INTRODUCTION

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The process of interaction/confrontation between different cultures, resulting from British imperial rule, led to the development of a large number of varieties of English language and to literatures written in English outside the British Isles. These literatures have been variously defined and labelled:

[. . .] politically, [. . .] as Commonwealth or national literatures such as Australian, New Zealand or Canadian literature; ethnically and/or geographically as African, Caribbean or Pacific literature; linguistically as World Literature written in English; and historically as New Literatures in English or ‘post-colonial’ literatures.

(Reimenschneider 271-72)

“However,” as Reimenschneider observes, “the parameters of nation and language, of race, region or history have all proved inadequate for a distinctive description of the totality and the relatedness of discrete new literatures in English” (272). Aboriginal literature is a seminal area in Australian literature. Since it is produced outside the British Isles, Aboriginal literature written in English is also part of World Literature written in English. It is a part of the New Literatures written in English due to its comparatively recent development since the 1960s and also forms part of the Post-colonial Literatures written in English as it reflects
the political, linguistic and cultural experience of colonisation/ European imperial domination.

In Australia, as in countries like Canada, and New Zealand, "cultural imposition associated with colonialism" (Hutcheon 171) resulted in the annihilation or marginalisation of the indigenous culture and people. However, as Hutcheon points out in respect of "Native and Metis writers," the indigenous people all over the world, "are today demanding a voice (Cuthand; Armstrong; Campbell) and perhaps, given their articulations of the damage to Indian culture and people done by the colonizers [. . .] and the process of colonization, theirs should be considered the resisting, post-colonial voice [. . .]." According to her the best model is that of Helen Tiffin in whose opinion "the aboriginal writing should be read as standing in what Richard Terdiman calls a counter-discursive relation to the settler literature, just as that settler literature stands counter-discursively against the imperial culture" (Hutcheon 172). Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, while dealing with the "'dominated' and 'dominating'" model of post-colonial literatures, state that "Aboriginal writing provides an excellent example of a dominated literature, while that of White Australia has characteristics of a dominating one [. . .]. However, this is "dominated in its turn by a relationship with Britain and English literature" (The Empire Writes Back 32).
As Colin Johnson [Mudrooroo Narogin], the most prominent and internationally known Aboriginal critic/writer maintains in one of his articles “White Forms, Aboriginal Content”

Aborigines do not occupy a unique position in this world. They are just one of the many peoples that became immersed in the European flood which flowed out from the fifteenth century onwards. The Aboriginal response to this threatened drowning has been and is similar to that of many other peoples. (21)

But as a literature “of the indigenous minorities submerged in a surrounding majority and governed by them” Mudrooroo feels that Australian Aboriginal literature “must be compared to similar literatures” and not to the majority literature. He calls Australian Aboriginal Literature "a literature of the Fourth World" (28).

The term "Fourth World", as Noel Dyck explains, has been employed to refer to a range of different phenomena. He points out that, according to Graburn, it has been variously applied to victims of group oppression, economically indigent or "basket case" nations and to the imprisoned, the poor, the sick, the elderly and underaged in America, that McCall applies the term to “nations without states,” and that Worsley reports a distinctive use of the term by the Chinese (25). The notion of a Fourth World of minority indigenous peoples encompassed within modern nation-states was popularised by native leaders
(especially George Manuel, former president of the National Brotherhood of Canada), and have been receiving increased national and international attention in recent years. Dyck maintains:

aboriginal populations in [different] parts of the world are struggling variously to retain traditional lands, to cope with government administration of their affairs and to survive as culturally distinct peoples within nation-states. These peoples are, by and large, politically weak, economically marginal and culturally stigmatized members of the national societies that have overtaken them and their lands. Together, they comprise what has, in the past decade, come to be known as the 'Fourth World'. (1)

It includes the Indians and Inuits of North America, the Lapps (Saami) of Scandinavia, some Africans, the Ainu of Japan, Maori of New Zealand, Aborigines of Australia, tribal groups in India, some of the peoples of New Guinea, the Indian peoples of Central and South America, and indigenous minorities within the U.S.S.R. In Seton’s opinion, six thousand to nine thousand “internationally unrecognized nations” of the Fourth World represent “a third of the world’s population” and continue “to resist the encroachment of the 192 [...] recognized states.”

Dyck makes a distinction between ethnic minorities, Third World and Fourth world peoples. He says that “unlike other ethnic minorities,
Fourth World peoples are not immigrants but the original inhabitants of lands that today form the territories of nation states” and that “unlike the peoples of the Third World who can at least hope to take control of their countries one day through strength of numbers, the tiny internal colonies that make up the Fourth World are fated always to be minority populations in their own lands” (1).

These Aboriginal peoples, who have been “subjected to government policies, that from one country to another, range from genocide to forced assimilation, from segregation to cultural pluralism” (1) have developed various forms of indirect and symbolic opposition, since direct resistance to government policies and attitudes have proved fruitless. They include different types of “cultural conservatism, reinforced by passive resistance and strategies of indirect competition [. . . ] that asserted the dignity and value of an Indigenous community and culture” (10). A “deep sense of grievance and injustice” makes them remarkably persistent and committed to their community, identity and culture. And for their survival as aboriginal communities it is imperative that they “discover effective means of articulating their interests” (239). Australian Aborigines, Norwegian Saami and Canadian Indians formed the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) based on the recognition of a commonality of their experiences. There has also developed a World Indigenous Movement with connections all over the world (Dyck).
“Black Writing”, which according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, "proceeds from the idea of race as a major feature of economic and political discrimination [. . .], draws together writers in the African diaspora"; and the classification might be extended to include, Polynesian, Melanesian, or Australian Aboriginal writing (20). The conference on Black Literatures held at the University of Queensland in June 1986, placed Australian Aboriginal and South Pacific literatures along with literatures of the African Diaspora. While Professor Ron Baxter Miller, who noted "common structures" among various black experiences cautioned against considering it as a monolith, Professor Lemuel Johnson, a scholar in African literary studies opined that the term “Aboriginality” can be used as a "general term to discuss the experiences and literature of all black peoples of the world" (Nelson, Connections 2). In his introduction to Connections: Essays on Black Literatures, Emmanuel S. Nelson argues that a shared colonial heritage of “defeat, dispossession and denigration" and the “debilitating psychological and cultural consequences” link various black experiences around the world (3). As Black literatures articulate those experiences, he points out similarities in the themes dealt with – “searching for cultural wholeness, forging a healing and liberating sense of self, seeking strength in community, reconstructing the past, subverting white texts, recreating rituals and ceremonies, celebrating blackness” – and in the problems faced by black writers: “reconciling their artistic and political
responsibilities, containing their black realities in a Western linguistic medium, articulating their non-European sensibilities through largely European aesthetic forms, managing the complex demands and expectations of their audiences" (4). Roberta Sykes describes Black writers as "the public sounds of our community weeping" (Connections 112). The vibrant tradition of protest, the close connection between activism and creative writing, a rewriting of history and the preponderance of autobiographical narratives, are seen to be common to all black literatures. In spite of the variety of similarities Nelson cautions that vast historical, political, linguistic and cultural differences do exist, which shape their literary traditions (3).

Aboriginal literature as described by Mudrooroo "begins as a cry from the heart directed at the whiteman. [. . .] a cry for justice and for [. . .] understanding" (1) [. . .] devoted to an Aboriginal existential being in [. . .] a multicultural Australia" (Writing from the Fringe 2). He explains that it arises from the different communities -- Nangas (South Australia), Nyungars (South-Western Australia), Yamadjis (mid-Western Australia), Murris (Queensland), Kooris (New South Wales & Victoria), Yolngus (Arnhem Land), Anangu (Central Australia), Wonghi (eastern Western Australia) and other regional and local groups making up the totality of people placed under the white term "Aboriginal"/Indigenous (Mudrooroo, Indigenous Literature 5). As Hodge and Mishra points out, Aboriginal people have not been passive victims of White cultural practices but have
always had their discursive regimes and systems of control, which maintained their political and social identity. The traditional society with sacred knowledges carefully encoded and protected by those with the right to know, was well suited to maintaining “an invisible continuity between past and present, making sense of the new in terms of the old, holding a people together against all that the enemy could do while concealing from them that this was being done” (72).

In “White Forms, Aboriginal Content” Mudrooroo also maintains that Aboriginal culture has modified and changed in response to new experiences and knowledge.

Aboriginal culture (or cultures) alone is (are) indigenous and rooted in the soil. They, like every other cultures on the globe, are subject to change and are changing constantly. I want to emphasize that such a thing as a stone age culture (static and unchanging), is a myth [. . .]. All societies and cultures change and adapt, and this is fact not theory. (21)

In his opinion, Aboriginal writing is a white form in that it is mostly written in English (28). Aboriginal writers do not necessarily betray their Aboriginality by adapting to and taking over aspects of white cultural forms. They see continuities in what they do (Davis et al 2)

Hodge and Mishra, defines Aboriginal discourse as a range of forms “which is anchored to Aboriginality both in the past (through understood derivation from Aboriginal forms) and in the present (through
Aboriginal ownership and agency)” (75). They too point out that contemporary Aboriginal culture is not a self-contained set of forms, but a complex product of the Australian colonial process acting on earlier forms of life and culture. Produced against the background of overt racism and “Aboriginalism” it has survived only by “a massive subterranean continuity across periods” (71). As they go on to point out, Aboriginal literature and culture “incorporates texts and modes of thought from the extremes of a spectrum that runs from preliterate, pre-industrial social forms to contemporary electronic, post-industrial mass societies,” and together with the process of transformation form a single complex which is a major component of world literature and culture (72).

Adopting a term from horticulture, which refers to the cross-breeding of two species by grafting or cross-pollination to form a third, “hybrid” species, Post-Colonial theorists refer to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization, as “hybridity”. Hybridisation may be linguistic, cultural, political, racial etc.

Hybridity had formed part of the colonialist discourse of racism -- in negative accounts of the union of disparate races, implying “that unless actively and persistently cultivated, such hybrids would inevitably revert to their ‘primitive’ stock”. However, Mikhail Bakhtin used it to suggest the “descriptive and transfiguring power of multivocal language and situations, and by extension, of multivocal narratives.” His hybridity intentionally “sets different points of view against each other in a
conflictual structure, which retains ‘a certain elemental organic energy and openedness’" (Key Concepts).

According to Bhabha, the production of meaning in the relations of two systems require a “Third Space” -- a space in which, cultural meanings and identities always contain the traces of other meanings and identities. This in-between space is the space of hybridity. He also articulated the potential of hybridity to reverse “the structures of domination on the colonial situation” by transforming it into “an active moment of challenge and resistance against a dominant colonial power . . . depriving the imposed imperialist culture, not only of the authority that it has for so long imposed politically, often through violence, but even of its own claims to authenticity” (qtd. in Key Concepts). Thus the theories of the hybrid nature of post-colonial culture assert a different model for resistance, locating this in the subversive counter-discursive practices implicit in the colonial ambivalence itself and so undermining the very basis on which imperialist and colonialist discourse raises its claims of superiority. Bhabha even suggests that it may eventually “open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. Throughout this thesis I use the term hybrid as described by Bhabha.

The idea of hybridity also underlies expressions of syncreticity, cultural synergy and transculturation. Ethnographers use the term
transculturation to describe how subordinated or marginalized groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While syncreticism identifies "the fusion of two distinct traditions to produce a new and distinctive whole" (*Key Concepts* 229), Synergy, refers to the product of two (or more) forces, variously contributing to a new and complex cultural formation, that is reducible to neither" (299). It "emphasizes the positive and energetic aspects of the process of transculturation and the equal but different elements that the various historical periods and forces have contributed in forming the modern post-colonial condition (299).

Traditional Aboriginal culture was distinctively oral. Their narratives "contained a mix of history, mythology, legend, customary law and art [. . .] [which were] characteristic of oral literature in general (including its written forms in other societies -- Homer's *Iliad*, the Bible and the *Ramayana*" (qtd. in Hodge and Mishra 76).

Realism, though presumed to be unaboriginal, did exist in traditional culture, although it had a different place in the economy of forms. Traditional Aborigines possessed an extraordinarily precise knowledge of their territory and an ability to read signs in the landscape that were invisible to Whites. Aborigines decoded the abstract forms of Aboriginal art and myths with reference to highly detailed realist texts, which were mediated through both speech (kinds of commentary) and action (rituals and acts of demonstration). Moreover, Aboriginal realist
texts are always structured by an underlying abstract text which encodes Aboriginal meanings and the metameaning of Aboriginality itself; just as Aboriginal formalist texts always encode concrete realities of Aboriginal social life (Hodge and Mishra 77).

According to the Aboriginalist doctrine of the "Dreamtime" it was believed that Aborigines divided time into two layers, "secular time (in which present and past merge into one) and "dreamtime" (a period outside time, before time, describing events which have as much, and as little, reality in the present as ever in the past)" (101) and this made an interest in history, unaboriginal. But Aboriginal society has its own versions of history. While the white versions of history, transmitted through the education system failed to record the role of the Aborigines in the development of the nation, Aboriginal literature representing the oral tradition contained hundreds of local histories handed down through the families, which is "cumulatively damning of the inhumanity and injustice of Australian 'development' " (qtd. in Hodge and Mishra 102). Aboriginal writers have displayed an intense interest in "what really happened" and contest the dominant version of history through "different classes of document, different modes of interpretation, and different grand narratives" (Hodge and Mishra 102). Most important of all is Jack Davis with his series of plays, *Kullark/The Dreamers* (1982), *No Sugar* (1986), and *Barungin* (1989) addressing the full scope of contact history.

Many Aboriginal texts directly deal with the fundamental issues
facing Aboriginal people and by adapting traditional Aboriginal ways, give meaning and perspective, direction and hope to their people. Contemporary Aboriginal society had to deal with problems of dispossession, unemployment, imprisonment, poor health and infant mortality, exacerbated by the so-called 'culture of poverty', marked by alcoholism, suicide and social disintegration and is torn between alienation and a sense of belonging. Aboriginal cultural forms which have always had two crucial social functions – “to interpret, reflect, report, and comment on social life, and to actively construct forms of social existence, ensuring social cohesion and flexibility in responding to the major problems facing Aboriginal people” (73) -- have encoded in them specific meanings through which Aborigines make sense of what seems to outsiders to be the overwhelming meaninglessness of much of Aboriginal life and also the kinds of solutions that have emerged from within Aboriginal society (74). Since Aborigines still are the oppressed minority in need of social justice, “the texts of Aboriginal literature and culture have an important role to play in the process of constructing policies that are sensitive to the needs and values of Aborigines” (Hodge and Mishra 73).

Mudrooroo also claims that Aboriginal literature does not exist in an aesthetic vacuum but within the context of indigenous affairs and hence must be seen holistically within a cultural, historical and social context (Indigenous Literature 4). What Michael M. Thelwell, the
Jamaican novelist says of the African Novel holds good for Aboriginal writing in general, that:

[... it is, [...] predicated on the assumption that there is a future for which to struggle; that conditions however grim are not beyond the reach of the people's decency, will and intelligence and that the writing and reading of such novels are not only testament to that faith, but an integral part of that struggle.

An honest African novel seeks to contribute to a people's evolving perceptions of their historical and cultural identity and the shared sense of national purpose. To the extent it is successful it will in part create its audience. This is a challenge and an honour denied contemporary western writers [...].

Finally an 'honest' novel about Africa seeks to make a contribution to the evolving form and to the content and purposes of a vital and modern tradition of African literature. It does not seek to latch onto the tail end of a moribund and thoroughly discredited colonial tradition which serves only to exploit and mutilate those cultures for frivolous, if not sinister purposes. (qtd. in Johnson 28)

Aboriginal political activism and Aboriginal imaginative literature are closely connected (Watego, Connections 5). As H.C. Coombs observes
Aboriginal involvement in the campaign for a positive outcome to the 1967 Referendum and Aboriginal activism resulted in the emergence of an Aboriginal intelligentsia (*Kullark/The Dreamers* ix-x). At the launching of his book *Kullark/The Dreamers* Davis, who had been in the vanguard of the efforts of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in the 1960s, spoke of how, Aboriginal activists were planning to ventilate the grievances and aims of black Australians through literature and hoped that his work “is going to help in some regard in making the Aboriginal voice [heard] within the wider Australian society” (qtd. in Watego *Connections* 20). Jack Davis, like most well known Aboriginal writers is “detribalised, urban, literate, racially aware and politically informed” and was receptive to black American influence (44). The largely successful Afro-American struggle for civil rights provided the Aboriginal Australian with an exemplary model for personal and collective liberation (44) and it was their militant assertiveness that was admired the most. Emmanuel Nelson observes that the influence is primarily psychological and only marginally literary (Nelson, *Westerly* 53).

As a result of the political need to express their contemporary experience, artists who had imbibed European education and ideas, yet had retained their Aboriginal identity and regarded English as their first language produced works which are European in structure, but Aboriginal “in purpose, in content and in style” (Coombs, *Kullark/The*
Dreamers x) and created a growing awareness among non-Aboriginal Australians, of the inequities inflicted on the Aborigines and the need for justice. According to H.C. Coombs Aboriginal texts express “the essence of Aboriginal experience” (x) and are directed not only at Aborigines but also at the Europeans. “It is an invitation as well as a contribution to a debate, a discourse, a mutual search for understanding and respect: a search from which some sense of shared identity may one day come” (x).

Roberta Sykes maintains that she write because it helps her to stay sane (28). “Writing first to react against the definitions that people already have in their minds about what and who we are” (Writers in Action 35). According to Cliff Watego, they write not only for sanity’s sake, but “they also write just for survival. And part of survival is being able to articulate some of those inner feelings that we have and being able to share them with people” (Writers in Action 34).

In their introduction to Aboriginal Writing Today, Davis and Hodge claim that Aboriginal writers have “a sense of purpose, an urgent task on behalf of their community, [. . .] a wealth of material and themes, [. . .] [and] a tradition that goes back millennia before the English literary culture was born” (Davis and Hodge 2). The contemporary indigenous writer analyses the evils which bedevil Aboriginal society seeing it as the result of a historical process; at the same time he also depicts positive aspects like “the human warmth, the spontaneity and humour with which life and its problems are faced” (Indigenous Literature 4). The
tradition of Aboriginal culture perceives the artist “as a value creator and integrator” (39). Mudrooroo describes the Aboriginal writer as a “Janus-type symbol, with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodernity”. According to him, “the past is there only to explain the present and is of utmost importance in that it is the basis of all indigenality” (40). He believes that until Aboriginal people “come to realize that many of their problems are based on a past of oppression [...] the self-destructive and community-destructive acts will continue (41). Many indigenous writers see their works as contributing to the task of creating viable indigenous communities from the chaos and passivity that have resulted from oppression and paternalism (Indigenous Literature 42).

Since in order to be published the indigenous writer has to make his/her work amenable in style or content to the standards of the publishers, the mere fact of writing and of deciding on a style becomes a political decision (Indigenous Literature 41). McGuiness maintains that unless indigenous people control the content, the publishing and the ultimate presentation of the article, it is not indigenous; that it ceases to be indigenous when it is interfered/tampered with, by non-indigenous people who exist outside the spectrum of indigenous life and culture within Australia (Aboriginal Writing Today 44) because edited volumes, as pointed out by Mudrooroo reflects the tampering through an absence of political comment and a feeling of outrage or historical understanding (Indigenous Literature 47).
Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal) in her opening speech to the Second Indigenous Writers Conference held in Melbourne in November 1983 set down the "BLACK COMMANDMENTS" to be espoused by Aboriginal writers:

1. THOU SHALL GATHER THY ScATTERED PEOPLE TOGETHER.
2. THOU SHALL WORK FOR BLACK LIBERATION.
3. THOU SHALL RESIST ASSIMILATION WITH ALL THY MIGHT.
4. THOU SHALL NOT BECOME A BLACK LIBERAL IN A WHITE SOCIETY.
5. THOU SHALL NOT UPHOLD THE WHITE LIES IN A BLACK SOCIETY.
6. THOU SHALL TAKE BACK THE LAND STOLEN FROM THY FOREFATHERS.
7. THOU SHALL MEET WHITE VIOLENCE WITH BLACK VIOLENCE.
8. THOU SHALL REMOVE THYSELF FROM A SICK, WHITE SOCIETY.
9. THOU SHALL FIND PEACE AND HAPPINESS IN A STABLE, BLACK SOCIETY.
10. THOU SHALL THINK BLACK AND ACT BLACK.
11. THOU SHALL BE BLACK ALL THE REST OF THY DAYS. (qtd. in Mudrooroo 38)
And Jack Davis observes that unlike non-Aboriginal writers, “most Aboriginal writers were involved within the Black movement . . . . We all started off as political people” (qtd. in *Black words* 187). Mudrooroo in *Aboriginal Writing Today* (1985) compares Aboriginal literature to mainstream literature as follows:

> Perhaps the most that can be said for modern Australian literature, or rather current literature, is its utter complacency and the fact that it is becoming more and more irrelevant to the society with which it seeks to deal. Aboriginal literature is and can be more vital in that it is seeking to come to grips with and define a people, the roots of whose culture extend in an unbroken line far back into a past in which English is a recent intrusion (28).

In his book *Indigenous Literature* (1997) Mudrooroo points out a number of differences between Indigenous and mainstream literature. First, he shows that within Australian settler literature the many Indigenous communities and cultures are given a singular totalistic representation as the Other, the Aborigine, with the European settler being the Subject; while in all Aboriginal literature instead of the Subject-Other dichotomy there is simply Subject-Subject. Secondly, he claims that, as opposed to the generalised historical narrative of mainstream literature there are hundreds of localised histories in Aboriginal literature handed down by
families, that these histories are concerned about family relationships, survival and ritual and that they are texts of community empowerment. Thirdly, Mudrooroo points out that instead of the domination of the written discourse of settler literature, Indigenous literature is an oral discourse. It uses different devices such as absence of closure, narrative dominance, epic style, collective authorship and recitation, generic fluidity, repetition, non-verbal and semi-verbal markers and other devices, many of which, he claims, are often edited out when it enters the print culture. Moreover, Aboriginal literature is “inclined to the interpersonal and how things are or were whereas print culture texts [. . .] tend to be about how things ought to be [. . .]” (57).

Literary efforts by Aborigines is characterised by an emphasis on Aboriginality. J.J. Healy in his article “Colin Johnson / Mudrooroo Narogin” published in International Literature in English claims that “the whole debate on Aboriginality in the seventies emerged from the unilateral, quite theological imposition by white Australians on all Aborigines -- living, dead, tribal and urban -- of a single umbrella term, Aborigine, with a very distinctive bias of content” (32). The first Aborigines Protection Act was legislated in 1869 in Victoria and it defined only the "full bloods" as "real" Aborigines. The Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (Victoria) changed the earlier (1869) definition of "Aborigine" to:

full-bloods, half-castes over 34, female half-castes married to Aborigines, the infants of Aborigines and half-castes who
were licensed by the Board of Protection for Aborigines to reside on a station. (qtd. in E. Bourke 38)

The *Queensland Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* 1897 added the following note to the clause defining half-castes: "Offspring of a white woman and Aboriginal father not half-caste" (39) and the 1939 Queensland Act included "a child on a reserve with a mother who is an Aboriginal" (E. Bourke 39). The *South Australian Aborigines Amendment Act* 1939 changed the definition of "Aboriginal" to include all people of Aboriginal descent. It also introduced the "dog-tag" or the exemption certificate, which exempted "[. . . ] Aborigines, who, by reason of their character, standard of intelligence, and development are considered to be capable of living in the general community without supervision" (qtd. in E. Bourke 38). But many did not want to lose their identity as an Aboriginal person. Thus, for almost a century, the State Aborigines Acts imposed a biological criteria based on percentages of Aboriginal blood to define Aborigines and there has been no less than sixty seven separate definitions of what constituted an Aboriginal person. These Acts underpinned official and social constructions of Aboriginality.

During the postwar period large numbers of Aboriginal people drifted to urban centres and urban Aboriginal identity came to mean "belonging to an Aboriginal community, identifying as Aboriginal and seeking out new values to blend with a common heritage and a proud tradition" (E. Bourke 40). Though acknowledging loss this meant a
celebration of survival as well. In 1979, Neville Bonner in his maiden speech in the Senate commented:

All persons who desire to be classified as indigenous, regardless of hue of skin and who have flowing in their veins any portion, however small, of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island blood are indigenous people. It does not necessarily follow that the degree of one's emotional scars matches the darkness of personal pigmentation or that the lightness on one's skin necessarily indicates a lessening of knowledge of, and belief in, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island culture and tradition. (qtd. in E. Bourke 46)

The National Report of the Royal Commission for Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported that Aboriginal people resented non-Aboriginal attempts to define and categorise them. European notions of Aboriginal identity were based mainly on race while Aboriginal people based it on their own cultural heritage, which is inseparable from the land, and their sense of belonging to a specific extended family group -- the sense of "my people". Mudrooroo believed that "[. . .] a search for Aboriginal identity and any conclusions reached must come from us, ourselves . . . We must determine our own identity within the parameters established by us" (qtd. in E. Bourke 42). This is true in the case of all aboriginal peoples. David Suzuki, writing generally about indigenous nations, considered "the sense of self-identification" as "the single most crucial element of
any working definition of indigenous Aboriginal or first peoples" (qtd. in E. Bourke 44). Since the 1930s Aboriginal organisations were formed in response to the various government policies but they were also expressions of Aboriginal identity. They brought to the fore a distinctive Aboriginal cultural heritage and an Aboriginal presence.

Jack Davis, the West Australian born poet and dramatist, was an active member and later the president of the Aboriginal Advancement Council. He was also the state secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. His poems and plays were also expressions of political protest and social comment -- a part of the struggle for a better future. Mudrooroo has rightly pointed out that, it is with the work of people like Jack Davis, who traced the evolving Aboriginal identity, that "there began a movement back, the counterpoint in literature to that of the homelands movement" which he describes as "a homecoming and a re-entry. A return from exile and alienation into Aboriginality" (Aboriginal Writing 29).

In the Aboriginal community, the world of theatre and the world of political activism are closely linked together. Jack Davis was a pioneer in the Black Australian dramatic revolution, which has been the most important development in post war Australian drama. He has played a crucial role as a successful exemplar and dramatist. In the 1980s nearly all the Aboriginal plays came from one Australian state and it is
remarkable that Jack Davis and his Swan River (later, Black Swan) Theatre company have been involved with so many of them. The plays of Jack Davis have been critically acclaimed and nationally recognised.

Raymond Williams, in his book *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*, introduces the critical term “structure of feeling” to describe the elements in a work for which no external counterparts remain, when one has measured the work against the separable parts. “It is accessible to others -- not by formal argument or by professional skills, on their own, but by direct experience -- a form and a meaning, a feeling and a rhythm -- in the work of art, the play, as a whole” (10). He explains that the structure of feeling is difficult to distinguish while it is still being lived because it has not passed into distinguishable formations and beliefs and institutions and is known primarily as a deep personal feeling to a particular writer (10).

When such a man speaks, in his work, often against what is felt to be the grain of the time, [. . .] established formations will criticize or reject him, but to an increasing number of people he will seem to be speaking for them, for their own deepest sense of life, just because he was speaking for himself. A new structure of feeling is then becoming articulate. (11)

Williams points out that this new way of seeing, leads to the making of
new conventions, new forms. As he suggests the discovery of actual contemporary structures of feeling is the most important kind of attention to the art and society of one's own time (11) and hence my interest in the work of Jack Davis. His art expresses and embodies the effect of a whole lived experience. They are structurally and ideologically unique and celebrate the collective resilience of Aboriginality.

According to Jack Davis, Aboriginality is all about growing up black in Australia. It includes the present as well as the remote past of some 40,000 years of black people. Their history includes the mind-boggling rock art recording the existence of their ancestors, and daily happenings recorded in song and dance around the evening camp fire. It still survives in the Moore River Native Settlement down to the corroboree grounds.

So it is knowing my culture, its vastness, its uniqueness, which makes me proud to be an Aboriginal person. Since the coming of the Europeans, some bad things which are so well known that I don’t need to go to the trouble of mentioning them here, have happened to my people. But there are also good things in our lives: the extended family way of looking at life, which binds Aboriginal people together; and the acknowledging of one another even if we are strangers. Amidst the sharing of our joys and sorrows our blackness unites us as one people, one together in our Aboriginality (Encyclopaedia 18).
Therefore, Aboriginality is the quality of being Aboriginal and all it encompasses.

Mudrooroo prefers the term “Indigenality” or “maban reality” which he says, “might be characterised by a firm grounding in the reality of the earth or country, together with an acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality” (97). He claims that it is “akin to magic realism” (46), that it may be “found in the complex system of mythologies” (97) and that it is “detailed in the oral and dramatic narratives which explain traditional Indigenous reality” (99). Mudrooroo makes a distinction between maban reality and Dreaming. While Dreaming is seen as “an actual state or reality”, maban reality is “concerned more with the narrative, the way it [the Dreaming] is encased in language” (101). As “it seeks to establish an Indigenous reality which is counter to the dominant natural reality of the invaders” (100) he considers it political.

Another characteristic of Aboriginal writing is its concern with history. Australian history had been written "by the victor". By taking the act of invasion of 1788 as the founding event and by suppressing the existence of the Aborigines, the foundation myth pivoted around the sufferings and achievements of the pioneers and early settlers. At the interface between the old and the new the power and knowledge of the Aborigines were held in respect since there was survival value in
accurate knowledge and representation. But later, parallel to the repressive government policies, the Aborigines were eliminated as acceptable speakers on any topic and they appeared only on the margins of works in the mainstream of White literature. “Aboriginalism” based on the principle that since the other cannot represent themselves, ‘they must therefore be represented by others’ flourished, silencing the Aborigines and negating their right to speak on their own behalf (28). Until the referendum in 1967, Aborigines were not classified, as citizens of Australia and “Australian Literature” did not include Aboriginal texts. The genocidal phase, characterized by forced dispossession of Aborigines, brutal crushing of Aboriginal resistance and containment through institutionalisation, was followed by the period of Aboriginal resurgence, which led to an Aboriginal cultural renaissance (Hodge and Mishra 26-31).

Davis and Hodge in their Introduction to Aboriginal Writing Today says that "Aboriginal people have been excluded from the pages of white history and denied access to the records of their own people" (5). It is upto the writers “to document and put in order. Who shall tell the story of Noonkanbah, of the Brisbane Protest of 1982, of the various Aboriginal struggles and people who are in the forefront of these struggles but our writers?,” (28) asks Mudrooroo. The large body of Aboriginal literature that has emerged has directly challenged the old versions of Australian history and in the process non-Aboriginal constructions of Aboriginality.
Indigenous history may be divided into the following periods.

1 **Pre-invasion**: From the Beginning (The Dreaming) to 1788.

Aboriginal oral records state that they have been in Australia since the beginning, while anthropologists believe them to have walked across the land bridge during the last Ice Age. As the first immigrants they are the original possessors of Australia. Archaeologists have constructed a past of 40,000 years of Aboriginal occupation of Australia. They had been visited by people from Malaya, Indonesia, Holland and France before the British. Estimates of the number of Aboriginal people inhabiting the continent when the British arrived vary. In 1928 Radcliffe-Brown developed the lower estimation of 300,000, while in 1983 Prof. Noel Butlin, geographer and demographer, estimated the population at about a million. It had also been estimated that some 250 languages with up to 600 dialect groups were viable at that time. Hundreds of identifiable nations clearly defined by language, geography, beliefs and descent were also there. A system of education with a strong spiritual base passed on the culture and knowledge of these intricately organised Aboriginal societies, through the ancient oral tradition (E. Bourke 35). The explorer Edward John Eyre wrote in 1845:

The Continent of Australia is so vast and the dialects, customs, and ceremonies of its inhabitants so varied in detail, though so similar in general outline and character, that it will require the lapse of years, and the labours of
many individuals, to detect and exhibit the links which form the chain of connection in the habits and history of tribes so remotely separated; and it will be long before anyone can attempt to give to the world a complete and well-drawn outline of the whole. (qtd. in E. Bourke 36)

2 The Time of the Invasion(s): (1788-1901)

In spite of Aboriginal resistance the first settlement in Australia was established in the name of the British Crown in 1788 with the concept of "terra nullius" -- practically unoccupied wasteland. Though early documents prove that it all began with the intention of dealing fairly with the original inhabitants of the land it ended up in their dispossession and destruction. The association of the Aboriginal people with the land was disrupted. Traditional hunting grounds and sacred sites were taken over for sheep and cattle grazing and waterholes were contaminated. Kevin Gilbert in his introduction to Inside Black Australia: An Anthology of Aboriginal Poetry (1988) describes how 'dispersion' of Aborigines before claiming the land was legalised by calling upon the rightful owners, the Blacks, three times in the name of the Crown of England, in a language unintelligible to them, and if the Blacks did not immediately surrender, firing upon them; thus ensuring "the historical fiction of 'peaceful settlement'" (xx). Aboriginal attempts to reclaim their land or to interfere with the various practices of European industry, like killing and eating settler's sheep and cattle for survival, met with violent
retaliation. Whites shot Blacks on sight, rode them down with their horses, poisoned their waterholes and massacred them. The Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia documents how clans around Botany Bay were pursued by formidable military detachments, a hunting party was attacked by canon fire on the east bank of the Derwent River in 1804 and a large party camped at Pinjarra was decimated in 1834 by a detachment of soldiers and settlers sent out by Governor Stirling from Perth. According to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crime of Genocide, genocide means:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

a. Killing members of the group;
b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or part;
d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. (qtd. in Armitage 6)

Though the term "Genocide" came into existence only after the holocaust
and other Nazi extermination policies, evidently the practice of genocide did exist earlier and white Australia can be found guilty on all points. Kevin Gilbert details some of the atrocities committed by the invaders. He describes how a large mob of Wiradjuri tribe were herded to the swamps, "dispersed" with guns and clubs, their heads were cut off and boiled down in buckets and the skulls were sent to England as curios. He also speaks of Aboriginal skeletons and skulls lying disrespectfully in heaps in state museums around Australia, of tobacco pouches made from dried scrotums of Blacks, of bodies skinned for their cicatrice patterns and pickled. According to him it is directly representative of some of the favourite pastimes of the Whites -- burying live Aboriginal children up to their necks in sand and kicking off the heads to the farthest distance from the body, cutting the throats of Black men and women and making them run till they collapsed and then throwing them, still alive, upon the fire, live children thrown directly into the flames (Inside Black Australia xx-xxii).

3 Protectionism (1860-1930) Paternalism.

The idea of "protection" of Aboriginal people was spelt out for the first time in the recommendations made by the 1837 House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines. It included sending in missionaries to convert the Aborigines, the appointment of official protectors to defend them from encroachments by settlers, schooling for their young, and special law for their supervision until such time as they learned to live
within the general community (*Encyclopedia of Aboriginal Australia* 903). But the period between the 1860s and the First World War saw the utter conquering and control of Indigenous peoples with the framing of restrictive legislation. The protection Acts based on the racial superiority of the British effectively excluded designated Aboriginal people from all aspects of modern Australian life. Aborigines were removed from their own country and families and were herded on to Reserves, and missions organised by various Christian groups. Boards for the Protection of Aborigines had absolute control over the daily lives of Aboriginal people and marriage and movements were subject to permission. These Acts justified discrimination against Aborigines, caused division among them and also facilitated take over of land by the British. They were considered to be a dying race and were excluded from the Commonwealth electoral rolls and from the Census of Australia until the 1960s.

4 **Assimilation**: (1930-97).

Concern about the growing numbers of "Half-castes" led various state governments to adopt policies of assimilation in the 1930s, and it was anthropologist E.P. Elkin who proposed the term to denote absorption of "mixed-bloods" into the general community. One result of this policy was to take Aboriginal children from their families, a practice which continued in all parts of Australia until the 1960s. The cultural assumptions of the assimilationist position is revealed in the attitude of A.O Neville the Commissioner of Native Affairs for Western Australia from
1915-1940:

Here in Western Australia in those early years there was little deliberate cruelty. . . . Indeed much effort was vainly expended in preserving the race in the hope of bringing it to a useful sort of life, that is to our way of life. . . . There was no deliberate intention of hurting the blacks, the idea was rather to teach them to behave and become useful. (qtd. in Elder 205)


Government policies imposed without consulting the indigenous population emphasised the powerlessness of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the failure to recognise the legitimacy of their ideas, views and aspirations. The Aboriginal Movement applied moral and political pressure on the Australian state to right the wrongs of the past. This led to the policy of self-determination, which acknowledged "the right of indigenous Australians to make decisions over their political status as well as their economic, social and cultural development" (Roberts 213). The 1967 referendum, which granted the Aborigines the right to vote and included them in the census, marked the beginning of a new era. Aboriginal issues became a significant part of the national agenda with increased funding for Aboriginal affairs, passing of anti-racial discrimination legislation, establishing the principle of Aboriginal consultation with the constitution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Commission. Issues of Aboriginal sovereignty and autonomy also were brought to the fore.

6 **Reconciliation:** Sharing cultures. (1988-)

The High court decision on the Mabo case acknowledged that Australia was not unoccupied in 1788. In their joint judgment, Justice Deane and Gaudron stated:

> The acts and events by which that dispossession in legal theory was carried into practical effect constitute the darkest aspect of the history of this nation. The nation as a whole must remain diminished unless and until there is an acknowledgement of, and retreat from, those past injustices. . . . The lands of this continent were not *terra nullius* or 'practically unoccupied in 1788.' (qtd. in C. Bourke and Helen cox 58)

While the decision set the record straight for many, it doesn't change what happened. Moreover, the courts refused to entertain any concept of Aboriginal sovereignty as it was against their power to question the legitimacy of Australian sovereignty. However, Mabo enables the indigenous Australians to be given justice through the Australian legal system, thus commencing the true process of reconciliation. Paul Keating's 1992 acknowledgement of past injustices to Aborigines is the most detailed statement of its kind from any Australian Prime Minister, which gives the hope of the two groups (indigenous and other
Australians) living together in harmony:

... 'It was,' he said ‘we [the non-Aborigines] who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases, the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us'. (qtd. in Carmody 17)

The styles of the writers and the content of their work are influenced by the period of history in which they are situated. Adam Shoemaker in Black Words, White page, identifies four Black Australian literary approaches to the past: “the usage of singular and venerable black narrative structures, the attempt to explore the lives of heroic Aboriginal figures of the past, and the revisionist view of Australian history which conveys, for the first time, an Aboriginal interpretation of past events” (130). Jack Davis speaking about the predominance of the theme of past injustice in Aboriginal writing says:

I really think the majority of Australians are just buffoons. They tell us to forgive and forget what’s happened in the past. Then, every Anzac day, they glorify their own history. How are we supposed to forget what’s happened to us in

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Australia when White Australians keep on remembering their own violent history elsewhere? Besides, we have a lot more to remember right here. (qtd. in *Black words* 128)

According to Kevin Gilbert:

An onus is on Aboriginal writers to present the evidence of our true situation. In attempting to present the evidence we are furiously attacked by white Australians and white converts, whatever their colour, as 'Going back two hundred years . . . the past is finished . . . !' Yet, cut off a man's leg, kill his mother, rape his land, psychologically attack and keep him in a powerless position each day -- does it not live on in the mind of the victim? Does it not continue to scar and affect the thinking? Deny it, but it still exists. (*Aboriginal Writing Today* 41)

Aboriginal political activism and increased access to the sources of power in Australian society has provided support and impetus to the rewriting of Australian history from an Aboriginal perspective (Hemming 19). The violence of first contact, the dispossession and resistance that followed, the inevitable cultural adaptation and change and the continuing brutality, indifference and institutionalised racism are all subjects of study. Through his works, Jack Davis has played a significant role in the re-writing of history and of Aboriginal Identity.

The theme of the pre-contact past emphasizes "the longevity and
continuity of Aboriginal residence in Australia” (Black Words 129), refutes the belief that they do not have a history, and tries to re-establish traditions, territory and forms of cultural expression. The historiography of Aboriginal resistance challenges the myth of Aboriginal passivity -- the suggestion that there was little or no resistance to imperial conquest. The deployment of indigenous forms to enact a historical moment reinforces the validity of local histories and distinguishes them from official, textual documents (Gilbert & Tompkins 110-12).


Born in Perth in March in 1917 Jack Davis grew up in Yarloop a small timber town in Western Australia, as the fourth child of a family of
eleven children. His parents, William Davis and Alice McPhee, were members of the Stolen Generation. Being part-Aboriginal children they were removed from their Aboriginal mothers under the policy of assimilation and were placed in white households (O'Connor). His mother was the daughter of a Scotsman named Rory McPhee and an Aborigine and his father the son of a Sikh called Bung Singh.

Davis has worked as a mill hand, an engine driver, a lay preacher, a boundary rider, a boxer, a horse breaker and a stockman. He has also been a Director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth, the first chairman of the Aboriginal Lands Trust in Western Australia, a member of the Aboriginal Studies Institute in Canberra, as well as a member of the Aboriginal Arts Board (Turcotte 181). For services to his people Jack Davis received the British Empire Medal in 1977. In 1981 he was named Aboriginal Writer of the Year and became a member of the Aboriginal Arts Board in 1983. In 1985 he became a member of the Order of Australia, received the Sidney Myers Performing Arts Award, an Hon. D.Litt. from Murdoch University and was elected Citizen of the year in Western Australia.

In 1932 at the age of 14 he was sent to the Moore River Aboriginal Settlement supposedly to learn farming skills. The Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia, A. O. Neville had persuaded Davis senior to send him there with the promise of a job at the end. It was here that he met other Aborigines and witnessed firsthand the stark realities
of Aboriginal existence in white Australia. The farm studies proved non-existent and after nine months he returned home. But the stories told by old Blacks around the fires at night deepened his knowledge of his Aboriginal heritage (O'connor). His experiences there made an indelible impression on his mind, and form the basis of two of his most important plays, *The Dreamers* and *No Sugar*.

After his father's death Davis went North to Carnarvon and into the business of Kangaroo shooting. Here he had his first encounter with the police. For publicly defying the curfew that forbade Aborigines to appear on the streets after 6 P.M he was first sentenced to one month and then to four months in jail. Luckily for him a sympathetic sergeant had allowed him to serve most of his jail term on a private farm. In Western Australia, which had one of the highest incarceration rates in Australia it was quite easy for an imprisoned Aborigine to die "in suspicious circumstances." This incident (Farmer, O'Connor, Hill) convinced him that direct confrontation with the police was pointless. Instead, he became interested in writing as a means of expression (Davis, *First born* vi) and believed that it is "the one thing which will bring change [. . .] " (qtd. in Turcotte 182) and through his poetry and plays strive to explain their situation to a world wide audience. However, one of his poems "John Pat" and a play *Barungin* is specifically based on the issue of deaths in custody.
During the Second World War he joined the Brookton Aboriginal church, which later led him to the activities of the Aboriginal Advancement Council (AAC), and activism. Christianity is a component of his spiritual beliefs and he believes that Aboriginal Christianity gives his people "a framework of hope and expectation" (Chesson 129). At the same time a critique of Christianity from an Aboriginal point of view is a prominent aspect of his works.

His instinct to write had developed with his parents who were great storytellers. Lewis quotes Davis's observation that at the end of the day, his mother used to describe funny incidents about her children and mime them and that his father used to love singing comic songs. And Jack himself was a highly imaginative child that his mother, who might be the inspiration behind the strongly drawn female characters of his plays, was convinced he would grow up to be a writer (Davis, First-born).

English is Davis's first language "My Aboriginal language is my second language" (Turcotte 191). To Berwyn Lewis he had asserted that "Black writers have to make their bread and butter and write in English" and that they wanted people to know about them. As editor of the magazine Identity he had become convinced that "a thorough knowledge of the Aboriginal heritage together with a firm grasp of English grammar was an unusual accomplishment" (qtd. in O'Connor) and it is a mastery
of white culture and language combined with patience, wisdom and goodwill that has made him a force in the Aboriginal Movement.

Christianity has been an important site of resistance and Aboriginal responses to it provide examples of cultural change and adaptation, which has been a part of Aboriginal life since the invasion. While some rejected it, many adapted it to fit their particular situations (Hemming 30). *Paperbark: A Collection of Black Australian Writings* (1990) gives an excerpt from the opening prayer by the Reverend Charles Harris, at the protest rally organised at the Bicentenary celebrations:

God of the Dreamtime, you who are with us for these 40,000 years or more before 1788, you who gave us our ceremonies, and the law, and our stories, and our sacred sites. You who gave us our Dreaming, you who gave us this land. You were with us then; you are with us now. [... ] You were with us through the last 200 years of onslaught, of terrorism, and of apartheid that has been administered to our people in this land. And you have helped us and enabled us to survive through the odds that were against us. We pray that you will avenge your people, the Aboriginal and the Islander people. [... ] Look and see the chains of oppression that keep your people, [... ] in bondage. [... ] Show the people that you are the God of justice and Lord be praised the God of the Dreamtime. [... ] (Davis et al. 332)
He has incorporated Christian imagery into an Aboriginal framework, without seriously challenging the concepts associated with The Dreaming. This in an excellent example of Aboriginal resistance to, domination by the ideologies brought by the European invaders.

According to Shoemaker, “the power and impressiveness of Aboriginal writing stems from the authors’ intimate knowledge of their subjects, their strong belief in what they are accomplishing through literature, and their socio-political involvement and awareness. Above all, [...] from their exploration of what it is to be an Aboriginal Australian” (Black words 121-22). It is “recognizably distinct from the orature of tribal Aboriginals collected and translated by anthropologists” (Tiffin 156), but draws on a wealth of traditional oral literature and incorporates a range of forms. It has been noticed that Aboriginal people -- Kooris, Murris, Nungas, Nyungars, Yappa, Yolgnu, Anangu -- all share common backgrounds in storytelling and that there is a widespread and unique tradition of ironic humour about the situations in which they find themselves.

With the dominance of English, loss of Aboriginal languages, flood of mass media and commercialism; Aboriginal culture, identity and spirituality are under increasing pressure but it is through participation in modern Australian life that it seeks to develop. Aboriginal literature reflects the change in Aboriginal experiences and identity down the ages.
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