protectionism did not include Aboriginal women in domestic service. Instead, they were expected to work for up to twenty hours a day, seven days a week, often for nothing but their keep. Moreover, Aboriginal women were labeled as unfit mother and their children were taken away from them due to the ideology that childcare was the responsibility of white women. White mothers were to be saviors of the race; all the ills of the world would be brought under control, claimed Maybanke Anderson in 1919, 'if only mothers would understand their duty and learn how to do it' (qtd. in Farrell 150). Driven by pro-natalism, early twentieth century governments enacted laws to ensure that white women bore even the children they did not want. The *WA Criminal Code Act 1902* punished abortion with up to fourteen years imprisonment, and outlawed infanticide and abandoned of children. Although few Australian women had access to safe abortion until the 1970s, the social misery of the great depression of the 1930s helped some hospitals to ignore the legislation. During the 1970s the women's movement championed a small group of doctors fighting for more liberal abortion laws. Although none of the states decriminalized abortion, paradoxically, most subsequently allowed the establishment of abortion clinics in hospitals and private practice. When arguing for abortion and fertility control, Anglo-Australian feminists of the 1970s relied on the concept of the self-owning citizen, asserting that doing women the right to legal abortion denied them the right to own and control their own bodies (Farrell 152).

For Aboriginal women of the same period, however, abortion campaigns demonstrated feminism's racial blindness, because for the Indigenous women their sexuality and maternity were controlled by a series of laws and policies by the white government. These policies and laws were represented in the life-writings of the Indigenous women. Eva Johnson highlighted the hidden sterilization of Aboriginal women, practiced under Aboriginal Protection Board in her play *Murras* (1988).[1] 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 her conversation with her mother, Jayda tells her mother about her condition, when her mother talks to her about having babies. She replies:

JAYDA: I can't have children, Mum.

RUBY: What? What you saying, Jayda? Who told you that?

JAYDA: Doctor at the hospital, I had a medical, a test, he told me.

RUBY: Medical? Test? What for?

JAYDA: It was a routine check-up. The doctor told me in one day. He had some special papers there, he said they were from the government, said that I was part of a programme or something, long time ago. Had to do with those injections that Sister use to give me and Jessie.

RUBY: Injections? You didn't tell me about any injections.

JAYDA: Mum, she said it was alright. I thought you knew, she said she explained it to you. She told me it was to stop diseases.

RUBY: She lied. Injections to stop disease, injections to stop babies. They lied to us, who they think they are? Boss over you, boss over me – your mother?

JAYDA: Mum, it was an experiment. We can't do anything about it now. Mum, I'm alright, it's alright.

RUBY: No, it's not alright! 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…

JAYDA: I saw a woman from Welfare, she said there's nothing I can do. But I thought of being a nurse, Mum, and going back to make sure they still not doing this.

RUBY: Those filthy *wudjella* dogs, they knew who had those injections. That's why the chased you and Jessie.

JAYDA: How would they know, Mum? We never spoke to them.

RUBY: I remember, I remember that sister coming around mustering time. She use to drink with them in the pub, that's how they knew (Johnson *Murras*, 101-102).

The different predicament of white women and Indigenous women was that while white women were expected to bear children whether they like it or not, the Indigenous women were denied of bearing children and were considered unfit for the role of mothers.

Therefore, while demanding the full rights of the self-owned citizen, Aboriginal women radically disagreed with how those claims for bodily ownership to be presented. The first recorded major conference in which Indigenous women participated was the Women and Politics Conference in Canberra in 1975. At this conference Indigenous women called for an end to forced sterilization, instead of supporting the white feminists' demand for the right to abortion. While white women were seeking the right to say "yes" to their sexual freedom, the Indigenous women wanted the right to say "no" to sexual harassment (Moreton-Robinson

155). Pat O'Shane and Roberta Sykes pointed out that many Indigenous women had faced compulsory sterilization or compulsory abortion. Their goal, therefore, was the right to bear and keep their children, at a time when some were still dying from malnutrition and untreated disease. Since Australian governments had historically denied both motherhood and citizenship to Aboriginal women, O'Shane and Sykes continued, if White feminists believed in sisterhood they should argue for women's control over reproductive rights and children's health, not just for abortion (qtd. in Farrell 152). Therefore, while white feminists claimed legal abortion, Indigenous women want stricter control over abortions and sterilization because they have been practiced on their bodies without their consent or even without them knowing, just as Ruby and Jayda from *Murras*.

The history of white government attitudes to Aboriginal women's fertility was very different from that of white women. Aboriginal protection Acts assumed Aboriginal women as characteristically unfit as mothers. Therefore, children of mixed descent were often taken away from their mothers. Since the Commonwealth *Franchise Act 1902* did not define 'Aboriginal native of Australia', the states used their own definitions, and their officers used their discretion. Peggy Brock writes, "The children who looked white had to be removed from an Aboriginal environment to prevent them growing-up Aboriginal" (Farrell 153). Thus, it seems evident that the Aboriginal Protectors either forced Aboriginal women to enforced sterilization or abortions or encouraged them to produce whiter children into breeding out their color. The state sought to control Aboriginal women's sexuality in relation to both Aboriginal, and non-Aboriginal, men, sometimes encouraging liaison with the latter in order to 'breed out' Aboriginality. Under Western *Australia's Aborigines Act 1905*, the Chief Protector controlled the general care, protection and management of the property, income and employment of any 'full-blood' or mixed descent Aboriginal. The Protector's permission was required for an Aboriginal woman to marry a non-Aboriginal man. Although the Act made

'cohabitation' illegal, it also stipulated paternity as grounds for financial support. However, paternity was virtually impossible for Aboriginal women to prove in court, since their word was disregarded if it conflicted with that of White men (Farrell 153-154).White men deceived many Aboriginal women and this happens to Florence, Leah Purcell's mother in her autobiographical play *Box The Pony*. As Leah mentions him in the beginning of the play, "Now my father, he's white. Two wives, two families, one white, one black and that was my mum. He and her had six kids together. I was the youngest" (Purcell, *Box the Pony* 25). Leah's father was a boxing trainer and though he fathered six children to Leah's mother, he did not provide any comfort to her. Florence gets into the habit of drinking because of her failure in life. She has no money and what she gets on the pension day is spent on alcohol. Here Florence represents the meaningless and hopelessness living of some Aborigines who use alcohol to abusive levels. However, though alcohol creates problem for her and family, she dies with her pride intact: 'And I don't want them bastards throwin' dirt on my coffin either, they been doing that all my life" (Purcell 107). The plight of Leah's mother Florence is understandable to an extent because, "In an era when Aboriginality was a recipe for dispossession of land, self and economic resources, sexual relations with white men was for many Aboriginal women necessary for physical survival, while the birth of mixed-descent children became for some a hybridized form of cultural survival" (Farrell 174).

By the early 1970s new feminist groups had emerged. From 1972 white feminists began to influence the Australian bureaucracies. Many of these early 'femocrats'- a term derived from combining bureaucrat with feminist- sought women's equality with men at work and the eradication of sexism in workplaces, media, the arts, politics and domestic life. Australian femocrats of the 1970s put domestic violence, child care and women's health on the mainstream political agenda, and ensured fund for a range of other programs, including women's refuges, rape crisis centers, educational and training initiatives, and equal

opportunity schemes. They became more powerful policy makers and femocrats directed both the Federal *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and the *Affirmative Action Act 1986*. With the femocrats at the driving force, there was a radical reform and subsequently passed the Supporting Mothers Benefit, legislation for paid maternity leave in the Commonwealth public service, and for a health insurance scheme- Medicare- in which abortion was free (although still technically illegal). However, by the early 1990s, there were only a handful of Aboriginal women in government departments and so Aboriginal women's interests were at best marginal to the concerns of white femocrats. For example, while white feminists sought round-the-clock availability of childcare, Indigenous women, with the wounds of the 'stolen generation' still traumatizing their lives, argued that the quest was misplaced and insulting. Since family separation had already done untold damages, Aboriginal women argued, feminists should fights to re-unite Aboriginal families, not just more child care for white children (Farrell 159-160). Therefore Aboriginal women demonstrated the ethnocentricity of white women's feminism and considered that they paid insufficient attention to the needs and welfare of the Aboriginal women. As Jackie Huggins points out, "femocrats have not opened up areas where Indigenous demands are respected and the politics of difference is understood." She further comments that, "White women were and still are a major force in the implementation of government policies of assimilation and cultural genocide…Racism in the welfare and education systems continues to be a major focus of Aboriginal women's political struggles today. These are the issues which Aboriginal women activists often see as priorities rather than those taken up by white feminists" (Huggins 75).

Aboriginal Women's narratives have made a significant contribution to the understanding of the diversity that exists amongst the Indigenous peoples of Australia. Their discourses are embedded in Aboriginal cultures and societies, which reflect a 'homeland' identity as well as national identity (Sabbioni 1996:72). White feminists have challenge the

nation-state on basis of, and about, their rights as white female citizens. Indigenous women give priority to the collective rights of Indigenous people rather than the individual rights of citizenship. This does not mean that they are unconcerned with the rights of citizenship or women's representation and advocacy in society. What Indigenous women embrace is a politics of Indigenous rights which encompasses the collective rights as citizens (Moreton-Robinson 160). Feminists exercise their white race privilege in the women's movement because, according to Larissa Behrendt, "issues of importance to Indigenous women such as the preservation of culture are not part of the political agenda for white women" (Behrendt 35).

Mudrooroo Narogin also known as Colin Johnson, in his book *Writing From the Fringe: A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (1990), argues that Indigenous women writings are not political because white editing of these texts makes their message one of understanding and tolerance. However, Indigenous women writers do not share his opinion, Aileen Moreton Robinson calls his critique 'spurious' as he separates Indigenous women's lives from Indigenous struggle. She said that he relies on a white patriarchal definition of what is to be political, thus denying subjectivity as a site of resistance, and he is overly concerned with how the text is written- its form, rather than what is written. Aileen Moreton Robinson claims that Indigenous women's life writings make visible dimensions of the hidden history and colonial legacy through their gaze as subjects. She further comments, "Indigenous women's life writings challenge and disrupt both Narogin's claims and anthropological representations of 'Indigenous woman' because self-presentation by Indigenous women is a political act" (Moreton-Robinson 3). As Larissa Beherndt remarks:

> The failure of feminist movement to meet the needs of minority women shows that just as men in our society will never know what it is like to be a woman, a white woman will never know the reality of living as a black woman (Behrendt 43).

Therefore from the writings of the male and female Aboriginal playwrights we find their different predicaments under the white colonization. How they interpret and resist the white colonization differs as much as their experiences and sufferings. As Jennifer Sabbioni in her essay rightly puts it, “An Aboriginal women’s narratives have been the catalyst for the reconstruction of our identities. Indigenous Australian authors have framed their narratives outside the sado-masochistic ideology imposed by white colonizers. It is interesting to note that Aboriginal men’s writings have made limited contributions to the reconstruction of the women’s identity” (Sabbioni 76).

ENDNOTES

[1] *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.

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CHAPTER – VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis deals with the issues and problems faced by the Aboriginal people in Australia with the help of selected plays by contemporary playwrights such as Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell. The thesis argues that the current situation of the Aboriginal people is a consequence of the white Europeans invasion and settlement in Australia. Chapter-I of this thesis examines the emergence of British colonization in different parts of the world and its subsequent colonization of Australia. The British colonizers considered Australia as 'terra nullius' i.e. a land free to be taken and took over it without asking the native Australians. The chapter also examines the life and works of the selected Australian Aboriginal playwrights.

The Aborigines were at first segregated from the "white" Australians by being displaced from their natural habitats and moved onto large reserves. Later, the policy of assimilation was adopted, in an effort to eliminate Aboriginality. Children of mixed descent i.e. from white father and Aborigine mother were removed from their parents and put in Native settlements or foster in to white families, where they would be educated in "white" manners. These removals continued until the early 1970s and affected many generations of "half-caste" children, who are called the Stolen Generations today. The general perspective of society has changed since 1967 with the citizenship rights given to the Aborigines and the policy of self-determination is recognized today. Thus, the Aboriginal people have better controls of their own matters but, given the years of targeted oppression and violence against them, there are still on-going tensions challenging their distinctive cultural identities and social and economic equality with the majority of the Australian society. As of today, for the Aboriginal people, radical resistance to white oppression has become sometimes illogical due to the gradual change in the social and political scene. They have found a new strategy of fighting against the injustices and oppression in the social arena by writing. Literature becomes an important medium used by the Aborigines to bring out their stories of personal or

historical experience of Indigenous life in Australia. Aboriginal writing as indigenous writing has a certain objective: the self for cultural identity and self-definition. The attempts of the Australian Aboriginal playwrights and writers to redeem their past fall into four general categories; recording Aboriginal legends and myths in order to ensure their survival; writing revisionist historical narratives; producing autobiographical texts and collating testimonies of Aboriginal survivors and subverting white historical discourses through imaginative literature (S. Nelson 31). All these four categories are deeply strengthen in all of the selected plays by the three playwrights.

Chapter-II of the thesis examines how contemporary Aboriginal drama helps in expressing a counter discourse against the hegemony of white Australians. First the issue about the oral tradition of narrating and storytelling is highlighted using the New Historicists perspectives which believe that the writing of history is a matter of interpretation, not objective display of facts. For them, the literary text and the historical situation from which it emerged are equally important because text and context create each other (Tyson 183). The dramatized stories of the Aboriginal playwrights have the power to resist the lies perpetrated by the government and at the same time they serve the purpose of passing on the stories to their children, ensuring the preservation of their history and culture. There are two main sources for a narrative about the history of theatre production by Australian indigenous artists- one is the text-based reviews of productions. The other is indigenous community knowledge, and is largely a series of individual oral records. They worked to bring out the historical perspectives by turning to oral sources in the form of interviews with Aboriginal people. The main concern of the Aboriginal plays is to create national and international awareness about the problem of the Aborigines in Australia.

This chapter also highlights important and crucial aspects of postcolonial literatures. Though some writers even the Aboriginal writers themselves refused to acknowledge their

writings under the post-colonial umbrella. This chapter highlights the possibilities of studying the Aboriginal literature using the theories framed by the post-colonial critics. Aboriginality is seen as a counter discourse to the European or Western discourse of representing the Aboriginal people. It tries to prove wrong the traditional European belief that the Aboriginal people were not able to represent themselves, and as such it succeeds by showing that there are substantial numbers of Indigenous authors, playwrights or film writers who represent their people from their point of view. Aboriginal drama in particular is presented as a powerful medium in Aboriginal self- representation and most of the plays share certain characteristics. The content of their play even when it is an individual life story is shared by the entire community; the disruption of their culture, tradition and customs, the displacement of Aboriginal children, racism, sexual and psychological exploitation etc. Their plays address the issues of alcoholism, domestic violence, as well as the issues of displacement and loss of identity with direct reference to the Stolen Generations. The imprisonment of Aborigines is quite common and the playwrights criticize the issues of Aboriginal deaths in custody, mainly in the plays.

In Aboriginal drama time is often reflected by a non-chronological order of events. Many of the places are set in a number of locations between which the characters travel throughout the play, for example Davis's play *No Sugar* is set in almost ten different locations. In *Stolen* Harrison projected both a child version and an adult version of Shirley and in *Box The Pony*, Leah Purcell is able to produce her whole life story from her childhood to adulthood. The unity of action is denied by incorporating many subplots, such as the two storylines in Purcell's *Box the Pony*. Although none of the plays studied can be termed a comedy, the use of humor is fundamental in the majority of them. Aboriginal plays describe scenes of hardship, misery, oppression, poverty or deaths and humor is used to temper the seriousness of the plays and also shows that Aborigines laugh simply to stay afloat. In the

plays, humor is also used to undermine the white authority and assert the agency of Aboriginal subjects through non-confrontational modes of resistance.

Chapter-III of the thesis deals with the Aboriginal body as a site of Aboriginal ideology and identity. As in theatre, the actor's body is one of the most prominent symbols; the physical body is prominent from other symbols because of its ability to suggest diverse meanings. The 'difference' of the post-colonial subject by which he or she can be 'othered' is felt most directly and immediately in the way in which the superficial differences of the body; skin color, eye shape, hair texture and body shape, are read as indelible signs of the 'natural' inferiority of their possessors (Ashcroft et al. 1999:321). As skin color is the marker for objectifying difference in the social construction of race, the colonized subjects are concerned with rejecting the colonially determined markers and descriptions of themselves. The Aboriginal playwrights are portraying their predicaments in Australia through theatre of the racist attitudes they face because of their skin color. Racial prejudice and racist onslaughts of the white Australians are found in most of the Aboriginal plays.

In Aboriginal theatre, the body itself is the site of greatest potential resistance to white Australians conceptualization of the Aborigines in Australia. Performance as the verbal and visual articulation of the body is seen as a logical medium for enacting such resistance, as it enables to defy the imperialists' scrutiny, which strives to subjugate the indigenous people in constructing their being as inferior being. Performance allows the colonized subjects to position themselves as a speaking, moving subject rather than manipulated objects. And as the culture of the Aborigines is a preliterate culture it does not privilege the written word, thus performance offers them spaces in theatre in which their versions of history might be represented. And giving importance to the body can sometimes be very advantageous on the part of the indigenous playwrights in reconstructing post-colonial subjectivity, because

European colonizers conceptualization of the Aborigines has been both deceptive and convincing in their construction of the colonized subject as an inscribed object of knowledge.

Chapter IV of the thesis presents the problems of the assimilation policies carried out by the white Australian government and its far-reaching implications in the lives of the Aboriginal people. The assimilation policy did not work - Aboriginal people did not want to lose their traditional way of life or become white. “This policy was doomed to failure because it presumed that Aborigines had to absorb a white lifestyle totally in European terms” (Shoemaker 66). The white community did not want to accept Aboriginal people into their society - racism was predominant in Australia. There were many people who still have a feeling of superiority against them and they did not want to have an equal status in the society with them. The Aborigines were looked down upon with distrust and contempt. Though assimilation policy that was implemented as being 'for the good' of the Indigenous people by the government it turned out to be just another way of destroying Aboriginal culture. It turned out to fail from the very beginning itself because the Aboriginal people were always being told they had to be more 'white' but they were never given the liberty to change, it was enforced upon them. In order for them to adopt and follow the ‘white standards’ they spent their lives being controlled by reserve managers or white authorities. When some Aboriginal people did try to assimilate they were supervised and scrutinized by the white police. The police monitored their every move and when something when wrong they were readily put in jail. So the white Australian government policy of assimilation never gave the Aboriginal people the same rights as the white Australians, even though they were assumed to fit in the white community and act like the white people.

The chapter also explores the plight of the “Stolen Generations” i.e. the mixed descent children who were forcibly removed from their parents by the government, which is widely believed to have begun in 1910 till the 1970s. In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal

Opportunity Commission in Australia was set up, the report, *Bringing Them Home,* makes horrific reading. It contains the stories told by 535 Aborigines of mixed race who were removed. Modern activists have described child removal as cultural genocide, Sir Walter Wilson, HREOC Commissioner, like indigenous writer Kevin Gilbert and other Stolen Generation narrators before him, called the victims' experiences of forced removal, geographic, linguistic and cultural dispossession a form of genocide (Schaffer 47). Many hard-hitting submissions were made to the Inquiry into 'the stolen generations', the dramatic term coined in 1981 by historian Peter Read of Link-Up (New South Wales) Aboriginal Corporation, whose submission was liberally sprinkled with allegations of 'holocaust, atrocities, ethnic cleansing and genocide' (Flood 233). *Bringing Them Home Report* also suggested, 'The policy of forcible removal of children from Indigenous Australians to other groups for the purpose of raising them separately from and ignorant of their culture and people could properly be labeled "genocidal"' (*Bringing Them Home Report* 275).

The chapter also examines the complexity of the term Aboriginality itself, the idea of what it means to be Aboriginal. Throughout the history there were many different ways of classifying people as Aboriginal. The prevailing definition of the 19th century considered the degree of Aboriginal blood, so called Blood-quantum classification, which was nothing more than paying attention to the skin color (Gardiner-Garden 3). The three-part definition concerning descent, self- identification and community recognition was adopted in the 1980s. This simply means that to be considered Aboriginal, a person needs to be of Aboriginal descent, identify as an Aboriginal and be accepted by the Aboriginal community as being part of it. This definition is not specific judicially and as such has been challenged many times, but it is the first time the spiritual side of being Aboriginal is mentioned. This means that a person can identify him or herself as an Aboriginal even if he/she does not have any apparent

physical features, which is typical for Aboriginal people from mixed families (*Australian Indigenous Law Reporter*).

It became clear that assimilation was not working as the white officials had anticipated. In 1965 the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission approved equal pay for Aborigines; a 1965 Conference modified "assimilation" to voluntary "integration" (Prentis 88). In an era of freedom and liberalization all over the world, assimilation no longer seemed to be the suitable policy to pursue for the white Australian government in regard to the indigenous population. With the increase of Indigenous protest movement in the 1960s many people became more conscious of the discrimination that was being perpetrated against the Indigenous people in the white society. Regardless of the official governmental policy of assimilation, the unofficial policy- that is, the reality of caste prejudice- worked to drive a wedge between the two races and militated against any more than token assimilation, this period saw just as much distancing of Aboriginal and white Australians as the "protection" era of the 1930s (Shoemaker 70). Therefore many people came to see 'integration' as a better way to move forward towards the national integrity of Australia. The Federal Government began to be more open in letting Aboriginal people integrate rather than assimilate. The Aboriginal people were still expected to adjust and embrace 'white' Australian culture, but they were given more freedom to practice the traditional aspects of what were left of their own culture.

Chapter V of the thesis examines the differences in the writings of the male and female Aboriginal writers. Though Jack Davis touches on themes, which are inherently important in the Aboriginal writings, there are certain themes in which he differs from the female playwrights. Indigenous women playwrights are working and writing about themes in order to bring Indigenous Australian women's experiences, history and topics to the fore. They express their identities as mothers, sisters, grandmothers, aunties, and convey pride in

being women, and highlight the important roles of Indigenous Australian women in their communities throughout Australian history. For the Aboriginal women the white European colonization meant invasion, dispossession, destruction of culture, abduction, rape, exploitation of labor and murder. Dr. Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes that Indigenous Australian women experienced the colonization process differently than men – 'their sexuality was policed and contained and their children removed from the influence of kin and community, their bodies were used by white men as sexual objects and many were forced to become domestic servants' (Moreton-Robinson 8). Indigenous women have started to talk about their histories through autobiography, novel and poetry. One of the predominant genres or forms of Aboriginal literature today is the autobiographical narrative or life story (Brewster 7). Although Aboriginal male writers have also continued to produce autobiographical narratives, the Aboriginal women playwrights are able to candidly produce their experiences and social conditions under the white European colonizer as seen and experienced by them. Dramatic narratives of women are critiques of the white European history and Aboriginal male works remaining silent about Aboriginal women's particular situations. As mentioned earlier, "No document has a greater chance of challenging the cult of forgetfulness than a black woman's autobiography" (Thomson 25). Here the 'cult of forgetfulness' is what the white Australians deliberately forgot in matters relating to the indigenous people- the invasion, the violence, the stolen generation etc.

The chapter also examines the Aboriginal women standpoint in resisting white feminism. Though the writing of the Aboriginal women touches themes like domestic and sexual violence, gender issues etc., they further challenge mainstream feminism. Dr. Aileen Moreton-Robinson an Australian indigenous feminist claims that Indigenous women's life writing, which foregrounds the Indigenous women's self- presentation, actually reveals that their realities and life experiences are grounded in different histories from those experienced

by white women. She further points out that the history of white feminists' relations with Indigenous women in Australia actually demonstrates the way the Western feminists normalized themselves and positioned themselves as the knowing subjects, constructing Indigenous women as the Other (Moreton-Robinson xxiv). Therefore from the writings of the male and female Aboriginal playwrights we find their different predicaments under the white colonization. How they interpret and resist the white colonization differs as much as their experiences and sufferings. As Jennifer Sabbioni in her essay rightly puts it, "An Aboriginal women's narratives have been the catalyst for the reconstruction of our identities. Indigenous Australian authors have framed their narratives outside the sado-masochistic ideology imposed by white colonizers. It is interesting to note that Aboriginal men's writings have made limited contributions to the reconstruction of the women's identity" (Sabbioni 76).

The present thesis highlights all misunderstanding of the complex issues of contemporary Aboriginal society. The laws and policies of past Federal Governments inflicted these issues and as it was the "white" people who promoted and fostered the implementation of them. The *Bringing Them Home Report* concluded that 'all Australian parliaments' should make a formal apology, 'there is an international legal obligation' to make reparation, 'this obligation passes from the violating government to its successors until satisfaction has been made', and that 'reparation be made to all who suffered because of forcible removal policies'. All state premiers have apologized. In May 1997, Prime Minister of that time John Howard expressed his personal 'deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous peoples', though he has consistently refused to make a formal apology, despite considerable public pressure. The minister for Aboriginal Affairs explained, 'The government does not support an official national apology. Such an apology could imply that present generations are in some way responsible and accountable for the actions of earlier

generations, actions that were sanctioned by the laws of the time, and that were believed to be in the best interests of the children concerned' (Flood 232-233).

Though the past governments had refused to apologize to the Aborigines, in the present political scenario, the then Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd made his famous apology in 2008. In his apology speech from February 13th 2008, the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd acknowledged the responsibility and culpability of the non-Indigenous people for the mistreatment of the Indigenous people. He apologized for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that had inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on the Indigenous Australians. He especially apologized for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander children from their families, their community and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of the Stolen Generation children, their descendants and for their families left behind. He further stated that the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that the apology was received in the spirit which it was offered as part of the healing of the nation. He acknowledged the gap that lies between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous in health issues, life expectancy, educational achievement, and economic opportunity. He proposed a future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility where all Australians are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with equal stake in shaping their future in Australia (Rudd "Apology"). The messages presented a positive outlook for the future of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships and hopes in better understanding and cooperation of these two cultures within Australia. However, with the consequences of two centuries and decades of European rule over Australia, Aboriginal communities were disrupted and severely damaged. It seems that it will take many more years to overcome the consequences of the past Governmental policies, the aftermath of the Stolen Generations or to raise the health and social standards of Aboriginal people to a significant level. When and if this will ever happen is still a question without any definite answer.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was created way back in 1990 and was given a decade to achieve reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. However in the light of the political situations it seems that real reconciliation between the indigenous people and the white Australian has a long way to go. Michael Dodson sees the way forward as resting in human understanding:

> It is my belief that when the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander story of Australia is heard and understood then there will be a true reconciliation. The abstract language of human rights and justice will settle down on the realities of the lives and aspirations of individual men, women and children who wish simply to have their humanity respected and their distinctive identity recognized (qtd. in Flood 249).

In the light of all the issues and complexities of the relationship between the Indigenous Australians and the white colonizers, it is undoubtedly true to say that the 'real' histories came to be known only through the writings of the Aboriginal people. The works of these writers resist the histories written by the white historians, in doing so they confront, examine, understand, accept and affirm their past, though their past must be that of defeat and dispossession. Such a meaningful connection with the past is essential for racial self-retrieval, for forging a valid and liberating sense of personal and cultural wholeness. It is indispensable for healing the cultural fracture caused by the catastrophic impact of colonial intrusion; it is a prerequisite for cultural reclamation, for continued resistance (S. Nelson 30). Reconstructing the self in history inevitably leads to restructuring of national identity. As Bhabha asserts, "Counter narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities' (Bhabha 1999:300).

The Australian Aboriginal people and the white Australians shared little common ground in ways of describing their past and there cannot be any literary medium or mode that

can proof that Aboriginal retelling and representation of their version is authentic. However, it can construct a new cross-cultural story. With all the consequences of what colonization has done to their lives and culture, there is no way that the Aborigines could return to their oral culture and tradition. So these playwrights and writers play an important role in exploiting the apparatus of European literary communication, not in the hope of recovering or preserving a vanishing culture, but with purposes of mediating between the cultures and gradually constructing new histories. Thus in doing so, the Aboriginal playwrights and writers create their own version of history. Emmanuel S. Nelson had rightly states in his essay:

> …the ongoing transformation of Aboriginal culture from an oral to an increasingly written base – from tribal culture to print culture – has radically redefined the terms of Australia racial politics. The cultural representatives of contemporary black Australians, its writers and artists, no longer have to rely only on oral forms of cultural expression to counter the European textual onslaught; they can now appropriate and press into service the very tools from their enemy's arsenal: written text and English language itself. If European texts had functioned as instruments of cultural destruction of the blacks, the Aboriginal texts can now serve as means of cultural regeneration. Those tools that were used to distort Aboriginal history can now be deployed to redeem the Aboriginal past and to construct revisionist versions of history (S. Nelson 31).

This is exactly what the selected playwrights have been doing; they are reclaiming their history through their texts and performance in order to assert their status of invisibility to historicity.

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APPENDICES

Name of Candidate	**:**	**M.C. Lalthazuali**
Degree	**:**	**Ph.D**
Title of Thesis	**:**	**From Invisibility to Historicity: A Study of Selected Plays of Jack Davis, Jane Harrison and Leah Purcell.**
Department	**:**	**English**
Date of payment of Admission Fee	**:**	**No. 3088, Dt. 26. 09. 2007**
Registration No.	**:**	**MZU/Ph.D/282 of 30. 03. 2009**
Extended up to	**:**	**29. 03. 2016**
Date of Submission	**:**	**11th May, 2015**
Publication (1) in ISSN Journal	**:**	**"Unlearning to Live White: Some Aboriginal Plays Vis-à-vis the Australian Assimilation", in *Labyrinth, An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies*, Vol. 5/No. 4 – October 2014. ISSN 0976-0814.**

(Prof. Sarangadhar Baral)

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BIO –DATA

Name	**:**	**M.C. Lalthazuali**
Father's Name	**:**	**M.C. Thanchhuma (L)**
Mother's Name	**:**	**Chawngthluaii**
Address	**:**	**H/No. J -30**
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Educational Qualification

Examination	Board/University	Div/Grade	Percentage	Year
HSLC	Mizoram Board of School Education	II	52.9%	1997
HSSLC	Meghalaya Board of School Education	II	52.8%	2000
B.A. (Eng)	Mizoram University	II	54.33%	2003
M.A. (Eng)	University of Madras	I	71.55%	2005
Pre –Ph.D Course Work	Mizoram University	'B'	5.87	2011

(M.C. LALTHAZUALI)
Aizawl, Mizoram

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION

1. Participated in the Regional Seminar on **"Rewriting Oral Narratives of North –East India"**, organized by the Department of English, Mizoram University and sponsored by Sahitya Akedemi, on November, 18th – 19th, 2008.

2. Participated in the National Seminar on **"The Dynamics of Culture, Society and Identity: Emerging Literatures of Northeast India"**, organized by the Department of English, Mizoram University in collaboration with Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla on March 10th -11th, 2009.

3. Attended Pre –Ph.D Course work from August – December 2011 in the Department of English, Mizoram University.

4. Participated in the National Seminar on **"Narrativizing Trauma in North Eastern India and Beyond"**, organized by the Department of English on 5th – 6th November, 2012.

5. Participated in the National Seminar on **"Writers from here and Beyond"**, organized by Department of English DRS/SAP, Mizoram University on 26th March, 2013.

6. Participated and Presented a Paper in the UGC sponsored National Seminar titled **"Globalization and Ethnic Identity"**, organized by English and Philosophy Departments of Pachhunga University College, on 23rd and 24th May, 2013.

7. Published an article titled **"Reclaiming Identity: Narratives by Sally Morgan and Jane Harrison"**, in ***Globalization and Ethnic Identity***. Ed. Henry Lalmawizuala and V. Lalmalsawmi. Scientific Book Centre. 2014. ISBN: 978-81-287-0004-0.

8. Participated in Regional Seminar on **"Creative Writers of North East India: Their Voices and Views"**, organized by Department of English, Mizoram University in collaboration with UGC/SAP (DRS I) on 15th March, 2014.

9. Published an article titled, **"Unlearning to Live White: Some Aboriginal Plays Vis-à-vis the Australian Assimilation", in *Labyrinth, An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies*, Vol.5/No.4 – October 2014. ISSN 0976-0814.**