

Julia Schwob

University of Vienna

## The Development of Cross-Cultural Relationships in Australian Literature After 1950

How are cross-cultural relationships portrayed differently in texts by indigenous and white Australian authors after 1950 and to what extent have these changed ever since? This paper attempts to examine the depiction of cross-cultural relationships in Australian literature on the basis of 10 books from the 1950s onwards. The focus here lies on the portrayal of indigenous men and women as such before it centers more closely on rape as an instrument of oppression in the respective novels. Furthermore, it will be analysed whether there is a development of these cross-cultural relationships throughout the various periods of time and to what extent Aboriginal men and women are treated differently. The examined corpus of literary texts is constituted of the following:

- 1960s: *Riders in the Chariot* versus *Wild Cat Falling*
- 1970s: *Malloonkai* versus *Karobran*
- 1980-90s: *Radiance* versus *No Sugar*
- 1970-90s: *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* versus *My Place*
- 2000s: *The Secret River* versus *That Deadman Dance*



These texts will be reviewed according to their depiction of cross-cultural relationships on the basis of the concept of intersectionality that denotes that the discriminations based on gender, race, and class are intersecting and cannot be considered separately, as they are equally stratified by the dominant power relations of society (Anderson 446). The treatment of the role of female and male natives in their respective relationships appears to differ vastly as the women are not only discriminated against due to their race, and class, but their gender as well, and therefore count as triple-oppressed (Hill-Collins 231). Black women in these texts are often regarded as sexual objects, who are used for the white man's pleasure, but are also abused by indigenous men, who are encouraged to marry white women in order to increase their status. Moreover, the rape of native women is not considered an offence as Aboriginals were not granted full citizenship until 1967 (Wilson 88). Therefore, white men did not take responsibility for the children they sired, which resulted in the loss of identity for these "half-caste" children in most cases, who were taken away from their mothers, and who are still known as the "Stolen Generation" (Heiss, Minter 3). What is more, the assimilation policy even encouraged these cross-cultural relationships in order to breed out the Aboriginality of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, the development of cross-cultural relationships into something normal and natural can also be observed in many of these texts, especially in the most recent ones. Here the question of skin colour does not even arise in the first place and thus strengthens the overcoming of racial boundaries.

## Portrayal of indigenous women

Aboriginal women are portrayed very differently in all of the texts from the 1950s to the present, with descriptions ranging from their depiction as sexual objects to educated and successful women. Interestingly, both white and indigenous authors start out with the objectification of Aboriginal women's sexuality and thus oppress them sexually, while only the later novels offer more positive identity positions for indigenous women, such as the independent mother figure or the educated woman of culture. Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that indigenous women have to cope with the triple-oppression due to their gender, race, and class, which is vividly dealt with in some of the novels.

In *Wild Cat Falling*, the controversial novel by Colin Johnson, the black protagonist considers Aboriginal women as "gins" or "dolls," who are only worth mentioning to satisfy his sexual desire. Mostly they do not even have names, except for Denise, who is a semi-professional prostitute, but still he admits to treating her violently until "she lies like a discarded doll" (66). This also reflects his general relationship with women, as he regards his mother in the same way, since she failed to offer him a proper Aboriginal identity by attempting to assimilate into the white world. Therefore, he projects this disappointment onto all women, whom he categorizes as sexual objects, who are either "fuckable" or "past raping age" (42). The only reference to indigenous women in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot* is to Alf Dubbo's mother, who is described as "an old gin named Maggie" (313), a sexually promiscuous woman, as she has never been able to decide which of the white men on the reserve actually fathered him. In both of these early novels, indigenous women are clearly depicted very one-dimensionally, as their only purpose in life is

serving male lust and bearing male children, who then are the actual protagonists of the stories.

In *Karobran*, which is possibly the first novel by an Aboriginal woman, the story is unfolded through the perspective of a girl named Isabelle, who slowly begins to realize that her skin colour differs from that of her foster parents. Once her white mother dies and she is taken away from her Aboriginal father, she is trained to be a domestic servant, but later starts engaging in political activity. Throughout her life she is faced with her mixed heritage and thus is considered a “half-caste,” not really belonging to either the black or the white community. Furthermore, one of the worst discriminations she has to face actually comes from another (white) woman: “she’s Aborigine, and the likes of her should not even be allowed in the cities, at least not where people can see them” (63). The white woman refuses Isabelle’s service as a waitress and actually manages to get her fired. This clearly represents the intersecting oppressions of gender and race, and how the empowerment of women against sexism stops at the barrier of racism in their exclusion of black women into their demand for equality. In Donald Stuart’s *Malloonkai*, on the other hand, there are some indigenous women “lying with one or other of the four Waibilla” (14). *Waibilla* here means white men, and the Aboriginal women of the Marngoo appear to seek their companionship voluntarily, learning their language and customs, even though they are promised to other men of their tribe. Still, “Marngoo women could share the Waibilla’s blankets at night . . . , but there could be no other contact” (122). As the white men use the native women primarily for the convenience of cooking and warming their beds, they are not allowed to eat with them. Furthermore, when a white woman arrives, the indigenous women are thrown out of the house, thereby being shown their inequality in terms of race. So, the indigenous women are

depicted as living between two worlds, neither fully belonging to the Waibilla nor the Marngoo. They are described as treating their elders insolently, but eventually when their indigenous husbands come to claim them, they accept their promised ones. Therefore, the Aboriginal women in this novel are depicted as strong-willed and independent on the one hand, but as objects of trade and sexual exploitation as well. This leads to the conclusion that they are not esteemed for themselves by the male characters, but only for their value as workers and lovers. In contrast to the white woman, the indigenous women are once again portrayed according to the stereotype of their sexual promiscuity, and are thus discriminated against due to their gender and race as well.

In Jack Davis' play *No Sugar*, the Aboriginal women on the settlement are presented as hard-working matriarchs, who hold the family together and stand up to the Chief Protector in the rationing of their food. Nevertheless, they are also at the mercy of the white male gaze, and the Aboriginal girl Mary is actually assaulted by Mr Neal, the superintendent of their settlement (93). This unpunished violence towards and attempted rape of indigenous women criticises their status as property and objects that can be treated according to their owners' likings. The poverty of the Millimurra family additionally suggests the women's helplessness in dealing with their triple-oppression. Louis Nowra's play *Radiance*, on the other hand, only features Aboriginal women in the first place. These are portrayed as successful working women, but as victims of male sexual exploitation as well. The three estranged sisters meet after their mother's death and discover the secret rape of their sibling Cressy by their mother's indigenous boyfriend, resulting in her giving birth to the youngest one, Nona (63). In the beginning the older sisters are appalled by Nona's lifestyle of living off men, which can be considered a form of reversed exploitation of men,

whereas the eldest, Mae, dutifully nurses their mother and Cressy pursues her opera career, thus completely immersing herself into white culture. Eventually though, the women account for their past and are presented as complex and tragic characters, who have to handle their status as poor Aboriginal women in this patriarchal world.

In Thomas Keneally's *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* indigenous women are considered undesirable by the protagonist, as they do not enhance the status of a "half-caste" like a marriage with a white woman does. In contrast, sleeping with a black woman is regarded a vice, as "by lying with blacks a white man was gradually reduced to impotence with white women" (3). This blatant racial stereotype presents Aboriginal women once more as sexually more lascivious "gins," whose black flesh lures white men into their arms. This bodily lust of indigenous women serves as an excuse for their shared responsibility in the case of rape, as they are said to constantly tempt white men. Aboriginal men in this novel refer to them as "black bitches," who are then lent to white men to satisfy their carnal needs. This objectification of Aboriginal women once again criticises their double burden as female and coloured. In Sally Morgan's autobiography *My Place*, the metalanguage of race, which describes the phenomenon of the skin colour among black people as a shared identity marker (Higginbotham 267), is exemplified in her grandmother Nan's identification with African-Americans in the US, because "they shared the common bond of blackness and the oppression that, for so long, colour had brought" (Morgan 138). Furthermore, Nan also highlights the intersection of racism and sexism as she advises Sally not to let her daughter be treated like a black woman by referring to the sexual assaults of native servants by their employers. Nevertheless, this book celebrates the notion of an independent Aboriginal woman, who discovers her indigenous heritage and receives an Aboriginal scholarship to go to university.

Her Aboriginality is constantly questioned by the authorities as well as her own family, who have become used to hiding their ethnicity. In the course of her story, her mother's and grandmother's lives are unfolded and thus offer an insight into the different identity positions of Aboriginal women throughout the generations. From the "Stolen Generation" to the emergence of Aboriginal rights in the 1960s, different identities for indigenous women became possible. The oppression and fear of the older generations reflected in their stories gives way to the emancipated identity of a young woman discovering her Aboriginal heritage. There is a huge discrepancy in the portrayal of indigenous women in these two books. While they both feature the exploitation of native girls at mission stations, the indigenous writer Sally Morgan offers a positive identity for Aboriginal women as well.

In Kate Grenville's novel *The Secret River* Aboriginal women are depicted as peaceful companions by Thomas Blackwood, whereas the other convicts hold them as slaves to satisfy their carnal desires with "their black velvet skin" (262) that served as a signifier of the sexual promiscuity of coloured women. These scenes are shocking even to the convict-protagonist and are meant to be abhorrent to the audience. Once again black women are objectified by some white men, but also offered the possibility of being equal partners. In Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance* there is again this twofold view on indigenous women. The white convicts either visit the native campsite for their carnal satisfaction or they take them as their wives, like the ex-convict Jak Tar did with Bobby's sister Binyan (238). The other identity position for indigenous women in this novel is the matriarchal figure of the later tribal chief's wife, Manit, who is a strong-willed woman that instructs Jak Tar how to hunt properly. Both of these latter women are depicted as independent and complex characters, who offer a positive identity for Aboriginal women.

In all of these texts, different identity positions are presented for indigenous women regardless of the author's descent. The more recent works differ in their more positive and three-dimensional portrayal of Aboriginal women, whereas the older books predominantly tend to objectify them. Authors as well as characters in these earlier novels appear to depict indigenous women as sexually promiscuous and inferior, such as Colin Johnson, Patrick White, or Thomas Keneally, while the later texts actually criticise this view by presenting the dual picture of native women as sexual objects and equal partners at the same time, like in the postmillennial First Contact novels. However, in contrast to the white authors, Sally Morgan and Monica Clare as indigenous writers themselves present the identity position of an independent Aboriginal woman by writing an autobiography from their insider perspective.

## Portrayal of indigenous men

This chapter deals with the depiction of Aboriginal men in the texts examined, which ranges from stereotypical simpletons to empathic companions. With the emergence of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, the first novels written by indigenous people were published as well. Colin Johnson, who is said to have faked his Aboriginality, recounts the story of a young "half-caste" who struggles with his indigenous heritage in the racist society of the Australian 1960s. In the foreword, it is mentioned that he "had tried . . . by seeking white companions, to remove himself from the shadow of the native dilemma" (7), exemplifying the predominant assimilation policy at that time, which denied a positive Aboriginal identity. As a result of not really belonging to either the white or the black community entirely,



young mixed-race male natives often found themselves in Bodgie groups, where “most of them had served prison sentences on minor charges of drinking, receiving liquor for their elders, or petty theft” (9). Aboriginals were prohibited from drinking alcohol until they received full citizenship throughout Australia in 1967. The protagonist of *Wild Cat Falling* belongs to such a gang of youths as well and cannot identify completely with either this criminal side nor with the white intellectual part, which was forced upon him by his mother. Therefore, he perpetuates a nihilist attitude towards life until he meets his indigenous uncle, who raises the awareness of his Aboriginal ancestry, which he then embraces and uses as a starting point for a new life. Patrick White’s character, the “half-caste” Alf Dubbo, faces a similar problem, as he is also forced to assimilate into the white world. In doing so, he is confronted with prejudices, such as the natural laziness and the sexual virility of Aboriginal men. This is exemplified in the scenes when the parson of the mission station takes advantage of the boy, who is said not to resist and then blamed to be the culprit of the priest’s seduction. Later on, he is also described as visiting brothels and sleeping around with other women, thereby suggesting that indigenous sexuality needs to be satisfied irrelevant of the partner’s gender or the feelings involved. This racist depiction of indigenous men as sexually voracious appears to be a dominant stereotype maintained by white society in the 1960s. Furthermore, the protagonist has to cope with the hopelessness of his “Aboriginal situation” as he officially “was not a man, but a blackfellow” (408). This refers to the lack of indigenous rights until the achievement of citizenship in 1967, which eventually granted Aboriginals full status as Australian citizens. Both male protagonists are portrayed as social outcasts, who have to come to terms with their exclusion from the black and white communities alike. The outcomes of the novels suggest the two

options of either acceptance of the indigenous identity or suicide, the latter unfortunately being a common phenomenon among young males (Sissons 69). The Aboriginal identities offered in these texts perfectly mirror the possibilities and problems of indigenous men at that time. Even though the indigenous protagonists in these books are ascribed the racist character trait of native sexual virility, they also attempt to explain the motivations of these men against the prevalent historical background.

In Monica Clare's novel, the protagonist's father is portrayed as a loving individual who is forced to leave his children to the welfare department due to his limited opportunities of earning money after their mother's death. The historical background of the Great Depression of the 1930s here perfectly reflects the societal hostility towards (working) Aboriginals. The difficulty of finding a job is juxtaposed with the desire to care for his children. In *Malloonkai*, the male protagonist is similarly unable to protect his family. His attempt of living in the white and indigenous world at the same time fails in the end, as his wife is murdered by the white colonists, who were using him as a labourer before. He is depicted as a diligent and hard worker, whose understanding of both sides excludes him from the black and white communities simultaneously. Both of these books present male Aboriginals confronted with the prevalent powerlessness due to the pressure to assimilate into white society and hence the denial of the possibility of a family of their own.

In the play *No Sugar*, there are two identity positions available for male Aboriginals. On the one hand, there is the Millimurra family, whose male members are mostly imprisoned for offences such as drinking or public misconduct, thereby only offering a criminal identity for indigenous men. They are confronted with the stereotypes of their laziness, which supposedly prevents them from working, thereby

obfuscating the real reason of white people denying them proper payment for their labour. The other possibility is presented by the character Billy, who works as a black tracker and assistant to the police. He is considered a traitor of his "race" as he punishes other Aboriginals, while he himself in turn is maltreated by his white employers. The play *Radiance*, interestingly, never even features Aboriginal men in the first place and the only reference to an indigenous man is the "Black Prince," who raped Cressy and therefore fathered Nona (65). The play thus addresses the vexed issue of violence within the black community which Aboriginal writers mostly shied away from and presents a male Aboriginal as a violent child molester. Both of these plays present Aboriginal men with criminal identities, thereby suggesting the impossibility of a positive identification for indigenous men at that time.

In Sally Morgan's autobiography, her uncle Arthur states that he is proud of being a "blackfella" and of all the land that he owns, which is located in his ancestral country. He grew up on a reserve and then tells about the hardships of making a living in the white world as a black landowner. In the end he expresses the yearning for his place, as "he wanted to die on his own land" (166). Here the Aboriginal connection to their place of birth is exemplified in the wish to return there in the hour of death. Arthur is depicted as a strong and caring man, who succeeded in adopting a positive Aboriginal identity in the white world. In Thomas Keneally's novel, which is based on an actual incident around the turn of the century, the protagonist Jimmie is presented as an exploited "half-caste," whose attempt to assimilate into white society resulted in his running amok, killing several white women. The mission station's reverend recommends Jimmie to breed out his Aboriginality by marrying a white girl. Still "he was a hybrid, [s]uspended between the loving tribal life and the European rapture from on high called falling in love" (27). The racist prejudices such

as the natural laziness or native malice come true as a result of the constant (verbal) abuse by the white people in his life. Even though some positive character traits, such as his close kinship ties, are emphasised as well, his violent nature still prevails, as he is said to beat his wife prior to the rampage. Due to his wife's poverty, his status is not enhanced by this marriage, which perfectly reflects the intersectionality of race and class in terms of oppression. Aboriginal men in this novel are portrayed as victims of Australian society, as they are forced to assimilate into the white world by abandoning their indigenous heritage—with tragic results. Both of these books illustrate the difficulty of Aboriginal men to adapt to the white community, which only offered them limited possibilities to develop a positive identity at the turn of the century. Furthermore, the outcomes demonstrate the futility of forcing indigenous people to assimilate into white society, but instead white people should accept Aboriginal identities as an integral part of indigenous peoples' being, like in Arthur's case.

In Kate Grenville's novel about the first encounter between colonisers and natives, the Aboriginal people are considered savages by most of the convicts, "lower in the order of things even than they were" (95). When their criminal status in Great Britain is improved to that of a landowner in Australia, the convicts now feel even more superior to the dispossessed Aboriginals of that country. In the following passage, the protagonist William Thornhill juxtaposes the parallel mechanisms of oppression due to class and race in that

the blacks were farmers no less than the white men were. But they did not bother to build a fence to keep animals from getting out. Instead they created a tasty patch to lure them in . . . They spent a little time each day on their

business, but the rest was their own to enjoy . . . In the world of these naked savages, it seemed everyone was gentry. (237-38)

The natives' inferiority due to their skin colour is a mirror image of the convict's discrimination due to their poverty in their home country. Nevertheless, in this extract he actually acknowledges the indigenous superiority due to their way of life. Moreover, Aboriginal men in this novel are represented as proud warriors, who attempt to communicate with the white men. While they are regarded as filthy vermin by some convicts, the protagonist befriends them in the first place until the conflict escalates in the genocide of the natives. A similar development can be observed in Kim Scott's novel *That Deadman Dance*. The native boy Bobby serves as a cultural mediator for the settlers and indigenous people in the beginning and can even be compared to Jesus Christ, as he is said to awaken the dead and also resurrects himself (131). Furthermore, due to his service as an interpreter he is respected by both the white and Aboriginal community. Nevertheless, he is not considered an equal to the white people, but is rather seen as belonging to the black boys, who appeal to their shared marker of "race" as a metalanguage, which suggests that their discrimination due to their skin colour serves as a marker of cultural identity (200). The other Aboriginal men are shown as proud warriors, whose connection with their land and family is crucial for their identities. Bobby, who serves as a symbol for the peaceful union of the different cultures, turns into an old storyteller in the end, whose people were deprived of their land rights and murdered afterwards. These novels both appeal to the notion that there is, in fact, the possibility of a positive Aboriginal identity and a peaceful coexistence despite all the racism. Indigenous men are portrayed as complex and loveable characters, who try to cope with their new situations, but fail to succeed.

In all of the texts examined, the role of Aboriginal men mostly reflected what the different historical periods actually offered them. From the impossibility of a positive identity for male Aboriginals in the 1960s and 1970s to the acknowledgement of their complexity in the 1990s and 2000s, the texts present a fairly historically accurate picture of identity positions offered to indigenous men at the time of writing. While the criminal identities of male Aboriginals in the white novels mostly result in their death, such as Patrick White's and Thomas Keneally's protagonists, the (supposedly) indigenous authors additionally provide another opportunity for their characters by accepting their Aboriginal identities, such as Sally Morgan's uncle Arthur or Colin Johnson's protagonist. This discrepancy is then softened by the postmillennial First Contact novels, where both the indigenous and the white author offer multiple identity positions for Aboriginal men.

### Rape as an instrument of oppression

In the course of Aboriginal literary history, the rape of indigenous women was always one of the main issues. As they count as triple-oppressed due to the discrimination based on their gender, race, and class, they suffer more often from cases of sexual assault than white women do. What is more, the perpetrators are less likely to get convicted, if the woman is coloured. Furthermore, black women are considered as traitors of their "race" when they report sexual abuse by black men and thereby forced to hide these rapes from their own ranks (Crenshaw 361).

In Colin Johnson's novel, (Aboriginal) women are objectified and only considered in terms of their value as "dolls," who satisfy the protagonist's sexual desires. He even admits abusing the coloured girl Denise when he "pull[s] off her

clothes and take[s] her violently, like it was rape" (66). In this story, sexual intercourse is regarded as a play of power for the main character, as he maintains the view of women's worthlessness in order to make up for his lack of power and frustration. Similarly, Patrick White's novel perpetuates the notion that Aboriginal women love to play the part of the "whore" for white men, when Alf Dubbo's mother is introduced as a sexually promiscuous person, who cannot even remember her son's father (313). In both of these novels, the racist picture of this semi-prostitution of Aboriginal women can be considered as a form of "legal rape." The women are objectified and oppressed by the male characters of these stories, who assault them sexually mirroring the society's racist attitudes towards the accepted rape of indigenous women.

In Donald Stuart's novel *Malloorkai* the Aboriginal women willingly warm the white men's beds, only to be discarded by them once a white woman arrives. Furthermore, they are treated similarly by their own people, as they are promised to specific men by the tribal system (115). This obviously grants them little freedom of choosing their own indigenous partners, while their sexual abuse by the white men is viewed as voluntary.

In Jack Davis' play *No Sugar*, in contrast, the superintendent of the settlement is actually described as a sexual assaulter of Aboriginal girls. As he serves as their protector and is responsible for their food rations, these rapes of indigenous girls are not reported and thus not punished by the legal system. Similarly, the Aboriginal girl Cressy in *Radiance* is raped by the ex-boyfriend of her mother, the so-called "Black Prince" (63). Her mother does not believe her and therefore this sexual abuse is likewise never reported. As the perpetrator in this case is a black man, the situation is reminiscent of Crenshaw's notion of the concealment of coloured women's rape by

their own ranks. Both of these plays reflect the historical period at that time, when the sexual abuse of Aboriginal girls was not taken seriously by the legal system and thus not punished accordingly.

In Sally Morgan's autobiography, her grandmother's rape by her employer is thematised, as this was considered part of the assimilation policy to breed out Aboriginality and thus justified by the legal system. She concedes that this happened to a lot of her co-workers at that time: "[w]e had no protection when we was in service. I know a lot of native servants had kids to white men because they was forced. Makes you want to cry to think how black women have been treated in this country" (337). The situation is similar in the story of Jimmie Blacksmith, as his mother was impregnated by a white man at the mission station, which happened frequently, with the excuse of the assimilation policy in the background. Furthermore, the so-called "half-castes" were then advised to breed out their Aboriginality by marrying white people, which in the case of indigenous women meant further sexual assaults by white men. Additionally, the white man's fear of the sexually virile native seducing white women is expressed in Jimmie's description as the "walking rape of womens' souls" (104) by the author. These two novels serve as a testimony of the assimilation policy at that time that allowed white men to rape Aboriginal women in consensus with the law in order to enhance the future lives of their "lighter" progeny.

The First Contact novel by Kate Grenville depicts the rape of indigenous women as a part of what the racist white ex-convicts consider their property rights. Here, Aboriginal women are objectified by the white settlers who disregard their status as human beings, and even chain them like animals. The protagonist of *The Secret River* is horrified when he sees "a black woman, cringing against the wall, panting so he could see the teeth gleaming in her pained mouth, and the sores



where the chain had chafed, red jewels against her black skin" (262). His neighbour sexually abuses this native woman and even offers her to Thornhill, as if he were lending him a bicycle. This racist character clearly believes in the stereotype of black bodies as sexual objects, as they are said to be more sexually active and lascivious. Interestingly, *That Deadman Dance* does not mention the sexual abuse of native women by the white settlers, aside from a brief remark by the convict Skelly, thus offering more empowering images of Aboriginal women.

In all of these texts the rape of Aboriginal women is discussed as a major issue of oppression. Mostly the sexual assaulters are white men, but there are some black men involved as well, who sexually abuse indigenous women. This instrument of oppression is a further confirmation of the status of female Aboriginals as triple-oppressed, as they are not only discriminated against due to their gender, but their race, class, and sexuality as well. Furthermore, the complicit role of the legal system is highlighted, as these sexual assaults of native women are not punished. As a result, rape as an instrument of oppression or even of the attempted annihilation (assimilation) of Aboriginals still is a crucial issue in the collective memory of indigenous people, especially women. In the earlier novels the authors tend to view women as complicit in the case of a rape, as they are considered as sexually lascivious, while the later books critically reflect the violence and racism of the male characters, as they are either depicted as psychopaths or as victims of the racist oppression who take it out on women. Even though, white and indigenous authors both critically engage with this issue of sexual assault of Aboriginal women by white men, it is interesting to note that it is a white author who adds the dimension of "intra-racial" rape.

## Stereotypes vs. acceptance

In this chapter, the relationship between indigenous and white Australian people is illuminated further. Therefore, friendships are investigated as well as cross-cultural relations between men and women, and it is explored to what extent these depictions developed in literature throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, cross-cultural relationships were actually forbidden by the Australian government in 1911 to segregate deviant Aboriginals from the mainstream society (Jordan 279).

In *Wild Cat Falling* the protagonist struggles with the two worlds of meaning, as he is brought up as a white person, but still misses something in his life. He is very cynical towards his mother's attempt to assimilate into white society by marrying a white man, but when he finally meets his indigenous uncle he reckons that they "would both have been better off if [they] had stuck with them" (120), referring to his indigenous relatives. Here his frustration is exemplified by his desire to connect with his Aboriginal heritage, as he feels like having served as "a sacrificial offering to the vicious gods of the white man's world" (120). His relationship with white girls is merely a physical one, as he describes sleeping with them as a great kick, but at the same time is annoyed by them, because they mostly consider him as an exotic experience: "[i]t's amusing in a way, after being born at the bottom of the world to find I have worked myself up such a long way. I frequent the best bodgie hangouts now and sleep with white girls if I want them – great kicks . . ." (33). Furthermore, he humours the white students when they consent that "given ordinary decent conditions [Aboriginals] would behave like ordinary decent citizens," as "[t]hey have such wonderful beliefs and customs of their own" (80). The novel was written against the historical background of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, when Aboriginal people had not received full citizenship status yet and thus white intellectuals also

debated indigenous rights. The protagonist does not approve of their opinions, as they themselves have never experienced the exclusion that he is faced with every day, and therefore their relationship is a very tense one. Still, this portrayal of cross-cultural relations remains controversial, as the author is actually accused of having faked his Aboriginality. In *Riders in the Chariot*, on the other hand, the “half-caste” Aboriginal Alf Dubbo is juxtaposed with a Jew and a madwoman, suggesting an equal discrimination experienced by all these characters. The lack of indigenous rights is exemplified by the fact that “[t]here was always the possibility that he might be collected for some crime he began to suspect he had committed, or confined to a reserve, or shut up at a mission, to satisfy the social conscience, or to ensure the salvation of souls that were in the running for it” (340-41). Aboriginal people at that time did not enjoy the same privileges that white people did, especially concerning their cross-cultural relationships. Alf Dubbo is described to be a sexually virile man, who is abused by his foster father Mr Calderon and his employer Mrs Spice alike. Both of them engage in sexual relations with him, but withal stress the fact that indigenous people are not their equals. Especially remarkable is the latter’s indignation that she is “not some bloody black gin” (338). In these novels, both of the authors acknowledge the prevalent white attitude towards Aboriginals at that time, which was still a repressive and abusive one.

In *Karobran*, the relationship between white and black people is a very much contested one, as the protagonist experiences discrimination on both sides. The novel is set in the historical background of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the father of the Aboriginal girl Isabelle concedes that “the colour of a man’s skin don’t mean much till something like this depression comes along, then it’s all important to be white” (3). After her mother’s death Isabelle notices her skin colour

for the first time and relates her different experiences with white people. There is an abusive ex-colleague of her father called Tom, who mistreats her physically and mentally, whereas her foster parents and her friend Bill, who engages her in political activity, accompany her throughout her life. As her mother was a white woman, her lighter skin excludes her from the black community as well, when she enters a black camp as a child. Later she “began to realise at the factory that her sheltered life in the white community in some ways had treated her well, but she was beginning to find that she was not being accepted by all she now met” (61). This especially refers to the encounter with a group of white women who manage to get her fired from her job as a waitress, which clearly emphasises the discrepancy between white and black women, especially concerning their shared (sexist) oppression due to their gender. Interestingly, she also acknowledges that

some of the white people had victimised those who treated Aboriginal people as equal . . . [but] no matter how sincere white people might be in trying to help the Aboriginal people to ‘kind of come out from under’, there was nothing that the white people could do for them. While ever Aboriginals remained under this inhuman fear of what Isabelle had come to call establishment authority, they themselves would be able to do nothing either. (82-84)

This clearly serves as a starting point for her own political activity, as she generally approves of white people’s help in their fight for indigenous rights, but admits that it is ultimately the Aboriginal people who have to stand up for themselves. What is more, she hopes for a better future of cross-cultural relationships, where “black [will] not [be] a dirty word, and that together with white it would mean strength for equality and human rights” (94). The peaceful union of her mother’s and father’s heritage for

her also symbolises the future equality of white and black people in her country. Contrary to the marriage of an Aboriginal man with a white woman in *Karobran*, the novel *Malloonkai* describes cross-cultural relationships as quite hypocritical. On the one hand Malloonkai and his fellow kinsmen are used as a labour force by the white men and their women are said to lie with the settlers, whilst white women are not allowed to be touched by native men. This coincides with Robert Miles' notion that

in situations of colonial settlement, considerable concern has been expressed about the potential for the wives of colonial settlers to be 'seduced' by sexually virile 'natives'. This has had major consequences for social control in the colonial situation, with both European women and the colonised men often being subject to strict observation and, in the case of the latter, extreme forms of punishment, especially where putatively 'inter-racial' sexual relationships have been illegal. (159)

This perfectly depicts the paradoxical relationship between the rights of indigenous and white men towards the women of the other ethnicity. Nevertheless, Malloonkai himself is said to be living two separate lives as "he slipped easily across from the world of the Marngoo proper man to the world of cattle man, at home in either" (158). He even finds himself respected as a diligent worker in the white world, which he is scorned for by his fellow tribal members. Eventually, after their wives' deaths, Malloonkai and the white man Haggus kill each other, and their mutual murder can be said to ultimately symbolise their equality.

In the play *No Sugar*, the relationship between white people and Aboriginals is an authoritarian one. The indigenous people living on the Moore River Native Settlement depend solely on the mission station's superintendent concerning their food rations as well as their behaviour, which often leads to the imprisonment of

Aboriginals in case of public drinking or indecent clothing. Moreover, the sexual abuse of indigenous girls by the superintendent is further evidence of the Aboriginals' subjection to white authority. When the political reason for their transfer to the settlement is uncovered, the Chief Protector attempts to appeal to their gratitude for the opportunity of taking their "place in Australian society, to live as other Australians; to learn to enjoy the privileges and to shoulder the responsibilities of living like the white man, to be treated equally, not worse, not better, under the law" (97). Nevertheless, the insincerity of these words and the following actions (the announcement of the discontinuance of their "privileges") once again exemplify the unequal relationship between white and indigenous people at the time of the Great Depression in the 1930s. The play *Radiance* does not actually feature white people, but the sisters only refer to them in their conversations about their mother's violent and abusive boyfriends (55). Here, the cross-cultural relationships are not portrayed positively at all, but rather as being exploitative.

In *My Place* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, cross-cultural relationships are illustrated very similarly. While the sexual abuse of Aboriginal girls by white men is accepted as a part of the assimilation policy, the intermarriage between an indigenous man and a white girl is regarded an atrocity. In the course of Sally Morgan's autobiography you can easily observe the historical development of Aboriginal rights. While her grandmother grew up with the view that if "you're white, you can do anything" (107) and when "you're black they treat you like dirt" (336), Sally herself is committed to her Aboriginal identity and has received an indigenous scholarship at the university. This novel clearly demonstrates the development from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Aboriginal Protection Board abducted "half-caste" children from their parents, to the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Similarly, the former rape of indigenous women by white men on mission stations and in domestic service develops into an equal “inter-racial” partnership, such as Sally’s marriage to Paul. Thomas Keneally’s novel, on the other hand, once again portrays the paradoxical relationship of white men’s accepted assault of indigenous women, while Jimmie’s marriage to a white girl named Gilda is regarded as a scandal, “for the whites had something of a tribal mentality too, in that they hated to hear that one of their girls was going to a darkie” (55). Aboriginal people, especially Jimmie, in this novel suffer from wide-scale discrimination by white society and ultimately the protagonist adopts the only indigenous identity offered, namely that of a criminal.

In the First Contact novels by Kate Grenville and Kim Scott, the hypocritical relationship of cross-cultural intimacy is once more emphasised. The conflicts between settlers and natives, due to their different languages and cultures, are portrayed vividly. In both novels the first encounters start out on friendly terms, but finally result in the genocide of the indigenous people. In *The Secret River* the protagonist befriends the Aboriginals living on “his” land and his neighbour Thomas Blackwood even starts a love-relationship with a native woman, whereas the other convicts consider them “thieving black buggers . . . taking advantage of a man’s hard work” (169). Eventually, after the murder of the “inferior race,” “[t]hose who did not die would marry among the lesser kind of whites. Learned gentlemen had announced that the blackness would be bred out in a few generations” (341). This once again refers to the Australian assimilation policy attempting to annihilate the Aboriginal culture and heritage. In *That Deadman Dance* it is once more stressed that the relationship between the white ex-convict Jak Tar and Binyan, an Aboriginal girl, is an equal partnership, while the union of Bobby, the indigenous mediator, and Christine, the harbourmaster’s white daughter, is indeed socially impossible (292).

This hypocritical fact can be traced back to the fear of the indigenous men's sexual virility seducing white women. What is more, the friendship between the settler Dr Cross and the Aboriginal chief Wunyeran, who also exchange clothes as a sign of their respect of the other culture, symbolises the peace between the white and black community. Their shared grave suggests the harmonic coexistence of the cultures and the later destruction of the grave and Cross' separate burial can then be interpreted as a symbol of the peoples' segregation (311). Interestingly, the indigenous child Bobby is also referred to as Cross' boy, the name suggesting the cross-cultural connection of the different peoples.

In all the texts examined, cross-cultural relationships are mostly portrayed as reflecting the situation of the particular historical period of the temporal setting of the books. This ranges from the physical and mental mistreatment of Aboriginals by white people to their achievement of indigenous rights in the 1960s. All of the authors attempt to illustrate the victimisation of Aboriginal people, thereby presenting them as complex characters who suffer from white oppression and misrepresentation. Nevertheless, there is also a development from a more stigmatised perception of cross-cultural relationships in the earlier texts towards a greater acceptance of these in the more recent novels. While the indigenous texts include a more emotional portrayal of the past discriminations due to their insider perspective, the white novelists, however, acknowledge their complicity in the Aboriginal oppression by addressing these issues in their books.



## Conclusion

This paper discussed the portrayal of Aboriginal men and women in the literary texts examined in detail. Moreover, rape as a major issue in these texts was considered as an instrument of oppression, and the depiction of cross-cultural relationships was illustrated in view of their respective historical background. Indigenous women undergo a development from their portrayal as mere sexual objects in some of the earlier novels to more complex and educated characters. Aboriginal men, on the other hand, are mostly described according to the dominant social structures at that time, which only offered them a criminal identity in the earlier novels, while they developed a more positive one in the course of time. The representation of sexual assaults on Aboriginal women by white men is portrayed as a crucial issue, as it serves as a further instrument of oppression, not only due to their race but their gender as well and thus introduces their status as triple-oppressed. What is more, the relationship between white and indigenous people is quite paradoxical, but thus corresponds to the historical and political circumstances of the temporal settings of the novels. The cross-cultural union between Aboriginal women and white men is accepted as part of the assimilation policy in the beginning and later as an equal partnership, whereas the indigenous men are not allowed to be with white women. Interestingly, this fear of the "Other" is explained through the stereotype of the sexual virility of native men. Eventually, the cross-cultural relationships, also in terms of friendship between the different cultures, are depicted very convincingly in the contemporary novels in contrast to the earlier novel by Patrick White, which presented indigenous people very one-dimensionally. The temporal settings of these novels reveal the discrimination Aboriginal people are

confronted with in everyday life. These start out with the oppression that indigenous people had to suffer due to their disenfranchisement by the Aborigines Protection Act at the beginning of the century and culminate in their achievement of Aboriginal rights in the 1960s, when their empowerment also opens the way to university education. In doing so, the white and indigenous authors present a very similar picture, even though the Aboriginal writers clearly possess an insider perspective and thus render a more emotional and detailed story of their stereotyping and discrimination. However, the stereotypical depiction of Aboriginals in earlier texts, especially by white authors, develops into a more complex and sophisticated image of both indigenous men and women, including the possibilities of cross-cultural relationships on the basis of equality and friendship.

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