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„Are We There Yet?
The Long Quest for Aboriginal Identity, Belonging and Recognition in Melissa Lucashenko's *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby*"

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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this diploma thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are all clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references, either in the footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors have been truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

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1. Introduction

The first part of this thesis' title is a homage to the Indigenous hip-hop group Last Kinection and their song "Are We There Yet" from their album *Next of Kin* (2011). In this song frontwoman Naomi Wenitong raps about the Stolen Generation, life expectancy, death in custody, poverty and other relevant issues of inequality between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population of Australia. The Indigenous guest singer Simone Stacey longs for equality and recognition, posing the following question, which also gave this thesis its title, in the chorus: "When are we gonna get there? / Are we there yet?" (Last Kinection). Naomi Wenitong can only answer in the negative, but calls for action in the last line: "Time to change / Time to understand / No more shame" (Last Kinection).

Though in the last decade several steps have been taken by the Australian government to close the gap between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population, such as the former prime minister Kevin Rudd's apology speech in 2008, several investigations and reports concerning the Stolen Generation, Death in Custody and health risks, there is still much to be done in order to defeat disadvantage and racism. In early Australian literature, such as in texts by white anthropologists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were frequently silenced inasmuch as they were written *about* rather than actively speaking or writing. Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, two acclaimed Indigenous academics who have edited and published the first anthology of Australian Aboriginal literature, see the starting point of Aboriginal literature "as we know it today" (5) in the 1960s – parallel to the onset of extensive organised political activity striving for change, recognition and rights for Indigenous Australians[1]. For the Indigenous people writing in the English language was a new medium to make their voices heard and it proved to be a means of claiming identity, celebrating survival and maintaining culture. As the praised Indigenous author Kim Scott concluded, "[y]es, it is a by-product of colonisation, but it can also be part of the continuation and regeneration of a prior Indigenous culture" (i).

Despite the recent blossoming of Indigenous literature in Australia there is only a low quantity of secondary literature, especially written by Indigenous critics and academics, that discusses, explains and evaluates the texts and the issues presented in them. The

[1] This development can be compared to other minorities across the globe which also started to organise themselves politically in order to achieve civil rights, for example the Afro-American community in the USA (Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up* 152).

pioneering scholars in this field are Anita Heiss and Peter Minter who, as mentioned before, have published the first anthology of Aboriginal literature and Belinda Wheeler, who has edited the first critical companion to Aboriginal literature. Thus, this thesis fills a gap in research as it comments and contextualises three novels by the Indigenous author Melissa Lucashenko.

This thesis investigates how the loss of land, family and culture as a result of dispossession and the Stolen Generation still affect the Aboriginal people, their role and their identity, as described in Melissa Lucashenko's novels. Furthermore, it explores how the author uses fiction in order to challenge stereotypical representations of Aboriginality by showing the diversity and cultural vitality of the Indigenous people of Australia. Lucashenko created numerous Aboriginal characters with individual identities, not only unemployed, violent and drunk people, but also everymen and everywomen with skin colours of every shade. Her novels are thus essentially a celebration of Aboriginal diversity, as the author also stated in an interview concerning her latest book *Mullumbimby*: "[o]ne day we will be managing our own affairs and we will be living the good life and that is what I wanted to point to" (qtd. in Chenery). Nevertheless, Lucashenko does not silence the problems that the Indigenous people of Australia have to face, such as racism (not only in everyday situations but also by the police), lost connections to kin, land and culture, substance abuse, poverty, domestic violence and uncertainty of one's identity due to the problematic concept of Aboriginality.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of chapters 2 and 3, will familiarise the reader with the background necessary for the subsequent analysis of Melissa Lucashenko's novels. Chapter 2 begins with a historical overview of Australia both before and after British colonisation and focuses on the relationship between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population in the last 200 years. This historical background is vital for an understanding of the present situation in Australia in which racism, injustice and distrust are still visible. Chapter 3 then aims to deconstruct the concept of Aboriginality – a concept that has been imposed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by the colonists. For them Aboriginality meant blackness, inferiority and basically everything that was opposed to whiteness and the West. Only recently has this concept begun to be questioned, but the image of the black, painted Aboriginal man with a spear in the desert is still often considered an 'authentic' representation of Aboriginality. This picture excludes Indigenous people who do not

have black skin, live in urban areas, work as doctors, managers and teachers and are female. The result is a shattered identity and a feeling of not belonging anywhere – a highly dominant theme in Melissa Lucashenko's novels.

The second part of this thesis, comprising the chapters 4 to 6, constitutes the analytical component, in which three of Melissa Lucashenko's novels, namely *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby* will be discussed. This Indigenous author has been selected as the focus for this thesis, because her novels address current issues of the Indigenous struggle for equality and recognition and at the same time celebrate the survival of culture and Indigenous pride. The three chosen novels centre on characters who could not be more different from the outside, being male and female, university graduate and school leaver, initiated into Aboriginal culture and ignorant of it, but they all experience similar struggles on their search for their identity. Lucashenko's other novels are young-adult fiction and were thus not included in this paper though it would have been interesting to compare the themes and characters. However, this would have exceeded the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 4 introduces the reader to the author and briefly summarises each novel in order to prepare the reader for chapter 5, the heart of the thesis, which analyses the aforementioned novels in seven subchapters, each discussing one dominant theme. The first subchapter revisits the problematic concept of Aboriginality and illuminates the characters' struggle with their identities due to their relatively white skin colour. The next subchapter discusses the importance of land with regard to identity and analyses the characters' feeling of belonging in different landscapes such as the city, outer suburbia and the bush. In the following section the role of culture in Lucashenko's novels is explored, especially the effects of culture loss on the Aboriginal protagonists. Racism is the next major topic in the novels under analysis, both in public and institutional settings. Lucashenko's protagonists experience racism on a daily basis to shocking extents: a white neighbour trains fighting dogs to attack black passers-by, a policeman bashes an Aboriginal man to death and a university employee dismisses an applying woman as illiterate because she is Indigenous. That such incidents are by no means only to be found in a work of fiction is proved by recent media coverage, such as the Death in Custody on Palm Island in 2004. Continuing in the setting of law, the next subchapter questions the practicality of claiming native title through a white law system by unveiling the problems in proving one's identity, heritage and claim before the very court which has dissolved the connection and thus the proof in the times of

dispossession and dislocation. The following subchapter analyses the intersections of race, gender and class in Lucashenko's novels. The focus of analysis lies especially on domestic violence against women and substance abuse and violence as a result of a fragmented idea of Aboriginal masculinity. The problem of substance abuse, i.e. the excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs, and its effects is explored in more detail in the last subsection of chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 focuses on Melissa Lucashenko as a writer and discusses her influence as activist on her novels and her distinctive writing style which often deviates from what is considered 'traditional', i.e. 'white' narratology.

2. Historical Overview of Australia and Its Aboriginal Peoples

For a long time histories of Australia began with James Cook and the subsequent colonisation of the continent; the history of Australia before the British settlement was generally omitted. Sir Walter Murdoch, an Australian scholar of the 20th century, gave the following reason for this custom:

> There is a good reason why we should not stretch the term [history of Australia] to make it include the story of the dark-skinned wandering tribes who hurled boomerangs and ate snakes in their native land for long ages before the arrival of the first intruders from Europe […] for they have nothing that can be called a history. […] Change and progress are the stuff of which history is made: these blacks knew no change and made no progress, as far as we can tell. (9)

This view changed in the late 20th century, when social and critical history became increasingly popular and therefore the people that had been traditionally "hidden from history" (Attwood, *Telling* 18). Mulvaney, for example, acknowledged the thousands of years of Aboriginal settlement in Australia in his *Prehistory of Australia* and reduced the British settlement to only 0.5 per cent of Australia's history in relation with humans (2). Unlike Murdoch he also did not dismiss the Aboriginal tribes as boomerang-throwing and snake-eating people without a history, but recognised their social structure, systems and beliefs as well as their impact on Australia.

The following overview of the history of Australia's Indigenous peoples will likewise begin with the pre-colonial history of what we now call Australia. However, the focus will be on (British) colonised Australia, since an understanding of the events accompanying and following the British colonisation and the nature of the past and present relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is vital for a reading of Lucashenko's novels.

2.1 Australia Before British Colonisation

The date of first human arrival in Australia is still debated in research; in the past decades proposed colonisation dates have ranged between 40,000 and 130,000 years BP. Archaeologists have found sufficient evidence for human occupation that dates back 40,000 years, though the fact that the sites of evidence are spread all over Australia suggests a much earlier date of arrival (Hiscock 34). Extremely early arrival dates such as 130,000 years BP, on the basis of of increased charcoal amounts as indicator for fire stick farming and therefore human impact, were disproved when Rasmussen et al.

showed through the analysis of an Aboriginal man's lock of hair that the ancestors of Aboriginal Australians were among an early wave of African emigration into Asia around 75,000 to 62,000 years ago – and from there into Australia (Rasmussen et al. 98). However, no matter where exactly in the time window 50,000 to 70,000 years BP the first Australians arrived, it is clear that they "[represent] one of the oldest continuous populations outside Africa" (98).

The first Australians lived a more or less nomadic life, depending on the climate and vegetation of the territory. However, none of the clans moved around aimlessly but systematically, as they returned in a regular cycle to familiar camps and waterholes (Bambrick 65). Within a tribal territory lived several clans or moieties, which ranged from a few dozen to hundreds of people. As a consequence of their belief that their specific territory was given to them by ancestral spirits, the Aboriginal people had no interest in conquering the territories of other tribes or even other continents (Clarke 13). They lived as hunter-gatherers, feeding upon small and medium-sized animals, mussels, fish and eggs (Bambrick 61), and neither practiced stock breeding nor agriculture in terms of cultivating crops for their own consumption (Bahr 65). However, they did develop another form of agriculture, namely fire-stick farming. The Aboriginal Australians regularly burnt different patches of bush in order to increase the amount of grasslands and thus attract potential prey for hunting (Clarke 15). Weapons for hunting included boomerangs, spears and hatchets (Bambrick 63).

There is archaeological evidence for complex rituals and cultural practices from an early age onwards. The so-called Mungo Man is one of the earliest known ritual burials found in the world: his remains, discovered at Lake Mungo, were covered in red ochre and are estimated to be between 46,000 and 60,000 years old (Smith and Burke 34). In 2011 archaeologists excavated a 28,000-year-old rock painting in Arnhem Land, the oldest one so far in Australia and among the oldest worldwide (David et al. 2500). Bambrick argues that the evolution of rock art marks the beginning of a new "socio-territorial [relationship]" (62), as people started to "[claim] places in the landscape by their visual integration into symbolic expression" (62).

2.2 The European Arrival and Colonisation

The legend of an unknown land in the south, a *terra incognita australis*, dates back as far as Greek antiquity (Eisler 9), when great minds such as Aristotle argued for the

existence of a great continent in the southern hemisphere that would counterbalance the weight of the landmasses in the northern hemisphere (*Meteorology* 5.2). Throughout the subsequent centuries this Terra Australis featured in numerous myths, theoretical works and maps, and in the minds of the Europeans eventually became an El Dorado full of spices, metals and other riches (Eisler 79). The first documented sighting of the continent that is now called Australia is accredited to the Dutch explorer Willem Jansz who discovered the Cape York Peninsula on a voyage to New Guinea in 1606 (Suarez 84). However, the most well-known explorer of Australia is without doubt the English captain James Cook, who was the first (known) European to land on the Austalian east coast in 1770 and marked the starting point for the British colonisation of Australia (132).

2.2.1 The Policy of Disregard

At the time of first European contact the Aboriginal people were dismissed as primitive, less-than-human and uncivilised. The Dutch captain Jan Carstenz called them "utter barbarians" (qtd. in Heeres 42) and the English explorer William Dampier even went so far as to say that they "differ but little from Brutes" (qtd. in White 2). Moreover, they were not recognised as possessors of land, since (in the eyes of the European explorers) the Aboriginal people did not cultivate the land, which was a crucial variable in the question of existing property rights at that time (Banner 18-19). The Swiss philosopher Emer de Vattel, for example, wrote in his influential work *Jus Gentium* ("The Law of Nations") that "unsettled habitation […] cannot be accounted a true and legal possession" (100) and that "land of which the savages took no particular need, and of which they made no actual and constant use" (100) was free for the Europeans to settle. Vattel's contemporary William Blackstone also concluded that only the development of "the art of agriculture […] introduced and established the idea of a more permanent property in the soil" (7). Against this background it was deemed justified by the British to treat Australia as a *terra nullius*, "land belonging to no one", and claimed it for the British Crown, denying the Indigenous people any property rights and disregarding the fact that they had inhabited Australia for thousands of years,.

2.2.2 The Policy of Dispersal

Until the 1970s the arrival of the Europeans was generally described as peaceful. Henry Reynolds was one of the first and most influential historians who acknowledged the existence of Aboriginal resistance from the early days of British colonisation onwards: "Black resistance in its many forms was an inescapable feature of life on the fringes of European settlement from the first months at Sydney Cove until the early years of the twentieth century" (Reynolds, *Other Side* 67).

Soon after the arrival of the First Fleet the Indigenous people realised that the white Europeans were neither relatives returned from the dead[2] nor transitory visitors:

> Increasingly the newcomers impinged on accustomed patterns of life, occupying the flat, open land and monopolising water. Indigenous animals were driven away, plant life eaten or trampled [by introduced animals] and Aborigines pushed back into marginal country - mountains, swamps, waterless neighbourhoods. Patterns of seasonal migration broke down, areas free of Europeans were over utilised and eventually depleted of flora and fauna. Food became scarcer and available in less and less variety and even access to water was often difficult. (Reynolds, *Other Side* 72)

Eventually the situation escalated: Reynolds identified four key conflict areas, namely land, property, women and revenge, and estimated that a minimum of 20,000 Aboriginal people lost their lives in these Frontier Wars, in contrast to approximately 3,000 Europeans (126). One of the most effective weapons against Aboriginal resistance was the so-called Native Police, which consisted of Aboriginal men equipped with horses and guns acting under orders of white officers (Reynolds, *Why* 235). They were instructed "at all times and opportunities to disperse large assemblages of blacks" (Select Committee of the Legislative Assembly Queensland 152). 'Disperse' at that time did not only mean 'to scatter', but was also a common euphemistic expression for "to seek out and kill (an Aboriginal or a party of Aborigines)" (Australian National Dictionary).

The Indigenous population was not only confronted with decreasing numbers due to the Frontier Wars, but also two smallpox outbreaks which had devastating effects on Aboriginal people, as they had not been confronted with this disease before. The first outbreak happened shortly after the European arrival in 1789; Sydney's governor Arthur Philipp reckoned that 50% of the Aboriginal population around Sydney had died from it (Hiscock 14). It is still disputed in literature whether the the Europeans were responsible

[2] In an Aboriginal language of central Queensland the Europeans were referred to as *miggloo* ('ghost'). Over time the word lost its original meaning 'ghost' and is now commonly used in Australia as (derogatory) term for white Australians (Reynolds, *Other Side* 43).

for the outbreak of smallpox (and if so, whether it was deliberate or unintended) or whether the disease was brought to Australia by Indonesian traders – an important question as it raises another potential case of genocide. It is a documented fact that the First Fleeters carried with them bottles of "variolous matter" (Tench qdt. in Willey 77), i.e. smallpox scabs. Warren has proved that the virus could have survived the long journey and the temperatures to which it was exposed (156-158). Still, even if the Europeans did bring the virus with them, it cannot be determined without doubt whether it was released on purpose or accidentally[3].

2.2.3 The Policy of 'Protection'

As a result of the massacres and smallpox outbreaks Australia's Indigenous population declined from "about 300,000 in 1788 to not much more than 50,000 in little over a century" (Reynolds, *Other Side* 127). The Aboriginal population was thought to be dying and the government and the Church resolved that nothing more could be done than "smoothing the pillow of [the] dying race" (Report of the Church Congress 1906 qtd. in McKnight 25). By 1910 every state except Tasmania[4] had established a so-called Protection Act following the Victorian example of 1869. These acts allowed the governments to interfere tremendously in the lives of the Indigenous people in that it could make decisions concerning their place of residence, employment, distribution of money and care of their children, and also decided who was to be deemed an Aboriginal person and who not[5] (Aboriginal Protection Act 1869 (Vic) reg. I-VI). The result were reserves which were more similar to prisons, as every aspect of the lives of the Indigenous inhabitants was controlled (Armitage 18).

2.2.4 The Policy of Assimilation

In the 1930s it became clear that the Aboriginal population was far from becoming extinct. However, it was noted that the previous policy had resulted in an extinction or fragmentation of Aboriginal rites, languages and family bonds, and in a rising number

[3] The devastating effect of smallpox on New World populations was well known after the conquest and colonisation of America. Pizarro and Cortés' conquests of the Incan and Aztec empires would presumably not have been possible without the spread of smallpox among the Indigenous population (Hopkins 212), and in 1763 smallpox was even used on purpose as a weapon against Native Americans by distributing infected blankets among the indigenous chiefs (Jones 68).

[4] The Tasmanian government declared instead that there were no Aboriginal people left on the island (Strohscheidt 73).

[5] This issue will be discussed in chapter 3 on Aboriginality.

of so-called ‘mixed-blood’ Aboriginal people, while the number of so-called ‘full-bloods’ had declined (Armitage 19). These observations led to the idea that Aboriginal culture and identity could be erased and replaced with a white one. Additionally, the government also decided to assimilate the external appearance of the Aboriginal people to the white colonists. Neville, a former ‘Protector of Aborigines’ of Western Australia, recommended miscegenation in order to “breed white natives” (Neville 75), as with every generation the ‘Aboriginal blood’ was thought to become more suppressed by the ‘superior white blood’ (Figure 1).

THREE GENERATIONS
(Reading from Right to Left)

1. Half-blood—(Irish-Australian father; full-blood Aboriginal mother).
2. Quadroon Daughter—(Father Australian born of Scottish parents; Mother No. 1).
3. Octaroon Grandson—(Father Australian of Irish descent; Mother No. 2).

Figure 1: ‘Breeding out’ skin colour (Neville 73).

Part of this assimilation-policy was the forcible removal of Indigenous children, especially with mixed descent (at that time called ‘half-caste’), to be raised in governmental institutions or fostered by non-Indigenous families. In the beginning the removal officially applied only to orphans or abused children, but soon Aboriginality became a justified reason as well (McGlade 45). This has become known as the Stolen Generation. The *Bringing Them Home* report of 1997 estimated that “between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970” (AHRC, *Home* ch. 2). The removal was both an act of racism, as it concerned only Indigenous children, and genocide, as it was done “with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national,

ethnical, racial, or religious group" (Convention on the Prevention and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide art. II).

Although the removal of Aboriginal children was officially promoted under the banner of protection and in the interest of the children, the majority of experiences told in the *Bringing Them Home* report paint a different picture. Life in the institutions was often harsh and abusive, as the children did not receive enough food and clothes, and frequently suffered from bashings and sexual abuse:

> I've seen girls naked, strapped to chairs and whipped. We've all been through the locking up period, locked in dark rooms. I had a problem of fainting when I was growing up and I got belted every time I fainted and this is belted, not just on the hands or nothing. I've seen my sister dragged by the hair into those block rooms and belted because she's trying to protect me … How could this be for my own good? Please tell me.
> *Confidential evidence 8, New South Wales: woman removed to Cootamundra Girls' Home in the 1940s*. (AHRC, *Home* ch. 10)

Moreover, the institutionalised children were completely separated from their families and culture. They were neither allowed to speak their language nor practice cultural rites. Parents were often restrained from visiting or proclaimed dead, abusive or indifferent. A victim remembered that they "were completely brainwashed to think only like a white person" (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) ch. 10). For her this resulted in the loss of her identity and a feeling of displacement:

> Most of us girls were thinking white in the head but were feeling black inside. We weren't black or white. We were a very lonely, lost and sad displaced group of people. We were taught to think and act like a white person, but we didn't know how to think and act like an Aboriginal. We didn't know anything about our culture. *Confidential submission 617, New South Wales: woman removed at 8 years with her 3 sisters in the 1940s; placed in Cootamundra Girls' Home.* (AHRC, *Home* ch. 10)

The transfer to foster families was often no improvement: sexual and non-sexual abuse, as well as suppression of Aboriginal culture frequently continued. Aboriginal children were also often taken into 'care' by non-Indigenous families as a work force. This is proved by a well-known clipping from a Darwin newspaper from 1934 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Clipping from a Darwin newspaper (1934) showing the exploit of Aboriginal children as work forces (National Archives of Australia, A1 1934/6800 <http://photos.naa.gov.au/photo/Default.aspx?id=7648210>). *Reprinted with the kind permission of the NAA.*

The clipping (Figure 2) shows a picture of a group of children with mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent for whom foster homes are searched. An unknown reader marked the girl in the centre of the picture with a cross and wrote below: "I like the little girl in the centre of group, but if taken by anyone else, any of the others would do, *as long as they are strong*" [emphasis added].

The forcible removal of Indigenous children continued in some states until 1970 and its effects are still felt in Aboriginal society. In order to determine the persistence of trauma in adulthood, the psychiatrist Dr Waters interviewed victims of the Stolen Generation as adults and found that they

> lack[ed] a sense of personal identity, personal worth and trust in others. Many have formed multiple unstable relationships, are extremely susceptible to depression, and use drugs and alcohol as a way of masking their personal pain. They see themselves as so worthless that they are easily exploited, laying themselves open to be recruited into prostitution and other forms of victimisation. (Dr Brent Waters submission 532 page 2 in AHRC, *Home* ch. 11)

2.2.5 The Policy of Integration – Australia as a Postcolonial Country?

In 1967 the Commonwealth gained control over Aboriginal affairs and terminated the assimilation policy in favour of a new strategy, namely "integration with limited self-management" (Armitage 21). A cornerstone in the shift to Aboriginal empowerment is the Mabo Judgement – a court case that started in 1982 when Torres Strait Islander Eddie Mabo and four others claimed land rights to the islands Mer, Dawar and Waier, basing their claim on the fact that their people had inhabited these islands "[s]ince time immemorial" (Mabo v Queensland (No 1)). The claim was first rejected by the Queensland government, but 10 years later, in 1992, accepted by the High Court of Australia (Mercer 198). With this decision the High Court dismissed the notion of Australia as *terra nullius* before British colonisation, recognised the Aboriginal peoples as first inhabitants and acknowledged the possibility of a land claim (Mercer 195).

In the same year, on 10 December 1992, Australia's Prime Minister Paul Keating renewed this statement of recognition in his famous speech held in Redfern Park in Sydney and also expressed the need to acknowledge the ill-treatment of the Indigenous population by non-Indigenous people in order to move towards a new, multicultural Australia:

> [R]ecognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases and the alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice and our failure to imagine these things being done to us. […] As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us. (Keating)

By using the word 'dispossessing' Keating took a firm stand against the concept of *terra nullius* and recognised Indigenous ownership to land. Furthermore, the word 'smashed' negates the myth of a peacefully settled Australia. Keating also highlighted that the wrongs done to the Aboriginal people are by no means things of the past, but still devastatingly current: "[T]he past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice – in the prejudice and ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australians and in the demoralisation and desperation, the fractured identity of so many Aboriginals and Torres-Strait Islanders" (Keating).

As an example of contemporary 'inequality, racism and injustice' Keating mentions the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which examined ninety-nine Aboriginal fatalities in custody between 1980 and 1989. Though in terms of percentage no relevant difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal deaths in

custody could be detected, a huge difference in their incarceration rate was discovered: Aboriginal people in custody constituted 28.6% of all imprisoned people, while they were only 1.4% of the whole population. The Commission explained this over-representation not only as a consequence of immediate racism but also of "the economic position of Aboriginal people, the health situation, their housing requirements, their access or non-access to an economic base including land and employment, their situation in relation to education [and] the part played by alcohol – and other drugs" (RCIADIC, *National* 1.3.6). All these factors were linked to a loss of self-esteem and identity as a consequence of the long history of mistreatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. It was also found that Aboriginal people were held longer in police custody than non-Indigenous people. On the other hand, the average duration of prison custody was shorter for Aboriginal people – at a closer look, however, it was discovered that this was due to a considerable number of short prison sentences for Aboriginal people for offences for which non-Indigenous people were not given a sentence at all. The Commission concluded that "facts associated in every case with their Aboriginality played a significant and in most cases dominant role in their being in custody and dying in custody" (RCIADIC, *National* 1.1.1).

Following a recommendation of the *Bringing Them Home* report of 1997, which investigated the case of the Stolen Generations, sorry speeches were held all over the nation. However, it was not before 2008 that the Australian government officially apologised to the Aboriginal population through Prime Minister Kevin Rudd: "We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering that we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted. We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied" (Rudd).

In 2011 the Australian Census counted 548,370 Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders, constituting 2.5% of Australia's total population (ABS, *Census*). This number has steadily increased, which might have also be influenced by a higher willingness (and knowledge) to identify as Indigenous (ABS, *Social Trends*). A comparative analysis of Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous population reveals striking gaps in fertility rate[6], life expectancy[7], education[8], employment[9] and housing[10] (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Health* 3).

[6] In 2009 the ratio was 2.6 babies per Indigenous woman compared to 1.9 for all Australian women (AIHW, *Health* 76).

For these reasons several scholars have questioned Australia's state as a postcolonial country. The Aboriginal academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson, for example, states that

> Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are situated in relation to (post)colonisation in radically different ways – ways that cannot be made into sameness. There may well be spaces in Australia that could be described as postcolonial but these are not spaces inhabited by Indigenous people. It may be more useful, therefore, to conceptualise the current condition not as postcolonial but as *postcolonising* with the associations of ongoing process which that implies. (*Home* 30)

The word Moreton-Robinson found apt to describe Australia's status in terms of colonialism, "postcolonising", stresses the still ongoing process in Australia to lead the country towards a postcolonial future. She therefore recognises the efforts that have been made to build a new Australia, but at the same time insists that it has not been enough and implies that there is hope for the future.

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[7] In 2007 Indigenous men were estimated to live 11.5 years less than non-Indigenous men; the life expectancy of Indigenous women at birth was 9.7 years below non-Indigenous women (AIHW, *Health* 63).

[8] Only about 75% of Indigenous students reached the Australian minimum standards of literacy and numeracy in 2009, compared to around 95% of non-Indigenous students. Furthermore, retention rates for Indigenous students were considerably lower than for non-Indigenous students (AIHW, *Health* 16).

[9] Considerably more Indigenous people than non-Indigenous people were unemployed in 2008 (AIHW, *Health* 19). There was also a distinctive difference in the type of occupation: A higher percentage of Indigenous people were employed as labourers than non-Indigenous workers, whereas there were less Indigenous people working as professionals or managers (21).

[10] Only 32% Indigenous people compared to nearly 70% non-Indigenous people owned their own home. Around 26% Indigenous households had major problems, such as broken roofs, electricity defects etc. (AIHW, *Health* 23). Furthermore, Indigenous Australians were more likely to live in overcrowded households with more than one family (24).

3. Aboriginalism and Aboriginality

In 1978 Edward Said published his influential book "Orientalism" in which he states that the concept of the Orient is constructed by the West by positioning it as the Other in contrast to the Self. This is achieved by establishing oppositional binaries, such as the following: where the West is rational, superior, masculine, familiar and progressive, the Orient is irrational, inferior, feminine, exotic and static (Said 40). Said's theory was subsequently applied to other postcolonial settings such as Australia. In 1987 Vijay Mishra coined the term 'Aboriginalism' to describe the attempt of the West to "[reduce] […] a culture to a dominant discourse" by "swamping the plurality of Aboriginal voices" (165). Rather than acknowledging the different Indigenous peoples of Australia, the colonists and non-Indigenous Australians constructed them as one people and set up binary oppositions, forcing the Indigenous population into the role of the Other. In other words, the colonial power established "authoritative and essentialist 'truths'" (Attwood, *Introduction* i) and thus developed a 'definition' of what a 'real' Aboriginal person is (McConaghy 125).

When the Europeans arrived in Australia, the definition of an Aboriginal person was based on racial factors, especially skin colour (Armitage 22). This definition, however, became increasingly problematic with miscegenation and the assimilation policy, which, after all, was determined to 'breed out' Aboriginal blood. The question then is, when does a generation stop being Aboriginal Australian and start being non-Aboriginal Australian. The 1934 *Aborigines Act* of South Australia came to the following solution:

> Every person who is
> a) an aboriginal native of Australia or of any of the islands adjacent to or belonging thereto; or
> b) a half-caste who lives with such an aboriginal native as wife or husband; or
> c) a half-caste who, otherwise than as a wife, or husband of such an aboriginal native, habitually lives or associates with such aboriginal natives; or
> d) a half-caste child whose age does not apparently exceed 18 years,
> shall be deemed to be an aboriginal […]. (Section 4.1)

This definition, which is often referred to as a blood-quotum classification (Gardiner-Garden 3), was essentially based on the interpretation of skin colour and denied several people the right to call themselves Aboriginal. The historian Peter Read highlights this problem with the following example:

> In 1935 a fair-skinned Australian of part-indigenous descent was ejected from a hotel for being an Aboriginal. He returned to his home on the mission station to find himself refused entry because he was not an Aboriginal. He tried to remove his children but was told he could not because they were Aboriginal. He walked to the next town where he was arrested for being an Aboriginal vagrant and placed on the local reserve. During the Second World War he tried to enlist but was told he could not because he was Aboriginal. He went interstate and joined up as a non-Aboriginal. After the war he could not acquire a passport without permission because he was Aboriginal. He received exemption from the Aborigines Protection Act—and was told that he could no longer visit his relations on the reserve because he was not an Aboriginal. He was denied permission to enter the Returned Servicemen's Club because he was. (qtd. in Gardiner-Garden 3)

In the 1980s the Commonwealth developed a new definition that was no longer based on racial but on social factors. The definition consists of three parts and is still valid today: "An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person

1. of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
2. who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
3. and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives" (Department of Aboriginal Affairs).

However, for many non-Aboriginal people Aboriginality is still based on skin colour and Aboriginalist stereotypes, myths and construction as the Other. The Indigenous singer Lou Bennett summarised a common representation of an Aboriginal person as follows: "basically a man, out in the desert, black skin, flat nose with a lap-lap on, standing on one leg, resting against a spear" (qtd. in Barney 213). This image perpetuates the Aboriginalist construction that Aboriginal culture is stuck in the past, male, 'primitive' and universal rather than progressive, nongendered, complex and diverse. It silences the presence of Aboriginal women and denies an Aboriginal identity to Indigenous Australians who do not live 'traditionally' or who are lighter-skinned. These points were the basis for an artwork by the Indigenous artist Bindi Cole: She took a photograph of herself and her family with faces painted black and wearing a red headband. It is called "Wathaurung Mob". The photograph was part of an exhibition called "Not Really Aboriginal" and included artwork that challenged the Aboriginalist constructions of what a 'real' Aboriginal person is and what he or she looks like. Bindi Cole herself is light-skinned, lives in Melbourne and identifies as Wathaurung: "I'm not black. I'm not from a remote community. Does that mean I'm not really Aboriginal? Or do Aboriginal people come in all shapes, sizes and colours and live in all areas of

Australia, remote and urban?" (Cole). Her exhibition thus emphasised that in order to identify as Aboriginal skin colour is irrelevant.

Bolt identified several key elements of Aboriginal identity: firstly, Aboriginal identity cannot be completely separated from non-Aboriginal identity, as it is constructed in relation to the 'Other'. The history of colonisation and its effects play a vital role in the construction of Aboriginal identity – the two-world construct that divides Australia into an advantaged white and a disadvantaged Aboriginal world is still present and reinforces marginalisation (Bolt 122). Secondly, Aboriginal identity is often based on ancestry and family ties. However, this is not a prerequisite as numerous stories of people illustrate who identified as Aboriginal (in the cultural and the biological sense), but were later shown to have a non-Aboriginal descent. A famous example is Colin Johnson (alias Mudrooroo) who was regarded the first Aboriginal novelist, but was later discovered to be of African-American rather than Aboriginal Australian heritage. Still, his 'Aboriginality' continued to be accepted in the Aboriginal community. This example emphasises the problem of the governmental three-part-definition of Aboriginality quoted above, as Mudrooroo fulfilled the second and third criterion, identification and acceptance, but not the first one, Aboriginal descent (Bolt 28-29).

The Indigenous writer Melissa Lucashenko also regards the descent-criterion as problematic, when she says that "[b]eing Aboriginal is about culture and family links, not just about race" (Lucashenko, "Q&A"). Lucashenko herself is of Russian-Ukrainian and Aboriginal heritage, but she identifies as Aboriginal, being "more influenced by Aboriginal thinking and Aboriginal culture than by any other" (Lucashenko, "Q&A"). Both Bolt and Lucashenko therefore argue for a more open, individual and cultural definition of Aboriginality. Thus, rather than being biological, Aboriginality is seen as a result of socialisation. However, many Aboriginal people are not only part of an Aboriginal Australian community, but also of a wider Australian society. This implies that not only the positive values of Aboriginal culture are internalised through socialisation, but perhaps also negative and racist stereotypes (Clark 152). The understanding of the construction of Aboriginality as a process of socialisation has two further essential consequences: first, an Aboriginal identity can also be acquired in later life stages, which is especially important for people who only discover their Aboriginal heritage later in life, such as victims of the Stolen Generation or people who have been "brought up 'white'" (Bolt 180). Second, it implies that the concept of what Aboriginal identity is can change, as the society which influences the identity formation of the

individual is also continually developing (30). This rejects the Aboriginalist concept of the Aboriginal people as noble savages stuck in the past and the stereotypical binary opposition traditional versus modern. Stan Grant, an Indigenous journalist, therefore rejects the whole idea of a definition of Aboriginality on the basis that such a concept requires certainty and fixedness where there is none: “Aboriginality doesn’t have to be static, doesn’t have to exist at some time in the past and only relate to the very narrow definitions of blackness” (Grant 51).

In conclusion, the definition of Aboriginality, or rather, Aboriginalities, is not as clear-cut as it may seem at first glance. In official definitions colonialist stereotypes such as black skin colour are no longer included, though still commonly found in Australia and the rest of the world, but they nevertheless depend on the category of race. The Aboriginal community, however, argues for a more individual definition of Aboriginality that is not restricted by rules and criteria.

4. Melissa Lucashenko and Her Novels *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby*

Melissa Lucashenko has been chosen as a focus for this thesis because she powerfully refutes the stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal characters by showing their diversity and vitality. In an interview Lucashenko states that her purpose in writing novels is "to show people that there is a living breathing Aboriginal culture in Australia" (Lucashenko, "Q&A"). Her novels feature various Aboriginal characters: they have white, olive or dark skin, identify as Aboriginal, are ignorant of or deny their heritage, they study at university or are illiterate, and they live on country and in urbanised areas. Lucashenko shows that being dark-skinned and living traditionally in the bush are no necessary prerequisites for identifying or being identified as Indigenous. She highlights instead that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people "come in all shapes, sizes, colours, religions and professions" (Lucashenko, *Black Woman* 5). Sadly, what they seem to have in common in Melissa Lucashenko's novels *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby* is their frequent experience of and contact with racism, poverty, violence and substance misuse. The following subchapters will give a short biography of Melissa Lucashenko and summaries of her three novels that are the topic of this thesis.

4.1 Melissa Lucashenko

Melissa Lucashenko was born in 1967 in Brisbane, Australia, and is of Bundjalung, Yugambeh and Ukrainian descent (AustLit). However, it was not until Lucashenko was fourteen years old that her mother revealed their Aboriginal heritage (Lucashenko, "Not Quite" 24). Now she strongly identifies as Aboriginal and this is reflected in her novels. Lucashenko has written five novels so far, namely *Steam Pigs* (1997), *Killing Darcy* (1998), *Hard Yards* (1999), *Too Flash* (2002) and *Mullumbimby* (2013). *Killing Darcy* and *Too Flash* are young adult novels. Lucashenko has won several awards for her novels, the latest being the Queensland Literary Award for Best Fiction in 2013 for *Mullumbimby*. Apart from being a prized novelist, Lucashenko is also renowned for her frank and direct essays which often employ a distinctive colloquial style that is also typical of her novels. Both her books and her essays are also often quite autobiographical. For example Lucashenko's love for horses as well as her past jobs as barmaid, delivery van driver and karate trainer have left traces in her writing (AustLit).

Nevertheless, she is careful when it comes to labelling her work as autobiographical: "All my books are true in the sense that they reflect modern Aboriginal life. Readers can judge for themselves how much I might resemble my protagonists" (Lucashenko, "Q&A").

4.2 Steam Pigs (1997)

The main protagonist of *Steam Pigs* is the seventeen-year-old Aboriginal young woman Sue Wilson, who moves to Eagleby, a working-class outer suburb of Brisbane, after having had an abortion in her hometown Townsville. She lives with her brother Dave and his two children Lucky and Kirk, and works as a barmaid and later as a delivery driver. During karate lessons she becomes acquainted with Roger, an Aboriginal Studies student, and they fall in love. Roger has very pale skin, freckles and red hair, and identifies strongly as Aboriginal. Sue, on the other hand, is unsure what her own Aboriginality means as she has grown up in a family of 'coconuts'[11] who denied their Aboriginality and considered themselves white. Roger begins to instruct her in Aboriginal history and culture. However, he is far from being an ideal teacher for Sue as he becomes increasingly abusive and frequently bashes Sue. Nevertheless, Sue stays with him and they even move in together. When she sees a local advertisement for a course on conflict resolution and recognises the trainer, Kerry, as an old acquaintance, she decides to meet her. Kerry is a white lesbian social worker with tattoos and a Harley and lives together with her girlfriend Rachel in Beenleigh. The three women get along well and Sue is fascinated by their method of conflict resolution which does not involve using violence. She agrees that she will help Kerry in the course by showing the female participants some self-defence moves from karate.

In the meantime Sue and Roger get engaged after a violent night in the pub, where Sue reacted to Roger's flirting with another woman by flirting herself with a young man called Carlos. When Roger attacks Carlos in his jealousy a fight ensues, but Roger loses. However, Roger does not touch Sue afterwards but is sorry for his behaviour and asks her to marry him. Things seem to be well again until their next fight on Christmas morning, when Roger cancels their trip to Townsville with Lucky and Kirk because he has to work and does not want to pay their trip without him going. There is no violence

[11] Coconut is an abusive term for somebody who is black outside, but white within, i.e. has black skin, but acts and thinks like a white person ("coconut, n.").

involved, however, Roger just storms off and returns some time later. In the meantime, Sue accompanies Rachel to university and eventually fills in the application form for herself. After having forgotten Sue's birthday and lying about his whereabouts in that night, Roger bashes her severely. Sue moves in with Kerry and Rachel for some time, but then goes back to Roger. In January she partly fulfils her promise to the boys when she takes Kirk to Townsville. The money was too short to take Lucky too. At first Townsville seems to be a place of harmony and peace for Sue and Kirk, as they explore the bush together and go fishing, but soon Sue experiences severe racism and also uncovers problems within her family, such as the criminal history of her brother Mick, who is even stealing money from their mother.

When Sue returns to Eagleby her life seems to be going well again. Roger and she are happy and Sue is even accepted at Griffith University. Soon, however, Roger abuses her again and this time he has gone too far: her whole body is black with bruises, her face swollen, one of her teeth smashed and he has even raped her. Sue escapes to Kerry and Rachel and is determined never to return to Roger again. She is true to her promise, moves to West End in Brisbane and begins her studies at Griffith University. Still she is not completely happy: her brother Mick has been incarcerated in the meantime and Sue feels lonely and finds it still hard to accept her olive skin, always being mistaken for a person of southern European descent. She drowns her worries in alcohol and drug until she reads a short story by an Aboriginal writer about belonging in Brisbane. After having read this text she finally feels that she can adopt Brisbane as both her home and belonging, no matter her true ancestral homeland, and looks ahead optimistically.

4.3 Hard Yards (1999)

The novel is structured into the four sections Darkness Kindled, His Death Grows Through Our Heart, Forgive Us and Arms Full of Fires. The protagonist is the nineteen-year-old Reuben 'Roo' Glover, who was adopted as a baby and spent his childhood and teenage years in partly abusive families or in juvenile detention until he was welcomed into the Aboriginal King family (except from Jimmy King, who rejects Roo due to his whiteness). Roo and Shaleena King become a couple and he feels that he has finally found his belonging. The Kings even speculate that he might be a victim of the Stolen Generation and thus Aboriginal. When he learns the name of his biological father, Graeme Madden, he seeks him out but is too scared to reveal his true identity other than

his name. Graeme is a police officer and runs Roo's name through the system. He discovers that Roo was born on the same day as his son that he gave away for adoption and realises that they might be the same person.

At the same time, Shaleena's cousin Stanley dies in custody and the family is determined that the police are responsible for his death. Some days later Shaleena realises that she is pregnant. Roo, however, does not want the baby as he needs to concentrate on his running career and prepare for the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Thus he breaks up with her. The same day Roo gets arrested for stealing a car with his Aboriginal friend Todd and driving under influence. Graeme hears of his arrest on the two-way phone and manages to talk the responsible policeman into letting Roo go with him and only charging him with illegal use. Graeme asks Roo questions about his identity and is confirmed in his belief that Roo is indeed his son. At Graeme's place Roo asks him about his mother, but Graeme is very evasive. He says that she was a Maltese woman, but between the lines the reader feels that she was in fact Aboriginal. Nevertheless, Roo believes him and moves in with him.

At a stag night of one of Graeme's colleagues Roo finds out that Graeme is the policeman who is being investigated for the case of Stanley's death in custody. Disgusted he runs away and sleeps in the park, having nowhere else to turn to. In the meantime, Stanley's ghost appears at the King's place after Mum King has used his name and tells Shaleena that she has to get back with Roo. The investigation of Stanley's death in custody commences and Graeme delivers his version to the court: he and his colleague saw Stanley fighting with another Aboriginal man and intervened. Stanley resisted arrest and hit his head on the concrete before they could get him into the car. In the watchhouse a power cut meant that there was no light for one hour. Graeme stayed until the new shift arrived. When the lights came back Graeme checked on Stanley who was lying on the floor unconscious. He performed heart massage and called the ambulance, but Stanley died on the way to hospital. Some days later when Graeme can persuade Roo to have dinner with him Graeme slightly changes his story: now Stanley's head injury was not a result of the scuffle between Graeme and Stanley but of the fight with the Aboriginal man. Roo is unsure what to believe, but agrees to come to his next hearing at the investigation. However, Roo is refused entrance. Instead he goes drinking with an Aboriginal homeless man he met in front of the building and wakes up the next day without any memory of the night as well as robbed of his money. When he steals a few cans of coke in a convenient store he is bashed by two men with

sticks. When the police arrive the two men accuse Roo of stealing and starting the fight, so Roo is arrested. He is put in the same watchhouse as Jimmy, who was also arrested in the meantime, and in the same cell in which Stanley was put the night he died. Again Graeme gets Roo out of jail. When they walk to the car park, Graeme turns back to get a torch but it is broken. Graeme remarks that it has not been working for weeks. At home Roo asks him again about Stanley's death and this time Graeme concedes that he belted him before putting him in the police car. The rest of the story remains the same. This time Roo believes him and moves in again with Graeme.

Things seem to improve when Roo is accepted in the running squad after he won the Queensland State Titles and is asked to join full training in Canberra. What is more, he gets back together with Shaleena. However, Roo is still haunted by Stanley's death and his father's explanation, knowing that something is not right. Suddenly it begins to dawn on him: he knows that Graeme is afraid of the dark and that the watchhouse torch has been broken for several weeks. Roo infers that while Stanley was dying in his dark cell and crying for help, Graeme did not go to him until the lights came back, because the torch was not working and he was too scared to go without light. Thus, Stanley died because Graeme did not help him. Having arrived at this conclusion Roo flees to Shaleena, but Jimmy is waiting there too. Shaleena tries to keep Jimmy from attacking Roo, but he hits her and a fight is about to erupt. Darryl can separate them until Uncle Eddie arrives. The Aboriginal elder hears both sides and lets them fight it out. In the middle of the fight Roo discloses his secret that it was his father who killed Stanley. Jimmy beats him until he is too exhausted, then Roo is welcomed back in the family. Roo decides to postpone his running career and goes to Cairns with Shaleena. Before that, however, he rings Graeme, who has been acquitted in the meantime, and tells him that he knows the true circumstances of Stanley's death. Graeme panics and goes on the roof of the police building where, finally, guilt overtakes him. Suddenly he becomes aware of his recently returned pistol – but the reader is never told whether he decides to pull the trigger or not.

4.4 Mullumbimby (2013)

Melissa Lucashenko's latest novel is divided into three sections headed jagan – land, gwong – rain and njanjargali – lies. The main protagonist of the book is Jo Breen, a Bundjalung woman of mixed descent in her forties, who buys a run-down farm on her

ancestral homeland near Mullumbimby in the Byron Bay hinterland for herself, her thirteen-year-old daughter Ellen and her two horses Athena and Comet. Jo has a university degree in Australian history and comparative literature, but mows the local cemetery in order to pay the bills. When Twoboy Jackson, a Brisbane law student claiming native title over the valley for his family, arrives in Mullumbimby, the peace among the Aboriginal community is disturbed, as there is already another plaintiff, the Bullockhead-Watt clan led by the violent Oscar Bullockhead. Jo is at first determined to stay neutral, but soon she is unwillingly drawn into the native title war when she and Twoboy become a couple.

The novel begins to become mysterious when Jo hears ancestral voices sing to her in the hills. Jo is petrified but Twoboy sees his chance to prove his belonging. However, Jo's recording of the talga[12] does not play for him. Apart from Twoboy's maddening native title case things are going well for Jo until she finds the dead body of her colt Comet entangled in barbed wire and drowned in a stream one morning. The owner of the barbed wire fence erected without their knowing turns out to be her white neighbour Rob Starr. He admits that he has recently erected the fence, though he does not reveal its purpose and insists that it is not on Jo's land. In the meantime the local war for native title begins to escalate: Twoboy receives daily life-threatening text messages on his mobile phone and he and Jo are even attacked one day by Oscar and his nephew Johnny armed with a poly pipe.

Things seem to improve again when Jo receives a stock horse foal as an anonymous gift in exchange for her deceased colt Comet. She accredits the gift to her friend Therese, who has just won in the lottery. Almost everything is back to normal when on a trip to Lake Majestic Ellen discovers that the lines of her hands form a map of Bundjalung country. Twoboy sees his chance for another piece of evidence for his native title case, but Ellen is too horrified, regarding herself as a freak of nature, and Jo is unable to give her the reassuring answers she needs. However, she begins to realise that she has to put Ellen first and forbids Twoboy to use her as evidence for his claim. Jo decides that she has to discover the meaning of Ellen's hands. She turns to the spirit of Aunty Barb, who cared for Jo after her parents' death and instructed her in Bundjalung culture and language, and receives the answer to *go west*. Jo follows her instinct and climbs the western hill of her paddock from where she sees Rob Starr and Granny Nurrung's nephew Sam next to a waterhole. Sam's arms are outstretched and birds gather on him

[12] talga = music (*Mullumbimby* 285)

singing the talga Jo heard in the hills when she fell off Comet. When Starr sees her on the hill Jo flees back to her farm in confusion. The next morning Jo decides to seek out Uncle Humbug for answers as the other Mullumbimby elders, Oscar Bullockhead and Sally Watt, are no option for her due to the native title war. She seems to forget Granny Nurrung or not deem her an alternative as she has not yet recognised her deep Aboriginal spirituality next to her Christianity. When Jo arrives in Brunswick, however, she learns that Humbug has been arrested for being drunk and disorderly. In the absence of elders Jo decides to go to the water, enter dadirri – a form of Aboriginal meditation – and "become her own elder" (261). Two fairy-wrens arrive, a male and a female, and begin to dance in front of her. Soon Jo realises that it is not a dance, but a message: go west-south-west. Just when Jo concludes that this is exactly the direction where Grafton jail lies and thus the incarcerated Humbug, her phone rings and she is informed that Ellen has deliberately burnt her hands in the fire. In the hospital Jo coincidentally meets Humbug who has been hospitalised after heavy bashing by the police. Jo begs him for answers but he cannot give them to her, as he has been raised by nuns, being a victim of the Stolen Generation. Instead he refers her to his older sister who turns out to be Granny Nurrung.

Finally, the mysteries of the novels are solved through Granny Nurrung's wisdom and knowledge: first, the talga in the hills was not really sung by the ancestors but by lyrebirds which learnt the song from the ancestors and kept it alive over the years. When Jo saw Starr and Sam standing by the waterhole at dawn, she saw them perform an old ceremony, ensuring that the birds did not forget the song. Secondly, Starr erected the wire fence at Granny Nurrung's bidding in order to keep strangers from approaching the waterhole, which is a sacred site for the Bundjalung people. Thirdly, it was Starr not Therese who bought Jo the new horse in exchange for Comet, who died because of the wire fence. Fourthly, Starr has overwritten the farm to Sam in order to ensure that the waterhole will be kept safe in the future. Thus he is not the racist and egocentric landgrabber Jo thought him to be. Finally, the map on Ellen's hand tells her that she is home and that she is the chosen one to look after the waterhole with Sam when Granny Nurrung has passed away. The novel ends in complete happiness as Jo and Ellen have found their belonging, the Jackson and the Watt clan united their claims and received native title, Oscar Bullockhead has conveniently died in a car accident and Jo, Twoboy and Ellen have grown into a peaceful family.

5. Analysis

Melissa Lucashenko's novels are topical, highly political and frank. The author does not euphemise when it comes to the fragmentation of identities, cultures and communities as a result of colonisation, Aboriginal deaths in custody, racism, sexism, violence and substance abuse – neither on the Aboriginal nor on the non-Aboriginal side. The reader is offered a glimpse into the world of various fascinating Aboriginal characters which is both enjoyable and distressing, as Lucashenko celebrates themes such as love, friendship and the survival of culture but also unfolds tales of deep hatred and violence. Her main issues with regard to Aboriginal identities and Aboriginal communities will be discussed in the following subchapters.

5.1 Not Black Enough: Indigenous Identities and the Problematic Issue of Skin Colour

Chapter 3 has shed some light on the problematic nature of a definition of Aboriginality, or rather Aboriginalities as it is impossible to capture all Aboriginal cultures and identities under a singular cover term. However, this is exactly what has been done from the eighteenth century onwards. The British colonisers and their descendants chose not to see the plurality of different nations, cultures and languages in Australia and instead summarised them all as Aboriginal. Furthermore, they began to define what it means to be Aboriginal and who is Aboriginal. Numerous of these colonial stereotypes have survived until today, the most prominent being skin colour as a marker of Aboriginality. Sentences such as 'You do not look like an Aborigine / a *real* Aborigine' are still commonly heard in Australia. Next to a jet-black skin colour racist stereotypes reduce Aboriginality to either living traditionally in the bush or hanging around drunk and unemployed in urban parks.

Melissa Lucashenko vehemently refuses to limit Aboriginality to a racist image constructed over the years by white colonisers and imposed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, denying them a voice and identity of their own. In her novels the Aboriginal characters seldom have dark skin colour, dark hair and flat noses, but come in all shades, occupy multiple roles, spaces and places and possess distinctive identities and values. In *Mullumbimby*, for example, the main protagonist Jo is described as being "coffee-skinned" (86) and having "ambiguous colour" (201). Her daughter Ellen's skin

is even "lily-white" (236), as her father is non-Indigenous. Jo was raised in Brisbane, but moved to the hinterland town Mullumbimby in order to buy back a piece of ancestral land. She is a single mother and has a university degree in Australian history and comparative literature. Both Twoboy and Humbug have dark skin, but apart from that they are quite different. Jo's boyfriend Twoboy is a law student at university, while Humbug lives in the park and is frequently involved in quarrels with several white authorities, such as the police, the hospital and a mall manager. Jo notices that for tourists he is an "Authentic Aboriginal Elder" (64), being dark-skinned, illiterate and poor. In *Steam Pigs* Sue is of "olive skin" (11) and has already had an abortion as a teenager. Most of her relatives deny their Aboriginality. Her boyfriend Roger is "of the pale freckly type […] [with] reddish-blonde [hair] […] [and] green-grey eyes" (20), but strongly identifies as Aboriginal and is an Aboriginal Studies student. He is often drunk and drugged and has serious anger management problems. In *Hard Yards* the situation is interesting, as the protagonist Roo does not know that he is Aboriginal. When he asks his white Australian father about his mother, Graeme says, "'She was…' He paused as the brown face came back. […] 'Oh, well, yeah, she had brown hair and brown eyes. Wog father, see, Maltese he was.' Graeme invented as he went along" (39). Graeme's stuttering response, the narrator's hint "Graeme invented", the fact that Roo was given up for adoption in combination with the novel's epigraph "It was genocide" (iv) taken from the report of the *Inquiry into the Removal of Aboriginal Children* and the Kings' speculations that Roo might be Murri and a victim of the Stolen Generation (39) indicate, however, that Roo is in fact Aboriginal. Not much is known about the life of the King family other than that they are working-class and experience racism at a daily basis and at least one family member has died in custody after being bashed by the police. All these different characters are only a selection of Lukashenko's repertoire and thus show the plurality and diversity of Indigenous identities, lives and values. The only thing they all seem to have in common is the racism they are confronted with both directly and indirectly, personal and institutional[13].

The theme of identity and belonging is essential in all of Lucashenko's novels. *Steam Pigs* is essentially a bildungsroman that follows seventeen-year-old Sue on her quest for identity and empowerment. Leane analysed Sue's development with the help of Arnold van Genepp's rites of passage – a three-step-model divided into separation, transition and incorporation (Gennep 11). Sue initiates her separation stage when she leaves

[13] Racism in Lucashenko's novels will be discussed in section 5.4.

Townsville and starts a life on her own in Eagleby. At that time her identity is quite ambivalent, as she has "no clue" (*Steam Pigs* 54) about the culture and history of her people (Leane 114), though she does know that she is Aboriginal. Having been brought up by a mother who had been brainwashed to the extent that she no longer thought of herself as black but white (*Steam Pigs* 166), Sue is unsure about her identity. She is the steam pig of the novel's title – "something that doesn't fit properly, a square peg in a round hole. A mongrel. Something not really definable, you know? A white blackfella" (146). In the beginning, for Sue "[h]aving a bit of Aboriginal blood was largely an irrelevance in her life, she tanned easy and could sprint at school, that was about the size of it" (9). She has internalised the racist ideology of measurable degrees of Aboriginality, such as half-blood and quadroon, which can also be seen from her initial inability to accept her light-skinned, red-haired and freckled boyfriend Roger as Aboriginal, and her conclusion that "[t]ogether the two [Sue and Roger] might add up to a *real* Aboriginal" [emphasis added] (21). Roger, on the other, identifies strongly as Aboriginal and defines Aboriginality not as skin colour but attitude and internal belonging: "[w]here I come from we just say we're all Aboriginal, eh? None of that half-caste, quarter-caste bullshit. Like, I've got Scots and Irish too, I won't deny that, but my heart's with the blackfellas. Waka Waka I am" (20-21). Later, however, the truthfulness of this statement is questioned by some characters who observe that Roger "likes the idea of being black more than the reality of it" (161). Roger seems to associate Aboriginality primarily with oppression and also has a distorted version of Aboriginal culture in which it is his right to bash Sue. His supposedly deep connection to his family in Cherbourg also seems to be more an idea than reality.

Nevertheless, Roger functions as her teacher and mentor in Aboriginal issues and thus marks the beginning of Sue's transition stage. However, O'Reilly notes correctly that he is "far from an ideal mentor, and […] certainly not a desirable role model for Indigenous men" ("Exploring" 2) due to his highly violent nature. Nevertheless, Roger "woke her up" (*Steam Pigs* 54) and thus instigates Sue's development. Until she befriends Kerry and Rachel, Roger is her only acquaintance with whom she can talk about her Aboriginality, as her brother Dave, who is her only relative in Eagleby (apart from his two children), is no help as he follows in his mother's denial of their Aboriginality:

> Dave was such a coconut, […] he just didn't understand that stuff … about assimilation, and claiming your heritage back off the migs. It was all too complicated for Sue to try and explain to him, he'd just mock and ask her when

> she was going to put in for land rights, like she had no right to and it was all a bit of a joke. The whites had done a real good job on him, alright. (166)

All of her other relatives live in Townsville and most of them deny or do not care about their Aboriginality either. Only her cousin Jackie and her brother Mick "knew the score" (166) though it is unknown how deep their identification reaches. Mick, for example, is, on the one hand, proud to say that he is "fair dinkum Aussie mate, 100 per center" (153), but on the other hand he is dismissive to reveal anything further with regard to his heritage in front of strangers. Mick has also internalised colonialist thinking and regards himself bitterly as only a "part-Aboriginal" (161).

Over the course of the novel Sue begins to identify more strongly as Aboriginal and at some point even wants her skin to be darker (127). However, this shows that she still associates Aboriginality with skin colour and she is not alone with this opinion: "Murries like her were told they weren't black at all, and to claim Aboriginality was all a big con. […] Even the papers, […] what did she see a few months ago but a headline screaming about tribal people up north claiming back blue-eyed blonde babies. Like they had no right to their own kids" (167). Sue recognises the irony of this as just some decades earlier everyone who was "a little bit dark was the same as […] a real true blackfella" (166). Sue is also trapped in other white 'definitions' of or stereotypes about Aboriginal people, for example that domestic violence is "part of being Murri" (145). Kerry, her non-Indigenous feminist friend and new mentor, corrects her as follows:

> I'm just saying you're confusing colonisation with culture, and blackness with oppression. […] It's manipulative bullshit that whites use to fuck minorities all the time, internalized oppression, letting us define what makes you who you are, and till you get over this hurdle, way or the other. What you've more or less said is what most whites think, too, that there's nothing more to being Aboriginal than drinking and fighting and being poor … but that's just the garbage we've given you since Cook arrived. You could live in a palace and still be a Murri in your heart. (147)

O'Reilly interprets the fact that Kerry and not Roger is the ideal mentor for Sue as an ironic echo of history, namely white people in power thinking they know best what Aboriginality actually means and trying to 'civilise' the Aboriginal 'savages' ("Exploring" 10), though he admits that Kerry "does not *impose* an Aboriginal identity on Sue and the kind of Indigenous identity she encourages Sue to embrace is one that is likely a product of dialogue with Indigenous people, rather than a European construction" (3). This problematic relationship between Sue and Kerry and Rachel will be discussed in detail in section 5.4.

Sue has reached the incorporation stage when she has settled in Brisbane and begun her Aboriginal studies courses at university: she has swapped drugs and alcohol for Aboriginal literature, wears red, black and yellow and begins to develop a deep feeling of belonging. In that very passage where Sue walks confidently through Brisbane Lucashenko uses "the Murri girl" (*Steam Pigs* 239) as a synonym for Sue and thus highlights that she has found her belonging and embraced her Indigenous identity.

In *Mullumbimby* Aboriginality is essentially linked with culture, land and family. Although Jo's parents have advised her to "[b]e white" (86), she has been instructed in the Aboriginal ways by Aunty Barb (11) and knows some Aboriginal language. However, Aunty Barb died "before [Jo] was old enough to really listen" (60), so in order to deepen her knowledge and connection Jo buys a patch of her ancestors' land. Standing on her own land, Jo is proud to identify as an Aboriginal woman: "Here I am, my budgeree[14] jagan[15]. Here I am. Know me for who I am, a Goorie jalgani[16], jinungalehla[17] here, poor and ignorant though I might be, I'm here at last" (22). Jo is aware of white constructions of what it means to be Aboriginal that mainly have to do with skin colour and living traditionally. She herself has "ambiguous colour" (201), but her daughter is "lily-white" (236). When Ellen dreams about her rich future as an artist, Jo is less euphoric: "Ah, if only. The jahjam hadn't yet realized that the world didn't want Aboriginal art by pale Goorie girls on the east coast. Buyers wanted exotica, dots and circles, red dust and people of Twoboy's colour – the real Aboriginals, cos they, the dugais, said so" (214). The quote is remindful of Sue's speculation that she and Roger, both being pale, "might add up to a real Aboriginal" (*Steam Pigs* 21). Unlike Sue, however, Jo is aware that dark skin colour and living traditionally, which is in the context of this stereotype often associated with primitiveness, are only white constructions of 'true' Aboriginality. Nonetheless, she acknowledges the power of both the construction and the dugais who are still able to impose definitions on non-white minorities, in that case the Aboriginal population of Australia. Jo is also aware that skin colour is a powerful outward marker of Aboriginality, though of course it cannot be trusted. For her light-skinned daughter Ellen the car that she paints in Aboriginal colours is her means of having "automatic visibility" (*Mullumbimby* 236) and Jo reflects

[14] budgeree = good (*Mullumbimby* 283)
[15] jagan = land (284)
[16] jalgani = woman (284)
[17] jinungalehla = standing (284)

that it would "do Ellen good to have a bit more recognition, help her feel okay about living in that lily-white skin" (236).

Similarly to *Steam Pigs*, *Mullumbimby* is a book about identity and belonging, though it is concerned with different aspects of identity. While in *Steam Pigs* Sue undergoes development with regard to her Aboriginal identity in that she begins to understand what it means to her, Jo in *Mullumbimby* already identifies strongly as Aboriginal from the beginning onwards. What changes in the course of the novel is her identification as mother. This development is highlighted by the very first and the very last sentence in the book. The book begins with the perspective of Jo as an aunt: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, reflected Jo, that a teenager armed with a Nikko pen is a pain in the fucking neck, and if it isn't then it fucken well oughta be. For here came Timbo […]" (1). Unlike her nephew Timbo her daughter Ellen is mentioned neither in name nor relationship, remaining an anonymous teenager. Jo's sympathy is with Timbo as well. At the end, however, when Jo has embraced her role as mother and the importance of it, the perspective has changed: "It is a fact universally acknowledged, she thought, bending to kiss the top of Ellen's head, that a teenager armed with a Nikko pen is a wonder to behold, a precious, precious thing that we all must keep close to our hearts, and protect by any means necessary. And if it isn't, then it fucken well oughta be" (280). Here Lucashenko uses the same Jane Austen quote as starting point as in the first sentence, but the tone and the meaning are completely different. Ellen is mentioned by name and the relationship between her and her mother is highlighted by caring gestures and positive word choices. She is no longer a "pain in the fucking neck" (1) that harasses Jo's nephew Timbo, but a precious wonder that has to be protected and loved and comes first before everybody else. Thus Jo has developed from an aunty to a mother and she realises that Ellen is her belonging rather than the land: "It seemed such a short time ago that the biggest mystery she faced had been […] who they belonged to; a question, and a state of being, that now seemed pathetically simple" (258).

Ellen is more difficult to analyse as the reader is only seldom allowed to know her thoughts. Nonetheless, it can be said without doubt that she is in a typical pubertal identity crisis trying to make sense of her identities as daughter, teenager, artist and Aboriginal. The climax of her crisis is reached when she discovers that the lines of her hands form a map of Bundjalung land, thus deeply connecting her with the land and her Aboriginal ancestors. This is also the turning point for Jo, who is torn between "claustrophobia that surged through her at Ellen's clinging […] [and] the almost

overwhelming urge to reef her hand away to freedom" and the decision to "become Aunty Barb, keep Ellen close in her turn" (248). However, Jo cannot fulfill her promise to "become her own elder" (261). Lacking the answers she decides to leave Ellen in order to seek out elders who have the knowledge. In her absence Ellen burns her hands in order to be 'normal' again – without an elder to guide her, Ellen does not understand the message of her hands and considers herself a "freak of nature" (258). Finally the Aboriginal elder Granny Nurrung arrives as a deus ex machina and solves the mystery of Ellen's hands. She interprets the map as a sign of belonging to Bundjalung land and promise of future importance for the land. Thus she predicts that after Sam Ellen will be the protector of the sacred waterhole on Rob Starr's farm and ensure the continuation of the talga and Bundjalung culture.

In *Hard Yards* talking about Aboriginality is difficult as Roo does not know that he is Aboriginal. Still he feels a deep connection to and belonging with Murries and jokes that he "musta been born white by accident" (203). For Roo the Aboriginal community of Brisbane offers him a family and justice – things which he was denied in the 'white world'. Roo had been handed over from family to family until he was welcomed into the King family. His biological father Graeme tries to reconnect with his son but he eventually fails when Roo discovers that he was responsible for Stanley's death. The white justice system is also unable to bring him unto the right track, whereas the Aboriginal law allows him a second chance with Shaleena and her family. Roo identifies strongly with the Aboriginal community and is bitterly disappointed when he learns that both his parents are non-Indigenous (at least that is what he is told): "I'm white, thought Roo heavily" (40). Nonetheless, he does not perceive white people as his kin, especially when they are racist towards Aboriginal people. This is confirmed when Roo reacts quite strongly to an allusion that a racist white man in a bar is Roo's 'brother': "Racist prick's no bruvva of mine" (55). For Roo, therefore, belonging is not linked to skin colour though he is aware that it can be a barrier. Shaleena's relative Jimmy, for example, excludes Roo on the basis of his skin colour: "he would always be white. He could never belong" (208). After a controlled fight as part of the Aboriginal traditional law also Jimmy is able to accept Roo as a member of the family.

In conclusion, Lucashenko is clear in her message that Aboriginality has nothing to do with skin colour. However, the stereotype that only someone with dark skin constitutes a 'real' Aboriginal is still dominant in present-day Australia. The majority of Lucashenko's main characters have white or olive skin, like the author herself, and are

seriously affected by the constant need to prove their Aboriginality. Some characters have even internalised the colonialist stereotype of the 'real', i.e. dark skinned and flat-nosed Aborigine and the racist concepts of half- or quarter-caste.

5.2 The Importance of Land: Longing and Belonging Between the City and the Bush

Land and belonging is a recurrent theme in Indigenous writing, both prose and poetry, fiction and non-fiction. The dispossession of land and fragmentation of families during the time of protection and assimilation has left countless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the dark about their tribe or even their Indigeneity. Gelder and Salzman argue that "[c]ontemporary Aboriginal fiction negotiates a pathway between the fact of dispossession and the need to articulate a sense of belonging, so that […] the protagonists might be both alienated and connected, separated from family but genealogically linked to community and a sense of indigenous nationhood that is ultimately empowering" (62). The paradox of being separated and connected at the same time can be explained by a well-known statement by the Aboriginal activist Patrick Dodson: "[l]and cannot be given or taken away" (qtd. in Strohscheidt 67), since according to Aboriginal beliefs, humans, non-humans and land all descend from the ancestral beings, who transformed the land by leaving traces of their doings as hills, rocks, rivers, lakes and other physical features in a time known as Jukurrpa[18] (Bambrick 75-76). Therefore, Aboriginal people and land are interrelated and inseparably belong to each other. In *Hard Yards* an anonymous Aboriginal man from the north reminds Stanley and Daryll of this:

> [D]on't go thinking you lost your country, boy. Said it was still there waiting, said the spirits are all 'round, daytime, nighttime, allatime, and they very patient. […] [H]e reckons, 'When you know your country proper way, it grows into you, grows through your heart and your blood and then they can't never take it away from you cos there's no difference between it and you.' That's what he said – they can't never take it away. (14)

Land and belonging to land is the key issue in *Mullumbimby*. For Jo living on the land of her ancestors "means everything" (164): it is "the loadstone, the foundation of

[18] Jukurrpa, or Bugaregara or Altjiranga (depending on the Aboriginal language), has been translated as Dreaming or Dreamtime in English. However, Indigenous writing protocols (Australia Council for the Arts) and also several non-Indigenous several scholars, such as Strohscheidt and Murphy, have noted the inappropriateness of this translation due to its rigid reduction of a complex belief system into one word that, additionally, carries connotations of sleep, childish innocence and, most importantly, irreality (Strohscheidt 68).

absolutely everything in culture" (50) and as such "the blueprint of your life, and the only thing worth working for" (50). In the beginning Jo does everything for her recently bought stretch of Bundjalung land in Mullumbimby: she works on it for hours every day and even subordinates her daughter Ellen's wishes of residence, unable to accept that she does not understand what it means to be "owners again of some Bundjalung land [and] [t]o take back even a tiny fraction of what had been lost" (36). By the end of the novel, however, Jo's priorities change when it is discovered that a map of the valley is formed by the lines of Ellen's hands, making her a valuable piece of evidence for Twoboy's land claim, in which Jo and Ellen are now inseparably involved. It is then that Jo recognises and embraces her role as a mother and puts her daughter's wellbeing before the land claim. Interestingly, this decision binds her even more strongly to the land, her ancestors (especially Aunty Barb, whose spirit is affirming Jo) and every Bundjalung woman:

> Jo now felt the fleshy boundaries of her skin weirdly dissolving. She became tremendously heavy and solid. There was no need for knives, nor even for argument, for she was as massive as a mountain, as heavy and immovable as a Chincogan or Bottlebrush. Standing in her kitchen with her hands on her daughter's quaking shoulders, she had somehow grown large enough to contain every Bundjalung woman who had ever stood near the place she stood. With her palms on Ellen's shoulders, she was a thousand black women, ten thousand black women, a mighty army of Goorie women who had been holding their jahjams[19] safely on this same spot for tens of thounsand of years. As her body swelled and rippled with this army's massive strength, Jo came to understand that she was no more alone than the stones in the creek were alone, or the blades of grass in the paddocks. (250)

Having found the answer to who she is, Jo is *becoming* the land: she is becoming Mt Chincogan and Bottlebrush Hill, two local landmarks of Mullumbimby and important sacred sites in Aboriginal culture, and with it the women who have lived on this land. She no longer feels alone, craving for a "mob to call your own" (82) – she finally knows where she belongs and what she has to do.

Though Jo and Twoboy are both full of the desire to reclaim their ancestors' land, their approach is completely different. First, while Twoboy has decided to file a Native Title claim and thus prove his right to the land in a white court, Jo, not knowing where her ancestors are from exactly, has "circled right around the hideous politics of colonial fallout, and bought back the ancestral land herself" (42). Second, their purpose in reclaiming their land is different: Twoboy's reasons point towards the past and things

[19] jahjam = child (*Mullumbimby* 284)

long gone – he wants to heal the land so that his ancestors may rest in peace and "might show us what we've lost" (165). Jo, on the other hand, bought the stretch of land for more future-oriented reasons, such as belonging, security and happiness for herself and her offspring (164). Thirdly, Jo's labour on and care for the land has made her deeply connected with it and she communicates with nature as much as it communicates with her. Jo greets her land with closed eyes and bare feet in the grass and in response a wedgetail arrives to welcome her home (22). Similarly Jo greets birds, such as a blue heron (mulinyin), with the typical Aboriginal greeting "jingawahlu" (51). Again the birds respond by giving signs: a blue heron blocks her way when riding (210), a flock of fairy-wrens show her Starr and Sam performing a ritual (253) and another pair of wrens tell her to go west for her questions to be answered (263). The weather also seems to reflect Jo's mood, as when her colt Comet dies, it is pouring never-ending rain (117). Her connection to nature reaches its climax when the hills in the World Heritage park start singing to her (97). Interestingly, the hills (or, as is later discovered, the lyrebirds) do not sing to Twoboy – even the recording of the talga Jo has made with her mobile phone does not play for him (101). This is explained towards the end of the book by Granny Nurrung: "he don't know this place. Not like we do" (275). By caring for the land Jo has come to know it and the land and nature responded by communicating with her, sharing with her the knowledge it had. Twoboy, on the other hand, has spent his time in court and in archives "retrieving little bits of songs, stories, dances" (101). Granny Nurrung concludes that he has "still got a lot to learn" (274).

In *Steam Pigs* country and nature only seem to play a minor role at first glance – on a closer look, however, they are omnipresent and important to Sue's development over the course of the novel. Sue has a bond to nature from the beginning: in order to "coax greenery into the Eagleby dust and rocks" (16) she has planted a row of bottlebrush tree seedlings. Bottlebrush trees are native to Australia and can thus be seen as a symbol for Sue and her growing sense of Aboriginality. Sue's decision to plant only indigenous trees is also reminiscent of Jo in *Mullumbimby*, who is literally on a holy quest to rid her land of all non-indigenous plants. Unlike Jo, however, Sue is in the beginning yet unsure about her love for and connection to nature: "When she looked after her bottlebrush trees it was like she was in another world, earthspeaking […]. This love of nurturing growing things sat *paradoxically* in her" [emphasis added] (*Steam Pigs* 17). At the end of the book, when Sue has embraced her Aboriginality and found her belonging in Brisbane, she metaphorically becomes a tree, a rivergum – again a plant

native to Australia: "her belonging roots reached deep into the soil, anchoring her like an old rivergum" (240). Interestingly, Lucashenko also employs a nature simile in *Mullumbimby* (although using a mountain for comparison and not a tree) precisely at the point when Jo has finally found and embraced her role as mother: "she was as massive as a mountain, as heavy and immovable as a Chincogan or Bottlebrush" (250). In both novels the simile expresses the connection between Sue/Jo and the land and thus marks the end of their search for belonging.

Sue's belonging to land is, however, crucially different to Jo's or Twoboy's in *Mullumbimby* as she claims Yuggera country, especially the area of Brisbane, as her own, though she does not know if that is the land of her ancestors. Her great-grandmother had been put on a mission on Palm Island and her descendants settled in Townsville, who were unwilling or unable to tell Sue "which was her tribe" (*Steam Pigs* 150). Yet Sue is craving for belonging and thus clutches immediately at the straw named Brisbane when she realises that it is in fact "Murri land, whatever they'd done to it or put on it. It was Yuggera country – shining towers of wealth or no – and that meant she had a connection to work from" (239). This approach is problematic, as pre-Cook Australia was not a united nation but divided into hundreds of individual nations and a member of the Bundjalung nation, for example, was a stranger to the country of the neighbouring Yuggera tribe. Thus, her connection to Brisbane is disputable. For her it would be impossible to file an official land claim[20] as that would require, amongst others, proof that the "continuity of connection was maintained [by her family] […], especially during any period of separation from the land" (Queensland Government 4), which is definitely not true in her case. Nevertheless, from a pan-Aboriginal perspective, Sue has a connection to any traditional land and her claim is thus valid as an individual choice of home and belonging.

The destructive impact of colonisation on the land and nature is frequently addressed in the novels, especially in *Mullumbimby*. Jo criticises the clearance of rainforests and the planting of introduced plants, which she refers to as "green cancer" (204), following the arrival of the British colonists. She often reflects how the landscape would have looked in the old days: "the rainforest still healthy and filled with animals and birdlife, not yet doomed by the axes of men who – months or years from anything they thought of as home – had tried to slash and log and burn their way into freedom here" (6). Jo has

[20] On a side note, even if Sue had the necessary evidence for a native title claim, it would not be valid for Brisbane, but only for vacant land owned by the government or similar types of land (Tanner 151). More details on the prerequisites of a native title claim will be given in section 5.5.

made it her goal to rid her farm of non-Indigenous plants which she considers useless for the native fauna and dangerous for the survival of the indigenous flora. On her quest for 'indigenous purity' she seems to forget, however, that her beloved horses are also an introduced species and not native to Australia. When her colt Comet dies Jo becomes even more aware of the destructive, and in Comet's case even lethal, effect of colonisation on the land:

> As she drove from the farm into Mullum each morning, she ruminated on the clear fact that the country roads she travelled were lined with fences, boundaries, impenetrable borders. She saw with fresh eyes the road signs and their host of admonitions to slow, to stop, to give way. Where previously she had seen paddocks and house lots (and admired or dismissed the fences around them), now she saw mainly the fences themselves. […] Everything in the world, she began to see, was bordered. Almost everything was locked up and claimed by other people. The dugai had come and had planted that bloody flag of theirs at Botany Bay, and in the intervening centuries had taken it upon themselves to lace the country tight, using bitumen and wire and timber to bind their gift of a continent to themselves. Jo obsessed over this inclination of the dugai to take things – normal, natural things like earth and creeks and trees – and tie them up in their endless clever ways. (133)

Jo's sudden realisation and dislike of fences stem from the fact that a barbed wire fence erected on supposedly her land without her knowledge was the cause of her horse Comet's death.

Basically, Lucashenko's novels are set in four different types of landscape: the bush, the hinterland farm, outer suburbia and inner suburbia. The bush is represented as a site of healing, escape and reconnection. In *Steam Pigs* the bush is juxtaposed with the "death of outer suburbia" (5) that is Eagleby. Sue never doubts the "recuperative powers of the bush" (55) and sees it as a healing centre for depression, aggression, substance abuse and emptiness – the 'ingredients' of every-day life in Eagleby: "[i]f you could listen to the early morning magpies, or see the sun dawning on dew-wet grass withoug feeling something holy, you may as well go and put a bullet ghrough your head, as far as she was concerned" (55). In *Mullumbimby* the bush is a place where the ancestors' presence is strongest, as it is there that Jo hears the talga of her ancestors and Ellen discovers that the lines of her hands form a map of the valley. Twoboy is also spending hours in the bush, a place where he hopes to be able to "talk to the ancestors, straight up" (233). Yet the bush is also depicted as something dangerous, a place with poisonous animals, labyrinthine paths and sacred sites that must not be trespassed.

The hinterland represents another place of reconnection and peace, although its peace may be disturbed by racism and other legacies of colonialism. In *Mullumbimby* Jo's

farm in the Byron Shire, which is compared to Narnia and heaven, offers her the quietude and connection to nature she lacked in Brisbane: "[e]ven your blood pumped more slowly, leisurely winding its way through arteries and veins, taking its own sweet time. No rush hour here, and still not a traffic light to be found in the shire. And enough shades of green to put Ireland to shame" (49-50). Most importantly, however, her farm gives her a home and satisfies her thirst for belonging and living on the land of her ancestors.

Outer suburbia is the dominant setting in *Steam Pigs* and depicted highly negatively. In this Lucashenko "perpetuate[s] the anti-suburban tradition in Australian fiction" (O'Reilly 1). Eagleby is a suburb of Logan City and "[t]wentyfive minutes from respectability" (*Steam Pigs* 7), which is Brisbane. The everyday life of its inhabitants circles around work, violence, substance abuse and boredom:

> Everyone slumped and sweated [the heat] out in their pokey rooms in that death of outer suburbia that was Eagleby. […] [T]he population melded into limpid living rooms, tranced by the flicker of flannels on screens. […] Too cowed to admit the killing boredom of their existence, too dulled to imagine more than the Six by Slater, the inhabitants of Slammer Street would sit and charge on and cheer with cheerless eyes. Polytheists these, worshipping the twin gods of cricket and TV on Saturdays when – *bliss!* – the two came together in a coupling of men and machine. (5)

In the beginning Sue is part of Eagleby and its daily agenda of alcohol, drugs, crime and violence: she drinks, smokes marijuana, steals alcohol from the liquor shop and is frequently bashed by Roger. For her these things are a "testimony to her belonging. She knew she was half at-home in the dirt, and resented the knowledge. It shows in me face, she worried, it's written in me bones. I'm sinking. I'll drown here and I won't even know" (6). Alhough Sue is scared of drowning in Eagleby's dirt, boredom and violence, moving to Brisbane is not an option for her at this stage, as she has seen to many "[s]lum kids" (6) failing in their attempt to 'make it' and decides that "[a]mbition was for the fucken birds, man" (8). With time, however, Sue recognises that Eagleby and outer suburbia are destructive places that have to be left behind in favour of inner suburbia (O'Reilly 7).

Inner suburbia is depicted as positive, multicultural and vibrant. Henderson also notes that while "the outer-suburbs are residual spaces of patriarchal ideology, […] the inner-suburbs represent feminine, often feminist values, in a more heterotopic region" (73). In Brisbane Sue studies at university and shares her flat, having declared it woman-zone only, with another female student. Alcohol and substance abuse soon seem to be

defeated by Aboriginal literature. Nevertheless, Henderson warns to interpret Sue's development as a "classic bourgeois trajectory of self-improvement, or the feminist quest for personal liberation" as it is "undercut by Sue's growing awareness of her Aboriginal identity and its specific history of space" (78). After all she only fully embraces Brisbane as her home when she likewise embraces her Indigenous identity. This means that she does not (only) occupy the "white feminists' or yuppies' Brisbane, but Yuggera country" (78).

In summary, belonging and (ancestral) land is deeply intertwined in Melissa Lucashenko's novels, especially in *Mullumbimby* and *Steam Pigs*. Both Jo and Sue only find their inner belonging once they are on their ancestral land, or in Sue's case what she adopts as her ancestral land. This land does not have to be in the outback or the hinterland but can also be situated in major cities such as Brisbane. The only destructive place in Lucashenko's novels is outer suburbia – a place that is corrupted by male violence, substance abuse and unemployment.

5.3 'Not Like the Old Days': Culture Continuation, Blending and Loss

It is estimated that before European arrival around 250 distinct language groups existed in Australia, dialects not included (Walsh 1). In the following two centuries more than half of these languages became extinct and of the surviving languages the majority is currently on the verge of extinction (2). This fate was shared by other components of culture, such as cultural knowledge, rituals and traditions, though unlike language decline it cannot be expressed in numbers. The reason for this loss or fragmentation of culture was the British invasion and the subsequent racist policies of 'protection' and assimilation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were banned from using their native language and performing traditional rituals. The climax was reached when Aboriginal children were deliberately taken from their families and raised in white foster families so that the Aboriginal cultures would cease to exist once and for all (cf. Armitage).

Fortunately, these racist government policies did not succeed (completely), but their consequences are still felt in present-day Australia. All of Lucashenko's novels address this issue, either more indirectly as in *Hard Yards* and *Steam Pigs*, or more explicitly as in *Mullumbimby*. For example, both Roo in *Hard Yards* and Sue in *Steam Pigs* were raised white: Roo because he was adopted and brought up in complete ignorance of his

(implied) Aboriginal heritage, and Sue because her mother denied her own Aboriginality. However, both characters regain some cultural knowledge – Roo, still unaware of his Aboriginal descent, is educated by Daryll, the cousin of his Aboriginal girlfriend, and Sue is "woke[n] […] up" (*Steam Pigs* 54) by her Aboriginal boyfriend Roger. Therefore, Lucashenko also celebrates the resilience of Indigenous culture, even in urban settings. Towards the end of *Hard Yards*, hope for the future is expressed when the Brisbane elder Uncle Eddie finds a prospective lawman in Darryl and thus ensures the continuation of culture and Aboriginal law.

In *Mullumbimby* the situation for the characters at the beginning is different. Though Jo's parents advised her to "[b]e Quiet. Be Obedient. Be White" (86) in order to "protect their coffee-skinned kids from the dangerous world of dugai power and dugai hypocrisy" (86), the Aboriginal elder Aunty Barb educated Jo in the Aboriginal ways, teaching her respect, cultural knowledge and some language, but died "before [Jo] was old enough to really listen" (60). Jo considers herself as a "*blackfella 101*[21]. A lot of it forgotten now, or pushed aside in the daily grind of paying bills, but, ah, some things remained. Some things remained" (11). Similarly, Twoboy has "grown up in culture" (59), but "still sometimes feel[s] like [he] know[s] fuck all, eh" (60).

In *Mullumbimby* Bundjalung culture is contrasted with white Australian culture, though it is often simplified into a more pan-Aboriginal view of black vs white world view. As a person with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage Jo has incorporated both cultures, yet her knowledge of Indigenous culture is fragmented. In *Steam Pigs* and *Hard Yards* the fragmentation of culture is even deeper, as the characters only know very little to almost nothing about it. This fragmentation will be analysed in the following paragraphs with the help of Hofstede's onion-model of culture (see Figure 3). Geert Hofstede identified five layers of culture, namely symbols, heroes, rituals (constituting the practices of culture) and values. These layers make up "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (9).

[21] 101 is the code number given to introductory courses at university. Thus, Jo thinks of herself as an Aboriginal person with a basic introduction in Aboriginal culture.

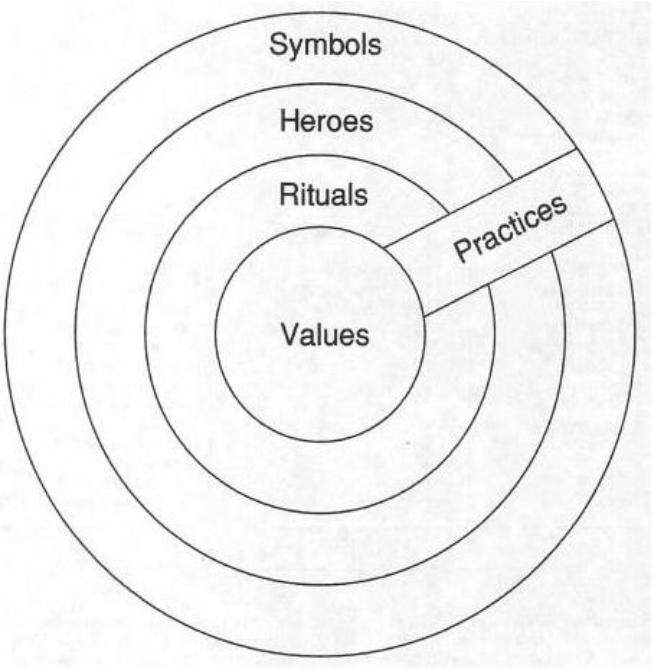

Figure 3: Layers of culture (Hofstede 11).

The most visible and also most superficial layer is symbols which refer to language and objects (Hofstede 10). In *Mullumbimby* Jo's native tongue is English, but she has a basic set of Bundjalung vocabulary at her command, especially for animals, land and relationships, as well as the more general Aboriginal English. Most of the time when Indigenous terms are used they are used instead of the English words, such as *jahjam* instead of child, but sometimes they are also used in parallel: "*Mura-kurahr*, Jo thought automatically, straight after she though *ibis*" (62). Though English is her mother tongue, Bundjalung language is the proper language for her. Therefore, it is even shameful for Jo when she realises just how fragmented her knowledge is. For example, she cannot remember the "proper word" (159) for turkey and at the end of the book she is unable to translate *kalwunybah*: "'Place of something,' she answered, ashamed of the few pathetic scraps she knew" (276). Unlike English Bundjalung language is not only a means of communication but also a carrier of identity and culture. The Yolngu elder Laurie Baymarrwangga summarised the meaning of language as follows: "The important thing about language and what it means is that language contains the essence of the ancestors, every word comes from place, and identifies people and links to land, country, the dreaming; they are all inherent in language, therefore it means the people, the land, everything" (*Fighting for Language* 4). Apart from her way of speaking Jo also employs other symbols that make her ethnic belonging visible to the outside world, for example the Aboriginal flag in front of her house and her car repainted in the Aboriginal

colours yellow, red and black and covered with Jukurrpa animals by Ellen and Kym. Though Jo at first slightly resents the "automatic visibility" (*Mullumbimby* 236), she concedes that it would "do Ellen good to have a bit more recognition, help her feel okay about living in that lily-white skin" (236).

In *Steam Pigs* symbols are also important for Sue and Roger whose skin colour does not immediately reveal their ethnicity. Roger likes to wear T-shirts with Aboriginal printings and towards the end of the book Sue also begins to wear necklaces in Murri colours, i.e. red, yellow and black – the colours of the Aboriginal flag. At the same time, however, Sue is aware of the problem of symbols: "isn't that the problem in the first place, colours and divisions and flags and whose side are you on boys, and o, what the fuck …" (146). Terms such as Indigenous as opposed to non-Indigenous as well as the Indigenous flag of Australia as opposed to the non-Indigenous one unite the Indigenous people and honour them as a nation, but at the same time keep them literally apart from the non-Indigenous population and make equality and a united Australia difficult. In *Hard Yards*, Darryl wears a red headband, which was originally a status symbol worn by Aboriginal elders and is now a well-known symbol of Aboriginal unity and pride.

The next layer, heroes, is highly fragmented. Jo's teacher and role model, Aunty Barb, passed away too early and the elders in Mullumbimby seem to be no alternative in the beginning. Uncle Humbug seems to be a drunk and slightly mad victim of the Stolen Generation and Granny Nurrung remains silent until the very last pages. Initially, Jo thought that living on the land of her ancestors would be enough, but soon she realises that she needs more than that:

> It rains here, thought Jo, entranced by the spectacle, as if the gods are trying to wash away some terrible story, wash away the blood in the rivers, wash away the names of the true owners of this place. Maybe that's why our connections are so weak, so tenuous, me and Kym and Stevo. They took our ancestors away, and it's pissed down so hard ever since then that the floods have washed away all their footsteps, washed away half our belonging. That's me – a *washed-up* blackfella. […] It was one thing – and a bloody big thing – to buy your country back off the landgrabbers. But how do you buy back a tribe? Where do you shop for a mob to call your own? (*Mullumbimby* 82)

Jo's desperation refers to both past and present heroes and role models. As has been stated in the historical overview in section 2.2.2, Aboriginal resistance and massacres have long been silenced in Australian history books. Similarly forgotten were the names of the hundreds of tribes that had lived on the land before the British arrival and the subsequent dispersal and dispossession. "They took our ancestors away" (82) means

both the silenced ancestors of early colonisation and the more recent victims of displacement that resulted in her having no tribe. This fragmentation is even more visible in *Steam Pigs* as Sue has to cope with her family's denial of their Aboriginality and her ignorance of her family's history and belonging. As Gelder and Salzman note Lucashenko "refuses to present a benign image of Aboriginal family and community life. These things are instead fractured and fragmented" (60). Alcohol, violence and neglect play a key role in this representation. Sue recollects that her brother had to care for her as a child when her mother was too drunk (26). In the end she also learns that her oldest brother James was sexually abused as a child by their father. Furthermore, Roger's cousin Maureen neglects her four children for the sake of "bingo and TV" (27) and Roger himself drowns his anger and sorrows in alcohol, drugs and violence. Sue is aware of the never-ending circle of violence as a result of the lack of appropriate role models for the young generation and the power of self-fulfilling prophecies that especially the dark-skinned children of Maureen are going to experience: "it won't be long, thinks Sue, before the local shop owners and coppers'll have them pegged as Trouble. Another lovely label for them to live up to" (27). In *Hard Yards* the community seems to be more intact. The Aboriginal elder Uncle Eddie is a respected person and a just lawman who is called when problems arise in the community. The novel ends in a hopeful tone as Daryll proves to be a worthy successor of Uncle Eddie. Thus the continuity of leaders and role models in the community seems to be guaranteed.

Rituals compromise the third layer of Hofstede's culture model and include social norms such as greetings as well as religious ceremonies (10). In *Mullumbimby* Jo has been instructed by Aunty Barb in the importance of respect, not only towards people but also towards the land and everything that lives on it:

> Walking past, Jo greeted them [the lilli pilli trees]. 'Jingawahlu baugal jali jali[22]', she whispered, touching the trunks with a soft hand. No call to ignore someone just cos they don't have a feed for you. Respect is a fulltime job, twenty-four seven. The way to behave in the world so that nobody's pride gets trampled, so that anger doesn't get a chance to ripen into disaster. Aunty Barb had shown her that. (11)

Jo also practises other Aboriginal rituals such as the dadirri, a form of meditation described as "[s]it, and look, and listen" (12), and a water ceremony she performs together with Twoboy and her brother-in-law to ensure familiarity between them and

[22] This can be translated as 'Greetings, good trees'.

the water as well as their safety in and around it. Still, half mocking, half in earnest Jo reveals her frustration that she is not living like in "the old days" (236), referring to the matches and insect repellents she is taking with her when she goes into the outback. In several other situations, however, she seriously mourns the lost cultural and spiritual knowledge of her ancestors, sighing that "Aunty Barb would know" (242).

In *Steam Pigs* and *Hard Yards* rituals are highly fragmented to non-existent. Sue, for example, often builds fires in her backyards, but there is no spirituality or ritual connected to it and Dave mocks her as being "real old traaibal [sic] way dat one" (9). For Sue, however, ignorant of her tribe and its cultural rituals, building fires is apart from skin colour and good running skills everything that she associates with Aboriginality in the beginning. In *Hard Yards* Aboriginal law is still practised, which can be seen from the fight between Jimmy and Roo to determine Roo's future with Shaleena. The ritual is opened by the Aboriginal elder Uncle Eddie, who forms a circle together with Jimmy and Roo and listens to both sides. Then the fight is decided, backers are selected for both parties and even spears are offered as weapons but rejected. For Roo the Aboriginal law system is neutral and forgiving unlike the white justice system, as after the fight he is given a second chance with Leena and welcomed back into the family. The Aboriginal customary law is used as a main argument against the stereotype that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are uncivilised. Daryll reacts very strongly to this colonialist myth by comparing the white legal system with his traditional law system: "Our old Law's in everything […], everybloodything in the world, nothing left out, nothing without a place, no Kings, no Queens, no slaves, no servants. Nobody lost, everybody wanted – that's civilised" (188).

The last layer and the core of Hofstede's model are values, a set of personal and social priorities, attitudes and beliefs (5). In *Mullumbimby* the values of the Aboriginal characters are often revealed through juxtaposition with another culture, especially the collective (and highly stereotyped) 'white culture'. Oppositional binaries addressed are, for example, ancestral land vs any land (50), instinctive knowledge about and connection with nature vs ignorance (67, 97, and 175) and caring for nature vs indifference or even destructiveness (6, 23, and 133). As with all oppositional binaries, reality is not that simple – Jo also realises this at the end of the novel, when her white neighbour Rob Starr reveals himself as a protector of a sacred site on his land in collaboration with the Mullumbimby elder Granny Nurrung and her nephew.

In conclusion, in all of Melissa Lucashenko's novels Aboriginal culture is fragmented, though to different extents. In *Hard Yards* and *Steam Pigs* the main protagonists know only very little to nothing about their culture and heritage – Roo because he was adopted and never met his Aboriginal mother (reminding the reader of the Stolen Generation), Sue because of her mother's silence and denial (after being brainwashed by white authorities, who also had removed her mother from her family as part of the Stolen Generation). Lucashenko therefore clearly states that the suppression by non-Indigenous people and colonisation are responsible for the extensive culture loss the Indigenous population was and still is experiencing. In *Mullumbimby* Lucashenko also mourns the knowledge that has been lost, but essentially the novel is a celebration of Bundjalung culture, as it is full of Bundjalung words, rituals and people. The novel can even be seen as an attempt to retain parts of Bundjalung knowledge, similar to Jo and Twoboy's "mutual urge to retain their old people's knowledge" (59) – this is achieved, for example, by the dictionary at the end that lists several Bundjalung words and their translation into English.

5.4 Black vs White: Institutional and Personal Racism

In an interview for her latest book *Mullumbimby*, Melissa Lucashenko said that she is "not writing to make people feel warm and comfortable" (qtd. in Chenery). All of her novels are very outspoken about problematic issues such as racism, both institutional and personal, and also take into consideration both sides – racism against blackfellas and racial prejudice[23] against whitefellas.

At the heart of *Hard Yards* lies the death of the seventeen-year-old Aboriginal young man Stanley, who has recently died in custody. The book was published in 1999, eight years after the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*, which officially disproved the popular rumour that Aboriginal people were more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous people, but instead highlighted the alarming over-representation of Indigenous people in custody and prison. Furthermore, it raised concerns about the care of incarcerated individuals in case they were drugged or injured. The report recommended amongst others that the incarceration rate should drop

[23] The word 'prejudice' instead of 'racism' is used here for the following reason: racism is defined as "prejudice plus power" (Tatum 7). Thus, as the 'white' population of Australia currently holds the power and the privilege, the term 'racism' has to be rejected in favour of 'racial prejudice' when talking about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

(RCIADIC, *Vol. 5* rec. 92) and that custodial care should be improved and the person holding care should be held "legally responsible for the death or injury of the person caused or contributed to by a breach of that duty" (rec. 122b). However, a follow-up report that was published in 1996, three years before the publication of *Hard Yards*, showed that incarceration rates had exploded after the original report and Aboriginal deaths in custody reached a new peak in 1995 with twenty-two fatalities (AHRC, *Deaths* ch. 3.1). Moreover, the report's validity, especially in terms of causes of death, was questioned in 1997 when Eddie Murray's body was exhumed in order to perform a second post-mortem examination. Murray had been arrested in 1981 for drunkenness and allegedly found hanged in his cell one hour afterwards. The Royal Commission acknowledged the possibility of Murray being hanged by police officers, but rejected it as "inexplicable in terms of rational human behaviour" (RCIADIC, *Murray* ch. 13.4). True, but possibly explicable by the irrational human behaviour of racism. The report goes on that no evidence was found for bashing. However, after the family of the deceased had requested exhumation in 1997, a second autopsy found a broken breastbone as a result of heavy bashing (Lee). Nonetheless, investigations continued only slowly and until now nobody has been convicted of Eddie Murray's murder.

This incidence is very similar to the situation in *Hard Yards*. Here several different versions of Stanley's death are mentioned: the official story of the arresting cop, Graeme Madden, is that Stanley hit his head on the footpath at the arrest, fell unconscious in custody and died in the ambulance (154). Stanley's brother Jimmy, on the other hand, reckons that he was hanged in his cell by policemen. When Roo argues that the autopsy does not support that, Jimmy expresses his doubt about a post-mortem examination that was performed by members of the white police system: "'The autopsy never said nothin about hangin,' Jimmy mocked him in a little kid's voice, 'Never said nothin 'bout murder neither, you dumb white fuck – '" (145). In Jimmy's opinion the white legal system burkes evidence and covers its policemen. As a matter of fact, the first coroner's report was indeed found unsatisfactory by the Coronial Inquiry, because the "as yet unexplained internal bleeding [was] inconsistent with a brief scuffle" (49). When Roo presses his father to tell the truth, Graeme hesitantly confesses that violence was involved: "I didn't 'bash' him, […] I smacked him across the face a coupla times, I got him in the chest once, I was aiming for his face. I belted him then, and I'd belt him now. He was a useless smart-mouthed little boong cunt and if you think otherwise ya fucken dreamin. […] But I didn't kill him" (155). Finally, however, Roo puts two and

two together and concludes that Stanley died of internal bleeding as a result of bashing and because Graeme ignored his calls for help as his fear of the dark prevented him from entering Stanley's cell during the power cut. Roo's hypothesis that Graeme is responsible for Stanley's death is confirmed at the end:

> A minute later he […] allowed himself to think, finally, of the thin dead figure of Stanley King. It didn't seem to matter what he did, he couldn't get rid of it, that night, the stench, the screaming. You'd think when bastards were dead and gone, that'd be it, but no. Ghosts are real. […] The dark's full of them. He stood gazing down [from the top of the police HQ], and then something odd, a small, marginal, insignificant hurt, brought him back to the present. In a kind of dream, Graeme Madden […] suddenly understood that the irritating sharpness in his hip was the protruding metal hammer of his police-issue pistol. (221)

Though the court has acquitted Graeme due to insufficient evidence, his own guilt finally overtakes him. The ghost of Stanley King haunts and chases him to the brink of suicide. As Graeme's story breaks off at this point, however, the reader never knows if he did press the trigger.

Police racism can also be seen in numerous other instances in *Hard Yards*. "[Chasing] up a few coons" (63) and "[teaching] [Stanley's] fucken boong mates a fucken good lesson" (63) is represented as the favourite evening entertainment of white policemen. What is more, in private Graeme and his colleagues refer to Aboriginal people as "coons" (63), "boongs" (50) and "black cunt[s]" (63), though in official situations he feigns neutrality by using the term "indigenous males" (96). Nonetheless, the use of lower instead of the upper case for 'Indigenous' uncovers him as disrespectful[24], at least to the reader, who is able to see the written realisation.

In *Steam Pigs* none of the main protagonists experience police racism at the beginning, as they are probably 'protected' by their pale skin. When Sue visits her home town Townsville, however, she observes a situation in which a policeman seizes the wrong person but does anything to arrest him anyway:

> 'Are you resisting arrest, are you? How dya expect us to tell you apart, boy, you coons look the same to me at night.' The pig stiffened bunging on the outraged aggro. 'Nuh, I'm not resisting nothing, butya got the wrong bloke, it's not me! […] You got no warrant for me, ya can't fucken arrest me, I ain't done anything, it's not me, it's me brother I keep telling ya, ya –' 'Indecent language in a public space,' said the cop, smiling triumphantly, 'come on, you've got an

[24] According to official protocols the capital should be used in 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal' when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (NSW Department of Commerce 9). This shows respect and distinguishes the Indigenous people of Australia from indigenous populations in other countries such as the USA.

> appointment in the city.' 'Ah, what do ya want me for, ya fucken cunt? Ya all the same, fucken captain cook cunts.' (181)

As in *Hard Yards* arresting Aboriginal people seems to be a satisfying game for white policemen. For Sue and her cousins there is nothing that they can do, as stepping in would only result in their arrest too. For Sue the scene also brings back the memory of "little black Oliver" (182), one of her classmates in Townsville, who died in custody two years before. The passage highlights the powerlessness of Aboriginal people against racism and abuse of power by white authorities, and explains the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody that was discovered by the Royal Commission in 1991 and the following years up to now. The reason is simple: "[c]os he's black, that's why" (182). Though Aboriginal deaths in custody are not the main theme in *Steam Pigs* Lucashenko nonetheless includes allusions and short references to it throughout the novel, such as the memory of Sue's classmate above and seemingly circumstantial description of Sue's t-shirt that says "Stop Black Deaths in Custody" (135). By doing this Lucashenko highlights that issues of injustice such as the over-representation of Aboriginal people in custody are omnipresent for the Indigenous people of Australia even when the media and the non-Indigenous population often choose to ignore them.

In Townsville Sue also experiences the inexplicable hatred against black people by white civilians, when she and another local Murri woman are attacked by dogs which have been trained by their owner to hate and bite black people. The local woman explains that the Aboriginal people of Townsville are powerless in this matter: "We can't do nothing. Cops don't wanta know" (169). She has accepted this powerlessness as a fact and has taken racism for granted: "You born black up north, you took what was coming. Human rights were for the middle class black, the ones who lived down south, and read books and went to college, and worried about what was said in the newspapers" (169). Sue is shocked not only about the unbelievable extent of racism but also about the indifference of the Murri woman who has to experience this on a daily basis. At the same time, however, Sue recognises that she cannot put herself in the other woman's shoes as she has enjoyed the privileges of a relatively fair skin that anonymises her heritage. Later in the novel Kerry warns Sue not to adopt the same passive and tolerating position towards racism and sexism as the Townsville woman in a long typical of Kerry:

> Once you *know* you're living with racism and sexism every day for the rest of your life, it's up to you to decide how to live it. You want to be a victim, fine,

> go ahead … […] There's enough white wankers out there who are more than happy to see blacks as the downtrodden sufferers, and you know why? […] Cos victims are *safe*, sister. No-one ever got challenged by a victim. No-one ever had to swallow their pride and take a risk about being real with someone who's hellbent on losing … it's easy, on both sides. I could sit here all day holding your hand, saying oh poor Sue-ey, isn't it hard being a Murri, and what's life worth, and aren't the coppers racist bastards, and look at the white government, the pricks, and why bother to read the passion in this (shaking a David Malouf at her friend) or the slicing wit in Tom Stoppard, cos what would they know. (189-190)

Kerry condemns the acceptance of racism and sexism as a part of being an Aboriginal woman, the curses against the injustice suffered at the hands of the police and the government which just remain curses and are not put into action, and the aversion against everything that is white, for example the non-Indigenous writers David Malouf and Tom Stoppard. Kerry emphasises that one cannot simply blame white society as racist but that the suppressed have to stand up and do something. According to her the first step is to read literature, not only Indigenous but also non-Indigenous literature such as David Malouf, and thus show that "Murries can be as smart and capable as [non-Indigenous people]" (190). Sue fulfils this first step when she enters university and thus begins to ascend a career ladder that promises to free her from a world of "poverty, racism, patriarchal bullshit, getting fucked over all your life" (122).

While several Aboriginal people have yielded to racism and accepted it as a part of their lives, Lucashenko also points to the fact that the 'white' world often does not care about or at least does nothing against the problematic issues of racism, violence and poverty in Aboriginal communities:

> The Murri protest singer gets death threats from the boys in blue.
> *(Doesn't worry)*
> Every black girl raped by the time she leaves home.
> *(Doesn't worry)*
> Sixty two deaths in custody since the Royal Commission.
> *(Doesn't worry)*
> Mum watches both her sons flogged for nothing every night.
> *(Doesn't worry)*
> Stealing to eat at seven years old.
> *(Doesn't worry)*
> It's a first world country, don't ya know? (245)

The last line is a sarcastic remark on the myth that as a first world country Australia does not have problems such as police racism, oppression of women, family violence and hunger. These things are instead silenced or tabooed. With the powerful passage

quoted above Lucashenko uncovers this myth as a lie and questions the postcolonial and emancipated status of Australia.

In *Mullumbimby* the relationship between the police and Aboriginal people is also deeply saturated with racism on the one side and distrust on the other. When Jo, for example, wants to free a parrot from its cage in front of a pet shop, Twoboy, being more experienced with police racism, vehemently stops her:

> 'I'm a big, powerful, educated black man! Nobody – *nobody* – in this country, except for a few Goories, thinks that I'm a good idea. And you want to break the law when you're standing beside me? Do you think I can afford to get locked up *now*, with the case about to go before the tribunal?' […] 'But it wasn't you that opened the cage,' she argued. […] Twoboy laughed a short, harsh laugh and shook his head at her naiveté. […] 'As if any white gunjies[25] are going to take a look at me and keep on going,' he told her angrily. 'I've got Cop Killer written all over me. There's any street crime within bloody cooee of me and I'll be the one responsible.' (201)

Twoboy's accusation that he would be held responsible for a crime he did not even commit just because of his skin colour is not too far-fetched. In 2008, for example, five Aboriginal young persons were arrested and convicted of assault after a fight against a larger group of white youths, although they had been provoked by the group of whites that had come to their house at night armed with clubs and shouting racist remarks. The white youths were free to leave (Kontominas). Aboriginal deaths in custody as a consequence of heavy bashing or lack of care are also still happening in the 21st century. In *Mullumbimby* Lucashenko refers at one point to a case on Palm Island in 2004 where the Aboriginal young man Cameron Doomadge died in custody after being arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. Immense riots on Palm Island were the consequence, but the arresting officer at the watchhouse was acquitted of manslaughter three years later due to the lack of firm condemning evidence (AAP). This case is recalled by DJ and Jo after the arrest and bashing of Uncle Humbug (having been arrested for the same reasons as Doomadge): "The dogs flogged him up real good, from what I heard. Palm Island all over again, except you've gotta die to make the news – or no, you need a riot to make the papers. [...] Nobody gives a shit if you just die" (259). The last remark about the general lack of interest in Aboriginal deaths in custody and similar issues is reminiscent of the poem-like passage in Steam Pigs where issues in the Aboriginal community are mentioned about which the white community "*doesn't worry*" (245) (see above).

[25] gunjies = white police (*Mullumbimby* 284).

It is therefore not surprising that the Aboriginal characters in Lucashenko's novels have little trust in the white justice system, where racial profiling seems to be a standard procedure. Several characters also criticise the lack of care or interest in Aboriginal deaths in custody and the reluctance of bringing white people to trial. Stanley's death, for example, is only followed by a departmental inquiry. A woman in the audience comments angrily that "[i]f it was a whitefella dead and a blackfella in the hotseat there'd be a trial, wouldn't there?" (*Hard Yards* 97). Due to this distrust the Aboriginal characters in Lucashenko's novels are also reluctant to call the police for help. Moreover there seems to be an honour code involved that prevents the blackfellas to turn to whitefellas for help:

> 'You should go to the cops.' Jo's brow furrowed. 'Get him charged.' She spoke knowing that this would never, ever happen. The day a Goorie man took his private black business to the gunjies was the day he'd officially lost his balls, whipped them off and put them on a platter for Her Majesty to sample. It was bad enough having to submit to the bullshit and humiliation of the Native Title Tribunal. (*Mullumbimby* 157)

Not only the relationship with the police is characterised by racism, but also other encounters with the non-Indigenous population. For numerous people in bigger cities such as Brisbane the only (conscious) contact with Aboriginal people is through the often intoxicated Aboriginal persons hanging out on Boundary Street in West End and Musgrave Park in South Brisbane, for example, or through newspaper articles or TV news reports about Aboriginal people involved in violence or heavy drinking. As colonialist stereotypes of this kind had existed already in Australia, these negative images in the streets and the media strengthened them even further. In *Steam Pigs*, for example, Carol, the person responsible for university entry considerations at Griffith University in Brisbane, has internalised these stereotypes about Aboriginal people:

> Carol in the Education Department (Special Consideration Section: A02) […] sourly match[es] Sue's tertiary entrance score to the courses they've put down and unwillingly let[s] another bloody boong into uni, it'sa wonder this – what is she? *Sue Wilson* can read if she's anything like the ones she's seen from a distance in Musgrave Park, but nah, she's going off to Griffith to do Arts; […] they're letting anyone in these days, Abos and Asians and everything. (123-124)

Although Carol is perfectly aware that she has seen Aboriginal people only from the distance, she does not find it ungrounded to ascribe illiteracy to them and consider them as second class people or even something closer to animals, as she uses the interrogative 'what' rather than 'who'. In general, however, Sue is not confronted directly with racism against her own person. This is probably due to her quite pale skin, which does

not immediately 'reveal' her as Aboriginal. Sue herself is aware of that: "I never get to see stuff like that [racism based on colour] close up, the lives of fair-skinned Murries must be so different to the dark ones" (126).

Jo, on the other hand, has personally experienced racism to an extent that it has made her accept it as a fact – though sometimes she may also be overinterpreting racism into words and actions. As has been shown above this was definitely the case with Rob Starr. The sympathy-free reaction of the nurse at hospital when Jo arrives with a gashed upper arm may have been too readily interpreted as racism as well. Nevertheless, Jo's neutral and matter-of-fact statement that "maybe she just didn't like blackfellas very much" (*Mullumbimby* 53) indicates that Jo has experienced racism before in hospitals or other situations.

Similarly Humbug has experienced so much racism, both personal and institutional, from day one onwards that he has lost (or rather never developed) trust in white authorities:

> The fool didn't realise he had been born into war. […] Humbug's mother before him had lived her entire life warring with the welfare which took seven babies off her, distributing them, apparently at random, to orphanages and foster homes throughout the land. His father's campaign against the mission superintendent and the tame blacks who did his bidding had consumed the man day and night until it killed him of sheer rage at the age of fifty-three. Humbug, stolen from his mother's arms in the hospital – or no, not *in* the hospital, out the back of the hospital in a dirty lean-to on a pile of stained chaff bags – taken from his distraught mother and gifted to the nuns down south, had likewise been at war for every single one of his forty-nine years. (177)

Having been a victim of the Stolen Generation he is paranoid that institutions such as the hospital and basically every white person want to "steal blackfellas" (55). His distrust in white authorities is confirmed when he is bashed by the police after having been arrested for drunkenness and disorderly conduct (259).

All these instances of institutional and personal racism as well as the lack of understanding of Aboriginal values, beliefs and law system show that Australia is still "[c]aught in that liminal, always undecided state between a colonial past and a possibly postcolonial future" (Curthoys 166). Yet stereotyping based on skin colour or ethnicity and misunderstanding is not unidirectional in terms of white on black racism, but there is – naturally – a backlash. In *Hard Yards* Jimmy's hatred for Roo mainly stems from his white skin colour and (presumed) non-Aboriginality. This distrust in white people has developed through the long history of racism he and his ancestors have experienced at the hands of the non-Indigenous population and is constantly confirmed and

augmented by the institutional and personal racism from which he, his family and his friends suffer every day. Darryl, on the other hand, is anxious to make sure that "there's no colour bar in this family" (47), but after Stanley died in custody and Roo left Shaleena and her unborn baby, his mindset begins to falter: "Part of Darryl knew that it was bullshit, was perfectly capable of making distinctions between whitefellas. But […] with the image of Stanley's coffin agonisingly fresh in his mind's eye, Darryl was just about ready to lump Roo in with the rest of them" (29). Though Roo proves at the end that white "racist prick[s] [are] no bruvva of [him]" (55) and that he was not after a "bitta black velvet" (46) when he abandons his running career for the sake of Shaleena and their baby, the conclusion with regard to white people is problematic as the reader knows that Roo is not 'white', that is non-Indigenous, but in fact Aboriginal. Thus white people remain to be depicted very negatively in the novel.

In *Mullumbimby* the situation is quite similar at the beginning. Dugai[26] is often used as an abusive term in contexts such as ignorance, avariciousness and uptightness. In several situations it is not only used pejoratively against white people but also against blackfellas. For example when Jo refuses to party and smoke drugs with Twoboy he says "I didn't know you was such a bloody dugai" (141). Jo is also very quick in forming a hostile opinion against her white neighbour Rob Starr and nothing can make her reconsider her accusations of him being a rich, supercilious, blood-thirsty and indifferent dugai. For example when Jo insults him as "[l]anded fucken gentry" (126) she focuses on his R. M. Williams boots alone and deliberately ignores, though notices, his "old worn jeans and […] cheap sky-blue pullover from Target" (126). For Jo Starr perpetuates colonialism and the never-ending lust for taking of his ancestors: "They just can't stop taking, can they? They just wouldn't know how" (128). At the end of the novel, however, Jo discovers that Starr has signed his farm and property over to Sam, the nephew of the Aboriginal elder Granny Nurrung, in order to protect a sacred Aboriginal site that is located on his land. Additionally, he was also the anonymous donator who bought her a new horse as an apology for the unfortunate death of Comet. Thus Lucashenko refuses to employ simple pairs of opposites, such as non-Aboriginal equals bad and Aboriginal equals good. As in real life the situation is more complex in the novel. Though it can be said that generally the Aboriginal characters score better sympathy-wise, there is Starr, who annihilates the first formula, and the aggressive Bullockhead, who unhinges the second. The revelation of Starr as a protector of

[26] dugai = white person (*Mullumbimby* 284)

Aboriginal culture and knowledge at the end of *Mullumbimby* gives the novel a highly optimistic and hopeful ending, suggesting that reconciliation and a respectful and inclusive coexistence between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population is possible and desirable.

In *Steam Pigs* Sue's friendship with the non-Indigenous women Kerry and Rachel could be seen as another attempt to show that there does not have to be a chasm between the different cultures. Ichitani follows this interpretation and celebrates their relationship as a hint at a "possibility of an alliance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in the Australian feminist movement" (197). O'Reilly, on the other hand, notes that the relationship between Sue and her non-Indigenous friends is not an alliance with the power evenly distributed, but a relationship where the power clearly lies in the hands of the non-Indigenous women (4). According to O'Reilly it even "mimics the colonial relationship between the colonizers and the colonized" (10), as Kerry and Rachel save Sue from her abusive relationship with Roger and from a life in working-class Eagleby by 'civilising' her through feminist ideologies, literature and a university education. This need of educated non-Indigenous women to 'save' an Indigenous woman is highly alarming to O'Reilly in terms of the message it delivers. However, there is also another line of interpretation. It is indeed true that Kerry and Rachel are more powerful in the relationship with Sue as they are her mentors. Nonetheless, it has to be pointed out that Sue only turns to them as she lacks other guides after Roger has proved to be unsuitable. Apart from Roger she does not have any other role models, as neither her brother Dave nor her mother identify as Aboriginal and her only other Indigenous acquaintance, JJ, is only too similar to his friend Roger. Thus the relationship between Sue and Kerry and Rachel is not so much of a colonial nature but rather a result of colonisation. The assimilation policy has disrupted and fragmented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities as well as culture and identity. Kerry is aware of this and is "angry with a system that could do this to people, fucked up Murries all over the damn country. Land – *gone*, families – *gone*, dignity – *gone*, culture – *gone*" (146). Furthermore, Kerry does not impose her own white version of Aboriginality on Sue but helps her in deconstructing colonialist stereotypes and instigates her to find her own Aboriginality: "you're confusing colonisation with culture, and blackness with oppression" (147). Kerry warns Sue that neither violence, poverty nor drinking is part of being Aboriginal but rather "manipulative bullshit that whites use to fuck minorities all the time, internalised oppression, letting us define what makes you who you are, and till

you get over this hurdle, your whole life is going to revolve around being fucked up one way or the other" (147). As the inclusive personal pronoun 'us' shows Kerry is aware that she is part of the group that constructs these stereotypes and reinforces the oppression of Indigenous people. In another situation Kerry even makes it more clear: "The racism's engrained into *us* Sue, and it takes constant weeding-out" [emphasis added] (190). All these characteristics of Rachel and Kerry question O'Reilly's analysis of their relationship with Sue. Rather than reiterating colonisation their relationship might indicate that reconciliation and collaboration is possible.

Kerry's job as social worker is also important for the interpretation. In 2005 Lucashenko published a guide for white social workers and counsellors working with Aboriginal women in prison. In this paper Lucashenko tries to give the reader an understanding of what it means to be Aboriginal, an Aboriginal woman and an Aboriginal woman in prison in modern Queensland. In order to achieve this she explains the difficult relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people in Australia as a result of colonialisation and dispossession of land and culture – a relationship that is now still saturated with racism, distrust and pain. Lucashenko offers solutions for white counsellors to overcome these problems and build a respectful working relationship. Kerry might be seen as an ideal counsellor for Sue: she is aware of racism, of herself being part of the racist group and of cultural and identity-related problem areas such as dispossession and dislocation. As Lucashenko advises, Kerry helps Sue to deconstruct internalised and direct racism, and does not rush Sue into leaving Roger and beginning a new life in West End, but waits until she is ready and takes the necessary steps herself. What is more and again in line with Lucashenko, Kerry does not try to stop Sue's drug and alcohol abuse with words, but replaces it with literature, university and a greater understanding of Aboriginal culture, thus ensuring a long-term abstinence from substance misuse. If we take these things into consideration, Kerry might serve as a role model for real-life social workers, counsellors or other people in close contact with Indigenous people. Sue's white flatmate Melinda, for example, is in need of such a role model as she is "unsure how to cross the gaping chasms of culture and class. Good intentions aren't enough, Melinda thought irritably, and no-one tells you what to *do*" (*Steam Pigs* 227). For Indigenous readers, on the other hand, Kerry might show that asking a social worker, regardless of his or her colour, for help is not a shamejob but can in fact liberate and empower them.

Whiteness in the novel is frequently associated with normality, power, money and a simple life. Roo in *Hard Yards* gets to the core of the matter when he notes after a fight with his Aboriginal girlfriend Shaleena that there were "[p]lenty more fish in the sea […]. Fish that wouldn't drag his colour up every fight they had, fish that never thought about him being white cos they were too" (32). The theory that Roo hints at is the theory of whiteness which has been extensively discussed, for example, by the Indigenous Australian academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson. She argues that whiteness is universal and invisible and that white people are not considered to be a race, but the 'norm' (*Whiteness* 77). As proof of her argument she asks the reader to "[c]onsider why Cathy Freeman [an Indigenous athlete, note by the author] is positioned as running for reconciliation, yet Ian Thorpe swims for the nation" (79). Another example is the specific labelling of Indigenous authors as Indigenous whereas white authors are not specifically marked as white or non-Indigenous in most cases. Again this example shows that white people are considered the norm and Indigenous people are, first, racialised, and second, othered as the non-norm.

This image of blackness as a deviation from the norm can also be seen in *Mullumbimby*, when Darren Ferrier, a white horse owner in the Nudgel Valley, asks her "Where are ya from, anyway" (26) meaning "Why are you brown of skin and hair and eyes? […] Why don't you look like me?" (26). In *Steam Pigs* Sue is able to evade racism due to her white skin (unlike the Chinese job hunters, for example, who are rejected at her work place because of their skin colour, or the countless dark-skinned Aboriginal characters who are frequently harassed by the police). Towards the end of the book Sue arrives at the conclusion that "life must be one bloody picnic if you're in the money class" (226), meaning white people. Darryl in *Hard Yards* thinks similarly when he tells Roo to "go off and have his nice white life with his running career and his white mates, probably end up a doctor or lawyer or some fucken thing, while Daryll's sister stayed pregnant, and his brother stayed dead, d. e. a. d., gone, finished up" (45). This quote shows that for Daryll whiteness means that the world and all its possibilities are open for you, without worrying about money, racism and injustice. According to Daryll these things are intrinsically linked to the world of the Indigenous minority in Australia.

In conclusion, though all of Lucashenko's novels depict an Australia that is still haunted by racism and colonialist stereotypes against the Indigenous population and that is divided by a colour as well as a money bar, all of them also end on a quite hopeful tone by uniting the Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters in some kind of positive

relationship. As has been analysed above, in *Steam Pigs* Sue befriends the two white feminists Kelly and Rachel and through their help fully embraces her Aboriginality and develops self-esteem. In *Hard Yards*, Roo – who is deemed to be white by the characters in the novel – is welcomed again into Shaleena's family and abandons his career for her sake. In *Mullumbimby*, Jo realises that Rob Starr is a key figure in the protection of a sacred Aboriginal site. Therefore, one of Lucashenko's messages is that reconciliation, coexistence and collaboration is possible in Australia, but only if injustice, racism and and racial prejudice are rejected on both sides.

5.5 Proving It Whitefella Way: The Problematic Nature of Native Title in a White Law System

The previous section has discussed the institutional racism that the non-Indigenous population of Australia faces at the hands of the white law system. This section will focus on the problems associated with native title, that is regaining the status of traditional owner of ancestral land through the Anglocentric law system.

Until 1992, when the Mabo case ended, the Australian justice system had rejected any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander claims to traditional land based on the colonialist concept of *terra nullius*. With the Mabo judgement the Australian legal system recognised that Australia had been occupied by Indigenous people before the British invasion and that the various Indigenous tribes had not been primitive but had possessed a multi-layered social, legal and spiritual organisation and a deep connection with land (cf. Mercer 196). The Mabo decision stated that in order to claim native title the following three points must be fulfilled:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had maintained an *uninterrupted connection* with the land throughout the period of European settlement; such title had not been extinguished as a consequence of valid legislation on the part of Commonwealth, territory, state or other governments; and the rights to native title could be demonstrated by reference to the traditional customs and laws of the people concerned. (Mercer 199)

The most important problem with these requirements relates to proving a continuous connection to the land. The majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population now live in cities, often miles away from their traditional land which countless Indigenous people do not even know. This is a result of the dislocation and dispossession from the arrival of the British colonists until the last victim of the Stolen Generation in the 1970s, which means a total of 200 years of eviction, killing and

expropriation, materially as well as culturally. Indigenous languages have become extinct by the hundreds as have many cultural practices and Jukurrpa stories and songs. Nevertheless, the court demands distinctive cultural, that is traditional, knowledge and completely uninterrupted ties to the ancestral homeland no matter how many times the plaintiffs have been dislocated and evicted by white authorities in the colonial past. Therefore, it is almost impossible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with no or only little knowledge of their heritage and traditional culture (especially in written form) to successfully file a native title claim. If they do it will be very time-consuming and expensive to retrieve the information they need.

Furthermore, not all traditional lands can be reclaimed. Native title can only be claimed for the following types of land:

- vacant[27] or unallocated Crown land;
- some reserve lands;
- some types of pastoral lease;
- some land held by or for Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islanders;
- beaches, oceans, seas, reefs, lakes, rivers, creeks, swamps and other waters that are not privately owned. (Tanner 151)

Native title is thus extinguished when it refers to urbanised and private land. The following map shows the distribution of successfully reclaimed traditional land through native title (highlighted in green). As can be easily seen the densely populated south and east coast is almost impossible to reclaim (Figure 4).

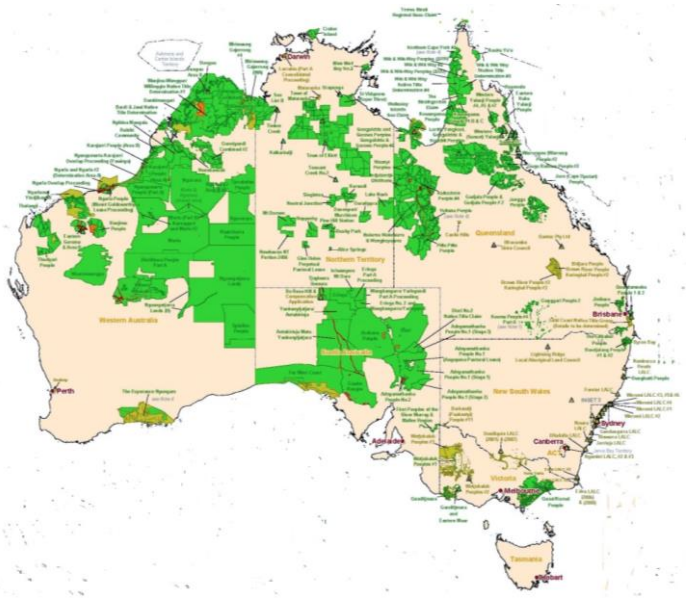

Figure 4: The area coloured in green shows native title in Australia found to exist as at 30 June 2014. *Map adapted and reproduced with the kind permission of the National Native Title Tribunal (*http://www.nntt.gov.au/Maps/Determinations_map.jpg, 16 August 2014).

[27] Wensing notes that using the term 'vacant' in relation to native title should be avoided as it is reminiscent of the concept of *terra nullius* (229).

Another problem associated with native title is, for example, that Indigenous people have to turn to white authorities to reclaim their traditional land. As has been shown in section 5.4 the relationship between non-Indigenous people, especially the legal system, and Indigenous people is characterised by racism, mistrust and injustice. Furthermore, parts of Indigenous knowledge or stories may be restricted to initiated people or people of a specific sex, for example secret sacred women's business, and must therefore not be told to a white and often male court. Finally, proof in the Anglocentric legal sense mainly refers to written documents. However, as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at Cook's arrival had a primarily oral culture (cf. Mathur 108), such documents often do not exist.

In *Mullumbimby* Lucashenko discusses these problems in the context of the Jacksons' native title claim to the Billinudgel valley in the Byron Bay hinterland. Twoboy claims that as the eldest great-grandchild of Tommy Jackson, who "knew this valley back to front and inside out" (41), he is "the one true blackfella for this place 1a" (41). However, he has difficulties in proving cultural continuity and connection. From stories of his father Twoboy knows that his great-grandfather Tommy Jackson was forced to join the Native Police, but managed to escape a week later after shooting a policeman. Yet the stories about his great-grandfather and his totem are all that Twoboy has – he lacks written proof and that is the only form of hard evidence the court is accepting. Twoboy and his brother Laz spend hours in the archives and libraries in Brisbane searching for the necessary sheets of paper.

> [Twoboy's] mind was overflowing with tribunal depositions, State Library files, and the unwelcome lawyerly advice, offered two days ago, that their paperwork was still far too weak, lacking in hard evidence of who Grandad Tommy was or why he had left the area, let alone that his 'cultural ties and traditions' had been maintained by his descendants. (180)

The Jackson clan's main problem is that they have not lived on Bundjalung land since his great-grandfather was forced to flee. Nevertheless, he is required to prove unbroken connection with the land, its culture and ceremonies.

> Twoboy had been told by the lawyers that he had to piece together the cultural jigsaw that had been exploded by his family's diaspora, or else accept defeat. The court wasn't interested in the gaps, only in the complete picture: songs, sites, family trees, language, ceremony. Especially songs. His case had to be watertight, strong enough to counter the automatic power that Oscar had, just from being born here and living on Bundjalung country all his fat, corrupt, deceitful life, without actually contributing anything of worth to the culture or to the Goories he claimed to lead. (161)

Although Twoboy has grown up in Aboriginal culture, his knowledge about his family and the valley is only fragmented. At the early stage of his native title claim he is still ignorant of his family ties with Granny Nurrung and Humbug, which prove to be vital in the end as they still live on Bundjalung land, and the existence of the sacred waterhole on Starr's farm.

For Jo and Twoboy appearing in front of the native title tribunal is humiliating (157), as they have to rely completely on the white court's decision whether their proof of who they are is accepted or not and whether they have any right to their ancestral land or not. Twoboy becomes desperate for written evidence, especially when the recording of the talga Jo made with her mobile phone does not play for him and when Jo forbids him to take Ellen to court as evidence. Unlike Twoboy Jo has realised that even if he learnt the talga by heart and sang it in front of the tribunal the court would not accept it as a proof for his connection as there is no record by anthropologists of it. Similarly Ellen's hands would not be accepted but probably simply disregarded as coincidence and superstition.

Though Twoboy assures Jo in the novel that "[s]trenghts lies in unity, not in numbers" (223) the Aboriginal community of Mullumbimby hardly represents a unified front in the native title case, or rather cases, as there are at least two if not three distinct parties of plaintiffs. The first claimant is the Jackson clan, the second the Bullockhead-Watt clan and the third Uncle Humbug, though he does not file a native title claim. The major problem of the Jackson clan is that they have not lived on the land for generations and are struggling to find evidence for their claim. The Bullockhead clan, on the other hand, has lived in Mullumbimby for at least two generations, but Twoboy claims that Oscar Bullockhead's great-grandfather was from the Sydney area or even further south. At least he concedes that Sally Watt would have a right to native title on her maternal side, but – again according to Twoboy – she has been forced by Oscar to join her paternal relatives, the Bullockheads, and claims native title through them. As has been said above, Humbug does not file a native title claim, but he considers himself as well "the one true blackfella for this place" (55), using exactly the same wording as Twoboy. Humbug can neither read nor write, has no money and probably does not even know about the possibility of native title – and if he did he would presumably not face a white court to prove his right due to his immense distrust of white authorities and the humiliation. While Jo thus questions the fairness of native title, Twoboy sees it more pragmatically: "Native Title's there for the taking. And if he ain't gonna take it, then all the more for us mob, eh?" (191).

Several characters in *Mullumbimby* refer to native title as a war, "a war that nobody even talked about for two hundred years" (172). This quote by Jo refers to the myth of the peaceful colonisation of a terra nullius rather than a forceful invasion of an already inhabited country. The taking of land was not seen as stealing or dispossessing by the British colonists, but simply as taking what was freely available. Only recently have historians begun to include the forceful appropriation of land and the massacres that went along with it in their history books and only recently were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people given recognition as traditional owners by the native title act. In *Mullumbimby* Jo's sister Kym, however, does not perceive native title as a means of recognition and reconciliation but as another, more hidden, tool of colonisation: "It's a fulltime job, Native Title, eh? […] It's driving Jason's family mad too. Shitfights everywhere you look. First cousins not talking after fifty years, brothers bashing brothers, it's Colonisation 4.0. The dugai don't have to lift a finger anymore – they've outsourced it to us" (233). The antagonism between the two parties Jackson and Bullockhead-Watt indeed soon assumes alarming proportions. Twoboy receives life-threatening text messages on his mobile phone and is even attacked by Oscar's cousin Johnny with a poly pipe. Against her will Jo is drawn ever more deeply into the conflict up to the point that she worries about her own and her daughter's security. Jo realises the destructive power of native title: "Years of hard yakka and fuck all at the end of it, except a community in ruins" (171). In the novel this is all neatly resolved at the end, as Oscar Bullockhead dies in a car accident, Sally Watt joins the Jackson clan as a co-claimant and Twoboy's mother conveniently remembers the sacred waterhole on Starr's land. Thus Twoboy can prove his connection to the valley and his ancestors, and his claim is granted by the court.

Lucashenko also includes the alternative of claiming native title in her novel by letting Jo buy back a patch of her ancestral land. Jo is unable to file a native title claim as she cannot "prove a damn thing about her family" (79). Apart from Jo Granny Nurrung also chooses an alternative way in *Mullumbimby*. Though the Aboriginal elder would have all the knowledge the white court requires at her disposal – continuous connection, language and knowledge about secret sites and ceremonies – Granny Nurrung does not pursue the way through court: "We're not interested in blooming Native Title! What's the good of Native Title? A bitta paper from the government if you're lucky. And a punch on the jaw on the Durrumbil bridge if ya not" (275). Rather than proving your right and identity in front of a white court and risking a war within the community (the

punch on the jaw refers to the fight between Johnny Bullockhead and Twoboy), Granny Nurrung has chosen personal negotiations outside the court. She has found an ally in Rob Starr, who happens to be the owner of the piece of land on which the sacred waterhole is situated. Starr writes over his property to Sam Nurrung, her nephew, and vows to protect the sacred site with Sam once Granny Nurrung has passed away. When Jo finds out that Granny Nurrung is the missing piece in Twoboy's puzzle, she is confused about her silence and her apparent unwillingness to help Twoboy in his case. Granny Nurrung's answer is clear: "We never grew him up. […] We don't know him. He our blood, yeah, but he don't know this place. Not like we do" (275). Granny Nurrung's decision to wait to introduce Twoboy to her knowledge can be explained by the Aboriginal knowledge and respect system. The elders are the custodians of knowledge and the younger generations are initiated into their knowledge with increasing age and depending on several other factors such as gender. The renowned anthropologist Diane Bell explains this system with regard to the Ngarrindjeri nation of South Australia:

> The respect system sets out the proper way of behaving; it specifies who may know what, when, and in what detail. The code is strictly followed, constantly reinforced, and it is not possible to engage in conversation of any depth or meaning if one does not abide by the rules. They are simple. *The elders know. Don't ask. Don't answer back or challenge. Wait to be told*. […] When one is told by an elder, one doesn't question the authority, or the rationality. […] The justification is the authority of the elder. (Bell 62)

Twoboy realises this at the end and changes his attitude. He finally finds the patience in him to wait "[u]ntil the ancestors were ready to reveal themselves" (280) in the form of the song sung by the lyrebirds that he has still not heard yet. Thus Twoboy follows the Aboriginal respect system and proves to be a worthy traditional owner who respects the elders and his ancestors.

In *Steam Pigs* land rights and native title are only addressed very seldomly. Similarly to Jo Sue is unable to file a claim due to her lack of evidence – she is even ignorant of where her ancestral land is situated. When she starts to think about Aboriginal issues, her brother Dave mocks her that she should file a native title claim, "like she had no right to and it was all a bit of a joke" (166). Speaking from a (white) legal perspective, Sue indeed does not have a right to traditional land in Australia as she cannot prove her connections and belonging. For Sue, however, it is clear that she does have the right as she is Aboriginal – her family just had the misfortune to be hit deeply enough by colonisation and its destructive effects on connection, community and culture. In 2008

visiting Maori Chief Joe Williams summarised the problematic of native title as follows at a native title conference: "It requires the Indigenous applicant to prove that colonisation did not hurt. The more it hurts, the less you get. The less it hurts the more you get. There is a deep contradiction in that idea" (qtd. in Boase 13). The reader also gets a glimpse into the reputation of native title among the non-Indigenous population when Nathan, a character only mentioned at this point, tells the following joke: "These blackfellas that want land rights? … I'll give em land rights, kick em in the balls and then they'll have two achers!" (98).

In summary, native title is represented as a controversial issue not only for non-Indigenous but also for Indigenous people. Filing a native title claim requires, apart from time and money, evidence of an uninterrupted connection with the ancestral land, its culture and its law. Secret knowledge as well as secret sacred sites must be revealed in front of a white court. For numerous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such evidence is impossible to procure as their ties to their ancestral homeland have been deeply severed and often even cut as a result of the dire policies of British colonisation. In *Mullumbimby* opinions are divided with regard to native title. Twoboy sees it as the chance to put his ancestors at rest and claim what is rightfully his, but he is driven mad by his weak evidence and the humiliation to prove his right in a white court. Granny Nurrung and Jo, on the other hand, realise the destructive power of native title as it can disrupt communities with more than one claimant and is in fact nothing more than a piece of paper. Nevertheless, Lucashenko's book ends on a hopeful note as all three ways of looking after ancestral land – buying it back, negotiating with the owners and claiming native title – are successful.

5.6 Intersections of Race, Gender and Class

The term *intersectionality* was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and refers to the fact that race, gender and class, amongst others, cannot be seen as independent but as concurring categories. Black women, for example, suffer from a form of interaction between racism and sexism which is impossible to compare with the sexism white women face or the racism that black men experience. This may be illustrated by an example Crenshaw gives in her article: in the 1977 court case *DeGraffenreid vs General Motors* five African-American women accused General Motors of both racism and sexism as the company had not employed black females before 1964 and when they

finally did they fired all black female employees during a recession (Crenshaw 141). The suit was rejected on the basis that the women did not sue the company as women *or* as black people but specifically as black women – a category that is, according to the court, not "a special class to be protected from discrimination. […] Thus, this lawsuit must be examined to see if it states a cause of action for race discrimination, sex discrimination, or alternatively either, but not a combination of both" (*DeGraffenreid*, 413 F Supp at 143 qtd. in Crenshaw 141). Later the court rejected the women's accusation of sex discrimination as the company had employed women – that is white women – before 1964, again failing to see the inseparable interaction between racial and sexual discrimination (142). This limitation of Indigenous women as either black or female has also been noted by Lucashenko twenty years later, when she states in an essay that "[f]orced into a false dichotomy – are you feminists or Black? – we have, much of the time, been silenced about issues of crucial concern" ("Violence" 156).

In Lucashenko's novels intersections of race, gender and class can be seen best by the cases of domestic violence. In *Steam Pigs* Kerry states that the statistics of women getting killed in cases of family violence are "[o]ne a week in Queensland, and a black homicide rate ten times that of the whites" (200). Lucashenko's figures are by no means fictional: according to a national report on family violence, for example, Indigenous women were thirty-five times and Indigenous men twenty-two times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to be hospitalised after domestic violence between 2003 and 2004 in the states Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland and Wallis 71). The following tables (Figure 5.1 and 5.2) illustrate this alarming figure and highlight the fact that domestic violence is most experienced by people that are both Indigenous and female.

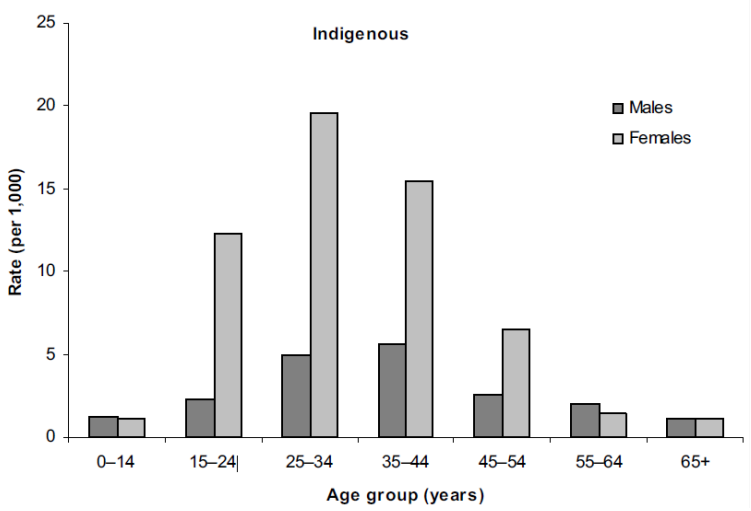

Figure 5.1: Hospitalisation-rate for Indigenous men and women after domestic violence (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland and Wallis 56).

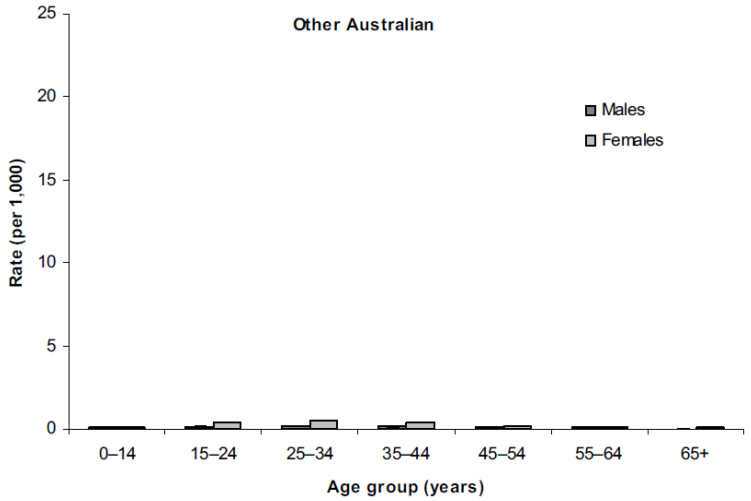

Figure 5.2: Hospitalisation-rate for non-Indigenous men and women after domestic violence (Al-Yaman, Van Doeland and Wallis 56).

In *Steam Pigs*, before Sue's realisation that it is neither her nor her culture's fault, she reckons that the experience of domestic violence is part of being black and female. This logic is as well not fictional but common among the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population. In fact customary law has been successfully used by several Indigenous men as defence in a white court for raping, bashing or even killing women. In 2002, for example, a fifty-year-old Aboriginal man was acquitted of raping a fifteen-year-old Aboriginal girl on the basis that as her future husband he had the right to do this according to customary law (Shah). In 2007 the debate whether violence against women is part of Aboriginal culture or whether it is a by-product of colonisation and dispossession re-erupted when the non-Indigenous author Louis Nowra published his controversial book *Bad Dreaming: Aboriginal Men's Violence Against Women and*

Children, painting a dark image of physical and sexual violence towards women and children within Aboriginal communities. Nowra concludes that violence against women was indeed a feature of Aboriginal traditional life but that it was controlled and ceremonial. Since then the law has become distorted and pathologised so that it is now often used as an excuse for rape or other violence where no traditional context but lust exists. However, Nowra has been severely criticised by several Indigenous academics for his disregard of Aboriginal attempts to solve the issue of violence, the portrayal of traditional Aboriginal society based on reports by First Fleeters or non-Indigenous anthropologists and the marginalisation of the role and traumatic effects of physical, sexual and psychological abuse of Indigenous men, women and children by *white* people in the past 200 years (Atkinson and Woods 4-5, 8). According to the *Bringing Them Home* report sexual abuse by white authorities and foster parents was commonly experienced by victims of the Stolen Generation until the 1970s. The Indigenous academic Mick Dodson agrees that contemporary violence within Aboriginal communities is not based on traditional culture: "We have no cultural traditions based on humiliation, degradation, and violation. […] Most of the violence, if not all, that Aboriginal communities are experiencing today are [sic] not part of Aboriginal tradition or culture" (Dodson). According to Aboriginal law rape outside the kinship system was severely punished, even with death, and violence or arguments within families was controlled and mediated through relatives (Lloyd 151). This law has been pathologised by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous (male) lawyers so that rape and violence against women is now said to be in accordance with traditional Indigenous law. This development is a result of the frequency of domestic violence and rape in the never-ending circle of violence inherited over generations of injustice and racism, which has normalised violence against women in some communities and even moralised it as a part of 'culture'.

In *Steam Pigs* Sue lives in Eagleby, a working-class suburb that is characterised by unemployment, poverty, substance abuse and violence – features that are intrinsically interrelated and fostering each other. Sue's karate lessons are by no means a simple hobby but survival training, "[k]nowing the world to be a dangerous one, adults pitted against kids, women against men, and men against each other and the world" (6). Her acceptance of both violence as being part of her world and domestic violence by her fiancé Roger as being part of her being an Indigenous woman shows that Sue has internalised oppression and mistakes it for culture. The white social worker Kerry is

aware that the extensive violence within Aboriginal communities is both a reaction to the dispossession and abuse the Indigenous people have experienced at the hands of the white colonisers and a self-fulfilling prophecy of the racist stereotypes that have been imposed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, such as being dirty, savage and promiscuous.

Lucashenko noted in an essay that the community could serve as a resort from the racism Indigenous women face in white society if it was not dysfunctional and violent: "Black women have been torn between the self-evident oppression they share with Indigenous men […] and the unacceptability of those men's violent, sexist behaviors toward their families" (Lucashenko, "Violence" 156). Thus for several Indigenous women there is no safe haven and no way out. The police or the court is often no option for Indigenous women who are subjected to domestic violence due to the history of injustice and even violence on the part of the white legal system. An Aboriginal woman responded as follows when asked by the Aboriginal Women's Policy Coordinator Carol Thomas to describe the problematic issues in relation to sexual assault: "Historically, police were raping young girls in the back of paddy wagons. So we are talking about mothers of the girls who are now being raped. What sort of advice does a mother give her daughter when she knows herself or sisters or cousins were raped by police? What chance do you have against the police?" (qtd. in Thomas 141). Another Aboriginal woman responded: "Why would you go to them [the police] for help? … they are part of the problem" (141). The women's answers highlight the long history of injustice, violence and distrust between Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women, and the white legal system. In the (not so distant) past rape of Indigenous women by white people was not seen as a crime as according to the white world view they were inferior and appetent beings without any understanding of chastity (Heath 17). In 1884, for example, Arthur Palmer, the then president of the Queensland Legislative Council, rejected the possibility of *raping* an Indigenous women as no force has to be involved: "anyone who knew anything about the habits of the blacks knew that the blacks had no idea of chastity – that a fig of tobacco would purchase any woman" (qtd. in Queesland Legislative Council 108). This image of Indigenous women is by no means outdated: a hundred years later, in 1980 Justice John Gallop stated that "rape is not considered as seriously in Aboriginal communities as it is in the white communities ... and indeed the chastity of women is not as importantly regarded as in white communities. Apparently the violation of an Aboriginal woman's integrity is not nearly as significant as it is in the

white community" (qtd. in McRae, Nettheim and Beacroft 380). Not only did justice Gallop confuse sexuality with sexual violence but he also reiterated the colonialist stereotype of promiscuous Indigenous women and silenced the victim in favour of the (male) community. In 1991 Justice Millhouse similarly stated that "there is no crime of rape known in [Aboriginal] community" (qtd. in Lloyd 161).

Sue in *Steam Pigs* has internalised this constructed sexist 'truth' and keeps finding excuses for Roger's violence. When Roger bashes her on the night of her forgotten birthday, Sue thinks it was her fault as she "lost it" (144) and asked him where he had been all night. She forgives him his assault against her, explaining to Kerry that "you know he's got a lot on his mind, and he smokes a lot of dope, he just loses it sometimes I think, it's like it's not him at all, it's someone else, you know? He's a good bloke, really, when things work they really work well, I just can't figure it out, like when he's in a mood there's nothing I can do that's right, or good enough…" (145). Sue euphemises Roger's violence as a 'mood' and blames herself and her inability to do something to lighten it for the bashing she receives. Only when Roger bashes her to near-death and rapes her Sue's line has been crossed and she realises that she "[does not] deserve this, no-one does. Wouldn't matter if I hadda done what he thought" (201). However, her brother Dave even reckons in this case that it was Sue's fault: "You know you've always had a big mouth, and now you've met someone who isn't prepared to put up with it" (196). Sue, however, is determined to leave but she has nowhere to go. Both the police and the hospital are no options for her: "So where do people go then, when they've got nowhere to go? Hospital – nah, fuck that, they'll talk about pressing charges again …" (198). Although Sue has accepted that Roger is violent and abusive she still does not want to involve the police. The reason for her decision is not stated but it could be one of the following: first she might not see violence against women and rape as report-worthy, having internalised the colonialist myth that violence is traditional and part of being Murri. Second, she might have no trust in the police or the white law system in general to give her the protection and justice she needs. Third, she might be reluctant to report her partner for sexual assault for several reasons such as fear of retaliatory violence or the community's reaction, disinclination to be responsible for another Aboriginal man in prison, and shame. Sue's unwillingness to involve the police reflects recent studies which estimate that only ten per cent of sexually assaulted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report to the police (Taylor and Putt 3). Reasons for this under-reporting are, amongst others, not considering sexual assault a

crime, not wanting to be responsible for another incarcerated Indigenous person, shame, fear of the police, the court's decision as well as the perpetrator and his family, and pressure from the community and family (3-4).

Although Sue does not involve the police she seeks help from her friends Kerry and Rachel. As a social worker Kerry has had abundant experience with domestic violence against women and helps Sue in her healing process. Kerry and Rachel's house in Beenleigh, a men-free space, is Sue's refuge. In the end she creates her own safe haven when she relocates to West End and declares her new flat to be free of "pretty boys" (224). Her flat and West End are starkly juxtaposed with her other flat with Roger in the destructive outer suburb Eagleby: whereas the latter is harmful, male and violent, West End and the inner city of Brisbane generally are positive, female and non-violent, ending her life as a victim of domestic violence and making her an independent and strong woman.

Though women are at the core of most of Lucashenko's novels she does not only discuss intersections of race, gender and class for women but also for men. Several Australian studies have shown that men's health, measured by life expectancy, death causes and health risks, is poorer than women's (ABS, *Social* 13). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men the figures are especially alarming as they are worse than for both Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men/women. Life expectancy for an Indigenous man born between 2005 and 2007, for example, is only estimated to be 67.2 years, that is eleven and a half years less than the expected lifespan of a non-Indigenous male (19). Indigenous men are also more likely to engage in behaviours detrimental to health than Indigenous women and non-Indigenous people, such as drinking alcohol at risky levels, using illicit drugs and smoking (AIHW, *Health* 32, 90). The poor health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men has frequently been associated with the loss of roles and responsibility during colonisation. According to the Aboriginal academic and elder Michael Adams "[t]he establishment of missions and government settlements restricted men from peforming their traditional roles as land owners, educators, father figures, providers and decision makers, breaking their spirit and connection to the land" (Male Health Policy Unit 7). In conformity with Adams Frank Spry affirms that this breakdown of roles has resulted in a destroyed masculinity and eventually in dysfunctional communities manifested by "chronic alcoholism, family violence, high imprisonment rates, deaths in custody, youth suicide and anti-social behaviour" (3) especially on the part of its male members. It is argued that men are more affected by

this crisis than women, as unlike women, who continued their traditional role as mothers and carers for family, men were denied their traditional roles as warriors and hunters. Dr Jon Willis, a renowned researcher in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's issues, in general supports the hypothesis that colonisation is responsible for the collapse of Indigenous masculinity and the poor health of Indigenous men, but cautions against employing a too simple before and after dichotomy of what he calls "Red Ochre versus Risk Group masculinities" (9). Red Ochre refers to the traditional lifestyle of Indigenous people before Cook's arrival in Australia and thus intact masculinities. Risk Group, on the other hand, refers to the present-day situation where colonisation has resulted in a collapse of Indigenous masculinities due to a loss of traditional lifestyle, land, culture and responsibility. Willis, however, notes that, on the one hand, Indigenous men nowadays do have authority as elders, academics et cetera, and, on the other hand, that male health problems are not restricted to Indigenous people living in urban areas but also apply for men living in remote communities who continue their role as hunters and never lost their land.

In *Steam Pigs* Roger's extensive consumption of alcohol and drugs as well as the violence that results from this misuse may point to an internal crisis with regard to his Aboriginal masculinity. Though Roger identifies strongly as Aboriginal, he seems to be unsure what that means as he associates Aboriginality solely with oppression and colonial history. His friend Lee even observes that he "likes the idea of being black more than the reality of it" (161). The connection to his family in Cherbourg is of a similarly ambiguous nature, as Sue reflects: "he hardly ever goes up there, but at the pub if he sees someone from there it's all 'cousinbrother' this and 'sistagirl' that, but he hasn't set foot on the place for years" (161). It seems that Roger has lost the connection to his family and his country. The fact that Cherbourg was a well-known reserve in Queensland for Aboriginal people from all over Australia during the policy of 'protection' might also indicate that Roger is in fact ignorant of his true ancestral land. Lacking the elders to guide him in Eagleby, he is unsure about his role and purpose in life as an Aboriginal male. Though it is never stated in the novel, this psychological crisis might be the reason Roger has turned to alcohol and also to violence. Thus Roger fulfils the self-fulfilling prophecy of the so-called Aboriginal Risk Group masculinity, as he consumes alcohol and drugs at risky levels and employs extreme verbal, physical and psychological violence.

In conclusion the intersections of race, gender and class play a dominant role in health and violence for both Indigenous men and women. Lucashenko includes the statistics of domestic violence in her novel *Steam Pigs* and her protagonist Sue has internalised the colonialist idea that domestic violence is part of being black and female. Lucashenko strongly positions herself against this idea that rape and violence against women is part of Aboriginal culture. Roger's extreme alcohol consumption and his related aggressiveness is likely to stem from an identity crisis due to a destroyed sense of Aboriginal masculinity and the fragmentation of culture, land and family connections. Class is another important factor in the eruption of violence as the working-class outer suburb Eagleby is represented as a destructive site in juxtaposition with the non-violent inner suburb West End. The police and the white legal system are not seen as an adequate solution for the alarming cases of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities. Instead Melissa Lucashenko proposes female social workers with experience in violence against women that help victims such as Sue leave their lives as victims behind and move on to an independent, non-violent and fulfilling existence, which is in Sue's case realised by relocating to the inner city of Brisbane and starting a university education.

5.7 Drowning the Pain: Alcohol and Drug Abuse Among Indigenous People

Drug abuse and extensive intake of alcohol is a serious problem among Indigenous Australians. According to a national survey in 2004-2005 almost fifty percent of the adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population had drunk alcohol in the week before the interview and of this number sixteen per cent classified their drinking as risky (ABS, *National* 10). While no difference could be found between Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults with regard to chronic alcohol consumption (long-term risk), an alarming discrepancy was found with regard to binge drinking (short-term risk), which is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 6).

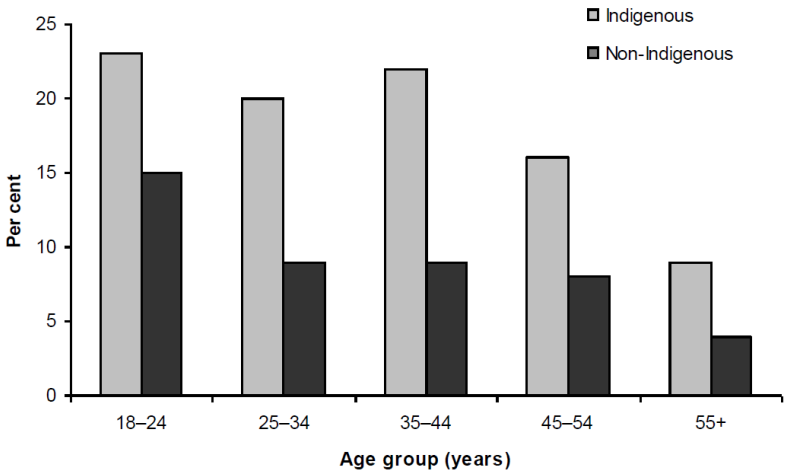

Figure 6: Percentage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults who took part in binge drinking once a week or more often (AIHW, *Substance* 17).

As can be seen from the graph (Figure 5) in some age groups nearly one quarter of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults interviewed in the survey drank at risky levels at least once a weak. In all age groups Indigenous people were more likely to participate in binge drinking than non-Indigenous people, with a ratio up to two (AIHW, *Substance* 17).

Indigenous people are also more likely than non-Indigenous people to use illicit drugs, especially marijuana, speed and non-prescribed pain-killers (21). According to a study in 2007 53.2 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged fourteen and over had used drugs at least once in their lifetime, with 24.2 per cent being recent users. In comparison, only 37.8 per cent of the non-Indigenous people over thirteen had used an illicit drug, of which 13.0 per cent had used it recently (AIHW, *Drug* 44).

Both alcohol and drug abuse have been found to be associated with violent and anti-social behaviour (AIHW, *Substance* 11, 20). Excessive substance abuse is not a problem restricted to the Indigenous people of Australia but can be found among several minorities in the world[28]. This is no coincidence but a result of the oppression from which minorities such as the Indigenous communities of Australia have suffered and are still suffering in many contexts. Among the factors that are said to provoke alcohol and drug abuse are "economic marginalisation, discrimination, cultural dispossession and cultural assimilation difficulties, family conflict and/or violence and family history of alcohol misuse" (AIHW, *Substance* 11). Dawe et al. have noted that alcohol and drugs can be a means to drown the pain as a result of the fragmentation of culture, family ties

[28] An American health survey in 2010, for example, found that the rates of binge drinking and use of illicit substances was higher for Native Americans than for the general population (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 1).

and identity and the anger and despair in view of every-day racism, sexism, poverty and violence (94). Thus drug and alcohol misuse is in fact only the tip of the iceberg with a whole range of problems underneath: "It is not the drug or alcohol use that is the whole problem. Take the substances away and the pain, the distress, the trauma remain" (94).

As with all other issues Melissa Lucashenko does not gloss over the problematic use of alcohol and drugs in Aboriginal communities in her novels, but at the same time does not reduce her characters to drunkards in the parks or unemployed drunk addicts, as the common stereotype goes. In several cases Lucashenko reveals or alludes to the reason why the characters have turned to heavy drinking or using illicit drugs. In *Steam Pigs*, for example, Sue's mother Annette has been brainwashed by white authorities into denying her Aboriginal identity. This identity loss parallel with the racism she faced may have resulted in her becoming alcoholic. Sue similarly turns to alcohol in order to forget the pain after leaving Roger and her lacking roots to her culture. Her brother Dave spends half of the weekly grocery money on beer after his wife Betty left him. Only when he has a new girlfriend is he trying to abstain from heavy drinking. Roger, finally, is frequently heavily drunk and drugged. As has been discussed in section 5.6 this might be due to the fragmentation of culture, family and masculinity. Thus, in all cases there is a deeper reason why the characters turn to alcohol and in most cases this has to do with the effects of colonisation. Her characters are therefore not the anonymous "drunken Aboriginals lurking menacingly in the margins in Act One" (Lucashenko, "Dead"), as she criticised the common representation of Aboriginal people in film and fiction, but are human beings with their own individual histories and problems. Dawe et al. note that "[f]or many, alcohol became the treatment of choice, because there was no other treatment available" (94).

In her books Lucashenko definitely rejects alcohol as a treatment as it only drowns the pain but does not heal it and makes people aggressive and/or depressive. In *Steam Pigs* Kerry, who is often the vehicle for Lucashenko's voice, opinions and beliefs, warns Sue to consume alcohol when she is suicidal because alcohol will only make it worse as it is a depressant itself (218). Alcohol is also very tightly interrelated with violence, which is best illustrated by Roger beating and raping Sue under alcohol influence. Sue is also notably more aggressive when she has consumed alcohol: for example, when she attacks the blonde woman with whom Roger has been flirting in the pub, Lucashenko notes that her rage and aggressiveness is "driven by a burning cocktail of alcohol" (83).

In *Hard Yards* alcohol is again deeply connected with pain and also aggressiveness, though it does not result in such extreme violence as in *Steam Pigs*. Right at the beginning the reader learns that alcohol has played a role in the death of Stanley though no details are given yet. Later the reader is informed that Stanley started a fight under the influence of alcohol. Stanley's brother Jimmy tries to drown his sorrow and anger in alcohol though his mother does not approve: "my lil' bruver's gone and if I wanna drink, I'll fucken drink" (*Hard Yards* 5). In *Mullumbimby*, on the other hand, alcohol misuse is not a dominant issue. Though Jo and Twoboy frequently drink some beers, they never do it at a risky level. Even when Jo loses her beloved colt Comet she does not try to forget her pain with alcohol but continues to drink her usual cup of tea. Later on again not alcohol but tea and ice cream are offered by other people who learn of her misfortune in order to give solace. Thus Lucashenko takes a firm stand against the use of alcohol as a treatment for pain. In terms of drugs the main protagonist Jo takes a clear stand against illicit substances like marijuana when she destroys all such plants on her farm land. She considers drugs neither cool nor a refuge from pain, but as "just another tool of the landgrabbers. *Leave it alone. Stay away from the snake. Addiction is no revolution*" (94). Twoboy thinks differently to Jo as he frequently smokes yarndi[29] and does not consider it dangerous. However, no negative consequences of his smoking drugs are known to the reader. In an interview Melissa Lucashenko revealed the reason for marginalising alcohol and drug misuse in her latest novel, when she said that she wanted to write a novel with new Aboriginal heroes[30] who did not drink or smoke excessively – this has been achieved by *Mullumbimby*.

In conclusion, Melissa Lucashenko presents risky consumption of alcohol and illicit use of drugs as a major problem in Aboriginal communities, especially in her earlier novels *Steam Pigs* and *Hard Yards* (her latest novel marginalises drugs and especially alcohol but does not gloss over or ignore them). However, her characters do not just drink for whatever reason but because of traumatic pain, loss and anger. Thus, Lucashenko de-anonymises alcoholism and its victims and opens the reader's eyes to the problem behind substance misuse, namely the still-felt effects of colonisation and racism. At the same time she vehemently discourages alcohol or drugs as a treatment for these traumata either by directly stating that in the novel or indirectly, for example through Roger's violence against Sue which is always preceded by alcohol intake.

[29] yarndi = marijuana (*Mullumbimby* 285).

[30] More details with regard to her other purposes and the realisation of this specific personal goal will be given in section 6.1.

6. The Writing Self and the Way of Writing

Though at first glance Aboriginal literature might seem easy to define – for example as texts produced by Aboriginal authors – it is much more complex. It is agreed amongst the Aboriginal writing community that Aboriginal authorship (or at least co-authorship) is the decisive ingredient of whether labelling a piece of literature as Aboriginal is acceptable or not (Heiss 26). The question is, however, if every text by an Aboriginal author is automatically Aboriginal literature. The late Indigenous poet Lisa Bellear challenged the category 'Aboriginal literature' altogether when she posed the following questions: "Is it Aboriginal literature because it's written about an Aboriginal person? Or is it Aboriginal because it's written by an Indigenous person about Aboriginal characters? Or is it Aboriginal just because it's written by an Aboriginal person, even if it's about someone surfing down Byron Bay" (qtd. in Heiss 27). The Indigenous author Alexis Wright highlights the difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal literature in terms of style, which might deviate from what is considered Standard English or the standard way of writing (qtd. in Heiss 26). This is definitely true for Melissa Lucashenko's novels and will be analysed in detail in subsection 6.2. Melissa Lucashenko herself defines Aboriginal literature in terms of content: "Aboriginal writing to me at the moment is a protest literature I suppose and it's centered around land and social justice and legal stuff" (qtd. in Heiss 27).

The following sub-sections will analyse Melissa Lucashenko's purpose in writing (Aboriginal) literature and her writing style with specific regard to the mode of narration, focussing especially on the question whether or not there is a difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal styles.

6.1 The Writer as Activist and Educator

In a seminar called "The Spear of Aboriginal Literature – Placemaking and Peacemaking Through Story" Melissa Lucashenko revealed her personal reasons to tell stories. The first reason has to do with identity (i.e. tell who your are), the second with education (i.e. teach how to live) and the third with decolonisation. Lucashenko says "I write to decolonise" ("Spear") and by that she means changing the stories that have been told about Aboriginal people from the British colonisation of Australia onwards. In these colonialist stories Aboriginal people have been and continue to be portrayed as

the Other, inferior and on the edge of extinction. In more recent portrayals they are also often connected with shame, for example for not knowing the language of their kin, not knowing one's ancestors or having too white a skin (Lucashenko, "Spear"). Melissa Lucashenko therefore sees her role as an Aboriginal writer as an educator and an activist for Aboriginal rights, equality and self-determination.

In Lucashenko's novels there are several passages which inform the reader about non-fictional facts and figures with regard to the Aboriginal people's status as minority and the racism and poverty they have to face. In *Steam Pigs*, for example, the reader learns that "we're [i.e. the Aboriginal people] only two per cent of the population" (20) and that "[o]ne [woman in] a week [gets killed in domestic violence] in Queensland, and [that the] black homicide rate [is] ten times that of the whites" (200). In these awareness-raising passages Lucashenko highlights issues of injustice, violence, (police) racism and poverty, and thus imbues her fictional stories with shocking non-fictional truths. The passages are directed at various target groups: Aboriginal people in general, Aboriginal women, Aboriginal men and also non-Aboriginal people. In *Steam Pigs* there is a particularly powerful passage, in which Melissa Lucashenko addresses her (urban middle-class white) implied readers directly and effectively criticises their condescending attitude towards lower class people: "What do you know? You're not them. You think they're stupid because they're poor, but their bare feets beat rhythms your city never will. […] They can live on your lunch money for a week, because they must. Your North Quay towers are no more exclusive than their CocaCola huddles, and your suit is almost as funny as your straight, white face" (7). Passages like these make Lucashenko's novels highly political, as they point out social inequalities and racism. For Indigenous academics Anita Heiss and Peter Minter this "nexus between the literary and the political [is] a persistent and characteristic element in Aboiginal writing" (2).

Melissa Lucashenko does not only try to improve the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as well as the violent situation in Aboriginal communities, but she also aims at changing the representation of Aboriginal people in fiction. In a lecture Melissa Lucashenko stated that she had become tired of all the onesided Aboriginal characters in texts of fiction, who are either noble savages, drunkards, or "dead by page 50" ("Dead"). Lucashenko calls for more Indigenous heroes and heroines in art: everymen and –women who have never been to prison, and have got money, culture and happiness ("Dead"). This call has been most successfully realised in Melissa Lucashenko's latest novel *Mullumbimby*, where she wanted to have her Aboriginal

characters possess "four things: Beauty. Power. Humour. And Land" ("Dead"). This aim resulted in the central character Jo Breen, who is independent, educated, spiritual, modern and (for most of the time) content with her life. Unlike the 'traditional' representations of Aboriginal people she is a multilayered, vibrant and strong character with strengths but also weaknesses, and develops over the course of the novel. Thus, Lucashenko has created a role model of an Aboriginal heroine and paved the way for more diverse Aboriginal characters in modern literature.

6.2 The Merging of Narrative Situations and Its Function in the Texts

In the previous subchapter the term *implied reader* has been used to describe the readership the author had in mind for his or her work. This shows that the communicative process in narrative texts involves more steps than the obvious communication between author (sender) and reader (receiver). The following model was devised by Seymour Chatman and is one of the most influential communication models in literature and film analysis (Figure 7). Chatman divides the communicative process into six entities, namely real author, implied author, narrator, narratee, implied reader and real reader, and arranges them on a unidirectional chain:

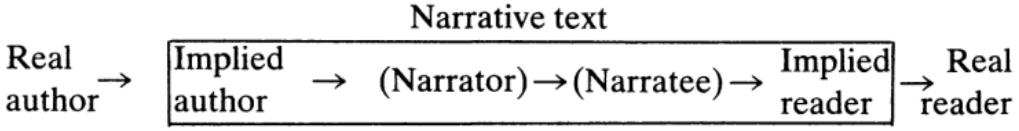

Figure 7: Chatman's communication model for narrative texts (Chatman 151).

Chatman positions the real author and the real reader outside the narrative text, although they are of course essential with regard to the mere existence and reception of the work (151). Their respective equivalents within the narrative text are the implied author and the implied reader. Chatman's implied author and reader correspond to Wayne Booth's concept of the imagined author and reader: "the author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his reader; he makes his reader, as he makes his second self, and the most successful reading is one in which the created selves, author and reader, can find complete agreement" (Booth 138). Thus, the real author constructs an implied author as well as an implied reader. At the same time, however, the real reader also constructs an image of the author, which is again the implied author and not the

real author. This last realisation might reveal a shortcoming of Chatman's model as it is unidirectional and thus does not allow any involvement on the part of the reader (Reese 70-71).

Chatman has put the narrator and the narratee into parenthesis, meaning that they are optional in a narrative text. At another point, however, he seems to be more careful with his claim of a non-essential narrating instance when he says that the term "minimally narrated […] transmission" might be preferred to "nonnarrated" (149), indicating that a narrator is always present, no matter how covert. Some literary critics completely reject Chatman's claim of the optional status of the narrator. Tzvetan Todorov, for example, highlights the narrator's importance in a narrative text when he says that he or she "c'est le sujet de cette énonciation que représente un livre" ("is the subject of the enunciation that a book represents") (146). Narratologist Rimmon-Kenan also states that "there is always a teller in the tale" (88). The following model (Figure 8), devised by Wolfgang Weiß, takes this position into consideration and additionally includes the narrative transmission by the characters:

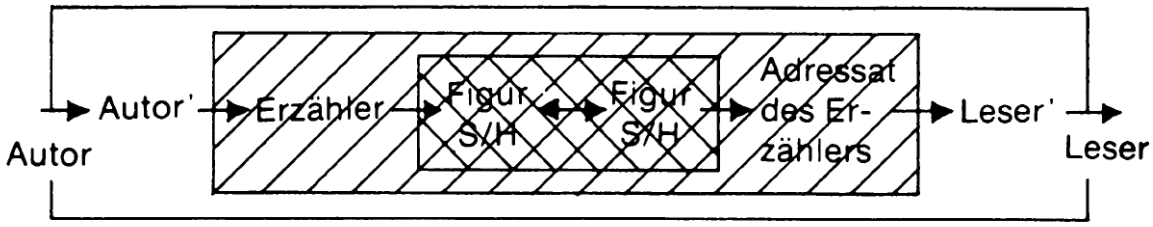

Figure 8: Weiß' communication model for narrative texts (Weiß 132).

The next step in deconstructing communication in novels is the analysis of the narrative situation. Two of the most influential narratologists are the literary theorists Franz Karl Stanzel and Gérard Genette. Stanzel defined three typical narrative situations, namely first-person, authorial and figural narrative situation, and distinguished them by using the categories of mode (narrator vs. reflector), person (identifaction vs. non-identification[31]) and perspective (external vs. internal) (51). The first-person narrative situation is marked by a first-person narrator who is part of the story that is being told. The authorial narrator, on the other hand, is an external narrator, i.e. is not a character in the story that is narrated. The figural narrative situation, finally, is characterised by the withdrawal of the narrator and internal perspective, resulting in a reflector instead of

[31] Stanzel highlights that not the person, i.e. first or third person, is important for the distinction, but "the question of identity or non-identity of the realms of existence to which the narrator and the characters belong" (49). Thus, an authorial narrator commenting on an event in first person does not automatically become a first-person narrator, but remains authorial due to the criterion of non-identification.

teller mode and mock immediacy (Stanzel 4-5). These three types are only the prototypical forms of narrative situations. In order to show the fluid transitions of one form into the other and the several hybrid forms that lie between them Stanzel devised a typological circle of narrative situations (Figure 9).

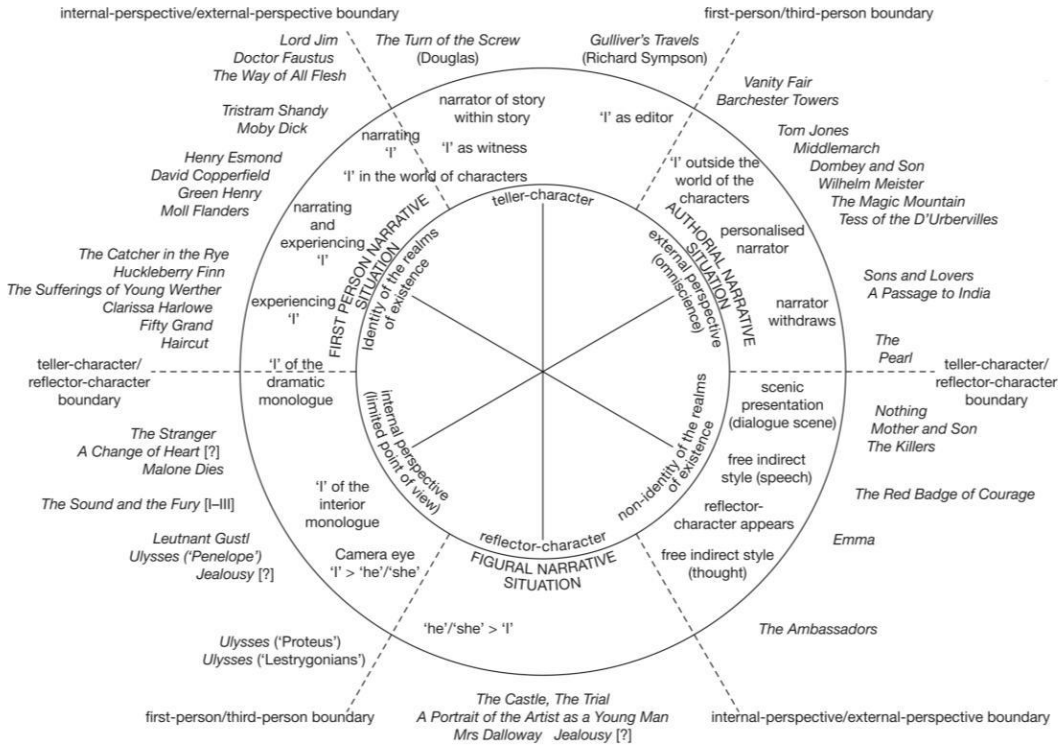

Figure 9: Stanzel's typological circle (Stanzel xvi).

The circle is divided into three parts, namely authorial, figural and first person narrative situation. Each of these parts exhibits three boundaries, respectively, which are the above-mentioned distinguishing criteria mode, person and perspective. Thus, Stanzel has created a continuum of narrative situations on which the work of fiction under analysis can be placed. Taking an example by Stanzel, both *Vanity Fair* by William Thackeray and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy feature an authorial narrative situation, but the first is placed nearer to the first person narrative situation than the latter due to its frequent comments of the (external) narrator in first-person.

The French literary theorist Gérard Genette devised another model of communicative situations, dismissing Stanzel's circular form as well as prototypes as a starting point of analysis. Genette's model is based on the two questions Who speaks? and Who sees / perceives? in order to describe narrator and focalisation, respectively (*Discourse* 186). The result is a table of freely combinable categories which enable the analyst to precisely describe the narrative situation at hand (Table 1).

Level / Relation	Extradiegetic			Intradiegetic		
Focalization →	0	Internal	External	0	Internal	External
Heterodiegetic	*Tom Jones*	*Portrait of the Artist*	*The Killers*	*The Curious Impertinent*	*L'Ambitieux per amour*	
Homodiegetic	*Gil Blas*	*Hunger*	*L'Etranger?*		*Manon Lescaut*	

Table 1: Genette's model of narrative situations (*Revisited* 128).

Genette dismisses the partly confusing terminology of Stanzel, such as first-person narrator. This term might be unclear as the first-person narrator is not the only narrative situation where the "I" is possible, since an authorial narrator can also refer to him- or herself in the first person. In order to unravel this possible confusion Genette does not define a narrator according to the person that is used but according to where the narrator is situated: a heterodiegetic narrator is a narrator who is not a character in the novel, but is situated outside the world of the characters in a kind of middle stage between the story and the reader. A homodiegetic narrator, on the other hand, is a character in the novel and thus tells the story from the inside. The special case in which the homodiegetic narrator is also the protagonist of the novel and thus tells his or her own story is called autodiegetic narrator (Genette, *Discourse* 244-245).

In terms of focalisation Genette distinguishes between zero, internal and external focalisation. In a non-focalised narrative the narrator is omniscient, which means that he or she has a greater knowledge than the characters in the novel. External focalisation is characterised by a neutral narrator who just observes the events but does not comment on them or depict them through the lens of a specific character. Finally, a narrator with internal focalisation limits his or her perspective to one or more characters, called focalisers. Internal focalisation can be fixed (one focaliser), variable (more than one focaliser) and multiple (more than one focaliser for the same narrated event). It is important not to confuse narrator and focaliser. A well-known example of a heterodiegetic narrator with internal focalisation is James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the narrator adjusts his way of writing to the age of the focaliser, Stephen Dedalus. At the beginning of the novel, for instance, short, simple

sentences are used together with baby language: "Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was coming down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo. His father told him that story: his father looked at him through a glass: he had a hairy face" (Joyce 7). Glasses are here circumscribed by "a glass" because young Stephen does not know the correct term yet. The older Stephen gets, the more complex the sentences become. Nevertheless, it is not Stephen who is telling his story, but the narrator – with internal focalisation.

Finally, Genette includes levels of narration in his model and thus distinguishes between an extradiegetic and an intradiegetic narrative situation, the latter describing second-level-narration, for example a story within a story. In summary, Genette's model allows for a more precise description of narrative situations, as can be seen from the following example. In Stanzel's terminology Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* is described as a figural narrative situation. Using Genette's analysis chart the description becomes more specific: the novel exhibits a heterodiegetic-extradiegetic narrative situation with internal focalisation.

In Melissa Lucashenko's novels *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby* a heterodiegetic-extradiegetic narrative situation with variable internal focalisations is used most of the time. In Stanzel's words Lucashenko employs a third-person-narrator and limits the point of view mainly to the main protagonist, but also switches to more minor characters from time to time. However, some passages are difficult to analyse with regard to the narrative situation and the identity of the narrator, as they do not allow a clear-cut categorisation.

This is especially true for Lucashenko's first novel *Steam Pigs*. The book begins with a short prologue which might be confusing for readers on many levels. First of all, the prologue is told in the present tense and it is not entirely clear when the events are taking place, as afterwards the story is told in past tense and the trip to Surfers Paradise mentioned in the prologue does not appear again. Secondly, the identity of the narrator is both obscure and confusing, as there are converse hints:

> Everything in their lives is going to be fixed one day soon, ("I dunno when, soon I said, alright?") and Dave's XB is no exception. In December it is a gleaming vee-eight marvel to the street, fucken hot as, eh, bucket seats, auto trans, cream duco, mags, easy terms, lovely. […] In March, the novelty has worn off a bit, the gas-guzzler still flash from the outside, but inside strewn with kid's toys, old receipts and bills, empty stubbies in the front under Sue's passenger feet unless she takes the trouble to clean them out. And what's one

> payment anyway, dunno what they're worried about. Maybe the mags could use a polish. In July, the petrol cap somehow gets lost (kids pinching petrol for their trail bikes, no doubt, if I catch the little sods doing it I'll kick their arses till their noses bleed) but is easily replaced for the time being with an orange plastic one from the Shell Beenleigh, just till he goes to the wreckers for another proper one, eh. (vii)

The passage is written by a homodiegetic narrator, i.e. a narrator who is also a character in the story, since the narrator promises to flog the petrol-cap-thieves. However, it is not clear which character the narrator is supposed to be. The language strongly resembles the main protagonist Sue's way of speaking, but Sue is mentioned in third-person, which seems to eliminate her as narrator. The mysterious identity of the narrator becomes even more puzzling after the last sentence of the prologue: "Still, the eight hundred [dollars] from the car kept em happy, brought everything up to date, and we got a weekend at Surfers out of it, too" (viii). The "we" indicates that the narrator went with "them", meaning Dave and Sue, to Surfers Paradise. However, this does not shed more light on the narrator's identity. Possible candidates for the trip co-participants are Dave's children Kirk and Lucky, but they are improbable as possible narrators. The only likely solutions are that the narrator is either Sue who tries to tell her story in third-person, but occasionally slips back into first-person narration, or an anonymous narrator who identifies so strongly with Sue that he or she sometimes uses first-person when narrating what in 'reality' happened to Sue. O'Reilly has also noted these inconsistencies in the narrative situation when he says that "Lucashenko's shifts in voice […] do not appear to follow any logic; however, they may be deliberate strategies to eschew traditional 'white' narrative techniques" (*Between* 191).

After the prologue the narrator is still quite active and overt, but does not give any more hints about his or her identity:

> Sue stood on the footpath and stared at the Riverleigh pub in rapt approval, though not for the usual Eagleby reasons. The besser-brick building squatted fatly beside the main road, marooned in a sea of white gravel. Well? [I]ts darkened windows asked the passers-by, what are you waiting for? You know you'll come in, token hesitation or not. The pub had no need to bag and plead. Beer is a seller's market, all over the world. (1)

However, the narrator is never mentioned in name by a character, which makes it less likely that the narrator is a member of the fictional world of the character other than those known to us. At first the narrator's knowledge seems to be limited to Sue's thoughts, but in chapter three the reader is also invited to read Roger's mind: "Nice arse,

nice face, no *susu*[32] but hey, two outa three aint bad, the man's thinking, watching Sue get out of the VW outside his flat on Riverhills Road" (19). Later on the narrator also exposes the thoughts of Kerry and Melinda, but only seldomly – most of the time the narrator follows Sue's thoughts and presence. These variable internal focalisalisations suggest a heterodiegetic narrator, i.e. a narrator who is not part of the story but for some reason can follow the characters and look into their heads. The complex of problems posed in the prologue are never addressed. Even the last sentence of the novel – "A person should write a book" (245) only mocks the reader's attempts to identify the narrator. Sue suggests that someone should write a book – and someone did. However, the narrator of this book stays as anonymous as the person addressed by Sue in this very statement.

Whatever the identity of the narrator, he or she fulfils a highly important role in the novel. The presence of the narrator is closely felt throughout the book. This is, on the one hand, achieved by the frequent employment of the second person ("What do you know? You're not them" (7)), and, on the other, by creating an atmosphere of face-to-face story-telling through comments by the narrator ("She [Sue] was lucky in this knowledge and – *although this came later, and I am getting ahead of myself* – discovered the possibilities of Limbo" [emphasis added] (7)). The narrator in *Steam Pigs* is also highly responsible for the reader's sympathy towards the characters. The main protagonist Sue is the dominant focaliser of the story and reader-sympathy clearly lies with her. According to Stanzel the

> [p]resentation of consciousness and inside views are effective means of controlling the reader's sympathy, because they can influence the reader subliminally in favour of a character in the story. The more the reader learns about the innermost motives for the behaviour of a character, the more inclined he tends to feel understanding, forbearance, tolerance, and so on, in respect to the conduct of this character. (128)

This can be shown quite well using the example of Melinda. Towards the end of the novel, the minor character Melinda rather unexpectedly becomes the focaliser:

> Melinda went quiet, not knowing what to say when it was obvious Sue was trying not to cry. She got up and took herself off to the loo, leaving Sue alone a bit. This is trickytrickytricky, she told herself, when a simple comment about dinner can open a Pandora's box of tears and lost parents. No wonder Rachel said to take it slow… I'm starting to know what she meant now. (227)

The reader is allowed into Melinda's thoughts as she tries to conceive of a strategy how to respond to Sue's personal history of violence. Her dilemma is effectively disclosed to

[32] *susu* = breast (Aboriginal English).

the reader by this change of perspective. The white reader is invited to identify him- or herself with Melinda and her insecurity with regard to bridging cultural differences.

However, focalisation can also induce dislike when the "inside views" (Stanzel 128) as Stanzel calls them are in opposition to the reader's beliefs or morals. That is probably the reason why the reader is allowed into Roger's mind the first time he appears in the novel, as his thoughts about Sue are superficial and do not make him appear sympathetic: "Nice arse, nice face, no *susu*[33] but hey, two outa three aint bad" (*Steam Pigs* 19).

In *Hard Yards* the narrative situation is more straight-forward. The narrator is cleary heterodiegetic and invites the reader into the heads of several characters, such as Mum King, Roo, Shaleena, Graeme and Daryll. Most of the time, however, Roo and his father are the focalisers. The transition between them is clear and not disturbing, as it changes with (sub)chapter-boundaries and the focaliser of the respective chapter is named straight at the beginning. Chapter two, for example, introduces for the first time Graeme as focaliser: "Graeme Madden checked the time showing on the microwave. It'd be an hour later in Sydney, eight-thirty, so Faith'd still be at home. Or rather: should still be home" (16). In the next chapter, the focalisation changes back to Roo: "His muscles stretched and loose, Roo stood in his Nikes and looked dreamily at the red rubber track" (27). The information that the narrator choses to reveal and not to reveal are vital for the reading of the book. For example, the reader knows of Roo's Aboriginality due to the narrator's comment that Graeme is inventing a Maltese nationality for Roo's mother (39). Without this overt interference on the narrator's side the reader would be in the dark about Roo's heritage, as Roo is himself. On a different matter, however, the narrator chooses to remain silent until the very end, namely Graeme's involvement in the death of Stanley. Thus the reader shares Roo's initial hesitance in categorising Stanley's death in custody as a matter of racism or accident. Another incidence which the narrator does not recount is Graeme's decision whether to commit suicide or to continue his life. His storyline suddenly stops when he feels the weight of his pistol in his trousers. This sudden stop, however, could indicate that the focaliser, Graeme, indeed pulled the trigger and died.

In Melissa Lucashenko's latest novel, *Mullumbimby*, the narrative situation is conventional except for a few passages. Lucashenko employs a heterodiegetic narrator with limited focalisation lying on the main character, Jo. The narrator is quite covert and

[33] *susu* = breast (Aboriginal English)

closely follows in Jo's steps. Only in a few instances does the narrator abandon Jo and recount an incident where she is not present. One of these instances is the short anecdote where Humbug is denied access to a supermarket after having triggered the smoke alarm and manages to turn the situation to his advantage by making the manager buy him chicken (136-139). This episode is told from Humbug's perspective and is quite disrupting as there is no transition or chapter boundary between the two different focalisers. The purpose of the passage is not entirely clear, as the story continues with Jo and the incident is never mentioned again, but it could serve as a humorous anecdote or as an example of Aboriginal people accusing other people of racism just to get their way. However, the sudden change of perspective remains disrupting, especially since Lucashenko uses free indirect discourse most of the time, which means that the voice of the main focaliser, Jo, and the voice of the narrator are – in Genette's words – "merged" (*Discourse* 174). This gives the impression that Jo is telling her story herself rather than a narrator. A sudden change of focaliser and a scene where Jo is not even present thus disrupts the reading.

In conclusion Lucashenko's novels sometimes do not obey the 'rules' of traditional narratology, but alternate and merge narrative situations. In *Steam Pigs*, for example, it is not clear in the prologue whether the narrator is hetero-, homo- or even autodiegetic and whether the narrator is Sue or somebody else completely. In *Mullumbimby* Lucashenko also surprises the reader by suddenly changing the focaliser of the story for a short episode. O'Reilly has argued that these irregularities are included deliberately in order to break the dominant system of 'white' narratology (*Between* 191). This fits into the picture of Melissa Lucashenko as an activist who aims at deconstructing power constructions, racism and white privilege.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to analyse the construction of Indigenous identity in contemporary Australia in view of racism, fragmented family ties and lost land. For this analysis Melissa Lucashenko's novels *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby* have been discussed with special emphasis on identity-shaping factors such as skin colour, culture, belonging and gender. Furthermore, the thesis attempted to identify how stereotypical, one-sided representations of Aboriginality, i.e. the Aboriginal people as the Other, are challenged in Lucashenko's work.

Australia's last 200 years, i.e. British colonisation, are but a fraction of the continent's human history, yet they clearly brought a change to the Indigenous peoples like no other period of time. After years of disregard, dispersal, so-called protection and assimilation, all euphemisms for massacres, dispossession and abduction, the First Nations of Australia were faced with lost or at least fragmented family ties, languages, social roles, land, culture and identity. The effects of this uprootedness are still perceptible in contemporary Australia, for example in health, education, housing, employment and life expectancy. It is thus more appropriate to refer to Australia as a postcolonising rather than a postcolonial country in order to point to the injustices that are still present although the country is on the right way. One of the problems is Aboriginalism, the colonialist reduction of the Indigenous people of Australia to a singular image fostered by Othering, which still prevails in Australia. A 'real Aborigine' is supposed to be black, live in a remote area and play the didgeridoo. This categorisation fails to see the plurality of Indigenous nations, cultures and appearances, and excludes the majority of Indigenous Australians nowadays. As a result, urban and/or lighter-skinned Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often denied 'authenticity', which can have serious effects on their identity formation.

Melissa Lucashenko's aim is to challenge such stereotypes and show the diversity and vitality of the Indigenous people, their languages and cultures. The psychological exclusion on the basis of skin colour as a result of Aboriginalism is one of the major themes in all of the novels by Lucashenko, who is herself lighter-skinned due to her father's European descent. A high percentage of her Aboriginal characters and all of her main protagonists have got a light skin colour and struggle with it, as they have to constantly prove their Aboriginality and even question it themselves, which results in identity crises, uprootedness and depression. Lucashenko also mercilessly shows the

ubiquitousness and extent of racism as well as its effects. *Mullumbimby*'s central character Jo, for example, has been trained as a child by her parents to 'be white' in order to evade racism. Characters with a darker skin like Twoboy, however, cannot hide their Aboriginality and face both personal and institutional racism due to their skin colour on a daily basis. Nevertheless, Lucashenko ends all her novels on a hopeful note as her lighter-skinned characters come to terms with their skin colour and realise that their Aboriginality has nothing to do with blackness but with identifying as Aboriginal, and her Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters are connected in a positive relationship. Thus, Melissa Lucashenko successfully challenges stereotypical and colonialist constructions of Aboriginality and gives hope for reconciliation and peaceful coexistence.

By showing the vitality of cultural practises, languages and rites Lucashenko also disproves the stereotype that Aboriginal cultures are obsolete and dying out. Though the characters often mourn lost cultural knowledge and the lack of elders, Lucashenko's novels are essentially a celebration of the survival and prosperity of Indigenous cultures. Both *Mullumbimby* and *Hard Yards* end with a hopeful look into the future, as the line of elders and keepers of the secret sacred site is secured through the youngest generation. What is more, each copy of the book *Mullumbimby* itself can be seen as a sustainer of knowledge since it includes a Bundjalung-English dictionary at the end and thus preserves junks of this language for future generations.

Another major topic in Lucashenko's novels is (ancestral) land and its importance for identity and belonging. Realising that after a time of dispossessions and displacements numerous Indigenous people no longer live on their ancestors' land and often do not even know where it is, Lucashenko employs two approaches to land in her novels, namely a pan-Aboriginal and a more specific one. In *Mullumbimby* Jo can only find her inner belonging on the homeland of her ancestors, namely Bundjalung land. This is further underlined by the map which appears on her daughter Ellen's hand. In *Steam Pigs,* however, the situation is different, because the characters do not know their ancestor's homeland. For Sue in *Steam Pigs* this is highly problematic in the beginning, but in the end she learns to embrace Brisbane as her home when she realises that it is essentially Yuggera country and thus an ancient Aboriginal nation which might have been her ancestors' home. Melissa Lucashenko therefore again deconstructs the traditional stereotype that Indigenous people can only belong to the bush by placing her characters in multiple landscapes such as the hinterland, outer suburbia and major cities.

The only place considered destructive is outer suburbia, which is described as a hotbed of violence as a result of unemployment and substance abuse.

The problems associated with claiming ancestral land have also been discussed in this thesis. In *Mullumbimby* Lucashenko juxtaposed two possibilities of retrieving land, namely buying it or filing a native title claim. Twoboy's claim highlights the problematic issues revolving around native title, as he has difficulty in proving his identity and his right before the court because his family has been forced by the colonists to leave their homeland. The native title claim, however, demands proof that the claimants have retained an unbroken connection to their ancestral land, disregarding that everything has been done in the past to break exactly this connection. Furthermore, even if the connection could be proved by retained knowledge of secret sacred sites, for example, it is often not allowed to disclose that knowledge to an uninitiated audience such as the court. In the novel this is symbolised by Ellen's refusal to show the map on her hands to the court. Lastly, Lucashenko questions the availability of the lengthy and costly native title claim to poor and illiterate people, such as the homeless Aboriginal elder Humbug. Though the author frequently criticises these downsides of the system, they seem to be forgotten at the end of the novel, when Twoboy's claim is granted by the court.

In order to alleviate the traumatic pain due to the issues described above several characters in Melissa Lucashenko's novels turn to alcohol and drugs. However, the author clearly positions herself against the use of such substances as treatment for trauma and instead proposes rebuilding a connection with one's heritage (if possible) and education. In *Steam Pigs*, for example, literature helps the demoralised protagonist Sue to overcome her pain and identity crisis. In the same novel Lucashenko also strongly refutes the idea of violence and rape as a part of Aboriginal culture. Instead it is linked to extreme alcohol consumption as a result of a fragmented Aboriginal masculinity and identity.

Melissa Lucashenko is not only a novelist, but also a political activist and educator. This is achieved by the current and important issues she addresses in her books, such as racism and other effects of colonisation, but also by her writing style. Several passages directly address the reader, informing him or her about shocking facts and figures and indicating instances of white privilege and power. What is more, Lucashenko also dissolves the rules of traditional, i.e. 'white', narratology by merging narrative situations. Her novels are targeted at a broad audience with specific messages. Non-

Indigenous readers are shown that Aboriginality cannot be seen or defined and that it has nothing to do with blackness, traditionalism and remoteness. Indigenous readers, on the other hand, are given strong and vibrant Aboriginal characters who have to face numerous struggles but overcome them in the end. These characters, who represent Aboriginal heroes/heroines and everymen/-women, pave the way for more diverse Indigenous personalities in modern literature which will then have a positive effect on the perception of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This thesis has solely focused on the representation of Indigenous people in Melissa Lucashenko's novels and a comparison with novels by other authors would have exceeded the scope of this thesis. It has been demonstrated in this thesis that the image of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by outsiders, that is non-Indigenous people, is often highly stereotypical and hardly authentic. Thus it may be worthwhile to compare the representation of Indigenous Australians in books written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors from the last two decades. This may shed light on different attitudes towards the Indigenous population and the concept of Aboriginality.

In conclusion, Melissa Lucashenko's novels grant the reader a glimpse into Aboriginal life which is often full of injustice, violence and identity crises but also vitality and joy. The author plainly shows the effects that colonisation had and still has on the Indigenous population and presents shocking figures regarding rape, health and poverty. However, while pointing out the injustices in contemporary Australia, Lucashenko also celebrates Aboriginal cultures, people and survival and conveys hope for a future in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people live in friendship together and are treated equally. This hope is powerfully illustrated on the cover of *Mullumbimby*: a bird's nest made from natural material and barbed wire – a symbol for the fences that marked the colonists' property. Similar to Kim Scott's statement cited in the introduction about literature being "a by-product of colonisation" (i) but also a "part of […] continuation" (i), here the fence which used to divide land and people is now made into a place of belonging and security.

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Index

Abstract

Though the British colonisation of Australia merely constitutes a small fraction of the continent's inhabited history, it had severe effects on the Indigenous population. Terms such as dispersal and protection have been used as euphemisms for the massacres, displacements and dispossessions of Aboriginal people by the colonists. In the last few decades the Australian government has tried to close the gap between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, but disadvantage in several areas, such as employment, education, poverty and health, as well as racism is still ubiquitous in Australia. In order to make their voices heard the Indigenous Australians did not only participate in organised political protests but also found a new medium, namely literature. This thesis examines the connection between politics and literature with special regard to the construction of Indigenous identities and the deconstruction of Aboriginalist stereotypes in three novels by the Indigenous author Melissa Lucashenko, namely *Steam Pigs, Hard Yards* and *Mullumbimby*. In terms of identity construction several factors such as skin colour, gender and the fragmentation of culture, family ties and land are analysed. The lack of guiding figures as a result of the disruption and dislocation of families in the past as well as present-day racism are shown to be omnipresent obstacles that Lucashenko's characters have to conquer. As a next step, the solutions the characters find in order to overcome these obstacles are examined, including alcohol and drug abuse, often in combination with violence, but also education and reconciliation. Furthermore, this thesis deconstructs colonialist representations of Aboriginal people which serve to reduce the Indigenous population to a homogenous Other and do not allow diversity and change. The effects which this image has on the self-perception of contemporary Aboriginal people are shown. Furthermore, the way in which Lucashenko challenges such stereotypical and one-sided representations is analysed, focusing on the creation of vibrant and strong Aboriginal characters and the celebration of the surviving Aboriginal culture, language and pride. Finally, the role of the writer and the writing style are considered in order to analyse how the author appropriates the new medium.

Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Obwohl die britische Kolonisation Australiens nur einen Bruchteil der bewohnten Geschichte des Kontinents konstituiert, hatte sie schwerwiegende Folgen für die indigene Bevölkerung. Englische Bezeichnungen wie *dispersal* und *protection* sind bloße Euphemismen für die Massaker, Vertreibungen und Enteignungen der indigenen Bevölkerung durch die Besetzer. Seit wenigen Jahrzehnten versucht nun die australische Regierung die Kluft zwischen der indigenen und nicht-indigenen Bevölkerung zu schließen, doch Benachteiligung in mehreren Bereichen, wie etwa Beschäftigung, Bildung, Vermögen und Gesundheit, sowie Rassismus sind in Australien immer noch allgegenwärtig. Um sich Gehör zu verschaffen nahmen die indigenen Australier nicht nur an organisierten politischen Demonstrationen teil, sondern fanden auch ein neues Medium, nämlich Literatur. Diese Diplomarbeit untersucht die Verbindung zwischen Politik und Literatur mit besonderem Augenmerk auf die Konstruktion von indigenen Identitäten und die Dekonstruktion von rassistischen Stereotypen in drei Romanen der indigenen Schriftstellerin Melissa Lucashenko, nämlich *Steam Pigs*, *Hard Yards* und *Mullumbimby*. Was die Konstruktion von Identität betrifft, werden mehrere Faktoren wie Hautfarbe, Geschlecht und die Fragmentierung von Kultur, Familien und Land analysiert. Das Fehlen von Vorbildern und Leitfiguren aufgrund der Spaltung und Vertreibung von Familien in der Vergangenheit sowie Rassismus werden als allgegenwärtige Hindernisse aufgezeigt, die die Charaktere in Lucashenkos Romanen überwinden müssen. Daraufhin werden die von den Charakteren gefundenen Lösungen zur Überwindung dieser Hindernisse untersucht, einschließlich des Missbrauchs von Alkohol und Drogen, der oft in Kombination mit Gewalt auftritt, aber auch Bildung und Versöhnung. Ferner dekonstruiert diese Diplomarbeit kolonialistische Repräsentationen von indigenen Personen, die nur dazu dienen, die indigene Bevölkerung zu einem homogenen Anderen zu reduzieren, und keine Diversität und Entwicklung erlauben. Die Folgen, die dieses Bild auf die Selbstwahrnehmung der heutigen indigenen Bevölkerung hat, werden gezeigt. Darüber hinaus wird die Weise, in der Lucashenko solche stereotypen und einseitigen Repräsentationen anzweifelt, analysiert, wobei der Fokus auf der Erschaffung von lebendigen und starken indigenen Charakteren und dem Feiern der überlebenden indigenen Kultur, Sprache und Stolz liegt. Schlussendlich wird die Rolle des Autors und der Stil erörtert, um zu analysieren, wie sich der Autor das neue Medium zu Eigen macht.

Curriculum Vitae

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