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## **Imagined Aboriginality**

The instrumentalisation of ‚culture‘ in the struggles of  
legitimising and exercising power in multicultural  
Australia

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# Declaration of academic integrity

With this statement I declare that I have completed this thesis autonomously and independently. The thoughts taken directly or indirectly from external sources are properly marked as such. This thesis was not previously submitted to another academic institution and has not yet been published.

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## I. Introduction

This thesis seeks to reflect on the discourses and imaginaries on Aboriginality in the broader Australian socio- political context. It traces the history of the power over defining ‘Aboriginality’ that has, in one way or another, always been of relevance for the narration of the Australian nation. The present day Indigenous struggles for recognition and sovereignty reveal the ambiguities of the multiculturalist aspirations within the liberal democratic nation-state, where ‘unity in diversity’ is considered as main asset in the construction of an ‘Australian identity’.

Based on my personal observations during the production of the documentary film “It’s all relative” in Australia in 2007, with Angela Milthorpe, a young anthropologist and aged care worker, and two Aboriginal families who adopted her into their extended kinship systems, I reflect on the effects that the power over defining ‘Aboriginality’ have had on the reality of Indigenous living conditions. The instrumentalisation of their stories, whether in order to silence resistance or to ‘absorb them’ – as a means of coming to terms with the white Australia’s own ‘illegitimate’ past – has shaped the nation’s contested history. The presence of ‘Indigenous issues’ in the Australian public sphere, which differ in various ways from those of immigrants who increasingly came into the country after World War Two, particularly gained attention since the 1960s. Those years mark the abandonment of the ‘White Australia’ policy, the beginning of the multicultural policy, and the emerging ‘reconciliation talks’, a setting in which the Indigenous people fought their first successful land right claims. Their struggle for recognition has gained new momentum with Australia’s adoption of the UN declaration on Indigenous rights in 2009 that provides an acknowledged basis for Indigenous people to refer to in their land right claims and on-going struggles for sovereignty and self-determination. In 2007, when the shooting of the documentary film *It’s all relative* took place, the issue of whether or not to apologize to the Indigenous people for past wrongdoings and oppression, has been on the table for years and widely debated in the media. Indigenous stories and memories have been reworked and incorporated into the national narrative throughout this process, in a way so that the government, after almost 200 years of discrimination and neglect, proudly announces Australia to be the home of the oldest living culture on

earth. The effects of these past struggles over exercising power and legitimising dominance, visualised, for example, by the writing of Australian history around Eurocentric narratives of white superiority, reach well into the present. They result in a duality of the existing images about present day representations of Indigenous life-worlds that is reproduced in the media and public sphere. It includes exotic fantasies of a kind of nature-bound, noble savagery on the one hand, and the focus on poverty, poor health and drug abuse, on the other. In the worst cases – as in the racist rhetoric of John Howard (Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007) and Pauline Hanson (leader of the *One Nation* Party 1997-2003) – this also includes representations of Indigenous people as exploiters of social services and government money.

This understanding guides, at least partially, everyday interaction and the experiencing of ‘Others’ in the multicultural Australian nation-state and is one of the reasons why discrimination continues even though counter-narratives to the dominant discourses have emerged in diverse cultural spheres. The representation of ‘authentic Aboriginality’, whether by government officials, the main players in the cultural industry or the particular agents of Indigenous resistance movements, is identified as being inextricably linked to the distinct understanding of ‘culture’ in this setting. This thesis reflects on this construct – which accompanies the circulation of power within the hegemonic discourse – as well as on the complexity (or may be even impossibility) to represent (e.g. by the means of a documentary film) ‘*Indigenous culture*’, and suggests possible ways to inspire its renegotiation. The combination of theory with insights from the participant observation and practical experience at the making of the film in Australia in 2007 should be understood as a means of coming to terms with the historically grown power structures at play that fix and bind subjects to distinct positions within the discourse. This is a first step towards my final aim in this respect, namely to understand – and enable – ethnographic/documentary filmmaking that is up to the level of differentiated insight achieved in theory while reaching out to citizens.

## I.1 Approach, structure and central questions

The experience I gathered, by plunging into the particular aspect of reality throughout the documentary film project *It's all relative* in Australia in 2007, inspired the theoretical approach in this thesis. It guided my aim to analyse the dominant structures which render the conceptualisation of 'Aboriginality' in the Australian multicultural nation-state. What troubled my observations in the field was what appeared as difficulty of fitting the agents involved, Indigenous people and *balander* (non-Indigenous) *people* alike, into one particular concept of *being in the world*. On several occasions throughout the trip we, the film crew, were confronted with our expectations and our own set of meaning making devices. Not the least because of economical restraints, we committed ourselves, partially, to the idea of producing a storyline with narratives that fit a television format. This aspect added to our personal expectations and inspired the ideas about what kind of images we 'need' and want. The tension that resulted from the fulfilment or disappointment of expectations, which, in further consequence, is likely to be mirrored in the representations about particular aspects of reality, points to the fact that our subject positions are deeply inscribed in the dominant discourse. Returning from the production in Australia I found myself confronted with the difficulties that arose by my attempts to explain the many layers involved in the project. This includes ambivalences regarding personal afflictions, as well as ethical and moral aspects, that were at first only noticeable as some sort of uncertainty. What did we want to show in the first place? What *can* and what *should* we show at all?

My approach towards analysing the structures at play was inspired by Zips' understanding of what is called "praxeologische Strukturgeschichte", a term initially coined by Pierre Bourdieu. This means defining and analysing each particular historical piece of reality or structure by identifying it as product of former struggles over maintenance or change of this structure, on the one hand, and as principle for later transformations, on the other (Zips 2003:21; see also Zips and Wernhart 2001). The question to what degree the discrimination and repression of Indigenous people is related to the prominent understanding of 'authentic Aboriginality' is what re-appears as constant theme in this text. The combination of materials from anthropological discourses, literature and political rhetoric – written, oral and visual accounts – helps to



illustrate the growth of discourses that rendered the development of certain understandings of ‘Aboriginality’ in the past and influences recent processes of articulating Indigenous empowerment and sovereignty. The focus rests on the relationship of Indigenous people and the dominant majorities in certain historical circumstances that became manifest in political, scientific and popular cultural discourses. My approach towards a critical analysis of the recent phenomena – of the contested field in which the project took place – is inspired by Foucault’s understanding of power-relations and Bourdieu’s notion of agency. The question that originally haunted me after filming the road-trip, and also guided my first theoretical approach towards the field, was concerned with the development of those structures that render our subject positions within the discourse:

*How do the effects of exercising sovereignty in defining Aboriginality in Australia become visible in the production of the documentary films like the project ‘It’s all relative’?*

In further consequence it was necessary to shed light on the concepts of nation, nationality and the articulation of *the* Australian identity. Those understandings do not only influence policymaking, but also structure so-called ‘cross-cultural’ interaction on the micro level. Another question that appeared as striking was thus:

*Which understanding of ‘culture’ guides the Australian nation-state’s multicultural policies and national narratives as a means of exercising inclusionary and exclusionary strategies in dealing with minorities?*

The observations conducted in the field underline Langton’s argument that ‘black-white’ relations lack actual intersubjectivity: She explains the difficulties that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have in relating to one another by pointing to the fact that most of the knowledge, that non-Indigenous people have about Aborigines, stems from stories from former colonists, films, videos and television (see Langton 1993:33). Although this has changed in the past two decades several stereotypical images remain and guide mainstream perception ‘those Others’. How we deal with ‘the

Other', whether we understand the relationship of the self and the other as reciprocal and manage to engage in a dialogue in a reflexive manner or not (see Schäffter 1991:14f; see also Baumann and Gingrich 2004), depends to a large degree on the society's coming to terms with the difficult past of those relationships, as becomes clear in the analysis of the reconciliation process. This touches questions of collective guilt and shame. In the course of this thesis I combine the relevant theoretical concepts mentioned above that help to reconstruct and analyse historically grown discourses of 'othering' with the material from the field, being field notes from my participant observation and interviews and conversations along the road and from my research later on (with Angela Milthorpe, Will and Danielle Tinapple).

Since the power over defining 'Aboriginality' or 'Indigeneity' can be identified as a main asset in the processes of gaining, legitimizing and exercising power, I am especially concerned with possible re-articulations and re-negotiations of the way representations about those concepts should look like today. Documentary film (or ethnographic film for that matter) can and should be a way to make accessible the view on antagonisms, contradictions and tensions in the analytical structures, in order to inspire corrections. This idea leads to the following question (that touches one of the oldest questions of the discipline itself, being that of how to make meaningful representations of 'culture'):

*How can we renegotiate the dense amalgam we refer to as 'culture' by the means of documentary or ethnographic film, in order to add positively to the cross-cultural understanding and interaction?*

This points to the political character and/or potential I assign to documentary film, a point of view I deal with in the first part of this thesis. In order to articulate possible answers to this question I suggest distinctive approaches that are theoretically inspired by Johannes Fabian's thoughts on 'representation' in combination with the work of anthropologist and filmmaker Elisabeth Povinelli (expert interview) in the final part, by which my line of argument will come full circle. This last part also provides my personal, final considerations and a short outlook.

## **I.2 Motivation**

My interest in this topic was initially inspired by the production of the documentary film “It’s all relative” in which I participated as part of the film crew from *Formation Studios* (as camera operator and audio facilitator) in Australia in 2007. Being a second year anthropology student back then, I held high hopes in documentary filmmaking as a praxis that allows meaningful individual agency. This thesis is thus also a way to personally come to terms with the ambiguities that result from the self-imposed, somehow naïve, obligations to overcome social hierarchies and not to perpetuate existing power relations on the one hand, and the acknowledgment that being embedded in precisely those structures is also what allows my freedom to move, on the other. In this respect this work does also, in a way, reflect on understandings of the sort of anthropology I can identify with after several years of study. Our privilege is also our duty; anthropologists, therefore, should increasingly engage in transferring knowledge from inside the discipline to a broader audience outside the academic arena. Several concepts and understandings that have been developed within the discipline throughout its contested history, in order to come to terms with certain societal phenomena, have made their way into the general public in the past, where they have been re-contextualised and gained new meaning. I understand it as part of our task to further promote the more fluid appropriation of anthropological insights and ideas into everyday life, and at the same time argue for a precise questioning of the usage of certain concepts that have been adapted to fit more broader political or economic means. I consider the film language an appropriate tool of the time in order to do so.

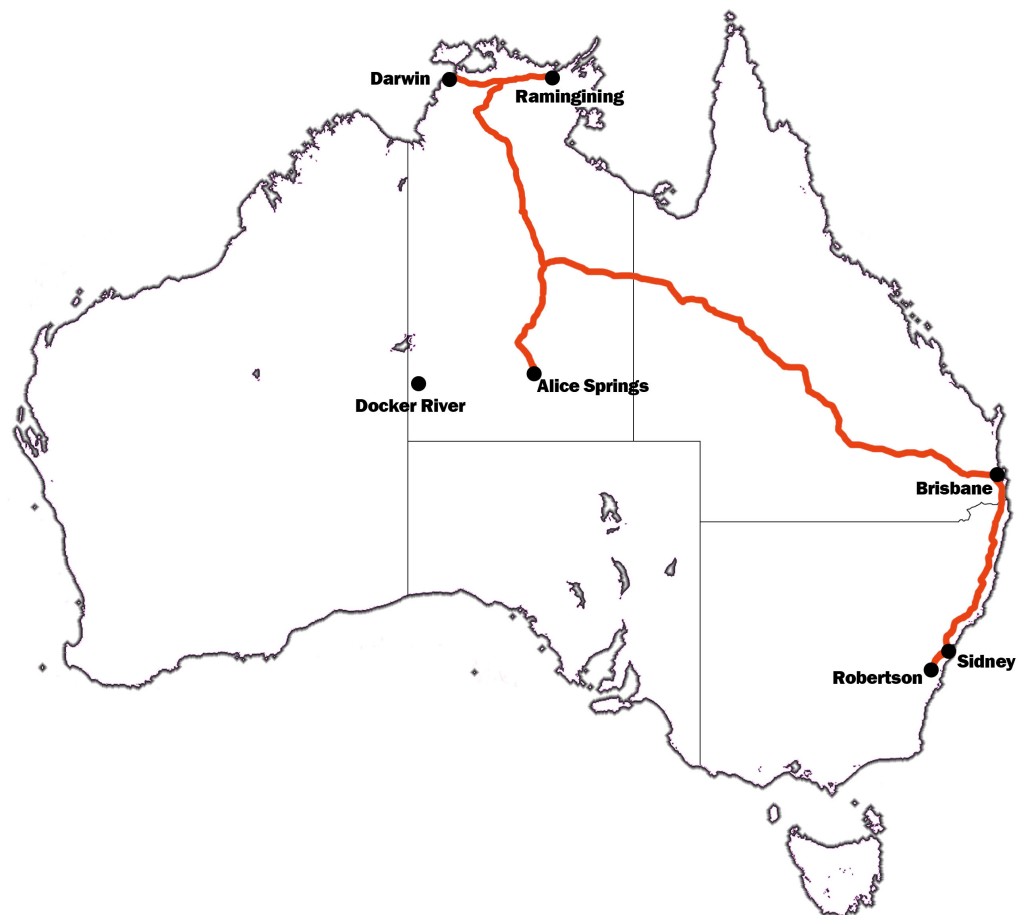
However, the process I embarked on cannot be ‘concluded’ within this exercise alone. I consider coming to terms with the right questions in this work as the basis for my further studies at the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology in Manchester in 2012/2013, where I hope to take the next leap in this process of improving theoretical and practical methods that allow the gaining of deeper understanding in such differentiated and complex field and also hope to find a way to express this knowledge in a meaningful way, in this case, by making film.

### **I.3 'It's all relative' – Project outline**

In the summer of 2007 I was asked to participate in the production of a documentary film in Australia as part of the film crew, assisting with the third camera and audio recording, an offer I accepted immediately the moment I learned more about the story: Angela (Ange) Milthorpe, a young anthropologist in her early thirties, has been living and working in aged care in the Northern Territory for several years. Throughout this time she got adopted into two Aboriginal families, one from North East Arnhemland and one from Central Australia. Being adopted is a meaningful way to incorporate non-Indigenous people into extended kinship systems. This is not only helpful in order to facilitate everyday interactions – because people then know how to relate to one another in this strict system of relations – but is also a sign of respect and mutual understanding. Becoming part of this kinship system relates you to the people around you, it brings obligations – such as restrictions to talk to some people directly or carrying out some duties for older family members – and rights – such as becoming involved in a tight network of care, help and respect. These relationships remain, but only stay healthy, like Western conceptions of family ties do, by investing time, effort and love. When asked about the relationship Ange stated that she believes that “you can have a family type relationship with someone who’s not a blood relative. So if the feeling is real, if the relationship is real, if the caring is real, and the sense of a sort of ‘duty’, I suppose, then that can be family” (AM). Family ties in the Indigenous communities are strong and an essential part of how society is built up and functioning. Both, the Yolngu (Ramingining, NT) and Anangu (Docker River, Central Australia) therefore time and again asked how she could possibly spend so much time away from her blood relatives, a situation almost unimaginable for most of them. One day several years before the project was finally carried through, the idea was born to go on a journey together and meet Ange’s blood relatives. At the end of the year 2007 we embarked on a one month long trip from Darwin to Robertson, close to Sydney, where Ange’s blood relatives and her two adopted families should meet.

Starting in Darwin we documented this one month road trip with Ange and the 30 Indigenous people, a journey that would take us, all in all around 45 people (including bus drivers, doctors, helpers and us, the film team consistent of five people)

– most of them with years of experience of working in Indigenous communities or with Aboriginal people in general – several thousand kilometres across the continent. What developed along the road was a story around sameness and difference and the values we share as human beings. It was a unique experience, tough and challenging from time to time, and it probably left us with far more questions that we would ever have thought. With some of them, as mentioned above, I am going to deal here.



*It's all relative - Route*  
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Angela's motivation to plan and carry this project through derived from several origins. After years of living with the families in their communities, sharing experiences and learning from each other, Ange felt she wanted to 'give something back', show them a bit of 'her world' in exchange. Her undertaking, including all the effort she (more than anyone else, probably) has put into this project, resulted from very personal drives and

emotions and had, of course, a lot to do with her own being in the world – as anthropologist, aged care worker, and as well-respected and included family member. May be she has envisioned a project that also helps herself to come to terms with those unusual and extraordinary relationships. Her role along the trip, though, was an ambivalent one and requires mentioning. Responsibilities and duties during the project were not always as strictly assigned to one person or another as it might should have been. Ange, in this context, was neither the ‘classical’ anthropologist nor the filmmaker (or both) or actually ‘one of *them*’ – those individuals she initially wanted to portray. Further, the required ability to adapt to the changing environment (yet alone putting up the camps every other night, cooking for 45 people, packing, etc) was challenging for every participant. Some proved greater flexibility than others, for some it was rather stressful while others simply enjoyed the action. A tight time plan, which we needed in order to travel more than 5.500 kilometres on time in order to get to Robertson for Christmas (which included taking one family from Ramingining to Alice Springs, where we picked up the second family, and traveling all the way to the East Coast and to Sydney, together), further altered the situation. It dictated the pace at which people had to act, react and deal with the appearing challenges and the way they approached each other. Ange, who was also occupied with organisational duties along the trip and simultaneously cared about the quality of the material we, the film team, produced, probably in the end had too little time to focus on being with the families, only.

Although this project was probably rather unique, it might, after all, point to more general problems filmmakers and anthropologists face in the field: What is it we want to film and which role do we play in all of this? Can we develop and define strategies, which help us to reflect about our position in the field and the (hierarchical) power structures at play, and if yes, how? Strangely enough then, I have to face the fact that the film’s postproduction, due to financial (and personal) reasons mainly, is not finished yet. A roughly edited short teaser is available online though<sup>1</sup>. As reasons for the postponement of the production the editors first and foremost mentioned the complexities in dealing with the many hours of film material. They did not, so far, particularly point to difficulties in dealing with the possible ways of representing the

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQfSf83pqRI> - last access July 2, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu understands the major function of the notion of habitus as to dispel the two fallacies being

complex whole of what the concept of Aboriginality in this context might entail (what it is we should show and what not). Having sorted out financial issues and having been promised another funding, they are now optimistic to finalize the postproduction. Unfortunately the editing takes place in Australia, which renders it impossible for me to join. Anyhow, the inability to produce a final document of the trip until today, from my point of view, proves the complex dynamics at play – not only in the process of film production with its economic, political and not the least personal afflictions, but it also points to the difficult task of representation in general, precisely when situated in a field that involves such complex historical as well as present day developments, as it is the case with Aboriginal people in Australia.

## II. Theoretical differentiation

“My entire scientific enterprise is indeed based on the belief that the deepest logic of the social world can be grasped only if one plunges into the particularity of an empirical reality, historically located and dated, but with the objective of constructing it as a “special case of what is possible”, as Bachelard puts it, that is, as an exemplary case in a finite world of possible configurations” (Bourdieu 1998:2).

Plunging into a particular reality is what we do as anthropologists and documentary filmmakers alike. This first part in this thesis deals with the anthropological differentiation concerning the production of visual material, in this case, film. Descriptions of the project are added to those theoretical considerations whenever considered useful in order to outline their relevance and in order to convey to the reader a sense of what had happened along the journey.

### II.1 Documentary film and „reality“

Authenticity and authority have emerged as key concepts in both the discussions concerning the representational crisis in anthropology and documentary/ethnographic filmmaking (see Crawford 1992:6ff). Ever since the critique on ‘othering’ on a literary level – as in the ‘Writing Culture’ (Geertz and Marcus 1986) debate – has been transformation onto the visual sphere, and became known as the ‘Picturing Culture’ debate, the image does no longer promise an escape from the representational crisis. Since “[t]he relation between knowledge and aesthetics is always tricky, and that between anthropology and film especially so” (MacDougall 1992:91), debates around the legitimacy of visual methods within anthropology as a means of expressing knowledge have a long history, and also have been addressed in numerous accounts (see for example Nichols 2001:99ff, Barbash and Taylor 1997, MacDougall 1998, Ruby 2000 and Rollwagen 1988). “Death of Objectivity” is what Ruby (2000:200ff) states. He refers to the paradigmatic shift that occurred in the past 40 years between the filmmaker and the filmed that resulted in a shift away from *speaking for anyone* to *speaking about* - or *speaking with*.



The earliest accounts of what came to be known as some sort of documentary film have been challenged for their supposedly objective approach towards reality, nevertheless the expectations and attitudes when watching a documentary differ to a large degree to those we develop when watching a fiction film. As audience we trust the filmmaker who labels a film ‘a documentary’ that the content presented is somewhat ‘more authentic’ than that of a fiction film, that what we see before us is a ‘depiction of reality’. What follows from the assumption that documentary film holds a special relationship to reality, as Hohenberger (1998:26) states, is that the genre constantly reproduces itself by renegotiating moral questions of exploitation of the people that are shown in the film, of authenticity of the content and the judging of attitude presented towards reality – questions that define documentary as an institution as well as its economic relations and its social functions. Binter, also referring to Hohenberger’s definition of documentary filmmaking as “social praxis”, argues that political thinking and the tradition of documentary filmmaking are closely interwoven (Binter 2009:33). It is a social praxis because of its exogenous structures that channel the means of production on the one hand, the audience reception on the other. Because documentary film is compelled to the historical world, its task should be to bring the spectator back *into* this world instead of trying to display the assumed reality in the cinema (see Hohenberger 1998:25).

Engaging in visualizing practices we have to be aware of the fact that what we, as “cultural brokers” (Kuehnast 1992:186) produce, is capital on the “economic market of exchange of global images” (ibid). It should go without saying that those images can never be representations of reality but are always constructed and interpreted based on the codes of the film-maker’s own culture. Following Barthes’ statement that “[t]he reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 1977:148 in Kuehnast 1992:134), the focus on questions around those constructed texts thus has moved the ‘reader’ or ‘the audience’ to the centre of attention. This argument has been continuously enhanced towards a more relational perspective, being the fact that we never just look at one thing, but at relations of things to ourselves.

How we make meaning of some notion of ‘authenticity’ depends on the incorporated social structures (dispositions for positions in the social field) (Zips

2001:221f) – meaning the habitus – of the observers in the field, which is historically flexible. The habitus, “obtained through shared conditions of existence, is subjected to a series of objective events occurring in the world” (Bourdieu 1977:84). The film’s ‘meaning’ can thus alter depending on who is ‘reading’ it, under what circumstances depending on social class, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. Film-makers/authors, similarly, might “not [be] aware of the historical horizons of expectations, of how they are ‘spoken’ by their own tropes, or of the potential ideological impact of their films” (Martinez 1992:147). It follows from this that the social structures of domination are not necessarily visible or communicated directly. Rather, this is likely to happen somewhat indirectly and often unconsciously by the filmmaker who transmits knowledge from one set of meaning to the another – and also depends on the context in which the material is screened.

### **II.1.1 Authority, engagement and legitimisation**

People make socially relevant documentary movies – and there are numerous examples for this – precisely *because* they are politically engaged, and there is certainly nothing wrong with arguing against exploitation or oppression by the means of documentary filmmaking. But since the status of film as a ‘document of reality’ is not convincing and it has been deconstructed as a form of negotiation and representation, it’s the

“structural space and intellectual historical force of an anthropology or of a documentary cinema engaged in such activity that now seems problematic. It conflates horizons of dominance and rationalism with objectivity and politics” (Faris 1992:172).

The wish to engage in filmmaking often comes along with an ignorant desire to consume the subaltern, expressed in filming them or *having* films about them (ibid.). Those desires are couched in humanist explanatory patterns, in a “sympathy for, and a celebration or revelation of the integrity of local expressions; or a critique of the exploitation commonly dictating the lives of such peoples” (ibid). Faris argues, that this “nevertheless turns the representation into fetish (and the fetish into representation)” (ibid), because the categories that have been developed in the ways ethnography represents – from the setting to the narration – are always focused and intentional, and

makes the subject available to the viewers gaze – “and this is not made less problematic because it is filled with good intentions” (ibid).

Martinez turns to the psychoanalytical perspective Lacan (1977) offers. Considerations, which he considers as “a key for analysing Western representations of, and unconscious desire for, the ‘primitive’ as a cross-cultural signifier” (Martinez 1992:140). When individuals begin to dissociate and retreat from the imaginary identification with the mother, they become subjects, “signifiers within a network of signification, [...] ‘subjects’ of the enunciated, that is, we are ‘spoken’ by the ideological and discursive formations” (ibid). Entering, thereby, the discursive complex of culture we create meaning and identity but simultaneously alienate ourselves from our drives. We are constituted as “‘lack’, which signals the formation of the unconscious and the inauguration of desire (desire of the Other)” (ibid). We constantly reproduce alienation and desire because meaning in social practice is gained through negativity, “that is, by eliminating other alternative meanings that remain in the field of the Other. The unconscious also speaks, through constant opening and closures, the codes and signifiers of cultural discourses (‘the unconscious is the discourse of the Other’)” (ibid). The orchestration of those ‘Others’ from a distance is, therefore, central to the form of European cultural leadership. Absence of the ‘Other’ is the moment in which we, in conversations “of ‘us’ with ‘us’ about ‘them’” (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989:67) silence ‘them’. It’s their absence that also ‘qualifies’ the perpetuation and dissemination of stereotypical ‘Others’ in the cultural industry. How the ‘primitive’ is read depends on each particular context and thus is a spontaneous act on the one hand. On the other, it depends on the power relation rooted in historic-cultural structures (see Martinez 1992:146).

The ethics involved in filmmaking, especially when representing the ‘Other’ (the strange), demand questioning the making of the meaning, the construction and mediation of truth. In following Foucault, Trinh T. Minh-ha states that ‘truth’ is always constructed, deriving from the dominant rules of the system (Minh-ha 1998:304). The degree to which a representation is considered ‘authentic’ is related to a collective, societal construct of perception. Martinez summarizes that

“in order to perform their ‘ideological work’, media producers encode texts by selecting and negotiating ‘preferred meanings’ which aim to predetermine the process of

decoding, that is, to obtain particular ‘preferred readings’. [...] Hall proposes that readers ‘appropriate’ the meanings that best fit as ‘imaginary’ solutions to their own socially experienced contradictions, ‘answers’ that confirm their sense of self, truth, rightfulness, and oppose and negate those that challenge their ideological formations and identities. Reading is thus a *struggle* for signification within hegemonic structures” (Martinez 1992:148).

All participating agents are preconditioned and constructed in the process, which could lead to the only possible solution that ‘truth’ can only be found in between the dominant claims to it. ‘Authenticity’ is to be found in the oscillation between the several subject positions, it can only exist across those differences. In order to avoid staged and paternalistic representations of ‘them’, many scholars have, in the on-going debates about representation, argued for “the camera in their hands” (see Faris 1992:173). While this approach tends to balance the issue of authority to some degree (although the question remains within the Indigenous communities, who amongst the homogenized ‘them’ is allowed or should be empowered to make what kind of representations) the issue of ‘authenticity’ remains. The naïve belief, that Aboriginal people will make better representations of themselves – of *the* Indigenous people – is still present (Langton 1993:27). It is based on a universal feature of racism, being the assumption of the undifferentiated, homogenized *Other*: without regard to variation – historical, regarding their gender, sexual preference and cultural diversity – they are perceived as alike and sharing a mutual understanding: “It is a demand for censorship: there is a ‘right’ way to be Aboriginal, and any Aboriginal film or video producer will necessarily make a ‘true’ representation of ‘Aboriginality’” (ibid). Producing convincingly ‘authentic’ representations has also become a main aspect for being economically successful in the tourism industry for example, to which I will return later. Besides this critique, though, the move towards authority over the content that is represented has indeed marked a major turning point in their struggle for recognition and pushed Indigenous self-determination a great deal forward.

### **II.1.2 Documentary and ethnographic film – labelling our project**

The fact that events are constituted as „media events“ in advance does not necessarily lead to the „impossibility of documentary film“ (see Hohenberger 1998:28). For Rouch,

straight forward, the camera is even the *raison d'être* without which people would not have gathered in the first place (see Hohenberger 1988:237). The renegotiation of reality-constructions leads to a constant repositioning of documentary film in its relation to reality, but also to continuing renegotiations of the categories that have been established in order to differentiate documentary and ethnographic films. They are usually described as varying in their emphasis on aesthetics and content, the degree to which they stress an explanatory modality or one that intends to be more open for interpretation, observation or participation. The boundaries between the categories usually tend to be more fluid than fixed, but are mostly drawn according to the emphasis one puts in the “difference in forms, content, purpose, intended audiences, methods, degree of anthropological relevance, and so on” (Crawford 1992:74). Banks points to the fact that “different films are given the ‘ethnographic’ label for different reasons and, on the whole, each may be useful when the fact is recognised and desired” (Banks 1992:126). But Banks warns against judging films on “a scale of ethnographicness” (that would probably question the time in the field, the ability to examine abstract phenomena such as kinship systems and moral knowledge, the distinction of participation and observation, the ability to grasp essential interconnections of things, etc.) and instead suggests to consider three angles: the intention, the event and the reaction (ibid p.117), in which the “ethnographic” can be located and thus analysed.

Locating our project in the on-going debates that seek to outline distinctions between documentary, ethnographic and even fiction filmmaking, would eventually lead to getting lost in between and across the differences between the several categories and modalities. Aspects that are usually considered when adding labels probably consist of the following notions: Angela is a trained and experienced anthropologist with years of experience in several communities. Will and Dani Tinapple are producers of formation studios; the former also gathered years of experience as camera operator in Aboriginal communities and several small-scale projects, the latter is also an experienced doctor. Paul Bell is a trained camera operator who has been working for *National Geographic* and different production networks but is neither trained as an anthropologist nor has he had primary experience in those Indigenous communities. I was a second year anthropology student back then and had only once been to an

Aboriginal community, Wadeye, with Will, where we had trained Indigenous people of all ages to use camera equipment in order to enable them to shoot films on their own.

The original motifs for the film production were no scientific ones, but rather personal and political. Besides the personal implications, which I have mentioned above, Angela saw the documentation of the trip as a chance to communicate to a broader audience a view she perceived to be more accurate than the current display of Indigenous life-worlds in the media and public sphere, which has increasingly turned into a contested field of political power struggles between the different parties, ideologically, economically and culturally. With this, she was hoping to contribute to Indigenous emancipation and self-determination, and enhance ‘reconciliation’. A fact that further influenced the production was the interest from the TV station SBS. It offered chances to seek for support from non-governmental organisations, activist groups and private investors for the journey itself. Being economically dependent, though, imposes restraints and introduces some sense of ‘pressure’, the feeling that we have to produce something *good*, something meaningful in a way this understandable and entertaining likewise. Throughout the trip the film crew held daily meetings where we discussed important events of the day, social dynamics, past events, and possible improvements in the team work. On this basis we agreed that it was us and the other people on the trip, who render the possible outcome of the film (not some external dictation by investors, for example). We thus demanded some sense of authority over the product, although the involvement of sponsors and the goal to be ‘TV-fit’ did of course bring implications and rendered our approach in the field: We were particularly concerned with developing a coherent and meaningful story, which we considered important in order to be able to depict the journey so that others – the viewers – can follow the events and the social dynamics, which is what the film was about, after all. This is why we decided to interview the three main actors along the journey, Ange, Joyce and Ruth (her two adopted mothers) on a regular basis. The evolving story line thus concentrated around these three actors, a development that would probably not have taken place in the same way, if we had not considered some sort of ‘narrative’ element as crucial for the film to be understood. Although we have hours of observational material of diverse scenarios without interference – in the sense of addressing the people directly by talking to them from behind the camera – I guess the

fear was that we could not grasp a meaningful development of the ‘story’ if we relied even more on this observational style. The ‘evolving story’ is possibly the best argument to distinguish the project from that of anthropological filmmaking, or as Crawford (1992:261) argues with reference to Turton, “the world of broadcasting and that of anthropology”.

“Referring to, amongst other aspects, the audience issue, he [Turton] introduces a crucial distinction between anthropologists, programme-makers and film-makers. Anthropologists and programme-makers are communicators whereas filmmakers are artists. Anthropologists share with programme-makers the ‘compulsion to explain’, filmmakers on the other hand share with programme-makers the ‘compulsion to entertain’. The introduction of the concept ‘programme-maker’ emphasises the specificities of the culture of broadcasting, a culture very different from both anthropology and film-making” (ibid).

But in drawing those distinctions Turton (1992:283ff) also reminds us of their antiquity and the fact that our *subjects* have changed radically throughout, especially since the 1970s. He therefore suggests a critical revision of television representation, meaning that the changing representational and viewing strategies offer “the prospect of making programmes which not only appeal to a large audience *and* are anthropologically informed but which appeal to a large audience *because* they are anthropologically informed” (ibid p. 284). This points to a new informed spectatorship that has been less extensively studied than the seemingly endless accounts into the ethics of ethnographic and documentary filmmaking and its modalities, and simultaneously points to the dissolving of another possible line of demarcation of ethnographic and documentary films.

### **II.1.3 ‘Shared humanity’ as a basic concept of the film**

By offering a perspective on the life-worlds of the two families and their interaction with the, overall ‘white’ Australia, the initial goal of *It’s all relative* was to add in a meaningful way to the knowledge about ‘cross-cultural’ understanding by focusing on our shared humanity, a “*Conditio Humana*” (Schäffter 1991:18). Angela’s main goal, as she communicated it to the film team beforehand, was to show how Indigenous people of different cultures and *balanda* (white people) get along despite all differences. The

understanding that the common basis of manhood which we all share, in itself suffices in order to experience of 'the Other', guides the thinking that we can apparently share existential emotions without having to ignore or neglect the 'basic dividing line', that in this context is not perceived as break between self and other, but as relationship of tense bonds. The 'Other' and the 'self' in this concept are bound to each other in a 'consonance of differences'. But, as Schäffter points out, experiencing the 'self' in this structure is only possible by stepping out of this shared, common background. What remains, then, is alienated and serves as contrast to the developing self. Inherent in this structure is the understanding of that the 'Other' as primary (or 'aboriginal' for that matter), that, in further consequence, has to be experienced as distant from the self, and thus becomes rendered as a relatively rigid and inflexible construct at the end. An understanding, that is fraught with conflict (see Schäffter 1991:16). By discussing an example of the *Disappearing World* documentary series (starting in the 1970s) Turton points to a central intention of the programme:

“The problem we face in doing anthropology and, therefore, in putting it on television, is how to demonstrate the humanity we share with the people we study without privileging our own, or, as Faris puts it, how to ‘obliterate otherness while preserving difference’” (Turton 1992:291).

The trouble with this in general is, that “it locates the focus and chief criterion of humanity in the *viewer's* cultural experience: *our* behaviour legitimates *theirs*” (ibid). This is often unintentional and masked behind the anthropologist's and film maker's intentions that suggest that: “if the victims are filmed, this will sooner or later lead to an alteration of their status” (Faris 1992:171). Seeking some form of “‘connectedness’ (even if mythological) anthropologists and film-makers tend to create discourses about ‘their’ subject-communities which have more to do with their own positions in dominant societies than with actual situations on the ground” (Tomaselli 1992:211). Putting emphasis on these connections and on anthropologists attempts to ‘be(come) one of them’ (which Ange, for that matter, actually is, according to their kinship system) – are processes that are likely to be located in the Western idealisation of Indigenous values (and therefore, trivialised).



## II.1.4 Marking the subalterns – locating the subjects on the social map

Telling a story of a journey through an alien environment, from the point of view of the Indigenous people (some of them have never travelled outside their communal territory) poses even greater challenges for depicting, in a meaningful way, the praxis of their cultural life in a way that it makes sense in another cultural context. ‘Western technologies’ have become part of the Indigenous people’s life-worlds, even in comparably remote communities – environments, which are by no means comparable to the densely populated (overtly white) cities on the East Coast. The family member’s reactions to the offerings of the culture industry, that are mostly oriented towards leisure, fun and consumption, aspects that visibly shape the lifestyle along the coast where most of the Australians live after all, was an element of the film we repeatedly discussed. Taking good shots of those encounters was a task we paid particular attention to. This way of focusing on the impact of our culture and technology on ‘our subjects’ can come across as a way of privileging our own humanity (see Turton 1992:291f). Even though unintentionally this might emphasises the passivity, marginality and shallowness of their way of life while taking our dominance, centrality and richness for granted. It renders them “interesting only to the extent that they react to us and our technology” (ibid). This process marks their role as ‘subalterns’ which is a necessary precondition on order to position the dominant self:

“Subalternität bezeichnet das Moment der Unterwerfung unter ein herrschendes diskursives Diktat, in dem das Ausgeschlossene als Ausgeschlossenes trotz eines möglichen Anscheins liberaler Partizipation (re)produziert wird” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2003:30 in Binter p.50).

Travelling to Dream World, visiting museums, taking belly-dance lessons, embarking on a boat trip on the Sydney harbour but also visiting the *Stockman’s hall of fame* (a museum about the European pioneer’s achievements in the outback) were all part of experiencing ‘Ange’s world’. But simultaneously not aestheticizing and ‘forever tying’ them to the environment we are used to locate them in (being it the wild bush or overcrowded houses) could also be the strength of this particular film. One crucial moment along the journey was the arrival in Sydney, which Will and I filmed separately

on the two buses. Discussing the material we shot afterwards it was almost as if the team was not only surprised but somehow also disappointed by the fact that the family members did articulate relatively little amazement and astonishment when crossing the Sydney harbour bridge to dig into the skyscraper jungle. With those, our own expectations, we were confronted several times along the trip. The ease with which most of the family members, especially the younger ones, moved in this cultural context was obviously unexpected. Could the depiction of such scenes disappoint the fortified expectations of the viewer by causing uneasiness and leading the viewer to find the ‘truth’ about their life-worlds exactly between the different suggested ‘authentic’ subject positions? Would it distort the imagery of the dominated – as either caught up in poverty or as noble savages – or would it merely raise superficial critique of the Western cultural imperialism? Would framing their behaviour in this setting imply that they have ‘lost their culture’ anyway, that they have adapted to our lifestyles, and that their presence no longer promises hope for our consumptive Western selves who seek ‘salvation’ in their way of life as close to nature and the spirits? Projects of our kind, as we can see, run the risk of affirming already existing assumptions and presuppositions, and instead of opening up a space in which the social map can be renegotiated, even cements the existing subject positions. Being confronted with the difficulties presented above, the following questions remain: Who are those multi-layered, discursively constructed, subjects we wanted to ‘represent’? And what are the power-relations at play that construct the position of the viewer?

## **II.2 Structural outlines of the field**

Since the introduction of the multicultural agenda in the 1960s old national narratives experienced a reframing. Challenging the ground upon which the nation had come to constitute itself the multicultural agenda, at first introduced in order to cope with the increasing ethnic diversity, therefore introduced ‘new’ parameters for the distribution of hope (see Hage 2003:15) within the discursive framework. A society within the borders of a nation state is concerned with the production and distribution of a meaningful and dignified social life. “If hope is the way we construct a meaningful future for ourselves [...] such futures are only possible within society, because society is the distributor of

social opportunities for self-realisation. We can call this hope societal hope” (ibid). Bourdieu, as Hage continues, often misunderstood as deploying too much of an utilitarian vision of human beings as always aiming to accumulate capital, in fact does not argue that profit maximisation is the individual’s sole goal, but that everything people say or do happens in order to “perpetuate or to augment their social being” (Bourdieu in Hage 2003:15)<sup>2</sup>.

“Indeed, for Bourdieu, being is not an either/or question, but a more or less one: some people have more being (a life that is more meaningful, satisfactory, fulfilling, etc) than others. To paraphrase him, we could say that there is no *communism of being* in society. Being is not equally distributed among the population. While some people inherit ‘a lot of being’, others have to scrape the bottom of the barrel to get even a bit of being” (ibid p.16, original emphasis).

People of all groups thus struggle to accumulate being in the social world: they struggle for recognition. Although capitalist societies have favoured the support of those who are able to invest larger capital, the nation-state, as distributor of hope, aligned those interests with the commitment to build a more viable society within its boundaries (see ibid p.16). Multiculturalism in Australia produced this duality of recognising migrants and indigenous labour and their ‘cultural contribution’ in order to create economic surplus on the one hand *and* the representation of their reception “as a commitment to an ethic of the good society in general” (ibid) on the other. The effort indigenous communities have put into the contribution to the ‘creation of hope’ happened not the least through the process of ‘branding’ their ethnicity as something uniquely their own, an essence of ‘what their identity is’. But we have learned that ethnicity

“is best understood as a loose, labile repertoire of signs by means of which relations are constructed and communicated; through which a collective consciousness of cultural

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<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu understands the major function of the notion of habitus as to dispel the two fallacies being mechanism and finalism. The first „holds that action is the mechanical effect of the constraint of external causes; and, on the other, finalism, which, with rational action theory, holds that the agent acts freely, consciously, and, as some of the utilitarians say, ‘with full understanding’, the action being the product of a calculation of chances and profits” (Bourdieu 2000:13). Rather, agents are endowed with habitus that is inscribed in their bodies by past experiences. “These systems of schemes of perception, appreciation and action enable them to perform acts of practical knowledge, based on the identification and recognition of conditional, conventional stimuli to which they are predisposed to react; and, without any explicit definition of ends or rational calculation of means, to generate appropriate and endlessly renewed strategies, but within the limits of the structural constraints to which they are the product and which define them” (ibid).

likeness is rendered sensible; with reference to which shared sentiment is made substantial. Its visible content is always the product of specific historical conditions which, in variable measure, impinge themselves on human perception and, in doing so, frame the motivation, meaning and materiality of social practice” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:38).

What, then, is this ‘essence’ that became a valuable commodity and opened access to the markets? And does it mean, to paraphrase a Tswana elder interviewed by the Comaroffs, that a group, that has nothing of themselves to sell, *has no culture* (ibid p.10)? The commercialization of identity has also had emancipatory effects and permitted long-marginalized impoverished populations to turn the means of their exclusion into sources of profit without alienation, estrangement, or a loss of ‘true’ selfhood. It is also a process that, through reflection and the recreation of their own narratives, leads to self-(re)construction and the creation of commonality, it thus “open[s] up fresh opportunities for producing, controlling, and redistributing value. But [...] the commodification of culture may also entrench old lines of inequality, conduce to new forms of exclusion, increase incentives for the concentration of power, and create as much poverty as wealth” (ibid p. 52).

“Urban minorities and indigenous people are compelled to relate to majorities, to states, and to capitalist systems of production and consumption. The recodification or reification of culture and self-conscious assertion of identity displayed by some of them cannot be entirely divorced from this historical fact, and their ways of displaying their identities are confined to modern societies. Like nationalism, modern ethnic associations and networks seek to emulate a politically useful and emotionally satisfactory *Gemeinschaft* in an historical situation where such communities have to be *created* because they do not already exist” (Eriksen 1993:144).

Indigenous empowerment in Australia has come a long way. Still most recent articulations of claims over sovereignty, for example at the Tent Embassy in front of the Parliament House in Canberra, prove that the gap – that has existed between the European invaders and the indigenous population in various degrees ever since their arrival of the former – has not yet closed. On the contrary though, the claim for political sovereignty is constantly being rejected because they prove unworthy in the eyes of those exercising power. As key axiom in the struggle for sovereignty often the claim for lands is the first step: “territory is a founding principle of modern sovereign existence” a concept that, “in the contemporary world order (still) presumes the nation-state as its

normative model” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:80). Povinelli points to recent events like the *Emergency Response* also called *The Intervention* in the Northern Territory, which the federal government has implemented as answer to the *Little Children are Sacred* (2007) report. Although the report first and foremost stressed the problem of child abuse in the Northern Territory (it was actually not the increase of those instances but the increasing awareness of the issue that led to the development of the report), it simultaneously addressed, by protocolling and analysing various meetings, visits and discussions in several indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, the structural problems that allowed such problems to arise in the first place. From the 96 recommendations on how to address problem solution, *The Intervention*, as applied by the government authorities, acknowledged two. They stated that the “indigenous people in the north had failed to prove themselves worthy of self-governance and self-determination”, which are “key synonyms for political sovereignty” (Povinelli 2011:3). Political sovereignty in the imaginary of liberal democracies is

“something like the Holy Grail, the possession of which bestows on the holder miraculous powers [...] But to find it, to hold it, and to secure it, the seeker-hero must prove worthy [...] To whom, or what, one is proving herself worthy is not clear at times because the source or ground of political sovereignty is not clear. Does one gain political sovereignty based on market prowess – her ability to deliver economic wellbeing – or moral sense – character irrespective of this delivery of goods and services – or her sheer might – ability to create and slay enemies? [...] Whatever the ground of political sovereignty might be it is clear that while some might prove themselves worthy of the chalice, others are publically shamed by their failure, said to have been slain in the quest by one or another vice, temptation, or quality” (Povinelli 2011:1f).

Thus, despite all the achievements indigenous people have gained and their endurance in their fight to ‘keep it [their culture, heritage and traditions] strong’, this ‘unworthiness’ left behind a vacuum that cannot easily be filled by the nation state. Following Bourdieu, the crueller inequality within capitalist societies, is the unequal distribution of symbolic capital. That is, also, social importance and reason of living. “There is no worse dispossession, no worse privation, perhaps, than that of the losers in the symbolic struggle for recognition, for access to a socially recognized social being, in a word, to humanity” (Bourdieu 2000:240f). With engaging in the creation of an economic surplus through the commodification of *their culture* the indigenous

communities found a way to contribute to the multiculturalist imaginary of distributing hope equally in a society that creates ‘unity in diversity’. They engage in this struggle as an ethnic group (with ethnicity referring to the “relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive” (Eriksen 1993:6)) which, although those groups can likewise “be ranked hierarchically within a society” (ibid) should be distinguished clearly from social class. It is their contribution to the system that renders the concept of hegemony more fitting for this context than an concept of domination in Bourdieu’s or Marx’ sense. Power in hegemonic systems as this works through a widespread consent that makes it appear natural and inevitable (Hall 2010:259) and thus creates the predomination of cultural forms over others. It identifies the powerful and the powerless as equally caught up in the circulation of that power/knowledge (ibid p.261) within the “regime of truth”. With this Foucault means a “general politics of truth”; which is the

“types of discourse which it [society] accepts and makes function as true, the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which is sanctioned the status of those who are charged with saying what counts true” (Foucault 1980:131).

The regime of truth produces, distributes and regulates what we consider ‘true’; it is thus power that is produced within a discourse. Subjects for Foucault are the effects of power/knowledge. It is thus power relations that constitute the subject positions within a discourse – the subject becomes the bearer of knowledge produced in this process.<sup>3</sup> Human beings are constituted within the discourses as two kinds of subjects, those who emerge out of the discourse, ‘written about’, and those who read, who approach the discourse form ‘subjectively’. It is only through those subject positions that the discourse becomes meaningful and has effects. Individuals thus might be quite different from each other, but “they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions that the discourse constructs, subjected themselves to its rules, and hence become the subjects of its power/knowledge” (Hall 1997:56). It is thus inevitable to engage in the circulation of power/knowledge, those historically particular, dominant discourses within which struggle for recognition takes place. It is within this framework

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<sup>3</sup>Hall adds that “since all social practices entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect” (Hall 1997:44)

that the question of ‘authentic otherness’, ready and modified to a consumer mass, can be thought.

A major source and an essential element to compete in this struggle is the power of definition through representation. The positions created in a discourse, as I have mentioned above, are characterised by essential difference from each other, to which things and subjects are then assigned to in the regime of representation. To mark the difference is, according to Hall (2010:236) the basis for the symbolic order, which is then referred to as culture. This concept of culture serves as ground upon which power operates and legitimizes itself through the creation of symbolic boundaries. The reductionist way of establishing meaning through the creation of binary oppositions of ‘us/them’, ‘black/white’, is challenged by the argument that meaning is created through the difference between opposites (see Hall 2010). Out of the “loose, labile dialectic” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 140) of “commodification of culture on the one hand and the incorporation of identity on the other, emerges” (ibid), as the Comaroffs state, the “projection of the entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism onto the place of collective existence” (ibid). The ‘Other’, that is of such essential necessity in order to imagine the self in a dialogue, in fact ‘all others’, seem to suffer a modern crisis in a web of ambivalences in which we are caught by experiencing “a sense of exile from ‘authentic’ being that seeks to requite itself in encounters with ‘authentic’ otherness – albeit in consumable form” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:140).

If it’s between and across differences (not dialectic, but multi-relational), that meaning – read ‘culture’ – is produced. We therefore need the ‘Other’ and avoid the distortion of this construct. It is in this light that we should rethink Ange’s aspirations to somehow ‘overcome’ this otherness, by the means of stressing humanistic principles. Arguing for a shared humanity in this, her, understanding, would not demand the negation of difference, but simply that those differences are not the ground upon which judgments are based. Following these ambiguities we are confronted with the question to what degree it is necessary and possible to play with this ‘Otherness’ as well as with our own fixed subject positions. While Foucault’s concept of the regime of truth helps to theoretically approach and analyse the growth and persistence of a discourse, it leaves us with no practical idea of how take action, of how to engage in the renegotiation of the social map in which ethnicity itself has come to be understood as

the most luring commodity thanks to neo-liberal consumer economy (see Bankston and Henry 2000). Not only that, but Foucault implies, as I understand it, that certain inequalities will never cease to exist and thus also undermines the efforts of indigenous resistance struggles. Would he disagree with the statement that “power in a bourgeois democracy is as much a matter of persuasion and consent as of force, it is never secured once and for all” (Gledhill in Hall 2010:348), that implies the understanding of hegemony as the struggle of competing groups over winning consent from marginalised groups – which they have to recognize in the process – “won in the to-and-fro of negotiation between competing social, political and ideological forces through which power is contested, shifted or reformed” (ibid)? But how should the discourse change, if not through the movement of individuals – as agents – within this discourse? While this is not a matter for Foucault, who’s critique of the subject is too radical as to allow any form of agency, it is for Bourdieu. Bourdieu connects relations of domination to identifiable agents and the institutions of the state. His theory of practices as symbolically mediated interaction between the habitus and the social structure is enhanced with the notion of *doxa*, the logic of laws that govern the fields in which individuals ‘unintentionally’ fight over capital. It thus has a very ‘practical’ meaning. Foucault’s regime of truth, the circulation of power/knowledge that is exerted through language refuses to introduce a concept of agency, which is why his theory remains, to put it quite bluntly, very theoretical ‘only’. For Bourdieu though, the fields change when agents reposition themselves within them – which they do mostly because of competition over cultural, economic, or symbolic capital. What he calls class struggle, is the competition of various groups to maintain current set of laws. Bourdieu’s theory of praxis is

“a philosophy of action designated at times as *dispositional* which notes the potentialities inscribed in the body of agents and in the structure of the situations where they act or, more precisely, in the relations between them. [...] It is radically opposed to the anthropological presuppositions inscribed in the language which social agents, and especially intellectuals, most commonly use to account for practice (notably when, in the name of a narrow rationalism, they consider irrational any action or representation which is not generated by the explicitly posed *reasons* of an autonomous individual, fully conscious of his or her motivations). It is also opposed to the more extreme theses of a certain structuralism by refusing to reduce *agents*, which it considers to be eminently active and acting (without necessarily doing so as subjects), to simple



epiphenomena of structure (which exposes it to seeming equally deficient to those who hold one position or the other)” (Bourdieu 1998:vii-viii).

To outline the field in which the social agents move, let’s now turn to the concept of multiculturalism in general, and to the form of state-policy it takes as in the Australian case in particular.

## **II.2.1 Defining Multiculturalism**

That multiculturalism lacks a precise definition that fits all contexts is a result of the particular histories and constellations in which the idea as a philosophical context, an ideology, or a governmental strategy emerged (see Gunew 2004 for a comparative analysis). In most general terms we can state that multiculturalism “may be both good *and* bad simultaneously, both liberating yet marginalizing, unifying yet divisive, inclusive yet exclusive, with benefits yet costs” (Fleras 2009:21). It raises questions of belonging, questions or strengthens patterns of inclusion and exclusion and the narration of a historical continuity. It thus is this ambiguity in liberal democratic state sponsored multiculturalism as policy to combine the narratives of national unity while simultaneously embracing difference. While it espouses modernism in treating everyone equally or *the same* it simultaneously appears *antimodern* in privileging difference over sameness,

“particularity in contexts where people must be treated *as equals* (“differently”) to ensure inclusion and equality. In rejecting the notion of multicultural governance as an unbending mosaic of paint-by-number cultural tiles, postmodernism envisions society as the interplay of multiple identities, hybrid cultures, and conflicting poses. It remains to be seen if a postmodern multicultural governance can address the ever-changing terrain of identity politics and contested ethnicities” (ibid).

### **II.2.1.1 Australian multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism in Australia today means basically a “cultural pluralism and identity politics” (Hage 2003:58). In the beginning multiculturalism was perceived as descriptive of the mixture of ethnically diverse minority groups on the one hand, and prescriptive as a set of policies adopted by the state to govern the inescapable reality. It

was initially developed as a program to deal with the increasing heterogeneity and to manage diversity in the state after World War Two and the increasing immigrant intake. It was, therefore, from its beginnings closely linked to questions of citizenship and the building of governance that involves “rejecting the idea of the state as the exclusive domain of a dominant group, replacing exclusionary governance with a commitment to accommodation; and acknowledging the importance of difference to state building” (Fleras 2009:7). Cultural differences were thus not only catered for, but state officials also understood that this aspect had to be celebrated as positive for society.

Regarding Australia’s multiculturalism it is essential to differentiate between multiculturalism as a mode of governing ethnic cultures and as a form of national identity, as Hage (2003:59) points out. In the past it has been articulated as welfare politics and as structural socio-economic policy, both directed towards access of institutions of the Australian society and less concerned with ‘culture’. Also the analytical differentiation between multiculturalism as social policy on the one hand and as cultural policy on the other is essential. The latter is closest to the form of cultural pluralism identified with Australian multiculturalism today, that has from its beginning, mostly been concerned with

“cultural traditions and practices. Its core element was the shedding of the ethnocentric claim that Anglo-Celtic culture was the most desirable culture to aim for and the accepting of a cultural relativism which recognised that no culture was superior to another, that all had enriching elements that could be incorporated into Australian society” (ibid).

Nation-states increasingly profit, market-wise, from a multicultural politics, especially on a global scale. As an “increasingly global discourse” (Gunew 2004:15) that “takes into account the dynamics of diaspora and their relations with nation states and other entities (such as transnational corporations), and the flow of migrants and refugees” (ibid), it is not only a reaction, a forced answer to the problems raised by the changing social relations, but also a conceptualized strategy. Although in its beginning as state policy the focus was not so much on empowering minorities and account for equality, it appears to be so in the way it is articulated today (see Stratton and Ang 1994:3). The emphasis of multicultural policies today lies on the “productivity of cultural difference - located in ethnicity - rather than in the old emphasis of race as the marker of national

cultural limits” (ibid p.12). This productivity also serves to promote the project in order to strengthen economic engagements on an international level where the (post)modern nation seeks to establish itself as a role model that shows other nations around the globe that “our better instincts lead us to coexist effectively with each other in a way in which a torn world finds inspirational” (Miller 1997 in Povinelli 2002:42), while at the same time to be perfectly fitting as a partner in a financial world. Cultural tolerance as a market matter is, also emphasized by Povinelli. She points to the importance of Aboriginal traditions as “vibrant sector of the economy mark(et)ing the Australian difference to national and international consumers” (Povinelli 2002:42).

### **II.2.1.2 Liberal democratic aspirations and multiculturalism as hegemonic discourse**

As Povinelli points out, the Australian case offers a quite interesting example of the way in which multicultural discourse and fantasy are deployed in “cohering national identities and allegiances and in defusing and diverting liberation struggles in late modern liberal democracies” (Povinelli 1998:580-581). After all, as several prominent observers have noted, Australian multiculturalism must be understood as promoting a dominant social order between a majority and minority groups. In its commitment to equality, the multicultural state necessarily exercises patterns of control and containment (Fleras 2009:7), not the least in order to create coherence in the narration of its national legitimacy. Therefore it must be identified as a strategy for the ruling elite to control the unruly ethnics. Multiculturalism can and should be understood as dominant ideology that is indeed an effective tool to defend national interests.

“Liberal discourses on multiculturalism experience the fragility of their principles of ‘tolerance’ when they attempt to withstand the pressure of revision. In addressing the multicultural demand, they encounter the limit of their enshrined notion of ‘equal respect’; and they anxiously acknowledge the attenuation in the authority of the Ideal Observer, an authority that oversees the ethical rights (and insights) of the liberal perspective from the top deck of the Clapham omnibus” (Bhabha 1996:54).

Bhabha summarizes the problem with the ‘diversity of cultures’ in multiculturalism as the “*creation* of cultural diversity and a *containment* of cultural differences” (Bhabha in Rutherford 1990:208, original emphasis). This means that the encouragement of cultural

diversity in multicultural societies is always bound to the host society's understanding of locating those other cultures within their own grid. Administering cultural differences, with which multiculturalism deals, is based on an understanding of 'difference' as "a kind of liberal relativist perspective that is inadequate in itself and doesn't generally recognise the universalist and normative stance from which it constructs its cultural and political judgements" (ibid p.209). According to him the present political construct misses the understanding, that cultures *are* indeed related to each other, but not because "of the familiarity or similarity of *contents*, but because all cultures are symbol-forming and subject-constituting, interpellative practices" (ibid p.210). Which is why multiculturalism is a not (yet) "a politics that is open to non-assimilationist claims of cultural difference" (ibid p.213) <sup>4</sup>. Nevertheless, multiculturalism as hegemonic discourse "constitutes a clever branding strategy for conflict resolution and impression management" (Bhabha 1996:54). The often presumed counter-hegemonic tendencies of multiculturalist policies, though, need to be questioned, and it remains to be seen whether or not minorities are and/or will be able to convert those tools into levers of resistance and change. But does that mean that multiculturalism is nothing more than an "empty signifier onto which a range of groups project their fears and hopes" (Gunew 2004)?

To be sure, the implementation of a multiculturalist policy did bring about powerful changes and changes in the actual living conditions of recent and future immigrants in Australia – even if the development of such an imaginary entailed the necessity to exclude a more violent and racist historical past. Those politics of diversity that have been articulated in the past decades in Australia have also raised anti-multiculturalist sentiments. Those discourses in general often point to the "misplaced emphasis on differences over commonality, diversity over cohesion, and separation over solidarity" (Fleras 2009:viii). These profound changes have been perceived by some as threatening to the notion of national unity, to a sense of 'Australianess' that has been narrated ever since the first European settlement on Australia's soil, and that can only be understood by shedding light on the 'White Australia' politics that governed most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the centre of anti-multiculturalist, racist, discourses in Australia,

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<sup>4</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the notion of culture as 'hybrid' – the so-called 'Third Space' – see Interview mit Bhabha in Rutherford 1990:207-221

John Howard, Prime Minister from 1995 to 2007, and Pauline Hanson, leader of the One Nation party from 1997-2003 and famous for her racist maiden speech as newly elected parliament member, have been the most prominent players. They have particularly stressed the idea of a national identity around core values that is endangered by the masses of immigrants that illegally enter the country. They identified the so-called 'boat people' as particular threat to the basis of the imagined community's values, a term that came to dominate the public discourse and has been subject to numerous debates, quarrels and national disputes. Pauline Hanson's success revealed deep anxieties and racist fears, obviously present in large parts of Australia's mainstream society (see also Galligan, Roberts and Trifiletti 2001:2). While she argued against certain improvements concerning Indigenous rights as well, one aspect that caused even more reactions was that she defined immigrants as threat to the imagined 'national common sense', ignoring not only their crucial participation in the building of the nation in settler-colonial contexts, but also the economic importance of immigration intake as well as the fact that the plurality visible, is also the basis for its being as a successful nation-state. Those two examples, on which I will return to in a later chapter again, visualise one aspect on how it is dealt with being confronted with the complex situation of articulating difference as main characteristic of the *imagined community*, while at the same time arguing for national unity 'beyond' those differences. It thus remains to be seen whether a multicultural governance is able to realign ways that promote the *social* (redistribution) with the *cultural* (recognition) without imperiling the *national* (integration) (see Fleras 2009) in the future.

In the 2011 government paper on Australia's Multicultural Policy called *The People of Australia* (2011) the "amazing breadth and diversity of Australian society" is particularly stressed and recognized. It also "reaffirms the Government's unwavering support for a culturally diverse and socially cohesive nation" and stresses equality as main good in democracy, economic and social benefits of diversity, always in relation to the benefits this diversity hold for the Australian nation. Julia Gillard, a migrant herself as she is underlines in this paper, in contextualising her own history as one that has been shaped by the great possibilities the multicultural Australia had to offer her family, disguises the fact that the national policy is foremost concerned with what multiculturalism can do for Australia – meaning, how it generates benefits that

improves Australia's social and economic status. The paper addresses the changes that appeared in the post World War II area and acknowledges this new diversity as being at the core of the nation and at the centre of the shared national identity:

“We will continue to be multicultural. This helps create a strong economy, drives prosperity and builds Australia's future. It will also enable Australia to enjoy the cultural and social benefits that cultural diversity brings. Multiculturalism is our shared future and is central to our national interest” (*The People of Australia*, p.6).

### **II.2.1.3 Multiculturalism and Indigenous people**

While multiculturalism and immigration have been closely linked throughout Australia's history, Indigenous issues have, for most of the time, been treated as somewhat separate from this discourse, not only by being dealt with in separate institutions. Indigenous people have positioned their demands to land and recognition, as has been argued by several scholars, mostly outside the multiculturalist framework, because “their interests as (descendants of) original occupants are fundamentally different from immigrants and multiculturalism” (Fleras 2009:126f). Multiculturalism is not equipped to meet the demands of “fundamentally autonomous political communities who claim they are sovereign in their own right yet sharing in the sovereignty” of a nation “by way of shared jurisdictions” (ibid p.127). Indigenous communities prefer the rhetoric of nationalism for justifying claims to self-determining autonomy in jurisdictions of land, identity, and political voice, which multiculturalism “with its roots in consensus, conformity, and control” (ibid) is unable to handle. The challenges Indigenous people's resistance and their politics of Indigeneity pose to multiculturalism somewhat pushes the construct, within which it nevertheless has to be located, to its limits. The claims of the autonomous community are acknowledged by the government and are still addressed as part of the multicultural discourse: “Supporting Australia's multicultural policy, the Australian Government has a wide ranging engagement with Australia's First Peoples – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This includes strengthening relationships through the National Apology, Supporting the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, establishing the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and an expert panel to build a national consensus on the recognition of Indigenous people in the Australian Constitution” (*The*

*People of Australia* p.2). Taking a look at the *National Cultural Policy – Discussion paper*, also released 2011, we can grasp a sense of the importance of Indigenous issues at the centre of nationalist discourse. The discussion paper seeks to work towards the creation of a new ‘National Cultural Policy’, the “first comprehensive cultural policy since the Keating Government’s *Creative Nation*“ (*National Cultural Policy – Discussion Paper 2011:2*). In referring to the “important role the arts and creativity play in the daily lives of all Australians” this paper seeks to “integrate arts and cultural policy within our broader social and economic goals. [...] The arts and creative industries are fundamental to Australia’s identity as a society and nation, and increasingly to our success as a national economy“ (ibid p.2f). As crucial for the Australian cultural sphere, “the oldest living culture in the world“ (ibid p.5) is addressed as heritage of particular importance that needs protection and revival, when possible. That Indigenous culture and art works have almost magically been absorbed into the huge narrative of the nation as something ‘originally’ Australian is indeed a very young narrative. Given the implicitness with which it is promoted this seems almost unimaginable from today’s perspective. Even more, as the introductory sentences of the *National Cultural Policy* discussion paper suggests, the history is told as continuous story that unites the “indigenous traditions of creative expression [that] stretch back millennia before European settlement” with the [colonial] arts that “have been an integral part of Australia’s cultural life since colonial painters depicted the Australian landscape and the bush poets articulated their experiences of life on this continent” (ibid), and thus promulgates an ignorant, one-sided approach to history. The ways in which the nation state has dealt with the challenges to unite the diverse dynamics around Indigeneity, the colonizers’ past and the immigrants’ present, in order to create a coherent society, have most often privileged white supremacist governance. In articulating a ‘right to difference’ the state articulates control and power by defining how this difference can and should look like. It is the power to articulate what kind of difference the state accepts that is the underlying dominant logic of the multiculturalist policy in Australia. The notion of a national identity, at the heart of the multiculturalist discourse, is a necessary aspect in legitimizing the nation, its boundaries, and its power. National force relies on its represented unity (see Bhabha 1990a) that is only “imaginable” (see Anderson 1996) if difference is somehow repressed. Multiculturalism

as “co-existence of a plurality of cultures within the nation [...] is controversial precisely because of its real and perceived (in)compatibility with national unity” (Stratton and Ang 1994:1).

## **II.2.2 The Nation**

The insurmountable presence of the concept of “nation” can appear in many facets, for example “simultaneously as always already there cultural commonalities, as new projects occasioned by colonialism and independence struggles, and as impositions of certain constructions of the national culture over other identities and cultural projects within the ostensible nation” (Calhoun 2007:19). According to Gellner, whose theory rests on European test cases, it is nationalist mobilization that engenders nations and serves to create a sense of membership that is often outlined as existing because of some sort of prior ethnicity that itself leads to nationhood and therefore nationalism. Nationalism thus invents nations where they do not exist, on the basis of some pre-existing differentiating marks, even if those are purely negative (see Gellner 1964:168 in O’Leary 1997:195). His notion of nation presumes some sort of inherited sense of unity, mostly explained by the shared territorial space and the locally bound history that finally “implies a natural correspondence between the (homogenised) nation and the (centralised) state. It seems to presume that, to a large extent, nationalism – the movement toward a unified nation – is an inevitable effect of the (unspecified) needs of the state” (Stratton and Ang 1994:3).

### **II.2.2.1 Inventing the nation**

A crucial aspect in arguing for the ‘necessity of nations’ is the understanding that people in the state – not identical *with* the state, which is a structure of government that itself might involve representation but as an idea itself is not representational (Stratton and Ang 1994:3) – have difficulties identifying with a bureaucratic and administrative construct, which is why they identify with the nation – an imagined collective experience “unified by a common language, culture and tradition” (ibid). Thus, by producing and reproducing national narratives, the nation is located in a specific place



in history, as Anderson has put it. Following his arguments we can identify national identity as symbolical artificiality, not as based on a sort of pre-existing sense of unity. National unity is created – it comes into being through cultural representation, through education and the media, a basis essential for the individual to identify with the otherwise abstract idea. The nation's cultural power has been identified as laying in its potential to articulate deeply rooted differences as unity and even narrate this actual diversity as a shared history of people who share common roots. Narrating a common history yet alone does not suffice to shape national identity. It also needs the acceptance of the majority of that identity as

“shared and unifying, ‘uniting values and institutions’ which give ‘us’ strength of purpose and demonstrate that unity and strength to outsiders. The belief in a shared historical purpose is something that requires to be learned, and learned formally in a multicultural, pluralist society, one divided and categorized along lines of class and gender, race and ethnicity. The effective achievement of national unity, national strength of purpose and respect for national institutions requires the mythmakers and marketing managers to capture the hearts and minds of the citizenry” (Kapferer 1996:38).

The ‘imagined community’, narrated by national mythologizers, is thus bound together by the process of remembering, creating a common faith and promulgate shared memories that transform historical bits and pieces into a collective destiny (see Wolfe 1999:33). The production and reproduction of those national narratives around the people locates and locks the nation in a specific place in history. The people of a nation, following Bhabha thus must be thought in a “double-time”,

“as historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin or event; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principle of the people as that continual process by which the national life is redeemed and signified as a repeating and reproductive process” (Bhabha 1990b:297).

### **II.2.2.2 Remembering and forgetting**

“Whatever is made of them, nations matter” (Calhoun 2007:10).

The linear writing of the Australian nation and its development, ironically, as Stratton and Ang (1994) argue, for a long time went hand in hand with claims to some sort of

primordial identity located in the British ancestry. That the nation, as Gunew (1990:103) points out, “has always been riddled with anxious cultural debates concerning its national identity”, results from the fact that the grounds on which the Australian national identity was built and continued to be remembered, also lies in the white anxiety concerning the history of the relations between Aboriginal and white people. Australia’s white myths of origin “are always produced in relation to the illegitimate status of the act of invasion that marks white national beginnings” (Elder 2009:30). Settlement in Australia and the subsequent decades that led to the formation of the federation constitute phases of profound changes in consciousness. The appearance of such changes, as Anderson has outlined at length, very likely creates some sort of amnesia, an act of forgetting that leads, in certain historical circumstances, to the creation of particular narratives. Modern nations, aware of the implications of being embedded in continuity, at the same time forget the experience that resulted from this continuity, which leads to the creation of a certain ‘narration of identity’ (Anderson 1998:176f). Or, as Bhabha puts it, “[b]eing obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation” (Bhabha 1990b:311). This “strange forgetting” constitutes a minus in the origin and beginning of the nation’s narrative. *Being* the nation, the will to nationhood as only legitimate criteria, involves a complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting (see Billig 1995:127), in which the evocation of a collective memory leads to the forgetting of the violence that brought nation states into existence and instead of acknowledging the historical recency of those formations, celebrates a sense of antiquity. The dialectic of remembering and forgetting leads to, what Billig describes as *banal* nationalism: once a nation state is established, nationalism ceases to appear as such, but actually becomes a surplus to everyday life, and becomes integrated into the natural environment of societies.

### **II.2.2.3 Counter-narratives - Reconsidering the national space**

The narrative of a national unity, as described above, has been challenged throughout the past decades by global migration flows and increasingly broader spanning market economies (see Appadurai 2008). The concept of multiculturalism is in itself a challenge to the former notion of unity, but instead of having overcome this concept, it

has only been replaced by a more differentiated and may be even more complex understanding of what it is that marks a cohesive nation. The complexity lies within the articulation of coherence while simultaneously maintaining the link to a historical past that gives meaning and legitimizes power and political force. Governments, in order to not lose legitimacy, need to address all parts of society without conflating the state with just one dominant group: they seek to reconcile demands of “social cohesion on the one hand and inclusion of diversity and difference on the other” (Fleras 2009:26f). In doing so, nationalist discourses often appear, not by coincidence, particularly emotional. This is the case when nationalism is described as force that creates nation-states, but even the more so if it is described as overtly negative force that “threatens the stability of existing states. In the latter case, nationalism can take the guise of separatist movements or even extreme fascist ones” (Billig 1995:129). Even more often, nationalism is considered as “developmental stage, which mature societies (or nations) have outgrown once they are fully established” (ibid). Considering the mainstream of scientific assessments of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’, is there any discursive room for a slightly more ‘positive’ notion, whereby nationalism would not solely be doomed as evil force? There seems to be at least one important dimension of nationalism, namely when we point to its roots of popular demands for equity.

“Though cosmopolitan thought often rejects nationalism as some combination of manipulation by the central state, ancient ethnic loyalty, or desire to benefit at the expense of others – all phenomena that are real – it commonly misses the extent to which nationalism not only expresses solidarity or belonging but provides a rhetoric for demanding equity and growth” (Calhoun 2007:18).

This argumentation points to the idea of the nation’s political potential to reconcile the state’s and the individual’s interests. The political potential of the nation within postcolonial societies need not necessarily be conservative but also holds the potential for supporting articulations of difference. Thus, ever since Anderson has stressed the idea of the nation as an imagined political community, the concept became “‘modular’ and could be transplanted into a wide range of otherwise disparate settings” (Calhoun 1993:216). Indigenous people, when articulating their claims to rights and recognition have, as I mentioned before, largely positioned themselves outside the multiculturalist discourse and also deploy a nationalist rhetoric. Further, in a context where citizenship

as a fundament for claims to rights is still a contested field, the nation-state is *the* important variable building and sustaining democracy. It serves as framework in which laws are formulated and executed – a basis upon which most international law is structured. But in an increasingly globalised world the state borders, as Calhoun (2007:4) stresses, have opened “very unevenly and disproportionately to the benefit of those with access to high levels of fluid capital. Conversely, it has made belonging to a nation state and having clear rights within a nation-state more, not less, important.”

Postmodern critique suggested, as indicated above, that the nation is no longer the “sign of modernity under which cultural differences are homogenized in the ‘horizontal’ view of society. The nation reveals, in its ambivalent and vacillating representation, the ethnography of its own historicity and opens up the possibility of other narratives of the people and their difference” (Bhabha 1990b:300). For him (ibid p.293ff) the ambivalence of the modern nation is rooted in the question of how to write a nation’s modernity “as the event of the everyday and the advent of the epochal”, in which the “scraps, patches, and rags of daily life must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects” (ibid p.297).

It has been argued, that the nation itself has become a space for the emergence of feminist and anti-colonial critique within which minorities’ and the oppressed work towards the articulation and promulgation of counter-narratives. Essentialist conceptions of identities, it has been argued, are thus disturbed, and boundaries are erased. Those counter-narratives have been created around new “localisms’ – usually of an ethnic, religious or regional nature” (Eriksen 1993:150). Eriksen shows at length how social change and contact situations are important for the emergence of new social identities that are understood as less fixed in time and space and are considered more flexible to take new shapes. Nevertheless, in order to articulate demands effectively, processes of modernization and/or homogenizations are considered necessary conditions for these liberating movements. Ethnicity studies contributed to a great deal to the understanding that those processes of homogenization and diversification of people in a modernized world are parallel and simultaneous (see ibid p.147).

Ethnicity studies’ main contribution to this discourse on nationalism, as I see it, was the acknowledgment of the contextual character of identity formation, of the

mutual dependency of factors for describing the self. Citizenship probably remains the category that regulates inclusion and exclusion before the law, but is no longer the category that regulates questions of belonging: the plurality of statuses is relevant and people constantly negotiate the degrees of sameness and difference. Their identities may not be infinitely flexible, but at the same time not mutually exclusive. People, therefore

“may be a bit of this and a bit of that. [...] [But] [f]inally, it is a universal fact that not everybody can take part in a given community. All categorizations of group membership must have boundaries; they depend on *others* in order to make sense” (Eriksen 1993:158).

We therefore acknowledge that the borders of the nation state are no longer the relevant fault lines along which people conceptualize their identities and likewise, that “ethnicity is not an identity given by nature, but an identification created through social action” (Baumann 1999:21). To understand ethnic identities as markers of some sort of primordial ties that legitimize nationhood means that ethnicity is “in its presumed biological sense”, defined as the “late-twentieth-century photocopy” of ‘race’, which is itself a “fallacious nineteenth-century fiction” (ibid p.20). In this context ethnic identities are deployed as “nothing more than acts of ethnic identification that are frozen in time” (ibid p.21).

### **II.2.3 Constructing Identities**

The rejection of essentialist notions of difference in favour of multidimensional and more flexible approaches to the construction of identity and alterity within anthropology resulted from a phase of critical self-reflection. Anthropologists have noted their own engagement in creating hierarchical and territorial distances by stressing peculiarities of “distanciated ‘others’” (see Gingrich 2004:15), which has been a central issue in postcolonial critique. What went along with it, according to Gingrich, was the overemphasizing of “strong moralist warnings against ‘othering’ as a profoundly neocolonial activity [...] without recognizing how, by definition, most social sciences – in one way or another – unavoidably have to write about ‘others’” (ibid p.12). This phase of critical self-reflection resulted in the specification of the modalities or “grammars” of *othering/selfing*, of which Gingrich and Baumann (2004) have identified

three: According to them, hegemony at work gives not only strength to what Said prominently has defined as *Orientalism*, but also to Even-Pritchard's concept of *segmentation* and Dumont's *encompassment*:

“Orientalism creates self and other as negative mirror images of each other; segmentation defines self and other according to a sliding scale of inclusions/exclusions [depending on the context]; encompassment defines the other by an act of hierarchical subsumption” (Baumann 2004:47).

Those grammars, on which involved agents by no means need to agree on, work in political, religious and aesthetic realms and provide a repertoire of structures through which groups put forward arguments about self and other. The answer to the question of the existence of dual organizations (see Lévi-Strauss 1976) “can [therefore] only exist by virtue of their ternary implications [...] Each binary grammar [...] is a ternary grammar, be it intrinsically, implicitly, or deeper down than their proponents will admit” (Baumann 2004:37). The ternary ordering in structuring the social means to point to the exclusion of “them” between “us” and “you” or the “in-between” in “before” and “after”. It points to the processes in between on the one hand, and to the ones excluded of any dialogue, on the other.

Multidimensional conceptions of identity/alterity thus challenge the idea that the “colonizing and the colonized, although fundamentally different from each other” are “intrinsically linked to each other through reciprocal identity formation” and suggest, rather, to go “beyond ‘strong’ and binary versions of identity/other (difference)” (Gingrich 2004:13, see also Bhabha 1990b and Tsokhas 2001). We have come to understand that relations between colonizer and colonized involved complicity as well as resistance and were much more heterogeneous and hybrid than the thinking in terms of binary oppositions could explain (see Tsokhas 2001:20). The three grammars of identity/alterity identified by Gingrich and Baumann, at first sight look like “being binary grammars that create a Self and an Other as mutually exclusive poles: ‘what is mine cannot be yours, and what is yours cannot be mine’” (Baumann 2004:35) but actually challenge this structural mode of thinking by stressing the idea that “binarisms inevitably raise the possibility of tripartition” (Baumann 2004:35). That the spatial and temporary distance between the colonizer and the colonized has been forever destroyed was one of the most important contributions of post-colonialism (see also Gunew 2004).

The question remains, whether this understanding of identities, as resulting out of particular discursive formations, open to negotiation, as “never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions” (Hall 1996:4), render the nation state as unimportant reference frame for the construction of identity and a sense of belonging?

### **//.2.3.1 ,National Identity’ – mythmaking in Australia**

The conceptualization of ‘identity’, let alone national identity, is, due to the increasingly growing frame of reference a difficult term to work with. The reason why I am still concerned with the latter is that Australian nation formation, the narration of the nation, has always stressed the understanding of some sort of national identity as crucial within this process. It is the deployment of this concept throughout Australia’s history since settlement that is of interest to me. I am going to argue, that today’s dominant discourse still bears the traces of those processes. However, *prima vista* the term national identity seems to have been coined as a ‘double safety belt’ of constructing ‘unity’, adding one set of notions (difficult in itself) on top of the other (not less complex). In the end, it also mirrors the desire for simple notions as it mirrors the inbuilt contradictions that - paradoxically - one doesn’t want to let appear.

Considering the Australian case it has been argued that the narrative that is deployed, compared to some sort of “old style nationalism” that refers to single versions of history, is indeed already modular (see Turner 1994:11). What will become visible though, is that this ‘multiplicity’ of histories that are merged in the Australian national narrative today, are not equally present but hierarchically, and even where the histories of the oppressed have been integrated, the process was more one of ‘absorption’ than one that allows parallel existence. This is why we can witness articulations of ‘the Australian national identity’ – despite the internal marks of difference (or diversity) – deployed by state officials, institutions and national mythologizers, which renders it a category worthy of analysis. Australia’s public has “been taught” how to celebrate nationality and overcome the “Old World view that regards their ‘nationality’ as inauthentic” (ibid p. 69) because, as a settler nation, it cannot draw on long mythic

histories about their origins that other nations (although actually likewise invented) claim for their legitimation. This relatively young 'settler-narrative' obviously is one of the core concerns of 'Australian nationalism', next to issues of reconciling 'colonial past' vis-à-vis the Aboriginal population and vis-à-vis nowadays 'multiculturalism' due to migration influx.

Galligan, Roberts and Trifiletti (2001) argue, that beside the consequences of the exposure of the Australian people and industry on an increasingly globalised market, that has already turned globalisation into "a fearful bogey", it is the "uncertainty about Australian identity and citizenship" (ibid) that turns Australia into a troubled nation. In 2001 they were probably right when they stated that "[o]ld certainties about national identity have been eroding without new consensus emerging" (ibid). And to some degree the questions they posed remain valid, which is also why national mythologizers are still in demand:

"Who are we Australians and how do we fit into the Asia-Pacific region? Is multiculturalism appropriate and does it capture our strong Anglo-Irish heritage? How do indigenous Australians fit into the identity mosaic of modern nationhood and why were they dispossessed and excluded for so long" (ibid)?

*National* identity, as it generally appears, arises from a narration of the national self and requires constant remembrance, as I have tried to outline above. The evocation of a common national will, necessary to hegemonic projects also like this Australian one, is the creation of passionate dramas and the experience of "intimate communities" by the state and public figures (Povinelli 1998:577). Whether referring to cultural practices abroad or within the nation, politics of sentimental feelings are deployed in order to create a national will or a national common sense as opposed to "those practices" that are articulated as threatening the modern, cultivated morals of the civilization and thereby create a superior total form of modern civilization" (ibid). As Kapferer (1996:17) argues, the difficulty to create a sense of patriotism and pride for the nation in an increasingly differentiated social group is even higher than to create and maintain a 'we'-relation and to achieve a sense of 'taken-for-grantedness' of the nation. Which paradoxically leads to the effect, that nationalist efforts in a multicultural can be as high as in one that stresses one homogeneous culture. Following Herzfeld, Kapferer argues that the state creates "*absolute* values as 'eternal verities'", with the most crucial one



being the state itself. In equating social identity with morality, defining common good and national interest with private and individual benefit, the state itself becomes the bearer of moral values, a static ideology that is maintained by the state's institutions. Kapferer calls this process of transformation – which identifies offences against 'public morality' as almost sinful – "public myth-making".

"It is a process of gathering up widely shared, often inchoate and ill-articulated but always situationally specific understandings of being in the world (all the elements of a culture) and refashioning them as timeless truths, encoded in law and sacralized in ritual, protected by the might of the very state which has organized their transformation" (Kapferer 1996:18f).

The practices that are deployed in order to constantly reproduce the images and narratives, that construct the national identity, are embedded in multicultural principles that demand a split from the colonial past on the one hand, a sense of continuity in order to legitimize itself and not lose strength in an increasingly globalised world, on the other. This tension is the most complex issue multiculturalist governance on a nation-state level has to deal with. In Australia the institutions concerned with this mythmaking are usually those concerned with education, they are apparatuses of the cultural industry that define what counts as culture. This understanding challenges the idea that individuals engage in spinning their own 'webs of meanings' (see Geertz 1973), which, paradoxically, is precisely what the Australian state, in worshipping individualism and equality, promotes. The government releases a national cultural policy paper that stresses plurality and at the same time defines what counts a culture and what not. The state, therefore, does not have to argue with a dominant 'shared' ideology people have to subordinate to, instead 'a common culture' is articulated as something we can contribute to, change and alter.

### **//.2.3.2 'Cultural' identities**

'Culture' – as public culture or the cultural industries in the Australian context – is usually enacted within a public arena, sponsored and managed by the state. When the Australian state officials or institutions stress core values that mark 'Australianess', which happens in official events, national day celebrations and public holidays, what is

at stake, then, is a public culture. It is the ‘mainstream cultural values’ Kapferer is concerned with, which reveals themselves as dominant ideology when its “elitist or oppressive, fundamentally self-serving, self-satisfied and *undemocratic*” character is exposed (Kapferer 1996:33, see also Rutherford 1990). For Baumann these celebrations of public culture, with the recurring themes of ‘giving birth to a country’, the family and descent, is how today’s nationalism celebrates itself as ‘civil religion’. The nation state that tends to be *secular-ist* is by no means *secul-ar*: “That is, pushed churches and worship into the private sphere, but the resulting vacuum of mystical rhetoric and ritual is quickly filled up with state-made quasi religion [...] and the nation-state relies upon a web of symbolic values, places, and times that is nothing short of religious” (Baumann 1999:44). At the heart of the multicultural triangle, with the three corners (as basis upon which people claim rights) being the state, ethnicity, and religion, is “the magnet of culture. What is at stake in all debates about nation making, ethnicity, and religious difference is invariably the idea of culture and what it is taken, by the different contenders in the multicultural debate, to signify” (Baumann 1999:24).

The acceptance and integration, at least on paper, of a diversity of cultures lies at the core of the Australian identity and is articulated as ‘united in diversity’. This understanding seeks to make the most out of an inevitable plurality of cultures. On this national level, it is ethnic minorities that have increasingly been equated with social groups under the name ‘community’, to each of which the dominant discourse attributes a reified culture (Baumann 1996:188). Culture has thus become a decisive factor in narrating modern nations, and the notions of reified cultures in particular have moved to the centre of the narration of the multicultural nation. Claims to common ‘traditional’ cultures have underwritten nationalism as well as ‘communal’ resistance to it, “each of which is a project of groups placed differently in a larger field, not simply a reflection of pre-existing identity – though never unrelated to ongoing cultural reproduction” (Calhoun 2007:19). But ‘cultural identities’, like others, result out of particular discursive formations and are therefore “constituted within, not outside representation. They relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself” (Hall 1996:4; see also Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Culture is a set of practices that we deploy in order to give and take meaning, processes whereby we make sense of the world. We have to be aware that meaning, that is “what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are

and with whom we ‘belong’” (ibid p.3), is produced and circulates in the media. Meaning “is tied up with questions of how culture is used to mark out and maintain identity within and difference between groups” (ibid). In essentialist conceptions of culture the nature of meaning, which is dialogue, although “always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange” (ibid p.4), is dismissed and “culture is conceptualised as primary or ‘constitutive’ process, as important as the economic or material ‘base’ in shaping social subjects and historical events – not merely a reflection of the world after the event” (ibid p.6). “However, if meaning changes historically, and is never finally fixed, then it follows that ‘taking the meaning’ must involve an active process of interpretation. Meaning has to be actively ‘read’ or ‘interpreted’” (ibid p. 32). Hall further stresses the importance of difference as essential in the process of meaning making once again. It is only through the difference in the subject positions that individuals are able to participate in a dialogue and create meaning:

“Culture depends on giving things meaning by assigning them to different positions within a classificatory system. The marking of ‘difference’ is thus the basis of that symbolic order which we call culture” (Hall 2010:236).

The ‘essentialist’ view of culture, that has taken shape in cultural relativism and stands in one tradition with Herder and Boas, perceives culture “as the collective heritage of a group, that is, as a catalogue of ideas and practices that shape both the collective and the individual lives and thought of all members. [...] Culture thus appears as a giant photocopy machine that keeps turning out identical copies” (Baumann 1999:25). Culture conceptualized from this point of view, is a field that is marked by fixed boundaries, it describes essentialist, homogenized meanings similar to the earlier concept of race. “[T]his reification is the very cornerstone that holds the dominant discourse together across all political divides” (Baumann 1996:11). ‘Groups’ and communities that constitute themselves with reference to culture, themselves constitute the basis upon which members of those groups demand distinctive rights. In a political discourse that identifies ethnicity and culture as basis for rights, the understanding of culture as perpetually changing meaning making process is replaced by the notion of a reified entity with definite substantive content, *thinglike*. Culture then becomes something we have or are members of, and having the same culture is the basis that suffices in order to mobilize people who thus form the, in some sense, pre-defined

minority community.<sup>5</sup> The merging of the concept of culture with that of ethnic identity in multiculturalism is a tendency all theorizing about this form of identity politics should be aware of. This merging risks

“essentializing the idea of culture as the property of an ethnic group or race; it risks reifying cultures as separate identities by overemphasizing their boundedness and mutual distinctness; it risks overemphasizing the internal homogeneity of cultures in terms that potentially legitimize repressive demands for communal conformity” (Turner 1993:411f in Baumann 1996:20).

### **II.2.3.3 Homogenisation and essentialism - Culture as tactic?**

In context where, due to processes of segregation and heterogeneisation, or even the exclusion from the status of citizenship – as it has been the case with indigenous Australian people for a long time – the commitment to the integrity of a culture, the articulation of some sort of ‘solidarity’ is often considered useful and efficient. The appearance of these emerging categories as homogeneous helps to articulate rights and demands over recognition, but at the same time raises questions of authority over those representations. Also, the strengthened essentialist view on culture and the homogenization of categories that goes along with it produces a view on those people that often misses congruence with profound dynamics of their actual life worlds. But emphasizing culture as identity serves, just like former markers did, the claims for rights and recognition. Rather than dismissing this as a ‘tactic’ deployed in order to reach certain goals, Cohen pleads to identify “culture as the issue itself, the object of strategy” (Cohen 1993:202), a point of view that further creates “circumstance in which culture is seen to be in such a condition of crisis that the consequence of its loss means not just the impoverishment of the social scene – like the loss of a beautiful building – but a kind of social *death*, because people predicate their very identity on *the* culture” (ibid). Although the empowering dynamics that such essentialising processes might have should not be undermined, the understanding of culture as identity remains at least partially problematic. Represented “through symbols: simple in form, complex in substance because of their malleability, imprecision, multivocality [...] the icons of a

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<sup>5</sup> See more in Baumann for the definition and the usefulness of the concept of community. He argues, that “irredeemably relational and thus analytically impotent as the term may be, it cannot be ignored in the ethnographic description” (Baumann 1996:19).

culture – tartanry, cuisine, costume, music” (ibid p.201) are easily depicted and consumable. Although valued as commodity, this understanding might also result in the understanding of *a culture* as “folkloric exotica and nostalgia firmly oriented towards the past so that it cannot possibly be seen to have relevance in the present. The logic here is that eventually these cultures will die out” (Gunew 1990:112f).

Baumann thus argues that “most people practice a double discursive competence when it comes to their discourses about culture, and they develop this dual discursive competence more strongly the more they expose themselves to multicultural practices” (Baumann 1996:93). This competence combines the re-construction of the thing-like essence in one contexts and the performative, processual agency in another, thus the two understandings of culture can and must not be treated as opposite theories, as one true and the other as false. Rather, as people engaging in multicultural contexts show, according to Baumann, the comfort of having culture relies upon its remaking. But the degree to which individuals participate in the remaking of national, ethnic or religious culture, or culture associated with a territory, language or social category, remains different according to each specific context. It is tied to the power executed by state institutions that define certain boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (see Kapferer above) in order to reach certain goals, mostly the maintenance of existing power relations. To what degree this ‘remaking’ of culture combines ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’, urban and rural, cosmopolitan and conservative elements and so on, is context dependent, but relies at least partially to the profits that the embracing of certain values bring about. Being rights, access to markets and the industry, the maintenance of certain narratives that provide security and stability, and so on. What is worth to presume and necessary to change is a process in constant negotiation between the most powerful players of the discourse, but also happens on a very personal, individual level. Being forced to articulate authenticity and tradition, as the Indigenous Australians in the context of land claims are, thus may limit the scope for possible articulations, but at the same time this limitation also raises awareness and resistance to this kind of systematic oppression. Lacking adequate representations of indigenous, present day life-worlds in the mainstream media, the majority of Australians today lack ideas about how to approach each other and engage in meaningful dialogues. Multicultural festivities usually tend to provide a space in which so called ‘cross-cultural’ approaches might

happen, as I witnessed at weekend market in Byron Bay for example. But the degree to which these festivities actually allow a renegotiation of certain present understandings of ‘a culture’ and not simply essentialise the reified understanding of culture and represent simple, fetishized material forms and performances in the form of “traditional dresses”, dances and artifacts (see Keesing 1994:3033ff), remains questionable.

Nevertheless festivities like the 2012 national multicultural festival in Canberra with its 260000 visitors (National Multicultural Festival, URL1) attract a variety of people and spread an important message of the importance of cultural variety and getting along with each other. But considering the fact that these gatherings at least also partially determine the discourse and understandings of what ‘Aboriginality’ (or, for that matter, what *the* Pakistani, Chinese, Cambodian ... culture) is, it remains our task to remain critical about it. Attending such festivities or not is of course not per se a marker for political attitudes and nothing I want to attach to much meaning to. Rather, since the most common reaction of people aged 15 years, to the question about how they spend their time is answered by watching television, as stated in the 2006 ABS Time Use Survey (Arts and Culture in Australia: A statistical Overview 2009:117ff), it is the importance of television programs that are particularly interested in, and concerned with, Indigenous issues, as offered by SBS and ABC, that I suggest putting more focus on. Producing content that is understandable and interesting for a larger audience without deploying stereotypical knowledge distribution, is thus a political act at least as much as it is an artistic one. In this context we can see, that the contested but nonetheless “successful” concept of ‘culture’ is not longer ‘owned’ by anthropologists, but instead can and should be “used ‘to its best intents’” (Brumann 1999:13). The Australian Indigenous Communications Association (AICA), well aware of the power that lies in controlling the content that is mainly distributed in the public media, argues for a strengthening of Indigenous strategies to make meaningful contributions to this sector. In 2011 it is still one of their main concerns, to underline the fact that there is not *one single*, but many Indigenous cultures. They define culture as

“the dynamic proof of the human expression of a past time and present place. Culture is the essential living record of human existence. The past gives culture its content, but the present gives culture its meaning” (Response to Government Discussion Paper 2011:2).

### **III. Australia's history in the light of its dominant discourses**

In the following chapter I seek to trace the genealogies of certain anthropological narratives whose ideological half-lives continue well into the present. I use Wolfe's (1999) considerations, whose primary data were anthropological debates, and will link them to accounts of political debates and considerations about products of the cultural sphere and some of their effects. I further add my own material from the project whenever useful to underline the fact that the present Australian context does not allow an innocent discourse on Aboriginality. What is necessary to remember throughout my remarks is that academic, including anthropological and intellectual discourses, have always informed policy making in Australia (anthropologists for example held positions as assigned administrators for indigenous affairs in the process of colonization). Although everyday life happened somewhat comparably uninformed by academic discourses and philosophical debates – especially in the early years after the settlement – this changed with the development of a public cultural space, a process closely linked to the formation of the Australian nation. I seek to assemble past discourses that have shaped the present day existing imaginaries on Aboriginality.

Seeking a possible beginning for the narration of the Australian history and the way in which Aboriginality has been shaped, we have to look at Europe, and Britain especially, to which it is inextricably linked. Conceptualizing the formation of an Australian identity and the Australian nation thus requires to think about the differences between a mostly British heritage of the white settlers in Australia and the Indigenous people. The specific historical context of Europe at the time has to be considered, since 'the Other' played an important role in the self understanding of the emerging European nations.

#### **III.1 The ,Others' and Europe**

Describing and defining 'other cultures' has a long history in the European cultural imperialism. "Images of the Other, the strange, exotic, incomprehensible creature, feared, abhorred, and yet in some ways also envied have run as a constant thread

through the European past” (Jahoda 1999:1). They have gained particular importance with the growing, and globally extending, bourgeois hegemonic world order in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and played a crucial role in the emergence of modern European nation states. The “more systematic study of mankind” (Williams 1998:564) – anthropology as a discipline – that emerged in the light of the new scientific understanding brought about an enhancement and the introduction of concepts that allow ‘us’ to study “cultures drastically different from our own” (Barth 1994:349). The anthropology’s contribution to the development of that radical alterity that, according to Keesing “fills a need in European social thought” (Keesing 1994:301) and has been of particular relevance for the European understanding of the ‘self’, has been elaborated and studied at length. In Europe of the nineteenth century the conceptual universe that expanded alongside the global extension of bourgeois hegemony basically worked by establishing ideological boundaries that - fuelled by the emerging evolutionist paradigm – distinguished between the European civilized and the savage. The primitive, as I have shown above, has been produced through negation of cultural and racial identities in order to construct the ‘self’. The suppression of this ‘Other’ within Europe, as the Noble Savage, thus ideologically marked the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Wolfe 1999:48).

The idea of a superior European identity thus has been “more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than [...] the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity – ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed” (Hall 1996:4f).

### **III.1.1 The ‘Aboriginal Other’**

While some scholars have particularly stressed the importance of the relationship to the mother country, Britain, in the process of forming an Australian national identity, it is



similarly important to take into account of relationship between invaders and indigenous people, particularly white obsession with defining Aboriginality. This process was characterized by an ambivalent effect, namely the unsettling of the colonial power by its simultaneous desire and repulsion of the 'Other' (that takes on a very specific raced-based meaning in colonial contexts) (see Elder 2009:31). What is particularly interesting about the Indigenous people in the Australian case is that, although there is no shortage of memories that serve the memorization of the nation, it is the Aborigine's presence that 'ridicules' the process of forgetting the nation's criminal legacy of genocidal theft. How difficult their presence is in the body politic becomes visible in the absence of any form of treaty or mutual resolution (see Wolfe 1999:33f). It requires not an abandoning of the subject, but its reconceptualization in the relation between subjects and discursive practices that allows questioning the use of resources of history, language and culture in the process of 'becoming' rather than 'being'. This is why we have to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices, which have disturbed, not to say 'shattered the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures. Recommendations for the government today, such as the one by Gardiner-Garden (2003) for example, stress the actual impossibility to find but one definition and simultaneously acknowledge the inevitability to continue looking for it. Today's discourses include the reflection over the government's past "fixation on classification [that] reflects the extraordinary intensification of colonial administration of Aboriginal affairs from 1788 to the present" (Langton 1993:29). Understanding race relations in Australia requires acknowledging the parallel existence of several ideas and modes of understanding through time.

"By convicts, Aborigines were seen as targets for retributive anger at the system that constrained them; by pastoralists, as a direct threat to the land they considered rightfully their own; by missionaries, as an opportunity for the religious conversion that would no doubt assist in civilizing them; by philanthropists, as a test-case for the humanistic ideals of Enlightenment thought" (Huggan 2007:19).

The contradictory ideologies which became manifest in white relations with Aboriginal people in Australia can not simply be "schematized as a linear narrative progress, [...] as rolling slowly forward from an evil extermination period through ill-judged moments of separation and exclusion to assimilation and integration, and now having arrived at

the end of the road of progress, at self-determination” (Elder 2009:20). Elder prefers to talk about a ‘repertoire’ of white discourses of race relations in Australia that allows an insight into the aspects that shaped Anglo-Celtic and indigenous relationships and set the course for the emerging Australian identity. This repertoire includes “[r]omanticism and the idea of the ‘Noble savage’, Aboriginal people as vermin, Social Darwinism, doomed race theories, protection, the ‘civilizing mission’, assimilation, self-determination and reconciliation” (ibid p.20f).

Therefore, defining ‘Aboriginality’ has been at the core of the relations between the Europeans and the indigenous people since Cook and Captain Philipp, which makes the term ‘Aboriginal’ one of the most disputed in Australia’s history. The indigenous people, the “Yolngu, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri, Waka Waka, Guugu Yimidhirr, or whatever the ‘Gadigal’ or ‘Eora’ actually called themselves” (Langton 1993:32) had troubles identifying with those definitions the whites had created for them. Langton refers to legal scholar John McCorquodale who, in summing up High Court decisions and State definitions of Australia’s history, has noted sixty-seven definitions of Aboriginal people in the Australian government’s official records. Overlooking those definitions makes clear, that they

“reflect not only the Anglo-Australian legal and administrative obsession, even fixation, with Aboriginal people, but also the uncertainty, confusion and constant search for the appropriate characterization: ‘full blood’, ‘half-caste’, ‘quadroon’, ‘octroon’, ‘such and such an admixture of blood’, ‘a native of Australia’, ‘a native of an admixture of blood not less than half Aboriginal’ and so on. In one legal case, whether or not an Aboriginal person lived in a ‘native’s camp’ even became an important issue of definition” (Langton 1993:28-29).

### **III.1.2 Picturing the “ideal Other”**

The first British literary representation of the Australian Aborigines is that of William Dampier, who in *A New Voyage Around the World* (1697) recorded his impressions of the active inhabitants of the northwest of New Holland near present day Broome, in Western Australia” (McLeod 2002:243). Early travelogues of this kind made their way to the European public who, in the light of the new scientific undertakings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, perceived this kind of material with a novel kind of interest. A typical product of ‘othering’ in colonial contexts, including the Victorian notion of the

primitive man and the developing Social-Darwinian logic of the survival of the fittest (see also Kuper 1988:92), is its simplified, iconized representation: the racial stereotype. Stereotypes “are products of the desire for fixity in ideological constructions of otherness; they are not so much crude simplifications as ‘arrested, fixed form[s] of representation’ (Bhabha 1994:45 in Huggan 2007:24). Stereotypes, as typical forms of representation, work as substitutions by articulating the looks of one category and therefore iconizing it, which completely lacks complexity and the notion of intersubjectivity of black/white relations (see Langton 1993). The cultural and physical differences as perceived by the Europeans in Australia therefore subsequently led to the definition of the Aboriginal culture as opposition to Anglo-Saxon culture, “categorizing it as ‘alien’ or ‘the other’ (Molnar 2001:314). It was this radical alterity, “the degree of difference from the European ‘norm’” (McLeod 2002:246) that also led to the complete scientific exhaustion of Aboriginal material.

The fact that the indigenous populations of Australia presented numerous features of interest at once to the European scientists – no clothes, no gods, no leaders, only little material possessions and little contact with the European invaders – led to the fact that Australia was considered “the crucial anthropological laboratory” (Kuper 1988:92). In other words: “If something like the earliest form of society was to be found, if a primeval religious ceremony was still being celebrated, this could only be in Australia” (ibid p.92). The ‘origins of mankind’ – as present in the idea of man’s evolution – have been studied by examining the social, religious and economic life of the Australian indigenous people, which led to what has been considered the most heated debates in the history of anthropology (Hiatt 1996:xii). The academic inquiries into the idea of ‘primitiveness’ required definitions of “who the Aboriginals are, what they mean, and what they tell us about ourselves. [...] For if anthropology is the understanding or even the appropriation of the other, then the Aboriginal in Australia is in some sense the “ideal other” (Yengoyan 1979:393). The designated hostile “natural” opposite, “a nature which included the original Aboriginal inhabitants who were not so much colonized in the path of white colonization” (Gunew 1990:103) was a helpful construct in order to develop the notion of a civilized “cultural” self.

### III.2 The British context

The Pacific region, and therefore the Indigenous people of Australia, appeared comparably late on the European map of interest. First Dutch, Portuguese, British and Spanish circumventions of the world in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent explorations were of different success and had different outcomes. Unlike the competitions for supremacy in the Atlantic region, India and Africa the colonial history of the Pacific region basically remained an exploratory history until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, basically because the European pursuit of expansion of the Pacific region was often disappointed: Large distances – the approximate sailing time from Britain to Australia is 4 to 5 months – made transport a difficult undertaking (Marshall 1998:14). It also lacked luring commodities and most islands were too small to be attractive for permanent settlement. Slave trade, the rush for gold and resources and the search for the most promising strategic positions to establish trading routes, usually motivated colonial expansions, but in the case of the Pacific region it was mostly scientific curiosity that led explorers such as Bougainville and Cook to confidently, and sometimes against all odds, push deeper into the area. Both were, amongst other reasons, engaged in the quest for the assumed continent ‘Terra Australis Incognita’, an enormous landmass on the southern hemisphere “extending across the South Pacific and South Atlantic from about the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel latitude to the South Pole” (Lindsay and Washington 1954:114; Wolfe 1999:26).<sup>6</sup> It was James Cook’s second travel that gave an answer to this question and finally brought an end to this hopeless quest. It was him, also, who brought home accounts in which he encouraged permanent settlement on a distinct island in the Pacific region. It was his depiction of this country’s shores, and the recommendations of Joseph Banks – who accompanied him on his first journey – that supported the decision to choose this land as the most suitable for Britain’s undertakings, namely to find a place to ship their convicts: Australia (see Bitterli 1981; Marshall 1998; Williams 1998; Wolfe 1999).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of this continent existed in one or the other form since the ancient world and was perpetuated and reshaped throughout the centuries. Scientific journals supported the idea and helped to keep the imagination alive. They deployed a mixture of ideas of topography, the history of creation and of an earthly balance in which, according to the known landmasses an equivalent other amount of mass had to exist on the other side of the world.

<sup>7</sup> It took some more years until this piece of land was officially called “Terra Australis” or Australia. It was “Flinders map, eventually published the day before his death in 1814, [that] marked a turning-point

While Britain's colonial power expanded across the world throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, it also had to face dramatic changes within its borders. Industrialization – a complete restructuring of agriculture and production modes – resulted in two of the most significant changes: population growth and mass emigration that subsequently led to a threefold of Europe's population through the 19<sup>th</sup> century from about 170 million to over 500 million (Meredith and Dyster 1999:29). New factories did provide jobs, but the conditions were dangerous and death rates in the factories as well as in the areas around them, were high. In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century possibly one third of the British urban working class was unemployed (Broome 2002:28). The events that led to the beginning of the industrial revolution shaped Britain's social structure. To what degree scholars do not agree on, but "its polarizing effect on Britain was palpable at the time, signs of class consciousness and conflict being everywhere visible" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:185). The beginning of the industrial revolution in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that replaced mercantilism went hand in hand with the ideals of the Enlightenment and prepared the ground for fundamental social and economic renewals that were significant for the following century. Europe throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century had been shaped by absolutism that rendered life hard for the ordinary citizen. The nobility and clergy domineered the general public, national debts and high taxes forced great masses to live under unreasonable conditions (Elsenhans 2007).

Crucial proponents of the Enlightenment, philosophers such as John Locke, early spokesman for the social contract and the rights of man, David Hume, Thomas Hobbes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau were important pioneers for Adam Smith's prominent critic of mercantilism 'An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations' (followed by Ricardo and his ideas of a national economy). They built the foundation for social reformers such as the liberal Bentham and later also Mill (Van den Brink 1995; Taylor 1995, Kociumbas 1992). Their works profoundly changed the persistent economic principles of the time, brought about nationalist movements and were therefore crucial for western self-perception. Those ideas not only circulated in Europe but were also perceived in the overseas colonies and led to definite events such as the North American declaration of independence in 1776 (which Britain accepted

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in cartography and navigational science. Except for a small section of the north-east coast, the whole outline of the southern continent which for so many centuries had baffled and intrigued geographers, traders, and monarch of Europe, had at last been filled in" (Kociumbas 1992:67).

only because of France's insistence in 1783) and to the French revolution starting 1789. In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the liberalist and nationalist aspirations embraced what became a dominant worldview and probably the most visible expression of the outcomes of the triumph of the bourgeoisie: the "'laissez-faire' capitalism" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Throughout the following decades, the rising capitalist ideology promoted "utilitarian individualism and the virtues of the disciplined, self-made person", it stressed "private property and status as measures of success, poverty as appropriate sanction for failure; [...] enlightened self-interest and the free market as an instrument of the common good; [...] reason and method, science and technology, as the key to the progress of mankind" (ibid p.187).

In Britain of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the struggles between the emerging classes and "the sexuality of the metropolitan dispossessed [were] rapidly becoming *the* overriding social concern of the day" (Wolfe 1999:31). Thomas Malthus' *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) pointed to what the conservative enemy of the French Revolution envisioned as the fatal consequences of the on-going progress: overcrowding due to an explosion of that population which ultimately leads to finite resources and merciless struggle.

"The twin motor of his Hobbesian vision were hunger and sex" and "as is well known, Malthus' logic of struggle also inspired (independently, it seems) the thinking of Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace, whose theories, as glossed and (at least, in Darwin and Wallace's case) teleologized, were combined to make up the rough Lamarckian amalgam that came to be known as Social Darwinism" (ibid p.31-32).

The complete restructuring of Britain's social and economic life involved the development of new jurisdictions and moral debates, including the penalty system (see Foucault 1977). Since the Enlightenment stressed freedom as the most valuable personal good, the imprisonment became the perfect punishment. Due to the large numbers of unemployed workers, who fled the rural areas in search for jobs, the city centres soon experienced rapid population growth and hence unknown crime waves. The prisons burst with inmates, and the conditions and consequences were fatal. The idea to deal with high population densities by sending them to settler colonies overseas, though, was not a new one. It had existed in Britain since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when convicts had to work in the colonies as free labour. In 1775 Britain lost its American

colonies after their fight for independence and with them their comfortable way to get rid of those who were considered dangerous for their society (Wolfe 1999). Although other former colonized countries, such as Gambia for example, were at moments considered as new penal colonies, Australia was chosen as a suitable destination to send the ones considered antisocial and unwelcome (Bitterli 1981:208). Unlike British settlements in Africa and Asia the undertakings in Australia were not “outcome of private monopolistic initiatives to establish and maintain highly profitable commerce [...] [Botany Bay] was not settled as a trading post, despite a few grandiose paper projects, and neither did it have much strategic significance, lying too far to the south of established shipping lanes and commercial centers to exert any influence” (Horn 1998:34f). It was particularly built up as a penal colony and the first settlers that arrived on the Australian shores were the rejected outcasts of British society.

### **III.2.1 ‘Enlightened ideals’**

Because commercial expansion had spread so fast, colonial undertakings in the last quarter of the eighteenth century could not be left to trial and error; the ‘market place’ allowed no unplanned beginnings: social and economic theories were not produced in an ideological vacuum, quite the contrary. Wealthy and literate gentlemen as well as professional experts processed data from around the world. The theories they produced served as ‘blueprints for social, political and commercial action’ (see Kociumbas 1992:xi). In the new spirit of the Enlightenment the colonial powers reached out for the world, confidently representing the ‘free’ individual, the mature citizen with a need for knowledge that has every right to be fulfilled. Ideas of the social contract on the one hand, and the emerging evolutionist paradigm on the other were central to the exploratory journeys. They were conducted under the ideal of a world governed by “‘natural’ laws discoverable to human reason, and of ‘natural’ rights, allegedly empowering every man to pursue whatever metaphysical and commercial voyages he chose” (ibid p.ix). They served not only the national profit but provided a broad range of information, which scientists, academics and scholars at home could further investigate. The continuing explorations but also the enforcement of power in already established colonial dominions led to shifting power structures throughout the world’s

most important ‘global players’, which led to the situation, that “from 1815 to 1914 European direct colonial dominion expanded from about 35 per cent of the earth’s surface to about 85 per cent of it. Every continent was affected” (Said 2003:41).

British preconceptions and stereotypes towards black people that had emerged from their experiences with African slave trade and colonial exploitation of its dominions began to be revised and challenged under those new premises of the Age of the Enlightenment. Although the idea of white supremacy remained intact, explorations conducted under those emerging ideals of equality and freedom had actual impact on the relationships between the invaders and the natives. When the First Fleet set foot on Gamaraigal land, European intellectuals such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau debated the idea of the social contract (Taylor 1995) – each one with different weightings, sharing the idea of the fundamental principle that the individual has certain rights (if those individuals are included in an entity). Around the same time Granville Sharp, a London ordnance clerk, published a manuscript that “set in motion a train of events that led to the abolition of slavery in the British colonies” (Hiatt 1996:1). Colonial enterprises and former imperial governmental operations were re-evaluated. “British rule would thus be ‘enlightened’, if, of necessity, authoritarian. [...] The pattern of representative government based on the rights of Enlightenment, first established around the Atlantic, would spread to Australia, New Zealand, and southern Africa in the nineteenth century” (Marshall 1998:16). When Cook and Banks set to sea with the *Endeavour*, the President of the Royal Society appealed to them to approach the natives with respect and not occupy any of their country without their voluntary consent, since they are human beings created by the same god (see Williams 1998:558f). Likewise Captain Arthur Philipp, before he set sail, was instructed “to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them” (quoted from the *Historical Accounts of New South Wales 1893*:89 in Williams 1998:568).

### **III.2.2 The first contact and its twofold ethic**

Europeans at home, in order to fight aristocracy and request understandings of equality and individual freedom under the utilitarian paradigm (which then promoted nationalist



aspirations) deployed a language of liberal universalism. But those ideals did not apply in the same manner to the encountered indigenous populations. Although measured by earlier standards the pacific explorers guided by ‘enlightened ideals’ did behave moderately humane, insofar as they did not *randomly* kill the indigenous population. Still, to acknowledge the improved guidelines for contact with indigenous people does not mean we can imagine the contact as peaceful meetings. Those contact situations were rather, in many cases, dominated by ideas of white supremacy and therefore dismissed indigenous people as childlike or even not human, and their cultures as prehistoric and simple. The liberal, capitalist ideals that promoted equality and freedom somewhat paradoxically went hand in hand with racist impositions that led to elimination and assimilationist politics concerning Aboriginal people. On the way to becoming a *Dominion* in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a *self-governed colony* with ambivalent relationship to the imperial metropolitan centre, it was to a large extent the way in which the invaders encountered the indigenous population that marked their distinctive constituency as ‘Australian’.

“In other words, the colonizers’ dealings with indigenous peoples – through resistance, containment, appropriation, assimilation, miscegenation or attempted destruction – is the historical factor which has ultimately shaped the cultural and political character of the new nations, mediating in highly significant ways their shared colonial roots/routes” (Coombes 2006:1).

From the day of the first arrival of Europeans onwards, country was taken without consent of the natives, sacred sites were violated and, although some contact was peaceful and inspiring, most of the encounters brought “a depressing train of consequences [...] – sickness, demoralization, and depopulation” (Williams 1998:559). It is estimated, that “more than 10 Aborigines fell for every European. This would place the number of Aboriginal casualties at about 20.000, yet it could be much more” (Broome 2002: 55).<sup>8</sup> Anthropologists at the time, the “founding fathers” – there were no mothers – of the discipline,

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<sup>8</sup> The colonial expansion on the continent itself was shaped by numerous parallel developments. As Broome (2002) point out, Aboriginal resistance to white domination from the beginning of white settlement onwards, is a fact that is still often undermined in the narration of the nation and therefore renders the indigenous people not as agents, but as victims only. Broome offers a point of view on those processes that combines the resistance strategies as well as their capability to deal with the, often devastating, events. He describes their ability to assimilate to imposed conditions, integrate into a

“certainly regarded themselves as members of a culture at the pinnacle of human progress. Some even believed that the black races constituted an inferior biological species. But others, just as influential, held steadfastly to the doctrines of the unity of man and the equality of all men before the law. Anthropology in Britain was born when the two parties came reluctantly together in a marriage of convenience” (Hiatt 1996:xii).

It was anthropologists who delivered first insights into the Indigenous cultures, established long lasting contacts and contributed to the development of an imagery of the Aboriginal Other. Among them Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, with whom a new era of ethnographic fieldwork that partially set off in Australia. What would make sense at this stage, namely to describe the complex social worlds present at the time of the first arrival of European ships at the Australian shores, would burst the limited scope of this. Nevertheless we should keep in mind the diversity that the population of approximately 300,000 to 500.000 (Berndt 1974:3; Peterson 1999:317) Aborigines, who were living in Australia at the time of first European settlement, represented. In later accounts some scholars argue for a population up to 5 times that number, introducing the idea that the impact of certain diseases like smallpox on the population could have been ignored in earlier calculation. Arguments about whether to group them in tribes on the basis of linguistic and territorial affiliations (500 according to Berndt 1974 and Elkin in 1938) or language groups (600 according to Peterson 1999), about their social structures, their spiritual beliefs, kinship and totemism have led to intense debates within our discipline. The question about their affiliations to territory, whether this is linked to clans, tribes or hordes, and how those entities are constituted, have been debated ever since and are still of high controversial value in today’s land right claims (see Hiatt 1968 and 1996, Elkin 1938, Spencer and Gillen 1904 and Povinelli 2002 for detailed accounts and suggestions for further reading). In any case the varied populations, apart from their trading with islands in the north and the long history of ceremonial meetings from several tribes within the country itself, were basically pretty much isolated from the rest of the world for at least 40000 years, until the European’s arrival.

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dominant society and at the same time strengthening their traditions and demanding independence in every possible remaining way.

### III.3 European Invasion

*“Invasion is a structure, not an event”* (Wolfe 1999:3).

The First Fleet landed on 26 January 1788 on Gamaraigal land at Botany Bay. It was a huge armada, containing 290 seamen, soldiers and officials and 717 convicts, male and female, mostly of British and Irish decent, that sailed off to build up the first permanent settlement on Australia’s shores (Broome 2002:26). The situation on the ships for the male and female convicts was disastrous; they were penned up, nourishment was often only scarcely provided and hygienic standards were poor (see Kociumbas 1992). Against their expectations which were based upon Captain Cooks earlier accounts of the region, the land was not considered suitable for permanent settlement and Captain Arthur Phillip decided to move further North and finally set up camp in Port Jackson.

The convicts, who had little or no chance to ever return to their homes in Britain to which they were tied through their past and their families and where they simultaneously were perceived as “alarming threat to public order and private property” (Horn 1998:34f) were confronted with the task to build a society. Unlike in America, where the pilgrims who were looking for a more suitable place to follow their political and religious convictions (Elsenhans 2007:148; Gunew 1990:103), were actually responsible for the first significant wave of British settler colonialism overseas, the first settlers in Australia did not share a common faith, no sense of community in exile that bound them together (Kapferer 1996). Australia was not considered a new Eden. If anything, it was British liberal political terms that united the settlers, but no “symbolic attachment to one of the more commonly recognized bases of national claims such as ethnicity, history, or land” (Spillman 1996:151) was present. The absence of repertoires of apparently ‘primordial ties’ is even a marker for emerging Australian national identity. The British convicts and the first free settlers that had followed in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mainly because of the gold rush, were both often cut off from their families and their past. Their ability to build a society almost from scratch, struggling against the harsh soil and the wild bush, are cornerstones in the founding myths of the nation. Between 1787 and 1810, 12000 men and women were transported at the rate of 500 to 1500 a year. Up to the year 1820 another 174000 were banished (Horn 1998:34f; Marshall 1998:4). Due to little knowledge about how to cultivate soil, land reclamation

was of little success in the first years of settlement. Official, governmental ties with Britain were strong and in 1792 officials for the first time received land grants from the British government (Williams 1998:567f). Historians highlight different aspects of the stories of the first settlers and it remains a difficult task to grasp a full picture of how their sentiments, dreams and wishes were constituted and to what degree they were inspired by academic debates. What can certainly be said is that their struggles and endurance have become main assets in the Australian national narrative.

### **III.3.1 Settlement**

Throughout the first phase of European settlement and exploration of the continent, the development of infrastructure and the erection of governmental structures that subsequently led to the formation of the federation, indigenous issues have mostly been dealt with neglect. Although of importance in scientific contexts in some cases, the Australian Natives were of no crucial political interest to the establishing governments. Compared to other colonial contexts the indigenous workforce in Australia was considered being of little or no use to the European invaders. This was different though in rare cases of friendships that resulted from contacts between convicts and Indigenous people and some contacts that resulted from scientific curiosity, mostly encouraged by one-sided enthusiasm and connected to goals that were not intelligible to the Indigenous population (see Broome 2002). Generally it is necessary to mention that not all encounters were violent or deadly. Scholars today emphasize different aspects of the encounters so that a full picture is hard to grasp. Especially the very first years were characterized by European curiousness and Aboriginal reservation. There are accounts of European attempts to ‘make friends’ with the indigenous population and of their bewildering when being confronted with disinterest and rejection. “Contradiction lay at the very heart of British policy. [...] Many British officials were no doubt moved by some good intentions, but the desire to possess, to dominate, to colonize, was at odds with their humanitarianism” (ibid p.31), and “[al]though instructed to engage in friendly commerce with the natives, Philips’ party very soon resorted to shooting them, establishing a pattern that was to be repeated across the face of the continent over the next century and a half” (Wolfe 1999:26). In this first phase of settlement the invaders,

against commands, “entertained few practical doubts as to their entitlement to settle the land, an entitlement whereby indigenous self-defence was itself seen as invasion” (ibid). Even though the rapid decline of Aboriginal population was bemoaned in official documents from the colonial powers, the Europeans, sometimes knowingly, sometimes out of ignorance, increased indigenous dependence during those years by introducing flour, sugar, tobacco and alcohol, which led to further decrease of their population.

All in all, from an European point of view, their expansion into the country in the first decades, it seems, would not have looked so different if the indigenous population would not have been there at all. Indigenous rights from the beginning of invasion onwards, or, probably put more accurately, the absence of them (see Wolfe 1999:27), was shaped by the concept of *terra nullius*, a doctrine which “was primarily a systematization of the mutual rights and obligations of rival European powers [that] specified the conditions under which one such power could lay claim to a foreign territory as against all the others” (ibid). According to the British understanding the invaders were entitled to occupy and make use of the land without acknowledging any native title if the land showed no visible traces of cultivation or the usage of any technological equipment.<sup>9</sup> The concept of *terra nullius* legitimized European land grabbing that was not only the reason that the base of subsistence for the indigenous people began to cease, which meant the beginning of economic dependency, but it also cut the indigenous people off from their sacred sites, which shattered their social and religious life. Indigenous resistance was often met with brutal force by the British invaders, a pattern of violence that was systemic to settler-colonization (see ibid).

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<sup>9</sup> In order to own land, it had to become property, which entailed a twofold criterion: on the one hand land had to be rendered more efficient than natural state, by cultivation, irrigation, building and enclosing (material/technical criteria), on the other hand governance had to be centralized and laws had to be formulated in order to legitimate sanctions (political/regulative criteria). “Unless these two criteria were met, the inhabitants were not a society but legally transparent entities, so that, for ownership purposes, the land was no one’s (a bourgeois elaboration of the Roman *vacuum domicilium*). A third, pragmatic criterion, which was generally derived from the first two, reflected the growth of urbanizing Europe’s concern over population densities. It held that, if an area was being so inefficiently used that it was only supporting a fraction of the population that it otherwise might, then more efficient societies were entitled to export their surplus population to realize its potential (the convicts being a paradigm case)” (Wolfe 1999:26)

### III.3.2 Moving frontiers

During the first decades of the settlement, frontiers moved steadily over the 7.4 million km<sup>2</sup> big Australian continent. Generally one can say that the encounters in the South differed much from those in the North. While Aborigines in the South were outnumbered rather quickly, the ones in the North profited from the harsh, climatic conditions that render the continent a much less hospitable place than for example the United States.

“By 1850 almost all the southern half of the continent was held by the European invaders. After this date Europeans, driven on by dreams of pastoral and mining wealth, pushed into the more inaccessible northern parts of Australia where they disputed Aboriginal ownership of the land” (Broome 2002:98).

The so-called ‘frontier wars’, not only the direct shootings but also the outcomes of the destroying of trading and ceremonial routes, the taking of land, disturbing the well calculated uses of resources in the often dry country as well as the introduction of all kinds of diseases, caused high death rates among the Indigenous population. It is likely that indigenous people in the North died more often due to violent encounters along the expanding frontier than in the South, where alcohol and diseases did their part to decrease the numbers (ibid p.100). For detailed accounts from the “other side of the frontier” I recommend Reynolds (2006) and rich descriptions of Indigenous resistance moves can be found in Broome (2002).

It is important to mention, that the question of property in land was largely academic from the very beginning, and scholars soon were aware of the fact that certain tribes, and even individuals, did have ties to their land and also used to defend it (see Hiatt 1996:13f). But most European ‘pioneers’ on the other end of the world from where scholars posed questions of private property, debated sanctions on those who caused Aboriginal deaths and installed, out of best intentions, Aboriginal Protectors and planned to send more missionaries. Settlers, pastoralists and frontier pioneers did not understand land taking as dispossessing others (ibid p.6f).

### III.3.3 'Frontier effects'

Ideologically, the idea of the *frontier*, inherent to the expansion of European power in the continent and symbol for the obsession with territory (see Langton 2007), played an important role in the understanding and slow emergence of some sort of 'Australianess'. The frontier represents the

“classic binarism that counterposes two pure types (civilization vs. savagery, etc.) and admits a multitude of variants [...] In practice, rather than fixed (as in the visual metaphor of the dividing line), the Australian 'frontier' was shifting, contextual, negotiated, moved in and out of and suspended [...] Though it is not possible to fix the precise extent of the process at any point from the landing of the First Fleet onwards, the idea of the frontier expresses the fact that, between the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth, 'Australia' was almost completely invaded. Moreover [...] the idea itself consolidated this process. Thus the point is not simply that the idea of the frontier was misleading. What matters is that it was a performative representation – it helped the invasion to occur” (Wolfe 1999:165).

The homogenizing effects worked for both sides of the frontier and affected the emerging myths around an identity that slowly developed characteristics distinct from the “British heritage”. “Frontier-effects”, as Hall names it, is a part of the process of identification that itself always requires the one on the other side of the frontiers, that, which is left outside – the constitutive other (Hall 1996:3)<sup>10</sup>. The imagined frontier divides the space and bans the Aborigines to this “somewhere else”. The border renders the idea anomalous that Europeans and indigenous people should exist at the same space. The idea persisted in academic discourses, and emerging evolutionist paradigm – that entailed the idea that whenever two societies in different stages of evolution meet up, the developmental gap would be flattened out – contributed to the discourse. Since this gap was perceived to be proportionate high, this would mean that the Aborigines – confronted with “their far-distant futures in the whites” who “had reached a level of progress that enabled the crossing of barriers that were at once both geographic and phylogenetic”, were bound to face their ensuing doom as “a result inscribed in the natural order of things” (Wolfe 1999:175). The process of expansion therefore – once the frontier lost its empirical reference and became “entirely, rather

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<sup>10</sup> As already mentioned above: identification as a signifying practice operates across differences, it is an articulation that “entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries” (Hall 1996:3).

than partly, mythic” (ibid p.173) – supported the emerging logic of elimination. The idea of the dying race had crucial impacts on the relations between the Europeans and the indigenous people and led also to an intensified study of the indigenous population before “it was too late” (Elkin 1970). The early stage of humanity that the indigenous population represented for most academics was not meant to make it through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The imported colonizer’s culture was meant to replace the indigenous societies, a logic of elimination that was rationalized by encoding the idea of *terra nullius* into the Australian law. In this context, the idea of ‘smoothing the dying pillow’ and ‘edenic’ images of the noble savage existed simultaneously.

### **III.4 Towards a federation**

With the Gold Rush, starting in 1851 free settlers now in greater numbers joined the convicts. Those predominantly *male* white groups began to fight for their rights. The Eureka Stockade 1854, a protest of gold diggers against the high taxes, the prohibition to vote and to possess land, was a fight for independence and came to be seen as the birth of democracy in Australia and essential step towards the building of the federation (Galligan, Roberts and Trifinelli 2001:50) although according to Spillman (1996:155) those early “unsuccessful moves towards federation in Australia in the 1850s and 1880s were politically and strategically motivated and did not reflect any strong popular nationalist claims”. In the following years the colonies time after time gained the privileges of “responsible governments”, which means greater independence but still under the control from London. At the end of the century (1898) the shearers, which constituted one of the biggest industrial branches in Australia at the time, protested and fought for the rights of the laborers, which led to the founding of the ALP and the creation of *Waltzing Matilda*, the unofficial national hymn of Australia until today.

The beginning of the constitutional talks in fact, were characterized by an “overall absence of any talk of people other than white men of different standing as members of the nation” (Spillman 1996:167). What was of primary concern in the undertaking to formulate the constitution was the degree to which the Australian federation is tied to Britain, always using one eye to yield to the American example of how to articulate independence and freedom as well as the ‘genius of the people’. If anything, it was the



“influence from abroad” that motivated delegates to articulate a “secure basis for claims that all prospective citizens were a nation and should form a state” (ibid p.152). For Spillman the success of constitutional projects results from a strong and unified promotion more than any sort of consensus. Even though there is evidence of some sense of national identity before the constitutional undertakings, it has not been actually established until much later – from his point of view until the emerging political and professional elite engaged in its articulation (ibid p.156). Anyhow, “the overall absence of any talk of people other than white men of different standing as members of the nation is one of the most obvious aspects of these convention records” (Spillmann 1994:167). The exclusion of immigrants such as Chinese labors, Pacific Islanders and the indigenous population was managed mostly on colonial levels and basically rested on racist assumptions that were so well integrated in the dominant discourse that they evoked little comment.

### **III.4.1 Forming a white nation**

The racist rhetoric was crucial to inform the ‘White Australia Policy’ that came into existence with the first law that the new national parliament released, the Immigration Restriction Act, and was implemented “at a critical moment in the positive development of a distinctive national identity” (Stratton and Ang 1994:9). The formation of the nation was therefore implicitly linked to politics of exclusion inherent in liberal political terms that were articulated as shared basis due to the absence of any other sort of primordial symbolic repertoire (ibid.; see also Spillman 1994:178f). The emergence of a distinctive Australian identity was informed by the European idea of a *homogeneous national culture*. The process of identity formation was closely linked to the idea of the Anglo-Australian white superior ‘race’, that “was believed to be a new product of the multiplying British stock” (Stratton and Ang 1994:9) that possessed the “duty and destiny to populate and civilize the rest of the world” (ibid). The unity of *the people*, the imagined community in the nation-state was thus not sought in a shared (religious) ideology, but in the idea of a shared race/culture. While ideologies that informed the first laws against immigration and formed the basis upon which the Natives were completely ignored, rested on those presuppositions, political talks constituted the

‘Other’ basically as an ‘international Other’ – everything that is not European. “[T]he delegates’ ideas of what characterized the nation were evoked by reference to presupposition that reflected their notions about the external world” (Spillman 1996:152) (ibid p.152). With the founding of the Commonwealth of Australia, that took place by an act of the British parliament on the first of January 1901, the separate colonies were not only united on paper but also free trade now allowed for new economical aspirations. With this act Australia became a national as well as geographic entity (see Wolfe 1999:30), but it’s nation building process, highly self-conscious as it was, until today appears to be as always in the process of creation (Kapferer 1996:201).<sup>11</sup>

The introduction of the “White Australia Policy” in the decades following the foundation of the Australian federation meant a strategy of racial cleansing from which most Asian and Pacific Islanders were affected. Edward Barton, first prime minister of Australia, refers in his speech to the parliament in 1901 to Charles Pearsons’ “National Life and Character, a forecast” (1893) where he states that the dominant white caste will be overrun if they don’t take care (see Bonnett 2005). The implementation of a policy that should prevent “racial contamination” began by introducing a spelling-test all migrants should run through before entering Australia. Australia, due to its dependence on the mother country on the one side and the need of its powers to secure the shores on the other, had ambivalent sentiments towards Britain by then. Due to its international relations the kingdom could not officially allow racist strategies as the ones the Australians, with Barton on top, had envisaged. But they found a loophole by implementing this strategy that appeared as if it challenged educational issues, but actually turned migration into a matter based upon racial differentiation. The ‘White Australia Policy’ humiliated its own people: it expelled Japanese and Pacific Islanders labourers who were essential for the pearling and sugar cane industry.<sup>12</sup> In 1908, 9000 people were deported, which is why the term ethnic cleansing is a legitimate term to describe government policies of “social engineering” at the turn of the century.

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<sup>11</sup> “The welding together of disparate peoples, often traditional enemies, into a modern nation state requires, according to the ideology of nation building, the formation of political and social institutions which conform to some universal ‘standard’. Such standards are imposed, often through military force and state power, by the superpowers of the day” (Kapferer 1996:201).

<sup>12</sup> Those who managed to stay had to sign three-year contracts that basically forced them into slavery. Many of those people stayed even after their periods ran out and constituted large parts of the settlement on the coastlines.

Additionally to the expulsion out of Australia the immigration intake subsequently was restricted to the ones who passed a 50 words dictation test that could have been held in *any* European language. Even if immigrants would pass this one, officials could make applicants run another test in another language of the official's choice. Needless to state that only rarely people passed this test (see Galligan, Roberts and Trifiletti 2001:87).

### **III.4.2 A developing public culture**

The role of literary culture's role in the formation of modern nation states has been widely acknowledged. In fact it has been argued that nations themselves are the product of the spread of mass communication systems - the press in particular has contributed to the emerging of a common identity that is imagined rather than experienced directly (Anderson 1996; Turner 1994:12). In the Australian case, the newspaper and magazine culture that developed provided a broad space that allowed the more public negotiation of the future of the Australian state and a notion of 'Australianess' (see Carter and Ferres 2001). Some observers of the Australian public sphere have noted that this way of including the public and creating some sense of participation, for example in providing talkback radio" and public space for Q and A's is still in a way a typical characteristic of the Australian notion of participation and an important factor in the creation of a 'national culture'. Literature's central role in shaping Australian public culture and political institutions (ibid p.141) united the imagined community in narratives of the nation in which, up until the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous issues had been widely ignored. "Journals like the *Boomerang*, the *Republican*, the *Australian Nationalist*, the *Bulletin* and the *Dawn* provided a space for discussion of the form the new polity should take" (ibid) and therefore helped to maintain a public sphere that provided the platform for an articulation of a national identity. Literature therefore should not be dismissed as tool of governmental interest only. The particular aspect of Australian nationalism that drew on the desire to acquire and cultivate land was visible in the importance that was attached to the appearance of drovers, shearers, farmers, pastoralists and rural pioneers in early Australian literature (see Tsokhas 2001:15).

The *Bulletin* is probably the best known example for the kind of new journalism that slowly emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, by providing a mix of “policies, entertainment, education and culture [...] brought into being a new form of the public sphere in Australia. It did so precisely by addressing the emerging generation of educated, literate middle- and working-class readers as interest citizens, members not just of a national audience but of a national culture and polity” (ibid p.145). The *Bulletin* could not maintain its critical character though, and created an increasingly populist and patriotic image, especially after the First World War. Other papers instead, in the following decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, challenged prevailing hegemonic discourses and provided space for the articulation of Indigenous Australian versions of the nation. Australian art in general has basically been “a public exercise in self-conscious construction: of a profession, of self, of nation” (Smith 2001:69), and the production and consumption of ‘national fictions’ in particular, that produce a sense of a unified self/nation, is often described as the way in which Australians come to know themselves as such. The production of an imagined unity in this narrative is a question of power within the framework of colonialism. National fictions have mostly been written by whites, the ones enabled by literacy. Even though the indigenous people had their own stories that “interpellated into white discourses of nation” and also “challenged ‘official stories’” (Elder 2009:33f), their narratives for most part of Australian’s history remained unheard, at least for the ‘mainstream’ audience. But the fact that their stories lacked a broader audience does not mean that Indigenous people remained invisible. Indigenous issues slowly made their way into politics.

### **III.4.3 Gallipoli – the ‘true’ birth of the nation**

Many (white) Australians, in the decades following 1901, were not sure about their nationality, which Tsokhas (2001:118) links to the fact that nation and state was not yet fully coextensive. Ties to Britain were close, due to the dominion status of Australia under the British crown and its status as main trading partner and source of capital imports and Britain being the defending power of Australia’s national security. “Uncertainty about Australian national identity was reflected in and sustained by the coexistence of both political and economic nationalism and pro-British attitudes in the

ideas and actions of major Australian political figures“ (ibid). The one event that is particularly often referred to as the ‘birth of the nation’ took place 1915: the battle of Gallipoli (see Gunew 1990 and Kapferer 1988), where the Australian and New Zealand army corps that came to be known as ANZAC troops, fought the Ottoman Empire. The remembrance of the battle of Gallipoli, ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) day – celebrated at April 25, is an important aspect of the development and maintenance of some of the most valued traits of the Australian national identity, the ideology of egalitarian individualism. Although the battle caused devastating losses – both, the Australians and New Zealander, were defeated by the Turks – the memory is a vibrant drive in the Australian nationalism. It symbolizes male mateship, practicality and rationalism – the denying of which, according to Kapferer, is almost “sinful” in Australian understanding. This refers to the statements made above, which identify nationalism in Australia as a ‘quasi-religion’. The web of symbolic values, places and times around which the community is imagined and that the nation-state relies upon, according to Baumann (1999:44) is nothing short of religious. The ANZAC day celebrations are crucial events in the process of creating national cohesion in that they create a basis upon which the nation can and should be remembered and upon which a sense of what it means to be Australian is recreated.

The repercussion of those events in literature added to the persisting themes of the bush and the male explorer in his battle against the harsh soil. It united colonial fragments in evoking values and attributes characteristic *for all Australians* (read: for all *white* Australians) and therefore justified colonization, the ‘ANZAC myth’ continued to establish a supposedly ‘true Australian identity’. Following Rose (2006), *expulsion* is the most important aspect in the narration of the Australian foundation myth. It explains the need to articulate some sense of unity beyond the British ideologies and ties. In her view the convicts, expelled from Eden (England), forced into an involuntary settlement that brought about a “life of toil and sweat amid thorns and thistles” (ibid p.24), eventually reworked and eventually claimed the “basic parameters of that myth” to create a “brash new-world Paradise” and a “new kind of settler identity founded in the antipodean assertion that the thorns and thistles, the flies, dust and salt lakes are indeed ‘God’s own’. They thus embraced the difficulties of Australian terrains and in good pagan fashion transformed the oppressive meanings of biblical expulsion into a

sensuous love of the bush” (ibid p.24). Still until the middle of the century though, British history basically dominated education in schools. *If* some sort of *Australian* history emerged, there was no attention paid to the time prior to British settlement or the numerous ways in which the indigenous people showed resistance. Intellectuals of all kinds crucially influenced the development of national images. Again in this phase, the Australians

„were much more likely to learn their history in novels, in which writers and readers felt and thought about the present in historical perspective. This was not empirical, positivist or closely documented history, but a conceptual, metaphorical and philosophical process of fictional yet truthful interaction with the social, geographical and natural world that was unmistakably Australian. The emotional, cultural and psychological aspects of human types and individuals were explored not as abstract figures but as flesh and blood Australians“ (Tsokhas 2001:270f).

While the global scale increased and Australia engaged more actively in the modern world, national identities provided stability and certainty. It should be clear at this point, that “Australian literature is not obliged, nor necessarily inclined, to comment on the nation; its degree of ‘Australianess’ is often of significantly less concern to the writer than it is to the critic, for whom autochthonous ‘traditions’ are always ready to be made, or unmade, if not exactly waiting to be found” (Huggan 2007:viii). Still, though, “the persistence and durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture” are better understood “when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting” (Said 2003:14), and it is in this way that we should understand Australian literature around the turn of the century, and two of its most well known representatives, Henry Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Peterson – author of *Waltzing Mathilda*, the unofficial national anthem of Australia (see more in Kiernan 1982). Their literature as well as the works from the artists from the Heidelberg school, reflect the “burgeoning of nationalist art” at the time of Anzac. “Some of those involved in the stirring of Australia’s national consciousness supported the Anzac cause enthusiastically” (Kapferer 1988:132).

### III.4.4 Blackness challenging the white nation

The movement towards a federation of the separate Australian colonies was characterized by an ideological shift concerning the government's dealing with the Indigenous population as well: the so-called 'half-caste menace' replaced the discourse around the 'dying race'. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards Indigenous people have been banned to live on reserves where 'protectors' exercised control over their lives (see Whitlock 2006:28). The paternalistic policies on the reserves served to keep the Aboriginal people separated from the white superior race. Teacher, missionaries and public servants administered the maintenance of the settler's dominance. The frontier violence during the invaders expansion into the country was high at certain times, and keeping Aborigines on the reserves was the strategy deployed in order to secure 'what's left' of their culture. The decrease of the indigenous population was explained by the Social Darwinist idea of the survival of the fittest – and thus rendered the Aborigines a 'dying race', doomed to extinct. Anthropologists and scholars therefore rushed for 'Indigenous material' before it was too late (see Spencer and Gillen 1904:vii), in order to discover the origins of social institutions, a process that lasted well into the present century (Hiatt 1996:xii). Where it was too late to study them in their natural environment, the reserves were meant as places that served to protect (this was the official language of the government) the indigenous people and further 'smooth the dying pillow'. If Aborigines on the 'European side' of the frontier were not *directly* forced by protectors to live on the reserves, it was the living conditions that forced them to move there themselves or at least put their children there 'under custody'. While the reserves mainly functioned to manage indigenous life-worlds and silence them, the missions can be understood as "antechambers of extinction" (Wolfe 1999:175). Even children of so called 'mixed decent' who, no longer counting as aborigines, have increasingly been sent there in order to provide the basis for future racial purity. In 1886 the *Half Caste Act*, 'half-castes' being the offspring of indigenous women and the white males who were wandering off alone in the bush being the offspring, became the model for legislation of Aboriginal communities throughout Australia, such as the Aboriginal Protection and Restriction Act in 1897. Despite the way it was articulated, handling

“Indigenous issues was more a matter based on racist assumptions than based on humanitarian, paternalistic, concerns. All people who were Aboriginal, ‘half-caste’, children of Aborigines (or for some provisions, *any* degree of Aboriginal descent) were placed under the Act, whether they needed protection or not. They could then be moved to a reserve and kept there against their will with no right of appeal. They were not permitted alcohol nor to vote” (Broome 2002:102).

Strangely enough this sexual aspect of the invasion supported the logic of elimination. The appearance of children with mixed descent posed a serious threat to the white society and led to the ideological shifting of the imagined frontier. The mythic Aboriginality on the other side of the frontier, that was created as opposed to the colonial subject on this side and was linked to the idea of the ‘dying Aborigine’, was replaced by a ‘duality’ created on this side of the frontier:

“For the duality in which the ‘half-caste menace’ was anomalous was not one between whites and mythic figures over the frontier, but, rather, one between whites and ‘*full-bloods*’ on the reserves. In other words, contradictory effect of the sexual dimension of the invasion was the eruption of an official conceded Aboriginality this side of the frontier. [...] [T]his concession provided the demographic ground for the inclusive discourse of Aboriginality which, in the wake of the achievement of nationhood, the Australian state would contradictorily combine with the logic of elimination” (Wolfe 1999:181).

The strategies that had been developed in order to deal with the children that resulted from relationships that were generally disapproved of, provided the basis for the 20<sup>th</sup> century catastrophes that destroyed most indigenous families and caused severe problems to the indigenous life-worlds. The racist views towards Aborigines, “based on ignorance, a lack of sympathy, on fanciful racial theories and on the need to rationalize the dispossession of the Aborigines’ land” (Broome 2002:97) supported popular thinking that argued “that the Anglo-Saxon race must be kept pure”, that “rested on the assumption that racial inter-mixture led to racial contamination and decline” (ibid). The *Bulletin* stated: ‘If Australia is to be a country fit for our children and their children to live in, we must KEEP THE BREED PURE. The half-caste usually inherits the vices of both races and the virtues of neither. Do you want Australia to be a community of mongrels?’ (Evans 1975:351 cited in Broome 2002:97).



### III.4.5 Politics of Assimilation

The Immigration Restriction Act had made quite clear how Australia should look like within its borders: what was desired was a white Australia. In this context inter-racial sexual contact was something that had to be taken care of. The envisioned solution then was called 'breeding them white'. The situation confronted white Australia with a paradox. The antagonism that sexual practices of the white male individuals contradicted the government's logic of elimination was central to the assimilation politics: "sex with those who are not white will make the nation white, yet we (white people) can never say we want sex with those who are not white. Or to put the paradox in a different register: 'white Australia' must absorb blackness to be white, yet 'white Australia' with blackness in it will never be white" (Elder 2009:60). The more 'half-castes' there were, the more threat they posed to white purity. What should a government do, that wanted the settlers to proliferate and not the indigenous people? The answer to miscegenation therefore could only be the absorption into the settler category, which is why those children of mixed descent were taken away from their families in order to turn them into 'as white as possible' until the percentage of 'black blood' is low enough as to be ignored. This tactic was referred to as 'breeding them white'. Children were removed from their parents and instead have been raised in dormitories or were forced to live with white families. This is how the Australian government, informed by recommendations of chief protectors like the anthropologists Spencer for example, managed the institutionalization of indigenous childhood (Whitlock 2006:29). The children that were taken from their parents, a practice that continued until the 1960s, are now referred to as *Stolen Generation*. Anthropological contributions, especially those of Spencer and Gillen, leaders of the academic discourse at the time, had great impact on the colonial regime's dealing with indigenous affairs. It was only the beginning of the increasing anthropologists influence in laws, politics and a broader public sphere (as advisors for television programs, in health care and schools, in teaching and so on). In his role as Chief Protector of Aborigines Spencer 1913 wrote in favour of withdrawing so called half-caste children from their parents and place them in stations. This and other incidents of the kind lead Wolfe (1999:11) to conclude that anthropology was so caught up in its own contexts and debates, that there was nearly no

essential new knowledge created. Assimilation, not only that of the Indigenous people, but also that of the migrants, thus indeed became a matter for the Australian nation. It asked quite unveiled to what degree the indigenous population can and should be integrated into the white Australian narrative. The politics and imaginaries included caused the most irritating outcomes for white imaginaries of a national identity. For the Indigenous communities, survival became a matter of not being assimilated. The rising discourse of assimilation emphasized the inclusion of Aboriginal people in the nation. It was at the 1937 Aboriginal welfare conference that the state and Commonwealth governments officially decided on assimilation as preferred way to control Aboriginal people's lives. Awareness of Indigenous living conditions, their life ways, customs and beliefs, arose and the government decided that the best way to secure Indigenous life expectancy is by transforming them into whites as soon as possible, which replaced the 'protection-policy' and the strategy to ban them on the reserves.

The *blackness* of Indigenous people became *the* overriding concern of the whites. As the politics and attitudes towards indigenous people had changed from 'toleration' (at the very beginning of the invasion) to one of displacement and eradication and to one of segregation, public acknowledgment of their presence increased. Influenced by racist views, they have been depicted as 'natural resources' rather than citizens under the constitution. The main feature of *the Aborigine*, as constructed by academics as well as literary figures, was the difference from the European 'norm' (see McLeod 2002).<sup>13</sup> From the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, anthropological data was given more and more attention. Schoolbook analysis' and official documents of that time show a more "balanced view of the Aborigines' contribution to the development of Australia" (ibid p.251), although the stereotypical representations remained as either deploying pictures of the hard life always close to famine or the more romanticized aspects that bear resemblance to what Sahlins thirty years later described as the "original affluent society". "Later, as the universities emphasized the use of primary sources, first-hand experiences of the explorers gradually permeated social studies texts, and so hearsay was at least a temporary fact. [...] By 1940

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<sup>13</sup> McLeod's (2002:248f) analysis of Australian children's literature in the first quarter of the 20th century provides also exceptions from this rule of exoticising 'Others'. The examples he brings show instead comparably great sensitivity and insight, for example *Coonardoo* (1929) by Susannah Prichard, *Children of the Dark People* by Frank Dalby Davison (1936) and the radio story *The Search for the Golden Boomerang* written by Laura Bingham.

fictionists were incorporating moral factual material into their stories dealing with the Aborigines. In part this was the result of the growing research being conducted by professional anthropologists in Sydney and Adelaide – especially Professor A.P. Elkin, Catherine Berndt, and T. G. H. Strehlow, and their students” (ibid p.251). This led to quite a huge amount of indigenous legends available from the 1940s onwards.<sup>14</sup> In general it can be said, that changing government policies throughout history had huge impact on the literary depictions of Aborigines. “However” (as Broome 2002:175) puts it, “the assimilation policy in the hands of many administrators and bureaucrats who operated the special Aboriginal Acts became a policy of absorption and naïve social engineering to change Aborigines into Europeans with black skins”. The government targeted the *black* individual: white teachers taught smartly clothed Aborigines how to cook and work. “The message was: the successful Aborigine was the Europeanised Aborigine” (ibid), “sanitized” and shaped “according to Anglo-Australian cultural political dictates” (Langton 1993:12). Simultaneously in the rural areas the notion of the *community* was created in order to better administer Aboriginal people. “The ‘transitional’ policies of segregation and incarceration, which predated and survived the ‘assimilation’ policies, were directed at those communities. These were institutions, rather like the hamlets in the military resettlement scheme during the Vietnam war, where people were sent to be ‘pacified’” (ibid). According to Elder (ibid p.12), it is the paternalism of assimilation politics that resurfaces time and again in the history of government decisions. The continuing resonances of the assimilation history shadows the discourse that emerges around counter-narratives of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination which still causes anxiety for a great deal of white Australians.

### **III.4.6 Populate or Perish**

From the post-war years on, politics towards the indigenous population and therefore their appearance in public changed. But this was a very slow process, and racist assumptions governed the policies as well as the everyday interactions. The idea of the federal democracy included learning from the mistakes of the countries of Europe. But the white Australian utopia was based on the paradox that democratic equality required

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<sup>14</sup> See more in Elkin 1938

racial exclusion. The envisioned equal rights amongst workers, labourers, and farmers could only be achieved through exclusion from others, which meant the indigenous population but also most Asian immigrants. Although some had been included in the formation of that new society and participated to a large extent to create a lively community, they were still perceived as inferior, incapable of joining this new society. Although their work was of economic importance to the community, the minority was more considered a threat to the white workingman paradise. What *white* meant for the majority of those days, where 99 per cent of the seven million people (1942) were white, is probably best underlined by the following statement from the scholar Livingston who wrote about the Australian nationalism in 1942:

“Australia has had no native problem; she has not been a duality, nor is she a melting pot for the many races of men. Her people are British people, as they proudly boast, ninety-eight per cent pure. They are English, they are Welsh, they are Scotch, they are Irish. If it is a melting pot, it is a British melting pot. The result is a new people – the Australians, more British even than the British themselves” (Livingston 1942:143).

World War II changed Australia’s commitment to immigrant intakes. One per cent immigration-based annual population growth was aspired, but this could not be achieved with British immigrants only, therefore larger numbers of non-British were accepted into the country.

“While to begin with it accepted the displaced persons from Northern and Eastern Europe, there were not enough of them, and it soon had to recruit its immigrants from the ‘darker shade of White’ regions of southern Europe and the Mediterranean” (Hage 2003:54).

Although the majority were still of British descent, “this change in direction was bound to worry a population whose sensibilities continued to be shaped by the White Australia Policy and its structural White paranoia. This population was now torn between the phobic war fantasy ‘populate or perish’ and the racial non-White immigration fantasy ‘populate or perish’” (ibid p.55). Like Indigenous people, the migrants under the assimilation politics had to change in order to fit into the Anglo-Celtic culture, an ‘ideal imaginary’ that increasingly became shattered. The articulation of an exterior threat in order to secure the national self is a rhetoric that was deployed even in most recent governments, as will become visible later on. The ‘unwillingness’ to integrate into the

mainstream society, both from Indigenous people and immigrants alike, also was stressed time and again.

### III.4.7 Progressive public culture

As mentioned before, the Aboriginal people, their mythology and knowledge, similar to their presence as subjects whose lifestyle the majority population has to manage, moved closer to the centre of public attention. The agents of a public cultural agenda in the final years of World War Two, as well as the post-war years, were concerned with redefining the status of national citizenship around the ideals of modern, democratic liberalism. *Meanjin's* (a magazine) appearance, according to Carter and Ferres, contributed to a large extent to a discourse around a national culture in which the Aborigines were now part of. "Essays on Henry Lawson and poems by Judith Wright [the female counterpart to Henry Lawson] sat alongside discussions of contemporary European philosophy, urban planning, or Aboriginal culture. Although *Meanjin's* concern was primarily with the culture of settler Australia, its discourse of nation also meant that Aboriginal culture became part of the understanding of the nation's culture. Here literature and anthropology together 'argued' Aboriginal culture into the meanings of contemporary, liberal Australia" (Carter and Ferres 2001:147). It was in those years that the idea of a national culture as a distinct sphere that requires promotion and protection, emerged. "[T]he nation, international politics, contemporary literature, communism, democracy – and the role of the writer, the critic, the intellectual and the magazine" (ibid) were now more seriously debated by and for a large audience in new magazines like the *Observer* and the *Nation*. The interaction between the academy and journalism was partly responsible for the formation of a new 'intelligentsia' that understood the nation as *culture* and *state* "and the sense of what culture might mean also began to change, for example with *Nation's* essays on cinema" (ibid). State sponsored nation formation, and the public debates around it, as Frow and Morris (1993) have also noted at length, has a long history in Australia. Until very recently a key strategy as a means to protect local or national cultural production against competition from outside has been the use of a distinct cultural policy (Turner 2001:161). The impact of societal and cultural change on the indigenous population was

perceived as widespread and heavy, so that anthropologists of the 1950s and 1960s stated that no further ethnographic fieldwork – that would examine ‘pristine’ Aboriginal societies – could be carried through. They argued that once “the tribal way of life had changed through contact and assimilation, the ‘real basis’ of society could no longer be described“ (Yengoyan 1979:394).

The 1960s were characterised also by the emergence of a diversity of filmic approaches towards Indigenous people’s life-worlds. Whenever possible, original ways of life have been tried to grasp and to capture on film. Ian Dunlop’s (1966) *Desert People*, for example, focused on portraying the original way of life, which, as stated in the inserts in the beginning, can be found in the Western Desert, for example. “Djagamara and his family were filmed as they were found, in the heart of the desert” (Desert People 1966; 1’09’’), but subsequently adds that the Welfare patrol had taken them to Warburton Mission recently. “We took Minma back to his own country to record his life, as it has always been until a few months before” (ibid 1’21’’). This points not only to the changes of the time but underlines the importance of the idea to ‘preserve what is left’. MacDougall’s *Goodbye old man*, produced a decade later in 1977, resulted from a request from inside the community to document a ritual that is conducted after the death of the head of a big family (The RAI, URL 2). The reason behind it was, on the one hand, to preserve the knowledge of the ritual, and to communicate the meaning of a ceremony to a larger audience, on the other. It conveys a completely different sense about how to approach the filmed subjects and reveals the cameras’ and filmmakers’ involvement into the scenery – in which the film literally becomes part of the ceremony. It was not until the 1980s that the films produced with and about Indigenous people reveal in themselves, in their production mode, something about the interaction between the filmmaker, the filmed and the audience, as for example in Kim McKenzie’s and Less Hiatt’s *Waiting for Harry* (1980) or, even more political, Dennis O’Rourke’s *Couldn’t be Fairer* (1984). In this film the protagonist is also the narrator of the story, which treats racism as part of the everyday living experience of Indigenous people who face alcoholism, oppression and violence resulting from tension-loaded race-relations. Ways to narrate and represent – to speak with, about, for and alongside Indigenous people or any ‘subjects’ for that matter – have developed in a huge variety in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They reflect upon and

comment on and the changing socio- political situations and Indigenous struggles and have to be understood, as every cultural product, as resulting out of the dominant discourses of the time. But, as Langton (2005) points out, there is still “no sizeable body of literature that provides an informed anti-colonial critique of the films and videos about Aboriginal people”. Given the fact that there is a huge amount of material produced about Indigenous people, she argues for “an expansion of experimental film and video-making” by Aboriginal people as a vital element in their struggle for “self-determination, cultural maintenance and the prevention of cultural disruption” (ibid).

### III.5 Developing multiculturalism

#### Prime Ministers from 1972 to present

Gough Whitlam	1972-1975	Labor
Malcom Fraser	1975-1983	Liberal
Bob Hawke	1983-1991	Labor
Paul Keating	1991-1996	Labor
John Howard	1996-2007	Liberal
Kevin Rudd	2007-2010	Labor
Julia Gillard	2010-present	Labor

It was the controversial Gough Whitlam who finally ruled off the White Australia Policy and introduced the “multicultural” agenda into Australia’s politics. The rapid move in the 60s and 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the notion of a unitary culture and tradition, based on cultural and racial British inheritance (Frow and Morris 1993:ix), to a multicultural, government supported policy of diversity was in part informed by the increasing Eastern European migration. From the 1960s onwards “the official construction of cultural identity has been progressively required to confirm but not exclusively delimit the available definitions of our national character” and slowly took “on the obligation of constructing alternative definitions, of incorporating the networks of cultural differences and similarities which mark post-war Australian society as distinctive” (Turner 1994:69). The introduction of multiculturalism overturned the

racial/cultural *particularism* that had dominated the phases of emerging national identity that constituted the opposition between ‘Europeans’ and everyone who is not. The new policy “could be characterized as the establishment of an *inclusionary* ethnic particularism” (Stratton and Ang p.10). Fleras (2009) argues that the major benefit of implementing the multicultural policy, the degree to which the integration into laws actually happened varied between national and state level, was the chance to redefine and promote a fresh national image abroad. Overcoming the racist past, with the introduction of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, means to include former enemies and unwelcome neighbours, especially the Asians, and support local economies. The following years up to the 1980s and the following decade particularly promoted globalization and economic rationalism the extension of citizenship to former marginalized groups (ibid p. 114).

The new understanding of more differentiated modes of national cohesion had actual impacts on the politics and attitudes towards immigrants. While society improved towards equal rights and standards *for all Australians*, which posed an increasing threat to the Anglo-Rights, the practical difference for the indigenous population was only marginally visible at first. To be sure, Aborigines *had* been incorporated into the public life, they were visible as part of the society, as artists, sportsman and army officers. Integration became a recurrent theme in post-war literature and indigenous authors for the first time represented their point of view to a greater public. The postcolonial recognition of other people’s voices led to a change in anthropological methodology. Ethnographic authority, as well known, experienced a “necessary breakdown [...] that was itself a structure of global hegemony” (Friedman 2000:641).

### **III.5.1 First Indigenous land claims**

When the 1967 referendum to abolish the two sections in the constitution, which excluded Aborigines from citizenship, was acknowledged without hardly any dissent, the first steps towards improvement of their rights was taken. Although this represented an important step towards equality it did not practically improve their living conditions and is thus often referred to as a ‘symbolic step’. Nevertheless the 1960 were the time when Aboriginal resistance, their fight for land and social equality, took shape. The



Yolngu people from Arnhem Land in 1963 sent a bark petition to the Parliament in order to protest against mining on their traditional land – a battle they lost. Although connection to the country was acknowledged it was not recognized by the Australian law until the *Mabo* decision 20 years later finally recognized *native title*. In the meantime the increasing protests against their living conditions pushed questions of indigenous land rights further into the Parliamentary debates. The land rights movement also gathered momentum around the erection of the *Tent Embassy*, the ‘Aboriginal Embassy’ in front of the Parliament House in Canberra in 1972, as symbol of indigenous’ people estrangement from their land that persisted several police operations and continued to reappear throughout the following decades. On Australia Day, January 26 in 2012 the *Tent Embassy* celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> birthday of the tent embassy where Aboriginal Elders and prominent indigenous spokesperson articulated their demands towards a *Sovereign Treaty* with a big cooroborree – a ceremonial get together to perform, sing and dance in unity. The Tent Embassy functions as a powerful means to articulate indigenous issues and concerns to a broader public. Although media coverage tends to overemphasize the protests in a negative rhetoric, stressing the terms ‘riots’ for peaceful demonstrations, for example, the overall perception of the indigenous and non-indigenous community’s protests tends to be positive.

After the erection of the original *Tent Embassy* Prime Minister Gough Whitlam introduced the so-called *Land Rights Bill* 1975 that was passed into law under the changed Fraser government in the following year. The new government changed emphasizes on the political agenda but continued the support of multiculturalism as policy. Fraser, who supported the black independence movement in Africa (Robert Mugabe against the white minority), also strengthened the ties to the Asian neighbours. For Australia he stated the future goal to become a “truly multicultural nation” (Australian Government, Department for Immigration and Citizenship, URL 3). The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* [ALRA], only applicable in the Northern Territory, was thus passed one year after the Racial Discrimination Act – exciting times for the Australian nation. Jenny Macklin, the Shadow Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in the now present Gillard Ministry, in 2007 (when she was part of the Rudd government where she also oversaw the formal apology to the Stolen Generations) defined the importance of the Act as follows:

“The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 was the first and strongest legal recognition of the profound connection that Indigenous people have to their country. It recognised the communal nature of landownership in traditional Aboriginal law and culture through a form of freehold title. The act, back in 1976, represented the most significant set of rights won by Aboriginal people after two centuries of European settlement. It returned about 50 per cent of the land area of the Northern Territory to its traditional owners” (Macklin 2007, URL 4).

This first acknowledgment of Aboriginal rights to land was the first step in a row towards reclaiming traditional land. Claim of title, by this law, could be made if Aboriginal claimants could prove evidence of traditional association with the specific land. Many other ACTS, in other states and territories, followed this one. “The ALRA (NT) meant that most land which was already part of Aboriginal reserves, plus other land where traditional association could be proven and which wasn’t owned or being used by other people, could be transferred to Aboriginal land trusts to be held in perpetuity for traditional owners” (Reconciliation Australia, URL 5). While on the basis of land rights governments acknowledge the connection between land and its traditional owners and may give legal tenure to indigenous communities (who then own the land as inalienable freehold title), Native Title, that resulted from the “Mabo” case in 1993, finally overrides “terra nullius” and states that indigenous people who had “retained their connection to land had common law rights to land if these rights had not been extinguished through ownership by other interests” (ibid). What this decision revealed was foremost the illegitimacy of the colonial land-grab and caused widespread debates about questions of (dis)possession. In order to claim native title one has to pass many obstacles, and most agreements are achieved outside the framework of the Native Title Act, by negotiations of the land-owners, traditional owners and the government. Proving traditional ownership or connection to land is a difficult undertaking and the small amount of successful native title claims today, that, *if* successful, sometimes take a decade to be negotiated, visualises the actual limits of the Native Title Act as it came to be established (see Povinelli 2002).

### III.5.2 The politics of reconciliation

The key term in debates on ‘Indigenous affairs’ at the time was, and continues to be, “reconciliation”<sup>15</sup>. This agenda provides the main framework of dealing with the contemporary consequences of the arrival of the British in 1788. A key part in this respect is to address the limitations of the legal system, which the Native Title Act provides. Simultaneously though, reconciliation as a framework for policy making has often been debated and criticized. Within the debates about reconciliation the two main subject positions, the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous, have often been reduced to outcomes of their particular, ‘separated’ histories, which are then identified as incommensurable. The reconciliation discourse is closely interwoven with questions of nationalism (see Morton 2003), in which, for certain purposes, history and myths are often merged and then inform political and individual praxis. He locates the debate about the usefulness and meaning of collective apologies in a broader context of discourses of nationalist values and identity, mostly inspired by melancholia and narcissism. The ten-year period between 1991 and 2000, when the Australian Parliament had introduced a formal plan to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, can be criticised for several reasons. The official reconciliation program, according to Gunstone (2006), has failed in many respects. However justified the critiques of the reconciliation program are, it (reconciliation) was (and is) mainly about the inclusion of indigenous Australians in the nation. This goes hand in hand with recognising them as part of the human race, which underpins the idea of human rights (Morton 2003: 255).

The discourse over reconciliation actually had first gained importance in the preparations of the 1988 Bicentennial celebrations, in the course of which also the somewhat contradictory multiculturalist attempt to promote diversity and national unity simultaneously have been seriously challenged for the first time. Again, the Australia that was celebrated in the construction of the Australian national character that underwrote the 1980s nationalism was anything but new. It celebrated the revival of the rural mythologies that reclaimed the experiences of the settlers,

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<sup>15</sup> See Pratt 2005 (p.171 in particular) for further literature on the issue of reconciliation

“the cheeky, resourceful larrikin who populates Henry Lawson’s stories and who was enshrined as the ‘national type’ in the work of [the historian and author of *The Australian Legend*] Russell Ward. This version of the national character is prescriptive, unitary, masculine and excluding. It is not a version of national identity that reflects the diversity of ethnicities, cultural traditions and political interests that currently exist in this postcolonial nation-state” (Turner 1994:5).

The popularity and importance of those narratives was enshrined in the opening of the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in Queensland during the Bicentennial year that “has enjoyed considerable success in re-establishing the histories it celebrates within the nation’s mythologies” (ibid p.9). While these pre-existing myths of Australian heritage were easy to grasp, it lacked few ideas of how those narratives could be replaced in a meaningful way (see Healy 2001:279).

### **III.5.3 A discourse of decline**

The loss of the predominant British heritage in favour of non-British ‘minority interest groups’ was a prominent fear of the time and continued to persist throughout the following decades. The different reactions on the festivities, as Turner puts it, were to some degree understandable: “to celebrate a nation which is united but diverse, on a day which is the moment of both settlement and invasion, through rhetoric which foregrounds difference and reconciliation over uniformity and assimilation, was not a simple public relations exercise” (Turner 1994:70). Those processes, caught up in this pressing conflict between the settler society and the Indigenous population, inspired the challenge to rearticulate the dominant traits of *the Australian national character* between the old legends and the new themes around ethnic diversity. This search for an inclusive national identity around the multicultural theme created by post-war migration and strengthened Indigenous resistance to oppression posed new challenges to Australia’s political authorities.

From an economic point of view multiculturalism was useful in the process of strengthening ties with Asia, a political agenda Bob Hawke had intensified and Paul Keating continued extensively. Australia was reconstructed as colourful, liberal, pluralist nation – by a group of Anglo-Celtic’s who continued to man the institutions which orchestrates those affairs (see Gunew 1990:104). It’s the bias towards minorities

and migrants on the one hand, and the global business interests on the other, that continued to shatter the grounds upon which the nation state created its basis for identification. This has turned into the most widely used argumentation in the discourse of “decline” of the core values and, more important, the core *culture* of the Australian nation: it transformed the positions in the discourse and turned white Australians into people suffering from reverse discrimination from the Aboriginals and the white intellectuals. As Hage (2004:65) puts it, most multiculturalists in Australia would state that pluralism does not per se negate the need for a core culture, but simply that this core culture is no longer Anglo-Celtic in its traditional sense – which was the basic idea of the ‘multiculturalism as national identity’ advocated by Bob Hawke (and Paul Keating after him):

“It is as if what White paranoia is expressing is fear that the new multicultural order threatens the old assimilationist dream of an unquestionably European Australian culture, but given the censorship that now disallows use of such ethnocentric language, this fear is expressed in terms of the loss of any core culture” (ibid).

### **III.5.4 At the heart of the nation**

The focus in the beginning of reconciliation talks was to strengthen the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in order to create a calm atmosphere for the national bicentennial festivities, a process that nevertheless pointed to the Aboriginal disadvantages and created awareness among politicians as well as a broader public. It was also the start for ‘Treaty’ negotiations, the negative outcomes of which were perceived as huge betrayal on the indigenous community. For Pratt the discourse that was developed around this theme demonstrates that the language of reconciliation, established in the 1980s, was the beginning of the terms usage “in discussions of Indigenous policy [...] by both major parties. And [...] that this language is sufficiently broad as to be able to accommodate almost completely opposite points of view” (Pratt 2005:12) concerning the question of which strategies help to improve relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and those that do not.<sup>16</sup> Following Pratt’s

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<sup>16</sup> While the Hawke government favoured the Treaty as meaningful step towards integration, the opposition around John Howard defined it as step towards separatism and not acceptable for the nation (see Pratt 2005:13).

analysis, this is a recurring theme in the discussions around the subject ever since. In the course of battles over land right claims the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), an important player in negotiations between indigenous and non-indigenous people, was founded. Debates on reconciliation gained full importance when articulated in the political discourse around land mining and land right claims. The *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation* that has been erected by the parliament in order to oversee the reconciliation process “advocated a broad, right-based ‘social-justice’ framework for reconciliation during this time”<sup>17</sup> (Pratt 2005:vii). Although the term reconciliation has often been stressed in diverse contexts, and was of particular concern in debates around further land claims, it still lacks a precise definition and instead has been filled with a broad variety of meanings ever since. The Howard government, that put more conservative, nationalist issues on the political agenda, for example used it in a more “practical” approach:

“[T]he amorphous nature of the term ‘reconciliation’ allows a broad range of political players to attach their own different, at times contradictory, meanings to the term. It can be argued that this is one of reconciliation’s greatest strengths, in that it allows for a diverse range of views to co-exist” (ibid p.viif).

With the introduction of the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* (URL 6), the term suggested the dawn of a new era of ‘bipartisan agreement’ that shaped the country in a meaningful way until at least the end of the formal reconciliation process in 2000. Throughout this decade though, the actual politics took several turns. Reconciliation, besides land rights, also moved housing issues, employment, education and health – with a main focus on the principle of self-determination – at the centre of national affairs – that were always simultaneously concerned not to threaten national unity. While it provided a framework to talk about those issues, it did not necessarily help to resolve any of the questions of how to deal with the problematic heritage. In fact, reconciliation became part of the discourse on nation building, in that it became a main theme of the centenary celebrations of the Australian federation in 2001 (see Pratt 2005:18, 29): “Reconciliation ‘goes to the very heart of this country’s identity and its

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<sup>17</sup> The author discusses and analyses 650 speeches in parliament between 1991 and 2000.

place in the world” (Robert Tickner cited in Pratt 2005:40)<sup>18</sup>. Reconciliation’s focus emphasised the notion of “building bridges” between the different parts of the population. For the Indigenous community, though, this was meant to support, first and foremost, Indigenous land right claims and therefore support social equity. Raising awareness for the Indigenous history, culture, heritage and Indigenous people’s achievements were perceived as steps on the way to reaching their goals, and reconciliation was critically reviewed from time to time from several public spokesperson:

“We have to look at the word ‘reconciliation’. What are we to reconcile ourselves to? To a holocaust, a massacre, to the removal of us from our land, from the taking of our land? The reconciliation process can achieve nothing because it does not at the end of the day promise justice . . . Unless it can return to us an economic, a political and viable land base, what have we? A handshake? A symbolic dance? An exchange of leaves or feathers or something like that?” (K.Gilbert ‘What are we to reconcile ourselves to?’ cited in I. Moores (1992), cited in Pratt 2005:44)<sup>19</sup>.

Protecting indigenous heritage and *a culture*, it ran danger of turning culture into commodities to promote ‘Australianess’ on an increasingly globalised scale: Parallel to the reconciliation talks that sought to unite the indigenous population and the non-indigenous – or should we rather say “absorb” its culture by promoting integration – the focus on the promotion and enhancement of a national Australian culture increased.

Paul Keating’s speech in Redfern in 1993, the *International Year of Indigenous People*, promised a very positive outlook into the process of reconciliation for which the creation of the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation* was a first promising step. Based on the results that the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* had showed, namely, “that the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice in the prejudice and ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australian, and in the demoralisation and desperation, the fractured identity, of so many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders” (Keating 1992, URL 7), Keating acknowledged the importance of the Mabo decision as a practical step towards reconciliation.

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<sup>18</sup> R. Tickner, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, ‘Second Reading: Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Bill 1991’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 30 May 1991, p. 4498

<sup>19</sup> I. Moores (ed) 1992: *Voices of Aboriginal Australia – Past, present, future*. NSW: Butterfly Books, Springwood, p. 283

“Mabo establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice [...] for this reason alone we should ignore the isolated outbreaks of hysteria and hostility of the past few months. Mabo is an historic decision – we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of new relationship between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians” (ibid).

The emphasis Keating put on the role that the indigenous people play for the nation, contains multifaceted aspects. “Complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia”, he stated. “They are part of us”, and their contributions for the nation are remarkable. Although his statement is a serious and important acknowledgment of the past wrongdoings that should be met with “recognition” as a start towards equality, he does “not believe that the report should fill us with guilt”, which he considers to be “not a very constructive emotion” (ibid).

His moves towards reconciliation were in his own language also very ‘practical’, still it was quite different from the sort of ‘practical reconciliation’ Howard embraced during his time as Prime Minister. Keating, who did not oppose practical to ideological reconciliation, underlined the importance of the creation of ATSIC as crucial step towards indigenous self-determination and self-management and embraced the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. He focused on the positive outcome that could result from resolving the issues between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians. What he mainly had in mind, was Australia’s standing in the world. By this he made clear that his government realised the importance of embracing indigenous culture and subsuming it into the Australian national narrative. Aborigines not only “helped build this nation”, but appreciating the depths and diversity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the music, art, dance and the knowledge of how to live with the physical environment, Australia can now begin “to recognise how much richer our national life and identity will be for the participation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders” (ibid).

### **III.5.5 A ‘National Cultural Policy’**

The distribution of ‘Australian culture’ was a main aspect of the national cultural policy that was to be implemented in the 1990s in order to develop a more cohesive cultural politics on a national level, instead of continuing to run diverse political programs on state level with different focuses and outcomes. Interestingly enough, none of those



papers on an emerging “national culture” has actually defined the term. The *Creative Nation*, the nation’s first coordinated national cultural policy, 1994 states the following:

“To speak of Australian culture is to recognise our common heritage. It is to say that we share ideas, values, sentiments and traditions, and that we see in all the various manifestations of these what it means to be Australian ... [Culture] is the name we go by, the house in which we live. Culture is that which gives us a sense of ourselves“ (Creative Nation 1994)

It is a “historically momentous convergence between officially sanctioned national policy and critical national discourses to do with multiculturalism, the republic, Indigenous issues and Asia, for example” (Bennett and Carter 2001:13), and it represents also the importance of culture as tool in promoting Australia as a tourist destination. Like all other cultures, which now constitute the multicultural Australian nation-state, also the indigenous cultures are embraced. Again, the economic factor should not be undermined. Indigenous issues were politically re-valued, but simultaneously their existence transformed a huge branch of the tourism industry that created a commodity market in Aboriginal heritage.

“‘Good Aboriginal art’ (paintings, sculptures, and artifacts) went on tour, so to speak, and was exhibited in internationalist galleries to critical acclaim. ‘Bad Aboriginal art’ was sold in tourist stalls across Australia and beyond. But both high and low cultural forms contributed to a new global traffic in commoditized indigenous culture, contributing significantly to the national GNP” (Povinelli 2002:24).

ATSIC throughout the following decades had worked effectively on developing indigenous tourism and cultural industry strategies that in many respects helped to improve indigenous self-definition and self-management. Its focus on the unique aspects of culture, customs, art and habitus simultaneously sought to draw attention to the threat that is posed onto them. Aboriginal tourism has been described as “win, win, win situation”; “It’s a win for the Aboriginal people, in helping them to achieve economic independence. It’s a win for the Australian people, generally, who can, through tourism, find out more and discover more of this rich and diverse culture. It’s a win for our overseas markets” (Morse 1999 in Craik 2001:106). As Craik has analysed accurately, this understanding of ‘indigenous tourism’ in the late 1990s and around the turn of the century mainly focused on the ‘modern tourist’s’ experience of some sort of

‘authenticity’. “Strongly-held ideas about ‘traditional’ culture and ‘native’ people” as rooted in the past and bound by unchanging and exotic laws and customs” (ibid p.107) dominated the industry. Although indigenous tourism led to an increasing international awareness of their problems, the generalization and commodification of indigenous knowledge also had a contradictory effect. It contributed to the revaluing of the term ‘indigenous’ and the related social struggles. “Indigenesness was unhinged and ‘liberated’ from the specificity of actual indigenous struggles, from their differing social agendas and visions of a reformed social world, and from the specific challenges they posed to contemporary nation-based governmentality and capital. Freed from specific struggles, the signifier ‘indigenesness’ began to function as an interpretant to be experienced as an aura, naturalizing any struggle or commodity desire to which it was attached” (Povinelli 2002:24). The move of *the* indigenous culture to the centre of interest for the Australian nation thus was a complex process that reframed the dynamics of profit and exploitation. The questions that were raised in this process, were to a certain degree met by the release of a paper called *Stopping the Ripoffs: Intellectual Property Protection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (1994) by the then Federal Attorney-General, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Minister for Communications and the Arts. “This paper called for submissions from interested parties on the inadequacies of current intellectual property laws in their application to Indigenous arts and culture, and sought recommendations on how these might be overcome” (Our Culture : Our Future. Report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights 1998:xiv).

Most of the recommendations concerned the introduction of specific legislations to give Indigenous custodians the necessary rights to control the use of their arts and cultural material by others, based on what indigenous people believe should be protected and how problems in the certain areas should be solved. The ‘(multi)cultural industry’, that affected the huge variety of ethnic groups within the borders of the nation-state, boomed. Simultaneously a man entered the political sphere, who fanned old fears and ‘reclaimed’ old narratives and ‘core values’ of the nation (like decency, tolerance, fairness and down-to-earth common sense) with which he criticized multicultural aspirations. His conservative, fundamentalist views shattered grounds

upon which the possible meanings of ‘unity in diversity’ might could have been debated in an open and tolerant way.

### **III.5.6 Howard’s election: An end for Indigenous self-determination?**

Keating’s defeat by John Howard 1996 was a shock for the Labor Party and brought about significant changes of direction for Indigenous affairs and the process of reconciliation. As Pratt shows, the ‘social justice’ rhetoric of former governments quickly disappeared in the parliament talks. Rising economic troubles did suit Howard well in his attempt to make responsible the former political undertakings. His social agenda was clearly against multiculturalism and the idea of a shared Australian identity.

“Looking at the political speeches made by parliamentarians of both sides in the last decade, none has used the notion of ‘Australian values’ as much as Howard, and none has been as systematic as he is in deploying it. No one positions it as the cornerstone of a holistic political vision of Australia in the way he does” (Hage 2003:70).

Howard continued former approaches towards reconciliation almost exclusively virtually. His politics came to be known as ‘practical reconciliation’ that differed profoundly from what Keating meant when he stressed the term. Howard, in creating an opposition between ‘symbolic’ and ‘practical’ aspects of reconciliation, emphasized his willingness to contribute much more than the former governments to actually improve the Aborigine’s and Torres Strait Islanders’ living condition. Simultaneously, through this opposition, he rejected the idea of a Treaty as an unnecessary move stressed by the idealists who were focused too much on those symbolic gestures and who are “overly concerned with the faults of the past” (Branscombe and Doosje 2004:113). The conservative government’s response to strengthened indigenous claims to sovereignty and self-determination was to continue to deploy the paternalism of assimilation, “narrated as ‘the Australian way of life’” (Elder 2009:15).

In the year of his Howards election the ‘WIK decision’ – that had been brought before the Court in 1993 under the Keating government – decided that native title could coexist with pastoral leases, a decision that caused uncertainty due to its lack of clear definitions. Although pastoralists actually did not lose any rights, they reacted with pure

rejection and demanded the extinguishment of native title. In reaction to this Howard and his government enacted the 'Ten Point Plan' that sought to restrict the rights the indigenous people had just received through the decision of the High Court. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner defined the *Wik decision* as "a potential basis for co-existence between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (Native Title Report 1997:36) and commented on the federal government's Ten Point Plan – the *Native Title Amendment Act* (1998) – as being a way to destroy this potential and as a concentrated drive towards the permanent extinguishment of native title. The government's reactions are described as unjust and unfair moves towards the destruction of a potential balance in questions of Australian property rights that are described as "bucket-loads of extinguishment" (ibid). Another process initiated by the Keating government also experienced a backlash through Howards politics. Keating had commissioned *The Report of the National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families*, usually referred to as the "Bringing Them Home" report, carried through by the Human Rights and equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC). The release of this report caused "unprecedented public debate concerning the maltreatment of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia's colonial history" (Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2004:236f). As answer to this report Howard articulated "personal regret" (Pratt 2005:106), but rejected any further demands to making financial compensations or saying sorry, a debate that grew exponentially after the release of this report. Howard was very cautious not to cast a shadow on "his Australia":

„On the issue of Indigenous people forcibly removed from their families, Mr Howard said he personally felt 'deep sorrow for those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of past generations towards indigenous people'. However, he argued, 'we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism'. Such a portrayal would be a 'gross distortion' which would deliberately neglect 'the overall story of great Australian achievement that is there in our history to be told'. Finally, Mr Howard said, 'Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control'. [...] The bitter

debates that took place over this period placed the official rhetoric of reconciliation—which emphasised unity and consensus—under considerable strain“ (Pratt 2005:106)<sup>20</sup>.

Howard criticised what he called the ‘black armband’ view of history, as supported by Keating for example, that, according to him, only diminished and denigrated achievements of early white Australian history, although it is – after all – the work of those early colonists and the following generations that the prosperous, democratic nation of Australia has come into being (see Hage 2003:81). Howard defended his unwillingness to neither make financial compensations nor to say sorry, despite the view of most Aboriginal spokespersons at the time who considered an apology a necessary move towards *true reconciliation*, by arguing that an apology would not help anyone and kept hiding behind his “practical” approach towards reconciliation about housing, employment, health and “the future” in general. Howard’s rhetoric that repudiated all notions of collective guilt also refused “to accept and assign responsibility for past injuries to present generation of White Australians” (Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2004:250). The opposition met Howards understanding of reconciliation with an increasingly moral language (see Pratt 2005:126ff). The overall analysis of the Parliament’s reconciliation talks by Pratt show, that the term has often and easily been used as a political tool in a broad variety of contexts. Its ambiguity shows that it “is a word to which many different ideas and meanings, often contradictory, are attached. As Prime Minister Howard himself remarked in 1998: ‘it is possible for Australians of good will to hold different views on the appropriate response to the *Bringing Them Home* report and issues of native title, yet be united in their commitment to the process of reconciliation”” (John Howard cited in Pratt 2005:129).<sup>21</sup>

Pratt’s analysis of statistics conducted by researches at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research<sup>22</sup> in a study in 2003 concludes that Howard’s practical approach towards reconciliation, the reason by which he justified the avoidance of an apology, actually achieved little to fix living-conditions for Indigenous people. Nor has

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<sup>20</sup> All quotes from J. Howard, Prime Minister, ‘The Australian Reconciliation Convention – Transcript of Opening Address, Melbourne 26 May 1997

<sup>21</sup> J. Howard, Prime Minister, ‘Questions without Notice’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 May 1998, p.3671

<sup>22</sup> J.C. Altman and B.H. Hunter, 2003: Monitoring „practical“ reconciliation: Evidence from the reconciliation decade, 1991-2001, *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) Discussion Paper No. 254*, p.16

the indicators of Indigenous wellbeing improved since 1996. Instead, public discourses focused increasingly on the problems within indigenous communities, for example around petrol sniffing. The problematisation of indigenous people and their issues in public was an obvious process to any observer of the Australian social sphere. Pratt herself concludes that in whatever way one looks at the possible meanings of the term reconciliation, Australia in 2005 was still far away from being reconciled.

### III.5.7 Resurfacing ‘white nationalism’

During the Howard government another person that has been identified as key figure in the racist discourse – which reappeared in a strengthened form from the mid 1990s onwards – is Pauline Hanson, a former Liberal Party member and a later member of parliament. Bennett and Carter, who identified the multiculturalist aspirations by the former governments as historically momentous steps, saw the processes “rudely disrupted by the election of the Howard Liberal-National Party Coalition and of Pauline Hanson [and her *One Nation* Party] at the 1996 federal election” (Bennett and Carter 2001:13f).<sup>23</sup> Her racist rhetoric focused on the abolishment of multiculturalism. She argued that a kind of separatism was at work that favoured the minorities and not the majority and thereby fuelled the fears of the Anglo-Right that they will suffer from economic inequalities. The racism she endorsed actually “did not rest on the concept of racial inferiority but on the incompatibility of different cultures” (Jupp 2001:265) that brought her “a stronger echo in public opinion than the original racist arguments for White Australia” (ibid). Her maiden speech in the federal parliament and some of her subsequent performances in public inspired widespread debates over racism and the limits of multiculturalism<sup>24</sup>. Observers asked Howard to take a clear position against her views, which he did only reluctantly several months after her speech. She was quite aware that her maiden speech, that addressed the “ordinary Australians” that “have been kept out of any debate by the major parties” will invoke people to call her racist, “but, if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in

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<sup>23</sup> Smith (2001) also turns to the effects, which the increasing liberal political attitudes have had on the cultural sphere and on the creation of an atmosphere where ‘culture’ increasingly turned into a market commodity with a main goal to strengthen the industry.

<sup>24</sup> See also Bogad 2001

who comes into my country. A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united” (Hanson 1996, URL 8). She did not only identify immigration as main challenge to the Australia she seeks to protect, but also addressed indigenous issues with a presumptuousness that seeks comparison:

“Along with millions of Australians, I am fed up to the back teeth with the inequalities that are being promoted by the government and paid for by the taxpayer under the assumption that Aboriginals are the most disadvantaged people in Australia. [...] This nation is being divided into black and white, and the present system encourages this. I am fed up with being told, ‘This is our land.’ Well, where the hell do I go? I was born here, so were my parents and children. I will work beside anyone and they will be my equals but I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago. Like most Australians, I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me. [...] Reconciliation is everyone recognizing and treating each others as equals, and everyone must be responsible for their own actions. This is why I am calling for ATSIC to be abolished. [...] If politicians continue to promote separatism in Australia, they should not continue to hold their seats in this parliament. They are not truly representing all Australians, and I call on the people to throw them out. To survive in peace and harmony, united and strong, we must have one people, one nation, one flag” (ibid).

Hanson’s rhetoric was a cut in the flesh for all those in the community, indigenous and non-indigenous people likewise, who actively engaged in a serious debate about how to improve relations and establish legal and moral frameworks to create equality and self-determination for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Hanson’s and, to a much greater extent, Howard’s politics have constructed the basis for an atmosphere that has been described as one in which ‘no one *is* racist, *but...*’ (Hage 2003:ix, my emphasis). A rhetoric of “national unity” such as this, Billig (1997) had described as being “so embedded in everyday common sense and reasoning that it constructed a form of ‘banal nationalism’”, and which Hage more harshly defines as paranoid nationalism. At the time of writing, up to 70 per cent of all people were supporting the conservative John Howard’s tough’ stand on the asylum seekers issue. In order avoid taking a political stand in the debate, to avoid left/right divides, people argued about ‘culture’, from which they thought that could not lead to an identification of someone as racist.

### III.6 Collective guilt and the impact on the “national identity”

As I have mentioned above, the impact of the release of the report on the Stolen Generation was unexpected and widespread:

“Since then, text and talk about the appropriateness of apologizing to Indigenous Australians has appeared on a regular basis in national and local print media, on television and radio, in organized community meetings, and also in everyday discussions between ordinary people. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that any Australian could have remained untouched by this issue, or would not have been involved in the debate at some level over the past several years” (Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2004:236f).

The narrative over child removal shaped the public discourse over reconciliation throughout the 1990s (Whitlock 2006) and raised questions about collective guilt: on whether or not a present generation should be held responsible for the wrongdoings of former ones. Some engaged defensive practices to rationalize and justify aspects of *their group*'s history, others felt ashamed and guilty and promoted the idea of an apology (ibid p.237). The symbolic act of a public apology became the main asset in the reconciliation talks. Through this process the debates about injustices in the past, caused by the white majority, have increased as theme in public debates and education plans: guilt and shame dominated the discourse. Simultaneously though the “old narratives” of the past persisted and thus identifying with a national narrative became a difficult task. “Australians all let us rejoice for we are young and free” (as promoted in the National Anthem “Advance Australia Fair”): but can a nation, united in diversity, actually feel guilty, as the public debates over a national apology implied? Like privileges and rights, which individuals enjoy as citizens of a nation-state and not because of a shared, “natural” humanity, responsibility and guilt are also a matter of group membership. Barkan, who argues that “we should recognize that membership in an identity group, nation, or social class often overwhelms individual attributes” (Barkan 2004:309), thus claims that a nation can be the reference frame upon which a group can experience feelings of collective guilt. Augoustinos's and LeCouteur's (2004) findings, as they analysed discourses around the debate on whether or not to officially apologize to the “Stolen Generation”, show that people who argued against it, actively engaged in “rhetorically self-sufficient” or “clinching” arguments “that reflect common sense



maxims that are central to liberal-egalitarian discourses of rationality, justice, freedom, and individual rights” (ibid p.241), but actually appear as overtly racist in the discourse. Those recurring patterns are instrumentalised “to justify and legitimize existing social inequalities between groups” (ibid p.240). The arguments put forward are the following:

- a) Resources should be used productively and in a cost-effective manner
- b) Nobody should be compelled
- c) Everybody should be treated equally
- d) You cannot turn the clock backwards
- e) Present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations
- f) Injustices should be righted
- g) Everybody can succeed if they try hard enough
- h) Minority opinion should not carry more weight than majority opinion
- i) We have to live in the twentieth century
- j) You have to be practical

(ibid p.241)

Indigenous people and ‘their’ problems are constructed in an overall quite negative manner, and apologizing in this context was constructed as preventing the nation from moving forward and being united. [...] Indigenous peoples were represented as ‘unproductive’, dependent on the largesse of the wider community, and responsible for their own social and economic disadvantage” (Augoustinos and LeCouteur 2004:257). The arguments put forward thus showed similarity to Hanson’s racist rhetoric, a fact that, given the impact of her and Howards politics have had, should not surprise after all. Those who argued for an apology did so by constructing it as a prerequisite for reconciliation and national unity (ibid). A national unity without a core culture?

### **III.6.1 Collective healing?**

The increasing awareness of past wrongdoings mixes with the historical narratives and thus reshapes the complex dialectic between remembrance and forgetting and renders ignorance impossible. Processes of identification with a group, as Branscombe and

Doosje (et al., 2004) showed at length, are complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Both their and Hage's (2003:83ff) approach to questions of collective memory and guilt (with emphasis on the Australian case) are extremely helpful and interesting but simply too far reaching to fit into the limited scale of this thesis in detail (for more on collective memory and cultural identity see also Assmann 1988). What can be said nonetheless is that the discursive framework over child removal had made its way into the public. While to some extent the debate was whether or not to apologize *at all*, the impact that the appearance of those narratives had on the renegotiation of national identity was immense. What developed was a powerful genre of memory and a very intense public debate, as Whitlock (2006:31f) shows. Public acts of telling and hearing of separation narratives constituted a "variety of textual forms: drama, popular music, film, autobiographical writing, fiction and poetry" (ibid p.31f). This "therapeutic paradigm of reconciliation" whereby non-indigenous and indigenous people listen to and talk about stories of the past, became a main asset in the process of reconciliation around a language of "collective healing" from a "shameful past" (ibid p.32f).

While the Mabo decision inspired a coming to terms with the past, those narratives made the majority of the population realize that those particular colonial activities basically lasted up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those processes inspired a great deal of academic writing and public debate and it required new strategies of dealing with a colonial memory (as part of an collective identity) in the present. Indigenous narratives came to be heard and made the majority (those with a "settler heritage" as well as "new immigrants") of the population reflect on questions of guilt and shame. The child removal narrative not only opened up a space for active remembrance but also for Indigenous reconstruction of the past, in which a broader community could engage and (re)connect. It thus rendered possible a space for the First Nations to articulate a common history of struggle over identities and rendered a counter-discourse to dominant narrative possible. I consider it necessary to acknowledge the positive outcomes this process of "making visible" had, since it allowed Indigenous agents to strategically reposition in the field. After all, the discourses *did* produce a framework within which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together could work towards the articulation of a history that can be shared by all parties. The recollection of personal suffering in the process of reconciliation was the incorporation of some memories into

*the national imaginary*. An imbalanced act from the beginning, imposed not least by state functionaries that engaged in this undertaking. The engagement with, or the *incorporation* of, those memories – that is essential in any talk about *a* national identity or the ‘we’ of a nation – have to be separated from the ‘white memories’ only (as the celebration of “Australia day” shows); this reveals “Australia’s impossible national memory” (Hage 2003:90), and led to the emergence of “mainstream knowledge and debate about national histories and good citizenship” (p.35). This should remind us that the context within which the articulation of testimonies is rendered possible, the ‘regime of truth’, is, especially in postcolonial contexts, created by a dominant culture in order to manage its traumatic legacy as a way of coming to terms with the past. We should also reconsider whether or not the term postcolonial actually fits in this context, since it suggests a *finalization* and points away from the process being one of on-going deconstruction. In reference to Spivak, Whitlock points to the fact that we are dealing with the problem around the management of crises in ‘postcoloniality’ through testimony:

“For the idea that individual healing occurs through revelation of suffering is extended in reconciliation discourses to suggest that the truth of suffering can be a source of regeneration, a collective catharsis and a means of creating a moral community which has come to terms with the violence of its national history. The trauma and mourning of First Nations’ peoples becomes the crucible for a reconstructed national narrative and identity” (Whitlock 2006:35).

Dominant and subordinate social groups likewise have been addressed in this ‘national drama’ of identity, history and consciousness, fuelled by a language of shame and reconciliation. This “public, collective purging of the past” became “an index and requirement of a new abstracted national membership. But the law and state do not require all citizens to undergo the same type of public, corporeal cleansing, the same type of psychic and historical reformation” (Povinelli 1998:580). Povinelli, from her personal experiences as anthropologist engaged in land right claims, can tell about the pressure on Indigenous people to fit into a national imaginary as an authentic other: she details “the contradictory demands the law places on indigenous subject, namely, that indigenous persons at once orient their sensual, emotional, and corporeal identities towards the nation’s ideal image of itself as worthy of love and reconciliation and at the same time ghost this *being for* the nation. Indigenous persons must desire and identify

in a way that just so happens, in an uncanny convergence of interests, to fit the national imaginary” (Povinelli 1998:580). Indigenous people involved in land right claims have to prove their attachment to territory by performing “authentic Aboriginality” – a term coined in the official discourse about the repression of indigenous people (Wolfe 1999:179). Knowing the songs and dances, telling the ‘right’ stories, and so on,<sup>25</sup> are practices Indigenous people have to engage in, in order to claim territory.

According to Povinelli, this process shows the Australian understanding of multiculturalism as a late modern liberal institutionalization of difference in which the state’s apparatus actually need not actively change in order to accommodate others. There is no need to experience the fundamental alterity of Indigenous practices, discourses and desires “or their potentially radical challenge to the nation and its core institutions and values such as ‘democracy’ and the ‘common law’” (Povinelli 1998:581). Other cultures are absorbed in the “incorporative project”, a way for the Australian state to continue to discriminate against those sorts of differences that appear threatening to core values. This incorporation is a move from the top to the bottom, it is a way for the nation to “come out from under the pall of its failed history, betrayed best intentions, and discursive impasses” (ibid).

### **III.6.2 Caring or worrying for the nation?**

Performing authenticity while their living conditions, influenced by the governments, enforce more estrangement from self-determined and empowered lifestyles everyday is a task that inevitably causes distortions. After the end of the official reconciliation process an event was orchestrated that visualised everything a ‘truly multicultural’ Australia should be able to offer: the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics was a colourful, rich and most vibrant carnivalesque display of a diversity of cultures imaginable. The ‘danger’ of folkloristic spectacles like is that multiculturalism is deployed as to “amalgamate and spuriously to unify nationalism and culture into a depoliticized multimedia event” (Gunew 1990:112).

Taking a look at the records of the event is probably worth the effort. To outline the course very briefly: It begins with an armada of flag swinging stockman on horses

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<sup>25</sup> See Povinelli 2002

and continues to show Australia's history by embracing the beauty and richness of the soil and the people that led Australia from its ancient roots to modernity and into a bright future. This is where the young girl singer Niki Webster (Sydney) and the Aborigine performance artist Djakapurra Munyarryun (Yirrkala, northeast Arnhemland) meet in order to watch together, as a symbol of unity, over the course the festivities take. *Dreaming* is a recurrent theme in all the motifs that are deployed in the ceremony, in a multiplicity of colourful and impressive, huge choreographies with several hundred artists. While there is one distinct part of the show that serves to present to the audience 'Aboriginal motifs' only, some aspects of 'Indigenous culture' also recur in later parts of the show. The outlook into Australia's bright future in which one should 'dare to dream' is narrated as the next logical step in a shared history. An ancient past in the ceremony is embraced as vital part of today's modern multicultural society, and as the performers of all sorts of cultural backgrounds – standing shoulder to shoulder – form the coastline of Australia and stretch their hands out, they welcome everyone who wants to join the big family of 'dreamers and the dreaming' in the land 'under the southern skies'. Male workers literally perform 'on the heart of the country' by erecting a huge steel construction in the middle of the arena. Just when you expect their female companions, who perform a powerful appearance on the staircases in the audience, are going to join them on top, they remain on the ground floor around them and instead Niki and Djakapurra reappear again and peacefully watch over the scenery that slowly comes to an end: A large group of colourfully clothed people from, apparently, all sorts of cultural backgrounds get together under a huge illuminated writing that says "eternity". Vanessa Amorosi in her performance then promises that "heroes live forever" and the Olympic games opening ceremony now turns to more sporty themes, at last.

There are several elements contained in this event that would be worth analysing, but I find it important to simply put the event in a greater context. Ironically enough, only one year after this colourful bunch of artists had formed Australia's coastline in the arena, stretching out their arms to welcome new arrivals – a picture that has stuck in my mind ever since – the nation is aroused by an event that fuelled again public debates on immigration issues and the multicultural agenda. In 2001 the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa rescued more than 400 Afghan refugees from a vessel

in international waters. As they approached Australian waters the Howard Government refused permission to enter. Influenced by the 9/11 attacks in America, the government was determined to keep refugee intake into the country as low as possible and increasingly deployed a language of fear that constructed the asylum seekers as threat to the country. This affair led to the creation of the Border Protection Bill and the Pacific solutions, strategies that allowed the government to keep refugee boats away and send them to detention centres on islands in the Pacific if they refused<sup>26</sup>.

Those highly controversial acts, that took place right before the federal elections, created widespread international outcry and attracted the protest of many observers of the Australian political sphere and human rights advocates. The (Liberal/National) Coalition with Howard on top won those elections. Immigration politics, including law and attitudes towards asylum seekers, moved to the centre of national debate in the following decade. The ‘Cronulla riots’ in 2005, fights between a majority of white locals and people of ‘Eastern European appearance’ again caused debates around racism in a multicultural society. Howard, although condemning the violent attacks, denied that there were any racist undertones in these events – which clearly was the case as several observers of the Australian society remarked. What is visualised in the debates resulting from those events is that the Howard government has managed uniquely to establish a *culture of worrying about the nation*. Creating the border as a site of struggle in order to defend what’s inside, it becomes a place that allows things to happen we would not want to witness ourselves, meaning inside the nation. ‘Worrying’ implies the presence of a factor that threatens the nation (as opposite to ‘caring’), a practice nationalist increasingly engage in, and therefore occupy the space that would allow, in a less paranoid manner, the “caring” or the nation. The discourse rendered ‘belonging’ as an ultimate, fatal consequence in a contested symbolic field (see Hage 2003:22f). The culture of caring or worrying about a nation, as Hage further elaborates, is closely linked to the distribution of hope within a society. To show *how* a society cares can provide conclusion for the understanding of the sort of nationalism that is consumed by worrying. In the arguments about immigration the subject became clear: fight at the border to protect what’s inside – which is where hope is fostered. It is the protection of hope at the borders that unleashes aggression, hatred and mistrust (ibid p.31ff). When

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<sup>26</sup> See Hage (2003) for more on the TAMPA affair

practices to protect hope 'have to' be applied within the nation's borders, this is done secretly or at least without being visible – a strategy the Indigenous population has experienced for too long.

### **III.6.3 The Intervention**

In the year of our project *It's all relative*, 2007, the Northern Territory (NT) Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse released the 'Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle' – *Little Children are Sacred* – report. Although the report addressed the problem of (actually the rising awareness of the problem not an actual increase of) sexual abuse of children in particular, the strength of the report was that it outlined the structures that led to these problems in the first place. Its constructive approach argued that the lack of functioning infrastructure and support in indigenous communities throughout the NT should not be met with even more constraints imposed by governments from above, but should be discussed, developed and rendered suitable for implementation on the local level. It particularly pointed at the necessity to not only let indigenous people participate in decision making, but that it has to happen with hindsight to local structures, customs, laws, and first and foremost people and their living conditions. The report presented 96 recommendations on how to address the process of problem solution. The Australian Government's answer to the problem was expressed in the 'national emergency response to protect Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory' that has become known as *The Intervention*. The Social Justice Report 2007 measured the adequacy of the "special measures" the government had sought to imply on indigenous communities in order to react to the problems. This report approves the quick reaction to the issue but states that the "haste with which the legislation underpinning the NT intervention measures was introduced has meant that there has been limited opportunity to consider the human rights implications of the approach adopted" (Social Justice Report 2007:211). It continues: "*The NT intervention legislation contains a number of provisions that are racially discriminatory*. There are also a number of provisions in the legislation that deny Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory democratic safeguards and human rights protections that exist for all other Territorians and Australians. [...] The NT intervention removes protections

against discrimination that occurs in the implementation of the intervention measures. [...] *It provides an extraordinarily broad exemption from protections of discrimination* [my emphasis]“ (ibid p.293). Operation Outreach, the intervention's main logistical operation conducted by a force of 600 soldiers and detachments from the ADF (SBS News June 12, 2009, URL 9) was only one part of the million-dollar package. Among some of the other key measures were the restriction of alcohol and kava, pornography filters on publicly funded computers, the quarantining of a proportion of welfare benefits to all recipients in the designated communities and of all benefits of those who neglect their children, and the abolition of the Community Development Employment Projects (see ibid.). From the original 96 recommendations made by the *Little Children are Sacred* report that have been developed including protocols that resulted from visiting communities, engaging people, elders and spokesperson in discussions and debates, *The Intervention* finally acknowledged two. Although *The Intervention* caused widespread outcry by non-governmental organisations, the UN, and political activists, some of the implemented strategies are effective until today.

### **III.6.4 Turning the page: an official apology**

Kevin Rudd's election in December 2007 brought improvements to those implemented measures, but formally and in many practical respects he continued *the Intervention* - despite critique from opponents, indigenous spokesperson and from international side. Nevertheless, Rudd finally did what has been debated for decades. On February 12 in 2008 Kevin Rudd, only 2 months after his election, officially apologized to the Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders for past mistreatment. The footage from that day on national television mostly shows high emotions with many tears from Indigenous and non-Aboriginal individuals alike, memories that will probably stick to everyone who experienced this public orchestration of a new national narrative, that, with representing seriously the good will of the government to come to terms with the past, simultaneously allows a peek into a brighter future for the nation:

“The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. [...] Our nation Australia has reached such a time and that is why the parliament is today here assembled. [...] To deal with this unfinished business of the nation [...] To



remove a great stain from the nation's soul and in the true spirit of reconciliation to open a new chapter in the history of this great land Australia” (Rudd 2008, URL 10).

The fear that had been centred by the right and the anti-immigration movement, a worrying about the nation, Rudd turned into hope for unity; at least symbolically. The apology was a long due act of recognition Rudd will most likely be remembered for in the future narratives of the nation. What is likely to vanish in the mystification of the national narrative is that, although he did reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act*, he continued *The Intervention*.

### **III.6.5 The politics of Indigeneity**

After more than two centuries of non-Indigenous power over defining Indigenous identity in one way or another, that prescribed only a very small area within which the Indigenous subjects could move, some argue that “it is this ‘otherness’ that still sets Aborigines and Islanders apart from multicultural Australia” (Molnar 2001:314f) today. But in September 2007 the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, after 30 years of being in the making, was put to vote. “The thrust behind the declaration was to create an international instrument that would frame and bolster the rights of “indigenous peoples,” setting benchmarks for change in domestic regimes. This was adopted by 143 nations [...] with 11 abstentions and rejections from four voting states: the United States, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada” (Merlan 2009:304), which came as no surprise. It took another two years for Australia to formally endorse the declaration on April 3, 2009.

The politics of Indigeneity and the liberal democracies’ notions of equality share several understandings but are nevertheless not always easy to reconcile. Group rights and their protection under a politics of Indigeneity are treated as preliminary to wider goals of securing individual freedom and liberty in the liberal democracy’s understanding, addressing issues such as access to language, customary use of land and resources, and culturally cognisant schooling and health care, for example (see O’Sullivan 2011:88):

“National sovereignty can not be reasonably shared without recognition of culturally framed and exercised rights, which in turn, demands public recognition of indigenous peoples as members of distinct communities with continuing claims on the nation state. The claims can be summarised as a right to be different in some senses and the same in others — to speak a different language but to enjoy the same employment opportunities; to elect members of parliament in different ways but to expect the same opportunities to participate in parliamentary decision-making; and to own land according to custom while enjoying the same protection of property rights as other land holders” (ibid).

The question of who counts as an indigenous person often leads to confusing results and in worst cases to the deployment of biologism as in the reference to ‘Indigenous blood’. But critiques of the concept of Indigeneity, as that of Kuper for example, who, in “Return of the Native” (2003) basically states that the concept of Indigeneity through the deployment of essentialist argumentation causes more problems than it does help, did not only appear at a very inappropriate moment, as Zips and Zips-Mairitsch (2012) remark – being precisely the time when several indigenous movements finally gathered strength to re-articulate their basic rights within the liberal democratic ideals. Kuper’s argumentation against supporting the rights of Indigenous people is based on a rather inaccurate analysis of the history of their movements, a polemical merging of several historical processes into singular stereotypical representations. Kuper basically argues that Indigenous people demand privileged rights on the basis of ideologies such as ‘blood and soil’ a line of argumentation that ignores the long histories of dispossession and discrimination faced by Indigenous people and also the fact, that Indigenous identity is established through participation in communities and in a huge variety of relations to cultural enclaves, kinship and territory, as much as it is defined in terms of historical priority of occupancy of a territory (Kenrick and Lewis 2004). Nevertheless, the widespread debates his article caused also visualizes the actuality of the debate and what is at stake when we talk about the contexts that shape individual and group rights today. What should be made clear is, that it is not on the basis of guilt, shame and white goodwill, that Indigenous rights should be acknowledged. Nor is it cultural variety in the rhetoric of humanist pluralism – that is not seldom deployed in order to profit from its economic value – that is the basis of Indigenous rights: It’s the right to land that legitimizes indigenous rights. Looking at the Australian context, the necessity of the concept of Indigeneity is given. As Zips and Zips-Mairitsch remark, the term, if embedded in its particular historical context, provides a framework that is able to

protect otherwise unprotected rights. It has become a tool for entitlement and empowerment, that in itself inhabits the former discourse around the harm that was done, and is thus of great importance. I agree with Zips that ‘Indigeneity’ in its reformulated, de-essentialised sense is not a category of timely difference and cultural ‘otherness’, but constitutes a relationship of complementary interpretative patterns of reciprocal alterity. I also agree, that separatism, cultural chauvinism and reversed racism do not belong to the spectrum of goals that the term ‘Indigeneity’ intends to provide (see Zips and Zips-Mairitsch 2012).

The effects of the official endorsement of the UN declaration of indigenous rights in Australia showed, however, little or no practical improvement for the living conditions of the Indigenous people. The Social Justice Report of 2011, two years after the official endorsement of declaration 2009, says that progress is slow. James Anaya, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous people in 2009 has noted in a statement after his visit to Australia that “[t]hese measures [*The Intervention*] overtly discriminate against aboriginal peoples, infringe their right of self-determination and stigmatize already stigmatized communities” (Anaya 2009, URL 11). And one year later he continues: “Having suffered a history of oppression and racial discrimination, including dispossession of lands and social and cultural upheaval, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples endure severe disadvantage compared with non-indigenous Australians” (Anaya 2010, URL 12). Nonetheless, the UN declaration underlines the importance of ‘Indigeneity’ as argumentative tool within the discourse. Indigenous movements now are provided with an extensive framework that strengthens their positions and they often refer to it when claiming that that the present day policies do not provide equal rights to all Australians.

### **III.6.6 A possible referendum**

The UN Committee stated that even in 2010 the Australian government had not managed to comprehensively implement the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* in the Australian law and strongly recommends the negotiation of a Treaty and the inclusion of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islanders as First Nations into the constitution (CERD Report 2010; see also URL

13). This, the question of whether or not to particularly acknowledge the First Nations in the constitution is a process that has been debated for over a year now in various public forums. Julia Gillard, the current Prime Minister, after receiving a report of the Expert Panel on *Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution*, is now planning to hold a referendum on this issue. The report strongly recommends that the setting in which the referendum takes place should be carefully prepared in order to guarantee a positive outcome. It particularly points to the

“material change in the self-respect and sense of belonging of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples engendered by the 2008 Apology. There was concern that an unsuccessful referendum could jeopardise the healing process that was started by the National Apology. This would be exacerbated if the referendum failed after a divisive public debate, or if the proposal generated opposition from substantial political minorities or from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or their leaders” (Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution 2012:225).

It further states that for “many Australians, the failure of a referendum on recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would result in confusion about Australia’s values, commitment to racial non-discrimination, and sense of national identity. The negative impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would be profound” (ibid p.226). The ‘Closing the Gap’ report (CTG 2011) refers to alarming statistics as reason to finally take action. This goal – to ‘close the gap’ – which has become the focus of government strategies concerning Indigenous issues, has been described by the Prime Minister’s report in 2011 as “to overcome decades of under-investment in services and infrastructure, to encourage and support personal responsibility as the foundation for healthy, functional families and communities, and to build new understanding and respect between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian” (ibid p.1). But, as many Indigenous people have claimed and as the report has documented also, „the best intentions of governments at all levels have failed to achieve acceptable results“ (p.41). It simultaneously stresses the importance of constitutional recognition, although remarking, that „past discrimination and non-recognition are the only reasons why poverty among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians remains unacceptably high. However, there are credible arguments that until remnant discrimination is removed from the Constitution, and ‘all people are

treated equally before the law, we will not ultimately succeed in achieving socio-economic equality, no matter how much responsibility we take to confront the more proximate drivers of poverty” (ibid). Given the long history of Indigenous suffering, the fact that their oppression continues in such obvious ways somewhat ridicules the government’s reports and their articulation of willingness to improve the situation. The Prime Minister, even in 2011, argues that in principle the Intervention is working and should continue to exist (9 NEWS, URL 14).

Indigenous responses to government strategies on the one hand manage to maintain a language that acknowledges the good will and action that is taken by government officials and programs. On the other hand their critique repeatedly challenges the same points that underline the fact that one of the basic problems remains: Indigenous participation in decision making processes remains underdeveloped and government politics are still imposed on the communities in a top-down approach. The preparations for the *Stronger Futures* policy, a strategic outline on how to improve living conditions in the Northern Territory, are a good example of how things work. The example illustrates that it doesn’t necessarily lack non-Indigenous sensitivity or willingness. Government officials have been travelling through the TN in order to meet locals, learn about local structures and see what works what is missing inside the various communities. But, as the National Congress of Australia’s First People stated in their report in 2012 (Statement to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs 2012), those encounters were, if at all, not properly protocolled and the final outcomes again lacked strategies to involve Indigenous people in decision-making processes. The statement once again stresses the necessity to change the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Bill* (and the accompanying Bills) in order to be compatible with human rights and the *UN declaration in the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), which remains the main reference point in the process of claiming rights. But like so many statements of Indigenous people before, this one also points to the fact that the declaration itself is one thing, and the implementation of its goals, another.

The diplomatic rhetoric of the oppressed as visible in documents such as the one mentioned above, considering the unrealized promises and concessions that have been made in the past, seems like an strenuous effort to underline their ‘being worthy for the

nation', which can only happen by rendering their moves of resistance fitting into the dominant language. It seems as if we have to be reminded that power is a fragile construct, contested and challenged for its legitimacy, and that one strategy in order to undermine this understanding and manifest dominance, is to make believe that past power structures are already overcome, as visualized in the constant assertion of the government to address and actually change to parameters for improving the living conditions of Indigenous people. Their struggle for recognition reveals the characteristics of the involved relationships as productive of power relations, rather than power being unilateral imposed by the dominant group, because participation in the discourse is only possible by subordination to their language of law. I understand the social relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, characterized by what seems to be some sort of deeply inscribed dominance but is actually continuously reproduced in the interaction, at least partially as the outcome of those political struggles. The effects that *The Intervention* and the continuing policies as part of the *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* policy have had on the communities, and the persistent mistreatments due to inadequate involvement of Indigenous people in the government's decision making processes, are repeatedly challenged by numerous activists who now also launch a petition (*CHANGE*, URL 15). The annual releases of the Social Justice Reports, that also underline the fact that most of the recommendations made by Indigenous people until today usually tend to be ignored and are only marginally implemented into politics, is indeed an important parameter in the discourse, but seems to lack actual relevance in the political sphere.

#### **IV. Rethinking culture in the dominant discourse**

Nowadays the state, and likewise *the nation*, is therefore confronted with two sorts of accusations of injustice,

“both if it promotes equality *and* if it promotes difference. If the state stresses equal rights and duties, minority members may feel that their cultural distinctiveness is not being respected; that their boundaries and identities are threatened. [...] If on the other hand, the dominant group stresses cultural differences and turns them into virtues,

minority members may feel that they are being actively discriminated against” (Eriksen 1993:142).

In Australia, this has been the case with the indigenous people, who “have come so close to the centre of nationalist thought that they have suffered from it” (Kapferer 1988:142 in Eriksen 1993:142). Eriksen concludes, that “they have not reached true self-determination in the sense of negotiating their identity in their own terms” (Eriksen 1993:142). While he states that they have come to be defined from the outside as ‘noble savages’ – “whether they like it or not” (ibid.) – I suggest that the inclusion of aboriginal affairs into the nationalist thought has rather led to a more distinguished definition of aboriginality, one that differentiates between, if you want ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Indigeneity, a discourse about inclusion and exclusion that is centred around demands of authenticity. The pivotal variable in this discourse is power. The tension that is created between the ‘necessary’ and ‘unavoidable’ assimilation on the one hand, and the impossibility to ever become just like the majority on the other is the paradox of multiculturalism (see ibid).

We have to acknowledge that the praxis – the goals, which ‘Indigenous politics’ tend to provide – are not necessarily congruent with the effects they actually have on Indigenous people’s living conditions, on their everyday lives. In the Australian context, the pressure on indigenous people to perform authenticity (‘authentic culture’, whether in land right claims or in the tourism industry) is huge, and can, in the same way as it empowers, re-creates commonality and a framework to strengthen identity, delimit the scope of action for Indigenous subjects. Homogenisation, even if introduced by politics of good will in order to grant rights often results in a setback of the fights of indigenous movements, especially when the focus of the argument turns to ‘a culture’. That people and their practices merge is a fact that cannot be ignored, and that a reference to some sort of ‘authenticity’ creates uneasiness with critical observers goes without saying. Culture, thus, becomes a contested field within this framework: as a common reference point for those who seek rights, culture for the individual being provides security and self-worth, but it simultaneously renders ‘it’ a preservable ‘good’, questioning of which is illegitimate from an internal and external point of view. In the former case, “cultural identities are subservient to the individual rights of group members and culture is worth

preserving for its capacity to give substantive context to indigenous freedom” (O’Sullivan 2011:91).

As for many other colonial contexts, the argument is also present in Australia, that after more than 200 years of contact there is an essence of an ‘authentic’ culture that should be preserved. Further, the loss of *this culture* does not only mean that those People lose their identity, but even more that this part of the variety of cultural variation represents a significant loss for humanity. Culture and identity in the rhetoric of Indigenous movements have become equally important to land rights. The current “‘culturalism’ (as it might be called)” (Sahlins 1994:379) has become the claim to one’s own mode of existence as a political right. As one member of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples states, “Culture is what makes us who we are” (a Member of the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples during the inaugural National Congress meeting 2011, in: National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples 2012:8). That this understanding embeds the variety of Indigenous practices and knowledge is emphasized throughout the statement. We thus face the following scenario: Culture must be conceived as always changing, lest one commits the mortal sin of essentialism (Sahlins 1994:379). But simultaneously, “western intellectuals have often been too quick to view so-called revivals as typical ‘inventions of tradition’” (ibid). Anthropologists have largely contributed to contemporary conception and usage in everyday discourse of culture as reified and essentialist. The ‘thinglike’ understanding of culture has been adopted by so-called ‘Third World elites’ and their cultural, nationalist rhetoric. The endurance of ‘cultural essences’ as promoted in this rhetoric, provides an ideal “instrument for claims to identity, phrased in opposition to modernity, Westernization, or neo-colonialism. A crowning irony is that through this borrowing, our own conceptual diseases may strike us down from unexpected directions” (Keesing 1994:303). Those claims to a reified and essentialist culture’ are therefore claims of identity, authenticity, resistance and resilience. Culture, therefore,

“can be subjected to metonymic transformation, so that the cultural heritage of people or a postcolonial nation can be represented by its fetishized material forms and performances: ‘traditional dress,’ dances, artefacts. So transformed, ‘it’ – the cultural heritage, semiotically condensed - can be deployed in rituals of state, art festival, tourist performances, and political appearances to reaffirm that ‘it’ survives despite Westernization (and hence to deny the erosion, capitalist reorganization, and pauperization of rural life)” (ibid p.307).



## IV.1 Managing Indigenous knowledge

The integration of Indigenous resistance moves into the political realm has two aspects. On the one hand, it creates an image, usually deployed by the right wing of the political spectrum, as if all the government's attention is drawn to Indigenous issues only, and they 'still want more', which results in a banalisation of their struggles. Their claims to rights are then perceived as increasingly unjustified and pretentious. On the other hand, the mass of critical material that is released, by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike, does create a growing pool of knowledge that cannot be destroyed again and will remain as a basis to refer to for future generations. Their perspectives have gained attention, not only in academic writing but also in several spheres of the cultural production, being literature, film and the everyday communication in the media. But "to what extent these histories actually reflect a paradigm shift away from well-established historical genres towards new, 'post-colonial' narrative strategies may be debated" (Furniss 2001:279), mainly because those images reach out only to a comparably small interested community and are only rarely perceived by the majority of the population. Representational strategies by Indigenous people have grown, spread and improved throughout the past two decades. Indigenous radio stations have developed and the presence of Indigenous led enterprises in the Internet has grown. Video channels, for example, have been improved, photo archives have been installed and local community networks have been created. Some of them, as Eric Michaels shows, have even transformed the relations of production (see Michaels 1985b, Tomaselli 1992:216; Furniss 2001:279). There are numerous projects that seek to collect colonial photographs and gather family stories in online archives, so that Indigenous people can connect and share knowledge. Those archives are accessible from the public computers in the communities or national libraries. I myself have witnessed the process of developing such an archive in the Wadeye community in 2005, and only recently the emergence of new interactive archives experienced a new boom. Projects such as *Ara Irititja* (URL 16), media based online archives try to manage Indigenous knowledge in order to pass it on to future generations. While they are usually organized as non-profit organizations there are also some undertakings that seek to find ways to bring money directly to the Indigenous communities. The *Karrabing* Indigenous network seeks to

combine the ethics involved in the special relationships of Indigenous people and the land they live in with the goal to economically profit from the knowledge they gather in their living library. The question, according to Beth Povinelli, was how the people could socially profit from the circulation of knowledge.

“It’s a bout how to make a local world’s sense of it bigger instead of destroying it, but also how to get cash flowing in here. [...] Anyone who lives with these people knows how extraordinary difficult these lives are” [BP].

In order to transmit this knowledge in a meaningful way they experienced with this GPS based archive. Information about the land such as songs, stories, videos and old photographs are geo-tagged and available on smartphone, when the application is downloaded. Three types of interfaces will be available, targeting tourists, campers, and fishermen at level one; ecologists and rangers in level two; and traditional owners at the third. This augmented reality intends to create new spaces, new environments and visualisations where physical and digital objects co-exist and interact (see Povinelli 2011, URL 17).

Although, as far as I know, this project is not funded by the government, the funding of independent Indigenous media movements in general apparently represents, compared to other contexts of Indigenous struggles for recognition, a particularly positive case for Indigenous empowerment (see Ruby 2000:216). With exception of the *Karrabing* project most of those undertakings address Indigenous communities only and do not reach out to a mainstream audience. The most widespread impact that images and imaginaries of Indigenous people – created by themselves – have, is probably to be found in the tourism industry, which is why it is important that the distributed content is managed by themselves. Unlike radio stations and Indigenous TV, those platforms are explicitly directed towards a non-Indigenous audience and thus contribute to a larger extent to the existing canon of knowledge. The number of Indigenously *owned* and *controlled* enterprises is comparably small and their visitation and income is generally low (Craik 2001:108), but the number of enterprises rises and the ‘culturally rich’ offerings are more and more enjoyed by Australian and international tourists (see Tourism Australia, URL 18). Craik defines problems in reconciling Aboriginal ways with the demands of tourists regarding technical and organizational matters of the journeys through Aboriginal land that are provided, for example. But today, many

Indigenous organizations have already addressed those problems (see for example the Lirrwi Tourism enterprise, URL 19). Another issue of concern according to Craik is the nature of the stories told to tourists. Not all the Dreamtime stories, which form a central part of the Indigenous tourism industry, can be told. “But in the absence of an explanation by the guides (or in brochures) of the protocols about storytelling, some visitors feel that the guides are simply inarticulate” (Craik 2001:108). Government homepages began to address those issues and try to communicate the Indigenous perspectives in an understandable way for non-Indigenous people (see the government information on the Uluru National Park, URL 20). While the Lirrwi Tourism example shows the pivotal centralization of Indigenous life worlds, the latter risks undermining and exploitation of Indigenous culture by the means of customizing it in order to render it attractive, entertaining and therefore consumable for tourists. Those representations seem disturbing. Indigenous participation is proclaimed as a means to secure future economic sustainability, the adaption to Western styles of representation seems unreal and staged. The marketing of tourism areas is clearly in the forefront of such undertakings, much more than the concern to come to terms with the ways Indigenous people would represent and talk about their land and make it known to others. For those who do not embark on Indigenous tourism experiences or on one of those trips into the central regions for example, the chances to meet Indigenous people in a way that allows dialogue, is limited.

## **IV.2 ‘Disturbed’ presence**

How deep essentialist conceptualizations of ‘culture’ are embedded in our understanding of the world was not only visualized by the reactions of many Australians we met during the trip but also by the images we thought of putting forward to create a meaningful narration within the film. We increasingly understand our own being in the world not as “‘belonging’ to a particular culture or living in the ‘culturally specific cognitive worlds’ emphasized by some interpretative anthropologists” (Vayda 1994:326) but rather as being engaged in constructing “our own nests of routine or identity with twigs and straws picked up from maybe a dozen ‘cultures’” (ibid). But “[b]y referring to a social practice and space that predates the settler state [...]

“indigenous people” denotes a social group descended from a set of people who lived in the full presence of “traditions” (Povinelli 2002:48). The discourse of romanticism and ‘noble savagery’ resurfaces and works today as valorising “Aboriginal cultures as providing answers to the problem of western cultures” (Elder 2009:21f), that are often rooted in precisely this understanding. Producing a consumable ‘Otherness’ is one legitimization for their being in the world.

On a weekend market in Byron Bay, where we stopped to sell some of the paintings the family members had produced, James, one of the older generation from the Docker River people, showed one of his paintings to a young woman who thought about a purchase. She then decided to think the deal over, but as she returned in order to buy it, another couple was about to negotiate the price with the artist. The young woman, to our surprise, burst into tears. She said she had made a connection to the painting she just couldn’t articulate and grasp in the beginning, she felt like the picture told her something. In the end the couple was willing to leave the painting to her, who was, as she told us later on, surprised by the unexpected and deep emotions she experienced. What if this ‘exotic otherness’ that stems from the ideological association between native people and some sort of originality, that we can even experience by consuming their cultural products (see also Friedman 2002:29), is disturbed? Indigenous people listening to I-pods, reading books, singing catholic songs, wearing their Nike’s, the teenager’s grouping, their poses for pictures, moving self-confidently through the big cities, joking and laughing...

“The gap between the promise of a traditional presence and the actual presence of Aboriginal persons is not simply discursive. It also produces and organizes subaltern and dominant feelings, expectations, desires, disappointments, and frustrations sometimes directed at a particular person or group, sometimes producing a more diffuse feeling” (Povinelli 2002:49).

The question of whether or not or under what circumstances indigenous people, after centuries of contact with white invaders, are still “connected with their territories” or “should all rid themselves of their reactionary rootedness” (see Friedman 2002:29f) is obviously present in the dominant discourse. Images of overcrowded houses, outstations covered in waste and stories about sexual abuse of children do their bit to shape the discourse. It’s disenchantment I sensed on people’s faces and in their reactions. If

Indigenous people do not first and foremost “identify with, desire to communicate (convey in words, practices, and feelings), and, to some satisfactory degree, lament the loss of the ancient customs that define(d) their difference” (Povinelli 2002:48), and therefore do not occupy the semiotically determined space (ibid) which is reserved for them in order to be “truly Aboriginal”, this causes unease and distortion. This is why Povinelli states that “the very discourses that constitute indigenous subjects *as such* constitute them as failures *of such* – of the very identity that identifies them (differentiates their social locality from other social localities) and to which they expected to have an identification (affectively attach)” (Povinelli 2002:48).

“At the most simple level, no indigenous subject can inhibit the temporal or spatial location to which indigenous identity refers – the geographical and social space and time of authentic Aboriginality. And no indigenous subject can derive her or his being outside a relation to other social identities and values currently proliferating in the nation-state. The category of indigeneity came into being in relation to the imperial state and the social identities residing in it, and it continues to draw its discursive value in relation to the state (and other states) and to other emergent national subjects (and other transnational subjects). To be indigenous, therefore, requires passing through, and in the passage being scarred by the geography of the state and topography of other social identities. Producing a present-tense indigeneness in which some failure is not a qualifying condition is discursively and materially impossible. These scars are what Aborigines are, what they have. They are their true difference; the “active edge” where the national promise of remedial action is negotiated” (ibid p.49).

It remains to be seen whether or not the multicultural politics will be able to „find a place for the complexity and the 'fundamental alterity' of Aboriginal identity, never pure or singular but always diversely produced in and by interactions over time with the dispossessing settler population“ (Frow and Morris 1999:626f).<sup>27</sup> The Australian example suggests, unlike in other colonial contexts where domination worked by “inspiring in colonized subjects a desire to identify with their colonizers [...] multicultural domination seems to work, in contrast, by inspiring subaltern and minority subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity; in the case of

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<sup>27</sup> Frow and Morris criticize Povinelli’s emphasis on the notion of multiculturalism as a ‘claim’ expressive of the will of ‘the Australian state’. They stress that “Policies are the hybrid products of diverse political activities by many social agents; almost always (in Australia) compromise formations that satisfy no one for long, they are open to contestation, sudden abandonment, and un-predictable change. True, multiculturalism until recently provided what Povinelli calls 'national hegemonic projects' [...] – we emphasise the plural-with a long-lasting and stable policy framework” (Frow and Morris 1999:629).

indigenous Australians, a domesticated nonconflictual ‘traditional’ form of sociality and (inter)subjectivity” (Povinelli 2002:6).

### **IV.3 Representing the peculiarity of cultures’ presence**

This framework, the parameters introduced by the politics of Indigeneity, not only renders policymaking, it is also continuously perpetuated inside the field of aesthetic productions in a cultural industry. All aesthetic products, “be they operas or soap operas, leaflets or novels, folk songs or fashion magazines, must all create two things at once: a self that the reader or viewer or listener can identify with, as well as an other that the consumer, or de-coder, of the work can comprehend as the self-defining counter-pole“ (Baumann 2004:31). It is from this “public sphere”, that most non-Indigenous people know about Aborigines, and it is this sphere, somehow, to which we wanted to contribute. What non-Indigenous people know about Aboriginal people, they know from stories from former colonists, films, videos and television (see Langton 1993:33; see also 2005).

Talking to Dave, an Australian in his thirties who joined us for a couple of days on the trip I learned that, despite the fact that Indigenous narratives – especially those that were re-told in the process of articulating an official apology to the Stolen Generation, that have been incorporated into the national narrative – the knowledge on Indigenous life-worlds that is passed on in school is comparably little. In a round of discussion I had with him and some friends his age (they all went to a private school in a well situated area of Sydney) they all admitted that their knowledge of how Indigenous people actually live today is rather little. Although critical reflections on the European invasion into the country are part of the history lessons in school, the present situation has almost not been treated. The persisting image they have in mind concerning Indigenous people and their living conditions is one that consists of alcohol problems, overcrowding, poor health and unemployment. Older people of all ages and social backgrounds that we met along the trip, for example at the auction of some paintings we organized in order to fund the trip, reported the same. Ange’s blood-related grandmother admits that she had never met any Aboriginal people, and honestly could not understand Angela’s decision to give up her comfortable life in order work in

their remote communities in the Northern Territory. Sinem Saban and Damien Curtis, the producers of the documentary film *Our Generation* (2010), which reflects critically *The Intervention* and its outcomes, also report that the overall media coverage is alarming. It usually creates this duality that portrays the situation as either living a life full of drug abuse, poor health and education in overcrowded, dirty houses, or as the exotic, nature bound, connected to the environment, peaceful life full of myths and stories about the past. Thus, the many encounters that emerged on the trip sure enough at least inspired some reflections over the predominant images that are constantly reproduced in the media. Seeing Aboriginal people engaging in everyday actions, seeing them as tourists, whether on the boat on a Sydney harbour tour, in an IMAX 3D cinema, or in the bus riding to a belly dance lesson, their actual *presence*, was baffling for many. Almost everywhere we appeared as a group, including up to 30 Indigenous people, we sensed how extraordinary, how unusual those encounters were. Some people engaged in dialogues, took pictures and asked questions and thus we often experienced an atmosphere of mutual interest and curiosity. There is an obvious lack of those physical spaces in the everyday life, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can meet and develop modes of understanding that may alter the knowledge that is created by third parties. Instead of engaging in yet another ‘representation’ of ‘Others’ it is probably the dialogue, the interaction between ‘all Others’ that we should focus on, although, and this goes without saying, that having this first hand encounter and representing it in a film, actually is a fundamental difference and we, as producers of those images, always are in danger of perpetuating classical patterns of consuming the subalterns.

#### **IV.4 Doing, making, transforming**

If we as anthropologists engage in an anti-essentialist discourse, what is it we have to offer? Is it, to explain variations by generalizing them? Is it possible to point away from a culture fixed in time and space and to allow the understanding of culture as performative, of subjects engaging in a multiplicity of practices that shape their conduct, that makes it difficult to subscribe them to one position only? As filmmakers we can only represent (like anthropologists can only empirically describe) objects or

subjects through the interaction with an indefinite number of other referents, which means that it is impossible to exhaust description. The constellation of only some of many possible concrete referents is always linked to processes of selection in historically and humanly constructed environments, and thus never objective (Sahlins 1994:393). Similarly subjects of the ‘third party’ if you will, the audience or the readers of such records, are also inscribed in the system. Parameters that render the understanding of such encounters are therefore context dependent. *Aboriginality* as such has always been a construct of negotiation between referents, ‘it’ is a field of intersubjectivity between black and white that “is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, or representation and interpretation” (Langton 1993:33) no matter “whether in actual lived experience or through a mediated experience such as a white person watching a program about Aboriginal people on television or reading a book” (Langton 1993: 31). Borofski suggests that

“we rethink the traditional paradigm that asserts people interact successfully because they share certain understandings. We might reverse the implied casual relation here. People share certain understandings *because* they have learned how to interact successfully – what they share are the experiences, built up over time, of successful interaction. From a developmental perspective, sharing follows from, rather than precedes, the interaction” (Borofski 1994:345).

Following from those considerations that ‘successful interaction’ is the basis for ‘cross-cultural’ understanding, if you will, the urgency to understand – and further being able to alter – the structural impositions that render the space in which this interaction might take place, becomes even more pressing. Fabian points to the fact that it is usually the absence of ‘those Others’ that qualifies representation in the first place (see Fabian 1990 and 1983). He suggests, that the problem of representation should perhaps not be located in the difference between reality and its images, but in a tension between representation and *presence*, which means the sharing of time and space – the primacy of experience. I have stressed enough the productive nature of representation inherent in anthropology, representation as *the* anthropological praxis, the *process* of making the ‘Other’ as a way of making the self. If we understand this powerful praxis as being not primarily concerned with producing accurate reproductions of realities, but rather its repetition, its re-enacting, the plural, *representations*, have to be considered as performances, as sequences of acts. Acts in order to be performed, need authors,



readers, writers, which leads Fabian (ibid) to conclude that the powerful aspect of representation is that it works by a functioning rhetoric, by convincing through persuasion and not because of logical proofs or scientific accuracy. This, in fact, is more a privileged knowledge created by anthropology, as it is in any science, which gathers its “true” character because it works when we apply it in the world. The act of writing up ethnography, in the way Fabian describes it, is characterized by a disjunction. It is the “ritual dramatization of spatial distance between the sites of observation and the places of writing” (Fabian 1990:759). To be written at, or ‘shot at’, is the process that creates *the victims*, but since to stop writing will not bring liberation, this could not be the solution (see ibid p.760). Following Crawford’s (1992:68f) explorations on the similarity and differences between the two discursive practices of representation, the *textual* and *cinematic* anthropology are two different outcomes of the same *process*. Thus, being written at and shot at we can add “to be shot”, as in the process of filming. According to Crawford, it is impossible to pinpoint the beginning and ending of ‘becoming’ and ‘othering’, which are temporally and spatially divided in *practice* but not as a process of knowledge. It is thus the relationship between the two categories, the *communicative* aspect of these processes that is at stake. Although both practices, filming and writing, approach the problem of representation from “opposite directions” (see more in Crawford 1992:70) they both struggle with an inherent paradox of anthropological theory and practice, that is being forced to oscillate between presence and absence, ‘becoming’ and ‘othering’, detachment from and to the culture under study. But if we rid ourselves from the idea that *doing* (read: othering, which is the praxis as representation) means *mirroring* anything, this alone is reason enough to abandon the notion of realism and discard it as naïve:

“Doing is acting on, making, transforming (giving form to), not regrettably so or incidentally (as complaints about subjective distortions in writing would have it), but inevitably” (Fabian 1990:762f).

Understanding films, like texts, as records of communicative events, does indeed move the production on the ground to the centre of attention, but does not leave out the attention and critique of the shape of the final product. To acknowledge the communicative process – not only in the form of actual spoken dialogue but even more important as the understanding that our thinking creates knowledge precisely because it

is able to be *intersubjective* – is to acknowledge dialogue. This does not mean that dialogical writing or filming automatically preserves the dialogical nature of the knowledge process. But allowing polyphony means going to allow the reader or viewer to understand the processes of how texts emerge as interactive processes.

“But the principle of dialogical textual production goes well beyond the more or less artful presentation of ‘actual’ encounter. It locates cultural interpretations in many sorts of reciprocal contexts, and it obliges writers to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multi-subjective, power-laden, and incongruent. In this view, ‘culture’ is always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, between subjects in relations of power” (Clifford 1986:14f in Wernhart und Zips 2001:30).

While Fabian considers some sort of poetic texts as answer to the questions of how the results of this process should look like, he reminds us that the answer to the problem – regarding the production of knowledge – by simply seeking a better representation, is to reaffirm and not to overcome the *representationist stance* (ibid p.766).

This should point to the idea that the goal of a filmic text is not to transmit “*the actual meaning*” but to create space that allows the viewer to *reproduce* (or, in order to not stress the term again, comprehend) the hermeneutic process in knowledge production. If we are to challenge the persistent mechanism that reproduce existing power relations we have to convey to the viewer, the third member in the discourse, the threefold axis, a document that shows individuals engaging in a dialogue as congenerous, but not identical, subjects. It means to encourage viewers to become sensible critics of history who not only understand traditional passing of knowledge but to engage in history-sensible manner in criticizing meaning making. This would mean that we create discursive spaces that allow the viewer to engage in the process of knowledge production, therefore emancipate her and also, referring to Hohenberger, awake interest in seeking and ‘realising’ the referent of the film in the non-filmic reality. The viewer cannot participate in the discourse in the same way as the filmmaker and the filmed, but she participates in the production of meaning by having “access” to the filmic reality. The ‘way out of the diegesis’ for Hohenberger can be achieved through aesthetics (see Hohenberger 1988:92;111).

It is not only the subject that is graspable “between telling/told, ‘here’ and ‘somewhere else’ (Bhabha 1990b:301), but also the limits and constraints of the process

of knowledge construction itself that is graspable in between the images. Enabling the viewer to see through the text onto the “real” for Hohenberger is only able if the film reveals its status as film and does not try to assume some sort of reality. But how to leave space between the frames, the images, that refer the viewer back to this non-filmic reality, to filmic processes that are hermeneutic-dialectical or practical rather than representational (see Fabian 1990:766)? Should we not be afraid of becoming “itinerant bards, clowns, or preachers” (ibid), as implied above, and therefore run danger of ridiculing the fights that anthropology as a discipline has fought in order to legitimize its scientific status? Since I regard the documentary film making, in the realm of anthropology, as a means to change power relations, self-consciousness, as the past 30 years have shown, and the insight that ethnographic data is not “given” but made through communication, does not necessarily help to end oppression but it is a step towards succeeding in empowering subversive practices.

#### **IV.5 Sharing presence**

Renegotiating our project and coming to terms with the status of the postproduction, I came across Fabian’s (1990) description of his problems in writing up the data from his research. Whether or not the difficulty of the material, the ethics and moral questions included, are reasons why the film is not finalized, are delicate questions I am in no position the answer since I am not in charge of editing the material. Being personally involved in the project the way the editors are, there is probably an anxiety involved in making the ‘right’ representation or coming up to the expectations of the other individuals, friends, family and crew-members involved. The material we, as film makers, not first and foremost anthropologists, gathered along the trip, cannot be equated to the material Fabian gathered on his long term, scientific fieldwork. But the process itself reveals similarities. The reason why I am still convinced that the project will come to an end one day, is that it is probably precisely this ‘negation’ in producing the film so far, that exerts the pressure to do so. After all, they are personally afflicted. From the many talks we engaged in long after the project has been carried through, I figure that the personal experience we gathered – of the self and the ‘Other’ and the space between – stays with us, wherever we go (see also Fabian 1990:789).

Fabian's further description guided my following considerations about how existing conventions and genres, the gathered material, the academic field, personal afflictions, etc. determine each other in the 'academic' regime of truth. With *not-writing* – from the point of view of ethnography (as opposed to 'writing up') – Fabian refers to the, often non-linear, processes of dealing with material, producing papers, and being in the field *without* processing material that afterwards fits into journals. Fabian's critique of the present regime of truth that defines what ought to be seen as ethnography (how to present data) and what not, reminded me of Abu-Lughod's (1991) reference to ethnographies written by 'untrained' wives of early anthropologists<sup>28</sup> – who, in directing their writings to a slightly different audience than the standard ethnographies of the time, were able to follow different conventions and were less bound to conventions of scientific authority. Her critique of *Writing Culture* addressed the 'hyperprofessionalism' of the scholars at the time, who, despite their sensitivity to questions of 'othering' and power, deployed an exclusive language that reinforced hierarchical distinctions between themselves and the others more than they challenged them. This leads to some 'ethnographic' examples – 'products', if you will – that, in my point of view, manage to maintain the *presence of the Other* by deploying mechanisms that have only recently been included into the 'scope of the possible' of ethnographic filmmaking (and are still discussed in degrees of their *scientific soundness* – as if, the assumption remains, anthropological data is simply there in the field, waiting to be found).

Following those considerations mentioned above (*othering is doing, read: representation is an act*) I figured that the images we produce have to be, consciously, situated in the field between some sort of "realism" and "fiction". I follow Wright (1992:276) who does not necessarily stress that ethnographic films should be "works of art", but nevertheless reintroduces the term "narrative" and argues indeed for a "greater respect for film and the wide range of possibilities the medium can offer" (ibid p.279). As always, it is important not to fall into the trap of generalizing the applicability of certain conventions of filmmaking because what appears to work in some contexts seems inadequate and inarticulate in others, as MacDougall (1992:90) points out. The

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<sup>28</sup> She refers to Elizabeth Fernea's *Guest of the Sheikh* (1965), Marjorie Shostak's *Nisa* (1981), Edith Turner's *The Spirit of the Drum* (1987), and Margery Wolf's *The House of Lim* (1968) (see Abu-Lughod 1991:152)

‘rebellious act’ of breaking with generalisations and existing conventions probably ‘simply’ results from not fitting into an existing genre. The following line of argumentation therefore points to Jean Rouch, father of *ethno-fiction* – a ‘style’ that comes pretty close to the subversive power that Fabian allowed us to think and articulate. He challenges the binary thinking that dominated the anthropologist’s way of interpreting the world. For Rouch, the camera is the *raison d’être* for people coming together (Hohenberger 1988:237), an approach that negates former classifications on the basis of “degrees of ethnographicness”. To centre the camera, means to centre the act, and therefore the communication. But his ‘shared anthropology’ does not only mean to make visible the camera in the field in order to raise awareness of the constructed character of the situation, rather, his “interactive” mode of documentary filmmaking (Colley 2005:3) allows the Other to speak on her own behalf. To introduce new layers can be a necessary move “to introduce new stimuli to uncover deeper layers of human subjectivity and experience”, as Grimshaw (2005:39) argues. I particularly refer to Rouch’s *Moi, un Noir* (1958), in which the filmed subjects, or actors, play themselves, their everyday existence in front of the camera: “I did not hide in order to film them”, Rouch states, “We were partners” (Jean Rouch in an Interview by Jean Carta; in Ruby 2000:195). For him the anthropologist disturbs the life (s)he is filming once (s)he aims the camera. His understanding renders unnecessary the role of the documentarian or ethnographic filmmaker as a professional outsider who engages in filming other people’s lives.

“It is this permanent ‘ethno-dialogue’ which appears to be one of the most interesting angles in the current progress of ethnography. Knowledge is no longer a stolen secret, devoured in the Western temples of knowledge; it is the result of an endless quest where ethnographers and those whom they study meet on a path which some of us now call ‘shared anthropology’” (Rouch 1971[1978]:7 in Ruby 2000:211)

It is more than rethinking the traditional ethnographic enquiry and its methods through a visual form, he refuses to accept the binary “either/or” thinking and reveals its co-existence, therefore not only subverting the dominant conventions within anthropology that divide description and imagination but also that of cinema, between realism (Lumière) and fantasy (Méliès): he “united the humanist impulse of anthropology with

the transformative power of cinema, and in doing so he transcended the limitations at the heart of each project” (Grimshaw 2005:118).

In creating this bodily experience as in the films of Rouch, the boundaries of the film-maker, the filmed and of the audience between self and the world are disrupted. This disruption is what it takes in order to sense the process of oscillating between ‘othering’ and ‘becoming’, getting to know the Other’s presence in realizing one’s own. Having said this, I want to add that filmmakers need not necessarily produce autobiographical films – films about the worlds they inhabit (see Ruby 2000:211) – *only*, as Rouch suggests. There are of course several ways in which this process described above can be evoked. “Shared anthropology” as in Rouch’s *ethno-fiction* is just one amongst them. Knowledge creation through intense observation in the way the MacDougalls practice it, for example, or the way Robert Gardner – as in the almost ‘transcendental’ film *Forest of Bliss* – manages it, probably achieve similar results. Another great example to break with the rules enacted by the dominant canon is the method Anja Salomonwitz deploys in *Kurz davor ist es passiert* (2006). Several people in staged settings tell the personal stories of women who were victims of illegal trafficking in the form of monologues, as if those stories were their own. ‘Substituting’ the bodies and thus the space onto which we might project our desires and wishes, anxieties and presuppositions with ‘random’ figures also inspires critical reflection and might lead to the processes described above. All those films, and there are many more, show the variety of possible ways in which we can address our own subject position in the process of the making, instead of involuntarily inscribing it in the film by trying to hide the bias we attach to it. We therefore do not have to be physically visible in front of the camera, a ‘plot device’ we use that mostly simply underlines the assumed ‘true’ character of the content we produce (look, I was there, this is reality). To what kind of audience those films might reach out to is a different question. It certainly is not the style classic documentary television programs ask for, but their appearance in cinemas or special broadcasting services is increasing.

## IV.6 Ethics and responsibilities – the *Karrabing* example

Beth Povinelli and Liza Johnson and the people from Karrabing, which is not a clan, but more like a horde, and more of a settlement that grew in the shadow of the land right claims than a ‘community’, most basically a network of Indigenous people from Belyuen (Northern Territory, Cox Peninsula), together shot a film called *Karrabing! Low Tide Turning*, that made it into the *Berlinale Shorts* selection 2012. The background story of how the film was produced is closely linked to the intimate relationships of the filmmaker and anthropologists Beth Povinelli and her friends and extended family at Belyuen, some of whom she has known for more than 28 years by now. Fighting alongside the community in their land right claim, which initially inspired her to become an anthropologist in the first place, she knows the hardship of their lives, the struggles and opportunities they face, and especially the problem *The Intervention* poses to their lives. In the course of fighting for their land rights they collected material and together administered the community’s archive. From this, the *Karrabing living library* (an augmented reality project) developed, on which they are working at the moment and which I described above. What emerged from this “administration” of the past *and* their everyday struggles in which they do not want to accept that they are basically forced to “chose between the bush and contemporary lives and chances” [BP] was the idea to make a movie and articulate these problems. The film that finally emerged is one around the everyday lives of the *Karrabing* people who face the menace to lose their government housing and the many obstacles of structural and “racialized poverty” (Povinelli 2012, URL 12) in their way to fight this problem. Beth states:

„The Karrabing believe this simple story captures the lived experience of many contemporary indigenous Australians where traditional and modern ways of seeing and experiencing the world is simply part of their everyday life and culturally diverse, technologically engaged, and economically and environmentally sustainable and rich future is a common hope“ (ibid).

The film represents their struggles and at the same time comments on how these struggles can be represented. It seeks to locate the answer by promoting a way that might cuts against the “spectacularized melodramas of particular modes of oppression.

For instance, *The Intervention* – no matter one’s opinion about its justification or outcome – spectacularizes the problem of Indigenous life in such a way that it militates against understanding everyday forms of poverty and discrimination“ (ibid). The method they applied for the production of the film is inspired by Augusto Boal’s techniques of the *Theatre of the Oppressed* that are linked with the performative traditions of the Karrabing themselves. Boal’s techniques emerge from a series of collective performance games that are meant to transform theatre into a space of spect-actors. Present persons are encouraged to participate in order to co-create the storyline and participate in the actions which should lead, at the end, to „facilitate discussion of existing social conflicts, and to use systematic means to perform those social conflicts. But as Boal noted, the point was not merely to be seen by the world—to be in the world as a spectacle—but to change the world” (ibid). The Karrabing story performances, executed by its members who are singers or storytellers with immense in-depth knowledge of their countries, are equally important to the project. According to Povinelli, they “describe *and make claims* about the conditions of a place, the proper people for it, the various kinds of life that inhabit it, and the behaviour proper to it. A story performance is not entertaining, or not *merely* entertaining, it is a critical commentary on the changing conditions of people and place” (ibid).

MacDougall (1992:90ff) points to the predisposition of some filmmakers which leads to exaggerating the importance of certain events such as rituals and or other particular sections of cultural features just because they appear more ‘filmable’. He stresses the importance of paying attention to the way we approach representations in films overlap and interact with the cultures they seek to portray. The Karrabing have developed quite a strong sense of how to represent themselves, and so numbers of the group wanted to participate in the movie, a kind of film format in which they are the primary actors. According to Beth, they haven’t acquired the professional skills of sound recording or shooting or standard filmmaking, but nevertheless wanted to participate in this area.

“It doesn’t assume that one always, for community projects, that one is just handing the camera over to people, and that people want you to handle the camera, so it’s a really interesting multi-dimensional community project” [BP].



This sharing of responsibility demands a continuous exchange in a dialogical form that points to the close relationship that has to be established in order to conduct such an undertaking. It demands a solid basis of trust and understanding of the experiences made by the people in the space one temporarily shares.

“They are family of mine, they are friends of mine; anthropology for me is an ethical relationship [...] How to recreate a home in the world – that’s what it [the project] was about” [BP].

When asked about how the ‘actors’ managed to come across so naturally, Beth recalls some interesting moments from the shoot. They often discussed the ‘degree of authenticity’ of some scenes and had to film some of them again. Renegotiating these scenes, knowing what kind of acting is more ‘authentic’ than another, which scenes are more staged than others, would not have been possible without the tight relationships they have with each other, which also allows the experience of each other on a daily basis. This example underlines the suggestion that a meaningful way to make statements about the life-worlds of people is always related to the being of the self in this world and somehow obliterates the notion of objectivity.

“In other words, we anthropologists should perhaps not think of representation in the first place as some enabling capacity of the human mind [...] but, more modestly, as something we actually do, as our praxis. This would help us to realize that our way of making the Other are ways of making ourselves. The need to go there (to exotic places, be they far away or around the corner) is really our desire to be here (to find or defend our position in the world)” (Fabian 1990:755).

The understanding of the anthropologist as ‘objective observer’ is, as mentioned above, finally obliterated. These considerations also underline a basic understanding about *It’s all relative*, being that the project was, of course, at least as much a story about Angela as it was one about the two families – if not *hers* at all.

## V. Final Considerations

„Und so sehen wir betroffen, den Vorhang fallen und alle Fragen offen“ - Bert Brecht

Trying to outline the structures that support the oppression of and discrimination against Indigenous people should not at all diminish their accomplishments on the long way of struggling for recognition. Indigenous people have proven enormous ability to resistance, but at the same time, to resilience. In this contested field they have managed to preserve the diversity of Indigenous live-ways, to keep traditions strong and to pass knowledge on to future generations. The nation's coming to term with its own illegitimate past at first appeared as supportive for the strengthening of Indigenous counter-narratives. But the re-articulation of Indigenous stories within this process has, to a large degree, resulted in the absorption into the national narrative, a process Indigenous people do not only profit from. This is visualised, for example, by the governments' continuing ignorance when it comes to the implementation of strategies actually designed with the aim to improve Indigenous living conditions. They often fail to do so often because they are outlined in a way that refuses recommendations made by Indigenous people themselves, diminishes Indigenous participation in decision-making processes and instead often imposes fatal decisions upon them in a top-down approach. By positioning and analysing the small, particular aspect of reality from the shoot of the documentary film *It's all relative* in the broader, historically grown socio-political context, we see that the overall power structures at play also become visible on the level of individual agency.

The conclusions I draw from the approach to my central question (of how the effects of exercising sovereignty in defining Aboriginality became visible throughout our film project) suggest that the processes by which Indigenous people are subject to oppression and discrimination today are crucially linked to the power over defining the markers that render 'authenticity'. Exercising power over the definition of 'authentic Aboriginality' means to determine the way they have to represent themselves, a process that is per se directed against Indigenous attempts of self-determination. The effects that result from this exercise of power become visible in the way the government struggles to determine 'the Australian identity' in the realm of multiculturalism. The Australian multiculturalism has been developed in order to deal with the changes that the

involvement in an increasingly globalised system of relations had brought about. It turned out as a “deeply optimistic liberal engagement” (Povinelli 1998:532), a commitment to democracy, an acknowledgement of cultural diversity and prominent force in supporting immigrant groups and cosmopolitanism. But attaching more substantial power to multiculturalism (in the way it is present today, resting on the current understanding of culture), suggesting that it could serve as basis for Australian policy and citizenship, overstates its significance and ignores the concept of unity it is built upon (see Galligan, Roberts and Trifiletti 2001:3f).

In order to deal with changing capital formations and proliferating cultural differences, national mythologizers and the cultural industry have argued for ‘the Australian identity’ to be understood as ‘unity in diversity’, a programmatic ideology that is challenged when it comes to the protection of the core values of the nation at its contested borders. Even though the Australian political culture is strengthened by the multiplicity of shared experiences and beliefs resulting from the diversity of cultures that the nation inhabits, the basis for its polity and citizenship is the maintenance of a core culture that needs to be defended. This defence is what nourished the ground on which racism re-emerged around the last turn of the century. In order to legitimise and give strength to the Australian nation in an increasingly globalised setting, the narration of national coherence is perceived as pivotal. But simultaneously the promotion of the nation’s cultural diversity on an international level promises economic profits. Thereby the country renders itself both a suitable tourist destination and a modern, liberal democratic nation-state, suitable as partner on the international markets. Although officially the fulfilment of ethical and moral obligations is an important aspect to be considered as such, in practice, however, the mere promise to do so meets the needs just as fine (as visualised in the example of the implementation of the UN declarations on Indigenous rights in 2009).

The country boasts about inhabiting the oldest living culture on earth, a process whereby the importance of the Indigenous heritage for the tourism industry is underlined. Indigenous people in this context are portrayed as part of nature, as living a life full of authentic traditions and mythical stories. A life that might be understood as serving to show alternatives to our technological, fast changing, complex way of life. This said, it is important to acknowledge that the government is not merely acting in

bad faith and that the effects of the instrumentalisation of culture, that result from this process, are not necessarily intended. Nevertheless, the way 'culture' is understood in this context, and guides the introduction of policies upon Indigenous people, adds to the present day structural inequalities. The language of law in particular stresses Indigenous people's abilities to prove their 'authentic Aboriginality'. The failure to do so is equated with a 'loss' of their culture, which is perceived as synonymous to being unable to prove worthy of self-determination. It results in the loss of the basis to argue for rights and destabilizes the grounds upon which they argue for self-empowerment. That this binary thinking informs policy-making is visualised by the events around *The Intervention*, for example. Thereby, the majority of images portrayed Indigenous as doomed to lose even the last bit of their cultural survivals, as people who live in overcrowded houses, who spend government money, abuse their children and still demand special rights. This argumentation justified more strict governmental control over their lives and territories.

The concept of culture that is deployed creates a duality in which both poles have little to do with the actual living conditions of Indigenous people. It suggests 'either/or' and renders the 'in between' as impossible space to locate Aboriginality. Indigenous lifestyles in the communities, settlements or outstations are coined by the everyday dealing with problems regarding land rights, housing, and poor health, all of which are results of colonial structures informed by ideologies of white superiority. Simultaneously they manage to profit from technologies and make use of certain niches the market provides and try to teach their children in ways that appear meaningful regarding the maintenance of traditions on the one hand, and modernization on the other. So far, there exists no governmental concept in the Australian realm that is able to grasp their *being in the world* in a meaningful way (as suggested by Bhabha in the notion of the 'third space'), with all the edges and tensions involved. One, that acknowledges their fundamental alterity without translating their understanding of the world into 'ours', and thereby diminishing it (see Rutherford 1990:208).

The gap, which the lack of any such concept or strategy produces, also becomes manifest in the everyday interaction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. 'Black-white' relations *still* lack actual intersubjectivity (Langton 1993), the knowledge people rely upon when approaching each other usually stems from the media, where the

binary thinking is most likely to be perpetuated. It renders expectations about ‘those Others’ and informs ‘cross-cultural’ dialogues. It also partially guided the kind of outcome/product I expected from the film project, regarding the kind of images we can and should produce. Expectations, which arose from my own essentialist and rather fixed understanding of culture at the time and were ‘disappointed’ by the easiness and taken-for-grantedness with which they moved through this world while keeping alive many of their traditions and life-styles quasi ‘en passant’. Most of the encounters along the trip revealed at least partially the uncertainty that arises when stereotypical expectations in the approach between non-Indigenous people and Aborigines are not fulfilled. By offering a perspective on the life-worlds of the two families and their interaction with the, overall ‘white’ Australia, the initial goal of *It’s all relative* was to add in a meaningful way to the knowledge about ‘cross-cultural’ understanding by focusing on our shared humanity, a “*Conditio Humana*” (Schäffter 1991:18). In this construct the common basis of manhood itself suffices in order to not only experience, but also to understand the ‘Other’. The tension between the ‘Other’ and the self results from being bound to each other in a ‘consonance of differences’ or sharing existential origins. But, as Schäffter points out, the ‘self’ in this schemata is only identifiable by stepping out of this shared, common background. What remains, is alienated and serves as contrast to the developing self. Inherent in this structure is the understanding that the ‘Other’ is primary (or ‘aboriginal’ for that matter). That this understanding is fraught with conflict is demonstrated in my explanations above. It is from this understanding of the ‘Other’, which – in further consequence – has to be experienced as distant from the self, that ‘it’ remains as relatively rigid and inflexible construct at the end (see Schäffter 1991:16).

How, then, could ‘Aboriginality’ be approached in a different way? The focus on the tensions and ‘uncertainties’ that is inherent in many of the Indigenous people’s lives prove, that it is the people who ‘make culture’, who fill actions and relations with (sometimes new) meaning. As Baumann (1996) puts it, “the comfort of having culture relies upon its remaking”. The tensions in the processes of exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people also points to this argument. Therefore the focus on ‘dialogue’ could probably reveal a glimpse on the processes by which culture is made as well as on the frames that render the space in which knowledge is produced.

Inherent in this argument is the idea that imagining a universal rationality is as questionable as the idea of a universally observable empirical world (see Schäffter 1991:25). Articulating observations of particular aspects of reality therefore relies upon outlining the specific subject positions within the field. This approach is informed by understanding the experience of the foreign as complementarity (“Fremdheit als Komplementarität”) that attempts to understand processes of meaning making which detract from conventional ways of thinking and schematizing our environment. The process of knowledge creation in which all involved agents acknowledge the limits of their possible fields of experience does not support the ‘integration’ of one set of knowledge and meaning into another, but allows each others autonomous existence. This leads to a modus of ‘permanent reflexion on experiencing the alien’, in which dual classifications are repealed (Schäffter 1991:27).

A possible answer to the question of how we can renegotiate ‘culture’ by the means of documentary or ethnographic film is, thus, to point, in particular, to the subject positions of the agents in the field, as opposed to focusing on a shared humanity and thus somehow negating them. Doing so allows shedding light on the process by which people take those positions and also invites the viewer to reflect on her own. It is this ‘betwixt and between’ we need to focus on as anthropologists, with or without the camera as tool in our hands. Considering possible ways to grasp these processes we have to acknowledge that there is no universal applicable filmic method or style for all of those complex particular contexts.

In order to approach this task, Fabian’s (1990) suggestions are considered useful. Instead of engaging in the task to make ‘better representations’, one should get rid of the representational stance in the first place and rather focus on the dialogical process of knowledge production. A necessary precondition therefore, is to be aware of the self in this process that allows dialogue by the understanding of presence as mutually dependant. As one meaningful way (not try to sell images as depicting reality, but rather) to refer – through the images – on to the reality behind them (Hohenberger 1998), I identified the space where documentary and fiction cross each other (and not fiction film ‘only’ as suggested by Faris 1992:173). Rouch’s notion of ‘shared anthropology’ addresses collaboration as a means of overcoming hierarchies in the production and distribution of knowledge. Rather than focusing on ‘spectacles’ or

events that appear to be ‘more filmable’ than everyday interaction, ‘ethno-fiction’ means acting out what is of relevance to the subjects of the film, which allows visualising and ‘imagining’ their life-worlds. The constant ‘ethno-dialogue’ is interactive and renders all agents as partners in the process of creation. It encourages the viewer to seek the truth between the images and to reflect upon his own – somehow fixed – position in the discourse. Several filmmakers have shown that this approach is not only realizable but also interesting for a broader audience, as Beth Povinelli and Liza Johnson, for example, have proven with their film *Karrabing! Low Tide Turning* at the *Biennale shorts* selection 2012.

Povinelli’s approach towards anthropology and filmmaking combines several understandings, regarding the ethics, morals and political aspects involved in our work, which I find useful and inspiring. Whether as anthropologists involved in one of the longest on-going land right claims (Belyuen, NT) or as filmmaker, concentrating on the particular ways the Karrabing manage to make a living in their contested environment, she practices reflexivity and suggests possible ways of dealing with the subject positions we all necessarily inscribe ourselves to in the dominant discourses in order to make meaning in the world.

Anthropology and filmmaking, from my point of view, are political and ethical acts. It is responsibility we assign ourselves to whenever we, as anthropologists, engage in the life-worlds of the people we study and film. And it is our duty to make accessible the insights we gather and conclusions we might draw in a broader context, outside the academic field, which does not mean, that studies should be conducted *with* a distinct (political) purpose. But concepts that have been developed by anthropologists have, in one way or another, always mattered in a broader socio-political spectrum; anthropologists have always been, for good or bad, engaged in politics. I still consider film a meaningful way to transmit knowledge we gather from our research, and we have to look for suitable techniques for each particular context that serve best to capture the stories of the people that inhabit the socially constructed space we move in.

“Von da an, wo keine Ethik, keine Politik, ob revolutionär oder nicht, mehr möglich und denkbar und *gerecht* erscheint, die nicht in ihrem Prinzip den Respekt für diese anderen anerkennt, die nicht mehr oder die noch nicht *da* sind, *gegenwärtig lebend*, seien sie schon gestorben oder noch nicht geboren, von da an muss man vom Gespenst sprechen, ja sogar *zum* Gespenst und *mit* ihm. Keine Gerechtigkeit – sagen wir nicht: kein Gesetz, und noch einmal: Wir sprechen hier nicht vom Recht – keine Gerechtigkeit scheint möglich oder denkbar ohne das Prinzip einiger *Verantwortlichkeit*, jenseits jeder *lebendigen Gegenwart*, in dem, was die lebendige Gegenwart zerteilt, vor den Gespenstern jener, die noch nicht geboren oder schon gestorben sind, seien sie nun Opfer oder nicht von Kriegen, von politischer oder anderer Gewalt, von nationalistischer, rassistischer, kolonialistischer, sexistischer oder sonstiger Vernichtung, von Unterdrückungsmaßnahmen des imperialistischen Kapitalismus oder irgendeiner Form von Totalitarismus.”

Derrida, Jacques (Marx' Gespenster, p.11f)



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**URL 20: Australian Government. Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities**

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**URL 21: Povinelli 2012: *Culture Web 3 – „Karrabing! Low Tide Turning“ short film invited to the Berlinale Film Festival.***

<http://open.abc.net.au/openregions/nt-top-end-42fL4XT/posts/karrabing-short-film-in-berlinal-01z14jm> - last access June 5, 2012

## **Filmography**

### **Dunlop, Ian**

1967 Desert People. Produced by John Martin-Jones. Australian Commonwealth Film Unit, Australian National Film Board and Commonwealth Film Unit; 51 minutes

### **Gardner, Robert**

1986 Forest of Bliss. Film Study Center; 90 minutes

### **MacDougall, David**

1977 Goodbye old Man, 70 minutes

### **McKenzie, Kim**

1980 Waiting for Harry. Anthropologists: Less Hiatt, 57 minutes

### **O'Rourke, Dennis**

1984 Couldn't be fairer. O'Rourke Associates; 50 minutes

### **Povinelli, E.A. and the Karrabing Indigenous Corporation**

2012 Karrabing! Low Tide Turning. Camera by Liza Johnson; 14 minutes

### **Rouch, Jean**

1958 Moi, un noir. Les Films de la Pléiade; 70 minutes

### **Saban, Sinem and Curtis, Damien**

2010 Our Generation. THAT Production Company; 73 minutes

**Salmonowitz, Anja**

2006 Kurz davor ist es passiert. AMOUR FOU Filmproduktion; 72 minutes

**Interview and additional material**

**Povinelli, Beth [BP]** - July 23, 2011; 135 minutes

**Field notes**, Australia 2007

**It's all relative – Project Teaser**

2007 Will and Danielle Tinapple. Formation Studios. Available at  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQfSf83pqRI>

## Abstract

Eurocentric narratives of white superiority have always shaped Australia's nation making processes and have legitimised the exertion of power in the country's contested past. Following the theoretical approaches by Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, this thesis seeks to come to terms with the historically grown power structures at play, which fix and bind subjects – Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike – to distinct positions within the discourse. Inspired by reflections about the making of the documentary film project „It's all relative“ with two Indigenous families in Australia in 2007, it is suggested that the power of defining '(authentic) Aboriginality' is still of relevance, when it comes to contemporary forms of oppression of Indigenous people in contemporary, multicultural Australia. Indigenous People, in their struggle for recognition, are compelled to affirm externally imposed imageries about Indigeneity in order to prove worthy of citizenship, self-determination and to claim land rights. The line of argument presented here sheds light on the complex relationships of emerging Indigenous counter narratives (a process that has recently been strengthened by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology in 2008 and the official implementation of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2009) and the white nation's coming to terms with its own 'illegitimate past' – a process whereby Indigenous stories are often instrumentalised and subsumed into the national narratives (as visualised in the discourse around reconciliation). Reviewing the continuing 'official' management of Indigenous live-worlds by strategies such as *The Intervention*, which has been subject to widespread international critique, reveals the government's inability to acknowledge and deal with the multi-layered reality of actual living conditions of Indigenous people. This thesis therefore challenges the link between the current conceptualisation of 'culture' in the multicultural agenda of 'unity in diversity' and the existing canon of images about Indigenous people today. The final aim of this thesis is to challenge individual agency, in this case filmmaking, as a possible means to re-negotiate essentialist understandings of culture. Following Johannes Fabian and Jean Rouch, the 'dialogical' approach to documentary filmmaking suggested in this work discards naïve claims to objectivity and suggests the introduction of elements from 'ethno-fiction' and 'shared anthropology' in order to overcome the obstructive representational stance.

## Abstract (Deutsch)

In der umstrittenen Geschichte der Australischen Nation haben eurozentrische Narrative weißer Überlegenheit immer schon zur Legitimierung und Ausübung von Macht und somit zur Unterdrückung der Indigenen Bevölkerung beigetragen. Anhand der theoretischen Überlegung von Michel Foucault und Pierre Bourdieu versucht diese Arbeit die historisch gewachsenen, aktuell wirkenden Machtstrukturen zu identifizieren, welche Indigene und nicht-Indigene gleichermaßen an spezifische, starre Positionen im Diskurs binden. Ausgehend von Reflexionen über die Entstehung des Dokumentarfilm-Projekts „It’s all relative“, mit zwei Indigenen Familien in Australien in 2007, wird argumentiert, dass die Definitionshoheit über ‚Aboriginality‘, die Macht darüber zu entscheiden wie ‚(authentische) Indigenität‘ auszusehen hat, eine entscheidende Rolle in der andauernden Unterdrückung der Indigenen Bevölkerung im multikulturellen Australien darstellt. In ihrem permanenten Kampf um Anerkennung, Rechte und Selbstbestimmung sind Indigene Australier stets dazu angehalten diesen, von außen diktierten, Vorstellungen von ‚Indigenität‘ zu entsprechen. Die hier verfolgte Argumentationskette wirft Licht auf die komplexen Zusammenhänge vom Entstehen von indigenen Gegenerzählungen zu dominanten nationalen Narrativen und der Bewältigung der Vergangenheit und dem schwierigen Erbe der ‚weißen Nation‘– ein Prozess im Zuge dessen Indigene Geschichten nicht selten instrumentalisiert, und in die nationalen Narrative vereinnahmt werden. Wirft man einen Blick auf die vielfach kritisierten Strategien der Regierungen, wie zum Beispiel *The Intervention*, die es zum Ziel haben indigene Lebenswelten zu planen, zu verwalten und zu kontrollieren, wird das Unvermögen der Regierung erkennbar, den tatsächlichen Facettenreichtum der Indigenen Lebenswelten anzuerkennen und sinnvoll damit umzugehen. Diese Arbeit hinterfragt also die Zusammenhänge der derzeitigen Konzeptualisierung von ‚Kultur‘ innerhalb der multikulturellen politischen Agenda von ‚Einheit durch Vielfalt‘ und dem existierenden Kanon von sich hartnäckig haltenden Vorstellungen über die Indigene Bevölkerung. In letzter Instanz hinterfragt diese Arbeit die Möglichkeiten und Probleme individuellen Handelns, in diesem Fall des Films, als möglichen Weg um das essentialistische Verständnis von Kultur neu zu verhandeln. Der hier vorgestellte ‚dialogische Annäherung‘ an das Filmemachen, inspiriert von Johannes Fabian, schlägt die Einbeziehung von Elementen von Jean Rouch’s ‚ethno-fiction‘ und ‚shared

anthropology' vor, um die naiven und hinderlichen Ansprüche an Objektivität in filmischen Repräsentationen abzulegen. Aktuelle Beispiele, unter anderem Beth Povinelli's filmische Annäherung an die Lebenswelten Indigener Australier, veranschaulichen die Theorie.

## Curriculum Vitae

### Sophie Wagner

- Born: 31.10.1986
- Nationality: Austrian
- Currently living in 1020 Vienna, Austria
- Email: [sophie.wagner@ethnocineca.at](mailto:sophie.wagner@ethnocineca.at) ; [stooo@gmx.at](mailto:stooo@gmx.at)

### Academic record

- Starting 09/2012* - MA Visual Anthropology at the University of Manchester (Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology)
- 07/2012* - expected completion of Magister study
- 06/2007* - First certificate (equivalent to BA) with honours: Cultural and Social Anthropology (since 02/2005)
- 06/2004* - Graduating from grammar school with honours (BRG1, Stubenbastei, 1010 Vienna)

### Relevant additional experience

- Since 2011* Organisation of the ETHNOCINECA - *Ethnographic and Documentary Filmfest Vienna* and the ETHNOCINECA *Projektwerkstatt* ([www.ethnocineca.at](http://www.ethnocineca.at))
- Since 2010* Camera, camera-assistance and sound for documentary projects, online screenings and commercials:
- Forum Umweltbildung
  - Jugendforschungswerkstatt Multikulturelles Wien/ Sparkling Science
  - *Pädagogische Hochschulen Vienna*
  - Institut für Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie (University of Vienna)
- 08-09/2011* Documenting the DGV conference (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde) (<http://www.univie.ac.at/ksa/html/inh/aktu/dgv.htm>)
- 11/2007 – 01/2008* Documentary film shoot in Australia: „*It's all relative*“ (camera, sound)

2006-2011

Production of several short documentaries:

- „One Love, One Hate“ (teamwork; concept, camera, editing, sound)
- „Blue Notes“ (teamwork; Co-Author & camera)
- „La mia familia“ - Tokio Video Award and screening at the *Today Art Museum* in Beijing; nominated for the *One Minute Movie Award*
- „kraftplatz:quelle“ (teamwork; concept, camera, editing)

12/2005

Conducting film-workshops with teenagers in an Indigenous community in Australia (Wadeye)