

My Other/ My Self: Cartesian and Objectivist Ontologies, Racial Darwinism and Selfing the 'Others' of the Earth in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*

by

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## Abstract

In this study I propose to examine some of the roots and implications of discrimination as illustrated in a novel by a contemporary Australian novelist, David Malouf, titled *Remembering Babylon* (1993). My choice of Malouf's novel is grounded in the fact that, in a narrative set in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Australia dealing with an encounter between Scottish settlers and the Aboriginal people, the novel embodies various kinds of thought systems of a discriminatory Cartesian nature. The issues in the novel are against a background of a long history of discrimination dating from antiquity which reached probably its highest point with Anglo-Saxon imperialism. It is a well known fact that the contact between European colonisers and their so-called Others has been dogged by confrontation, discrimination, exploitation and domination. The latter's responses to these phenomena have been varied. But, as JanMohamed notes in his *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa* (1985) these responses have been characterised by crisis - both conscious and unconscious, material and metaphysical. And ever since this contact/reunion both groups have existed in this state of crisis and conflict - at both the manifest and latent levels.

The causes of this crisis are both exo- and endogenous in origin: endogenous in the sense of the majority of these peoples' incapacity to hold their ground and 'properly' analyse/synthesise the substance of their 'new' existence and define themselves pushed to the wall as they are by exogenous factors of European imperial and neo-imperial agendas. Most of the behaviors of the colonised, even the most 'bizarre' of them, are expressive of this existential crisis and their tenacious will to survive and approximate to a bearable life in an extremely oppressive and confusing environment. Especially in the African context, this inability to 'properly' analyse phenomena may have been brought about by a psychotic disjuncture engendered by an exogenous (European) chimerical metaphysics that parcels out existence into rigid, airtight, dualistic compartments in religion and philosophy. In these worldviews existence is described in specular, dominating and oppositional rather than in inter-subjective, co-operational and synthesizing terms. One result is that, speaking generally, Europeans are seen to exist at variance with themselves, with one another, with their environment and with non-European groups of people. Existence is defined not as 'in' and 'with' but as 'apart from' and 'against'. Even where 'cooperation' is engaged in among them, it is for purposes of discrimination, exploitation and domination. This is not only a skewed ontology even in all demonstrable rational circles, it is also a highly escapist, confrontational, unscrupulously competitive/exploitative, and brutally pessimistic one.

Philosophically, perhaps the earliest signs of European pessimistic and disjunctive construction of reality can be seen in Plato's escapist theory of reality which parcels out existence into two rigidly distinct, yet somehow causally related, worlds: one of forms/ideas and another world of material phenomena. Aristotle, Plato's own pupil, disagreed with his master on this by arguing instead that forms or ideas arise *from* and subsist *in* the world of material phenomena and not apart from and independent of the latter. One notices that all subsequent debates on the origin, nature, and relations of ideas (self-consciousness) and material phenomena, have been variations and expansions on these two diametrically opposed positions. But the most favoured school for the dualistic ontologies is idealism/rationalism, especially that of Descartes who is regarded as the highest point of the Enlightenment. These seem to find resonance in the subsequent theorising of Darwin, Spencer, and the social philosophy of Nietzsche among others. In spite of dissenting voices even from within their own ranks challenging such a metaphysics, the general trend among Europeans has been to hold tenaciously onto these pessimistic and escapist illusions mainly for egoistic, exploitative and supremacist purposes. Malouf does question discrimination based on binary assumptions of natural superiority and inferiority by juxtaposing notions of the human and non-human, progress and degeneration, modernity and pre-modernity (Science/Culture) in the 'Cartesian' sense as well as in the social and racial Darwinian sense. It is the approach he adopts in this project *inter alia* which I seek to examine in my study.

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I declare that this thesis, except for the specific quotations in the text, is my own original work.

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*"What fire does not destroy it hardens." -Oscar Wilde*

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## CHAPTER ONE: DESCARTES, DISCRIMINATION AND DAVID MALOUF

### 1.1 Cartesian ontology, identity and discrimination – an overview.

‘Cogito, ergo sum’ [...] It is a formula I have always been uncomfortable with. It implies that a being that does not do what we call thinking is somehow second class. To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being - not consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation - a heavily affective sensation - of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes’ key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell. (JM Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*, 1999:33)

The above quotation from J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* (1999), in which his character, the novelist Elizabeth Costello, defends the rights of non-human persons, reasonably captures the essence of Cartesian dualistic ontology which, as Patricia Waugh (1992:125) notes, “...fetishize[s] Pure Reason as the locus of subjecthood.” In Cartesian ontology, reason (or mind) alone is said to constitute human self-consciousness, the “I”, and this is opposed to the body or material phenomena. The source of this dualism between mind and body in Descartes may be found both in Plato’s Idealism and in largely transcendentalist religions such as Judaism or Christianity which have a soul as a separate entity from the body - traditions of thought with which Descartes was familiar. Materialist or largely immanent religions of a pantheistic nature on the other hand make no such rigid distinctions. And, to my knowledge, even cognitive studies have not established whether the mind is non-matter, different from the brain, or whether the brain, or a part of it, is itself the mind, hence material. Costello’s analysis holds in the sense that, in Cartesian circles, the mind is seen as being *in* the body but not *of* the body, just as Costello’s pea can be said to be *in* the shell but not *of* the shell. (In *A Treatise on Man* Descartes (1987:101) supposed that this separate mind somehow influences the body through the pineal gland – which he erroneously believed to be uniquely human.) It is exactly this Cartesian cast of mind that has led to metaphysical crisis in human relations, between men and women, between humans and the environment, between social classes, and ultimately within the same human being in the form of alienation and even the schizoid belief that s/he is not only totally alone but a divided self as well.

Introducing Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan’s study of Frantz Fanon, entitled *Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression*, the editor of the text points out the pervasiveness of discrimination (‘Othering’) and oppression in the world thus: “Few human encounters are exempt from oppression of one kind or another. Whether this oppression is based on race, national origin, class, gender, age, religious belief, political stance, or physical handicap, each of us,

depending on circumstance, becomes either victim or perpetrator of this condition” (1985: inside flap). Discrimination, as the desire and practice by one Self or group of Selves to exclude, have control over or transform another Self or group of Selves into something different or something more like oneself, is my concern in this study. Such discrimination, even of a colonialist sort, is still a widespread feature of humanity; in political, cultural and economic terms. In this connection Gayatri Spivak observes elsewhere that “ [w]e live in a post-colonial neo-colonised world” (quoted in Childs, 1997:7). One need only witness for instance the North’s monopoly of the UN, the discrimination inherent in the policies of international institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF and WTO, and the reluctance of the North to ease the unjustified debt burden of the South. It is an open secret that for a very long time already the North has been oppressing the other peoples of the world. Indeed, as Michael Renner observes in the essay “The New World Disorder” (1999), global disorder, as starkly exemplified by widespread terrorism and political instability worldwide, can be traced perhaps even directly to such neo-colonialist and discriminatory practices. It is not only poverty that is an issue here; terrorism, for instance, is also a reaction against political and cultural imperialism. For instance, Sardar and Wyn Davies pointedly highlight this Northern neo-colonialism and monocentrism as exemplified by American imperialism when they write: “America’s idealised view of the human future permits a perverse, dangerous and often brutally destructive disconnection between ends and means. To define America as *the* future, everyone’s future, is an arrogant denial of the freedom of others, and of the potential of the present to create alternative futures in the complex image of the whole world and all its peoples” (2002:10). A similar argument runs through Noam Chomsky’s post-September 11 publication titled *9-11* (2001).

While discrimination and its attendant oppression are widespread social phenomena, perhaps the most obnoxious form of discrimination and oppression is not the simplistic popular type which most people unreflectively engage in in their personal capacity but for which they have no supposed ‘rational’ prop to defend it - this owing to the unfortunate general silliness of the majority of humankind, as the British philosopher Bertrand Russell once satirically noted in another context - rather it is that kind of discrimination which has been given ‘philosophical’ and ‘scientific’ justification and then institutionalised which is most pernicious.

Most identity theorists point out that construction of identity involves sameness and otherness. Kevin Hetherington, for instance, observes: “Identity is about similarity and difference. It is about how subjects see themselves in representation, and about how they

construct differences within that representation and between it and the representation of others. Identity is about both correspondence and dissimilarity. Principally, identity is articulated through the relationship between belonging, recognition or identification and difference...” (Hetherington, 1998 :15). In this type of identity construction I think it is the recognition of and importance attached to *difference* as opposed to *sameness* that determines whether or not one is likely to use that identity construction to discriminate against another. If more emphasis were to be laid on a conscious awareness of interchange rather than separateness or apartness the chances are that one would be more able to see the *self* in the *other* and the *other* in the *self*, not in the anxious mode of mimicry where otherness slides into sameness, but in the sense of ‘co-extensive’ inter-subjectivity, a relationship of mutual cooperation between one subject and another subject. Indeed, even by all rationally demonstrable means, interchange cannot just be willed away - however hard one may try to do so - except in the superstitious and deluded ‘Cartesian’ sense of a *sui generis* autonomous subject. This is so because even for one to establish or construct difference one would have to take into account that which is different from the specifically individuat(ed)ing self in the first place, and part of the apparatus for making those judgements lies within that self. In other words, the ‘different’ will have ‘rubbed off’ onto one first and somehow become incorporated into one’s psycho-epistemological make-up before that distinction can even be made. In line with what most postcolonial theorists maintain, my own postulation is that discrimination is closely tied to those identity constructions which over-emphasize difference or alterity from the same or the self at the expense of integration, interchange or co-extensivity with the ‘others’ who, as I argue, in fact constitute the self. And, ultimately, it is whether or not one configures the other as a part of the self that determines positive integration on the one hand or discrimination and disintegration on the other hand, with an option for the latter resulting in a schizoid condition of sorts.

One of the starting points towards correcting discrimination is to re-examine the way we construct our identities and the social-cultural relations that follow from them. Socially, my approach is in line with the views of social and cultural identity theorists like Paulo Freire (1971), Patricia Waugh (1992), Johan Galtung (1996) and others, who advocate a reorientation of the structures of our relations across whatever divides - be they racial, gender, class etc. – so that, as Galtung observes, they be more horizontal rather than rigidly vertical, and where room will be created for participation, solidarity, cooperation, and cultures thereby made less exclusive, without steep Self-Other gradients, and we become able to see ourselves in “Others” and “others” in ourselves. (see Galtung, 1996: 46). This amounts to translating



our relations from being specular, dualistic and rigidly hierarchical into inter-subjective, co-extensive, monistic-yet-plural, syncretic and horizontal/ rhizomic ones. Writing about cultural cooperation among peoples as opposed to cultural invasion, Paul Freire puts this outlook more systematically, an approach which expresses in some major way the essence of my study. In his approach Freire advocates an inter-subjective, dialogical (democratic) and subject-to-subject approach to relations, as opposed to a discriminatory, anti-dialogical (totalitarian) one:

In the theory of antidialogical action, conquest (as its primary characteristic) involves a Subject who conquers another person and transforms her or him into a 'thing'. In the dialogical theory of action, Subjects meet in cooperation in order to transform the world. The antidialogical, dominating *I* transforms the dominated, conquered *thou* into a mere *it*. The dialogical *I*, however, knows that it is precisely the *thou* (not-*I*) which has called forth his or her own existence. He also knows that the *thou* which calls forth his own existence in turn constitutes an *I* which has in his *I* its *thou*. The *I* and the *thou* thus become, in the dialectic of these relationships, two *thous* which become two *Is* (1971: 148).

Freire here insists on an 'I' which is not *sui generis* but which is other-constituted and co/inter-subjective with another 'I'. As we will note in greater detail in chapter two regarding Cartesianism, the antidialogical position tends to be Cartesian, seeking as it does to do away with mutuality or interchange. What it calls an autonomous subject is almost a *sui generis* entity that also calls everything else into being *ex nihilo* (see for instance Rene Descartes's Third Meditation, 1952: 83). In a sense this autonomous subject is God-like, so to speak. Freire, however, insisting on co/inter-subjecthood and cooperation, further points out: "The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it. If at a certain historical moment the oppressed [...] are unable to fulfil their vocation as Subjects, the posing of their very oppression as a problem (which always involves some form of action) will help them achieve this vocation" (148).

The ultimate objective of this study is similarly to argue for an alternative ontology to Cartesianism — an ontology of mutually respecting 'Selves' only akin to the Freirean paradigm — and to argue that the rigid Self/Other binarism in the Cartesian sense is Descartes' own convenient illusion for the discriminatory subject, especially as appropriated by the white, upper class male and expressed in the individualistic notion of the autonomous subject. Susan Friedman observes in this connection that: "Isolate individualism is an illusion. It is also the privilege of power. A white man has the luxury of forgetting about his skin colour and sex. He can [afford to delude himself and] think of himself as an 'individual.' Women and minorities, reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex

or colour have no such luxury” (1991: 39). Martin Prozesky also puts this very clearly with regard to current ecological and international relations when he writes: “ Nothing can exist in real isolation. We need to get this truth so deeply entrenched in our minds that it becomes a veritable axiom of the 21<sup>st</sup> century consciousness” (2002: 25).

That Cartesian binary thinking is increasingly coming under attack from various sources lends strength to the realization that it is metaphysically untenable. Similar to Homi Bhabha’s project of hybridity, even though espousing a slightly different bent, my study too seeks to “ provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience” (1994: 178). As we shall see a little later Bhabha hopes to achieve this objective by means of a project that is, in his words, “inimical to binary boundaries: whether these be past and present, inside and outside, subject and object, signifier and signified ...[with the view to] eras[ing] the Occidental ‘culture of commonsense,’ that Derrida aptly describes as ‘ontologizing the limit between outside and inside, between the biophysical and the psychic’” (251). In this regard I need to point out at this stage that my overall task in this study too is to bring the ‘Other’ into a subject position from which discriminatory thought systems (and practices arising from them) such as Cartesianism had ejected her/him/it, hence the issue of ‘Selfing’ the ‘Other’ in the title. I must hasten to point out here that I am mySelf quite uneasy about the role I am trying to play here; which is why I am focusing on *co-responsibility*. I don’t think I have the right to ‘Self’ anyone but myself (of course already I am setting out from a position of selfhood myself). I do think, however, that I have a duty to acknowledge and affirm the ‘Selfhood’ of every entity and, at the risk of sounding somewhat absolutist, I personally think that that duty is incumbent upon every human being.

Properly to expose the lack of basis for the Cartesian Self/Other binarism one has to go to the roots of the construction of any conceivable self-consciousness, the ego, or, in the Cartesian formulation, the *cogito*. A string of questions may be posed at this point: How does the ‘I’ or, more appropriately, the ‘we’, arise? What sort of building blocks constitute any being’s ‘I’ or ‘we’ at any given moment? What validity is there in the argument that there is a rigid dichotomy and opposition between a self and its so-called ‘others’? Isn’t there perhaps rather an organic, co-extensive and necessary connection between a self and its so-called others, such that postulating an oppositional relationship between them is the surest recipe not only for social strife but also for the internal conflict of a schizoid individual or the unintegrated existence of someone afflicted with a multiple personality disorder?

In whatever guise, European discrimination, oppression and domination within its own ranks and against non-Europeans are generally premised on the individual’s struggle for

survival in not just an unpredictable, but also a supposedly actively, even consciously, capricious universe. This is reflected in various European social and biological Darwinist theories that necessarily, religiously and ontologically speaking, are closely tied to the imperialist's very sense of being – religiously expressed in the form of a Manicheanism of sorts, and philosophically in Cartesianism. These seem to be essentially chimerical metaphysical postulations that parcel out existence into rigid, dualistic compartments, as in the Manichean assumptions of religions such as Judaism/Christianity, and in Platonic Greek philosophical metaphysics - both precursors to Cartesianism. Here existence is conceived of in specular, dominating and oppositional, rather than co-extensive, co-operational and integrative/synthesizing terms. One result is that, speaking generally, as we have already noted, Europeans are seen to exist at variance with themselves, with one another, with their environment and with non-European groups of people. Existence is defined not as 'in' and 'with' but as 'apart from' and 'against': you must dominate or you risk being dominated. Even where 'cooperation' is entered into among them it seems to be for purposes of discrimination, exploitation and domination.

Religiously this is an ontology of dualistic (Manichean) absolutes – either “the body” or “the spirit”, not both, or just one, or even several. One is either 'saved' or 'damned', 'chosen' or 'not chosen'. There is an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God who somehow, in spite of his omniscience, created the Devil who was to rise against him and with whom, in spite of his omnipotence, he somehow has to engage in a protracted mortal combat – and with each looking for soldiers to assist them in their cause. There is no possibility that 'God' and the 'Devil' may not be in opposition at all or that it is only one that exists and not the other, or that neither does. And when the more intellectually bold and adventurous Nietzsche mooted the last case, his postulate disrupted the whole European metaphysical edifice. But, as Freud and Jung both noted, a collective unconscious dies hard and a repressed one can return with a vengeance. Furthermore, the grossly anthropocentric cosmogonic myth in Genesis creates a metaphysical schism leaving Western man alienated from the rest of creation - with the latter in fact at the mercy of especially the male human being. Women, being mysteriously 'cloned' from men, are seen as just part of the 'other' that must be subdued. This outlook is what essentially leads to European male chauvinism and alienation from the environment. The estrangement can be traced back to the Cartesian notion of the autonomous subject which does not only claim to summon the rest of creation into existence, but also claims self-sufficiency out of its own resources.

At this stage the main thrust and possible illusion of Descartes' dualistic epistemology can be illustrated with the aid of a very simple analogy, that of the brick and the mould that is used to make that brick. *Consciousness* is like the mould you use in making bricks: by its constitution it has the inherent capacity to shape a brick of some kind or other after its own shape. But a brick comes about only after you have put material into this mould. So self-consciousness is a combination of a specific mould and the specifically shaped brick. Descartes, on the other hand, seems to be saying that the mould itself is self-Consciousness on its own and out of its own resources it produces the brick - he gives to the mould the creative power to bring bricks into existence out of nothing - *ex nihilo* - which is where, like so many others before me, I too do not agree with him. (It needs pointing out, however, that the shortcoming of the above analogy is that it seems to imply closure because the mould will have a specific shape, while in reality with each concept added to the human mind the shape of that mind -and one might add, of the concept itself - changes such that the formulation of the next concept will be determined by all the others that came before it).

When all is said and done, the strange part of it is that Cartesianism is still so popular among Western scholars that those who propound contrary views - like the Objectivist philosopher Ayn Rand - are summarily dismissed. The major reason for the enduring popularity of Cartesianism seems to be as follows: Western metaphysics gives the individual almost the same creative powers that Descartes gives to his mould (or mind), and, for some reason which is difficult for me to pin down yet but which is very probably linked to a crude and narrow sense of the Darwinist 'survival of the fittest' theory, Westerners find that 'illusion' difficult to let go of - whatever problems it brings to its subscribers. From my point of view, the self can best be regarded as a configuration/integration of others and as one and not dualistic, even if 'pluralised' by the fact that it is a collection or a legion. There is no pre-existent self-consciousness. Consciousness is not self-consciousness until after some abstraction has taken place. That is my central thesis in this study. The problem we have to point out even at this preliminary stage is that Descartes does not construct his self-consciousness as do 'normal' people but only as a conjurer would. His self-consciousness is based only on difference/dissimilarity and hangs in the air since it starts from a position where there already is a mysteriously constructed *a priori* "I".

For illustration purposes, here is an example of how a 'typical', self-contradicting, Cartesian will construct his identity, as presented by the German critic Jorg Heinke:

"The identity of a human develops along the line of differentiation between the self and everything which is not the self, which is outside. The process of

recognition of what is 'I' and what is 'Not-I' is influenced by the individual socialisation. The definition of identity of every 'I' does not only occur in the individual mind. Everyone defines oneself individually while setting the self into opposition with every other individual." <http://www.scholars.nus.edu.sg/post/australia/malouf/jh1.html>

And he then makes a very revealing statement of what is the motive behind such identity constructions: "If another group has access to *resources* (in any direction) that we desire, it is automatically a competitor and therefore an outside group...." (emphasis added) Here it is clear that emphasis is placed on *difference* – and competition for resources - and not *correspondence* and *integration*. Yet what the 'I' is in itself, so that we can establish what it is different from and which it must needs compete against, is not made clear. It is just assumed that there is an innate, *a priori* 'I'. On the other hand, then, could an alternative ontology to Cartesianism – such as Ayn Rand's Objectivism - help towards minimizing the blight of discrimination from our midst? Rand categorically puts the case of self-consciousness in Objectivist epistemology in the following way:

Any theory that propounds an opposition between the logical and the empirical, represents a failure to grasp the nature of logic and its role in human cognition. Man's knowledge is not acquired by logic apart from experience or by experience apart from logic, but *by the application of logic to experience*. All truths are the product of a logical identification of the facts of experience." (1990a: 112)

In that sense Heinke's, and hence his model Descartes', analysis fails in terms of the Objectivist definition of cognition. It needs asking at this point in what way exactly Descartes and Cartesianism could be linked to the Western discriminatory metaphysical crisis.

Whatever the social origins of European individualism and egocentricity, these phenomena had a new lease on life with their subsequent philosophical justification and institutionalisation by idealist philosophers such as Rene Descartes on the one hand, and by the social and biological assumptions of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and the social philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other. This self- (and other-) destructive metaphysics seeks to annihilate not just the 'other' but self-consciousness itself by obliterating or glossing over its due constitutive elements. In spite of opposition from British empiricist philosophers such as John Locke and David Hume among others, Cartesianism, already more suited to European cultural individualism, held more sway among Europeans in general particularly because empiricism or materialism themselves signally fail in their attempt at supplying a satisfactory alternative answer to explaining human construction of

'reality'. The Cartesian metaphysical fiction was then deployed to 'intellectually' further justify discrimination and exploitation internally and imperial conquest externally which was already underway on account of the belief that existence was not only precariously lonely but also 'oppositional': it was the 'self' 'apart from' and 'against' the other. Furthermore, for the Enlightenment, Descartes' thinking 'I' epitomised Reason *in absolute terms*. Those who were not Cartesians were regarded pre-modern and this justified Europe's presumptuous drive to modernise them - but the so called pre-moderns themselves had to pay for this, and with interest. Just as Coetzee's Costello argues against this cast of mind in the opening quotation above the French scholar Bruno Latour also explores this outlook very searchingly in the book *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) exposing the existential crisis engendered by the highly acclaimed Cartesian sense of modernism..

And yet this sort of modernism seems to be nothing else but an epistemological (hence leading to a metaphysical and ontological) fraud. Indeed, there may be a very real need for the Cartesian European and her/his non-European convert to be saved from themselves. While Descartes may have made enormous contributions in the field of mathematics, etc., one could say that there is virtually no rationally justifiable discovery that he bequeathed to Western ontology, but only metaphysical schizophrenia. This is because, in the strictest sense, even taking into account the relativity of rationality, a Cartesian ontology is inconceivable – certainly not in the conscious, primary sense of existence, not even in the secondary order of existence to which belong mirages, chimeras, hallucinations, superstition and any such dream-like states. And much worse is the attempt to credit Descartes with being the father of the modern consciousness (and in the absolute sense too since, by some strange logic, European modernity is necessarily everyone's modernity), an accolade which misses the point by a very wide margin because in fact what Descartes' supposed prometheanism created was the Frankensteinian monster which, in my view, attempts to annihilate self-consciousness itself. Even to argue that Descartes brought 'method' to philosophy as does Rogers (1936: 240) is to be guilty of an intellectual dishonesty given that most of what is attributed to Descartes in that method is not original to Descartes at all. Aristotle had formulated deductive logic (which has remained virtually unchanged) several millennia before Descartes. And even doubt as the beginning point of philosophy can be traced to the beginnings of philosophical practice itself – whether we choose to trace this back to Egyptian philosophy or simply from the Greek pre-Socratics. Besides, it is a given that it is creative doubt that lends dynamism to all cultures and leads to new innovations and improvements on old discoveries (no culture is static), none of which can strictly and honestly be attributed to Descartes.

So, to recap, taking as its point of departure a background of institutionalised discrimination, this study, like those of other critics before it (Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JahnMohamed, etc), is about that kind of discrimination engendered by what I think are ‘mistaken’ identity constructions such as those of Platonic and Judaistic ontological formulations in general and Cartesian dualistic ontology specifically. The observation is that by a roundabout way the latter became the ‘official’ ‘Western’ ontology lending a ‘philosophical’ dimension to what was already a cultural reality in such worldviews. Its ‘scientific’ counterpart, on the other hand, seems to have found expression in the various assumptions informing social and biological Darwinist/Spencerian evolutionary debates and those reflected in the social philosophy of Nietzsche. Historically all these have manifested themselves in institutionalised racial, gender, class and environmental discrimination and exploitation, such as ‘Western’ discrimination against and oppression or exploitation of indigenous peoples and those of colour, women, non-human persons (animals) and exploitation of the environment at large.

This study will seek to consider some of the negative ramifications of these by examining *Remembering Babylon* (1993), a novel by a contemporary Australian novelist, David Malouf. I have chosen to concentrate on this specific novel because it embodies these discriminatory elements from multiple angles. In a narrative set in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Australia and dealing with an encounter between Scottish settlers and the Aboriginal people mediated through the liminal figure of an English boy, Gemmy, who has grown up amongst the Aboriginals, the novel presents and analyses these very kinds of discriminatory thinking almost in their entirety. Malouf questions discrimination based on binary assumptions of natural superiority and inferiority by juxtaposing colonial notions of the human and non-human, progress and degeneration, modernity and pre-modernity (science/culture) in the ‘Cartesian’ sense as well as in the social and racial Darwinian sense, in an effort to transcend the binary constructions. Malouf also outlines the existential crises resulting from the Cartesian dialectic, a phenomenon already observed by many colonial and postcolonial theorists whose views I proceed to explore so as to properly contextualise my discussion.

## **1.2 Metaphysical crisis, and its colonial manifestations**

As colonial and post-colonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon (1952 & 1961), Albert Memmi (1957), Edward Said (1978), Abdul JanMahomed (1983) and Homi Bhabha (1990 & 1994) note, the causes of the colonised peoples’ current condition are both exo- and endogenous in origin: endogenous in the sense of their incapacity to ‘properly’ analyse/synthesise the

substance of their existence and define themselves, pushed to the wall as they are by exogenous factors in the shape of imperial and neo-imperial activities of imperialists as well as by their own witting or unwitting complicity in their disempowerment.

For Fanon, the metaphysical crisis attendant on colonialism assumes a myriad of shapes. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) it takes the form of a Manichean crisis where the colonizer and the colonized each projects the other as the quintessence of evil. The crisis also manifests itself in the various neuroses afflicting the colonized, resulting in a neurotic tension which is expressed either in violence against one another or in “spirit possession”, dance, and the general desire to flex muscles (1974: 1-35). (These may still be seen expressed among blacks in some aspects of such music genres as Jazz, Blues, Reggae and Rap, or the social and political violence that is still pervasive among them, or the large numbers of certain brands of traditionalist, pentecostalist/revivalist or cultist religious sects that have taken root among them.) In Fanon’s *Black Skins White Masks* (1968: 255), this crisis comes across as a crisis of identity where the colonized (Negro) straddles two worlds, being neither one thing nor the other and meanwhile striving hard to rid her/himself of her/his colour and traditional consciousness in keeping with the dictum “*turn White or disappear!*”(1968:100). This is so because the colonizer’s dialectic assumes that “moral consciousness implies a kind of scission, a fracture of consciousness into the bright part and an opposing black part. In order to achieve morality, it is essential that the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from consciousness” (194). So the gullible black person is seen as trying to run away from her/himself. This crisis is also shown as being one of an inferiority complex in the colonized and superiority complex in the colonizer (60ff).

In *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1991: 88-89), Albert Memmi too notes the mutuality of the colonizer and the colonized creating each other. Memmi (1991: xvii & 111) talks of colonialism almost as a form of putrefaction: “For me, oppression is the greatest calamity of humanity. It diverts and pollutes the best energies of man – of oppressed and oppressor alike. For if colonization destroys the colonized, it also rots the colonizer.” Memmi observes that this is a result of the “calcified colonized society which is a consequence of two processes having opposite symptoms: encystment originating internally and a corset imposed from outside. Both have one common factor, contact with colonization. They converge in the social and historical catalepsy of the colonized”(102). Memmi presents this colonial crisis more fully as being that of the colonizer who accepts or refuses and that of the colonized who accepts or refuses. For the colonizer who refuses, he lives his life under contradiction which looms at every step, depriving him of all coherence and all tranquillity” (1991: 20). He either



has to leave the colony or join forces with the natives and risk being crushed by those of her/his own race who support colonialism (21). (Of course exception needs to be made regarding the place of the colonizer who refuses and radically joins forces with the colonized and who cannot then be distrusted by the colonized - a position which contradicts what Memmi alleges about this type of colonizer-turned-revolutionary). For the colonizer who accepts matters are not as straightforward either. Of such a person Memmi says: "The colonizer who accepts his role tries in vain to adjust his life to his ideology (45) - because this "adjustment" involves a crisis of legitimacy.

In the section titled "The two answers of the colonized" (119-141) Memmi observes that many of the colonized, on the other hand, may start off as imitators of the colonizers in the hope of getting assimilated into them: "The first ambition of the colonized is to become equal to that splendid model [i.e. the colonizer] and to resemble him to the point of disappearing in him" (120). Memmi gives the example of the practice by some blacks to "uncurl their hair [...] and torture their skin to make it a little whiter" (122). The most extreme expression of this desire for assimilation, according to Memmi, is the colonized's contracting a mixed marriage (121). But the hollowness or ridiculousness of these attempts, coupled with a sure rejection of total assimilation from the colonizer's side, leads this once gullible group of colonized to come into their own and in turn reject any forms of assimilation: "Those [among the colonized] who understand their fate become impatient and no longer tolerate colonization [...] [T]wo historically possible solutions are then tried in succession or simultaneously. [They] attempt either to become different or to reconquer all the dimensions which colonization tore away from [them]"(120). Often this includes violent revolt (127). (In Objectivist ontological terms, as I point out later, this revolt is not a result of the colonized being denied total assimilation by the colonizer. Rather, revolt could be explained in terms of a self rejecting itself on the one hand and the rejected self seeking equilibrium by getting back to where it by rights belongs.) For Memmi the ultimate solution to the colonial crisis lies in the end of colonization itself: "In order to witness the colonized's complete cure, his alienation must completely cease. We must await the complete disappearance of colonization - including the period of revolt"(141).

In *Orientalism* (1978) Edward Said defines "Orientalism" as "Europe's way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western Experience [the Orient being] not only adjacent [to Europe]; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1).

Said discusses Europe's discrimination in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis of the self and its other as its shadow part where the "Occident" uses the "Orient" as its underground self (4-5). Said presents the picture of the West using the so-called other as its counter, setting itself off against the other which reflects what the West is not and thus becomes "a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (3). As for the colonized's complicity in the process, Said analyses the phenomenon in terms of Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony according to which the oppressed actually unwittingly cooperate in their own oppression by wrongfully believing that they are doing a duty to the establishment which is for their own good as well. In this regard, throughout *The West and the Rest of Us* (1987) Chinweizu notes the amazing lack of critical inquiry even among the 'enlightened' among the so-called 'others' (and this, surprisingly, could include academics) to whom he refers as Europhiliacs and who exhibit such a serious colonial constructedness that one might regard them virtual zombies or Hegelian slaves - the kind of beings whom in a preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* Jean-Paul Sartre calls 'walking lies' (1974:1).

In *Manichean Aesthetics...* (1985) Abdul JanMohamed sums up the consequences of imperial domination as having been characterised by crisis - both conscious and unconscious, material and/or otherwise. In his incisive analysis of the "social surgery" the colonial process engendered - with the inevitable "social pathology" that has resulted from it - JanMohamed (who at the time more or less summed up postcolonial studies from Fanon to the early Said) puts the matter squarely and sheds further light on why there is this lack of critical inquiry among the formerly colonized:

... the drastic measures of imperial domination - population transfers, the policies of 'reserve', of gerrymandering, and of forced production, the negation of indigenous legal systems and religious, and, ultimately the denial of the validity of indigenous cultures - render colonisation at times 'an act of social surgery.' Furthermore the changes are so swift that the dominated people scarcely [have] time in which to devise methods of readjustment or of balancing the various conflicting interests. The social disruption produced by such rapid and drastic changes and the profoundly antagonistic relations between the colonisers and the colonised cause colonial societies to exist in a state of latent crisis: 'they are involved to some extent in a kind of social pathology'. (19-20).

One of the questions to be asked at this point is whether or not this state of latent crisis has ceased after the end of the era of official colonialism. However, it is the next section of JanMohamed's analysis that may be seen to apply more directly to Malouf's juxtaposition of the settlers and the Aborigines in *Remembering Babylon*:

The social pathology [of colonialism] is produced by facts of domination and race. The colonisers' efforts toward absolute political, economic, and spiritual domination create in them a feudal spirit, supported by a series of rationalisations: the superiority of the white

racism, their mission to civilise the rest of the world, the inability of the natives to govern themselves and to develop their own natural resources, the blacks' tendency toward despotism, their ease in reverting to atavistic barbarism, their lack of intelligence, their hyperemotional and uncontrollable personalities, and so forth. Such claims designed to rationalise and perpetuate the coloniser's dominant position, are not accurate appraisals of reality but rather projections of the settlers' own anxieties and negative self images: whatever a white man experiences as bad in himself...whatever is forbidden and horrifying in human nature, may be designated as black and projected onto a man whose dark skin and oppressed past fit him to receive the symbol. These projections are self-contained fantasies that are entirely indifferent to reality; they can be projected on an individual African [non-Western] as well as on the whole African [third world] continent - onto the 'heart of darkness' (19-20)

It is a similar picture of anxiety and a projection of one's negative self-image onto others that Malouf presents with respect to the relationship between the settlers and Aborigines in nineteenth-century Australia. To the male settlers, especially, the Aborigines, women and the land are seen, in Jungian terms, as the shadow part of their self-consciousness which must either be tamed or done away with altogether.

For Homi Bhabha, the whole question of colonialism and post-colonialism can be looked at from such varied angles as stereotype as fetish, ambivalence or metonymy, mimicry, menace, etc., all of which hinge on hybridity or indeterminacy as their rallying point. In *Nation and Narration* (1990 :1-7) Bhabha proposes to do away with nationalism (which assumes clear-cut 'Cartesian' divisions between the insider and the outsider) in favour of the liminality, hybridity, ambivalence, indeterminacy or dispersal/dissemination that characterise internationalism or multinationalism. In this sense,

cultural boundaries of the nation...may be acknowledged as 'containing' thresholds of meaning that must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production [where] the 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it. The boundary is Janus-faced and the problem of outside/inside must always itself be a process of hybridity, incorporating new 'people' in relation to the body politic, generating other sites of meaning and, inevitably, in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation (4).

It is the *international* that fascinates Bhabha the most. My study will pursue some of the implications of the idea of lack of closure or containment or determinacy that comes across quite persistently in Bhabha's theorising. That is a feature this study also emphasizes.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994: 189,193,217,243,etc.) Bhabha comes back to some of these themes of indeterminacy and third place where different, indeterminate postcolonial identity constructions really take place. In the main, Bhabha's theory of colonialism as a nervous condition of fantasy and desire and a violent, neurotic relation, as presented especially in *The Location of Culture*, is not different from Fanon's general thrust

in both *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*, and Bhabha often refers to Fanon. Ambivalence, disavowal, splitting and doubling as linked to the stereotype come about because, as Bhabha argues, what is derided by the colonizer is also secretly desired, just as the colonized too wants to be both in the place of the colonizer and also look down upon himself from that position: "The demand of identification – that is, to be *for* an Other – entails the representation of the subject in differentiating order of otherness. Identification ...is always the return of an image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other place from which it comes" (45). The stereotype seeks to fix the unknown to make that unknown manageable - and this is where the stereotype is linked with Freud's analysis of fetishism (89). The sexual fetish serves to mask the sexual difference that is said to occasion the so-called Oedipal crisis in the male child. In race relations the stereotype as fetish serves to mask the racial difference which, like the sight of the absent maternal penis, is unfamiliar and disquieting (75). Like the stereotype, mimicry results from the colonizers' desire to make the colonized more manageable by changing the latter into people more like the colonizers themselves. But the crisis of mimicry comes about because for colonialism to perpetuate itself difference as a marker of superiority and inferiority must remain, leading to moves by the colonizer to ensure that the colonized must be like the colonizer, but not quite (86). However, the fact that the so-called other seems more like the colonizers becomes menacing (like a mask) both in terms of the Frankensteinian crisis of having created someone after one's own image and also because it means that the colonizers' culture is not so special that it is not inimitable and thus there is a threat of losing the position of privilege that it accords the colonizer. But there is also the threat from the colonized realising her/his constructedness or in-authenticity, which might produce a disequilibrium in the colonized whose discovery - although Bhabha does not hint at this - may lead him/her to revolt (87).

I am, however, very wary of strictly psychoanalytic approaches to oppressive relations. For instance, what sort of native are Fanon and Bhabha talking about when they deal with issues of splitting and doubling which involve labeling the native as an envious person who simply wants to be in the place of the colonizer, sleep in his bed and possibly have sex with the colonizer's wife? What about the native who neither simply wants to take the place of the colonizer nor in the least desires the colonizer's wife, or white women in general, but is just an agitator who wants equal rights? On the other hand, what about the colonizer who, not just out of an abuse of a position of power, but out of real love desires the native woman or man and begets mulattos with the latter? What sort of colonizer is Bhabha talking about when he looks at stereotype as a fetish? Why should the fetish, in Freudian terms, be only that which

fills the place of the mother's absent penis and not the other way round where a fetish will fill the place of the father's absent vagina, as I suspect some gender theorists may already have pointed out?

Perhaps Bhabha's most significant contribution is his rejection of a supposed unitary nature of either the colonizer or the colonized, which has resonances with Derrida's deconstructive post-structuralist postulations of a centreless universe where meaning is a result of difference and is at the same time not fixed but deferred. Of course while very sensible, such an indeterminate postulation in colonial and postcolonial studies as that of Bhabha may be regarded as somewhat fanciful, not combative enough as it fails to take account of the fact that, in the actual world out there, some people, and perhaps a good number of them - which includes politicians, economic policy makers, etc. - still have a centred universe in their minds which they appeal to in carrying out their various assignments and which must therefore not be ignored by any serious-minded theorist or strategist. This is where Spivack's 'strategic essentialism' comes in handy.

As this study seeks to illustrate, while I am focusing on Australia, the various crises and the cast of mind that occasioned these crises were in no way restricted to the Australian situation. The imperatives behind European imperialism are a shared European worldview: their kind of cosmogony, theogony, aesthetics, 'ethics', their whole metaphysics. Whatever variations in the individual situations and places, the European worldview operates like the Marxist superstructure - and an unusually inflexible one at that - dialectically interacting with the currently prevailing situation, determining the course of action and events but with only one goal and result: their men's exploitation and domination of the so-called other and, ultimately, even their own individual selves. (Of course when it comes to other groups of people their oppressed women often throw their lot in with their own oppressive men.) In *Orientalism* (1978) Said too mentions this interplay between the general thrust and the particular influences in the European colonial process (8-9) The crisis experienced by the imperialist mind may best be illustrated in that branch of philosophy called Existentialism. While Existentialism has the positive valuing of individual choice/volition, its flip side manifests itself in such phenomena as alienation and a strange sado-masochistic mixture of what Bruno Latour (1993) calls European "despair...self-punishment...fright [and] celebrat[ion] of the Death of God, or the Death of Man, the European *Krisis*, imperialism, anomie, or the end of civilisations..."(114)

In the broad realm of colonial and postcolonial theory, you do find critiques of Cartesianism in a number of theorists of differing persuasions. However, as far as theorizing

in that area is concerned, my suspicion is that most literary writers (including Malouf) and their critics engage in the colonial/racial and gender debates from the Cartesian self/other angle without going to the technical roots of that dialectic. One unfortunate result of this is that these writers and critics at best contribute towards the stagnation/stalling of the debate or at worst actually aggravate it by unwittingly subscribing to the very dualistic constructions they seek to transcend. I think this is a concern that needs to be addressed if we are to move forward. As far as systematic analysis of the dialectic is concerned, so far I have only come across Edward Said's discussion of Giambattista Vico's scholarship in *Beginnings: Intentions and Method* (1985) – an analysis which, though anthropological in approach, is not very different from Ayn Rand's in its attack on Cartesianism as Vico also insists on the co-primacy of external existents and the mind as I have already pointed out. In *Orientalism* (1978: 2), Said points out the ontological and epistemological distinction made between "The Occident" and "the Orient", a distinction he does not approach strictly from a Cartesian point of view but a Jungian one or even in terms of their being *doppelgängers* of each other (4-5). In a similar manner, Julia Kristeva too approaches the debate from a psychoanalytic perspective, an approach that is not much different from those of Memmi, Fanon, some of Said, or JanMohamed. All these theorists' views are best illustrated by the thesis in Kristeva's *Strangers To Ourselves* where she argues that one's other is one's own unconscious – an alien double, uncanny and demoniacal (1991:183). I do not think that these positions quite capture our psycho-epistemological processes, besides the unfortunate fallout of continuing to put the so-called other in a negative light as the shadow to the self, an attitude that involves value judgement on the so-called other as the eternal monster. In a similar mode, in the *Location of Culture* (1994: 64) Homi Bhabha exhorts us to be "others to ourselves". There is some relevance in his exhortation for this study provided that what he means by being an 'other' of oneself does not presuppose that there are two things: an anterior self and a separate other within that self. As I point out above, from my point of view, epistemologically, and hence ontologically speaking, the self itself is a collection or integration of others and is one (and not dualistic), even if 'pluralised' by the fact that it is a collection or a legion on the one hand and made indeterminate by the fact that concepts are by their very nature always open-ended, ready to integrate new material on the other hand. There is no pre-existent self-consciousness. *Consciousness* or *mind* is not *self-consciousness* until after some abstraction has taken place. My approach in this regard explores those philosophical debates that challenge what Homi Bhabha, writing about Fanon, calls "the metaphor of vision complicit with a Western metaphysic of Man" (1994: 42). While Bhabha questions the Cartesian-like notion of a pre-

given identity (45), he does not take up this epistemological/ontological problem in any sustained philosophical manner, presumably because his interests lie elsewhere, namely in psychoanalysis. Even his view of the 'Cartesian subject' is one that merely seeks to expose such a subject's two-dimensionality – from a Jungian psychoanalytic concern with the self and its shadow (57 & 60). However, Bhabha, following the lead from Partha Chatterjee, correctly identifies the motivation behind the Selves' maintaining the 'Other': "For enlightenment itself, to assert its sovereignty as the universal ideal, needs its Other; if it could ever actualise itself in the real world as the truly universal, it would in fact destroy itself" (141).

### 1.3 Malouf and (post)-coloniality

Malouf's novel is a post-colonial text dealing with a colonial subject: in other words, it is revisionist, looking at the colonial process with the benefit of hindsight. Paraphrasing Malouf himself, the critic Nicholas Dunlop qualifies Malouf's position as a postcolonial novelist:

It is interesting to note that, although ... we are studying Malouf's novel in terms of a post-colonial response, the author himself has expressed the opinion that it is not, strictly speaking, a post-colonial text. Most would agree with Malouf in that it is certainly not an example of resistance or response from a member of a colonised community in the same vein as, for example, Chinua Achebe or some Native Canadian authors. Rather, it can be seen as an examination of the colonial project by a descendant of the [...] colonisers. (Web)

This makes the text occupy a rather precarious ground because, more than anything else, hindsight or history is not neutral – it is overlaid by one's own personal interpretation of experience or history which one may then erroneously extend to others.

In this regard, when one reads about the broader Australian history – both its remote and not so remote past - the thinking one is tempted to develop is that if ever there was a place where more transformative relations between the various groups of people was possible that place is Australia. The general history of Australia as a penal colony, the often harped-on common feeling and alliances that were there between the convict or ex-convict populations (who were looked down upon by the free settlers) and the Aborigines, did seem to have been fertile ground for the possibility of a new type of socio-cultural identity altogether. An Australian social scientist makes the following observation – which I think is worth quoting at some length because it also points to why often it was possible to forge formidable alliances between the Aborigines and certain white rebels:

Australia seems to have two distinct distinct cultures. One group of Australians support the underdog. Their greatest icon is Ned Kelly. They are egalitarian, innovative, jovial, sports

loving, good hearted and blessed with a quick wit. It is these people who define how Australians are known on the world stage.

On the other hand, intellectuals, some journalists and people who define themselves as upper class, find nothing but dissatisfaction in the behaviour of these Australians. Consequently, they seem to feel a disconnection from Australian culture; frequently complaining that Australians don't act like Americans, Europeans or Asians.

The origins of these differing attitudes to Australia and their conflicting attitudes to each other, can be traced to the class warfare between the 'Exclusives' (wealthy free settlers) and the 'Emancipists' (freed Convicts)... A census taken in 1828 found that half the population of NSW were Convicts, and that former Convicts made up nearly half of the free population. By this time, the Convicts had begun referring to themselves as Government-men or legitimates in reference to their sardonic view that since they had been selected by the finest judges in England, they were of the very few people with a legitimate reason to be in Australia.

Freed Convicts were initially known as Expirees but they began referring to themselves as Emancipists as it implied that they had attained liberty and strove for the liberty of others. The emancipists considered themselves the true Australians because the colony had been established specifically for them. They felt few ties to England and referred to the English as Poms - Prisoners Of the Mother country.... (for more analysis in this regard see <http://www.convictcreations.com/history/classwar.htm>)

Also there were quite a few Aboriginal rebels who were joined by whites in the fight for emancipation. One of these nationalists who was joined by some Irish rebels was the "invincible" Pemulwuy. <http://www.convictcreations.com/history/pemulwuy.htm>.

Furthermore, while the Aboriginal community, like most colonized peoples, has not fared very well throughout Australian colonial history, it may be said as a plus for the majority of white Australians themselves to have thrown in their lot with the Aboriginal community by overwhelmingly voting for the abolition of the "White Australia Policy" in 1967. (<http://www.austemb.org/timeline.htm>.) Of course the politically important issue of demography needs to be taken into account when looking at such moves. After nearly two centuries of systematic decimation the Aborigines are much fewer in number than those who came from without and therefore do not pose a very serious political threat - hence the seemingly benign approach towards these groups by their former and 'current' colonisers. In this connection George Fredrickson tries to provide a possible explanation why apartheid in South Africa was more virulent than other forms of white supremacy: it is not that the other white groups were more benign as such, but that according to the logic of white supremacy if the oppressed were a majority anywhere an apartheid-like situation would arise. (Fredrickson 1981: 247)

However, in *Remembering Babylon* Malouf does not present and pursue the possibility of cross-cultural inclusiveness or even of possible revolution. This is a complex issue. Even though he has set his narrative in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, in the encounter between the whites and Aborigines, Malouf does not in this novel engage with an important section of the history of the colonization of Australia, namely Australia as largely a penal colony with a



good number of the first European people going there as convicts (<http://www.austemb.org/euroset.htm> & <http://www.austemb.org/devset.htm> & <http://www.convictcreations.com/history/>). As we observe above, these convicts themselves had to battle both physically and mentally against the prejudices of the those who out of their own will went there to conquer and settle - the 'Exclusives'. Without wanting to prescribe what a novelist should write about, it is worth noting that Malouf highlights the sense of exile of the settlers as opposed to that of the convict and ex-convict population and only slightly that of the Aborigines. During an interview with Hellen Daniel Malouf himself provides some explanation for prejudicial attitudes amongst some white Australians. Answering a question from Helen Daniel on his novel (titled *The Conversations at Curlow Creek*) on why there is Irish material in it and whether it was motivated by the "Castle Hill Rebellion" of 1804 by Irish political prisoners arrested in the Irish Revolution of 1798 (see <http://www.onwar.com/aced/data/alpha/australia1804a.htm>), Malouf points to 'English' prejudice against the Aborigines, the Irish and the Scots:

...I was very much interested in the Irish as a symbol almost, in our Anglo-Saxon world, of disorderliness, of something which can't be included. Something which we recognise as having an enormous force of life, but being not orderly. This is a prejudice of course, but it's one of the prejudices on which we've postulated our notion of order....But it was also interesting that the Aborigines were seen, in so far as they *were* seen, as a threat to order in the same kind of way. There was seen to be some relationship between the Aborigines and the Irish. And again it's quite interesting the very large number of people who are of mixed blood in this country, who are in fact a mixture of Aboriginal and Irish.

Apart from that I felt I could do it for the same reason I felt I could deal with the Scots in *Remembering Babylon*. Certainly in the world in which I was growing up in Queensland, one was surrounded by people who were Scots and Irish. That background, in someone growing up in Australia in my generation, was almost stronger than anything one thought of as an *English* background..." [www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-Sept-1996/intermal.html](http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-Sept-1996/intermal.html) -emphasis mine

With views such as these, one is obliged to question to what extent Malouf's toying with the possibility of what might have been new and more viable kinds of postcolonial identity patterns for Australia (and by extension a postcolonial identity for not only all settler colonies and former colonies, but also for all of the postcolonial terrain) is taken up and developed in *Remembering Babylon*. Even more tricky is Malouf's resort to a supposed mythologised Aboriginal ontology in his efforts to to bridge the racial gap between the settlers and the Aborigines. In the case of the latter issue, since there are no references indicated in *Remembering Babylon* as to which accounts of a supposed Aboriginal ontology Malouf may have used – if at all he did use any such – to bring in for consideration any specific Aboriginal ontology is therefore not central to this study. In fact it can be argued, and justifiably so, that, strictly speaking, there is no Aboriginal ontology in the novel since whatever is said about the

Aborigines (not by them since the Aborigines do not speak in the first person anywhere in the text) is mediated by non-Aboriginals. The settler ontology is at least mediated by Malouf's settler characters themselves. In an appendix, Malouf himself points out that the main thrust of "the novel has no origin in fact" (183).

In this connection, the publishers of Ivor Indyk's critical work, *David Malouf* (1993) point out in the blurb that Indyk "presents Malouf as both a primitive and a romantic, a writer who draws deeply on rhythms of nature in his expression of desires which largely go unrecognised in the social domain." The problem in *Remembering Babylon* is that, by some roundabout way (in this particular case through the liminal figure of Gemmy), Malouf tries to link these kinds of perceptions to the Aborigines, which perhaps creates misconceptions. In his essay "Unspeakable Bodies: Representing the Aboriginal in Australian Critical Discourse", Suvendrini Perera (1994) points out the controversy generated among Australian critics by *Remembering Babylon* and various other writings on Aborigines by non-Aborigines. Perera singles out Germaine Greer who categorically called *Remembering Babylon* "Malouf's Objectionable Whitewash" (15). Such criticism may not be totally unwarranted given that we do not get to hear the side of natives from the Aborigines themselves in the novel, and perhaps this is inevitable since one cannot fully put oneself into the position of another person. As such, whether the ontological presentation of aboriginal metaphysics is Aboriginal or Maloufian is difficult to decide. There is some evidence, though, that it is Maloufian, as seen in the works of critics such as Ivor Indyk (1993), Paul Kavanagh (1994) and Elaine Lindsay and John Murray (1997). According to one critic, it appears Malouf experiments with Heideggerian materialism/ phenomenology (see Kavanagh, 1994), ascribing it to the Aborigines, an approach that yields some questionable results. What needs to be asked in this study is how effective Malouf's alternative mythological ontology to Cartesianism could be. Also, does Malouf himself quite succeed in escaping the pervasive Cartesian influence and its attendant crises in this novel?

## CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

### 2.1 A philosophical background

Among other approaches discrimination may be seen either in Hegelian terms as implying the existence of a self-determining self-consciousness which is opposed to an “other,” rather unformed, consciousness which depends on the first self to exist, or in a ‘Cartesian’ way whereby, as Michael Marais puts it, the self, in order to fully actualise itself, must either totally objectify the other or get rid of or elide any other self that stands in its way (Marais, 1997:17). In his *Phenomenology of Mind* (1931), Hegel delineates what he calls the dichotomy between Master and Slave consciousnesses: “...they stand as two opposed forms or modes of consciousness. The one is independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself; the other is dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another [...] The master is the consciousness that exists *for itself*; [...] it is a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through an other consciousness, i.e. through an other whose very nature implies that it is bound up with an independent being or with thinghood in general” (234-5). This dichotomous consciousness is comparable to the Jungian notion of self-consciousness according to which the brighter part of the self is mediated by its shadow. Yet no such opposed selves as metaphysical entities can be said to exist anywhere, except as figments of the imagination. Such an other opposed to the self is the construction of a Manichean or ‘Cartesian’ ontology which only serves to continue to consign the so-called other to the realm of the negative. As we have noted in the preceding chapter, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) Fanon notes that this sort of dualistic ontological formulation assumes that there is an opposing black part which must vanish from consciousness (194).

Fanon’s view above is in line with Barbara Johnson’s argument in her essay ‘My Monster/ My Self’ (1982) about the schizoid relationship between Frankenstein and the monster he creates in Mary Shelley’s gothic novel *Frankenstein*. Johnson employs the creation of the monster as a trope for the autobiographical creation of a being in one’s own image. This Frankensteinian relationship is, I think, comparable to colonial mimicry, where the so-called other as ‘other’ is a creation or construction of the ‘self’ and, often polarised in Manichean relations as these two are, they are psychologically forced to exist very much in a *specular*, even *menacing* relationship with each other - *doppelgängers* of sorts. As we have already noted in the preceding chapter, post-colonial theorists such as Memmi (1957), Fanon (1967&1967), Said (1978), JanMohamed (1985) and Bhabha (1994) too discuss this process of mutual creation and destruction between the coloniser and the colonised. Not that these so-

called 'Others' had no 'being-ness' or 'becoming-ness' and were nameless before the 'Selves' came on the scene; nor that they were at some point without history and suddenly colonisation gave them history; but the Others as 'Other' are a creation of the Self (akin to what Gayatri Spivak (1985) calls the "worlding of the third world"). Homi Bhabha's formulations of ambivalence, stereotype as fetish, mimicry, menace, the Imaginary, etc. are the hallmarks of this relationship. And following from this, therefore, both the transgressing 'Selves' and their mistakenly so-called 'Others' have a duty to correct the mutually destructive condition in which they find themselves.

Philosophically, perhaps the earliest signs of the Western seemingly pessimistic and disjunctive construction of reality can be seen in Plato's theory of reality which parcels out existence into two rigidly distinct, yet somehow causally related, worlds: one of forms/ideas and another of material phenomena. Aristotle, Plato's own pupil, disagreed with his master on this by arguing rather that forms or ideas arise *from* and subsist *in* the world of material phenomena and not apart from and independent of them. One notices that all subsequent debates about the origin, nature, and relations of ideas (consciousness) and material phenomena have been expansions and variations on these two diametrically opposed positions. In the debate there are positions such as 'idealism' (which contends that there are only mental entities - Levin, 1979:54), 'property dualism' (which contends that there are only physical entities but some physical entities have both physical and non-physical, psychological properties (50)), and 'property monism' (which argues that there are only physical entities, and all properties of physical entities are physical (50)). The first two positions have very close affinities with Cartesian dualism - in fact it could be said that idealism is what gave birth to Cartesian dualism. The third one, in a slightly refined form, is the proposed alternative ontology that I hope to develop in this study, an ontology which, though seemingly leaning more on the empirical side, in essence is 'objectivist', a middle point between the hyper-rationalism of Descartes on the one hand and the empiricism of David Hume and John Locke on the other.

Broadly, and ontologically speaking, these philosophical debates have taken place in the context of at least three major philosophical schools, namely idealism/rationalism (Plato, Rene Descartes, Immanuel Kant, etc.) where, generally, self-consciousness is said to arise *a priori*; realism/empiricism (John Locke, David Hume, etc.) where self-consciousness arises *a posteriori* -but in a deterministic, almost mimetic, fashion; and objectivism (Ayn Rand) where self-consciousness is a result of a dialectical, 'organic' interaction between the innate analytical qualities of the mind and the material phenomena on which the mind works. The

most favoured school for the oppositional, dualistic ontologies is idealism/rationalism, especially that of Descartes - who is regarded as the highest point of the Enlightenment. In spite of dissenting voices even from within their own ranks challenging such a metaphysics, the general trend among imperialists has been to hold tenaciously onto these sorts of ontologies mainly for egoistic, exploitative and supremacist purposes. Yet, these are not only skewed ontologies even in all demonstrable rational circles; they are also highly escapist, oppositional/confrontational, unscrupulously competitive/exploitative and brutal, perhaps rendering those who subscribe to them, when coupled with Social Darwinism, no more civilised than any uncouth barbarian who has ever trodden the earth - since their ultimate authority is what Irving Copi refers to as the fallacy of appealing to force: "Might makes Right" (Copi, 1982:99) - something like: "If you don't agree with me/us, I/we will beat you up". Investigating the practical consequences of such ontologies, and the attempts at transcending them as they are played out in Malouf's novel is the overall objective of this study.

## 2.2 Cartesian epistemology/ontology: a close analysis

The observation and contention here is that how people construct their self-consciousness or ontological understanding even as first peoples depends on how they construct their knowledge of reality. The basic components of an epistemology (cosmogony, theogony, ethics/morality, aesthetics, ontology and metaphysics ) work very much in an inter-determining fashion, i.e. each facet bearing on the others. Of the two classical strains of reality construction Cartesianism belongs to the Platonic school. Like Plato, Descartes starts from *essences* - in his case the 'I'- and then moves to *being*. How this 'I' comes about, however, is a pure mystery, an article of dogma calling upon blind faith to accept it. Perhaps a look at the circumstances in which Descartes arrived at his sort of 'I' would be helpful.

In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes, plunged deep into doubt, supposes that the "I" can exist as an isolate entity (the "autonomous subject" phenomenon) and that it has some innate capacity to produce concepts, ( hence self-consciousness) in its own right:

Is there not some God, or some other being by whatever name we call it, who puts these reflections [i.e. concepts] into my mind? *That is not necessary, for is it not possible that I am capable of producing them myself?* I myself, am I not at least something? But I have already denied that I had senses and body. Yet I hesitate, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without these? (1952:78, my emphasis)

And again, elsewhere in the *Third Meditation*, Descartes doubts that concepts result from a dialectical interchange between the mind and existents outside it:

And to the other reason, which is that these ideas must proceed from objects outside me, since they do not depend on my will, I do not find it any more convincing. For just as these impulses of which I have spoken are found in me, notwithstanding that they do not always concur with my will, *so perhaps there is in me some faculty fitted to produce these ideas without the assistance of any external things, even though it is not yet known by me; just as apparently, they have hitherto always been found in me during sleep without the aid of any external things.* (1952:83, my emphasis)

Here is where my objections to Cartesianism, like those of so many others before me, come in. Indeed, it is not surprising that opposition to the Cartesian cast of mind was swift and has been persistent right from the 17<sup>th</sup> century down to this day. The earliest critics were Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715), Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716), Julien Mettrie (1709- 1751), Pierre Cabanis (1757-1808), etc. Reaction came even from Darwinist evolutionary psychologists such as Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) himself. The central questions that necessarily arise are: what are the constitutive elements of the “I”? How does the Cartesian mind produce concepts independent of existents and percepts?

It is the emphasis Objectivist epistemology places on the *existent-mind-percept-concept* process when referring to the “I” that makes it differ from most ontological constructions. Is the ‘I’ not a cumulative result of an integrative process which is a dialectical interaction between the *mind*, *existents* and the *percepts* derived from them, producing *concepts* which are the store of the “I” or, more appropriately, which indeed are the “I”? My position is that the “I” itself is constructed from the mind plus all that that mind comes into contact with, as Ayn Rand categorically puts it in her Objectivist epistemology alluded to earlier. The “I” is never unitary, definitive or closed, yet at any given time it is held together by its own laws of integration. What is called the self is itself made up of so-called ‘others’ as there is no self which comes into being *ex nihilo*. Not even the stuff of dreams or hallucinations, or mirages, etc. are pure constructs without reference to the existent-mind-percept-concept psycho-epistemological process. A self is a self of mediated something(s) (i.e. existents), both physically and ‘metaphysically’ speaking. At any given point the ‘I’, individual and unique as it obviously is, is in fact a ‘we’. It is plural, which includes other human beings (female, male, etc.), animals, trees, grass, stones, water, fire, etc. as the case may be – somewhat reflective of Hegel’s notion of difference or diversity in a co-extensive unity (see an account of this in Rogers, 1936: 408-10). In a way these mediated ‘other’ elements in various guises will have become ‘organically’ co-extensive with the self. Self-consciousness or the “I” is made up of open-ended concepts, such that an individual’s “I” is the sum total of all the concepts their mind has abstracted from the percepts it has received from contact with the surrounding existents. And this need not be only after birth since

percepts are not only visual but tactile, auditory, kinesthetic, etc. (- the foetus or a non-human person may thus be said to have a consciousness of itself). As such when one says "I..." one brings to the utterance the whole load of one's open-ended concepts (whose exact nature, to my knowledge, cognitive studies have not yet established – they could be physical and have the quality of extension after all). The only difference between one "I" and another "I" lies in the way each mind abstracts and integrates its percepts into concepts, as well as the volume of their conceptual store. And epistemologically speaking, this is more a perspectival difference than a strictly and rigidly procedural, conceptual or ontological one. The basics involved in the process of abstraction are quite uniform. Whatever differences may follow later are a result of supra-structural issues and the type of phenomena each "I" comes into contact with – whose order of contact, and therefore of configuration and reconfiguration too, cannot be uniform. Furthermore, as soon as these two "I"s have perceived each other, they become part of one another, not by way of being simply coterminous with each other but they are inter-subjective and not totally or radically separate Leibnizian monads. Not that the two "Is" then obliterate each other - as that would imply a lack of individual subjectivity – but they have different configurations. Ontologically speaking, the only aspects that may be regarded as "other" are *only* those aspects one has as yet never come into contact with because the moment one comes into contact with any such previously unknowns - by whatever means - they cease to be 'other' and become part and parcel of one's self. Only those aspects of another "I" that one is not aware of can remain 'other' because one cannot know everything about another entity. However, such unknowns cannot then be said to have been 'othered' because to other another self involves an act of volition and one cannot 'other' what they do not yet know.

We can say even at this stage of basics that at least two things have been established, and these are: The one "I" does not call the other "I" into being *ex nihilo* - as Cartesianism would have us think - nor does either "I" exist *a priori*. Rather, each integrates the other into itself resulting in a paradoxical type of integer – an open-ended whole, held together, as we have said, by each mind's internal laws of integration. In other words, self-consciousness is not simply a product of the mind out of its own resources, but a result of a dialectical interaction between the mind and its surroundings - including other minds. The "I" is an intricate conglomeration of co-extensive, mediated 'others', and it is this that Cartesians crudely call a 'self'. This self-consciousness based on inter-subjectivity between the mind and its surroundings is not even simply because after we die we all turn into our constitutive elements which may not be very different from those of other existents. My study advances



the argument that co-extensivity is the case at both the metaphysical and organic levels *while we live* - not even just out of some humanistic or philanthropic or sentimental sense but as an ontological/epistemological 'reality' (as cold a 'fact', I assume, as that certain atoms have to be configured in a certain way to result into a particular stable molecule and that forced to configure differently will result in immiscibility, instability or explosion) - and for Cartesians to believe in what is called the "autonomous subject" is to be guilty of what I would term "ontological appropriation".

In light of the above, at the deepest conscious or unconscious level, what discrimination against a so-called other essentially involves is the cancer-like or schizophrenic phenomenon of the self's rejection of a part of itself, a self divided against itself. As Waugh notes: '[t]he destruction of the other...cannot be accomplished without an accompanying effect of fragmentation of the self' (1992:121). Somehow or other the plural self must find a way to integrate its plurality/diversity or risk its own dissolution. When the laws of integration are violated the result is 'schizophrenia' or some multiple personality disorder - and a Cartesian ontology/epistemology seems to me to be a sure recipe for these conditions. Or, as Douglas Livingstone writes in his 1976 essay "Africa Within Us" :

A living body is of course subject to certain immutable laws. A body divided against itself, as someone I'm sure said, dies - as in various types of cancer for instance, where some cells, not content with their orderly dissimilarities yet underlying unity of purpose with the blokes over the road, differ yet again from their associates, and in trying to impose their ways on the others, destroy the whole world they occupy. Dying too in the process, of course: the inexorable final goal of which they are no doubt mindlessly aware while the heady process of Antigone-like resurrection ensues. ( quoted in Brown 2002: 97)

As I pointed out in passing in the first chapter, it appears that when the Cartesian self rejects a part of itself that does not cause a crisis only in the self that is rejecting a part of itself, but this crisis is created in the rejected part as well; and to resolve this crisis (since equilibrium is what a self seeks after) it seems the rejected part is forced to find its way back to where it rightfully belongs, which may explain the occurrence of insurrections and revolts that sooner or later almost always break out anywhere discriminatory relations exist, be they interpersonal or inter-group.

The confusion in Descartes' approach lies in the fact that he equates the mind's - or is it the brain's? - natural capacity for abstraction (which is a process and in no wise equal in everyone) to simple or axiomatic concepts which he calls *innate ideas* and proceeds to invest these with necessity or universality. In other words, there is a conflation of the natural



capacity involved in the *process* of abstraction and the *end product* of that process with an unfortunate bypassing of the raw material which the process transforms into that end product. In Objectivist theorizing, even simple concepts (like primary concepts) are abstractions and not innate as Descartes would have us think. And the existence of an innate capacity to abstract cannot itself be ascertained until the mind has abstracted at least a concept - even if a simple one - which has formed part of its store of self-consciousness. Rand calls a content-less self-consciousness such as that of Descartes a "process of concept-stealing" (1990a: 247). And this is where Descartes' trouble starts, and since the foundation is dubious whatever else follows from it is unsteady. In this regard, whatever the demerits of his deterministic empiricism, Locke has a very practical test for those who argue that it is the mind alone that creates reality without interacting with something outside it. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1924) Locke says: 'He that sees a fire, may if he doubt whether it be anything more than a bare fancy, feel it too, and be convinced by putting his hand in it; which certainly could never be put into such exquisite pain by a bare idea or phantom'(quoted in Rogers, 1936:309)

Furthermore, Descartes' main distinction between mind and body, and one of his main sources for his dualistic/binary thinking, is grounded in the aspect of *extension and divisibility*, where the body is distinguished by extension in space and is amenable to division, while the mind is distinguished by a lack of such extension:

As to the clear and distinct idea which I have of corporeal things, some of them seem as though I might have derived them from the idea which I possess of myself, as those which I have of substance, duration, number, and such like. For [even] when I think that a stone is a substance, or at least a thing capable of existing of itself, and that I am a substance also, although I conceive that I am a thing that thinks and not one that is extended, and that the stone on the other hand is an extended thing which does not think, and that thus there is a notable difference between the two conceptions - they seem, nevertheless, to agree in this, that both represent substances.....( 1952, *Third Meditation*: 85-6)

The above argument is internally inconsistent because *substance* presupposes extension anyway. Furthermore, there is no proof that the mind or thought itself may not have the quality of extension or that it is indivisible. As we stated at the beginning of the first chapter, there is no proof yet that the mind is an entity separate from the brain. The brain itself could be the mind and therefore physical. There is thus no reason to completely rule out the possibility that there may actually be a 'physical' albeit mediated relationship/connection between existents, percepts, mind and concepts. Indeed who can tell whether or not our concepts are of a physical nature? As we mentioned earlier, 'property monism' postulates that there are only physical entities, and all properties of physical entities are physical (Levin,

1979:50). If one cannot see air with the naked eye that does not mean that air is not a physical substance with physical properties. In this connection Anta Diop notes the 'discoveries' in the fields of parapsychology which point to the possibility of co-extensivity, as exemplified in instances of telepathy, premonition, clairvoyance, psychotronics, the Kirlian effect, Bell's inequality, supraluminous interaction, etc. (1991: 366-71).<sup>1</sup> Until such time that it is disproved that concepts are physical, or 'organically' connected to the objects they derive from, the case will have to rest as such.

In any case, extension or no extension, divisible or indivisible, it still remains a fact that the constitutive elements of the 'I' are both internal and external, and to talk of a totally autonomous subject is to be guilty, as we have said, of "ontological appropriation". It is with such appropriation, under Descartes' papacy, that Western metaphysics and its philosophical sanctioning of individualism begins resulting in endless dichotomies between mind and body, subject and object, self and other, etc. How much of this phantom went into Hegel's construction of Master and Slave consciousness in his *Phenomenology of Mind* or Nietzsche's postulation of a Master and Slave morality is a matter for conjecture. What is certain, though, is that, for later Europeans, Descartes had given the individual not just a supposed 'philosophical' stamp but he had asserted the supremacy of that individual as the measure of all things – the mighty autonomous subject - even at the express and deliberate expense of others.

That whatever concepts one forms after the process of abstraction will be different from the next person's cannot be doubted because, as we have noted, no two people's matrix of experience will be the same, resulting in different configurations and reconfigurations. This means that whatever prior knowledge each person will bring to an experience will be different, and that is what marks us as individuals. Even the capacities of abstraction differ from one person to the next. But that one can form their self-consciousness in a vacuum is perhaps not rationally demonstrable anywhere – perhaps not even a mind on the verge of dissolution will have that kind of self-consciousness. Whatever such a mind's hallucinations, chimeras and other such figments, its constructs, when analysed, will be traced to some 'real' existent outside itself.

### **2.3 Pre-Cartesian and Cartesian ontologies: A Contrast**

In a section titled 'Perspectives of Research for a new Philosophy that Reconciles Man with Himself' in his anthropological work *Civilisation or Barbarism (1991)*, Anta Diop makes interesting observations, in general terms, regarding the individualistic 'Cartesian' worldview.

He delineates two traditional strands: “The one, of individualistic and social origin [i.e. a largely rough and inclement European environment], and the other, of a metaphysical nature,[...] a result of scientific progress and of the development of philosophical thought” (Diop, 1991:361-362).

Here Diop identifies the individualistic cultural tendencies and the subsequent metaphysical or philosophical tendencies that propped them up – of which Cartesianism is one. In this connection Malouf quotes an existentialist, almost apocalyptic poem by John Clare as one of his epigraphs. By quoting the poem Malouf hints at a metaphysical crisis, as that poem’s central trope is one of metaphysical anomie or void:

Strange shapes and void afflict the soul  
And shadow to the eye  
A world on fire while smoke seas roll  
And lightnings rend the sky.

The moon shall be as blood the sun  
Black as a thunder cloud  
The stars shall turn to blue and dun  
And heaven by darkness bowed  
Shall make sun dark and give no day  
When stars like skys shall be  
When heaven and earth shall pass away  
Wilt thou Remember me.

This study, however, argues that one of the most effective ways of reconciling one with oneself, with others and with the environment, is the realisation that whatever it is that one calls the “I”, indeterminate and ever provisional as it may be, it is nonetheless always a product of the interaction/interchange between one’s mind and external existents and not that the latter are simply a projection of the mind out of its own resources or that one can ignore them. This Objectivist ontology is quite pre/post-Cartesian, an ontology that precedes or transcends dualisms or binarisms.

It is important to note at this point that the so-called pre-Cartesian ontology does not do away with the individual. There is a clear difference between the process of and recognition of individuation and the philosophy of individualism or the Cartesian belief in the autonomous subject. The chauvinist (be s/he a racist, sexist, tribalist/regionalist or ‘specieicist’) may not even be aware that s/he is a fully individuated existent and that others are individuated existents too. But what comes out clearly about him/her is that s/he is narcissistically individualistic and exclusive in the schizoid sense. In this vein, in *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha provides both question and answer, confirming the difference between individuation and individualism: “How does agency come to be specified

and individuated, outside discourses of individualism? How does the time-lag [i.e. the temporal break in representation] signify individuation as a position that is an effect of the 'inter-subjective': contiguous with the social and yet contingent, indeterminate, in relation to it?" (1994:184) The debate here has to do with the contention that being co-extensive does not mean that we are totally entangled with one another, that we are no longer individuals endowed with agency in our own right and that we are therefore simply at the mercy of everyone else. Existents are individuals alright and they have a good measure of independence to manoeuvre around, a freedom rightly captured in the various post-structuralist theories, especially the deconstructive ones of Jacques Derrida where we have a 'centre-less universe' and that whatever meaning or relationships we come up with depend on context-bound *difference* but being at the same time not fixed but *deferred*. And this is what prevents total entanglement in our co-extensiveness. This impossibility of total entanglement, as we have noted, is in due recognition of the fact that not everyone has the same matrix of experience. As such our self-consciousnesses are as individual as anyone can make out. But at the same time our matrices interconnect with our environs and with other people's matrices and therefore cannot be said to be totally *sui generis* because we owe the points at which they intersect with 'others' to those 'others' (even if we interpret and integrate them in our own individual way) in a nexus of inter-subjective and interdependent relations. Debate about co-extensivity is not even geared to "sharing" as Biko puts it in *I Write What I Like* (1996); instead it is about a properly integrated self (as opposed to a schizoid one) and 'responsibility' *for* oneself and co-responsibility *with* other selves. What a pre-Cartesian ontology precisely does is put the individual in some context rather than leave her/him in a conjured-up void. As such, whatever the individual thinks and whatever action follows from that thinking will be traceable and explainable in terms of her/his context and frame of reference. In that case such to subscribe to Cartesian epistemology, "rooted in the instrumental domination of inert object (body, world, nature, woman), by a detached and transcendent subject (mind, self, science, man)" as Waugh puts it (1992:120), is to say that things either do not happen at all, or, somehow or other "they just happen", like acts of the gods, thereby surrounding everything with a nimbus of mystery not amenable to rational explanation. As such the irony of ironies is that the supposed 'rationality' of Descartes and Cartesians appears to be no more than mere superstition.

As I will point out in greater detail later, through Gemmy, Malouf touches on some form of pre-Cartesian ontological formulation in *Remembering Babylon*, attributing it to the Aborigines who are themselves virtually absent from the text. The question is: how is co-

extensivity interpreted in this text -- in a mediated fashion or a mimetic, unspeculative/unmediated, deterministic and empiricist fashion? Whether this is an Aboriginal ontology or simply a Maloufian one is, in the context of this study, somewhat beside the point here. What are important are the questions we posed at the end of the first chapter regarding the viability of such an alternative ontology and whether Malouf himself does not unwittingly fall prey to the very Cartesianism he is struggling to avoid.

#### **2.4 Ayn Rand's Objectivist epistemology and the question of ontology (being/self-consciousness)**

My choice of Objectivism as a theoretical approach is based on the understanding and argument that, with its openly verifiable dialectical interchange between the mind and the existents in the external world (existents-percepts-mind-concepts), it provides a more credible explanation of the constitutive elements of self-consciousness (and hence elements of identity) and of how self-consciousness stands in relation to the external elements of its content.

Ayn Rand was a Russian-born American philosopher (1905-1982). I do not agree with most of Rand's philosophy - her ethics, her political theory, etc. - because of its possible inconsistencies. When asked by a book salesman whether she could present the essence of her philosophy while standing on one foot, Rand replied as follows: 1. Metaphysics: Objective reality 2. Epistemology: Reason 3. Ethics: Self-Interest 4. Politic: Capitalism. (Rand, 1990b - preface). I do not even agree with her confused environmental ethics for that matter. For instance, when asked to comment on the launch into space of Apollo 11, Rand said: "For once, if only for seven minutes, the worst among those who saw the lift-off had to feel – not 'How small is man by the side of the Grand Canyon!' – but, 'How great is man and how safe is nature when he conquers it!'" (1990b: preface). Yet elsewhere she concedes the fact that to command nature humans must obey it (1990a: 82).

Furthermore, it may be asked how one can associate an inter-subjective ontology with a philosopher who believed in an egoistic ethics. This is to me Rand's central paradox. It seems surprising that for someone who tirelessly strove to outline and "prove" an "Objective" epistemology, not only on an individual level ( which would admit of relativity), but who also prescribed common or "shared" or "universal" rules of arriving at objective knowledge ( whose subjectivity she erroneously rules out ( see 1990a:81)), Ayn Rand would subscribe to an egoistic/individualistic ethics and politics.

For my part, I find this her ethics to be a direct contradiction of her epistemology. Rand is quoted as having said: "If a life can have a 'theme song' — and I believe that every worthwhile one has — mine is [best] expressed in one word: Individualism." <http://www.aynrand.org/aynrand/> . It is hugely strange that an "Objectivism-intoxicated" philosopher could at the same time hold a "Cartesian" view such as this. If Rand maintains that our knowledge of reality is also from without and not only a construction or a projection of the individual mind (purely out of its own resources and no more), as Descartes supposes in his Second, Third and Sixth Meditations, it does not make rational sense for her to espouse a purely egoistical ethics - whatever her notion of the ego is.

Another instance of such contradiction is that Rand's *Aesthetics* is, on the one hand, against both realism/naturalism for their obliteration of the individual and individual choice, and, on the other hand, against modernism and post-modernism with their insistence on a de-centred individualism, a supposed purposelessness and nihilism. In her *Romantic Manifesto* (1975), which contains her aesthetics, she prefers Romanticism with its focus on the self-conscious individual, who is imbued with volition and is goal-directed and battling whatever odds put in her/his way to attain that goal. What needs to be borne in mind from this is that, at the root of it, Rand may not necessarily approve of 'individualism', which is the hallmark of modernism and post-modernism, as she asserts. That there is a difference between the process of and a recognition of *individuation* and the philosophy of *individualism*, could possibly not have been lost on her. My own hypothesis as to why this might have occurred - and is purely political in nature – starts from Rand's own political circumstances:

Ayn's father, Zinovy Zacharovich Rosenbaum was a successful pharmacist in St. Petersburg. Ayn greatly admired her father as an honorable and principled man. Her mother, Anna considered herself an intellectual and attended many lectures and theatrical productions. She often commented to Ayn that raising children was a "hateful duty", but was concerned and attentive to her family's needs....

In 1917 the Russian Revolution broke out and Bolsheviks seized her father's business. This was the beginning of her hatred of Communism. Collectivism vs Individualism would be her life-long theme running through all her writings....

[http://ellensplace.net/ayn\\_rand.html](http://ellensplace.net/ayn_rand.html) /[http://ellensplace.net/ar\\_05\\_26.html](http://ellensplace.net/ar_05_26.html)

Rand formulated her philosophy at the height of the Cold War and it may conceivably have been to please those who gave her sanctuary (namely the US) and her own extreme dislike for communism (with all its excesses) that she espoused an egoistical ethics and politics which were going to run counter to her epistemology. To me her politics and ethics seem to be a matter of expediency, quite Cartesian too, and I find it unfortunate that she allowed her

political circumstances to cloud her philosophy. It may be one of those contradictions that imperialism plunges individuals into. Actually it may need noting that Rand took her Objectivism so far as to argue that a lie, say, is unethical not because of reference to some deity's injunction against it, but because a lie necessarily seeks to go against objective reality and would therefore show itself as an epistemological fraud in the long run. In other words a lie upsets a sort of epistemological or 'cosmic' balance and would therefore be unsustainable (1990b:339-42).

Of course we need to point out that it must have become clear by now that "collectivism" and an "Objectivist" ontology are not one and the same thing. Also, and this is most important, technically speaking, it would be committing a category mistake to try and postulate an ontology from an *ethics*. An *ontology* can be constructed only from an *epistemology* and not from an *ethics*. An *ethics* itself must be constructed from an *epistemology*. Indeed, from my point of view, it would in fact be more reasonable to postulate an *ethics* from an *ontology* rather than the other way round. All the aspects of a *metaphysics* (cosmogony, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, etc.) must necessarily be derived from a specific *episteme* and will have to be consistent with that *episteme* to be credible. Rand's metaphysics is rather disjunctive, Cartesian almost, which shows how difficult it is to escape the pervasiveness of a Cartesian cast of mind. So, tentatively, it can be said that Rand's ethics is at variance with her epistemology, and the two are directly contradictory. As such we cannot use her ethics to construct what would pass for an Objectivist ontology—in keeping with her epistemology.

Furthermore, Rand's understanding of *individualism* or *selfishness* is quite complex and not fully resolved yet. But one clear thing is that it is certainly not individualism in the Nietzschean sense of social Darwinism (much as Cartesianism itself was not necessarily of that same order, whatever its later inevitable subsequent exploitation for those ends). Even Rand's best-known scholar to date, Leonard Peikoff (2001), can only write the following in respect of Rand's egoism:

At this stage, I want merely to dissociate Ayn Rand's approach from the subjectivist idea of dealing with others. Egoism, in the Objectivist interpretation, does not mean the policy of violating the rights, moral or political, of others in order to satisfy one's own needs or desires. It does not mean the policy of a brute, a con man, or a beggar. It does not mean the policy of turning other men, whether by clubs or tears, into one's servants. Any such policy, as we will see in due course, is destructive not only to the victim, but also to the perpetrator. It is condemned as immoral, therefore, by the very principle of selfishness.

The best formulation of the Objectivist view in this issue is the oath taken by John Galt, the hero of *Atlas Shrugged*. "I swear — by my life and my love of it — that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." The principle embodied in this oath is that human sacrifice is evil no matter who its beneficiary is,

whether you sacrifice yourself to others or others to yourself. Man — every man — is an end in himself.

If a person rejects this principle, it makes little difference which of its negations he adopts — whether he says "Sacrifice yourself to others" (the ethics of altruism) or "Sacrifice others to yourself" (the subjectivist version of egoism). In either case, he holds that human existence requires martyrs; that some men are mere means to the ends of others; that somebody's throat must be cut. The only question then is: your life for their sake or theirs for yours? This question does not represent a dispute about a moral principle. It is nothing but a haggling over victims by two camps who share the same principle.

Objectivism does not share it. We hold that man's life is incompatible with sacrifice — with sacrifice as such, of anybody to anybody. We reject both the above theories on the same ground. As Ayn Rand states the point in *The Fountainhead*, the rational man rejects masochism and sadism, submission and domination, the making of sacrifices and the collecting of them.... <http://www.peikoff.com/opar/egoism.htm> <sup>2</sup>

This reflects some confusion about the hermeneutics of egoism in the Randian sense. What does Peikoff mean by "a man" above? What constitutes a human being? Where does the existent-percept-mind-concept paradigm come in in this set-up of Randian egoistic ethics? Strictly speaking, Rand's egoism has very little to do with Objectivism as an epistemology from which I am postulating an "Objectivist" ontology. In this task it is to her epistemology that we must look.

Rand's objectivist epistemology, however, is an asset to philosophical speculation. It is crisp, simple, brief and straightforward and it does provide a potent counter to Cartesian epistemology. As Harry Binswanger and Leonard Peikoff observe in Rand's *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1990a), Rand's objectivist philosophy tries to save traditional philosophy from intellectual assaults which threatened to annul philosophy altogether - especially the post-structuralist rejection of universals or of necessary propositions (1-4) - attacks which Rand does not totally succeed in warding off. Perhaps Rand's contradictions, limits and successes are best outlined by the rather sceptical Kelly Ross (2001) who writes:

Rand's description of "concept formation" seems more sensible. Qualities are "abstracted" from experience and formulated into concepts. Rand shoots for a "conceptualist" theory of universals, which avoids an Aristotelian "realism" of substantial essences on the one hand and the subjectivism of "nominalism," where universals are just words, on the other hand. However, a conceptualist theory cannot be consistently maintained (and this is not just a problem for Rand). Even if concepts may be conventional and arbitrary in many ways, they can only be connected to reality if they are based on *some* abstract features that are *really in the objects*. Thus, as soon as Rand allows that the terms for features "abstracted" from experience refer to features that are *really there*, then she has let in some form of Aristotelian realism, whether she wants to or not. And if there are indeed natural kinds, then there must be natural, and real, essences. Otherwise her theory is nominalist and subjectivist. Evidently aware of that tension, we have the motivation for Rand's idea that concepts refer to everything in the objects. That preserves the objectivism of her theory, and so the appropriateness of "Objectivism" as the name of it, but, as we have seen, it leads down the paradoxical road of a Leibnizian theory of concepts.

<http://www.friesian.com/rand.htm>



Ross's objection above is similar to the one I raise later about Rand's presumptuous claim about the possibility of a 'universally objective' knowledge which then would reduce attributes or concepts to their being fully embodied in phenomena prior to their conceptualisation – and that all humans have congruent minds - which then ironically reduces her epistemology to a brand of Aristotelian realism/materialism that Ross mentions in the passage above.

I need to point out at this stage that not much attention has been given to Rand's philosophy yet (except for the prodigious efforts of Leonard Peikoff ). This could be for two possible reasons. The first is that she is quite a newcomer onto the scene (and a woman too at that) with most of her philosophical publications appearing in comprehensive form only in the late eighties. Second, one notices that Western philosophical practice tends to over-value idealism/rationalism of the Plato/Descartes/Kant type on the one hand, and the realism/empiricism/phenomenalism of Aristotle/Locke/Hume/Heidegger, on the other hand. Rand, however, tries to come up with middle ground between these two positions, an approach which although it can be traced in Hegel, does not seem to have gained ground yet among Western philosophers.

Rand begins her philosophy by dismissing both the Cartesians and the empiricists:

Throughout history, philosophy has been torn by the conflict between the rationalists and the empiricists. The former stress the role of logic in man's acquisition of knowledge, while minimizing the role of experience; the latter claim that experience is the source of man's knowledge while minimizing the role of logic. This split between logic and experience is institutionalized in the theory of the analytic-synthetic dichotomy...

Any theory that propounds an opposition between the logical and the empirical, represents a failure to grasp the nature of logic and its role in human cognition. Man's knowledge is not acquired by logic apart from experience or by experience apart from logic, but *by the application of logic to experience*. All truths are the product of a logical identification of the facts of experience. (1990a: 112)

But how exactly does 'knowledge', and hence self-consciousness, arise? Rand proposes the following objectivist psycho-epistemological process:

Consciousness, as a state of awareness, is not a passive state, but an active process that consists of two essentials: differentiation and integration.

Although, chronologically, man's consciousness develops in three stages: the stage of sensations, the perceptual, the conceptual - epistemologically, the base of all man's knowledge is the *perceptual* stage. (5)

There is nothing like a pre-existent Cartesian self-consciousness here. Rather there is the innate ability to *differentiate* and *integrate*, but working on material data in the form of *perceptions*. We need to note, however, that both difference and integration are also qualities of the mind itself, which means that they are part and parcel of its natural constitution.

Conceptually, difference and sameness occur at the interface between the mind and the external existents. Difference more than simply rubs off onto one's mind before it can even be established; it is a constituent quality of the mind itself. And to be different is not the same as to be other. Indeed, to recognize difference is the mind's psycho-epistemological process of acknowledging the individual (not individualistic) subjectivity of existents, and this has nothing to do with the schizoid phenomenon of "othering". What an Objectivist ontology that I am postulating in this study insists on is the interchange between, and the co-primacy of, existents and the mind and the added possibility of a physical and metaphysical co-extensivity between the two. In this regard, analysing the process of concept formation, Rand says:

A concept is a mental integration of two or more units which are isolated according to a specific characteristic(s) and united by a specific definition.

The units involved may be any aspect of reality: entities, attributes, actions, qualities, relationships, etc.; they may be perceptual concretes or other, earlier formed concepts...The uniting involved is not a mere sum, but an *integration*, i.e. a blending of the units into a *single*, new mental entity which is used thereafter as a single thought (but which can be broken into its component units whenever required) (10).

In another chapter she expounds on this further when she says: "Directly or indirectly, every phenomenon of consciousness is derived from one's awareness of the external world. Some object, i.e., some *content*, is involved in every state of awareness...Awareness is awareness of something. A content-less state of consciousness is a contradiction in terms" (1990a: 29). And as I pointed out earlier, the postulation of an *a priori* content-less consciousness, as Descartes does, she calls "a process of concept-stealing"(247), and constitutes what in this study I term "ontological appropriation". And when Rand talks of content she explicitly refers to "some aspect of the external world which is measurable by the various methods of measurement applicable to the external world..." (31). However, as to whether concepts themselves are physical like the content they are derived from, Rand says no: "[C]oncepts are formed by retaining their distinguishing characteristics and omitting their content. For instance, the concept 'knowledge' is formed by retaining its distinguishing characteristics (a mental grasp of a fact(s) of reality, reached either by perceptual observation or by a process of reason based on perceptual observation) and omitting the particular fact(s) involved" (35). But, as I will keep on insisting, this does not of course rule out a co-extensive, organic relationship between percepts and concepts. Rand herself has no right to rule out the possible physicality of concepts.

My proposal of the possible physicality of concepts does not suggest that concepts exist in a narrow, mimetic relationship with the existents they designate, but as mentally mediated material which remain physical nonetheless. It is strange to note that while Rand

acknowledges the lack of closure of man's knowledge she still posits the possibility of objective universal knowledge for humankind. Discussing the analytic - synthetic dichotomy debate, Rand concedes that by their very nature concepts foreclose closure, they are provisional: "It is crucially important to grasp the fact that a concept is an 'open-ended' classification which includes the yet-to-be discovered characteristics of a given group of existents. All of man's knowledge rests on that fact (99). This relates to Bhabha's conception of the indeterminacy of identity which defies fixity of any kind in his notion of the "third space" (1994: 182,184).

To add to this, while Rand's objectivist epistemology succeeds in establishing the link between the mind and the material it works on - something which Descartes had completely overlooked - it falls short on yet another important point: from an objective process of cognition it seeks to create a universal, as opposed to a relative, objective knowledge of reality (1990a: 80-1), which rules out individual peculiarities such as the make and quality of the individual's mind and of their perceptual faculties - an approach that would directly lead to the collectivism she was fighting against, hence her confusion. An objective *process* of getting to grips with 'reality' yes, but not to achieve universal objective reality. To this I would respond that there is no such thing as an absolutely universal objective knowledge. The reason is that, as I have already mentioned, our cognitive apparatuses are very individual in capacities and in the kind/quantity of material or order of configuration. This is why, ideally, every other person deserves to be consulted so that they can themselves define what they 'mean' and what they want. This is also why continuing to be responsible *for* others rather than be responsible *with* them is a presumptuous and an absurd approach. And so is being monocentric and totalitarian, which assumes a universal consciousness on the part of the monocentricist or the dictator. But then this is not the same as saying that since there is no universal objective knowledge therefore the individual's knowledge is not 'valid' as the neo-Kantians that Rand is attacking in the above section suppose. Validity is tenable, except that it, too, is as subjective as the individual constructing the specific knowledge. Everything is thus relative and it is only consensus (and provisional consensus at that too) that can come to the rescue.

## 2.5 Social and biological Darwinism

It is not very difficult to see a relationship between European cultural individualism, Manichean theogony, Cartesian metaphysics and the various racist/exploitative social practices arising from biological Darwinism and its allied social philosophies such as that of

Friedrich Nietzsche. Indeed, I contend that it would be incomplete to discuss the European metaphysical Cartesian Self/Other binarism without relating it to these its social correlatives. Cartesian epistemology, racism, sexism, speciesism, the rigours of a Manichean theology - with its *Great Chain of Being* assumptions - and European alienation from the environment are some of the atoms comprising the molecule of European discriminatory metaphysics.

In this connection in *Racism: A Short History*, George Fredrickson defines 'racism' in two senses. The term 'racism' he says, is often used in a loose and unreflective way to describe the hostile or negative feelings of one ethnic group or 'people' toward another and the actions resulting from such attitudes" (2002:5). He regards it as playing on issues of difference and power, originating from a mindset that regards 'them' as different from 'us' in ways that are permanent and unbridgeable (9). More comprehensively, he says:

Racism...is more than theorising about human differences or thinking badly of a group over which one has no control. It either directly sustains or proposes to establish a *racial order*, or a permanent group hierarchy that is believed to reflect the laws of nature or the decrees of God. Racism in this sense is neither a given of human social existence, a universal 'consciousness of kind,' or simply a modern theory that biology determines history and culture. *Like the modern scientific racism that is one expression of it, it has a historical trajectory and is mainly, if not exclusively, a product of the West* (2002:6, my emphasis).

Further to this, this study is concerned, among other things, with the concept of 'degeneration' on which Europe's racist colonial enterprise was founded (and which found its expression in that presumptuous and hypocritical trope of "The White Man's Burden"). Fredrickson points out the racist assumptions underlying Western imperialism and how this imperialism links up with the theme of degeneration:

The Western Imperialism that began in the late half of the fifteenth century climaxed in the late nineteenth with "the scramble for Africa" and the seizure of new possessions or territorial concessions in East Asia and the Pacific. The ideology justifying the acquisition of new colonial territories by France, Britain, Germany, and ultimately the United States was transparently racist. Rudyard Kipling summed up this ideology in the poem "The Whiteman's Burden," which he wrote in 1899, in the wake of the Spanish-American War, to encourage the victorious Americans to establish colonial rule over the Philippines. The duty of the superior race, according to Kipling, was to take responsibility for 'new caught, sullen peoples, half-devil and half-child.' His trope artfully combined a Darwinian emphasis on the competitive fitness of the white man with the suggestion of a pseudo-paternalistic mission to uplift or improve the natives who were coming under European or American hegemony. Racial Darwinism meant...that 'nations and races progressed only through fierce competition' and therefore 'had no choice but to participate in the struggle for the survival of the fittest'...[B]elief in the superiority of the 'civilised' over 'barbarous' or 'savage' peoples was an essential rationale (2002:107-8).

In this regard Childs and Williams note Homi Bhabha's observation that "the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis

of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (in Child and Williams, 1997:123).

In a 1985 collection of essays on the notions of progress and degeneration titled *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, the editors J Chamberlin and Sander Gilman, have brought together the various senses in which the two concepts operate, essays which are very central to this study. The opening essay by Modris Eksteins deals with how historians viewed the various trends in Western civilisation with the aim of monitoring the dynamics between progress and degeneration. One such historian, the German Ludwig Buchner, is said to have commented in 1898 that “an enormous gap had emerged between scientific and technical progress on the one hand and moral [development] on the other. He himself felt that the gap could be bridged, but a presentiment of doom or, at the very least, the expectation of a radical reorientation gripped the minds of many (20). In an essay on “Sociology and Degeneration” Robert Nye traces the rise of such sociologists like Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer etc. and their ideas on what distinguishes the ‘civilised’ from the ‘uncivilised’. One of the most interesting trends here is the association of increasing levels of crime, madness, alcoholism, prostitution, suicide, and the declining birthrate with widespread degeneration (60). This is an important observation because, as we see later, some of these categories become ‘races’ in their own right at some point and become the objects of European ‘racism’. Malouf makes extensive use of these notions with respect to both the Aborigines and the settlers in *Remembering Babylon*. As Sander Gilman notes in “Sexology, Psychoanalysis and Degeneration”: “Degeneracy is the label of the Other, specifically the Other as the *essence* of pathology (83, my emphasis). Gilman further notes: “individual perversion is thus seen as a proof of the potential for the perversion of the group” (73), an outlook at the root of the conflatory and exclusionist policies of colonialism.

Of immediate relevance at this point is the essay by Nancy Stephan titled “Biology and Degeneration: Races and Proper Places.” Like most weapons in the arsenal of the coloniser the concepts of degeneration and progress like that of race to which they are closely connected, are ambiguous, amorphous and protean enough to suit any convenient occasion. In the introduction to the collection the editors, J. Chamberlin and Sander Gilman, begin by noting that:

Nineteenth century obituaries sometimes used to describe the passing of the dearly beloved as a result of ‘simple decay of nature’. The nice courtesy of the phrase marks one limit of the discussion of degeneration. The other limit concentrated on its morbid and grotesque affiliations, usually with a *grim superiority*. It was never an easy commerce between these points of view.[...] The word degeneration was itself a curious compound. First of all, it meant to lose the properties of the genus, to decline to a lower type ... to dust for instance,

or to the behaviour of the beasts of the barnyard. It also meant to lose the generative force that through the green fuse drives the flower .... Just as the nature of evil has always had a more compelling appeal to the imagination than the nature of goodness, so the idea of degeneration engaged the nineteenth century mind with a troubling sense that here, perhaps, might be found essential reality. In some measure, this was because with the idea of degeneration they came closer to the sanctity of types, or genuses, or species, *a sanctity that was the more frantically embraced as it became more uncertain*. ...

Degeneration was also closely linked to Charles Darwin's theory of Natural Selection and like its prototype degeneration rose to the status of an impersonal force. The figurations of degeneration established their own imaginative autonomy... by creating an image of a process that had the authority of a natural or divine law, and an image of a force that had the authority of a supernatural or an organic power. As an indication of this, it is easy to note a tendency to speak of the degenerate as *damned*, just as those who survive (being the fittest) might be described as the *chosen*. (1985:ix-xii, emphasis added)

In addition to the self-explanatory issues in the quotation above, Stepan's essay on place contains the all-important debate about whether the origins of the human race are monogenetic or polygenetic and how this relates to environmental adaptation. If the former is the case, is it the environment which 'degenerates' some? If the latter, are certain races "in and of themselves degenerate types [?]" (97). Then the issue of whether races have proper places where they function best - known as racial biology - is also discussed here: "A Negro placed outside his 'proper' place in nature - in too stimulating an intellectual or social environment, or in a climate unsuited to his 'tropical' nature - could undergo a further 'degeneration,' causing the appearance of atavistic or evolutionarily even more primitive behaviours and physical structures" (98).

Interestingly in this connection, Fredrickson points out that not all European racists were overseas imperialists: "It was also the case that extreme racists could be anti-imperialists on the grounds that little or no good could come out of close contact with the inferior breeds inhabiting Africa and Asia, or from the effort to settle tropical environments for which the Caucasians were naturally ill adapted [...]. In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler was retrospectively critical of Germany's joining in the scramble for overseas colonies in the period before World War I. Germany should have left the British do what it could with the coloured races of the world, he averred, while Germany expanded directly eastward" (2002: 109). Why? "The only desirable colonies were those that 'seem in large part suitable for settlement by Europeans.' Tropical regions that were thickly settled by non-Europeans he deemed useless, and he thought that Germans should have as little to do with them as possible" (109).

Stepan further points out that "[b]y the late nineteenth century, the urban poor, prostitutes, criminals, and the insane were being construed as 'degenerate' types whose deformed skulls, protruding jaws, and low brain weight marked them as 'races apart,' interacting with and creating degenerate spaces near at home" (98). Proof enough that a

Manichaeic world will create as many “Others” as there are people – including oneself. These notions of race and place, in addition to a sense of exile in general, play themselves out in strange ways in Malouf’s novel i.e. in the form of colonial mapping, naming and ‘husbandry’ practices.

The ‘Great Chain of Being’ assumptions of European cosmogony - but with a Darwinian poly-geneticist twist to them - were put to use in tracing the ‘origins’ and civilisational development of different racial groups and compartmentalising them accordingly. In this connection, in the context of the study of patriarchy and the family in colonial South Africa, Anne McCLintock explores how the colonialist’s patriarchy not only feminises women but also how it feminises and ‘infantilizes’ the colonised peoples - both their men and women:

In the poetics of degeneracy we find two opposed, dialectical narratives of human development, both elaborated within the metaphor of ‘the family.’ One narrative tells the story of the familial progress of humanity from degenerate native child to adult white man. The other narrative presents the converse: the historical possibility of racial decline from white fatherhood to a primordial black degeneracy incarnated in the black mother. Both these notions were very much debated ...[I]n the 1880s ...scientists, medical men and biologists of the day were tirelessly pondering the evidence for both, marshalling the scientific facts and elaborating the multifarious taxonomies of racial and sexual difference.... (1990 :99)

Reference to the metaphysical and material conditions of Gemmy and the Aborigines in several important sections of *Remembering Babylon* reflects the colonial settlers’ sense of what McCLintock calls the racialised theories of the relationship between women, children and the colonised:

Racial stigmata were now drawn on to elaborate minute shadings of difference in which race, class and gender overlapped in a three dimensional graph of comparison. The English male aristocrat was placed at the pinnacle of the white evolutionary hierarchy, with the white working-class female in the lower depths of the white race. The white working class prostitute was stationed on the threshold between the white and black races, sharing many atavistic features with the ‘advanced’ black men. The Zulu male was regarded in turn as the ‘gentleman’ of the black race, while displaying features of females of the white race. Carl Vogt, for example, a pre-eminent mid-century German analyst of race, asserted that a mature black male shared his ‘pendulous belly’ with a working class woman who had had many children (1864:81). More often than not the female Khoi or San was located at the very nadir of human degeneration, before the species left off its human form and turned bestial. (100-102)

The case of the Khoisan woman, Sara Baartman, exhibited as the Black Venus in Europe in the early twentieth century, aptly illustrates this last bit of the Darwinian racial theory. For Malouf’s characters the Aborigines seem to be located at a level far below that of the female Khoi: as animals.

## 2.5 Malouf, critics and the Cartesian dialectic

To deal with the settler problem of a supposed lack of metaphysical and physical attachment to the land and to the Aboriginal inhabitants in the colonies Malouf, as I will demonstrate, uses the fictional/mythological approach where attachment is clothed in mystification. For purposes of this study, I have decided to suspend judgement on how the Aboriginal worldview can be interpreted, also being fully cognizant of the fact that, more often than not, the so-called other's metaphysics has always been subjected to yardsticks that are external to these worldviews which are often simplistically viewed as 'transparent' and 'literal'.

As I mentioned before, apparently Malouf experiments with Heideggerian materialism/phenomenology (see Kavanagh, 1994), which yields a few interesting results. In a nutshell, phenomenology tries to reconcile the ideal with the real through a view of *being* as "*presencing*", a position which does not essentially distance it from Aristotelian realism but which in phenomenology takes on a magical perspective because *being* is imagined to be called forth or *presenced* through utterance. Unlike Plato's formulation where *essence* precedes *being*, for phenomenology, as for Aristotle, *being* precedes *essence*. But this supposes that essence is in the existents and therefore fixed or closed. But is this an effective answer to Cartesianism? How 'rationally' tenable is this alternative ontology? Does it quite stand up to the discriminatory and alienating settler ontology which Malouf seeks to challenge?

This explains why in the novel there seems to be an over-reliance on literal representation to the exclusion of the mediated figurative representation. Phenomena are interpreted in a mimetic fashion even though it is fairly common knowledge that it is not within the province of humanity to reproduce exact copies: the very concept of a copy or representation always entails mediation – intellectual or otherwise – a lesson empiricists and materialists seem to find difficult to grasp, but which rationalists and idealists, on the other hand, seem to exaggerate by making the copy so alienated from its external existents that it can hardly be traced back to them. It is precisely so as to find middle ground between the two schools of thought that I have resorted to Ayn Rand's Objectivist epistemology. Objectivism does share the Aristotelian, and hence the phenomenologist, claim of being preceding essence. But in Objectivism *essence* is not in the existents as such. Rather, as we have already noted, any such essence is a product of a dialectical interchange between existents and the mind – without any pretences to closure but only an assertion of open-endedness. In trying to avoid the extremism of Platonism/Cartesianism, Malouf, as will be shown, falls into the trap



of phenomenism/empiricism of a positivistic brand (in a deterministic way) - two opposite extremes here. Ayn Rand's Objectivist epistemology identifies *being* with *concepts* in a set-up where the "I" or self-consciousness is identified with its constitutive elements (i.e. existents, mind, percepts and concepts) which are neither a projection of the mind out of its own resources (as in Cartesianism) nor unmediated matter without the influence of the mind (as in empiricism). Furthermore, as the study seeks to explore, it seems that what both Malouf and some of the critics I have come across, such as Peter Pierce (1994) and Elaine Lindsay and John Murray (1997), do not question are the fundamentals of Platonism/Cartesianism in a technical manner. Notions such as the 'self' or the 'I' are not given sufficient analysis; they are almost assumed to be 'givens' and self-explanatory. The result of this is that you have hanging analyses that fail to address the question of self-consciousness from its philosophical roots.

Malouf's own possible motivation in this regard may be illustrated by Elaine Lindsay and John Murray (1997) who point out that it is part of the tradition of Australian writing to try and establish a connection with the land:

*Remembering Babylon* appeared in 1993, when the Australian nation had begun, through its political and legal systems, to take conscious account of the consequences of European appropriation of the land during the nineteenth century. For over a hundred years Australian writers have striven obsessively to establish a spiritual connexion with the country through depiction of landscape and through strongly symbolic narratives that bring Europeans into contact with that landscape and its indigenous peoples. *Remembering Babylon*, firmly set in the landscape and history of Queensland, continues the process. (94)

This Australian obsession is a reflection of the attempts to overcome the general malaise or crisis inherent in an environment of colonial oppression, domination and exclusion. In this regard, in *Remembering Babylon* Malouf captures various forms of crises which make the text an ideal ground for an investigation into the colonial and post-colonial condition. In the text, various men are presented, by the author, to be at odds with the women, with the Aborigines, with the land/environment and ultimately also with themselves.

Language is also another tool of Othering in Malouf's text where Aboriginal language is presented as silence, undeveloped, pre-ocdipal i.e. it does not 'separate' the signifier from the signified, and (hence the colonial drive to give the colonised 'language' to make them grow into adults). The views of Walter Ong (1982) in *Orality and Literacy* seem to be drawn upon in this. Ashcroft (1993) makes a comparison between *Remembering Babylon* and *An Imaginary Life* - an earlier novel by Malouf - on issues of language and subjectivity or self-consciousness, an essay that reflects European views of the languages of non-European peoples. We will also look at Giambattista Vico's views on the etymology of

words (which insist on the co-primacy of the concrete and the abstract), and an “Objectivist” view of language (which looks at words as mediated perceptual symbols of concepts which may be traced back to the concretes in the existent(s)-percept-mind-concept paradigm) as alternative approaches to the matter.

In my own study of Malouf the so-called ‘Other’ will be looked at from at least four angles, namely the ‘Aboriginal’ peoples and their supposed metaphysics, (white) women, the alienating ‘degenerate’ land and, finally, ‘civilised’ vs ‘uncivilised’ languages. The ‘Other’ as lower orders will be investigated only in so far as the class status of Gemmy who is the Aborigines’ European ‘representative’ and his chief antagonists among the settlers are concerned. This will be in the context of the promising but failed cultural syncretism or synthesis between the ‘white’ European settlers and the ‘black’ aborigines and some of the causes of this failure, such as the role played by fear of the racialised ‘Other’, and fear of degeneration resulting from contact on an equal plane, with the solution that the aborigines are presented by the European encroaching settler ‘Selves’ as absolute ‘Others’ – as non-human even, and hence justifying their subjugation and exclusion. Theorizing on the possibility of a kind of schizophrenia associated with colonial mapmaking, naming and husbandry practices by Graham Huggan (1994) and Paul Carter (1987) among others also points to this phenomenon – the questions being: how does colonial map-making and the naming system contribute to the supposed settler alienation? And is there perhaps not a purely political factor arising from the contradictions attendant on the colonial situation (such as dispossession and exclusion of the Aborigines) that contributes to this alienation?

## Endnotes

1. Anta Diop contends that it is because Plato was plagiarising from Egyptian cosmogony that his philosophical system seems to be suspended in the air and led to some of the absurdities that have spread down to modern Western philosophy including the Cartesian Self/Other formulation. In Egyptian cosmogony matter has always existed. "There did not exist in Egyptian cosmogony a period designated as zero, at which point being, matter, arose out of nothing, out of non-being; being, in Heidegger's and Jean-Paul Sartre's sense, is eternal; its fullness excludes *a priori* even the hypothetical possibility of non-being, of nothingness, as supreme absurdity. Nothingness, non-being in the Egyptian philosophical cosmogony, is equivalent to concrete matter in disorder, in the chaotic state of the *Nun*, of the primordial abyss ... (Diop, 1991: 340-1) Parmenides's 'Pythagorean' materialist cosmogony reflects this kind of thinking. (see Rogers, 1936:29-30)

2. On this matter Ross further says: "Although David Kelly and Leonard Peikoff, and others now try to develop her thought into a complete philosophical system, nothing can hide the relative shallowness of her knowledge [of other philosophers] : She despised Immanuel Kant but then actually invokes 'treating persons as ends rather than as means only' to explain the nature of morality. Perhaps she had picked that up without realizing it was from Kant. At the same time, the Nietzschean inspiration that evidently is behind her 'virtue of selfishness' approach to ethics seems to have embarrassed her later: She very properly realized that, since the free market is built upon *voluntary* exchanges, capitalism requires firm moral limits, ruling out violence, coercion, fraud, etc. That was certainly not a concern of Nietzsche, but it was very much a concern of Adam Smith, who realized that, in a context of mutually voluntary exchange, people will always go for the best deal, producing the "invisible hand" effect of mutual and public goods being produced by private preferences. This confuses people enough in regard to Smith; and that makes it all the easier to mistakenly see Rand as advocating a view of capitalists as righteous predators -- especially unfortunate when the popular vision of *laissez-faire* capitalism is already of merciless and oppressive robber barons. A careful reading of Rand dispels that idea, but her rhetoric works against a good understanding.

Rand also confuses her case with her emphasis on individuals being deliberately 'rational' That sets her against the Austrian and Chicago principles of economics that the free market is the means of coordinating *limited* knowledge, not some place where rationalistic supermen (e.g. the John Galt of *Atlas Shrugged*) display superhuman intellectual and moral powers. That makes it sound like the free market works just because such supermen exist to control it. Rand herself was actually aware that was not true: At her best moments she asserts only that capitalism is superior because it automatically, through the 'invisible hand,' *rewards* the more rational behavior, not because some superrational persons must exist to hand out those rewards. That would have been F.A. Hayek's 'intentionalistic fallacy.' Nevertheless, one is left with the impression that Rand and her "Objectivist" successors do commit Hayek's "fatal conceit" by supposing that heroic characters will exercise a superrationalistic control over themselves and the economy, and that capitalism is not really a way of coping with ignorance, or with *dispersed* knowledge." <http://www.friesian.com/rand.htm>

## CHAPTER THREE: The Place of David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*

### 3.1 The narrative

In *Remembering Babylon* Malouf relates at least two *main* stories. There is a gendered story about the rivalry between Lachlan Beattie and Janet McIvor as they compete for control and attention. But this rivalry unfolds against the backdrop of another story which is the main one and which in many ways occasions the first one, thereby necessitating analysis of the former story to take place in the context of the latter one. This is the story of Gemmy Fairley, a London street urchin who, after a disastrous stint at Willett's (his oppressive street master), falls into the custody of seamen sailing on the Pacific seas, and by whom he is further ill-treated. During his third year at sea Gemmy gets very ill on board one of the vessels, the sailors wrap him in bark and cast him overboard off the coast of Australia - leaving him for dead. Eventually he is swept ashore and taken in by an Aboriginal community.

At this point begins the process of mutual Othering, first by the aboriginal community. This is not unexpected or unexplainable considering that they are at first unable to distinguish him as human as he is in bad shape: "What was it? A sea-creature of a kind they had never seen before from the depths beyond the reef? A spirit, a feeble one, come back from the dead and half reborn?" (20). It is only when they come to see familiar body marks such as the navel and his penis that they begin to recognise and acknowledge him as *human* (21). But as his humanity is becoming clearer to them his different skin colour is made to make them remain suspicious still: "as the last encrustation of crabs broke up and his sea-attendants left him, the *white* worm of his prick. Again they murmured to one another but remained puzzled and drew back" (21, my emphasis).

On his part Gemmy is made to feel lost. It is interesting, however, to note that what first strikes him as peculiar with these beings is "the smell they [give] off; or maybe it [is] the air of the place. *Animal*, unfamiliar" (21, my emphasis). These stereotypes are typical of European colonialism which views the natives as animal-like and 'smelly'. Fanon outlines these two colonial stereotypes in *The Wretched of The Earth* (1974:33) which come up persistently in Malouf's novel. In the same connection, later on when Gemmy meets the settlers he is presented as being on all fours countless times.<sup>1</sup>

It is important to observe that, in the encounter between Gemmy and the Aborigines, while the Aborigines are willing to give Gemmy the benefit of the doubt about his being human, the latter is made to see only their 'Otherness' and that too in very ungenerous and unequivocal terms: animal (21). However, Malouf presents the Aborigines as

themselves perpetuating the Self/Other binarism in some fundamental way. Their initial hostility towards Gemmy and a sustained exclusion of him from total initiation into their worldview (even after sixteen years among them) do not put the aborigines in a much better light than the settlers he is to meet later – and they do have good reason for not including him fully initially. The Aborigines need to be cautious because it would be naïve simply to suppose that this sea-creature bodes good. Welcoming though they might at first have seemed to Gemmy, he soon realises that he would have to fight to earn himself a place in the sun among them. This he notices immediately as the nomadic community move camp: “They left a good space round him, but in a place where the forest thickened and it was almost dark, tried to elbow him off the track, then, when they saw that he was not to be got rid of, gave up [...] When they came to a halt at last and made camp, he claimed a place for himself in the second or third ring from the fire, and his neighbours, though wary, made no dispute”(21 ).

As we have already hinted at, what complicates matters is the fact that the aborigines too refuse fully to integrate Gemmy into their lifeworld - they are made to remain forever suspicious of this supposed “sea-creature” turned into a “human child” (24-5). What happens is that he is “accepted by the tribe but guardedly; in the droll, half-apprehensive way that was proper to an in-between creature...No woman, for example, would have to do with him, and there were many objects in the camp that he was forbidden to touch. Their life was a cat’s cradle of rights and restrictions; they all had objects, people too, that they must not look upon; but the restrictions on him were his alone, and the separation he felt, his questionable status, kept alive in him what he might otherwise have let go...”(25). This continued suspicion is not justifiable. Nonetheless, by the time Gemmy breaks in upon the settlement he is feared by the settlers to have lost not only the language of civilisation (hence the Lacanian Symbolic order of intellectual abstraction) but his “essential” whiteness too - the *It* - with the rest of the story showing how the settlers try to ‘help’ Gemmy recover this ‘It’, but ultimately without success

:

He had started out white. No question. When he fell in with the blacks – at thirteen, was it? – he had been like any other child, one of their own for instance.(That was hard to swallow.) But had he remained white?

They looked at their children, even the smallest of them chattering away, entirely at home in their tongue, then heard the mere half dozen words of English this fellow could cough up, and even those mismanaged and distorted you could barely guess what he was on about, and you had to put to yourself the harder question. Could you lose it? Not just language, but *it*. *It*( 36).

In this connection, Bill Ashcroft views Gemmy’s “repatriation” into the settler community as holding promise for the creation of a new postcolonial identity, a project

which, fraught with immense hardships, fizzles out with Gemmy ending up the marginal and the liminal figure he has always been: “[Gemmy’s] entry ... has immense social and historical significance because he symbolises all the possibilities for human development that seem to be denied by the erection of fences, ‘the worlding of a world on unscribed earth’ as Spivak puts it ( Spivak 1985:133), the Othering of those beyond the fence and the separation of the indigenous and the settler [...] the simple binary division which relentlessly antagonises the hybrid development of post-colonial society” (1993:56). Even without the settlers’ hostility towards him, due to Gemmy’s inability to synthesize the two worlds (because of his liminality in relation to both worlds), cultural synthesis has already been forestalled: just as he was living at the fringes of English society in London, his integration into the aboriginal community is equally incomplete. This perhaps begs the question: how justifiable is Malouf’s employment of Gemmy as a figure through whom cultural synthesis can be explored in the text and in real life?

What further stands in the way of the two groups reaching an understanding are the typical preconceived fears of the colonists who suspect the natives of being cannibals (in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz too is suspected by his fellow Europeans of having sunk so low as to have participated in ‘unspeakable rites’): “Poor bugger, he had got lost, and as just a bairn too. It was a duty they owed to what they were, or claimed to be, to bring him back, if it was feasible, to being a white man. But *was* it feasible? He had been with them, quite happily it appeared, for more than half his life: living off the land, learning their lingo and all their secrets, all the *abominations* they went in for...” (36-7). However, this colonial stereotype needs to be seen in perspective since claims of widespread socially sanctioned cannibalism among the colonised are largely groundless. What needs to be borne in mind is that what some members of a culture may practice in their own right and for their own reasons cannot reasonably be attributed to mainstream tradition. No culture is unitary; there will always be sub-cultures in any society running counter to the mainstream. <sup>2</sup>

In the novel’s story, gradually and eventually Gemmy is so marginalized that he fails to integrate the two worlds within himself and, as happens to most of those who are pushed to the margins by imperialism, he simply ‘disappears’. As we will see later, those few ‘critical’ ones among the settlers who try to give him a chance (like Jock McIvor and Mr Frazer) are mere impractical liberals whose efforts amount to nought not only because of opposition from their fellows but, as we shall see later, in their uncritical eagerness to protect him they actually further serve to ‘other’ him - their philanthropic actions reducing Gemmy to the place of the Hegelian slave.

### 3.2 Cartesianism, colonizers and colonized in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*

In *Practising Postmodernism: Reading Postmodernism* (1992) Patricia Waugh notes that "Enlightenment's [Cartesian] epistemology [is] rooted in the instrumental domination of inert object (body, world, nature, woman), by a detached and transcendent subject (mind, self, science, man)" (120). This epistemology is played out, almost in its entirety, in Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. The whole novel can be said to be an exposition of the settlers' racist Cartesianism coupled with biological Darwinism. In a Western racist fashion, the settlers cast the indigenous Aborigines as absolute others who are not only not selves in their own right but who *cannot* be selfed. George Fredrickson analyses the process of institutionalised (racist) discrimination as "play(ing) on issues of *difference* and *power*, originating from a mindset that regards 'them' as different from 'us' in ways that are *permanent* and *unbridgeable* (2002:9, my emphasis). It is no surprise then that, in the minds of the settlers, there is seen to be an unbridgeable chasm between themselves and the aborigines.

In this connection, in his essay "Post-colonial Themes in David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*" Nicholas Dunlop sums up the tragedy of David Malouf's novel by noticing Malouf's sense of 'colonial guilt' arising from what he calls "the suspect morality of the colonial process [which] rests [...] on merely exploiting the resources available (while ignoring or displacing the indigenous people) [rather than] reaching a kind of harmony and exchange with the landscape and with the colonised." (see also Whittick 1997). He notes that it is in fact this 'hybrid culture' which is "the ideal ultimate outcome of the colonial process." Typical of classical tragedy, however, it is human bad judgement arising from the hubristic way in which the colonisers view themselves as naturally and irrevocably superior to the indigenes that leads to the "missed opportunity for true cultural harmony and expansion of human knowledge, which has had tragic repercussions for every subsequent generation of Australians both native and immigrant." In Malouf's text those few critical and independently minded characters who try to investigate the possibility of cultural harmony become ostracised, which leaves the impression that the cultural gap/ difference is too wide to bridge, a Cartesian attitude that another critic calls "a fall from grace that has implicated succeeding generations of European Australians..." ([www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/remembering\\_babylon.asp](http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/remembering_babylon.asp)).

I regard Dunlop's view of a hybrid culture as the ideal outcome of the colonial process as erroneous, however, because he proceeds as though the project of colonialism has ever been to achieve such harmony. The later European imperialism which Dunlop is analysing consists of one long story of exploitation and barbarism to the present day.

Nevertheless, I think that the issue of colonial guilt needs more critical treatment. From my point of view the dynamics of colonial guilt can be dealt with by means of Nietzsche's discussion on the place (or rather lack of it) of the emotions of (self-) pity and compassion. Nietzsche dismisses the two emotions on the grounds that they only succeed in dragging down into the mire of suffering both the actual sufferer and the one who resorts to these emotions in meeting that suffering (in Rogers 1936:470-1). This applies to the sentimental self-pity of the colonized as well as to the sentimental guilt-driven approach of philanthropic liberals among the colonisers

I prefer, instead, to approach the question of colonial guilt with reference to Kantian 'categorical' ethics which would introduce the debate on colonial 'responsibility' and 'duty' hinged on Kant's twin ethical dicta. The first is the categorical imperative which argues that a moral action is one which when taking it one would wish that it became a universal law. Kant qualifies this notion of the categorical imperative with what in philosophical circles is known as his second dictum of the 'kingdom of ends'. This argues for dealing with other Selves not just as means to one's own ends but as both means and ends in themselves too (see *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1991) & *Critique of Practical Philosophy* (1996)). These, I think, would replace the sentimental 'victim syndrome' and its corollary, the equally sentimental 'colonial guilt', with self-assertive agency on the part of the 'othered' on the one hand and 'colonial responsibility' and 'duty' on the part of the colonized on the other. You make good a bad past by unflinchingly analysing and acting on it and not by whining. There are, in fact, no absolutely innocent victims. Almost always the victim is in some way complicit in her/his own victimisation. As I pointed out in the first chapter, in *The Colonizer and The Colonized* (1991:88-9) Albert Memmi puts across very clearly this idea of how the colonizer and the colonized create each other. By not standing up to and contradicting the colonizing selves when they misrepresent their epistemes, by fawning upon them and playing the sycophant in order to gain fleeting personal favours from the exchange at the expense of more enduring ones, and by being apologetic in dealing with the sources of their oppression, the oppressed create fertile ground for the 'sleight of mind' tactics of their oppressors. And, indeed, in extreme cases, when all else has failed, by not putting up a physical counter-attack (since the ultimate fallacy of oppression happens to be that of might means right which, however, is often the first resort for the colonizer), the victims become complicit in their own oppression.

We have already noted in the preceding chapter that Elaine Lindsay and John Murray point out that it is part of the tradition of Australian writing to try and establish a connection with the land and its Aboriginal inhabitants: However, in this novel the failure of a different



approach to the relations between the Aborigines and the settlers shows even before the novel proper takes off. This is seen when the author privileges the colonizers' exile and disorientation at the cost of the Aboriginal experience. One of the epigraphs Malouf prefaces the novel with is a line from William Blake's poem 'The Four Zoas': "Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not." The question that immediately comes to mind is: whose Jerusalem or Babylon experience is being doubted here? Surely not that of the Aborigines – they do not come into the picture in that light at all. Nor that of the unwilling convict immigrants. In the essay "Exile and the Loss of Language", Samar Attar notes that, generally, in Malouf's works "exiled characters may be discussed as reflecting four different kinds of exile: they appear as the colonised indigenous Australian, the migrant grandfather, his son, and the grandson poet" (1994:56). However, it does not seem that the brutal exile of the Aborigines from their ancestral territory is much of an issue for the settlers in *Remembering Babylon*. It is largely the settlers' sense of exile that is highlighted.

While Aboriginal exile is at least referred to in the novel – a token reference, really – that of the convict immigrant is totally absent. In some way this seems to point to what appears to me to be Malouf's too selective kind of remembering – a phenomenon that is not new in Australian history circles. In exploring Australian convict history, Diana Pittet makes this selectivity clear. She begins by quoting from Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore* (1986) – an account of Australian history from a non-traditional perspective: "'History' meant great men, stirring deeds, useful discoveries and worthy sacrifices; our history was short of these. This made us even more anxious about our worth as Australians living in Australia – the root of "cultural cringe" which would continue to plague us until long after World War II" Pittet then goes on to elaborate on the sources of this cultural cringe:

On January 26, 1788, Captain Arthur Phillip landed in New South Wales. 1,000 people, of whom 717 were convicts, accompanied him to establish a new colony. It was a colonial experiment; never before had a colony served as a jail for convicts. Until 1840, when convict transportation was abolished in New South Wales, convicts arrived regularly and were used as labor by the free settlers who came to New South Wales to raise sheep for wool. Australians have regarded their convict heritage as a stain on their Australian selfhood. As a result, most Australians have desired to forget this past, and schools have conveniently ignored its study. An incredible silence has pervaded the acceptance of Australian convicts because it threatened notions of British decency. The pressure to disown this history became especially strong in the late nineteenth century when debates about biological determination and notions of race and purity dominated the intellectual climate of the time. Not until the 1960s did Australian historians seriously examine the convict experience in Australia. The works which inspired these works were Manning Clarke's *History of Australia*, (1962) and L.L. Robson's *The Convict Settlers of Australia* (1965). These works and others have begun to prove that convicts have a history that can no longer be ignored. <http://www.postcolonialweb.org/australia/aussettle2.html>

As far as *Remembering Babylon* is concerned, one could say that Malouf seems to belong to that group of Australians who would rather ignore this aspect of Australian history than take proper account of and come to terms with it. Indeed, to dwell solely on the voluntary exile of the 'Exclusives' and only partially on Aboriginal involuntary exile (and not at all on that of banished British prisoners) does not help matters. Surely, the Aborigines too have been "Babylonised" from their "Jerusalem" by the encroaching settlers – equally so the convict settlers. Take note that by the time in which Malouf sets his novel (mid 19<sup>th</sup> century) there had already been nearly a century of convict transportation to Australia.

### **3.3 'Aboriginal' ontology in relation to Cartesianism and Objectivism in *Remembering Babylon***

As I mention in the two preceding chapters, there is sufficient evidence that Malouf does not agree with Cartesianism, which is why even in this text he tries to attribute an alternative ontology to the Aborigines, an ontology which he then tries to peddle to the settlers. Malouf himself is quoted as having stated, during a radio interview in 1985, the reasons for his doing this:

You have to find some way – I call it mythological – to find some real spiritual link between us and the landscape, us and the cities, us and the lives we live here. And to do that you have to give people something like a mythology...And you have to make it for them – it's not ready made – it has to be imagined. (Lindsay & Murray, 1997: 94)

We have noted with Lindsay and Murray (1997) elsewhere that this practice by Malouf is part of a long tradition within Australian writing. What needs to be considered are the implications of this resorting to *myth* rather than to a wholly rational approach to the matter of ontological attachment. Why resort to the mythological when one can trace a link between oneself as either a man or woman and other human selves, and the land etc. through purely rational analysis?

In this regard, throughout the novel Malouf is struggling hard to try and imagine what he thinks a so-called pre-Cartesian Aboriginal ontology (that could also help link the settlers to the land) could be like. Early on, as Gemmy is being initiated into Aboriginal society, what he notices - and this is very crucial - is that, in typical Freudian and Lacanian terms, in the aboriginal world life is at the pre-Oedipal phase where the Self and the supposed Other are indistinguishable, inseparably and 'un-mediatedly' co-extensive. The most revealing passage illustrating Malouf's characters' understanding of such an ontology - and with much comic effect - comes in the second chapter in a passage about ingestion:

[H]e got into his mouth as much of its fat and flesh as he could manage, its names too, its breath. What kept you alive here was one and the other, and they were inseparable: the creature with its pale ears raised and stiffened, sitting up alert in its life as you were in yours, and its name on your tongue. When it kicked its feet and gushed blood it did not go out of the world but had its life now in you, and could go in and out of your mouth forever, breath on breath, and was not lost, any more than the water you stooped to drink would cease to run because you gulped it down in greedy mouthfuls, then pissed it out. (23-24)

Here Gemmy is made to assume the position of Lacanian psychoanalysts who assume that a pre-Cartesian ontology must be something like the supposedly unmediated Freudian pre-Oedipal stage of identity construction, characterised by a deterministic, empirical co-extensiveness. There is no *intellectual mediation* here (fat, flesh and names are unmediatedly inseparable). There is not even *digestive* mediation (the creature now has its life in you). Not even *homeostatic* mediation for that matter (you take in water and piss out water, not urine, or lose it through sweat). All there is here is unmediated co-extensivity. In *David Malouf* (1993) Ivor Indyk notes this tendency in Malouf with reference particularly to *An Imaginary Life*, an earlier novel. According to Indyk, in that novel, "Ovid's encounter with the centaurs [in a dream] is a prelude, the first in a series of such encounters, which gather in intensity, breaking down the social boundaries of his experience, and leading to his immersion in the primitive continuities of nature" (1993:13). Of course there is sufficient reason to think that in the world of material phenomena nothing really gets lost. As we have pointed out elsewhere, in Egyptian cosmogony, for instance, being/matter has always existed, it only changes its nature as per the natural laws of configuration at work in some specific circumstance. But this is not the same as the supposed lack of mediation that is posited in the above passage from *Remembering Babylon* - 'reconfiguration' necessarily presupposes mediation/abstraction. In this matter I would then be forced to agree with the publisher of Ivor Indyk's *David Malouf* (1993), that Malouf comes across as "a primitive and a romantic, a writer who draws deeply on rhythms of nature in his expression of desires which largely go unrecognised in the social domain" (blurb). But it is the romantic or fanciful part of him that applies here, because not even a so-called primitive would have such an unmediated ontological construction of themselves. At this stage I doubt it very much if the Aborigines themselves have ever looked at the matter this way.

In a similar vein, at a later stage in the novel, when Gemmy and Mr. Frazer are out in the fields botanising, as Mr Frazer draws diagrams of the plants Gemmy shows him, in a complex mystical way the latter is made to view the spirit or essence of the plants as presenced in (or even as) the real plants that the diagrams represent: "Gemmy, watching, is

solemnly impressed. His tongue, following the movements of Mr Frazer's hand, works at the corner of his lips as if it too had a part in the business. The drawings for him had a mystical significance. They are proof that Mr Frazer, this odd whitefeller, has grasped, beyond colour or weight or smell, the *spirit* of what has been shown. Watching a plant emerge, the swelling bulb or fruit, the perfected leaf, Gemmy is entranced almost to breathlessness, his own spirit suspended as the real, edible object, in its ghostly form, breaks out of itself onto the whiteness of the page" (118). Here take note that diagram and the "edible object" (i.e. the fruit) are not clearly distinguishable; they are unmediatedly coextensive.

As mentioned previously, it is common knowledge to most critics of Malouf that he experiments with Heideggerian materialism/phenomenology in an effort to break down the Cartesian boundaries between the self and its so-called others. Introducing a collection of critical essays on David Malouf, Amanda Nettelbeck puts Malouf's approach as follows:

"One of the most striking features of Malouf's writing, in fact, is its accommodation of different perspectives. A recurring feature of Malouf's work, for instance, is its capacity to suggest both a Romantic idealism and what might be defined as a post-colonial conception of language, world and subjectivity. In one sense, and following what he defines as Heidegger's 'primitive and anti-Platonic' consideration of the 'oneness' between words and world, Malouf's writing articulates the possibility of a world in which 'the word and the object are absolutely one, as if there never was question of mind and object being separate, of word and object being separate. In that way, all my writing is an attempt to make that true...' " (Kavanagh, interview, 253, in Nettelbeck, 1994: iii).

But in trying to avoid the extremism of Platonism/Cartesianism Malouf appears to have fallen into the trap of its opposite: gross phenomenism/empiricism, of a positivistic brand (and in a deterministic way). As I have mentioned before, phenomenology tries to reconcile the *ideal* with the *real* through a view of *being* as "*presencing*", a position which does not essentially distance it from Aristotelian realism but which here leans towards the *magical* because, as we have noted in the second chapter, being is imagined to be called forth (i.e. presented or made present) through utterance. In the same vein, also note that when Gemmy enters settler society Mr Frazer the church minister and George Abbot the young teacher take it upon themselves to write down his story – which they do with a lot of embellishment, adding in details of their own. The papers containing this story are then kept by Abbot. But perhaps due to a change in the environment (which makes Gemmy feel ill after he moves to the Hutchences following a xenophobic attack on him by some of the settlers while at the

McIvors), Gemmy imagines that it is because his life was taken away from him during the taking down of his story, and accordingly goes to collect the story back from George Abbott. He imagines the prospect of reality and his own being finally springing back to life in the writings:

He felt, as he followed the white ribbon that led to the settlement, that he had lost all weight in the world; his feet made so little impression in the dust that it was as if he had not passed, or had passed through into another being and no longer shared – with the powdery dust under his feet, the rocks, the trees ... where he paused a moment to rest and settling his palm against a tree trunk, he felt the sap streaming up from where the giant tree was rooted – the hold these things had on the earth. He shuffled. He tottered. His tongue felt brittle in his mouth as an insect's wing. He was going to claim back his life; to find the sheets of paper where all that had happened to him had been set down in the black blood that had so much power over his own: the events, things, people too, that sprung to life in them, Willet's boots, the ferrets, Mosey and The Irish. *Magicked* into squiggles, like the ghosts of insects under bark, they had drawn the last of his spirit from him. They were drawing him to his death (160, my emphasis).

For Gemmy, *being* is called forth or presented in the very writings about those beings; they are one and the same, inseparable. Unlike Plato's formulation where essence precedes being, for phenomenology, as for Aristotle, *being* precedes *essence*. This supposes that essence is in the *existents* and therefore fixed or closed. But is this an effective answer to Cartesianism? My approach poses two questions: How 'rationally' tenable is this alternative ontology? Does it quite stand up to the discriminatory and alienating settler ontology which Malouf seeks to challenge? It is precisely so as to find middle ground between the two schools of thought that I have resorted to Ayn Rand's Objectivist epistemology. Objectivism does share the Aristotelian, and hence the phenomenologist, claim of *being* preceding *essence*. But in Objectivism *essence* is not in the existents as such. Rather, any such *essence* is a product of a dialectical interchange between existents and the mind – without pretences to closure but only an assertion of open-endedness. Phenomenology is no answer to Cartesianism and it is no wonder that Cartesians, rightly keen on noticing signs of the mind's mediation, think it better to hold on to their 'illusion' than to subscribe to such a self-evidently absurd epistemology. It is not even simply because after we die we all turn into our constitutive elements, some of which may not be different from those of other existents such as crabs as Malouf argues (see Kavanagh, 1994:160). I think that mediated co-extensivity is the case at both the metaphysical and organic levels *while we live*, as an aspect of ontological reality.

And then - perhaps unwittingly this - Malouf extends this supposedly unmediated pre-Cartesian 'Aboriginal' ontology to the settlers in his notion of an unmediatedly co-extensive social self (mateship in the Australian outback). This shows particularly when Gemmy is visited by the equally suspicious Aborigines who come perhaps to get some

necessary information from him about these people who have not only displaced them but who also mean to have no communion with them. In this connection Ashcroft notes: "When Gemmy is visited by the aborigines the occurrence objectifies the sense that some of the settlers have that he is a link between the 'fenced' certainties of civilised life and the savage primitive, wild unknown. Because thought operates in terms of these binaries as the mode of self-identification, the Other cannot be viewed as anything but fearful and treacherous..." (1993:57). As such Jock's mates give him and his family considerable trouble (they kill his poultry, smear his barn with human shit and even try to kill Gemmy by drowning him) primarily on account of the latter's giving sanctuary to Gemmy who then serves to drive a wedge between them. In due course Jock McIvor becomes estranged from his mates and has to persuade himself to believe, in spite of his fast disintegrating self, "that there was [still] a reasonable centre to things" (94). Jock begins to look at himself in a totally new way in relation to his mates:

Was he changed? He saw now that he must be, since they were as they had always been and he could not agree with them.

When had it begun?

When they agreed to take Gemmy in. That was the simple answer, since it was from that moment that some area of *difference*, of suspicion, had opened between them...

*He had never been a thinker*, and he did not know how to become one, but he began to have strange thoughts....

It was as if he had seen the world till now, not through his own eyes, out of some *singular self*, but through the eyes of a fellow who was always in company, even when he was alone; *a sociable self, wrapped always in a communal warmth that protected it from dark matters and all the blinding light of things*, but also from the knowledge that there was a place out there where the *self might stand alone*. (96-7, my emphasis)

The debate about the difference between *individuation* and *individualism* comes in here. There are at least two interesting things here about Jock's Cartesian and pre-Cartesian senses of the 'self.' First there is the mistaken assumption that a 'sociable self' is necessarily protected from 'the blinding light of things' i.e. that it is uncritical, simply a 'herd' self where one does not distinguish between oneself and another self. This implies that the "I's" in such a sociable self are totally entangled with one another so that they are no longer individuated but just one indistinguishable stretch of being. In *An Imaginary Life* this sort of thinking is represented by Ovid's fear in his dream about hunting: "Ovid's dream takes place against a backdrop of the hunting party's slaughtering of deer, which leaves their camp looking like a butcher's shop, so that the spectre of death is never far off. Death is also present in Ovid's fear – since union with nature requires the abandonment of individuality, the sense of human separateness, it is in effect a kind of dying...." (Indyk,1993:14). Just as is the case with

Gemmy's sense of ingestion which we saw earlier, in this dream too Ovid imagines himself being drawn up into the wolf's belly – whole. In the passage above, what Jock (and on the other hand, Cartesians) imagine the 'singular self' to be constituted of is never explored. It is just assumed that there is something called the self out there. How that self arises, its nature, etc. is never an issue to the Cartesian. And that is exactly what constitutes the blind spot in Cartesianism because its adherents uncritically believe in an *innate self-consciousness* without furnishing us with 'rational' proof as to how the existence of such a *sui-generis*, genie-like, self-consciousness, arising *ex nihilo*, is possible. Metaphysically/ontologically speaking, therefore, one could say that it is precisely because this so-called "social self" (though not exactly in the way Malouf conceives it) is rejecting a part of itself that leads to the fabric of settler society coming apart at the seams. Indeed, the settlers actually do the very degenerate things that they suspect the Aborigines of – such as the senseless killing of Jock's fowl and smearing human shit on his barn. And since they are fairly recent arrivals in the colony one can argue that it is not the land that has caused them to degenerate. The crisis in their community has been caused by their own Cartesian minds.

On the other hand, Gemmy's inability to integrate easily and his own metaphysical crisis can be attributed to the discriminating metaphysics of the settlers which engenders such a crisis in the colonised (as JanMohamed observes in *Manichean Aesthetics* (1985)). In this regard, whatever rejection Gemmy experiences among the Aborigines, it does not result in a metaphysical crisis, strictly speaking. Why? Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra (1991) point out the way a certain Aboriginal ontology distinguishes itself from that of the settlers through the traditional artwork of its people which presents Aboriginal place as "semicircular and rectangular rounded open shapes" as opposed to "rectilinear closed shapes" for Whites with the latter "seeming not unlike the bars of a cage, symbols of regimented existence" (in Ashcroft et al. 1995: 415-16). In the same connection, Berndt and Berndt (1978) note: "[t]he dependence of man on land, on his natural environment and all within it, as at a different level, the social level, equivalent to his dependence on his fellow men – on his kin, variously defined, who are arranged conventionally in a network of reciprocally dependent relationships. It is in the utilization of these resources, both human and non-human, that the lineaments of living take shape" (225) It may be said that the Aboriginal worldview, while reasonably cautious about those perceived unfamiliar, does not have rigid 'fences'; it is more holistic/inclusive. Note in this regard that later in the novel, when Gemmy is visited by some Aborigines, he is presented as having been rejuvenated by the encounter; made whole again by it:



The air he breathed here did him no good, the food too. The ground he walked on jarred at every step. The land up there was his mother, the only one he had ever known. It belonged to him as he did to it; not by birth but by second birth, by gift, and not just for his lifetime either but for the whole of time, since it was for the whole of time that it existed, as he did too so long as he was one with it. This was what the blacks had brought him, in case he needed it (107-8).

The Aborigines fear that Gemmy's coming among "these [discriminating] ghostly white creatures" may have a disintegrating effect on him (108). Indeed, immediately after the encounter Gemmy feels whole again – until Andy Mckillop intrudes:

Then that bloke Andy appeared; came stumbling out of the scrub with his crooked jaw and restless, runaway eyes, and stood leaning on air, with the odd, empty look that anything, any madness might fill; hinting, demanding. The air around him was immediately infected, sucked into the emptiness he made just by stepping into it. Gemmy felt the good health that had been given him weaken. As if he had looked into a pool – that was how this Andy affected him – and seen an image of himself that was all unfocussed pieces that would not fit (108).

It is Gemmy's contact with one of the fenced-in "ghostly white creatures" (108), Andy, which starts the process of his disintegration over again – and with disastrous consequences.

### 3.4 Very morbid 'Cartesian' boundaries

In *Remembering Babylon* the settlers' preoccupation with rigid Cartesian boundaries results eventually in the failure of any meaningful syncretism - cultural or otherwise. Discussing the notion of boundary formations, Graham Huggan notes that the notion of boundaries has had, and continues to have, far-reaching theoretical and, one may add, practical, implications in various fields of life. Huggan quotes the anthropologist Shirley Ardener who writes from a gendered point of view arguing for a revision of the notion of boundary in societies where men control and dominate space. Ardener says: "Since the physical world is largely defined through social perceptions of it, societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges" (Huggan, 1994:14). In the case of Malouf's novel, to say 'invisible fences' is to miss the point by a very wide margin: there are real physical fences here set up with the sole purpose of keeping out the Aborigines not just 'metaphysically' but physically as well:

The country he [Gemmy] had broken out of was all unknown to them [the settlers] Even in full sunlight it was impenetrable dark.



To the north, beginning with the last *fenced* paddock, lay swamp country, bird-haunting marshes; then where the great spine of the Dividing Range rose in ridges and shoals of mist, rainforest broken by sluggish streams (7).

In keeping with the racist assumptions underlying European colonialism which designate the colonised as 'other' and social non-persons, in Malouf's novel the Aborigines are virtually 'fenced out' of the text except for a few token occasions such as when they take in the young Gemmy and later when the settlers are constructing a road and encounter them (85). The other occasions are shadowy and mystical ones such as when Gemmy and Mr Frazer are botanizing. To the settlers everything about the Aborigines, imagined or real, is regarded as strange, curious and threatening (28, 107, etc.). Their 'representative', the black white man Gemmy, is accordingly made to vicariously suffer all the indignities that would befall the Aborigines in the event of actual contact. In Bhabhan terms, the relationship between Gemmy and the settlers is characterised by stereotypes of degeneracy and a supposed mimicry on the one hand (even if there is some 'sly civility' to it on behalf of the Aborigines especially when he deliberately never divulges all the information about them – see 58), and mere *reactive* dispersal of colonial monocentric epistemology on the other:

So he hummed and harred and chewed his tobacco, and when he was forced to speak at last, put them off with answers which, by shifting a landmark and counting a few dead in with the living, set his people further north than they actually were and made them more numerous. He felt a heavy responsibility.

They were sly. They pretended to be pleased with him. He too was sly, but was less sure than he would have liked to be that he had told them nothing they might use. He leapt about, and with his heart heavy in him, joked a little, and they narrowed their eyes, all smiles. 'Good boy, Gemmy,' Ned Corcoran said, as if he could have brained him. (58)

It needs pointing out here that if there is one most effective tool that any oppressed group of people (women, minorities, natives, etc) has at its disposal it is, in the words of Homi Bhabha (1994) "sly civility". The effectiveness of sly civility lies in the fact that the oppressor, puffed up with his megalomania and bragging about how transparent the epistemes of those he oppresses are to him, rarely suspects something underhand in their dealings with him, until he suddenly realises that he has been deceived. And when that happens the oppressor concocts the stereotype of the oppressed as an inscrutable creature, and from then on the two contradictory stereotypes (at once wholly knowable and very inscrutable) co-exist in an uneasy relationship leading to the contradictions attendant on any situation of oppression. This makes any situation of oppression (racist, sexist, etc.) precarious and eventually fruitless, and, because freedom, fairness and equality seem to be the ultimate goals

of human beings, any thinking oppressed person will find ways to throw off the shackles of oppression – and will usually succeed in doing so.

It is particularly Gemmy's cultural mongrelisation in a society that believes in its purity and authenticity (the "It" syndrome) more than anything else that puts Gemmy at the receiving end of the settler's racial Darwinian and Cartesian 'dialectics.' However, in the novel Malouf still appeals to Gemmy's mongrelisation and Janet's passion for and "at-one-ment" with the mongrelised many-minded single-minded swarm of bees as seeds for the possibility of post-colonial ontological co-extensiveness/inter-subjectivity. But for the settlers it is the morbid Cartesian marking of *difference* rather than the search for *correspondence* that is preponderant. As Ashcroft formulates this racist and exclusionary colonial cast of mind: "the notion of 'race' is reduced to the egregious binarism of 'black' and 'white' ...the comfortable sense of identity which rests upon the certainty of difference ..." (57) This he aptly calls "imperialism's binarism which relentlessly antagonises the hybrid development of post-colonial society" (56). It is exactly this binarism that Gemmy undermines and, in this type of society, to his own peril – and to the peril of that society too. His hope of "cover[ing] the space" between the two groups (29) comes crashing to the ground as a result.

In this connection, as Pierce notes, having spent sixteen years among the Aborigines "Gemmy comes to represent atavistic fears [of the possibility of degenerating] that the community thinks to extirpate by assaulting and expelling him. He is elected as the convenient, punishable surrogate for the elusive, menacing, aborigine... Nascent Australian fear of the Aborigines, or worse, of becoming like them (as Gemmy is presumed to have done), is depicted as the expression of a 'horror' at the instability of the self in this alien place" (1994:190-1). In the novel Malouf makes his bigoted white characters appeal to the so-called notion of "It" to legitimate an "essential, collective Self" of the settler community in Australia: "Could you lose it? Not just language but *it. It*" (36). However, whatever features may be dominant in a group, if those features attain an ossified status it poses a danger not only to those so-called others with whom such a group comes into contact but to the group itself as it prevents its own meaningful adjustment where needs be. It is precisely this attitude that does not leave room for any meaningful cultural exchange between the settlers and the Aboriginal community whom they accordingly proceed to displace, dispossess and exclude rather than constructively engage with. This subject needs a fuller treatment and, in this connection, Stuart Hall's analysis of essentialism – with regard to the 'essential black' and any political action that can arise from it - in his essay 'New Ethnicities' (1989) might prove instructive when negotiating the uneasy road between the general and the particular:

[T]he end of the essential black subject is something which people are increasingly debating, but they may not have fully reckoned with its political consequences...that formulation ...threaten[s] the collapse of an entire political world. Alternatively, it may be greeted with extraordinary relief at the passing away of what at one time seemed to be a necessary fiction. Namely, either that all black people are good or indeed that all black people are *the same*. After all, it is one of the predicates of racism that 'you can't tell the difference because they all look the same'. This does not make it any easier to conceive of how a politics can be constructed which works with and through difference, which is able to build those forms of solidarity and identification which make common struggle and resistance possible but without suppressing the real heterogeneity of interests and identities, and which can effectively draw the political boundary lines without which political contestation is impossible, without fixing those boundaries for eternity. It entails the movement in black politics, from what Gramsci called the 'war of manoeuvre' to the 'war of position'—the struggle around positionalities. But the difficulty of conceptualising such a politics (and the temptation to slip into a sort of endlessly sliding discursive liberal-pluralism) does not absolve us of the task of developing such a politics. (In Ashcroft et al., 1995: 225).

Nothing has really changed. While before the strategy was both divide-and-rule as well as the essentialising of the so-called other, now it is both divide-and-rule but, being a supposed postcolonial era, this is accompanied by a global identity in the form of cultural "formlessness" which then becomes another form of "essentialising", but this time at a global level. But, interestingly, even in Pierce's seemingly well disposed analysis in the essay we alluded to earlier, what constitutes this self is never quite analysed because it is just assumed, in typical Cartesian fashion, that there is a pre-existing, unitary, *innate* self somewhere, the *It*. That *difference* itself is part and parcel of the *self* is conveniently or unknowingly overlooked.

### **3.5 Babylon or Jerusalem? The degenerate and alienating land and the 'magic' of maps and naming**

As I have already mentioned, Malouf prefaces his novel with two quotations: the first one from William Blake's poem *The Four Zoas*: 'Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not', the second one a poem by John Clare which deals with a sense of void. My concern in this section is the sense of emptiness, ambivalence and alienation (due to exile) traditionally associated with settlerism. According to Darwinian/Cartesian dialectics the land too is 'other' and so is there for the self to subdue. In this regard, we notice that the settlers' fear of Gemmy reflects European notions of race, place and degeneration according to the views of Fredrickson (1981 & 2002), Stephan (1985) and McClintock (1990) referred to in the second chapter. For instance, the young teacher, George Abbot, is sorely disenchanted with his stay in Australia:

The place worked its defeats in a low way. It was on every side oppressive, in all its forms clammy and insidiously sweet-lushness and quick bloom followed by dank putrescence, so that the soul was at one moment garishly excited, brittle, overwrought, and in the next slothfully laid low. Even the natives were of a dingy greyness. Thin-shanked, dusty, undignified, the life they lived was merely degenerate, so squalid and flea-laden that it inspired nothing but a kind of horror at what human nature might in its beginnings spring from, and in such a place so easily sink back to. (46)

Here Australia is seen by Abbot as the “primordial” space, a tough and degenerate place where stoicism is the only mode of endurance. Gemmy does not seem to have been helped much by the conditions in a place such as this. And the fear is: Has he degenerated - and Abbot fears such a fate befalling him too – or was he already a degenerate before coming here? Abbot’s ambivalence in his recognition of physical deterioration and human potential here is reminiscent of Marlow’s ambivalent feelings at the suspicion that he could have a distant kinship with the ‘degenerate’ people who make an uproar on the banks of the Congo in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*:

Part of the affront he felt as Mr Frazer agonized over the greasy rag of a man, who had never perhaps been more than a plain imbecile, was that in all the time he had been here, he had never once shown any feeling for *him*...But there had been something deeper, even then. It was the fear that Mr Frazer, for all his effusions, might be closer to them, to *him*, than he knew. Mr Frazer had accepted that from the start – he paid much tribute to the man. He, choked by the stench of the suggestion, by what he felt as its blackening touch upon him, had fought it, but come round at last. He felt humbled now; and most of all when Gemmy, recalling no doubt the persecutions he had used against him, shrank at his approach.

He would have liked to break through the silence that kept Gemmy apart from them, find what it was in him, beyond what was visible in the marks he bore, the one eyebrow that gave him the quizzical, wren-like look, that had harmed him one part and in another had not, so that he had at moments, and most of all when he appeared merely dumb and ox-like, a kind of grandeur that went painfully to the heart [...] Grandeur was the word that came to him, and he did not reject it. It did seem too large for what he saw at times in a man who had been kicked from one side of the world to another, not even knowing perhaps what part of it he was in, except that he was there in his own skin. That, the skin, is what had come down from the realm of noble sentiments. (163)

Such are the European’s fears of the yet unknown that he will concoct all sorts of theories to try and come to terms with it if only to tame it. Talking to Hellen Daniel about his novel *Conversations at Curlow Creek* (1976), Malouf himself likens Australia to an underworld or heart of darkness, to use Conrad’s metaphor:

When Adair sets out to look for Fergus he’s really looking for Fergus on Virgillia’s behalf, or so it would seem. Except we discover as we go through the book...there are a lot of times when Adair thinks he is acting for someone else but is in fact secretly acting for himself. I mean there are a series of self-preservative, not to say selfish motives about this behaviour that he’s not aware of, almost until the end of the book. *But I also wanted him ...to go into a kind of underworld and Australia offers itself in those terms and from an Irish point of view as a very suitable image of the underworld, which is a psychological underworld and a mythological underworld as well as a real one.* He has to go into that darkness and come back again. That was another of the patterns in the book that I was interested in: what he

discovers about himself and about the world when he does leave the world of light and go into the world of dark, which is, for him, quite a difficult thing. *Darkness and disorder, much as they attract him, also scare him. He feels that's where you will lose control and discover things about yourself that, once you know them, will prevent you forever living a life of order again.* (<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/AHR/archive/Issue-Sept-1996/internal.html>, my emphasis).

One cannot help noticing here Malouf's formulation of Marlow's sense of the consequences of his encounter with Kurtz in the Congo. In this same connection, as Ellen McIvor reminisces about their early days in Brisbane she notes a kind of degeneration among the colonists reflected in their over-indulgence in liquor:

...the air had a sweetish smell just this side of putrescence. The drunkenness they met in the streets had a desperation to it that made her wonder what there might be in the place, given so much space, that could madden the men and made the women so pinched and colourless... (68).

In this same vein Kean-Hong Teoh, looking at the relationship between identity and setting, argues that the effect of setting on character in the novel partly defines the conflicting identities between the settlers and the aborigines. Gemmy's changed appearance is attributed solely to the Australian setting in general and to his living among the degenerate aborigines specifically. The settlers' view of the later Gemmy in the novel is very misleading: "He was a man who had suffered a good deal of damage. There were scorched marks on his chest and arms where he had rolled into a camp fire, and signs that he had, at one time or another, taken a fair bit of knocking about. One of his eyebrows was missing" (7). His teeth were ground down to the stumps and blackened (5). One wonders whether some of these deformities had not been sustained while he was living rough on the streets of London and from all the beating he was getting from Willett. Indeed, when Gemmy is thrown overboard the ship he is not exactly the picture of health. Yet these settlers (and some critics) mistakenly attribute all these physical blemishes to the degenerating effects of life not only in Australia but among the Aborigines as well. Whatever the settler's imagined fear of degeneration, either due to place or contact with the indigenes, ironically many of the people who came to the colonies were themselves regarded as 'degenerates' back home in the metropolises:

In the 18th Century, the threat of a French style revolution loomed large in Britain. To prevent martyrdom of dissidents by public hangings, England exiled to America, then Australia, its political rebels.

Along with the exiles, England also exported the 'undesirables' to be the cheap labour force of the new colonies. The undesirables included homeless children, prostitutes, poachers, pick pockets, alcoholics, vagrants and ethnic minorities. There were no known murderers or sex offenders transported as such criminals were executed in England. <http://www.convictcreations.com/history/timeline.htm>

Malouf himself has quite a few characters who border on the suspicious, if not the degenerate altogether – the low-class Andy McKillop, the mysterious Hutchences (whose secret origins and eagerness to please those they join renders them a bit suspect) and the young Gemmy himself. Yet to the settlers at least, the case of Gemmy in this novel serves to re-state that grim warning of the figure of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

The overstatement of the Darwinian-based colonial argument that the colonies are inherently degenerate is an absurdity which breeds further absurdities in its wake, such as the frantic, almost morbid, desire in the settler to transfer wholesale whatever is going on in the home countries to the colonies. But it is the psychological and racially discriminatory assumptions underlying this much harped upon lack of attachment to the place in the settler that are of special interest in this section. The place is strange and 'obviously degenerate' - how do you approach it? To aid the process of coming to terms with the land, maps have to be drawn to ensure attachment through appropriation and ownership. Further, in the colonies the need for maps is coupled with the ever-present desperate eugenicist attempts to work the land and make it more like home. This is due to the metaphysical alienation compounded by the usual colonial fears of degeneration. In the colony the map and the bestowing of the 'home' name - what Malouf calls 'analogy' in the case of governor Bowen (154) - serve an important metaphysical purpose different from that in the metropole. In the colony the map is a 'legitimizing' instrument for violent appropriation. In this connection, Graham Huggan calls colonial mapmaking the "mimetic fallacy" through which an approximate, subjectively reconstituted and historically contingent model of the "real" world ... passes off as an accurate, objectively presented and universally applicable copy...[when in fact it] is especially designed to empower its makers" (Huggan, 1994:127). In Bhabhan psychoanalytic terms, we could say that the map, and more especially the home name, plays the role of the fetish to hide difference – it serves as a mental prop to 'fix' the different and degenerate 'Other' land (which stands in contradiction to the feminised supposedly 'bountiful Motherland' of the metropole). Notice in this connection that the 'aboriginal' peoples are presented as being both *in* the place and *of* the place. The coloniser in the colony, supposedly being essentially only *in* the place and not *of* it – J.M. Coetzee's Costello's pea-in-a-shell phenomenon - violently appropriates (ravishes/rapes) the land using the phallic sword. He then tries to overcome this fundamentally alienating (both physically and morally) and potentially degenerating experience through the mediation of the fetish (il)legally called title deed. He then tries to further hide difference by a wholesale importation of metropolitan

husbandry practices - the word has another phallic meaning, perhaps even more fitting in the colony (that is seen as needing regenerating) for its eugenicist connotations and possibilities. In Malouf's novel this is illustrated by Herbert Herston with his fifty acres of Cambridgeshire (157) and Governor Bowen's fantasizing about an Arcadia in Australia (154).

It is interesting to note that the settlement that Gemmy 'discovers' is said to be "twelve miles away from the nearest named place"(1). No account is taken of the real likelihood that all these places had names before the settlers dispossessed the indigenes of them. As Maryanne Dever notes, quoting Malouf's own observation in his other novel, *Harland's Half Acre*, the place the settlers call Killarney "had an equally poetic indigenous name that no one has bothered to record" (1994: 126). Similarly, Jock McIvor's wife's major sense of anxiety in relation to Australia is the supposed absence of ghosts:

She had known such occasions, often, often. The children saw them in her and kept clear. It was the fearful loneliness of the place that most affected her - the absence of ghosts. Till they arrived no other lives had been lived here. She had not understood, till she came to a place where it was lacking, the extent to which her sense of the world had to do with the presence of those who had been there before, leaving signs of their breath - a threshold worn with the coming and going of feet... (100)

But one is bound to ask: can we really say that there were no supposed ghosts in Australia before the settlers went there or it is simply a question of whose ghosts? These are the notions of the same old empty virgin lands (*terra nullius*), ready for appropriation, of the blank map tradition. In this connection, as Huggan notes: "In the scramble for Africa and other overseas colonies, the map realized its potential as a formidable political weapon. In fostering the notion of a socially empty space, the blank map was fully exploited by the colonizers of the new, 'virgin' lands; blank maps proved equally valuable to the commercial and geopolitical agents of imperialism in countries such as Africa and India, which, although densely populated, could be impersonally refashioned for the purposes of political control and economic gain" (9). It is not surprising that in keeping with colonial megalomania in *Remembering Babylon* the mission of the coloniser is "to make this place [Australia] part of the world's garden"(121). It is surprising that even modern day critics like the German Jorg Heinke still talk of vast empty spaces in Australia where *nobody* lived. One is bound to ask: Is to be Aboriginal the same as to be nobody? Were there no Aborigines living there?

But often imperialism's making the colony a part of the world's garden is riddled with all sorts of contradictions. Huggan quotes JB Harley who remarks, "the graphic nature of the map gave its imperial users an arbitrary power that was easily divorced from the social responsibilities and consequences of its exercise. The world could be carved up on paper'

(1994:9). Perhaps the current American government administration's utter disregard for the global environment as seen in its trashing of the Kyoto Protocol is one clear example of a 'Cartesian' view of the world i.e. arbitrary power divorced from social responsibilities (see Sardar and Davies 2002: 80-81). And apparently for political reasons, reminiscent of the Cold War, Russia too has simply decided to suspend the Kyoto Protocol perhaps fearing unfair advantage from the US (announcement on 50/50, SABC, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2003 ). The possibility that the mass production of other goods may have a negative effect on global cosmic balance is not an issue to the reckless imperialist whose claim to some of the world's resources is highly questionable. On the contrary, though clothed in mysticism, in the novel the Aborigines are said to have an idea of the need for such cosmic balance. This is shown when, as Gemmy and Mr Frazer are botanising, Gemmy is very careful in his dealings to avoid upsetting the balance:

He was sensitive in his dealing between name and spirit. It was out of a kind of reverence, as well as concern for the danger he might put them in, that he concealed from Mr Frazer, who he knew would not notice, a good deal of what he himself could see. Things forbidden them to touch, since they were in the care of the men whose land they were crossing; others that only women could approach; others again that were a source of more power than he could control. They could have nothing to do with these things without creating a disturbance in the world that would do him, and Mr Frazer, and others too perhaps, irreparable injury (60-61).

What the Aborigines knew - supposedly mystically, although they may have noticed such imbalances from actual experience with their environment - we all know scientifically through studies of the stability or instability of eco-systems.

In *Remembering Babylon* the settlers uncertain claim to possession in the colony is reflected in the frantic setting up of boundaries/fences, the construction of maps and title deeds and then enshrining these in the 'Law' as property 'rights', "empowered with the authority of the Law" (8). However, appealing to the map to maintain a hold on one's reality has its own problems. It is difficult to believe in the map as a conceptual model of reality. Huggan quotes Phillip Muehrke, who says: "a map-like conception of reality is inherently suspect; it may well have the effect of alienating us from our environment, rather than uniting us with it" (1994: 4). The fact that the imposed names have no organic relationship to the places they designate may itself be a source of schizophrenia. Notice for instance that in spite of Governor Bowen's persistent analogising, the schism between the places he refers to and the place he lives in perhaps contributes to his sense of otherworldliness:

Sir George's commission here is to call into existence a new self-governing state; in a land, territory rather, about the size of France and all the Germanies combined, wild, cut in two by the southern tropic, and largely, as yet, *unpeopled*. He is alternately intoxicated by the



largeness of the undertaking and depressed that in being set down, at more than forty, at the ends of the earth, he may drop from sight. (153)

Governor Bowen is not only anxious about degenerating in this place but also about being forgotten by those at the metropole. He feels alienated. As such he both writes home regularly and devises a mental habit of drugging himself with analogies between Australia and places in the 'civilised' world:

To keep his name before the Lords in Westminster he writes to one or another of them almost daily, describing in grandiloquent terms, all classical allusion and analogy, the names he has bestowed on a nameless part of the empire, the town he has founded, the laws laid down. He sees himself as a kind of imperial demiurge, out of mere rocks and air creating spaces where history may now occur-at once the Hesiod of the place, its Solon, and its antipodean Pericles...

Queensland, one has to say, was not Sir George's first choice, but he is determined to make the most of it. He refuses to be put off by its failure at times to come up to the mark. His own mind knows no bounds. He is monstrously ambitious. What he fears is that if he is too successful here he will be taken for granted and overlooked; but there are occasions when he fears even more that he may be *exposed*, since the secret that gnaws his soul, child as he is of a Donegal rectory, is that he is an imposter.... (154).

All this creates in him a sort of schizophrenia since he imagines himself as being not of the place, but just in it. His *real* place, so he thinks, is Europe whose names and practices he is frantically trying to import wholesale to Australia. His mind gets so dissociated from the place that he becomes metaphysically otherworldly: "Sir George ... exudes an air of magnificent unreality that includes everything he looks upon. He has got close enough to feel its disintegrating effect in every part of him" (153-55). In this vein, John Vernon notes that the map itself may very well be a source of schizophrenia with its encouragement of a geocentric point of view in which distance intervenes between the world and its perceiver: "At its most extreme, the attitude fostered by the map induces a kind of *schizophrenia* by persuading its user to believe that the world can be transformed into an object. The conceptual model of reality provided by the map may thus contribute to the rigidly dualistic philosophy that has enabled '[Western] civilization to confirm its absolute space of reasonableness, cleanliness, freedom and wealth, precisely by creating equally absolute but sealed off spaces of madness, dirt, slavery and poverty'" (in Huggan, 1994:5, my emphasis).

The Aboriginal oral and mental claim to the land, even if shaped by specific cultural attitudes as well, may be even more concretely established than the settler's. Her/his mental map is no less complex. As Huggan notes: "mental maps are not necessarily simple; indeed they may be highly complex, particularly in societies reliant on direct visual experience rather than on mediated graphic information" (1994: 16). Indeed, if spoken words are seen as reflective of existents rather than as signs or symbols of existents (as blurring the

signifier/signified dichotomy) and therefore co-extensive with the signifieds, then the written word of the imperial map is at a third remove from the signifieds and therefore even more inauthentic/inferior semiotically speaking. As such its graphically mediated claim upon the concrete in the form of a map is even more tenuous/elusive. Therefore, in the case of maps and possession, surely a 'sung' land makes aboriginal claim to the land less contestable than the settlers'. In an essay titled "Tiwi Cosmology" Michael Sims observes as follows regarding the Tiwi, an Aboriginal tribe north of Darwin: "The relationship between the land and the people is connected with The Dreaming. The land is sacred, for it is part of the self of the Tiwi" (in Hiatt's *Some Australian Aboriginal Concepts*, 1978:167). In the same connection Ronald and Catherine Berndt observe the following about the Gunwinggu Aborigines of north Australia: "A strong spiritual association between man and his natural environment binds him intimately to the land, his own land, his 'home' (even though he is resident elsewhere), his place of origin if not of birth. This attitude is basic to Gunwinggu thought, and has not decreased in importance [...] Traditionally, estate land was not transferable. It was held in trust collectively by its members, in a time perspective that looked backward indefinitely into the past and forward into the future"(1970:213-14). All this then renders colonial dispossession all the more violently absurd. The irony though is that, to the settlers in *Remembering Babylon*, it is the Aborigines instead who are seen by them as encroaching on their map and not the other way round:

Out here the very ground under their feet was strange. It had never been ploughed. You had to learn all over again how to deal with the weather: drenching downpours when in moments all the topsoil you had exposed went liquid and all the dry little creek-beds in the vicinity ran wild; ...And all round, before and behind, worse than weather and the deepest night, natives, tribes of wandering myalls who, in their traipsing this way and that all over the map were encroaching on boundaries that could be insisted on by daylight - a good shotgun saw to that - but in the dark hours, when you no longer stood there as a living marker with all the glow of the whiteman's authority about you, reverted to being a creek-bed or ridge of granite like any other, and gave no indication that six hundred miles away, in the Lands Office in Brisbane, this bit of country had a name set against it on a numbered document, and a line drawn that was empowered with all the authority of the Law. (8)

This whole exposition begs the questions: whose names, whose authority and whose Law?

In an essay referred to earlier, "Whether this is Jerusalem or Babylon we know not", Elaine Lindsay and John Murray approach the crucial question of attachment to the land and reconciliation with the Aborigines from the Jungian theory of the self and its shadow: "Gemmy Fairley's irruption into the fragile world of a mid nineteenth century European settlement brings its people to face what Jung calls the 'shadow', symbolizing our 'other

side', our 'dark brother', who is an invisible but inseparable part of our own psychic totality" (1997:94). And, later in the same essay:

The final image of the continent brings together darkness and light, shadow and fire, the elements constantly associated with Gemmy. Remembering Gemmy and all he stands for puts the continent 'in touch with its other life' in which the conscious and unconscious, the light and the shadow, combine. Acceptance of the Darkness of the past and the present, acceptance of Gemmy, and of 'the power, all unconscious in [us], of ...[our] need to draw him into [our] lives (p99), and recognition of the knowledge and endurance of Aborigines, will allow Australians as a people to attain the wholeness needed to make their land Jerusalem, a place of peace and hope, rather than Babylon, a place of division and despair. (1997:102)

As I point out in the second chapter, I personally do not accept this psychoanalytic theory as it consigns the so-called 'other' to the same old negative position. It does not shed the dualistic approach to the self and how that self stands in relation to an other self. The so-called other remains an 'other' towards whom the self must just try to be benevolent. The so-called other does not achieve, or rather, does not reclaim, its ontological selfhood, which it had prior to contact, or reunion. In such a conception, even the land itself is made to remain negative, and therefore potentially still alienating.

### 3.6 'Cartesianism' and patriarchy in the novel.

Feminist theorists and activists make a clear distinction between sex and gender. While sex is acknowledged to be biologically determined, gender is seen as socially constructed, and patriarchy is the dominant process through which this construction takes place. As such feminist theory seeks to understand this process while feminist activism which follows from the theories seeks to put to an end this system (Humm, 1989: 84-5). The chauvinistic and possibly eugenicist connotations inherent in the English farming terminology such as "land husbandry", "animal husbandry", etc. as practiced in the colonies (in this case by people like Governor Bowen and Herbert Herston, and which Mr Frazer condemns throughout most of chapter 14 are reflective of this connection between women, land and nature. In 'Cartesian' patriarchal metaphysics of *Remembering Babylon* settler women are very close to the Aborigines (who are themselves very close to animals). In the Jewish cosmogonic myth in Genesis, women are not selves endowed with agency in themselves. They are 'cloned' from men and they are meant to be mere helpers, and that too very much in the order of the Hegelian slave. Linking the notion of the map as claim to the land to her discussion of the position of women in a patriarchal society, Helene Cixous argues that the map serves as a dual paradigm: "for the phallogocentric discourse that inscribes woman as 'other,' and for the rationalistic discourse that inscribes the land as 'other.' Predicated on the principle of the

binary opposition, these two mutually supportive discursive systems legitimise the subservience of woman as a 'logical' counterpart to the conquest of nature: woman, like the land, becomes an enslaved object of male representation" (Huggan, 1994:12).

In *Remembering Babylon* patriarchy is interrogated within the context of the gender-based struggle between Lachlan and Janet which runs throughout the novel. Right from the time of the first contact between Gemmy and the McIvor children, Janet and Lachlan are set against each other. Lachlan imposes himself on the McIvor girls on two grounds: first, that of sex, and second, among people who believe the colonies are degenerate, he employs his superior airs about having recently come from the supposedly regenerate metropole. Right at the opening of the novel we meet Lachlan forcing the McIvor girls to take part in a wolf-hunting game of his own devising set in an imaginary 'snowy' forest in Russia. He is the agent, the subject, the girls are under his command, mere objects: "They had no experience of snow, and wolves did not interest them" (1). Even though they see Gemmy simultaneously (after the dog's strange behaviour having scented him) Lachlan quickly claims all the credit for the 'find' - to Janet's intense dislike. Lachlan's claim is grounded in the fact that he plays the 'manly' role expected of him when he captures Gemmy in the midst of much confusion, which the two sexes are seen to experience and recover from very differently: "The two girls stood spellbound. They had given a gasp, one sharp intake of breath, then forgotten to breathe out. The boy too was struck but had begun to recover. Though he was very pale about the mouth, he did what his manhood required him to do. Holding fast to the stick, he stepped resolutely in front"( 2). And as they lead Gemmy to the settlement Lachlan "order[s] his cousins to keep back, and in the glow of his new-found mastery they let themselves be led" (4). [Not even the fact that Janet is half a head taller and that she can sometimes mock [Lachlan] to tears (51) is of much help in her drive to gain even a semblance of equality with him]. And when breaking the news to the fast-growing group of settlers who have come to see Gemmy, Lachlan monopolises the show, claiming for himself the credit. When Janet protests against this injustice and tries to provide a more balanced version of events - which in fact includes the role of the small dog - "no one seem[s] interested in her version"(6). This confirms the already entrenched masculine prejudices among the general populace - something for which Janet never forgives Lachlan and the male species. To her Lachlan becomes an embodiment of male chauvinism: "[Janet] resented bitterly the provision his being a boy had made for him to exert himself and act. He had no need to fret or bother himself; only to be patient and let himself grow and fill out the lines of what had been laid up for him [...]. The vision of what lay before him would square his shoulders, deepen his voice,

give him room" (52). In due course, though, she has her temporary revenge on him. This happens when some disgruntled members among the settler community decide to abduct and possibly kill Gemmy in the night. This is a 'manly' event she a woman is a bold first-hand witness to while Lachlan the man is fast asleep: " 'I am the one who is seeing all this, she thought [...] Me, not Lachlan' [...] Not for a moment in all this did she think of danger" (114).

This troubled gendered relationship is never fully resolved until fifty years later when Lachlan as a disgraced politician seeks contact with Janet again (171-2). She has partly contributed to Lachlan's disgrace because her communication with the German beekeeper priest during the war mistakenly leads the authorities to become suspicious of Lachlan as colluding with the enemy. While she is cleared, Lachlan is not, for reasons of political vendetta (166-7). The most interesting aspect of the reconciliation between the two archrivals is that, Lachlan having been politically disgraced and having lost his wife and child, they fully reconcile in adversity. Somewhat like Lurie in Coetzee's *Disgrace* disgrace and difficult life experiences make Lachlan begin to see himself in "others" and "others" in himself.

There is in the novel a further very close affinity between the land, animals/nature and Gemmy on the one hand, and women/children (or the so-called women's/children's behaviour) on the other. As Cixous notes above, all these entities are regarded as 'other' by the Cartesian 'dialectic' but with a patriarchal bent. Amanda Nettelbeck also notes that studies like Kay Schaffer's *Women and the Bush* "have familiarised the idea that, in the making of Australia, the feminine and Aboriginal took the place of the other in a process of defining as self a particularly masculine and anglocentric national image" (1994:103). In her essay, 'Maidens, maps and mines: King Solomon's Mines and the reinvention of patriarchy in colonial South Africa', Anne McLintock (1991) explores how the colonialist's patriarchy not only feminises women but also how it feminises and 'infantilizes' the colonised peoples, both their men and women. Gemmy's manner of carrying himself, his language, etc. in typical Lacanian fashion are seen to be closer to those of women and children and are accordingly referred to as such. Gemmy does not behave like a 'typical' settler male does. Even young Lachlan outdoes him on this count. Gemmy is submissive, delights in tagging along, is ready always if necessary to appease, does not tell raw jokes as do the settler boys but plaits grass and makes dillybags, and befriends the McIvor girls and plays with them, playing their doll when they want someone to dress up (32). In addition the McIvor girls are said to be "disgusted by [his] display of unmanliness" (94). Gemmy, at almost thirty, is still a child. When the McIvor children meet him he shakes off the dog "with a childish whimper" (4). He

has a childish eagerness to provide Mr Frazer with whatever it was he wanted to hear" (15). Furthermore Countless times we see Gemmy on all fours, like an animal (22,30, etc.).

And when one considers the fact that to them Gemmy represents the absent Aborigines, one notices that the settlers view the Aborigines too as 'effeminate' and childish, unable to resist foreign occupation. This sort of colonial mindset on the part of the settlers spreads the historically false notion that the colonised are naturally submissive and accept colonialism without putting up a fight. This is hardly the picture of the rebellious and hardy Aborigine and the bushranger in Australian history. Indeed, in this regard, the settlers in Malouf's novel contradict themselves (unintentionally I think), about the supposed 'effeminacy' of the Aborigines. This is when in the heat of the debate about whether Gemmy should stay or not, those who oppose make reference to the rumour of a massacre of nineteen settlers by Aboriginal guerrillas at a settlement just north of theirs:

Of course it was not him you were scared of. He was harmless, or so they said, and so you preferred to believe it. It was the thought that next time it might not be him. That when you started and looked up, expecting the silly smile, what would hit you would be the edge of an axe. He made real what till now had been no more than the fearful shape of rumour, though lately had name and number to it: Comet River, nineteen souls (38).

Whether this report is true or a figment of the settlers' imaginations, it still points to the very real possibility of resistance. And the Australian history of Aboriginal/Bushranger alliances bears this out as we have already seen (see <http://www.convictcreations.com/history/pelmulwy.htm>).

In any case, charges of 'effeminacy' could very well be 'technically' unfounded, irrespective of whom they are applied to - male or female. There is sufficient reason to reject the Cartesian rigid division between men and women. First, according to the theoretical postulates of this study, the very psycho-epistemological process underpinning our construction of the self dictates that other people - be they men or women - are part and parcel of our cognitive make up. Second, speaking in gendered terms, as we have already noted above, while sex is biologically determined, maleness and femaleness could be said to be socially determined. Even psychically speaking, Carl Jung observes that there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man - the animus and anima concepts: "No man is so entirely masculine that he has nothing feminine in him. The fact is, rather, that very masculine men have - carefully guarded and hidden - a very soft emotional life, often incorrectly described as 'feminine.' A man counts it a virtue to repress his feminine traits as much as possible, just as a woman, at least until recently, considered it unbecoming to be 'mannish'. The repression of feminine traits and inclinations naturally causes these contrasexual demands

to accumulate in the unconscious....” (Jung, 1959: 158ff). It could be simply that the proportions of these elements determine one’s conception of oneself as predominantly ‘male’ or ‘female’ irrespective of your sex. In a sense we are all quite androgynous, so to say, because after all it is society that has arbitrarily designated some traits “feminine” and others “masculine”. In this connection Chinua Achebe’s attempt at creating an androgynous character in Beatrice (who is both firm and tender) in *Anthills of The Savannah* is one explicit example of this ontological phenomenon. And at the end of that novel, the giving of a ‘male’ name to a female child is also meant to be indicative of this lack of rigid gendered boundaries.

But, as Jung notes, the ‘Cartesian’ fiercely represses whatever traces there might be of the anima in him and thus becomes outwardly stony - emotionally starved. Take note for another instance that as Ellen McIvor is reminiscing on their life in Scotland with her brothers working in the mines, she takes note of how that kind of life - and one may add, any grossly patriarchal society - turns male children from ‘tender’ beings to tough, aggressive, belligerent and psychopathic beings. This is told from Janet’s point of view:

Her mother as a girl had kept house for them all, washed their shirts, darned their socks, listened to their growls and grumbles, but she hated the pit life and was determined that when she found a man of her own he would never be a miner. She had watched them grow up, each one, from eager, affectionate little lads into coarse fellows who pushed down and extinguished everything fine in them. On Saturday nights they were no better than any other of the Airdrie men. They got into fights, came home bruised but elated, then lay stupefied (48-49).

There is something almost psychopathic involved in this account. It is also perhaps telling, furthermore, that the settlers in *Remembering Babylon* subscribe to the Nietzschean (1909) interpretation of tragedy as ennobling and that one must go so far as to inflict pain even to bring it about. Abbot for instance thinks that it is the “Dark Continent” – Africa (44) - which can better bring out the man in him than Australia. After Gemmy has taken back the papers on which he thinks his life was recorded Abbot warily notices that Australia has not ennobled Gemmy at all:

He regarded Gemmy very differently now from when he had sat at the table there, an unwilling schoolboy, and taken down the ‘facts’ Mr Frazer dictated. Gemmy had repelled him then. Something in the muddiness of his eye, the meaty stench he gave off, a filth, ingrained, ineradicable perhaps – most of all in his cringing eagerness to please, had challenged his belief that suffering, even of the most degrading sort, would bring out the best in man, and that the spectacle of it must inspire noble sentiments. Well, no noble sentiments had come to him when he was faced with Gemmy. If what had survived in this brutish specimen was, as Mr Frazer appeared to believe, naked essential humanity, then it was too little. He held his nose. He wanted no part of it. What a fastidious little theorist he had been. Was youth an excuse? Unhappiness? He no longer thought so. (162-3)



Similarly, later in the text and in the colonial context, as Lachlan is growing up, his peers and his schoolmaster try to encourage him to shed off his 'boyish' attachment to Gemmy by appealing to his sense of being a man:

It was one of the conditions of his move into older group that Gemmy could not appear, and he had, gently at first, then coldly, to discourage him. He was sorry for it. But it was absurd to have Gemmy always tugging at his heels, and he blushed now to recall a time when he had regarded it as a sign of his power. How puffed up he had been with his own importance!....

His enlightenment had begun with the humiliation the schoolmaster had heaped upon him, and though he did not thank the man for it, he saw now that having set his face in the direction of manhood, he could not turn back. *What he distrusted in himself was a tendency, a girlish one he thought, to let his affections rule. It was a weakness he was determined to stamp out...* (144, my emphasis)

Skewed patriarchal socialization, speaking generally, creates whining women on the one hand and psychopathic men on the other, leading to a gendered polarisation where neither group understands the other in this respect as in so many others. For instance, in the novel, when later the disgraced Lachlan pays Janet a series of visits, as the Sisters of Iona meditate on the war-ravaged world which they tried to set themselves apart from, they are wary of Lachlan as he seems to represent to them the assumptions associated with male dominance ironically and tragically shown clearly in the vicious political battle that earned Lachlan his disgrace:

[T]hey rather enjoyed the hint, beyond his obvious plain speaking, of something not quite trustworthy in him. It confirmed them in their distrust of the world, especially the active, overbearing male part of it. Some of them rushed about to see that the banisters were without dust, rubbed their elbows on window glass, peered at the tiles in the entry hall for heel-marks and scratches, as if he were here as an inspector of their devotion to the domestic virtues of, to expose them as housewives largely failed. (167)

It is worth noting that Janet, like Achebe's Beatrice in *Anthills of the Savannah*, is very much of an androgynous character. While Janet may be seen as an escapist who by joining the convent has run away from the battle against patriarchy, she is a different sort of woman. As the gendered struggle for attention and influence between Janet and Lachlan rages in the earlier part of the novel Janet does her best to mix traits assumed to belong exclusively to either of the two sexes. She learns to scoff at feelings even as she is furious about, almost envious of, the benefits that Lachlan has just by virtue of being a boy: "[S] he was a practical child and sceptical of mere feelings. They blazed up a moment then died and left you stranded, barefoot, in the grass. She did not put too much store by them, but they were important enough, these moments, for her to keep them to herself" (54). Even her later vocation as a beekeeper is traditionally on the other side of the gender divide. Men are to her merely megalomaniac imposters. When she writes to Lachlan to intervene on her behalf she



does so very scathingly, calling the government authorities “more than usually stupid” (170).

A little later Malouf further notes with respect to her:

It seemed absurd, she wrote, that the business of nations [...] should get in the way of work that had only to do with *nature*; which knew nothing, cared nothing either, for the little laws of men – even statesmen [...] All this in a hasty, rather untidy hand, and all of it evocative enough of what he had known of her over the years to make him smile at the bossiness, the mixture of appeal to his power and large-handed dismissal of its sphere. (171)

Ultimately, I tend to think that as far as gender construction is concerned, what are out there are socially constructed values and tendencies and it is the gendered socialisation process and particularly individual amenability to that process, that determines what one becomes in life. Simone de Beauvoir once said that “one is not born woman, one becomes one.”

### 3.7 Cartesianism, Lacan and Language

There is a very close connection between language and civilisation in the text, a connection whose sheer baselessness is enough to cast doubt on the seriousness of some Eurocentric language theorists. Memmi (1991: 134) succinctly puts colonial prejudice with regard to language as follows: “It is pointed out to him/[her] [i.e. the colonized] that [her/his] language[’s] vocabulary is limited, its syntax bastardised. It would be comical to hear a course in higher mathematics or philosophy in it.”

In this connection, in an essay in which he compares Malouf’s novels *An Imaginary Life* and *Remembering Babylon*, Bill Ashcroft dwells at length on Gemmy’s supposed degeneration to a child-like position in relation to imperial language. As we have noted, Anne McCintock explores how late nineteenth and twentieth century scientific racism not only justified class and gender superiority in natural terms, but also how it feminised and turned into infants the colonised peoples of all ages. In this regard, notice that as Gemmy is struggling to find words with which to communicate with the settlers, from the settlers’ point of view, it is suggested that in aboriginal ontology word (signifier) and thing (signified) are conflated; one is just the same as the other without the mediation of mental abstraction. As Gemmy is trying to become integrated into the settler community the latter’s language holds a special fascination for him, from a supposed pre-oedipal/Cartesian point of view:

*It was as if the language these people spoke was an atmosphere they moved in. Just being in their proximity gave him access to it. He breathed it up out of the air between them, snatched the words like buttons off their shirts, or hairs out of their beards. ‘B-beard’ he yelled – again, it was with him now, and would not go away – ‘foot’, holding one up and dancing awkwardly on the other; then, with appeal to what he knew was the comic side of things, ‘arse’, and slapped his meagre buttocks. (12-13, my emphasis)*

In this regard Bill Ashcroft points out the connection between the child who lives among animals in *An Imaginary Life* and Gemmy (who lives among the supposed “animal-like” Aborigines) in *Remembering Babylon*, a comparison in which in the latter novel the “lost child’ moves from the dimensionless silence beyond language into the realm of imperial discourse” (1993: 51). Here Gemmy is seen as the speechless child of *An Imaginary Life* returning into human society. Nothing can be more arrogant than that with regard to matters of language. What is supposed to be meant by “beyond language?” Whose language? But that is the line of thinking Malouf’s settlers take in the text. Aboriginal language is at best presented as “silence” –“dumbness” (5), “muteness” (7) and at worst, as “quacks”, “whines”, “blackfeller’s lingo” (3,91); “grunts”, “gabbles”, “whimpering sounds”(11), “clucking sounds” (27) etc. George Abbot, on the other hand, reads French in Australia and even though he has no opportunity of practising it here, he has to keep up his proficiency in the tongue as it assures him of an attachment to civilisation (74).

Further, because of Cartesian rigid metaphysical divisions, non-European languages are presented to be as pre-oedipal as their owners and therefore pre-modern and inferior. As we have pointed out above, Gemmy literally senses an unmediated co-extensive relationship between words and the things they are meant to designate. A number of scholars have made comments on this ‘interesting’ phenomenon. Ashcroft comments that: “This demonstrates something of the energy of language in oral society, in which language does not represent reality but actually embodies its energy [...] The oral culture which colonialism so often comes into contact with is a world beyond representation, a world of enunciation rather than the enunciated, beyond the will to truth...” (55). In the same vein, elsewhere when he discusses Gemmy’s later metaphysical crisis at the Hutchences, Ashcroft observes, “[f]or Gemmy [...], language does not represent but embodies reality and so when he looks at the sheets of writing on which the earnest historians have recorded his life, they appear to have absorbed his life into them, and he begins to plot how to steal his life back” (1994:58). In the same connection, outside of the Maloufian discourse, a typical Cartesian oral theorist Walter Ong, says that “ non-literate people tend to conceive of ‘reality’ in less abstract, essentialising terms than do literates, while it is literacy that encourages the development of modern unified subjectivity [...] By separating the knower from the known, writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before not only to the external objective world quite distinct from itself but also to the interior self against whom the objective world is set” (1982:87). Again in *Voicing the Text*, Duncan Brown (1998:20-21) interrogating the supposed superiority of the written over the oral mentions another scholar’s

observation about the Tswana who believed that written words could cure wounds and thus used paper as bandages, etc. etc. European privileging of writing over orality so as to justify superiority and prolong subjugation is a well-known colonial ploy as seen in cases of deliberate under-education of certain groups of people – (the introduction of ‘Bantu’ education by apartheid South Africa is an example of this.) And in the case of Ong, the major problem here is that he is conducting his studies from a literate platform which therefore does not give him enough window into what illiterate orality precisely is like. But also note that Ong, in typical Cartesian fashion, understands the self as distinct from and set against the objective world.

In the same vein Ivor Indyk too points out with regard to *An Imaginary Life* Malouf’s idea of the power of the unmediated sense of language: “With its assumption of an immediate relationship between language and reality, without the mediation of social usage or convention, this view of language is at one with the primitivist stance Malouf takes in *An Imaginary Life*. As with imagination, the power exhibited by language is essentially a procreative power – in *Harland’s Half Acre* it is actually presented as the medium through which the son believes he has been brought into existence by his father” (1993:28). And later Indyk points out the reason behind Malouf’s stance on language: “The imagination, in its creative aspiration, has lost contact with nature. Human beings have become separated from the natural world and must find their way back again, presumably through imaginative apprehension, directed downward towards the source” (29). In an essay titled “The Magic of Language in the Novels of Patrick White and David Malouf” Carmen Concilio (1999) too points to this problem of the relationship between language and ‘reality’ and Malouf’s ‘interesting’ phenomenological solution to it. But this much harped-upon power of language – what in an essay on Malouf Leigh and Gilbert call the “eastern” concept of the *ki* or *chi* ( see Leigh and Gilbert, 1994: 96) may not be interpreted literally by anybody except the possibly superstitious. It is not necessarily that words *embody* the supposed energy. Rather it is a recognition of the possibility of those uttered words being *acted upon* in one way or another either by the utterer, God or ‘spirits’ or by someone else who has heard them being uttered.

However, what precisely can be said to be the rational nature of ‘any’ language in real terms? I mention in the first and second chapters on Objectivist epistemology’s approach with regard to the isolation/integration process of logical analysis with reference to an instance of a pre-Cartesian epistemology/ontology. Linguistically speaking, according to Rand’s Objectivism - which I think is a more credible way of looking at things - except perhaps for the phenomenon of onomatopoeia, words are by their very nature in and of

themselves perceptual *symbols* of concepts (Rand, 1990a:163). As such language is necessarily *symbolic*. A spoken word is at a third remove from the concrete or group of concretes that occasioned its construction in the sense that existents must exist first, then the *mind* has to interact with existents by way of abstraction by isolating differences and similarities and integrate these into a perceptual concept (words being either auditory or visual as in writing). As such, words in all languages, being products of the process of mental abstraction, are necessarily symbolic. But I need to make something clear about what I would understand as meant by “symbolic” in the context of the Objectivist ontology that I am postulating in this study. To be symbolic in this case does not mean to be an arbitrary signifier but to be a signifier arising from the interchange between the mind and the existents with which that mind interacts. And as I have postulated, there is no reason to rule out a physical though mediated connection between the symbol or signifier and the signified or existent, and this rules out extreme arbitrariness of rationalists.

In this light, to get back to the earlier question of the power of language, the supposed arbitrariness of the relationship between words (signifier) and the things (signified) they designate seems extremely exaggerated and is itself a matter of debate. How sure can we really be that there has never been any direct ‘organic’ relationship between the two? Words themselves can’t exist *ex nihilo*. They must have an ‘organic’ relation to something existing external and prior to them. The question is: what exactly happens in the process of ‘coining’ words? What if at our (collective) unconscious level there is no such arbitrary relation between the signifier and the signified? It may very well be the case that we are projecting our own laziness and stupidity onto language. In this regard, in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1985) Edward Said makes a sustained analysis of Giambattista Vico’s prodigious philological research into the etymology of words:

In language, Vico seems to have thought, either an abstract or a concrete word signifies (*a*) an indefinite meaning first, (*b*) thereafter, as one demands definition, a conditional meaning, and (*c*) a greater or lesser distance from a main body of significance and from particular experience. The latter signification (*c*) needs some explanation. ...Vico tried to account for the first appearance of language in history....Words for him were unimaginable as simply emanations from the lips of some primitive being. Every word carries - indeed, is - a system of relationships to other words [which involves] the name and a character (the concrete and the abstract) [having] the same meaning. (Said, 1985: 350-51)

If we try to approach the issue from an objectivist epistemology, a view of language that denies the arbitrary (though mediated) relation between the signifier and the signified will not necessarily take us back to a strictly structuralist view of language at all. It seems post-structuralism will always obtain. Why? Auditorily speaking, outside of onomatopoeia, there

are no words that do not belong to the symbolic order. Yet even onomatopoeic words, though less 'arbitrary', are not *exact* copies; even these involve human *mediation*. In any case a copy necessarily implies being at some remove from what immediately precedes it and therefore not congruent with it. And some words are actually abstractions of abstractions i.e. derivations from derivations, which puts such words at some considerable remove from the source closest linked to the signifieds. These types of words are linked to these signifieds only by indirection - as would a chimera, or a mirage, or hallucination or dream or a phantom stand in relation to the mediated 'original 'real' from which it derives. That would be as close to the arbitrary as you can get without actually yielding to the arbitrary, because even the individual constitutive parts of a chimera, or mirage, or hallucination, etc. can be traceable to their source in the mediated 'original real.' In this regard, with respect to any concept - words included - Rand says:

...the question of how particular [human beings] happen to *learn* concepts and the question of what concepts *are*, are two different issues. In considering the nature of concepts and the process of abstracting from abstractions, we must assume a mind capable of performing (or retracing and checking) that process. And we must remember that no matter how many [human beings] mouth a concept as a meaningless sound, *some* [human being] had to originate it at some time. (1990a: 21)

Now, if it is indeed the case that women use words that are reflective of a supposed imaginary/pre-oedipal state - in which case it would mean words that are restricted to first-order concepts as opposed to concepts of concepts i.e. abstractions from abstractions (Rand, 1990: 19ff) - then the causes of this are arbitrary social constructs rather than necessarily intrinsic to the supposed nature of women or that of language itself. In this regard, in an essay titled 'Language and Gender' in her book *Sea Changes: Essays on Culture and Feminism* (1986), Cora Kaplan argues that it is culturally orchestrated female exclusion from public 'high' language that accounts for whatever linguistic differences can be observed between men and women. That she does not question the rational basis of Lacan's very construction of the symbolic order just goes to show how complicit the oppressed can sometimes be in their own oppression. The so-called 'Symbolic order' is a pure male construction to designate privileged speech. It has nothing to do with the epistemological nature of language in itself - all words being *de facto* symbols. But, we seem to have accepted - at least for the time being - that words are arbitrary, pure symbols. As such Lacanian chauvinistic theorising of the imaginary/ pre-oedipal in relation to language is a travesty of reason. Therefore to give Aboriginal language all the derogatory epithets that settlers give is to be ignorant of the psycho-epistemological processes that govern language construction.

### 3.8 Cartesianism and class prejudice in *Remembering Babylon*

The idea of rigid social stratification, like all social tendencies, is a construct which is then projected onto “Nature” or “God” and made out as being entirely natural or divine in origin. Indeed, when race or gender are not the issue, class is always somewhere in the background waiting to rear its head. Marxism makes this clear. However, things are not as straightforward as mainstream Marxism claims. Warren Montag (1992) points out: “Central to Marxism and Marxist literary criticism was and is the following ‘materialist’ insight: consciousness, without which such things as art cannot be produced, is not the source of social forms and economic conditions. It is, rather, their most important product” (288). But this also takes into account the Althusserian observation that ideology is “riven with contradictions that works of literature sometimes expose and even widen” (293). Such that, as Montag further notes, just as Gramsci’s theory of hegemony takes into account the role of the oppressed themselves in shaping the struggle, literature itself is seen in some progressive Marxist circles as having a degree of autonomy and space not simply determined by the base-superstructure configurations obtaining during a particular period (293). But, when all is said and done, in all social constructs women generally come out worse off. In Marxist terms women constitute a subordinate class that cuts across all the socio-economic classes and on this score even mainstream Marxism has a point.

In Malouf’s novel the settlers move back and forth between gender and racial prejudice and class prejudice. In “The Return of the Native,” Bill Ashcroft correctly observes with reference to Andy McKillop that due to a need for affirmation and possibly a fear of stiffer competition the “the socially marginal, the social detritus of the ‘civilised’ society [...] the ones whose need of affirmation is greatest, are the ones who are most hostile to those who call the boundaries and definitions of civilisation into question” (1994:57). This phenomenon lends some credence to the argument that race and class often go together but that class tends to have an upper hand. Here, according to the settler’s perception, Gemmy, who *is* racially white, because he is suspected to be the link between the Aborigines and their contact with the settlers, is classed with the Aborigines by being perceived as having the looks of a mongrel (7), a prejudice which is also reflective of the European’s dislike of and discrimination against the mulatto. And in the novel the fact that Gemmy finds it easier to fit in with Aboriginal life is attributed to his hard urchin life on the streets of London. Gemmy is made to see, rather liberally, that the aboriginal world is in many ways not much different from the one he had left behind on the streets of London:

He was a child, with a child's quick capacity to take things in and the street child's gift of mimicry. They were astonished at the swiftness with which he learned their speech, and once a thing had been pointed out to him, how keen his eyes were. Relying on wit that was instinctive in him and had been sharpened under harder circumstances than these he let himself be gathered into a world which, though he was alarmed at first by its wildness, proved no different in essence from his previous one, for all that it was, day after day, hot tracks over stone, and insect bites, and nights when you had to creep in under logs while the rain slushed, and long spells between one bellyful and the next. (23)

For Gemmy himself, it is his marginal status back in London that makes it easier for him to identify with aboriginal life, but then at one fell swoop this presentation conflates the whole of the aboriginal community with the lowest of the lower orders - a factor which explains Gemmy's difficulty to make the settlers see them in any other light - indeed the closest the settlers hope to get to the aborigines is to turn them into a working class among them in the form of farm labourers and domestics:

What they looked forward to was a settled space in which they could get on with the hard task of founding a home, and, maybe, if they were lucky, a town where in time all the civilities would prevail. If they got the preliminaries right, the natives too might be drawn in, as labourers, or house servants. They had secretly, some of them, a vision of plantations with black figures moving in rows down a field, a compound with neat whitewashed huts, a hallway, all polished wood, with an old grey-haired black saying 'Yessir', and preparing to pull off their boots (all this off in the future and preparing of course, maybe far off; for the moment they would not mention boots since most of them did not have any. (56)

As it is, in the novel, that future has arrived because Gemmy himself can only be assigned menial tasks and in those tasks he cannot even "settle or keep his mind on things" (31). This is typical of the colonial charge that the colonised lack sustained focus and the ability to manage their own affairs and resources, as JahnMahommed notes in *Manichean Aesthetics* (1985:19-20). Then the improbable possibility of Gemmy becoming customs officer is mooted, all the more ironic and comic as he is not being given the necessary training to suit that kind of position, which is also a typical colonial tactic of division of labour through educational systems. But all this class conflation totally disregards the possibility that the aborigines may have their own kind of social division and surely to turn their chief, say (supposing they had chiefs - the aborigines are never heard at all), into a domestic or farmhand must be a big blow to their self-worth as a people. But it is the habit of imperialism to conflate the imperialised in the tradition of vulgar Marxism. It is this wholesale proletarianization that colonialism did to the colonised, and one would suspect that that is what the present international division of labour is essentially doing to the third world.

### **3.9 Conclusion: The potential for cultural 'mongrelisation', its naive proponents and its Cartesian opponents.**

The few possibilities for cultural syncretism from the liberal characters in the novel are as ridiculous as the people standing in the way of such a post-colonial possibility. The shadowy aborigines in the background have no worse representative than Gemmy. On the whole he is nothing more than a mere fawning mimic man; a person who cannot be taken seriously as a potentially equal partner of the settlers. One of the reasons the settlers approach Gemmy from a Manichean/Cartesian specular/imaginary point of view, as “a parody of the white man” or as “imitation gone wrong” (35) is because of his own sycophantic eagerness to play such a role for them - at least that is how the settlers largely perceive him. With typical colonial presumptuousness the settlers see in Gemmy a character who has to be amenable to their tutelage and not one who will engage with them on an equal plane - a far cry from the proud resisting historical aborigine in collaboration with the rebellious bushranger:

Even those who felt sorry for the man found themselves dismayed by what they called his ‘antics’. They felt an urge, when he went into one of his jerking and stammering fits, to look hard at the horizon, and when that yielded no satisfaction, to give grave attention to the dust between their boots. He was a parody of a white man. If you gave him a word for a thing, he could, after a good deal of huffing and blowing, repeat it, but next time round you had to teach it to him all over again. He was imitation gone wrong, and the mere sight of it put you wrong too, made the whole business somehow foolish and open to doubt. (35)

Indeed, a little later after this even Lachlan’s schoolmates begin to look at Gemmy not as an ontological entity in his own right but as the former’s shadow or double - *doppelgänger* - almost in the Jungian sense. For instance, in a bid to isolate Gemmy the children dissuade Lachlan from associating with him: “So where’s yer mate,’ Jeff Murcutt asked, ‘yer shadow?’ And then looking about with mock surprise, ‘Oh, I didn’t see ‘im!’ Leo Corcoran had began a little lopsided walk around them, with an expression so like Gemmy’s that three or four younger boys, who were watching, rolled about in the dirt at such a show of brilliance” (144). By and by Lachlan begins to see himself in the very position into which those around him put him. In this regard, at one point as Lachlan takes leave of Gemmy on the path near the Hutchences, to Lachlan the two almost appear as each other’s doubles; they fade into each other in the form of a sort of mimicry where otherness slides into sameness:

He looked back once and saw that Gemmy too had turned, about sixty yards off, and they faced one another down the white ribbon of track. They were too far off to be more to one another than figures whose eyes, whose real dimensions even, were lost to distance. For years afterwards he would have dreams in which he would stand trying, against the fact of distance, to see the look on Gemmy’s face, and once or twice, in his dream, he walked back through the white dust, which rose in ghostly spirals around him, and went right up to where he was standing, and looked into his face. But it remained as blurred as it had been from sixty yards off, and he woke with his cheeks wet, even after so long, though he was no longer a child (149-50).



Lachlan takes this sentimental subconscious attachment to Gemmy very seriously. Much later in life this sentiment gets the better of him and, as he works on a road building project in an area where there are Aborigines, he sets out to search for the latter's remains. When the Aborigines lead him to a place where they 'buried' a group of eight of their kind massacred by the settlers in one of their routine raids, Lachlan puts his soul to rest by supposing that one of the bodies could be Gemmy's after all (178-180).

Of course there are a few occasions when Gemmy comes close to be only playing a role he assumes the settlers expect of him (sly civility – pp.32, 58, 109), but for the most part he accommodates himself to what he thinks is his expected station among them. As such his plan to cover ground, to cover the space between them (29) can only be described as a product of the most naïve wishful thinking on his part. If he really wanted to gain respect among them and be seen as a potential equal then he needed to have held his own ground and proved his worth. As it is, though, he remains largely a mimic man.

Those who try to assist Gemmy break out of this discrimination are for the most part impractical liberals who, eschewing really critical engagement (like Jock McIvor does), play the ostrich hoping that the problem will somehow go away, when the problem may actually be closing in on them. And if they do get involved they do so only as do-gooders (as Mr Frazer does) and so end up imposing their own version of life on others. Jock does not want to address the real concerns and fears of the settlers with regard to Gemmy's relationship with the aborigines who pay him a visit. He is keen to insist that Gemmy is harmless without furnishing incontestable proof as to why he holds such a belief. Jock is aware of his own dishonesty in this regard. When one of the sceptics, Barney, corners him to prove Gemmy's harmlessness, Jock is dismissive: "[W]hen he put Barney off with an assurance of Gemmy's harmlessness he was being truthful in one way – there was no physical harm in him – but in a deeper way he was not[...] Jock sympathised [with Barney's worries] but had decided he could do most good by making light of Barney's fears while admitting, secretly, they might be real" (64). The greatest irony is that Jock mistakes these people's suspicions for a simple lack of a critical mentality when it is he who comes across as not sufficiently critical in this matter:

None of what followed was new, though it wounded him just the same; they were not original, these fellows. What surprised Jock was that not so long ago he would not have seen it, and if he had he would have found reassurance in their being so easily predictable. He had began lately to be critical even of Jim Sweetman, and he did not want to be. He did not like the experience, which was new, of seeing his friends from a distance, of finding them on one side and himself on the other, and the knowledge that if he was seeing them with new eyes, he too, since the distance must work both ways, had become an object of scrutiny. He was disturbed, most of all, by the view this gave him of *himself*. As if there

was something in him that justified scrutiny. That he might be less open than he appeared. (67)

It is precisely Jock's wilful oversight in this area that constitutes his impracticalness and liberalism. It must be pointed out that when two groups of people meet for the first time there is bound to be suspicion and discomfort/uneasiness. It would be naïve to immediately assume the other group are friends and not possible foes. And the process of reaching out to the other, like the epistemological one of abstraction and integration, is a tortuous one; it involves taking risks but which I think are worthwhile risks because the alternative, a schizoid existence, is more counterproductive.

As for Mr Frazer and the other small time liberals like the young McIvors, for the most part he wants to do things *for* Gemmy rather than with *him*. When the former and George Abbot take down Gemmy's life story they literally supply the details for him. In most cases Gemmy is said to be all stutters (see161). In a BBC interview with Caryl Phillips on who owns the story, Chinua Achebe points out that everyone has a story. You can't supply the words in the story even of the person who stammers because s/he is bound to contradict you in her/his own good time (programme broadcast via SABC3 from 11pm, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2003). But that is exactly what Frazer and Abbot do to Gemmy in this text. Indeed, it would seem as though Frazer does not so much wish for syncretism as for the settlers to cultivate what is indigenous. Mr. Frazer's stance on the state of affairs in the Aboriginal's Australia is overzealously simplistic. While everyone of the settlers (particularly people like governor George Bowen and Mr Herbert Herston) believe that they are in Australia to bestow a name on a 'nameless' patch of land – imperialist cartography - and to make it part of a fit habitation for the self-appointed messengers of 'civilisation', Mr Frazer reaches the conclusion that the land is habitable already and that all it needs is a change of perspective from the side of the colonizers when approaching it. Mr Frazer reaches this superficial conclusion - when as Ashcroft puts it, Gemmy takes him 'to the edge of the imperial consciousness': "...Mr Frazer is taken by Gemmy to the edges of imperial consciousness, a place constructed in the imperial language, to a vision of what Australia might become. 'We have been wrong' he says ' to see this continent as hostile and infelicitous, so that only by the fiercest stoicism, a supreme resolution and force of will, and by felling, clearing, sowing with seeds we have brought with us, and by importing sheep, cattle, rabbits, even the very birds of the air, can it be shaped and made habitable. It is habitable already' (1994:58). And, according to him, Gemmy provides the clearest example of its being already habitable:

*The children of this land were made for it, as it was for them, and is to them a rich habitation, teeming with milk and honey of the Promised Land, which was neither milk in fact, nor honey, and the land itself to all appearance parched and without promise. We must humble ourselves and learn from them. The time will come when we too will be sustained not only by wheat and lamb and bottled cucumbers, but by what the land itself produces, tasting at last the earthy sweetness of it, allowing it to feed our flesh with its minerals and underground secrets so that what spreads in us is an intimate understanding of what it truly is, with all that is unknowable in it made familiar within [...] Our poor friend Gemmy is a forerunner. He is no longer a white man, or a European, whatever his birth, but a true child of the place as it will one day be, a crude one certainly, unaware of what he has achieved – and that too perhaps is part of His intention: that the exemplum should be of the simplest and most obvious sort, deeply moving to those who are willing to look, and to see, without prejudice, that in allowing himself to be at home here, he has crossed the boundaries of his given nature. Of course such changes inspire in the timid a ... (119 & 121, italics original)*

In keeping with his outlook, at one point Frazer offers a hard, locally found nut to Jim Sweetman to eat raw as proof of his shallow thesis:

One day, not long ago, returning from one of his afternoon excursions, he came upon Jim Sweetman with his granddaughter on his shoulders...Still in the excited state his excursions aroused in him, he hailed the man, and they stood a moment on the path while the child, sulking, jerked her legs, impatient to have her grandfather go back to being a pony. Jim Sweetman, patiently, set his hands over knees, and still half attending to the child's call upon him, and a little put out of himself, perhaps, at the interruption to their play, listened, accepted the hard little fruit he was offered, though not the suggestion that he should bite into it. So he [Frazer] himself did and showed the man the seeds. (121)

As it happens, in the end Sweetman is more interested in pacifying his crying granddaughter than in any orchards to be planted by Mr Frazer from these shrivelled up local fruits (122).

Furthermore, very early in the novel, and with Gemmy's complicity, the settler children too want to do things for him:

His object was to make himself agreeable to the girls, to play the pupil when they wanted to be teacher, the doll when they wanted someone to dress up. But he kept a watch on Lachlan, ready always if necessary to appease; and the boy, because he was very quick in his perceptions, felt it and knew his power. He led the man on an invisible leash, swaggering before the other children of the place, and only when they were alone together let out his natural affection.

The girls, especially Janet, took great interest in how he kept himself.

'No, no, Gemmy dear, let *me* do it,' she would say when he failed to button his shirt straight. Or laughing at the way his hair stuck out in quills and would not be disciplined, 'Sit still, now, there's a good fellow, and I'll brush it and make you neat. I'm giving you a nice parting, Gemmy, see? (32)

Gemmy is not regarded as an agent or subject here but, as he himself rightly noted at the beginning, an "object" (3). These liberal elements fan this perception and therefore come across as no better than the open opponents of such integration like Governor Bowen, Herbert Herston, Andy, Abbot, etc.

Janet's epiphanic experiences seem to hold promise for what could be a new identity in this place. She is at one with nature as reflected in her 'communing' with the

many-minded, one-minded swarm of bees (129-130 & 175). Janet tries to approximate the androgynous in beings. As Janet and her sister Meg go to visit the Hutchences they find the old woman at her beekeeping job and Janet is immediately attracted to the project and wastes no time to show this:

[F]or Janet the real attraction was Mrs Hutchence and the hives, which looked so closed and quiet under the trees but were filled with such fierce activity – another life, quite independent of their human one, but organised, purposeful, and involving so many complex rituals. She loved the way, while you were dealing with them, you had to submit yourself to *their* side of things.

Meg, on the other hand, was attracted to Leona. Janet too enjoyed the company of the kitchen table, with its games and teases, but it was the hives that drew her more. If she could escape, she thought, just for a moment, out of her personal mind into their communally single one, she would know at last what it was like to be an angel.

This thought belonged, yet did not, to what she thought of as her 'visions' but was more reliable than those, more down to earth. They had a worked-up quality to them; she worked them up out of *herself*. This came from outside and had begun when she saw Mrs Hutchence at work for the first time. (128)

Already you can see Janet's propensity for the visionary, a trait which in later life will lead her along the escapist (because hermit-like) path of entering a convent (to be ameliorated only by her continued keeping of bees). But the above passage is also important in other respects. When Janet sees Mrs Hutchence at work, she is sure of being in touch with something outside herself. But then she assumes that her visions are worked up out of *herself*. There is something schizoid about Janet's sense of her visions. In a rather Cartesian way she believes she can bring something into being *ex nihilo*. It is no surprise that she thinks her visions a little hallucinatory, chimerical, not quite reliable. And later in life as she advances in her beekeeping project she holds this Cartesian view of being more openly with delusions of being a creator:

Years later she would become expert beyond anything Mrs Hutchence might have dreamed of at the bee business. She would know all the breeds and crossbreeds, *and create one or two new ones – actually bring them into being*, whole swarms of them. She would devote her life to these creatures, bringing to the daily practical study of their habits and all the facts and lore that is the long history of their interaction with men, a bodily excitement that went back to this moment, under the trees, when *her mind had for a moment been their unbodied one* and she had been drawn into the process and mystery of things (130, my emphasis)

That Janet seeks to achieve some form of syncretism in her project, which might then spill over into advocacy of syncretism in the relations between the settlers and the Aborigines which Mr Frazer sees in Gemmy and highly recommends, is a plausible possibility. Ultimately, though, whatever promise she holds of such syncretism - her mongrelised bees, her own epiphany, etc. - the fact that she more or less withdraws from the real world out there militates against actual engagement which is a pre-requisite to achieving

this objective. But there is also a further problem with her apiary vocation here. While I mentioned earlier Janet's taking on a traditionally male occupation, the flip side of this Maloufian project is that by making her have special experiences with the bees, almost bonding with them to the point of unmediated co-extensivity, Malouf may be seen as subscribing to the Cartesian dialectic that identifies women with Nature and hence, belonging merely on the body side of the dichotomy. Note that among the male characters it is only the feminized Gemmy and the naïve Mr Frazer who are as close to nature as the women are shown to be. It is as though in Malouf's understanding, for Cartesian men to achieve bonding with nature they first need to become feminized and naïve, which are very mythical solutions that no thoroughgoing Cartesian, inconceivable though his own ontology may be, can be persuaded to embrace. From my point of view the Cartesian mind needs to be addressed in rational and not mythical terms. In the context of the Objectivist ontology that I have postulated in this study, one need not first become feminised or naïve to become bonded to nature. The "I" itself comprises and therefore bonds with every other external existent that it comes into contact with – trees, butterflies, bees, gullies, grass, buffaloes, warthogs, cranes, etc. In other words, the "I" is as androgynous as it is plural-yet-monistic i.e. as we point out elsewhere, it is an open-ended integer.

However, Malouf's novel may even be read as a response to Robert Kroetch's discrimination against women in his novel *What The Crow Said* (1978). In this regard, in an essay titled "Bees, Bodies and Magical Miscegenations: Robert Kroetch's *What The Crow Said*" (1999), using Kroetch's 1978 novel Luca Biagiotti discusses at great length the subject of the supposed unmediated association between women and body. However, Biagiotti himself does not transcend the self/other binarism or the Jungian notion of the lighter and darker sides of the mind debates – they are intact, unquestioned. Among other things Biagiotti discusses the correspondence between the human and natural worlds *via* women. He quotes from a scene in which the female character Vera experiences an erotic encounter with the bees that enter her body and the enraptured movements of her body in response to them. One cannot help comparing the passage to the one in *Remembering Babylon* for their striking similarities. The following is the passage from *What The Crow Said*:

Without quite opening her eyes she knew they had touched down onto her arms, onto her belly, her legs. For how long she lay transfixed there was never a way to tell. Somewhere, long ago, the queen had been impregnated, her body never more to need that mating. Why the drones followed her, why they mistook a swarming into a new nest for a mating flight, was simply a mystery. Vera, the bees in her blond hair now, touching onto her cheeks, could only lie still. (10) ( 1999:107)

According to Biagiotti, in the novel “men are excluded from this act of communication: it is an act of love which leaves both men and herself inexorably separated” (1999:112).

In *Remembering Babylon* the bees are attracted to Janet’s menstrual flow, and the sexual associations are similar to those in Kroetch’s novel:

The day had been unusually oppressive, steamy, and for the last hour a dull sky had been glowering, bronze with a greenish edge to it, that bruised the sight. Suddenly there was the sound of a wind getting up in the grove, though she did not feel the touch of it, and before she could complete the breath she had taken, or expel it in a cry, the swarm was on her, thickening so fast about her that it was as if night had fallen, just like that, in a single cloud. She just had time to see her hands covered with plushy, alive fur gloves before her whole body crusted over and she was blazingly gathered into the single sound they made, the single mind.

Her own mind closed in her. She lost all sense of where her feet might be, or her dreamy wrists, or whether she was still standing, as she had been a moment before, in the shadowy grove, or had been lifted from the face of the earth....

She stood still as still and did not breathe. She surrendered herself.

You are our bride, her new and separate mind told her as it drummed and swayed above the earth. Ah, so that is it! They have smelled the sticky blood-flow. They think it is honey. It is. (129-30)

The experience so transforms her that afterwards sees her *body* as a totally new one (131). But perhaps Janet’s superiority lies in the fact that she mixes with the bees on both sides of the body and mind dialectic hence her androgynous transcendence of the dichotomy. However, Malouf confers upon Janet the creative powers that Descartes in the Second Meditation gives to the mind. By this stage Janet has moved away from “communion” with the bees to objectifying them. In other words, typical of a liberal approach towards relations across the divides, she precisely ends up othering the bees by thinking, like the Cartesian autonomous subject, that she has called them into being. And like any thoroughgoing Cartesian, she too has the idea of the mind as *unbodied*, un-extended, lacking the possibility of co-extension.

Furthermore, and this is most important, on a literal plane it is not the bees that the settlers are in conflict with; it is the Aboriginals. Of course they did find the environment rather puzzling. In an excerpt from a book titled *Ecological Imperialism* (1986), Alfred Crosby cites the case of one J Martin in the 1830s who complained that in Australia “ the trees retained their leaves and shed their bark instead, the swans were black, the eagles white, the bees were stingless, some mammals had pockets, others laid eggs, it was warmest on the hills and coolest in the valleys, [and] even the blackberries were red.” (1989: 420). But what is probably happening in the case of Janet’s preoccupation with the bees is what in Freudian terms is called the phenomenon of “displacement” where a neurosis finds its expression in a quite unrelated symbol or activity. It is perhaps Janet’s wishful fixation on the other ‘home’ in Scotland that leads to her otherworldliness as seen in her entering a convent (170).

Essentially, for a long time already, Janet has had an existential crisis of a magnitude equivalent to that of governor Bowen. Janet never quite overcame the envy she had of Lachlan having lived in Scotland while she was born and grew up exclusively in Australia. Very early in childhood she is engaged in an ambivalent battle with Lachlan which brings to light her schizophrenia:

He began every sentence with 'At hame in Scotland' – yet at home, as she knew from her mother, they had been starving. She would harden her heart and mock him. 'Oh, at hame in Scotland,' she would sing, imitating his accent, *which she also loved*. He went red in the face and could barely hide his tears.

She had her triumph. But seeing it she felt ashamed, it was so easy. And Scotland, home, was scared to her. *She was going against herself when she mocked it.* (50)

Janet's attachment to the bees and later her going into a convent seem to be indicative of an attempt at putting the pieces of her divided existence together. Also, much later, perhaps still in an effort to find a centre to things, she does charity work among the lower-class children in the settler community, something which I suspect she would have done among the Aborigines if only her society had allowed her access to them. Notice, similarly, that Lachlan, who is also her double, tries to be charitable towards Gemmy when he sentimentally goes to look for his remains with the guidance of the local Aborigines. In the novel these three (Gemmy-Lachlan-Janet) form a triad of *doppelgängers* of one another. Indeed, when Lachlan and Janet meet at the end of the novel their reminiscences about the family and *particularly* about Gemmy take centre stage. Yet it is not sentimentality and charity that can lead to the transcending of the divides, be they racial/ethnic, gender or class. In the novel these do not bring together the Aborigines and the settlers on an equal plane. Such an approach only serves to make those marginalized feel patronized and traps them in a dependent and subservient position. It is not charity that those who are othered need, but inter-subjective, subject-to-subject relations. The failure of these liberal characters to reconcile the divides within their society and between that society and the Aboriginal society is a sign of the failure of their liberal vision. As Watson (1982) puts it in the case of Alan Paton's *Cry The Beloved Country*:

[T]hough it may be possible to establish just relations between individuals purely by moral and rational suasion and accommodation, in inter-group relations this is practically an impossibility. The relations between groups are always predominantly political rather than ethical; they are determined by the proportion of power each group possesses as much as by any rational and moral appraisal of the comparative needs and claims of each group. (38)

Indeed, while individual acts of mutual cooperation are necessary at the inter-personal level, it is the broader picture that needs looking into more seriously. At this point I wish to point out that even the change in self/other paradigms that I am advocating in this study, which I am sure is rationally plausible, without being acted on at an institutional level, becomes a mere

'liberal' or academic argument. And to prove that liberalism is just as malignant as active opposition to change, in keeping with this liberal vision, the novel ends with an account of a vision of a possible harmony between one self and another self:

Out beyond the flatlands the line of light pulses and swells. The sea, in sight now, ruffles, accelerates. Quickly now it is rising towards us, it approaches.  
As we approach prayer. As we approach knowledge. As we approach one another.  
It glows in fullness till the tide is high and the light almost, but not quite, unbearable, as the moon plucks at our world and all the waters of the earth ache towards it, and the light, running in fast now, reaches the edges of the shore, just so far in its order, and all the muddy margin of the bay is alive, and in a line of running fire all the outline of the vast continent appears, in touch now with its other side (182).

This looks attractive enough. But in view of the foregoing discussion, this ending here is fallacious; it is a problematic conclusion following from the problematic premises strewn all over the novel.

Of course, at another level, there are suggestions to the effect that not all is lost. Gemmy's disappearance, for instance, is seen as containing a redemptive paradox. In keeping with the resilience and totality attendant on a holistic Aboriginal metaphysics, the disintegration of his story (and supposedly hence of his being - in phenomenological terms) is both as catastrophic as it is redemptive. He goes back to reintegrate with the earth and the elements and thus does not suffer annihilation but lives on in a different configuration (chapter 19). But, to be practical, is this the best the Aborigines aspire to, and is this the best the settlers are willing to grant? Finally, can the settlers themselves avoid the disintegrating effect of this their Cartesian approach? As Malouf makes clear in the novel regarding the internal disintegration of settler society following Gemmy's arrival, the answer is in the negative. Sadly though, I think that he himself fails to provide a viable alternative to the impasse.



## Endnotes

1. Yet some accounts have it that it was not Europeans who invented a culture of bathing. While the Romans are known to have been quite particular about bodily functions and hygiene not even they invented bathing – this is common knowledge which is as recent the Victorian Era. Yet I know that in most African villages even right now people have millenia old knowledge of which plants to manufacture soap from - I myself know these kinds of plants.

2. Indeed, there are recorded instances of European cannibalism. For illustration purposes, here is one of them from Australia itself:

### **Alexander the cannibal**

*Alexander Pearce* was transported to Sarah Island in 1822. A month later, he escaped with *Thomas Bodenham*, *Robert Greenhill*, *Matthew Travis* and *John Mather*. The party headed overland to Hobart.

After 15 days without food, they decided to experiment with cannibalism. The men drew straws and it was Thomas Bodenham who drew the short one. He knelt down, was killed by a blow to the head and subsequently served up for lunch.

A week later, John Mather was foraging for roots when a hungry Greenhill crept up behind him, and swung at him with an axe! At that very moment, Mather moved and the axe glanced off his head. The two men wrestled and Mather seized control. However his good fortune didn't last long. Determined to eat him, the other three ganged up and killed him. Four days later, Travis was bitten by a snake. Six days later, he too was on the menu. This left only Pearce and Greenhill. For a few days, each eyed the other suspiciously but vowed not to betray the other. Pearce thought Greenhill was lying and so killed him in the dead of night. Out of character for Pearce, he left the body untouched.

In 1823, Pearce was recaptured and confessed to his crimes. Such was the fanciful nature of his story, no one believed him and so he was sent back to Sarah Island. Nine months later, he again escaped and for provisions, he took with him *Thomas Cox*.

A few weeks after escaping, a crew of a passing ship saw smoke and Pearce was found. He again confessed to his crimes and even had a morsel of Cox to verify his story.

Pearce was taken back to Hobart and hanged on the 19th July 1824. The judge at his trial declaring that the case was '**too inhuman to comment on**'.

<http://www.convictcreations.com/history/escapes.htm>

This account shows that occurrences of this nature are not culture-specific and to attribute them only to the so-called 'other' is mere prejudice. Very recently a German national, Amin Merwis, a computer expert, went on trial (and confessed to) cannibalism in the city of Rothenberg (SABC3 News at 7, 3 December, 2003). One need only bear in mind in this connection the cannibalistic undertones of the Catholic doctrine of *transubstantiation* in the sacrament of the last supper which turns Christians who so believe it into ritualistic cannibals (Homi Bhabha's Hindus too make this observation (1994: 103)).

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### Conclusion

In *Racism: A Short History* (2002), which follows on his earlier book *White Supremacy* (1981), George Fredrickson asks whether the downfall of Hitler's Germany with its Holocaust, the overthrow of Jim Crow in the United States and the fall of Apartheid in South Africa have marked the end of discrimination - be it on the grounds of race, age, gender, or sexual orientation (2002: 141). Not quite so, he seems to be arguing. Why? Just celebrating the 'end' of discrimination without addressing its long-term consequences is a very liberal/laissez faire approach to issues which will amount to nought. Fredrickson puts this matter squarely: "Histories of slavery, Jim Crow, apartheid, or colonization have left many members of previously stigmatised and legally disadvantaged groups in an economically and psychologically vulnerable situation, which may make it difficult for them to compete with those whose families and forebears have not had to undergo such shattering experiences. The blacks now in power in South Africa cannot, given the resources at their command, adequately compensate blacks for three and a half centuries of expropriation, exploitation, and deprivation to the extent that would be required to make them truly equal to the whites" (2002: 142-3). And echoing what JanMohamed says in his *Manichean Aesthetics*, Fredrickson also notes: "The damage left behind by 'overtly racist regimes' may also encourage antisocial or self-destructive behaviour. The failures and 'pathologies' that can result seem to confirm negative stereotypes about the group that persist despite the removal of the full ideological scaffolding that once sustained them" (2002:143). This is part of the very metaphysical crisis which this study has been exploring – and South African society is no stranger to the manifestations and effects of this crisis.

That Cartesian ontology is coming under attack from various quarters is perhaps proof enough that it has run its weird course. Starting with Plato's skewed theory of 'reality' finding its way into European idealism and the rationalism of Immanuel Kant, and reaching its peak in René Descartes, this intellectual fraud has had enormous influence on the relations between European and non-Europeans. As I have argued in this study, Ayn Rand's Objectivist epistemology is one such mainstream philosophy's most potent attack on Cartesianism. And Rand's epistemology is closer to the pre-Cartesian ontologies generally found among non-Western peoples. While biological Darwinism and Spencerism may be applicable to the animal and plant worlds, the social and racial Darwinism (that shows in Nietzsche's social philosophy) that derives from them may not be condoned anymore. Whether we deal with race, gender, age, ecology, sexual orientation, etc. it is interchange,

integration, and cooperation rather than the morbid Cartesian search for difference, psychotic disintegration and Darwinian competition that will get humankind somewhere. What a Cartesian ontology fails to take into account is that, metaphysically speaking, to be able to posit difference presupposes epistemological, and hence ontological, interchange between the natural capacity of the 'mind' and existents outside it. A holistic existence involves the integration of both *difference* and *sameness* into one, open-ended, rather than closed, whole. From that point of identity construction, I have postulated that it is the proportion attached to *interchange* or *difference* that determines whether or not one is likely to use one's identity construction to discriminate against another. If more emphasis were to be laid on a conscious awareness of *interchange* rather than *dissimilarity* chances are one would be more able to see the *self* in the *other* and the *other* in the *self*. In other words, it is an intricate conglomeration of co-extensive, mediated, 'others' that comprise what is carelessly called a 'self' by deluded Cartesians. As such, at the deepest conscious or unconscious level, what discrimination against a so-called 'other' essentially involves is the schizophrenic phenomenon of the self's rejection of a part of itself - a self divided against itself. As Waugh notes '[t]he destruction of the other...cannot be accomplished without an accompanying effect of fragmentation of the self' (1992:121). The settler community's 'disintegration,' Jock McIvor's crisis and Gemmy's disappearance are illustrative of this process.

In Malouf's novel the potential for this monistic, co-extensive unity in difference (plurality) is reflected in the examples of Gemmy and Janet's epiphanies, and particularly the many-minded, single-minded swarm of bees (175) and the local and the foreign kinds of bees she keeps, but especially those bred by "calling them into existence" through the crossbreeding of these two varieties. In his quest for phenomenology's magic of summoning into existence, Malouf creates problems for Janet by giving her the Cartesian powers of being able to create almost *ex nihilo* and not by reconfiguration which is quite un-phenomenological because, as we noted in the first chapter, for Heidegger being has always been and the mistaken idea of 'nothing' is a contradiction in terms. On the whole it is the Cartesianism of the settlers with their physical and metaphysical boundaries and all their irrational prejudices on the one hand, and Gemmy's supposed naivety on the other (and by extension that of the Aborigines he represents), that lead to the failure of the settlers to integrate Gemmy into their community or more appropriately to co-integrate. Janet's failure to achieve a positive integration in the real world out there can be attributed to the relentless efforts of male chauvinism to thwart the realisation of our essentially androgynous, ontological selves. But her failure to achieve harmony with the Aborigines stems from her own 'liberal' attitude

toward them as well as toward the race question in Australia. It is not liberals who bring about positive change, but selfless and focused radicals. In this respect, Malouf's novel might be regarded less in terms of a post-colonial than in terms of a post-colonizing discourse.

'Positive' metaphysical settler acclimatisation to the place is prevented by spurious Darwinian-based fears of European degeneration in the tropics. As far as an Objectivist ontology goes, there is absolutely no reason why anyone should be alienated from the land anywhere. As soon as one comes into contact with a place, that place becomes part of your "I" and it is up to you to choose to accept it or reject it and risk a schizoid existence thereby. And often integration is prevented by the schizoid (because exclusionary) 'dispossessive' policies of the same settlers which create antagonism over sharing of natural resources.<sup>1</sup> As we have mentioned in the first chapter, when the self rejects a part of itself, this does not cause trouble only to the self that is rejecting a part of itself but it probably forces the rejected part to find its way back to where it by rights belongs, and this may explain the occurrence of insurrections and revolts. The Darwinian side of the debate leads to the morbid wholesale transfer of practices from the 'home' countries to the former colonies, some of which are totally inapplicable there. Dispossession and exclusion, on the other hand, naturally lead to social strife between the settlers and those dispossessed.

In conclusion, a reminder: in their essay titled "'Whether This Is Jerusalem or Babylon We Know Not': National Self-Discovery in *Remembering Babylon*", Elaine Lindsay and John Murray (1997-1998) still look at the 'other' – which includes the land, as a *shadow* to the self in Jungian terms. This critical position does not only continue to other the so-called 'other', it also makes it difficult to achieve any harmony with the so-called 'other', since it continues to consign him/her to the negative. Ultimately, it is clear that it is only when we recognize our co-extensive relations, coupled with a conscious effort to move towards more horizontal/rhizomic relations, that we will get somewhere as readers, critics and citizens of the world.

## Endnote

1. In view of these persisting inequalities one sure way to advance the cause of everyone is to institute affirmative action programmes which must be supported even by those formerly in a privileged position - which some of them question, arguing that equality means levelling the playing field (see Frans Rautenbach's "Affirmative Action By Law is Doomed"

*Business Day*, September 2, 2003). To bring the debate closer to home, one could say that the land question in these parts of Africa where glaring inequalities still exist, for instance, is one case in point here. How do you level the playing field between parties that come from such vastly different positions? And when the privileged ones are in their position not out of some natural superiority but because of having ridden on the backs of those with whom they now say they must have a level playing field? To argue that the oppressed people will be empowered by working on the farms of their oppressors is a *reductio ad absurdum* stance and it is either the case that those who continue to propound this thesis know this or there is some acute myopia somewhere. Empowerment has not happened for the past three and a half centuries: why should anyone expect it to happen now when the underlying material conditions have not changed? While possible skewed governance may not wholly be ruled out (particularly in view of some disturbing recent developments), Zimbabwe provides a classic example of what delayed justice can lead to. I personally do not find convincing and honest those analyses of the Zimbabwean situation that focus merely on Mugabe's supposed tyranny while conveniently sweeping under the carpet colonial thievery and arrogance.

Similarly, in the Australian context, the Aborigines themselves are still struggling to win back some of their traditional land. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra point out that: "For the Aborigines today the issue of issues is land rights" (1995: 412). In this connection one of the most publicised successful cases in recent times is the Eddie Mabo case, in which Mabo and four other petitioners won a case to restore some traditional land to the Aborigines (<http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/places/cth/cth18.htm>). Fredrickson cites the ruling upheld by Judge Harry Blackman of a 1978 Supreme Court case upholding affirmative action in that country: "[I]n order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way. And in order to treat some persons equally, we must treat them differently. We cannot - we dare not - let the Equal Protection clause perpetuate racial supremacy" (2002:143). Of course any affirmative action programme must have a time frame to it; it cannot be affirmative action forever or you risk creating counter oppression where the formerly oppressed become the new oppressors of their former oppressors.

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