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Australian Aboriginal Identity: Being and/or Becoming

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The paper focuses on the shifting signifier of Aboriginality as discussed by Aboriginal public intellectuals and writers from the publication of *Aboriginal Writing Today* in 1985 to the most recent anthology of essayist writing by *Aboriginal Australians, Blacklines* in 2003. The discussion shows initially simple bifurcation of Aboriginal identity on "black" constructed in opposition to "white" and a whole plethora of different and sometimes opposing views on defining contemporary Aboriginal identity from the 1990s onwards.

Problematizing Aboriginal¹ identity through the lens of a non-Aboriginal speaker may very easily imply talking about, talking for, and talking on behalf of as if the very subject of study cannot or will not talk on his/her behalf. Hence, before my attempt to discuss notions and aspects

¹ The word "Aboriginal" used as a noun and adjective herein will always refer to Australian Aboriginals either coming from the mainland Australia or the Torres Strait Islanders. For the sake of this thesis, this term is used instead of the term "Indigenous Australian" which has become widespread from the late 1990s. The reason for rejecting the latter term lies solely in its "numerical" Eurocentric nature – two Eurocentric terms have come to replace one Eurocentric term and both are culturally (in)correct. Furthermore, the





of identity as analysed by some Aboriginal scholars and literati, I would like to clarify my place of utterance. As a non-Aboriginal I automatically inhabit a privileged site of utterance in relation to the Aboriginals. Consequently, according to Aboriginal scholars such as Jackie Huggins, I am not eligible to talk about Aboriginality. In the wording of the historian and writer Huggins, my attempt “insults [her] [...] intelligence, spirit and soul and negates [her] [...] heritage” (Huggins 2003: 60). Being very much aware of my inability to escape history or erase the fact that my non-Aboriginal standpoint *per se* disables me to grasp Aboriginality, I rely on another academic source to escape my suddenly acquired and distinctly unpleasant subaltern status. My writerly position is, hence, appropriated from Spivak: “Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?” (Spivak 1990: 41). In other words, why not “edit the script prepared for [me] [...] and speak another role, one that understands power and oppression, even where you are powerful, even if you have not been oppressed” (Cooper 2001: 10)? Hence, this is the position from which this paper is written, logically a non-Aboriginal position, but, hopefully, an informed and open-minded one.

One of the most distinguished scholars in the field of cultural identity, Stuart Hall, has formulated a very flexible definition of identity that sounds so well in scholarly papers, but does not necessarily function on the grass root level. Hall discards any essentialist or transfixed nature of identity by claiming that

identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. [...] Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questioning of using the resources

term “Black Australian” also used by some scholars and publishing houses introduces a specific “pan-non-Whiteness” to Australian soil which is not in accordance with the current Aboriginalist debates surrounding the identities of some of the authors discussed in this thesis.





of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not “who we are” or “where we came from”, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.

(Hall 2000: 4)

In other words, Hall argues that identity is not about the “so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms with our ‘roots’” (4). The latter part of this claim is very important because the indefinite article preceding the noun “coming-to-terms” denotes indefinite paths one can take in the attempt to map one’s identity. One of the reasons why there is no prefixed path, no secure procedure that might result in any answers, comes from another very important aspect of defining identity. Hall points out that though identities create a specific basis for attachment, they always imply that something is excluded, left out, something remains unnamed. In his wording, every identity has “at its ‘margin’, an excess, something more” (5). This ostensible “lack” remains a site of a perpetual postponement, a specific Russian Formalists’ minus device which achieves an effect by withholding a device. As in the case of Kasimir Malevich’s *White on White* (1918), detection of the lack of device testifies to its presence. Hence, this detectable but unnameable lack should, logically, render any static definition of identity, be it Aboriginal or not, impossible.

However, in the case of the Aboriginals, when the discursive formations and practices in the social domain are taken into consideration, and when given historical and ideological factors rendering such discursive formations and practices possible for over 200 years in Australia are considered, the situation becomes more complex. Notwithstanding Hall’s claim of being and becoming, for Aboriginals Aboriginality was, and to a certain extent still is, a matter of being OR becoming.

It is useless to list all the legal and scientific verbiage that British colonizers have used to define Aboriginality. They can be summarized in the statement by Michael Dodson:

Since their first intrusive gaze, colonising cultures have had a preoccupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling





Aborigines and Aboriginality. Under that gaze, Aboriginality changed from being a daily practice to being a “problem to be solved”

(Dodson 2003: 27)

Observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling implies a specific negative gradation of narrowing down a semantic field whereas the end product should be the answer which solves the problem, i.e. the procedures for petrifying Aboriginality into Aboriginal being which famous Aboriginal scholar Marcia Langton identifies as the “trope of a ‘Stone Age’ Aboriginal culture frozen in time” (Langton 2003b: 81).

The Aboriginal voice against such mummification and *dummification* became irreversibly visible from the second half of the 1960s when Aboriginal discourse was allowed, albeit in a limited and controlled manner, to enter into Australian public domain. Due to Australian policies of disciplining Aboriginality, asserting one’s Aboriginality has become most of all an act of freedom. However, even this freedom of self-presentation, as Hall’s definition of identity testifies, cannot and should not come up with a uniform construction of Aboriginality because there is no such thing as a “centre Aboriginality”.² But, this is easier said than done.

One of the most quotable definitions of Aboriginality comes from Marcia Langton’s publication “*Well, I Heard it on the Radio and I Saw it on the Television...: an Essay for the Australian Film Commission on the Politics and Aesthetics of Filmmaking by and about Aboriginal People and Things* (1993) in which she identifies the following three broad categories that contribute to cultural and discursive construction of Aboriginality in Australian society:

- * the experience of Aborigines interacting with each other in social situations within traditional Aboriginal cultures;
- * stereotypes and mythologies of Aborigines from whites who have had no substantial contact with Aborigines:

² The term “centre Aboriginality” is appropriated from Norm Sheehan’s article “*Some Call It Culture*”, *Social Alternatives*, Aug. 2001, Vol. 20, Issue 3.





* constructions generated through dialogue between Aborigines and non-Aborigines in which both subjects participate in their constructions as they try to find forms of mutual comprehension

(Langton in Sabbioni et al. 1998: xxvi)³

According to Langton, Aboriginality functions as a palimpsest born out of multi-layered interactions among Aboriginals themselves and their interactions with non-Aboriginal people that “affect the understanding of what it means to be both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in Australia” (xxvi). Langton’s Aboriginal identity/Aboriginality surpasses the often reiterated borders of the so-called Aboriginal authenticity. Moreover, Langton pinpoints a temporal and spatial frame for this type of Aboriginality: “geographically somewhere between the Western Australian border and the Warlpiri Land Trust boundary, and temporally in the Iolithic [sic] dawn of time when Stone Age men first hit two stones together” (xxvi). As is the case with Stuart Hall’s definition, Langton’s does leave enough space for numerous identity reinscriptions, for various modes of Aboriginality. What is interesting, though not surprising, is that even when the definition comes from an Aboriginal person, the notion of any mode of Aboriginality causes a specific set of anxieties among Aboriginals. Again, what is at hand is theoretically a useful definition and practically a very problematic method which implies that regardless of the place of utterance, “the borders of identity are patrolled for signs of nonconformity” (Joan W. Scott in Morrissey 2003: 53).

There are numerous issues at work here. In the contemporary moment when Aboriginals have received a space to talk, albeit after more than 200 years of relentless struggle, it has become harder for them to come to terms with their roots. Even though, as Sonja Kutzer claims, Aboriginal people never contribute to the discourse on Aboriginality from a “free space”, because, for starters, they always have to fight previously established discursive constraints,⁴ from the 1990s onwards Aboriginal communities have been uttering different if not disparate views about their identities.

³ See also Langton 2003: 119-120.

⁴ See Kutzer 2003: 188.





On the one hand some Aboriginal scholars and literati claim that Aboriginality implies “one mob, one voice, one land”,⁵ and, on the other, some assert that there is a space for an Aboriginal “rainbow nation”. There is a reason for such opposing views coming from Aboriginal society and there is a reason why from the end of the 1980s and especially from the 1990s onwards Aboriginals have been facing quite a different kind of problem regarding their identity.

From the 1960s when Aboriginals were allowed to enter the public domain and launched their struggle for land rights and human rights put together under the umbrella term of Aboriginal affairs, every Aboriginal mode of expression has been focused on representation of Aboriginality. We could say that the common topic and the common stance of any Aboriginal participating in public life, be it a writer, artist, civil right activist, etc., from the 1960s onwards, has been defining and redefining the term “Aboriginality”. Until the 1990s it seems that it was easier for Aboriginals do define Aboriginality and anything outside Aboriginality, because most of the time they were questioning the licence of a non-Aboriginal hand writing about and on behalf of Aboriginality. This was the time when visibility of Aboriginal voice in terms of Aboriginal publications was scarce in comparison to the number of books on Aboriginals written by the white majority in Australia. At the same time, Aboriginals themselves were gradually formulating a specific criterion of worth or value mostly based on the fact that an Aboriginal person does not exist in isolation, but as a member of community.⁶

In 1983 Oodgeroo Noonuccal formulated the famous “Black Commandments” the most notable of which is the 10th proscribing the obligation of the Aboriginals to “think black and act black”.⁷ These commandments served as a template for Aboriginal writing and activism. In 1985 Kevin Gilbert stated that the “onus is on Aboriginal writers to present the evidence of our true situation” (Gilbert 1985: 41) because, as the title and the content of his polemical writing suggests, the

⁵ This is the logo of a national Aboriginal newspaper called *Land Rights News*.

⁶ See, e.g. Narogin 1990: 37.

⁷ See Noonuccal in Mudrooroo, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, Melbourne: Hyland House, 1997, pp. 36-38.





white man will never do it.⁸ One could say that until the mid-1980s the Aboriginality as defined by Aboriginals was constructed as the antithesis of something regarded as white. That kind of Aboriginality was very assertive and engagé, very black and ultimately relied on the notion of traditional Aboriginal community. Bearing in mind the state of affairs for the Aboriginals in Australia for 200 years, this was a logical standpoint. Furthermore, at the time many Aboriginals, especially those in the limelight, fit into the context of Aboriginal affairs and fit into the construct of Aboriginality excepted as valid, or “pan-Aboriginal” at the time.

However, even then the Aboriginality of some Aboriginals, meaning those that entered the public domain, was put under scrutiny because Aboriginality was still a matter of “visibility”. In an interview from January 1988, which was subsequently published in a special issue of *Kunapipi*, Oodgeroo Noonuccal said that white people used to approach her because they noticed that she was not “a full blood” but “half white”. She was able to debunk such attacks by saying that Aboriginal “great, great grandmothers were raped by whites” (Oodgeroo 1988: 28). On the one hand, her Aboriginality was questioned by the whites and notwithstanding Oodgeroo’s life experience which is Aboriginal *per se*, and notwithstanding the fact that she dedicated her life to Aboriginal struggle, there was still the blood taxonomy and the assimilation policy to account for her right to be an Aboriginal. In *Aboriginal Writing Today* (1985), the most famous Aboriginal playwright Jack Davis was asked to comment on the Aboriginality of the then young writer Archie Weller and of Aboriginal activist Faith Bandler. His answer is very illuminating and worth quoting in its entirety:

I have to go back to blood type, because Archie is one thirty-second part Aboriginal. Now that does not necessarily make him Aboriginal because, if we use the factor terms, if you’d got seven-eighths white blood you were considered white, according to how they used to work out our blood system back in the early days. I think Colin would remember that: you were half, you were a quarter, you were three-quarters or you were

⁸ See Kevin J. Gilbert, *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973.





seven-eighths. Well, using that definition to decide whether Archie is an Aboriginal or not, he is one thirty-second part Aboriginal but he lives as an Aboriginal, as he wrote *The Day of the Dog* because he is an Aboriginal, he's been to jail because he is an Aboriginal, so he is an Aboriginal. Faith Bandler was one of the tremendous workers for the referendum in 1967 and she has worked in New South Wales and in Queensland most of her life, so that makes her an Aboriginal. She identifies as being an Aboriginal, and when the Commonwealth had to have a term for Aborigines back in 1967 – they couldn't call us Murris, Kooris and Nyoongahs, so they had to have a term – their definition was that anyone is an Aboriginal if they like to define themselves as being one

(Davis 1985: 16-17)

What kind of Aboriginality is at stake here? Davis mentions blood taxonomy on the one hand, but also contemporary Aboriginal experience on the other. Unlike Oodgeroo, neither Weller nor Bandler have the safe backdrop of blood taxonomy, but what they do have is their Aboriginal *lived* experience. Is that enough? Unlike the older generation such as Aboriginal writers Oodgeroo, Jack Davis or Kevin Gilbert who worked in the context of the so-called “high” assimilation period, the Aboriginal identity of younger generation became more fragile because it could no longer be protected by the “tangible” side of identity, if one can call it that. Of course, a more direct expression would be a “racially” defined aspect of identity. The Aboriginal ancestry of Weller and Bandler was put into question and, additionally, in the case of Weller, the quality of his writing, or more specifically, the authenticity of his writing was also challenged for its ostensible “lack of Aboriginality”, i.e. appropriation of the “white form” (novel and short stories with explicit violence). However, the difference between the identity assaults on Oodgeroo, and the ones on, Weller e.g., is immense. In the case of Oodgeroo, her Aboriginality was put under inquisitive gaze by the white majority whereas Weller's Aboriginality and consequent literary production was questioned by one segment of Aboriginal society. Furthermore, at the very end of the 1990s, Weller underwent a public assault on his, “epidermal” Aboriginality and this assault came from the Aboriginal community which he ostensibly belonged to.⁹





Hence, there are at least two issues at stake here: the questioning of the legitimacy of one's genealogy, and the questioning of the authenticity of one's cultural production – simply put whether one is born into Aboriginality and whether one's production is authentically Aboriginal – and both segments are equally important for construction of Aboriginal identity.

Maybe at this point it is worth introducing a well-known term of the apparently unfortunate state of inbetweenness. Franz Fanon has identified it as “black skin white mask” referring to a black man who “becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (Fanon 1991: 19), and is “putting on the white world” (36) Bhabha defines it as “almost the same but not quite/white” (Bhabha 1994: 86, 89). A frequently used term in the Australian context is the so-called “coconut” status, a historical term used for Aboriginals who are white on the inside and black on the outside (Hodge and Mishra 1991: 75). But how useful is this term for Weller and current and incoming generations of Aboriginals? There is a point in the claim that some Aboriginals have mimicked the white man's way, but that was done decades ago in order to survive as well as to subvert colonial practices, as Bhabha claims.¹⁰ Can we say that contemporary Aboriginals are no longer authentic because they do not perform corroboree or, ultimately they do not know where their ancestors come from, or, because it is not self-evident that they are Aboriginals? Does this make them “less Aboriginal”? The problem is far from being simple and Aboriginals themselves share different views about it.

A distinguished Aboriginal scholar, Philip Morrissey, has pinpointed the traps in defining Aboriginality today by relying on what he calls a “fetishised notion of Aboriginality” (Morrissey 2003: 56). The scholar stresses a huge difference between third- or fourth- generation urban Aboriginals, and the older generation that has experienced actual

⁹ Archie Weller's unsuccessful public search for his Aboriginal identity was broadcasted in a documentary by Sally Riley entitled *In Search of Archie* (1999-2000) in which the author did not pass the protocol by the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation.

¹⁰ See Bhabha 1994, especially Chapter IV “Of Mimicry and Men: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse”.





dispossession. Morrissey states that the majority of the Aboriginal population is the result of colonial dispossession, but that the true issue lies in the changes of Aboriginal identity as that “originary moment of dispossession moves further and further away” (58) In this respect Morrissey asks himself:

Is the only option the practice of a form of neo-traditionalism in order to remain Aboriginal? A prominent Aboriginal intellectual of the 1980s would often argue to me that Aboriginal identity would end up splitting on the fact of those who had land and lived in self-contained communities, and those who did not and so would inexorably be absorbed into the wider community. The other issue is one of genetics, which bothers both Mudrooroo and [Ron] Brunton. Will the Aboriginal community accede to a genetically determined notion of Aboriginality? (58)

Morrissey believes that there are numerous options in constructing identity: from multiple identities, via a unitary identity resembling the theory of *mestizo* as a form of a synergistic Aboriginal identity, to the identity as defined by Stuart Hall which can function only because the construct of identity has the inborn feature of exclusion, something which is left outside, as discussed earlier. But what he stresses is the requirement of “minimal ‘othering’” stemming from Aboriginal descent. The descent Morrissey has in mind is not biological but implies the “historical connection that leads back to land and which claims a particular history, just as the Anzac celebrants do” (59). His parallel to the Anzac celebrants refers to those who participate in Anzac Day ceremonies though neither they nor their ancestors participated in the war but yet they feel specific “benefits and continuity” (58) with the event.

Morrissey’s reasoning is somewhat shared by Ian Anderson who tries to deconstruct his own identity in relation to previous generations. He states that his generation takes many aspects of life for granted which were not available for Aboriginals who lived during the assimilation period. The reason why Anderson rejects the notion of the “hybrid” Aborigine, or the *mestizo* Aborigine is because it reiterates Fanon’s split leading to the “complete lysis of this [black] morbid body” (Fanon 1991: 10) which Anderson calls a “titanic struggle between the opposing black and white





bits" (Anderson 2003: 51). On the other hand, like Morrissey, Anderson appropriates Hall's definition of a more fluid identity which preserves this othering element:

As I am an Aborigine, I inhabit an Aboriginal body, and not a combination of features which may or may not cancel each other. [...] How I speak, act, and how I look are outcomes of a colonial history, not a particular combination of traits from either side of the frontier. [...] In the transforming experiences through which Aboriginal people grow, those qualities which constitute our identities are constantly re-forming as we engage and re-engage our world. This is one experience which coheres us, despite all ambiguities and contractions. (51)

This simultaneous change and preservation is also shared by the artist Lin Onus when he discusses changes in Aboriginal artistic expression. He rejects the opposition urban/traditional and concludes that "[s]ooner or later, some Aboriginal artists may use lasers and holograms to make their art. Although the artists' material may change, the imagery and stories will remain strong and everlasting" (Onus 2003: 96).

As already mentioned, Marcia Langton also shares the same view when discussing Aboriginality and representation and stresses the irony of the claim that "to be truly, authentically, deeply Aboriginal, one must be quarantined in remote Aboriginal lands, untouched by media, education, health services, satellites, and above all, uncontaminated by reputable, honest art dealers and access to legal advice" (Langton 2003b: 87). However, Langton's view is more interesting owing to two interconnected points. The first refers to the claim that only Aboriginals can represent Aboriginals:

There is a naïve belief that Aboriginal people will make "better" representations of us [Aboriginals] simply because, it is argued, being Aboriginal gives you a "greater" understanding. This belief is based on an ancient and universal feature of racism: the assumption is that all Aborigines are alike and equally understand each other, without regard to cultural variation, history, gender, sexual preference and so on.

(Langton 2003a: 115)





Her next point is the one already mentioned in her famous definition of Aboriginal identity, that Aboriginality is not just a “label to do with skin colour or the particular ideas a person carries around in his/her head which might be labelled Aboriginal, such as an Aboriginal language or kinship system” (118), but a social thing, born out of a dynamic interaction between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. Of course, one precondition to this interaction resides in the fact that both sides are “subjects not objects” (118). Langton’s view as well as Hall’s definition of identity are very logical and apparently flexible enough to make it possible for people to define themselves the way they want to. Why, then, are there Aboriginals who discard the possibility of a dialogue?

In this respect, it is worth recalling the standpoint of a distinguished Aboriginal historian and writer Jackie Huggins. Huggins rejects any notion of dialogue with non-Aboriginals when it comes to Aboriginal identity, because

non-Aboriginal academics make their living out of theorising and intellectualising Aboriginals and racism without having to live in it daily or experience it (racism) at all. Like a racism [sic], Aboriginality is always being theorised, intellectualised and trivialised by those who have never felt the passion, anger or the pain.

(Huggins 2003: 64)

Furthermore, she also harshly criticises Sally Morgan’s international bestseller *My Place* (1988) for faking Aboriginality. Huggins’ standpoint is not solitary. There is the (in)famous Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation located in Perth led by Aboriginal Robert Eddington. The corporation has the power to authenticate Aboriginality of cultural production by identifying Aboriginal descent of the author in question in the network of Aboriginal families and through the clan directly to one’s link with the land – put simply, a person must be accepted by an Aboriginal community. This connection, according to Eddington, is crucial because these protocols identify those who abuse resources belonging to the Aboriginal community. (Van Toorn 2000: 42). Following news articles, Weller did not “pass” the protocol. Neither did Mudrooroo, the most prolific Aboriginal author





and literary critic until; in fact in 1996, Eddington put Mudrooroo's name on the "Wall of Shame" which led him to leave Australia for good.¹¹ Writer Roberta Sykes was also targeted for her inability to identify her Aboriginal paternity notwithstanding her rather painful lived Aboriginal experience and subsequent ardent participation in Aboriginal affairs. There is also the "Label of Authenticity" that was introduced by the National Indigenous Arts Advocacy Association in 1999 which was designed to protect the Aboriginal works of art such as music, theatre, dance performances and literary works. In other words, every Aboriginal artefact notwithstanding its medium of mediation, must be authorized by a government body and if its authenticity is proved, it receives the "authentically Aboriginal" tag, something Langton and Onus fervently oppose.

Why should there be such a discrepancy of opinions among Aboriginals? Is this a form of "inverted racism", or Aboriginalist views when Aboriginals publicly criticise each other? Yes, it is partly a case of inverted racism, but this should not come as a surprise. It is evident that the hunt for the "pure" Aboriginal identity of prominent Aboriginals was caused by earlier artistic hoaxes launched by white writers such as Sreten Božić known as "B. Wongar", Marlo Morgan or Leon Carmen known as "Wanda Koolmatrie" who stated that in the "current climate of political correctness and affirmative action, manuscripts by women and ethnic minority writers were far more likely to be accepted for publication than those of middle-aged white males" (Van Toorn 2000: 43). The situation might have also been triggered by initially very important dates in Aboriginal and Australian history which function only on a formal level, but lack the content to a certain extent. Dates such as the referendum of 1967; Whitlam's introduction of the policy of self-determination in 1972; the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights Acts in the Northern Territory in 1976; the setting up of a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Death in Custody in 1987; as well as the bicentennial celebration; the foundation of

¹¹ The issue of Mudrooroo's identity goes beyond the scope of this paper. For a very elaborate and most recent discussion on Mudrooroo's work and Aboriginality, see *Mongrel Signatures: Reflection on the Work of Mudrooroo*, Analisa Oboe (ed), Cross/Cultures 94, Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2003.





the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC); the Mabo Ruling in 1992; the International Year of Indigenous Peoples in 1993 with Paul Keating giving his historic Redfern speech; and the launching of the national inquiry on the Stolen Generations in 1995. While all of these testify to a reappraisal of Aboriginal contributions to Australian history, they are more often than not paper words lacking action. The commission into Aboriginal death in custody neither lessened nor solved this phenomenon. The bicentennial celebration was marked by the publication of numerous Aboriginal books written by Aborigines and introduced numerous grants to Aboriginal writers, dancers, filmmakers, graduates and postgraduates. Paradoxically, for the first time in Australia's history it literally "paid" to be an Aborigine which might have motivated some non-Aboriginals as well as some others to become "paper blacks" or "pop-up blacks" (Knightley 2000: 317). The Mabo Ruling designated to recognized the land rights of the Aborigines inhabiting Australia prior to the arrival of the white settlers-invaders did not actually return significant amounts of land to the Aborigines especially if considering that the former prime minister, John Howard, introduced amendments to the Racial Discrimination Act to limit further claims. Ultimately, if the land is returned to various Aboriginal communities, non-Aboriginal Australians would not end up having *terra nullius*, but *terra nulla*. Also, the inquiry into the Stolen Generation, though it produced a huge report, cannot miraculously reunite Aboriginal families. Finally, the historical "Sorry Speech" by the new Australian prime minister, Kevin Rudd, in February of 2008 does not mean that the problem of the petrol sniffing communities of the Northern Territory and Western Australia as well as high unemployment rate and illiteracy will miraculously disappear. Finally, when it comes to current trends such as globalisation and multiculturalism, Aborigines are very careful because, as Sneja Gunew claims, multiculturalism "obscures the battle for land rights currently being waged by the Aborigines" (Gunew 1999: 104). Though this may seem farfetched, one should bear in mind that while what Aborigines do remember is the notorious policy of assimilation.

All these factors contribute to a rather fragile and overprotective feeling surrounding Aboriginality. Some Aborigines share more liberal views on Aboriginality, some show a more essentialised connection between what





it means to be Aboriginal and the colour of one's skin. Adam Shoemaker has summarized this Aboriginal double bind in the following manner: "in theory they can only 'save' the West if they connect with it but they can only 'preserve' themselves if they stand resolutely apart from it" (Shoemaker 2000: 10). Ultimately, what should not be forgotten is that it is outside the protective carapace of academic discourse where Langton's and Hall's definitions are tested, where the true battle for cultural identity lies because, as Bhabha notes, the "racial drama [...] is enacted every day in colonial societies" (Bhabha 1994: 78). This drama may not be as dramatic as it once was, but it is still very much present.

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IDENTITET AUSTRALSKIH ABORIDŽINA: BITI I/ILI POSTATI

Rad se bavi problemom promjenjivosti označitelja aboridžinalnosti, odnosno aboridžinskog identiteta kroz kritička promišljanja aboridžinskih intelektualaca i spisatelja. Time se daje prikaz razvoja aboridžinske misli o uspostavi kulturnog identiteta od izdanja prve antologije aboridžinskog esejističkog spisanstva iz 1985. godine do trenutno zadnje antologije iz 2003. godine. Rasprava ukazuje na početnu vrlo jednostavnu izgradnju aboridžinskog identiteta u kojem se «crno» supostavlja «bijelom», te na bitno drugačije stanje od 1990-ih nadalje kada iz aboridžinske zajednice proizlaze raznorodni i ponekad oprečni stavovi o uspostavi suvremenog aboridžinskog identiteta.

Key words: traditional vs. contemporary Aboriginality, cultural identity, being and/or becoming, the other

Ključne riječi: tradicionalna naspram suvremene aboridžinalnosti, kulturni identitet, biti i/ili postati, drugo

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