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THE DIALECTICS OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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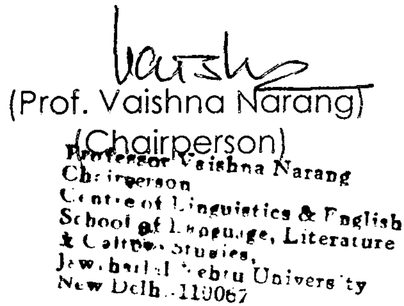
20 July 2003

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **"THE DIALECTICS OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES"**, submitted by Rajesh Kumar, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of the University, is to the best of my knowledge an original work and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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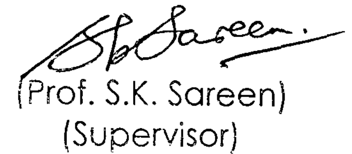

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DECLARATION

This dissertation entitled "**THE DIALECTICS OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL IDENTITY IN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**", submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University.

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TO MY BELOVED

MAA & PITAJI

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Rajesh Kumar

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CHAPTER - 3

The Construction of Aboriginality in *Don't Take Your Love to Town*

'If you pick up this book, you pick up a life. It is as simple and as difficult as that. The life Langford has lived in Australia is as close to the eyes and ears as print on the page makes it.'

—Billy Marshall - Stoneking The Australian

You painted up your lips

and rolled and combed you tinted hair

Ru-by are you contemplating

going out somewhere

The shadow on the wall tells me

the sun is going down

Ru-by, don't take your love to town.

— Kenny Rogers

Investigations into questions to identity often lead researchers into studies of place - where certain humans have 'formed' their identity or struggled to form their identity - and the past - the cultural or social heritage, which informs a present sense of belonging, or of displacement. Shifting the focus from the idea of the priviledged individual and focusing on the representation of identity within autobiography and biography, allows for different kinds of writing and reading practices. From this viewpoint the telling of "life stories" can be read as a 'testimony' to a lived life, and as a form of 'resistance' literature. Text can, then, be read as sites of resistance and, at the same time, can reflect our own reading processes.

In this paper, I will discuss *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'* by Ruby Langford Ginibi as testimony that reveals a number of issues, which affected the lives of Aboriginal women in terms of the construction of 'Aboriginality'. By expanding on some of the incidents recounted, I attempt to illustrate the very way in which the identities that emerge in testimonial writing can be constituted both as 'testimony' and as sites of 'resistance'. While autobiographies, oral and written, are undoubtedly constructed and follow certain conventions, at the same time, these texts impart 'the primacy of everyday life and its concrete material events, persons, conversations'. One way of talking about the process of writing a lived life is through the idea that 'bio' is graphed in the process of writing. This graph of a 'bio' places the 'lived life' within a history and a social order. Accepting that material reality exists does not mean that material reality needs to be priviledged over the highly constructed nature of autobiographies. My intention in this paper is to foreground the 'lived life' in the form of the 'bio' representing a testimony that is a writing of collective experience.

My key argument will be that life writing in *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'* exemplifies a form of 'testimony' to the kinds of injustices that occur to identify which are 'already judged' as inadequate in that they deviate from the constructed 'norm' of the settler culture. Many societies have quite different histories in terms of imperialism and colonization, and as a consequence, the differences and incommensurabilities that emerge are specific to the location, to the history, and to the social order. Anne Brewster *Literary Formations: Post-colonialism, Nationalism, Globalism* (Melbourne University Press, 1995, p. 73) points out that in their writing, Aboriginal women's *"life (his) stories construct alternative versions of self and community that resist and oppose the hegemonic narratives of individualism and nationalism"*, thus constituting 'self' which is a self constituted by race and gender within a collectivity.

It is a known fact that until the early 1970s, Aboriginal people's experiences of history remained hidden from wider public view by the colonial myth of Britain's "peaceful settlement" of Australia. Yet vivid memories of a past that was anything but peaceful lived in the minds of many Aboriginal people. Although these recollections, circulated by word of mole mouth in Aboriginal communities, they remained largely inaudible to the non-Aboriginal people. Like other indigenous populations, Aboriginal people were thought to be a people without history. Their stories about the past were classified as myths, legends, or folktales. These oral modes of remembrance were contrasted with "history proper", which Europeans claimed was exclusive to Western cultures. Disqualified as speakers of history, and without access to the technological means to transmit their knowledge to a wide audience, Aboriginal voices were largely excluded from historical debate.

White versions of the past gained a monopoly on historical truth : White history became the only history. If Aboriginal people were

included in the picture at all, it was usually as primitive savages who impeded economic and material development, or as passive victims of history's iron laws of progress. As *Wayne King* rightly observes:

> *'My dislike of school grew when we were introduced to Australian history. We were told of how the exploits of the great British explorers were often impeded by the local Aborigines who were "barbarous savages'...'*[1]

This white version of history formed part of what all Australian children learned in the course of their primary school education. For generations, we were taught that Australia was an empty land, a silent continent whose history began in 1770 with Captain Cook's discovery of the east coast. Wayne king writes:

> *Alternatively, he (teacher) spoke proudly of the mighty explorers, who were the fist men to discover Ayers Rock, the Murray River on the Blue Mountains. Not the fist 'White men' but the 'first men'.*[2]

The heroes of colonial Australian history were those plucky white explorers and settlers who braved the perils of fire, flood, drought, and "marauding blacks". These heroic white pioneers were said to have "opened up" the land, and to have spread the light of British civilization to the furthest reaches of globe. Australian history was understood as a series of changes for the better, and countless cruelties and injustices were inflicted on the indigenous people of Australia in the name of progress.

Ruby Langford's "*Don't Take Your Love to Town*" was first published in 1988, the year Anglo-Australia celebrated its first two hundred years. As Europeans measured history, Australia seemed a young country, a country with a very short history. This myth was overturned in 1988, when the officially organized Bicentenary Celebrations provided the most public forum ever for Aboriginal people to proclaim that they had

already been here for tens of thousands of years when the first British settlement was founded in 1788. On 26 January 1988, placards and T-shirts printed with the words. '*White Australia has a Black History*' were televised across the nation and overseas. This slogan pointed to the shadow side of white-Australia's shining deeds, the history of violence, dispossession, exploitation, and the breaking up of Aboriginal families. When it was first published, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* thus joined a chorus of Aboriginal voices speaking out publicly and powerfully against whitewashed versions of Australia's history.

The years of 1980s and 90s have seen as spectacular growth in Aboriginal art, film, theatre, music, dance and writing. Through this media, aboriginal people have been able to speak both to each other and to the wider non-Aboriginal public. In all these areas of cultural activity, one of the most consistent concerns has been to set the record straight about white Australia's Black History. The number of university trained Aboriginal historians is small, but there is a large army of Aboriginal writers, artists, film-makers, dramatists, etc., who are intent upon telling the past as it was experienced by Aboriginal people and Autobiography has been a very effective means of achieving this objective.

Autobiography has been the dominant genre over this time for most Aboriginal women writers, including Glenyse Ward, Sally Morgan, Doris Pilkington and Mabel Edmund. In writing autobiography, they have been able to construct a visible identity as indigenous women within Australian society, and to write about aspects of the past that have been hidden from view as Langford Ginibi puts it *'so we don't get left out of the next lot of history'*.[3] *'Don't Take You Love to Town'*, is one of the crests of a wave of Aboriginal women's published autobiographies that began nearly twenty years ago with Monica Clare's *'Karobran'* (1978). Many of

these Aboriginal texts, while they might be seen primarily Autobiography, have a hybrid quality (the most hybrid being Morgan's '*My Place*'), and combine features of more than one genre. The generic labels that get put on texts such as these are connected to how close what seems to be the authorial voice s to that of the narrator. Personal autobiographical life writing has a documentary effect; it gives the reader the sense of being told the truth. In fact, Langford Ginibi has explicitly stated that she is not producing fiction:

> *I'm not interested in fiction, don't need to be, because I'm too busy writing the truth about my people... This from our side of the fence... although the history of the whole of white Australia is one of the biggest fictions, aye?*[4]

The advantage of autobiography as a historical genre is that it brings the past 'up close and personal'. While an academic historical searcher might, for example, interpret historical records relating to governments' 'native policies', the Aboriginal autobiographer tells us what it was lie to be on the receiving end of those policies. They can tell us at fist hand how decisions made by politicians, bureaucrats, and social workers affected their day-to-day lives. Ruby Langford Ginibi, for example, was subject to the assimilation policy, which meant splitting up Aboriginal communities and, as she explains:

> *putting us in among whites to see if we could live together, but because there were so few families there in 1972. We felt very isolated from our fiends and our culture... You also weren't able to have anyone come and stay without permission from the Commission. It reminded me of the missions. The rule was useless in our culture, where survival often depended on being able to stay with friends and relatives.*[5]

Ruby Langford Ginibi's autobiography has the truth-value of an eyewitness account. It is a little slice of Australia's history as lived by one woman, and as told to readers straight from the horse's mouth. The

autobiographical form allows readers to feel they know Ginibi personally, and to see her as an individual rather than in terms of racial stereotypes. As Ginibi shares her life with us, she allows us to come in close, so that we care about what happens to her, and can empathize with her sufferings and joys. Ginibi's autobiography works to open up a channel of personal communication. For many white city-dwellers, this may be the only window they have ever had into an Aboriginal person's life-world; it may be the only time a Koorie voice has spoken to them.

After reading the text we might find Ginibi as a unique individual, but her life history is not entirely unique. Ginibi has stated repeatedly that her story is typical in many ways: by writing her own life-story, she therefore also describes conditions under which many Aboriginal women of her generation lived. One individual can speak for the group in so far as their destiny was determined by the same historical forces. Aboriginal people's lives were controlled at every turn by racially discriminatory laws and policies aimed precisely at setting them apart as a people, and curtailing their freedoms and opportunities. When Ginibi recalls sitting in the segregated seats in the picture theatre, or giving birth to her babies in a room out the back of the local hospital, or carting heavy tins of water from the creek for her family to drink and wash, or taking care to show the welfare officer she is a good, responsible mother - when Ginibi recounts all these experiences, she is writing not only of her own life, but also of hundreds of other Aboriginal women whose stories would be similar in many respects to her own.

This does not mean that Aboriginal people's historical experience was absolutely uniform across all periods and places in Australia. Some experiences were common to all; some were not. Ginibi's story contributes to our understanding of Aboriginal history not only by being typical, but also by being different from, say, the life of a northern

territory cattle-worker. Like pieces in a mosaic, Aboriginal people's autobiographies taken together, form a composite picture of the Aboriginal history, in all its variety. The forming of this big mosaic is a part of the process through which Aboriginal people from different parts of Australia - urban, rural, and remote areas - have in recent decades been forming a sense of themselves as a national, pan-Aboriginal community. While many aboriginal communities take great pride in their uniqueness, they also see themselves as having interests in common with other communities. There is increasing recognition amongst diverse Aboriginal groups that in certain political contexts - at the 1988 Bicentenary protest, for example, or when negotiating with the Federal government over Native Title legislation - Aboriginal people's interests are best served if they unite and speak together with a single powerful voice. History, social identity, and poltics are tied inseparably together.

Ginibi's *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'* works here to document and weave community connections to form separate social identity. It is a book with a huge cast of characters - although to call them 'characters' is to simply that they are fictitious people. Better, then, to say that Ginibi's story includes an unusually large number of individuals (Black and White) who lived in historical actuality. No matter whether these people are beloved relatives and longtime fiends, or whether they pass fleetingly through her life and are never seen again, she does them all the honour of documenting their existence. No one is too insignificant for Ginibi to leave out. There are literally hundreds of people included in the book. Ginibi's text works to bind people together as a community. It is a place where many people's stories intersect with Ginibi's own. What is happening here in that Ginibi is documenting her extended community, bringing them all onto the stage of her own personal history.

Over the course of Ginibi's narrative in *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'*, the scope of her own vision broadens out. When she was a child, her world was relatively small: she was aware of her immediate physical surrounds, her family and childhood friends. But as she grew up, and the scope of her vision began to expand, she came to realise that her own struggles were not simply, the fate alone. The difficulties she faces are not just a matter of personal misfortune, but are part of a larger historical pattern of oppression. Partly through the act of writing itself-getting her memories, thoughts, and feelings out into words - she comes to understand the meaning of her life in a new light.

The Acknowledgments tell us that *'Don't Take Your Love to Town' 'is a true life story about an Aboriginal woman's struggle to raise a family of nine children I society divided between black and white culture in Australia... And, it is dedicated to every black woman who's battled to raise a family and kept her sense of humour'.* When Langford Ginibi was born in 1934, it was the Depression and conditions were particularly hard. Housing, health and education have been, and continue to be, key issues for Aboriginal people. Even years later, in the 1960s, things many of us take for granted were luxuries for families like hers: alone with eight children and trying to get housing from the Aboriginal Protection Board (APB), she has 'fantasies about getting a roof over the kids' heads and having taps, and floors.'[6] On one occasion, when she is going into labour, she has to walk to the hospital; on another she has to carry her daughter, Pearl, who has bronchitis, four miles to find a doctor; no help was available. When another daughter, Ellen, is at high school, the mother is told by the headmaster that she has been fighting. Ellen's explanation is: *'The girl I hit called me a dirty abo, so I decked her'*[7] Even today, Langford Ginibi does not see a dramatic improvement, either in relation to ideas having changed or wealth being distributed more equally. *'I say*

to people that say that there's no racism in this country, paint yourself black for a day and see how well you fare'.[8] As she put it in a later book : '

> *There are two types of people who inhabit Australia: there's the rich and the poor, and I don't mean just that it is Aborigines who are the most disadvantaged.*[9]

Intersecting with poverty and racial discrimination is the specific oppression associated with gender. There has been much debate about whether sexism, or racism, or class oppression under colonization and capitalism, has been the primary negative factor in Aboriginal women's experience. Langford Ginibi's life as a woman is affected by racism, and her life as an Aboriginal person affected by sexism. Often it is hard to separate the issues, though there is a gender-specificity to some of the differences between the experience of being black (and very often poor) of Aboriginal women and men. In reading an Aboriginal woman's, autobiography like *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'*, what contributes to a sense of its truth-effects are such things as the informal mode of address that has some affinities with oral expression, and the candour with which Langford Ginibi describes a number of painful and sometimes embarrassing experiences.

Although this text is largely autobiographical, focusing as it does, on the life of Ginibi and her large extended family, it is the story of many Aboriginal families. Most importantly, it is celebration of the strength and tenacity of people who, in spite of formidable odds, raise their families and maintain their joy of living. After reading the text we will find that there are many commonalities between Ginibi and her family's experiences and those of other Australians. Mothers working to support their children; looking after them when they are ill; dealing with weddings and death are all such instances. Ginibi's account of her husband, Sam Grriffin's, family is a poignant example, though most

families do not experience as many Tragedies. Sam's father died when he was about thirty and Sam's mother, *"was left with two young kids, Sam and Bill. When Bill was about two, he'd burnt to death in a fire at Burra Be Dee mission."*[10] We all, either from direct personal experience or through other people, can understand what it means to have a husband, father or child die. If people are able to feel compassion for the people spoken of in the text they might be able to explore the particular difficulties experienced by Aboriginal women.

Many people know little or nothing about the legislation that governed the lives of Aboriginal people so it may be difficult for them to make immediate links between this legislation and the "battle" that Ginibi describes. This struggle that she talks of has a history. Since the arrival of Philip in 1788 Aboriginal peoples have been subjected to government legislation that has directly impacted on family life, this has taken many forms. Throughout the country there has been a continual movement of people from their traditional lands to missions and reserves. This was carried out under the direction of the Aborigines' Protection Board, which was responsible for the 'care' of all Aboriginal people. It had the power to decide where people could live, who they could marry and even whether they were fit to look after their own children. The Board had separate policies for 'full blood and part-Aboriginal' children. 'Full-blood" children were considered to be 'primitive' and unteachable while 'half or quarter caste' children were considered teachable because of their white 'white' blood. In many cases people defined as 'half, quarter, eighth part' Aboriginal were taken from their families to separate missions to be 'educated' to live and work as 'white' people. This resulted in thousands of children being taken from their families, country, language and cultural heritage. Comparing the works of writers such as Glenyse Ward (which we'll see in the next chapter), Sally Morgan (which we saw in the last chapter),

Kevin Gilbert and several others provide some comprehension of the extent to which this happened. Parents were most often given no official information about the location or health of their children, including whether a child had died or not. Children, on the other had, were often told that their parents had died. These strategies were implemented; in particular, to break connections between families and thus stop movement of people back to their country. Only in the last to decade, particularly as a response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into aboriginal Deaths in Custody, has there been limited government support for the reuniting of families who were separated during the assimilationist era.

Ruby Langford Ginibi was fortunate; she wasn't taken away from her family. Although her mother left then when she was six the remained with her father, extended family and friends. Later, Ginibi had nine children of her own and adopted others along the way. The father of her fist three children, Bill, Pearl and Dianne, is Sam Giffin, a Koole. Gordon Campbell, a gubb or whiteman, is Nobby, David and Aileen's father. Then she married Peter Langford, also a gubb, and had Ellen and Pauline. Her youngest child Jeff has a Koorie father, Lance Marriot.[11] We can notice that Ginibi's family is an intersection of black and white; at this personal level the cultural divide is not apparent. This raises important questions about the ways in which cultural and racial divides are institutionalized in Australian society.

Ruby Langford Ginibi's *'Don't Take Your Love to Town'* shares a member of characteristics that work towards setting up a kind of 'frame' around the text. To look even briefly at some of these characteristics - the way the book is opened and closed, the way the chapters are set out - suggests the remarkable achievements Ginibi makes in both using and departing from traditional white tools of storytelling. The book opens

with 'Names', a chronological trace of how the identities and locations of the author have been figured throughout her life. In between are chapter headings that have individual titles but are all subtitled with the names of the places in which the chapter will be set. Immediately, then, we have signals as to what will be made important in the text: testimony to the people and places the author has encountered; testimony to the labour of writing itself and the ways in which the book was brought into being; and the importance of location in the book. We also have from the outset signals as to how this text will differ from more familiar autobiographies. Australian white-authored autobiographies do not generally begin with an acknowledgment and foregounding of the ways in which other people have seen the narrator, the "I", of the text. Most start out and continue with the "I" at Centre stage, to the point where we lose a sense of the importance of relationships with other people. Many, if not most, white-authored autobiographies do not locate the political nature of the production of the text, and its political function, as part of the main action of the book. Most autobiographies can be recognized as an unravelling of the lives of people into a straight-line chronological account, with the self at centre and all the peripheral described only in terms of their importance to that self.

Let us now look at the ways in which the struggle to maintain culture is carried out in the face of widespread decimation of Aboriginal populations and lack of understanding of Aboriginal ways of making their own sense of the world. This reading can also realize some of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships to land, and the importance of land to storytelling... "Don't Take You Love to Town", figures locations as significant not only in naming them at the beginning of each chapter, but in investing a number of places with an importance independent of their place in the lives of the text's players. Bonalbo which, like inner Sidney, is a scene of repeated arrival and

departure, is described as "my belonging place",[12] and is associated with a strong sense of community and identity. One of the most powerful moments of the book is the account of the visit to Uluru:

> *It was like a huge animal that was asleep in the middle of nowhere. We came closer and I could feel the goosefuys and the skin tightening at the back of my neck. Everyone else was quiet. It made me think of our tribal beginnings and this to me was the beginning of our time and culture. Time was suddenly shortened to include all of history in the present, and it was also stretched to include a way of seeing the earth that was thousand of years old.*[13]

Bonalbo and Uluru represent two different examples of how place and land can be significant in the constituting of identity and relationship: Bonalbo is important because of the pivotal familial and communal ties associated with memories of it. Uluru, has a less individual, more broadly cultural significance: emblematic of both the historical and contemporary Aboriginal societies. However, despite the significance of land and place, no opposition is set up between rural and urban settings to Langford's sense of self; location is never more important than her identity and experiences. Katoomba, where the *"kids disappeared staight into the bush and made cubbies and climbed trees, they were so happy."*[14] is eventually inadequate because *"isolated - not enough kooris to go around"*[15]. Described in the text is not some mystical 'pimitive' significance of place, nor a conventional story of travel. Instead is an argument against both white traditions that disrespect land, and against white racist ideas of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and land. Many of the ways in which non-Aboriginal societies have attempted to understand the relationship of Aboriginal people to place has been inadequate because it has been characterized by a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding, or a desire to manipulate facts for ulterior motives.

As the book progresses and its political focus becomes increasingly apparent, description of the troubles of people is also reflected in the way place is described. Inner Sydney, initially a place of unfamiliar but solid community - her father and stepmother lie there, she meets friends and family walking down the street[16] – becomes at the end of the text emblematic not only of the solidarity of Aboriginal communities but also of threats to them. Two of her children run away from the house in fitzroy Street Newtown[17], David dies at Globe House[18]. Importantly, transformations in places such as Sydney - and the contrasting unchanged nature of Bonalbo at the school reunion[19] – in some ways take the place of more conventional transformations in autobiography; where for example a hometown represents the difference between childish and adult perceptions. Rather than Ginibi, tracing what is only a journey of spiritual development and learning, she instead traces the community and networks of her family and the ways these are transformed over time. This shift in perspective from the more familiar autobiographical development involves absences - there is little attention paid, for example, to the impact on Langford of the circumstances in which her mother left home, or of being a mother so young herself, no long passages of the thoughts that went through her mind, or the lessons she was learning. A single individual's growth and change becomes instead an account of the movement and struggle of a whole community of individuals.

The reading of travel and journeys as important also means that it is possible to read the travel Ginibi makes not only between places, but also between communities, cultures and languages: *"I spread the clothing on bushes to dry and years later standing over a washing machine in Alexandria I saw an image of myself squatting over a gigai - how I'd had two completely different lives."*[20] This travelling and movement is one of the most important ways in which the narrative is mobilized and, as noted above, often replaces

the more expected long descriptions of thought and feeling of autobiography. Travel also outlines and makes visible the politics and struggle of moving between the white and black communities described in the text. The trip to Uluru is the result of lobbying, fundraising and building of solidarity; it is also part of the process of the explicit involvement in politics that Ginibi undergoes quite late in the book, and which produces the book. Uluru itself becomes a meeting of the different worlds of tribal and urban Aboriginal people, one in which the differences between them remain distinct. Moreover, *'Don't Take You Love to Town'*, also deals with an arena of political struggle for the Aboriginal communities that are described. However, in making language, the labour of writing, testimony, and the politics of place into important narrative structures, the arena of struggle is transformed. In this way, Ginibi's book becomes a part of the battle that it describes. For if the battle described in the text is one against bureaucratic, educational and legal institutions that are both enormously powerful and intractably racist, then the text is an argument the tactics of struggle can be found outside of the courts and in the way people live their lives and fight their battles.

Ruby Langford lives in a *'half black half white world'*[61] that say too often that Aboriginal people belong in neither. The text under consideration demonstrates by its existence as well as its language and movement that Langford has instead a knowledge of both; able to use both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal storytelling conventions and other cultural traditions. The importance of place in the book is one that is established by the significance of land to Aboriginal communities, the political imperative to make this significance understood to non-Aboriginal communities, and the knowledge of the ways in which it is difficult for non-Aboriginal people to gain this, understanding. *'Don't*

Take Your Love to Town' is thus a testimonial a bearing witness to struggle, as well as becoming in its own right part of the struggle itself.

Ruby Langford is a remarkable woman whose sense of humour has endoured through all the hardships she has experienced. *'Don't Take You Love to Town'*, is a book, which cannot fail to move you. Let us look at this extract, which is not less moving:

> *We picked up our pay and drove into St. George. Look here is a dress shop. I went in; I needed a new dress. Half way into the shop I saw myself in the long mirror, close up. Here was a pregnant woman with blistered hands. Her face feeling like flaky pastry, and black. I stared at myself for a long time, then I bought a sleeveless cotton dress and went outside. I hadn't been in town for so long. I was lonely for another woman to talk to. So every woman I passed I said hello, hello, just to hear them talk to me.*[22]

Ruby Langford's story is one of courage in the face of poverty and tragedy. She writes about the changing ways of life in Aboriginal communities - rural and urban; the disintegration of traditional life styles and the sustaining energy that has come from the renewal of Aboriginal culture in recent years. Ginibi is bold enough to describe all the struggles and sufferings that she underwent. Just like Glenyse Ward, (as mentioned in 'The Wandering Girl') who worked for white families after having to been taken away from her family, Ginibi also worked for other families when the she was small:

> *Mr. and Mrs. Peter Bull needed someone to look after their two little girls. ...I was to be like a housemaid and clean house, bath the kids and put the vegetables on for tea.*[23]

Later on when she had kids she writes

> *I earned money by cleaning and washing for the whites in town*[24]

She even had to go for the job of fencing along with her husband Gordon. She couldn't have proper sleep at night *'we were woken up by wild pigs... they came into camp every time a sheep was killed.'* [25]

Not only this she was also disturbed by wild snakes *'I kept watch for snakes. I killed four or five a day...'* [26]. She didn't have facility to take proper bath as well. She once bathed her children and herself in rain:

> *By the time we get back to camp it was raining and the gilgals filled with water. I stripped the kids' clothes off and bathed them there, than I washed the clothes because the rainwater pathered well and the water in the drums was hard bore water. I spread the clothing on bushes to dry and years later standing over a washing machine in Alexandria I saw an image of my earlier self squatting over a gilgal - how I'd had two completely different lives.* [27]

One of the most severe problems she was in, I think, is when she had physical relationship with Sam without getting married and was pregnant and hospitalized. She writes *'I'd had my baby right before visiting time, and I was sitting up in bed waiting for Sam, but he didn't turn up. Because I had no visitors and was unmarried it made me embarrassed, so when the other women had visitors, I would turn to the wall and cover my head and cry to myself'.* [28] At that time she was absolutely alone and nobody to look after he one can imagine what would have been her feeling at that very moment. Late on After Sam is arrested and taken to jail Ginibi is not allowed to meet Sam. The a big question mark arises in her mind as to who she was in relation to Sam because she wasn't officially married to her:

> *'They wouldn't let me see him. I wasn't classified as anything. I wasn't married to him, so who was I'.* [29]

One can imagine what would have been the child's reaction over his own identity. He wasn't given his father's name either so there was a big question of his identity existence in front of him. Ruby Langford

later on also had physical relations with other persons who she accepted as her husbands but she might have not been serious regarding this matter it may be because she was undergoing lot of problems, struggles and sufferings and sole responsibility of looking after her nine children as she herself says: *At this time all I knew was 'maintenance charge', and that was enough.*[30] So it may be the so called 'maintenance charge' which might have made her to be in those conditions because circumstances prevalent at that time were eve worse to survive as she herself says that - *'you had to fight to survive out there'*[31].

Moreover, she was denied even housing facility in spite of being Aboriginal the only reason being that she was a woman who had eight kids and no husband. One day a welfare officer came and assured her of housing land in town:

> *'I want you to get in touch with the Aboriginal Protection Board because I'm gona recommend you for housing land in town. It becomes freehold in ten years, what d' you think?' he said.*

'I'll be pleased if you'll do that', I said, and straight away while he was talking I had fantasies about getting a roof over the kids' heads and having taps, and floors. Full of excitement and plans I wrote the letter but not long after a reply came that I was refused, because I was a woman who had eight kids and no husband to support me and was only surviving on welfare and endowment payments and what I could earn washing and ironing in town.[31]

Ruby Langford Ginibi had nine children of her own and adopted others along the way. The father of her first three children, Bill, Peral and Dianne, is Sam Griffin, a Koorie. Gordon Campbell a gubb or whiteman, is Nobby, David and Aileen's father. Then she married Peter Langford,

also a gubb, and had Ellen and Pauline. Her youngest child Jeff has a Koorie father, Lance Marriot. Ginibi's family is an intersection of black and white at this personal level the cultural divide is not apparent. This raises important questions about the ways in which cultural and racial divides are institutionalized in Australian society. From Ginibi's opening statement it is clear that raising a family for her and other Aboriginal women involves more than the usual concerns: health, education, growing up, employment. As she has said the 'divide between black and white culture', as exemplified historically by Protectionist policies continues to impact upon Aboriginal mothers. Although the 1967 referendum and citizenship marked the end of these policies there are continuing ramifications including institutionalized racism affecting almost every facet of life. For instance when Ginibi and her family moved to Green valley they were isolated from other aboriginal families through the Housing Commission's integration policy. A few Aboriginal families were placed in houses in predominately 'white' areas.

Although the ongoing effects of protectionist policies are central to an understanding of the lives of Ginibi, her family and the many other people she writes about there is, in fact, very little direct or extensive information about them given anywhere in the text. Consider the opening sentences of the first paragraph:

> *'I was called after my great aunt Ruby. In the mission photo, she's sitting beside her identical twin, Pearl.'*[32]

This very simple statement, through the phrase 'the mission photo' situates Ginibi and her family's life within the context of the protectionist legislation, and the colonial process that it developed from. The simplicity of this statement makes it powerful. The lack of explanation reinforces the fact that this was a common experience it was life for Aboriginal people.

Government sanctioned separation of families, under the umbrella of protectionism, continued in most states until the late sixties or early seventies. Knowledge of these practices makes it possible for us to understand Aboriginal peoples fear of government intervention in their lives and anger at the Aborigines' Protection Board that was directly responsible for implementing these policies under the guise of caring for the welfare of Aboriginal people. There are unimaginable psychological consequences for Aboriginal people when children have been forcibly taken from families, often never to return. We are left to imagine how this affects a mother, such as Ginibi, when she has to place her children in a home because she is temporarily unable to provide for them.

It is a direct result of this history that Ginibi's father, Henry Anderson, refused to have anything to do with the Aboriginal Protection Board even if it might benefit his family. When Mr. Rubenach, the school principal, suggested that Ruby be allowed to complete the intermediate certficate and go on to college with funding from the Board her father would not even consider it. He said to Ruby:

> *I don't know about third year. You decide about that. But I'm not having any protection board put you through college. All the protection they've done is take people from their land and split up families.*[33]

Ginibi gives no further account of her father's feelings towards the Board on the legislation that governed their lives.

We see in the text that Urban neighbourhood support structures are often not available or are constantly changing because families cannot find adequate housing and regular work. This has resulted in women having to 'voluntarily' place their children in homes, for varying lengths of time, until they could support them again. Many children attended several schools because they had to move so often resulting

in high attrition rates and low achievement. Families then often become caught in a cycle of unemployment, alcoholism, family breakdown and even imprisonment.

It is through the experiences of Nobby, Ginibi's fourth child, that the reader most clearly sees the ways in which alcoholism, imprisonment and institutionalized violence its affect families. Ginibi recalls the first time that Nobby is arrested and gaoled:

> *I got a message from (son-in-law) Steve saying Nobby had been gaoled for firing shots at police... Not had already heard that Penny was seeing another bloke, so he got blind drunk and asked his mate Maxwell to drive him home to the Valley ... Maxwell was driving negligently so the police chased them. Then shots were fired at the police car ... Not was to spend six years of a ten year sentence in Long Bay.*
>
> *It began 21 June 1973 when they were charged and in court in Bankstown. I went to see Nob in the cells and he had two black eyes. We knew what this meant.*[34]

Ginibi gives a matter of fact account of what happened. She is not judgemental about Nobby, Penny or Maxwell's behaviour. Nobby's lack of constructive ways of dealing with relationship problems is clearly foregrounded. His response to his girl friend seeing someone else is to get "blind drunk". It is the tone in which this description of Nobby's behaviour is written that is very important. It suggests that while Ginibi is disappointed and concerned, what Nobby did and what happened to him was not entirely unexpected; it is part of Ginibi's experience of life.

Police violence, and potential violence, impacted on Ginibi and the rest of the family both emotionally and physically. This was particularly so after Nobby's arrest when the family overtly opposed the police. For instance, when Nobby was on the run, after escaping from prison, David acted as a decoy to help his brother escape.[35] Then when

a young friend of David's was running from the police Ginibi concealed him in the manhole and gave erroneous directions to officers chasing him. She allowed others, running from the police, to stay in her house even though it meant she could be arrested for aiding and abetting criminals and that this would result in her younger children being taken from her.

A crucial year in the growth of Ginibi's historical awareness is 1964, a year when they established connections with a variety of different Aboriginal groups. In chapter 10, 'Corroboree/Phaedra', she recalls attending her first meeting of the Aboriginal Progressive Association. There she meets urban Aboriginal activists Charles Perkins and Lester Bostock, and is elected editor of the Association's newsletter, Churringa. Around this time, Ginibi and other members of the APA attend a traditional dance performance at the Elizabethan Theatre in Newton by an Aboriginal group from Mornington Island. The dance speaks to her deeply, and with other APA members, she goes backstage to meet the performers. At first the dancers are shy and wary; they see Ginibi and her friends as strangers. But the dancers break into big smiles and reach out warmly to shake their hands as soon as they learn that Ginibi and her party are not strangers but are 'part of them'.[36]

With the APA Ginibi also attends a National Aborigines day at Martin Place. There, for the first time in many years, she hears a man singing in her own Bundjalung language. The singer turns out to be uncle Jim Morgan. Some time later, she receives a newspaper cutting of Jim Morgan's obituary. A link with the past has gone. But in the obituary notice she reads that Jim had made many recordings for the Richmond River Historical society. This information excites her greatly : *'This meant I could find out some more about my history. I decided to write to the RRHS for the tapes.'*[37]

This chapter seems to be very significant because what we see in this chapter is both recognition of the differences between Aboriginal communities, and the formation of a sense of solidarity between them. As Ginibi connects with the urban activists, members of a traditional community from the far north, and her own Bundjalug roots, the recognizes that despite their differences, there is a level at which these disparate Aboriginal groups form a single pan-Aboriginal community and they are part of the peoples who were here first, and they have all survived and in their own ways resisted the harsh historical consequences of colonialism. Yet, Aboriginal history includes not only oppression and suffering: it is also about heroism, achievement, and victory against terrible odds. Acknowledging White Australia's Black history involves recognising the Aboriginal people both resisted and assisted white explorers. They fought to defend their traditional lands, and served in the Australian armed forces in two world wars. Many Aboriginal women and men helped build the nation's wealth by working for decades as unpaid rural labourers and domestic servants. Ginibi's own story is a success story- "the ultimate battler's tale" - and she is concerned to remind us that there are numerous other stories of outstanding achievement among Koori people. Looking at the posters and pamphlets at the Aboriginal Medical Service, she sees

> *the endless photos of Kooris and their achievements... I thought how this kind of information hardly ever got printed in the Herald, the Sun, the Mirror. You got historical articles with headlines like. "Aboriginals Treated as Vermin".*[33]

Often what is hard to talk about is sexual and other violence from white men in a historical situation where the sexism and sexual oppression encountered by women is compounded for black women by racism. Langford Ginibi is comparatively explicit about this:

My grandmother was a full-blood. She was raged by an Italian, the banana plantation owner up home, Billy Nudgell, that's how my mother came to be. You see.[39]

Even more extreme economic inequality than many white women have experienced exacerbates the effects of domestic violence. Langford Ginibi is beaten up by Sam earlier, and later by Lance, though, by contrast, when the boys are in their early teenage years and have run away from home and Ruby asks Lance to 'give them a good belting', he only pretends to do it and hits the beds instead.[40]

There are some significant differences between black and white women's writing, produced not only negatively by the racism, sexism and class factors I mentioned before, but also by racial and cultural differences, asserted as a positive thing. Singularity is the objective of traditional autobiography; in Aboriginal women's writing, *identity is achieved as an extension of the collective.* Langford Ginibi has commented: *'this is not only my book, my story; it's the story of every Aboriginal Woman in this country today that's got kids to raise. I'm only one.'*[41] History and family history is written; Langford Ginibi is proud to have been able to trace *'five generations of Koori experience'.*[42]

Aboriginal women's life writing: *'is a challenge to the ways in which Aboriginality has been constructed in dominant "white" discourses. In contemporary Australian society, "living black" and writing about it can be seen as a process of political confrontation.'*[43] Langford Ginibi's earlier political involvement with groups like the Aboriginal Progressive Association had been curtailed by Lance who demanded to know why she didn't stay at home to look after the kids *'instead of running around to meetings'.*[44] The socially destructive effects of hard drugs, and the inability to various organizations to rehabilitate the casualties of

an oppressive system lead Langford Ginibi to trying to find out how David got the drugs : *'but everyone I spoke to was so pathetic, and all in their own private hells'.*[45] For Langford Ginibi, writing is also a way of articulating the pain of all these experiences; she recalls how *'back in the room I'd run to hide my hurt*[46] ; *'I can assure you that everything that's written in there is true, because I've got the scars to prove it',*[47] she also comments. These are both scars on the body and scars on the mind. Later, she tells her Aunt Alma, *'I don't want to get upset any more about Nobby... But reading this, I'm getting upset about everyone'.*[48]

Ginibi's *'Don't Take You Love to Town'* also depicts a world where youth get into trouble with the gungies, get put into institutions, take risks with hard drugs, kill themselves, or die in a prison system that Langford Ginibi describes as 'killing our sons like a war'. All this time the mothers, and often the sisters, are supposed to be always there, holding everything together. Talking of her friend of thirty - eight years, Nerida, she comments:

> *She had a family of ten children and lost four boys and I had lost two, so we know what it's like to lose the ones we love the most of all, our children.* [49]

There is some ambivalence in Langford Ginibi's representation of being a mother, and of all the pain involved in the fight for survival. In 1984, she is living in Allawah hostel in Granville, *'for people who'd raised their families and didn't want to become live-in baby-sitters for their kids.'* [50] She has her 'first holiday away from my children in thirty three years... and I needed to stop thinking about them for a while, and calm myself'. The enormous load of responsibility borne by mothers in particular can produce immense strain. Langford Ginibi recalls how she wrote to Nobby that his being in jail was as painful for his family as for himself: *every time you were*

jailed, we went to jail with you... You never received all the knocks on your own, because we felt everything.[51]

Langford Ginibi has spent the greater part of her life moving from place to place, and job to job. She has managed, in the space of a very busy life, to raise nine of her own children, and despite financial strife, to adopt and care for several others. She has worked at everything from a clothing machinist to laying fencing to teaching:

> *We went over to the depot, the deep, we called it, found an old forty-four gallon drum, and cut holes in it and got a copper and put it on top. I used to have to carry water on a yoke with two buckets - four gallon buckets seven days a week to fill a forty-four gallon drum, just for drinking and washing purposes, from two hundred years away. I've had three major operations on my stomach from all that gut-busting and boy, I'm glad I'm here where I can get water from a tap. And our people used to say to me, you're a woman, you're not a man, and you're lifting those heavy buckets, like that. You're going to kill yourself. Nobody else around was going to bloody well do it for me, only one. But I raised them kids, and they were clean and tidy when they went to school and they were well-fed, because I saw to it that they were.*[52]

Many Aboriginal women writers claim that while the narrative they unfold s their personal story, their experiences are similar to those of many other Aboriginal women. For this reason these personal stories can be viewed as 'testimonies' to the way Aboriginal people were treated by non-Aboriginal people: in particular, the government in the form of the Aborigines Protection Board, the Native Welfare Department, the Education Department, the Police, the Church, missionaries, and other institutions within the state apparatus. Louis Althusser points out that it is these institutions through which ruling class ideas are legitimated.[53] Furthermore, these writings are a 'testimony' to the dominant attitudes and beliefs of the society at a particular time.[54] Ruby Langford-Ginibi,

the Koori writer, explains why she wrote her life story at the end of *Don't Take Your Love to Town:*

> *I know when I finished this book a weight would be lifted from my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white peop le. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we had surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here.*[56]

In short, many of the writings are a 'testimony' to the struggle to survive because of the human rights denied to Aboriginal peoples. John Beverley defines *testmonio* as 'a novel or novella length narrative in book or pamphlet form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience.[56] This type of writing 'may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories some of which are conventionally considered literature, others not. Beverley offers examples of textual categories such as, 'autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, memoir, confession, diary, interview, eyewitness report, life history, novella-testimonio, non-fiction novel or facto graphic literature. Of key importance is that the 'word testimonio translates literally as testimony, as in the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. I have used testimonio as a special kind of narrative from the autobiographies and biographies by Aboriginal women winters as a recording of 'life-stories'. Thus, my argument is that the stories told are not fictions, because there is an element of truth, even though there are embellishments. In testimonial writing often "the narrator is someone who is either functionally illiterate or, is literate, not a professional writer'.[57] As a consequence, 'the production of a testimonio generally involves tape recording and then transcription and editing of an oral account by an

interlocutor who is an intellectual, often a journalist or a writer". What is important about the production of the text is that the reader is "meant to experience both the speaker and the situations and events recounted as real." Of importance is that "testimonio constitutes an affirmation of the individual self in a collective mode. in terms of narrative presentation, Beverley argues that the literature of testimonio can lie "not in its uniqueness but in its ability to stand for the experience of community as a whole".

The writers of the life stories give testimony to being removed from their mothers through 'compulsion' or 'duress' by the station owners for whom they worked.[58] The argument put forth by the station owners or managers was that the children would be taken to get an education, but to the dismay of the girls they found they were being used as 'slave' labour. Ruby also worked, as mentioned in the text, for Mr. and Mrs. Peter. But she writes: *'I was to be like a housemaid and clean house, bath the kids and put the vegetables on for tea.*[59]

Many of the 'life stories' are witnessing to the lack of human rights, specifically, the lack of sexual rights Aboriginal women had in relation to non-Aboriginal men. Sexual violation, in many cases, was perpetrated b station owners, and males in households where Aboriginal women were domestic servants. The belief of the authorities in the north of Western Australia was that Aboriginal women were not safe in the community. Connie Nungulla McDonald says: *"Documents show that the protector for Aborigines at Wyndham, Sergeant J.F. Flinders had consulted with his fellow protector, Dr. Webster, and they decided that it was in my mother's 'best interests' for us to be taken to the mission. They feared that left in Wyndham, 'she would become victim to the lust of degenerates - whites and Afghans.'*[60] My supposition is that the contributing factors to the position of Aboriginal women in the community were both the colonial 'racist' beliefs and the denial of citizenship, which meant one's human rights could be infringed upon.

Without citizenship and knowledge of their legal rights Aboriginal women had no protection in the eyes of the law.

Connie Nungulla McDonald, whose mother was from the Duulngari tribe, lived on the Forest River Mission (near Wyndham north of Western Australia) and gives testimony to the way in which some children came to be at the mission:

> *As well as children from the mission, the dormitories housed children from outlying cattle stations, most of whom were fathered by white station owners. These children were bought to the dormitories by the police. Once a year the police also did a 'round up' to take the Aboriginal children from their tribal families in the bush.*[61]

In the *Bringing Them Home* report, generations of Aboriginal women who were sent to Cootamundra Girls' Home in New South Wales until it closed in 1969, are shown to have suffered the fate of separation that affected their mothers: *"Many girls became pregnant in domestic service, only to have their children in turn removed and institutionalised."*[62]

One woman, who was removed from her home at eight years of age with her three sisters in the 1940s, gave a confidential submission in which she said:

> *When the girls left the home, they were sent out to service to work in the homes and outflying farms of middle class white people as domestics. On top of that you were lucky not to be sexually, physically, and mentally abused, and all for a lousy sixpence that you didn't get to see anyway. Also, when the girls fell pregnant, their babies were taken from them and adopted out to white families, they never saw them again.*[63]

In most of the 'life stories' at least one of the women in the family was either raped, sexually violated, or harassed by a non-Aboriginal man she worked for, or did not know. Langford Ginibi is very explicit about this:

My grandmother was a full blood. She was raped by an Italian, the banana plantation owner up home, Billy Nudgell, that's how my mother came to be. You see. [64]

Aboriginal women's writing is also a 'witnessing' to the rights, or lack of rights, citizenship gave Aboriginal peoples living in a liberal society. One of the oldest tenets of liberalism is equality before the law (legal rights, equality of citizenship). In liberal societies, an individual's worth and equality are based on having the status of equal citizenship publicly affirmed. Having citizenship means individuals have access to a number of social goods: for instance, voting rights, medical attention, social security, legal rights, police protection etc. John Rawls reveals in his theory of justice that without citizenship individuals have limited access to primary 'goods'. Thus the question of social justice is inextricably linked to citizenship. What many of the testimonies reveal is that without citizenship many Aboriginal people were denied the basic legal and health rights. It could be argued, then, that the Rawlsian condition for background fairness is inadequate or lacking with regard to disempowered groups.

Interestingly, Anglo-Australians born in Australia, who were the descendants of Anglo settlers, were automatically granted citizenship at birth, yet Aboriginal - Australians who were Indigenous to the country had to apply for citizenship in order to access rights automatically bestowed on Anglo individuals. While many citizens in liberal societies think their political and moral identities (as citizens) are natural, they are actually socialized to co-operate in the social order, that is, to have a specific sense of justice, and to have a cultural conception of the good life. In this sense, having a liberal identity means taking up certain values over other values, and a form of life over other forms. Lack of citizenship, thus, reinforces the formation of social identity in terms of how one 'judges' and / or positions 'other' identities. For Aboriginal Australians,

even after the 1960s primary goods available to others were denied to them, which reveal how the identity of Indigenous peoples had already been judged as 'inferior' to non-Aboriginal people.

One of the issues that emerge when reading 'life stories' written outside one's cultural experiences is that the reading is framed by one's situated knowledge. This framework is more evident when reading the work of those groups who are 'already judged' as outside the 'norms' and 'values' of the dominant society. Denise comments on this problem[65]:

> *'Some people only want to hear the harrowing stories in relation to Aboriginality. The want to hear about deaths in custody or the stolen generations and so on. While I can understand that these are very important issues for Aboriginal peoples, and issues which many white Australians need to be educated on, somehow if we haven't experienced any of these experiences our authenticity is questioned. And people will say when you give a talk or lecture, "but you haven't mentioned racism." It is like the agenda that people want us to talk on has already been set."*

Aboriginal identity can be discussed in terms of country. It can he be claimed that "locating or researching family histories, has led to the resurrection of many 'subjugated knowledges'. These 'new-found' knowledges have facilitated the re-thinking and public articulation of many indigenous people's own position on identity/nation."[66] What these knowledges have specifically enabled is "identity to be mapped to country and provided a reference by which other knowledges (such as the histories, cultures and family identities associated with country) can be accessed."[67] As a consequence, *"identifying through country remains an incredibly empowering process and is seen as necessary to legitimate one's speaking position."*[68] Groves claims that speaking from regional identities has *"not*

made us politically weaker because through the concept of 'pan-Aboriginality' we can talk about issues, which are central to us as Aboriginal peoples."[69]

While many Aboriginal women's autobiographies reveal the often horrific relations between colonizer and colonized, there are a number of other insights which often go unchecked if the reader is unfamiliar, or unable to 'read' or identify with, the Aboriginal discourse in which many autobiographies are often presented one of those things of particular interest is the role of humour as shroud experience in a number of testimonies. Many writings by Aboriginal women contain wonderful elements of "blak"[70] humour particularly the works of Ruby Langford Ginibi and Alice Nannup. This "blak" humour is also evident in a play written by Sally Morgan and David Milroy, *Cruel Wild Woman*, which satirizes Pauline Hanson.[71] It should be pointed out that Aboriginal people might find different incidents recounted in the testimony to be humorous. In view of our different cultural experiences, I feel unable to point with any authority to the humour in relation to Aboriginal discourse. In both Ruby Langford-Ginibi's texts, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, and *Real Deadly*, there are a number of stories, which reveal the humour in what could also be construed otherwise. Ruby's reflection on her life as she was returning to Bonaldo (her childhood town) is a case in point. She sings along with a song playing on the radio:[72]

You painted up your lips
And rolled and combed your tinted hair
(my sisters looked at me sideways, they knew the stories of my four men,
what had happened in each case, and they sang)
Ruby are you contemplatin'
Going out somewhere
I saw behind their heads the Richmond Range around Mt. Lindsay.
The shadow on the wall tells me
The sun is going down
Ru-by, don't take your love to town.

I turned on a high black mama voice and patted my chest. "I took my love to town too many times!" and burst out laughing.

To sum up, the 'life-story' or to say the autobiography namely, *Don't Take You Love to Town,* which I have discussed as testimony reveals a number of issues which affected the lives of Aboriginal women in terms of the construction of 'Aboriginality'. By expanding on some of the incidents recounted I have attempted to illustrate the very way in which the identities that emerge in testimonial writing can be constituted both as 'testimony' and as sites of 'resistance'. Having said that, however, it needs to be recognized that 'life stories' in the form of testimonies are also constrained by certain literary conventions. While autobiographies and/or life stories are a form of narrative about a "lived life", they are also constructed by a set of conventions which define the genre of auto / biographies.

At heart, it is the 'truths' of Aboriginal women's experiences that engage the readers of the 'life stories'. It is not the 'truths', or the legitimated speaking positions as recorded in the history books, or the newspaper reports that the readers of these 'life stories' search for. It is the 'truths' revealed in the speaking positions of those who have been treated as invisible, or who have been silenced by the dominant voices. In the writings by Aboriginal women, it's the 'petite narratives' of the life story that are a 'witnessing' of other experiences rather than the legitimated (his) stories.

NOTES :

[1] Wayne King, Black Hours, Sydney, A & R, 1996, pp. 39-43.

[2] Ibid, pp. 39-43.

[3] Langford Ginibi, Ruby. Interview with Janine Little 1994: 108.

[4] Ibid, pp. 102.

[5] Langford Ginibi, Ruby, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, pp. 174.

[6] Ibid, p. 108.

[7] Ibid, p. 175.

[8] Langford Ginibi, Ruby. Interview with Janine Little 1994: 118.

[9] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *My Bundjalung People*, University of Queensland Press, p. 45.

[10] Langford, Ginibi, Ruby, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, p. 55.

[11] Ibid, p. 2.

[12] Ibid, p. 61.

[13] Ibid, p. 234.

[14] Ibid, p. 121.

[15] Ibid, p. 126.

[16] Ibid, pp. 42-45.

[17] Ibid, p. 127.

[18] Ibid, p. 227.

[19] Ibid, p. 243.

[20] Ibid, p. 91.

[21] Ibid, p. 235.

[22] Ibid, p. 93.

[23] Ibid, p. 40.

[24] Ibid, p. 63

[25] Ibid, p. 91

[26] Ibid, p. 91

[27] Ibid, p. 91

[28] Ibid, p. 58

[29] Ibid, p. 64.

[30] Langford Ginibi, Ruby, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, p. 64.

[31] Ibid, p. 176.

[32] Ibid, pp. 108-9.

[33] Ibid, p. 1.

[34] Ibid., pp. 37-8.

[35] Ibid., p. 182.

[36] Ibid., pp. 185-7.

[37] Ibid., p. 116.

[38] Ibid, p. 116.

[39] Ibid., p. 231.

[40] Langford Ginibi Ruby. Interview with Janine Little 1994 : 105.

[41] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, p. 128.

[42] Langford Ginibi Ruby. Interview with Janine Little 1994: 114.

[43] Ibid., p. 103.

[44] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, p. 90.

[45] Ibid., p. 118.

[46] Ibid., p. 227.

[47] Interview, 1994: 102.

[48] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Boks, Australia, 1988, p. 115.

[49] Ibid, p. 257.

[50] Ibid, p. 221.

[51] Ibid, p. 267

[52] Interview 1994: 121

[53] Michell Grossman, *Out of the Salon and into the streets: Contextualising Australian Indigenous Women's writing*, p. 172.

[54] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses : Notes Towards an Investigation", *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York : Monthly Review Press, 1971.

[55] *It* needs to be noted that not everyone held these beliefs.

[56] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, p. 169.

[57] John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Centre : On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)' *Modern Fiction Studies* 35. 1 (Spring 1989) 11, 12-13.

[58] Ibid., p. 15.

[59] 'Duress' differs from 'Compulsion' in that it can be achieved without the actual application of force. However, we usually understand it to involve threats or at least morall pressure.

[60] Ruby Langford Ginibi, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, Penguin Books, Australia, 1988, p. 40.

[61] McDonald and Finnane, p. 3.

[62] Ibid, p. 24.

[63] HREOC, p. 44.

[64] Confidential submission 617, New South Wales: Woman removed at 8 years with her 3 sisters in the 1940s; placed in Cootanmundra Girls' Home, HREOC, 44.

[65] Interview, 1994: 105.

[66] Denise Groves, 'Sexualities, Identities, New Aboriginalities', in *Foreign Dialogues*, ed. Mary Zournazi (Annandale : Pluto Press, 1998) 80.

[67] Denise Groves, 'New Aboriginalities: Creating Multiple Sites', Masters Dissertation, Murdoch University, 1996, 23.

[68] Ibid, 23

[69] Ibid.

[70] Groves (1998), 83.

[71] For the use of this term see Hetti Perkins, Blakness : *Black City Culture*! (South Yarra: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Conjunction with Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative, 1994), 4-7.

[72] Sally Morgan, and David Milroy, *Cruel Wild Women*, Perf. Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, dir. David Milroy, Subiaco Theatre, Perth, 1999.

CHAPTER - 4

Aboriginal Identity in *Wandering Girl*

"As I lifted myself up on my elbow to gaze out the window towards the hills that surrounded the mission, the aroma of wild berries come drifting past my nose. Yet I felt dispirited and sad, for today was the day I was leaving my home to work for white people'...

As a matter of fact, Australian Aboriginal Literature protests against the two centuries of colonial rule, loss of indigenous rights, culture, languages and identity. It tires to reconstruct the identity and history of the Aborigines from an Aboriginal perspective and deconstruct the same that have been created by the whites. The 'stolen generation', which was one of the atrocious consequences of colonialism, is the crucial theme of Aboriginal Literature given the fact that most aboriginal writing is autobiographical and most aboriginal writers were stolen children. They were stolen from their people and culture in the name of education and etiquette and trained to become good domestic servants in white households.

Until quite recently, Aboriginal children could be excluded from schools for the only reason that they were Aboriginal. For many Aboriginal students in an urban situation, the question of identity remains at the forefront of everyday school life. For some, their identity is denied by the school itself. It can sometimes be the case that schools fail to recognise a student's identity, or deliberately deny it, as they view Aboriginality in terms of certain physical characteristics, employment, dress and ability. On the other hand, many Aboriginal students decide not to identify, because it makes life at school too difficult. At one time it

was believed that Aboriginal people were "uneducable" and should be taught housekeeping and farm work. Most of this "teaching" took place at mission schools. There was, and unfortunately continues in some areas to be, a perception that because people were black, they were inferior and had no need of a Western education. It was believed that Aboriginal people were destined to work in unskilled areas. However, times changed and people like Peral Duncan, Charles Perkins, Margo Williams (Weir) undertook tertiary studies and were role models for the rest of the community.

It is still the norm for many Aboriginal parents/careers not to send their children to pre-school. One of the reasons is that they are afraid that their children will be taken away; another is that they are under the impression that it costs too much or schools are assimilationist.

Wandering Girl, the text under consideration by Glenyse Ward, is also a first - person account of an Aboriginal teenage girl living in Australia in the 1960s. As was the case with many Aboriginal children at the time, the author too, was taken away from her natural parents at the age of one and placed in a German Catholic mission to be raised in the European manner. At 16 she was sent out to work as a maid for a wealthy white family. After suffering many humiliations from her mistress, Ward summons the courage to strike out on her own. She eventually finds a better job, marries and raises a family.

We will see that as the narrative unfolds in Glenyse Ward's personal story, her experiences are similar to those of many other Aboriginal women. For this reason this personal story can be viewed as 'testimony' to the way Aboriginal people were treated by non-Aboriginal people: in particular, the government in the form of the Aborigines Protection Board, the Native Welfare Department, the Education Department, the Police, the Church, missionaries, and other

institutions within the state apparatus. Most importantly, I'll try to illustrate how Mrs. Bigelow, the antagonist is representing the class 'white women' and Glenyse representing the class 'Aboriginal women' in general.

The Stolen Generations

Before turning directly to the specific text, *Wandering Girl* I want to discuss the way that the Aboriginal people were treated in the years between 1885 and 1969 and also the way that Aboriginal children were taken away from their families and forced to work as domestic servants and to live on the White peoples' government - controlled missions and reserves. In the state of New South Wales, Aboriginal tribes have been forced to leave their tribal lands and go onto government - controlled reserves. It was commonly believed by white settlers that the Aborigines would soon die off, and the reserve land would be sold and used for farming - but, by the start of the 1900s, a new generation of Aboriginal children was growing up in the reserves. This fact, combined with the large-scale arrival of white immigrants from Europe, changed the Aboriginal life forever.

When it became clear that the Aboriginal people would not die off, the protection board for the Aborigines decided to break up all Aboriginal communities. They would then sell the land to the newly arrived Europeans for farming. The board started by taking away all the rights from Aborigines to own or use reserve lands; the Aborigines could own nothing. The reserves were made a training ground for Aboriginal children to become servants. The protection board had plans to remove Aboriginal children from their reserves and place them under the control of white employers. After these children were removed, they were never allowed to return home.

The white society thought it would be in the best interest of the child to remove her from the corrupting influence of her Aboriginal family; they would send the girls to an institution or foster home, and train her to become a servant. There were no rules or regulations for the treatment of the Aboriginal children who were sent to work.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Aborigines worked for flour, sugar, and tea rations on the cattle stations of northern, central and western Australia. Aboriginal women on settler's stations often worked harder than the men, who were mostly stockmen. The women not only had hard domestic chores - such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for children - but, they also worked as cattle drivers; with camel teams; as shepherds; road repairers; water carriers; house builders; and gardeners. If they tried to escape, they were captured and beaten.

It was the women who were responsible for keeping Aboriginal groups together in camps and on these properties. They cared for their children and for their men. The older women taught traditional skills and customs to the younger generation. Most girls who were removed from their white employers ended up in Sydney working for the middle-class white people. These girls usually were awakened before 5: 30 A.M. to do all of the household jobs. Employers had the girls working seven days a week. They only got paid a small amount, and often got nothing. The middle-class whites didn't allow the girls to show any affection to white people, since they said it was like black rubbing off onto white. The Aboriginal people were just there to work.

The forced removal of indigenous children happened in every state and territory of Australia. The separation of Aboriginal children started in Victoria and New South Wales as early as 1885 and, in some states, was not stopped until the 1970s. About 85% of Aboriginal families

have been affected in some way, either by having children taken away from them or by being forced to make major decisions to avoid having their children taken. Mothers of some Aboriginal children would cover their fair-skinned children with black clay; hide them in trees, behind sand dunes, or in hollow logs. Families were moving constantly, to keep one step ahead of 'welfare'. Some families said that they were Italian, Maori, or Greek, leaving their identity to themselves to escape the strict control of the white 'protector'.

The removal of these children from their families affected more than just a few people. In New South Wales the government estimated that, in new South Wales alone, there were at least 8,000 Aboriginal children who had been taken away from their families between 1885 and 1996. Aboriginal children were often taken for being 'neglected'. The missions and reserves were often the places where the Aborigines would eventually die off.

The children in the institutions were the most neglected children in Australia. Many had to sleep in dormitories with about nineteen to twenty-five other girls in each of dormitory. If any of the girls wet the bed, she would get her rubbed in the wet sheet and then receive a beating. The food they ate was so bad that sometimes the meat was infested with maggots. They were not supplied with shoes; in order to keep their feet warm, children would jump into the cow dung. They would practice this behaviour often at Roelands Mission, because during winter it got very cold. In Kinchela Boys' Home, which was based in new South Wales, the boys often suffered sexual and physical abuse.

Often the white people would send Aboriginal women out into the white community, and if they came back pregnant, the rule was to keep each women for two years and then take the child away; sometimes mother and child would never see each other again. The

white society thought it would be in the best interest of the child to remove her from the corrupting influence of her Aboriginal family. There were no rules or regulations for the treatment of the Aboriginal children who were sent to work. The children then grew up in a white community knowing nothing of the Aboriginal culture and environment.

Young Aborigines were soon forced from their homes to travel the state looking for work. For the first time, many whites and with Aborigines and realized what poor conditions they were forced to live under. Even with this evidence, it was not until 1967 that Aboriginal people had a vote about their treatment in society. The protection of the Welfare system remained in place until 1969.

Turning now to a specific text, it is evident that Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* is a very first-person account of an Aboriginal teenage girl (the author herself), forcibly taken from her parents, as was the case with other Aboriginal children at that time, and raised in a strict Catholic institution, who describes her time as a servant during the 17th year. Glenyse writes:

> *You see in the early days of survival and struggle, there was a lot of hardship and agony amongst the Aboriginal people. Through the misguided minds of earnest white people we were taken away from our natural parents. This affected all of us. We lost our identity through being put into missions, forced to abide by the European way.*[2]

She describes her life in the following words:

> *I was taken away from my natural parents at the age of one, because mum took me to see a doctor when I was sick. The Native Welfare was called in and mum was told she was an unfit mother and I would be better off put into a home and reared up the European way. I was put into an orphanage called St. John of Gods, run by the order of St. John by Gods' nuns. And it was situated in a suburb of Perth called Rivervale.*

From there I was picked by a Catholic priest and brother, Father Leuman and Brother Leonard, who were of German descent, and driven down in an old grey ute to a mission, St. Francis Xaviers Native Mission, Wandering Brook which was 80 miles south of Perth. It was there that I did my schooling and grew up. I wasn't a bright student, I never made the grades to attend a school in Perth, and so I was made a working girl at the Mission. That meant you had to help the nuns with the domestic chores. So I ended up washing pots and pans until I was old enough, like 15 or 16, to take on an outside job - which meant working for the upper class white people, washing their pots and pans. After a year of madness, I broke away to hang onto what bit of sanity I had lift, and found my own independence working as a domestic in the kitchen at Busselton Hospital. From there, I went to Perth and became involved in different field of work, like nursing assistant in a couple of big hospitals in Perth..[3]

We can notice that Glenyse had no other choice : she's delivered to Mayor Bigelow and his vicious wife as their one domestic. Housed in a dirty garage, instructed to eat meager, inferior food after cooking sumptuous meals for the family to share in their luxurious dining room, given unfamiliar tasks with no instruction, browbeaten and humiliated at every turn, she quietly retaliates by garaging hungrily and luxuriating in the Bigelow's bath when they are out and by hosing the inside of their car when told to 'wash' the back seat where she herself has been sitting.

She was supposed to wake up before dawn everyday and slaved for fifteen hours. She was given tin plate to eat off and tin mug to drink from and slept on a shabby cot above a garage. It must have been very humiliating for her to drink off a tin mug, which was given to pet dogs and cats. She was amazed when a tin mug was placed down in front of her. She notes:

As she powered herself and Mr. Bigelow tea in beautiful cups and lowers, I wondered if I was going to get a cup. I could only see two cups and saucers on the table, when she went to a cupboard in the far left of the kitchen, and I thought. "Oh, that's good, she's going to get me a cup and saucer". To my amazement she came back to the table with an old tin mug, poured tea in it, and placed it down infront of me.[4]

Glenyse couldnot even retaliate properly she was amazed though because she was taught *'never to speak out to people unless we were spoken to first, no matter what the circumstances'.*[5] She was given very clear instruction by Mrs. Bigelow that she was there as her dark servant, that she was to obey her orders and do what she was told to do. She writes that *"In those days, not so long ago either, we were not allowed to say anything against our white bosses".*[6] The stolen children being brought up in mission were not allowed to meet even their parents. Glenyse says of her mother *'she once came down to wandering and tried to visit but I had not been allowed to see her."*[7]

Thus we can notice that while the narrative unfolded is author's personal story, her experiences are similar to those of many other Aboriginal men. For this reason this personal story here can be viewed as 'testimony' to the way Aboriginal people were treated by non-Aboriginal people: in particular, the government in the form of the Aborigines Protection Board, the Native Welfare Department, the Education Department, the Church, missionaries and other institutions within the state apparatus. Louis Althusser rightly points out that it is these instituting through which ruling class ideas are legitimated.[8] Furthermore, this writing is also a 'testimony' to the dominant attitudes (in the text shown by Mrs. Bigelow) and beliefs of the society at a particular time. Ruby Langford Ginibi, the Koori writer, explains why she wrote her life story at the end of *'Don't Take You Love to Town'*:

I know when I finished this book a weight would be lifted from my mind, not only because I could examine my own life from it and know who I was, but because it may help better the relationship between the Aboriginal and white people. That it might give some idea of the difficulty we had surviving between two cultures, that we are here and will always be here.[9]

There this life writing is also a 'testimony' to the struggle to survive because of the human rights denied to Aboriginal peoples.[10] Beverley argues that the literature of 'testimony' can lie *"not in its uniqueness but in its ability to stand for the experience of her community as a whole".*[11]

One instance of a communal experience is the events recorded as personal stories in the narratives of the *Bringing Them Home* report which are given testimony again in the writings by Aboriginal women and here it is given by Glenyse Ward: for example, the removal of children from their homes, parents, or school.[12] What is foregrounded here is the 'terror' the child experienced and in a sense the 'horror' of the Aboriginal children being taken away from their family. This 'terror' emerges because of an 'unspeakable' act; an act that silences a people because they are 'already' judged as 'inferior'. The voices of Aboriginal people have been judged as not legitimate in the phrase universe of the dominant Anglo-Australian policy making. Glenyse Ward gives her testimony as to the manner in which she was taken from her mother to Wandering mission :

'I was taken away from my natural parents at the age of one, because mum took me to see doctor when I was sick. The Native Welfare was called in and mum was told she was on unfit mother and I would be better off put into a home and reared up the European way.'[13]

Thus, this 'unspeakable act' is experienced by a community of parents, and children who were sentenced by the legitimation of a law that denied them agency. It has been seen that the writers of the life

stories give testimony to being removed from their mothers through 'compulsion' or 'duress' by the station owners or white people for whom they worked.[14] The argument put forth by the station owners or managers was that the children would be taken to get an education, but to the dismay of the girls they found they were being used as 'slave' labour. In the case of Glenyse Ward The Native Welfare accused her mum to be an unfit mother and took her away and later she was used as 'slave' labour.

Aboriginal women's writing is also a 'witnessing' to the rights, or lack of rights that citizenship gave to the Aboriginal people living in a liberal society. One of the oldest tenets of liberalism is equality before the law (legal rights, equality of citizenship). Having citizenship means individuals have access to a number of social goods: for instance, voting rights, medical attention, social security, legal rights, police protection etc. What many of the testimonies reveal is that without citizenship many aboriginal people were denied the basic legal and health rights. Interestingly, Anglo-Australians born in Australia, who were the descendants of Anglo settlers, were automatically granted citizenship at birth, yet Aboriginal-Australians who were Indigenous to the country had to apply for citizenship in order to access rights automatically bestowed on Anglo individuals. White many citizens in liberal societies think their political and moral identities (as citizens) are natural, they are actually socialised to co-operate in the social order, that is, to have a specific sense of justice, and to have a cultural conception of the good life. In this sense, having a liberal identity means taking up certain values over other values, and a form of life over other forms. Lack of citizenship, thus, reinforces the formation of social identity in terms of how one 'judges' and/or positions 'other' identities. For Aboriginal-Australians, even after the 1960s primary goods available to others were denied to them, which reveal how the identity

of indigenous peoples had already been judged as 'inferior' to non-Aboriginal people.[15]

Having viewed the text *Wandering Girl* by Glenyse Ward from the position of Aboriginal women as 'victim' to colonial practices, now I want to look at it from another perspective. I will now compare the society of white women which Mrs. Bigelow is representing with the society of Aboriginal women which Glenyse Ward is representing and show how Aboriginal women are struggling to make their own recognition or create their own identity under the dominance of white women.

Identity and Recognition

In his influential essay on 'The Politics of Recognition', Charles Taylor has explored the emergence in recent times of political movements animated by the need, indeed the demand, for recognition - recognition of people's identity, of who they are, of their defining characteristics as human beings. It is a fact that Recognition struggles arise in response to an absence of recognition or misrecognition, or both. Non-recognition and misrecognition have been identified as grave harms constituting distinctive new forms of political oppression. Taylor explains that recognition struggles have become definitive of modern times, because in earlier ages 'recognition was built into the socially derived identity by virtue of the very fact that it was based on social categories that everyone took for granted.[16]

Only with the simultaneous rise of the idea of individual identity and the advent of democracy's promise of human rights could the failure of recognition become a cause of grievance. The emphasis on equality gave rise to the idea of universal human rights; the importance attached to identity has given rise to the politics of difference and the

concomitant refusal of assimilationism, of being forced to fit into someone else's mould.

Here I want to discuss the dynamic inter-relationship of the white women's movement in Australia and Aboriginal women's struggles for recognition and self-representation. The dialogue between the white women's movement and Black women shaped a new sense of racialised identity on both sides, but in a further development, Aboriginal women came to assert the distinctiveness of their claims as Indigenous Australians, as the colonized and dispossessed. And they claimed their right to political voice through self representation.

Writing in 1976, Miriam Dixson was perceptive in the connection she drew between history, identity and recognition, which she had signalled in her subtitle:

> *Australians are now increasingly discovering their past. But the explorers are mainly males and what they are uncovering tends to concern the lives and achievements of males. Their work is thus a kind of unacknowledged affirmation of their present identity through a celebration of their past selves. They believe, however, that they are uncovering 'the past', and fait to notice that they deny that same affirmation to women through school, university, the novel and the mass media. Thus in this proud democracy, women figure as pygmies in the culture of the present and are almost obliterated from the annals of the past."*[17]

Anne Summers writes that women had been colonised by men:

> *Within a supposedly free and independent Australia women are a colonized sex. They are denied freedom of movement, control of their bodies, economic independence and cultural potency'.*[18]

She continued:

"... the native people is persuaded, or forced, to concede that its own culture is inferior and that it should strive to emulate and adopt that of the colonizing power."[19]

The native people here, of course, were not Indigenous Australians but women; the colonizers were all men. The disputed territory was woman's body.

In her 1975 essay, 'Black Women in Australia - A History', black activist Bobbi (Roberta) Sykes insisted that Black women were subjected to a particular form of contempt in Australian. On the other hand, Aboriginal people had survived largely through the work of women in raising up families and sustaining communities. But the Black woman remained oppressed:

Burdened down with the complexities of bringing up children in this sophisticated and complicated society, she remains an object of sexual fulfillment for the white man, and an 'invisible' woman to her white female contemporaries, especially the 'establishment' of Women's Liberationists who chatter on about sexual oppression and the competitive orgasm, and who spare not a thought for the true object of sexual oppression in this country today".[20]

The most important obstacle faced by Black women, Sykes concluded, was 'the barrier of racist attitudes'.[21]

In a 1993 article entitled 'Aboriginal Women and the White Lies of the feminist Movement', published in *The Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Larissa Behrendt reminded her (mostly) white readers: *'White women lived and profited on the land stolen violently from Aboriginal women'.* She demanded acknowledgement of the real relations of oppression in Australia:

'Aboriginal women have been oppressed by white women. White women were missionaries that attempted to destroy Aboriginal culture. They used the slave labour of Aboriginal women in their homes. White

women were the wives, mothers and sisters of those who violently raped Aboriginal women and children and brutally murdered Aboriginal people. White women can be racist as white men. White women have benefitted economically from the dispossession of Aboriginal people."[22]

White women, had to recognise that Aboriginal women had a different history and thus, a different political agenda. Aboriginal women were also necessarily pro-family: there was a need to rebuild families, which had been systematically smashed by the state through the removal of children. They emphasised the preservation of language and culture and improved access to health, education and legal services.

'Wandering Girl' by Glenyse Ward can be taken into consideration to see how Aboriginal woman was oppressed by white woman, that is, Mrs. Bigelow. Mrs. Bigelow is the antagonist in the story because she is always rude and wants everything her way. Everything has to be perfect. The protagonist is Glenyse because she pulled through when Mrs. Bigelow was ordering her around all the time.

Glenyse, representing the Aboriginal women, shows a very positive attitude towards Mrs. Bigelow. She was always being ignored and disrespected, but she never let it get to Mrs. Bigelow. On the other hand, Mrs. Bigelow's attitude like white women, was not very positive, she always show negative attitude towards Glenyse. She made Glenyse do everything and did not call her by her name, she called Glenyse her "dark slave". Even other white women's behaviour were also very negative towards Glenyse. Let us consider an example from the text. Mrs. Bigelow had arranged a party and invited all her white friends who had gathered into the V.I.P. room. Glenyse thought of helping Mrs. Bigelow and went there.

Soon as I opened the door all the chatter and laughter stepped. You could hear a pin drop as all eyes were on me. All of a sudden, some pushed-up voice, with a plum in her mouth, came out of the crowd, 'Tracey dear, is this your little dark servant?

I just stood there smiling. I thought it was wonderful that at last people were taking notice of me. There were sniggers and jeers from everywhere, I turned to the lady who did all the talking, and said, "My name is Glenyse". she was quite startled; she said, "Oh dear, I didn't think you had a name.[23]

In this way all the white women were laughing at her not showing even little bit of positive attitude. Glenyse receives absolutely no respect from either of the Bigelows. Nothing that Glenyse told sounded unreal, she had the experiences that other Aboriginal woman also had. But some people just haven't been through anything upsetting in life so they don't know how to attempt the 'real would' which was the case with white women and here in this case Mrs. Bigelow.

Glenyse was made to cook, clean, polish and do yard work, which was the same case with all the Aboriginal women. But if Glenyse didn't complete her work she punished very severely for that. Glenyse, infact, hated to cook and clean for the Bigelows, but ended up with all of the work anyway. One can juncture what would have been Glenyse's undergoing sufferings when at the age of 13 she went from helping the nuns with a group of people, to becoming a slave and doing tons and tons of work by herself.

One can wonder how Mrs. Bigelow felt all through the book when they knew she didn't have to clean ever and how she felt when she almost never had to talk to Glenyse, in a friendly manner. I wonder if Mrs. Bigelow actually would associate with people who weren't as wealthy and as powerful as herself and her husband. Mrs. Bigelow was

most likely brought up in a wealthy home, with stuck up parents and was raised to think that people other than her are less fortunate and less important. She was, just like white women, most likely raised to believe that there is only one colour or skin.

I was surprised at the beginning of the book when Glenyse went to work for the Bigelows and Mrs. Bigelow said she was going to put on some tea. When the tea was ready she got out two cups and saucers. Surprisingly, the two cups were for her and her husband. What did Glenyse get? Mrs. Bigelow placed a tin mug and a tin plate in front of her and then poured some tea into it for her. Glenyse was shocked. In one way, the author is trying to remember her past and make a point about racism, which was prominent at that time. She was not treated equally just may be because of the colour of her skin. She is trying to point out to others that racism should not occur anymore.

Thus one can understand how Aboriginal women were oppressed by white women by being used as 'slave' labour in their homes. So, white women can be us racist as white men.

But now the situation is changing and Aboriginal women are intent on debunking the cherished myth of 'sisterhood' and refusing the political identity 'woman'. *'I am no more woman than I am Aboriginal'*, insisted Lynette Morris[24]. Jackie Huggins, like O' shame, Behrendt and Morris, pointed to Aboriginal women's different needs and priorities, and reiterated the refusal of indigenous people to assimilate themselves to the white would, the white feminist mould.

The struggle for identity, for recognition, was taking place on the terrain of culture and in opposition to 'white feminism and women's studies' :

Aboriginal women fight not only the material, but also the cultural pressures which have sought to construct them according to someone else's mould. Western theory, language, academia - to name a few - are foreign constructs in which Aboriginal women do not fit. Therefore an oppressive society controls and manipulates Aboriginal women and in turn dictates how they should behave, think, learn, speak, write etc. White feminism and women's studies are white cultural products which have been guilty of all the above.[25]

No longer could white feminists cast themselves as the marginalised and oppressed in the context of the Australian nation. Aboriginal women's demand for recognition cut two ways: there was the demand that feminists acknowledge Indigenous women's different experiences and interests, but at the same time feminists were called upon to themselves as 'white women' complicit in the historical dispossession of Aboriginal women; they were to accept a new identity as imperial oppressors, indeed as the agents of 'cultural genocide'

Aside from the domestic servant sphere, the oppression of Aboriginal women and children by white women was also extreme in the fields of welfare and education, and this situation continues today. Many Aboriginal children have suffered brutally at the hands of white women who have always known what 'is best' for these children. White women were and still are a major force in the implementation of government policies of assimilation and cultural genocide.[26]

Aboriginal women demand not just recognition and respect from those who would deny these things, but also that the oppressors own up to their 'real' identities, to their specificities, investment and power. Invited to join a movement, Aboriginal women replied that they had a movement of their own. Invited to identify as women, Aboriginal women have responded by emphasising their identity as Aboriginal, as the Indigenous people of Australia, whose possession was produced, in part, by white women. An Aboriginal leader Bert Groves cautioned:

We want to be part and parcel of the community, but we want to do this without losing our identity as Australian Aborigines'. Assimilation was 'a modified method of extermination over a long time. Once assimilation was complete the Aboriginal race would cease to exist, and the Aboriginal problem would cease with it.' [27]

Writing Their Own Story

Central to Aboriginal women's struggle for recognition has been the production of life stories or autobiographical narratives, a genre which, As Anne Brewster has noted in her study *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography,* women have come to dominate. In her recent book on Indigenous women and feminism in Australia, *Talking Up to White Woman,* Aileen Moreton Robinson, has pointed to the crucial importance of these 'self-presentations', noting, however, that in their writing, 'self' is constituted in fundamentally different ways than in white women's writing:

In these life writings experience is fundamentally social and relational, not something ascribed separately within the individual. Indigenous women's life writings are based on the collective memories of inter-generational relationships between predominantly Indigenous women, extended families and communities ... These relationships are underpinned by connections with one's country and the spirit would. In all these life writings, Indigenous people are related either by descent, country or place or shared experiences. In this sense the life writings of Indigenous women are an extension of Indigenous relationality in that they express the self as part of others and others as part of the self within and across generations. [28]

The proliferation of Indigenous women's life writings has been a publishing phenomenon. A substantial number of life stories/autobiographies/ biographies have been published until recently. As collective life stories these narratives told of their people's history of dispossession and colonization. As Ruby Langford wrote:

We are invaded people, and have been since 1788.... We have always had to conform to the laws and standards of the invaders. Our tribal laws mean nothing to the white man, our traditional people were classified as heathen and vermin to be cleared off the face of the earth. Assimilate us or wife us out was the order of the day.[29]

Many of the life stories tell of the removal of children and whole families from traditional country, their incarceration into white homes and institutions, under government laws allegedly passed in the interests of Aboriginal 'protection'. Indigenous women's narratives also tell of their coercion into various forms of unpaid or lovely paid labour and the experience of working in domestic service for white women, and as Moreton Robinson notes, *'acts of humiliation and cruelty by white women pervade Indigenous women's life writings'.*[30]

Together these self-presentations offered a new and dramatically different account of national history. As Langford has observed:

My story is about twentieth century Aboriginal life... About the way we live today. And it is probably the only information that a lot of students get that puts the Aboriginal point of view. Because Koori history and culture is almost never taught in schools, and if it is, it is seen by whites, and not from an Aboriginal perspective.[31]

In Australia, during the last thirty years, the women's movement and Aboriginal rights movements have been engaged in a dynamic and interdependent relationship, with the different struggles influencing and shaping each other. In the process of waging recognition struggles, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women had made their relationships to country and nation definitive for their assertion of identity - white women had raged against their national subordination while Aboriginal women had identified white colonization as central to their oppression - and thus the writing of national history became a contested field and key site for struggle. In the process, feminists came to see themselves as

colonizers as well as the colonized, as benefitting from, as well as subordinated by, nation building. Non-Indigenous Black women were re-positioned in terms of the dichotomy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous as 'white fellas'. The proliferation of Aboriginal women's life stories - their coming to political voice - changed understandings of national history, challenged white women to acknowledge their priviledge as the descendants of colonizers and contributed importantly to the popular movement towards 'reconciliation', that remains one of the most important political issues for Australians as we move into the twenty first century.

As a step towards meeting their goal of self-determination, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established in 1990, an elected 'Aboriginal parliament', with responsibility for the distribution of high levels of federal funding to support Aboriginal educational, health, employment and cultural programs in regional communities. Calls for reparation for the harm done to children removed from their families are ongoing. For Indigenous Australians, recognition and redistribution struggles have necessarily been and central to those struggles has been the discursive power provided, in part, by Aboriginal women's life stories. As Moreton - Robinson has argued their 'self presentation' has been 'a political act' - and enactment of their relationship to the country and the past, inspired in part, as was Moreton-Robinson's book, by the provocations of the women's movement.[32] They have played a crucial discursive role in educating the women's movement and the broader community about Indigenous Australians' historical oppression and the justice of their current claims. The dialogue first sparked between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in the 1970s has been a key aspect and instigator of this broader movement towards the recognition of historical injustice that underpins the current movement towards reconciliation.

NOTES :

[1] Glenyse Ward, *Wandering Girl* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1987), p. 1.

[2] Ibid, p. 1.

[3] Magabala Books

[4] Glenyse Ward, *Wandering Girl* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1987), p. 11-12

[5] Ibid, p. 12

[6] Ibid, p. 126

[7] Ibid., p. 126

[8] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. Notes Towards an Investigation', *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

[9] Ruby Langford, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1988), p. 269.

[10] Generally, Aboriginal people were constructed as 'childlike', closer to animal species, than Homo sapiens, thus, uncivilised (tribal) not fully adult, not fully human. This view was institutionally held until 1967, but there are still people in the Australian public who put forth this point of view today.

[11] John Beverley, 'The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio* (Testimonial Narrative)', *Modern Fiction Studies* 35. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 23.

[12] The Inquiry into the removal of indigenous children, as reported in *The Bringing Them Home Report*, is a non-Indigenous issue about the history of injustices that have been inflicted on Aboriginal people, specifically, because of previous Government policies.

[13] Magabala Books.

[14] 'Duress' differs from 'compulsion' in that it can be achieved without the actual application of force. However, we usually understand it to involve threats or at least moral pressure.

[15] Roberta Sykes' autobiography, *Snakes Dancing* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998), p. 147.

[16] Charles Taylor 'The Politics of Recognition' in Amy Gutmann ed. *Multiculturalism Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994), p. 34.

[17] Miriam Dixson *The Real Matilda Women and Identity in Australia 1788 to 1975*, (Penguin, Ringwood, 1976) p. 12.

[18] Anne Summers *Damned Whores and God's Police The Colonization of Women in Australia*, (Penguin, Ringwood, 1975).

[19] Ibid., p. 198

[20] Bobbi Sykes 'Black Women in Australian: A History' in Jan Mercer ed. *The Other Half Women in Australian Society*. Penguin, Ringwood, 1975, p. 318.

[21] Ibid., p. 319.

[22] Larissa Behrendt 'Black Women and the Feminist Movement: Implications for Aboriginal Women in Rights Discourse' *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 1, August, 1993, p. 31.

[23] Glenyse Ward, *Wandering Girl* (Broome : Magabala Books, 1987), p. 24.

[24] Lynette Morris 'Black Sisters: Indigenous Women and the Welfare' in Kathy Bail ed. *DIY Feminism* Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1996, p. 203.

[25] Huggins 'A Contemporary View' p. 70.

[26] Ibid., p. 73.

[27] Bandler quoted in *Australian Women's Weekly* 10 May, 1967, in Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus eds. *The 1967 Referndum, Or when Aborigines Didn't Get the Vote* Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Canberra, 1997, p. 108.

[28] Aileen Moreton-Robinson *Talkin' Upto the White Woman Indigenous Woven and Feminism*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 2000, pp. 1-2.

[29] Anne Brewster *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 2.

[30] Moreton-Robinson, p. 28.

[31] Brewster, p. 44

[32] Moreton - Robinson, p. 3.

CHAPTER - 5

Conclusion

"You see me
half Black
half white
but never whole

a corpse
torn apart
to toy with
my body -
an 'intellectual's'
commodity

You 'make' me
arranging
rearranging
my history
and identity

I turn to see
myself
I am decapitated
limitless
my body -
re-assembled
in gubbah' discourse"[2]

Jeanie Bell believes that *'identity gives you an opportunity to write, to look at your own position and how you feel about yourself and where you see yourself in relation to history, and your community in terms of the bigger picture. But it also reaffirms who you are, and it's a statement to the world of 'This is who I am and I'm*

proud of who I am'.[3] Truly, *'This is who I am and I'm proud of who I am'* is exactly what Aboriginal people are looking for. They are demanding for their own definite identity, which they can be proud of and say with pride that *'This is who I am'.*

Therefore, the Aboriginal search for identity grows out of a need to come to grips not merely with the question of 'identifying' as an Aboriginal person, but seeking to know, to understand, what can be the components of an Aboriginal identity, credible to individuals, which they can select out of the many Aboriginal identities offered them, and which they can build upon in order to attain a personal identity. Throughout the past years Aboriginal people have always been denied all the rights by the white people.

To our great surprise the Australian government has issued a 'working definition' of aboriginal identity and if they wish to search for identity they have to locate themselves in terms of the definition. It is not enough, for the construction of identity for individuals to locate themselves unilaterally within a particular 'world'. Identity is a social construct; its maintenance depends not only upon the individual, but upon the readiness of others to confirm the chosen identity of the individual.

The past more than two hundred years of Australian history has been dominated and formulated by a network of 'white' discourses. Specifically, official representations of the relationships between 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal' societies have been written by the 'colonisers' to construct an official Australian history. This 'history' has ensured the relegation of 'Aboriginal' history and heritage to a mythical time pre-1788 and thus these official constructions of history are instrumental in the subjugation and marginalisation of knowledges from displaced peoples. And a more equitable account of Australian history

post-1788 is only possible if official history is mediated by a reading of 'Aboriginal' literature as history but unfortunately it has never been allowed to happen so far.

Official history has served to marginalise 'Aboriginal' knowledges, customs and beliefs and further ensures a privileged place for 'white' knowledges, customs and beliefs as the foundation of Australian society. 'White' Australian culture has come to be considered the 'natural', central or dominant culture of Australia, which is passed on through birthright. British imperialism and politics has thus facilitated the legitimation of 'white' Australian history. This newly invented history has subsequently been utilised to legitimate Australian politics - 'white' dominance, 'white' Australian policy, paternal attitudes to 'Aborigines'. 'Aboriginal' subjugation and marginalisation is subsequently justified through the domination of 'white' society political/economic relationships. Despite the injustice upon which these politics are based, such an account appears to be justified when 'Aborigines', their technologies and cultures are viewed and evaluated by Western Standards, as they most often are.

Aboriginal writing in Australia has begun to emerge discursively as powerful visible forms of protest against a chequered history of exploitation both in the socio-politically materialist and discursive realities. In Aboriginal writing "Aboriginal women's writing" has undergone a number of marked shifts over the last 20 years, particularly ever the last decade as the genre of Australian Indigenous life-writing has gained an increasingly domestic and international profile. Many of these life-writing texts are poised between the historical recall and evocation of the impact of successive government policies on the one hand, and the current cultural and policy contexts in which they have been written on the other, so that Aboriginal women's life writing has

increasingly come to be viewed as a genre that, in its ability to counter-narrativise the national record and reach out to broad audiences, has become part and parcel of one kind or level of 'self-determination' as it plays out in the cross-cultural domain.

The appearance of *My Place* in 1987 and Ruby Langford's (now Ruby Langford Ginibi) *Don't Take Your Love to Town* in 1988 signalled not the sudden emergence of Aboriginal women writers into the Australian literary landscape but a discernible shift in the Australian cultural landscape, one marked by, amongst other things, an increasing non-Indigenous awareness of and receptiveness to the genre of Indigenous women's writing frequently referred to a 'life-writing' or, as Sandra Phillips terms it, 'lifestory'.[5] The two texts mentioned above and the third *Wandering Girl* by Glenyse. Ward, are the three texts that I have dealt with and have discussed 'the construction of aboriginal identity' as dominant structuring interpretative frame in all these texts. They have been illustrated in the context of the search for a redefinition of Aboriginal identity, involving an intense engagement with history itself.

Sally Morgan's *My Place* foregrounds a search for identity, for a place within Australian history, that doesnot have white as its hidden agenda. The life-stories of Arthur, Daisy, Gladys and Sally are striking contributions to counter history. In this text, Sally writes of her guest to uncover her heritage as an Aborigine, a heritage that had been denied her for many years by her family's insistence that they were not Aboriginal at all. The text *My Place* uses the technologies of autobiography to construct an Aboriginal identity, an identity that the life writing of other contemporary Aboriginal women, such as Ruby Langford Ginibi, have further problematized. We can notice that the shifting identities available in autobiographies always defy the fixed racial identities determined by apartheid and other racist government

policies. Despite the negotiation of voices and the problematics of truth and authority in autobiography the genre does offer the possibility for oppositional narratives, where marginalized voices speak and resist categories of identity forced upon them by the dominant society. *My Place* can be seen as one of the examples for this.

I have discussed *Don't Take Your Love to Town* and *Wandering Girl* both as testimony that reveals a number of issues which affected the lives of Aboriginal women in terms of the construction of 'Aboriginality'. By expanding on some of the incidents recounted, I have attempted to illustrate the very way in which the identities that emerge in testimonial writing can be constituted both as 'testimony' and as sites of 'resistance'. I have tried to illustrate how these two texts exemplify a form of 'testimony' to the kind of injustices that occur to identify, which are 'already judged' as inadequate in that they deviate from the constructed 'norm' of the settler culture.

Collectively all these histories provide some understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal people post-1788. They act as a count-memory, as a record of displacement and deculturation, as opposed to official Australian accounts of settlement and civilization. Most importantly, texts such as *My Place*, Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* and the increasing number of other texts by Aboriginal authors are interventions directed towards opening up the space for self-determined representations.

The celebrating of 1988 took place under the banner the "Celebration of a Nation" comprising the first such occasion when Australia, as nation, was rhetorically present at its own celebration. At the same time, the idea of "the nation" produced a powerful set of tensions. One tension was around the need to fashion a distinctively national time on the one hand, and the imperative to respond to the

transnational time of the postmodern (signalled in part of Australia's increasing integration into the wider geopolitical community of the Asia-Pacific region). Even more significant, some time before 1988 made it public and explicit, was the tension between *"an external time that gestured beyond nationalism and an internal time, the ancient 'deep time' of Australia's Aboriginal peoples, that preceded and resisted incorporation within the particular version of national time that the Bicentenary constructed."*[6]

In contract to 1988, the Bicentennial conception of the nation sought to include Aboriginal people. This was refused by a year long programme of non-participation and protest. *"In their stance toward 1988-40,000 years don't make a bicentenary"*, Bennett writes, *"the organisers of the Aboriginal Bicentennial boycott displayed a commitment to a form of political remembering which in its demonstration that white Australia has a black history, ought not to be forgotten."*[7]

In Australia, the November 7, 1999, referendum to decide whether the nation should become a republic with a president to take the place of the Queen; the move to have the premier inaugurate the 2000 Sydney Olympics instead of the Queen; and the granting of Australia's request to the International Olympic Committee to fly the Aboriginal flag alongside the Australian flag[8] at the Games mark shifts in that nation's construction of its post-colonial identity. However, questions still remain as to the limits of the policy of reconciliation towards the Aboriginal community. Australia Day and the bicentennial 'celebrations', which have had totally different connotations for Aborigines, who celebrated their survival, and mainstream white 'Australians' who commemorated their immigration, are also symptomatic of the problems involved in resolving the tensions between the dominant construction of national identity and the subaltern construction of identity within the nation-space. The latter by exploring what is silenced by the former and by the very nature of its posited alterity can be a subversive contestation of the putatively normative premises of the national discourse. Aboriginal literature in Australia has not been recognised as full-fledged marketable 'national' literature. As the Australian studies project begins outside Australia, for instance, in India, the

emphasis in terms of course structuring in literature programs, the availability of texts at universities' and the High Commission libraries and focus in translation programs, remains by and large on the colonized white Australian male writers - Patrick White, Thomas Keneally and David Malouf. Judith Wright and say, an Aboriginal writer like Ruby Langford or Sally Morgan are added on occasionally as taken representatives of the gender and Aborigine erasures of what is exported as a 'national' literary canon.

The exclusion of Aboriginal people in the 19 70's through a *"boundary from-without"*, nevertheless paradoxically worked to the advantage of Aboriginal people in the construction of Aboriginal identity, as the possibility of disparate groups of Aboriginal people becoming more cohesive and constructing a framework for building positive identity was facilitated by policies which acted to exclude Aborigines, while "theorizing" about them positively. After having been excluded from multicultural society, the Aborigines were forced into exercising their autonomy outside that framework.

Certainly, Aboriginal people seized the concept of self-determination and interacted with it to build a new, positive world of meaning for themselves. The tradition-oriented people express this by saying *"The marrngu are the boss!"* This is used both as a rallying cry, and as a firm basis for building a world of meaning in which Aboriginal people exert autonomy. Today, on all sides, Aboriginal people at every level in society and in every sphere of action, such as health care, legal rights, and educational policy-making, are asserting, *"We will do it ourselves"*. It is no longer accepted without question that white people will work for Aboriginal people as before. Rather, today the meaning of working for Aboriginal people has changed. Aboriginal people employ white staff to "work for" them - in Aboriginal independent schools, in legal services, in health care. While Aboriginal people are physically located within a multicultural society, more and more they are entering into situations which are structurally alternative, and within which they have greater control of their futures. While this was to by choice originally, social interactions have produced

a situation where the Aboriginal voice, expressing political, cultural, physical and educational needs, is heard. Now Aboriginal people have taken responsibility for their own development, and incipient, rudimentary theorizing has become fact - *"we will do it ourselves".*

Now what the Aboriginal people want is to re-affirm their identity, which for so long has been defined by the Whites. They want to find a place for their 'socio-cultural' life in the Australian society and don't want to be left behind in Australia's march to 'progress' and to break the stereotype image of being dirty, lazy, stupid, and immoral people. The Aboriginal people now want to re-affirm their identity that has been 'debased' and 'demeaned' by the Whites. They no longer want to be seen as a 'different people' who require special attention but they want what is rightfully theirs, and definitely not on the grounds of sympathy.

NOTES

[1] For those who don't know, the word 'gubbah' is a slang term used generically throughout NSW and VIC and means 'white man'.

[2] Birch, Toni, 'Half Caste', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, no. 100. April 1993, p. 458.

[3] Interview with Heanie Bell, 15.1.98, p. 4.

[4] Liz Stanley, 'Part III: On Feminist Auto/Biography', *The Auto/biographical. 1: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/biography* (Manchester : Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 245.

[5] Sandra Phillips, 'Aboriginal Women's Writing Today', *Australian Women's Book Review*, 9, (1997), p. 40.

[6] Tony Benett, *Celebrating the Nation: A Critical Study of Australia's Bicentenary*, ed. Pat Buckridge, David Carter & Colin Mercer (Sydney : Allen & Unwin, 1992), p. xvii.

[7] Ibid, p. xviii

[8] The Olympic Charter permits only the national flag and Olympic flag to be hoisted. 'Aboriginal flag', *The Sunday Times of India*, (New Delhi, October 3, 1999), p. 20.