1995

Contemporary aboriginal songs and songwriters: post-colonialism, categorisation and orality

David Beniuk
University of Wollongong

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Unless otherwise indicated, the views expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the University of Wollongong.

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL SONGS AND SONGWRITERS: POST-COLONIALISM, CATEGORISATION AND ORALITY

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree Master of Arts (Honours) in Post-Colonial Literature from The University of Wollongong

by

David Beniuk

Department of English
1995
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and support during the preparation of this dissertation of my parents, Mary and Peter Beniuk, Mila Bogovac, Maurie Scott, Paul Sharrad and Gary Wood, and the company of my sister, Charlotte. Thankyou.
ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines contemporary Australian Aboriginal songs and songwriters within the context of post-colonialism. It argues that contemporary Aboriginal songs are post-colonial texts and that post-colonial literary theories can be adapted and applied to them. It considers a range of post-colonial theories to arrive at a working model which posits the central characteristic of metonymy. It then considers the related issue of the social conditions which effect contemporary Aboriginal songs, particularly the problems and consequences of the categorisation of Aboriginal songs and Aboriginal songwriters. The dissertation then considers the relationship between traditional Aboriginal orality and contemporary Aboriginal songs, examining lines of continuation between the two, the effect of differing modes of transmission on orality and the contemporary song as oral history. The singer/songwriters, Kev Carmody and Archie Roach, the band, Yothu Yindi, and Aboriginal women songwriters are then considered as case studies for the issues above. This dissertation concludes that the discourses which produce contemporary Aboriginal songs are dominated by the discourses of power and are therefore not allowed to exist in a syncretic relationship where Aboriginal songwriters would have control over the production and distribution of their work.
INTRODUCTION

The 1980s in Australia saw the emergence of an 'Aboriginal rock music' where Aboriginal musicians began producing rock music through the media of white Australia. The influences of urbanisation and black musics from other parts of the world, as well as the more 'traditional' country and western, gospel and bush musics, combined to instigate this movement. Pioneering groups like No Fixed Address and Coloured Stone achieved some recognition, while the Warumpi Band took a step closer to the 'mainstream' success which has recently been achieved by Yothu Yindi, Archie Roach and Tiddas.

In the same way that the literatures and oral cultures of colonised indigenous peoples have recently been 'discovered' by post-colonial literary studies, this movement in music can be examined as a post-colonial phenomenon. As such, the social forces and discourses at work in and around these song 'texts' are as important as the texts themselves. Further, the relationship between Aboriginal oral culture and contemporary songs is a significant one with a strong line of continuity. These major areas are considered in this dissertation.

Chapter one examines how post-colonial literary theories be applied or adapted to contemporary songs. It posits a working definition of the contemporary song and then considers how it can be considered a 'text'. In this sense, this chapter determines which aspects of songs equate with the elements in novels, drama, poetry and film which are studied for their ability to produce meaning. The second part of the chapter discusses several theoretical models of post-colonialism and their applicability to the contemporary song text.
Chapter two examines the problems associated with the establishment of categories like 'Aboriginal songs' and 'Aboriginal songwriters'. The fundamental question of what is 'Aboriginal' about a song is addressed, as are notions of 'Aboriginal textuality' and their relationship to Western concepts of textuality. The definition of 'Aboriginality' is considered. Similarly, the expectations that come with these categories are investigated. The effects of 'editorial' processes on the 'Aboriginality' of the song text are also discussed. Finally, the relationship between the categories and the discourses which create them is examined, particularly with regard to the motives for their creation and implementation.

Chapter three discusses the relationship between traditional Aboriginal orality and contemporary Aboriginal songs, and investigates the line of continuity between the two. It considers the effects of the various modes of transmission of the contemporary song on orality. Finally, it examines the relationship between the orality of the contemporary song and the notion of oral history.

Chapter four discusses two contemporary Aboriginal singer/songwriters, Kev Carmody and Archie Roach, comparing them in relation to some of the issues examined in chapters one to three. One tenet of post-colonialism touched upon in chapter one, that of an individual's relationship to the landscape, is considered. The chapter then compares the two songwriters with regard to some of the categorisation issues examined in chapter two, particularly the notions of sponsorship and of Aboriginal songwriters being positioned as spokespersons for 'their' people. It also considers cooption and ghettoisation in light of Mudrooroo's concept of Aboriginal 'post-activism'. Chapter four concludes with a discussion of the relationship between the contemporary song and oral history.

The marginalisation of women in the music industry is described in post-colonial terms in Chapter five, with the double colonisation of black women, including women from
indigenous cultures, considered. The effect of the silencing of women musicians on the post-colonial aim of formulating local identity is examined. Finally, a recent article, claiming a breakthrough for women in the Australian music industry, is examined with reference to the media representation of Torres Strait Islander, Christine Anu. The following question is asked in this context: Is the music industry's ideological basis actually being challenged, or are the women being coopted into internalising its masculine and competitive ideology?

Chapter six discusses Yothu Yindi's music and 'success' in terms of several of the issues considered in chapters one to three. For instance, their album, *Tribal Voice*, is examined as an example of the metonymy which characterises post-colonial texts. The relationship between the band's contemporary songs and their Yolngu oral tradition, and the 'editorial' processes mediating this, is considered in the context of metonymic strategies to maintain difference while entering dominant discourses. In relation to this, the band's attempts to syncretically establish the value of their own discourses alongside, and in communication with, those of white Australia, are explored. Finally, the dynamic between this assertion of Yolngu discourses and the continual attempts by white Australia, and the multinational recording industry, to coopt them is considered.

To conclude this introduction, I wish to state that I am aware of my position as a non-Aboriginal. I hope I have avoided statements in this dissertation which would be inappropriate for a non-Aboriginal to make. Rather, I hope this dissertation displays some of the sensibility described below by Mudrooroo:

> If it is impossible for us to, for example, change the colour of our skins, or even our sexual preferences, we can come to some understanding of other ways of being by reading about them. And when we begin formulating ideas on exactly why we are reading, why we want to put ourselves in the less than passive position of the reader, we then might begin growing and querying some of the things around us.¹

CHAPTER ONE

This chapter will position the songs of contemporary Aboriginal songwriters as post-colonial texts. By doing this, the songs will be able to be meaningfully examined through the theoretical apparatuses of post-colonialism that have been developed for 'literature'. This task immediately posits three questions. The first relates to the definition of the contemporary song: what is a contemporary song? The second relates to the song as text. That is, how can contemporary songs be considered as 'texts'? What aspects of songs equate with the elements in novels, drama, poetry and film which are studied for their ability to produce meaning? How can songs be considered as 'meaningful inscription', as 'writing' in the broadest? And necessarily, what is the audience's relationship to the creation of meaning through songs? The third question in relation to the task is: what is 'post-colonialism' and to what extent do contemporary Aboriginal songs exhibit the characteristics of post-colonialism? It therefore also needs to be asked: is post-colonialism a 'literary' phenomenon only or is it present in all 'writing'?

The answer to the question of what constitutes a contemporary song should be dealt with first. For the purposes of this study, the Western notion of a piece of music with words which is, by comparison with other Western forms of music, 'short', will be adopted. 'Contemporary', as it relates to the song in general, will refer to songs produced since the rock 'n roll 'revolution' of the 1950s. However, each of the case studies (chapters four, five and six) relate to artists who are currently performing. Similarly, most of the examples used throughout this dissertation come from the past ten years.

The overriding question for this chapter is: how can post-colonial literary theories be applied or adapted to the examination of contemporary songs? As 'the post-colonial' is a theoretical reaction to the presence of 'texts', the question of textuality precedes that of post-colonialism. That is, it is essential to establish the viability and nature of the song as
a text before proceeding with its examination within the theoretical framework of post-colonialism.

Significantly, for a study dealing with works by Australian Aboriginals, Mudrooroo Narogin's *Writing from the Fringe* quotes Roland Barthes's definition of a 'text' no fewer than three times. This would therefore be a useful starting point:

...a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of cultures.¹

From this post-structuralist theoretical base, Mudrooroo constructs his own definition: '...any system of signs form a text which may be read, and by reading I mean only the deciphering as much as we are able to of a system of signs'.² In another book dealing specifically with Aboriginal texts, Stephen Muecke's *Textual Spaces: aboriginality and cultural studies*, the following definition of 'text' is posited:

Rather than being the realisation or the expression of an intended meaning, the appearance of language is conditioned by a series of exclusions - what can't be said, who cannot speak and when...The text is the site of multiple exclusions rather than a place where the desire to speak is liberated.³

As Muecke continues, these post-structuralist definitions of textuality, when applied critically, have the effect of drawing 'attention away from the sentence, or even the interconnectedness of sentences...towards the social conditions under which texts are produced and distributed'.⁴

These definitions suggest two major characteristics of textuality, neither of which are incompatible with the contemporary song form. Firstly, they suggest that inscription is the result of a discursively constructed subjectivity rather than the result of an individual writer's ability to illuminate transcendental 'truths'. There is nothing in this which conflicts with the practice of the contemporary writer of song lyrics. This element of the

² Mudrooroo, p. 182.
⁴ Muecke, p. 98.
song directly corresponds with 'literary' notions of language as a mediator of reality. It is
the musical element which needs further examination. A songwriter will attempt to
construct a piece of music to convey a particular 'mood', a particular emotion which they
consider to be real. But in the same way that the word, 'lonely', can never be the emotion
(only its signification), a slow, lilting melody can only ever signify an emotion. Both the
word and the tune can evoke emotion within that discourse which is able to decode their
symbolism, but neither can ever be the emotion. In this way songs, even on the most
basic level of lyrics and music, are systems of signs constructed within discourse which
are decoded according to the subjectivities of individuals and collective audiences.

The second major characteristic of textuality, suggested by Muecke, is its position as a
site of exclusion. In this sense, the text's relationship with power, with the means of
production and distribution, and with the social conditions under which it is produced are
the dominant issues. Both Derrida's notion of difference and Bhabha's examination of
the ambivalence of colonial discourse suggest that the sanctioning of texts by the
discourses of power can only occur ambiguously, by reference to that which is excluded.
For example, the term, 'Literature', with its connotation of 'quality', necessarily refers to
that which is 'not Literature' in order to establish its 'superiority'. In this context, the
examination of the ways in which discourses of power control textual sites, and therefore
the voices which are allowed to be heard, and the methods of production and distribution
employed to this end, are as applicable to the contemporary song form as to any other
textual form. Indeed, given the (contentious) status of contemporary songs as 'mass' or
'global' culture, and therefore their potential for massive profit, the song form is perhaps
the one most amenable to analysis as a text in the manner suggested by Muecke. The
obvious examples are: who is allowed the record contract, the radio airplay and the video
exposure, under what conditions, and for whose gain?

Several studies have addressed the issue of how to consider a song as a 'text'.
Comparisons have been drawn between 'literature' and music under several headings,
including 'linguistics', 'semiotics' and 'post-structuralism'. Ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl, eager to protect their 'patch', have suggested that such studies 'have only rarely gained insights that could not have been provided by older and more conventional approaches or, indeed, by simple common-sense inspection'.\(^5\) McClary and Walser, under the heading of 'Musicology and Semiotics', have drawn comparisons between speech, literature, painting and film on the one hand, and music on the other:

...a literary critic can cause one to become conscious of underlying metaphors, the rhythmic patterning of sentence structures, or organising narrative strategies to demystify...the means by which moods seem to be created in texts...Something of that same procedure is possible in music criticism, except that the equivalents...are explicable only up against abstractions in sound organization...\(^6\)

A study of several 'peripheral' contemporary musics, *Music at the Margins*, bases its approach on post-structuralist definitions of textuality similar to those utilised above. The following echo Barthes's, Muecke's and Mudrooroo's definitions of 'text' almost exactly:

...the creative process goes far beyond the discernible influences and conscious intentions of individual musicians...; it also has to do with undefined semiotic and musical codes and conventions, myths of a collective past, traces of individual musical memories, ideologies of form, and multiple, overlapping energies...the creative act of bricolage or encoding is articulated fully only in what our musicians finally produce. The meaning of that production process lies somewhere in the relationship among the musicians, their music, and their audience within a specific social context.\(^7\)

Significantly for this study also, Mudrooroo has made the connection between 'literature' and song within the specific context of Aboriginality. *Writing from the Fringe*, descriptively subtitled 'a study of modern Aboriginal literature', includes the chapter, 'Listening to the Fringe', which discusses contemporary Aboriginal songs as texts. In the same publication, Mudrooroo describes the relationship:

There is a connection between Aboriginal writers and musicians in that Aboriginal poets have had some of their poems recorded by Aboriginal musicians. Aboriginal poetry with its regular metre is easily adapted to music. Again,

---


Aboriginal poetry often is created to be heard rather than read and this means many poems are suitable as song texts.8

It is clear that contemporary songs can be considered 'texts', in both their relationship to the subjectivity of their producers and in terms of their production within discourses of power. However, several questions remain. Firstly, what elements or layers actually produce meaning in a contemporary song? Secondly, what is the relationship between this particular textual form and its audience? And thirdly, in the specific context of this study, how do these notions of textuality relate to the values underlying Aboriginal cultural production? This third question will be considered in chapter two, which deals with the definition and categorisation of contemporary Aboriginal songs.

The first of the remaining questions is: if contemporary songs can be considered 'texts', then what elements or layers represent meaningful inscription? For instance, the meaningful inscription that is the novel exists as several layers; as well as the actual letters and words forming the narrative, there is the extra baggage of genre, packaging, marketing, retailing, the author's public profile, the reputation of the publisher and the institutional contexts in which the book is read and discussed. In the same way, the song form has been described as a series of 'events and inflections occurring on many interdependent levels...simultaneously'.9 So, not only does a melody (the tune) occur at the same time as a rhythm (the beat), but a certain guitar sound, a written narrative (the lyric), an expectation of the performer (their reputation) and the creation of an image of what the music is about through the graphic design of the CD cover all inscribe meaning simultaneously. As McClary and Walser have described it:

The chords, melodic contours, and metric structures must be grasped analytically...The reconstruction of semiotic codes is crucial, both for grounding musical procedures (including rhythmic) in terms of various discursive practices and for explaining how the music produces socially based meanings. Verbal texts, performance styles, and video imagery need to be analyzed carefully and in tandem with musical components. Modes of commercial production and distribution, the construction of band or star images, the history of a singer's

8 Mudrooroo, p. 66.
9 McClary and Walser, p. 278.
career all have to be taken into account. And political issues (the positioning of the music with respect to class, race, gender) always must be dealt with seriously.10 Hence the song text is open to multiple readings and its layers spread beyond the music and lyrics to include all of the social conditions which produce and disseminate it.

The other remaining question is: what is the relationship between this particular textual form and its audience? Debate in the available literature revolves around the degrees of influence of the various layers of the text; for example, between a retailer's advertising campaign and an audience's desire to make the song mean something within their specific social situation. It can be described as the tension between an audience's autonomy as 'reader' and the desire of the means of production to position them as 'consumer'. It must be noted that this model constructs a binary opposition which is illusory; the subjectivity of the 'reader' may include elements of its constructed binary opposite, those of the 'consumer'. Nevertheless, cultural critics pursue the 'debate'.

On one side of the argument, Du Gay and Negus contend that 'as consumers of recorded music, we have no 'proper' place of our own because we operate within a space delineated and monitored by music retailers'.11 Theodor Adorno argues that 'subversion of satisfaction is the name of the game in pop rock music. The constant changes in artists and sounds perpetually subvert conventional meanings of desire and pleasure, and we "can't be satisfied".'12 Garofalo suggests that: 'The records released to the public each year are not a representative sample of the varieties of music which are composed and performed, and the audience does not have equal access even to the range of musics which are released.' Hence a 'fragmented audience cannot reappropriate that to which it has no access'.13 Buxton considers the contemporary song a peak in the emergence of twentieth century consumerism:

10 McClary and Walser, p.290.
12 Campbell Robinson... (et al.), p. 257.
13 Campbell Robinson... (et al.), p. 258.
It was only with rock music in the 1960s...that...consumption as "liberation"...and the key role of youth in accelerating the consumption cycle...were finally realized. This "liberation" from the puritan restraints on consumption (and sexuality) was realized when youth were sufficiently well off to assume their role as consumers.14

However, Buxton necessarily allows the possibility of the active 'reader' through his summary of an argument of Baudrillard: 'This argument implies that the accession of the record to mass status has been a consequence of the symbolic strategies invested in it, rather than any inherent quality of the music recorded on it'.15 Disregarding for the moment the elitism of the argument about 'quality', the notion of 'symbolic strategies' allows for audience appropriation. That is, 'symbolic strategies' can be actively invested in a text by its audience; the text can be appropriated.

Campbell Robinson et al., as is consistent with their view on meaning being created by the audience, object to the word, 'consumers', preferring 'users...because music does not disappear when it is used'.16 They cite Benjamin and summarise his argument as 'the ability of people to appropriate mass-produced cultural artefacts and recontextualise them.'17 They conclude that, ultimately, the song text is actively 'read', that reading must occur beyond consumption, even if the song is a consumer item: 'Even though the recording industry largely determines what is produced, listeners are not passive but are actively engaged in the construction of meaning within and around the production and use of music.'18 Similarly, Buxton concludes with a kind of post-consumerism, or the emergence of a 'consumer "awareness"', and quotes Charles Reich to illustrate it:

A new generation can come along and can say we're going to take all these things, the stereo, the motorcycles, the things in the supermarkets and the music above all, and we'll command them. Now they'll be tools of revolution instead of tools of repression because we'll use them as we wish. (Now) in both films, and

15 Buxton, p. 429.
16 Campbell Robinson...(et al.), p. 23.
17 Campbell Robinson...(et al.), p. 258.
18 Campbell Robinson...(et al.), p. 258.
in music, people are making their own culture right in the heart of the repressive machine...That's the miracle of it.\(^{19}\)

The conclusion that can be reached is that, like literary forms or film, contemporary songs can be considered layered texts, always actively decoded by the subjectivities of an audience. One of these layers is the song as consumer item, but this layer also exists for novels, plays, films and so on. Like these other forms, contemporary songs can be read for their layers of meaning, and can be appropriated and reappropriated.

The second part of this chapter will consider theoretical models of post-colonialism and their applicability to the contemporary song text. It will consider these on three interrelated levels. Firstly, the foundation post-colonial textbook, *The Empire Writes Back*, will be taken as a starting point. Secondly, advancements and critiques of *The Empire Writes Back* which specifically relate to Australian Aboriginals will be considered, particularly those of Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, Stephen Muecke and Hugh Webb. Thirdly, the reactions of black and Aboriginal writers and critics to the notion of post-colonialism will be considered, particularly N'gugi wa Thiong'o, Thomas King and Mudrooroo Narogin.

Homi Bhabha's 'Representation and the Colonial Text' provides the immediate link between post-colonial theory and the base already established by Barthes's definition of textuality. Just as Barthes's text is constructed, mediating and iterable, Bhabha's consideration of the representation of the colonial subject 'entails a critique of representation as simply given':

...the category of literature, as of its history, is necessary and thoroughly mediated: that its reality is not given but produced; its meanings transformative, historical and relational rather than revelatory; its continuity and coherence underscored by division and difference.\(^{20}\)

This fundamental position of Bhabha's is also a starting point for Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin's post-colonial 'textbook', *The Empire Writes Back*.  

\(^{19}\) Buxton, p. 433.  
Essentially, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe various models of post-colonialism. In the process however, they characterise post-coloniality, virtually cementing their own model by their conclusion.

The theoretical model of *The Empire Writes Back* sees post-colonialism as a counter discursive practice which questions the philosophical and ideological assumptions of Eurocentrism. According to the model, post-colonial literatures are essentially political in their questioning of these assumptions. They are characterised by the various strategies employed to this end. These include language use, where the privileged language of the coloniser is abrogated and appropriated to form an 'english'. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin explain this in terms of metonymy, where the 'new' language suggests 'gaps' between the expectation of a totalised cultural and linguistic standard, and the partial 'variants' of it, without ever surrendering the connection between part and whole. They include a syncretic vision which disrupts the binary oppositions with which Eurocentrism is both familiar and comfortable. The aim, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, is the creation or recreation of a local identity.

Post-colonial literature's relationship with Europe is essentialised by the model proposed in *The Empire Writes Back*. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin depict this relationship, 'writing back', as inescapable:

> Such construction or reconstruction only occurs as a dynamic interaction between European hegemonic systems and 'peripheral' subversions of them...the rereading and the rewriting of the European historical and fictional record is a vital and inescapable task at the heart of the post-colonial enterprise...Post-colonial literatures/cultures are constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices.21

This characterisation of post-colonialism as essentially counter discursive determines the post-colonial's attitude to Eurocentric canons; that is, the impulse is to rewrite them while simultaneously disrupting them. Both rewriting and 'writing back' serve the purpose of questioning the philosophical and ideological assumptions of Eurocentrism:

---

...it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in its colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world.22

The notion here of 'within and between two worlds' hints at the definitive strategy of post-colonial literature, according to The Empire Writes Back, the use of metonymy.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point to language variance in post-colonial literatures, that is the use of 'English', as 'metonymic of cultural difference'.23 That is, 'language to signify difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood' or 'the "part" of a wider cultural whole'.24 Echoing Homi Bhabha's 'ambivalence of mimicry (almost the same, but not quite)...'25, the authors contend that the 'relational' aspect of metonymy avoids the metaphor's 'inference of identity and totality' and allows a reading of 'the social, cultural, and political forces' which traverse a text.26 The English which is this language is formed by the abrogation and appropriation of the coloniser-privileged English:

The crucial function of language as a medium of power demands that post-colonial writing define itself by seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. There are two distinct processes by which it does this. The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege.27

The result of this metonymic language, which The Empire Writes Back describes as 'the active characteristic linking all post-colonial texts', is a silencing of universalist meanings sanctioned by a dominant culture:

The post-colonial text therefore does not 'create meaning' through the mere act of inscribing it, but rather indicates a potential and shifting horizon of possible meanings.28

---

22 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 196.
23 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 52.
24 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 51.
26 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 52.
27 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 38.
28 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 187.
The ideology which underpins the assertions of *The Empire Writes Back*, and which the authors believe post-colonial literatures characteristically employ to disrupt Eurocentric binary oppositions, is that of syncretism, 'difference on equal terms'. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin frame the post-colonial world in these terms:

> The post-colonial world is one in which destructive cultural encounter is changing to an acceptance of difference on equal terms. Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognise cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity', and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized.²⁹

The ideological bases of *The Empire Writes Back* can be applied to the contemporary song textual form relatively unproblematically. Songs can be examined for their questioning of Eurocentric assumptions, their place within a syncretic vision and their relationship to the (re)creation of a local identity. It is the principal method of achieving these ends according to *The Empire Writes Back*, that of metonymic language variance in literature, which needs to be adapted from literature to song. This can be considered in two ways. Firstly, 'language' in literature can be directly equated with the words to a song, in isolation from its other textual elements, and discussed as 'literature'. This form of analysis is clearly inadequate as it ignores many of the song's layers of meaningful inscription. Secondly, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's "part" of a wider cultural whole' can be applied more broadly so that, for example, the genre suggested by a song can be seen to stand in metonymic (differential), rather than metaphoric (essential), relation to some pure set of conventions validated by the dominant culture. So, when the Warumpi Band launch into a twelve bar blues rock 'n roll piece ('Jailanguru Pakamu') it is hardly expected that when the vocalist starts singing he will sing in Luritja, the language of the Pitjantjatjara people.³⁰ When he does, he disrupts the discourses which have defined both rock 'n roll and 'Aboriginality'.

²⁹ Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 36.
³⁰ Tracee Hutchison, *Your Name's On The Door* (Sydney: ABC, 1992), p. 64.
Criticisms of the model proposed by *The Empire Writes Back*, with specific reference to Australian Aboriginals, have been made by Hodge and Mishra, in their publication, *Dark Side of the Dream*, Muecke, in *Textual Spaces*, and Webb, in an article titled 'Doin' the Post-Colonial Story? Neidjie, Narogin and the Aboriginal Narrative Intervention'. Hodge and Mishra articulate two major criticisms of *The Empire Writes Back*. Firstly, they question the prefix, 'post', in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's 'post-colonialism', believing that it 'seems to construct a simple version of history in which the...'colonial' is totally superseded'. They redefine the term without what they see as a symbol of linear progression, the hyphen:

> Postcolonialism in this...sense is the underside of any colonialism, and it can appear almost fully formed in colonial societies before they have formally achieved independence. Conversely, 'postcolonialism' as the period that follows a stage of colonisation is not necessarily subversive, and in most cases it incorporates much from its colonial past.32

Secondly, Hodge and Mishra believe that the differences between settler and colonised post-colonial societies are collapsed in *The Empire Writes Back*, that their heterogeneity is homogenised: There is the shadow of a new imperialism in claims that all sectors of all such societies have or should have a single position and a single cultural strategy, especially one that is characterised by subversion and resistance.33

Like Hodge and Mishra, Muecke does not consider post-colonialism as an historical completion of the effects of colonisation:

> ...post-colonialism is something that can only be properly achieved in relation to the original inhabitants...A post-colonial political situation might be said to exist only when the Aboriginal peoples achieve recognition, compensation and political autonomy.34

Although Muecke does not directly criticise *The Empire Writes Back*, he does critique centre-margin models which resemble Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's notion of the post-colonial as necessarily counter discursive:

---

32 Hodge & Mishra, p. xi.
33 Hodge & Mishra, p. xii.
34 Muecke, p. 11.
The usefulness of centre-margin is coming to an end; deconstruction teaches us that oppositions are a structuralist *leitmotiv*. It teaches us, too, that marginality would have to be a condition of centrality - they are interdependent - and that one limits the possibilities for thought or action as much by confidently assuming the role of the dispossessed, the role of authentic marginal,...as one does by confidently endorsing a status quo that remains fairly rigid.\(^{35}\)

Hugh Webb dismisses the entire notion of post-colonialism, and particularly the model of *The Empire Writes Back*, as an adequate theoretical account of the writing of Australian Aboriginal people. Webb questions the motives for the development of the category, asking: Whose social and political needs are fulfilled by the claim that what was the 'colonial' is of the past? And whose temporal scheme of past-present-future (pre-present-post) informs the category? Not that of Aboriginal culture.\(^{36}\) For Webb, post-colonialism is the imposition of European values upon systems of cultural production which occur within their own sets of values:

In a sense it is an enterprise that answers to a developing Eurocentric recognition of (and need for) a cogent, sustainable schema of theoretical explanation that can relatively unproblematically position those texts of the former 'natives' that otherwise would have a worryingly subversive lack of position.\(^{37}\)

Webb similarly sees post-colonialism as prescriptive: 'It is now functioning something like a genre - a genre not only of texts but of peoples, of cultures...an ideology in its own right.'\(^{38}\)

Despite their criticisms of *The Empire Writes Back*, each of these critics advances a model of Aboriginal writing which ultimately resembles Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's notion of metonymy. Hodge and Mishra posit systems of 'antilanguage' and 'antireading' which they describe as 'camouflage':

The relationship of colonisers and colonised is a strong instance of domination, and the richest development of antilanguage strategies in Australia is found amongst Aboriginal people. The intense attachment of Aboriginal communities to their traditional languages is an antilanguage strategy, excluding outsiders (White Australians, and even other Aboriginal groups) and bonding the community. At the other extreme, opposition can be managed by a strategy of 'appropriation',

---

35 Muecke, p. 187.
37 Webb, p. 33.
38 Webb, p. 35.
linked to a distinctive antireading strategy that is no less effective for being invisible.39

Muecke similarly advances a model of post-coloniality for the Australian Aboriginal context which, like Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, centres metonymy as an essentially post-colonial characteristic. For Muecke, the term 'Literature'

...needs to be decapitalised so that it becomes *Uerature*, a minor version of the majority term, a product of the guillotine: or more importantly a nomadic machine of itinerary texts that don't stay put as genres but appear between genres in a language which shakes the edifice of Correct Standard English words and sentences...The result of this is that one doesn't know whether one is dealing with oral history, poetry or the 'short story'.40

Significantly for this study, Muecke's analysis of Yothu Yindi's video clip, 'Mainstream', suggests a metonymic practice in the production of contemporary songs. He summarises this as: '...we are sovereign in our own country, but we can play your musical game too'.41 Similarly, he refers to Yothu Yindi's music as 'affirmative appropriation', invoking the syncretic vision where 'it is acceptable to dialogue respectfully across cultural boundaries, by stylistic quotation.'42 For Webb, Aboriginal texts, rather than reacting against the 'centre', react against the ideology of post-colonialism which prescribes this reaction as their task. These texts 'mark the Aboriginality of their discourses. Something called 'the post-colonial' has little or nothing to do with that cultural marking'.43

Like Hodge and Mishra, Thomas King, an indigenous Canadian writer, takes issue with the linearity implied by the term, 'post-colonial'. Like Webb, he questions the conditions under which the category has been developed and applied. King contends that the term, post-colonial, assumes that the starting point for discussion of the literature of native peoples is the arrival of colonising Europeans. Further, he believes that the term organises literary achievements linearly, suggesting progress and improvement with time and since colonisation. For King, the term disregards traditions that were in place before

---

39 Hodge & Mishra, p. 206.
40 Muecke, p.49.
41 Muecke, p. 182.
42 Muecke, p. 184.
43 Webb, p. 40.
colonisation occurred or became an issue and instead assumes that the struggle between indigenous people and colonisers is the catalyst for the literature of indigenous people.44 King posits four alternative categories for indigenous literature. Firstly, there is 'tribal' literature which exists primarily within a tribe or community and in a Native language. Secondly, 'polemical' literature, in either a Native or a colonising language, concerns itself with the culture clash between Natives and non-Natives, perhaps with the championing of Native values over non-Native values. Thirdly, 'interfusional' literature blends oral and written forms. Finally, 'associational' literature, by contemporary Native writers, defies any one set of criteria but often describes 'the daily activities and intricacies' of a Native community.45

King's questioning of post-colonialism demonstrates the need for the theory to continually and vigilantly de-centre itself in the same way that it de-centres the canon of English literature, particularly when it is applied to writing by indigenous peoples. Treating post-colonialism with an uncritical reverence is establishing another canon all over again.

Despite the proliferation of models of post-colonialism which emphasise metonymy, mimicry and, by extension, hybridity, African writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that writing which utilises the language of the coloniser is not African writing:

Their work belongs to an Afro-European literary tradition which is likely to last for as long as Africa is under this rule of European capital in a neo-colonial set-up. So Afro-European literature can be defined as literature written by Africans in European languages in the era of imperialism...African literature can only be written in African languages...46

There are certainly marked differences between the neo-colonial societies of Africa and Australia, but the common experience of oppression by blacks under colonisation on both continents renders Ngugi's strategy relevant for consideration in relation to Australian Aboriginal people. Indeed, the colonisation of language highlighted by him bares a

44 Thomas King, 'Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial', World Literature Written in English, no.2 (1990): 11-12.
striking similarity to that which occurred in Australian missions and as part of the 'education' of Aboriginal children. Ngugi's argument proceeds from his assertion of 'language as culture' or 'the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history': 'Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next'. He concludes with the following call to African writers:

We African writers are bound by our calling to do for our languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English; what Pushkin and Tolstoy did for Russian; indeed what all writers in world history have done for their languages by meeting the challenge of creating a literature in them...  

There are several problems with Ngugi's oppositional stance. There appears to be a contradiction in his call for a return to African languages (and therefore cultures) and the way in which he describes this return with reference to European achievements; that is, doing 'for our languages what Spencer, Milton and Shakespeare did for English' is defining the use and value of language from a European perspective. At the least, this slip-up illustrates practically the difficulties with achieving such a 'return' as well as positing the question: why isn't the 'new' African culture 'African'? Ngugi's oppositional stance, particularly his contention that 'writers in African languages should reconnect themselves to the revolutionary traditions' would also be questioned by Bhabha. In 'The Commitment to Theory', Bhabha advances the notion of the 'third space' (or hybridity) as a more effective alternative to overt political oppositionality because it 'extends the domain of "politics" in a direction that will not be entirely dominated by the forces of economic or social control'.

Mudrooroo Narogin, in Writing From the Fringe, presents a model of Aboriginal post-coloniality which similarly emphasises hybridity rather than oppositionality and which resembles Thomas King's 'associational' category. Mudrooroo expresses reservations

---

47 Ngugi, p. 15.
48 Ngugi, p. 29.
49 Ngugi, p. 29.
about the shift towards 'individual' Aboriginality and an Aboriginal literature for a white audience, but nevertheless develops an argument for a stage he calls 'post-activism':

...the stage of active struggle for an independent identity may be passing. Assimilation, although discredited, still operates through government education and employment policies. New writers...do not see themselves as part of an active ongoing movement, but as individuals either searching for their roots or seeking equal opportunity in a multicultural Australia. It might even be said that Aboriginal affairs is entering a stage of post-activism in that any separate goals are being replaced for those of equal opportunity in the wider Australian community...Thus there might seem to be a movement away from a literature being used as a weapon to raise the consciousness of Aboriginal people and to articulate their concerns. Activist literature has moved to a literature of understanding...one committed to explaining Aboriginal individuals to a predominantly white readership.51

Like Ngugi, Mudrooroo repeatedly emphasises the importance of the colonisation of language, describing it as a function of the social policy of assimilation:

Assimilation at the social level is reflected on the language level...Aboriginal English must be translated, that is assimilated into the Standard English discourse of white Australia. This translation reflects an ideal or ideological position in which Aborigines are to be forced into the majority culture. It is assimilation on the discourse level, though in actuality it does not mean that the Aboriginal person has the option of being assimilated.52

But Mudrooroo also allows for this assimilation to be disrupted by the necessary ambivalence of mimicry and the resulting production of its metonymic effects. He observes that:

The Aboriginal writer exists in ambiguity. White people assume that he or she is writing for the white world, the world of the invader...The assimilated writer has succeeded after much effort in making Standard English his own. Now he or she can only fully express himself or herself in it; while all the time supporting Aboriginal languages and clamouring for the complete use of Aboriginal discourse.53

In this passage, too, Mudrooroo hints at what lies beyond the metonymic effect. That is, 'the complete use of Aboriginal discourse' suggests that it is the informing meta-text of Aboriginality that lies beneath the immediate ability of the white reader to comprehend the text. In this sense the white reader merely scratches the surface. Hence the work of an Aboriginal songwriter may be

...deeply rooted in both form and content in Aboriginality...In effect an understanding of his verse relies on an understanding of the cultural system

52 Mudrooroo, p. 144.
53 Mudrooroo, p. 148.
structured within it...Songs and rituals are not brain-made, but imparted in dreams.\textsuperscript{54}

The effect of the Aboriginal meta-text on contemporary songs will be considered in chapter two.

The discussion of theories of post-colonialism above demonstrates that Aboriginal texts can be loosely considered 'post-colonial' where the term remains fluid enough to continually de-centre itself. The establishment of binary oppositions between centre and margins needs to be avoided in favour of syncretism, and the heterogeneity of post-colonial societies needs to be insisted upon. Colonisation must not be presumed to be an historical instance which has ended, and neither must it be seen as a starting point for the production of indigenous culture. The concerns of the post-colonial are, to some extent, the concerns of Aboriginal texts: marginality, oppression, subversion, identity, locality and syncretism. However, the term needs to be viewed largely as a reflection of European values, as much an ideological construct as is the canon of English literature.\textit{The Empire Writes Back}'s metonymy can be broadened from the words on the page in 'literature' to the 'language' of sounds in contemporary songs, a post-colonialism of culture rather than of 'literature' only. What this ambivalence reveals to the white audience is the surface of an all-encompassing ideology that is awesome in its totality.

With a model established, and to conclude this chapter, the songs of Jimmy Chi's \textit{Bran Nue Dae} can be cited as a brief example of the post-colonial contemporary Aboriginal song text, particularly as Neumann has used it as an example of Bhabha's notion of post-colonial mimicry:

'The ambivalence of mimicry - almost but not quite - suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal.' Misappropriating Homi Bhabha's observation, I suggest that here his reservation must mean that the 'fetishized colonial culture' becomes an insurgent counter-appeal only provided that it is mimicked with the brazen irreverence of somebody like Chi, who takes it for granted that Western traditions, be they part of popular culture or icons of the West's cultural identity, are up for grabs.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{54} Mudrooroo, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{55} Klaus Neumann, 'A Postcolonial Writing of Aboriginal History', \textit{Meanjin}, no. 2 (1992): 297.
Chi employs 'a subtle subversity: he makes his white audiences sing along'.\textsuperscript{56} What they sing along to are lyrics like 'Rebuild all your convict ships and sail you on the tide' ('Nothing I Would Rather Be') and 'the words Peace On Earth just carry a curse when the words are so easily broken' ('Listen To The News').

\textsuperscript{56} Neumann, p. 296.
Fancy letting me up here, with this category, to say what I'm about to say. Is there a difference between the 'indigenous' category and the 'adult contemporary'? Who knows. Or is it just maybe that more Aboriginal performers are in the 'indigenous'? Sorry David Bridie and Not Drowning Waving, you're good musicians, but you're not black. Thankyou.

-Amy Saunders, from Tiddas, receiving an Australian Recording Industry Association Award on 30 March, 1994 for best 'folk, multicultural or indigenous album'.

Amy Saunders' acceptance speech at the 1993 ARIA awards highlights a number of problems with establishing categories like 'Aboriginal songs' and 'Aboriginal songwriters'. Both the processes and the consequences of categorising need to be examined as both have implications for the songs and writers involved, and for studies dealing with these. The fundamental question of what is 'Aboriginal' about a song needs to be addressed. Related to this is the notion of the 'Aboriginal text' and how it relates to Western notions of textuality. The definition of 'Aboriginality' needs to be problematised, particularly in relation to constructions of a pan-'Aboriginality'. The expectations that come with these categories need to be investigated. Similarly, the 'editorial' processes which effect the 'Aboriginality' of the song text can be considered. Importantly, the relationship of the categories to the discourses which create them needs to be examined, particularly with regard to the motives for their creation and implementation.

The question of what constitutes a contemporary 'Aboriginal song' is necessarily preceded by the question of what characterises 'Aboriginal textuality'; that is, what are the specific cultural values which inform the production and distribution of 'Aboriginal texts', and how do these differ from Western values? As was illustrated in chapter one, the Western contemporary song can be considered a 'text' within Western definitions of textuality. However, a consideration of contemporary Aboriginal song texts must be preceded by an examination of their positioning within these European definitions of
'text' and 'song'. So, whilst Mudrooroo proceeds from a definition of textuality provided by Barthes, it must be remembered that this definition is a European construct. Before it can be defined and categorised, the Aboriginal song must be recognised by Europeans as a 'text', or as a 'song'. As Muecke suggests (using 'literature' as the example) the questions of who is doing the recognising, under what conditions and for what gain become important:

To attempt to recuperate a body of Aboriginal narratives as 'works of art' or as 'Literature' is not to discover any intrinsic merit in them. Rather it is to reiterate a discourse of the aesthetic which reads them in a certain way. In a sense it *rewrites* them as literature in ways that are the familiar, everyday practices of departments of literary studies in various tertiary institutions.1

The editors of *Paperbark* describe as characteristic of the 'Aboriginal text' its status as 'a culturally significant artefact in its own right, not...a way of reproducing and disseminating information or ideas on a mass scale in commodity form'.2 The assertion here is that Aboriginal texts have been, and are still, produced within different discourses to those which produce European texts. The connection between Aboriginal 'literature' and song highlighted by Mudrooroo further informs this notion of Aboriginal textuality. The connection problematises definitions of textuality because it deconstructs European notions of literature as the written word and, therefore, of textuality as only this narrow definition of 'literature'. Mudrooroo's Aboriginal textuality deliberately allows the song to be considered as a 'text'. Further, and similarly to *Paperbark*, the cultural values which inform the production and distribution of these texts are removed from the Western capitalist 'ceremony' or 'ritual' of accessorising, consuming and profitteering:

Traditional Aboriginal culture is a complexity which does not separate out a literature from ceremony or society. Literature is sung...Songs are to be sung and experienced in ceremonies or rituals, and the meanings vary to the degree in which a participant has entered into the complete spirituality of the community. Thus signifiers have changing signifieds with the significations depending on the knowledge of the recipient, or the reader.3

Mudrooroo's 'changing signifieds' (the iterability of the signifier) and 'the degree in which a participant has entered into the complete spirituality of the community', lead to the consideration of the broader Aboriginal meta-text, the ideological base which informs and supplements Aboriginal texts. Muecke describes this in terms of 'the Dreaming': 'the Dreaming is the constant supplementary signified of all Aboriginal narratives: that is, whatever each narrative might specifically refer to, or function as in social practice, it always evokes the Dreaming as well'.

It is these complexities in the subjectivity of the Aboriginal 'writer' (in its broadest sense) which have caused Hodge and Mishra to conclude their review of *Writing from the Fringe* with: 'Aboriginal literature does not open its secrets readily to the uninitiated'.

The meta-text of the 'Dreaming' offers some answers to the question of what is 'Aboriginal' about a text. However, the issue of the construction of a pan-'Aboriginality' needs to be examined to qualify the generalising tendency of the 'Dreaming' concept. Initially, it needs to be remembered that 'Aboriginality' itself is a European construct, deriving from anthropological discourse. Aboriginal people did not consider themselves 'Aboriginal', or 'other', in the way that Europeans consider them. As well as being constructed as 'Aboriginal', Australia's heterogeneous indigenous populations have been homogenised by the term. For contemporary songs (and similarly for other art forms) the result has been the 'reduction of diverse Aboriginal cultures and the more than one hundred Aboriginal languages in Australia into a pan-Aboriginal music which is largely promoted by uncomprehending white market forces'. Indigenous Canadian Thomas King takes the questioning of a pan-Aboriginality (in the comparable Canadian literary experience) to another level, such that the concept of a unitary 'Dreaming' becomes problematic:

> In our discussions of Native literature, we try to imagine that there is a racial denominator which full-bloods raised in cities, half-bloods raised on farms,
quarter-bloods raised on reservations, Indians adopted and raised by white families, Indians who speak their tribal language, Indians who speak only English, traditionally educated Indians, university-trained Indians, Indians with little education, and the like all share. We know, of course, that there is not. We know that this is a romantic, mystical, and in many instances, a self-serving notion that the sheer number of cultural groups in North America, the variety of Native languages, and the varied conditions of the various tribes should immediately belie.7

In the light of King's comments it is perhaps more appropriate to speak not of a single meta-text, but of multiple meta-texts or 'Dreamings'.

The reaction of Aboriginal artists to the construction of pan-Aboriginality can be described in two ways, pluralisation and appropriation. Penny Van Toom has described how a number of poets have 'pluralized Black identity, which is not all the same thing as denying their Blackness'.8 Hence, Black artists have deconstructed pan-Aboriginality by identifying with feminist, anti-nuclear and conservationist movements. Aboriginal artists have, at least since the Black Rights movement of the sixties and seventies, also appropriated pan-Aboriginality as a means of resistance. Hence, the Survival concerts, held annually on January 26, have, for Roberta Sykes, become 'the one event that is as unifying as the Tent Embassy'.9 But, as Coloured Stone's Buna Lawrie has suggested, it is unity as respect for diversity, or syncretism, which characterises the appropriation of pan-Aboriginality: 'The point is to show just how diverse Aboriginal culture is... Even from the performers, their stories and messages in their music reflect their communities and gives an overall perspective on a lot of things. That makes Survival a really diverse and exciting event'.10

Categories such as 'Aboriginal songwriter' raise the question of what defines the 'Aboriginality' of a writer. At times this has been 'determined' according to an individual writer's biological ancestry. In a famous example, C.K. Stead criticised the awarding of

---

9 Debra Jopson, "Beautiful black day is a thing of love", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January, 1995: 12.
the Pegasus Award for Maori Literature to Keri Hulme in 1984 on the grounds that: ‘...of Keri Hulme’s eight great-grandparents, one only was Maori’. This notion of biological essentialism is an inadequate ‘measure’ of Aboriginality because it does not allow for socialisation, which occurs regardless of biology. As Jack Davis has suggested, ‘if one “lives Aboriginal” one writes as one’. Biological essentialism is also dangerous because it threatens to doubly discriminate against those with mixed ancestry; that is, you may be considered ‘too Aboriginal’ to be treated as the equal of a white person but then, when you wish to speak from the position of an Aboriginal, you may be dismissed as ‘not Aboriginal enough’. The fact that terms like ‘Aboriginal’, ‘half-caste’ and ‘white’ are homogenising social constructs is recognised by the Commonwealth government’s current definition of an ‘Aborigine’ agreement: persons of some Aboriginal descent who identify themselves as such.

As well as expectations of what ‘Aboriginality’ means biologically, categorising Aboriginality can similarly foster a form of cultural essentialism where ‘authenticity’ is equated with cultural stasis or a constructed and unattainable ‘purity’. In her ‘Foreword’ to the publication, Aboriginal Voices, Pat O’Shane describes this as an extension of the destruction of Aboriginal society and culture since white settlement:

> There are some people throughout Australian society who would continue the processes of destruction. One such process is the way in which they would define “real” Aboriginal culture as that of times past - a static view of culture. Unfortunately many of our people internalise this Anglo-Australian view. Often then, one hears that “we must go back to traditional culture”...But culture is about people living. It is a dynamic process.

It is one of the most brutal ironies that, having tried and having failed to destroy Aboriginal culture through assimilationist policies and genocidal practices, white Australia has insisted that its target, pre-invasion culture, is ‘authentic’ Aboriginal culture. Hodge and Mishra have described the effect for Sally Morgan and Mudrooroo:

---

12 Fee, p. 13.
Because they have the benefits of White education and White modes of literary production the old Aboriginalist premise is invoked, that they couldn’t be 'really Aboriginal'. Thus their right to draw on Aboriginal meanings and artistic forms is questioned.15

As with biological essentialism, the effect is the silencing of voices which have escaped containment within the dominant discourse's category of 'Aboriginality', voices which therefore threaten its authority to construct such categories. In the context of contemporary songs, any Aboriginal songwriter using the Western song form would be disqualified as 'Aboriginal' by this discourse.

Hodge and Mishra offer a more appropriate description of contemporary Aboriginal culture as 'not simply the "primitive" end of the spectrum, like a living museum, but the process of the transformation itself, as a phenomenon that has been dramatically accelerated to become part of the lived experience of the majority of the group'.16 The concept of 'the transformation itself' deconstructs dangerous notions of cultural 'purity' or 'completeness'. It is consistent with post-colonial notions of subversion through mimicry and metonymy. It is also a reflection of reality in the production of contemporary Aboriginal songs. For example, a tutor at the University of Adelaide's Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM) has described the aims of the Centre as follows: '
...to promote Aboriginal music in all its varieties as a living tradition, and to foster fruitful interaction between Aboriginal musicians and the representatives of other musical traditions found in Australia'.17 Mudrooroo suggests that, for many Aboriginal people, 'traditional' music, the music they heard the most and therefore related to, was not that of pre-invasion culture: 'To many Aboriginal people, country and western was traditional Aboriginal music'.18 Castles takes this further, suggesting that if you define "tradition" as something sovereign to a bounded community, unaffected by a compulsion to have a meaning beyond it', then country and western music performs this role for Aboriginal

15 Hodge & Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream, p. 97.
16 Hodge & Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream, p. 72.
18 Mudrooroo, p. 63.
people more so than the didgeridoo and clapsticks, which have now been coopted to represent 'mainstream' Australia.\textsuperscript{19}

Biological and cultural essentialism are also complicated by the effect of 'editorial' processes on the 'Aboriginality' of songs. Indeed, the fact that most Aboriginal songwriters usually have to work within a means of cultural production which is not their own renders their work vulnerable to what could be called 'cultural editing'. In this sense, the translation of one culture's products into another system of cultural values involves comparable limitations to the translation of literary texts from one language to another. Hence the work of Aboriginal songwriters is tailored to and by the dominant discourse. In the same way that novels are altered by an editor, songs are 'treated' by a producer. For example, the producer's choice of instrumentation or electronic sound effects can alter the 'feel' of a song. The producer may not be 'Aboriginal' and hence the 'Aboriginality' of the work is diluted. The biological essentialism argument is further problematised by collaborations with white songwriters and by 'Aboriginal' bands which include white members. This does not mean that these bands are not 'Aboriginal'. Rather, it reveals the complexities of the label, 'Aboriginal band'. It refutes the biological essentialism argument and reinforces the notion that 'Aboriginals' can only be defined as those people who call themselves 'Aboriginal'.

As the discussion of the textuality of the song in chapter one suggested, less obvious forms of 'editing' also inscribe layers of meaning in the 'Aboriginal song'. In this sense, editing includes the decisions made by record companies about promotion of the album or song, the visual meanings created by the director of a song's video clip, and the artwork on the CD cover which contextualises the song. Ultimately, 'editing' includes the various interpretations of listeners in differing contexts. As a song can only ever signify and mediate, there is no 'ideal' reader for whom meaning is transparent. This empowers all readers as final 'editors'. All of these editorial processes complicate the simple labelling

of a song as 'Aboriginal'. Most of them relate to control over the means of cultural production. This has led Bruce McGuinness to conclude that unless Aboriginal people control 'the ultimate presentation of the article, then it is not Aboriginal; that it ceases to be Aboriginal when it is interfered with, when it is tampered with by non-Aboriginal people'.

The establishment of categories like 'Aboriginal song' and 'Aboriginal songwriter' occurs within the discourse of music marketing. This can be illustrated by the fact that there are not, within this discourse, categories like 'white song', 'European song' or 'white songwriter'. Songs by whites are also pigeon-holed, but they are at least allowed the diversity of 'rock', 'pop', 'jazz', and 'folk', rather than being homogenised as 'white'. Within this discourse of music marketing, 'Aboriginal songs', with all of their 'essential characteristics', are just one more niche market. This appropriation by the sellers of music results in a set of limitations placed upon Aboriginal songwriters. They are essentialised as spokespersons for their 'people', as romantically 'political' and 'spiritual'. They are often allocated a 'sponsor', a white person who has facilitated their 'salvation' from 'the margins'. They are not even allowed to autonomously occupy their 'own' category; white people are continually entering and leaving the category. They are 'ghettoised', contained within a manageable category, so that their voice is less threatening. Finally, some are coopted to represent the dominant discourse; ceasing to represent themselves they become 'Australian' or 'world music'.

Songwriters categorised as 'Aboriginal' are often required to carry a certain baggage with them regardless of their artistic aims. In particular, Aboriginal songwriters are often immediately positioned as spokespersons for 'their' pan-Aboriginal people. As Margery Fee has put it: 'White writers can choose to write as whatever they like; minority writers are usually forced into the position of speaking for their minority whether they want to or not'. This insistence by the dominant discourse can become contradictory and

---

20 Van Toom, p. 110.
21 Fee, p. 15.
patronising. Theoretical approaches are bent or abandoned altogether to avoid accusations of 'political incorrectness'. Artists are patronised because they are considered 'special cases', cases beyond the application of the appropriate theories. Nicoll offers the following example in the context of the visual arts, but it applies equally to current cultural theories dealing with contemporary songs:

If art critics are increasingly reluctant to reduce 'mainstream' contemporary aesthetic texts to 'self-expression', there is still a tendency for ethnic/indigenous texts to be read simply in terms of 'cultural expression'. This can be put down, at least in part, to the 'politically correct' desire of non-Aboriginal writers to emphasize Aboriginal agency in the emergence of this art.22

The insistence upon the Aboriginal writer as spokesperson for the constructed 'other' recalls Spivak's argument that the subaltern is always essentialised by the dominant discourse and therefore cannot speak. The allowance of some space from which the 'other' can apparently 'speak' is only ever part of the Europe/'other' construction and the 'other' is therefore always homogenised, a constructed stereotype. The heterogeneous subaltern therefore has no space from which to speak and is effectively silenced.23 However, the ability of Aboriginal artists to regenerate their culture dynamically through the appropriation of the coloniser's forms, mimicking them against a background of over 40 000 years of culture, makes this issue of silence a contentious one.

Muecke has made the link between the essentialised Aboriginal writer as 'spokesperson' and the expectation that they and their work will also be definitively 'political' or 'spiritual':

Aboriginal artists, poets and sports people...live in a society...that has burdened them with this totalising concept of Aboriginal culture. Normally, when one lives happily in a culture, one 'swims' in it, one tends to behave appropriately, one is not constantly reminded, as they are, that one is (Aboriginally) cultural.

This legacy, then, forces contemporary Aboriginal subjects into positions, by turn, of essentialism (you are Aboriginal) or of representativeness and knowledge (you would know about kinship systems of the Western Desert), so that they can be constantly called upon...to display this essence, or this or that

skill, as if culture were an endowment of a totality. This is a burden; and it is the Western version of culture, not the Aboriginal that gives them this.24

Aboriginal writers are not only constructed as 'other', but as an exoticised 'other', mystically in touch with values 'that we have lost' and romantically involved in 'their struggle'. The dominant discourse's categories for 'oppositionality' can either appropriate or contain these images. As Thomas King points out, the expectations of, and allowances for, Aboriginal writers differ dramatically from those of white writers:

Within western literature we are willing to allow the creation of fictional language, places, people, and events, all of which come under the protection of literary license. But I doubt that a novel by a Native writer about a fictional tribe, speaking a fictional language, performing fictional rituals, would be given the same latitude.25

Examples of Aboriginal artists being essentialised as 'political' or 'spiritual' abound. The first sentence of Liz Thompson's 'Introduction' to Aboriginal Voices reads: 'Contemporary Aboriginal arts are inextricably linked with the politics of being black in Australia'.26 Although this statement may be true, the same is true of art by white people; politics cannot be escaped, whether it is an affirmation or criticism of the dominant power structures. However, the point is that statement's like Thompson's are never made about 'Contemporary white Australian arts'. Another example comes from the United States version of Rolling Stone magazine. In an article about 'Australia's new wave of aboriginal pop musicians', the author of the article suggests several times that Aboriginal albums are 'truly a visit to another world'.27

The label, 'political writing', reveals a blind spot in the discourse of those doing the labelling; they fail to recognise that all writing is essentially political. Hence Aboriginal writers have appropriated the label to more accurately describe their contemporary art and to simultaneously deconstruct the notion that 'good art' and 'politics' are incompatible. The editors of Paperbark draw this important conclusion about the essentialising of

24 Muecke, pp. 16-17.
25 King, p. 6.
Aboriginal writers as 'political'. What emerges is a new aesthetic which recognises that oppositionality is not the only form of politics:

...if one accepts the proposition that all literatures are political expressions, then Aboriginal literature is one of those which has not yet succumbed to the rhetorical ploy of saying that "politics gets in the way of literature". It asserts the contrary: literature is one of the ways of getting political things done. Accordingly, this collection makes no claim for an Aboriginal literary aesthetic divorced from rhetorical writing. Its aesthetic, if anything, lies in the force of the political statements that it makes...28

Entry into the 'Aboriginal songwriter' category controlled economically and discursively by the music industry is rarely permitted to occur without the valorisation of a white 'sponsor', usually a successful musician. To be fair, this is generally not an insincere attempt by 'left-leaning' musicians to have themselves associated with an issue that improves their image. Most times, the intentions of these musicians are genuine and the results productive for the Aboriginal musicians involved because both parties are forced to operate within the inequitable music industry. The problem is generally not with the white individuals, but with the discourse of power which renders as 'exceptional' the entry of Aboriginal songwriters into their 'mainstream'. Put another way, the problem lies in the fact that Aboriginal musicians have no control over the means of production of their work.

The issue of the white 'sponsor' or 'legitimiser' has nowhere been better illustrated than in Mary Durack's 'Foreword' to Mudrooroo's first novel, *Wild Cat Falling*. Durack, as a respected member of the literary world, was used by the publisher to 'legitimise' the work of a 'marginal' Aboriginal writer. Her piece now reads as a condescending update of the 'noble savage' myth:

Early in 1958, I was asked to find accommodation for a boy who was coming to a job in the city. I expected to see one of the youths we knew but he turned out to be a complete stranger with little of the familiar coloured boy's willing-to-please manner. In fact he showed little obvious trace of native blood, but he had, what most of the darker people have lost, the proud stance and sinuous carriage of the tall, tribal Aboriginal.29

28 Davis... (et al.) p. 2.
A similar use of 'sponsors' to 'legitimise' the work of Aboriginal songwriters can be found in various articles. In Tracee Hutchison's history of Australian rock music in the 1980s, *Your Name's On The Door*, the lead singer from the white band, Goanna, provides the interview piece for the coverage of Aboriginal band Coloured Stone's achievements (pp. 94-95). Various publications describe the 'arrival' of bands in terms of their support tours with white band, Midnight Oil: the Warumpi Band in 1986, Scrap Metal in 1987 and Yothu Yindi in 1988. Despite their intentions, the benefits (for the supporting bands) of Midnight Oil's sponsorship have been questioned. Mitchell has suggested that the arrangement has 'engendered as much indifference to these groups as attention'.

Typically the power of band, music and crowd becomes concentrated in the single figure of the lead singer who then becomes the meta-identity everyone momentarily takes on. The seas of outstretched hands at Oils gigs testify to the absolutely integral part this process plays in their success. But it is precisely these silhouetting moments that fail to emerge in the performances of bands Midnight Oil choose to support them. The supports, as groups, stand or dance for the communal past before the Oils take the stage and Garrett stands out to call down the individual future. The combination of brief intensive exposure and commercial failure...which seemed to characterise Aboriginal rock at times in the '80s might owe more to this blockage than to simple racism.

However, Midnight Oil's sponsorship may be limiting because of the type of music they play; that is, they play 'hard rock' whereas the support bands mentioned above do not. Hence the criticisms may hold only in specific cases where musical genres are not compatible. It should also be noted that these bands are probably receiving better wages than they could normally hope for, that 'commercial failure' has not been Yothu Yindi's lot and that 'support band syndrome' (audience indifference to a support act) exists no matter what the colour of the band.

Undoubtedly, collaborations between white and black musicians in Australia have been fruitful, both musically and commercially, for Aboriginal songwriters. The problems, then, with 'sponsorship' become the public perceptions that Aboriginal musicians are incapable of achieving success on their own and that they are indebted to the whites who

---

30 Mitchell, p. 327.
31 Castles, pp. 37-38.
have helped them. The larger problem is that the music industry's status quo is not questioned. Rather than considering the values which inform Aboriginal cultural production, the discourse of power plants the assumption that Aboriginal musicians want to be assisted into the 'mainstream'. Its power means that the same view may be internalised by Aboriginal performers, particularly as their survival is a question of the money they can make out of their music.

Related to the issue of sponsorship is that of the appropriation of the Aboriginal voice by 'sympathetic' white songwriters. Several white songwriters are regularly included in the category, 'Aboriginal songwriters', by virtue of their subject matter or lifestyle. Neil Murray, formerly a member of the Warumpi Band, is a good example. The wider question of who can speak for whom is raised, as is the issue of writing as 'other'. In a *Books In Canada* article entitled 'Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?', a number of arguments have been presented for and against the notion of writing as 'other'. Arguments for writing as 'other' contend that imagination and creativity should be unrestricted, that anything less represents censorship. They also suggest that it does not matter what positionality white writers adopt because writing by indigenous people about themselves will always 'ring truer'. In this context, it is argued that the issue is really about equality of access to the means of propagation of writing. Another argument presented was that writing as 'other' represents a cultural gain. Arguments against writing as 'other' consider the practice exploitative, misrepresentational, oppressive and inconsiderate of the spiritual and communal values of indigenous peoples. Mudrooroo has commented on the issue in the Australian context:

If a Patrick White, a Thomas Keneally, a Dorothy Hewett decides to write about Aborigines, after they have done with them, they are discarded. The fringe after all is but a subject for their literary skills, it is not the reality which confronts them each and every day. They belong to another reality and stand outside looking into the fringe camps inhabited by the Aboriginal writer.32

32 Mudrooroo, p. 165.
Two examples of white songwriters writing from the position of Aboriginality are the band, Midnight Oil, and the singer/songwriter, Paul Kelly. However, both examples illustrate the complexity of the issue rather than offering any solutions. Midnight Oil's song, 'The Dead Heart', appears on their 1987 album, *Diesel and Dust*, an album which was the result of their 1986 outback tour with the Warumpi Band. The song is written from the perspective of the Aboriginal people, rather than that of an individual:

we don't serve you country  
don't serve your king  
white man listen to the songs we sing  
white man came took everything  

The song could be criticised as an appropriation of the Aboriginal voice. The fact that it was written before the outback tour would reinforce this criticism. However, the song was also commissioned by representatives of the Mutijulu community for a film celebrating the return of Uluru to its traditional owners. So while Midnight Oil are writing as 'other', their material is being accepted by the 'other'. In this case the issue appears to shift to one about control of the means of cultural propagation. The question needs to be asked: would the assignment have been given to a white group if Aboriginal musicians had the influence of Midnight Oil?

Paul Kelly's 'Special Treatment' is often introduced by the songwriter with: 'I keep hearing that Aborigines receive a lot of special treatment'. With incisive irony, Kelly turns the phrase on its head, appropriating the racist rhetoric, but writing from an Aboriginal perspective:

My father worked a twelve hour day  
As a stockman on the station  
The very same work but not the same pay  
As his white companions  
He got special treatment  
Special treatment  
Very special treatment  

Despite the songwriter's intentions and skill, the song could be criticised as an example of appropriating the voice of the 'other'. But Kelly's appropriation is more of the racist language of his own people than of the Aboriginal voice; he is clearly criticising his own

---

from within. In this way he demonstrates an awareness of his own position among the colonisers and constructively suggests that we all consider imagining ourselves in the position of the 'other' before passing judgement.

Obviously there are examples of white writers who have appropriated the position of Aboriginality for their own gain and without questioning their right to do so. Mudrooroo has criticised Ted Egan for this in *Writing from the Fringe*.\(^3^4\) However, for writers with 'genuine' intentions the issue is problematic. Rather than attacking individual writers, it would seemingly be more productive to work towards a situation where Aboriginal writers had equal access to the means of cultural propagation. In this way, Aboriginal people could represent themselves and there would be little call for the white writer who adopts the Aboriginal position. However, it is now very difficult to justify white writers who make the paternalistic assumption that they are conveying the values and concerns of another culture for them. These writers should be able to exhibit an awareness of their own position in relation to the subject matter and allow this to permeate through their text so as not to make the reader think they are receiving a 'truth' that they are not.

The establishment of the categories, 'Aboriginal songs' and 'Aboriginal songwriters', seems to allow two alternatives in relation to the dominant discourse. These alternatives are 'ghettoisation' or cooption, with both being attempts by the dominant discourse to contain its opposition. Ghettoisation ensures that the opposition will not be heard by excluding them from the means of propagation of culture. Cooption takes the voice of the 'other' group and adopts it as its own so that the 'other' are no longer able to represent themselves. Both options refuse to question the closure of the dominant discourse or to consider Aboriginal discourses as either valid or equal. In this way they deny the possibility of syncretism whilst taking refuge in the rhetoric of multiculturalism. As Muecke has put it, 'the whole post-colonial problematic...is based on the notion of (re)attributing value to the Aboriginal discourses'\(^3^5\). The Aboriginal artist, Michael

\(^3^4\) Mudrooroo, pp. 69-76.

\(^3^5\) Muecke, p.15.
Nelson Tjakamarra makes the same point in relation to his art: 'White people. You don't seem to understand. [They] look at my work, all they see is a pretty painting'.

Perhaps the more common consequence of categorisation is the containment, or 'ghettoisation', of Aboriginal songs and songwriters within categories by the dominant discourse. Put another way, categorisation provides an excuse for these songs and writers to be excluded from the 'mainstream'. As Amy Saunders' quote at the beginning of this chapter suggests, an 'indigenous' category at the ARIA awards means that Aboriginal musicians do not need to be nominated in any of the 'mainstream' categories. Bima Lawrie, from Coloured Stone, has suggested that the categories represent 'white concentration on the Aboriginality of their music as a way of keeping them in place, of blocking what should be an "invisible" movement into the mainstream'. He has commented that 'a story specifically on Aboriginal music only served to "ghettoise" Aboriginal bands'.

Van Toorn theorises the containment of Aboriginal voices in sanctioned categories as follows: 'through its sponsoring discourses, the dominant culture issues minority writers with their licenses to speak (which is also, of course, the site where mechanisms of exclusion and suppression operate)'. Hodge and Mishra describe this tokenism as more effective in maintaining power relations than is total suppression:

...total suppression is too crude to meet all the aims of control, because those who are controlled by the regime are Whites as much as Aborigines. Alongside the system of suppressions must be another system of controls on permissible forms of representation. Otherwise, leakage may occur, and uncontested accounts of the supposedly non-existent may circulate and acquire force.

Again, the control of cultural production becomes the main issue. A dynamic and contemporary Aboriginal culture could, as it did for thousands of years, exist outside of the categories imposed upon it by colonisation:

36 Nicoll, p. 715.
37 Castles, p. 33.
38 Van Toorn, p. 103.
39 Hodge & Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream, p. 27.
Aboriginal writing controlled exclusively by an Aboriginal community would not be a literature addressed either commercially or rhetorically to non-Aboriginal audiences. It would work as an integral part of a separate cultural milieu, not as a specially demarcated 'exotic' cultural product subsumed within the larger white Australian cultural context...40

The other consequence of categorisation, cooption, involves the use of Aboriginal texts to represent a discourse other than that which produced it; for example, Australian nationalism or 'world music'. Mudrooroo sees appropriation as a neo-colonial activity:

...suddenly things "Aboriginal" have become important artefacts within the majority culture. A majority culture now classified as 'postmodern': a weariness eschewing the creative for the pastiche. Cultures are there to be plundered as once the whole world (excluding Europe) was there to be plundered.41

Aboriginal songs and songwriters have, at times, been coopted by the discourse of Australian nationalism. This is possible because of the iterability of the text. That is, whilst Aboriginal writers can appropriate and mimic Western texts, an Aboriginal text can be coopted to become the signifier of a colonial or neo-colonial discourse:

...what a text is, and what is at stake in its analysis, depends on the specific uses for which it has been instrumentalized in particular institutional and discursive contexts - some of which will be governmentally constructed and organized.42

The above comment comes from an article dealing with the use of Aboriginal art to signify that a governmental building is 'Australian'. Examples of Aboriginal art and artists being coopted as 'Australian' include the Australian bicentennial, as Mudrooroo comments: '1988 in many ways was the year of bribing the Aborigine. Aboriginal culture was invited into the centre'.43 In the musical context, an advertisement for 'The Indigenous Event of the Year' (a concert for the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples) not only appropriates the 'indigenous' category, but also coopts the musicians so that they become 'Australia's Finest'.44

40 Van Toorn, p. 106.
42 Nicoll, p. 708.
43 Mudrooroo, Writing from the Fringe, pp. 179-180.
44 In The Drum Media, 19 October, 1993, p. 84.
One of the problems with the cooption of Aboriginal texts by the discourse of nationalism is that it confuses this with the current buzzword for 'Aboriginal issues', 'reconciliation'. As Nicoll has argued, the question again relates to the value attached to Aboriginal discourses:

'Reconciliation' replaces 'protection', 'assimilation', 'self-management' and 'self-determination'...the question here arises: is the dominant non-Aboriginal state proposing reconciliation with Aborigines, or are the latter expected to be reconciled to the former?45

That is, will reconciliation involve syncretism or does it mean neo-colonial appropriation by the dominant discourse? As Hodge and Mishra observe, 'Aboriginal people have been assigned the task by the majority of Australians of constructing the terms of a single Australian identity that resolves the opposition between Aborigines and Whites'.46 The problem is that Aboriginals are expected to perform this task without reference to their own discourses. An example of this, in the musical context, can be found in Oz Arts Magazine which suggests that: 'The time when black musicians take their place alongside whites will see Australian music find the maturity for which it has been striving'.47 In this example, the onus is upon the Aboriginals to rectify our guilt, but the solution must be formulated within the discourse of the colonisers.

Another category to which Aboriginal songs and songwriters are coopted, particularly in markets where 'Aboriginal' is not a recognisable identifier, is that of 'world music'. The term, 'world music', itself represents an appropriation of non Anglo or American (including white Australian and Canadian) music by the discourse of music marketing. It is a 'catch-all' retailing category which was invented by a UK musical distribution company to facilitate the sale of this music in record shops.48 This could not have been stated more plainly than it has been in an article by the US music magazine, Billboard: 'Despite the eclecticism of the genre, retailers and label executives say world music has become a useful marketing category to draw more attention to a wide range of artists'.49

---

45 Nicoll, p. 707.
46 Hodge & Mishra, Dark Side of the Dream, p. 52.
Alternatively, Thos Brooman, one of those who first coined the term, admits it is virtually meaningless: 'No-one plays this bloody world music thing. All people do is play the music from wherever they come from'.

As well as being forced to operate within the discourses of retailing and marketing (with the profits directed accordingly), 'world music', including Aboriginal songs, is forced to fit into one definition of 'music', the Western capitalist definition. This facilitates a kind of surface-level musical 'tourism' for Westerners, as Parkhill has noted:

World music is presented and marketed with a kind of heavy-handed cultural relativism dominated by Western values. The world music heavies prefer not to distinguish between different musical traditions. To them, all is music, as music is understood in the West...The different traditions, or aspects of them, are open and available for 'interpretation'. Music that is outside the parameters of Western art and popular music is thus reinscribed in the narrative of world music. Complexes of social meaning originally associated with time-honoured musical traditions are now endowed with a non-specific, non-directional 'depth' by the cover-note writers' Eurocentric dreams. Musicians themselves are presented with a European-style stage to perform on, and viewed as artists in the Western sense.

Cosgrove has linked this discourse of the tourist with the neo-colonial economic reality for many 'world musicians': To listen to the Sudanese vocalist Abdel Aziz El Mubarak and his mixture of African and Islamic styles, is to lend the tourist's ear, as the economic other is broadcast through an amplifier of first world power. These economic realities suggest that McLuhan's 'global village', to which it is so often suggested that 'world music' contributes, is another Western construct 'in which only we annihilate distance. The "others" remain where they are'. Further, as Mora contends, Western liberal humanist notions of a 'common humanity' provide the justification for ignoring the cultural specificities of musical production:

The idea that we need only tap into some inscrutable inner source of universal truth in order to experience cultural otherness gives comfort to those who do not wish to confront the fact that local traditions are being absorbed ever increasingly into global patterns of production and consumption. It is a way of legitimising the appropriation of other people's music.

---

54 Mora, p. 27.
Some positive points can be made about 'world music'. Firstly, as Mitchell notes, 'the music itself needs to be differentiated from the marketing economy which has sold it' and which is 'too often reminiscent of colonial trade patterns'.\footnote{Mitchell, p. 335.} That is, it is not necessarily the individual musicians or listeners who are at fault. Rather, it is the system of economic power which dilutes and homogenises the enormous range of musics and cultures. Secondly, it is true that 'world music' has exposed to Western listeners musical forms which have traditionally been appropriated by rock and pop. Similarly, it is revealed in the music's 'hybrid, cross-fertilized nature that notions of musical purity and authenticity are an idealistic form of colonialist nostalgia'.\footnote{Mitchell, p. 335.} Chapman suggests that 'world music' represents 'a new syncretic or hybrid music' which is 'the most interesting and creative response to the commercial monopolising of Anglo-American music corporations'.\footnote{Chapman, p. 55.}

While Spivak would contend that the Aboriginal voice is silenced by cooption, Bhabha would probably suggest that cultural difference is still articulated metonymically through mimicry. Bhabha's model here suggests that 'Aboriginal songs' could resemble the camouflaged 'Trojan Horse'. Garofalo has translated this notion into an example from contemporary songs:

While there is no doubt that the music industry commoditises both music and musicians, this view of cooptation is overly economistic and simply not adequate to explain for example, how a Bruce Springsteen can wend his way through the deadly star-making machinery of the music business and still manage to retain, at least in the eyes of his enthusiastic following, an oppositional stance...Clearly, commercial success and artistic quality are not mutually exclusive, nor does commercialisation necessarily preclude an artist from contributing to a culture of resistance.\footnote{Deanna Campbell Robinson..(et al.), Music at the Margins: popular music and global cultural diversity (Newbury Park, California: SAGE Publications, 1991), p. 265.}

In other words, cooption by the dominant discourse can never totally annihilate cultural difference and cultural difference is perhaps the most effective form of resistance.
The categories, 'Aboriginal song' and 'Aboriginal songwriter', can only be described as the problematic constructs of the discourses of power. The only satisfactory definition of a contemporary Aboriginal song is that it is a song produced by any combination of the heterogeneous Aboriginal discourses by a person or group who identifies itself as Aboriginal. It is no more representative of all Aboriginal people than are songs by whites representative of all white people. They are necessarily political, as are all songs, whether affirming or questioning the status quo. Aboriginal songs are not adjuncts to the musical 'mainstream', but are produced within discourses which are 'centres' in themselves. However, Aboriginal songs are rarely permitted to function effectively within the discourses which have produced them due to the neo-colonial structure of the means of cultural propagation which denies Aboriginal songwriters control over their work.
CHAPTER THREE

Archie Weller, 'Untitled'

Our songman is a flashing silver king
who will always please and never die;
whose vibrating songs are new all the time:
honeyed lips, love and soulful eyes.

In the passage above, Archie Weller laments the loss of Aboriginal traditions since the invasion of Australia by Europeans. At the same time, however, he establishes a link between the tradition of Aboriginal orality and the contemporary song form. In the poem, the traditional 'songman' has been replaced by the radio, 'a flashing silver king', and songs about 'honeyed lips, love and soulful eyes'. Weller's poem can also be read positively, for its description of a contemporary Aboriginal oral culture which is both progressive and a continuation of thousands of years of culture.

The relationship between orality and contemporary songs is one that the 'literary tradition' has struggled with, even with its recent embracing of the broader term, 'textual studies'. That is, the apparent 'discovery' of 'oral literatures' has all but ignored the contemporary song as a progressive form of this 'literature'. For example, while The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English devotes around a third of its space to 'The Oral Tradition', the contemporary song is seriously under-represented. The book's editor, Paula Burnett, explains the prevalence of 'oral literature' in the book in her Introduction:

It is the literary tradition's relatively recent 'discovery' of the oral tradition (in the same sense in which Columbus 'discovered' America), which is perhaps the single most important poetic event of this century. The poets of the Caribbean are leaders in the world-wide attempt to find a poetic language which can

1 Walter Ong, in Orality and Literacy, describes the term, 'oral literature', as a 'monstrous concept' and a 'preposterous term' because 'it reveals our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organised materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all'. (11)
communicate with the majority of the people, not just an elite of initiates, a
language which can be both simple and profound.2

However, despite Burnett's assertion that orality represents 'a poetic language which can
communicate with the majority of the people', *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in
English* includes only one entry from undoubtedly its most 'read' poet, the reggae
songwriter, Bob Marley. Marley has been described as 'indisputably the most widely-
known and most influential Third World figure on the international scene'.3 Modern
audio-visual technology has taken Marley's and others' songs to audiences of millions,
arguably cementing the contemporary song as *the* poetic language which, transcending
the boundaries of 'literacy', *does* communicate with the majority of people. In this sense,
the 'importance' of the 'discovery' is also debatable because it was made by the majority
of all people, who necessarily interact with culture, long before 'the literary tradition'
began to question the discourse which segregated 'high' and 'low' culture. Put in simple
terms, the Rolling Stones had connected with millions of edgy teenagers long before they
may have been considered an important continuation of the oral tradition by 'the literary
tradition'. As such, the 'literary tradition' should recognise the importance of the
contemporary song for the continuation, reinvention and progression of all cultures.

The collection of Black Australian writing, *Paperbark*, in many ways parallels Burnett's
anthology. It includes the lyrics to songs by Jimmy Chi, Herbie Laughton and Bob
Randall and includes a similar statement to Burnett's about the 'discovery' of 'orality':

Black Australian literature, while largely unknown and unheralded until the past
three decades, is not a new development. Many of the stories, poems and dramas
published in these pages have their roots in the oral traditions which for centuries
have been the lifeblood of the Aboriginal and Islander cultures spread right across
the continent...Just as Australia was not discovered by the British in 1788, black
writing was not "discovered" in the 1960s: what appears in these pages is only a
fragment which indicates what has always existed and what can exist in the
future.4

---

4 Jack Davis, Stephen Muecke, Mudrooroo Narogin & Adam Shoemaker, eds., *Paperbark: a collection of
Black Australian writings* (St Lucia, Qld: UQP, 1990), p. 1.
Unlike Burnett, though, the editors of this collection allow something like equitable representation from contemporary songwriters.

The issues raised above posit the fundamental question of what defines 'orality'. It is the purpose of this chapter to address this question and to examine the relationship between orality and contemporary Aboriginal songs. In his book, *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong describes two forms of orality which he calls 'primary' and 'secondary'. Ong defines a 'primary oral culture' as 'a culture with no knowledge whatsoever of writing or even of the possibility of writing'.5 'Secondary orality' he describes as follows:

...with telephone, radio, television and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of 'secondary orality'. This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well.6

Ong describes the following as characteristic of orally based thought and expression: it is additive rather than subordinative, aggregative rather than analytic, rhythmic, repetitive, conservative, agonistic, 'close to the human lifeworld', participatory, homeostatic, and situational rather than abstract.7

Ong's notion of 'secondary orality' appears a useful model for the consideration of contemporary songs. His list of the features of orality may also be helpful. However, Ong's concept of 'primary orality', as a model for pre-invasion Aboriginal culture, is problematic. Ong states that 'An oral culture has no texts'.8 This statement is inconsistent with the definition of textuality, as the broadest form of meaningful inscription, provided in chapter one. Similarly, his mention of 'Aides-memoire such as notched sticks or a series of carefully arranged objects'9 could be viewed as a contradiction of the supposed inability of the 'primary oral' culture to conceive of the possibility of writing. Clearly,

---

6 Ong, p. 136.
7 Ong, pp. 34-49.
8 Ong, p. 33.
9 Ong, p. 34.
these examples are a form of writing in that they signify thought processes and inscribe meaning. This example is reminiscent of Root's critique of Todorov's 'othering' of Aztec pictographic-ideographic forms of writing:

Todorov's elisions are symptomatic of the way discursive absences are constructed: their money is not (our) money, so it becomes no money at all, just as their writing becomes not-writing, their (cyclical) time becomes not time, and so on...he differentiates the two societies, the two regimes of signification, and the two mental structures ultimately on the basis of the presence and absence of writing.10

Pre-invasion Aboriginal culture could not be considered one of Ong's 'primary oral' cultures; cave and bark paintings, markings on the body and the significance symbolised by the land itself all could be considered forms of 'writing'. Muecke broadens this, considering 'performance to be a kind of writing in the Derridean sense of "inscription", that is, making traces'.11 He even suggests that 'this writing resembled a writing system like Chinese'.12

Ong critiques Derrida, contending that 'Words are not signs' and that 'Thought is nested in speech'.13 In this way he takes one of his characteristics of orality, that it is 'close to the human lifeworld', to an extreme, as Goldie has observed, so that 'speaking has more subjective presence than writing'.14 The fact that a spoken word, a sound, is no more a real tree than is the same word, 'tree', written down, contests Ong's view of orality. Indeed, Muecke suggests the opposite, that the history of the signifier is often an evolution from a picture which resembles the signified.15 Hence he makes a case for a closer link between 'writing' and the things it signifies than orality. Williams has linked this romanticising of orality with the essentialising of 'other' cultures as, in Ong's words, 'close to the human lifeworld', warning that its results are the cooption of these discourses into our own:

12 Muecke, p. 7.
13 Ong, p. 75.
15 Muecke, p. 9.
The danger of writing out of a sense that oral cultures represent some desired connection with reality or to the gods that written cultures have lost is that we merely discover in those cultures, or project onto them, a compensating image for our discontents. By making them supply what we feel ourselves to lack we oblige to serve not their, but our own, political and cultural agendas.16

Although Ong's 'primary orality' is an inadequate model for pre-invasion Aboriginal culture, it is true that their textual production could be described as predominantly oral. Using Ong's models, it is perhaps feasible to describe all 'oral cultures' as displaying the characteristics of 'secondary orality'; that is, an orality which relates to 'technology' and 'writing'. In this sense, 'technology' ranges from the implements used by Aboriginal people to produce cave paintings to the telephone. 'Writing' ranges from body markings to books. With this in mind, the characteristics of pre-invasion Aboriginal oral texts can be considered. Ong's list of characteristics is useful because, as Muecke suggests, Aboriginal storytelling techniques 'have features in common with any culture which maintains an oral tradition'.17 These include the vital mnemonic devices of repetition and formula. They also include a nomadic progression, moving from place to place across the land so that 'Knowing the performance text...means also knowing the country, and what it has to offer'.18 Unlike in Western discourses, pre-invasion Aboriginal oral culture places emphasis upon a custodianship of stories and songs, rather than ownership by an individual author, so that 'ownership' tends to be communal. As Archie Weller's poem suggests, some songs are 'received' by individual song-men and song-women from a visiting spirit and these may be associated with the individual who first sang it.19 Songs can also be divided into those that are sacred, often with a restricted audience, and those which are public.20 Hodge and Mishra have concisely described Aboriginal orality as:

17 Muecke, p. 53.
18 Muecke, p. 52.
19 Muecke, p. 45.
'absence of closure, generic fluidity, the dimension of performance, and a specific attitude to the potency of the word'.

A remaining issue is that of the relationship between pre-invasion Aboriginal orality and contemporary Aboriginal songs. That is, to what extent does a song by Yothu Yindi represent a continuation of the Aboriginal oral tradition? The assertion that, using Ong's terminology, all orality is 'secondary' initially suggests that the relationship is strong. However, the effects of the modes of transmission of contemporary songs on their 'orality' needs consideration. For instance, just as the use of gesture to enhance an oral telling cannot be reproduced when it is transcribed onto the page, the transformation of a song into a sound recording parallels this process. That is, the recording of a song (onto a non-visual medium like a compact disc), whilst maintaining the integrity of the oral delivery's rhythm and vocal inflexions, must necessarily discard gestures. The recorded song must still be considered as primarily an orally delivered text, but the issue splinters when different media are considered. That is, the live performance of a song does involve both gesture and the physical expression of the performer. However, once a song is transformed into a music video, a whole new set of conditions apply.

Ruth Finnegan has argued that 'modern popular culture is essentially an oral literature'. Hodge and Mishra have argued similarly, that 'the culture of the electronic "global village" threatens the privileges of literacy with obsolescence, in its return to a transformation of oral modes'. In these arguments, both 'modern popular culture' and the 'global village' include the contemporary song. Proceeding from Finnegan's argument, Burnett contends that:

The definition has to depend on the manner of transmission, and in the late-twentieth-century world of audio-visual technology there is a special sense in which the wheel has come full circle, with the live sound in the ascendancy once more.

---

22 Burnett, p. xxviii.
23 Hodge & Mishra, p. 76.
24 Burnett, p. xxviii.
Burnett's mention of 'the manner of transmission' is crucial to the consideration of video and, writing in 1986, the full impact of this technology has probably not been felt. While we can consider a sound recording as predominantly an oral medium, it is harder to categorise this newer manner of transmission, with its bombardment of music videos, video games, and saturation advertising, in the same way. The music video is probably the most appropriate example here because it is directly related, artistically and commercially, to the contemporary song. Although music videos have in a sense reinstated the visual aspect of oral culture, that is gestures, they have overstated them to the extent that the 'reader's' interpretation of the song is interrupted by the visual. The technology available provides more than the 'storyteller' complete with gestures and expression. The music video is a new and different text, only some of which's layers are the textual layers of the song. 'Readers' are presented with an arrangement of images determined by the video's director, usually someone other than the 'storyteller' (the songwriter, musicians and those associated with the production of the song). In this way, the video 'edits' the message of the song. The visual mediates between the oral offering and the 'reader', interpreting the oral text for the 'reader', while challenging the 'reader' to interpret the visual. The fact that the aim of this exercise is still the sale of the recorded form of the music (although increasingly, and with new technology, the video versions are becoming available) may seem to reinstate the predominance of the oral. But, by the time this product has been purchased, the interpretation suggested by the visual is well and truly entrenched. Although, as Finnegan suggests, it is possible to consider recorded music a continuation of oral traditions, it is probably more accurate to use a new term, 'visual culture', to describe the wider trends in modern popular culture.

It is therefore possible to see contemporary Aboriginal songs, in live performance and as sound recordings, as oral texts. Contemporary Aboriginal songs which become video, however, are problematic. On the one hand, the oral text can be diluted by the video's producers interpreting the song for the 'reader'. On the other hand, if the producers of the video are Aboriginal, the tradition of communal 'ownership' of the song could result in a
video which integrates sound and gesture in the way that Aboriginal oral texts have for
generations. For this medium, the real issues are therefore control over the means of
production and 'editorial' processes. Similarly, while Ong correctly notes that 'secondary
orality' creates a sense of the communal for groups immeasurably larger than those of
primary oral culture, for Aboriginal video producers it is access to this audience,
controlled by the dominant discourse of white capitalism, that is difficult. Mitchell has
provided evidence of this difficulty with reference to ABC Television's music video
program, \textit{Rage}:

A survey of the first three hours of \textit{Rage}'s output over two weekends in March
and April 1990 found that out of a total of 120 four-minute music videos, forty-nine were Australian, and of these only one was by an Aboriginal group...Of the
120 video clips, a total of ten were by non-Anglo-Saxon artists, or less than 10 percent.\footnote{Tony Mitchell, 'Treaty now! Indigenous music and music television in Australia', \textit{Media, Culture and Society}, no. 2 (1993): 300.}

This discrimination against Aboriginal artists places them in a no-win situation. That is,
have your text tampered with, or else have no access to an audience.

The question of how contemporary Aboriginal songs, as live performance, sound
recording and video, relate to pre-invasion orality has been addressed by some Aboriginal
commentators. Aboriginal writers and critics like Mudrooroo have recognised the value
of contemporary songs to their culture. In particular, the traditional song-man and song-
woman are invoked to describe the activities of contemporary songwriters, who are
considered the new song-men and song-women. For example, Mudrooroo describes
Archie Roach as such in his introduction to a collection of Roach's lyrics:

\begin{quote}
Now in these new days, in these new ways, the singer of songs is still boss man,
boss person in our communities, and still singing of our plights and mights, joys
and problems. He is still the community doctor, healing the wounds and easing
the hurts. Archie Roach is one of our powerful song men.\footnote{Mudrooroo, 'The Poetics of Healing', Archie Roach, \textit{You Have The Power} (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1994), p.9.}
\end{quote}

\footnote{Ong, p.136.}

\footnote{Ong, p.136.}

\footnote{Tony Mitchell, 'Treaty now! Indigenous music and music television in Australia', \textit{Media, Culture and Society}, no. 2 (1993): 300.}

Elsewhere, Mudrooroo has made the link between orality and the Western genres appropriated by songwriters to progress and continue it: 'To many Aboriginal people, country and western was traditional Aboriginal music'.

Other critics agree that Aboriginal orality continues in the form of contemporary songs. Muecke contends that: 'Oral production remains the major means of cultural transmission and maintenance for Aboriginal peoples in Australia'. In this context, he specifically mentions the lyrics to country and western songs. Interestingly, for Muecke, contemporary Aboriginal literature cannot fulfil this role in the way that songs can: 'It would be extremely difficult to establish any sort of continuity between traditional Aboriginal 'literature' and work by contemporary Aboriginal writers'. This is the case, he believes, because oral 'literature' is 'solely an artefact of the social conditions under which it is produced; kinship, nomadism and the hunter and gatherer economy are the basis of the traditional oral forms'. For Muecke, the processes of 'translating or transcribing, publishing and promoting' threaten the 'orality' of oral 'literature'. From this viewpoint, it would follow that the recording, promotion and distribution of songs would parallel this threat to orality. In this sense, it could be argued that only the live performance mode totally 'preserves' the traditional orality of songs. However, recorded music should be viewed positively as a progressive orality to avoid essentialising notions of Aboriginal cultural stasis.

Hodge and Mishra argue that traditional cultural forms have been effectively adapted to modern needs in a continuity with pre-invasion culture:

Traditional culture provided a highly flexible set of ways of encoding a nexus of rights and obligations towards the land. It gave rise to aesthetic statements which were essentially political and juridical rather than personal and expressive. This quality made it equally well adapted to the needs of Aborigines today, all of whom are in some respects fringe dwellers in their own land, needing a means of

30 Muecke, Textual Spaces, p. 38.
31 Muecke, 'The Penguin New Literary History of Australia', p. 34.
32 Muecke, 'The Penguin New Literary History of Australia', p. 34.
relocating themselves in White Australia, reconstructing an identity which is fully Aboriginal yet adequate to the new situation.33

This connects with the notion of the Aboriginal meta-texts, of 'Dreamings', considered in chapter two, where contemporary Aboriginal texts are produced within discourses different to those of white Australia.

The contemporary Aboriginal song is both a continuation and a reinvention of traditional Aboriginal culture. It refutes suggestions of cultural stasis and transforms the colonisers' imposed musical culture into a contemporary Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal songwriters have appropriated and recontextualised white musical genres: Jimmy Little's country and western, Tiddas's folk, Scrap Metal's rock and the almost vaudevillian Bran Nue Dae. They have also tapped into black forms: No Fixed Address's reggae and Archie Roach's soulful blues. By mimicking the forms with which the colonisers are comfortable, they have also subverted the legitimisation of colonisation through 'official' colonial history. This contemporary orality becomes oral history, utilising narrative forms different to those of 'establishment' history to write against the 'established' history which has, by exclusion, committed genocide against Australia's indigenous inhabitants.

Klaus Neumann, in an article entitled 'A Postcolonial Writing of Aboriginal History', describes the way in which 'establishment' histories assert a detached 'objectivity', and how this discourse can be subverted by contemporary songs:

Historians in this country...managed to write histories of Australia that couldn't have got the facts more right - and white. They set the record straight and wrote Aborigines out of Australian history...I am perturbed by the casualness with which we accept established practices when writing against established histories. Why do we pay so much heed to the factuality of the past? Why do we privilege certain narrative forms in our representations of the past?...Just imagine histories told in the form of rap lyrics.34

Mudrooroo presents the same argument from an Aboriginal perspective, and within the specific context of Aboriginal orality:

Scientists and scholars prefer to work backwards from what is now to what was and tend to ignore any accounts found in the mythology of the Aboriginal

33 Hodge & Mishra, p. 92.
communities, though this mythology is the oral records of the communities. Different scholars argue different things from the evidence they collect and often their accounts and theories seem more fantastic than the myths they seek to replace.35

Muecke suggests that traditional Aboriginal oral narratives did not distinguish between 'history' and 'fiction' so that all stories can be read as 'historical', 'even in Western terms'.36

In this context, Mudrooroo argues that: 'The job of the Aboriginal writer is to give his people a history'.37 Aboriginal songwriters have certainly risen to Mudrooroo's challenge. Archie Roach's 'Took the Children Away' (which will be considered in chapter four) and Bob Randall's 'Brown Skin Baby' are two of the most stunning pieces of oral history ever to be heard by white ears in this country:

Between her sobs I heard her say,
'Police bin take-im my baby away.
From white man boss that baby I have,
why he let them take baby away?'

_Yaaawee, yaahaawawwee,_
My brown skin baby they take 'im away.

(Bob Randall, 'Brown Skin Baby')

This side of the story has rarely, if ever, appeared in a white history book. Similarly, the songs and dialogue of Jimmy Chi's _Bran Nue Dae_ address historical realities, one of which is black deaths in custody. Chi's gaol scene is set in Roeburne lockup, the site of John Pat's death in the juvenile cell in 1983, the incident which contributed more than any other to the establishment of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody38. In this context, Willie's remark whilst in gaol, 'Yeah uncle, I'm man now' (34), has been described as 'a Royal Commission in five words'39.

35 Mudrooroo, _Writing from the Fringe_, p. 5.
36 Muecke, _Textual Spaces_, p. 90.
37 Mudrooroo, _Writing from the Fringe_, p. 140.
38 Neumann, pp. 294-95.
Contemporary Aboriginal songs are both a continuation and a reinvention of Aboriginal orality. They are also a manifestation of a rich and progressive contemporary Aboriginal culture. Their media of transmission, whether live performance, sound recording or video, when controlled by Aboriginal people, represent the 'technology' of a contemporary orality. As a challenge to established discourses, such as history, contemporary songs are spearheading the reattribution of value to Aboriginal discourses.
CHAPTER FOUR

Aboriginal songwriters Kev Carmody and Archie Roach can be compared because they have both appropriated the male singer/songwriter 'genre' which has emerged in contemporary Western music. The 'genre' is generally considered to have emerged in the 1960s with Bob Dylan, but in many ways it was the revival of an older American folk music performed by the likes of Woody Guthrie and descended from the tradition of Anglo-Irish balladeers. Dylan's arrival, however, came at a time when technology could take his music to a mass audience. It also represented both a deconstruction of the notion of 'good singing' and a construction of the singer/songwriter's 'authenticity'. That is, while Dylan could not sing like Frank Sinatra, the fact that he wrote his own songs meant that he was somehow more 'authentic'. Despite the 'quality' of the singing, 'the voice that wrote the song' was now considered to be reaching the listener unmediated. The notion of the 'return' to musical roots reinforced this construction of 'authenticity'.

As well as appropriating this 'genre', Carmody and Roach draw upon their contemporary Aboriginal discourses, their post-colonial Aboriginal meta-texts. Here 'post-colonial' does not imply that colonisation has ended for Australian Aboriginal people; a glance at any comparative statistics on health in Australia would correct any such suggestion. These contemporary Aboriginal meta-texts, as discussed in chapter two, have been described by Mudrooroo in his introduction to You Have The Power, a book of Archie Roach's song lyrics. Mudrooroo invokes the Aboriginal notion of the songman, the individual receiver of songs:

> Now in these new days, in these new ways, the singer of songs is still boss man, boss person in our communities, and still singing of our plights and mights, joys and problems. He is still the community doctor, healing the wounds and easing the hurts. Archie Roach is one of our powerful song men.¹

As was mentioned in chapter two, it is probably more appropriate to speak not of a single pan-Aboriginal meta-text, but of multiple meta-texts or 'Dreamings'. This was perhaps

---

the point being made by Archie Roach when he titled his second album *Jamu Dreaming*. The title track, a song in the Western contemporary song form, is seemingly informed by a specific Jamu meta-text:

```
Look at the walls, hey, people sing  
Cockatoo flies, Whirrikhuthi crawls  
Not penned in by four walls  
Higher than, so it seems  
All we have is our dreams
```

Jamu dreaming, my Jamu dreaming

Carmody and Roach can be seen as strategically mimicking the genre of the singer/songwriter and combining this with the Aboriginal tradition of the songman to produce contemporary Aboriginal songs. For both Carmody and Roach, the insertion of colonisation into their world has been significant. Carmody was sent to a Christian school by the white authorities at age ten. Roach was removed from his parents and fostered when he was three years old. For each of them then, their relationship to the notion of the songman and to the post-colonial Aboriginal discourses which inform their work must be individual and therefore different.

In this chapter, Carmody and Roach will be compared, firstly, with reference to one tenet of post-colonialism touched upon in chapter one, that of an individual's relationship to the landscape. Carmody's 'Eulogy (for a Black Person)' and Roach's 'Native Born' will be discussed in this context. The chapter will then compare the two songwriters with regard to some of the categorisation issues examined in chapter two, particularly the notions of sponsorship and of Aboriginal songwriters being positioned as spokespersons for 'their' people. It will also consider cooption and ghettoisation in light of Mudrooroo's concept of Aboriginal 'post-activism' (discussed in chapter one). The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the relationship between the contemporary song and oral

---

history, theorised in chapter three, with reference to Carmody's 'Thou Shalt Not Steal' and Roach's 'Took the Children Away'.

An individual's and a society's relationship with the landscape they inhabit, and the way in which this is represented artistically, is an important tenet of most post-colonial theoretical models. The maturity of settler societies has often been measured by their ability to adapt the artistic forms they have brought with them to an environment which had no part in creating these forms. Trevor Graham's documentary about Kev Carmody, *From Little Things Big Things Grow*, includes comments by Carmody (who is completing a doctorate in Australian History) on some early art-work by Australian settlers. One picture Carmody describes as 'an alien's view'. Of another, featuring a kangaroo, he says: 'If that looks like a kangaroo, then I could never find one in the wild'.4 Carmody's comments are significant in light of the indigenous view of landscape provided by himself, in 'Eulogy (for a Black Person)', and by Archie Roach, in 'Native Born'.

Carmody's 'Eulogy (for a Black Person)' weaves Aboriginal beliefs about death, burial and nature with a criticism of colonisation. The song begins by describing connections between all aspects of nature, the land, stars, trees, rivers, sun and wind, and human beings:

Wrap me in the deep warm earth  
Where the stars can see my soul  
Take me where them trees stand tall  
By the waters in the river bend  
Let me face the rising sun  
Commend my spirit to the wind

In particular, the 'Earth' is capitalised and described as 'sacred' and 'warm'. These Aboriginal beliefs are supplemented by others in the song. For example, the narrator commands that nobody 'speak my name again when you lay me down'. Amongst some Aboriginal groups the name of a deceased member of the community cannot be spoken, and those with the same name as the deceased must change names. In the song, mortality is considered both natural and inevitable such that the narrator asks:

4 Graham.
Do not grieve and do not weep
Mortal memories are all we keep

The song's view of the landscape stands in stark contrast to the early representations by settlers such as those commented upon by Carmody. Interestingly, in the song, Carmody also comments on the insertion into the landscape of these settlers, and therefore makes a direct reference to their view of the landscape. Whilst his narrative affirms traditional Aboriginal beliefs about the landscape early in the song, at the first refrain it negates Western materialism: 'Make no monuments or mortal crowns'. Similarly, the narrator sings of 'the land thats seen no plough' and asks for 'no coffin or shrouded sheet' to separate his body from the earth. Hence Carmody makes the Aboriginal view of landscape relative to that of the colonisers and is, to some extent, singing back to the coloniser. This address becomes direct in the last line of the last verse: 'Give me back my land in which to lie'. There is also a direct address to Aboriginal people regarding colonisation: 'Carry the struggle wide and long'. Carmody's view of landscape, then, comes from traditional Aboriginal discourses, but the insertion of colonisation means that these must be combined with a contemporary discourse of resistance.

Roach's 'Native Born' makes direct references to the application of the artistic forms of the coloniser to an 'alien' landscape. The song describes the paintings of Albert Namatjira as 'Not so much the things he saw/But what he felt inside'. In this way, Namatjira's methods are made relative to those of the early settler painters who did attempt to paint the things they saw. Similarly, the settler's gaze is invoked by Roach in his image of the botanist, Joseph Banks:

Do you remember Joseph Banks
Who stood upon this sacred earth
And what he felt inside when he looked
around and saw
The land to whom we gave our thanks
Our mother land who's given birth
To trees and plants and animals he'd
never seen before?
What Banks 'felt inside', a sense of the exotic, contrasts with what Namatjira 'felt inside', a sense of belonging. The introduction of flora, fauna and buildings to the traditional landscape of the Aboriginal people is depicted by Roach as part of the attempt by settlers to 'civilise' the exotic:

So bow your head old Eucalypt and Wattle Tree
Australia's bush is losing its identity
While the cities and the parks they have planned
Look out of place because the spirit's in the land

Hence the introduction of species and the construction of cities parallel the introduction of the artistic forms of the colonisers. Just as a landscape painting by an early settler makes Australia look, to Carmody, like 'an English meadow', the introduction of plant species attempted to make this a physical reality.

Like Carmody's song, 'Native Born' also draws upon Aboriginal discourses to speak of the interconnectedness between humans and nature: the capitalisation of 'The Native Born' throughout the song links plants, animals and humans. Hence Roach also combines traditional discourses with a response to colonisation. While the attempts of settler societies to come to terms with their new landscapes can be considered post-colonial, the fusing of traditional and contemporary discourses by Aboriginal artists to deal with the effects of colonisation on the landscape of their traditions can be considered a different kind of post-coloniality, an indigenous post-coloniality.

Mudrooroo has reluctantly described a shift in Aboriginal literature towards an 'individual' Aboriginality which writes for a white audience, a stage he calls 'post-activism'. Post-activism, according to Mudrooroo, has shifted from Aboriginal communalism and separatism, and has embraced multiculturalism: Aboriginal texts are no longer 'being used as a weapon'. This notion can be considered in relation to the positioning of Carmody and Roach by the dominant discourses of white Australia.

5 Graham
It would be difficult to label Carmody post-activist in Mudrooroo's sense. Indeed, the word most often used to describe Carmody's work is 'polemical'. Certainly, much of Carmody's work vigorously questions the assumptions of white Australia. 'Thou Shalt Not Steal', for instance, reveals colonisation as a breach of the colonisers' own rules, and 'Comrade Jesus Christ', as the title suggests, appropriates the West's saviour as a 'humanitarian socialist'. Carmody has also been active in print, also questioning the assumptions of the colonisers in this medium. He has written of 'Illusions such as Equality, Democracy and Capitalism', the 'unshakeable nexus between the three C's of Colonialism, Capitalism and Christianity' and has called for a separate Aboriginal nation: 'Our own financial system, flag, laws, language and education system could be implemented and Black Australians could be accepted as a nation of communities'.

Carmody has also questioned the discourse of stardom to which record companies expect artists to conform:

I just can't get used to the idea...in the record industry they market the individual or the band, and culturally, from the background I come from, it's just a weird concept, because there's no such thing as bloody star. The only star in the culture is the culture itself.

In the same context, he has described performing songs repetitively, as Western 'stars' are expected to do, as 'like having verbal diarrhoea'. For these reasons, Carmody does not fit neatly within Mudrooroo's category of post-activism.

Also for these reasons, Carmody is marginalised, or ghettoised, by the dominant discourse of music marketing. In an insidious manner, the glowing reviews Carmody receives for his 'political' songs also ensure that he will not receive 'mainstream' radio or television exposure. Despite the fact that all songs are necessarily political, only some, those which are critical of the status quo, are labelled as such. For example, one review has described Carmody's first album, Pillars of Society, as '...arguably the best protest album ever made in Australia'. Another says Carmody 'belongs to the old school of

9 Graham
10 Quoted from Rolling Stone by Illawarra Folk Club Newsletter, September, 1992:1.
anger and outrage', is 'blunt and abrasive' and writes 'about the Australian working-class experience with such power and anger'. Despite the outrage of music critics at the ghettoisation of songwriters like Carmody, the language they use, that sanctioned by existing power structures, contributes to this situation. The multinational music industry has both a category and a place for musicians like Kev Carmody: they are 'political' and they belong on the margins. Carmody himself is aware of his ghettoisation, as his comments on Yothu Yindi's success in the 'mainstream' illustrate: 'To get airplay on mainstream radio is almost a fluke, you get it by accident. That's why I don't see the floodgates opening for Aboriginal music, I really don't. There seems to be a structural resistance in the industry'.

Archie Roach could be described as post-activist in Mudrooroo's sense in that his work does not display the 'separatism' which has been exhibited by Carmody. Roach himself has said of his abduction as a child by white authorities, 'I don't want people to feel guilty about it'. A review of his book of lyrics describes them as 'less accusatory, more lyrical'. It is true that Roach does not use his songs as 'weapons' in the sense that Mudrooroo meant it, but it is questionable as to whether his songs could be described as 'individual'. For example, Roach has said of his song, 'Munjana', about Russell Moore, an Aboriginal who received the death sentence in the United States, that 'it could have been any of us'. Similarly, Ruby Hunter, Roach's wife, explained her reaction upon hearing 'Took the Children Away' for the first time as follows: 'I just looked at him, I said "Oh Dad, that's a song for everyone...Even though it's about what happened to you, you're singing about me too and a lot of others"'. It would therefore be totally inaccurate to suggest that Roach has lost a sense of the communal.

---

13 Reisz & Cleaver.
14 Heather Cam, 'Bitter-sweet celebrations', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 January, 1994: 10A.
15 Reisz & Cleaver.
Just as Carmody's questioning has resulted in his ghettoisation, Roach's leaning towards post-activism has contributed to his cooption. For white Australia, Roach is 'purely emotional', transcending the 'ugliness' of politics. Hence Roach's record company placed a full page colour advertisement for his second album, *Jamu Dreaming*, on the back cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine. The advertisement mentions his two Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) awards, describes the album as 'a milestone in Australian music' and calls Roach 'one of the most significant musicians and songwriters in Australia'. Each of these references describe Roach as a representative of Australia, and each represents a clash between the discourses which produce Roach's songs and those which market them.

Interesting dimensions to the cooption of Archie Roach are the images used by the coopting discourse to describe the site from which he has been taken, or 'saved'. In a disturbing parallel to the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents during the policy of assimilation, Roach is metaphorically removed from his Aboriginality. For example, one article begins by describing how Roach and 'James Savage' (Russell Moore) come from 'similar backgrounds'. However, the article says, 'luck was on Roach's side'. This incredible statement suggests that Roach's removal from his parents at age three was somehow 'lucky', and that his 'escape' from the 'unsavoury' world of Moore was even 'luckier'. Another article suggests that: 'For many he fitted the old White Australia stereotype of one of those "lazy, dirty boongs" who congregate in mobs in parks and back-alleys getting pissed'. By describing Roach as such, the author of the article not only resurrects an appalling stereotype, but validates it by finding someone whom it apparently fits. According to this neo-colonialist discourse, Roach has the white man to thank for saving him from modern day 'savages', his own people.

---

17 Back cover of the March 1993 edition of *Rolling Stone*.
Particularly because they are 'solo' artists, Carmody and Roach make interesting case studies with regard to the issues of sponsorship and of being positioned as spokespersons for 'their' people. The cooption of Roach, as opposed to the ghettoisation of Carmody, is reflected in the way that the two artists have been allocated 'sponsorship'. That is, Roach is closer to the 'mainstream' (although by no means wealthy) and therefore his 'success' needs explanation. In the discourse of music marketing, Aboriginal people do not 'make it' on their own. The results can only be described as overkill: in only two articles on Roach20, his three major 'mentors', Paul Kelly, Steve Connolly and David Bridie (all of whom have produced Roach's records and are major performers in their own right) are mentioned or quoted no fewer than seventeen times. Paul Kelly is also interviewed in the documentary film about Roach, Best Kept Secret. On the other hand, the ghettoised Carmody is rarely allocated a sponsor. In this way, potential audiences can be reminded of his 'fringe' status, his 'radical' voice, his 'divisive' politics. When he is associated with more 'successful' musicians, as he is in the documentary film, From Little Things Big Things Grow, it is either on equal terms (writing and recording with Kelly) or with musicians who have equally been branded 'radical' (Billy Bragg).

Both Kev Carmody and Archie Roach have dismissed themselves as spokespersons for Aboriginal people. Carmody has said:

I can't talk for all Aboriginal people, no way. I just reflect my reality. All I can do is hold a mirror to the wider, immigrant society and say, 'Look, this is the way I see it from my perspective'. It's obviously a big country and there's 250 separate languages, as separate as Greek is from Finnish, so there's a hell of a lot of groups. I can't possibly think the same way as the Arnhem Land people do.21

Roach has expressed a similar view:

What I wrote about on Charcoal Lane I suppose was really misunderstood. Sure it dealt with a lot of things that affected Aboriginal people, but I am a separate person from my race. What happened to me, and what I wrote about was just about Archie Roach as a person. Granted, an Aboriginal person, but as Archie Roach. So a lot of my songs I write now, I'd rather be seen as a singer-

songwriter. Because you're an Aboriginal person, people think that you must have a statement or an opinion on everything.22 Despite these disclaimers from the songwriters themselves, and the obvious impossibility of a single Aboriginal person representing the plethora of Aboriginal cultures, languages and communities on the Australian continent, Roach, as an 'acceptable' Aboriginal is still burdened with this role, particularly by white journalists. For example, Clinton Walker, writing in Rolling Stone, suggests: 'In the International Year of Indigenous People, Aboriginal Australia couldn't ask for a more humble, eloquent spokesman, a better role model'.23 Sydney Morning Herald music critic, Bruce Elder's reviews (for Rolling Stone and The Sydney Morning Herald) of Roach's second album, Jamu Dreaming, are further examples of the allocation of the spokesperson role. In the Rolling Stone review, Roach is not allowed to be an individual songwriter with a set of artistic aims. Rather, Elder suggests that 'he carries the sad history of his people. He is the authentic voice of dispossession'.24 Elder's comments render the title of his Herald review, 'Why some labels just won't stick', heavily ironic.25

Carmody's 'radicalism', however, leads the dominant discourse to question whether his Aboriginality is 'real', rather than installing him as a cultural commentator. In many ways this resembles the treatment of Tasmanian Aboriginal, Michael Mansell. Carmody's university education is one aspect which 'taints' the 'authenticity' of his Aboriginality. Another, as Carmody points out in From Little Things Big Things Grow, is the accusation that he is a 'half-caste'. The untenable biological essentialist position is answered by Carmody in the film in words which echo those of Jack Davis quoted in chapter two:

They say you're half-caste, well which bloody half are they talking about? Like, which bit are they looking at? Its up here, its in this cerebral bit up here, its in the brain matter. You live it and your background, your spirituality, your world

22 Wayne Coolwell, My kind of people: twelve Aboriginal profiles (St Lucia: UQP, 1993), pp. 139-140.
23 Walker, p. 80.
view, your values are totally bloody different. It don't matter nothing about
bloody skin colour. I'm black and that's it.26

In chapter three, the contemporary song as a form of oral history has been discussed
utilising the suggestion by Neumann: 'Just imagine histories told in the form of rap
lyrics!'27. The chapter also quoted Mudrooroo on the role of the Aboriginal writer in this
regard: 'The job of the Aboriginal writer is to give his people a history'.28 Despite the
suggestion that Archie Roach may represent a post-activist stage of Aboriginal writing,
his song, 'Took the Children Away', answers Mudrooroo's challenge and can be
considered an oral history. The song begins by directly establishing itself as a corrective
account of history, in comparison with the 'promises they did not keep', the 'objective'
histories written by white Australia:

This story's right, this story's true
I would not tell lies to you
Like the promises they did not keep

The song then dismantles the exclusions of white Australia's historical account of the
policy of assimilation, under which Aboriginal children were removed from their families
and placed in institutions and foster homes. Initially, the very existence of the song
challenges the exclusion of any account of the policy from many history text books.
However, it also interrogates the content of existing accounts by dismantling the
assumptions upon which they rest. For example, the first line of the second verse begins,
'The welfare and the policeman'. This coupling reveals white Australia's 'welfare' policy
towards Aboriginal people as binding, forceful and violent. The term, 'welfare', is
revealed as euphemistic rhetoric for a collusion with the sanctioned violence of the police.
The rhetoric of the term, 'assimilation', is challenged in the song by the exposition of
what 'assimilation' actually meant in human terms. This is not Roach's 'bias' or
'emotion', it is a reality that has been falsified by language. In this sense, one phrase in
the song, 'split us up', describes 'assimilation' in three words. Roach's depiction of the

26 Graham.
28 Mudrooroo, Writing from the Fringe, p. 140.
actual physical removal of the children is another human reality previously hidden behind
the political rhetoric of 'assimilation':

One dark day on Framingham
Came and didn’t give a damn
My mother cried go get their dad
He came running fighting mad
Mother’s tears were falling down
Dad shaped up, he stood his ground
He said you touch my kids and you fight me
And they took us from our family

All of this is covered by one phrase in white Australian history text books, 'the policy of
assimilation', and the text books, not the song, are considered as the legitimate
'objective' history. 'Took the Children Away' also deconstructs the binary oppositions
upon which established Australian history has rested, particularly that which has been
constructed between black and white in Australia:

As we grew up we felt alone
Cause we were acting white
Yet feeling black

Black and white are blurred into complex subjectivities. The fact that Russell Moore
comes from such a background, and the way in which this has been publicised by the
media, adds an intertextual dimension to the song. An extension of the binary opposition,
the notion that white is purity and black is depravity, the Manichean allegory which has
so easily been applied to Moore (both in Australia and the United States), is also
dismantled by the song. In this way the neat constructions of the 'criminal' and the
'innocent', the 'right' and the 'wrong' are disrupted.

Kev Carmody himself has commented upon the usefulness of the contemporary song as a
conveyor of oral history. Narrating From Little Things Big Things Grow, Carmody
speaks of his entry into university to study Australian History. At the time, he says, his
reading and writing abilities were not of the standard that universities demand and so he
suggested that he could present his work as songs. He described them 'as a means of
implementing oral history and my background and what I wanted to say'. Carmody adds:
'It worked...so well that I ended up doing my PhD in Australian History'. In the same
film he says of his music: To me its just an oral record. I’m really lucky 'cause they
write the lyrics down, it becomes a written record then as well'. In this context, Carmody's 'Thou Shalt Not Steal' can be considered an oral history of the settlement of Australia from an Aboriginal perspective. The song dismantles the rhetoric of 'discovery' and of the establishment of 'civilisation' by revealing the blind spots in these discourses. For instance, the current racist phrase, 'boat people', is used satirically to describe the first British settlers of 1788. The rules by which the colonisers legitimised themselves, those of Christianity, are turned back upon the settlers in both the title of the song and in the line, 'Your Jesus said you're supposed to give the oppressed a better deal'. In this way, the colonisers are revealed as hypocritical and the closure of their discourses becomes apparent. One of the colonisers' latter day belief systems, environmentalism, is compared to the earlier system, Christianity, to reveal its contradictions:

You talk of conservation, keep the forests pristine green
but in 200 years your materialism has stripped the forests clean
a racist's contradiction that's understood by none
their left hand holds a bible, their right hand holds a gun

Carmody's alternative history reveals a colonial discourse which, when applied more broadly, becomes irrational within itself.

Kev Carmody and Archie Roach are both singer/songwriters, in the Western sense, and songmen who call upon their traditional and contemporary Aboriginal discourses to inform their work. In this way they have been able to articulate an indigenous post-coloniality in relation to the Australian landscape which contrasts with the post-colonialism of the settler society. However, this is as much (and as little) an individual process as it is for white Australian writers and neither Carmody nor Roach should be considered spokespersons for 'their' people. The respective ghettoisation and cooption of Carmody and Roach by the discourses of white Australian capitalism are indicative of both the economic inequalities which exist in Australia and the unwillingness of the discourses of power to attribute any value to alternative discourses. Finally, Carmody and Roach are both oral historians who challenge both the content and the form of the

29 Graham.
'legitimate' history of the invasion of Australia. As such, their songs are amongst the most important historical documents produced in this country since the invasion.
CHAPTER FIVE

'Come all you men of learning'; 'Oh listen for a moment lads'; 'The wind is fair and free my boys'; 'Oh don't you remember black Alice Sam Holt, black Alice so dusky and dark'?1

This amusingly archaic collection of opening lines to Australian folk songs is quoted by Jane Belfrage in her article, 'Loud Silences', to illustrate what she calls 'a phallocentric deafness to women's musics'.2 Belfrage's article refers specifically to print publications about folk, country, popular and jazz music in Australia, but the patriarchal deafness extends to the other media and to the music industry in general. Put simply, the music industry is still one of the most sexist industries currently in operation. Musicians, management, record company executives and touring personnel are dominated by males in an industry almost totally devoid of even the most basic regulation. Women who are serious musicians are still considered novelty acts by the media and industry. Underpinning this situation is an ideology of masculinity, competitiveness and status, aspects of patriarchal rule which dominate regardless of the protagonists' biology.

Campbell Robinson (et al.) have examined eight contemporary 'marginal' musics in Music at the Margins, and they reach the following conclusion about contemporary women musicians:

The gender gap is universal and women musicians throughout our international sample were inequitably treated even on a local level. Few women are even working musicians. Those who do manage to break into the circle tend to be younger than the men and assigned to the traditional female role of singing..."Women's music" is still regarded as a separate and relatively unknown genre everywhere.3

Belfrage writes of the instruments of patriarchal discourse which:

......amplify women's silences and men's musical achievements - as if this were natural, the way life really is, that Australian women haven't been and aren't

---

2 Belfrage, p. 22.
involved in music. Women musicians haven't been heard; there has been a roaring, resonating, selective deafness to their musics...loud silences.\(^4\)

Belfrage contrasts this silencing with the fact that most colonial music involved the woman of the household at the piano, and that these women 'were predominantly the teachers and encouragers of rising generations of Australian musicians'.\(^5\) Significantly for this study, Aboriginal singer, songwriter and musician, Brenda Webb, has said of the Australian Recording Industry Awards: 'I thought it was a big wank and a big boys club'.\(^6\) The discourses of the music industry, including the arm of it which produces music commentary, have effectively marginalised women musicians.

This marginalisation of women in the music industry can be described in post-colonial terms. That is, the relationship between feminist and post-colonial theories can be used to describe these women as having been 'colonised' by patriarchal discourses. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe this link between feminist thinking and post-colonialism as follows:

Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of 'Other', marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, 'colonized', forced to pursue guerilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply embedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from, that *imperium*. They share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. Women, like post-colonial peoples, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available 'tools' are those of the 'colonizer'.\(^7\)

Similarly, Hodge and Mishra describe Anne Summers' *Damned Whores and God's Police* as 'specifically claiming that women were a "colonised sex"'.\(^8\)

One of the necessary results of combining feminist thinking with post-colonialism is a pluralisation of feminism so that the heterogeneity of the women in the widely varied post-colonial societies can be represented more accurately. The implementation of these

---

\(^4\) Belfrage, p. 22.  
\(^5\) Belfrage, p. 24.  
'feminisms' reveals the double colonisation of black women, including women from indigenous cultures, in post-colonial societies. These women experience subordination by both patriarchal and racist discourses. In terms of the patriarchal power structure, they become doubly female as the strategy of 'féminisation' is utilised by patriarchal discourse. That is, indigenous peoples, and the landscape itself, are ascribed feminine characteristics so that patriarchy can draw upon the well established domination of male over female to conquer them. In this way, colonisation is equated to sexual conquest. A good example is provided by Jose Rabasa in an article titled 'Allegories of the Atlas'. Rabasa deconstructs Mercator's Atlas, with one of his observations being:

All the continents are represented by women in a hierarchical arrangement in terms of the emblems and amounts of garb worn...Africa and America in their nudity testify to the dominance of the feminine and typify barbarous states which are, nonetheless, full of treasures for Europe.\(^9\)

Recent media depictions of the Aboriginal singer and songwriter, Ruby Hunter, can be used to illustrate a modern day version of the double colonisation of indigenous Australian women. Initially, it should be noted that Hunter has been 'colonised' because of her race: she was removed from her family as a child, has lived on the street and was unable to secure a contract from a record company when she began recording her recent debut album, *Thoughts Within*. To add to this, in an article for the street music press, Michael Smith writes: 'So what took this housewife out of the kitchen and into a songwriting career that will see her travelling for the next couple of months while her husband stays home and looks after the kids'?\(^{10}\) In a review of *Thoughts Within*, Murray Cook makes the following reference to the fact that Hunter is married to Archie Roach: 'As the saying goes "behind every great man is a great woman," and this CD more than proves the axiom'.\(^{11}\) To be fair, both of these male journalists have attempted to present Hunter and her music positively, and both are making a valuable contribution to the fight against racism. However, as the above references illustrate, both are working within a

---


patriarchal discourse which considers Ruby Hunter's achievements, the achievements of a black woman, irregular. Further, patriarchal discourse can only define these achievements in relation to men, as is done in both of the quotes above.

The aim of post-colonialism, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin is 'to create or recreate an independent local identity'.

This can be applied to the other post-colonial arts, including contemporary songs. In terms of the colonisation of indigenous Australian women, this aim posits two questions. Firstly, given that music contributes to the formation of identity, how is this 'independent local identity' affected by the silencing of women musicians? And secondly, what do women musicians have to say about both their silencing and about local identity?

In her novel, Don't Take Your Love To Town, the Aboriginal writer, Ruby Langford, poignantly describes the effect of the silencing of women on the 'independent local identity' of Australia. Langford does this by depicting the silencing of the reality of the lives of women: 'Nothing about women's matters ever got mentioned, even between the women.' (23) The arrival of a female character's 'monthlies' is accompanied by the warning, 'You mustn't mention this to anyone.' (23) The dominant patriarchal ideology permeates the thinking of women to the extent that they feel improper in talking about their own bodies. Hence patriarchy excludes 'women's matters', like period blood, from the national identity whilst, at the same time, celebrating the blood of the ANZACS as the very centre of this identity. The result, for Langford, is, 'I realised I was pregnant but I didn't know the facts of life' (54). Keeping this information from women virtually ensures they will fall pregnant which, for patriarchal discourse, further anchors them to the home, and this role is therefore cemented as part of the local identity.

---

12 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 195.
13 Ruby Langford, Don't Take Your Love To Town (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988).
The lyrics of the Melbourne based group, Tiddas, made up of two Aboriginal women and a white woman, can be read in a similar manner to Langford's novel. The theme of the song, 'Nobody Talkin', is the silencing of certain discourses:

Aint nobody gonna talk about it
Don't you wanna hear what I say
All I wanna do is get it through to you
Our life is not a game, why do you throw it away

Later in the song, this silence is linked to an aspect of the local identity, the physical and spiritual significance of the environment:

We gotta get and talk about it
We can't do it to the land
We're cutting down our future
With every movement of our hand

The song comments on the effects of environmental degradation, and of disregarding Aboriginal beliefs about land, on the physical and spiritual identity of Australia. It relates this to the silencing of alternative voices. In a sense, these voices have been 'feminised' so that they can be dominated. The song therefore calls upon discourses of feminism and Aboriginality to deconstruct the apparent completeness of the patriarchal discourse of capitalist exploitation.

Another song by Tiddas, the title track to their album, *Sing About Life*, also deals with the way in which 'marginal' discourses are silenced by the discourses of power. The song suggests the possibilities which would be provided by a syncretic co-existence of discourses:

Sing about life, sing about possibilities
You know you may be right
You and me will both be free

The suggestion is that the discourses of power examine their limitations and exclusions so that the realities of the excluded can be included. That is, those with the power to currently construct an 'independent local identity' should consider the discourses of those excluded from representation by the constructed identity. Elaborating on Langford's example, it means that the reality of women's 'monthlies' is as much a part of Australia's
identity as was the blood shed during the defeat at Gallipoli. Tiddas' song, however, does not conclude optimistically:

So we try to do it right, we sing about it
Everyday we talk about life
Is anybody listening to the cry
Of one child...

Hence, like the novelist Langford, Tiddas comment on the effect of the silencing of the discourses of women on the creation of an 'independent local identity'. They ask that these silenced voices be heard and they suggest that a truly representative national identity (if such a phenomenon is possible) would include them.

A recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, titled 'Swing High: The Women Who've Rescued Pop', contends that a new wave of Australian women singer/songwriters, which includes Torres Strait Islander, Christine Anu, have brought about a fundamental change in the thinking of the Australian music industry about women. The article's author, Jon Casimir, argues that, unlike in the past, the new wave of women artists have achieved a large measure of control over their music, careers and images. Casimir quotes one of the performers, Max Sharam, to support his argument: 'I'm definitely in control of the way I'm presented...Record companies can no longer fabricate an artist like they used to be able to'.

Casimir's article, and particularly its inclusion of Anu, raise several fundamental questions: Is the music industry's ideological basis really being challenged, or are the women being coopted into internalising its masculine and competitive ideology? Does the shift only represent the expiry date of the marketability of the 'fabricated artist' and hence also the industry's appropriation of what is now marketable? On the positive side, does the record companies' endless search for something 'new' to satisfy consumers mean that they must allow alternative discourses to be heard? This latter question relates to Bhabha's notion of mimicry, a kind of ideological 'Trojan Horse'.

---

The recent media portrayal of 'next big thing' and Torres Strait Islander, Christine Anu, can be used to consider these questions. Another article by Casimir has described Anu as follows: 'She's black, urban, hip, contemporary, strong and beautiful. In fact, Christine Anu is so perfectly marketable that the record industry would have had to create her if she hadn't come along'.\(^{15}\) Casimir's statement reinforces the existing neo-colonial, patriarchal power base in the music industry. The 'advantages' he attaches to Anu can be attributed to this discourse. She is 'black' and therefore 'exotic' and essentially 'rhythmic'. She is 'urban' and therefore can be used to reaffirm the 'centre' over the 'margins'. She is 'hip', a euphemism for her disposability by the economic forces, controlled by neo-colonial patriarchy, which construct 'fashion' for their own economic benefit and sexual gratification. She is 'strong' and therefore able to survive and compete in the masculine world of the music industry. And she is 'beautiful', the ultimate criterion for success in the patriarchal order.

Casimir's statement also raises serious doubts about whether the music industry's masculine and competitive ideology has been challenged by the arrival of the 'new wave'. The suggestion that 'the record industry would have had to create her if she hadn't come along' suggests that the status quo has been maintained, that Anu embodies characteristics which have already been determined by the music industry. These are the characteristics listed above. It suggests that the discourses of the music industry have been internalised (probably by most of us) and therefore that its masculine, competitive and status driven ideology is being maintained. The statement also directly questions Sharam's view that 'Record companies can no longer fabricate an artist like they used to be able to'; the point is they may not have to because artists will happily do it themselves.

The suspicion that nothing has really changed in the music industry is almost confirmed by another statement from Casimir: 'She represents the second wave of indigenous artists

\(^{15}\) Jon Casimir, 'Islands come to city on wings of song', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October, 1994: 13A.
people whose talent impresses you before their skin colour'. Casimir's universalisation of the term, 'talent', as it is defined by the West, confirms that the discourses of the music industry do not allow a consideration of 'talent' from the perspective of other discourses.

The question remains: Is Christine Anu's cooption also an incidence of the cultural 'Trojan Horse'? A similar dynamic to that which affects Yothu Yindi (discussed in chapter 6) is probably at work. That is, Anu's innovative representations of herself and her culture will, in all probability, be appropriated as representations of Australian identity or 'world music'. This is not to say that they will have no initial impact, only that this impact will be usurped. Indeed, the 'world music' pigeonhole, with all of its baggage, has already been invoked by one street press front page headline: 'Christine Anu: the cultural teacher'.

Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin posit 'another significant parallel between feminist discourse and the post-colonial in that their projects are oriented towards the future, positing societies in which social and political hegemonic shifts have occurred'. Here a parallel exists between the attribution of value to Aboriginal and feminist discourses by the discourses of power. As Belfrage contends, there is a deafness to these discourses. When they are heard they are mediated by their very presence within the apparatuses of the discourses of power. For this reason they may only really be heard momentarily. Enough of these 'moments', however, may well result in significant 'social and political hegemonic shifts' in the future.

16 Casimir, "Islands", p. 13A.
18 Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, p. 177.
CHAPTER SIX

By the standards of white Australia, which measures musical success in terms of record sales, chart positions and dollars, Yothu Yindi are the most successful Aboriginal band of all time. In 1991 they became the first Aboriginal band to achieve major chart success with their songs, 'Treaty' and 'Djapana', and their album, *Tribal Voice*. It is because of this 'success' that they make an interesting case study in terms of many of the issues discussed in chapters one to three. For instance, their infiltration into the 'mainstream' can be examined in terms of the metonymy which characterises post-colonial texts. The relationship between Yothu Yindi's contemporary songs and their Yolngu oral tradition, and the 'editorial' processes mediating this, can be considered as a metonymic strategy. In relation to this, the band's attempts to syncretically establish the value of their own discourses alongside, and in communication with, those of white Australia, can be explored. Finally, a consideration of the dynamic between this assertion of Yolngu discourses and the continual attempts by white Australia, and the multinational recording industry, to coopt them is needed.

Yothu Yindi's use of mimicry and hybridity to achieve their effect metonymically can be seen at the various levels of their albums, songs, videos and live performance. What they mimic is the coloniser's rock music. What results is a hybrid of Yolngu culture and this rock music. What the white listener receives is a rock song with a difference, an opening into the Yolngu meta-text, or ideology, which produced it. This can be viewed as a post-colonial strategy, particularly as lead singer and contributing songwriter, Mandawuy Yunupingu, has said: 'what we're trying to do now is to decolonise ourselves'.1 Similarly, the post-colonial notion of decentring 'mainstreams' and recentring 'margins' has been articulated by Mandawuy:

> When we came back to Arnhem Land, we came back to our mainstream, don't you see? You have to understand, this is our mainstream. Sure, we might have

---

'made it' into what you call the mainstream in your culture, but we have our own mainstream and our own structures...Through music we are trying to bring you into our mainstream.2

At the level of the album, the strategy of metonymy, as a kind of shadowing or doubling, can be seen using Yothu Yindi's second album, *Tribal Voice*, as an example. The cover of the album provides the initial incidence, with the bilingual listing of songs, so that 'My Kind of Life' appears immediately before 'Maralitja', and the latter is accompanied by a translation, 'Crocodile Man'. The album then begins with a traditional song, 'Gapu', sung in Yolngu matha and accompanied by traditional instruments, an unexpected starting point for a 'rock' album bearing an advertisement on its cover which says: 'Includes the Hit Single…'

'Gapu' is followed by 'Treaty', which can be used to demonstrate the use of metonymy at the level of the song. 'Treaty' begins as a Western rock/funk song accompanied by what the dominant discourse can contain as 'political' or 'oppositional' lyrics:

```
Well I heard it on the radio
And I saw it on the television
Back in 1988, all those talking politicians
```

However, the comfort of the category, 'oppositional', is disrupted as the song progresses. After the first chorus, but continuing the already established rhythm, the song's language becomes Yolngu matha, its accompaniment the didgeridoo and clapsticks, and its vocal inflexion distinctively Yolngu:

```
Treaty Yeh Treaty Now Treaty Yeh Treaty Now
Nhima Dja’parangk nhima walangwalang
Nhe Dja’paratpa nhima gaya nhe
Matjini…Yakarray
Nhe Dja’pa nhe walang
Gumurrjarrk Gutjuk
```

The song then returns to its original rock/funk form, returning periodically to, and eventually climaxing with, the Yolngu matha piece. The song which follows 'Treaty', 'My Kind of Life', is sung in English, but also functions metonymically in the way that it draws upon Yolngu ideology and life experience. For instance, the songwriter,

---
Mandawuy, utilises a metaphor which is unfamiliar to the Western listener: 'Like the honey from the mayku tree'. The effect is the infiltration of Yolngu ideology into Western forms, or camouflage. 'Maralitja', the fourth song on *Tribal Voice*, differs from 'Treaty' in that the entire song is sung in Yolngu matha. It begins with a country-tinged guitar which suggests the ballad form familiar to the Western listener. However, the use of the Aboriginal language marks the song's difference. Similarly, the song regularly reaches a chorus section where it shifts into rock which is accompanied by Aboriginal instrumentation.

Muecke's analysis of Yothu Yindi's video clip, 'Mainstream', provides an example of the metonymic practice in the production of the band's music videos. In his discussion, Muecke summarises this shadowing effect's political dimension: '...we are sovereign in our own country, but we can play your musical game too'.  

Certainly, 'Mainstream' can be viewed in this way. It is a 'rock' video, but it features Aboriginal imagery prominently, and the Aboriginal flag and protest marches even more prominently. That is, it centres the 'periphery' (Aboriginal culture) with its title and chorus: 'We're living in the mainstream'. By suggesting to white Australia that the Aboriginal protest movement is the 'mainstream', the song and video breach the containment of their category, 'rock music video'.

Yothu Yindi's live performance can also be discussed in terms of metonymy. The obvious point to be made is about the 'rock concert' which features traditional Aboriginal dances throughout, the 'rock concert' which, like their albums, also features traditional songs and dances, and the 'rock concert' which fuses the two in a single song. Perhaps the most striking image is that of the traditionally decorated dancer wearing the ultra-modern technology of the radio microphone headset. Like the technology of language used by colonised peoples to 'write back', this technology is being appropriated to sing back. Reading this metonymically, the headset represents white technological modernity

---

while, at the same time, the body paint represents traditional black culture. Each of these signs implies a metaphoric claim; on the one hand, the performer is declaring his status as 'modern man' and, on the other, as 'traditional Aboriginal man'. However, they are each only a 'part' of the 'whole' performer and so neither can be completely true. In this sense, the truth is in the tension between the two, and the whole is therefore more than the sum of its parts.

The effect of this metonymic doubling on the Western listener has been described by Magowan as follows:

Understanding texts is not an a priori necessity for inducing empathy for a cause. The ethnoaesthetics of display through performance content and structure create an atmosphere that evokes feelings of what it means to be Yolngu. Whether the song is understood or not does not detract from aesthetic value...By creating multivocal symbols from which international audiences may interpret Aboriginal identity they are communicating, simultaneously to a hugely varied audience, the multifarious orders of meaning that exist in Yolngu life.4

Magowan’s use of the word, 'empathy', is questionable as is her suggestion that the 'multifarious orders of meaning that exist in Yolngu life' are communicated by texts which non-Yolngu listeners cannot understand. What she does articulate, though, is the notion that the contemporary song text can be produced by discourses other than those of the West. The reader’s empowerment as final 'editor' of a text suggests that contemporary Aboriginal songs, produced by contemporary Aboriginal discourses, offer an opening to the Western listener rather than an entire world view in three minutes.

In considering Yothu Yindi and post-colonialism, it would be interesting to position them within the four alternative categories for texts by indigenous writers proposed by Thomas King. King’s 'tribal' category, for texts which exist primarily within a tribe or community and in a Native language, can certainly be applied to the traditional songs and dances performed by Yothu Yindi (although they are recontextualised). At the same time, his 'polemical' category, for texts in either a native or a colonising language which concern themselves with the culture clash between natives and non-natives, could

---

describe a song like 'Treaty' with its themes of broken promises and reconciliation. King's 'interfusional' literature blends oral and written forms. For contemporary songs, 'written forms' can be substituted by the Western contemporary song form, and its strong relationship to orality in Yothu Yindi's music is considered below. Finally, King's 'associational' texts, by contemporary Native writers, defy any one set of criteria but often describe 'the daily activities and intricacies' of a Native community. It is equally possible to position songs like 'My Kind of Life', dealing with both the Yolngu worldview and daily life, in this category. King's categories can therefore be used for individual Yothu Yindi songs, but the band can be seen as spanning all four.

The continuation of an oral tradition in contemporary Aboriginal songs represents one method by which the informing meta-texts of Aboriginality exist metonymically in these texts. The predominantly oral sound recording, the possibilities for a contemporary orality offered by the technology of video, and the continuation of live performance can all be considered in this respect. For Yothu Yindi, it is not only their contemporary songs which continue this tradition, because they perform traditional songs as well:

They perform the traditional dances of their people only with the explicit permission of their elders. They asked to take the dance and song outside northeastern Arnhem Land not to be an object of curiosity, but as an implement of survival.

However, the performance of these traditional songs is recontextualised by their placement on, for instance, a Western stage or a compact disc. They therefore represent a textual hybridity, a response to colonisation as well as the continuation of a tradition.

This continuation can also be seen in the more obvious hybridity of Yothu Yindi's contemporary songs:

When they choose to inject a rock sensibility into the songs, in Treaty or Djapana for instance, the roots, the stage performance, primary instrumentation and even the language of the lyrics, still stem firmly from the land around Yirrkala.

---

7 Masterson, p. 30.
The performance of one song⁸ at the 1992 Stopem Ground festival illustrates this continuity. The piece begins as a traditional song and dance, with only the traditionally decorated dancers and musicians on the stage. Upon its completion, one band member tells the audience: 'Same song, different feel'. The drums launch into a rock beat and are followed by a funk bassline, synthesiser, and electric guitar as well as the traditional instruments. Mandawuy arrives on stage and sings the song in Yolngu matha. The traditional dances remain and, during breaks in the singing, assume centre stage. In this piece, Yothu Yindi physically demonstrate the continuation of their oral traditions.

However, the continuation and progression of an oral tradition by Yothu Yindi can also be examined in terms of the editorial processes discussed in chapter three. For instance, the influence of producers on sound recordings and directors on video productions can be considered. The most obvious example for Yothu Yindi is the re-mix of their song, 'Treaty'. The description of 'Treaty' in the discussion of metonymy above refers to the 'original' version of the song (although this version, too, was influenced by a producer). However, the version of 'Treaty' which became Yothu Yindi's first chart success was a technological 'cut and paste' performed by a group of sound engineers known as Filthy Lucre, whom the members of the band had never met. The 're-mix' substituted a dance beat for the original rhythm, removed most of the song's oppositional lyrics and replaced the original bass line with one section of the original repeated throughout the song. To the Western ear, 'Treaty' went from being a standard 'political' rock song with touches of Yolngu matha (receiving limited airplay on 'alternative' radio) to a 'sophisticated' and 'sexy' modern song with an 'international quality'. Mitchell has noted that this was the first of several re-mixes of the song, and he describes the effects of one of the later ones as follows:

It is difficult to see this UK remix, despite its inclusion of the complete text of the song on the record sleeve...as anything more than an exercise in musical "colonial discourse", censoring all of the song's political statement and leaving only bland.

---

⁸ Unfortunately, the ABC Television broadcast of the Stompem Ground concert did not include song titles on the screen.
ambient-styled suggestions of the Australian outback within a rigid techno dance beat.9

In this sense, Yothu Yindi's cooption into the 'mainstream' can be related to the editorial processes which alter their oral traditions. These represent an extension of colonialism, a neo-colonial repression and exploitation.

The medium of music video can be considered similarly. Indeed, the video for 'Treaty' was also re-made to fit the re-mix of the song. Both videos were made by the director, Stephen Johnson, about whom Andrew McMillan has written:

...arguably the first film-maker to humanise the portrayal of Aboriginal people, to highlight the humour and the culture. Indeed, much of Yothu Yindi's early success, circa 1991, can be attributed to Johnson's skills as a film-maker. He captured something about Yothu Yindi no other film-maker had come close to portraying, and in the process he helped to define the band.10

At this point, one starts to wonder whether the members of Yothu Yindi were needed at all. Johnson's take-two of the video for 'Treaty', a catchy piece of fast-paced exotica reminiscent of a tourism promotion, won him an ARIA award. Mitchell describes the video as follows:

The result conveys an anonymously homogenized impression of Aboriginality combined with a fast-paced European techno dance beat. Land rights and other political imagery have been removed...the removal of potentially confronting political material has paid off in terms of popularity.11

Johnson's influence on the texts produced by Yothu Yindi can also be seen in his documentary, Tribal Voice, made for Mushroom Films (an off-shoot of the record company which produces Yothu Yindi's records, Mushroom Records). In this film, the text which is the image of the band is edited by Johnson. The image of the 'successful' Yothu Yindi is depicted. Johnson's images of bulldozers digging up the land near Yirrkala, Yothu Yindi's home, parallel Mushroom Records and Films' 'mining' of Aboriginal culture. In a similar manner to the way in which the song, 'Treaty', and its video were edited, Johnson's documentary 'edits' the issue which produced the song.

---

11 Mitchell, pp. 304-305.
Bob Hawke's 'Treaty' speech is shown, but then the re-mixed version of the song, without the oppositional lyrics, is played to illustrate the band's response. Further, Johnson does not indicate the fact that a treaty has never been forthcoming and that this was the reason for the song. Johnson's film reinforces the notion of 'world music' by continually showing the band amongst the national symbols of other countries: the Eiffel Tower, the Lincoln Memorial, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Colosseum amongst others. The subtext seems to be, 'haven't these exotic black people come a long way'. A blind spot, not recognised by the director as a parallel of his own activities, occurs in Johnson's depiction in the documentary of a radio interview in the United States. The American interviewer declares how I love bringing you new music, new acts' (my italics) and then asks Mandawuy about the music that Yothu Yindi perform. Mandawuy tells him some of it is around 80 000 years old.

These editorial processes are not always external to the songwriters and musicians. The pervasive power of the dominant discourse means that they can be internalised, either consciously or unconsciously by the original producers of the text themselves. Mandawuy himself has commented on these self-editing processes: 'We wrote a song about Mabo. My brother wrote that song. We just rearranged it, to get radio airplay. And we rearranged some lyrics so it has a friendlier attitude, a rational approach'. In another interview, Mandawuy explains these processes in terms of hybridity and the progression of Aboriginal culture: 'these days we're doing more compromising in terms of cultural situations, and you've got to do it because you're dealing with the commercial aspects of the industry...we don't want to be a museum piece'. Mandawuy's awareness of the 'need' for self-editing demonstrates the threat posed by the discourses of power. It is the control of the means of cultural production by capitalism which forces artists into these kind of compromises.

13 Mitchell, p. 305.
As has been suggested by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*, the ideal which underpins these post-colonial activities and characteristics is syncretism, or difference on equal terms. In this sense, syncretism can be contrasted with the policy of Australian multiculturalism. Whereas syncretism seeks the co-existence of cultures with each respecting the others' ideological bases, multiculturalism has been produced by the discourse of white capitalism and tends to coopt the surface level of other cultures into this discourse. Just as Mandawuy has spoken about decolonisation, margins and mainstreams, he has expressed his support for the ideology of syncretism. In his 1993 Boyer lecture, Mandawuy spoke about different, but equal, systems of knowledge: 'Governments and institutions need to see and to find ways of working with different knowledges. Part of this is beginning to see European-type knowledge as just one sort of knowledge among many'.

He has used the Yolngu metaphor of salt and fresh water meeting to illustrate his point about reattributing value to Aboriginal discourses:

Now there are knowledge structures about salt water and there are knowledge structures surrounding fresh water. And there is a point where the two streams meet, the fresh water and the salt water, and where the two meet is brackish water. But that water is drinkable. And where the two waters meet is the place where the two knowledge structures meet.

Hence Yothu Yindi use Aboriginal discourses to describe their syncretic vision for Australia, preferring these to the white rhetoric of multiculturalism and reconciliation:

The interlocking fabric of Yolngu physical and spiritual identities are used as a symbolic model to create an interwoven structure of an idealised Yolngu and Euro-Australian political and social understanding which allows them to maintain their own ethnic independence.

Mandawuy's own Yolngu discourses are therefore an informing meta-text for his songs, as he has suggested with regards to the differing historical knowledge systems: 'I follow my own history. I don't follow the white man's history. When I'm writing songs...I don't necessarily follow the white man's version because I don't necessarily think that they're right'. Similarly, Yothu Yindi have deliberately used Aboriginal discourses for

---

16 Magowan, p. 150.
17 Masterson, p. 30.
social purposes. Their outback tour of 1993 promoted 'raypirri', an Aboriginal notion of self-respect through self-discipline, as an answer to alcohol problems.18 Aboriginal discourses, for Yothu Yindi, also inform their beliefs about the function of their music. In this sense, they differ from Western capitalism, such that 'popular music carries a symbolic load that is not equivalent to a specific economic goal, as is the case in ritual music'.19

As would be expected then, many of the band's songs assert their own discourses and their place within their syncretic vision. As the title suggests, 'My Kind of Life' asserts the 'Yolngu way of life'. 'Tribal Voice' not only declares 'You better listen to your tribal voice', but suggests the heterogeneity of tribal voices:

You better listen to your gumatj voice
You better listen to your rirratjingu voice
You better listen to your wanguri voice
You better listen to your djapu voice...

The final lines of 'Mainstream' apply this difference on equal terms, between Yolngu and Balanda (white Australians) to the nation:

Yolngu, Balanda
Balanda, Yolngu
This is Australia.

Yothu Yindi's assertion of their own discourses, their syncretic vision for Australia, exists in a dynamic relationship with the dominant discourses of white Australia. As the most 'successful' Aboriginal musical act, they are therefore the most vulnerable to cooption by the discourses of power. It seems that each time the band achieves an artistic breakthrough in the representation of their people and ideals, the dominant discourse moves to make it its own. This has nowhere been better illustrated than in the awarding of Australian of the Year to Mandawuy Yunupingu on Invasion Day, 1993. The dynamic can be seen between the label, Australian of the Year, and what Mandawuy actually said about the award: 'I feel as if I'm Yolngu first, it comes from my heart. "Australian" is

19 Magowan, p. 146.
just a label put on to what has happened in the past. But I'll always be Yolngu.\textsuperscript{20} That is, Mandawuy's label for himself (and the world view which accompanies this), Yolngu, is smothered by the discourse of patriotism which supports concepts like an award for the 'Australian of the Year'. Mandawuy's syncretic view can accommodate both discourses, but the patriotic discourse which informs the award refuses to consider Yolngu discourses on their own terms.

Other examples of Yothu Yindi's cooption by the dominant discourses of white Australia abound. Andrew McMillan has written:

\begin{quote}
By breaking through, Yothu Yindi have been embraced by everyone from the Prime Minister to the Australia Day Council to the Drug Offensive and the Australian Tourism Commission.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

A particularly poignant metaphor for Yothu Yindi's cooption by nationalism has been provided by one of the band's recent live performances; the venue which 'contained' them was a national symbol, the Sydney Opera House. In a review of this concert, Bruce Elder categorised Yothu Yindi's music as 'world music', and found, incredibly, that this category allowed him to compare them with virtually every musical style on the planet: 'They are arguably the most interesting, and the most adventurous, of all the current crop of world music acts'.\textsuperscript{22} Would he also consider that Jimmy Barnes could be classified with the music of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan of Pakistan? At the 1992 Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) awards, Yothu Yindi were recognised as an asset to 'the industry' and received awards for Australian Song of the Year, Best Australian Single ('Treaty'), Best Indigenous Record ('Tribal Voice'), Best Album Cover Artwork, Best Engineer of the Year (Filthy Lucre).\textsuperscript{23} As yet, this same industry is yet to actually listen to any of Yothu Yindi's ideas about discrimination against Aboriginal musicians, let alone implement them. One recent reviewer of the band described Mandawuy as 'such a national symbol that it's almost odd to see him get down to the sweaty business of

\textsuperscript{20} Qips Mackinolty, 'The title may only be a label but Mandawuy will wear it proudly', \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 27 January, 1993: 3.
\textsuperscript{21} McMillan, p. 46.
\textsuperscript{22} Bruce Elder, 'Potent, any time, anywhere', \textit{The Sydney Morning Herald}, 13 September, 1993: 15.
\textsuperscript{23} Mitchell, p. 303.
singing the songs'.24 Another could not even recognise that the band's traditional dancers represented another culture, insisting that they 'seemed quite pleased with their sex-symbol status'.25 An American review of the album, *Tribal Voice*, suggested that Yothu Yindi 'could strike a chord here at both world music and alternative and modern rock outlets' and that the album would 'delight the politically correct as well as music fans who value something different'.26 The discourses of power continually fail to attribute anything but marginality to the Aboriginal discourses which inform Yothu Yindi's songs.

Yothu Yindi exhibit the post-colonial characteristics of hybridity and mimicry and achieve their purpose metonymically. One method by which the band achieve this is through the continuation of their oral traditions. The strategy which underpins these characteristics is syncretism, a belief in the centrality of one's own culture, but also a recognition that the cultures of others are equally valid and central to them. However, Yothu Yindi's syncretism exists in a dynamic power relationship with the dominant discourses of white Australia which refuse to recognise the centrality of other cultures. Rather, these discourses believe that cultures are available to be 'edited' and plundered for commercial gain.

CONCLUSION

Contemporary Aboriginal songs can be loosely considered 'post-colonial' where the term remains fluid enough to continually de-centre itself, where binary oppositions between centre and margins are avoided in favour of syncretism and where the heterogeneity of post-colonial societies is always the starting point. In considering an indigenous post-colonialism in Australia, colonisation must not be presumed to be an historical instance which has ended, and neither must it be seen as a starting point for the production of indigenous culture. As both singer/songwriters, in the Western sense, and songmen who call upon their traditional and contemporary Aboriginal discourses to inform their work, Kev Carmody, Archie Roach and others articulate this indigenous post-coloniality which contrasts with the post-colonialism of the settler society.

The metonymy of literary models of post-colonialism can be broadened from the words on the page in 'literature' to the 'language' of sounds in contemporary songs, a post-colonialism of all cultural forms rather than of 'literature' only. What this ambivalence reveals to the white audience is the surface of an all-encompassing ideology that is awesome in its totality. Yothu Yindi exhibit this characteristic of post-coloniality, utilising hybridity and mimicry to achieve their purpose metonymically. The ideology which underpins this is syncretism, a belief in the centrality of one's own culture, but also a recognition that the cultures of others are equally valid and central to them.

The categories, 'Aboriginal song' and 'Aboriginal songwriter', can only be described as the problematic constructs of the discourses of power. The only satisfactory definition of a contemporary Aboriginal song is that it is a song produced by any combination of the heterogeneous Aboriginal discourses by people or groups who identify themselves as Aboriginal. They are no more representative of all Aboriginal people than are songs by whites representative of all white people. They are necessarily political, as are all songs, whether affirming or questioning the status quo. Aboriginal songs are not adjuncts to the
musical 'mainstream', but are produced within discourses which are 'centres' in themselves. However, Aboriginal songs are rarely permitted to function effectively within the discourses which have produced them due to the neo-colonial structure of the means of cultural propagation which denies Aboriginal songwriters control over their work.

Contemporary Aboriginal songs are both a continuation and a reinvention of Aboriginal orality. They are also the manifestation of a rich and progressive contemporary Aboriginal culture. Their media of transmission, whether live performance, sound recording or video, when controlled by Aboriginal people, represent the 'technology' of a contemporary orality. As a challenge to established discourses, such as history, contemporary songs are spearheading the reattribution of value to Aboriginal discourses. In this sense, Kev Carmody and Archie Roach are both oral historians who challenge both the content and the form of the 'legitimate' history of the invasion of Australia. As such, their songs are amongst the most important historical documents produced in this country since the invasion. Similarly, one method by which Yothu Yindi achieve their metonymic effect is through the continuation of their oral traditions.

A parallel exists between the attribution of value to Aboriginal and feminist discourses by the discourses of power. At present, there is a deafness to these discourses, a neo-colonial relationship between them. When they are heard they are mediated by their very presence within the apparatuses of the discourses of power. For this reason they may only be heard momentarily. However, the structures which force these silences are being questioned by groups such as Tiddas, and individuals like Christine Anu and Ruby Hunter.

Stephen Muecke's comment (quoted in chapter two) that 'the whole post-colonial problematic...is based on the notion of (re)attributing value to Aboriginal discourses' is perhaps the one statement which sums up the principal argument of this dissertation. It
also ties together the notions of post-colonialism, categorisation (and its consequences) and orality. The insertions being made by contemporary Aboriginal songwriters into the discourses of power in Australia are some of the most effective in the struggle for this attribution of value to Aboriginal discourses.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Casimir, Jon. "Islands come to the city on wings of song." The Sydney Morning Herald. 15 October, 1994: 13A.


*The Drum Media.* 19 October, 1993: 84.


Jopson, Debra. "'Beautiful black day is a thing of love'." The Sydney Morning Herald. 30 January, 1995: 12.


Mackinolty, Chips. "The title may only be a label but Mandawuy will wear it proudly." The Sydney Morning Herald. 27 January, 1993: 3.


DISCOGRAPHY/VIDEOGRAPHY


Warumpi Band. "Jailangaru Pakarnu." (music video)

Yothu Yindi. "Mainstream." (music video)