INTERROGATING COLONIAL ASSUMPTIONS

Chapter IV

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in pain or in splendour
we will never surrender
the claim to Our Land
(Davis, “Our Land” 79)

They passed their laws
then drew a veil of death across
the children of the sun
(Davis, “The Land at the Brewery” 22)

[. . .] we led them out of barbarism
into the era of Christendom by baptizing
bibling blanketing and clothing them.
(Davis, “A Letter to the Shade of Charles Darwin” 29)

Views of Australia and the Aborigines framed in Europe before settlement drew on the works of classical authors like Herodotus, Caesar, Thucydides, Tacitus and Diodorus and their half-mythical accounts of Scythians, Helvetians and many other people on the fringes of the ancient world; on the Old Testament and on actual reports about North America or the Pacific (Reynolds, Law of the Land 28). After settlement attitude towards the Aborigines changed from feelings of ethnocentrism to hard line racism and accordingly, the policies adopted
towards them also changed. While ethnocentrism of the early period arose out of feelings of cultural superiority, later racism gave rise to feelings of superiority based on physical and racial differences; led to attempts to dominate and exploit the other through invasion, economic control or slavery, and was "illogical, scientifically invalid and unethical" (Broome 88). It was based on ignorance, on lack of sympathy, on fanciful racial theories and on the need to rationalize the dispossession of the Aborigines' land and the accompanying exploitation and violence (Broome 93). While the Aborigines were denigrated as 'savages', the Europeans were glorified as pioneers and celebrated as such in Australian literature. Broome points out that "the Europeans were not pioneers, because the Aborigines preceded them by 50,000 years" (91).

**Land as Motif**

Aboriginal people regarded land as a spiritual phenomenon. The landscape, considered to be formed through the activities of the Spirit beings, the creative ancestors of the Dreaming, was believed to retain their essence and the clans and groups held in sacred trust the chains of Dreaming sites. Each tribal group moved in a specific area, safeguarding and tending the land, which supported their traditional hunter-gatherer economy. They considered land to be the giver of life, their ceremonies ensured the annual cycle of life and they believed that on dying their spirits returned to the land.

Henry Reynolds in *The Law of the Land* makes the following
observations about Aboriginal occupation of land:

The Aborigines lived in relatively small districts with fixed, known and recognized boundaries. Although the food quest took them in many directions they had ‘fixed residences’. They defended their territories against trespassers. Movement across boundaries necessitated diplomatic niceties. They ‘enjoyed’ their land, exploiting a wide range of food sources. They identified with their districts and took their name from it (59-60).

Aboriginal oral literature encoded in it, a wide range of rights and obligations towards the land and the aesthetic statements it gave rise to “were essentially political and juridical rather than personal and expressive” (Hodge and Mishra 92). Traditionally land was not an explicit theme in visual or verbal art.

When the British arrived in the 1770's, about a million Aborigines inhabited the continent and territories clearly defined by language, geography, beliefs and descent, divided the land into hundreds of identifiable nations (Bourke, Aboriginal Australia 35). However, in 1770 Captain James Cook claimed the Eastern coast of Australia for the British crown, on the concept of terra nullius, i.e. as territory belonging to no-one or over which no-one claims ownership. And “on the foundation of New South Wales [. . .] and South Australia, every square inch of territory in the colony became the property of the crown” (qtd. in
Reynolds *Law of the Land* 7). The British legal system recognised ownership of land as shown by the fencing of land to mark boundaries, the building of permanent structures and the farming of the land and failed to comprehend sophisticated systems of Aboriginal land usage and tenure. Hence, European ignorance, and their philosophical and political ideas, discredited Aboriginal occupation and possession (Reynolds, *Law of the Land* 22).

The British Common Law introduced in 1788, superceded customary law, handed down from the Dreaming to each Aboriginal group and followed by them for generations, and took away the sovereignty of the Aboriginal people -- the right to care for their own country and govern their own affairs. While the indigenous inhabitants of New Zealand, United States, Canada and South Africa have been acknowledged as the original owners of the soil, the rights of the Australian Aborigines, who had lived on their land for 40,000 years, for 1600 generations or more, have not been recognised. Explorer Edward John Eyre wrote in his journal:

> Without laying claim to this country by right of conquest, without pleading even the mockery of cession, or the cheatery of sale, we have unhesitatingly entered upon, occupied, and disposed of its lands, spreading forth a new population over its surface, and driving before us the original inhabitants. (Stone 66)
This fact of dispossession was the crux of the future race-relations problems in Australia.

In Jack Davis's play, Kullark, Yagan dancing out the creation of his homeland and naming his territory and Moyrahn marking the ground in front of Captain Stirling points to their claim over the land, which sustained their life and was part of their religion and culture since time immemorial. Billy Kimberley in No Sugar insists: "This still your country. [Flinging his arms wide]. You, you, you, you listen! Gudeeah make 'em fences, windmill, make 'em road for motor car, big house, cut 'em down trees. Still your country! (2.6.66-67). As Joe decides to run away with Mary from the Settlement to Northam, he promises to show her his "country" which has a big river and beautiful white swans (No Sugar 2.6.70) and later when he is permitted to leave, on condition that he would not return to Northam, Billy Kimberley insists: "That your country. You back sit down that place" (No Sugar 4.9.108). In In Our Town, Uncle Herbie insists that the place where he had set his yonga snares might be Mr. Crawford's land, "but it's still my country" (In Our Town 1.7.16) and Joe is glad that Gran could come back to her own country to die (In Our Town 1.5.11). Uncle Herbie in In Our Town claims that he [has] "been living out the lakes for [He counts on his fingers.] fifty years and [hence] that's my country -- see that's the law -- blackfellas law you know"; but as Joe reminds him "it's wayjella law now. Ours is finished" (In Our Town
2.5.43). Jamie of the contemporary family depicted in *Kullark* is shown to be a landrights activist continuing Aboriginal resistance.

While in *Kullark* Stirling's authorization of Aboriginal land to William, the settler raises the issue of land ownership, the massacre of the Aborigines at Pinjarra is also shown to be based on the issue of land. The Oombulgurri massacre of 1926, described by Billy Kimberley in *No Sugar* (2.6.67), and the shifting of the entire Aboriginal population of the Northam camp to Moore River Native Steelement in 1933, dramatized in both *Kullark* and *No Sugar* shows other forms of territorial invasion and dispossession.

Davis critiques the British system of justice. According to Yagan native wildlife including sheep belonged to everyone. The white man who killed kangaroo, duck, swan and mullet; accused, imprisoned and even killed Aborigines when they speared grazing sheep. Yagan's puzzled response to the settler Will's argument that "the sheep belong to the whiteman" only "But all those [other] things belong to everyone," is that "Archh, wetjala kartwarrah" (". . . the white man is mad") (*Kullark* 1.7.28). Gilbert points out that this incident highlights the differences between settler and Aboriginal approaches to landscape and points to the inconsistency, or even hypocrisy, of white notions of ownership (65).

Yagan found that the same British law that appropriated their land, and made them intruders on their own traditional grounds enabled them to be shot with impunity (Chesson 192). Whites shot Blacks on
sight, rode them down with their horses, poisoned their waterholes and massacred them.


Yagan is destroyed for upholding Aboriginal law and its principle of a life for a life, which justifies his killings of the settlers Entwhistle, Jenkins, and the Velvick brothers in Fremantle. But Captain Stirling's massacre at Pinjarra is also shown to be based on that same 'barbaric' principle. To make their appropriation of Aboriginal land more secure and less hazardous and to ensure that there would be no more resistance to settlement, a tribe of sixty to seventy natives are surrounded and shot with the help of soldiers, policemen and settlers like Peel. In his warning to an Aboriginal woman Stirling justifies his actions with "The white man will not tolerate murder" (Kullark 1.9.38). To this day the region is known as the Peel region of Western Australia.

For the Aborigines today the issue of issues is land rights (Hodge and Mishra 92). In his 1991 National Report Commissioner Elliot Johnson pointed out that the socio-economic problems faced by many Aborigines were linked to the limited access to land and failure to protect sacred sites (Bourke and Cox 56). In 1982 the Mabo case forced the courts to review the doctrine of terra nullius, which had been found
binding on the Australian courts for long precluding any acknowledgement of native title. In the light of the established facts the Australian High court decision in June 1992 stated that, “at the time of occupation, Australia was NOT terra nullius” (qtd. in Bourke and Cox 58). Though the decision set the record straight, the courts have consistently refused to entertain any concept of Aboriginal sovereignty as it is against their powers to question the legitimacy of Australian sovereignty (Bourke and Cox 61). But in the words of Yami Lester, Aboriginal elder and Chairman of the Anangu Pitjantjara in 1988, “Until a real settlement is worked out, until a real treaty is agreed, we will continue to be surrounded by invaders, and you can’t really call this land your home” (qtd. in Hodge and Mishra 24).

By the 1840s Aborigines could be arrested and held without trial, were unable to testify in court and were not permitted to buy alcohol or to carry a gun (Broome 91). Aborigines placed under the Act could be moved to a reserve and kept there against their will with no right of appeal (Broome 98).

According to Colin Tatz, law in Australia has perpetrated the Aborigines as a special, inferior legal class, has ascribed for generations, immutable negative traits, has branded as criminal (for the Aborigines) behaviour which is acceptable in society at large, has controlled Aborigines physically, mentally and geographically, has predicated the negative black image in white eyes and had fashioned official stereotypes.
Law has been manipulated to their disadvantage, excluded or allowed to be excluded, Aborigines from its benefits, and had created institutional subordination (Race Politics in Australia 49). Tatz goes on to point out that several policies, -- like segregation, protection-segregation, so-called assimilation, the wardship and welfare philosophy, so-called integration, -- proclaimed to protect Aborigines from white depredations became discriminations (50); that on reserves their cultural customs were prohibited, their mail, reading matter, recreation, marital and sexual relationships censored, their movements monitored their labour and wage worth diminished (Tatz 50). Law created 'offences' which only blacks could commit: drinking, leaving a reserve, entering one when barred, inter-marrying, refusing to work, being cheeky, writing salacious letters to a boy/girl-friend, committing adultery, playing cards; ascribed negative characteristics: 'grog' susceptibility, sexual promiscuity, cultural savagery, labour non-productivity and -- by white definition -- an unconcern for money; defined octoroos, quadroons, half-castes, full-bloods based on 'blood-content' and determined the degree and extent of rights (Tatz 50-51). These laws were applied to all Aborigines unless they had an exemption certificate. “Australia has no legal culture, no historical ethos of giving Aborigines anything. With the exception of a handful of recent statutes, all laws have taken away from them, diminished them” (Tatz 53). Davis believed that: “once the truth is revealed forcefully enough, the bureaucrats, representatives of white
society, will no longer be able to deny us our birthright in a place which is still ours, regardless of politics and white notions of ownership” (Meanjin 47).

Instances of racial discrimination abound in Davis’s plays. In No Sugar Jimmy informs Frank that they [the Aborigines] are not allowed to walk down the street after sundown, not allowed in town, not allowed to go down the soak (No Sugar 1.3.28) that the police “can shoot our dawgs, anytime they want to” (No Sugar 1.3.29) and that, “it is an offence to supply liquor to an Aboriginal native under the Aboriginal Act”. If caught it would result in “three months hard labour” (No Sugar 1.2.18). In Kullark, Thomas Yorlah mentions “special place for Nyoongahs”, in 1933, at the pictures “sort of roped off, right up the back” (Kullark 2.3.47), so does Jimmy in No Sugar. “Wetjalas funny fellas all right [. . .]” (2.3.47) agrees Thomas Yorlah. Cissie in No Sugar complains that, “Old Tony the ding always sells us little shrivelled [apples] and them wetjala kids big fat ones” (No Sugar 1.2.16).

Milly complains that “cockies want ‘em [Aboriginal men] to work for nothin’” (No Sugar 1.2.22) and that her son Joe who cut a hundred posts was given “a pair of second hand boots and a piece of stag ram so tough even the dawgs couldn’t eat it” (No Sugar 1.2.23). “They not slaves, Chergeant” (No Sugar 1.2.23) insists Gran. In 1945 while Thomas Yorlah clears four hundred acres of land for a quid an acre, Wetjalas who did

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the other four hundred get thirty bob an acre for the same sort of country (*Kullark* 2.5.61).

As the Chief Protector of Aborigines, in *Kullark* A. O. Neville points out, while the ration given to unemployed Aborigines was worth twentytwo cents, that given to unemployed whites was worth seventy cents (2.3.46). In his letter to the minister in *No Sugar* he mentions that the weekly rations for the native costs only one third of the sustenance paid to the white unemployed (1.2.20).

Aborigines who constituted only one percent of the Australian population, represented ten percent of prison inmates and it was more than tripled in Western Australia (Davis, *Writers in Action* 182). In Davis’s plays imprisonment is a recurrent image, but its agency is often subverted by depicting Aboriginal incarceration as substitute initiation -- the ritual passage into adulthood. While Shane in *Barungin*, feels that Micky is “headin’ for trouble” and would soon be keeping Arnie and Peter company in gaol the way “he’s goin’”; to Peegun “[. . .] he’s just walkin’ out into a big white world and he’s gotta learn how to survive. [and] [. . .] he’s learnin’ -- his way. (1.5.29).

“Wetjala’s gaol don’t frighten”, (*Kullark* 2.3.53) Thomas Yorlah in *Kullark*. “gaol’s yuart, only a wetjala thing” (*No Sugar* 4.3.94) to Jimmy and is nothing to worry about. He boasts of being in jail four times for “drinkin’, fightin’, and snowdroppin’ ” (*No Sugar* 1.3.27) ie, “pinchin’ things off other people’s clothes lines” (*No Sugar* 1.3.27). In *The Dreamers*
Eli has occupied almost every cell in Fremantle goal, and has "got his name scratched in all of 'em" (1.2.12). While Aunt Peggy's boy has just been released (1.2.12) Auntie Rose's, boys Reggy and Zac are still in jail (1.6.34). Later young Peter also ends up in Jail for riding in a stolen car though unknowingly.

Joe in No Sugar, describes conditions in jail: “plenty of Nyoongahs and some from up North. Tucker's not too bad, better than the Settlement. At least they don't give us bread and fat, and we get real bacca, not nigger twist.” (4.3.94). Peter in Barungin, observes that “We've just about got them wetjalas outnumbered and we all stick together” (1.6.31). It is part of their survival strategy. Eli in The Dreamers details another “All you gotta do is butter 'em [the warders] up a bit. Play it smart” (The Dreamers 1.4.18). In Barungin, Peter also says the same thing: “it's all right, so long as you jump when the bastards say 'jump'. (1.6.31). He also describes how the Aboriginal inmates “get a kick out of putting it over these dumb screws, specially the Pommy ones”, of how they made them believe that Tarney Wallace, the little desert bloke was a cannibal (Barungin 1.6.31).

PETER. [...] He keeps telling them he's hungry for meat — any sort of meat. He told one of the screws last week that he had a nice big fat bum, and that man's flesh tastes just like pork. Tarney was only joking, but next day he was ordered to see the prison psychiatrist (1.6.31).
According to Peegun in *Barungin*, "[...] in this country you got ten times the chance of ending up inside if you're black than if you're white. So you gotta keep a step ahead of the cops" (1.5.29). He considers himself a survivor because "Well, I keep a mile ahead of the bastards [...]" (1.5.29). In *No Sugar*, on being arrested, at Northam, Joe refuses to walk in front of Constable Kerr because in his opinion Kerr was not the sort of bloke Joe wanted to turn his back to (3.4.85). He too is a survivor.

Davis points to the injustice of white systems of law. In *No Sugar*, when Jimmy, Sam and Frank Brown are brought to court, the Justice of the Peace, a Northam cocky farmer is in a hurry to get to a bank auction (1.5.34). The JP, who professes it to be his duty to protect natives and half-castes from alcohol, though willing to listen to Brown's explanation is unsympathetic and sentences him to "six weeks imprisonment with hard labour" for supplying alcohol to the natives (*No Sugar* 1.5.35). It being his sixth offence related to alcohol Jimmy is promptly sentenced to "three months imprisonment with hard labour" (*No Sugar* 1.5.36) and Sam is given a fine of twenty-five shillings . . . and two and six costs; in default seven days imprisonment with fourteen days time to pay (*No Sugar* 1.5.36). In *Kullark*, Jamie describes the court room where the hearing took place:

JAMIE. You know, Dad, today everything in that court-house was white. White walls, white judge . . . only one black spot in there . . . no three -- me in the box and you two up in
the gallery. Yeah, it’s an awful bloody feelin’ all up there on your own (2.6.65).

Finally he is let off on a “twelve months good behaviour bond” (Kullark 2.6.65) because the judge was impressed when he heard that Jamie was training to be a school teacher, “gonna be part of the system” (Kullark 2.6.65). According to Peter, in The Dreamers,

PETER. Look, Nyoongahs buy their grog from Wetjalas, they break the law and they git jugged by Wetjalas. The lawyer’s white, the cops are white, the magistrate’s white, the warden’s white, the whole box and dice is white. Put a Nyoongah against all them. I tell you we ain’t got a bloody chance. (1.4.18).

As Jack Davis points out in his poem “John Pat” and as Shane recites in Barungin:

SHANE. ‘Write of life’, the pious said.

‘Forget the past . . . the past is dead.’

But all I see in front of me

Is a concrete floor . . . a cell door . . . and

John Pat. (2.9.60)

The end product of gudiya law

Is a viaduct for fang and claw
And a place to dwell like Roebourne's hell

Of a concrete floor . . . a cell door . . . and

John Pat. (Barungin 2.9.60)

The issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody is seen as “both concrete evidence for continuing oppression and metaphor for the meaning of the dispossession which is the inheritance of the Aboriginal people” (Gillam, Westerly 131). Mudrooroo points out that the term barungin, which means ‘to smell the wind’, and refers to the survival skills of the Nyoongah people to find, food, water, to forecast the weather and so on, is used metaphorically by Jack Davis in his play Barungin, to refer to the number of Aboriginal corpses which pollute the wind since the invasion (viii). As warned by Moyarahn in Kullark, it is “the smell of death” which sums up Aboriginal -- European relationships since then. In The Dreamers Eli comments:

ELI. I still reckon they knocked old Sandy off and dumped him back in the cell. Look you blokes, I'm tellin', yuh, Sandy was as tough as an old boomer. Slept under bridges, ate 'ard tucker all 'is life. Heart failure, be buggered; number nines killed 'im, that's for sure. (The Dreamers 18)

Robert in his speech at the Rotary meeting points out that the first Aboriginal deaths in custody occurred in eighteen thirty-two.
ROBERT. . . At first they used to hang them just up the
terrace there . . . near the causeway. Then they moved the
gallows out to Redcliffe, near the racecourse . . . Hangings
were public in those days . . . A kind of spectator sport . . .
They would carry those poor terrified fellas on a cart along
the terrace, then tie them up and blindfold them . . . say a
few nice Christian prayers . . . then drop them to their
deaths. Sometimes they hung the bodies in chains to rot . . .
. as a warning to their people . . . It is a war (2.5.53).

After describing the fate of the Aboriginal war heroes Midjitaroo and
Yagan he continues: “If they didn’t sentence you to gaol . . . a flogging . . .
or . . . a hanging . . . you got transportation” and that for this “they
established Rottnest Island as a prison” (2.5.54).

ROBERT. . . In the winter of eighteen eighty-three . . of a
hundred and eighty prisoners . . sixty died in the space of
a few weeks in an influenza epidemic and another thirty of
measles . . . For you Rottnest is a holiday resort . . . For us
. . . it is what Auschwitz must be for the Jews. (2.5.55)

And in the final scene of the play Barungin, which resembles a
military memorial service, (Mudroooroo viii) a roll of the names of the
Aboriginals who died in police custody is recited over Peter’s grave. The
last name on the list which begins in 1833, a few years after the
settlement on the Swan River (later to become Perth) was established,
“had been alive a matter of weeks before the play opened” (Gillam Westerly 128). According to Helen Gilbert the list also commemorates the ‘absent friends’ in Davis’s plays, who though mentioned doesn’t appear on the stage -- the babies buried in the pine plantations in *No Sugar*, the massacred tribes mentioned in *Kullark* and *No Sugar*, and Tim in *In Our Town*.

Mudrooroo, in his foreword to the play *Barungin* points out that “Nyoongah funerals are of great cultural significance being not only a time of mourning, of laying the deceased to rest, but also a time of strengthening family ties through communion” (*Barungin* vii-viii). According to Alec in *Kullark* “the only good thing about funerals” is that “ya get to see people ya ain’t seen for a long time” (*Kullark* 1.1.9), like Auntie Peg and Uncle Eli who had come from the Reserve with Libby and Joe and all the kids; and as Alec had observed, “there was even some *Wongai* from out in the eastern goldfields” (1.4.15). In *Barungin*, which begins on a graveside with a funeral service (1.1.5) Shane comments about the “Big mob there” including relations Granny Doll hadn’t seen for years (*Barungin* 1.2.8).

MEENA. All them cousins, couldn’t get away from ‘em. Kept shakin’ hands and tellin’ me who they was [. . .] (*Barungin* 1.2.8).

In *Wahngin Country* the protagonist Old Mick contrasts White and Nyoongah funerals:
Ay did you ever notice when white people hold a funeral everything is so orderly. They cry quietly and wipe away their tears on white handkerchiefs and then shake hands politely and solemnly. But Nyoongahs, when we have a funeral, oh brother, we have a ball. I mean we really let it all hang out. You know (he shouts and wails and tears at his hair) and we always have big funerals -- you know, mums, dads, brothers and sisters, first cousins, second cousins, third cousins, nieces, nephews, everybody turns up and everybody has a real good time, even the preacher has a ball, he talks on and on and on. (12).

**Self/Other dichotomy**

In colonization the invaders attempted to valorize the Self in distinction to the Other. But as Franz Fanon has noted, “To the theory of the ‘absolute evil of the native’ the theory of the ‘absolute evil of the settler’ replies” (qtd. in Elder 204). While the invaders viewed the Aborigines as “destitute of any of the feeblest semblance of government, having no rulers or priests, or chief personages of any kind and religion or generally recognized code of moral obligations . . .” (qtd. in Elder 204); the Aborigines considered the invader “A cruel inhumane, barbaric alien” (qtd. in Elder 204). Davis’s plays foreground this psycho-political conflict and response. He demonstrates both the Aboriginal and British concepts of the Other as culturally and spiritually inferior to the Self. The often
contradictory political strategies adopted by the British officials are shown to be the result of this Self/Other dichotomy, and both assimilation and genocide to have led to the same tragic results for the Aborigines (Elder 206). Through his plays Davis lays bare the contradictions of Australian colonial discourse.

The office of the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Murray Street, Perth, displays the sign reading “Government of Western Australia, Fisheries, Forestry, Wildlife and Aborigines” (No Sugar 1.2.18) and has separate entrances front and rear for whites and blacks respectively. Neville considered Aborigines as “communities whose influence is towards laziness and vice” (Kullark 2.1.41). Neville’s speech to the Western Australian Historical Society is on the theme of anti-genocide but he practices cultural genocide by strongly advocating the policy of assimilation.

Sister Eileen, the missionary at Moore River Native Settlement, who had been lending books – novels – to some of the natives and was planning to get good books donated to start a new library is informed that the Department doesn’t encourage the natives to read. According to Superintendent Neal, his experience in South Africa as well as in Australia, has led him to believe that “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing” and that as it is “there’s enough troublemakers without giving them ideas” (No Sugar 4.4.96). Sister Eileen wonders what Neal would classify the Bible as (No Sugar 4.4.96), and protests against the use of
violence by the native policemen to enforce attendance at her religious instruction classes. She’d prefer the Aborigines to “come of their own free will”. Neal considers her a “Bloody do-gooder” and threatens to transfer her to another settlement, perhaps Mulla Bulla, on the edge of the Gibson Desert if she doesn’t comply with the unofficial directive.

In *Kullark*, it is Lyn, the sympathetic white school teacher, who is called a “flamin’ do-gooder” (*Kullark* 1.4.16, 1.6.24). Alec is rude to her when she visits the Yorlah household (*Kullark* 1.6.23) and glares at her all the time she is there. “I been dealing with people like her all me life. If they pay you a visit they’re all over you. I bet she’s runnin’ us down to her flamin’ mob right now” (*Kullark* 1.6.25). He also feels that Jamie’s “too much mixed up with them white students” (*Kullark* 2.2.44) and fears that “those Wetjala’s’ll lead ‘im on, an’ when the chips are down he’ll be out on ‘is ear.” (*Kullark* 2.2.44).

Alec fears that his son Jamie will “finish up marryin’ some Wetjala yok, ‘ave blue eyed kids and ‘e won’t want nothin’ to do with us” (*Kullark* 1.4.17). According to him Jamie is “a Nyoongah [. . .] and ‘e should marry a Nyoongah” (*Kullark* 1.4.17). Rosie who feels that Jamie “can please himself who ‘e marries” (*Kullark* 1.4.16) calls Alec is a “plain bloody racist” since he believes that the marriage of his sister Mary to a Wetjala is different and all right, especially since Ol’ Bill brings a flagon around now an’ again (*Kullark* 1.4.17).

ROSIE. [. . .] every year she brings me tea towels, and every
year she tells me to keep 'em nice and clean. Just because she's married white she tries to think white. She'll always be black. She's blacker than me (Kullark 1.4.17).

But in In Our Town noticing the growing affection between David and Sue it is Sue's parents who fear of the consequences since "the town's starting to talk" (2.8.47). Milly, David's mother is unperturbed as her grandfather who was a Scotsman had lived with her grandmother who was a full-blood Aborigine, for thirty years. (2.10.53).

Sam considers the wetjalaas strange "what have they got, four walls, always seem to be in a hurry, always up against time" (In Our Town 1.9.23) and points out that there are essential differences between Black and White Australians. He feels that he will never understand the wetjala that "they have a different outlook on life to us and sort of sly approach" (In Our Town 2.9.50) and advices his son: "We don't need them David, we never have and never ever will. Our world is different to theirs".

SAM. [...] the wetjala was swinging by his tail when we were a nation of people. We had laws and customs and a religion while they were yelling and throwing stones at one another in some jungle.

DAVID. [laughing] Yeah, but they caught up, Pop, and passed us.

SAM. Sure they did, one day they accidentally discovered
how to make iron -- learnt about gun powder -- thousands of years after the Chinese and they learnt how to make a gun. *(In Our Town 2.9.50)*.

But he warns David that in the combat of the mind “there’s one thing wetjala’s don’t like”.

SAM. Direct attack. You see they like to talk, dilly-dally around with things. “that’s when you gotta get in and attack them when they’re not ready. Attack, that’s the way.” *(In Our Town 2.9.51)*.

In *Barungin*, Meena feels that one “can’t hurt wetjalas since they’ve got no conscience” but in Robert’s opinion, “we just gotta help them find it” *(2.4.52)*. David who feels that “they’ll never understand us” *(In Our Town 2.9.50)*, however, believes that “Underneath, deep down, we’re all the same. *(In Our Town 2.9.50)*. Jim Moss sees David as a threat to his survival and he himself is a threat to the survival of David and his community.

The play *In Our Town* illustrates the “psychological ploys of denial and rationalization, which occur in situations of racial conflict” – of the individual acting through a generalized reference to the community at large *(In Our Town xi)*. The Barman refuses to serve David liquor *(In Our Town 2.1.40)* and justifies his action with “Look, don’t blame me. I’m just following orders” *(In Our Town 2.1.40)*. In *No Sugar*, Sergeant Caroll
informs Joe that they were only following orders in burning down the camps at the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve Northam.

Tim, is an absent character who is mentioned throughout the play *In Our Town*. A stray who had come to live with the Millimurras when he was about thirteen or fourteen, he had put up his age and together with David, had joined the army at seventeen. According to David, Tim was a real dreamer and as a kid who was always scared of the dark, of his own shadow, and physical violence, he was not cut out for the army (*In Our Town* 1.15.34). David felt that the military authorities had some notion that blacks would make good forward scouts. They sent Tim up ahead of patrol and in spite of reporting a large concentration of Japs on the side of a hill, their position and even their numbers, the Lieutenant wasn’t satisfied and sent Tim a third time. The next day he was found dead. He had managed to stuff his field dressing into the wound in his chest, but it wasn’t enough. The starving Japs had cannibalized him: “had stripped all the flesh off his legs, his thighs” (1.15.34). David believed that “If he had been white it wouldn’t have happened” (*In Our Town* 1.15.34) and that “It was cold indifference which caused Tim’s death (*In Our Town* 2.9.50). Towards the end of the play, *In Our Town* Sue feels that her family, Mrs. Rose and the rest of the town are ready to do that [cannibalise] to David, just like the Japs had cannibalized his eighteen year old cousin Tim (*In Our Town* 1.15.37).
David and Sue decide to go back together to the town, to confront them and "shake their morality as it has never been shook before" (In Our Town 2.15.66). And that's what Sam had advised David: "attack. [. . .]" (2.15.66).

Davis has declared that "There will always be differences . . . between black and white" and as Shoemaker points out he speaks optimistically of his fair-skinned grandchildren who 'talk with an Aboriginal patois . . . [have] Aboriginal behavioural patterns and Aboriginal speech patterns' (qtd. in Elder 212). But in The Dreamers the character of Robert, a legal aid officer, who is depicted as the product of assimilation is unsatisfying. While Dolly in The Dreamers speaks contemptuously of the "barefooted blackfella", in Barungin Shane and Peegun cannot tolerate "the bloody coconuts" who as Peegun explains are "two-tone black on the outside, white on the inside"; (1.2.12) -- "a bloody black bureaucrat" says Shane. At school Little Doll who is "not really black" feels insulted at being called a porpoise (Barungin 1.2.9).

**Subversion**

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin emphasize "an inevitable tendency towards subversion" as "a characteristic of dominated literature" (33). According to them:

Directly and indirectly, in Salman Rushdie's phrase, the 'Empire writes back' to the imperial 'centre', not only through nationalist assertion, proclaiming itself central and
self-determining, but even more radically by questioning the bases of European and British metaphysics, challenging the world-view that can polarize centre and periphery in the first place [. . .]. [post-colonial] writers [. . .] have [. . .] rewritten particular works from the English ‘canon’ with a view to restructuring European ‘realities’ in post-colonial terms, not simply by reversing the hierarchical order, but by interrogating the philosophical assumptions on which that order was based. (Empire Writes Back 33)

Sheep Stealing is a recurring incident in the plays of Jack Davis. According to Helen Gilbert, the small but significant act of defiance enacted through sheep stealing raises important ideological issues and points to the difference in Black and White approaches to the landscape; and as sheep represents the landscape which has been claimed as the property of the Settlers, through sheep stealing the Aboriginal characters make a symbolic reclamation of the land. In Kullark Yagan is accused of sheep stealing. In No Sugar, while Sam goes to borrow old Skinny Martin's cart to take Cissie to hospital, Jimmy plans to solve the meat problem by stealing his sheep: "We'll git one of the skinny old bastard's sheep and bring it home on his own cart" (No Sugar 1.8.46). Uncle Herbie is imprisoned for stealing sheep and he blames the sheep: "Silly kookanjari. She thinks she's a yonga and poke her head through the snare and snare catch 'em there and then she have her nyanyi. First
time I caught two in one snare” (In Our Town 1.14.32). According to Helen Gilbert, Jimmy Munday and Uncle Herbie are Aboriginal trickster figures (65).

The trickster, a personification of ambivalence (Radin xiii) is found among the ancient Greeks, the Chinese, the Japanese and in the semitic world (Radin xxiii). Laughter, humour and irony permeate everything the trickster does. (Radin xxiv). According to Paul Radin: trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being (xxiii).

Kerenyi describes the trickster as a primodial being of the same order as the gods and heroes of mythology, (175) [who] could be defined as the timeless root of all picaresque creations of world literature (Radin 176).

According to the Native Canadian writer, Thomas King, the trickster figure allows the indigenous writer to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and
harmony...[and] speak to the nature of the world and the relatedness of all living things (xiii) and according to Moses, it is emblematic of indigenous humour and spirit in the face of both historical and existential dilemmas (375).

Eli and Peter are the trickster figures in the play *The Dreamers*, seeking chances to subvert white systems. In their interactions with the white world they become natural actors, and it may be seen as a means of survival. Peter fakes that he had lost his bus fare and on the point of being thrown off the bus is helped out by an old *wetjala* lady who pays his fare (25), while Eli who calls himself old Hawkeye or Patchy, disguised as a one eyed man fleeces white shoppers on Thursday nights: “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 (2.2.59). He ends up collecting ten dollars and one cents! (2.2.58) as patcheye.

The trickster Peegun, in *Barungin* had left Derby, Kununurra, Broome when it became too hot for him: “Her bloke come home at three o’clock in the mornin’, says somethin’ about a shotgun, so out the fuckin’ window I went, man, in me jocks, left a brand new pair of Levis’ and a pair of R.M.Williams boots behind” (*Barungin* 1.2.12) admits that he’s “too old to change, [. . .] and too young to carry around an arse full of pellets” and senses trouble when he hears that Arnie, Meena’s husband is getting out on parole (*Barungin* 1.2.12). Though he had been doing “a
bit pubwork, bit a sortin' pearl shell . . . few games a cards [. . .], was broke at the moment and plans to rectify it by going busking to Freo, with Shane playing the guitar and himself the didgeridoo. The fact that he has lost his licence doesn't bother him. In Wahngin Country when short of money Old Mick strikes a variety of poses and gets his photograph taken to be sold to tourists as “a postcard of a genuine Australian Aborigine” (6).

Other plays also give glimpses of such characters. When the sergeant leaves after checking their bag for liquor, “David rolls up his trouser legs and produces a bottle of whisky from his sock” (In Our Town 1.3.9). When brought to court for being under the influence of alcohol, Jimmy tries to delay court proceedings and keeps the judging waiting.

JIMMY. Sorry, sir, I was on the shit bucket . . . toilet . . . Got a guts ache, sir (No Sugar 1.5.35).

As the trial proceeds Jimmy admits nothing, Sam takes responsibility for anything and everything their actions amount to a subversive contempt of the colonial court -- a refusal to acknowledge, to engage and to accept the white processes (Dibble 95). As Gilbert observes, through his amusing antics as performer and entertainer, Jimmy transforms the prison cell and courtroom into a form of theatre where he asserts control over the spaces designed to segregate and punish them (67) He has contempt for the Native Protector as well. Out of jail and unrepentant, Jimmy urgently pesters Miss Dunn and Neville for
a train fare to Northam, so that he may leave by the mixed goods at eleven and on finally getting his travel voucher changes his plans and decides to catch the five o clock train (No Sugar 1.7). Walking off from the Chief Protector’s office with his travel voucher, Jimmy exclaims: “Native Protector, couldn’t protect my dog from fleas” (No Sugar 1.7.44). When Sergeant Carrol couldn’t immediately comply with Milly’s request for more blankets, Gran comments too expresses the same feeling: “An’ you’re supposed to be native ‘tector” (No Sugar 1.7.44)

Irony

As a doubled or split discourse, which has the potential to subvert from within (Hutcheon, Last Post 170), irony becomes a popular rhetorical strategy for working within existing discourses and contesting them at the same time (171) and according to Hutcheon, is a powerful subversive tool in the re-thinking and re-addressing of history (Hutcheon, Last Post. 171). Citing Raymond Williams, Hutcheon points out that all national literatures develop from imitation of a dominant pattern to assimilation or internalization of it, to a stage of open revolt, where what was initially excluded by the dominant pattern gets revalorized (176). “The challenge is to use the existing language, even if it is the voice of a dominant other -- and yet speak through it: to disrupt . . . the codes and forms of the dominant language in order to reclaim speech for itself” (qtd. in Hutcheon 177).
Often combined with some sort of self-reflexivity, irony allows a text to work within the constraints of the dominant, while placing those constraints as constraints in the foreground and thus undermining their power (Hutcheon 176).

Though dualities abound in the ironist's world, the stances he may take range from parody and innuendo through sarcasm and self-disparagement to absurdity and nihilism. . . . At its best, the ironic stance provokes a serious deliberation onto the problems that led to dualities in the first place (qtd. in Hutcheon 177).

As the trope of the unsaid, irony becomes a possible way to encode a subtext which will deflect the risks of “[f]ull visibility and accessibility . . . [which] constitute an inherent danger for the colonized” (qtd. in Hutcheon 178). Hence Lorainne Wier points out that, irony in the hands of those who exercize genuine power is very different from the same device in the hands of those classified as powerless and that among those whose basic communication may frequently depend upon the skilled use and reception of ironic utterance -- that is, among the powerless, irony will be all the more powerful. (qtd. in Hutcheon 178)

According to Stephen Slemon, by using the strategies of the dominant culture, parody gives “new meaning to old forms” (31) and thus challenge its discursive processes from within (Last Post 20). A “parodic”
repetition of imperial "textuality" sets itself specifically in opposition to the interpellative power of colonialism . . . (Slemon, Last Post 4)

Often the official white versions of history are "constantly edited and interrupted by black voices questioning the truth" (Turcotte 11). In No Sugar, the special centenary edition of the newspaper Western Mail, the voice of the white society features a report of the celebration. It describes a tableau "Commemorat[ing] the pioneers" whose lives "Were a steadfast performance of duty in the face of difficulty and danger. With them was a reminder of the dangers they faced, in the shape of three lorries . . . carrying Aborigines" (No Sugar 1.1.15). While Sam, with "Koorawoorung" an expression of disbelief ridicules the "Nyoongahs corroboreein' to a wetjala brass band", (No Sugar 1.1.15) Jimmy points out the fact that the "[. . .] stupid bloody blackfellas" (No Sugar 1.1.15) were doing so "'cause them bastards took our country" (No Sugar 1.1.16). According to Turcotte the very fact that Joe reads the words in the newspaper "falteringly" "reinforces how alien the message and the white language are" (12).

No Sugar dramatized an Australia Day ceremony at the Moore River Settlement. The purpose of the gathering, as described by Sister Eileen is "to pledge our allegiance to the King, [. . .] to celebrate the birth of this wonderful young country [. . .] and to give thanks to God for what he had provided" (No Sugar 4.5.97). According to her, Mr. Neal, Matron Neal, Mr. Neville and herself "are but His humble servants, sent by Him
to serve your needs" (No Sugar 4.5.97). At this the whites clap and the Aborigines remain silent.

Neville, in his long speech, describes the birth of the nation “one hundred and forty-six years ago at Sydney Cove in the Eastern States”, contrasts the contemporary world “in the grip of depression” represented by the unemployed men he saw on the road to “this small corner of the Empire” [the Settlement] where everyone is “provided for with adequate food and shelter” (No Sugar 4.5.97) to which Jimmy mutters about “weevilly flour” (No Sugar 4.5.97). Neville goes on to remind them why they are there:

**NEVILLE. [. . .]** you are preparing yourselves here to take your place in Australian society, to live 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 (No Sugar 4.5.97).

To introduce the theme of assimilation Neville says:

**NEVILLE. [. . .]. Occasionally some of you might ponder why you are here –**

and Jimmy comments:

**JIMMY. [a little louder] Too bloody right (No Sugar 4.5.97).**
At the end of the speech all sing the hymn *There is a Happy Land*. While the whites sing the original version, the Aborigines substitute a parody of the words.

ALL. 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. (*No Sugar* 4.5.98).

As Dibble and MacIntyre observes, their deviant compliance enables subjectivity and solidarity, and destablilises the authority of the Chief Protector of Aborigines – A. O. Neville. On Neville's order to stop it they repeat the parody even louder.

NEVILLE. Never in my life have I witnessed such a disgraceful exhibition. [. . .] I can tell you that you will live to rue this day. There will be no privileges from now on.

JIMMY. [*calling out*] Rotten spuds and onions?

NEVILLE. Be quiet! And there will be no Christmas this year!

No Christmas!

JIMMY. What, a dried up orange and a puddin'?

NEVILLE. Will you be quiet? [. . .] You must listen to me.

JIMMY. [*approaching NEVILLE*] No, you listen to me Mr. A.O.
You come an’ eat supper with us, tonight, right? Bread and drippin’ and black tea. Are you game to try it? (*No Sugar* 4.5.98-99)

Jimmy questions him about voting for Jimmy Mitchell, of their removal from Northam under false allegations and continues to mock the hypocrisy of the whites until he collapses at the foot of the flagpole clutching his chest.

The play *In Our Town* begins with the Anzac Day ceremony in which Mr. Moss remembers the soldiers who had fallen in battle to free the nation from “the tyranny and oppression that became the lot of those invaded by those barbaric forces” (*In Our Town* 1.1.1). Assuring that democracy would never allow “the evil that became the lot of the Jewish race to happen ever again” (*In Our Town* 1.1.1), he affirms that “Australia as a young and virile nation has always stood firm against racism. Racism is barbarism in its infancy and is a hidden menace” (*In Our Town* 1.1.1). But the same Mr. Moss deprives David Millimurra of his chance to buy a house in town and to start a business, because he is Aboriginal.

**Christianity**

In an interview with Shoemaker, Davis acknowledges the fact that he is having “a gentle dig at Christianity. [. . .] Not too badly but I’m having a dig at the fact that they are part of Aboriginal existence; therefore, they have to be recognized and they are recognized” (45). He also adds that “They helped to destroy Aboriginal culture, they did not
permit talking in Aboriginal languages and that they separated the children their parents" (46).

Eleanor Bourke points out that European missionaries from various Christian denominations started to arrive in Australia in the 1820's, and that while they expressed goodwill and concern for Aboriginal people, they were more intrusive and disruptive than other Europeans, because they endeavoured to break down belief systems, destroy ceremonies and wreck the very fabric of Aboriginal society (6). Critics have pointed out that the Missions they established had been instrumental in undermining tribal and familial solidarity, in the appropriation of land for white settlers and in the eventual destruction of the Aboriginal race (Gilbert 67; Gilbert and Tompkins 43). However, citing Ron Brunton's claim Bourke E. observes that at a later stage, Christianity had helped place Aboriginal people in control over the direction of their own lives, had strengthened individual self esteem and revitalized communities (12). Davis, himself acknowledges that it was as a member of the Brookton Aboriginal Church that he learnt to address a group with confidence and discuss politics, religion, and Aboriginal affairs (Chesson 125) However, he feels that nothing the missions gave could ever compensate for the loss of family continuity.

On capturing Yagan he is sent to Carnac Island, "there to be instructed in Christianity and the British way of life" (Kullark 1.7.29). In No Sugar, Jimmy boasts that he had been the leadin' choir boy at New
Norcia Mission (1.3.27) and Milly proudly acknowledges that, "he used to sing 'Ave Maria' solo real good" (No Sugar 1.3.27). In In Our Town Uncle Herbie complains that they were not allowed to use their own language songs and dances but could only sing church songs.

UNCLE HERBIE. [. . .] Kia! Sing only church songs.

Jesus he liked the diddle chillun
Diddle chillun ob de world
Red and yeller black an white
They all precious in his sight
All de diddle chillun ob de world

(In Our Town 1.5.12).

Gran is proud of the fact that Milly is “proper church married” and has got “paper to prove it, and birth ‘tificate” (1.7.43). However Gran and Milly are not too enthusiastic about asking help from the vicar at St. John’s.

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 hit him on the leg ‘. . . musta wanted a bit a’ holy meat. (No Sugar 1.7.43).

Alec in Kullark complains about the “long -winded missionary” from the Nyoongah church “ravin’ on” (1.1.8) at the funeral service of the old man “about livin’ or dyin’” (Kullark 1.1.8), “playing on people’s feelings”,

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"trying to frighten people into goin' to 'is church" (1.1.8 Kullark). According to Alec ")e can't lose, it's like an each way bet: If )e can't get ya to 'is church that don't matter, 'e'll still get to 'eaven 'cause 'e tried. It's even better than an each way bet, cause "e bets on the whole bloody field". To Alec " 'E's just a bookie's clerk, and "im up there, "e's sort of in charge of like the TAB in the sky" (Kullark 1.1.9). In Barungin Meena and Shane complains about the American fundamentalist preacher who went droning on at the funeral of Eli. Meena comments: "] . . . ] He must 'a' been vaccinated with a fuckin' gramophone needle. I thought he was never gonna stop" (Barungin 1.2.8). According to Shane "that's all they live for: preachin' over Nyoongahs in their graves" (Barungin 1.2.9) and he goes on to imitate the preacher:

SHANE. [imitating the PREACHER]: Brothers and sisters! We are all sinners. Believe me, if this man suffered in this world he will find peace and justice -- on the big reserve on high. Eli was but a sinner. I repeat myself: a sinner! [resuming himself] Gawd, if uncle Eli could 'a' heard him.

MEENA. He probably would 'a bitten him for a cask and packet of Winnies. (Barungin 1.2.9).

In The Dreamers when Dolly asks Roy to say grace, Shane wonders:

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 eatr with me eyes closed.

ROY. We thank you, Lord, for what we have got.

WORRU. [to SHANE, pointing upwards] I forgot about that fella up there.

.................................................................

ROY. We thank you, Lord, for what we got for... your sake an' ours too. *(The Dreamers 1.6.39-40)*

Eli, after collecting ten dollars as patcheye gestures skywards: "The big boss! You up there! You listenin'? Hope you been givin' out some of them blessin's I been promisin' them wetjalas." *(2.2.59).* On singing the hymn ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’, Eli wonders:

ELI. ‘ow can you be a soldier an’ a Christian? Lot a rot;

soldiers used to chuck Christians to the lions. I'm a Christian, Freo Prison Christian. Sin't nobody gonna chuck me to the lions. The Wetjala's a lion, he eats. Aw, he eats, he eats everything land, trees, rivers, forests, even people, 'specially people. I 'member old grandfather Kooroop used to say: 'don't trust the Wetjala, he’s a real widartji. He'll kill
you for sport and eat your brains and kidney fat’. (The Dreamers 2.2.59).

In Moore River, Sister Eileen had given Uncle Herbie a “Bible book”, and Joe had been given one in Fremantle Jail. According to Uncle Herbie, “[..] 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! (In Our Town 2.5.44).

In The Dreamers, Robert explains that, the “belief in the Bible is based on faith, not fact.” (2.2.65)

ROBERT. Now you take the Bible, the story of Noah’s Ark. It would have been physically impossible for Noah to transport every species of animal on earth for forty days and forty nights.

[..]

ROBERT. [...] Noah would have had to have a stallff of thousands to fees all those animals and look after them. (The Dreamers 2.2.65).

Uncle Herbie also complains that “Mr. Crawford and his missus, they go to church every Sunday, then he come home and knock my snares down. Christians! (In Our Town 2.5.43).
In his unpublished play *Wahngin Country*, Old Mick narrates how his friend Ernie, after entering St. Mary's Cathedral during the service, had described the church as “a bloody casino”:

Well one bloke standin' up the front all dressed up with red clothes on, and these little boys with red and white clothes on. And the big watjella in the red clothes slings out dominos robiscum, and the watjellas sing out *et cum spirit toto*. 'Jesus Christ' says Mick 'what that mean?' “My father can play dominoes better than our father can and them watjellas are saying 'pigs arse he can', and it's a casino alright, cause there's these two blokes walkin' down the aisle takin' side bets. (7)
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