Practices of Proximity
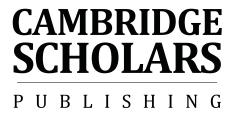
Practices of Proximity:
The Appropriation of English
in Australian Indigenous Literature

By

Katherine E. Russo

To Riccardo and our many journeys

Propelled
in giving me damned names
They gave me unknowing roots
White with jewels of nakedness
Sights-silenced
then demanded to catch shadows
travelling aware in innocence
But as mixed up in trickery
of my free roots
I found myself
sucked by seed
I felt dressed in native trees
Then having urgency to wipe away
white values
I drunk healthyness
I learned more about my ended Shakespeare name
coming back
the snakes began attacking
Spears came travelling in my thighs
leaving me
Rejuvenated
No more my damned name.

(Lionel Fogarty, "My Cry is Lost in a Name")

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PREFACE

> At the heart of the imagining is the shore as border … At the heart of this thinking is the combative machinery of a legalised sovereignty uneasily aware of Aboriginal presence and Indigenous Sovereignty.
> —Katrina Schlunke, "Sovereign Hospitalities"

Today, while nations reinforce their frontiers and multiply their border controls, the Australian contact zone works in a way that is more complex than the imagined space portrayed by immigration policies suggests. In the last ten years, the re-irruption of the nation and its borders in Australian and European politics shows how the capacity to raise the myths of freedom and security to the status of truths in order to create internal consensus lies on the bedrock of representation (Ashcroft 2005).

According to the famous scholarly work by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, a modern nation is a community imagined as limited, sovereign and fraternal (1984, 15). This model of "community" achieves solidarity, equality, fraternity and liberty on "an essentially imagined basis" (1984, 74). Anderson's study arguably resonates with the "fair go" and "border crossing" rhetoric of Australian nationalism, which promotes Australian common values as under constant threat from internal and external forces in order to de-centralize the political authority of Indigenous land claims (Papastergiadis 2004, 9). The recent apology of the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the descendants of the Stolen Generations (February 13, 2008) and the same government's somewhat contradictory Intervention and income management of Indigenous Australian communities, treated as dangerous "states of exception" (Agamben 2005), is consistent with the imaginary egalitarianism of the Australian nation.

Yet the discursive construction of the Australian nation-state based on the fear of a foreign contamination and on the necessity to regulate Australian shores, as in the case of the Tampa affair or of the Cronulla Beach riots, is based on the amnesiac removal of Indigenous Sovereignty (Hage 2003, 98-99). The Australian nation-state is disrupted by the "polluting memory" of Indigenous Sovereignty, which lies within its borders as an enduring contamination (Hage 2003, 98-99). Performative acts of Indigenous Sovereignty alert citizens to its constitutional presence

as an inherent contamiNation–a return of the repressed which denaturalises the idea that Australia is a nation with sealed borders.

The lively recent debate on Indigenous sovereignty has arguably constituted a disruptive moment in its critical rethinking of the nation's aporetic foundation, shaking Australia's national identity and casting its national self-representation in a wider transnational framework (Moreton-Robinson 2004c, 2007; Perera 2007; Watson *et al.* 2002). The contemporary proliferation of transnational flows and relations created by the wider circulation of Indigenous literature may prove interesting for a reflection on how writers and readers participate in the practice of transforming the nation.

My experience as an Italian Australian migrant and reader of Indigenous Australian literature is that a people's solution to the imposition of borders is incessant movement and pressure along geopolitical and cultural boundaries. As Bhabha writes, those who experience the incipient conditions of global life with the greatest intensity and inequity are minorities who have always been denationalised subjects and whose free attempt of recognition is denied in the name of a majoritarian normalisation or neutralisation of difference. Thus, as Bhabha further notes, to continue to pose the questions of difference and subject positioning in the contemporary globalised world is to rethink identity as no longer a pre-established position or a uniform entity, but as an agency that gains its power in unexpected performances and encounters (2003-2004).

> At its best, I believe, the politics of difference lives on to rethink the minority not as an identity but as a process of affiliation…. that eschews sovereignty and sees its own selfhood and interests as partial and incipient in relation to the other's presence. This form of minoritarian identification converts the liminal condition of the minority – always partially denationalized – into a new kind of strength based on the solidarity of the partial collectivity rather than the sovereign mastery. (2003-2004)

The interpellation of readers in Indigenous Australian literary texts and in public debates has created its own transnational audience (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). Entering the reading exchange, accepting its gift, entails the impossibility of seeing Europe as untainted by the memory of colonialism. I have found a force unintended by global and national powers in Indigenous Australian writing, which renders the production of literary representation strategic and transformative. As Judith Butler puts it, "One might say that the purposes of power are not always the purposes

of agency. To the extent that the latter diverge from the former, agency is the assumption of a purpose unintended by power" (1997, 15).

Thus, while my encounter with the powerful work of Indigenous Australian writers and intellectuals first came at the expense of my inward ease, my understanding of the imaginary internal and external boundaries of the Australian nation-state were unsettled by a different economy of reading set in motion by Indigenous literary works. I now realize how distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has been created to counter-act the anxiety and fear of being dispossessed. In the political discourses on Indigenous peoples, the boundaries of differentiation are drawn to exclude or limit the spaces of complicity. The distinction between the national us and the foreign them is marked up by the recourse to stereotypical constructions. Constricted identities are positioned in an oppositional framework which minimizes the possibilities for mutual recognition. This strategy of othering establishes an incommensurable difference but also vigilance against proximity. As W. E. Du Bois explains ([1903] 2000), the politics of "proximity" is more difficult than the politics of distance because despite "much physical contact and daily intermingling" (128), the shadow of the colour-line often implies that there is no "interchange of ideas through conversation and conference, through periodicals and libraries" (116). Proximity necessitates continual negotiations between the different cultures which form the "curious *tertium quid"*, which Du Bois calls "public opinion" (116), and create "the atmosphere of the land, the thought and feeling, the thousand and one little actions which go to make up [its] life" (127).

My experience as a hyphenated identity is one of free movement, self-definition and multiple identifications. The intermingling of displacement and going home brought to the texts by my experience as a researcher and migrant has inevitably inscribed in my writing the desire for travelling as a process of continual becoming and affiliation. Yet I have found home in the possibility of establishing relations of solidarity across borders. It has been quite a journey, but often the best part of travelling are the people you meet along the way.

I could not have commenced the project without the support of my PhD supervisors Anne Brewster and Bill Ashcroft. To both, for inspiring, guiding and supporting me with invaluable expertise and friendship, goes my sincere gratitude. This volume has also greatly benefited from many conversations and discussions with Oriana Palusci.

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INTRODUCTION

> It's the master's rules, not his tools that are the problem: starting from rule
> one, that the tools are his and should only be used as and when he directs.
> —Bob Hodge, "Poetry and Politics in Oodgeroo"

In 1987 Eric Michaels wrote about how the local schoolmaster of
Yuendumu, Terry Davis, commissioned some Warlpiri senior men to paint
the local school doors with the available standard school acrylics
(Michaels 1994, 51). The creation of the Yuendumu doors was a
cooperative venture by the senior men of different kin subsections, Paddy
Sims Japaljarry, Larry Spencer Jungarrayi, Paddy Nelson Jupurrurla and
Paddy Stewart Japaljarri. The result was more spectacular than anyone had
envisaged and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of
Yuendumu took considerable pleasure and pride in the achievement. Later,
a book of colour plates made from photographs of the doors was published
and the designs of the doors were reproduced on small canvases for a
presumably non-Indigenous audience. The doors, which were created to
serve a specific sign/exchange value, were now required to perform
somewhat different tasks. As Michaels writes, the Yuendumu doors stand
midway between their use in ceremonial ground painting and the canvases
exported to European audiences. However, they also confirm the
importance of Indigenous Australian appropriation strategies "for anyone
interested in developing alternative models of … production, distribution
and reception" (Hebdige 1994, xiv). To understand the meaning of the
doors, one would need to be a full member of a particular Warlpiri kin
group, initiated and competent in the stories and landscapes that are
intimately associated with the sources of these paintings. Even then, some
meanings would remain inaccessible until the painter, reciprocating a
ceremonial obligation, passed on the design to another initiated member of
the Warlpiri kin group. Michaels writes: "Despite the endless hours spent
with the men while they painted, listening to their stories and explanations
… I could not claim to be able to describe the meanings of the paintings
from the painters' point of view" ([1987] 1994, 51).

Hence, the Yuendumu doors offer an example of the intercultural space
created by strategies of appropriation because they are both a suggestion
that the inhabitants of Yuendumu may use doors differently and a

reminder of the co-existence of different epistemologies in the Australian contact zone. Situated at the crossroads of culture and language, the focus shifts to the appropriation of the doors, providing an interesting case for discussing the inherited authority of who 'owns' their meaning.

Practices of Proximity pays attention to this central issue by questioning wide-spread discursive representations of the English language and writing as colonial properties. To this end, it offers a study of appropriation which may be fruitful in testing pre-conceived representations of the English language, opening up endless possibilities on the roles the "users of the English language can play, and – attitudinally – above all, how others view the importance of this use" (Kachru 1990, 4). Insisting on the complex, ultimately open-ended and multilateral ownership of languages and writing by all who inhabit and use them, *Practices of Proximity* investigates the appropriation of the English language taking place in the Australian literary contact zone between the official 'white' Australia – the apparent owners of both the land and the English language – and Indigenous Australian peoples.

As a time for both recollection and projection, the last thirty years in Australia have been characterised by a reflection on Indigenous and non-Indigenous appropriation. The debate on appropriation has ranged from an essentialist view of appropriation as a process of cultural contamination to the recent, often assimilative, celebration of a neutral, transparent, cross-cultural exchange, which is open to all. The question of appropriation has a variety of connotations. Firstly, it addresses the possible directions and developments of Indigenous/non-Indigenous Australian relations in the intersubjective space of literature. Secondly, it relates to the future of Indigenous studies of language appropriation and ownership. Thirdly, it refers to the future of the Australian nation and the way in which that future is appropriated by Australian peoples. Of course, all these points are closely connected to self-representation, as changes and transformations in modes of production and the approach of scholarship to the subject are mutually influenced, although not always on an equal basis. This is also evident in the ever more frequent use of the renaming of Aboriginal peoples as Indigenous Australian people, which is increasingly used by Indigenous writers and intellectuals to substitute the erroneous colonial naming of the many groups of people inhabiting the Australian continent, such as the Yolngu, Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri, and Waka Waka as Aboriginal (Grossman 2003).

The English language has borne the connotation of colonial property since its introduction in Australia: it has arguably functioned as an unalienable "insignia of colonial authority" (Bhabha 1985, 144). Conversely,

colonial language policies have been fiercely directed towards Indigenous languages for they constituted counterfactual evidence to the claim of *terra nullius*. The *National Indigenous Languages Report* (2005) has recently found that only twenty of the approximately 230 Indigenous languages which were spoken in Australia before invasion are still spoken in their full form and only a hundred are spoken by older people. Similarly, the emergence of Indigenous English varieties has been counteracted by several processes of institutionalisation which have attempted to reduce the strength of Aboriginal "norm-setting epicentres" (Leitner 1992), and there is still scarce recognition of the heterogeneous varieties which form the Indigenous Australian English continuum. The standardization of the settler variety of English as Australian English was mainly achieved under the White Australia Policy, which guided the imposition of the British education system and the implementation of restrictive language policies under the Immigration laws and the Aboriginal Acts until as late as the 1970s. Hence, the use of the English language in Australia may be considered as one of the most important aspects of neo-colonialism. As Philip G. Haltback claims, "on the ruins of traditional colonial empire has emerged a new, subtler, but perhaps equally influential, kind of colonialism" based on the ongoing impact of the colonial cultural heritage and education system (1971, 548).

As the *National Indigenous Languages Survey Report* has found (2005), minority languages are still represented as handicapping the children of minority groups and Standard Australian English is promoted as "the power language", which enables the acquisition of education, employment, and, in short, a "fair go" in the lucky country (2005, 19). The ideology of "monolingualism" or "linguicism" is arguably part of the Australian definition of productive citizens (Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson, 1994). English entry tests, such as IELTS, are employed as effective border devices as they are a necessary requirement to obtain Australian citizenship and temporary residence visas, especially within the General Skilled Migration programme available to people who have specific skills which meet the nation's demand. Moreover, the "Australian Values Statement", which must be signed in applications for permanent and temporary residence visas, clearly defines the English language as one of the most important unifying elements of the nation: "the English language, as the national language, is an important unifying element of Australian society".

Consequently, the use of the English language has been variously questioned by Indigenous Australian writers, for it is closely tied to colonial governmentality and to policies of forced assimilation. Yet

according to this study the English language is not essentially colonial but derives its authority from colonial discursive claims of property (Ashcroft 2001c; Pennycook 1998).

The "possessive investment" in the English language did and does have material effects on a socioeconomic level (Lipsitz 1998, 3). Indigenous linguists and writers have often commented on the socio-economic value of Standard Australian English (Bell J. 1994, 55). In Mudrooroo's words, [1]

> English is the language of the Master and whether we like it or not, whenever we deal with him we have to speak, or attempt to speak, his language…. For us the acquisition of a standard English is a matter of economic importance in that to function effectively in the Master's world we have to understand and be understood by those with whom we come in contact, though among ourselves we may use the language with which we are most at home. In many places this is what is now called 'Aboriginal English', an English dialect often interspersed with Indigenous words… Many Aborigines use two brands of English, and switch from one to other as occasion demands. There is the formal language of the economic situation and the informal of the social. Problems often arise for someone who has not mastered the economic language. He or she will be at a disadvantage, which the speaker may exploit to assert personal or political power. Is this good or bad? It depends on the results, but although it is obviously necessary to understand the 'economic language', this is only one form of communication available to Indigenous people, many of whom may be multilingual, or at least bilingual, and at home in both worlds. (1995, 56-58)

As Mudrooroo notes, the devaluation of the empowering potential of multilingualism and code-switching aims at reinforcing the socioeconomic value of Standard Australian English, while also acting as an effective device of social exclusion. The discursive representation of English as a colonial and settler property has determined the asymmetrical access to the social space engendered by its possession. Yet, the inequalities that are

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[1] I acknowledge that Mudrooroo's Nyoongah identity has been disputed, yet I include his work for the purpose of discussion as his critical work has been well known among critics of Indigenous literature for at least three decades and has inspired many Indigenous writers and intellectuals. For a discussion of Mudrooroo's problematic identification with Nyoongah peoples, I refer the reader to Terry Goldie's articles "Who Is Mudrooroo?" (2001) and "On Not Being Australian: Mudrooroo and Demidenko" (2004), and to my review-essay, "Self-Definitions and Multiple Identifications: Mudrooroo's Mongrel Signatures" (2003).

produced and reproduced through its property are not givens or inevitabilities, rather conscious selections regarding the structuring of social relations. Through the representation of the colonial uses of the English language as the only appropriate and authoritative ones, the colonial order has established and protected an actual property interest in Australian English which is used to create a social divide and reputation. As Cheryl Harris notes, this selection is the central feature of the reification of property: "Its basis is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity', an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people" (1993, 1730).

Critical approaches suggest that property claims over the English language pertain to the realm of discursive representation (Fairclough 1989; Pennycook 1994, 1998, 2001, 2007). While colonial discourse is monological in its authoritative representation of linguistic competence and in its creation of literary canons, language and literature are inherently dialogic in their permeability to the social conditions of usage. The possessive investment in English is disrupted by practices of appropriation which demonstrate the inherent alienability of language and media. As the Russian linguist and critic, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, argues, meaning is always "half someone else's":

> As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exists in a neutral or impersonal language … but rather it exists in other people's mouth, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own. ([1935] 1981, 293-294)

As Bill Ashcroft notes, meaning is a constitutive interaction created within the message event, it does not exist prior to practices of appropriation and transformation (1983; 2009). When approaching the aesthetic or symbolic systems of Indigenous Australian languages and writing, a conveniently covert hegemony has represented Indigenous Australian English varieties and literatures as unauthentic or inappropriate for they are part of a process of negotiation among contested positions, ideologies, and languages where meaning is a property acquired in the context of struggle. Nevertheless

Indigenous English varieties have developed into language varieties, which have been useful in the communication between disparate Indigenous Australian language groups and are the mother tongue of many Indigenous Australian peoples (Muecke 1992; Schneider 2007).

Despite the colonial refutation of the constitutive creole nature of English, the English language is as much the property of Indigenous Australian peoples as it was of its first speakers, who held a subaltern position in relation to the speakers of Latin and French up until the end of the thirteenth century (Mufwene 2001). Similarly, while the contemporary use of the term Standard Australian English carries with it the assumption that values articulated in Australian English are shared, understood and accepted by all Australian citizens as it is premised on a normative assumption of cultural sameness, Indigenous writers and linguists have a long-standing knowledge of the process of naturalisation of the English language: its transformation from a parodied and demeaned deviation of British English to a powerful "measure and marker of normality" is highly visible for Indigenous Australian peoples (Moreton-Robinson 2003: 66).

Moreover, the issue of the dependence of Australian English on Indigenous languages is often assumed to lie solely in the fact that settlers borrowed lexicon pertaining to flora and fauna; the possibility that cross-cultural fertilization was a two-way affair has received scarce attention. On the contrary, it seems that Indigenous peoples were actively trying to teach their languages and assimilate newcomers from the beginning of European settlement (Muecke 2004, 6). The denial of the Indigenous cross-fertilization of Australian Englishes and literatures is arguably part of the colonial amnesia of Indigenous/non-Indigenous contact and co-habitation, with its long history of representation of Indigenous Australian cultures as distant in both time and space (Goldie 1989, 148-169). Yet, moving beyond centre and periphery models of the English language may be attainable if Australian transculturations and appropriations of English and literature are envisaged as practices of proximity rather than distance. Linguistic studies increasingly conceive of English language varieties as 'constellations' and have demonstrated how migration contact settings have resulted in the mutual cultural and linguistic approximation of two parties (Schneider 2007).

Social movements, such as the Land Rights campaign and the pan-Aboriginal movement of the 1960s-1970s, have used appropriation as a form for political empowerment, often taking terms, images, and representations that are considered to be derogatory to re-use them in empowering ways. Strategies of borrowing, changing or reconfiguring texts have proliferated in all areas of cultural production and have been

diversely theorised. One of the terms which has been used in contemporary critical theory to describe practices of appropriation is *bricolage*, a piecing together of a diverse range of materials or sources. The term of the anthropologist, Claude Lévi-Strauss, has been drawn on by the cultural studies theorists, Dick Hebdige, Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer. According to Hebdige (1979), commodities can be symbolically re-possessed and endowed with implicitly oppositional meanings. Subcultural styles come into existence as marginal groups put into actual practice the meanings made available by pre-existing dominant codes. Conversely, Stuart Hall and Kobena Mercer gesture towards Bakhtin's "dialogic" theory of meaning. Hall writes about "transcoding" strategies, which re-appropriate existing meanings for new purposes (1997, 235, 270), while Mercer points to the multiaccentuality of *bricolage*, collage and montage and to the strategic possibilities of critical dialogism ([1988a], [1988b], [1990] 1994).

Appropriation, as a textual reconfiguring of meaning, has also been called "textual poaching" by the literary and cultural theorist, Michel de Certeau. Textual poaching, as defined by de Certeau, is a process analogous to inhabiting a text "like a rented apartment" (1984, xxi). In other words, viewers and readers can "inhabit" a text or a language by making it their own. Yet the turn towards habitation and place has been central to the analyses of post-colonial literatures, in which central studies of appropriation such as, *The Empire Writes Back*, emphasise that 'writing back' to the Empire involves a "re-placing" of the English language and a complex variety of linguistic strategies of abrogation and appropriation, translation and transformation (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989). In the case of post-colonial literatures, appropriation refers to instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms. According to Mary Louise Pratt, partial collaboration with the idiom of the conqueror is part of the practices of appropriation which take place in "contact zones": the "spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures" in which "subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other" (7).

Thus, the choice of concentrating on literary texts as sites of contact lies in an attempt to evade those modes of analysis that analyse "colonial discourse" as a universal and essentialist opposition of colonizer and colonized. A critique of Australian colonialism that is based on the idea of a coherent system may function as an erasure of the multiple and diverse experiences that have shaped the encounters of colonisers and colonised. Since colonialism has also been a cultural and linguistic practice, signs,

metaphors and narratives shape it in unique local and historical situations. Therefore, this study follows the path indicated by Nicholas Thomas in *Colonialism's Culture*, "localizing colonialism in encounters, and in the socially-transformative projects of colonizer and colonized … to historicize something that can usefully be referred to as 'colonialism'" (1994, 3).

Appropriation is here theorised as a variety of highly fluid and ever-changing practices of proximity, the result of interaction among writers, editors, critics, recorders, readers, collaborators, consumers, translators etc. The analysis of the social formation of texts calls for a deeper investigation of editorial practices and the intercultural relations that underlie the creation of literary texts. Australian literatures and Englishes have created a social knowledge system in which participants establish intersubjectivity, a state of shared meanings (Riley 2007, 33-37). Yet intersubjectivity is a useful but untrustworthy term for discussing the role of literature and English in Australia. "Intersubjectivity" derives from the phenomenological philosophy of Edmund Husserl, who, in spite of his speculation on egology, transcendental idealism and solipsism, claimed that "the experiencing ego is still nothing that might be taken for itself and made into an object of enquiry on its own account. Apart from its 'ways of being related' or 'ways of behaving' it is completely empty of essential components …" (1962, 214). Later, the founder of phenomenological sociology, Alfred Schutz, insisted that individuals recognize the world as intersubjective, that is, shared with people with whom they share reciprocal perspectives. According to Schutz, individuals assume they can communicate with others, understand their motives, make themselves understood, and coordinate action across shared typifications of time and space.

Yet theorizations of intersubjectivity such as Schutz's lack any extended consideration of power and intercultural relations. Cultural difference, as Pratt notes, is not inherently a problem because all over the world groups of people with radically different ways of life and world views live together in all kinds of dynamic arrangements and continually negotiated relationships (2004, 25). Difference becomes a cause of conflict when the most positive form of intersubjectivity, called by the feminist theorist Jessica Benjamin (1988) "mutual recognition", is denied. In entering the intersubjective space of English and publishing, power relations are often but not always made effective by the absence of reciprocity and mutual recognition of cultural difference. As Langton explains, "From inside, a culture is 'felt' as normative, not deviant" (1993, 37). Writers, readers, critics, translators, and editors are always

intersubjectively related in the production and reception of texts. However, texts are also intercultural: they are heterogeneous on the reception end as well as the production end; they are read and interpreted very differently by people in different positions (Pratt, 1999).

The absence of reciprocity in entering the social knowledge system, the assumption of sameness underlying the standardization of the settler variety of English as Australian English, and the misrecognition of Indigenous disciplines and genres by the publishing system, reveals the lack of a widespread acknowledgement of Indigenous Australian cultures as reciprocally different, indicating that Australia remains in many ways "an unfinished Western colonial project as well as a land in a permanent state of decolonization" (Hage 2001, 350). Thus, the use of the terms colonial and neo-colonial in this book indicate that the Australian nation is yet to achieve the status of post-colonial in the simple chronological sense.

Since the early years of settlement until, in some states, as late as the 1960s, the Australian government tried to regulate the life of Indigenous people. In the second half of the nineteenth century the different states of The Australian federation established Aboriginal Protection Boards and ruled Indigenous Australian lives according to the Aborigines Act, which enforced what was termed as a policy of protection. As historian Jackie Huggins notes, a system of police protectors and reserve superintendents was established "to control the movements of Aborigines, to enter employment contracts, to hold any funds and control their spending. The Act assigned Aborigines inferior status, and regarded them as slave labour without entitlement to the wages enjoyed by their white counterparts" (Huggins 1988, 4). Moreover, in 1905 the Aborigines Act was amended and set up a special system of control over Aboriginal families and children including controls over marriage, freedom of movement, where families could live, employment and guardianship of children. The Aborigines Act also enforced a child removal system according to which Police officers had legal authority to remove children under 8 on their own initiative; there were no legal criteria setting out conditions for removals and no court committal process (Haebich 1989).

In 1991, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody recommended that the nation should undertake a formal process of reconciliation. That same year, the formal process of reconciliation was established by the Commonwealth Parliament by a unanimous vote and the Australian Parliament passed the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act. The Council promoted a process of reconciliation and a National Document of Reconciliation. During its first and second terms (1991-94 and 1995-97), the council undertook and encouraged a wide

range of local, regional and national initiatives, including meetings, negotiated agreements, cross-cultural awareness and cooperation, and working with Education Authorities to incorporate reconciliation ideals in their curricula. In 1997, the Premier of the New South Wales Parliament, Bob Carr, made an official apology to the members of the Stolen Generations and in 2001 half a million people participated in a reconciliation walk which was met by the refusal of Australia's Prime Minister John Howard to apologize for his ancestors' actions against the Indigenous peoples of Australia. The recent apology of the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the descendants of the Stolen Generations (February 13, 2008) was felt by many as an important historical event. Yet many feel that since the same government has implemented a policy of Intervention in Indigenous communities and has not moved forward in recognizing Indigenous Australian peoples' land claims, it hasn't achieved the goal of reconciliation.

However, Australia has long been traversed by post-colonialism as a constant engagement and writing back to colonial domination (Ashcroft *et al*. 1989). In this sense, as Terry Goldie suggests, "Being Australian", might be explained through Heidegger's philosophy not as a subject who understands his or her being, but as "Da-sein": "Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of the possibility to be itself or not be itself. Da-sein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or in each instance already grown up in them" (2004, 10). Non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians are variously alerted to their intersubjective relation. Sometimes, they have already grown up in this, as in the case of some Indigenous Australians who are constantly made aware of "whiteness", or they choose to admit this relation and interpret it in several ways as in non-Indigenous professions of shame, guilt etc., or they simply stumble upon something that alerts them to this relation. As in the latter case, Indigenous literature alerts non-Indigenous peoples both to their possessive investment in the representation of language and technology as colonial property, and to their intersubjective relation inherent in their co-habitation of the Australian nation. Thereby in Australian Indigenous literature a re-routing of issues of co-habitation, sovereignty, and being and becoming Australian may begin.

By unsettling dominant colonial modes of empathy and self-recognition, Indigenous Australian writers call new readers into existence. Indigenous Australian literary texts have alerted non-Indigenous peoples to the complex and different experiences within and between the multiple identities that constitute Indigenous Australian communities. Indigenous Australian appropriations are, as Philip Morrissey suggests, "situative" in

that they deal with the different situations of Indigenous peoples in Australia (2000, 320). They are the space of articulation of Indigenous self-representation.

The literary texts analysed in this volume are unavoidably limited in their representation of the great variety of genres and styles which constitute Indigenous Australian literature. Hence, this volume does not aim at being a comprehensive Australian literary history. Similarly, the intersubjective space created by literary texts is exemplified by inevitably limited examples which, for the purpose of the argument, are sometimes but not always ordered chronologically. The critiques and editorial relations which are taken into consideration have varied greatly both across historical periods and within historical periods. They have often co-existed in the periods that are described and, unfortunately, are often still practiced today. Moreover, since the performative nature of editorial relations is specific to the volatile context in which they are performed, the analysed editorial practices may also be practiced by the same author, editor or critic at different times.

The volume is divided in three sections, "The Struggle in Language", "The Lie of Writing", and "Textual Co-habitations". The division is due to the practical reason of articulating the argument, however in many cases the chapters recall each other subverting the artificial containment imposed by the division. Chapter One centres on the power of colonial language property claims and the standardization of Australian English in shaping ideas of Australian national culture and identity. It further argues that the colonial possessive investment in English contributed to creating the imaginary possession of the Australian land in Australian settler literatures and focuses on the settlers' various attempts to appropriate, incorporate and capture Indigenous languages in fiction as part of a wide range of forms of "indigenization", a term coined by Goldie to suggest "the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous" (1989, 13, 15). Yet it also questions the deterministic assumption that speaking and writing in English means to 'think white' through critical tools such as critical discourse analysis, creole linguistics, and postcolonial theory. Chapter Two analyses the heterogeneous varieties which form the Indigenous Australian English continuum. Moreover, it takes into consideration the strategic use of contact phenomena, such as code-switching, loan translation, and re-lexification, in the literary texts of, among others, Jack Davis, Kim Scott, Aileen Corpus, Lionel Fogarty, and Romaine Moreton.

Chapter Three traces the nostalgic rhetoric of the white possessive investment in orality, a story that remains largely invisible in the persistent

severing discourses of developmental modernization of histories of Indigenous Australian literature and Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaborations. It argues that writing and verbal art exist in a constitutive intertextual relation, but that the access to these media has been differentially regulated in Australia according to a hierarchical order dictated by colonialism. The aim of Chapter Four is to trace the different genres and uses of writing of Indigenous Australian writers, such as David Unaipon, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Larissa Behrendt and Kim Scott. Chapter Five focuses on the analysis and theorization of Australian intercultural editorial relations and collaborations.

PART I:

THE STRUGGLE IN LANGUAGE

CHAPTER ONE

ON THE COLONIAL CLAIM
OF LANGUAGE PROPERTY

Words belong to nobody, and in themselves they evaluate nothing. But they can serve any speaker and be used for the most varied and directly contradictory evaluations on the part of the speakers.
—Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres"

Meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange.
—Stuart Hall, *Representation, Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*

Whose Property? The White Possessive Investment in English

Australian English in the present day is recognized as the official language of Australia. It has become the language of law cases, of international business, of diplomacy, and broadcasting. Surely one might presume that this has facilitated the understanding of intercultural communication in a country largely defined by multilingualism and by the co-habitation of many English varieties. On the contrary, the assumption of cultural sameness embedded in the national institutionalization of standard codes has nourished the illusion that the cultural difference of Australian speakers of English can be easily bridged (Bassnett 2004, 53).

Although there has been some recognition of the increasing internal differentiation of Australian English within studies of linguistics (c.f. Schneider 2007; Sharifian 2006; Leitner 1992), the official adoption of English is often framed by the discursive representation of the language as a heritage of colonialism and settler cultures. English in Australia often still functions as a primary referent of colonial identity, which in social practice involves the exclusion of other varieties from the linguistic colonial economy and the internalization of colonial social networks of language structure.

The colonial claim of property over the origins of English, based on the denial of the constitutive alienability and dialogic facets of language, is persistent in the Australian social knowledge of the English language. The developmental and evolutionary perceptions of language contact and creolization, which lie at the foundation of the widespread colonial representation of post-colonial Englishes as the illegitimate product of British colonial expansion, significantly erase the memory of the creole formation of Old and Middle British speech conduct and of standardised English varieties. Yet while it is still the subject of debate, reflection on the subaltern role of Old English in relation to Latin and French and on the creolization of Middle English has interrupted the discursive construction of Standard British English based on purity and sameness (Fennell 2001). Moreover, as Salikoko S. Mufwene contends, it is significant that the lexifiers involved in colonial contact ecologies were non-standard varieties themselves, with attendant basilectilization (2001; 2008). The English language, which was imported in Australia in 1788, was already articulated into a creole continuum which had undergone many changes and had developed in several varieties since its first generations of speakers. The convicts and settlers which were brought together in the Australian continent came from all over the British Isles. Language varieties and mixture were the norm of the imported language (Schneider 2007, 119; Kiesling 2004, 418-425; Gordon and Sudbury 2002, 69).

Even though Standard Australian English is now well established in academic and official usage, it was initially parodied or demeaned as in the first accounts of the language, such as Samuel McBurney's contribution to *Early English Pronunciation* (1887) which simply labelled Australian English as "cockney", or Karl Lentzner's *Colonial English: A Glossary of Australian, Anglo-Indian, Pidgin English, West-Indian, and South African Words* (1891)[1] which defined it as "slang" (see Delbridge 1999, 259). Correspondingly, the first systematic attempts to record Australian English are largely apologetic. Edward E. Morris's introduction to the first lexicographical account of Australian English, *Austral English: A Dictionary of Australasian Words Phrases and Usages* (1898), reveals a great degree of uneasiness related to the mainstream devaluation of Australian English as slang or incorrect speech, and is enlightening in the revelation of its editorial conception as the emancipated colonial offspring of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In the introduction, Morris feels compelled to offer the reader a series of justifications for the work, yet he also recounts how he was pushed to begin his collection by an official invitation of the Philological Society of the *Oxford English Dictionary* to

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[1] Later reprinted as *Dictionary of the Slang-English of Australia* (1892).

compile an extension of the latter and later decided to develop an independent dictionary. Significantly, Morris concludes his apology through an affirmation of the creole nature of English lexicon,

> It may be thought by some precisions that all Australasian English is a corruption of the language … English has certainly a richer vocabulary, a finer variety of words to express delicate distinctions of meaning, than any language that is or ever was spoken; and this is because it has always been hospitable in the reception of new words. It's too late a day to close the doors against new words. This *Austral English Dictionary* merely catalogues and records those which have already come in. (1898, xvi)

Morris's decision to collect an independent vocabulary is not surprising as it is part of the spirit of the 1890s republican movement, which worked towards the 1901 declaration of independence and did not conceal its interest in the instrumental development of an Australian national idiom.

Since the 1890s, the Australian national vocabulary, based on the idiom of the settlers, has been one of the most important markers of Australia's white national identity. One of the first legislative measures of the Federal Parliament was the 1901 Immigration Restriction Bill, which implemented a prescriptive language measure, the English "dictation test" and renunciation of foreign languages for potential migrants. Just a few years later, the 1905 Aborigines Act made provision for individuals who had dissolved their Aboriginal associations to become exempted from the application of legislation pertaining to the control of the Indigenous population which included the removal of children from the custody of their families. Renouncing Indigenous languages was part of the exemption. As the Jagera/Nulinbara linguist, Jeanie Bell recounts, the White Australia government policies forced Murri people living in Brisbane to "speak English and forget their traditional languages" because they wanted them to "believe that the only acceptable form of communication and lifestyle was one that mirrored the white one" (1994, 48).

The twentieth century has witnessed the representation of the Australian nation as 'white', self-dependent, rooted in her territory, closed towards the Asia-Pacific environment, until the 1970s-1980s, a decade marked by a new wave of acceptance of immigration and acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures and languages. Yet the cultural nationalism of the 1970s, which aimed at severing the ties with colonialism, went hand in hand with the acceptance of Australian English. In 1976, Graeme Johnston's *Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary* appeared and was followed by *The Macquarie Dictionary* in 1981, which was devised, as the lexicographer notes, as an "unashamedly national dictionary" (1999). In

1988, the *Australian National Dictionary* was edited by William Stanley Ramson according to the historical methodology of the Oxford English Dictionary.

These formal acknowledgments were followed by a series of national policies which completed the stabilisation and standardization of Australian English. In 1987, the *National Policy on Languages* provided a strengthened strategy to promote literacy and language learning in Standard Australian English (Delbridge 1999, 267). The use of Australian English in national broadcasting and in legal procedures, government reports and commerce, training and employment, are an evident sign of its new role as the language of the nation (Moore 2001, 45).

Australian English has undergone a process of "standardization" through the institutionalisation of the English variety which perpetuates the settlers' historical heritage (Leitner and Sieloff 1998, 154). Standard Australian English did not develop in a vacuum but is part of a sociolinguistic struggle for hegemony with other English varieties which has legitimized as standard the English settler variety based on the assumption that the English language is colonial property. Consequently, the most common fallacy of social identifications of Australian English may be that they are based on a colonial developmental vision of language contact and creolization which denies the alienable and creole nature of all English varieties.

The understanding that the restructuring processes that form creoles are not fundamentally different from those involved in ordinary language change have partially reshaped the colonial marginalization of English peripheries. Yet, while the social knowledge of language creolization and the multidirectional claims of language property have been considerably redressed by the consideration of language as constitutively created in contact, "White English Vernaculars" such as Standard British English, Standard American English and Standard Australian English have become the norm and often continue to be unmarked as creoles, acting as a "marker" of correctness (Mufwene 2001). The colonial claim of English language property is articulated on the level of discourse and biopolitics, and its mobility – its privilege based on racism, its move from a basilectal to an acrolectal form, its unmarked creolization and normative positioning – interestingly shows a set of linked dimensions which have been defined by the American sociologist Ruth Frankenberg as pertaining to the social organization and construction of "whiteness",

> Whiteness has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others and at society. Third,