THE REAL AUSTRALIAN STORY

Chapter III

The Real Australian Story

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, "Aboriginal Australia" 13)

Rewriting History

To the colonialist, history was considered to determine reality itself (108) but Denning points out that, “History is not the past: it is a consciousness of the past used for present purposes” (qtd. in Gilbert and Tompkins 106). To Barthes, it is “a play of structures just like language . . . itself also a form of ecriture” (qtd. in Arthur 58). Today, history is seen as a discourse open to interpretation like any other narrative discourse (Gilbert and Tompkins 106). The concept of historical objectivity is shown to be a myth and emphasis is given to heterogeneity of representations. With European colonization, local indigenous histories were replaced with Euro centric accounts of the past (106) and were reclassified as myths and legends; instead written official versions of history were validated (Gilbert and Tompkins 107). Alternatives to the official narratives were suppressed through massacres and even genocide (107).
Aborigines were written out of literature, out of law, out of history, by means of documents written in the English language (Arthur 55). This occurred due to the absence of indigenous writing to act as a counterforce (Arthur 56). Kateryna Arthur views the unequal struggle between black and white in Australia as the struggle between literacy and orality (55) which can only be rectified by the Aborigines rewriting their history in English from an Aboriginal point of view. A reassessment of history becomes a political endeavour in that it is an act of anti colonial resistance (108).

History and Drama are both based on a conscious selection, organization and presentation of events. Theatre is well suited to “the interrogation of spatial and temporal (teleological) aspects of imperialism and facilitates the telling/showing of oppositional versions of the past” through visual and oral signifiers embedded in the text as performance (Gilbert and Tompkins 109). Davis makes use of the possibilities of this medium to contest the messages of history. By enacting the Aboriginal versions of the pre-contact, imperial and post imperial past on stage (Gilbert and Tompkins 107), and by presenting key events in an Aboriginal context, history is revaluated and redeployed. By foregrounding the Aboriginal historical perspectives Davis’s plays disperse the authority inherent in official accounts (Gilbert and Tompkins 108). While addressing the foundations of colonialism he also looks at the ways in which a continued colonial authority had been
sanctioned by official historical accounts (Gilbert and Tompkins 109).

Davis's play *Kullark* dramatises events from the history of the south west of Western Australia, during the early period of contact, the protection and assimilation eras, to the contemporary urban Aboriginal situation. *No Sugar* depicts life on the Reserve during the 1930s Depression, forced removal of Aborigines to Moore River and life there. *In Our Town* looks at the same Millimurra family ten years later in 1946, living on the fringes of a town. While *The Dreamers* deals with the contemporary urban Aboriginal Wallitch family of 1982, *Barungin* looks at the same family in 1988. Starting from the story of Mitjijirroo, Moyrah and their son Yagan of 1820s in *Kullark*, it moves on to Thomas and Mary Yorlah, in Act two of *Kullark* and Sam and Milly Millimurra in *No sugar*. *In our Town* tells the story of David Millimurra, a returning Aboriginal serviceman. The contemporary scene is depicted through the story of the families of Alec and Rosie in *Kullark*, Roy and Dolly in *The Dreamers* and Arnie and Meena in *Barungin*. The five plays taken together depict an epic of Aboriginal history.

In *Nyoongah*, the major Aboriginal language of the south west of Western Australia, the term "kullark" literally means home, the place where fire is made (v). It is believed that Warrgul, the Rainbow Serpent, considered to be the creative spirit of the Swan River, emerged from beneath the ground and moved over the land creating the Darling Ranges and the Swan River, before resting at Kargallup, (corrupted to
Karrakatta, now Perth) (Glossary Kullark 145). According to Davis, Warrgul the Rainbow Serpent represents the generation and regeneration of life (Chesson 194) and “the hegemony of Aboriginal land and culture” (Carroll 105). In Act One Scene two of Kullark, Yagan (a totemic name meaning “freshwater turtle” (Kullark 146)), in ceremonial paint chants and dances this Dreaming event. With precise description of the landscape, perceived as the body of the totemic being, and acknowledgement of the abundant gifts of flora and fauna, laws and legends and sacred places, Yagan names Karta Koomba (identified as Mount Eliza, the highest point in an area surrounded by marshes, plains and the Swan River, with a running fresh water spring at its foot) and Kargattup (the area surrounding Karta Koomba) as his home. Strongly identifying himself with this landscape which has spiritual significance for him, Yagan moved within its boundaries, fixed and validated by the movements of his ancestral spirit Warrgul.

YAGAN. And as you went into the sunset
Two rocks you left to mark your passing,
To tell of your returning
And our affinity. (Kullark 1.2.12)

Yagan’s chant in Kullark, which began with Woolah, a shout of praise in Nyoongah, ends with the wail of wirilo, wirilo when he laments the coming of the Jungara (‘returned dead’, as the whites were first thought to be) from across the ocean “to decimate and kill” (Kullark 1.2.12).
In the scene described above, we have the Aboriginal map of the country in Yagan's chant and dance, in his body painting and on the backdrop which is "a painting in neo traditional style of Warrgul the Rainbow Serpent in the shape of a map of the Swan River" (Kullark 6). Gilbert and Tompkins observes that by situating the landscape within an Aboriginal cosmology this map shows that it is not an empty space awaiting the settlers' inscriptions (148). By showing that the two cultures interacted, that territory was contested and that Aborigines were displaced, and disenfranchised, Davis goes on to challenge the pioneer myth which ignores the possibility that Aborigines and whites moved in the same landscape (Gilbert, Jack Davis 71).

The revolving screen through which Charles Fraser, the botanist and Captain James Stirling enter in Act One Scene three, cuts the Rainbow Serpent near the tail, thus symbolising the disruption of traditional life by the British invasion; and the flip side of the screen reveals a water colour of the Swan River in 1827. Generally assumed to contain unbiased scientific knowledge, maps mark out boundaries and as suggested by J.B. Harley represent "a plan or at least a desire to occupy and own particular territories" (qtd. In Gilbert, Jack Davis 64). Here Davis demonstrates how cartography functions as an aid to colonisation. The stylised serpent image questions the supposed mimeticism of the Western map and juxtaposes different versions of history. It also exposes the processes through which subjective and
contingent models of “reality” are passed off as objective and universal representations (Gilbert and Tompkins 148). In spite of being continually cut by such maps and other signs of imperial presence -- represented on the flip side of the revolving screen through which the colonisers enter -- the Rainbow Serpent remains the dominant image of the set and is restored each time the actors representing the colonisers exit. As Davis himself observes, “enough members of the public picked up the message and symbolism of Warrgul -- the promise of an Aboriginal rebirth -- for Kullark to become popular” (Chesson 195).

The meeting of people from the two different cultures is marked by misunderstandings, especially with the language barrier. When Fraser and Stirling, eagerly scouting the Swan River valley in Western Australia in 1824, for possible colonial settlement, encounter the Aborigines Mitjitjiroo, Moyrahn and Yagan, both parties are taken by surprise, are frightened, curious and cautious. The Aborigines believed that at Watjerup (Rottnest Island) the soul of the dead “shed its dark skin and appeared white” (Glossary Kullark 142). Hence when they first meet Mitjitjoroo rubs Stirling’s hand vigorously to ascertain that his skin is white not painted white and expresses astonishment at the strange appearance of the Europeans. This gesture “denaturalises the white body as the dominant sign of humanity” (Gilbert and Tompkins 209). The dialogue between the two parties carried out in two different languages is incomprehensible to each other and masks common, human feelings.

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But the fact that, the Aborigines speak entirely in the Nyoongah language foreground their cultural autonomy and independence.

Casting a death wish on Stirling and Fraser, Moyrahń “marks the ground in front of them with her wahna, and gestures to the sky” (1.3.15). She repeats the same gesture on her first encounter with the settlers too, who according to her “smell of death” (Kullark 1.5.19). Gilbert opines that by this gesture of marking the ground, Moyrahń is inscribing her priority over the land, and that hence the depiction of the moment of contact in Kullark may be seen as a territorial dispute (Jack Davis 63). Without their military support the invaders are shown at a disadvantage.

Stirling’s report summarising his encounter with the Aborigines for his superiors in England exemplifies the misunderstandings brought about by discourses of racial otherness (Elder 210). He says: “The natives are fascinated by the colour of our skin, believing it to be painted white, but care must be taken in all dealings with them, for they are vengeful and capricious and will not hesitate to resort to offensive weapons” (Kullark 1.3.15).

In her letter of 1829 an Irish pioneering woman Alice, expresses her excitement over the plans to set sail on the Parmelia for the Swan River Colony; over the prospect of a new life, and of the expedition, to be headed by Captain Stirling including a detachment of the sixty-third regiment for protection (Kullark 1.5.18). 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. As the Governor of Western Australia, it is by the authority vested in him by His Majesty the King, that Stirling authorises “William Patrick O'Flaherty [settler] to take up a selection of one thousand acres [of Aboriginal land] on the Upper Swan River” (Kullark 1.5.18). Captain Stirling himself is said to have appropriated some 100,000 acres of land on the banks of the Swan River (Chesson 52, Whyard).

The history of development in Black-White relationship may also be traced through the voice of the settlers in the play Kullark. Alice, in her letter of 1830 describes the natives who frequent her encampment “as black as ink and clad only in the scantiest of garments fashioned from the skins of animals, [. . .] jabber[ing] away to each other in a language that would cause Meg and the children a great deal of mirth” (Kullark 1.5.20). In her later diary entry she speaks of the prudence of sharing their food supplies with the natives “to avoid the risk of it being taken by force” (Kullark 1.5.22) and in 1832 expresses her fear and anguish over ‘a number of incidents [. . .] resulting in the deaths of natives” and of Yagan’s involvement “in all this terrible violence. [. . .] Lives are being lost for a mere sheep or a bag of flour” (Kullark 1.7.25) she writes. The setting up the Militia force by Stirling, and the establishment of an exclusively black prison on Rottnest Island points to the effectiveness of Aboriginal resistance and the fearful mood of the
colonialists. In 1834 the struggle in the Murray River reached a climax in the “Battle of Pinjarra” (Robinson and York 79).

According to Hodge and Mishra “for most of the history of European – Aboriginal relations, colonial policy has been driven more by ideological than by material considerations” and the Aborigine is constructed out of a double impulse of fear of revenge and desire for the security of legitimacy (25). According to the eighteenth century British imperial policy, officially, the Aboriginal peoples did not exist, while each Australian state developed its own policy in the nineteenth century.

Andrew Armitage in his book Comparing the Policy of Assimilation: Australia, Canada and New Zealand, divides Australian policy towards Aboriginal peoples into four principal periods: (1) initial contact, 1788-1930; (2) protected status, 1860-1930; (3) assimilation, 1930-70; and (4) integration with limited self-management, 1967- (Armitage 14). He points out that during first settlement in Australia, which was an experiment in criminology and colonialism, the land needed was obtained by an act of dispossession, assisted in British law by the convenient assumption that Australia was Terra nullius. Aboriginal peoples recognised exactly what had happened and from the beginning there was determined Aboriginal resistance to the loss of their land. “They were poor now. White men had taken their good country, they said, no ask for it but took it. Black man show white man plenty grass and water and then white man say come be off and drive them away and no let them stop” (qtd. in Armitage 16). As
Armitage puts it, dispossession without negotiation, compensation or recognition was characteristic of the Australian frontier.

In *Kullark* we find that, based on the conclusions drawn from his encounter with the Aborigines during his explorations, Stirling formulated his policy in dealing with the natives: i.e. "to avoid all possible means of quarrel with them, and the necessity consequent thereon of rendering them hostile to future settlers in revenge for the severe measures we should be obliged to take, if put to our defense" (1.3.15). On settlement, Stirling’s announcement “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” (*Kulark* 1.5.19) promises the protection of British justice to Aborigines. But his later proclamation stressed the urgency of establishing a militia force for “the safety of the Colony from invasion and from the attack of hostile native tribes” (*Kullark* 1.5.21) and urges “all male persons whatsoever between the ages of fifteen and fifty [. . .] to enrol themselves in the militia of the country” [. . .] “in the defense of the lives and property of the inhabitants of the territory” (1.5.21) points to a different situation.

Each encounter between the settlers and the Aborigines is followed by a proclamation by Stirling, which according to Elder disrupts their attempts to communicate and help each other (Elder 208). In a dramatized episode of 1830 we find the two groups trying to learn each
other's languages, trading flour and fish and establishing friendly relationships. But later in Private Jenkins' reminder to Will and Alice we see that "the Government has forbidden settlers to give flour to the natives" who have "to go down to the official rationing station" for it (Kullark 1.7.26).

Jenkins' attitude, and attempts to give Yagan "a bit of a fright" (Kullark 1.7.27) show how tribesmen around the Murray River and Swan districts were provoked into violent resistance by "trigger-happy" colonialists.

JENKINS. You go! Get off, I said.

[JENKINS fires a shot into the air. YAGAN drops his fish and flies. JENKINS picks up the fish, laughing.]

WILL. There was no need to do that, was there?

JENKINS. [handing the fish to WILL] Only language they understand, sir. (Kullark 1.7.27)

When Jenkins arrests Yagan, fearing retribution from the natives, through a proclamation Stirling sends Yagan "under armed guard to Carnac Island, there to be instructed in Christianity and the British way of life" (Kullark 1.7.29). After they escape and spear two white men in Fremantle, through another proclamation Stirling declares both Mitjitjiroo and Yagan as outlaws, deprived of "the protection of British law" and offers "a reward of thirty pounds to any person producing their bodies dead or alive" (Kullark 1.7.31). Exploding the white Australian
myth of a peaceful settlement on an unoccupied land, Davis here points out that a state of war existed between the invaders and the Aborigines and that in Western Australia, Midgegooroo and his kinsman Yagan figured prominently in the struggles of the early years.

On Yagan’s arrest, in his letter to the Governor, pleading for “mercy and understanding in dealings with the native Yagan” the settler Will expresses his concern “for the possible consequences, should Yagan be executed” and fear that “the militia cannot afford sufficient protection against attack” (Kullark 1.7.28). Alice in her letters speaks of Yagan’s escape from Carnac Island in May 1833, of Jenkins’s body being found in a well soon after, of the capture and execution of Mitjitjiroo after which his body was hung for public viewing (Kullark 1.7.31), of Yagan’s death in July 1833, brought about by two boys aged eighteen and thirteen, who had befriended him and shared his hearth and food before shooting him, and of how a settler “hacked off Yagan’s head with a knife and skinned the body to souvenir his tribal markings” (Kullark 1.7.33).

The letter to the English scientist Mr. T.J. Pettigrew, enclosed in the box containing the head of an Aboriginal native, preserved by “smok[ing] in the stump of a tree for three months”, claims it to be that of Yagan and hopes that “this piece will prove of phrenological interest and a worthwhile addition to your collection” (Kullark 1.7.33). According to Gilbert and Tompkins, the decapitated Aborigine points to the inhumanity of the invaders and operates as part of a strategic critique of
imperialism's policies and practices (223). Moreover, as the key signifier of cultural and racial difference, skin, according to Bhabha is the most visible of fetishes. Hence, “the mutilated black body [skinned for its tribal markings] functions within the colonising culture as a fetishised object” (Post colonial Drama 209).

Different representations of Yagan are given in Kullark. In one of her diary entries in 1829, Alice speaks of Yagan as a native who is intelligent enough to have learned several words of English (Kullark 1.5.22), Will’s letter to the Governor, after Yagan’s arrest in 1833 describes him as being “possessed of noble instincts, and a sense of justice that would do credit to any British citizen” (Kullark 1.7.28), while the letter to the English Scientist says that “he was believed to have been a leader of his people and ever disposed to violent and criminal activity. His nature was sullen, implacable and ill-tempered, in short a most complete and savage villain” (Kullark 1.7.33). According to Jack Davis, Yagan was a natural Aboriginal leader, a great orator among a people with a strong oral tradition, accomplished in law and religion, master of ceremonies during corroborees, politically astute, intellectually, morally and physically courageous (Chesson 191). Davis felt that, Yagan, who tried to convey to the settlers a better understanding of the Aboriginal point of view and fought for recognition of Aboriginal rights is an important symbol for the Nyoongah and “deserves better recognition than a flayed hide preserved in some obscure museum” (Chesson 193).
The Actress lists some of the incidents that occurred as white settlement spread south.

ACTRESS. [...] In eighteen forty-one at Vasse, seven Aborigines were shot by Mr. Bussell. In eighteen forty-two Bussell shot an Aboriginal caught stealing flour. The verdict was self-defense. In the same year he shot a seven-year-old-girl at point blank range. The verdict: accidental death. In eighteen forty-two Captain Molloy rounded up an entire tribe at Vasse and according to reports exterminated them and burnt their bodies. In eighteen twenty-nine the Aboriginal population of the South West was estimated at around thirteen thousand. By nineteen hundred and one there were less than eight hundred full-bloods left. (Kullark 1.9.38)

And at the end of Act one an Aboriginal actor sings:

ACTOR. [...] Then you propped me up with Christ, red tape, Tobacco, grog and fears, Then disease and lordly rape Through the brutish years. [...] (Kullark 1.9.39).
Through the Aborigines Protection Acts of the various states and officials called protectors, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines sought to control the everyday life of all Aboriginal peoples. With the sharp decline in the numbers of full-blooded Aboriginal population during the 1930s the original Aboriginal population was expected to die out, and the settlements created through this legislation were supposed to provide a “pillow for a dying race”. But a population explosion of part Aborigines at the same time, led to “the forced removal of mixed-blood children from their parents and camp life to be raised in orphanages, institutions and foster homes in White Australia” (21), and to the herding of Black Australians into reserves. As Shoemaker points out, “the 1929-1945 era saw both the summit of legal control and legislative repression of Aboriginal Australians and the first halting steps towards equality and citizenship [. . .]” (Black Words 34)

Act two scene one of Kullark takes stock of the situation in 1901. When “[. . .] after seventy-two years of European settlement the population of the colony of Western Australia [had] increased to one hundred and eighty thousand [. . .]”, the Aboriginal population had “reduced by half” and it was expected that “they will eventually die out” (Kullark 2.1.41). “[. . .] committees, inquiries, legislation, regulations, investigations and a new Government department, headed by a Chief Protector of Aborigines” was set up to deal with the “alarming” increase in the half-caste population (Kullark 2.1.41). A.O. Neville spells out his
policy of not allowing half-castes to grow up as vagrants and outcastes but to take them from its native mother and make them "into useful workmen and women" (Kullark 2.1.41). He would rather "be cruel in order to be kind" (Kullark 2.1.42) because according to him "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" (Kullark 2.1.42).

BLACK ACTOR. [speaking over the music] The police would just arrive and take the child and put him on a reserve or a mission where he could learn to live white, to assimilate. While the children played in the Settlement compound -- huge were 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 dreamings were. The children were caught, belted by the authorities, and told not to mix with those dirty blacks. (Kullark 2.1.42)

On reading "Living Black: Blacks talk to Kevin Gilbert", written by "a Koori, black fella from the Eastern States", Jamie in Act one scene eight reads out to his mother Rosie, some of the things Gloria Brennan, a Wongai girl had to say:

'My mother was used as a teacher on a settlement once too. She was taken away from my grandmother because she was
a half-caste. All half-castes, as they called them, were rounded up in Western Australia back in those days. And then they were put on a settlement down in the South-West that was right out of their area. Out of sight, out of mind". (Kullark 1.8.34).

Rosie didn’t need books to know about things like that. It had happened to Alec, Jamie’s father. Jack Davis’s parents too belonged to the stolen generation and in his life story he comments that, “nothing the missions gave could ever compensate for the loss of family continuity” (Chesson 122). In the epilogue to his autobiography A Boy’s Life, Jack Davis describes how when Sally Morgan was researching for the life story of Jack McPhee’s book Wanamurraganya strands of his own mother’s origins began to come together. The memory of her being taken away had never left the minds of her tribal people and Jack McPhee was able to trace Davis’s mother’s family by the oral history network. Jack McPhee, who had been with him at Moore River turned out to be his uncle, and he was also able to supply Davis’s skin name which is Burungu (Davis 145). Davis was never able to trace his father’s Aboriginal family.

**Life on the Reserve**

The 1905 Act made it compulsory for Aborigines and part-Aborigines to live on reserves when required by the authority to do so (Chesson 127) and during the early 1920s town reserves became the focus of the Aboriginal way of life; the only alternative was incarceration.
at Moore River Native Settlement (Haebich 222). Being in town meant living in unsatisfactory conditions under the watchful eye of the police and facing the resentment of the white townspeople. It also meant the distinct possibility of being sent to Moore River by zealous police officers or the department (Haebich 233). Ration depots were being deliberately closed down to force Aborigines to move to the settlements (166).

While in *Kullark*, the cast presents the Aboriginal situation during the Depression years of the 1930s, the first act of *No Sugar* depicts life in the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve at Northam in 1929. According to Anna Haebich,

the Aborigines at the Northam camp had a background of displacement and discriminatory treatment at the hand of whites. Many were originally from New Norcia; pushed off the mission early in the century, they camped in Moora until the early 1920s when, following a sustained and vicious campaign by the white town residents, they were forced out of the town and into the surrounding districts. Several families found regular employment in the Northam district until the Depression forced them to move into the Northam town camp which was typically situated one and a half miles from the town in a river bed opposite the sanitary depot and the rubbish dump” (Haebich 304).
They lived in humpies made of corrugated iron, flattened kerosene tins, old wheat bags and bush timber (Haebich 234).

Apart from a hundred Aborigines who were employed all the rest depended on Government rations which included one-and-a-half pounds of sugar, eight pounds of flour, four ounces of tea, one stick of tobacco per week, plus a daily issue of three quarters of a pound of meat (Kullark 2.3.46). In nineteen thirty the distribution of meat was discontinued (Kullark 2.3.46). Soap no longer being included as a ration item, Milly worries about keeping the kids clean and sending them to school (No Sugar 1.2.22), and Cissie wonders how she’s going to wash her hair (No Sugar 1.3.26). According to Gran, Jam and Wattle seeds, which used to be available in abundance, were “more better than white man’s flour”, and there were “no weevils in jam and wattle seeds”. However, as “wetjalas cut all the trees down” (No Sugar 1.2.22) they were no longer available. Sam, Joe and Jimmy contribute to the household. While Sam and Joe hunt rabbits with dowak and dogs to supplement meat for their dinner, Jimmy supplies stolen turnips for the rabbit stew (No Sugar 1.3.26). Sam earns some money by cutting fence posts for old skinny Martin, and a bundle of fox scalps fetches Jimmy a bounty of three pounds at the Shire Office (No Sugar 1.2.18). As all the money Milly has got would only suffice to buy the children an apple each for lunch, Joe supplements money so that they might have a pie (No Sugar 1.1.16).
The Depression is shown to have affected whites as well. Frank Brown, who once had his own farm on Lake Yealering lost it, between the rabbits a couple of bad seasons and the bank and “had been on the road already for six months” without work. He had been in Northam for about a fortnight, and was camped down near the saleyards with ten other white unemployed blokes (No Sugar 1.2.18). His “wife and two kids [were] staying with her parents in Leederville” and he couldn’t “even raise a train fare to Perth to go and see them” (No Sugar 1.2.18). The Millimurra family shares their meagre meals with him.

During winter, Cissie falls sick with pneumonia. The Millimurras try to keep out the cold by patching up the sides of their shelter with bags sewn together and by putting more tin salvaged from the dump for the roof (No Sugar 1.6.38). They have bread and fat for breakfast and the rabbit traps are empty.

**Northam transfer**

In *Kullark* the White actress comments:

WHITE ACTRESS. On January seventeenth, nineteen thirty-three, eighty-nine Aborigines, the entire population of the Northam camp, were rounded up by police and dumped in the Moore River Settlement. The Northam Shire Council said they had scabies and were a health risk. (2.3.46)

Black Actor adds that, “at Moore River it was found that only four of the eighty-one had the disease” (*Kullark* 2.3.46). In an author’s note in
Kullark, Davis explains that, “the experiences of Thomas Yorlah are [...] based on those of a number of Aborigines involved in the 1933 Northam transfer” (6). Both Kullark and No Sugar features this well documented incident.

No Sugar dramatizes the circumstances leading to their removal. The Lands Department refused to gazette the Guildford Road site in Northam, which had been proposed as a new reserve for the Aborigines, because it had met with objections from the adjoining landholders. A Mr. Smith, who according to Sergeant Carroll was “[...] generally down the Shamrock Hotel till stumps” (No Sugar 1.2.21) claimed that “[...] he wouldn’t be able to go out and leave his wife home alone at night” (No Sugar 1.2.21). Moreover, the Guildford Road site, with water supply and a couple of acres of grazing land was considered unsuitable for a native reserve and the Council planned to develop it as a “[...] recreation park, for boy scouts and picnic parties” (No Sugar 1.7.42). Though at first Sergeant Carroll of Northam is asked to recommend an alternative site for a new reserve for the Aborigines “[...] well away from any residences” (No Sugar 1.2.21) later it is decided to shift the Natives at Northam so that “the town and shire [...] [would be] quite devoid of natives after the seventeenth” and the impending elections (No Sugar 1.9.47). Warrants are prepared to arrest and remove them to Moore River, which according to Neville was already bursting at the seams.
In the play *Kullark*, the character Thomas Yorlah, born at Narrogin, on the reserve and living at Northam, is arrested under Section Twelve of the Aborigines Act and along with his wife and two children is bundled on to a train to Moore River since the law states that "[...] any native under the Aborigines Act can be moved from any area to any other area" (*Kullark* 2.3.47). In spite of his protest that he doesn’t fall under the Act, that he was only a quarter native blood, that he doesn’t live on the reserve or obtain Government blankets or rations (*Kullark* 2.3.47), Yorlah is given an hour’s time to move out. They were permitted to take only the clothes they stood up in (*Kullark* 2.3.48), and could pick up the children, who were playing down at the well, on the way to the station (*Kullark* 2.3.47). Their “kangaroo dawgs” were not allowed (*Kullark* 2.3.48).

In *No Sugar*, the shifting of the natives is shown to have been planned with military precision and is kept strictly confidential. Neville instructs Carrol that they are to be shifted in a special AR coach and brake van on the seven-twenty a.m. train. At Midland, the coaches will be attached to a train that leaves immediately for Mogumber and from there they are expected to proceed on foot to a quarantine camp at Long Pool, just east of the settlement (*No Sugar* 1.9.47). He authorises an expenditure of one and sixpence per native for food and insists that they are not to be allowed to leave the train at any stage of the journey.

At the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve, under threat of being arrested, the natives are ordered to leave the next morning, taking only
their personal belongings. According to Sergeant Caroll “every native in Northam’s goin’! (No Sugar 1.10.49) [. . . ] for health reasons. Epidemic of skin disease” (No Sugar 1.10.50). Jimmy knows why they’re being removed: “‘Coz wetjulas in this town don’t want us ‘ere, don’t want our kids at the school, with their kids” (No Sugar 1.10.50). Moreover, Jimmy Mitchell, the premier of Western Australia, wants to win the elections and the Aborigines are no vote banks. However, according to Jimmy, Mitchell is not going to win “‘Coz he’s got all them Chinamens workin’ on his farm at Grass Valley and wetjulas don’t like that. He’s gunna get rida the blackfellas, he should get rid of them Chinamens too” (No Sugar 1.10.50). While Old Uncle Herbie and Jimmy who has a serious heart condition are taken by train, Sam and his family, and on her insistence, Gran, are allowed to go by road with the horse and cart. In spite of all the efforts, Premier [Mitchell] loses the Northam seat and the Government is routed in the elections (No Sugar 2.10.76) but the Aborigines are not allowed to return.

**Moore River Settlement**

Anna Haebich describes the Moore River Settlement as a “multipurpose ‘total institution’ used by the Department as a ‘dumping ground’ for Aborigines from various parts” of Western Australia (199). Staff quarters, dormitories for children and trainees and settlement facilities were located in a central area called the compound, the adults
lived in a cleared camping area within walking distance both being surrounded by farming land (Haebich 169).

At the Moore River Settlement Yorlah is supplied with Settlement, clothes and the kids are separated from the parents to sleep in the dormitory. The parents are allowed to see them two-and-a-half hours every day and all day Saturday and Sunday (Kullark 2.3.48). According to Neville, at Moore River, Yorlah’s “wife and children are well cared for, [. . .] get three nourishing meals daily” and “everything is supplied there” for them. Yorlah’s description of life at Moore River is different: “bread and fat for breakfast, kangaroo stew for lunch and bread and golden syrup for evening meal”; [. . .] “a bag humpy for my wife, a locked-up compound for my kids, sleeping in beds riddled with bugs and fleas, and a cat-o'-nine-tails for beltin’ my eldest boy” (Kullark 2.3.50). According to him, “[. . .] Moore River is, a prison” (Kullark 2.3.50). While at Northam the kids always got a full belly and on Saturdays were treated to a packet of boiled lollies each and apples, when they went into town in the old horse and cart, shopping. At night they went to the pictures (Kullarrk 2.3.46), though they had to watch it from the roped off section for the Nyoongahs, “right up the back” (Kullark 2.3.47).

Yorlah is expected to start work at the Settlement digging ditches for three-and-six a week while he had been paid three pounds ten a week at his job in Northam (Kullark 2.3.51). His son, Little Alec had been “in seventh grade before they stopped the Nyoohgah kids goin’ to school” at
Northam, while at the Moore river Settlement they had only up to grade six (Kullark 2.3.52). Mary his daughter also had been in trouble and “Them trackers held her down over a bag of flour and Mr. Neale flogged ‘er till the poor kid piddled herself. Then ‘e made ‘er eat the flour” (Kullark 2.3.52)

“If I’m quarter and she’s half, what does that make the bloody kids?” (Kullark 2.3.49) wonders Yorlah. After waiting outside the Aborigines Department for two days to see Mr. Neville, he grabs Neville’s arm as he enters to make him stop and asks Neville “for an exemption from the Aboriginal Act” in order to get out of the Settlement. But according to Neville, Yorlah had “about as much chance of getting an exemption as a camel has of [. . . ] getting through the eye of a needle” (Kullark 2.3.51). Anna Haebich records that the racial background of many applicants for the exemption was so complex that Neville had to seek the advice of the Crown Law department and that the subsequent legal decisions often created strange anomalies (164). She documents how one man was informed that as a “quadroon” he was exempt from the Act, his wife, a “half-caste”, was not while their children being “octaroons” were, like their father, exempt from the Act (164).

Thomas Yorlah and his family escape from the Settlement with expert advice from Peter Jackson who had runaway lots of times with his kids, on how to beat the trackers by keeping away from the railway lines and the main roads and by sticking to the high ground (Kullark 2.3.53).
The sixty year old Peter Jackson had become a legend of his time by repeatedly escaping from Moore River in the 1920s so that he may bring his children up his own way, away from the influence of white society and according to the inspector of Aborigines, E.C. Mitchell, Jackson felt that he needed "some law to protect him from the chief Protector" (Haebich 255). The Yorlahs are caught and brought back by Bluey the black tracker and Thomas is given a six-month term in goal. But by then he had his kids looking healthier and their sore all healed. After four unsuccessful attempts and two years in goal, Mr. Neville gives Yorlah permission to take his wife and children from the Settlement. But Mr. Neale makes it very clear that they will not be allowed to return to Northam, "to apply for assistance from the Aborigines Department" and to appear in "any town after six in the evening" (Kullark 2.3.55).

In No Sugar, the Millimurra family from Northam is brought to the quarantine camp in Long Pool and is sheltered in a tent with a bush shade over it. As soon as they reach the camp Gran is concerned about gnummarri (tobacco), and winjar (water), Sam about the availability of tucker and daitj (meat) and Milly about a sheet of iron for the fireplace. The Matron, [the superintendent's Missus, who runs the hospital (No Sugar 2.1.55)], who examines them, declares that, "they 're a healthy lot" [and] a credit to Milly (No Sugar 2.3.60).

Superintendent Neale is furious to hear that after busting his guts to get the quarantine camp ready on time only four of the eighty nine
natives dumped on him under the pretext of the skin disease have actually got it (No Sugar 2.5.64). Dogs being identified as the only health hazard in the camp, he goes out to get them with horses, a length of rope, rifle and ammunition (No Sugar 2.5.64).

Superintendent Neal had been given his position because of his experience with the native people in South Africa during the Boer war, and he had a colonial mentality (Chesson 28). He ran the settlement like a colonial establishment and employed Aboriginal guards, like Billy Kimberley. Neal, who had the full force of the wider community behind him, was the representative of bureaucracy, authority, cruelty and oppression from the outside society (Chesson 32-33).

Mary Dargurru, a compound girl who's “from up North” (No Sugar 2.2.57) had spent three Christmases at the Settlement and hated everything in it especially Mr. Neal who scared her. According to Mary, “He's always hangin' around where the girls are workin'; in the cookhouse, in the sewin' room. And he's always carryin' that cat-o'-nine tails and he'll use it, too” (No Sugar 2.4.62). A letter from Mrs. Mary Warmadean, an Aboriginal woman living at the Moore River Settlement, submitted as evidence to the Mosley Royal Commission in 1934 states that: “Neal lays the girls over the flour Bags and use the cat nine tail on them while the trackers hold them for him [. . .]” (Chesson 31). Another statement submitted to the commission by Annie Morrison is given as a prefaces to Act two of Kullark: “[. . .] 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" (Kullark 40). In No Sugar, Neal flogs Mary with the cat-o'-nine-tails as Billy holds her outstretched over a pile of flour bags (No Sugar 4.2.93).

Joe Millimurra notices that Mary is pretty and is glad they're not related as strict rules apply to marriage (No Sugar 2.2.57). Mary explains what happens to Aboriginal girls who go out to work for guddeeah (whitemen) on a farm:

MARY. [. . .] Some of them guddeeahs real bad. My friend went last Christmas and then she came back boodjarri. She reckons the boss's sons used to belt her up and, you know, force her. Then they kicked her out. And when she had that baby them trackers choked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation (No Sugar 2.4.62).

In The Dreamers Uncle Worru also says the same thing.

WORRU. Some of them trackers was real warrah, you know when them yorgas was sent to work for wetjalas. [Miming a pregnant woman.] And sometimes they would come back bootjari, and when them koolongarahs was born, them trackers, Billy Kimberley and Bluey too, [miming chocking] they would woort beeryn them babies an' bury them in the pine plantation, night time. (1.6.30)
In his note to the Minister, Auber Octavius Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines, had mentioned that "[...] of eighty girls from the Moore River Native Settlement who went out into domestic service [...]" (1.2.20), "Thirty returned to the Settlement in pregnant condition ..." (No Sugar 1.2.-21).

At the Superintendent's office in Moore River Native Settlement, Neal leers at Mary's body when she brings him tea on a tray (No Sugar 2.5.63) and later asks her to work at the hospital. Mary is in tears at the prospect because "when Mr. Neal sends a girl to work at the hospital it usually means ... that he wants that girl ... for himself" (No Sugar 2.6.69) and if she didn't comply she'd be sent back home to marry some old man. The fact that he would never give her permission to marry Joe forces them to run away to Northam. "I'm gunna show you my country. Got a big river, swans, beautiful white swans" (No Sugar 2.7.70) The Millumurra family helps them to get away. Milly gives Mary some damper, Sam gives Joe a blanket and Jimmy advices them to "jump the rattler" and "keep to the gravel country" in order to avoid the trackers (No Sugar 2.7.71). Milly warns them not to wake the kids since the "less they know the better" (No Sugar 2.7.71).

On his return to the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve at Northam with Mary, Joe finds that, their camp had been destroyed by the police. He shows Mary the spot where their camp used to be, the rocks on which he and Cissie used to slide down on pieces of tin when
they were little, and the gum tree on which the magpies used to nest. Sergeant Carrol forbids them from camping at the Government Well Aboriginal Reserve (No Sugar 3.2.81), so with Sam's rabbit trap, and the burnt remains of David's bike (No Sugar 3.1.79) salvaged from the rubble they go on to live independently in Northam, which was no longer a ration depot, for two months, by working at Lockyer's, when Neville once again interferes in their life.

Since the Town council and especially the councilors George Withnall and Ray Drew were adamant that no natives remain in the Northam area, Neville instructs Carrol to apprehend them. Moreover "some mob of do-gooder women were kicking up about them being shifted out before the election" (No Sugar 3.3.83). With the Royal Commission on natives making enquiries the council did not want any trouble. The girl was to be sent back to the Settlement while Joe was to be sentenced for six months imprisonment for absconding with Mary Dargurru, a minor. Back at Moore River, Mary refuses to stay in the Nurses' quarters and work in the hospital as suggested by Neal but insists on living with Joe's Mum and Dad. Furious, Neal flogs her with the cat-o'-nine-tails as Billy holds her outstretched over a pile of flour bags (No Sugar 4.2.93). On getting out of gaol Joe gets Neville's permission to leave the settlement with Mary and his baby on condition that they don't return to Northam. Jack Davis in his foreword to Anna Haebich's book For Their Own Good says: "I lived through these times: I
have experienced the oppression of the Aborigines Act, the misery of the fringe camps and the horrors of Moore River native settlement” (xiii), and hence gives a true portrait of the times through his plays.

**World War II**

Contravening published regulations Aborigines were used by the Army and also fought in the AIF, in North Africa and New Guinea during World War II and it provided “the spark for increased black Australian urbanization, activism and self-determination” (Shoemaker, *Black Words* 63). Aboriginal contribution to war is given in a metatheatrical piece in Act two scene five in *Kullark*. Over four hundred Aborigines served in the Army, fifty served overseas, two died in Japanese prisoner of war camps. Young Alec Yorlah, demobilised back to civilian life and to a job in the Forestry Department, is warned by his colonel about the psychological warfare outside:

**COLONEL.** [. . .] it’ll be a lot harder for you coloured boys. [. . .]

[. . .]

**COLONEL.** [. . .] You’ll always have to try harder, do better, prove yourself more than a white man.

[. . .]

**COLONEL.** [. . .] 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 (*Kullark* 2.5.59)
Young Alec Yorlah is given a citizenship certificate, called "dawg collars" (*Kullark* 2.5.59) by the Aboriginals. "Classified white by the Commissioner of Native Welfare" (*Kullark* 2.5.60) he is "exempt from the Natives Administration Act" (*Kullark* 2.5.59) and is expected to "think white an' act white" (*Kullark* 2.5.59). But Alec believed that, as a forward scout for his platoon in New Guinea, it was thinking black that helped him survive. "Somehow I always knew when they [Japs] were goin' to open up, always had time to yell to me mates behind me" (*Kullark* 2.5.59). Now that Alec has got the citizenship rights, the local policeman warns him that he would have to live up to the privilege which means that he "[. . .] Can't have no 'lations visitin', can't live on the reserve. Citizenship don't sound much like freedom to [. . .]" him (*Kullark* 2.5.63).

Jack Davis observes that since Aborigines holding the citizenship rights were forced to dissociate themselves from the wider community many possible leaders were lost to the Aboriginal community (Chesson 118).

David Millimurra in *In Our Town* also exclaims: "the law by some miraculous metaphysical process has changed me into a whiteman" (1.3.8). According to David Millimurra, who had recently returned from war, and is "[. . .] the most decorated serviceman in [. . .] town" (*In Our Town* 1.12.30), "Whenever I faced the Japs I never thought of country. All I thought of was survival" (*In Our Town* 1.8.21) and he was accurate in throwing a hand grenade because he "was scared some quick nip bastard would be better at throwing them back at me" (*In Our Town* 1.10.25).
According to him, War “brings out the worst and the best in men” (In Our Town 1.15.33).

In Kullark, Alec notices that things hadn’t changed much in the reserve and he doesn’t expect the town to have changed much either. But he plans to move off the Reserve to a house just out of town, is determined not to become like the wetjalas he used to see as a young boy, “clingin’ to the bar like half dead flies” (2.5.62), hopes to marry Rosie Betts, a Yamatji from Carnarvon, who used to be a compound kid like himself at Moore River Settlement, and had later moved on to Perth and when his kids grow up wanted to see to it that they get a good education. “I want ‘em to grow up to be teachers or nurses, something with a bit of dignity [because] They’ve been servants and farmers far too long” (Kullark 2.5.64). But his father warns him that “Wetjalas still the same in this town, still don’t like Nyoongahs” (Kullark 1.5.60).

Set in Northam, Western Australia, in 1946, the play In Our Town continues the story of the Millimurra family of No Sugar, now, a decade later, living on the outskirts of a country town. Most of his life David Millimurra had been living “on the patch of gravel a couple of hundred yards from the local rubbish tip” (In Our Town 1.3.6). But now that he has got his citizenship rights he plans to shift to “the old Beaumont place out on the cemetery road” with his “mum, dad, Joe and his family and old Uncle Herbie Mirralga” (In Our Town 1.3.6). According to David, his mother has “never switched an electric light on in her life, let alone
cooked with an electric stove!” (In Our Town 1.8.20). Milly, looks forward to their move from their camp on the reserve to a house in town and dreams of “... a place of our own, roof over our heads, rooms for the kids, lovely rose garden . . . [and plans to] put some veggies in . . . some chooks” and is sure she wouldn’t miss the rain pouring in through the hole in the roof, “Having to shift the kids out of the drips. The heat in summer, the doublegees and flies and stink from the tip” (In Our Town 2.4.42). But Sam warns her not to count out chickens before they are hatched (In Our Town 2.4.42).

Milly hopes that it would be their last move and insists on taking everything with her: “It’s taken me years to gather what I got and I’m not leaving anything behind” (In Our Town 1.5.9). She remembers their earlier moves to the settlement and back again. Of how her old mum had “fought with that old Sergeant to take her dog, Wow Wow, with her” and how she laughed when they could come back to Northam “to her own country to die” (In Our Town 1.5.11). The family remembers their days at Moore River, of how Sam had made his water carting yoke “the day little Jimmy was born in Moore River, [. . .] eight years ago” (In Our Town 1.5.9) and how Joe had run away from the settlement with Mary and got locked up in Northam by a young cop.

JOE. [. . .] I remember telling him that the only reason he was in the police force was because he wouldn’t have to join the army.
DAVID. Well he didn't make it. He was taken prisoner and died in Tobruk. *(In Our Town 1.5.10).*

Joe adds that Moore River was now a “training place for aboriginal missionaries” *(In Our Town 1.5.10).* Jack Davis had dramatized most of these reminiscences in his play *No Sugar.*

Though David assures his family that “this move is permanent” *(12)*, Sam warns him that it is only “if the whiteman will let us” *(In Our Town 1.5.12).* According to Uncle Herbie “the wetjala’s like, a dugaitj. You gotta watch ‘em all the time. Don’t take your eye off ‘em” *(In Our Town 1.5.12).* Milly decides to keep her fingers crossed and asks Sam not to throw away the water-carrying yoke yet *(In Our Town 1.5.13).*

The publican considers David a “bit ambitious” in looking for a house in town since in his opinion “nigs don’t usually buy houses” *(In Our Town 2.6.44).* According to him they would be better off in a camp. At the bowling green, the town talks about Alec Beaumont selling his house to Miller and the general opinion is that “property values will go down if they start selling houses to boongs [. . .]” *(In Our Town 2.6.45).*

Soon the coach drops David from the next week’s game *(In Our Town 2.9.50)*, Jim Moss refuses to sell the truck to David and by buying off the Beaumont property, which had been promised to David denies him the one chance to get his family and Uncle Herbie out of the cold.

In all his plays Davis presents without apology and with deep sympathy the pressure of alcohol on many Aboriginal families. He
portrays how the disalignment of cultural values have led to an uneasy existence in a “twilight world of welfare dependency and petty criminality” (Gillam 131). The contemporary Aboriginal situation is depicted in *Kullark* through the characters Alec and Rosie Yorlah and the opening scene gives a glimpse of the Yorlah household of 1979. A radio is blaring out the local commercial station. Rosie clears up the bottles of the night before. Alec clearly suffering from a hangover flips through the newspaper to the racing page. Alec is an alcoholic, is dependent on the Social Service, is prejudiced against white “do gooders” and is impatient of Jamie and his Aboriginal activism, while Rosie struggles to keep the family going.

According to Jamie the trouble with Pop and his generation is they got no guts. If a Wetjala said “jump”, they all jumped (*Kullark* 1.8.34) while Alec feels that “All these young fellas today, just ‘cause they’re getting’ an education they think they’re ‘igh an’ mighty” (*Kullark* 1.4.16). Rosie defends (*Kullark* 1.8.34, 1.8.35) the alcoholic and irresponsible Alec with whom she had been “shacked up” for twenty five years, as she is aware what he had to go through; and believes that “ole boy’s pretty level ‘eaded when ‘e wants to be” (*Kullark* 2.2.45).

The irresponsibility, defeatism and alcoholism of the men in the family are also depicted in *The Dreamers*. “As a race of people we have one of the highest mortality rates in the world, due to alcohol and alcoholic diseases. In Western Australia alone, one in twenty eight dies
through alcoholism, before the age of forty-five”. In *The Dreamers*, the hopeless attitudes of Roy and Eli and Dolly’s endless fight to make ends meet is the inevitable result of this situation. (Davis, *Meanjin* 45). Jamie in *Kullark* gets involved in a fight with the publican, is arrested and has to be bailed out for fifty dollars by his parents, Alec and Rosie Yorlah (*Kullark* 2.2.44). In *Barungin* most of the male members of the Wallitch family of 1988 are in and out of jail.

Both Meena in *Barungin* and Dolly in *The Dreamers* are concerned about their teenage sons, Peter and Micky ending up in goal. When Peter is found riding in a stolen car and is arrested by the police Dolly declares: “No son of mine is goin’ to gaol if I can help it” (*The Dreamers* 1.7.42) and gets him out. But years later, as Granny Doll in *Barungin*, she has to mourn the death of her son Peter who dies in custody. And this happens because he tries to protect his nephew, Micky, whose stolen goods are found in the car Peter was driving. Peegun who accidentally catches Mickey redhanded had stashed it away for him.

Jack Davis observes that superhuman efforts were required on the part of the women to keep a house under reserve conditions and to hold the family together (Chesson 128). In the tribal family presented in *Kullark*, the women and children are shown to be following the men with bags kulumans and firesticks (*Kullark* 1.1.7), but in an urban situation as shown later, it is the women who lead carrying an assortment of boxes and bundles (*Kullark* 2.1.47).
In *The Dreamers* Dolly complains about the living conditions: "Oh, gawd, I wish we 'ad a decent place to live in. No hot water, no locks on the doors, worse than livin; in a bloody camp" (10), and the children fight for soap and water. All the women characters are found struggling to survive in deplorable living conditions; fighting against alcoholism in their family, but determined to see that their children have a better future. Rosie Yorlah of the contemporary family depicted in *Kullark*, is determined that her son Alec should complete his course in a Teachers' Training College and go on to be a school teacher (2.1.44) She wants to "[. . .] prove to every single Wetjala in town that [her] son is as good as theirs, even better" (*Kullark* 2.2.44), while Dolly in *The Dreamers* wants Meena and Shane to finish school, and Meena to stay on in school with an Aboriginal study grant and land a decent office job, or to become a nurse (2.1.55). She is concerned about Meena keeping late nights as she has seen “young girls walkin’ around with babies on their hips” and doesn’t want that to happen to her daughter (*The Dreamers* 2.1.55).

Dolly remembers how she, like other young girls, used to get a piece of cotton from the sleeves of her dress and tie notes on the legs of beetles and throw them up in the air, hoping that some boy would find them and read the notes (*The Dreamers* 1.6.34). She now wonders whether to be thankful for that beetle or not for finding Roy.

Though powerless to effect any changes Gran in *No Sugar* protests spiritedly when the rations are cut and walks off with Milly hooting and
laughing *Nyoongah* fashion. She refuses to comply easily with the order to shift to Moore River, insists on going with the road party along with Sam and Milly and on taking the dogs as well. By wailing, crying, tearing her hair and throwing plates and mugs about she forces Sergeant Carrol to give in (*No Sugar* 1.10). As Jimmy and Sam start a drunken brawl, at their dwelling in the Reserve Gran charges at them, grabbing both by the hair pulling viciously (*No Sugar* 1.3.30). Later she takes her wahna stick and gives them both a solid poke in the ribs forcing them to get up though reluctantly (*No Sugar* 1.3.30). Proud of her heritage and skills, she shows off Joe's neat belly button and announces "I brought him into the world with me own two hands" (*No Sugar* 2.3.60), "I brought plenty *kooloongah* into this world, Matron" (*No Sugar* 2.3.60), Matron admires and acknowledges Gran's midwifery skills. At the Long Pool Camp, Gran fetches some medicinal leaves for the huge welts on Mary's back, made by Neale's cat o nine tails. "put these *Jeerung meear* on your back. Fix up quick and make you better" (*No Sugar* 4.3.93). As Mary refuses to go to a hospital but insists on having her baby in the camp, Gran assures her of her assistance. "I brought Joe into this world and, by crikey, I'll bring his baby" (*No Sugar* 4.3.93).

History is also presented through the memories and stories of the old Aboriginal characters in the plays. The Old fella whose death is mourned by the contemporary Nyoongah family in *Kullark*, was well over a hundred (*Kullark* 1.1.10) at his death. Alec Yorlah, remembers how
when they were kids at Moore River the old man used to speak about being “brought up shepherding sheep before any fences was put up” (Kullark 1.1.10). It is an often forgotten fact that Aborigines were the mainstay of the cattle industry. He also used to go sandalwood cutting out in the eastern goldfields (Kullark 1.4.16). This old man who was “always tellin’ yarns about them old Nyoonghs” (Kullark 1.1.10) reminds one of old Worru, the great "Universal man" in The Dreamers. Dolly remembers him as a young man, "straight as wattle spears" (2.7.79), fast and sure in a hunt, the custodian of Nyoongah stories, songs, dances and language (2.7.79). She also remembers how as a young man working on Minily: “[. . .] the overseer and the boss tied Worru up and they beat him and belted him with a bleedin’ stock whip. They left him there tied up in the sun. Anyway he got loose and night time they was tjurip sleepin’, he snuck up on ‘em and he belted them two Wetjalas somethin’ cruel” (The Dreamers 2.2.67).

In the opening scene of The Dreamers, Worru, the elder of the family and the only one who can remember what life was like in the bush, is revealed alone downstage going down memory lane “to where the camp place used to be” (1.1.7). Pleasant memories, -- of "voices, laughing, singing," of Billy Kimberley corroboreeing for a tin of Lucky Hit, and then sharing it with his friends, of Angie, who was proud of her church wedding to Herbie, of meal times when Bella pulled "the damper like a golden moon / from the ashes of the fire", of sharing "the last of
the bacca", (1.1.8) -- come surging back to his mind. The camp situated on the Swan, the old homestead near by and the kindly old man Hammersley are all gone. And as Worru puts it in the refrain:

WORRO. Now we who were there
who were young,
are now old and live in suburbia,
and my longing is an echo
a re-occuring dream,
coming back along the track
from where the campfires used to gleam.

(The Dreamers 1.1.8)

Here Jack Davis addresses the problem of reconciling the old "way of life tied to being a part of the land, whilst living in suburbia" and of surviving with an Aboriginal sense of identity (Saunders viii). It may be noticed that even in Worru's farthest memories the colonial presence is very much there. The setting for this poem is "on the banks of the Swan River at historic Guildford, on Hamersley's farm", which was established on Nyoongah tribal ground and Davis remembers that from the early days of white settlement, he and his descendants had allowed the original people to camp there unmolested (Meanjin 43).

The old man Worru is a conglomerate of three old men Davis knew as a boy of fourteen years in Moore River Native Settlement (Meanjin 43). Davis describes Skipper, one of the inspirations for the composite
character Worru, as “blind through trachoma, hunched and alone in a world of his own [. . .] It was as if he could see a vision of the past in [his campfire] [. . .] when his disposition changed he would begin to recall the past, as if it dwelt there, alive in the flames” (Chesson 36). Winarn, another old fellow from the north, and the second of the trio who inspired Worru, lived an active life and had done just about everything it was possible for an outback man to do. A master storyteller, he was able to hold an audience until the embers of the campfire had faded into ash (Chesson 37). Jack Henry, an old man of such an antiquity that it would have been impossible to guess his age, recalled a time when Aborigines had not been affected by European intrusion, saw that period as a golden age, and regretted its passing (Chesson 37). Jack Davis who shared his feeling of nostalgia hopes that in Worru, Henry will continue to live on (Chesson 38). Jack Davis himself played the part of Worru in the stage production (Johnson, John Pat xii).

Both Granny Doll in Barungin and Gran in No Sugar are preoccupied with the survival of their family and “fiercely holds the family together, instructing them in the ways of their people” (Carmody 56). Like Worru, towards the end of the play, a tried Gran, uses her own language more frequently and lives more often in the past.

Under the 1916 regulation to the 1905 Act a small number of Aboriginal men were appointed as “trackers” or “police” to assist in
maintaining discipline. Recruited from among the inmates at the settlement, they had a higher status, power over other inmates and material benefits. Both ‘traitors’ and ‘victims’ they were not accepted as equals by the staff and were openly ostracized and shunned by their fellow inmates (Haebich 205). At the Moore River Native Settlement in the play _No Sugar_, Billy Kimberly, identifies himself as, “a politjman” (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55). But Cissie exclaims that “he’s black” (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55) and to David he “ain’t black, [but] purple” (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55). To Sam, Billy who smokes a clay pipe and carries a whip, is “more like Tom Mix” (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55), the American film star of the twenties who played cowboy roles (Carmody 35). To Gran, he “ain’t politjman”, [but] “just [a] black tracker” (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55) but she fears that he might be a boolyaduk (magic man). To Joe “he’s yuart (nothing) (_No Sugar_ 2.1.55). The children laugh at him and Joe, David and Cissie call him “wahrdung, wahrdung, black crow” (_No Sugar_ 2.3.61). Neal calls him “blithering stone-age idiot”, and “a bloody incompetent savage” (_No Sugar_ 2.10.76). In _Kullark_, for capturing the runaway Yorlah family, Bluey, the black tracker, is rewarded with a “couple of extra sticks of tobacco” (_Kullark_ 2.3.53).

Billy Kimberley is Other to both the whites and the Nyoongahs. In the White colonizing discourse, he is an agent of its oppression of the blacks. He acts his part as the policeman, when in _No Sugar_ he pursues
Mary and Joe who had runaway and whips David who was going swimming instead of attending the Sunday class. But at the corroboree he reveals himself as a man without a people or a place, a family or a home. And by offering his whip to Joe, Billy fashions a new identity and a position for himself within the constraints of colonization (Dibble 96).

As Gilbert and Tompkins point out, characters in the plays of Jack Davis, are figured as “the remnants of a pre-contact history, the forces of the more official colonial record, and the contingencies of the current situation” (109), who are further fragmented through “the spatial and temporal limits to personal action, as well as political and intellectual discourses” (109). As part of the project of a recuperation of subjectivity, they have their own stories to tell.
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Haebich, Anna. *For Their Own Good.* Perth: University of Western Australia, 1985.

