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„The People of Oz: Australian-ness in Filmic Representations from the 1970s to the Present"

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1. Introduction

> What exactly is history at the national level? Is it merely the sum of all the diverse histories of peoples, places and communities, or do only some of these have national significance? Do all Australians – Indigenous, settler, immigrant – share the one national history? [...] And do we all have a national identity? Can we have none or more than one? (Carter 3)

In his work *Dispossession, Dreams and Diversity*, David Carter poses some crucial key questions. Pointing to the difficulty involved in the process of defining the concept of Australian national identity, he emphasises a factor highly relevant to the present thesis: there is no 'true' Australian national identity. As Richard White has convincingly argued, any attempt to derive a universal definition would equate to an unreal, fictional place (viii), comparable to the Land of Oz in Frank Baum's *The Wizard Of Oz*.

Taking this assumption as a starting point, *The People of Oz*[1] explores how Australian national identity has been represented over three periods of Australian film. The first chapter provides theoretical background knowledge on influential concepts in the field of identity studies, including Maurice Halbwachs' collective memory, Jan Assmann's cultural memory and Benedict Anderson's imagined community. In this context, special consideration is given to the components that are involved in the process of nation formation.

Drawing on the works of Halbwachs, Assmann and Anderson, the subsequent sections trace back the emergence of an Australian national 'type', and explore the dominant cultural elements in Australian society. Here, special attention is paid to the emergence and definition of central cultural figures, such as the Bushman or the pioneer, and the values and principles they are said to embody – the anti-authoritarian stance, egalitarianism and mateship.

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[1] Oz is not only the fictional land in Frank Baum's novel *The Wizard Of Oz*, but also an abbreviation for Australia.

The main part of the thesis is devoted to the medium film and its immense importance as vehicle of ideas about the nation. On the basis of seven Australian films, this thesis investigates how Australian-ness has been depicted over three periods of Australian cinema: the New Wave Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, the Australian cinema of the 1990s and the cinema of the 21st century. The first section discusses three of the most successful Australian New Wave Cinema films: *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Man from Snowy River*. The insights gained from their analysis, are compared and contrasted to three films of the 1990s as examples of a different approach to the issue: *Strictly Ballroom*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding*. The final chapter focuses on Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, as a representative of the 21st century of Australian cinema. Produced in 2008, *Australia* may well be regarded the most recent Australian film. In this sense, *The People of Oz* may well be viewed as giving a comprehensive overview of the filmic representations of Australian-ness from the 1970s to the present.

2. Collective Memory, Cultural Memory and the Imagined Community – From Halbwachs to Anderson

> Jede Kultur bildet etwas aus, das man ihre 'konnektive Struktur' nennen könnte […] Sie bindet den Menschen an den Mitmenschen dadurch, dass sie als „symbolische Sinnwelt" (Berger/Luckmann) einen gemeinsamen Erfahrungs-, Erwartungs- und Handlungsraum bildet, der durch seine bindende und verbindliche Kraft Vertrauen und Orientierung stiftet. (Assmann, *Gedächtnis* 16)

The construct inherent in every culture that Jan Assmann has referred to as "connective structure" is what he gives the name 'cultural memory' later in his book of the same title. There, he proposes that the individual is merely able to live within society due to his or her memory, which offers guidance and faith by means of its binding power (*Gedächtnis* 16).

The notion of the existence of such a "connective structure" is based on the findings of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, a pioneer in the field of culture-scientific research of memory. His concept of the mémoire collective (collective memory) represents the essential starting point of the majority of theoretical discussions of the collective memory today (Erll, 14). Adhering to Halbwachs' findings, these analyses perceive collective memory as a collectively shared knowledge, which greatly depends on communication as a means of creation and preservation (*Gedächtnis* 364). Leaving aside any physical basis of the memory, Halbwachs proposes that „no memory is possible outside frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections" (*Collective Memory* 43). That is to say, Halbwachs conceives memory as a purely social phenomenon, the formation and maintenance of which is based on its social context and the interaction between people.

Using the memory of the individual as a starting point, he suggests the distinction between the individual memory and what he calls the collective memory, while stressing that there is a constant interchange between the two proposed concepts. The idea is that individual memories are both acquired and received in society. The community then becomes the external factor that reconstructs the memories of any individual member, and this is the point when the individual and the collective memory

merge to an inseparable construct (Halbwachs, *Collective Memory* 38). The interconnectedness between collective and individual memory, however, does not imply that the collective memory of a given community may be equated with a pool of individual memories. In fact, collective memory rather reconstructs past ideas that are in accordance with the beliefs prevalent in a certain society. The collective memory of this society is, thus, shaped by the respective community itself and is expressed in the memories of the individual (Halbwachs, *Collective Memory* 40).

In linking the individual memory to the social world, Halbwachs submitted a pioneering thesis in the research of memory. In contrast to Assmann, however, he understood collective memory as an inherently social concept and was not willing to take his thoughts further to propose the necessity of a cultural basis (Assmann *Religion*, 8). In his work *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte*, Halbwachs certainly indicated the need of some kind of concrete entity – an omnipresent event, person or place (qtd. in Assmann, *Gedächtnis* 38) – to avert the loss of memories that define the identity of a community. But his concept did not go beyond theorising this idea, while Assmann gave this phenomenon a name by coining the term 'cultural memory'.

According to Assmann and Czaplicka, the concept of cultural memory may be understood as the "body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image". That is to say, cultural memory is perceived as a form of knowledge, which is passed to the following generations in order to provide some sort of shared identity and to raise their awareness of a certain unity (132). What Assmann calls the 'cultural memory' is juxtaposed with the social aspect of collective memory as analysed by Halbwachs – the kind of memory that arises from the interaction with others – called the 'communicative memory' (*Religion*, 3). In his concept, Assmann, hence, suggests that the collective memory of any given community consists of two elements – the communicative memory and the cultural memory.

In both cases, repetition represents the basic prerequisite for the existence of any "connective structure", for only the recurrence of certain elements makes them recognisable as key elements of a given culture. In other words, repetition distinguishes key elements of the community's self-image from less 'important' ones, and makes sure

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that they are recognized as part of the common culture (Assmann, *Gedächtnis* 17). Since collective memory heavily relies on the repetition of "reusable texts, images and rituals" (cultural memory) and national stories that are passed on orally (communicative memory), collective memory may only be constructed artificially and institutionally. That is, the collective memory of a given community is deliberately constructed, rather than inherently given (Assmann, *Gedächtnis* 24).

This particular aspect of memory as an artificial and institutionalized entity has been adopted by a closely connected concept – the idea of the nation as an imagined community by Benedict Anderson. He adapted the theory of cultural memory developed by Assmann to a national level. A nation, he claims, is "an imagined political community [...] because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). In other words, even though one will only be acquainted with a minimal number of one's fellow citizens, there is a certain imagined feeling, which links the members of a nation – their shared national identity – or as Anderson puts it "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 7).

Similar to the concepts of Halbwachs and Assmann, this imagined comradeship heavily depends on cultural factors. In this context, Anderson points to the essential role of "print capitalism" – the activity of printing and publishing – as an important means of the construction and maintenance of national identity (36). Catriona Elder adds to Anderson's claim that the idea of the nation as an imagined community equally heavily relies on what she calls "a common set of stories" (25). These are promoted by popular culture as well as educational and political institutions, and provide the citizens with a basis for a shared feeling of belonging.

The fact that the nation is an imagined concept does not imply that these national stories are false, and ought not to obscure the fact that they are frequently rooted in actual past events (Elder 25). What the term 'imagined' does suggest, however, is that the promoted national narratives may be truer for some members of the community, while deviating from the way others perceive themselves and lead their lives (Carter 7). But regardless of the fact that the members of a nation are far from being a homogenous

group, they are pushed to incorporate these shared images and stories when it comes to defining their national identity (Elder 25).

Apart from its unifying and binding function, national narratives (the collective memory) simultaneously operate as a means of distinguishing the insiders of a community from the outsiders (Carter 7). Anderson makes exactly the same point when he argues that nations are "imagined as [...] inherently limited", and, as such, are based on the exclusion of the other by having boundaries separating insiders from the members of other communities (6). That is, the concept of the nation is inherently based on the notion of exclusion (Elder 28).

Anderson's notion of the nation as an imagined community is a highly valuable concept as it points to the two major functions of national identities and collective memory – it functions to perform both unification and discrimination. It, moreover, calls the attention to the fact that national identities ought not to be taken as facts that mirror the lives, beliefs and thoughts of an entire nation. As they are imagined, they rather mirror the lives, beliefs and thoughts of powerful, dominant groups, and exclude marginal groups from the nation's self-image (Elder 25). Most importantly for the present paper, Anderson, just as Halbwachs and Assmann, points to the importance of concrete entities, such as national symbols or figures, as well as rituals and ceremonies, as a means to remind the people of what it means to be a member of a given nation.

3. Australia as an Imagined Community

In his book *Inventing Australia*, White has proved Anderson's concept of the imagined community on the basis of the Australian nation. By analysing the altering and mostly ambiguous ways of depicting 'genuine' Australian-ness over the centuries, he arrived at the conclusion that any attempt to find a universal definition of the 'real' Australia will inevitably be "an invention" (viii).

Since "there is no real Australia waiting to be uncovered" (White viii), there is no use in balancing the validity of deviating images claiming to depict the 'true' Australia. According to White, we rather need to ask "what their function is, whose creation they are, and whose interests they serve" (viii). As pointed out by Carter, national ideas serve as a means of unification and discrimination and are also biased as some members of the community will correspond to the national image more than others (9).

White claims that such images of what it means to be Australian are constructed mainly by the "intelligentsia", meaning "writers, artists, journalists, historians, critics" (ix). Carter adds politicians, TV presenters and film-makers as being involved in the process of constant national reinvention (9), during which concrete items are integrated into the story of the nation and furnished with a deep meaning for every citizen, or as Cater puts it:

> There is no fixed or inherent national meaning in historical events, such as the arrival of the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 [...]; in people such as Bushranger Ned Kelly [...]; or in objects ('national icons') as the pavlova dessert [...]. In each case, national significance must be attributed or 'invented'; they must be constructed as national through the communication of verbal and visual representation or the performance of certain kinds of commemoration and ritual. (10)

In a similar way, Anderson argues, the past needs to be given national relevance, for "nations [...] always loom out of an immemorial past" (11). In the case of white Australia – a settler society – attempts to build the nation on what Anderson calls the "immemorial past" (11) have been without success, for Australia's white settler society has British roots and, thus, a British history (Carter 12). Furthermore, Australian settlement took place under highly unfortunate conditions as the new Australians occupied land formerly inhabited by the indigenous population. Due to these circumstances, Australia finds itself in a situation that goes beyond the necessary process of identity formation often observable in 'new' nations (White viii). In the case of Australia the search for a national identity seems to assume vast proportions, as the following section will show.

4. The Australian Identity Crises

As with many young nations, Australia has long been occupied with resolving issues of identity formation. As this chapter will show, Australia arguably suffers from "an *extreme* case of 'identity crisis'" [emphasis added] (Whitlock and Carter 2). According to White, this insecurity on the part of the Australian nation shows in the endless endeavours to depict the 'typical' Australian on canvas or paper. Speaking of Australia's national identity as a "history of national obsession" (viii), he points to the attempts of the Australian intelligentsia "to give [the country] an individuality, a personality" (viii). Be it in literature, the arts or, more recently, in the field of local film, for all of Australia's white history, its inhabitants have constantly been told who they are and how they are supposed to lead their lives (Rattigan, *Images* 15).

But the eager attempts to endow Australia with a national identity on the part of the "image makers" (White, viii) could not compensate for the issue of the two Australian histories. Having settled in a land that had already been inhabited, the new Australians were not the only Australian residents on the continent. Due to the existence of the indigenous people – the Aborigines – prior to the arrival of the British convicts, the Australian nation possesses two different histories.

In understanding Australia as an old country, one emphasises the country's Aboriginal history, which probably started many thousand years before the arrival of the first British fleet on the continent (Carter 5). By contrast, the perception of Australia as a young nation focuses on the British settlement in 1788 as its date of origin, when the supervising British authorities deported their convicts to Australia (Bulbeck 62).

The co-existence of two valid points of view on Australian history and, thus, two different understandings of what it means to be Australian pose certain problems to any attempt of finding a homogenous self-image. The desired definition of the 'typical' Australian will, thus, always lack plausibility. Nevertheless, Australia's white history – its image as a white settler society – has long been the generally more accepted and dominant version on which to base common notions of Australian-ness (Carroll, *Preface* viii). This does not mean, however, that the white population was immune to

any doubts as regarded their national identity. In fact, it was Australia's Anglo-Celtic settler population that hardly managed to position itself in an Australian context (Elder 231). Their quest for a singular identity to present themselves to the world was a mere phenomenon of the white population, just as the insuperable problem of the two Australian histories discussed above. Australia's indigenous population neither made the distinction between a black and a white Australia, nor did they question their own identity as a community. They had to show a thousand-year old identity and knew exactly their place when the white settlers arrived – a knowledge arguably lacking in the Anglo-Celtic Australians.

4.1. White Australia and Its Identity Crisis

Certainly, the younger version of the Australia-image – Australia as a young nation of white settlers – may be celebrated for the fact that Australia has developed into a modern, democratic nation within an incredibly short time (Carter 5). At the same time, however, it may as well be criticized for its partiality and narrow approach to the Australian nation. Since this understanding of Australian history stresses the mostly British and consistently Anglo-Celtic settlers as "the nation's seed" (Carroll, *Australian Foundation* 184), it excludes the country's indigenous inhabitants from the notion of Australian national identity. Nevertheless, it has long been the prevailing idea of Australian-ness both among Australians and in the world (Carroll, *Preface* viii).

In accord with Anderson's idea of the invented community, the promotion of the very same image has generally been approached from two different angles: by trying to condense the Australian society to a character that was determined to be typical of every single Australian, and by attaching the idea of Australian-ness to specific customs and historic experiences, which were declared as distinctively Australian (Carroll, *Preface* viii). While the former was easily realized, as one of the following sections shall show, the attempts to base the Australian national identity on historic events were not quite as easy.

4.2. The Origins of White Australia – Nothing to be Proud of

Despite the fact that the settlement of Australia started with convict deportation, its development is not entirely unique in the history of nation formation. The United States of America, for instance, was also first settled by British emigrants. Nevertheless, Australia finds itself in a different position, for the Australians "never experienced stirring revolutionary or civil wars like the Americans" (Macgregor et al. 10). While the latter build their national self-image on the War of Independence as the formative event of the American nation, any attempt to base Australia's national identity on historic events proves to be highly problematic (Carroll, *Australian Foundation* 183).

Firstly, Australia's white settler society had British roots and could, thus, only fall back on a British history instead of having its own (Carter 12). Secondly, as John Carroll argues, it is extremely difficult to determine a formative event, on which to base the legitimacy of the nation's foundation. The arrival of the first fleet of British settlers was considered unacceptable, for it was regarded a moment of shame rather than a source of pride. The common belief was that "Australia's foundation, the nation's formative experience, was one of Evil, oozing a stain across the fabric of the society which was too shameful to admit" (Carroll, *Australian Foundation* 184). That is, Australians felt that they had no reason to be proud of their origins – their forefathers, who were brought to the continent were convicts and British prisoners (Carroll, *Australian Foundation* 183-184).

The feeling of shame on the part of the new Australians was partially rooted in the way the continent was represented in Great Britain. By the so-called 'mother' country the convict colony Australia was exploited for its own purposes. Using deportation to Australia as one of the major punishments for crime, the British authorities sought to decrease the number of crimes by promoting a rather daunting image of the colony (White 17). By this means, a negative picture of the foreign country was manifested in the minds of the British, but also was spread among the offspring society itself. That is, by supporting the notion that Australia was "hell upon earth" (White 16), the British authorities unintentionally counteracted a "settling of the mind" (Carroll, *Preface* viii) – the development of an attachment to the unknown place – for the first few generations of Australians. It is only natural that, from such unpromising beginnings, the new

Australians found themselves in a constant quest for a way to define and present themselves to the world (Carroll, *Preface* viii).

4.3. Australian National Identity or Second-Hand Britishness?

Based on Australia as "hell upon earth" (White 16), the previous section has shown how the British government used Australia for its own purposes. When Great Britain tried to encourage new migrants to go to Australia in the mid-nineteenth century, the negative presentation of Australia as a "hell upon earth" was rapidly altered. The promotion of Australia as a "working man's paradise" was meant to solve Britain's migration problem (White 29).

But despite the endeavours on the part of the British authorities to encourage positive associations with the Australian continent, the new place was largely regarded as strange and uncultivated by its new inhabitants (Elder 51). In order to create the feeling of being at home, the settlers, who were largely of British descent, conducted extensive changes in the Australian native flora and fauna. This involved the instalment of European, or mostly British, trees, plants and animals at places where there had already been native Australian vegetation and animals (Elder 231).

It was, however, not only this absence of emotional attachment to the unknown continent that made the mainly British immigrants look back to their native country with nostalgia. As Duncan Macgregor et al. has justly observed:

> the nation has long exhibited narcissistic insecurities about [its] history and [its] place in the world. [Their] national stories are viewed as lacklustre and boring, somehow not as legitimate and genuine as those of other nations. [They] lack the dashing heroes and the resolute political leaders of the British. [...] And [they] do not have the cultural and intellectual heritage of the Germans or the Chinese. (10)

Macgregor et al. conclude that it is lack of self-confidence that has made Australia, for many generations, "cling closely to Great Britain, looking to the Empire to give

Australians second-hand access to an identity [they] considered better than anything [they] could produce locally" (10). Moreover, the Australian nation was viewed as a deteriorating race by the British, who reflected on the well-accepted theory that the British heritage would decline under the influence of the Red Continent – another reason for the offspring society to believe in their cultural inferiority to the former penal colony (White 48).

As a result, the white Australian population was long looking up to the 'mother' country, adhered to British cultural practices and tried to build up an Australia based on the British model (Macgregor et al. 10). Soon the majority of Australians, who were mainly of English descent, were leading a life endowed with elements of British culture (Partington xviii). Carroll perfectly summarizes this strong British heritage when he claims that

> virtually all [Australian] institutions – governmental, administrative, judicial, financial, educational, religious, cultural, and trade union – came out of the British mould with, at the most, minor adaptations. (143)

In fact, the ties to Great Britain, Francis Keble Crowley argues, were so strong that by 1901, there was

> no fully developed Australian self-image. Most Australians who thought about the matter referred to themselves as Anglo-Australians, or Scottish-Australians, or Irish-Australians, or paradoxically as 'independent Australian Britons' or 'Britons of the Empire'. (261)

In addition to that, Australia was connected to Great Britain both economically and politically. While the economic relationship between Australia and the British Empire manifested itself in the position of Great Britain as Australia's major trading partner and lender, the relationship on the political level may rather be characterised as a dependency relationship, in which Great Britain functioned as the superior power, which guaranteed military protection and gave security (Miller 229). In return, Australia was obliged to support the British Empire in their military actions without hesitation, and immediately followed Great Britain in World War I and World War II (Kevin 295).

In this sense, the majority of Australians were just as patriotic in terms of their Australian-ness as they were in acting out their British-ness, or as Geoffrey Partington puts it:

> nineteenth century Australians felt Australian when they met 'new chum' British immigrants or British visitors, but British when they encountered Aborigines, and Chinese and other migrant groups. (xxi)

This strong British heritage posed a great problem to the development of a unique Australian national identity that went beyond a mere second-hand Britishness. Having maintained the cultural linkages to Great Britain for most of its history, the white Australian society inevitably stumbled across the huge void of national insecurity, when they gradually turned away from the 'mother country'. In their search for a unique Australian identity, they realized that there was not much left on which to build a national identity, apart from the borrowed Britishness they had looked up to. Before a sense of belonging could emerge, figures, events and places needed to be given meaning, or as Carter puts it they needed to be "made national" (10). Towards the turn of the 19th century Australia found itself in the middle of the laborious process of inventing itself.

5. The Rise of National Pride among Australia's White Population

It was only towards the end of the 19th century, with the following generations, that Australians were no longer content to live with a borrowed identity. By the 1830s, the number of free-born Australians had begun to outnumber the first settlers, who came to Australia as criminals, together with those meant to control them; and by the 1890s the number of Australian-born inhabitants had already been higher than the percentage of people coming to Australia as immigrants (Walter 8). Among these new generations of Australians a new national consciousness arose, going along with a search for means of

expressing a unique national identity, which stood in sharp contrast to anything Great Britain had to offer (Walter 21).

This quest for a distinctively Australian identity and the growing emotional attachment to Australia were accompanied by similarly emancipatory political events. Before the beginning of the 20th century, Australia had consisted of six mutually independent British colonies, whose political loyalty lay with the British Empire. In 1901, a significant change in political direction took place, when these separate colonies were formed to build one nation. While the former colonies had been building individual colonial characteristics due to their intense rivalry amongst each other, the time after Federation was marked by a new national sentiment (White 83).

5.1. A New National Sentiment among the Australian Intelligentsia

The rise of national pride was a nation-wide phenomenon. As such, it was observable both among the ordinary Australians as well as among the makers of Australian art and literature (White 86). From the mid-1880s onwards, a new generation of painters and writers, subsequently known as the Heidelberg and the Bulletin School, abandoned the British heritage in the quest for the creation of a distinctive Australian national identity.

The term 'Bulletin School' was used as an umbrella term in order to refer to the group of literary writers working for the *Bulletin* - a weekly academic journal that was founded in 1881 (Elder 190). First published in a time of increasing nationalism, the journal's point of view was highly "nationalist, radical and republican" (Ward, *History* 197). Its most influential writers were A.B. "Banjo" Paterson (1864-1941), Henry Lawson (1867-1922) and Joseph Furphy, alias Tom Collins (1843-1912) (Ward, *History* 196). Born in Australia, their compositions provided an innovative way of presenting what it meant to be Australian (White 86). As Ken Gelder points out, "[this] Australian literary tradition was constructed out of a confident assertion of difference" (11). That is, Australians began to feel more confident with being viewed as a nation that was different from their European country of origin, and were willing to emphasize and celebrate this difference. Instead of perceiving the Australian landscape through their

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lenses of British values, they started perceiving it from the perspective of Australians (Ward, *History* 196). As a result, they managed to convey a sense of belonging to the Australian landscape as well as a feeling of being at home (Elder 191).

Form the middle of the 1880s onwards Australian writers started having an Australian audience in mind. Whereas prior to that period their compositions had largely been aimed at a British sophisticated audience, they were now writing for an audience that "self-consciously wanted to be Australian" (Elder 190). Keeping this target audience in mind, they were looking for a means to do justice to their readers by drawing on the wealth of uniquely Australian sources. And where else would they find the sought-after inspiration than in the land itself – a means to set oneself apart from the British heritage. It was in the Australian Bush that the Australian intelligentsia found a place that was "distinctive, not representative". By making the Bush the major setting of their stories, they turned it into a national space carrying significant meaning for the entire Australian community (Walter 15).

Similar developments were observable in the field of the Australian arts. Just as their colleagues from literature, a group of young, urban painters was looking for the 'real' Australia in the local landscape. The so-called Heidelberg School (Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Charles Conder) provided the Australian population with the same images that were rendered by the writers of the Bulletin, albeit in graphic form. In this sense, they were equally influential in the reinforcing the idea of true Australian-ness to be situated in the Australian Bush (Elder 184).

5.2. The Creation of a National Australian 'Type'

Promoting the idea of the Bush as the 'real' Australia, the artists of the Bulletin and Heidelberg School were more actively involved in the process of nation formation than any other intellectual group. In understanding the Bush as the quintessential Australia, the native artists valorised the people living and working in the Bush – generally white Australian men – as 'typical' Australians, their values and beliefs as definite principles of the Australian way of life (Ward, *History* 197). In times of a new national

consciousness and a lack of national heroes, the promoted understanding of 'real' Australian-ness was well-received among the crisis-ridden white Australian population, as it offered orientation and a certain confidence with being Australian (Walter 15).

The enthusiastic reception of the proposed self-picture, however, ought not to obscure the fact that the image hardly conformed to the actual formation of the nation's population. Given the fact that Australia has been known as "one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world" (Glynn 229), the notion of the Bush worker as the Australian archetype is undoubtedly lacking plausibility. Furthermore, the created self-image proves to be highly problematic, since it merely operates on the basis of exclusion. While former writers and painters had included native Australians and women in their compositions, the artists of the Bulletin and Heidelberg School eliminated the same from their national narratives (Macintyre 144). By building the national self-image on the white, male Australian Bush worker, their works functioned as vehicles of discrimination and helped to create an image of Australian-ness that was both gender- and race-specific (Elder 187). In this sense, the notion of the Bush worker as the Australian type needs to be understood as a creation of the Australian artistic elite, rather than an absolute truth.

In summary, the Australian artists of the Bulletin and the Heidelberg School were highly influential in the development of common notions of Australian-ness. They equipped the Australian Bush with a deeper mythic meaning and contributed to the development of an Australian type – the Australian Bush worker. By endowing him with distinctively Australian character traits and values, they provided the Australian nation with an idealised self-image they could live up to, and with a means to fill the hole that the cultural break with Great Britain had created. In this way, the Australian artistic elite played a key role in the creation of a homogenous Australian self-image and induced the process of constructing the imagined community known as the Australian nation.

6. Inventing Australian-ness – Dominant Elements in the Quintessential Australian Character

In the 1890s, artists played a major part in the invention of henceforth dominant images of Australian culture. While these images have undergone minor modifications over the ensuing decades, the character traits and morals underlying these figures have remained almost unchanged. The three main features claimed to be essential components of the 'true' Australian character, are analysed in the following section. They are antiauthoritarianism, egalitarianism and mateship.

6.1. Cultural Concepts

6.1.1. Anti-Authoritarianism and the Anti-British Stance

As mentioned in the section on Australian-British relations, the majority of early settlers were of English background. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the connections to Great Britain were extremely strong, be it on the political, economical or cultural level. The feeling of being culturally inferior to what was often referred to as the 'mother' country and the early attempts to adjust Australia to accustomed European conditions were overcome only gradually. It was only by the late 19th century that the white Australian population had witnessed the emergence of a new national consciousness. It was only then that the new Australians began to focus on the future of the country instead of adhering to the archaic ties to Great Britain (Platz 241).

The emancipatory development among the Australian people was not only initiated by the compositions of the Australian artists, referred to as the Heidelberg and the Bulletin school, but also by the fact that the earlier close connection to the 'mother' country was never entirely without tensions. In sports, for instance, their rivalry went beyond competition. In particular, incidents such as the so-called 'Bodyline' during the cricket tour in the early 1930s provoked a crisis in the relationship between Australia and Great Britain. The term 'bodyline' refers to a tactic in cricket in which the ball is thrown *at* the

batsman of the opposing team, rather than thrown *to* him. Although often considered as unfair and hazardous, exactly this tactic was applied by Captain Robert Jardine, the leader of the British team. As a consequence, the British defeated their Australian opponents, albeit by unsporting means. This occurrence, subsequently known as the 'Bodyline' incident was being exploited by the press in both countries and was even discussed on a political level (McComb 68).

The actual turning point in the British-Australian relations, however, was the Fall of Singapore in Feb 1942, when the Australian troops could no longer count on the protection of their British ally against the attacks of the Japanese. Since this incident was perceived as an act of treason on the part of the British, Australia sought protection from another superpower - the U.S. In their turn from the 'mother' country, they not only entered a similar "dependency relationship" with the US, but simultaneously witnessed an increased sense of national independence and a growing desire to detach from Great Britain both politically and culturally (Macintyre 188).

Nevertheless, Australia was not excessively motivated to induce the process of distancing itself from the British Empire. Despite the wish for an increased independence, Australia has maintained a flag that contains the Union Jack as its national symbol and continued to have the Queen of England – a British monarch – as its official head of state (Macgregor et al. 29). Among the Australian people, however, the unsatisfactory compromise Australian government had a notable effect: it evoked a characteristic that was henceforth regarded an essential element of the Australian self-image. The archaic yet still existent ties to Great Britain were not compatible with the growing national awareness among the Australian people. It is, therefore, not surprising that their desire to loosen the ties to the British resulted in fierce critique and resistance towards the British authority and everything considered typically British. As a consequence an anti-British feeling developed, which went hand in hand with a general scepticism towards authority (Macgregor et al. 15).

This anti-authoritarian stance, however, was not entirely new in the Australian character. Already by the beginning of the 20th century a general dislike of authority came to Australia together with the waves of Irish immigrants. The strong anti-authoritarianism on the part of the Irish was largely caused by their social position in the

dominantly British new home. From the very beginning, the Australian Irish were marked as the underdogs, classified as the foe and treated as the convict or the rebel. As such, they were scorned and not accepted as proper members of the Australian community (Elder 118). Instead, "they were hated and they hated in return" (O'Farrell 8).

But they did not give in to the often anti-Irish establishment in the new world. Although they found themselves in the position of a minority group, they rebelled against the prevalent injustice caused by their descent. They revolted against the discrimination and hostility, claimed equal rights in society and refused to accept authoritarianism and oppression. Most importantly, they insisted on an understanding of Australian-ness that was not dominated by British culture, but also accepted their Irish roots (O'Farrell 10-11). In this sense, their influence on the notion of what it means to be Australian was enormous. By rejecting and questioning the predominantly British establishment, they functioned both as a "warning and inspiration" (O'Farrell 6) to the Australian society, for they encouraged the rest of Australia's society to be alert to the excessive power of the English culture in the new world. By this means, they prevented the reproduction of the social order known from Great Britain (O'Farrell 11).

Inspired by the anti-authoritarian stance of the Irish, the entire white Australian society began to clearly distance itself from typically British principles. That is, the rise of a strong nationalist enthusiasm towards the end of the 19th century merely strengthened a character trait that had always been there embodied by the Irish minority group. The wish to break away from the culture of the 'mother' country, which had been so dominant for such a long time, eventually made it an essential trait of all white Australians. As a result, they tried to develop a distinctive national identity, which was based on values standing in sharp contrast to those proudly upheld in Great Britain. Rejecting the British "system based on privilege, birthright and religion" (Macgregor et al., 29), Australians started to valorise the exact opposite in concepts such as egalitarianism and mateship (Macgregor et al. 18).

6.1.2. Egalitarianism

According to Russel Ward, the core idea behind the concept of egalitarianism is best described as follows: "Jack is not only as good as his master, but, at least in principle, probably a good deal better" (2). In view of the obvious existence of social stratums today, egalitarianism is usually said to mean that members from any social group feel equal to and are regarded as equal by members of any other social group (Elder 44).

While there is a general agreement among cultural critics that egalitarianism, as defined above, may be regarded as a core value of Australian society (Macgregor et al. 18), the extent to which Australia may be seen as an egalitarian country seems to be a source of constant debate. Ted Wheelwright, for instance, suggests that egalitarianism in Australia has always been a myth (199). In contrast, Ward points to the development of Australian society as from the bottom to the top, rather than from the elite to the lower social groups (17). Likewise, Donald Horne illustrates the absence of class prejudices by drawing on the concrete example of the Australian pub. Here, the employee and his employer meet as individuals, regardless of their profession and social status (qtd. in Elder 44). The former Australian leader of the opposition, Kim Beazley, brought this conflict to the point when she referred to Australia as a country that "may not be [egalitarian] in outcomes or experiences, but in spirit" (qtd. in Hartcher 9).

If egalitarianism is merely something that the Australian society *tries* to live up to, rather than actually living accordingly, the question as to how egalitarianism gained such great importance in today's understanding of Australian-ness seems legitimate. It has been argued in one of the previous sections that the writers of the Bulletin were highly influential in the creation of an Australian national type. They equally decisively contributed to the notion of Australia as an egalitarian society, by valorising the common working man as the core figure of the Australian nation (Hirst 73). This idea of the quintessential Australian as being embodied by the working man – a national member historically associated with a "'lowly' type of work" – has played a highly relevant role in the construction of Australia as an egalitarian country (Elder 49).

It has furthermore been argued that the Australian egalitarian nature developed in opposition to the class-consciousness prevalent in the 'mother' country. While adhering

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to the English legal system, education etc. the Australian society tried to build their identity on the basis of the idea of equality. By denying social differences they tried to revise British ideas and values in order to create an 'improved' Great. The egalitarian stance, just as the celebrated anti-Britishness, may, thus, be understood as a way of distancing oneself from the most dominant values and ideals of the former colonizer (Rattigan, *Images* 12).

Once created by the writers of the Bulletin, the idea of egalitarianism as an Australian core value was fostered by national stories of war. The Australian army was known for differing from their British counterpart insofar as it endorsed a close relationship between officers and their soldiers. In fact, Australian officers liked to regard themselves as one of their men, and were respected for their qualities as individuals, rather for their military rank (Carroll, *Mateship* 147).

However, Australian egalitarianism is not without flaws. The notion of the emergence of the Bush worker as the typical Australian may just as well be criticised for its partiality. Traditionally the idea of social equality did not apply to all Australians. By being centred on the figure of the white worker of British descent, the concept excluded women, indigenous Australians and non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants from the idea of an egalitarian Australia (Macgregor et al. 18). Egalitarianism may, thus, be understood as a highly complex and contradictory concept, for it seems to promote equality by creating inequality.

6.1.3. Mateship

The concept of mateship is fundamental in the self-definition of the majority of Australians, yet enormously hard to define (Carroll 145). Not to be understood as an ordinary friendship, its full meaning may only be grasped in the context of Australia and its history (Platz 261).

According to the *Oxford Companion to Australian Folklore*, the origins of mateship may be traced back to colonial times, when men were left to their own devices. Living alone in the harsh Australian landscape, they relied on each other's company and

support for survival (Davey and Seal 175). In the late 19th century, an emotional component was added, extending the former meaning of the mate as a mere companion in the struggle for survival to a loyal, intimate friend (Platz 261).

Given the virtual lack of female contacts, this development is not surprising at all, for the relationships among men represented the only channel for letting one's emotions free, for talking about problems and thoughts (Hodges 7). More recent studies do not even rule out the possibility of homosexual relationships between so-called mates in the course of the 19th century. They suggest that, in view of the relative absence of women, the extension of mateship to a sexual relationship between men appears quite likely (Platz 262).

The dominant contemporary understanding of mateship, however, is the idealized picture promoted by the works of the so-called Heidelberg School in the 1880s and 1890s. With the aim of painting and expressing their love for the 'real' Australia, they provided the Australian society with nostalgic images of hard-working Anglo-Celtic men, their life in the harsh Australian Bush and the mateship offering support in hard times (Elder 182-185). In a similar way, the writers of the Bulletin celebrated the deep mateship existent among the Australian Bush workers in their stories (Carroll 154). In particular, the tales and poems by Henry Lawson, Banjo Patterson and Joseph Furphy contributed to the consideration of mateship as one of the foundation pillars of Australian national identity (Elder 190).

The romanticized image presented by the native artists, however, ought not to obscure the fact that the term mateship was historically used to refer to a special relationship between white-Australian men only. Since the concept still calls up associations with exclusively male relationships in the minds of most Australian people, the notion of mateship is no less problematic than the concept of egalitarianism. Just as the latter, the idea of mateship is not universally valid and excludes indigenous people and women. In fact, the existence of mateship is even dependent on the exclusion of women (Schaffer 101). This goes along with Kenneth Dempsey's claim that bonds of mateship are based on practices such as ridiculing women and treating them as a lower order of person (139). The idea of mateship as an "emotional commitment that overrides all other

considerations" (Rattigan, *Images* 27), thus, implies that same-sex relationships are valued higher than relationships between men and women.

Men's deep-seated belief in the superiority of their relationships among each other may well be observed in today's local pubs. Even though the access to the pub is no longer only permitted to male Australians, the pub is still largely understood as a male territory. Many pubs are still reminiscent of earlier social conventions, when women were assigned the lady's lounge, and the pub was considered a place for Anglo-Australian men only. Being defined as a man's place and a space for acting out mateship behaviour, the pub does not permit any space to women within the concept of mateship and contributes to its maintenance as a white male category (Elder 100-101).

6.2. National Australian Figures

6.2.1. The Bushman Legend

At the beginning of the 20th century Ross Gibson argued that "if you want the real Australia" you should "look at the earth, not the people" (Gibson 69). The view that Australian identity is linked to the landscape of the country has been held for most part of its white history.

The close association of Australian identity with the Bush as a national symbol emerged with the formation of the Heidelberg School and the writers of the Bulletin – the democratic national writers and painters of the 1880s and 1890s. The so-called Bush ballads, by the writers Banjo Paterson and Henry Lawson, were particularly influential (Platz 259). By predominantly depicting white, male Australians and their attempts to tame the harsh Australian landscape, they contributed to the emergence of the idea that the 'real' Australia is to be found in the Bush (Turner, *Fictions* 26). The centrality of the Bush in national paintings and literature emphasized the importance of the Bush worker in national stories, and helped to construct an Australian identity that had the heroic Bushman at its core (Elder 184).

Since the Bush is the occupational place of the Bushman, it may well be regarded as the genesis of the Bushman figure, for it endows the Bushman with his qualities. In other words, the features of the Bushman are the direct result of the hard work and effort that the life in the Bush requires. Rattigan is, therefore, perfectly right when he states that the Bushman legend may be understood as "an expansion of the emphasis on the Bush" (26). It is the Bush, after all, that makes the Bushman an Australian hero and justifies his status in Australian culture, by equipping him with his heroic qualities (Rattigan, *Images* 25).

The historian Ward, who was the first to analyse the Australian national identity, described the typical Australian as follows:

> […] a practical man, rough and ready in his manners and quick to decry any appearance of affectation in others […] He swears hard and consistently, gambles heavily and often, and drinks deeply on occasion […] he is great knocker of eminent people unless, as is in the case of his sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess. He is a fiercely independent person who hates officiousness and authority […] above all, he will stick to his mates through thick and thin, even if he thinks they may be in the wrong. (*Australian Legend*, 2-3)

In today's understanding of the Bushman character, Ward's description is still valid. At its centre is the Bush worker of British descent (White 103), who has acquired all the qualities necessary to secure his survival by conflict with nature - "manly independence", "physical prowess" and "endurance", an egalitarian spirit and love for his mates. Having acquired these qualities, the originally British settler becomes the Australian Bushman and his features became increasingly regarded as being typical of the 'real' Australian (Rattigan, *Images* 27-28).

Although the figure of the Bushman has derived from the actual Australian Bush worker portrayed by the artists of the 1880s and 1890s, one ought to keep in mind that the Bushman is a romanticized mythical figure, and as such, is to be seen as the typical Australian, rather than the average Australian. Being a product of the Heidelberg and the Bulletin School – urban Australian artists, who sought the escape from the everyday hardships of city life – the emergence of the Bushman as the Australian self-image may be regarded as an urban phenomenon. Moreover, Australia is one of the most urbanised

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countries in the world. A national self-image that regards the Bushman as its core therefore evidently lacks plausibility (White 101-102).

The lack of plausibility is not the only problem inherent in the attempts to valorise the Bushman legend to the Australian legend. Dealing with the stories about 'Bush*men*', rather than 'Bush*women*', the most significant Australian legend is equally exclusive as the concepts discussed above. The emphasis on the achievements of the Anglo-Celtic Australian men living in the Bush, makes it not merely gender-specific but restricts the idea of Australian-ness to the Anglo-Celtic race, and excludes indigenous people and non-British immigrants. They do not fit the idea of the true Australian, are omitted from the national self-image and made outsiders of the Australian community (Elder 187).

6.2.2. The Pioneer Legend

Placing its hero in the surrounding of the Australian Bush, the legend of the pioneer uses the same operational sphere as the Bushman legend (Rattigan, *Images* 28). Due to this similarity the legends found themselves in a virtual competition for the right to be regarded the central image of the 'real' Australian in the late 19th century (Platz 257). As the analysis of the pioneer figure shall point out, however, the two legends significantly differ from each other.

The term 'pioneer' originally denoted the early immigrants who settled in Australia in order to find work. In this sense, the so-called pioneers emerged out of the same group of early settlers as the Bushman (Platz 257). It was only in the 1890s, however, that its current and major meaning developed. Henceforth, the term pioneer came to mean the landowner (squatter) or smaller landholder who was the first to settle and tame the land. Its primary meaning emerged, thus, at the same time as that of the Bushman legend – a time that witnessed the revival of a feeling of nationalism as well as a lack of potential historical figures that could have been celebrated as national heroes (Rattigan, *Images* 29).

Moreover, the figure of the pioneer was glorified by the same group of young Australian writers as the Bushman, first and foremost by Paterson and Lawson (Hirst

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207). These literary writers generally adopted the qualities of the Bushman, gave them a special twist and created a new heroic cultural figure (Rattigan, *Images* 29) – a figure that stands out due to features such as endurance, courage, initiative and the willingness to work hard (Hirst 205).

Although sharing a great number of elements with the Bushman legend, the legend of the pioneer includes aspects that are absent in the former legend. Firstly, the legend of the pioneer captures the myth of the early Australian settlement. By celebrating the idea that the pioneers risked their lives in their attempts to tame the environment, the legend implies that the early settlers did not merely work for their own profit, but also for the next generations to come (Rattigan, *Images* 28). Secondly, the figure of the pioneer is equipped with a certain tendency to settled-ness, whereas the Bushman is said "to be a rolling stone, highly suspect if he should chance to gather much moss" (Ward 2). That is, the Bushman tends to follow the principle of mental and physical flexibility, and, thus, lacks the pioneer's desire to settle (Platz 257).

The most significant element of the pioneer legend – an element that makes it stand out from all the other Australian myths – is the fact that it pays credit to the heroic achievements of female settlers. Whereas women are almost entirely excluded from other Australian legends, the pioneer legend celebrates the women taming the Bush as heroines of the early settlement (Rattigan, *Images* 29). Women are permitted particularly much space in the prose of Henry Lawson, who devoted many of his literary compositions to the hardships in women's everyday life in the Bush (Hirst 22).

Given the fact that the pioneer legend assigns a central role to the settler women living in the Bush as companions of their husbands, the concept of mateship celebrated in the Bushman legend is pushed into the background. Replacing the mate for the loyal wife, the pioneer legend undoubtedly puts more emphasis on the concept of egalitarianism (Rattigan, *Images* 29). The advocacy of social equality also accounts for the fact that the legend focuses on the so-called squatters and small landowners, who are basically ordinary Australians. Regardless of their social conditions, each of them may have the typical pioneer qualities of "diligence, courage perseverance". The pioneer legend, thus, emphasises the Australian egalitarian spirit, by granting everyone the same opportunities (Hirst 29).

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Being firmly anchored in the self-definition of most Australians, both the pioneer and the Bushman legend have been incredibly powerful myths in Australian culture. When the two legends started merging in the early 20th century, the Australian culture witnessed the construction of an even stronger Australian tradition; a tradition that has henceforth been an essential part of how the Australians liked to perceive themselves and how they liked to be seen by others. From that point onwards, the Australian people have tried to live up to the ideal of the Anzac.

6.2.3. The Anzac Legend

In terms of Australian self-determination, the Anzac legend may well be regarded as the most powerful tradition; even more powerful than the legend of the Bushman or the pioneer (Reynaud 1). The centrality of the Anzac in Australian national narratives may partially be ascribed to the legend's formation. In contrast to the "more diffusely inspired legends" of the Bushman and the pioneer, the Anzac legend emerged out of an actual historical event – the landing of the Australian troops on the Turkish Gallipoli Peninsula during the First World War (Rattigan, *Images* 29).

On 25 April, 1915, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, subsequently known under the abbreviation ANZACS, landed on the Dardanelles (Manning 234-235). That Australia would support Great Britain in its military campaigns was an unquestioned fact, since Australia was still constitutionally bound to follow the 'mother' country. Regarding it to be their duty, 20,000 troops were sent to Gallipoli in order to fight the German and the Turkish troops on the side of the British allies (Macintyre 156).

By taking over Istanbul, the Anzacs were meant to pave the way for the British, so the latter could attain the Black Sea and form an alliance with the Russian army. For this purpose, the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps started their attack from the part of the peninsula that was later named Anzac Cove. Being "hemmed by precipitous cliffs" (Haythornthwaite 39), the point of attack turned out to be "a terrible, inhospitable landscape" (Haythornthwaite 39), and accordingly exacerbated the Australian

campaign. In spite of numerous attempts, the Australian soldiers were not able to conquer the steep slopes. The start of winter finally forced them to withdraw from Gallipoli and leave 8.000 dead fellow soldiers behind (Macintyre 158).

In hindsight, the battle is often said to have "revealed errors of command and execution", meaning that mistakes on the part of both the British authorities and the Australian solders were evident (Macintyre 158). Given the lack of success and the high number of casualties, the battle at Gallipoli may justly be seen as one of the greatest defeats in Australia's history of war participation. Macgregor et al. put forward a similar point when they refer to the campaign as "a mostly pointless war to maintain the increasingly dysfunctional idea of balance of power at the heart of Europe" (Macgregor et al., 23). But if Australia's participation in World War I was not more than a minor, failed invasion, why is it exactly this lading at Gallipoli that "has [...] served as a surrogate story of nationhood and independence" (Macgregor et al. 22) for so long?

Bill Gammage accounts for this question by providing the broader historical background of the Gallipoli campaign. According to him, the participation of Australian troops in the war took place at the right time for the Australians at home to celebrate it as the birth of the Australian nation. About six month prior to the event, the Royal Australian Navy had celebrated a victory over the Germans as a symbol of achieved adulthood. Similarly enthusiastic was the reaction of the rest of the Australian nation, which welcomed the victory just as much as the Navy itself. Some Australians even spoke of the action as contributing to the process of Australia's nation formation, while others were impatiently looking for a more decisive experience to serve as a foundation on which to build Australian nationhood. Thus, Australia was waiting for an event such as the Gallipoli campaign to compensate for the absence of any kind of formative event (57).

Certainly, Australian troops had fought next to Great Britain in the British Colonial Wars as well as in the Boer Wars. Both wars, however, were of minor cultural importance to Australia. In fact, Australia was suffering from an almost entire absence of any military tradition before following Great Britain into World War I (Reynaud 9). In this way, the combat at Gallipoli is often regarded as the point in Australian history when "the Australian nation lost its innocence" (Elder 247). Being inexperienced in

military affairs, the Australian soldiers, and thus the entire Australian nation, was given the opportunity to prove themselves on both the battle field and the world stage (Gammage 56). The role of the actual battle in the development of the Anzac myth ought, therefore, not to be overestimated. The nation's craving for a moment in history that could be celebrated as the birth of the nation possibly was the major factor contributing to the rise of the Anzac legend (Rattigan, *Images* 30).

The Anzac was not an entirely new self-image. In fact, it merely served the modernisation of the then slightly outdated but well-known Australian legends of the Bushman and the pioneer. By giving them a more conservative touch, the Anzac legend functioned as a means to reincorporate the myth of the Bushman into the contemporary cultural consciousness (Rattigan, *Images* 30). Certainly, the opponent had changed from the harsh Australian Bush to the Turkish foe, the required qualities, however, had remained: prowess, courage and enterprise (Gammage 62). The figure of the Anzac, therefore, adopted most of the Bushman and pioneer qualities as well as their values and motivations, such as "resourcefulness, initiative, capacity for endurance, reliability, courage, and (most importantly) mateship" (Rattigan, *Images* 31).

The Anzac figure may, hence, well be understood as a product of the mythic qualities of all former Australian heroes (Rattigan, *Images* 30). As such, the Anzac combines all the fundamental concepts embodied by them: egalitarianism, anti-authoritarianism or anti-Britishness and, above all, mateship. Endowed with these principles, the Australian soldiers arrived in the home country as the guardian/embodiment of what was regarded as being Australian, and equipped the Australian identity with a fresh, albeit not entirely new, "heroic, legendary core" (White 130).

Since the term 'Anzac' may only be used in order to refer to the men who actually participated in the war, the term 'digger' has been used in order to incorporate the ordinary Australian into the legend – as "the Anzac in civilian clothes" (Rattigan, *Images* 31). This way, the legend was extended in application, including any ordinary Australian who displays the heroic qualities of the Anzac. By detaching the legend from its original context of war and adapting it to the conditions of everyday life in Australia, it was brought to its full cultural potential. The qualities of the heroic Anzac came to be an essential part of the character of Australian men (Rattigan, *Images* 31).

Today, the legend of the Anzac is frequently reaffirmed and re-enacted. Exhibitions and museums are meant to serve as constant reminders of the battle and function as a means to reinforce the idea of Gallipoli as one of the most significant events in the Australian past (Elder 7). The act of 1927, by which Anzac Day was made an official public holiday in all Australian states, had a similar reminding function (White 136). Over the years, the celebrations of Anzac Day and the practices connected with it have helped construct the influential narrative of the homogenous Anzac figure described above and have contributed to the maintenance of its status as a symbol of identification (Elder 7).

6.2.4. The Ocker

As revealed in the analysis of the three dominant Australian legends, the majority of cultural Australian heroes are to be found in a rural setting. Even though literary writers have shown considerable interest for urban cultural figures (Glynn 230), the record of city heroes falls comparatively short (Davey and Seal 175). One of the very few urban figures is the so-called 'Ocker'. Having his origins in the city, he certainly differs from his country counterpart. More surprisingly, the Ocker also shares some of the characteristics found in the Bushman, the pioneer and the Anzac.

In order to grasp the full knowledge of the concept, one has to bear in mind that the term 'Ocker' has recently been applied to a character type that in itself is much older. Though the term is recent, the emergence of what has subsequently been known as the Ocker already begins with the figure of the Australian Bushranger, who is, strictly speaking, a criminal that has been elevated to the status of a cultural hero (Rattigan, *Images* 32). Frequently compared to figures such as Robin Hood, the Bushranger has been celebrated for his courage in his (mainly unlawful) rebellion against the authorities and the injustice they caused (Davey and Seal 58). That is, what is known as the Ocker today, was a law breaker in the first place.

Starting from the legendary Bushranger spirit, the Ocker took a 'detour' via another culturally significant figure – the socially more acceptable larrikin - in order to finally culminate into what is celebrated as the Ocker today. In this sense, the direct ancestor of the Ocker is embodied by the larrikin: a young, rough, urban Australian, who was

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notorious for defying generally accepted rules of behaviour – a rebel (Davey and Seal 175). This goes along with Rattigan's definition, who states that "the larrikin […] was a delinquent, maybe even a minor criminal" (31-32).

In the field of theatre and literature, the larrikin figure competed against the Bushman and his fellow heroes for interest of the artists. Taken "from the lowest social strata in Australian cities" (Glynn 230), larrikinism was mainly used in literary compositions and theatrical productions in order to meet the expectations of the masses. Certainly, the creators of the Bushman as a cultural icon, Henry Lawson and A.B. ('Banjo') Paterson, hardly paid attention to the theme of larrikinism in their literary works. The two of them, however, were not the most extensively read writers in Australia at the time. More interest was directed towards a poet called C.J. Dennis, who very well devoted his best known compositions to larrikinism. Since most Australians were living in the major Australian cities, his portrayals of the larrikin figure were highly successful in meeting the taste of "the average Australian" (Glynn 231).

The fact that the well-received larrikin type was understood as a "minor criminal" (Rattigan, *Images* 31-32) suggests that the Ocker originated from a figure that is not necessarily exclusive to Australian society, but may also be encountered in other cultures (Rattigan, *Images* 31). The aspect possibly endowing the concept with a specifically Australian twist was the extension of the term's application. From the 1890s onwards any Australian who showed a certain disrespect for social and political rules could be called a larrikin (Davey and Seal 175). This generalisation put a more positive light on the figure of the larrikin, who, thenceforth, was mainly identified with the "authentically Australian characteristic of non-conformism, irreverence, impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32).

The Ocker adopted these qualities of "non-conformism, irreverence [and] impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32) together with a set of less favourable features, such as "drinking, swearing, noisy vulgarity". In contrast to his predecessors, the Bushranger and the larrikin, the Ocker was no longer a criminal or lawbreaker, but "an ordinary member of the community". In the figure of the Ocker the character traits of his antecedents combined in order to form a highly complex cultural type, who is not easy to define (Rattigan, *Images* 32).

The *Macquarie Dictionary* gives the following definition:

> The archetypal uncultivated Australian working man. A boorish, uncouth chauvinistic Australian. An Australian male displaying qualities considered to be typically Australian, as good humour, helpfulness and resourcefulness. ("Ocker")

Neil Rattigan gives a similar definition when he ascribes the following character traits to the figure of the Ocker:

> philistinism, inherent vulgarity or crudeness, anti-intellectualism, and especially the consequence of lack of proper respect for authority, which if taken too far is insolence or even revolution. (*Images* 32)

Taking a look at the definitions provided by Rattigan and the Macquarie Dictionary, it may be observed that the Ocker is not merely an Australian anti-hero. In fact, he even possesses features usually associated with the heroes of earlier legends, such as "resourcefulness" ("Ocker") and antiauthoritarianism (Rattigan, *Images* 32). The main difference to these cultural figures, however, is the realistic approach to heroism in the case of the Ocker. While the rural legends present their flawless, legendary heroes through a romantic lens and smooth away their rough edges, the Ocker is brimming with unacceptable character traits and even celebrates them. In this sense, the Ocker embodies "the unacceptable face of the Bushman, the pioneer and the Anzac" (Rattigan, *Images* 32). While the less favourable character traits are played down rather than celebrated in the latter cultural figures, the same rather negative features are played up in the figure of the Ocker, who displays them openly and proudly. Therefore, he is often understood as the ironic city cousin of the Bushman, who embodies the undesirable sides of the other cultural figures (Rattigan, *Images* 31-32).

The disagreeable features to his character, make the Ocker a rather paradoxical and odd kind of hero, who is far less tolerable than his fellow figures - the Bushman, the pioneer and the Anzac – in terms of an ideology. But despite being more or less viewed as a caricature of Australian vulgarity, he was readily received by the Australian society and immediately integrated into their understanding of the average Australian (White 170).

6.3. Dominant Cultural Elements and Their Problems

In accord with White's argument that "there is no real Australia waiting to be uncovered" (viii), the concepts and figures introduced from the 1980s onwards do not capture what being Australian is all about. They are rather, as White has put it, "an invention" (viii) – a representation of what dominant social groups, in this case the native artists of the late 19th century, valorised as the core of the Australian character (Carter 9).

As such, the proposed images may not only be criticized for lacking plausibility, but also for their partiality and exclusiveness. Firstly, the archetype of one of the most urbanized countries in the world may hardly ever be found in the country's landscape. The presentation of the Bush as the 'real' Australia seems, therefore, inadequate (Walter 12).

Secondly, most of the dominant cultural figures and concepts are exclusive in one way or another. Having their primary focus on the Anglo-Australian male, the majority of legends and concept claiming to be inherent to the Australian culture are both gender- and race-specific. Non-British immigrants and indigenous people are generally ignored, and apart from their role in the pioneer legend, women are excluded from the national self-image as well (Elder 187).

Any attempt to define the Australian nation on the basis of the promoted images is, thus, demonstrably problematic; and it seems comprehensible that there is a general consensus among critics of Australian culture about their unsuitability as cultural elements of the nation. Nevertheless, they have repeatedly been reinforced in the course of the White Australian history, as the following section will show.

7. Australia in the 1970s and Early 1980s – Using Australian Film as a Vehicle of National Identity

Based on what has been said before, the concept of national identity appears to rely heavily on constant re-enactment and reinforcement, as far as its emergence and maintenance are concerned. As implied by Anderson's concept of the imagined community, there seems to be a necessity of certain media, serving as constant reminders of what it means to be part of a nation (36).

Calling filmic productions "cultural artefacts" (99), Ian Bryson suggests that the film industry might function as such a vehicle of national identity. Suneeti Rekhari implies the same when she claims that "representation is made 'real' to an audience through the medium film" (125). In the context of Australia, as Tom O'Regan points out, the local film industry has always had a considerable share in the construction and preservation of what it means to be Australian (*Australian National Cinema* 304).

Drawing on the concept of Anderson, the following section traces the development of an early Australian national cinema. Paying particular attention to the films *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Man from Snowy River*, this section further investigates how nationalistic images of Australian-ness were embedded in the Australian cinema of the 1970s and 1980s.

7.1. The Rise of the New Wave Australian Cinema

The revival of the Australian film industry was preceded by a virtual drought of the Australian Cinema, which had reached an all-time low in the 50s and 60s of the twentieth century. During this period of time the number of film productions dropped to less than ten feature productions (Rattigan, *Images* 6), while some years of the 1960s not even saw the production of one single feature film (Cunningham 67). Due to the virtual absence of an Australian film market, local actors and producers had to leave the country in order to gain ground in the film business (Adams 61). Running short of

Australian filmmakers and films, the local cinemas were brimming with films produced beyond the borders of Australia – predominantly in America and Great Britain (Murray 71).

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Australia witnessed the same revival of national consciousness that had emerged in the 1890s under the influence of the Heidelberg and the Bulletin School. Similar to the situation surrounding the latter, the late 1960s were marked by a drastic change in politics as well as a change of mind among the Australian people. In contrast to the late 19th century, however, this change was not only observable in the field of politics and society, but also in the Australian film industry. In particular, the Australian filmmakers were alarmed by the excessive American and British influences (Adams 61). Accompanied by the emergence of a new national consciousness, the increased awareness of the foreign cultural dominance in the country led to a general quest for an individual Australian national culture – a force connecting the representatives of the arts, politics and the general Australian population (MacFarlane 20).

7.1.1. Government Intervention

The new spirit of optimism among the Australian society was partly evoked by the election of the Labour Party in December 1972. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, the Labour Party took the place of the Conservative Party after twenty-three years of continuous regime (Manning 240). This change from a conservative to a liberal political leadership had a positive influence on the sentiment of the population in general, and on the nation's cultural development in particular. In terms of the arts, the new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, has often been said to have heralded a new era insofar as he eliminated all British-ness and American domination that had marked Australian culture (Hutcheson 40). Taking the view that a local film industry is "essential to the rekindling of Australian national pride and self-confidence" (Whitlam 3), he supported its restoration by generous government funding (Adams 62).

The first discussions concerning the need of a local film industry, however, were initiated much earlier. In 1962 Whitlam's predecessor, Prime Minister John Gorton,

ordered the first enquiry regarding the Australian film industry in 30 years. The so-called Vincent Report was meant to examine the capacity for the production of Australian films (Bertrand and Collins 139). Although its recommendations have never been implemented, the Vincent Report played a crucial role in the process of stimulating the Australian film industry. As it pointed to the significance of local films as media for the presentation of Australian culture to the world, the Vincent Report initiated the very first debates centred on the issue of an absent Australian film industry in years (Shirley 38).

Prime Minister John Gorton, furthermore, paved the way for the rebirth of the Australian film industry in a second way. During his term in office he implemented the Experimental Film and Television Fund (EFTF) as well as the Australian Film Development Corporation (AFDC). While both governmental bodies served the purpose of supporting the funding of filmic productions, they operated in different fields of the film branch: the EFTF encouraged experimental film production and the AFDC operated in the field of the more commercial feature films (MacFarlane 21).

The latter governmental film institution, the AFCD, only granted financial support to film projects that allowed for two factors: quality and an Australian character (Bertrand, and Collins 149). The AFDC's understanding of the expression 'Australian' was recorded by the institution as follows: films with a "significant Australian content", which have at least "substantially" been made "in Australia" (qtd. in Bertrand and Collins 149). It was entirely within the subjective discretion of the AFCD to determine the extent to which a given film had a *significant* Australian content and, thus, deserved funding (Bertrand 265). By means of the AFCD, the government had thus enormous power over the Australian film industry.

7.1.2. Initial Success - The Australian Ocker Comedy

The first set of films produced with the support of the AFDC included the sex comedy and the so-called Ocker comedy. While the former was marked by a humorous approach towards sexual practices (Murray 73), the more popular Ocker comedy was mainly loved for its "masculine, populist, and cheerfully vulgar view of Australian society"

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(Carter 194). By celebrating slang, bad behaviour, excessive drinking and sex, the Ocker comedy provided the "unabashed celebration of the 'Australian'" (O'Regan, *Ocker* 76), which the Australian audience had been waiting for. Furthermore, the viewers appreciated its overt treatment of sex, for the traditional Ocker comedy was all about "getting enough of it, not getting enough of it [and] talking about it" (O'Regan, *Ocker* 76). The most popular representative of its genre is probably the comedy *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, which was the first revival film to be entirely funded by the government (Adams 62). Here, Australian-ness is embodied in the figure of Barry McKenzie, who, as Tim Burstall remarks, is certainly vulgar in his manners, but "loveable in [his] vulgarity" (qtd. in O'Regan, *Ocker* 81).

Early Ocker comedies, such as *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie*, were of great importance to the Australian film industry, as they proved the potential of Australian films to attract both audiences and investors (O'Regan, *Ocker* 78). Soon, however, critical voices began to be heard, expressing disapproval of the Australian-image that the Ocker comedy presented. By the mid-1970s its popularity among the Australian audience had significantly declined (Murray 76), and the calls for a "'quality' film policy" had spread among ordinary Australians and politicians alike (O'Regan, *Ocker* 95).

7.1.3. The Australian Film Commission (AFC) and the Period Film

With Gough Whitlam taking office the demands for a restructuring of the film industry were realized. Only recently in office, Whitlam arranged for the establishment of a national film and television school, and more importantly, for the replacement of the AFDC, the former funding agency, by the Australian Film Commission (AFC). By 1975 the AFC had come into operation. Its function was to provide financial support as well as to supervise the production and distribution of Australian films. Since it was designed as a statutory body under the Prime Minister's department, the influence of the government upon the film industry was greater than ever (Stratton 13-15).

7.1.3.1.   The Development of the 'AFC Genre'

With the onset of the 1970s, the government no longer regarded film as a mere means of entertainment, but recognized its value for propaganda purposes (Bertrand, and Collins 176). Bearing the huge potential of the medium film in mind, the government gradually incorporated the Australian film industry in the general process of constructing the nation (Turner, *Identity* 32); and the establishment of the AFC made it possible.

According to Sue Mathews, the newly established funding body raised the majority of capital needed in order to produce films. About half of the production costs, more than three quarters of marketing costs and almost the entire amount of money required for the vital script development were provided by the AFC (13). The AFC, and thus the government, had enormous power over the decisions concerning which projects were to be realized, and which films were to be refused financial support (MacFarlane 25). This enabled the government to use the film industry for its own interests. That is, films were used as vehicles of national culture and the film industry as a means to support the governmental endeavours to forge a consistent Australian national identity – a national self-image that the nation could be proud of (Turner, *Identity* 32).

Soon a suitable genre was found, which was meant to replace the rejected Ocker comedy (O'Regan, *Ocker* 78). The so-called 'Australian period film' or 'revival' film was given increased attention from the mid-1970s onwards. In fact, the period of the late 1970s and early 1980s, subsequently known as the 'New Wave Cinema', turned out to be the time of the Australian period films – "films set in the past, foregrounding their Australian-ness through the re-creation of history and representations of landscape" (Turner, *Period* 100).

Alluding to the enormous influence of the AFC in their production, Susan Dermody and Liz Jacka have coined the term 'AFC genre', which functions as an umbrella term for the kind of period film serving as a cultural flagship. In their function as vehicles of national images, the films belonging to this genre were expected to present what it meant to be Australian, both to the Australian people and to the rest of the world. Aimed at an international audience as well, the period film was clearly meant to be seen by a broader audience than its predecessor, the Ocker comedy (Turner, *Identity* 32). It

is, therefore, hardly surprising that the period film greatly differed from the Ocker comedy in its features.

7.1.3.2. The Characteristics of the 'AFC genre'

The Renaissance of the Australian film industry took place at a time when the Australian nation became increasingly aware of the necessity to see characters and landscapes they were familiar with. Encouraged by government funding, the majority of producers strove to live up to the expectations of the AFC and the Australian population by searching for distinctively Australian themes and contents (Adams 62). Several decades after the cultural nationalism of the 1890s, the Australian artists, this time film makers, found themselves in a similar need of typically Australian images to work with.

But where would they find them in a local culture that had been dominated by British and American cultural influences for such a long time? Confronted with a relative absence of more recent national images, the Australian film makers were forced to rely on the traditional images of Australian culture. That is, the majority of film makers drew on the same narrow Australian self-image and presented the same archaic version of Australian-ness that had been introduced in the 1890s – the Australian legend as illustrated by Henry Lawson and A. B. Paterson, the writers of the Bulletin, towards the end of the 19th century (Rattigan, *Images* 20). In accord with their understanding of the typical Australian, the Australian revival film placed its hero in the glorified Australian Bush, of course – a place "free from the city's petty constraints and corruptions, from its divisions and inequities" (MacFarlane, and Mayer 195). Again the Bush was presented as the 'real' Australia and understood as some kind of "mythic forming factor" – a place to shape the hero's character through the struggle that it imposes (Rattigan, *Images* 16). As a result, the revival films were – just as their literary archetypes of the 1890s – all about the Australian Bush as the ultimate source of all Australian-ness.

Focusing on the life in the harsh Australian landscape, the films were virtually brimming with the glorified figures of the Bushman, the pioneer or the Anzac. That is, they were largely male-centred and pre-eminently focused on the white Australian hero, who embodied the celebrated concepts of free spirit, the anti-authoritarian stance, anti-

Britishness, closeness to nature, love for his mates, anti-intellectualism, hard drinking and fairly sexist behaviour (Sheckels, *Schema* 33).

Based on the compositions of the Australian elite towards the end of the 19th century, the revival films were no less exclusive in terms of the way they presented Australian-ness than the former, and thus, just as problematic. Since the so-called flagship films flourished during a time that was marked by an increasingly multicultural composition of the Australian nation (Turner, *Identity* 33), it seems obvious that the films did not strive for an authentic presentation of the contemporary Australia. Instead of making an attempt to capture the hybrid character of Australian national identity towards the beginning of the 1980s, the films returned to earlier successful formulas of presenting the nation. How this return to archaic versions of Australian-ness was realised by the filmmakers is demonstrated on the basis of three selected films in the following section.

7.2. The Films of the New Wave Cinema

7.2.1. Gallipoli (1981)

7.2.1.1. Content

While the first films dealing with the Australian legend of the Anzac were produced as early as the year 1911 (Reynaud 11), Peter Weir's *Gallipoli* may be regarded as the most successful and influential representation of the First World War on the screen (Reynaud 185). In accord with the features of the AFC genre, *Gallipoli* introduces its audience to an important historical event of Australia's history – the landing of Australian soldiers on the Greek peninsula called Gallipoli in World War I. This highly relevant point in Australia's national history represents the frame for the story of two young Australians, Archy Hamilton and Frank Dunne, who not only become mates in the course of the film, but also turn into significant figures of Australian culture – the Anzacs.

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The first part of the movie serves as an introduction of the main characters Archy and Frank, who meet as rivals in a sprinting race in Western Australia. Their relationship develops as they head to Perth in order to join the esteemed Light Horse Regiment together. Contrary to their plan, however, they are separated in Perth, because Frank, an urban Australian, lacks certain qualities such as riding a horse and hence does not qualify for the Light Horsemen. While Archy is successful in joining up, Frank winds up with a group of hometown mates in the infantry.

The second part of the film depicts the reunion of Archy and Frank in Cairo, where the Australian troops are trained for the confrontation with the Turkish troops. As Archy and Frank spend more time together, their mateship gains more substance and importance, as does the mateship with the rest of the Australian soldiers.

The final part of the movie portrays the actual battle of Gallipoli and the unfortunate attempt of the Australian troops to distract the Turkish foe from the attacking British ally. Since the Turkish troops turn out to be unexpectedly strong, the situation of the Australian soldiers appears hopeless. Although Major Barton – the officer in charge on the ground – recognises the unpromising situation and advises against the execution of the attack, Colonel Robinson insists on continuing – an ill-fated decision, which leads to the massacre of thousands of Australian soldiers. Watching the Australian soldiers as they consecutively run into death, Major Barton sends Frank to General Gardiner in the hope of getting the order to withdraw. Frank does return with the message to stop the operation, but comes too late to prevent Archy and his fellow soldiers from going over the top and facing death.

7.2.1.2. Analysis

7.2.1.2.1. Preoccupation with Historical Event

As mentioned above, a great number of the revival films of the New Wave Cinema share their preoccupation with past events, and place Australia in a historical context (MacFarlane 156). In accord with that, *Gallipoli* is set in a period seventy years previous to its production – the time of the First World War. By re-enacting the battle at Gallipoli, the film deals with a moment of enormous national significance, which has ever since been celebrated as the "birth of the Australian nation" (Elder 357).

More importantly, however, *Gallipoli* takes its share in the governmental process of nation formation. "Advertis[ing] itself as the film that will make you 'proud to be Australian'" (Turner, *Fictions* 114), *Gallipoli* clearly aims at promoting a certain understanding of Australian-ness, rather than serving the purpose of coming to terms with the past. As Jane Freebury rightly observes, *Gallipoli* is neither a "war film" nor an "anti-war" film, but rather "a celebration of the national ideology" (5). Rattigan suggests the same, when he argues that the film's main objective is to trace back the development of stereotypical ideas about the Australian society as they are known today (*Images* 136). That is, the historical aspect mainly serves as a frame for the construction of a singular version of Australian-ness, which is based on traditional concepts and dominant cultural figures (Haltof 28).

7.2.1.2.2. Presenting of Australian Archetypes: the Bushman, the larrikin and the Anzac

Tracing back the development of the heroic Anzac figure – "the melting together of all the mythic qualities of the other legends" (Rattigan, *Images* 137) – *Gallipoli* combines three legends in one film: the Bushman, the larrikin and the Anzac. The figure of the Bushman is embodied by 18-year-old Archy Hamilton, the naive youth. Growing up under the difficult conditions in the Australian Bush, he displays the typical Bushman qualities of "physical prowess and endurance" (Rattigan, *Images* 25) – the direct results of the hard physical work that the Bush requires. Due to his Bushman qualities, his

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injured feet cannot prevent him from beating Frank Dunne in the race, and it is the attributes of the Bushman that enable him to join the Light Horse Regiment. Due to the influence of the Bush – a place untouched by the moral corruption encountered in urban Australia (MacFarlane, and Mayer 195) – he is, furthermore, equipped with "purity" (Rattigan, *Images* 136) and "wordly innocence" (Rattigan, *Images* 137), features absent in his mate Frank.

While Frank fits the description of the Bushman equally well as regards physical strength, his penchant for gambling and his ability to forge birth certificates suggest that he is less innocent and less pure than Archy. In contrast to the latter, who is driven by conscientiousness towards the English Empire, Frank is primarily motivated to join the army by his vanity and the expected personal advantages (MacFarlane 55). Motivated by less noble reasons, Frank's character is much closer to the figure of the larrikin – a character type frequently described as anti-authoritarian, cheeky and rough (Rattigan, *Images* 32). He tries to sneak out in order not to be charged for the hotel room and uses fake letters to reach his goals, for instance, the attendance of a dance evening for officers.

By the characterization of Frank Dunne as a larrikin type, the features of "non-conformism, irreverence [and] impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32) are clearly ascribed to the people living in the city. Having his roots in urban Australia, Frank could not entirely elude the corruption of the city, taking from him the purity encountered in Archy's character. By juxtaposing Archy's naivety and Frank's cunning, the film obviously constructs an opposition between rural and urban Australia – the life in the Bush versus the life in the city (Haltof 30). While the Bush produces purely heroic figures such as Archy, the city creates crude and cheeky figures such as Frank.

The larrikin behaviour is, however, much more pronounced in the other Australian characters – Frank's former mates Barney, Snowy and Billy. They more evidently conform to the larrikin type. Since they spend their time in Cairo buying pictures of naked women and running riot at a bazaar, a comparison to the traditional Ocker figure does not seem too far-fetched. This goes along with Daniel Reynaud's claim that even a certain resemblance to the vulgar, ill-mannered and unrefined behaviour of the Ocker abroad in *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* is perceptible (Reynaud 191).

While the bigger part of the film is devoted to the celebration of the larrikin and the Bushman, it is only towards the end of the film that the emphasis is put on the development of one of the most crucial legends in the history of Australia – the Anzac legend. The Anzac, as a third stereotypical version of the 'real' Australian, is created by combining the character traits of the former legends. In fact, Rattigan remarks that *Gallipoli* more obviously presents the Anzac legend as the "melting together of all mythic qualities of the other legends – including the larrikin/Ocker image" (*Images* 137) than any other film. The characteristics of "resourcefulness, initiative, capacity for endurance, reliability [and] courage" (*Images* 31), assigned to the Anzac by Rattigan, are particularly obvious in the final scene of the film. Here, the Anzacs prove their courage and reliability by fulfilling their duty, even though their situation appears to be hopeless. Central to all Australian myths, be it the Bushman legend or the legend of the Anzac, are the well-worn cultural concepts created by the Australian writers and painters in the 1890s: mateship, anti-authoritarianism and egalitarianism.

7.2.1.2.3. The Institution Called Mateship

In *Gallipoli* the relevance of mateship, as a concept of the white Australian male (Schaffer 101), is expressed via pro-war slogans, saying "Your mates need, your country needs you" (*Gallipoli*). Apparently paying attention to mateship first and to commitment to the country second, the slogan clearly makes the concept of mateship the major reason to join the war, and thus to one of the motifs of the film. The centrality of the concept is, furthermore, expressed by Frank, who proves to be a good mate when he stands up for his friend Snowy. The bad teeth of the latter almost pose a problem to his inclusion in the recruitment program of the infantry. His rejection may only be prevented by Frank, who ensures Snowy's acceptance by issuing the ultimatum that it is either all of them or none of them.

Not at all surprisingly, the genuine example of mateship is embodied by Archy. Well aware of the fact that he risks his own life, Archy insists on switching his position with Frank. That is, he gives up his position as a runner – somebody who is not directly involved in the combat – in order to participate in the war instead of his mate Frank. He saves Frank's life and gives his own.

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The concept of mateship also finds a more jolly expression. In Cairo the Australian mates have a good time together: they drink, dispute, enjoy the offer of oriental women, and make fun of the British (Sheckels, *Heroes* 47). While Archy's self-sacrificing act corresponds to the traditional understanding of mateship, the scenes in Cairo offer a different image of the concept. They are reminiscent of the contemporary Australian pub culture, rather than corresponding to the understanding of mateship as an intimate friendship. Given the centrality of mateship to the central characters, *Gallipoli* clearly reinforces the status of the concept as one of the core values of Australian culture.

7.2.1.2.4.   The Anti- British Stance and Egalitarianism

Despite the claim of Director Peter Weir that "the large issue is not the anti-British viewpoint, but the pro-Australian viewpoint" (Bonardi, and Bonardi 42), the anti-British stance is clearly evident in *Gallipoli*. Here, the viewpoints are mutually dependent, for the "pro-Australian viewpoint" is mainly achieved through the emphasis of the negative attributes of the English. Only by means of depicting the British officers as "monocled silly-ass types" (MacFarlane 57), does the film manage to sufficiently point to the more valuable character traits of the Anzacs. While the British are said to be "just sitting on the beach drinking cups of tea" (*Gallipoli*), the Anzacs are shown on the battlefield, meeting their fate. The latter's reliability, courage and willingness to sacrifice their lives for their mates, are merely apparent through what Reynaud has called the film's "'Pom bashing' intentions" (192).

The negative portrayal of the British is particularly obvious in their highly stereotypical portrayal, as in the case of the British officers in Cairo. Snobbishly looking down on the Australian soldiers, they clearly help to create a certain sympathy for and emotional connection to the Anzacs, and simultaneously develop an anti-British attitude on the part of the viewers'.

This anti-British feeling is also expressed by most of the Australian characters, above all by Frank. His negative attitude towards the British is particularly evident in his refusal to fight in, what he calls, an "English war" (*Gallipoli*), which "[ha]s got nothing

to do with [them]" (*Gallipoli*). Out of disrespect, he not only refuses to greet the British soldiers in Cairo, but even puts down the hand of one of his saluting mates.

While the anti-authoritarian stance is certainly most apparent in the figure of Frank Dunne, it is not entirely absent in the other Australian soldiers. Statements such as "England needs a hand, well, here it is" (*Gallipoli*), for instance, obviously fulfil the purpose of making fun of the British and ridiculing their abilities as soldiers. Given the fact that fighting abilities and courage are so central to the definition of manhood and manliness in *Gallipoli*, the quote mentioned above not only questions the qualities of the British on the battlefield, but even questions their masculinity to some extent.

The makers of *Gallipoli* top it all off towards the climax of the film. Here, Colonel Robinson, the officer giving the instruction to hold the fort to the last, has a British accent, while General Gardiner, the officer who orders the concession of all military action, speaks with an Australian accent. Despite the repeated claims on the part of director Peter Weir that it was not his intention to portray Robinson as British, an anti-British stance is clearly apparent (Reynaud 192).

In the course of the film the negative attitude towards the British authorities gradually merges with a general anti-authoritarian stance – a mistrust of authority – as the movie equates authority with the British. While authority, in British terms, equals superiority, the Australian officers in *Gallipoli* do not appear as authoritarian in the usual sense. They neither disapprove of the disruptive, larrikin-like behaviour of the Australian troops, nor do they treat their soldiers as their inferiors. Frank's successful attempt to attend a dance evening for officers by using a fake letter is tolerated with a smile and a shake of the head. As paradoxical as this may sound, the 'Australian' version of authority, as opposed to the British one, is clearly an egalitarian one.

The importance of egalitarianism to the Australian army in *Gallipoli* is particularly evident in the figure of Major Barton and his relationship to his soldiers. In contrast to his British counterparts, he refuses to watch the Australian soldiers from a safe distance, while they are sent out to risk their lives in the final scenes. He rather prefers facing the attacking Turks as one of the Anzacs, for, as he puts it, "[he] can't ask the men to do what [he] wouldn't do" (*Gallipoli*). This portrayal of Major Barton as an understanding,

fatherly figure promoted the idea of egalitarianism as an Australian core value. As a result, Gallipoli constructs the notion Australian national identity as being based on the principles of fairness and equality.

7.2.1.2.5. Conclusion

To conclude, the governmental funding body must have been pleased by the myth-espousing approach provided by *Gallipoli*, for no other film managed to integrate so many of the cultural myths emerging during the nationalistic period of the 1890s. Firstly, *Gallipoli* presents three out of the four dominant cultural figures: the Bushman as embodied by Archy, the larrikin in the figure of Frank, and the Anzac as a combination of both figures. Given the centrality of the heroic Anglo-Celtic male in the film, it is not at all surprising that the promoted image of Australian-ness fails to incorporate women, non-British immigrants and Aboriginal people. Excluding them from the notion of what it means to be Australian, the film presents a masculine, white Australian identity, which celebrates the passage to manhood by the proof of bravery and physical ability – evidently a fairly simplistic view.

Secondly, the film obviously uses the well-worn concepts of mateship, egalitarianism and, in particular, anti-authoritarianism and anti-Britishness to promote certain ideas about the nation. Most obvious is the strong anti-British stance, which is not only expressed by the characters, but also by the dichotomy between Great Britain and Australia. Since Australian-ness is mainly defined in terms of how it contrasts to the once beloved 'mother' country, *Gallipoli* clearly celebrates the moral values and principles that are the exact opposite to the British. By this means mateship and egalitarianism become the essence of what it means to be Australian.

7.2.2. Crocodile Dundee (1986)

7.2.2.1. Contents

Sue Charlton, a journalist from New York, travels from Sydney to the Australian Bush in order to meet the man who is said to have lost one of his legs in a bitter fight with a giant crocodile – legendary Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee. Once in Australia, Sue Charlton learns that Mick Dundee is still in possession of both of his legs, albeit he sustained a scar as a result of the fight. In order to get more insights both into the incident as well as into the life of Mick Dundee she accompanies him into the harsh landscape of the Australian Bush. Thanks to attacking crocodiles and drunken rednecks, who are shooting kangaroos for fun, Mick Dundee is given plenty of opportunities to prove his survival skills.

Sue appears to be susceptible to Mick Dundee's rustic charm and gradually develops a feeling of affection for him. In order to introduce him to her way of living, she invites him to come to the U.S. In New York Mick Dundee finds himself confronted both with Richard, Sue's editor and boyfriend, and an entirely unfamiliar surrounding; both of which lead to tensions and hilarious incidents. The humour mainly lies in the misunderstandings that are caused by Mick's lack of knowledge of the foreign culture.

New York, however, also offers a great number of opportunities for Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee to prove his heroic qualities, albeit wild animals are replaced by armed muggers on the street and a pimp. Much to the disappointment of Mick Dundee, Sue accepts the proposal of her boyfriend Richard on a dinner party. In order to be able to deal with this loss, Mick Dundee decides to go walkabout[2] in the middle of New York City. But Sue is determined not to let him go and desperately tries to overtake him. Finally, she finds him in a subway station and manages to prevent him from entering the train by letting him know that she has refused to marry Richard. This makes him get to Sue even though the station is crowded – by climbing over the heads of the people.

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[2] In the context of Aboriginal culture, walkabout is a spiritual journey undertaken alone. Mostly a journey of self-discovery and pilgrimage, it might as well mark a boy's passage into manhood.

7.2.2.2. Analysis

Regarded as being "internationally the most successful Australian film ever made" (Crofts 158), *Crocodile Dundee* has arguably played a major role in the construction and preservation of common ideas about Australian-ness outside the national borders. Rattigan accounts for its substantial local and international success by claiming that *Crocodile Dundee* is possibly "the most Australian film of the New Australian Cinema" (*Dundee* 101). As such, the film is heavily loaded with preconceived notions about Australian identity, which are mostly embodied by the Australian protagonist Mick Dundee.

7.2.2.2.1. Playing with Australian Stereotypes

Representing what Desmond Ryan has called the "easygoing, extroverted 'G'day Aussie image" (qtd. in Crofts 160), Mick Dundee certainly behaves according to common stereotypes about the Australian nation. It is, however, worth mentioning that the film not merely constructs certain stereotypical notions about Australian-ness, but also tries to combat them by means of the protagonist. That is, the Mick Dundee is ever pivoting between creating narrow images and ridiculing the same. Putting away his razor and pretending to shave with his big knife, or pretending to be able to tell the time just from looking at the position of the sun are meant to exactly fulfil this purpose of making fun of existent clichés.

Simultaneously, the protagonist contributes to the construction of common notions about Australian-ness, as he mostly conforms to the simplistic images so typical of the New Wave Cinema. As a typical revival hero, he is portrayed as combining two kinds of cultural figures, both of which, although being seemingly contradictory at first sight, claim to be quintessentially Australian: the Ocker and the Bushman.

7.2.2.2.2 Mick Dundee: Ocker or Bushman?

The first encounter with Mick Dundee takes place in what Rattigan calls "the Ocker's traditional stamping ground" (*Dundee* 151) – the Australian pub, which marks him pretty much as the typical Ocker. His Ocker image is readily underpinned by the open display of what Rattigan has identified as the typical Ocker behaviour – "drinking, swearing [and] noisy vulgarity" (*Images* 32). At the same time, these first scenes expose some of his more pleasant Ocker features. Ordering "one beer for [him], and one for [his] mate" (*Crocodile Dundee*), a fake crocodile, and his fight with the same in the pub are proof of his raw good humour and his Ocker cheekiness. Obviously the act is meant to ridicule the expectations of journalist Sue Charlton – a representative of the outside world. By giving her, and the viewer, this grossly exaggerated version of their expectations, his manners clearly conform to the "boorish [and] uncouth" behaviour that Rattigan has associated with the city hero (*Images* 32).

Undoubtedly, this first sequence characterizes Mick Dundee as an Ocker, albeit not in the traditional form known from the Ocker comedies of the early 1970s. While earlier Ocker versions were loved for their exaggeratedly sexist and vulgar behaviour (O'Regan, *Ocker* 76), the Ocker character had undergone a number of modifications over the years, in order to culminate in Mick Dundee – a more accurate Ocker image (Rattigan, *Dundee* 151). Certainly, his treatment of Sue in the beginning of the film is suggestive of chauvinist behaviour. In contrast to his predecessors, however, he is not offensive in doing so. Moreover, the fact that he has a mate among the indigenous Australians eliminates the exaggeratedly racist component from the Ocker figure, so that the viewers gain a character with understated Ocker features (Sheckels, Heroes 64-65).

"Sending the rough edges off the traditional hero" (Sheckels, *Heroes* 65), Mick Dundee clearly distinguishes him from the remaining male characters in the pub scene at the beginning of the film. Presented as sexist, manner-less, drinking boorish ruffians, who brag about their hyper-masculinity and male superiority by treating the waitress like an inferior sex object, they clearly correspond to the traditional Ocker image of the early 1970s. Interestingly, but not at all surprisingly, the waitress is the only woman in the pub, which not only degrades her to an object of the male gaze and a victim of their

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sexual harassment, but also suggests that the pub is a primarily male domain; and Australia a society that is dominated by the Ocker.

The idea of Mick Dundee as the 'refined' Ocker type, however, is soon abandoned, as he turns into another dominant cultural figure. Once Sue Charlton has accompanied him into the Australian Bush, he withdraws from the Ocker image and increasingly conforms to the perceived ideal of the Bushman. As the Ocker's "country cousin" (Rattigan, *Images* 31), the Bushman certainly shares some of the Ocker character traits, such as independence, antiauthoritarianism and love for his mates. In contrast to the Ocker figure, however, the Bushman is much closer to nature, or as Allan James Thomas puts it, "an expert at surviving the landscape" (100). His affinity to nature is neatly encapsulated in one of the first scenes set in the Australian Bush. A wild bull standing in their way provides the first opportunity for Mick Dundee to prove his Bushman qualities. By hypnotizing the dangerous animal, he induces it to lie down and averts the danger. His Bushman skills are furthermore evident in his successful efforts to rescue Sue from an attacking crocodile and in his handling his extremely huge knife. His respect for the Australian flora and fauna shows, among other things, in his defence of nature against drunken intruders, who shoot kangaroos for fun.

Mick Dundee seems, moreover, to be based on Ward's definition of the Bushman as "a fiercely independent person" (Ward *Legend* 2). We learn that Mick Dundee may well be referred to as an Aussie loner at the very beginning of the film. During the car ride to the Australian Bush, Mick exposes his unwillingness to commit to a lasting relationship. Certainly, he has not led his life as an eternal bachelor, but the women he dated were not willing to wait for his return after several months of walkabout.

Once in New York the Ocker features seem to revive in the character of Mick Dundee. Provoked by the pejorative remarks of Sue's lover Richard, Dundee's Ocker behaviour becomes particularly apparent in the scene in the exclusive restaurant in New York. Richard's depreciatory comments that "eating without killing it first, is a novelty for [Dundee]" and that the restaurant is "no place for a country gent" (*Crocodile Dundee*), are readily punished with a punch in the face. The New York surrounding not only restores the "crudeness", identified as typical of the Ocker by Rattigan, but also the Ocker "anti-intellectualism" (*Images* 32). Scenes, such as his moving into the fancy

New York hotel room, help to highlight these features, for he is neither familiar with how a toilet works, nor with the function of a bidet; and when he eventually recognizes its purpose he shouts it out of the window so Sue can hear it: "for washing your backside" (*Crocodile Dundee*).

7.2.2.2.3. The Bush Versus the City

The great number of scenes emphasising Mick Dundee's ineptness in New York City, are clearly part of an approach towards Australian-ness that is not entirely new to the Australian New Wave Cinema: the presentation of Australian identity as opposed to another culture. While earlier revival films, such as *Gallipoli*, present the traditional Australian/British dichotomy, *Crocodile Dundee* basically defines the Australian character in terms of how it contrasts to the sophisticated American city people. By juxtaposing the rural area that Mick Dundee comes from with the urban surrounding Sue has lived and worked in, the film not only creates an Australian/American dichotomy, but the same contrast between the Bush and the city encountered in *Gallipoli*.

While the characters in New York are portrayed as progressive, modern and sophisticated, Mick Dundee appears a bit primitive and uncultivated. At the same time, however, he displays the more pleasant features of innocence and purity. Dundee's encounter with the prostitutes, whom he invites to the movies, for instance, emphasizes this innocence, as does the fact that, instead of giving the hotel servant a tip, he shakes his hand and introduces himself. As the American value system is alien to him, he is not familiar with the idea of transvestites, either. Convinced to be talking to a woman, he is completely stunned when he is told the actual sex of his conversational partner. Here, he cannot help but touch the genitals of the latter. A similar situation is presented at a fancy party at which he joins Sue. Being introduced to a rather masculine looking lady, he again checks. Sue's explanation that "he is Australian" surprisingly satisfies the party guests and even elicits an "I think I have to go there someday" (*Crocodile Dundee*).

The portrayal of Mick Dundee as being overwhelmed by the escalators, toilets and bidets in New York is highly suggestive of Australian society as being unprogressive,
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but also more pure and free of the materiality of the life in the city. This goes along with Rattigan, who, in the context of *Crocodile Dundee*, defines innocence as a "closeness to nature and a (culturally implied) lack of compromised morality, corrupted or debased social structure of the 'Old World', enhanced by the 'pure' air of a (perceived) unspoilt land" (*Dundee* 149). The innocence and naivety displayed by Mick Dundee may, therefore, be understood as a character trait that is preferable to the materialistic, commercially-oriented American characters.

7.2.2.2.4. Mateship

Since *Crocodile Dundee* introduces its audience to two of the dominant perceptions of Australian-ness in form of the Ocker and the Bushman, it is hardly surprising that it also incorporates the institutionalized concept of mateship. Although *Crocodile Dundee* is usually categorized as a romantic comedy, it has often been claimed that mateship is just as central to the film as is love. The fusion of romance and mateship is nicely depicted in the freeze frame at the end of the film. Having climbed over the heads of the people at the crowded station, Mick hugs Sue and at the same time clutches the hand of a man standing next to him, as a symbol of the importance of male bonding and mutual support (Enker 218).

While the concept of mateship has been freed from its racist aspect by introducing a bond to a member of the indigenous community, female Australian characters are marginal at best. That Australia is male territory is argued by Mick Dundee himself after the crocodile attack, when he claims that the Australian landscape is "no place for a city girl", but rather, what he calls, a "man's country" (*Crocodile Dundee*). By masculinising the Australian Bush, which was, strictly speaking, the 'real' Australia in the mind of most people at the time, a clear parallel to other revival films may be drawn in terms of how the Australian nation is depicted: as a male dominated society, in which women are merely given a minor role.

7.2.2.2.5. Conclusion

Given the fact that Mick Dundee is the main representative of the Australian nation in *Crocodile Dundee*, all Australian-ness is embodied by him. As Mick Dundee unites the legendary figures of the Bushman and the Ocker, the film implies that Australia is a country only inhabited by Bushmen struggling in their attempts to survive the Australian Bush and Ockers hanging around in the local pubs. The national image presented in *Crocodile Dundee* thus is strongly reminiscent of the homogenous construct of the Anglo-Celtic, male Australian-ness encountered in *Gallipoli*. Certainly, the concepts of egalitarianism and anti-Britishness have been omitted from the typical Australian character in *Crocodile Dundee*, nevertheless the parallels between the films are hardly deniable. Rattigan implies the same when he addresses the combination of Bushman and Ocker features in the figure of Mick Dundee, by calling the latter the "amalgam of both Archy (the Bushman) and Frank (the larrikin/Ocker) in *Gallipoli*" (*Dundee* 151).

A further similarity to *Gallipoli* shows in the way *Crocodile Dundee* presents Australian-ness as opposed to another culture. While *Gallipoli* presents the traditional Australian/British dichotomy, *Crocodile Dundee* defines the Australian society with respect to how it contrasts to the people in New York City. By this means, the protagonist Mick Dundee promotes the idea of Australian society as having preserved its worldly innocence and its closeness to nature.

7.2.3.1. Content

Jim Craig has lived his entire life in the Snowy Mountains located in the Australian Bush. After the sudden death of his father, the mountain men dispute his inheritance of his father's property, and banish him into the valley, so he can "earn the right to live up [there]. Just like [his] father did" (*Snowy River*).

Forced to leave the Snowy Mountains, Jim takes a job at the station of the American farmer Harrison in the valley. Soon it is time to bring the cattle down from the mountains. Jim is not taken seriously, however, and is not allowed to join Harrison and the other workers. He has to stay at the station, together with the female workers and Harrison's beautiful, headstrong daughter Jessica. While they are alone at the station, Jim and Jessica successfully try to tame the wild prize colt of Jessica's father, which arouses romantic feelings between them. Shortly before Harrison and his companions return to the station, the wild horses, the Brumbies, which caused the death of Jim's father, pass the cattle station. In his attempt to catch them by riding the colt, Jim has a terrible accident, a fact which cannot be concealed from Harrison. When he finds out, he fires Jim and threatens to send Jessica to a Presbyterian girls' college. Jessica is not willing to accept her father's punishment and decides to take her horse and leave the station.

Once in the Snowy Mountains Jessica soon encounters her limits and, caught in a storm, ends up close to the edge of a fatal drop. Jim sets out to find her and, once she is rescued, brings her to a miner and friend of his, named Spur. At this point both the audience and Jessica learn that Spur is Harrison's brother and, thus, Jessica's uncle. Spur brings Jessica back to the station. Harrison thanks Jim for Jessica's rescue, at the same time however, he starts a fight, motivated by his disapproval of his daughter's relationship to Jim. During the argument also Spur and Harrison meet each other. Their encounter reveals the reason for the discord between the two brothers. Apparently, both of them were in love with a young woman called Matilda – Jessica's mother. She could not decide whom to marry, and said that she would marry the man who would be

wealthy first, which happened to be Harrison. The audience further learns that Harrison is to blame for Spur's loss of his leg, as he shot at him in a fight for Matilda.

In the meantime, Jim has an argument with one of Harrison's workers, who, anticipating that Harrison would blame Jim, seeks revenge by letting Harrison's colt loose. In order to bring back the prize stallion, which has joined the brumbies in the meanwhile, Harrison hires a group of men to join him. Catching sight of Jim in the crowd, who has returned in order to clear his name, Harrison is upset and reminds him of his banishment. Jim's mate Clansy, a highly honoured rider, puts in a good word for Jim and secures his participation. Drawing on his knowledge of the Snowy Mountains, Jim is successful in bringing both the colt and the rest of the brumbies to Harrison's station. This way he stands up to Harrison and gets everything he was striving for: the girl, the horses and the right to call himself 'The Man from Snowy River'.

7.2.3.2. Analysis

"Probably the most nationalistic film that has been produced since the beginning of the 1970s revival" (Turner, *Fictions* 117), *The Man from Snowy River* has been criticized for its trite approach to Australian national identity. The return to well-worn formulas is partially caused by the fact that the makers of *Snowy River* sought inspiration in one of literary sources composed in the 1890s (Rattigan, *Images* 199). Following A.B. 'Banjo' Paterson's nationalistic poem of the same title, the adaptation equally strongly emphasises the institution of mateship and the principle of egalitarianism (Turner, *Fictions* 118). It is, therefore, not surprising that Rattigan remarks in the context of the promoted Australian self-image, that "the makers of *Snowy River* have run into risk of presenting cliché" (*Images* 200).

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7.2.3.2.1. Closeness to the Australian Landscape – the Bushman in his Familiar Surrounding

In accord with the remark that "if you want the real Australia" you should "look at the earth, not the people" (Gibson, 69), the clichéd presentation of Australian-ness is based on presenting the close relation between the Australian character and the Australian land – a feature mainly presented by means of the protagonist Jim Craig. Growing up in the mountains of Snowy River, Jim has learned how to deal with the Australian Bush – a land both charming and dangerous at the same time, or as Jessica puts it, "one minute it's like paradise, the next it's trying to kill you" (*Snowy River*). While the other men in the valley, including Mr. Harrison, Jessica's father, unsuccessfully try to dominate the Australian Bush, just as they try to dominate the wild horses, Jim is careful not to change nature. In contrast to the former characters, he accepts the unique characteristics of the land and knows that "you've got to treat the mountains like a high-spirited horse" (*Snowy River*): "you work with a horse, not against it" (*Snowy River*). Being aware of the fact that the Australian landscape with its special characteristics may not be conquered, he tries to live in harmony with nature. This is why, in Harrison's absence, he does not try to break the horse, but, as he himself calls it "to gentle it" (*Snowy River*).

His view on Australian nature is what makes him a typical Bushman figure, who by definition, is a product of the Bush, rather than an intruder (Rattigan, *Images* 25). That is, the Bushman is integrated into and shaped by the landscape in his struggle for survival, rather than aiming at bringing a change. Living according to this principle, Jim has acquired all the traditional Bushman qualities of "manly independence", "physical prowess" and "endurance" (Rattigan, *Images* 27-28), which make him stand out from the remaining male characters in the film. Equipped with the heroic features of the Bushman type, he is the only one to bring the Bush horses back and recapture the runaway colt. Where all the others shy away from following the wild horses any further, Jim proves his manliness and returns with the brumbies and the colt to the farm where his companions are waiting for him.

In accord with Ward's definition of the typical Bushman, Jim is, furthermore, a "fiercely independent person" (Ward 2), who lives in harmony with nature. In contrast to the pub-loving Ocker partially perceptible in Mick Dundee, Jim only finds enjoyment in the tranquillity connected to the simple life in the Snowy Mountains. With the aim of

stressing Jim's frugality, the film contrasts his character to the materialistic, arrogant and egocentric figures living in the valley. The main subject of opposition is the commercially-oriented Harrison, Jessica's father. Given that he is an American, it seems obvious that *Snowy River* draws on the trite Australian/American opposition. Interestingly, however, *Snowy River* pushes the juxtaposition into the background in favour of a more general dichotomy of minimalism versus commercialism.

The minor importance of the Australian/American dichotomy is particularly evident in the figure of Harrison's brother Spur. Despite his American origins, he has adjusted to the land and, as a consequence, lives according to the same principles Jim has grown up with. By juxtaposing Harrison's profit-oriented way of thinking with Jim's modesty, the film does not, as one might be tempted to think, aim at contrasting Australian-ness to American-ness. The film rather aspires towards a general reinforcement of Jim's heroic qualities, or the qualities of the mountain people in general, which not only distinguish them from Harrison, but from anybody living in the valley. Given that the mountain people, and the modest Jim Craig in particular, represent the 'real' Australian in the film, Australian-ness is presented as being based upon the plain things: the ideas of mateship and egalitarianism as Anglo-Celtic male concepts.

7.2.3.2.2. Mateship, Egalitarianism and the Anti-Authoritarian Disposition

Based on a literary model, *Snowy River* carefully integrates the concepts of mateship and egalitarianism into the promoted understanding of Australian-ness. The former concept is certainly represented as a bond mainly existent between the people living in the mountains, rather than in the valley. Already the very first scene puts the concept into a rural context, as it depicts the intimate relationship between Jim and his father. Showing them as they harmoniously live on their own in the Australian Bush – they work together, eat together, drink together and joke together – the scene introduces the notion of mateship in its traditional definition. That is, mateship is presented as an intimate friendship that lends company and support for survival in the Bush.

In a similar way, Spur and Clansy may be considered Jim's mates. When Jim's father dies, Spur gives him a horse so he can start to earn the right to live in the Snowy

Mountains. Clansy is equally supportive as he makes use of his good reputation among the people in the valley in order to put a good word in for Jim. The scene showing Clansy, Spur and Jim as they are sitting in front of an open fire, discussing the banishment of the latter, refers back to the time when the relationships among men were the only opportunity to talk about one's problems (Hodges, 7). The film, hence, returns to the traditional understanding of mateship as encapsulated in the writings and paintings of the nationalistic period of the 1890s.

Similarly dominant is the concept of egalitarianism, albeit included in the general message of the film, rather than expressed by the values and principles of the characters. Since Jim starts from the position of the underdog, and gets everything he strove for in the end – the brumbies, the girl and the right to live in the mountains – the film promotes the idea that everyone has the same opportunities. The ending of *Snowy River* may, thus, be well interpreted in egalitarian terms.

The anti-authoritarian stance known from *Gallipoli* also finds its application in *Snowy River*. Mainly embodied by the figure of Jim Craig, the concept particularly shows in his obvious disrespect for Jessica's father. Questioning Harrison's authority, he not only comes back to the farm despite the ban, but also woos Harrison's daughter regardless of his disapproval. The fact that Jim is not willing to submit to the authority of the latter is furthermore stressed in one of the protagonist's last statements, saying "I'll be back for [the brumbies]. And for whatever else is mine" (*Snowy River*). Clearly alluding to Jessica, Jim defies Harrison's future plans for his daughter and rebels against the only authority existent in the film.

7.2.3.2.3. Acting Like a 'Real' Man

Given the significance assigned to mateship and egalitarianism – basically gender-specific concepts – it is not surprising that *Snowy River* falls back upon a clearly male dominated approach to Australian-ness. The one-sided national self-image promoted is linked to both a specific understanding of Australian masculinity and the eager endeavours to conform to it. As the audience learns relatively early, Jim goes to the low country in order to prove his worthiness of being called a man. Only when he follows

the wild horses to where no other of his companions dares to follow, does Jim correspond to what is called a 'real' man in the film. *Snowy River* is, thus, clearly suggestive of the notion that 'real' men are supposed to be fearless, responsible and courageous.

Due to the centrality of bravery and strength to the understanding of achieved manhood in *Snowy River*, male characters not equipped with these qualities are looked down upon. The depreciative attitude towards immaturity, defined as weakness in the film, is particularly obvious in the way the characters address each other. While terms such as 'boy', 'lad' or 'son' seem to carry a mainly disapproving and pejorative meaning, being called a 'man' is positively connoted. The centrality of courage and strength to the Australian idea of masculinity is most clearly pronounced in the final scene, when Harrison calls Jim a "lad", despite the fact that he has proved his manliness by capturing the brumbies:

> Harrison: You've got a long way to go yet, lad!
> Spur: He is not a lad, brother, he's a man!
> Clansy: The man from Snowy River. (*Snowy River*)

Obviously, Harrison adds the component of commerciality to his concept of a 'real' man and questions Jim's achievement of manhood based on his lack of financial means. The other characters present, however, correct Harrison, in particular Harrison's brother Spur. He is readily supported in his claim that Jim may well be regarded a man by Clansy, granting Jim the title 'The Man from Snowy River'. In doing so, they not only defend their mate Jim, but also restore and reinforce the understanding of Australian masculinity as comprising physical prowess, endurance and courage, rather than material wealth.

The importance of 'acting like a man' is furthermore expressed by Jim, when he argues that "[he] is not hiding beneath the skirts of a bunch of women" (*Snowy River*). In his view, taking support from the weaker sex would equate to the loss of his masculinity and strength, for a 'real' man is meant to stand up for what he does. The centrality of manliness for the image of Australian-ness becomes obvious in a further scene, showing Jim, Spur and Clansy as they discuss Jim's abandonment. Sitting around a fire in the

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Bush, Spur and Clansy try to convince Jim to return and join Harrison's men in their search for the runaway colt. Wrongly accused of having freed the colt, Jim refuses to go back to the station first, for, in his own words, "That's asking too much of a man" (*Snowy River*). Spur tries to persuade him not to hide by questioning his manliness, "Man did you say?" (*Snowy River*). Being acknowledged as a 'real' man is obviously so important to Jim, that he returns to the low country, even though his pride made him refuse at first.

The centrality of Jim's passage into manhood, as a demonstration of physical strength and courage, makes 'real' Australian masculinity a central theme in *Snowy River*. It is presented as a state that Australians are encouraged to live up to – an essential part of the development into a fully fledged member of Australian society and, thus, the prerequisite for being acknowledged as a part of the Australian nation.

7.2.3.2.4. A World Dominated by the Australian-Celtic Male

While the dominant notion of manliness in the film is based on physical abilities and bravery, the female perspective on acting like a man, as embodied by Jessica, seems to be slightly different. Criticising Jim for stubbornness, when he objects being covered by "a bunch of women" after the incident with the colt, Jessica calls him "a foolish boy" (*Snowy River*). When you add to this the frequency of feminist views expressed by her, manliness for her obviously means treating women as equals, which involves accepting their help.

Nevertheless, her attempts to overcome the stereotyped gender roles imposed on the characters, eventually fail to convince, since the film has her rescued by the heroic farmer after all. Certainly, the very first scenes present Jessica as an exaggeratedly feminist, strong young woman, who is standing up to the stout Bushman. In every situation she is willing to express her feminist viewpoint that "women should have the right to do anything they are capable of" (*Snowy River*). Every single action is meant to demonstrate that she does not rely on the help from men, only, however, to prove that she is not right in her claim in the end. Surprised by a storm, trapped in a cliff, she helplessly screams and shouts, and relies on Jim, who finds and rescues her. Her

helplessness in the Australian Bush is quite neatly presented by using a clichéd juxtaposition of two images – the Bushman in the Bush, on the one hand, and the woman in the same surrounding, on the other hand. The former image provides the audience with an image of Jim as he perfectly deals with the stormy, foggy weather by making himself a fire and tent. In contrast, Jessica is shown trapped on a cliff, crying for help.

After being rescued by Jim she even more obviously slips into the role of the typical woman, as she informs Jim of her decision to stay with him and abandon her father forever. While Jim remains rational and persuades her to go back, Jessica openly displays her feelings. Contrasting Jim's sense and Jessica's sensibility, this scene is highly suggestive of emotionality as a typically female character trait, while men are presented as making their decisions on the basis of rationality, rather than feelings. That is, despite the fact that Jessica eagerly tries to break with traditional views on women, she merely ends up re-enforcing them and contributing to the notion of male superiority over women.

The idea of male dominance is further implied by the limited space granted to female characters. Due to the centrality of the male protagonist and his passage into manhood, the audience is presented a similarly gendered Australian landscape as encountered in *Crocodile Dundee*: a primarily male domain, simply too harsh and dangerous to be dealt with by a woman. Similar to the journalist Sue Charlton in *Crocodile Dundee*, who relies on Mick in the crocodile attack, Jessica would not have survived the harsh landscape without Jim's support. Again, the 'real' Australia, in this case the Snowy Mountains, is presented as a place that requires strength and physical prowess, which only 'real', meaning male, Australians possess. Spur points that out himself when he claims that, "It's a hard country, made for hard men" (*Snowy River*). Given the fact that non-white immigrants as well as indigenous people are completely omitted from the Australian self-image promoted in *Snowy River*, the message conveyed is the same as in *Crocodile Dundee* and *Gallipoli*: Australia is a country dominated by the Anglo-Celtic male.

7.2.3.2.4. Conclusion

As the analysis has shown, the film does not base the promoted understanding of Australian national identity on the well-worn dichotomy of Australia and Great Britain/America known from *Gallipoli* and *Crocodile Dundee*. In the case of *Snowy River*, the traditional anti-British stance is substituted by the opposition between the commercial values of the valley people and Jim's more valuable principles of mateship, egalitarianism and respect for nature. The centrality of the Snowy Mountains and their acknowledgement as the 'true' Australia – the place where the 'real' Australian comes from – contribute to the elevation of Jim's values to a higher role in the Australian character. The typical Australian invented by the makers of *Snowy River* is, thus, the Anglo-Australian Bushman, who accepts the uniqueness of the Australian landscape, has been integrated into it and has adopted the qualities necessary for survival. He is masculine, tough and fearless and lives according to the notions of mateship and egalitarianism. Again, the audience is presented a rather simplistic version of the Australian nation, which does not grant any space to native Australians, non-white immigrants and women. Despite the attempt to introduce a strong female character next to Jim Craig, the figure of Jessica merely serves the purpose of emphasising male superiority in the end.

7.3. Conclusion: *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Man from Snowy River* as Vehicles of National Identity

In their attempt to please the AFC, the governmental funding body, and due to the lack of alternatives on which to base the newly initiated process of nation formation, local filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s mostly drew on the formerly successful images of the late 19th century. With the objective of illustrating the respective approach towards dominant national images, the preceding analysis has revealed clear tendencies among the films under discussion.

In accord with the literary and artistic models of the 1890s, the close relationship between the 'typical' Australian and the Australian land remained a major preoccupation of local filmmakers. In all three films, special emphasis is put on the

Bush as the main source of Australian-ness, shaping and forming its inhabitant. As evident in Archy in *Gallipoli*, Mick Dundee in *Crocodile Dundee* and Jim Craig in *Snowy River*, both the Bushman and the Anzac are a product of the Bush, equipping them with a combination of mental flexibility and physical prowess. Strength and endurance are given particular significance in *Snowy River*, resulting in the promotion of a hyper-masculine Australian-ness, an ethos which reduces masculinity to bravery and physical abilities.

Given the perceived centrality of Australian archetypes – the Bushman, the Anzac and the larrikin – it is hardly surprising that the concepts of anti-Britishness, egalitarianism and mateship underlying the same, are similarly dominant in the films discussed. While the ideas of mateship and egalitarianism are excessively celebrated as being core features of the Australian character in all the films, anti-Britishness is most conspicuously illustrated in *Gallipoli*.

Fairly brimming with hostility towards the British, *Gallipoli* obviously draws on the traditional dichotomy between typically Australian and British characteristics. The practice of presenting Australian-ness in terms of how it contrasts to another culture is also perceptible in *Crocodile Dundee*. While the film contrasts the Australian nation to the American one, a more general dichotomy between the city and the Bush is presented in *Snowy River*. Be it the dichotomy between Australia and Great Britain, between Australia and America or the city and the Bush, the practice of opposing 'true' Australian-ness to an alien, and mostly less desirable, value system is an effective way of marking the promoted Australian character as distinctive and unique – as an identity no longer dependent on a borrowed British identity.

For the same reasons of proving the existence of a distinctive Australian identity, the "image makers" (White viii) have drawn on homogenous and narrow images of Australian-ness, a procedure chiefly exerted at the expense of female Australians, immigrants with a non-Anglo-Celtic background and the indigenous Australian population. Their role in the films analysed is marginal at best, and non-existent at worst. What remains is an archaic, male-dominated, Anglo-Celtic image of Australian-ness, based on myths around the Australian Bush, which is just as exclusive as it is incompatible with the composition of the Australian nation of the time.

8. Australia and the Australian Film in the 1990s

As mentioned above, the production of the so-called cultural flagship films witnessed a virtual boom from the late 1970s onwards (Hodsdon 162), and culminated in the revival films of the early 1980s. (Rattigan, *Images* 8) Ironically, this period saw a simultaneous change in mind among the Australian people (Turner *Identity* 33) – a development that was in complete opposition to the "masculinized, conservative, and reductive depiction of Australian identity" (Bennett 64). With the onset of the 1980s, Australians started questioning the simplistic notion of Australian-ness celebrated in the revival films of the Renaissance, and called for contemporary and more authentic representations of the Australian nation (Turner, *Making* 6).

8.1. Calling for a Change – Social and Political Developments in Australia

It is not at all surprising that the Australian population could no longer identify with the narrowly chauvinist, Anglo-Centric representations once so convincingly presented by Lawson and Paterson. According to Stephen Castles et al. former marginal groups increasingly demanded their place in Australia. As early as the 1980s, women's rights activists started protesting, Aboriginal issues engaged general attention and multiculturalism was prospering (120). When you add the fact that most Australians live in the major Australian cities, while the rural areas have remained mostly unsettled, it is only too intelligible that the Australian population could not relate to the filmic representations of the Australian Bush and its legendary inhabitants (Hutcheson 42). As a consequence, there was a growing awareness that revival films neither reflected the Australia that the people knew and lived in, nor presented Australians as they actually were (Bennett 64). The common belief was that it was time to find more appropriate ways of characterizing and depicting the Australian nation (Turner, *Making* 5).

Evidently, the idea that the former narrow self-image was not able to reflect the actualities of contemporary Australian life was further underpinned by earlier

significant changes on the political and the social level (MacFarlane and Mayer 203). From the mid-1940s onwards, the Australian government had tried to stimulate the local economy by the implementation of a post-war immigration policy (Hirst 193). Albeit designed as a policy to increase the number of British migrants, the program resulted in "one of the most ethnically diverse of all immigration programs" (Collins 104). While the desired British migration decreased, the post-war immigration assumed vast proportions "with migrants from over 100 nationalities and ethnic groups" (Collins 104). By 1981 the amount of Australians born outside Australia had made up 21 percent of the entire population and 20 percent of the native-born Australians had at least one parent with a migration background. That is, more than 40 percent of the entire Australian population today are an immediate result of the migration policy initiated after the Second World War (Collins 103-104).

Given the fact that "immigration has […] had a greater impact in Australia than in any of the other major countries experiencing post-war immigration" (Collins 104), the simplistic revival images failed to appeal to the large number of immigrants living in the country (Hutcheson 42). The 'typical' Australian of the 1990s was, therefore, less then ever the Anglo-Celtic male working in the Bush, but rather what Ghassan Hage has aptly termed a "cosmopolite": a "'mega-urban' figure, detached from strong affiliations with roots and consequently open to all forms of otherness" (76). In O'Regan's words, the 'quintessential' Australian was now "a product of several ancestries" (*A National Cinema* 163). That is, Australian-ness came to be defined in terms of a variety of identities instead of cultural homogeneity.

Interestingly, the impact of post-war immigration was realized by the Australian authorities as early as the 1970s, when they declared Australia a multicultural society.[3] That is, already simultaneously to the flourishing of the New World Cinema, Australia's cultural diversity had been acknowledged (Collins 103). Apparently, the Australian nation needed some time to fully comprehend what it means for to be multicultural (Jupp 261), for it was only from the late 1980s onwards, with the 'National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia', that the government integrated a multicultural perspective

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[3] The declaration followed a period of 70 years marked by the so-called White Australia Policy, which had refused immigration to any race, other than the white race. The restrictions of immigration were recorded in the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act. In accordance with the act, Australia banished all African labourers working on the sugar plantations, and denied access to any applicants of Chinese origin (see Collins 103).

into their political program (O'Regan, *A National Cinema* 157). Henceforth pursuing a multicultural political agenda, the following governments used the social changes brought about by the post-war immigration in order to promote a heterogeneous understanding of Australian-ness (Castles et al. 65). As a result, the year 1989 witnessed the introduction of an official definition of multiculturalism, as operating on the following levels:

- Cultural identity: the right of all Australians [...] to express and share their individual cultural heritage, including their language and religion
- Social justice: the right of all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity, and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, or place of birth
- Economic efficiency: the need to maintain, develop and utilise effectively the skills and talents of all Australians, regardless of background. (Jupp 264)

8.2. The Fall of the AFC – The Australian Film Industry of the 1990s

Equally dramatic changes were initiated in the field of the Australian film production. In the early 1990s the Liberal Party under the lead of Prime Minister Howard made substantial amendments in the financing of the film industry (French 16). Aiming at the decline of governmental involvement by attracting private financiers, the year 1980 saw the introduction of an amendment to the 'Tax Assessment Act'. The alteration in tax law, later known as 10BA, allowed for extensive tax savings for private investors in film. As a result, the role of the government in financing diminished from half of the production costs to 10 to 15 percent soon after its implementation. The government, thus, no longer acted as the primary source of financial support and lost its control over local film production (O'Regan, *Enchantment* 119). While film makers had previously relied on the financial support supplied by the funding agencies, largely the AFC, producers could do without government support now – the industry had been passed into private hands (Murray 96).

8.3. The Australian New World Cinema and Its Characteristics

While the AFC, the former governmental funding body, had functioned as what O'Regan has justly called the "gatekeeper to most Australian feature productions", the now private film industry was open to a greater variety of films (*Enchantment* 118). As a consequence, the cinema of the 1990s, also known as the Australian New World Cinema, was "a cinema of the melting pot" (O'Regan, *Australian National Cinema* 319). As such, it challenged the idea of the Anglo-centric, masculinised identity so excessively celebrated by its predecessor, the New Wave Cinema. In contrast to the latter, it introduced a blend of identities placed in a social milieu that was marked by heterogeneity (Carter et al. 196). That is, the films of the 1990s not only presented the Anglo-Australian male characters encountered in the stories of Henry Lawson, but also considered immigrants and women – members of the Australian community that had been ignored in the filmic productions of 1970s national radicalism (Elder 200).

Since the so-called New World Cinema of the 1990s eventually gave women and non-British immigrants the voice they deserved, Bushman and co, the well-worn figures so popular in the revival films, and many of the concepts and principals embodied by them could not be retained in their traditional form (Carter et al. 196). The institution of mateship, for instance, lost the legendary status it used to have in the New Wave Cinema. Endowed with both positive and negative aspects, the formerly romanticized concept came to be presented in more realistic terms now. Instead of taking a central part in the nature of the Australian character, it was now depicted as "an adolescent relationship which needs to be outgrown for a boy to reach adulthood" (Butterss 87). That is, rather than an essential element of achieved maturity, mateship was now seen as an obstacle that ought to be overcome in order to grow up,.

In a similar way, Australian masculinity had undergone major modifications. While the filmic productions of the New Wave Cinema had the strong Anglo-Australian male hero at its core, the 1990s characters underwent a certain feminization (Ferrier 65). That is, the revised Australian protagonist of the 1990s cinema was frequently either a female or a "camp, daggy [or] queer" (Carter et al. 196). At the same time, the New World Cinema was marked by what Liz Ferrier calls "vulnerable bodies; bodies which struggle

with disabilities, physical or mental, than render them prone" (65). Given the vulnerability of the 1990s protagonists, the modified heroes were no longer reminiscent of the hyper-masculine, excessively strong and hard-working characters of the New Wave Cinema (Ferrier 65).

The extensive modifications mentioned above were well received by the general Australian audience and critics alike. By the mid-1990s the Australian film critics largely agreed on the fact that the last remaining nationalistic components of the preceding two decades had eventually faded away. By calling it "post-national", Ian Craven, for instance, celebrates the inclusiveness of the 1990s Australian cinema, meaning a cinema that has abandoned any form of definition in terms of the national (5). This tendency is both a logical consequence of the political developments in Australia and underpins Anderson's idea that national identity is constructed rather than inherently given.

Despite the inclusion of some former marginal groups, such as women and immigrants, however, the New World Cinema is not entirely immune to exclusion. Adhering to the former films' marginal treatment of Aboriginal Australians, the often-celebrated open-mindedness of New World Cinema did not apply to the indigenous population of Australia. As Graeme Turner rightly observed in the mid-1990s, "Australians are arrested at an earlier stage in the process of understanding and accepting Aboriginality than occurs in the case of multiculturalism" (*Making* 132). The portrayal of indigenous Australians and other former outsider figures is examined on the basis of three films of the Australian New World Cinema – *Strictly Ballroom*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and *Muriel's Wedding* – in the following section.

8.4. The Films of the New World Cinema

8.4.1. Strictly Ballroom (1992)

8.4.1.1. Content

Scott Hastings is a professional ballroom dancer. Born into a family of enthusiastic and exceptional ballroom dancers, his ballroom dancing future was settled upon him for life by his mother. Shirley Hasting is driven by her ambitions and wants her son to accomplish the goals that she has never been able to achieve – to win the Pan Pacific Grand Prix – the prestigious nation-wide contest.

On the day of the qualifying tournament, however, the unfair methods applied by another couple force Scott to improvise. He dances his own improvised steps, which clearly deviate from the traditional steps of ballroom dancing. The ballroom committee, above all Shirley Hastings, Scott's mother, and Barry Fife, the chairman of the Dancing Federation, are appalled and even fear that Scott might be disqualified from the dancing competition. Although his family's close relationship to Barry Fife secures his participation in the main contest, his partner Liz turns her back on him and leaves him for another dance partner.

While Shirley Hastings eagerly tries to find an appropriate substitute for Liz, Scott has an encounter with the coy beginner Fran, who agrees to be his partner at the competition, despite the fact that Scott wants to try his own steps. Barry Fife and Shirley Hastings, however, disapprove of his intentions to participate on the side of Fran and try to convince him to dance with Tina Sparkle – one of the leading female ballroom dancers in Australia.

Even though Scott's mother is successful in her attempts to intimidate Fran, Scott is not willing to give in and follows Fran to her house. This is the point when Scott and the audience learn that Fran is short for Francesca and that she and her family come from a Spanish background. Apparently, Fran has concealed her plans to participate in the Pan Pacifics from her father. On being told by Scott that they are going to dance the paso

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doblé, Fran's father Rico asks the latter to give a performance. The response of Rico and his friends to Scott's paso doblé is fairly discouraging. While they just laugh at him, Fran's grandmother YaYa appears more supportive and is willing to teach them to dance the paso doblé. As time goes by, Scott realizes that the rhythm has to be felt with the heart and not merely in the feet, and, much to the anger of the Dancing Federation learns to cherish both Spanish culture and Fran.

In order to prevent Scott from participating with Fran, Barry Fife and Shirley Hastings induct Scott into his father's hidden secret: allegedly, Doug Hastings, who only dances secretly when no one is around, was an excellent ballroom dancer. In fact, together with his wife Shirley he was said to be unbeatable. The Pan Pacific Grand Prix, however, was the turning point in his career, for he got selfish and started dancing his own improvised steps. He lost the contest and has never been able to recover from this disappointment. The story of his father intimidates Scott and he decides to act on Barry Fife's advice to dance with his former partner Liz.

Right before the beginning of the contest, however, Doug Hastings tells the true story to his son. According to Doug Hastings, he gave up dancing because Barry Fife was successful in convincing Shirley to replace her husband for another dancer. Since Les was not in danger of dancing improvised steps, Shirley abandoned her husband for the former. By encouraging his son not to make the same mistake by giving in to Barry Fife, Doug Hasting convinces Scott to carry out his initial plan: to dance the paso doblé with Fran.

On the dance floor Barry Fife disqualifies Scott and Fran from the competition. They, however, refuse to leave the dance floor, and, accompanied by the clapping of Scott's father and the support of the rest of the audience, they finish their paso doble. In the utopian closure the music sounds again and everyone joins Scott and Fran on the dance floor.

8.4.1.2. Analysis

"Unburdened of the policy expectations of previous decades that filmmakers should produce and promote a singular version of Australian national identity" (Goldsmith 115), the films of the 1990s try to show Australia's multicultural reality. *Strictly Ballroom* represents one of the attempts to break with previously celebrated, stereotypical portrayals of Australian-ness, as it depicts Australia in its cultural diversity.

8.4.1.2.1. Living in Two Worlds – The White Versus the 'Other'

In *Strictly Ballroom* the heterogeneity typical of the 1990s cinema is presented in terms of the intermingling of two cultural worlds – the ethnically marked world of Fran and the Anglo-Celtic world of ballroom dancing, which Scott is a member of. The white world of ballroom dancing is represented as an artificial, radical and conservative world of weird hairstyles, too much make-up and fake smiles. It is a world marked by fear and oppression, the members of which desperately cling to traditional and outdated views. Their unprogressiveness is recorded in the motto of ballroom dancing itself: "Where the man goes the lady must follow" (*Strictly Ballroom*). In other words, their way of dancing is indicative of the male supremacy known from the self-image promoted in the Renaissance of the 1970s and 1980s.

Similar to the nationalistic position held by the Australian elite in the 1970s and 1980s, who tried to promote a dominantly white, male understanding of Australian-ness, the characters of the ballroom dancing community doggedly stick to their archaic views. They suppress any form of deviation and creativity that might pose a threat to the traditional order. This is particularly evident in the figures of Barry Fife and Shirley Hastings, Scott's mother, who want to adhere to the traditional steps by all means. Barry Fife expresses this rigidity himself, when he says that he is "not going to let what [they] have fought for all these years be destroyed" (*Strictly Ballroom*).

The notion of the white world of ballroom dancing as a world of anxiety and tyranny is implied by Doug Hastings, Scott's father, when he admits that they have lived "a life in

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fear" (*Strictly Ballroom*). Similar to Scott, he was prevented from dancing his own steps, since they were "not always strictly ballroom" (*Strictly Ballroom*). Thus, the world of ballroom dancing is a world of constant fear of the new, in which both Scott and his father are not able to fulfil their full potential. As such, it is hostile to the aspirations of the two characters. They are pushed to either follow the conventions of ballroom dancing or give it up entirely.

Their hostility towards anything outside the conventional order, is reminiscent of the attitude towards multiculturalism in Australia from the 1940s to the 1960s, as depicted by Castles et al., when immigrants were assimilates, rather than integrated (45). James Bennett even takes it a step further when he suggests that the world of ballroom dancing may be understood as an exaggerated version of the 'White Australian policy' (70), a 70-year period of white dominance and control.

Mirroring the Anglo-Celtic community during the period of white supremacy, the established members of the ballroom dancing community are just as dominant in their world of ballroom dancing, for they have the power of definition. It is not surprising then that Fran, an absolute beginner in ballroom dancing, is not taken seriously and finds herself in a marginalized position within the Anglo-Celtic world of Scott. Her eager attempts to integrate into the white community remain unsuccessful, as she is repeatedly ignored and overlooked.

Her position as an outsider figure is furthermore reflected in Scott's remark that "a beginner has no right to approach an Open Amateur" (*Strictly Ballroom*) – a statement clearly indicative of his supremacy. Being rejected as a new dancing partner by Scott, Fran argues, "You're really just scared! You are scared to give someone new 'a go' because they might be better than you are" (*Strictly Ballroom*). Addressing the fears of the ballroom dancing community, she clearly alludes to the xenophobia still existent among Australia's Anglo-Celtic community of the time. The anxieties and hostility of the ballroom dancing community, thus, clearly stand for the fears of 1990s Australia to meet and mingle with other ethnic cultures.

As a contrast to the intimidating world of ballroom dancing, the viewer is introduced to the world of Fran – the world of the 'other'. Marked as ethnic by highly stereotypical

signs, such as the rubbish in front of the house, the seemingly strict father, the fiesta, the garlands on the veranda and the ethnically looking man playing the guitar in a dark corner, Fran's world is easily identified as stereotypically Spanish. In the beginning Fran's ethnically marked culture appears to be just as narrow-minded as the world Scott comes from, for Fran's father Rico appears equally hostile as the ballroom dancers. Observing Scott's version of the paso doblé, Rico merely ridicules the attempt. When Fran's grandmother Yaya intervenes, however, Fran's world turns out to be superior to Anglo-Australia. Believing in Scott's ability to learn the paso doblé as danced in their culture, Yaya defies Rico's initial doubts and supports Fran and Scott in their plan to participate in the contest. Even though located at the margins of the Australian community, it is the ethnic world of Fran that appears to be more tolerant to outsider figures and more open to change. Given the open-mindedness of the ethnic community, it clearly appears to be more appealing than the artificial world Scott has grown up in.

The preferability of Fran's world is further symbolized by its members' way of dancing. The paso doblé, as danced in Spanish culture, is perceived as an innovative, creative alternative to the stiffened posture of ballroom dancing, as it stands for passion, vigour and spiritedness. Scott evidently profits from the contact with the 'other', as the Spanish influence not only improves his dancing steps, but also contributes to his personal development. By encouraging him to feel the rhythm with his heart, the members of the ethnic community make him open his heart for the 'other' culture, both alien and inspiring to him. The mingling of cultures is, thus, certainly seen as something positive in the film – as a means to enrich the dominant Anglo-Celtic Australian culture.

8.4.1.2.2. Celebrating Multiculturalism

In addition to the noticeable signs of Scott's "'reversed assimilation'" (Rattigan, *Ballroom* 90), Rattigan convincingly suggests a transformation of Fran towards a more striking ethnically-looking outward appearance. While Fran's ethnic background remains quite subtle in the beginning of the film, when her ethnicity only becomes visible in connection with her usual, ethnically marked surrounding, her Spanish origins become increasingly pronounced in the course of the film. As the film gradually

uncovers her Spanish roots, culminating in her performance of the paso doblé at the competition, it reinforces and openly celebrates the same. (Rattigan, *Ballroom* 92)

Offering the freedom of will that Scott has been looking for in vain in his own community, the ethically marked world of Fran appears to be the more appealing one until the very end. Its meeting and mingling with the hegemonic white community of ballroom dancing, is portrayed as a universally favourable development for both communities. The enrichment on the part of both communities is particularly evident in the utopian ending of the film, where Fran's grandmother Yaya and Les Kendall, a member of the white community, are happily dancing together, and Scott and Fran can openly display their relationship. The paso doblé danced at the completion symbolizes the harmonious union of deviating cultures, both of which are enriched by the influence of the other.

8.4.1.2.3. The Break with Archaic Ideas about Australian Masculinity

Presenting a positive depiction of multicultural Australia, *Strictly Ballroom* quite perceptibly turns away from the simplistic xenophobic representations of Australian-ness encountered in the films of the previous decades. Part of this break with earlier conventions is, furthermore, the withdrawal from former definitions of Australian masculinity. Replacing the heroic Bushman by a professional ballroom dancer, *Strictly Ballroom* challenges the hyper-masculinity promoted in earlier films. Neither Scott nor his father conform to the traditional Australian-image of masculinity displayed by 'Crocodile' Dundee, Jim Craig in *Snowy River* and Archie and Frank in *Gallipoli*. Suffering from the oppression by his wife Shirley, Doug Hastings may hardly be viewed as embodying the male superiority displayed by former protagonists. His son Scott would be equally out of place in the role as a revival hero of the New Wave Cinema. A ballroom dancer, he is equipped with a slightly feminine touch, and, thus, Philip Butterss has justly called him "the most radical shift from the tradition of heroic male leads like [...] Paul Hogan" (87).

8.4.1.2.4. Modified but Still There – Mateship, Egalitarianism and the Anti-
        Authoritarian Stance

Despite the obvious challenge of outdated notions of Australian-ness, *Strictly Ballroom* cannot but at least touch upon the concepts virtually exploited in the revival films. As a result, *Strictly Ballroom* involves the concept of mateship, albeit not in its traditional form. By presenting the bond between Scott and Fran – a form of mateship that is neither gender- nor race-specific – *Strictly Ballroom* successfully distances itself from the idea of mateship as a primarily Anglo-Australian male concept. Secondly, as Butterss has argued, the 1990s films have turned mateship into a "stage through which it is necessary to pass before attaining adult masculinity" (87). Mateship is therefore no longer viewed as a concept central to the identity of the Australian male – an "emotional commitment that overrides all other considerations" (Rattigan, *Images* 27) – but rather as a phase that needs to be overcome to achieve mature manhood. In this sense, the mateship between Scott and Fran exactly fits into the 1990s idea of the concept, as it shapes and forms the protagonist by opening up his eyes for the beauty of the unknown. Scott's process of maturation is, thus, thought to be completed through his refusal to dance with any partner other than Fran.

In a similar way, the concept of egalitarianism is altered by its extension to non-British immigrants and women. While it has originally been understood as a principle primarily applied to the Anglo-Celtic male Australian population (Macgregor et al. 18), *Strictly Ballroom* suggests its validity for every Australian citizen. Presenting people from different cultural backgrounds united on the dance floor, the final scene is clearly aimed at members of the dominant white-Australian culture, encouraging them to break with the traditional understanding of egalitarianism. The promoted modified version of the concept has lost its rough edges, as both its racial and chauvinist elements have been omitted. In this sense, *Strictly Ballroom* clearly expands the meaning of egalitarianism in order to encompass every Australian citizen, regardless of ethnicity, class or gender.

The notion of anti-authoritarianism is arguably the most dominant of the well-worn revival concepts in *Strictly Ballroom*. Depicting the protagonist's rebellion against the Dancing Federation, Scott Hastings obviously shares the characteristics of "non-conformism, irreverence [and] impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32) with his predecessors of the revival films. Similar to Frank in *Gallipoli* and Jim in *Snowy River*, Scott

Hastings finds himself in a revolt against the odds. As the viewer learns relatively early, he is "sick of dancing somebody else's steps all the time" (*Strictly Ballroom*), and rebels against the rules of ballroom dancing by performing his own steps. What Berry Fife, the chairman of the Dancing Federation calls Scott's "flashy crowd-pleasing steps" (*Strictly Ballroom*), is regarded as a disaster within the ballroom dancing community. Suffering from the rebellious behaviour of her son, Scott's mother even questions her maternal abilities. Revolting both against the Dancing Federation and his mother, Scott certainly reminds of Archy in *Gallipoli*, who also defies the will of his uncle in order to find his calling. Given the strong parallels to former anti-authoritarian heroes and their values, a subtle return to former depictions of Australian-ness may not be denied.

8.4.1.2.5. Conclusion

Despite the fact that *Strictly Ballroom* undoubtedly falls back on the well-worn concepts of the Renaissance, clear attempts to break with earlier archaic version of Australian-ness are perceptible. Placing a female character with a Spanish background next to the Anglo-Celtic protagonist, the film evidently goes beyond the outdated representations of the Bushman and his fellow figures. It promotes a broader understanding of Australian-ness, which clearly views ethnicity as being favourable to Anglo-Celticism.

Although Fran's world is depicted as more appealing than the white one, the portrayal of the Spanish community is not entirely without flaws. The first encounter with Fran's family provides the audience with a highly stereotypical image, placing them at the margins of the Australian society. Since Fran is presented as an outsider figure in the dominant white culture of ballroom dancing, the film suggests that Australia has not lived multiculturalism successfully yet. Too strong seem the fears of the 'other' on the part of some Anglo-Celtic Australians – anxieties that make them doggedly adhere to archaic conventions. In this way, *Strictly Ballroom* clearly touches upon current issues in 1990s Australia and criticizes the same.

The final scene, however, implies that Australia certainly has the potential to break with outdated views of Australian-ness. Presenting an utopian ending, which depicts the

harmonious integration of non-British cultural elements into the dominant white culture, *Strictly Ballroom* offers a model according to which multicultural Australia might work.

Certainly, the trite concepts of anti-authoritarianism, mateship and egalitarianism are not entirely off the table, yet *Strictly Ballroom* presents modified versions of the latter two ideas. Expanding their application to women and non-British immigrants, the film evidently attempts to present Australian-ness in the light of heterogeneity, rather than offering a reproduction of earlier simplistic images. *Strictly Ballroom*, thus, contributes to the development of the Australian cinema as getting a bit closer to reflecting an authentic image of the Australian society of the time.

8.4.2. *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994)*

8.4.2.1.   Content

The film *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* accompanies two drag queens and a transvestite on their journey from Sydney to Alice Springs on a bus of the same name – Priscilla.

In order to comply with his wife's wishes, the drag queen Mitzi alias Anthony 'Tick' Belrose, agrees to give a performance in her bar located in the small Australian outback town Alice Springs. After convincing his friends and colleagues Felicia and Bernadette – an eccentric, flashy drag queen and a transsexual – to join him into the outback in order to perform together, they get on the bus and leave for Alice Springs. On their way to Alice Springs they find themselves confronted with both the remoteness of the Australian outback and the discrimination and hostility on the part of the narrow-minded country people. In contrast to the latter, the more tolerant mechanic Bob, who develops romantic feelings for Bernadette, is supportive and fixes their broken bus. Due to the persistent problems with the bus and his feelings for Bernadette, he even decides to join the three performers on their journey to the centre of the Australian continent.

Once they have arrived, Felicia and Bernadette have to deal with another revelation, as they learn that Tick is married to a homosexual woman, and that he is the father of a eight–year old son, both of whom are waiting for him in Alice Springs. But also for Tick himself the situation is more than awkward. He wants to prevent his son from seeing his father in his performance dress, and feels uncomfortable when he spots his son in the middle of the audience, cheering at him. After a failed attempt to display 'typically' masculine behaviour, Tick realizes that his son is capable of dealing with his father's occupation, and that there is no reason for him to hide. In fact, his son is even proud of his father's reputation as the best performer in the business.

For Bernadette and Bob the journey to Alice Springs ends in a relationship and their decision to stay in Alice Springs together. Felicia and Tick return to Sydney, joined by Tick's son Benjamin, in order to give an ABBA performance in front of their usual audience.

8.4.2.2. Analysis

As has been pointed out in one of the previous sections, the Australian cinema has played an important role in the construction and preservation of common ideas about Australian identity (Bennett 61). Australian cinema, however, also seems to be a powerful tool to question common ideas about national identities, as evident in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the desert*. By accompanying two drag queens and a transvestite on their journey to Alice Spring, the film removes the excessively celebrated figures of the Bushman and the other cultural heroes and installs three homosexuals in the setting of the Australian outback. It is, hence, not surprising that it provides an alternative representation of Australian identity to the earlier gender and race-specific images of Australian-ness in *Priscilla*. Probably more surprising is the fact that *Priscilla* partially seems to fall back on some of the anachronistic ways of depicting what it means to be Australian.

8.4.2.2.1. *Priscilla* and Its New Wave Characteristics

Analysing the parallels between the revival films and *Priscilla*, Thomas rightly refers to the latter as "the direct inheritor of the cultural logic that underlies the Ocker film of the early 70s" (101). This is true insofar, as the main characters in *Priscilla* display some of the same character traits that are said to be the source of humour in the Ocker comedies of the early 1970s: "colourful slang for people, beer and bodily functions" (O'Regan, *Ocker* 101). And indeed *Priscilla* is virtually brimming with Australian slang words for the scatological: the audience encounters "dickheads", "bitches", "dicks" as well as several "fuck[s]", "shit[s]" and "blood[ies]" (*Priscilla*).

Furthermore, the "lack of proper respect for authority" (*Images* 32), identified as a typical Ocker feature by Rattigan, equally well applies to Mitzi, Felicia and Bernadette. Felicia's act of dressing up and trying to make a pass at the country men, for instance, is obviously an act of provocation and may be understood as a reaction to the hostility of the country people and their archaic views. Similarly, their visit of the local pub in their drag queen outfits during their first stop points to their impudent nature, since it has no other aim than shocking the locals.

The audience is moreover reminded of the Ocker comedy by the numerical dominance of male outback people in the local pubs and their penchant for drinking. Presenting the country pub as a primarily male domain, (Shirl is the only woman and even she appears masculine,) *Priscilla* clearly reinforces the idea of excessive drinking as one of the core practices of men. When you add the fact that the only way of securing herself male respect is for Bernadette to win the drinking contest, the ability of drinking vast amounts of alcohol may well be regarded as a desired Australian quality and a prerequisite for being accepted as a mate. The partial return to the anachronistic ideas about masculine behaviour as embodied by Ocker figure may, thus, not entirely be denied.

Male dominance may not only be encountered in the outback pubs. In fact, the relative absence of female characters appears to be a general feature of the film. Assigning only a minor role to women, *Priscilla* is strongly reminiscent of the revival films of the 1970s and early 1980s: Tick's wife Marion is only introduced at the end of the film and

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Bob's Filipina wife Cynthia is not granted more than two two-minute sequences, which, to top it all off, portray her as a calculating devilish woman. As the audience learns relatively early in the film, she only married Bob out of financial motives – an insight that will hardly encourage the viewers to sympathise with her.

A parallel between both Marion and Cynthia is that they have been abandoned by their husbands in the latter's preference of the other sex. Tick (Mitzi) has left Marion in order to be able to lead a gay life in the city, and Bob leaves his wife Cynthia in the course of the film in order to form a new bond with Bernadette. That is, both men turn away from their female partners in order to form new unions – unions that do not permit any space to women. Estella Tincknell and Deborah Chambers are, therefore, right in arguing that, "even the 'love interest' is taken by a man playing a woman" (152). Replacing Cynthia by Bernadette, who certainly dresses and behaves like a woman, but is in fact a biological man, the film omits women even from its romantic element, and may be seen as being equally male-centred as *Snowy River*, *Gallipoli* and *Crocodile Dundee*.

Central to the cinema of the 1990s remains the country/city dichotomy so excessively treated in the films of the New Wave Period. Similar to *Crocodile Dundee* and *Snowy River*, *Priscilla* constructs differences between rural and urban life, between the country people and the Bush people. While the earlier films mainly aimed at celebrating the Australian Bush for its freedom from corruption and materialism – as untouched, pure nature – *Priscilla* does not fall back on the praise of rural Australia. The country people encountered in the film are, on the contrary, portrayed as restricted, narrow-minded rednecks, who perceive the three drag queens as a threat to their narrow, homophobic views and their understanding of masculinity.

It is not surprising, then, that the city turns out to be the more tolerant and, thus, more favourable sphere for the protagonists. Sydney is depicted as progressive, modern and sophisticated, and its inhabitant as being more liberal and less restricted when it comes to sexuality – a factor that makes it easier for Felicia and Mitzi to act out their homosexual lifestyle. The preferability of urban Australia to its rural counterpart is addressed by Bernadette in the film, when she refers to the city as some kind of refuge. Wondering "if that ugly wall of suburbia has been put there to stop [the others] getting in, or [themselves] getting out" (*Priscilla*), she clearly ascribes homosexual and queer

culture to the life in the city, making it a place where marginal figures such as Mitzi (Tick), Felicia and Bernadette feel they belong.

The alleged urban progressiveness finds its opposition in the narrow-mindedness of the country people. While the ABBA performance by Mitzi (Tick) and Felicia is acclaimed by their audience in Sydney, they have to deal with hostility and resentment in the outback. The unknown rural environment confronts them with insults such as "Go home aids fuckers" (Priscilla 1994) written on their tour bus, and inflicts on them encounters with people who, after having taken a look at Mitzi's drag queen outfit, refuse to help them, when they are caught in the vastness of the Australian outback. The hostility of the country people is particularly evident during their first stop, when their entrance of a pub is commented by degrading statements, such as "Well, look what the cat dragged in. [...] Where did you lady's come in from? Uranus?" (*Priscilla*). Similarly, their performance in a pub calls up little enthusiasm on the part of the dominantly male audience. Given only minor attention, they leave the stage to Bob's wife Cynthia, whose performance seems to be more appreciated.

Their encounter with a group of indigenous people, however, presents an entirely different picture of rural culture. In contrast to the homophobic baiting experienced in the outback towns, the Aboriginal community appears more tolerant and open-minded. As the Aborigines sing and perform together with Mitzi (Tick), Felicia and Bernadette, the film unites two outsider groups, who, in their performance of *I Will Survive* by Gloria Gaynor*,* rebel against parochial views.

Similar to the well-worn country/city dichotomy, the concept of mateship undergoes minor modifications in *Priscilla*. As in the case of *Strictly Ballroom*, male bonding finds its integration into the promoted essence of Australian-ness, albeit not in its traditional, one-dimensional form. Certainly, the outback scenes provide the audience with images of mateship in its originally exclusive form, as embodied by the country people. Based on what has been said, the anachronistic version of mateship, however, is evidently marked as an element of rural Australian society, rather than an urban phenomenon. Within an urban context, *Priscilla* seems to offer an alternative version to the traditional institution of mateship presented in the nationalistic cinema of the 1970s. Celebrating the bond between the main protagonists Mitzi (Tick), Felicia and Bernadette – two drag

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queens and a transvestite – the film appears to contribute to the extension of the concept, for the first time including homosexual people. While the encounter with Australia's indigenous population even erases the racist element from the traditional concept, the exclusion of women remains a component intrinsic to the concept. Given the fact that both Bob and Tick abandon their wives for a same-sex relationship, the bonds to men are presented as being preferable to relationships with female characters.

8.4.2.2.2. Watching "Cocks in a Frock" (*Strictly Ballroom*) – The New Australian Masculinity

Obviously, the attempt to distance itself from the singular images of Australia-ness offered in the revival films clearly shows in the modified versions of former concepts, such as the country/city dichotomy and mateship. Arguably, the most prominent contrast between *Priscilla* and its predecessors of the 1970s and 1980s lies in the representation of Australian masculinity. While flagship films such as *Crocodile Dundee* and *Gallipoli* emphasize the traditional qualities of Australian masculinity - closeness to the Bush, strength and courage – *Priscilla* presents male characters who address their anxieties and emotions. Tick (Mitzi), for instance, openly displays his insecurity in his role as a father. His coming to terms with his position as an outsider figure clearly depends on his son's approval of what he himself does for a living. Only with his son's consent is Tick able to complete his journey of self-discovery successfully.

While drawing on some of the archaic notions of typical Australian masculinity, which are mostly embodied by the outback people, *Priscilla* simultaneously challenges and ridicules them. The criticism of former narrow ideas of manliness is particularly apparent in the figure of Bernadette. Triumphing in the drinking contest, Bernadette, a transsexual, is apparently closer to the outdated image Australian masculinity than both Shirl and the men whom she defeats. The ridicule of clichéd Australian hyper-masculinity, as promoted in earlier films, reaches its climax in one of the final scenes, when Tick (Mitzi) tries to live up to preconceived notions of 'good' fatherhood. Dressing up according to the traditional understanding of the Australian male, he appears as a "body-waxed Bryan Brown, dressed in moleskins and Akubra, and suckin' on a tinny of Fosters" (Thomas 102). Most obviously, Tick (Mitzi) tries to act a role that

he does not feel comfortable with and accordingly appears artificial and ridiculous. Obviously unsuccessful in his attempt to correspond to common ideas about 'real' masculinity, the figure of Tick (Mitzi) implies that the traditional version of maleness is no less a role performed than his role as a drag queen on stage (Thomas 102). Assuming that gender roles are performed, rather than innately given, *Priscilla* questions the cultural categories of male and female gender and blurs their boundaries.

The proposed break with clear-cut boundaries between masculinity and femininity is underpinned by Bernadette. In contrast to Mitzi (Tick) and Felicia, she has deliberately chosen to lead a transsexual lifestyle. This involves an intentionally feminine self-representation on her part, both in terms of appearance and behaviour. Simultaneously, however, she also lives up to expectations placed on a 'real' man by rural society. Literally drinking Shirl under the table, Bernadette, rather corresponds to the traditional Ocker image than both the men in the pub and Shirl. Bernadette also challenges Shirl verbally by applying rough Ocker humour, as she attacks her, "Now listen here, you mallet. Why don't you light your tampon and blow your box apart, 'cause it's the only bang you're ever going to get" (*Priscilla*). Having uttered the insult, she immediately switches back to her feminine behaviour, so that her entire appearance and conduct seem more feminine than Shirl's crude Ocker behaviour. Bernadette, hence, is superior to Shirl in corresponding to traditional notions about both 'ideal' masculinity and femininity.

Bernadette is, furthermore, contrasted to Cynthia and her shocking performance. In order to draw the male attention from the drag queens towards herself, she half-nakedly performs in the pub, shooting ping-pong balls out of her vagina. Cynthia's alleged attempt to correspond to common ideas about the behaviour of 'real' women fails, so that, as Karen Brooks justly argues, "the 'normal', the 'original', is revealed to be a copy, and an inevitably failed one" (87). That is, in her attempt to undermine the drag performance of the male protagonists, the biological woman does not manage to live up to the expectations of feminine behaviour. The "copy", Bernadette, is much closer to the romanticized image of feminism.

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8.4.2.2.3. Hybridity in *Priscilla*

As mentioned above, *Priscilla* successfully challenges common notions of masculinity as presented in the flagship films of the 1970s and 1980s. In connection with that, the audience encounters a general break with the singular image of Australian identity in favour of a colourful hybridity. While Australian-ness is restricted to various combinations of the Bushman, the Anzac and the Ocker figure in the films of the Australian New Wave Cinema, a wide range of Australian identities are encountered in *Priscilla:* the masculine outback woman, who has never lost a drinking contest against any of the male inhabitants, the hostile hillbilly country people, the open-minded city people, the immigrant Filipina wife and the tolerant Aborigines. Certainly, all of the figures mentioned above are presented in a highly stereotypical way. Nevertheless, their inclusion into what it means to be Australian makes the film go beyond the simplistic version of Australian-ness as promoted in the Renaissance of Australian film. As a result, the Australian nation is no longer understood as a homogenous group of people, but rather celebrated for its diversity.

8.4.2.2.4. Conclusion

As has been observed in the context of *Strictly Ballroom*, the New World Cinema of the 1990s was not entirely ready to turn its back on the figures and concepts that had led the Australian cinema out of its crisis. Similar tendencies are perceptible in *Priscilla*, which incorporates mateship and anti-authoritarianism into the promoted image of Australian national identity, albeit not in its traditional form. Presenting a modified version of mateship, the original understanding of the concept is clearly undermined and challenged.

Particularly strong is the challenge of narrow ideas about 'typical' Australian masculinity. By blurring the boundaries between gender categories, *Priscilla* certainly questions the simplistic concepts of masculinity and femininity once so proudly upheld in the revival films. It may be true that women are treated as marginally as in earlier films; nevertheless *Priscilla* has taken a major step towards presenting Australia in its actual heterogeneity. As the proposed Australian self-image grants space to

homosexuality, *Priscilla* does away with singular versions of Australian-ness, in favour of a more hybrid approach towards the nation. In this sense, the film may be seen to present "what this country needs. A cock, in a frock, on a rock" (*Priscilla*).

8.4.3. Muriel's Wedding (1994)

8.4.3.1. Content

Muriel Heslop is unhappy. She feels overweight, useless and unloved. Her main objective in life is to get married in a glamorous wedding. What she is denied in real life – she is single without any hope of improvement – is what she finds in her daydreams, lying on her bed listening to her favourite ABBA songs.

In her parochial home town, Porpoise Spit, she desperately tries to be accepted by a group of girls (Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl), who embody everything that Muriel is striving for: they are pretty, popular and are married or are at least on the way to getting married. Despite Muriel's eager attempts to please them, she is nothing more to them than an unwelcome plague, who does neither fit their crowd nor necessarily conduce to their image. As a result, they expel her from the group.

Muriel is similarly despised by her father, who regards her, just as the rest of his family, as useless failures. Luckily, Deidre Chambers, officially an acquaintance of her father, unofficially his mistress, offers Muriel a job as a saleswoman for cosmetics. In order to support Muriel in her new job, her mother writes a blank cheque, meant to enable her to buy products for the job.

Instead of using it for the intended purpose, however, Muriel plunders the entire bank account of her parents and uses the money to follow the group she would kill to be a member of to Bali. Again she encounters rejection on part of her 'friends'. Unexpectedly, she meets Rhonda, a former school-mate, who was similarly abandoned by the group of girls, and spends the rest of the vacation with her.

Since her parents are aware of Muriel's act, she leaves behind her old life in Porpoise Spit, joins Rhonda in Sydney and begins a new life. This break-up with her former life is expressed, among other things, by the fact that she no longer wants to be called Muriel, but changes her name to Marial. Although she leads a new liberated life, she is haunted by the rigid values of her old existence – her obsession with marriage.

While Rhonda's life is thrown off track due to a diagnosis of cancer, which leaves her chair bound, Mariel finds herself only one step away from her wildest dream, when she is offered to be paid A$ 10.000 for agreeing to a marriage of convenience. A handsome south-African swimmer desperately needs Australian citizenship in order to be allowed to compete for Australia at the Olympic Games. Marial agrees, although this means abandoning Rhonda, who, entirely dependent on outside help, moves back to her mother.

By contrast, Marial is eventually happy. The marriage gives her everything she has ever wanted: a handsome husband, a glamorous wedding, which is even broadcasted, and the envy of the group that once rejected her. This, however, has not changed her life for the better. She has lost her friend Rhonda, lives with a man who does not love her and, finally, he mother commits suicide, when she learns that her husband has been cheating on her and wants a divorce. This is the point when Marial realizes that all she has ever wanted is an honest restart with Rhonda, a reliable friend, as Muriel – her true self.

8.4.3.2. Analysis

Since "[*Muriel's Wedding*] is still usually thought of as *Strictly Ballroom's* daughter and *Priscilla's* straighter sister" (Medhurst), it is not surprising that one will encounter certain parallels between *Muriel's Wedding* and the latter two films, in terms of how the Australian nation is conceived. As Jane Landmann has observed, "a celebratory vulgarity and the use of a brash vernacular links *Muriel's Wedding* to the Ocker cycle films of the seventies" (111). It seems only natural, therefore, that the Australian-ness in *Muriel's Wedding* shows major similarities with the national identity encountered in *Priscilla*, which has also been associated with the Ocker film of the early 70s (Thomas 101).

8.4.3.2.1. Integrating Old Myths – A Tribute to the Ocker Comedy

Just as their predecessor, the Ocker comedy, *Priscilla* and *Muriel's Wedding* rely on crudeness and coarse language as a major source of humour. Words such as 'bitch', 'cock' and 'bastard' seem to take an essential part in the everyday language of the minor characters Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl as well as Bill Heslop, Muriel's father.

Furthermore, the features of "non-conformism, irreverence, impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32), usually ascribed to the Ocker, are reflected in Muriel's rebellion against her father's authority. Leaving Porpoise Spit with all his money, she not only defies her father's will, but also violates the law, making her the "delinquent" (*Images* 31) that Rattigan has called the larrikin type – the predecessor of the Ocker figure.

The concept of mateship, which lies at the heart of both the larrikin and the Australian Ocker figure, also finds its application in *Muriel's Wedding*, again, however, in a modified form. Given the fact that Muriel abandons her husband in favour of her mate Rhonda, *Muriel's Wedding*, as opposed to *Strictly Ballroom*, seems to retain the traditional understanding of mateship as an "emotional commitment that overrides all other considerations" (Rattigan, *Images* 27). That is, while mateship is presented as a phase that needs to be overcome in order to achieve adulthood in *Strictly Ballroom*, *Muriel's Wedding* reinforces the traditional idea of mateship as an essential part of Australian-ness. At the same time, however, it distances itself from previous notions of mateship by omitting its misogynist element. Presenting the bond between Muriel and Rhonda – an exclusively female version of mateship – *Muriel's Wedding*, just as *Strictly Ballroom*, turns it back on the notion of mateship as a concept that is restricted to the Australian male.

Earlier male supremacy, as promoted by *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *Snowy River*, is moreover challenged by Muriel's father, Bill Heslop. Known as "Bill the battler" (*Muriel's Wedding*) among his business colleagues, Bill certainly refers back to the battler spirit - "the willingness to meet life's challenges or injustices head-on, unflinchingly and with resolve" – so excessively celebrated in *Snowy River*. At the same time, however, the consistently negative depiction of Bill Heslop questions the validity

of his nickname. Obviously, his character is in lack of any kind of heroic quality. Depreciatingly, he calls his children "a bunch of useless no-hopers" (*Muriel's Wedding*), exploits his wife, tyrannises his family, and accordingly contributes to Muriel's acute lack of self-confidence. His love affair with Deidre Chambers and his dubious businesses also disqualify him as a representative of the Australian battler. Providing a character so improper in the role of a traditional Australian hero, *Muriel's Wedding* satirically looks at the legends of the Bushman and his fellow heroes and questions their eligibility. It evidently challenges the basis on which the heroes of the 1890s have been celebrated and, as a consequence, decries the New Wave Cinema for valorising them.

8.4.3.2.2. From the Bush into Australian Suburbia

Similar to the archaic Australian legends, the country/city dichotomy, so excessively reflected on in the New Wave Period, has undergone major modifications in *Muriel's Wedding*. As has been observed in the context of *Priscilla*, the 1990s cinema, just as its predecessor, tends to construct differences between rural and urban life, while interchanging the attributes assigned to them. That is, the films of the 1970s and 1980s were largely dedicated to the celebration of the Australian Bush, whereas the films of the 1990s shed an entirely different light on the same. In fact, rural life is largely presented in an exaggeratedly negative way in order to emphasise the preferability of the life in the city. Tracing back Muriel's personal growth in Sydney, *Muriel's Wedding* is certainly suggestive of city life as being beneficial to the personal development of the female protagonist.

The less preferable surrounding, however, is no longer rural Australia, but Australian Suburbia – a location that prior to the 1990s was largely neglected in Australian films (Simpson 24). Similar to the rural Australia in *Priscilla*, the suburban surrounding Muriel has grown up in is presented in highly negative terms. The inhabitants of her hometown Porpoise Spit are portrayed as regressive, shallow and hypocritical:

>   Nicole: People think we are mad. [...] That's our image. You know what I mean.
>   Muriel: We are mad!
>   Nicole: We don't want you hanging around us anymore.
>   Muriel: I didn't steal the dress. It was a mistake.
>   Nicole: It's not the dress, it's you! We've told you a thousand times how to do your hair, but you never listen.
>   Cheryl: You never wear the right clothes.
>   Janine: You're fat.
>   Nicole: You bring us down Muriel.
>   Janine: You embarrass us.
>   Muriel: I, I know I'm not normal, but I'm trying to change.
>   [...]
>   Nicole: You'll still be you. (*Muriel's Wedding*)

Porpoise Spit is obviously a place where some of the characters, in particular Muriel and her mother Betty, are marginalized, suppressed and inhibited, their hopes and dreams estranged, and their objectives assimilated to the wishes of the dominant figures, the group in power: Muriel's father Bill Heslop and Muriel's role models, the clique of popular girls.

It is a world of superficialities and unscrupulousness, in which both Muriel and her mother are constantly reminded of their weaknesses, and in which they are prevented from fulfilling their full potential. Betty Heslop, has apparently given in to the tyranny of her husband, has given up her dreams and even, as it were, her personality. Withdrawing into her dream world, she ignores her husband's too obvious love affair and seems to have no thoughts on her own, since she merely repeats her husband's words.

In a similar way, Muriel uses her dream world of marriage and ABBA music as a defence mechanism against the insults of her father and the cruelties of what the people call her friends – Tania, Nicole, Cheryl and Janine. Because of her looks and her poor prospects for marriage, she has been excluded from their clique and given the advice to "find friends on [her] own level" (*Muriel's Wedding*). Their ruthlessness and superficiality becomes particularly evident on Muriel's wedding day, as her marriage seems to change everything. Their shallowness is perfectly addressed by Jill A. Mackey when she observes that "'Mariel's' new fame as a wife of swimmer David Van Arkle [...] is enough for [them] to forgive her of her past sins against their sense of fashion and deportment" (92). Apparently, they forgive her and willingly report to one of the present

camera teams on how they have always been best friends. It is no wonder then that Catherine Simpson refers to Porpoise Spit as "a bizarre, mysterious and even threatening place" (25). Given the portrayal of its inhabitants as superficial hypocrites, even a comparison with the white world of ballroom dancing in *Strictly Ballroom* appears legitimate.

8.4.3.2.3. Marriage as the Ultimate Goal? Muriel's Wedding and Its Concern With Gender Roles

The family Muriel has grown up in appears to live according to traditional gender roles, assigning separate spheres to husband and wife. While Bill clearly occupies the public domain, Betty seems to be bound to her home through her marriage to Bill and the social conventions. Repressed and harassed by her husband, she has given up all the aspirations that go beyond her domestic life.

According to the value system manifested in the minds of their community, Betty Heslop's life as a wife is thought to represent an ideal state – the realization of a woman's dreams. Entering into the state of marriage is considered the major goal of any woman, for only through marriage may a woman achieve ultimate perfection. For Muriel Heslop the ritual of marriage symbolizes even more than achieved femininity. Pushed into an outsider position from the very beginning of the film, she craves for conforming to the social expectations put on her by her surroundings. To her, marriage represents the ultimate solution to all of her problems – a way of proving, as she puts it, to be "normal":

> Muriel: I want to get married! I've always wanted to get married. If I can get married, it means I've changed. I'm a new person. [...] In Porpoise Spit, no one would even look at me. But when I came to Sydney and became Mariel, Brice asked me out, and that proves I'm already different than I was, and if someone wants to marry me, I'm not her anymore, I'm me".
> Rhonda: No who, anymore?
> Muriel: Muriel! Muriel Heslop! Stupid, fat, and useless! I hate her! I'm not going back to being her again! (*Muriel's Wedding*)

In her hope of overcoming her marginal position, Muriel is practically obsessed with marriage. Every inch of her bedroom walls is either covered in ABBA posters or

pictures of women in wedding dresses. Passing by a bridal shop, she longingly observes the future brides as they try on their wedding dresses, and the fact that she has caught Tania's wedding bouquet is a symbol of achievement for her. Even in Sydney, she cannot help but visit bridal shops. Making up heart-rending stories about fatally ill mothers and sisters, she tricks the saleswomen into taking photos of her wearing a wedding dress, all of which go straight into her photo album. Muriel's transformation to Marial – an 'improved' version of herself – is only viewed as completed when she walks down the aisle on the side of her future husband David Van Arkle. The fact that she is entering in an arranged marriage – that she is merely used by David for his own purposes – neither irritates her, nor does it lessen her rise in the esteem of the people that used to marginalize and exclude her. The act of marriage is, thus, no longer understood as an act of love, but is reduced to a shallow and trivial spectacle, undertaken only for the sake of social acceptance and the gratification of personal vanities.

Given the fact that *Muriel's Wedding* presents brides as "models of recognized successful femininity" (Landmann 115), this type of female perfection is embodied by Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl. They are pretty, popular and married or at least on the way to getting married – in short, they have made it. Their female success is not in the least impaired by their obvious lack of moral virtue. In fact, the hypocritical inhabitants of Porpoise Spit accept the loose morals of the supposed embodiments of ideal womanhood. The fact that Nicole sleeps with Chook, the groom of her best friend Tania, on the day of their wedding is generously ignored. Apparently, their doubtful morals are not seen incompatible with their valorisation as personifications of female perfection, nor is their vulgarity in language use. *Muriel's Wedding*, thus, critically reflects on the status of perfect femininity as embodied by Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl. In fact, their vulgar behaviour disqualifies them as ideals of femininity, like Cynthia, Bob's Fillipina wife, in *Priscilla*. Similar to the latter, the kind of femininity embodied by Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl is artificial, egocentric and based on being an object of male desire.

Since femininity, as understood by many characters in the film, primarily rests upon the state of being chosen as a wife, its definition entirely depends on male perception. In this sense, female perfection is viewed as a male-defined concept, imposed upon women

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through a system of male hegemony. Muriel's world is, thus, portrayed as a male-centred society, in which 'real' femininity is equated to passivity. Since this 'real' femininity is thought to be embodied by Tania, Janine, Nicole and Cheryl, unjustly regarded as 'truly' feminine, *Muriel's Wedding* obviously presents a caricatured version and aims at challenging it.

Muriel's Wedding furthermore questions the very principles that marriage stands for, by placing Muriel's romantic expectations of marriage in opposition to the actualities of being married. The juxtaposition of expectations and their realization ridicules the notion of marriage as an ideal state, and puts into question the archaic gender roles that marriage evidently creates. While Muriel expects from a marriage to provide the love and respect she has been refused by her father and 'friends', the examples of marital life offered in the film suggest that it yields the exact opposite: insincerity, unfaithfulness, disappointment and distress. Tania's husband, Chook, for instance, betrays his newly wedded wife on their wedding day with Nicole, one of Tania's bridesmaids. Muriel's mother Betty ignores her husband's affair and patiently endures that Deirdre appears wherever the Heslops happen to be.

Despised by her husband, who blames her for all of his mistakes, Betty ends up torching the backyard before she puts an end to her life. "Even in death," however, as Landmann has justly observed, "Betty's story remains Bill's story" (115). In other words, even after her death, her life serves but one purpose: to be used by her former husband Bill for his own ends. Hoping for a milder judgment in his trial for corruption, he plays the role of the loving husband in mourning. To top it all off, he asks the priest in charge of the funeral to read a telegram in his family's honour by Prime Minister Hawke. The actualities of marriage, as embodied by Tania and Betty Heslop, thus, yield loneliness on the part of the wife at best, and complete destruction, at worst.

It is relatively late in the film, that Muriel gains this insight. Only when she lives her life as the wife of David Van Arkle, does Muriel recognize that her life neither differs from Tania's, nor is it happier than her mother's. Muriel as well as Tania and Betty suffer from the intense loneliness in their marriages. Instead of being with Chook, Tania spends her honeymoon together with her bridesmaids, and Betty Heslop finds herself on the brink of getting divorced. Similarly, Muriel lives a marriage that only exists on

paper. Once in David's apartment, he points out Muriel's space as being clearly separated from his.

The turning point in Muriel's development is the death of her mother. Looking at her mother's photo album, catching sight of the neatly selected pictures of Muriel's wedding, she clearly recognizes the parallels existent between her and her mother. Only then does Muriel realize her mother's presence at the wedding and her own shallowness, which made her overlook her. The final picture, showing Betty Heslop as she is sitting at one of the wedding tables all by herself, shows Muriel the actualities of marriage quite plainly. Aware of the superficiality of the ritual, she abandons her husband David and decides to start a new life with Rhonda in Sydney, as Muriel. It is only then that Muriel completes her search of self-discovery and achieves true adulthood.

8.4.3.2.4. Conclusion

As has been observed above, *Muriel's Wedding* has often been linked to *Strictly Ballroom* and *Priscilla*. It is, hence, not surprising that the former shows the same tendency to integrate traditional understandings of Australian-ness into the promoted self-image: a mix of concepts, such as mateship and anti-authoritarianism, the vulgarity known from the Ocker comedy and references to the archaic legends as embodied by "Bill the battler". As is the case with *Strictly Ballroom* and *Priscilla*, these concepts and figures are presented in a modified form, putting their validity in question. When you add the fact that the film introduces a female protagonist, the same eager attempts to break away from the narrow, anachronistic ideals of earlier film periods are fairly evident. *Muriel's Wedding*, however, clearly distances itself from *Strictly Ballroom* and *Priscilla* in terms of location. While the settings of its predecessors are the city and the Australian outback respectively, *Muriel's Wedding* is largely located in a landscape that was almost non-existent prior to the 1990s – Australian suburbia.

Based on what has been said, *Muriel's Wedding* may well be regarded as a satire on Australian suburban life. Every idea linked with suburbia is ironically reflected on in *Muriel's Wedding*: the efforts of maintaining traditional gender roles, the centrality of marriage to women's lives, the dominance of the Australian male. By presenting a

caricature of the archaic principles of suburban life, *Muriel's Wedding* successfully questions the same. It challenges the institution of marriage and the happiness it is thought to yield, ridicules the suburban understanding of ideal femininity and criticizes the passive role ascribed to women.

Pointing to archaic values and ideas, *Muriel's Wedding* clearly decries the male dominance and female passivity evident throughout the history of Australia. It further criticizes the male-centred concepts celebrated in the Australian New Wave Cinema, as it turns its back on Bushman and his fellow figures in favour of a young female hero and her journey of self-discovery. That is, women have finally been included into the promoted notion of Australian-ness.

8.5. Conclusion: *Strictly Ballroom*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, *Muriel's Wedding* and the New National Self-Image

With the aim of presenting a more realistic image of Australia and reflecting current social and political events, local filmmakers, for the first time, considered former outsider figures as regards their definition of Australian-ness. As a result, they turned their back on the hyper-masculine heroes of the New Wave Cinema, and equipped their revised heroes with a feminine touch. The feminization that Ferrier has referred to is evident in all of the three films analysed above (65). *Strictly Ballroom* introduces a ballroom-dancing hero, *Priscilla* presents three homosexuals as embodied by Mitzi, Felicia and Bernadette, and *Muriel's Wedding* provides a biological woman as personified by Muriel Heslop.

All of these 1990s heroes find themselves in an outsider position. Scott Hastings' improvised steps do not conform to the ballroom dancing conventions, Fran is a ballroom dancing beginner, Mitzi, Felicia and Bernadette are discriminated against by their male-dominated surrounding and Muriel is regarded a misfit due to her poor chances of marriage. At the centre of the narrative the viewer finds protagonists who try to revise the values which make them outsider figures – values embodied by the

dominant groups. The process of overcoming their outsider status is what positively influences their personal development, making them stronger and more self-confident.

Presenting vulnerable heroes that are not afraid of addressing emotions and fears, the New World Cinema of the 1990s, certainly turned its back on the hyper-masculinity celebrated by its predecessor, the revival cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. While the latter presented the tough Anglo-Australian male as the essence of Australian-ness, the New World Cinema distanced itself from the omission of women from earlier understanding of what it means to be Australian. Instead, it criticized the earlier reductions of femininity to the submissiveness to male dominance. In a similar way, other former marginal groups were given a voice, such as homosexuals and non-British immigrants. The inclusion of the latter makes multiculturalism one of the leading motifs in the New World Cinema.

Certainly, the traditional concepts of anti-authoritarianism, mateship and egalitarianism are not entirely discarded. In particular, as far as *Priscilla* and *Muriel's Wedding* are concerned, the Ocker characteristics, known from the 1970s Ocker comedy, are relatively strong. While all of the films clearly convey an egalitarian message, the concepts of anti-authoritarianism and mateship have undergone obvious modifications. While anti-authoritarianism, as perceived in *Gallipoli*, was mainly directed towards the British, the films of the 1990s declare parents to be the major carriers of authority, whose will needs to be defied in order to achieve adulthood. The notion of mateship has been modified insofar as it has come to include former minority groups: the indigenous people in *Priscilla*, Fran, a female migrant, in *Strictly Ballroom*, and Muriel and Rhonda in *Muriel's Wedding*, the latter of which even presents an exclusively female concept of mateship.

The films, furthermore, draw on the traditional dichotomy between urban and rural Australia or, as in the case of *Muriel's Wedding*, the city and Australian suburbia. In contrast to the male ensemble films of the 1970s and 1980s, however, the life in the city is viewed as being preferable to the life in the Australian Bush, the outback or the Australian suburbs.

Given the revision of former dominant cultural concepts, the "image makers" (White viii), clearly, no longer drew on homogenous and narrow images of Australian-ness. Instead, they not only extended the notion of Australian national identity to include female Australians, homosexuals and immigrants with a non-Anglo-Celtic background, but also made representatives of the Other the central figures of the narration. Certainly, the indigenous Australian population is merely given minor attention, as their role in the films analysed above is still either marginal or non-existent at all. Nevertheless, the cinema of the 1990s has successfully detached itself from former narrow representations, in order to celebrate the hybrid nature of the Australian nation.

9. Australia (2008) – A Film by Baz Luhrmann

As has been pointed out in one of the previous chapters, from the early 1970s onwards the Australian cinema has been used to promote various understandings of what it means to be Australian. The cinema of the 1970s and early 1980s was integrated into the governmental endeavours to propagate a homogenous understanding of Australian-ness as embodied by the Anglo-Australian male. An entirely different image of the Australian nation was presented in the cinema of the 1990s, when the earlier narrow image of Australian national identity was no longer tenable. The new notion of Australian-ness was a hybrid construct, considering migrant Australians and women. The final chapter investigates the notion of Australian national identity as represented in the Australian cinema of the 21st century. On the basis of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, one of the most recent Australian films, special attention is given to parallels and contrasts existent between *Australia* and the earlier filmic periods.

9.1. Content

Northern Australia in the year 1939: With the aim of making a lucrative contract with the Australian army, Sir Maitland Ashley, a British aristocrat, puts a great effort into the organisation of his newly purchased company – the cattle station Faraway Downs. In the meantime, his wife Lady Sarah Ashley prepares her journey from Great Britain to Australia, mainly motivated by the conviction that her husband is cheating on her. At her arrival at the cattle station, however, she does not find an unfaithful husband, but a dead husband.

Overwhelmed by the situation, and mislead by her calculating administrator Neil Fletcher, she is prepared to sell her husband's company to Australia's leading stock farmer King Carney. A mystic encounter with the half-Aboriginal boy Nullah, however, changes her plans. Informed of her administrator's dishonest business, who is stealing her cattle in order to support King Carney, Lady Ashley decides to keep her husband's farm and drive the cattle to Darwin herself. Her intended plan is met with support by her companions, including a man called 'the Drover', an employee of her departed husband, Drover's Aboriginal brother-in-law Magarri, Nullah, Kipling Flynn, her accountant, and Lady Ashley's cook, Sing Song.

But the enterprise to drive the cattle to Darwin proves unexpectedly hard, due to Lady Ashley's opponents, King Carney and Fletcher. Driven by greed of gain, they go any length to prevent Lady Ashley from signing the contract with the army. By contaminating all the watering places on the way, they force Lady Ashley to drive the cattle across the dangerous Never Never – a venture that may only be achieved with the help of Nullah's Aboriginal grandfather, King George, and his magic. By singing to them, he leads them across the Never-Never and they manage to bring the cattle to Darwin on time.

Euphoric from the successful enterprise, Lady Sarah Ashley decides to stay, keep the farm and run it together with Drover, whom she has fallen in love with. Together with Nullah, whose mother has drowned while hiding from the White authorities, they live happily on the Faraway Down station. Their happiness, however, is soon clouded, since Fletcher remains a constant threat. Having killed Australia's leading stock farmer King

Carney, and married his daughter, he is now the new owner of Carney's cattle station. Apparently, the newly acquired wealth does not satisfy him. He wants Faraway Downs, and in order to get it, he blackmails Lady Ashley by his threatening to kill the ones she loves.

As the story proceeds, Drover leaves Lady Ashley after an argument, and Nullah is caught by the white authorities while undergoing the Aboriginal ritual of walkabout with King George. Together with a number of other half-Aboriginal children her is taken to Mission Island in order to be raised according to white standards. In the meantime, World War II has reached its peak. Darwin is entirely destroyed by the Japanese attack, claiming a great number of victims. Lady Ashley, who should have been working at the telegraph office during the bombing, is thought to be one of them.

Drover returns and learns both of Lady Ashley's alleged death and Nullah's deportation to Mission Island. Together with his Aboriginal friend Magarri he rescues Nullah and the rest of the Aboriginal children. Magarri is killed in the rescue attempt, as he sacrifices his life for the sake of Drover and the children. Back in Darwin, it turns out that Fletcher's wife, Cath Carney, was working Lady Ashley's shift in the telegraph office. Instead of Lady Ashley, Fletcher's wife died in the bombing.

Driven by his grief and rage, Fletcher points his gun at Nullah, but is killed by King George's spear, before being able to fire his gun. Lady Ashley, Drover and Nullah go back to Faraway Downs, and Nullah is finally ready to go walkabout with his grandfather.

9.2. Analysis

9.2.1. Dealing with the Past

As Brian MacFarlane has observed in the context of the AFC films of the 1970s and 1980s, the tendency towards placing Australia in a historical context is clearly perceptible (156). The special interest in Australian history has been demonstrated on the basis of *Gallipoli*, which places its characters in the historical milieu of World War I. Similar to the revival film, *Australia* makes the treatment of historical events one of its major concerns. Introducing its audience to the year 1939, a time when the country found itself on the brink of World War II, *Australia* addresses one of the major turning points in Australian history. Abandoned by their British ally, the Australian troops could no longer fight back against the Japanese and were taken prisoners. The lack of support on the part of the British was perceived as an act of treason in Australia and today is viewed as the major turning point in the British-Australian relations (Macintyre 188). *Australia* is, thus, clearly reminiscent of the revival films, as it places the country and its inhabitants in a past setting.

In contrast to the cultural flagship films of the 1970s and 1980s, however, *Australia* does not restrict its historical emphasis to events that merely affected the heroic white-Australian male. *Australia* incorporates the country's sensitive and painful chapter of Aboriginal oppression. In fact, noticeably more attention is given to indigenous issues than to the participation in World War II and the related break with the 'mother' country. While the latter is merely touched upon towards the end of the film, the country's indigenous story seems to go like a red threat through the entire movie.

At the centre of the narrative, the audience finds Nullah, a half-Aboriginal boy. Born to an Aboriginal mother and an Anglo-Australian father, Nullah comes to embody various key issues that affected Aboriginal life at the time, all of which are linked to the Australian Assimilation Policy. As Rekhari has pointed out, the policy rested on the idea that the indigenous population was a dying, inferior race, whose character would profit from the adjustment to the white man's world (128). Acting on the assumption that "Aboriginality [was] 'a problem to be solved'", the British colonizers categorized

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the Aboriginal people according to their percentage of black blood (Dodson 3). They were categorized either as forlorn full-blood Aborigines or the more promising hybrid type, the white authorities decided whether they were 'worth' to be 'freed' from their Aboriginal surroundings. With the aim of racial cleansing, children of mixed-race were forcibly removed from their Aboriginal relatives in order to be raised in institutions or by white foster parents. The Aboriginal children that were removed from their familiar surroundings to be assimilated to white culture are known as the 'Stolen Generation' (Elder 359).

In *Australia* the underlying idea of the Assimilation Policy is expressed by Doctor Barker, who is convinced that "mixed-race children must be dislocated from the primitive full-blood Aborigine" (*Australia*), and is wondering how else to "bring the black out of them" (*Australia*). The policy's destructive effects are mainly embodied by the character of Nullah. A half-Aboriginal boy, he comes to stand for an entire generation of Aboriginal children that were forcibly taken from their Aboriginal relatives, in order to be imposed upon an alien white lifestyle. On a constant run from the white authorities, Nullah and his mother hide in a reservoir at Lady Ashley's cattle station – a dangerous venture, which eventually leads to the death of Nullah's mother.

The tragedy of the 'Stolen Generation' is, furthermore, explicitly addressed in the introduction of the film, which provides the historical background, as well as in the end credits. Informing about the abandonment of the assimilation policy in the Northern Territory in 1973 and the most recent formal apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, the closure of the film creates a link between Aboriginal history and the current actualities in Australia. Coming to terms with what Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has called "one of the darkest chapters in Australia's history" (Rudd), may well be regarded as one of the major concerns of director Baz Luhrmann.

It is hardly surprising then that *Australia* takes an exceedingly critical position towards the dominant Anglo-Celtic population and their attempts to erase Aboriginal culture and history from the story of the nation. The ruthlessness of the white Australian community is powerfully addressed by Lady Sarah Ashley on the Commission Ball. To the acute discomfort of the white elite of Darwin, she confronts them with their faults, and openly criticizes their hypocrisy and cruelty in the matter. Although reminded that it "is most

inappropriate" (*Australia*) to refer to such a matter on a society occasion, Lady Ashley vehemently proceeds by accusing the male guests of being responsible for the situation: "Has anyone asked their mothers, how they feel about this? […] We can't very well ask their fathers, can we? […] Maybe I should. After all, they are right here in this room!" (*Australia*) As evident in this statement, the film aims at pointing at the brutality and deceitfulness of the Anglo-Celtic community and voices sharp criticism as regards their opting for the easiest solution to the problem: the deportation of half-Aboriginal children to Mission Island.

Further criticism on the Anglo-Australian society is based on the ground of the severe racism faced by the Aboriginal community. The unjust treatment of the latter is not restricted to mere name calling such as "creamy" – a depreciative way of referring to a half-Aborigine. More explicitly, racism towards the indigenous community is depicted via their deprivation of fundamental civil rights and their segregation from the social life of white Australians. A full-blood Aborigine, Drover's brother-in-law Magarri is refused entry to public places such as the pub. Similarly, Drover's dead Aboriginal wife was a victim of white hostilities. Suffering from consumption, she succumbed to her decease, since, as Drover puts it, "hospitals wouldn't treat Blacks" (*Australia*). Evidently, the makers of *Australia* did not shy away from critically pointing to some of the most sensitive aspects of Australia's indigenous history.

Given the centrality of Aboriginal issues, *Australia* clearly aims at coming to terms with one of the most tragic chapters in Australia's history. As has been argued earlier, the film's thematic preoccupation with historical events may be considered a parallel to the films of the New Wave Cinema. More importantly, however, *Australia* considerably deviates from the revival films, as it refrains from a depiction of Australian society as exclusively white. In view of the promotion of a multiple idea of Australian history, one might be tempted to draw parallels to the heterogeneous cinema of the 1990s. In fact, *Australia* goes a step further, as it pays considerable attention to issues of indigeneity – an element relatively absent in the 1990s cinema.

9.2.2. The Aboriginal Community

The first section of this chapter has shown how *Australia* provides a relatively genuine image of the Australian past, as it presents a multiplicity of Australian histories, rather than a singular white Australian history. The representation of the indigenous community appears similarly authentic insofar as the film offers a more differentiated picture of the Aboriginal characters. While the cinema of the 1970s and 1980s reduced the native Australians to a mere "complementary racial Other" (Rekhari 128) – to the "noble savage" (Rekhari 127) – Australia presents Aboriginality in two ways: in its assimilated form and in its traditional, pure form.

On the one hand, the audience is introduced to Nullah and a great number of Aboriginal minor characters, who have adjusted to the white man's culture. Certainly, Nullah is raised by his Aboriginal mother; both are, however, exposed to the influences of white Australian culture, as they live at the Faraway Downs cattle station. Torn between two worlds – the progressive Anglo-Celtic world and the spiritual world of Aboriginal culture – Nullah appears to suffer from a severe identity crisis. Several times in the film he complains, "I'm not white fella, not black fella, either. Creamy. Me belong no one" (*Australia*). As Nullah repeatedly points to his fate as a half-Aborigine, he addresses a vital issue in contemporary Australia: the cultural disruption caused by what Michael Dodson has called the "policy of 'de-Aboriginalising' Australia" (7). Certainly, Australia does not explicitly refer to the contemporary harsh actualities of poverty, alcoholism and illness, as addressed by Geoffrey Bolton (306). Paying attention to the inner conflict of one member of the indigenous community, however, the film may be viewed as alluding to the contemporary issues mentioned above.

The second form of Aboriginality is embodied by Nullah's grandfather King George, a representative of those Aboriginal people who have entirely distanced themselves from any form of Anglo-Australian influence, and live according to traditional Aboriginal principles. Pure and close to nature, King George conforms to the romanticized image of the indigenous population, as being unaffected of the corruption of the white world. Part of his portrayal is, furthermore, the constant depiction of his intrinsically spiritual nature. Most obviously, his omnipresence and his "black fella magic" (*Australia*), as Nullah calls it, assign supernatural powers to the Aboriginal community. Their

mystification and glorification is most evident in the first part of the film, when Lady Ashley and her companions are forced to cross the Never Never. By singing to them, King George safely leads them across the dangerous landscape, so that they manage to bring the cattle to Darwin on time. In the course of the journey, also Nullah discovers his own magical powers, as he successfully stops the cattle from falling down an abyss – a sign that he has not been successfully 'de-Aboriginalised' yet.

Certainly, the grossly exaggerated mythical qualities of the indigenous community lead to a fairly clichéd representation. Notwithstanding the often stereotypical portrayal, the depiction of indigeneity has clearly gained in plausibility due to the more differentiated approach. Presenting two forms of Aboriginality, *Australia* clearly tries to distance itself from the one-sided approach offered in earlier filmic periods. When you add the allusion to contemporary indigenous issues as embodied by Nullah, a new tendency in Australian cinema is perceptible: an increasingly contemporary representation of Aboriginality and the inclusion of Indigeneity in the concept of Australian-ness. Absent in the New Wave Cinema and the 1990s cinema, both tendencies may well be regarded as the distinctive feature of 21st century Australian cinema.

9.2.3. *Sliding into Old Habits – The Depiction of Myths and Legends in Australia*

As mentioned above, *Australia* offers an Aboriginal perspective on Australian history. One might therefore expect the film to turn its back on the simplistic Australian self-image as propagated in the nationalistic cinema the 1970s and 1980s. As the following section will show, however, the opposite is the case. Examining the way myths and legends are integrated into the story of the nation, special attention is given to the depiction of egalitarianism and mateship, the portrayal of well-established Australian heroes and the application of the traditional Australian/British dichotomy.

9.2.3.1. Mateship and Egalitarianism

The first part of *Australia* ends in Lady Ashley's triumph over King Carney and his henchman Fletcher. Not surprisingly, the concept of mateship is presented as being central to the victory, as Lady Ashley's success in defying the foe heavily relies on the support of her companions Drover, Magarri, Kipling Flynn and Nullah. Given the emphasis on companionship for survival, *Australia* seems to include mateship in its original form, as described by Gwenda Davey and Graham Seal – as a prerequisite for achieving one's goals in the harsh Australian landscape (175).

Mateship is equipped with an emotional component by introducing the mateship existent between Drover and his Aboriginal brother-in-law, extending it to equate intimate friendship. In accord with this definition, the special bond between Drover and Magarri may neither be threatened by the harsh conditions that the Australian Bush imposes, nor by the critical eyes of the white-Australian population. Being refused a drink for his mate, Drover, who is not willing to accept the discrimination against Magarri, starts a fight in the local pub. Magarri, in return, makes the ultimate sacrifice, as he gives his life to ensure Drover's well-being when they are attacked by the Japanese armed forces.

As *Australia* assigns such a central role to the lives of the protagonists, the film re-enacts the notion of mateship as being an Australian core value. While mateship came to be depicted as an obstacle to adulthood in the 1990s (Butterss 87), *Australia* reinforces the concept's traditional legendary status. In this sense, the film appears to return to the depiction of mateship as encountered in the New Wave Cinema. This is only partially true, however, since mateship, as presented in *Australia*, is no longer the race and gender-specific concept that it used to be in the revival films. Instead, the revised version of the special bond may not only include women, but also indigenous people, as evident in the mateship between Drover and Magarri. Adding the aspect of Aboriginality, *Australia* even goes a step further than the hybrid cinema of the 1990s, as it includes a formerly marginalized community. In short, *Australia* intersperses the traditional idea of mateship with an almost entirely new component – the Aboriginal perspective. In this way, mateship becomes an essential element of Australian-ness – including both of Anglo-Celtic and Aboriginal Australians.

While *Australia* views the cult of mateship as being at the core of the Australian character, the concept of egalitarianism is relatively absent in the depiction of the Australian society. Traditionally understood as a primarily Anglo-Australian male concept (Schaffer 101), egalitarianism in its traditional form does not envision equal rights for people outside the Anglo-Celtic male community. It is, therefore, not really surprising that Aboriginal people are not treated according to the principle of equality in the film. Regarded as inferior to the white community, they are both legally and socially restricted, as evident in their ban on entering the local pub. And yet their inferior position does not necessarily contradict the traditional conception of egalitarianism. Equally plausible appears the fact that King Carney tries to suppress Lady Ashley, for women were granted just as little space in the traditional concept as the indigenous population.

Interestingly, however, the Anglo-Celtic characters in *Australia* not only lack an egalitarian stance when it comes to Aboriginal and female Australians, but are also presented as being short on egalitarian views among themselves. King Carney, for instance, appears to be clearly aware of social differences. To him "Jack is [definitely not] as good as his master" (Ward 2), and, even less, is Jack "a good deal better" (Ward 2). Based on his social prestige, King Carney is the one to give the commands, and Fletcher submissively obeys. The obvious absence of egalitarian ideas and beliefs among the people of Darwin questions the notion of egalitarianism as being at the core of Australian-ness.

The lack of egalitarianism as presented in the film does not imply, however, that the prevalent social state is considered desirable. Lady Ashley's statement that "just because it is, doesn't mean it should be" (*Australia*), clearly points to Australia's potential to live egalitarianism, including every Australian, regardless of race or gender. The final scene of the film underpins the notion that the Anglo-Celtic may live on egalitarian terms with the Australian Aborigines. In this sense, Australia is clearly reminiscent of the utopian ending provided by *Strictly Ballroom*, interestingly, another Baz Luhrmann film. In the case of *Australia*, the harmonious union of different cultures on the dance floor presented in *Strictly Ballroom*, is replaced by Drover and Lady Ashley, the happy white parents and their Aboriginal son Nullah.

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That is, *Australia* does not return to the depiction of egalitarianism as a key element of Australian culture, as excessively celebrated in films such as *Gallipoli*. Instead, the majority of the white-Australians are portrayed as being anxious to maintain the existent class differences – in the case of King Carney even by unfair means. The sharp criticism uttered by Drover and the utopian ending, however, are clearly meant to convey an egalitarian message, implying how it could and should be. *Australia*, thus, definitely expresses a desire for more equality – not only among white men but also in the treatment of female and indigenous Australians.

9.2.3.2. 'The Drover': Just a More Handsome Crocodile Dundee?

Concluding her review on *Australia*, Stephanie Van Schilt has remarked that the filmmakers, instead of exploring historical facts, "chose to perpetuate stereotypes". The criticism put forward by Van Schilt is not surprising, since *Australia* undoubtedly draws on some of the national figures and legends familiar from the New Wave Cinema.

As soon as the audience is taken to Darwin, it is made acquainted, as it appears, with the geographical centre of Ockerdom – a virtual breeding ground of uncultivated, butt-groping, beer-drinking Australian workingmen. The archetypal Ocker is embodied by the male protagonist 'the Drover'. Apparently modelled on 'Crocodile' Dundee, Drover is, not surprisingly, introduced in the context of the Australian pub, and even less surprisingly, involved in a fight. Much to the dismay of Lady Ashley he uses her luggage to defend himself. To top it all off, one of the suitcases opens up and the underwear of Lady Ashley is spread all over the ground in front of the pub. While Lady Ashley could not be more outraged and disgusted, Drover certainly matches his role model in terms of typical Ocker pertness. He just puts on a cheeky smile, spits on the ground and utters a sassy, "Welcome to Australia" (*Australia*) – suggesting that this is exactly the way of handling things down under.

The very first scene in Darwin is, furthermore, indicative of what Rattigan has identified as typical Ocker features – "drinking, swearing [and] noisy vulgarity" (*Images* 32). All of them are depicted in the very first shot in the local pub, showing grisly, sweaty, drunken redneck, who calls Drover a "boon lover" (*Australia*). Drover starts a fight, and

soon they are surrounded by bawling men, drinking beer from bottles, cheering and laughing at Lady Ashley's underwear. Interestingly, alleged members of the upper class equally well conform to the Ocker image. King Carney, for instance, is depicted in his office with a bottle of beer in his hand, calling Lady Ashley a "sheila" (*Australia*). The 'typical' Ocker features as mentioned by Rattigan are clearly celebrated as a general element of Australia-ness.

The typical rough Ocker humour is depicted in Drover's delight in ridiculing Lady Ashley's exaggerated conservativeness and mincing behaviour. Her complaints about the existence of only one tent are met with chauvinist remarks by Drover and his male companions, saying that "[they] like to bunk up together", because "it gets pretty chilly [there] at night" (*Australia*).

Similar to Jim Craig in *Snowy River*, Drover finds himself in the position of the much celebrated underdog. On friendly terms with Aboriginal people, he is situated as much at the margins of the white Australian society as the Aboriginal community itself. As pointed out by the owner of the local pub, Drover's contact to the indigenous population has marked him as the 'Other': "As far as this town is concerned you are black. You work with them, eat with them and sleep with them" (*Australia*). Drover, however, is not forced into a fringe existence imposed on him by the dominant white community. In fact, he refuses to socialise with them, or as he puts it, "I mix with dingoes, not duchesses. […] They keep out of my way, and I keep out of theirs" (*Australia*).

Defying the dominant white elite, Drover clearly lives up to the typical Ocker traits of "non-conformism, irreverence [and] impudence" (Rattigan, *Images* 32). Instead of taking the path of the least resistance, he deliberately turns his back on the values and principles of the Anglo-Celtic community. In accord with the traditional heroes of the revival films, he is not willing to give in to injustice and discrimination. He defends his Aboriginal friend Magarri, assists Lady Ashley in her attempt to defy Fletcher and King Carney, and, although unwanted, appears at the Commission Ball organized by the white elite.

Mostly set in the urban surrounding of Darwin, *Australia* certainly puts great emphasis on the vulgar city hero. Despite the evident dominance of the Ocker figure, however,

the film could not entirely renounce the presentation of the Australian land as a forming factor of the Australian character. Once Drover has accompanied Lady Ashley into the Australian Bush, his Ocker features are played down in favour of the more heroic character traits of the Bushman. A professional drover, the male protagonist certainly knows how to deal with the special characteristics of the Australian landscape. As Jim Craig in *Snowy River*, the Bushman figure in its purest form, Drover has an affinity to nature, "really [does] have a gift with horses" (*Australia*), as Lady Ashley remarks, and has the physical abilities to survive the Australian landscape. He is at home in the Bush, sleeps outside instead of using a tent, and is successful in taming Lady Ashley's brumby. The portrayal of Drover may, thus, well be regarded as what Rattigan has usefully called "the apotheosis of the Ocker" (*Dundee* 151) observed in *Crocodile Dundee*: the refinement of the Ocker figure by equipping it with the heroic qualities of the Bushman.

9.2.3.3. Typical Australian Masculinity

Obviously, the depiction of 'typical' Australian masculinity has been one of the major concerns of the Australian filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s. *Crocodile Dundee* excessively propagates the notion of the Bushman qualities as being essential to the Australian understanding of masculinity, and *Snowy River* virtually forces the idea on its audience that 'real' masculinity rests upon physical strength and bravery. A combination of the Bushman and the Ocker, the character of Drover clearly follows its revival models by embodying the traditional understanding of what it means to be a 'real' man: fearlessness, courageousness, initiative and responsibility. When they spend the night in the Bush on their way to Darwin he clearly takes the initiative:

> Lady Ashley: Mr. Drover, I really don't think it's appropriate to work a child in
> Nullah's age like that. I'm more than willing to take his shift. [...]
> Drover: When I was his age, I was man at outstations.
> Lady Ashley: Not everybody is you, Mr. Drover.
> Drover: That's right. Not everybody is me. I'm the boss. (*Australia*)

With the aim of emphasising his physical qualities, *Australia* offers numerous scenes that eagerly set the stage for his strong, well-built body. To Lady Ashley's delight, Drover, naked to the waist, washes his muscular body by pouring water out of a bucket. The centrality of physical ability and fighting spirit to the concept of 'true' Australian manliness is, moreover, obvious in the scene following Lady Ashley's remarkable triumph over Fletcher. Having demonstrated her physical strength and endurance, Lady Ashley is permitted to have a drink at the local pub – an exclusively male domain, as repeatedly emphasised by its owner. Lady Ashley has, however, earned the right to enter the male sphere, for as one of the men in the pub remarks, "She drove her cattle across the Never-Never. She deserves to drink like any man" (*Australia*). *Australia* is, thus, evidently suggestive of the notion that 'real' men are supposed to possess the qualities of fearlessness and courage, enabling them to survive the harsh Australian landscape. The parallels to *Snowy River*, in terms of the portrayal of ideal Australian masculinity, are evident.

A further similarity between *Snowy River* and *Australia* rests on the connotative meaning assigned to the ways the characters address each other in the film. As in *Snowy River*, the term 'boy' seems to be assigned a rather negative meaning, while being called a 'man' is positively connoted. Since Neil Fletcher's attempt to prevent Lady Ashley from bringing her cattle to Darwin failed, he did not manage to live up to the expectations imposed on him by King Carney. Based on Fletcher's failure, King Carney denies him the claim to call himself a man, when he remarks, "that's what happens, if you send a boy to do a man's job" (*Australia*). Degrading Neil Fletcher to a boy, King Carney's claim clearly conforms to the overall message of the film, as he rests his definition of a 'real' man on assertiveness and reliability.

Since Australia gives special attention to the traditional idea of Australian masculinity as observed in *Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee*, the film suggests a return to the well-worn formulas of the 1970s and 1980s cinema. Like its predecessors, *Australia* largely presents a male-dominated society, which only grants respect to females, if they adjust to the male understanding of heroism. Lady Ashley is not allowed to have a drink in the pub as a heroic woman, but rather as a pseudo-male, as a woman who has adopted the typically male features of strength and prowess. Suiting a male-derived definition of heroism, she still finds herself inferior in a male-dominated world. In other words, the

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depicted Australian-ness remains the same narrow male-centred construct that may also be encountered in the majority of films produced during the 1970s and 1980s.

Interestingly, however, *Australia* also introduces an Aboriginal concept of masculinity, which has the idea of male independence at its core. The centrality of freedom to the Aboriginal understanding of manliness is expressed by Nullah, when he claims that "sometimes men got to get away from women" (*Australia*) in order to be 'real' men:

> Nullah: You are a man, Drover!
> Drover: I'm proud to be.
> Nullah: Sometimes men got to get away from women. That's why you go droving.
> Drover: I go droving, 'cause that's my job.
> Nullah: You don't go droving, you're not a man. If I am a man, I gotta go walkabout. Then I'll be a man.

To Nullah, manly independence is a crucial element of achieved masculinity, a state reached through the Aboriginal ritual of walkabout. Understood as a pilgrimage journey, the Aboriginal walkabout marks the boy's passage into manhood, as he proofs his ability to survive in the Bush. Just as Jim Craig in *Snowy River* had to prove his masculinity, Aboriginal boys, Nullah in this case, have to demonstrate their survival skills, in order to be regarded respectable members of the Aboriginal community. That is, *Australia* extends the concept of Australian masculinity as depicted in *Snowy River* to include the Aboriginal population. Considering Australia's indigenous population, *Australia* distances itself from the race-specific understanding of Australian-ness celebrated in the New Wave Cinema. Despite the ethnically hybrid approach to Australian-ness, however, the misogynistic element remains and underpins the masculinised image of the Australian nation propagated in the revival films.

9.2.3.4. The British-Australian Dichotomy Reloaded

Based on what has been said in the context of *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *Snowy River*, the New Wave Cinema may well be regarded as defining Australian-ness in terms of unsubtle, simplistic binary oppositions, such as Bush versus city. *Australia*

seems to return to the approach of situating the Australian character in opposition to another, equally stereotyped, national identity.

In the case of *Australia*, the filmmakers have drawn on *Gallipoli* and the traditional dichotomy between Australia and Great Britain. The emphasis on the tremendous cultural differences to the 'mother country' is thus equally strong, albeit not in the same judgmental way. While *Gallipoli* deliberately presents the British as "monocled silly-ass types" (MacFarlane 58), *Australia* distances itself from the former extensively negative portrayal of the British. The stereotypical depiction of the British as prim, arrogant and conservative remains, however, and points to the different value systems existent in Australia and Great Britain.

Embodied by the British aristocrat Lady Sarah Ashley, Britishness is mainly likened with prudery, arrogance and artificiality. Obviously used to a different kind of social life than the one she finds herself confronted with in Australia, Lady Ashley is appalled by the concentrated mannerlessness and vulgarity. Men touch women's butts, problems are not solved verbally but physically and swearing is an essential part of daily discourse. Appalled by her drunk accountant, Lady Ashley genteely covers her nose in a handkerchief. Apparently she is also annoyed by the other women in Darwin. Feeling superior, she ignores them welcoming her. In Great Britain, people are apparently well aware of the cultural differences existent between Great Britain and Australia, as is evident in the claim of Lady Ashley's British butler: "But Lady Ashley, it is Australia" (*Australia*).

Her excessive conservativeness is juxtaposed to Drover's laidbackness, rough humour, vulgar behaviour and crude language. He fights, spits and shares his water bottle with his dog, much to the disgust of Lady Ashley. In his Australian cheekiness, he ridicules her attitude and remarks that the car ride would be easier to bear if she was not so, as he puts it, "constricted" (*Australia*). Their contrasting attitudes and values are also reflected by their outward appearances and ways of dressing. Drover's dirty half-open shirt and comfortable leather pants appear appropriate for a ride through the Australian outback, while the white silk scarf that covers Lady Ashley's face makes her look ridiculous and out of place.

Juxtaposing British and Australian values and patterns of behaviour, *Australia* clearly draws upon the revival tradition of defining Australian-ness on the basis of how it contrasts to another culture. Similar to *Gallipoli*, *Australia* uses the dichotomy as a means of emphasising the more valuable Australian character traits, such as the rough Australian humour, the looseness and the unconventional character so enthusiastically celebrated in Mick 'Crocodile' Dundee. The contrasting depiction, thus, mainly serves as a tool of presenting Australian-ness as more positive and favourable than its British counterpart. While the British were largely presented as the calculating and malicious traitors in the films of the New Wave Period, however, *Australia* uses the traditional dichotomy in a highly alleviated form. As a result, the British are no longer depicted as the foe known from earlier films, but rather as a nation that has different, not surprisingly less favourable, character traits, values and principles.

9.2.3.5.   Tracing Back the Legend of the Pioneer

Based on what has been said in the context of Drover, a relatively traditional approach towards Australian national identity is fairly apparent. Combining the legendary myth of the Bushman and the Ocker, Drover certainly embodies the traditional approach towards the notion of Australian national identity. *Australia* also chooses a traditional depiction of another, albeit less prominent legend: the legend of the pioneer.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters on dominant cultural elements, the pioneer legend may be viewed as celebrating the heroic achievements of the early British settlers. In their attempts to settle and tame the harsh Australian land, they acquired the qualities that have subsequently been known as the 'typical' pioneer features, turning them from British settlers into Australians: endurance, courage, initiative and the willingness to work hard (Hirst 250).

Wondering "what [her] husband would have seen out [there]" (*Australia*), Lady Ashley finds herself in a similar position as the early British settlers celebrated in the pioneer legend. Overwhelmed by the Australian land and its alien value system, she regards the new surroundings as a strange and uncultivated place. She learns that her husband is

dead, has to fend for herself, falls a victim to Fletcher's intrigues and feels impelled to run a business that she is not in the least familiar with.

But in accord with the legend, she does not accept the obstacles that are put in her way. She fights the injustices imposed on her by King Carney and Neil Fletcher, conquers the Australian landscape by crossing the Never-Never and settles at the Faraway Downs cattle station. In her fight against injustice, she acquires the pioneer qualities of "diligence, courage and perseverance" (Hirst, 29), turning her from an arrogant British aristocrat with exaggeratedly prim manners into an informal Australian. That is, the shamelessly overstated British stiffness and formality are replaced by the no less clichéd Australian laidbackness and fighting spirit.

Presenting Lady Ashley as the embodiment of the heroic pioneer, *Australia* points to the differences between the pioneer legend and the Bushman legend, as identified by Rattigan. According to his definition, the pioneer legend not only includes the heroic male settler, but also pays credit to the pioneer women and their successful attempts to tame the Australian Bush (Rattigan, *Images* 29) A female settler, Lady Ashley corresponds to this definition, and represents the female counterpart to Drover – the embodiment of the Bushman legend. Furthermore, the pioneer's desire to settle is juxtaposed with the Bushman's need for freedom and independence. By this means the film emphasises the differences between the legends as they exist in their traditional understanding.

Incorporating the legend of the pioneer into the storyline, *Australia* clearly reverts to the traditional, skill-centred approach towards Australian-ness as encountered in the national cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Since Lady Ashley's transformation into a 'real' Australian entirely rests on the acquisition of certain qualities, such as bravery and initiative, the film reinforces the notion of Australian-ness as having the pioneer qualities at its core. Taking into consideration that Drover embodies a blend of Bushman virtue and Ocker vulgarity, *Australia* is certainly indicative of Australian national identity as being built on certain physical and mental strengths – the abilities of the Bushman and the Pioneer.

9.3. Conclusion: *Australia* and Its Return to Archaic Formulas

As Van Schilt has observed in the context of Baz Luhrmann's film, "*Australia* pulls moments of Australian history and culture from an iconic mix-bag of images". The approach of the filmmakers, addressed by Van Schilt, to piece together various aspects of Australian culture, makes it extremely difficult to lay down a coherent depiction of Australian-ness.

What may be said is that *Australia* hardly shares any obvious similarities with its direct predecessor – the cinema of the 1990s. Mateship is not equipped with both positive and negative aspects, Drover is clearly not reminiscent of the feminized hero encountered in *Strictly Ballroom* or *Priscilla*, and there is no reference to what Ferrier has called "vulnerable bodies; bodies which struggle with disabilities, physical or mental, that render them prone" (65) encountered in *Muriel's Wedding*. Certainly, the makers of *Australia* have chosen to present a similarly hybrid image of Australian-ness as provided in 1990s films as they introduce a wide range of Australian identities: Neil Fletcher, the 'bad guy', the pub rowdy, the conservative British, the assimilated Aborigine and Asian cook, to name just a few. Mainly based on the inclusion of the indigenous population, however, the heterogeneous image offered in *Australia* may not really be equated with earlier versions. While indigeneity remained a marginal issue in the latter, *Australia* makes it one of its major concerns, and presents the concept of national identity as being inclusive of Australia's indigenous community.

More striking are the apparent parallels to the films of the New Wave period. Integrating the well-worn myths and legends into the promoted notion of Australian national identity, *Australia* certainly propagates an understanding of Australian-ness as being built on physical abilities, courage and prowess but also vulgarity, a good sense of humour and hard drinking. All these characteristics are neatly packaged in the legends of the Ocker and the Bushman, as embodied by Drover, the legend of the pioneer represented by Lady Ashley, the traditional Australian/British dichotomy and the concept of mateship in its traditional form. Falling back on the trite formulas so typical of the revival films, *Australia* clearly indicates that the traditional strong white-Australian male is the essence of Australian-ness.

Next to the archaic stereotypical depiction of Drover and the male citizens of Darwin, Baz Luhrmann has been careful not to forget about the native Australians. The reference to the past so typical of the New Wave Cinema, is given an Aboriginal perspective and mateship and masculinity are no longer ethnically marked, as they include members of the indigenous community. Extending Australian history and important cultural concepts to Aboriginal people, *Australia* draws on an Australian-image that may well be regarded as being specific to the cinema of the 21st century. What remains is a stereotypical representation of the Bushman, the Ocker and the pioneer from an earlier period, interspersed with partially equally clichéd images of Aboriginality.

10. Conclusion

> There was no moment when, for the first time, Australia was seen 'as it really was'. There is no 'real' Australia waiting to be uncovered. A national identity is an invention. There is no point asking whether one version of this essential Australia is truer than another because they are all intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible – and necessarily false. (White, viii)

Tracing back the altering and often implausible ways of depicting 'genuine' Australian-ness from the 1970s to the present, the present paper has proved White's claim that any universal definition of the 'real' Australia will inevitably be "an invention" (viii). During the Renaissance of Australian cinema the local image-makers drew on the formerly successful images introduced by the Australian elite in the 1890s. On the one hand, this was done due to the absence of alternative images. On the one hand, it was a response to the regulations initiated by the government in form of the AFC, the governmental funding body. The result was a narrow, Anglo-Centric male concept of Australian-ness that excluded female Australians, immigrants with a non-Anglo-Celtic background and the indigenous Australian population from the idea of the nation. The films produced during this period largely provided story around the Australian Bush, inapt to reflect the actualities of contemporary Australia.

With the turn of the decade, the Australian cinema turned its back on former narrow representations. Passing into private hands, the Australian film industry of the 1990s was marked by a greater variety of films, celebrating the hybrid nature of the Australian nation. Former outsider figures were given a voice and the nationalistic images around the Australian Bush, mateship and egalitarianism were either revised or used in order question and ridicule them.

Interestingly, the subsequent decade saw a retreat from the more realistic portrayal of the 1990s New World Cinema. The analysis of Baz Luhrmann's *Australia*, as a representative of the 21st century Australian cinema, has revealed a return to many of the well-worn formulas specific to the New Wave Cinema of the 1970s and 1980s. Certainly, *Australia* pays close attention to Australia's Aboriginal population, a community formerly excluded from narratives of the nation. At the same time, however, the notion of Australian national identity is brimming with the same images

encountered in the New Wave Cinema – the Bushman, the Ocker and the pioneer, mateship and the dichotomy between Australian-ness and British identity.

In this context the question arises as to why the local filmmakers have returned to the representation of an Australian character that is inconsistent with the actualities of Australian life. The slide into old habits may be accounted for by the interplay of various factors. Given the excessive international promotion of *Australia*, and the vast amount of money involved, the filmmakers found themselves confronted with enormous pressure to success. It is hardly surprising then that they chose to draw on earlier successful formulas, in particular on the images presented in the film's famous predecessor, *Crocodile Dundee*.

As Stephen Crofts has argued, *Crocodile Dundee* is "internationally the most successful Australian film ever made" (158). Given its international success, the sun-tanned, good-humoured, hyper-masculine Australian encountered in *Crocodile Dundee* may well be considered the most prominent Australia-image around the world. As such, it seems to have a long-term effect on the way in which the Australian nation is perceived beyond the Australian borders. So why not provide the audience with the stereotyped image they expect and wish to see? Why not live up to previous success?

Aimed at an international audience, *Australia* furthermore serves as an influential medium of presenting Australian culture to the world. Had Baz Luhrmann chosen to adhere to the filmic conventions of the 1990s cinema, would *Australia* have stood out as a distinctively Australian film? May marginal characters, such as Fran in *Strictly Ballroom* or Muriel in *Muriel's Wedding* be recognized as Australian figures? Obviously, multicultural characters as well as women and homosexuals on their journeys of self-discovery may be encountered in any national cinema. The emphasis on the uniqueness of Australian culture, therefore, heavily relies on something specific to the Australian continent – the unique Australian landscape and Australia's indigenous population. A blend of both is arguably the most effective way to prove that Australia indeed has a distinctive local culture – a fact that justifies the film's production and its attendance.

Certainly, the present thesis bases its findings merely on a single film of the 21st century. The findings gained, thus, need to be complemented by the analysis of other Australian films of the same period, in order to be able to draw more definite conclusions. An interesting field of further research would therefore be to extend the examination to include other Australian films of the 21st century.

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Zusammenfassung

Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit ist es zu untersuchen wie die nationale Identität Australiens während drei Epochen Australischen Kinos dargestellt wird. Als Ausgangspunkte dieser Untersuchung dienten drei Konzepte im Bereich der Identitätsforschung: das kollektive Gedächtnis von Maurice Halbwachs, das kulturelle Gedächtnis von Jan Assmann und das Konzept der *imagined community* von Benedict Anderson. Trotz gradueller bis essentieller Unterschiede in ihrer detaillierten Ausführung haben all diese Konzepte gemein, dass sie auf den künstlichen Aspekt des Konstrukts des kollektiven Gedächtnisses hinweisen. Ebenfalls Übereinstimmung lässt sich in jenem Punkt erzielen, dass sich die Entstehung und Aufrechterhaltung des künstlichen Gedächtnisses durch nationale Symbole sowie nationale Rituale konkretisieren lässt. Diese Riten, Gegenstände oder Symbole haben im Wesentlichen die Aufgabe die Mitglieder einer beliebigen Gemeinschaft daran zu erinnern, dass sie nicht nur ein Teil einer Gemeinschaft sind, sondern was es bedeutet ihr anzugehören.

Ausgehend von den oben erwähnten theoretischen Konzepten wird in den darauffolgenden Abschnitten die Entstehung eines so-genannten nationalen „Charakters" australischer Prägung beschrieben. Während man sich zuvor noch an der nationalen Identität und Kultur Groß Britanniens, dem vielzitierten Mutterland, orientiert und bedient hatte, gab man sich damit nicht länger zufrieden. Zur Wende des 19. Jahrhundert versuchte sich Australien daher in kulturellen Belangen bewusst vom ehemaligen Mutterland abzuheben. Besonders augenscheinlich war dieser Gesinnungswechsel in der Australischen Literatur ersichtlich, und dass sich Australische Schriftsteller vermehrt auf die Suche nach einzigartigen Australischen Charakteristika begaben. Fündig wurden sie vor allem in Form des Australischen Busches, den man als einzigartig und wahrlich australisch erkannte. Der Busch war dann auch jener Ort, in dem in weiterer Folge der typische Australier zu finden war – der weiße Buscharbeiter. Die Figur des weißen Buscharbeiters wurde bald mit bestimmten, spezifisch Australischen Qualitäten und Attributen ausgestattet: einer prinzipiellen Skepsis gegenüber Autorität (*Anti-authoritarianism*), dem unbändigem Willen zu sozialer Gerechtigkeit (*Egalitarianism*), und der tiefen Zuneigung zu den männlichen Freunden (*Mateship*).

Auf diesen Konzepten basierend entstanden weitere dominante kulturellen Typen. Als erster Stelle wäre der Buschmann (*Bushman*) anzuführen, ein ausschließlich weißer Australier der es gelernt hat im Busch zu überleben und dadurch bestimmte Fähigkeiten erworben hat, wie etwa Stärke, Ausdauer und Einfallsreichtum. Ähnliche Fähigkeiten besitzt auch der Pionier (p*ioneer*), der Einwanderer Britischen Ursprungs, der sich ebenfalls gegen die rauen Verhältnisse der Australischen Landschaft durchsetzte und dadurch zum ‚echten' Australier wurde. Eine Verschmelzung der beiden Figuren ist der *Anzac*, der Soldat der im Ersten Weltkrieg an der Seite der Briten kämpfte. Die Teilnahme der Australier am Ersten Weltkrieg mag globalgeschichtlich gesehen eher unwichtig erscheinen, allerdings wurde dadurch ein Moment markiert, in dem sich die Australische Nation zum ersten Mal im Kampf beweisen konnte. Diese Kampfhandlungen wurden somit zur Geburtsstunde einer bestimmten Form des australischen Heldentums. Eine andere Form des australischen Heldentums ist schließlich der *ocker*, ein Held der, im Gegensatz zu den anderen Helden, seine Wurzeln in der Stadt hat. Er ist vulgär, laut, trinkt und flucht. Die oben beschriebenen Figuren und Konzepte, die lange als zentrale Elemente des Australischen Charakters gefeiert wurden, sind allerdings äußert Problematisch und nur wenig plausibel. Zum Einen konzentrieren sie sich fast ausschließlich auf den weißen, männlichen Australier, und schließen somit Frauen, Immigranten nicht-Britischen Ursprungs und Aborigines vom der Idee Australischer nationaler Identität aus. Zum Zweiten siedeln sie den typischen Australier vorwiegend im Busch an, während der Großteil der Australier in den Städten lebt.

Mit Hauptaugenmerk auf die Darstellung eben genannter kultureller Figuren und Konzepte werden im Hauptteil der Arbeit drei Perioden Australischen Kinos untersucht: das *New Wave* Kino der 1970-er und 1980-er Jahre, das Kino der 1990-er Jahre und das Kino des 21. Jahrhunderts. Im Zuge der ersten Periode werden dabei folgende Filme analysiert: *Gallipoli*, *Crocodile Dundee* und *The Man from Snowy River*. Die Analyse der 1990-er Jahre erfolgt anhand der Filme: *Strictly Ballroom*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* und *Muriel's Wedding*. Der letzte Teil beschäftigt sich mit dem wohl neuesten und aktuell international erfolgreichsten Australischen Film: Baz Luhrmanns *Australia*.

Diese Analyse dreier filmischer Perioden hat vor allem verdeutlicht, dass die Filme der 1970-er und 1980-er Jahre konsequent auf die Mythen die zu Ende des 19.Jahrhunderts von Australischen Schriftstellern und Maler kreiert wurden zurückgreifen. Augenscheinlich ist dabei auch, dass der weiße Australier Britischen Ursprungs, dessen Anti-autoritäre Einstellung, *Mateship* und *Egalitarianism*, gefeiert werden. Frauen, Aborigines und Immigranten nicht-Britischer Abstammung werden aus dem dargestellten Australien-Bild dagegen fast zur Gänze ausgeschlossen. In den 1990-ern bietet sich im Kontrast dazu ein völlig anderes Bild: Helden werden effeminiert, Australische Identität wird auf Frauen oder Homosexuelle ausgeweitet. Grundsätzlich wurden in dieser Periode die Konzepte der 1970-er und 1980-er in Frage gestellt und abgeändert. Eine erneute Trendumkehr stellt der Film des 21.Jahrhundert dar, da man hier wiederum vom heterogenen Bild der 1990-er abweicht. Interessanterweise wird in *Australia* auf das veraltete Australien-Bild des *New Wave* Kinos zurückgegriffen. Zwar räumt man den Australischen Aborigenes einen besonderen Platz im Film ein, genauso wie dem hybriden Charakter der Australischen Nation, die alten Mythen, Figuren und Konzept sind allerdings genauso dominant wie im Kino der 1970-er und 1980-er. Besonders deutlich sind hier vor allem die Parallelen zu *Crocodile Dundee*, dem erfolgreichsten Australischen Film bis dato.

Daher scheint es wohl naheliegend, dass *Australia* mittels eines stereotypen Australien-Bildes, welches augenscheinlich immer noch fest in den Köpfen der internationalen Seher verankert ist, an frühere erfolgreiche Schemata anschließen wollte. Ebenso offensichtlich scheint der Versuch damit die Einzigartigkeit der Australischen Nation zu zeigen – zu beweisen, dass Australien tatsächlich eine eigene, einzigartige Kultur besitzt, und nicht länger von der Identität des früheren Mutterlandes zehren muss. Hätte man an die Darstellung der 1990-er angeknüpft, einem Australien, das der Realität am nächsten kommt, hätte man wohl kaum ein einzigartiges Bild von Australien zeigen können. Die Rückkehr zu früheren Darstellungsmustern überrascht also nur auf den ersten Blick.

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Seit März 2005	**Nachhilfeunterricht** in Englisch und Russisch
Oktober 2006 - November 2006	**Fachbezogenes Praktikum** im UF Englisch (Gymnasium Kurzwiese in Eisenstadt)
März 2009 - Mai 2009	**Fachbezogenes Praktikum** im UF Russisch (Gymnasium)

Auslandsaufenthalte_____

Juni 2001	**St. Petersburg**, RUS
September 2002	**Malta**
April 2005	**London**, GB
Juli 2008 - Februar 2009	Auslandssemester an der **University of Queensland** (**Brisbane**)