

'That Migloo Shit': The Clash of Cultures in Aboriginal Short Fiction Xavier Pons, Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail

It is fair to say that no aspect of Aboriginal life in the twenty-first century remains untouched by the massive, and in many ways oppressive, white presence in what used to be the traditional homelands of the first Australians. This is true of their social life, of their economic condition, and also of their cultural productions, especially their literature.

The very existence of this literature is predicated on the use of the white invaders' language and, though to a lesser degree perhaps, of their literary forms, which are all too often alien to indigenous traditions. In addition, the tragic history of indigenous dispossession at the hands of the invaders cannot but loom large in the outlook and preoccupations of contemporary Aboriginal writers – the descendants of the dispossessed ones, and themselves the victims of new or ongoing forms of European colonialism. Inevitably, then, Aboriginal literature enacts the clash of cultures which has been unfolding in Australia for over two hundred years. Its major point is less to produce aesthetically satisfying or innovative narratives than to assert an indigenous point of view that might counter the lies and distortions to be found in white pronouncements, and proclaim the continuing dignity of Aboriginal culture, fulfilling the expectations voiced by Philip McLaren when he said: 'As a kid growing up in the slums of Redfern I hoped one day someone would tell Australian stories from an Aboriginal perspective' (McLaren 1999, iv).

Clash means discordance and conflict – white culture and black culture are often presented as fundamentally at odds, with little common ground between them. Those differences are very much in evidence in Aboriginal writing, and they are the basis of the misunderstandings and disputes which keep the two groups apart, or bring them together in violent encounters.

Can any sort of accommodation be reached between the two cultures, as would seem desirable since, willy nilly, they share the same land and have no choice but to live together? Several indigenous writers suggest that convergence is not entirely out of the question, if only whites could heed the lessons of the land. While the racial conflict inevitably overshadows much indigenous writing, the picture the latter projects is not exclusively drawn in black and white, so to speak. There are suggestions of conflicts within Aboriginal culture too, and of cultural compromises which may allow indigenous and non-indigenous Australians to negotiate their differences. Aboriginal writing does not ignore the complexities inherent in those cultural encounters. The desire to rehabilitate their much despised culture, and their pride in being Aboriginal, does not blind the writers to the facts of cultural relativity

and the need of all cultures to hold a constructive dialogue with neighbouring cultures, no matter how alien they seem.

One of the most celebrated features of Aboriginal culture is its respect for the natural environment, its sense of the wholeness of the universe, of the interconnections between all living creatures, and between these and the natural world. By contrast, the whites saw the land, and the creatures that lived on it, as an enemy to be subdued and then ruthlessly exploited. Attitudes to the land, to the natural environment, are a basic sticking point, as they condition so much else beside, and the question of land rights has been a major bone of contention between the two communities for half a century. It is above all by taking away their land that the whites dealt a severe blow to the Aborigines' culture, and it is by getting their land back that the Aborigines seek to recover and maintain their cultural integrity. The whites' arrogance and insensitivity in respect of the land translate into racist violence towards its traditional owners, launching a cycle of destruction that engulfs both the environment and the people, and leaving Australia impoverished.

The contrasting attitudes are encapsulated in John Muk Muk Burke's novella, *Bridge of Triangles*: after a devastating flood, the local whites decide they've had enough: 'Many of the people muttered about the Godforsaken land and how they were going to pack up and go. How they didn't belong. How they were losing their fight with the land' (Burke 53). But the Aborigines see things very differently because they feel part of the natural environment:

No one understood the floods except the other people of the river. They lived not in a river but in the whole world. The landscape was not separated into hills, valleys, rivers, flats. The river was the sky. But there was no time. It hid and played under the dry flats and flowed across the face of the burning sun. It filled the space between the stars and as the whole great play of light and dark, of shifting water and wind-swept earth rolled around with its birds and lizards, kangaroos and snakes, everyone moved effortlessly like shadows in the bush, just as the sun moved away for the wind. Floods do not arrive either catastrophically or quietly – they are always here. The river is a tide... (Burke 53-54).

The world of the whites is all the poorer for their lack of spiritual connections with the land, for their inability, as a result, to see the wonder of the world. In the same novella Chris, a part-Aboriginal boy, moves from the bush to Sydney and feels oppressed by the dullness of the white world, which is exemplified by the way his mate Barry explains where babies come from – an explanation which is technically correct but coldly prosaic, so that Chris is left to wonder:

Was there really no magic? Did he not begin beyond the great looming sky-hill which dipped down to touch the rim of the world? No, everything screamed that Barry was wrong – and yet perhaps he was right for Sydney. Yes, that was it – in Sydney everything was changed. But back home – his real home where the Old Granny's kewpie dolls had hung around the walls and the great laughing Paula had stooped over the mint-perfumed washing tub and where the rocking sky was huge and clean in its infiniteness – why back there things were as they really were. Sydney was all wrong. His soul tried to resist it (Burke 86).

The white man's world is unnatural and soul-destroying, whereas the black man's world is continuous with nature, as Archie Weller also suggests in 'Stolen Car', where, contrasting the living, natural environment with the encroaching artificial one the whites have built, he says of a black youth: 'the tree and he are the same, out of place in this brick and bitumen world' (Weller 1986, 86).

The Aborigines' strong, vital connection to the land has to do with their spiritual outlook and takes its source in Dreamtime stories, as Alexis Wright's story 'The Serpent's Covenant' (Shoemaker 180-91) makes it clear. This is about a river in the Gulf country and the people who live there: the area was created by 'the ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds', which 'From time immemorial, ... gathered on the horizon, came down from the stars laden with its own enormity of creative pursuits' (Shoemaker 181). Only Aborigines, familiar with this story and 'living with the river from before time began' (Shoemaker 186), can truly understand the country.¹ As a result, they are in true harmony with the land,² while the white intruders, having no connection with the Dreamtime, do not know how to respond to unforeseen environmental changes.³ Contrary to what the whites believe, neither the land nor its native inhabitants need to be 'tamed' – indeed they cannot be tamed but simply mutilated.

The way the whites exploit, and in the process destroy, the environment is denounced by black writers – like Alexis Wright who deplores the role of mining companies which 'set about to pillage the region's treasure trove' (Wright 188) – and it underpins Kim Scott's allegorical story 'Capture'. A white couple, Peter and Cory, have developed an interest in native plants and animals, and think this is enough to achieve a sense of belonging: 'Like many Australians, Peter and Cory wanted to put down stronger roots in this country of ours' (Scott 25), the narrator notes in a phrase strongly tinged with irony. 'This country of ours', as he says—does he mean it is the country of all Australians, or exclusively that of the Aborigines? The drift of the whole story favours the latter interpretation. The couple's attitude is predatory and destructive rather than sympathetic or constructive, as appears from their collection of stuffed animals:

Shelves were crammed with stuffed specimens of various endangered and extinct species which, stiffly posed, were often stacked upside down, or balanced on one end. Most were missing at least a tuft of fur, a handful of feathers, a few teeth and their many dusty, glass eyes were oddly expressive; diffidence, defeat, confusion (Scott 29-30).

¹ 'The inside knowledge about this river and coastal region is the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal law handed down through the ages since time began' (Shoemaker 182).

² 'It takes a particular kind of knowledge to go with the river, whatever its mood', Wright says. 'It is about there being no difference between you and the movement of water' (Shoemaker 183).

³ 'A river that spurned human endeavour in one dramatic gesture of jilting a lover who had never really been known, as it did to the frontier town built on its banks in the hectic days of colonial vigour' (Shoemaker 183) – the river changes its course, and deprives the town of its port.

Killing and stuffing native animals is clearly not the path to belonging in the ancient land. The whites are invaders, black writers pointedly recall.⁴ What Peter and Cory do to native animals their ancestors did to the traditional owners of the land, who were regarded as animals too, as John Muk Muk's Chris reflects: 'His people had been pushed back by the invaders. They had resisted until their numbers fell to almost nothing. The remnants had been rounded up and caged, like birds. A scattering of food was thrown their way each day through the wire of their cages' (Burke 106).

The wide cultural gap between the two races makes for strained, unequal and often violent relations which, unsurprisingly, feature quite prominently in indigenous writing. The historical wrongs done to the Aborigines are not forgotten – from the massacres of the nineteenth century to the stolen children of the twentieth and the discriminations that persist into the twenty-first. Whites never doubt they are the chosen race. As the black narrator puts in Philip McLaren's 'The Music Man', 'The premise was simple: superior white people, inferior black people, with the black people always getting into all kinds of mischief' (Mc Laren 2001, 196). As a result, whites have discriminatory attitudes towards the Aborigines, ranging from active and brutal hostility to casual callousness. This is the case of the nice bus driver in Jack Davis's 'White Fantasy – Black Fact.' He gives money to overseas missions, and congratulates himself for living 'in a country that was white, where there was plenty for all, where nobody starved, and everyone was equal' (Davis 107). But he won't allow an Aboriginal family on his bus, causing them a lot of misery...

It could be argued that the basic premise, in Aboriginal writing, is that relations between blacks and whites are conflictual – that whites are hostile to blacks and intent on harming them: they are, in Archie Weller's words, 'our number one enemies, by whom I mean our loving white brothers' (Weller 1986, 41). Aborigines try to resist and retaliate as best they can, like Clayton Little the boxer in Weller's story: 'If an Aboriginal came to try his luck, Clayton would be gentle with him. But, with any white person he fought angrily, remembering the shame of his father and the cruelty dealt out to his brothers, sisters and friends' (Weller 1990, 24). Conversely, any attempt at friendly relations between the two groups is doomed because individual decency is eventually overwhelmed by the ingrained racism of Australian society. As Archie Weller's narrator puts it, 'A lot of white folk are friendly if no one's looking, but when there's a crowd around, they don't want to know you if your skin is black' (Weller 1986, 40). Thus Johnny Blue, in Weller's eponymous story: 'he was the Nyoongah's mate, and mine especially. The only person who ever understood me and the only white bloke... ever to show any real kindness to me' (Weller 1986, 38-39). But Johnny dies tragically saving his mate's life, and the friendship between the two is rudely interrupted. In much the same way,

⁴ Cf. John Muk Muk Burke, *Bridge of Triangles*, p. 124: 'From the earliest days of the invasion...; cf. Alexis Wright referring to 'traditional lands taken but never ceded' ('The Serpent's Covenant', in. Shoemaker 185).

the nascent love between Perry, the wild black youth, and white Melanie is brought to a brutal end when Perry is shot by the police (Weller, 1986, 44-67).

Aborigines are consigned to the lowest rung of Australian society – they are 'the scapegoats of society' (Weller 1986, 15) – and cannot expect fair treatment on the job market, especially in country towns where prejudice is rampant. As Hyllus Maris writes of her black protagonist Joey, '...where the hell could he get a job in that lousy town? It was the same for most of the blacks there, except for jobs like driving the night-cart and a job now and then on the Council pick and shovel, that was about all' (Maris 126).

When Aborigines try to assert themselves in response to the humiliations visited upon them, they're put down as 'brazen' or 'aggressive', like little Bidjibub in Tracy Bunda's story. Her racially-prejudiced teacher, Miss Gordon, tells her 'When you're out there in the wide wide world, not many will employ black people, especially someone as brazen as yourself' (Bunda 118). And when Bidjibub sports a black eye that her father accidentally gave her, she thinks the girl has been in a fight, and she makes derogatory comments: '...I know your kind. Can't help themselves, can they? Most aggressive race I've seen. You're no different' (Bunda 119).

White education aims to assimilate Aborigines, that is to erase their cultural distinctiveness, and thereby the crimes committed against them. When John Muk Muk Burke's Chris is told at school about the heroic deeds of Captain Cook and Arthur Phillip, he asks 'But what about the people who already lived here?' This simply attracts a dismissive answer from the teacher:

'Well, they didn't really live here. Not properly – not like us. They just moved away a bit further into the bush. You've got to understand, they just wandered around the place – there was plenty of room for everyone. Now let's go back to how the first people in the new settlement set about clearing the land and building their houses' (Burke 71).

If supposedly enlightened and liberal school teachers respond in this way, what can be expected of more overtly hostile and repressive institutions like the police? The answer is violence, as experienced by the black protagonist of Archie Weller's story 'Stolen Car': 'A fist slams into his face, just under his left eye. He doubles up in shock and pain, covering his head. He is pummelled in the side of the stomach, and punches thud on his thin back' (Weller 1990, 132). No cordial relations seem possible between the two races: '...Johnny has learnt in these last five minutes what he should have known since the day he was born, to keep a shutter always between himself and the white man' (Weller 1990, 134).

It is small wonder that there is strong resentment of the whites among many Aborigines, a resentment that extends to many seemingly innocuous cultural practices, as is exemplified in Melissa Lucashenko's 'Not a Ghost Story', in which the protagonist describes her grandfather's funeral: 'I go, put my arm round Mum. Flowers. Gum flowers. Murri one, not that Migloo shit' (Lucashenko 2001b, 13).

The choice of indigenous flowers is politically significant, and is a way of castigating the invaders and their alien cultural symbols.

Even when whites are trying to be of help they cannot truly reach out to the Aborigines because they force their alien ways on them and make no effort to arrive at some sort of mutual understanding. This is set out in sarcastic fashion in Lucashenko's 'The Very Important Meeting,' in which white administrators organise meetings with Aboriginal elders to discuss native title, but there is total incomprehension, on the part of the Aborigines, of the ways of white administration – 'After five minutes Uncle Ronnie was absolutely convinced that the whitefella was speaking English. He caught many words—as many as one in three—yet nothing that came out of the gubba's mouth helped illuminate the situation' (Lucashenko 2002, 36). The whites seem mostly intent on pulling the wool over the Aborigines' eyes, as is conveyed by the story's ending: instead of going to a new meeting, Uncle Ronnie decides to go fishing. He confesses 'I wasn't at no pucken important meeting' and points to the fish in his bucket, 'the thrashing silver fish, the frantic fishes' entire incarcerating universe' and concludes, 'But I reckon these fellas were' (Lucashenko 2002, 38). White people will always try to have the upper hand, and Aborigines should never lower their guard.

Given the destruction wreaked on their culture by two centuries of white colonialism and the myriad social problems they face in a world that holds them to be of little account, how can Aborigines preserve their dignity and their values? Indigenous writers suggest a variety of strategies, all of which are based on the maintenance of their cultural integrity. They range from violent revenge to a wry assertion of the superiority of their own traditions.

An example of the former is Jack Davis's 'Pay Back', (Davis 115) in which the indigenous protagonist, Munda gets his revenge on a party of white men who had poisoned one of the Aborigines' water holes, killing several members of the tribe, by leading them to another poisoned water hole, which kills the white killers just as the blacks themselves had been killed.

Yet violent responses are seldom presented as the best way of protecting Aboriginal rights and dignity if only because the whites are capable of even greater violence. In indigenous short fiction, many characters, faced with the ways of the white world, come to realise how much better their own ways are. Thus Chris, who notes that white people seem to find existence a burden, and are perpetually angry:

But what was the source of the cancerous anger? Was it an anger and hatred directed at their betters, blacks, God and the Church? Didn't they know they had no betters; that at least the blacks could believe happiness was attainable – even if at the end of a bottle or in holding paper money or learning a few chords on the guitar ...No the Old Granny and Auntie Paula were never world weary (Burke 131-32).

In spite of their material deprivation, the Aborigines have a far more secure sense of their place in the world than the whites, and they face life with a much lighter heart, like Clayton in Archie Weller's 'The Boxer':

He had never had much reason to laugh as a child on the reserve, with his mostly-out-of-work father and his thin, dried-up, whining mother. Yet laughter had always been a part of their existence and, even now, a smile flitted across his squat, unreadable face as he remembered those early years' (Weller 1986, 18).

The Aboriginal characters in Alexis Wright's 'The Serpent's Covenant' are amused by the whites' stupidity when they think they're paying homage to the Aboriginal Norm by renaming the river after him:

'Traditional people gathered up for the event [renaming of the river] mumbled, *Ngabarn, Ngabarn, Mandagi*, and so did Norm in a very loud and sour-sounding address, although those who knew a fruit salad full of abuse in the local languages, knew he was not saying *Thank you! Thank you!* And belly-laughed themselves silly because the river only had one name from the beginning of time. It was called *Wangala* (Wright 189).

The whites are shown to be silly and ignorant, which allows Aborigines to maintain a sense of their own dignity, based on an age-old culture that still holds its own despite white efforts to debase it. Melissa Lucashenko's jailed teenage protagonist in 'Sissy Girl' finds strength in her half-forgotten Aboriginal heritage, even though her pride has to be restored by Auntie Myrtle who teaches her about her own culture:

'That's where she showed me the start of our Murri dreaming, and where I found out I was gonna be alright... But we got our dreaming still, inside. Inside our bodies, still in our blood. Inside our brains 'n our hearts. That's where she showed me the start of our Murri dreaming, and where I found out I was gonna be alright...lost me mob but coming back, see. Coming back....I be gettin ta be a woman dreckly, only fourteen but I'm gonna be learnin my song, my dance. I'm gonna find that dreaming, meet my mob, get me a proper name' (Lucashenko 2001b, 103).

In other words, she's rebuilding her life by going back to her roots. Hence her sense of superiority over the whites who, in spite of themselves, have helped the narrator develop her Aboriginality: 'That's a laugh, eh. Locked up cos of whiteman's law, and that's where I find me own...' (Lucashenko 2001b, 103). Hence the conclusion: '...fore I got in here I useta spend all me time feelin sorry for meself, and its funny, but now reckon I feel sorry for Migaloos instead' (Lucashenko 2001b, 103). While there is nothing ennobling about being oppressed, sometimes it does give you additional strength. Aborigines will not be defeated.

If, for obvious historical reasons, indigenous writing mostly presents black and white cultures on a collision course, it also suggests an accommodation is not entirely out of the question. In some respects, white Australian culture has been moulded by the land itself, as was the case with black culture. Having to meet the challenges of the outback, in particular, creates commonalities between the races, who develop similar outlooks. This is conveyed in humorous fashion in Herb Wharton's story 'Where Ya' Been, Mate?' The drover narrator (Herb himself), who

studies at the University of Queensland, meets an old mate, Possum, and they have a yarn:

'...I'll tell you something—they don't know everything at that University.' Then I told him how not one person I asked at the University knew who the publican was at Toompine, Kajjabi or Beetoota.

'Yes, ya'd think they'd know that,' said Possum' (Wharton 50)

Drovers always knew who the publican was in the places they went through – anyone who didn't must be lying about his travelling, and the colour of an individual's skin makes no difference.

In much the same way, in 'Carpet Snake' Oodgeroo presents an Aboriginal family who retain their traditional culture but have adopted some white cultural elements: like any white country woman, the mother raises fowls and goes to hospital to have a baby. And, the narrator says, 'Mother's swearing could outmatch that of any bullocky anywhere in Australia' (Oodgeroo 2004, 159). We should note, however, that even though the Aboriginal characters have adopted some features of the white way of life they don't seem to intermingle with whites (at least, these interactions are not represented). This makes conflict far less likely but doesn't quite suggest that blacks and whites can share Australia in harmonious, amicable fashion.

Sometimes, indigenous writers note, the differences between blackfella ways and whitefella ways are less than they seem because these ways serve a similar purpose – all cultures, after all, are defences against the perception that life doesn't make much sense, as Chris realises in *Bridge of Triangles*:

What of the rituals of feet stamping into a sandy soil, kicking up the dust on ochred shins, lifting high the ceremonial feathers past the dancer's face. Or the ritual of an old lady shuffling down the stone-bordered path to bring in the milk. Was there much difference ultimately? Were not both these actions merely degrees of ceremony that seemed to tame the chaos? That promised a kind of salvation? (Burke 136).

Aborigines and whites share a common humanity, and this makes it possible for constructive conversations to take place between the two 'races'. But this can only happen if whites are ready to listen, if they are willing to share indigenous wisdom instead of dismissing it as so much primitive superstition. All too often, white arrogance will put paid to any attempt at cross-cultural communication. But there are glimmers of hope, as Lucashenko's 'Fishing Lessons' shows. It is about a white man who goes jogging along a beach and meets an Aboriginal woman who's fishing there. The white man is stressed out by the demands of his job: 'Everything felt like hard work... He put in 50-hour weeks, and still his in-tray towered ominously.' Conversations with the black woman broaden his mental and spiritual horizon and allow him to reach a much more satisfactory perspective:

Just before Christmas, the man said tentatively, 'It's all connected up, eh. The islands and the sky and everything'...He... saw the earth at his feet, how it was infinite, and flowed on and on and on. He saw that in some places it changed, becoming loam, and the rich dark silt which fed the

mangroves. It covered its face with the mystery of oceans, it rose high to meet the mountain air and to find a cloak of granite and lichen...Near and far, there was no end to this earth. It touched every living thing, and—his feet muddied and nourished by this—the man touched it in his turn, and at last remembered that his place was nowhere but where he already was, and things didn't seem like such hard work after that' (Lucashenko 2000, 7).

Accepting the age-old Aboriginal wisdom has restored a sense of purpose to his life. He was sick, and now he finds himself healed.

It would be tempting to end on this hopeful note, and to suggest that the clash of cultures between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians is gradually turning into a process of reconciliation. Nothing is in fact less certain, given the persisting socio-economic gulf between the two communities and the Aborigines' lack of political clout to advance their own agenda. So in the end we return to politics. The literary staging, in black writing, of conflicts between Blacks and Whites has an unmistakable political dimension, as is no doubt appropriate for men and women who continue to bear the brunt of racial discrimination and inequality.

The predominant focus on this issue, however, constricts the expression of the Aboriginal viewpoint, and while there is little doubt that the consequences of European colonialism lie at the root of many problems experienced by Australia's Aboriginal population, it would be reductive to suggest that one needs to go no further to explain, and therefore solve, those problems, and Aboriginal disadvantage in general.

Marcia Langton took Aboriginal filmmakers to task for leaving out 'Aboriginal stories of good times with white people'; they want, she suggested, 'to see "Europeans" portrayed only as oppressors and all the complexities are eliminated' (Langton 121). This is also a danger for Aboriginal short story writers but, as we have seen, many of them do not shy away from the complexities involved in such cultural encounters. As Indigenous commentators have pointed out, Aboriginality is not a fixed category, immutable and independent of the local context. Aboriginality—a notion that did not exist before the coming of the white invaders—is constructed as a result of cultural encounters, of dialogue between Blacks and other ethnic groups.

These encounters need not be hostile ones, though hostility is the dominant paradigm. In some cases, as we have seen, genuine conversations can take place across the racial divide. Yet, as Stephen Muecke pointed out long ago, the very fact that Aborigines write for a mostly white audience imposes constraints over what they can say and how to say it. To come across as hostile or threatening is to alienate the white readership, and so, Muecke argued, black writers will tend to propose images of Aboriginality that are acceptable to whites, thereby casting some doubt on the authenticity of those representations, and minimising the intensity of the clash of cultures.

In view of the stories we have examined, it seems fair to say that contemporary Indigenous writers have mostly overcome this reticence, and are not afraid of presenting an image of Aboriginality that whites might indeed find threatening or starkly critical. This gives even greater significance to the minority of stories in which dialogue and perhaps even reconciliation are presented as achievable. To suggest this is not to sell out: dialogue can only be based on frankness and mutual respect.

A jaundiced view of the predominance of black v white cultural clashes in Indigenous writing might point out that such issues are easier to address than intra-ethnic conflicts, which are rife in Aboriginal communities and which, to many prejudiced whites, are simply evidence of Aboriginal savagery.

The Aborigines have always been divided into many cultural and linguistic groups, which means tensions and conflict existed between the various groups, often intensified when different clans or tribes were forced by the whites to live together in missions or settlements such as Palm Island. We could add that domestic violence is all too common in many communities, resulting in bashings and child abuse. This is not something Aboriginal writers are keen to stress, as they prefer to set up starker black and white clashes in their work. This is not to deny that these conflicts are in large part the result of the Law breaking down because of the impact of European colonialism, and are thus traceable to the more fundamental clash between black and white cultures. One can hardly expect Aborigines, and the writers among them, to offer a derogatory vision of their own culture, which has already suffered so much at the hand of the white invaders and which needs to be strengthened rather than weakened further. Yet, to the extent that Aboriginal writing has an important political and social function, it should also address the conflicts within indigenous communities, and develop a more critical outlook on Aboriginal practices.

I'm not suggesting, of course, that indigenous authors should stop writing about the legacy of European colonialism, which will continue for the foreseeable future to weigh heavily on Aboriginal development. Such a focus helps to reinforce the sense of Aboriginal identity, but this sense will remain unnecessarily limited if it viewed almost exclusively in terms of the clashes between black and white cultures. Identity is constructed through conflict and resolution, and the great diversity of Aboriginal identity can only emerge if intra-ethnic conflicts are also taken into account. South Pacific writers such as Albert Wendt or Epeli Hau'ofa, in addition to denouncing the legacy of colonialism, have offered in their work a critical vision of their own indigenous societies, but this is something Aboriginal writers seem reluctant to do, no doubt because of the continuing trauma inflicted by British colonisation.⁵ Perhaps this will be the task of the next generation, the post-Stolen Generation.

⁵ One does find occasional references to inter- or intra-group conflicts, as in Oodgeroo's story 'Mai', which is about a conflict between two traditional women – one asks the other to share the many seeds she had, and the other refuses: '...the old woman was selfish and mean. She would never share with anyone outside her own tribe.' So the younger woman tricks her, and both women end up being punished for their transgressions

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(Oodgeroo 1972, 119). This story is representative of a significant aspect of Aboriginal writing, namely the rendering in English of traditional indigenous tales. This trend started with David Unaipon's *Native Legends* in the late 1920s and has made available to non-indigenous readers a great many Dreamtime stories. These also deal in conflict, as protagonists break the law in various ways, and either get away with it or receive appropriate punishment. A modern example (though set 32 000 years BC) would be Philip McLaren's story 'Oliver, Yabbara and Matlong' (In P. McLaren, *There'll Be New Dreams*, Broome : Magabala Books, 2001, pp. 108-127) which tells of a young man's illicit love for Kirra, another man's wife, and the deadly punishment inflicted on him for breaking the law. These conflicts are obviously of a different order than the clashes depicted in stories involving white people – they do not have to do with conflicting laws but rather with keeping law and order. They depict a stable world where disorder erupts briefly before order prevails again, even though it is sometimes a slightly different kind of order. Challenges to the laws are dealt with in accordance to the law, the authority of which is not fundamentally threatened, as in the case of conflicts between black culture and white culture. On the contrary, such challenges serve to assert and maintain the predominance of the law, whereas white challenges are destructive of the law. However, such stories are set in the distant historical or mythological past, and do not address the serious problems contemporary Aboriginal communities face.