

Chapter - II

The Glorious Aboriginal Past

*(Kullark)*

For any individual it is the history of his roots that gives a sense of belonging from an inspiring Past and anchorage in the Present and, like a beacon from a lighthouse, gives him a sense of direction into the future. So is it to a nation or a tribe. It is precisely this that Jack Davis achieved by weaving Aboriginal past and present together in the Australian context to form a whole in his play Kullark. By presenting their ‘true’ past he brings meaning and purpose to the Aboriginal existence in the present.

The story of the play *Kullark* shifts back and forth into history and the present. It explores the pre-colonial Australia through Yagan, a famous Aboriginal hero, and his family on one hand; and on the other hand, through the Yorlah family with their memories of the past Aboriginal life giving them solace and strength to struggle in the present. The beginning of the play *Kullark* in itself throws light on several aspects of Aboriginal life and culture before and after Australia was colonized. Rosie and Alec are depicted struggling to balance their Aboriginality despite all the odds and at the same time trying to cope with their present reality as pawns of colonization. All aspects of Aboriginal existence right from the first contact to issues like gender inequality among the Aborigines, their miserable economic, political and social condition, their yearning to return to Aboriginal culture for solace in the present are presented wonderfully. “The action of the play moves from the kitchen of the Yorlah
household in a country town in the South West of Western Australia, 1979, to a
farm in the Pinjarra area between 1829 and 1834, the Moore River Native
Settlement in the 1930s, the Yorlah’s chaff-bag humpy in 1945 and other
associated areas.”(6)

Jack Davis poignantly presents all the intricate aspects of the Aboriginal
life and culture right from the initial contact to the present day and all that lies in
between. Yagan is presented in ritualistic paint, dancing and chanting.

Yagan is present in his natural surroundings. Adorned with ceremonial
paint, Yagan chants praises of the Creative Spirit of the Aborigines, The
Rainbow Serpent. It is the Creative Spirit which has structured the Australian
landscape as it passed through it at the Dreamtime. It has formed the plains,
mountains, rivers, seas, emu, swan, kangaroo and all the flora and fauna. It is
also associated with water, the all life giving. The sacred Rainbow Serpent has
given them laws and bounteous life. The way Aboriginal life is directly linked
with their traditional and sacred land is brought forth by the playwright. To do
this he borrows from their oral tradition. Yagan is presented singing the praise of
Australia with its abundance but at the same time Jack Davis is quick to bring
his audience back to the present with the culminating words of Yagan. He sighs:

The jungara came across the deep blue Waters
To rend my soul, to decimate and kill. (12)

The meaning of the word ‘jungara’ in Nyoongah or Bibbulumun, the Aboriginal
language used in the play, means ‘returned dead’. The white colour of the
English men who landed on Australian shores looked unbelievably unnatural to
the eyes of the brown/black Aborigines. They associate pallor with death, as the early Europeans gave the Africans the impression of lepers in their initial encounters. It becomes symbolic of how the Aborigines could not in the least suspect that their dead ancestors would return and stay back with them forever. But the impossible seemed to become possible and those whom they named ‘dead returning’ proved to be deadly to them in real life in every respect.

The Aborigines’ connection with their land is such that they could never imagine a living person leaving one’s home land and go and settle in an alien land. Such is their affiliation with their traditional land. In the Glossary notes (142) Jack Davis explains the meaning of ‘jungara’ and makes its significance explicit.

The Tjuart believed that when they died their kanya (freshly departed soul) rested in the moord-gah tree(nuylsia floribunda or Christmas tree) until it de-parted for Watjerup (Rottnest Island) when the tree’s vivid orange blossoms die. There it shed its dark skin and ap-peared Whites. When Captain Stirling and his party landed, the Aborigines assumed them to be the jungara (‘the re-turned’). They assumed the visit of the jungara was tem-porary; some even recognized departed relatives. They were surprised, however, that the visitors had forgotten their names, their language and their law (142)

The arrival of Captain Stirling and Charles Fraser, a botanist, on the Australian landscape and their first encounter with the Aborigines changes the future of
Australia and its ‘people’ to a state of affairs undreamt of. The scene throws light on the perception of both the settlers and the Aborigines when they bump into each other. Yagan and Mitjitjiroo assume the new comers to be painted Whites and so take them to be the souls of their dead ancestors returning. The spiritual strength of Aboriginal women is brought out by Jack Davis. Moyarahn is reluctant towards the newcomers. She cautions Yagan and Mitjitjiroo not to fall prey to the newcomers’ words and deeds when Fraser and Stirling try to lure them with sundries. The natural difference between the genders is brought out by Jack Davis very finely. Men are usually more practical and adventurous when compared to women who are cautious and foresighted. Women being more sensitive to surroundings and things around them as the caretakers of the family are capable of perceiving and sensing things that men cannot grasp and comprehend. Moyarah, receptive to her intuition, cautions the men, but Yagan and Mitjitjiroo do not pay heed to her warning. Her intuition is so strong that she is mad when Yagan and Mitjitjiroo fall for the clothes and bread that the settlers offer. She tells them that they are devils. She confesses that they ‘smell of death’ and pleads with them to leave the place. When Stirling offers his hand to befriend them, Mitjitroo ‘Instead of shaking STIRLING’s hand rubs it vigorously, to see if the colour will come off. Astounded, he runs back to the other.’ (Davis 14) She is so sure that the newcomers are evil that she even ‘casts a death wish’ on Stirling and Fraser. But Yagan and Mitjitjiroo do not pay heed to her warning. They fall for the pieces of clothing that the Whites men had offered them. Sterling announces: “…care must be taken in all dealings with them, for
they are vengeful and capricious and do not hesitate to resort to offensive weapons” (15)

It is natural for any living being to fear the unknown. The scene mirrors this human tendency. In fearing the unknown the attitude of Yagan and Mitjitjiroo is that of curiosity and innocence whereas that of Captain Sterling is that of pride and selfishness. One fundamental question that arises is that of familiarity with the subject one is dealing with for one to comment on it. How is it possible for Captain Sterling to assume so without actually knowing these original dwellers and their culture? For one to draw conclusions on a particular thing or aspect one needs to have sound knowledge of it. To assume is one thing and to conclude is another. One can assume something with one’s prior knowledge and experience but one should not conclude without proper investigation and verification of facts of the subject. Thus arises the question of the Whites’s conception of the ‘other’ which is based on their preconceived notion of Aborigines. The writer appears to suggest that the White settler failed to see and acknowledge the fact that there were multiple lived realities and one such was also that of the subaltern which was as authentic as their own. One might not understand all that the other is doing but one must always be empathetic in understanding the other. Only with this empathy blooms tolerance, harmony and peace. Empathy also leads to humility; to acknowledge the other as equal and respect the other’s culture. This is another common thread that runs through all Aboriginal cultures. The White settlers who believed in the Divine Right Theory and Social Darwinism truly believed that their culture is superior
and started not only occupying the land but also set forth establishing their own social order through cultural genocide. Captain Sterling’s character explains the way this was carried out in Australia. He declares: “By the authority vested in me by His Majesty the King, I do hereby authorize William Patrick O’Flaherty to take up a selection of one thousand acres on the Upper Swan River, with the provision that the river frontage does not exceed one quarter mile.” (18)

Captain Stirling announces: "I do here by give notice that any person or persons acting in a fraudulent, cruel or felonious manner towards the Aboriginal race, will be prosecuted and tried for the offence as if the same had been committed against any other of His Majesty’s subjects". (19)

But it is not very long before he says:

…whereas the safety of the Colony from invasion and from the attack of hostile Native tribes may require the establishment of a militia force, which on emergency may be depended upon to assist His Majesty’s regular troops in the defence of the lives and property of the inhabitants of the territory, all male persons whatsoever between the ages of fifteen and fifty are hereby required to enroll themselves in the militia of the country. (21)

An offence against the Aborigines, which Captain Stirling states, which would be considered as an offence committed to ‘His Majesty’ quickly, not before long, takes the form of ‘defence’ to safeguard the White settlers in assisting ‘His Majesty’s’ troops from ‘the attack of hostile Native tribes’. One careful observation of this attitude of the Whites reveals the fact that the Whites did not
have any concrete rationale, fact or incident to arrive at such conclusions. It is a veiled strategy that has guided the Whites man’s opinions. It is the same strategy that has made the settler talk of defence in the absence of actual offence. Thus the overbearing attitude of the Whites man distorted his understanding of the Aborigines and the culture that they have come in contact with in the new found land. This also resulted in the Whites man committing many atrocities against the Aborigines and their culture which, to this day, is irreversible and a permanent damage to the very essence of Aboriginal life.

In contrast, Alice and Will, a couple among the first settlers, are quick to befriend the Natives in their first meeting itself. This acquaintance gradually blooms into friendship with the exchange of fish and bread and the Natives trying to learn English. The closing dialogue of Alice about their friendship with the Natives becomes very crucial in understanding the settler-Native dynamics. Alice says:

I am sure that Meg would never believe me if I told her that there is a Native here who actually appears to be intelligent and who has already learned several words of English. He calls himself “Yagan” and often comes to visit us, sometimes alone, and sometimes in the company of an older Native called “Mitjitjiroo”. We believe Mitjitjiroo to be Yagan’s father, though of course we’re not quite sure at this stage. I find him rather fascinating, really. Sometimes he brings a catch of fish to exchange for flour. You see, the naives have acquired a taste for bread, which they call
“Bery goot”, which causes Will to laugh and laugh. He’s a decent soul, my Will, and he believes it is good to share our food supplies with the Natives. I agree, and it is sensible too, to avoid the risk of it being taken by force. (22)

The assumption in the statement, ‘I am sure that Meg would never believe me if I told her that there is a Native who actually appears to be intelligent and who has already learned several words of English’, is indicative of the dual nature of the settlers’ attitude towards the Aborigines. One is of patronizing and the other is derogatory. There, is in this attitude, an absence of objectivity that leads to bias. The emphasis that he had actually picked up a few words of English is worth noting. The ability to speak English appears to be related to having an intellect. Alice’s opinion suggests, though a well intentioned compliment, the prejudices working in the Whites mind, at times, at the unconscious level. Alice’s attitude, too, though not consciously is patronizing. Though Alice and Will represent the goodness in human nature, they also become symbolic of human beings holding preconceived notions about the unknown. They have strong preconceived notions about the Aborigines and their culture and they measure the ‘other’ culture with their own yardstick.

Civilization is external progress, progress in terms of materialistic aspects of life. Culture on the other hand is one's inner self, what a person stands for from within, i.e. what one is from within. It is the actual state of the inner self with all its feelings, tendencies, emotions and accumulated knowledge. The Whites man mistook and got confused between civilization and culture i.e.
between possession and values. The superiority of a culture, according to the settler, is measured in terms of materialistic advancement only. The settler culture failed to realize that the Aboriginal culture is a culture of peace and harmony, within oneself and all that surrounds the individual and the universe that one lives in. This is very typical of how the settlers assume that the Natives were intellectually incompatible with their intellect solely because the settlers were unable to understand the rich Aboriginal heritage with all its legends, rituals and customs and also because the Aborigines were not materialistically advanced/industrialized. In reality what is called progress by the Whites man is nothing but de-culturisation of the other’s culture.

Will and Alice share a very good relation with Yagan and the Natives. They represent innate goodness in human nature crossing all the narrow boundaries of ethnicity and geography. Despite their doubt of Yagan being connected with several violent incidents that have been happening they trust their friendship and are good with Yagan. They believe in mutual respect and sharing. In spite of good friendship with Yagan and his family, Alice due to her patronizing attitude cannot see through the Aboriginal condition before and after their arrival. She blindly feels: "Poor Will, he tries to protect me by telling me that Yagan means no harm and is merely showing his displeasure, but I can be comforted like a child no longer. Lives are being lost for a mere sheep or a bag of flour. It’s a tragedy, that’s what it is, a tragedy." (25)

An innocent child is not capable of analyzing anything that happens around. The child takes solace in others’ assurance that things would be fine.
Alice’s intuition could be contrasted with that of Moyarahn. Moyarahn’s intuition could sense the impending danger from the newcomers as her mind was in its natural state whereas that of Alice’s was filled with prejudices preventing her from seeing the truth behind the obvious. The minds of both the female characters are seasoned by their respective cultures. Moyarahn’s is pure and close to nature and Alice though good in nature is conditioned by her unconscious. Jack Davis, the Aboriginal activist comes forth in the characterization of these two female characters. The suggestion is that human beings, with an open mind in their natural state, untouched by prejudices, are capable of perceiving the ‘truth’ more than people from an aggressive violent artificial civilization.

Private Jenkins on the other hand is very inconsiderate. Though Yagan tries to explain that he had come just to trade fish for flour and tries to explain that he does not steal, Jerking pays no heed to it at all and accuses Will and Alice of trying to save their heads ‘at the expense of everybody else’”(26). He fires a shot in the air to scare Yagan. When Will protests saying that there was absolutely no necessity for doing so Jerkin replies saying, ‘Only language they understand, sir.’(27) The cultural arrogance of Jenkins blinds him. He fails to recognize the Natives as human beings capable of rationality, intelligence and reason. The responsibility of the colonizer in souring the friendly relations with the original inhabitants of the island cannot be overlooked.

The attitude of Jenkins is worth noting. The comment that he makes, reveals his true attitude towards the Natives. The likes of Jenkins do not consider
Natives to be human beings in flesh and blood with feeling, emotions and bonds like the settlers though their culture might be different. The conversation between Will and Yagan that follows the above mentioned incident throws light on the concepts of justice and its implication in their different cultures.

WILL: [to Alice] Go and get the flour for him.[To Yagan] If we give it to you, it’s all right, but you must not steal – sheep, pigs or bery good.

YAGAN: [rubbing his stomach] Tjeep kwobinyahn [‘Sheep are very good.’]

WILL: But the sheep belong to the Whites man. To the farmer.

YAGAN: Yuart, Wetjala kil yonga, gwinninm kuljuk, kalkana. [‘…kangaroo, duck, swan, mullet.’]

WILL: But all those things belong to everyone.

YAGAN: Archh, Wetjala kartwarrah. [‘…Whites man is mad.’]

[ALICE enters with a bag of flour which she gives to Yagan.]

ALICE: Yagan, here is bery good for you and your family. But, remember you must ask for it and not steal it.


WILL: But Yagan, you must understand. The Whites fella takes stealing very seriously if you steal they’ll catch you, put you in prison, even kill you. (27-28)
The settler fails to understand the systems of the Aborigines. Jack Davis gives his audience this aspect of the initial dynamics of relationships between the settler and the Aborigines. Talking about indigenerity and the way quarrels were settled among the Aborigines Mudrooroo in Us Mob states: “All was not peaceful and harmonious among us, but there were ways to heal the quarrels. At the joint family gatherings, we managed to settle our differences, for we knew that families must cooperate for survival and well-being. (1)

Will tells Yagan that one should not steal but forgets that the settler has already stolen the land of the Aborigines. The fallacy behind the choice of words used by the settler draws one’s attention. The settler uses the same words with entirely different implications based upon who and what the words refer to. The irony of the situation also lies in the fact that for the Natives the land and all that is in it belongs to everyone. For them healthy sharing of resources means that sharing is vice-versa and mutual where as for the settler it is one way. Aboriginal law of forgiveness gives a second chance when a mistake is committed depending on the severity of crime no matter who commits the mistake. Whereas the law of the Whites man is insensitive when it comes to dealing with the Natives. Irony and paradox are abundant in the last lines of the dialogue. Through this Jack Davis seems to question his audience if it is the Native who is invading the Whites settlement or if it is the Whites who have invaded the Native land. Thus the issues of sharing the resources of the land are greatly debated by the settler whereas that of the Aborigines’ is clearly an attitude of sharing, tolerance and common justice passed to them by the ancient laws of the
Dreamtime. All through one can observe that the Whites man was trying to dominate the Aborigines psychologically whereas the Aborigines try to come up with ways of appeasing the colonizer. If the aborigine proves to be a stubborn rebel he is sure meet death. But the Whites used to take every opportunity to achieve something more than punishing an individual. Converting and conquering the Natives seems the larger course of action. For instance when Yagan began to resist the violent oppression of the White settlers with force, he is branded an offender whereas in truth he is only a defender of his people. But he is not immediately killed. He was taken away to Carnac Island and he was given instruction in the British way of life and the beliefs and values of Christianity. This strange measure suggests the Whites man’s desire to conquer more than an individual rebel. Through him they hope and plan to unnerve the Aborigines and unsettle them in their original way of life.

The innate goodness and understanding of Will propels him to plead with the Governor to show compassion towards Yagan and claims that in his, ‘continued contact with him over the past two years I have found him possessed of noble instincts, and sense of justice that would do credit to any British citizen.’ (28) The paradox lies in the fact that in spite of noble instincts that would do credit to any human being, the hostility of the environment thrust upon the Aborigines by the settler drive the aborigine into a situation of self-defence. One sees that for the aborigine there was nothing to fear initially except the fear of gun at a later stage. The Aborigines are forced to come to terms with the world around. But this does not appear to be necessary on the part of the settler.
The settlers’ domineering attitude forces the aborigine to face the harsh reality of being colonized. Freedom of choice is the essential prerogative of any human being. When freedom of choice can be experienced as a reality in life, a person recognizes existence as an individual. Any political or social situation that robs a person of this essential freedom of choice pushes him into a mental condition of conflict, self-consuming anger and indignation which in the event of inability to express or act may lead to profound despair or rebellious violence. How the individual copes with it is the question, because the end result of such one sided compromise results in despair and then follows the question of coping with despair. The only way to cope with despair is by letting things go. Transcending this existential despair is an extraordinary ability and only when one is successful in transcending this despair one can go forward with confidence and find new and better solutions to the existing problems and find a way out of them. Letting things go and transcending despair is a very difficult task. The Natives’ existence is an existence without any hope of experiencing self identity. This is the situation into which the Aborigines are thrust into both in inner as well as outer life.

Despite the cultural, psychological and physical labyrinths of situations into which the Natives were driven hopelessly, the Native is left with the choiceless option of self-defence and such self-defense is also misconstrued as wicked motivated offence by the White settlers whose invasion is described as a process of civilizing the Natives. The double standards of the White settlers is not difficult to understand but very difficult to discuss because the gun is the
ultimate silencer. Mitjitjiroo’s ‘body was hung for public viewing.’(31), and
Yagan’s head is ‘smoked in the stump of a tree’ (33) and is added to the
Whites’s collection as they think the ‘piece will prove of phrenological
interest’(33) Yagan, in spite of his father’s death, trusts the friendly settlers in
whose hand he dies within no time. The death of Yagan at the hands of the two
Whites boys is symbolic of the Aborigines’ trust in the goodness of human kind.
It also indicates the settlers’ prejudiced mind which argues that the murder was
committed in self- defense. After Yagan was beheaded, his head was smoked in
a tree till it shrunk. It was sent to a phrenologist for investigating the qualities of
‘head’ of Yagan according to phrenology. The White settler could easily use the
dead body of a Native for scientific investigation as if it were a guinea pig or a
rat, without decent burial or Aboriginal rituals to bid adieu to him. This episode
reflects the height of European intolerance and impertinence towards other
communities practicing other religions especially when those communities are
helplessly enslaved.

This Aboriginal past is paralleled with the Aboriginal present through the
Yorlahs. The play starts with Alec Yorlah suffering from the previous night’s
hangover and his wife Rosie clearing the mess from the previous night. Further
dialogue reveals that they have just returned from a funeral. It is clear that the
church sermons make no sense at all to the likes of Alec. Alec is shrewd enough
to realize that the priest is not true towards the God which he vouches for. He
remarks that all that the church is interested in is to bring everyone to the church.
Whether they have succeeded in converting people or not does not matter. What
matters the most is if they have tried to persuade people to come to the church or not. This becomes very clear when Alec remarks that the priest at the funeral has given less of a funeral service and more of a church sermon on conversion. Through Alec’s remarks on the priest, Jack Davis makes a subtle suggestion that the church is not as much interested in the spiritual aspect of Christianity as it is in the political aspect of it.

ALEC: That weren’t no funeral service. More like flamin’

Sermon.

ROSIE: Anyway, he meant well, and it don’t hurt to shake

Nyoongahs up about livin’ or dyin’.

ALEC: Look, he spoke for three quarters of an hour at

the church and three quarters of an hour at the grave-

side, and that’s what I call playin’ on people’s feelin’s.

ROSIE: But that’s his job. That’s what ’h’s there for.

ALEC: Ah, all ’he was tryin’ to do was frighten people inta

Goin’ to ’his church.

ROSIE: When you’re dyin’ you’ll be glad of a man like ’him.

ALEC: [laughing] You know, ’he 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 stukk get to ’eaven ’cause ’e tried. It’s even better

than an each way bet, cause ’e bets on the whole bloody

field.

ROSIE: [reproachfully] Alec Yorlah. I’m sure I know where
you’re going when your time comes.

ALEC: But what I said’s true. (9)

This throws light on Alec’s insight into the Aboriginal condition as well as the attitudes of the Whites. He is sure that the interest in conversion is more political than religious. One observes that Aborigines are cornered to embrace Christianity more as a political and social convenience than any strong inner urge to arrive at a necessary spiritual experience. Christianity for them is not a well considered belief but only an option thrust upon them - a sort of compulsory option. Rosie, Alec’s wife, on the other hand represents those Aborigines who embrace Christianity for its true essence. So she is able to strike a balance between her Aboriginality and Christianity. A careful and close study of any ‘-ism’ brings to light the fact that the true essence of any religion is nothing but upholding human values and peace for a better future of generations to come.

Religions that evolved from time to time have accommodated many practices to suit the individual needs based upon the time that they lived in. When religions fail to do this they become either fanatic or archaic and fade. Many Aborigines who went to missionaries were thus able to imbibe the true essence of both Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality and arrive at absolute bliss. Aboriginal Spirituality has enabled them to understand the multiplicity of belief systems given to man by the Dreamtime and thus helped them make peace with their existence and strike a balance between Aboriginality and Christianity. Jack Davis very skillfully weaves this spiritual aspect of religion into his plays. In the work Us Mob Mudrooroo explains:
It is rarely acknowledged that Indigenous people were not the passive victims of an overwhelming advanced civilization in the face of which their beliefs and customs simply crumbled away. This is a racist belief which needs challenging, for there is ample evidence that resistance to the cultural domination from Indigenous people was intense and that in response to the missionary impact they consciously modified their beliefs. Many of them did not become Christians, but succeeded in accommodating their beliefs to the new Christianity. One response to Christianity was the acceptance of an Indigenous All-Father deity, Biami. (45)

One observes that for people like Alec it is very difficult to accept it when its true spirit is lost. For people like Rosie it is the same strength of their culture and their Dreaming that guides them derive meaning from the two. Each of them is right in their own way. Davis’ text depicts the crises in religious sphere of Aboriginal life and its many implications before and after the Aborigines’ confrontation with the White settler.

Aboriginal culture is mainly a culture of kinship and community which play a vital role in protecting their traditions revealed in the dream time. Theirs is basically an oral culture passed on from one generation to another generation.

The past, present and future are all intertwined to make the communities rich adding to what the ‘Dreamtime’ has given them. But evacuating Aborigines to settlements by and by has affected them badly. Alec remarks that ‘The only
good thing about funerals is ya get to see people ya ain’t seen for long time’ (9). Thus funerals become significant in building family ties. This theme has been discussed elaborately by Jack Davis in his play *Barungin*. This might be one of the reasons for Alec’s disappointment with his son, Jamie, not making it to the funeral. The pathetic condition of the Aboriginals in the suburbs is insightfully brought out by Jack Davis. When Alec remarks to Rosie that he does not understand how Auntie Peg and Uncle Eli manage to bring up their family in a ‘bloody dump’ at the Aboriginal reserve, Rosie quickly dismisses it by saying that it is at least their home; they cannot be kicked out easily. Rosie reminds Alec that Aboriginals cannot get away doing the same things that the Whites do. Even if people of their clan come to visit them they are in for trouble. The Whites man’s law had not only removed them from their traditional lands and put in reserves/settlements far away from their home land but also controlled every aspect of their lives. The Whites man’s law has taken away even basic human rights of the Aborigines by imposing irrational laws on them: none of the family is allowed to visit them at their home, they cannot buy liquor or be seen in the streets after sunset. But Alec is bold enough to resist. He asserts that if his friends want to visit him no one can stop them. It is through visiting relatives that their communities get strengthened and they can pass on their bonding to the next generation. Mudrooroo in *Us Mob* writes:

‘Visiting relatives’ is an aspect of Us Mob culture which has been part of Australian Indigenous society since the beginning, as has the love of one’s country, and awareness of the old ways and
customs and the ideas of belonging to an extended family (14)

This is one of the many strategies that the settler has used to weaken the Aborigines. Alec and Rosie then fondly recall the stories that their uncle had told them when they were younger. It is only the memories of their past that give them solace in the present. Michael Halloran in his paper titled *Cultural Maintenance and Trauma in Indigenous Australia* presented at the 23rd Annual Australia and New Zealand Law and History Society Conference, Murdoch University, Western Australia (2-4th July, 2004) observes:

culture can be thought of as a complex and diverse system of shared and interrelated knowledge, practices and signifiers of a society, providing structure and significance to groups within that society and ultimately an individual’s experience of his or her personal, social, and physical and metaphysical worlds [4] [5] Shared knowledge includes collectively held norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, and the like, while cultural practices are evidenced in the language, law, and kin relationship practices of a society. In part, cultural knowledge and practices are dynamic phenomena; collectively maintained and transformed by the ongoing interaction of societal members over time and space [6] [7] Cultural maintenance, transmission, and transformation are the result of ongoing interaction of people engaged in shared activities in concrete situations. Put simply, culture is socially constructed and maintained.
When viewed in this light the source of the Aborigines’ cultural alienation is clear. The attitudes and beliefs of the Aborigines are profoundly disturbed by the domination of the Whites people. Besides, their social interactions are also obstructed. A society disintegrated socially and disturbed by an external force cannot have continuity of culture in an unbroken way. Yet it is the innate spirituality, vitality and flexibility of the Aborigines that contributed to the survival of Aboriginal culture in spite of adverse cultural situation.

Jack Davis’ text depicts different Natives’ attitudes towards the settlers. Rosie is symbolic of a strong woman who is able to be pragmatic by successfully overcoming existential despair while Alec is very pessimistic and is emotionally against the White settlers and this resistance only adds to the lasting residual pain in his heart. He represents those for whom anything that is ‘Whites’ is bad and how education its modern sense is alien to Aborigines of his generation. The text also raises many other issues that an aborigine faces in the present day. Alec’s attitude towards young Aborigines being educated is very pessimistic. The very question of being truly educated is brought out beautifully by Jack Davis. Alec states that the young Nyoongahs who are getting the ‘Whites’ education think they are ‘igh an’ mighty’(16) What he and others like him see is that the education system of the Whites accentuates the division between the educated Nyoongahs and their peers without such education. Though the Aborigines have ‘only’ an oral culture and are ‘illiterate’ know all that is to be known for a happy and good life as the Aboriginal culture and tradition has this essence of life in abundance embedded in it. Alec is angry that his son Jamie
could not make it to the funeral and says that none of the ‘Whites’ education is
going to do any good to Jamie if he fails to understand what is really important
in life. He feels that when education is passive without embedded knowledge it
is of no use. Such an education might make people literate but cannot make them
knowledgeable and truly educated. Alec is aware of his oral tradition, its history
in the form of legends, its songs, dance and rituals. To Alec, in it, it held all that
one needs to know to live a life of abundance and a life which is in harmony
with one another and with the surroundings one lives in and when he is alienated
from it he is desperate to get back to it. Alec feels that the movements supported
by the Whites like that of land rights are futile efforts. He feels that their son,
Jamie is unnecessarily motivated by the Whites only to be deserted in the time of
real need. He feels that Jamie would be better off living with them in the reserve
just like the other Aborigines do. As the play proceeds one realizes that Alec’s
fears are only a tip of the iceberg. Adam Shoemaker in Black Words Whites
Page states,

the decade beginning in 1960 was one of protest, publicity and
in some cases, significant change in the realm of Aboriginal
affairs. This is not to say that the autonomy or the political
influence of Black Australians increased evenly throughout the
entire country. There were during the same decade clear examples
of the continued powerlessness of Aborigines in the face of
governmental and industrial economic aims. (6)
Rosie on the other hand is a woman of determination and one who believes in the innate strength of her son and wants to prove to the world the same, that their son is as good as any Wetjala and even better. She has a very strong urge not only to give the next generation a decent living with, dignity and respect in the society, but also to prove to the Whites world that the Aborigines are also equally capable in their intellectual capacities.

Rosie reminds Alec that it is not that Jamie is not aware of his priorities in life but he is helpless and adds that his education would help him become a school teacher giving him a decent life and earning him respect in society. Alec argues that it would not make any difference to them and remarks that he is sure that Jamie would marry a Whites woman. Alec though depicted as a lazy alcoholic disapproves of his son marrying a Whites woman. His innate desire that Jamie should marry a Nyoongah suggests his fears. Alec is very cynical about the White settlers, thus reflecting the attitude of many blacks towards Whites. Though Lyn, their neighbor, is a good human being and very helpful Alec does not trust her. He labels her a ‘do-gooder’ and does not respect any of her good intentions. Lyn is depicted as one of those Whites who hold genuinely good intentions towards Aborigines. She invites their family to join her family for dinner only to be insulted by the rude behavior of Alec. But in spite of Alec’s short-sighted impertinence she does not hesitate to run to their help when she receives the phone call of Jamie’s arrest. Mudrooroo observes in *Us Mob*:

The Master does not share but indulges in charity, which often is used as a bait for those outside the system to be drawn into it. The
raise of the so called philanthrophy in the nineteenth century occurred not so much to help a wretched working class, but to ‘uplift’ the wretched working class – not to mention fallen women and ‘Natives’ – to a symbolic level which conformed to the ideological beliefs of the Master. (27-28)

Mudrooroo is pointing out the limitations of the efficacy of charity in the context of obvious social injustice. Moreover charity may carry with it an ulterior motive of religious propaganda, giving the impression that Christian values are superior to the values of the Aboriginal cultural values. However the injustice perpetrated has nothing to do with Christianity. The Whites’ behaviour is obviously un-Christian. Philanthropy is a means of covering up the un-Christian exploitation and violence of the Whites.

Jamie and Rosie on the other hand are very open-minded and hopeful. They are aware of the innate goodness in human beings. They do not stereotype all the settlers. The contrast in the attitudes of Jamie and Rosie on one side and Alec on the other can be traced back to the difference in their past. Rosie though belongs to Alec’s generation has somehow come to terms with reality. Jamie being a next generation aborigine does not share the experience of a child brought up in the assimilist era. It is through the character of Alec that Jack Davis brings out this aspect of Aboriginal existence as the Aboriginal present has its roots embedded in the past. Jack Davis’ text, through its various characters, records the feelings and reactions of the Natives at the changes that are taking place in their lives. Rosie and Jamie represent those Natives who are
practical and who understand that one cannot judge a person based on the colour of the skin or ethnicity. They are more tolerant towards handling change and are more practical in life than Alec. Alec, due to his past experiences, on the other hand stereotypes Whites, arguing that he had been dealing with people like Lyn all his life who go around like a ‘do-gooder’. Rosie is smart enough to remind Alec that his sister is married to a Whites man and because of that she tries to behave like one. Rosie points out to Alec that his sister always presents her Whites napkins for Christmas and asks her to keep them Whites and clean. This is a significant dialogue that captures how some Aborigines try miming the settler. Alec resentfully remarks that he had never won an argument in twenty five years of their married life. The whole dialogue is a suggestion of how the Aborigines are trying hard to create their own realities deeply rooted in their culture but at the same time are trying to come to terms with their present and future. Rosie tries to be practical as she is well aware that what has been lost cannot be regained in its original form nor can they move forward holding on to the memory of agony. She is well aware of the aftermath of the invasion of the Whites man as well as sensitive to the issues of the future involving the next generation Aborigines and their culture that have also to an extent, appropriated her existence. Rosie is a strong woman, supporting her family emotionally and economically despite odds. She has to strike a balance between the stark Aboriginal reality and the ideal that needs to be achieved and also build a bridge between generations who are poles apart. She is a perfect example of the feminine aspect of Aboriginal life.
Alec’s character is that of an aborigine who is drained to the optimum of his emotional balance. His is the agony of one who has lived a full life of profusion, seen the abundance suffer, now in great scarcity and on the verge of disappearance. He is aware of injustices of the society and the justice that the Aboriginal culture is capable of. Though he might sound bitter, a thorough analysis of his character reveals his anguish to regain his past, an Aboriginal past, as a foundation for his future generations to live in peace. Michael Halloran in his paper titled *Cultural Maintenance and Trauma in Indigenous Australia* confirms:

I argue that the cultural trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples has undermined their basis of meaning and value to the extent that they have little protection from basic human anxiety, which has become manifest in the extent and prevalence of social and psychological problems they suffer. Although various approaches have been implemented to address the situation of Aboriginal Australians, the most promising measures are those that reinvigorate Indigenous culture and life-ways.

The next generation is presented in the character of their son Jamie, who though not fully aware of what has been lost of their culture respects it on one hand and on the other is trying his best to be part of the larger Whites Australian community he has to live in.

All through the play one is made aware of the sinister effects of colonization on the Aborigines like alcoholism, poverty, social, cultural,
economic and political vulnerability. Aborigines are isolated from the post colonial Australian society, their numbers fast dwindling and their problems proliferating on all planes of life. For one to develop physical resilience one needs to develop psychological resilience and the period in between is that of anguish which is movingly reflected in the play. Here comes the issue of choice and free will of the individual to act and shape his/her destiny. The text raises questions of the extent to which any individual is free to make choices, the external factors affecting an individual’s choice, influencing action and limiting freedom. Environment influences the individual. An individual’s independence is in conflict with many circumstances. If an individual does not have psychological resilience, resistance develops which in turn renders the environment becomes more hostile than it actually is. But in the case of the Aborigines of Australia the environment has become hostile to such an extent that it has tested them to the maximum. The Aborigines have been very tolerant towards the new comer in all the ways, but their nature has been exploited and this in turn has led to disappointment. Rosie has developed this psychological resilience but not Alec.

Jamie’s attitude as that of a next generation aborigine who believes in the innate strength of his origin, emboldens him to fight for his rights. This could partly be because of his lack of experience of the ‘brutish years’ in the Aboriginal-settler history and of that generation of Aborigines who were capable of giving a hope of a better future to their communities in particular and minorities at large. Alec, on the other hand, represents one who has had
experiential impact of the ‘brutish years’. It is through Rosie that the audience come to know that Alec has similar experience as that of a half-caste. Alec is a half-caste taken away from his parents and who was trained in the Christian way of life. As he had bent towards Christianity unconventionally the settlers’ religion has not given Alec the necessary solace in life. Though he is well respected in his community, Alec’s experiences through those years leave him indifferent towards the prevailing conditions of the Aborigines. He loses hope and holds strong prejudices indiscriminately, towards both the Aborigines and the settlers. It is Rosie who runs the household. Alec is interested in nothing but alcohol and the pub as he feels that things have changed beyond the control of the original dwellers. Jamie warns Rosie that if Alec continues to do so, she would be left only with an alcoholic. Alec is unconcerned if Aborigines are accused of theft without proofs. He is indifferent too when Ron, the Whites bar owner, shows a racist attitude towards him but is disappointed when Ron would not book a couple of bottles for him. He is indifferent towards what is happening around him as long as it does not affect him. This is so because he is acutely aware that things are well beyond his circle of influence and intertwined with many vested interests. Giving up the ‘the will to change his own destiny’, he is reduced to a passive observer and a pessimist who did not trust his environment anymore, and who is steeped in despair. The reason behind the despair of many like Alec is very skillfully brought to light by Jack Davi.

ROSIE: You don’t ‘ave to read books to know about things like that. Somethin’ just like that ‘appened to your father.
JAMIE: Yeah, but the trouble with Pop and his generation
is they got no guts. If a Wetjala said ‘jump’, they all jumped.

ROSIE: They ‘ad to jump. If not they went to goal. (34)

The drama presents this bestial reality to its audience. It takes one through the
pathetic conditions of the Aboriginal experiences: a few accepted, a few fought
and a few more that cannot but to be endured.

The compeering Actress talks about how the numbers of the Aborigines
stared decreasing drastically and acknowledges the fact that:

The death of Yagan did not end the violence in the Swan River
Colony. While Yagan’s tribe was quiet, to the south of Perth, along
the Murray River, there was more bloodshed. (37)

The number of the full-bloods started decreasing drastically. The settlers’
military exterminated and burnt the bodies of the Aboriginals. At one point of
time the decree of the settler was that of self defense and at another it was that of
accidental death. The actress reports, ‘By nineteen hundred and one there were
less than eight hundred full-bloods left.’ (38)

The transition in the plight of the Aboriginal experience is introduced by
Jack Davis in the play in the handwritten facts by Annie Morrison, to the
Moseley Royal Commission in 1934. It records the most bizarre of conditions
that the Aborigines were living in.

I have six children three boys three girls at moore river and they
haven’t enough to eat Water soup no meat and bread. and fat for
breakfast and tea no green vegetables and fruit. they havnt Warm
clothes for Winter. My children have only one blanket between
three of them Winter and Sumer i have been there and seen it. i
hear some girls screaming in the office and the trackers said two
trackers held the Girls hand and feet over a sack of flour and Mr
Neal gave them a hiding and till tha wet them self we had to eat the
flour after. (40)

By early nineteen hundred the Whites Australian population had increased
considerably and that of Aboriginals decreased drastically. The decrease in
Aboriginal number was considered as natural despite the tyranny committed on
the Aboriginals. The problems that arose in Australia due to settlement were
broadly divided into the half-caste problem, the Aboriginal problem and Whites
problem, as put forth by the Comperer (black actor). (41) Explaining about the
Stolen Generation in his work Us Mob Mudrooroo states:

He sought to render Us Mob futureless by cutting away our tender
shoots – our children. Some were even taken away to his country,
Britian, where they died far from family and country. A terrible
future was forced on us without a qualm, for the Master knew what
was good for us. Many of our children were placed in those
orphanages he had constructed for his own bastards, and even had
special placed constructed for them where they might be far from
us. They were to be disciplined and educated in what was called
‘civilisation’(21)
A.O. Neville, the Chief Protector is typical of the Whites officers. He remarks:

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

‘Out of sight, out of mind.’ (34) One line that sums up the multiple realities that exist in the lives of the Aborigines of the present day. The problem of the half-caste is great and an issue in itself. They are neither completely accepted by the Whites society as equals nor do they have a family of their own to call themselves part of the Aboriginal community to which one of their parents belonged. The constant inner struggle of the half-castes is, more than that of striking a balance between the two worlds. It becomes a question of identity, an existential issue, identity that is arbitrarily thrust upon them by the Whites/settlers, regardless of their views.

The condition of these half-castes is miserable. They are a kind of lost generation in utter confusion, alien to their roots at the same time unable to assimilate in the Whites culture. Children and youth who are symbol of hope and
the future of any community were removed from their parents. Their attitude gradually becomes that of a desperado. The White settler wanted the Aborigines to change according to the settler’s world view. The aggressive settler tried to defeat the Aborigines not just politically and socially but psychologically de-rooting them permanently from the Australian landscape. The residual experience of cultural alienation of the Aborigines is something that is not tangible but is intrinsic in their souls. The Aborigines were and are determined.

Mudrooroo in *Us Mob* writes:

I do not believe That the mere fact of ‘blood’ denotes a possible plenitude of an Original Indigenality, for though resting on heredity and descent, Indigenality includes a learnt portion, and to stress degrees of ‘blood’ is in effect playing the master’s game, which is always one Dealing with possession, legality, paternity and caste. (13)

The Black Actor narrates:

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

The consequences of the Great Depression are felt the most by the Aborigines. Where the Aborigines received 20 cents a week for maintenance, the Whites received 70 cents. Many allowances like meat, sugar etc were either completely done away with or a very scanty quantity was rationed. Consequently, the number of Aborigines decreased drastically. On the pretext of spreading diseases they were rounded up and put into settlements.

WHITES ACTRESS: On January Seventeenth, nineteen thirty three, eighty-nine Aborigines, the entire population of the Northam camp, were rounded up by police and dumped in the Moore River Settlement. The Northam shire Council said they had scabies and were a health risk.

BLACK ACTRESS: At Moore River it was found that only four of the eighty-one had the disease. (46)

The audience is taken back to the time when Alec was a child. From the words of Thomas Yorlah, father of Alec Yorlah, one comprehends that the Yorlahs lived a contented life on the farm. They always had enough to keep their bellies full. He adds “Then at night we go to the pictures. Special place for Nyoongahs, sort of roped off, right up the back.” (46-47) Though they were still a discriminated lot and had to face a lot of hardships due to this racism, they were still happy and content with their lives and as a family.
Despite Thomas’ protests that he is only quarter Native blood and that he doesn’t even come under the Aborigine Act, the policeman is determined to put him and his family on a train to the Moore River Settlement. The policeman adds that “That’s the law. Any Native under the Aborigines Act can be moved from any area to any other area.” (47)

When Thomas wants to appeal to Mr. Neville, Chief Protector of the Aborigines in Western Australia, the policeman suggests that Thomas save his fighting for the Moore River and he would have Thomas for resisting the arrest if he does not cooperate. When Thomas enquires about their ‘kangaroo dawgs’ the policeman tells them that he would attend to them later and the Yorlah family would ‘only need the clothes you stand up in.’ (48). Upon reaching the settlement Thomas and Mary realize that none of the things that the policeman had told them are right and that their children would be living in the compound dormitory and would be allowed to meet them only for two and half hours every day and for a whole day on Saturday and Sunday. Talking about the Aboriginal education system in his work titled Us Mob Mudrooroo says that:

Our educational methods came under attack from the start by the Masters, who deliberately cut off young twigs from our Dreaming Tree Children were taken from us and thrust into the Master’s system, but those who managed to stay with their from families continued to received an Indigenous education. Our culture and customs are best learnt not in the formal structure of the Master’s schools but within our family grouping, and it is up to
the mature adults of our communities to ensure that what should and must be passed on is indeed passed on. (116)

The Aboriginal families are shattered. Aboriginal culture that is passed on from generation to generation in the form of song, dance, ritual and storytelling is disrupted. For the Aborigines culture, belief, tradition and life are not separate from one another. They are all intertwined giving meaning and contentment to life. Thus the very nucleus of their family, culture and life is shattered by the settler. One realizes that though a few Aborigines were permitted to live outside the reserve, several constraints were laid not only on their movement but on their social life as well. This aspect is brought out subtly in the play in Alec’s remark about funerals being an occasion when one gets to see people that one has not seen for a long time, or his warning to Jamie that he cannot invite friends home as it is not allowed for the Aborigines to entertain guests at home, whether extended family, relatives or friends. The law simply does not permit them to do so.

At the reserve, the Yorlahs are not given even bare housing and their tent in Northam is much better than the corner they are entitled to at the settlement. The condition at the settlement is thoroughly disappointing for the Yorlah family. The once ideal and contented life of the Yorlahs has now become a mockery held up for ridicule by Mr. Neale when re remarks that he hopes that the Yorlahs find the life at the settlement to be satisfactory. When Thomas expresses his doubt in this regard Mr. Neale is quick enough to add ‘Not that it makes much difference.’ (48) But Thomas is persistent in getting his family out
of the settlement. Thomas tries hard to explain to Neal that though they were not rich he was earning enough to keep the family’s tummy full and that they had a contented life on their own and that neither he nor his family comes under the Aborigine Act to be taken to the settlement. After many unfruitful attempts he finally feels that it is of no use talking to Mr. Neale and decides to report his case to Mr. Neville. Thomas broods:

Well I’ve been waitin’ outside the Aborigines Department for two days, waitin’ to see Mr. Neville. I know he’s tryin’ to dodge me but I’ll see ‘im, even if I have to wait ‘ere a year I can’t understand Mr. Neville, he knows I’m only a quarter Native blood. He knows I don’t really come under the Act. Now my wife Mary, she’s half, real half-caste. Now I’m not much good at arithmetic but if I’m quarter and she’s half, what does that make the bloody kids? I don’t think Neville knows. I think ‘e just wants ‘em ‘cause they’re bright and smart. Anyway, I’m gonna ask him for an exemption from the Aboriginal Act, then we’ll be out of the Settlement like a shot out of a gun. (50)

Thomas is disappointed that neither Neale nor Neville seem to be convinced and feel that the Yorlahs are better off outside the settlement. He realizes how bad things are in due course through conversations with his wife Mary and Matron Neale. He realizes that Alec, who is very smart at academics, was done with seventh grade before they stopped the Nyoongah kids from going to school. They have only up to grade six at the settlement. Matron says that she would see
if they could find some school work to suit him, which never materializes. Such was the pathetic condition of education for the Native kids.

Their daughter Mary has been a victim of severe atrocities. She has been badly beaten by Mr. Neale till she ‘piddled herself. Then ‘e made ‘er eat the flour.’ (52) Thomas requests Matron to talk to Mr. Neal to give them an exception, but she, just like the other Whites, feels they are better off here at the settlement and cautions them from doing ‘anything foolish like absconding because that would mean prison’ (52) for them. Thomas tells her that the ‘Wetjala’s gaol’ does not scare him in the least. Mudrooroo observes in Us Mob: “But often the politics and policies of these Master organizations are wrong, owing to a lack of understanding of our kinship and family ways, and lead to a wastage of funding.” (22)

Despite all this Thomas is determined to take his family away from the settlement. He shares with his wife that ‘Mr. Neale says he’l never let us go, but if we keep runnin’ away he’s got to get sick of us and then ‘e’ll give in.’ (Davis 53) However, The Yorlaha are not fortunate enough to give the trackers a run of their lives. They are soon caught by Bluey, a black tracker. Bluey is very sincere and committed towards his master without understanding the implications of his job. He is so gullible that he is content with getting a couple of extra sticks of tobacco as a reward for catching the Yorlaha. Thomas is sentenced to six months of imprisonment but is still determined to free his family. Once out of jail he starts planning for the next escape. Each time he is back from the jail he is more determined to free his family. It is not until two years and four trials, for his
attempts to escape, that they finally manage to get the exceptions with several conditions attached to it. Neal announces to Mary:

You will not be allowed to return to any of the following towns Northam, Toodyay, York or Beverley. You even visit any of these places again and you’ll find yourselves back here, understand? You will not be allowed to apply for assistance for the Aborigines Department and you will not be allowed in any town after six in the evening, is that clear? (55)

As the playwright takes us back to Alec’s youthful days, the scene become especially significant as it depicts the condition of the Aborigines who served, along with their Whites Australian counterparts, in the world war after they returned to Australia. Adam Shoemaker in his work titled *Black Words Whites Page* observes:

The supreme irony is that though out the entire war, official policy forbade the conscription of Aboriginal Australians, yet their familiarity with the land and their talents of tracking and bush craft were skills highly prized by the military. Indeed, though it was not officially admitted at the time, the anthropologist Donald Thomson was empowered to mobilise an entire unit of about 50 Aborigines skilled in guerilla tactics, in order to repel a potential Japanese invasion in remote areas of Arnhem Land. (30)

It is at this point that one comes to know that young Alec has served in the Army. The Colonel while handing over Alec’s discharge papers cautions him of
the psychological war that the Aborigines need to face in-spite of getting citizenship and a job. He says that life is not going to be easy for those who have returned from the army and it is even more so for the coloured boys as they have “to try harder, do better, prove yourself more than a Whites man.” (58) Though they had rendered equal services as their Whites counterparts they do not receive the same respect as their Whites mates. Assuring that he Alec need not hesitate to come to meet him whenever he visits Sydney, the Colonel confesses: “I’m ashamed to say, Alec, that Australia is still a racist country. Oh, not in physical terms so much, but morally and mentally we’re still a racist nation at heart. People will always treat you differently and find some excuse to justify their actions.” (59)

A Citizenship card is a card issued to Aborigines by the Commissioner of Native Welfare classifying the particular individual as Whites, exempting them from the Native Administration Act pursuant to regulations. Though Alec is aware of the racist nation he is living in he is hopeful of a change in its attitude towards the Natives and considers the old thinking to be that of the bygone days. On reaching home he realizes that things have not changed a bit on the reserve and is sure that they have not changed in the town either. Shoemaker in Black Words Whites Page opines that “This so-called ‘nigger hunting’, with its coercive treatment of Aborigines as enemy aliens – almost as prisoners of war – offers a sobering contrast to the mythology of wartime egalitarianism.” (32)

At the pub a policeman warns Alec to keep his relatives away. He says that it is the job of the Natives with citizenship card to live up to the privilege of being
the same as the Whites man. He adds that if he can’t keep up the standard he can always turn his rights in. He sarcastically comments:

POLICEMAN: …I thought the Army would’ve taught you to have more respect for a uniform.

ALEC: One thing the Army did learn me was to sorta look past the uniform to the man inside. (63)

This is a very revealing remark on the part of Alec. What he means is that the uniforms given to soldiers participating in the World War II are uniform in colour and design but does not give them any real status of equality. Behind the uniform the Whites man remains the contemptuous master and the Aborigine remains the contemptible Other. Alec reflects:

Well did you hear him tellin’ me to keep on the straight and narrow? Can’t have no ‘lations visitin’, can’t live on the reserve. Citizenship don’t sound much like freedom to me. I seen a lot of blokes die in the war for freedom. None of ‘em would call this freedom, none of ‘em (63)

The culminating dialogue of Alec in the scene can be contrasted with his attitude earlier towards Jamie’s training to become a school teacher. This becomes extremely significant in understanding the undercurrents that influence the attitudes and perceptions that they hold in the present. Alec wishes:

Well, Rosie’s comin’ down next week. Reckon we’ll get married, ‘ave a few kids; but when my kids grow up I want to see they get a good education. I want ‘em to grow up to be teachers or nurses,
something with a bit of dignity. They’ve been servants and farm hands far too long. Far too long. (64)

Shoemaker in *Black Words Whites Page* clarifies,

the end of World War II in 1945 marks a turning point in black/Whites relations in Australia. The returning servicemen had fought against tyranny, discrimination, and oppression in various theatres of war around the globe. The Aboriginal soldiers among them were often prepared to fight these same afflictions in the domestic arena upon their return. In addition, the Black Australians who saw action in World War II sometimes developed uniquely egalitarian relationships with their Whites fellow-soldiers in the heat of battle, so that both Whites and black attitudes underwent a radical – if usually temporary – change. 7 other blacks who had obtained employment in Australia due to the exigencies of wartime production had been absorbed into the trade union movement, a factor which was to become of considerable importance in the genesis of Aboriginal political protest, as the Pilbara strike of 1946 was to illustrate. (9)

This also gives an understanding as why Rosie supported Alec by requesting Jamie not to talk against his father with prejudice without knowing how respectable he is in his town. But the reality proves that his dream is still a dream which is shattered as he realizes that in the present Whites Australian society the original dwellers of the Australian soil still need to fight something that cannot
be seen. Jack Davis sums up the Australian Aboriginal sense of betrayal by the
Whites, the brutal ways of their domination and the Whites man’s glorification
and justification of his triumphs and the entire hypocrisy implicit in the
unfolding of the process of colonization in the following stanzas used as a kind
of poetic epilogue to Act II of Kullark:

You once smiled a friendly smile,
Said we were kin to one another.
Thus with guile for a short while
Became to me a brother.

Then you swamped my way of gladness,
Took my children from my side,
Snapped shut the law book on my sadness
At Yirrkala’s plea denied.

I remember Lake George hills,
The thin sick bones of people;
Sudden death and greed that kills,
That gave you church and steeple.

You murdered me with rope, with gun,
You massacred my enclave,
You buried me deep on McLarty’s run,
Flung into a common grave.
Then you propped me up with Christ, red tape,

Tobacco, grog and fears,

Then disease, and lordly rape

Through the brutish years.

Now you primly say you’re justified

And sing of a nation’s glory;

But I think of a people crucified,

The real Australian story. (Davis 39)

Michael Halloran in his paper titled *Cultural Maintenance and Trauma in Indigenous Australia* affirms:

Culture suppresses existential anxiety by its capacity to give meaning and value to individual existence. Culture meets the need for meaning by tying the individual and society into meaningful relationship and, in doing so, provides a general order, structure, and purpose to social interaction that imbues individual existence with significance. By prescribing valued social roles, personal qualities and standards of behaviour, culture also generates opportunities for deriving a sense of personal value. Thus, at the most fundamental level, cultural conceptions of reality provide people with a sense of meaning and value; thereby assuaging anxiety that life could be no more significant than taking in food, expelling waste, and temporarily clinging to survival on a clump of dirt and rock hurtling through space.[12] By implication,
individual existence would be anxiety-laden and productive action stifled without the meaning and value culture provides to existence.[13]

Nothing can explain the Aboriginal existence in the wider Australian society embodied in the character of Alec then the above.

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